the weekly Standard

FEBRUARY 12, 2018 • $5.99

FREE MONEY FOR EVERYONE?

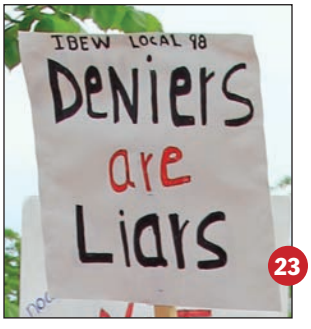
Why so many people are enamored of universal basic income

BY TONY MECIA

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

Contents

February 12, 2018 • Volume 23, Number 22



Articles

Features

Books & Arts

COVER BY GARY LOCKE

Bill Nye the Quisling Guy

Since he became famous hosting his children's TV show, Bill Nye, aka "the Science Guy," has spent the last couple of decades being an insufferable scold on climate change and other charged political topics. Aside from appearing on TV, Nye often has no particular expertise on the topics he's weighing in on. He does have an undergraduate degree, but "the Mechanical Engineer Guy" just doesn't have the same ring to it.

Nonetheless, we find ourselves surprised and pleased to note that Nye attended the State of the Union last Tuesday as the guest of the Trump administration's NASA administrator nominee Jim Bridenstine, with the ostensible goal of promoting space travel.

We're agnostic on whether this is a good use of resources—NASA projects frequently entail so much pork-barrel spending that the agency has been jokingly called "pigs in space." But we do commend the normally hyperpartisan Nye for reaching across the aisle for a shared scientific goal.

For making nice with a Republican official, Nye has been roundly condemned over at *Scientific American* in a broadside by the grassroots group called "500 Women Scientists," who "speak up for science and for women, minorities, immigrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA." For them, no amount of support for NASA will allow them to overlook the "expressly xenophobic, homophobic, misogynistic, racist, ableist, and anti-science" Trump administration. Bridenstine in particular is alleged to have "worked to undermine civil rights, including pushing for crackdowns on immigrants, a ban on gay marriage, and abolishing the Department of Education." But these are, of course, wholly political objections that have nothing to do with science. If "500 Women Scientists" don't see it that way, we await their attempt to provide empirically sound proof that America's education system has improved since the creation of the Department of Education. Best of luck with that one.

Look, kids! It's fatuous left-wing apoplexy!

Alas, the problem can be distilled down to this: "As women and scientists, we refuse to separate science from everyday life." Well, in everyday life—at least everyday life for those of us that don't live and work in blinkered monocultures such as academia—normal people have messy relationships that involve finding ways to work together when you don't agree. God forbid Nye and Bridenstine actually have honest conversations that lead to compromise. Or are "500 Women Scientists" so lacking in confidence in their arguments that they're afraid a well-known spokesman such as Nye will be won over to the dark side?

Ultimately, if you look around in the present moment of material abundance and unprecedented tolerance and yet still believe "our ability to do science and our ability to live freely are both under threat," the problem isn't the existence of Republicans. The problem is you. ♦

An Honest Fiction Writer

Garrison Keillor is an embittered old liberal whose political pronouncements range from the unfunny to the ungenerous. But the creator and longtime host of the radio show *A Prairie Home Companion* is also a talented writer and bewilderingly versatile entertainer, and we took no joy in hearing that he had been forced to step down from his position at Minnesota Public Radio as a result of sexual harassment allegations against him. He has denied the allegations, saying they arose from an episode in which he had merely placed his hand on a colleague's bare back.

His accuser says this is not the case. Her attorney says there were many other incidents, seemingly far beyond back-touching. But Keillor insists his version is correct. "If I am guilty of harassment," he says, "then every employee who stole a pencil is guilty of embezzlement." He also promises to put his account in writing: "I'm an honest fiction writer, and I will tell this story in a novel."

Have I got a story for you.

We wonder if, at a time when so many progressives lament the rise of "alternative facts," Keillor's liberal cobelligerents are similarly exercised by the idea of creating one's own fictional account of a disputed encounter. We're guessing Keillor will come out looking pretty good in his version, but how will it comport with, say, the sworn testimony of his accuser?

The ability of writers of fiction to create their own worlds, with their own alternative facts, is of course one reason hidebound traditionalists of a bygone age thought poorly of fiction. The Puritans were suspicious of the stage and at various points banned dramatic performances. Scottish Presbyterians and

TOP: ED SCHIPUL / FLICKR

English evangelicals of the 17th and 18th centuries never liked novels, feeling as they did that writers could use them to tell lies about history.

We won't go as far as that, but they had a point. In a marvelous essay in 2002 for the *New Criterion*, the Australian critic Keith Windschuttle lucidly exposed Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* as a work of Marxist propaganda. And yet, just as Wellington claimed all his English history came from Shakespeare, so most of what the average American knows of the Great Depression comes from Steinbeck's book (or the movie version starring the improbably handsome Henry Fonda). Distinguishing between lies and artistic license is an ongoing problem, especially when it comes to Hollywood. We think of *U-571*, a World War II film that credited the Americans with capturing an Enigma machine that was in fact captured by the British; or of the recent movie *The Post*, which, as John Podhoretz explained last week in these pages, slanders the memory of Frederick Beebe.

Well, never mind. We won't prejudice our readers against Garrison Keillor's fictional account of the dispute that led to his resignation and disgrace. We're sure he'll tell the absolute unvarnished factual truth. But we can't help recalling a remark made by the great novelist Muriel Spark in 1979. "I have a strong sense that fiction is lies," she said. "It really is." ♦

The Arc of His Tweets Bends Toward Treacle

If former FBI honcho James Comey's Twitter feed is anything to judge him by, perhaps President Trump was right to can him—on the basis of his grating social media persona alone.

Some people use Twitter to catch up on news, others to waste time cracking jokes. Not the onetime top law enforcement professional though. No, Comey's Twitter feed is full of treacly, Hallmark-card sentiments, pulled apparently from a well-thumbed copy of Bartlett's.

"'Applause is the spur of noble minds, the end and aim of weak ones.'—Edmund Burke (1730-1797)," he tweeted on December 8. "'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!' This country's greatness and true genius lies in its diversity." That was January 11's tweet. (Shockingly, he has yet to tweet the "fake Tocqueville" line that "America is great because America is good.") On December 15, Comey hit a baby boomer grand slam, invoking both the greatest moral voice of our times . . . and Martin Luther King Jr: "'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.'—Bruce Springsteen tonight, quoting Martin Luther King, Jr."

For sheer self-regard, nothing

has yet topped, or is likely ever to top, Comey's December 3 tweet: "'I want the American people to know this truth: The FBI is honest. The FBI is strong. And the FBI is, and always will be, independent.' Me (June 8, 2017)." ♦

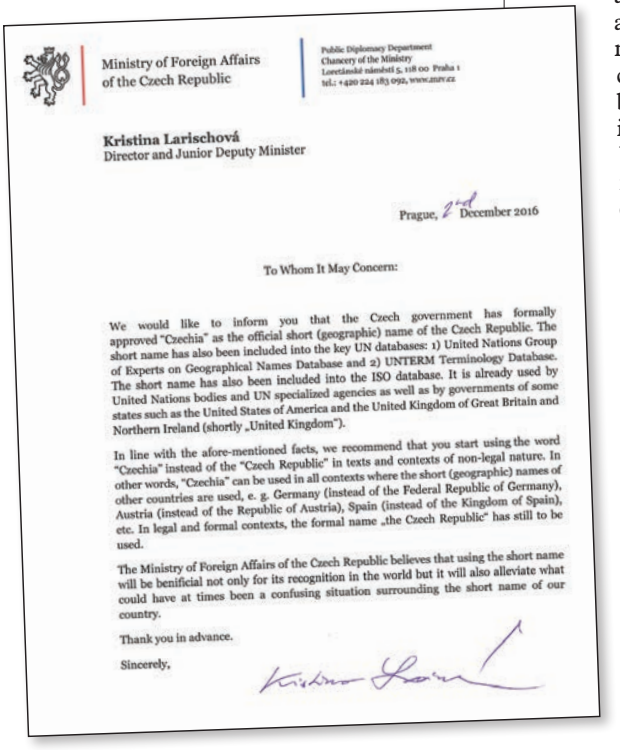
That's Czechia, Mate

When it comes to place names, The Scrapbook is decidedly reactionary. We finally, reluctantly, made our peace with the demise of Mukden and Peking, but until the day someone pours us a Mumbai gin martini, we're still Bombay all the way.

So we hope the gentleman who emailed last week urging us to stop writing "the Czech Republic" and start saying "Czechia" instead will understand if we are slow to take up the new usage. Our correspondent pointed out that Czechia has been the "official, internationally recognized short name since May 2016." Moreover, the U.S. State Department is using Czechia, as is Switzerland's Department of Foreign Affairs, as is Google Maps.

But "everybody else does it" has never been a strong argument in our book. What's more, he urged us to read the official memorandum, dated December 2, 2016, informing us that "the Czech government has formally approved 'Czechia' as the official short (geographic) name of the Czech Republic." Well, we did read it, and meaning no disrespect to our Czech friends, we note that the letterhead over the official memorandum says "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic."

So we'll be sticking with old-fashioned formality, at least until the day we receive a memorandum from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechia, with a letterhead to match. ♦



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

Public Diplomacy Department
Chancery of the Ministry
Loretánské nám. 5, 118 00 Praha 1
tel.: +420 224 183 092, www.mzv.cz

Kristina Larischová
Director and Junior Deputy Minister

Prague, 2nd December 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

We would like to inform you that the Czech government has formally approved "Czechia" as the official short (geographic) name of the Czech Republic. The short name has also been included into the key UN databases: 1) United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Database and 2) UNTERM Terminology Database. The short name has also been included into the ISO database. It is already used by United Nations bodies and UN specialized agencies as well as by governments of some states such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (shortly „United Kingdom").

In line with the afore-mentioned facts, we recommend that you start using the word "Czechia" instead of the "Czech Republic" in texts and contexts of non-legal nature. In other words, "Czechia" can be used in all contexts where the short (geographic) names of other countries are used, e. g. Germany (instead of the Federal Republic of Germany), Austria (instead of the Republic of Austria), Spain (instead of the Kingdom of Spain), etc. In legal and formal contexts, the formal name „the Czech Republic" has still to be used.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic believes that using the short name will be benificial not only for its recognition in the world but it will also alleviate what could have at times been a confusing situation surrounding the short name of our country.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Our Favorite Conversation, So Far

The Scrapbook has often touted the Conversations with Bill Kristol video series (available free at conversationswithbillkristol.org), but we are especially fond of the latest installment and suspect you will be, too. It's an extended discussion of movies, TV, and popular culture with this magazine's longtime movie critic, *Commentary* editor John Podhoretz. Here's a small sample to whet the appetite:

> Everybody went to movies in the 1970s. And, now, teenage boys go to movies. I mean, the classic Hollywood audience is young males, 30 and under. And that's why the most reliable form of commercial moviemaking, which has been true of the last decade, is movies derived from comic books, which have this built-in audience not only from comic books themselves, but from previous cinematic and television versions of comic-book characters. . . .
>
> The old movies, they had this studio and they had sound stages and they had to keep them busy, and so they made a lot of Westerns—but they cost ten cents and they were made in two weeks. And now these movies cost 300 to 500 million dollars just to get off the drawing board.
>
> But they're not about us. They're not about people. They're not about life. They're about escape. ♦

the weekly Standard
www.weeklystandard.com

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except the first week in January, fourth week in March, first week in July, and third week in August) at 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-274-7293. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 421203, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1203. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $5.99. Back issues, $5.99 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005.

A Fan's Notes

Shortly before Christmas, I got an email from the Washington Wizards basketball team. "You are in your 45th year with the Wizards!" it said. "We will be taking you and a guest on a trip to see your Wizards in Atlanta on January 27th."

I was astonished, not by the trip but by the 45 years I've been a season ticket holder. I'd never kept count. My life consists of few threads that long. I've been married longer and in the same line of work—journalism—longer too. But that's about it.

A day or two later, when the "Milestone Travel Itinerary" arrived, I was thrilled. The Wizards are an acquired taste, and I acquired it in 1966, the year before my wife Barbara and I got married. We spent many hours in her parents' basement, sometimes watching TV. That's when I discovered the Baltimore Bullets, as the team was then known.

I don't know why I was smitten. I wasn't much of a basketball fan, and the Bullets were terrible. They got better with the arrival of Earl Monroe, the master of the spin move, and Wes Unseld, a dominant big man. So when they moved to Washington in 1973, I signed up for season tickets, even though Monroe had defected to the New York Knicks. Barbara never got over his departure.

No one in my orbit joined me. Washington is filled with transients devoted to their hometown teams. Many adopted the football Redskins and later the baseball Nationals. The Wizards were a bridge too far.

But not for Robert Novak, the great columnist. I met him while covering a trip of Vice President Gerald Ford. We got to talking about basketball, and he suggested we get Wizards seats together. He knew Peter O'Malley, the team president and a political leader in Maryland. Great seats followed—at midcourt.

Bob was as astute an analyst of basketball as he was politics. We rejected the common idea that college basketball is wonderful but pro ball isn't. I suspect the folks who say this rarely watch an NBA game. If they did, they'd know the pro players are at the top of the sports pyramid.

Pro basketball has many advantages over football and baseball. A 48-minute game takes a little over two hours. Pro football takes nearly twice that, as you sit though endless ads, long timeouts, and reviews of calls by refs.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Bullets' Bobby Dandridge in the NBA championship, June 7, 1978

Columnist George Will may relish baseball's lack of a clock. I don't. Baseball needs a clock, especially in the late innings when relievers wander around the mound between pitches. Umpires are supposed to speed things up. They don't.

NBA players are the best athletes in the world. Their skills and their smarts, especially in passing or driving to the basket, continue to amaze me. The big scorers—Michael Jordan, LeBron James—also play defense. The 7-footers also shoot three-pointers from 25 feet away.

This may be more than you want to know, but the most underrated players are the non-shooters who play hard. They make contact. They're brutal. They know how to foul without getting whistled. They treat basketball as a test of strength and usually prevail.

Which leads me to Dennis Rodman and Steven Adams. Sure, Rodman was crazy, but so what? He could harass, rebound, and shut down scorers like no one else. The Detroit Pistons wouldn't have won two championships without him. I saw Oklahoma City's Adams last week against the Wizards. Anyone who got near the rim with Adams around paid a physical price. Adams is from New Zealand.

Washington's Bobby Dandridge was a special type, the clever, mistake-free player whose presence is the difference between winning the NBA title and merely coming close. Dandridge coolly worked the baseline and embarrassed taller defenders. He palmed the ball without getting called. No Dandridge, no championship in 1978, the only one Washington has enjoyed in my long tenure as a fan. Sadly I was away that season on a fellowship at Harvard.

When our "milestone" group gathered at Reagan National Airport on January 27, there were 22 of us, counting me and my son Freddy. We didn't know the others, a diverse lot including a lobbyist, a Capitol Hill aide, and an official in the George W. Bush administration. We didn't exactly bond. But there was a shared feeling that longtime Wizards fans are especially loyal but not obnoxious about it.

In Atlanta, the Wizards won easily. The only revelation came from backup point guard Tim Frazier's performance. He had 14 assists. All the players hung around to chat with our gang of 22. Bradley Beal worked the group like a pol.

John Wall, resting a sore knee, didn't play. He was friendly and talkative, not at all like the glowering figure on the court. He told me he could have played if he'd wanted to. Well, maybe not. Several days later, he had surgery on the knee.

With my son's help, I'm committed to seeing that my five grandsons are raised as Wizards fans. I took one of them, 9-year-old Paul Liles, to the Thunder game last week. I explained to him why a lot of people cheered for the Thunder. They're frontrunners. I made sure Paul understood that wasn't a compliment.

Fred Barnes

the weekly Standard

A Sin of Omission

President Donald Trump's State of the Union address was a success. The theater was unbeatable. The president's special guests were particularly moving at this year's address: a double amputee who somehow escaped from North Korea by sheer strength of will; a police officer who adopted a drug addict's baby; the families of two girls slain by the criminal gang MS-13.

Trump touted passage of the tax reform bill and his administration's efforts to unmake the Obama administration's regulatory state. He called attention to the nefarious North Korean regime and praised Iran's democratic protesters. And he asked Congress to stop scrimping on the federal government's chief priority: its military.

It's showtime.

Less successful, in our view, were his proposals on immigration and his denunciation of "economic surrender"—or, as we prefer to term it, free trade. But these stem from the president's campaign commitments and were neither surprising nor as radical as might have been feared.

What *was* deeply surprising was the president's failure even to mention the nation's $20 trillion debt or its nearly $1 trillion deficit. For the leader of America's party of small government, this was quite a break with tradition—an omission, we fear, indicative of both his and the party's priorities. The last president who neglected to mention the national debt or the federal deficit in a State of the Union address was Gerald Ford. It was 1976, and the national debt was by any measure a tiny fraction of what it is today.

A year ago, the new president sharply criticized the Obama administration for heedlessly running up the debt. "In the last eight years," Trump said, "the past administration has put on more new debt than nearly all of the other presidents combined." This year, the issue was quietly sidestepped. Nor was there any mention of the financial commitments responsible for our debt. No mention of Medicaid, Medicare, or Social Security.

Instead, the president proposed a $1.5 trillion infrastructure plan—a proposal three times larger than the one offered by Hillary Clinton during the 2016 campaign. Trump's plan is nearly double the size of Barack Obama's 2009 stimulus bill, the one that flooded states with new money and stimulated nothing but government expansion.

Yet congressional Republicans were blissfully unconcerned—and not just moderate Republicans, but erstwhile Tea Partiers too: "It was an A+ tonight," said Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus. A few brave conservative souls, such as Michigan's Justin Amash, complained as loudly after Trump's address as they had during the Obama administration. But most Republicans were too happy that a Republican president had a good night to register any apprehension about a spending proposal that dwarfs our already colossal deficit.

It was not always thus. Back in 2011, remember, Tea Party-aligned members of the House and Senate were willing to stop Congress from raising the debt limit and so precipitate a default on the Treasury's debt in order to secure promises on reforming entitlements and spending reductions. They were ridiculed by Democrats and some centrist Republicans and by virtually every political commentator outside talk radio. The *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial board, hardly a set of welfare-state squishes, dismissed the Tea Partiers as fantasists. Theirs was a brave and principled stand. Yet in 2018, they're happy to stop worrying and embrace the nation's coming financial doom.

As the week wore on, some of the deficit hawks did appear to be waking up to what Trump is proposing. "The one thing missing in the president's State of the Union address was: What are we going to do on the mandatory spending side that continues to be ignored?" Meadows told us after we asked him how he could give the president's spending plans top marks. The Freedom Caucus has apparently shared its recommendations for mandatory spending reforms with the White House, and Meadows wants them to be considered in any debate about new infrastructure spending. "Without those, getting anywhere close to the $1.5 trillion number the president outlined would be virtually impossible."

We're glad to hear it but remain skeptical.

As for the president's plan, maybe it's true that our infrastructure is "crumbling" and that the best way to deal with the problem is not for states to alter their

WIN MCNAMEE / BLOOMBERG

spending priorities but for the federal government to spend a mind-numbingly large amount of money. And maybe it's true, too, that Americans should "reclaim our building heritage" and that we should have "gleaming new roads, bridges, highways, railways, and waterways across our land." Maybe.

But remember: There are two ways to pay for new expenditures, not one. The first is to raise revenue with tax increases, now or in the future. The second is to stop spending money on less important items. It's an old idea, cutting expenditures—but it works. Perhaps Congress and the White House should consider it. ♦

The Politics of the Memo

The only thing we can say with absolute certainty regarding the controversy over the Devin Nunes memo is this: It's unwise to accept any claims made with absolute certitude about its contents and their meaning.

MSNBC's Joe Scarborough said the memo is a "smear" filled with "falsehoods" to set up a "political purge." Fox News contributor Sebastian Gorka claimed that it documents abuses "100 times" worse than those that led to the American Revolution. Chuck Schumer called it a "slanderous memo of GOP talking points." None of them had read the memo about which they were so confidently telling us what to think.

Devin Nunes

The Nunes memo summarizes hundreds of pages of documents and testimony about the FBI's investigation of the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. Devin Nunes, the House Intelligence Committee chairman and the putative author of the memo, has never read the underlying materials. And while Adam Schiff, the leading Democrat on the committee, reportedly has read those documents, he nonetheless authored a *Washington Post* op-ed about the controversy so misleading as to make bad faith the unavoidable explanation. Schiff and Nunes know more than most people about the memo, and even they're dealing with fragmentary information.

It's as if everyone is describing in detail a 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle after looking at a couple dozen of its pieces. Not that this lack of knowledge has prevented members of each tribe from making their arguments with passion. Certitude has so far appeared in inverse proportion to actual knowledge. In this respect, the debate perfectly symbolizes our politics in these hyper-polarized times.

As we went to press, the release of the memo was said to be imminent. It's likely that by the time you read this, we'll know exactly what it says. What we won't have is a full understanding of what the material means.

Its author believes with the greatest conviction that the details of the FISA applications and the congressional testimony reviewed in the memo demonstrate that bad faith and partisan politics drove law-enforcement decision-making at the outset of the probe into the Trump campaign and Russia. We have reason to believe that the memo includes facts that bolster this argument. We've already seen too many examples of poor judgment from senior law-enforcement officials, and we're confident that we'll see more.

Yet many of our peers in the establishment media have been too dismissive of the possibility that politics played a role in decision-making about the investigations of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. A good deal of disturbing material has come to light about how the FBI handled the Clinton investigation and sought to oppose a duly elected new president.

That doesn't mean there aren't serious questions about Russian influence in the 2016 election; about the demonstrated willingness of Trump associates to collude with the Russians to help Trump win; about their persistent dishonesty regarding contacts with the Russians during the campaign and afterwards; and about the president's bizarre pleas for loyalty from those investigating him and his obsessive efforts to dismiss the entire affair as a hoax.

Donald Trump Jr. lied repeatedly about his meeting with representatives of the Russian government who promised dirt on Hillary Clinton. That's true whether or not a senior DoJ official took shortcuts on a FISA application to surveil Carter Page. If Jared Kushner indeed asked a high-level Russian official for a scheme that would allow him to communicate with the Russian leadership outside normal diplomatic and intelligence channels, we ought to learn more about why—even if FBI agents working on the case exchanged hostile texts about Trump.

And even if the memo shows malfeasance on the part of federal law-enforcement officers—which we expect it will—it cannot in its four pages possibly justify the far-fetched conspiracy theorizing by some Trump supporters.

The broader conspiracy these folks are alleging is improbable. In its more imaginative version, the Republican attorney general, an early endorser of the president, needlessly (or suspiciously) recused himself from an investigation of the president despite having done nothing wrong (his misleading testimony to Congress a simple misunderstanding). This left the Republican deputy attorney general to work with the newly appointed Republican FBI director to target the Republican president who appointed

ALEX WONG / GETTY

them by downplaying and dismissing the broad institutional bias of federal law enforcement against that president back when he was merely the Republican nominee.

What's more, the Republican former FBI director now serving as special counsel, appointed and supervised by the Republican deputy attorney general, is compromised for having hired some investigators who had given money to Democrats—giving money to Democrats being an obvious sign of bad judgment unless it's the president himself, who gave money to Democrats for years so that he might one day be in a position to dismantle the deep state they'd set up to target Republicans.

Got that?

The people willing to advance such nonsense are unlikely to abandon it because some facts emerge to contradict their hypotheses. Just as stubborn are the people unwilling to entertain the possibility that senior law enforcement and intelligence officials did, in fact, allow their politics—or simply the expectation that Hillary Clinton was shortly to be their ultimate boss—improperly to shape the investigation.

The memo won't make either group reexamine its presuppositions or its arguments. And we say that with absolute certainty. ♦

The Demons of Higher Ed

A recent study of abuses in for-profit postsecondary education highlights a reputational disparity within American higher education. For-profit programs and colleges are distrusted and maligned. Their proven value to populations for whom traditional college is out of reach and the various good-faith reforms win little or no notice. Neither do the abuses of nonprofit colleges, themselves rife with institutional decadence and dishonesty.

The study, a 780-page doorstopper from the University of San Diego's Child Advocacy Center entitled "Failing U.," asks whether state laws adequately protect students from "for-profit predators." It lines up one critique after the next of recruitment and regulatory oversight. Any time the premises of a study identically match its conclusions, we pause. And what immediately struck us about the USD study is that many of these complaints are equally applicable to for-profit and nonprofit programs.

One of the study's stated goals is "to start a discussion about how to protect taxpayers, who ultimately pay the price when students who attend unscrupulous institutions cannot repay federal student loans." But of course taxpayers ultimately pay the price whether a defaulter has attended for-profit Strayer University or nonprofit Stanford University. Loan-default rates have risen significantly at nonprofits and for-profits alike.

The stories of fraudulent for-profits like the Corinthian Colleges, whose closure in 2015 set Congress on the warpath, are well known. The sham of Trump University has been hard to miss. And lately a crackdown on DeVry University's dishonest recruitment techniques demonstrates the value of stricter accreditation oversight and auditing. No one needed an 800-page study to learn this.

The highest concentration of student-loan defaults has, since the late 1970s, come from the ranks of the for-profit college, according to a recent data report from the College Board. But for-profit graduates' debt loads are lighter than those of their nonprofit-college-going counterparts. To put it the other way around: Nonprofits' loan defaulters, though they're less common school by school, tend to owe more. There are, moreover, far fewer for-profit than nonprofit schools, and the for-profit sector is shrinking fast—11 percent of the country's for-profit colleges closed in 2016, and the trend continues. The spectacle of traditional universities funding giant studies about the problems of their tiny and shrinking competitors seems a bit rich.

While education advocates malign for-profit schools, the underlying problems afflicting nonprofit colleges are less widely discussed. Graduation rates at expensive four-year schools are faltering, and graduates are failing to find work. There are growing financial pressures.

Indeed, the vast majority of the 177 colleges designated financial failures by the Department of Education last year are small, nonprofit private colleges. A 2016 study from the center-left think tank Third Way used the Education Department's college scorecard to diagnose an unexamined "quality crisis" in nonprofit colleges. It found that "at the typical institution, nearly half of the students aren't graduating, many students aren't earning sufficient incomes even years after enrollment, and far too many are unable to repay their loans."

None of this will come as a shock to anybody who's followed the follies and failings of traditional nonprofit higher ed: the politicized and hyperspecialized curricula, the astronomical prices, the ever-expanding armies of administrators, the diminishing quality of teaching. All this at institutions that pay no taxes and that, in the case of state universities, receive hundreds of millions in direct appropriations every year.

The essential premise of USD's report is that for-profit colleges need stricter oversight lest they find new ways to swindle uninformed students and saddle them with debts they can't repay. But the far deeper and less studied scam may be the nonprofit private college. Perhaps the University of San Diego should confront its own demons. ♦

ANDREW FERGUSON

The Final Hagiography of the Obama Team

The new documentary *The Final Year* records the ups, the downs, the smiles, the frowns of President Obama's foreign policy advisers during their last months in office. It was made for HBO but it won't hit the small screen until later this year. For the moment it's playing in a few theaters in Obama country (Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, of course, and the pleasanter boroughs of New York City) and on various pay-per-view outlets. If you have the chance to watch it, there are stupider ways to spend your time. In the Trump-created chaos of the present, it is good to remember that chaos takes different forms.

The stars of the movie are John Kerry, U.N. ambassador Samantha Power, and Ben Rhodes, who served as Obama's closest foreign policy aide. (Susan Rice, Obama's last national security adviser, tells the audience that Obama and Rhodes enjoyed a "mind-meld" early on and apparently never decoupled.) They granted the filmmaker, Greg Barker, extensive access to their daily doings and mulled their way through countless interviews. Whether they did this in service of transparent policymaking or in hopes of memorializing their strenuous efforts on the country's behalf is unclear. Evidence tilts toward the latter. The movie, says Rhodes, could "actually be a record that survives and that people could view 10 years from now."

Every administration acquires the personality of its leader. By 2016, Obama's foreign policy team had taken on the president's self-possession, his distaste for confrontation, his weakness for lofty language, and his embarrassment at all the sins committed by his predecessors; also his need to let other people know of his embarrassment. The movie reminds us that Obama's "apology tour"—during which he parachuted into various countries, told the residents how badly they had been hurt by America, and then, unburdened, skipped lightly away—was an ongoing feature of his presidency, through to the very end. In *The Final Year* we see the president instructing the citizens of Hiroshima about the incredibly destructive bomb we used to kill most of their grandparents. Later he drops into Laos to remind them that they were carpet-bombed by Richard Nixon. While apologizing to the Laotians, Rhodes explains, the president also wanted to force "Americans to confront that history, which is not a very good part of our history." You may want to take notes.

The movie portrays John Kerry as a clueless and oddly endearing popinjay who lurches from photo-op to photo-op, shaking hands with one international grifter after another.

When I think back over the Obama administration, I have the enduring impression of articulate, well-credentialed people talking, talking, talking. The stars of *The Final Year* are among the most skilled Obama talkers. When Kerry releases little bubbles of gas like "We have to be realistic about the challenges we face" he is taking a cue from the master, the president, who can say "It's ultimately where politics, government, diplomacy has [sic] to be rooted—in that belief in a common humanity" and say it slowly, thoughtfully enough to almost persuade you he's saying something substantial. "Bearing witness is both an instinct and a responsibility," says Samantha Power, without clarification. Obama's foreign policy, says Rhodes, is "engagement-focused."

The manipulation of high-toned, empty tropes was both a cause and a consequence of Obama's foreign policy. The most touching sequence in *The Final Year* concerns the "ceasefire" that Kerry negotiated with the Russians and Syrians in September 2016. The movie portrays Kerry as a clueless and oddly endearing popinjay who lurches from photo-op to photo-op, shaking hands with one international grifter after another, getting his pocket picked all the while. He spends dozens of hours "brokering" the ceasefire with those friendly Russians. Then he is astonished and crestfallen when it falls apart, after Russian and Syrian aircraft bomb a U.N. humanitarian convoy headed for Aleppo, killing more than 20 aid workers and destroying food supplies meant for 75,000 starving people.

"It's so frustrating," Kerry tells the camera. "Because we had an agreement that could have worked! But some people didn't want to cooperate."

And we know who those "some people" are, don't we? The Russians aren't friendly at all! Kerry rushes to the Security Council to give their mean old ambassador a piece of his mind. He condemns "in the strongest possible terms" (in Obama's diplomacy, the strongest possible term was "in the strongest possible terms") "an outrageous, sustained two-hour attack directed at a fully authorized

humanitarian mission." He gives the ambassador the hairy eyeball and says it again: "Fully authorized!" This is evidently the dispositive fact for the secretary of state. If the U.N. had only *half*-authorized the convoy—well, that would be a different thing . . .

After Kerry is gone, it is left to Power to talk like a man. She takes his seat at the Security Council and stares at the fleshy, vacant face of the Russian ambassador. "Are you truly incapable of shame?" she says. "Is there literally *nothing* that will shame you?" In that moment Samantha Power walks off with the movie. If only she could've done the same with our foreign policy.

But this may not be the movie's highlight. For a viewer susceptible to *schadenfreude*—I name no names—that comes on election night, when the "legacy" of Obama and his visionaries effectively dissolves before their very eyes. A camera follows Rhodes outside, where he slumps, devastated, on a bench. He's asked how he feels. "It's a lot to process," he says. For more than 30 seconds he gropes to express himself. "I can't . . . I . . . I ca . . . I mean, I ca . . . "

The silence is like a fresh breeze. ♦

COMMENT ♦ BARTON SWAIM

So long as they don't do it in the streets and frighten the horses

On January 12 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Michael Cohen, Donald Trump's attorney, paid a pornographic actress with the *nom de scène* of Stormy Daniels the sum of $130,000 in exchange for her signature on a nondisclosure agreement. The thing she was not to disclose was an "alleged sexual encounter," as the *Journal* put it, with Trump. I have no idea if the encounter or the payoff ever took place—nor do I want to know—but most people in the media I've spoken to or read seem to accept the story at face value.

Some of those same reporters and media personalities also seem frustrated that the story hasn't put much of a dent in Trump's popularity with his supporters. Nobody's dying to find out the truth, and this absence of outrage is said to be a sad sign of the times. *Well*, these observers conclude with anguish, *I guess this is the new normal. I guess a sitting U.S. president can now be the sort of person who cavorts with a porn actress and has his attorney pay her off.*

Well, maybe. Maybe if Trump weren't already known as a libertine, and maybe if he hadn't already said and done so many shocking things, he might be obliged to pay some small political price for the alleged transaction. But politicians caught in sex scandals frequently pay a surprisingly low political price, or no discernible price at all, at least when those scandals don't involve either (a) assault or some other serious illegality or (b) behavior so stomach-churningly loathsome that they immediately resign in disgrace.

Louisiana senator David Vitter confessed to seeing a prostitute and went on, three years later, to win reelection. He ran for governor in 2015 and lost by 12 points, but the fact that he ran at all seemed remarkable at the time. My own former boss, Gov. Mark Sanford of South Carolina, was discovered to be secretly seeing a mistress in Argentina, but he served out the rest of his term and later ran for his old seat in Congress. He is now safely ensconced in the House of Representatives.

Then there is the greatest of all modern political sex scandals: the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. The president was pretty clearly guilty of the charges brought against him by the House, charges that included lying to a grand jury, tampering with evidence, and encouraging others to lie to federal investigators—all of which stemmed from the sexual harassment lawsuit filed against Clinton by Paula Jones. In the end, Clinton was acquitted by the Senate and served out his term. Now he is so beloved of Democrats that they nominated his wife to be president and fully expected Bill to be First Gentleman.

The chief consequence of these and similar cases isn't that we have hounded lots of creeps out of public life and so cleaned things up. No indeed; the chief consequence is that millions of Americans feel they must read about and discuss the anomalous sexual behavior of a lot of arrogant men. We grow more accustomed to the lewdness each time; the jokes become crasser, the discussions more graphic, and the young more used to laughing at the appetites of grown-ups and more adept at spotting double entendres. The offending politician often enough either stays in office or takes up a lucrative lobbying career.

The political commentariat exacerbate the whole sordid mess with brazen, unprincipled hackery. Many on the right would thunder against any liberal or Democratic officeholder thought to be guilty of the sort of behavior they openly excuse in Trump. And the converse is true on the left—a tradition going back to the 1960s when the news media kept quiet about John Kennedy's many dalliances but worked overtime to find any hint of misbehavior by Richard Nixon. A few smart liberals will defend the double standard, pretending it's not about sex but "hypocrisy." Since only Republicans claim to care about "family values," these liberals argue, so only

Republicans are targets. This is cant. Bill Clinton never proclaimed a belief in free love. He toted his gigantic Bible to church services and in public spoke lovingly of his wife.

The point is not that right and left should be more consistent in going after sexual misbehavior in public officials. The point is that, making exceptions for illegal and abusive behavior, they shouldn't go after it at all. Politicians are mostly vain and self-willed men, and they misbehave in the way of vain and self-willed men. If we insist on a public spectacle every time we discover an act of—let's use the word *indiscretion*—we won't change our politics for the better and will mainly succeed in further debasing our common life.

I'm not advocating a surrender to the libertinism so relentlessly promoted by our cultural insurrectionists for a half-century. I'm suggesting that we no longer accept the worldview of the 1960s counterculture—a worldview that refused to distinguish between public and private morality. The older outlook is eloquently described by James Bowman in his book *Honor: A History* (2006). "The appeal of the old system of honor," Bowman writes, "was precisely that it was not the same thing as morality."

> Because our public business could not be conducted at all if it were to be conducted by saints, there was a very clear boundary drawn between public and private life, and only those things falling on the public side were deemed to be subject to the requirements of honor. It might have been thought to be regrettable that a leader should have fallen short in his private morality, but it was essential only that he should not have fallen short in his public morality—whose public nature made it subject to the demands of honor. Thus he might lie to his wife about where he was last night, but not to his cabinet colleagues about the probable result of a proposed course of action. . . . He might be miserly or prodigal with his private finances, but he must pay strict regard to his rectitude in handling the public ones.

Conservative culture warriors (are there any left these days?) may interpret this as a capitulation, but it's only by valuing the distinction between public honor and private morality that we can keep our shared culture from slipping further into prurient disorder.

We may at last have arrived at the first moment in our lifetimes when a return to the older distinction is just possible. Many liberals suddenly realize to their horror that the libertinism they've endorsed has made it impossible for them to destroy a hated adversary with a salacious revelation. And many conservatives suddenly wonder why they're disinclined to revile Donald Trump for behavior that would have caused them to mount the barricades were he a political foe. The puzzlement arises from the obliteration of a valuable distinction.

In the 1950s—and in the 1850s—people didn't seriously believe their political leaders were models of private rectitude. Midcentury Americans weren't stupid or naïve and neither were the Victorians. But they knew how to keep silent about things that deserved silence—and they were happier for it. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

What would J. Edgar Hoover do?

When J. Edgar Hoover died suddenly in May 1972, there had been one director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the previous 48 years. In the nearly 46 years since that day, there have been 15 of them.

Some of Hoover's successors—William Webster, Louis Freeh, Robert Mueller—have been better than others and, admittedly, a few were only briefly in office as acting directors. But the picture of a riven, highly politicized, even dysfunctional federal agency that has emerged in recent months is not a pretty one and prompts a revisionist conclusion: None of the chaos and bureaucratic cannibalism and ineptitude that have emerged from the Trump-Russia saga would ever have occurred in J. Edgar Hoover's FBI.

Of course, as everybody knows, Hoover has long been ensconced in popular mythology as a folk villain. You can make almost any claim about his motives and instincts, or tell tall tales about his behavior, without fear of contradiction. He was certainly a Washington empire-builder and strategic wielder of power accumulated over the decades. He was a firm, one might say zealous, anti-Communist—with antiquarian views about American society—in an era when the challenge of the Soviet Union to the West was not considered a joke.

He was also decidedly peculiar. Hoover was a lifelong bachelor—conclusive evidence of his sexual life, if there was one, is entirely speculative—and his singular devotion to his mission had a rigid, defensive, even obsessive-compulsive element. He was a mass of eccentricities and biases, some endearing, others less so; and some of the enduring folklore about Hoover—that he blackmailed a series of public figures with voluminous files on private misbehavior or that he was a cross-dresser—is fictitious.

To be sure, Hoover's long tenure in office—too long, by any measure—was both a strength and weakness. In the course of his youthful construction and leadership of the Justice Department's bureau of investigation after World War I, he came to represent to most Americans a reliable bulwark of competence and vigilance against crime, wartime saboteurs, radical terror, and communism, foreign and domestic. At the same time, he came to identify the federal struggle against violence and subversion with his own interests, and the FBI, which had pioneered a scientific, professionalized approach to criminal detection

and law enforcement, became calcified as Hoover grew old.

Still, at the present moment, it is worth recalling (in the words of Hoover's best and most perceptive biographer, Richard Gid Powers) that

> despite all obstacles, he was able to build one of the best disciplined and proudest agencies in American history. His techniques for running the [FBI]—keeping it subject to his will by ingenious networks of rules, regulations, reports, and inspections; and creating an independent power base in the government and the public that was almost irresistible—required intelligence, dedication, sacrifice, and a sophisticated sense of public relations.

Hoover's fondness for secrecy and indirection very much appealed to FDR, who made good use of their unlikely and mutually advantageous alliance.

Moreover, while Hoover's transgressions were not trivial—he was not always subservient to the presidents he served, and his methods sometimes hovered near the boundaries of legality—the historical record is considerably more complicated, and complimentary to Hoover.

His fondness for secrecy and indirection, for example, very much appealed to Franklin Roosevelt, who made good use of their unlikely and mutually advantageous alliance throughout the 1930s and World War II. By contrast, Hoover and Harry Truman disliked and distrusted one another, and Truman's low opinion endures in posterity. Yet Hoover had reasons to be wary of Truman, whose administration was a curious mixture of statesmen and courthouse gang.

Much has been written of the delicate relations between Hoover and John F. Kennedy, and in particular Attorney General Robert Kennedy, ostensibly Hoover's boss. But Hoover's knowledge of the Kennedys' Rat Pack behavior—their personal indiscretions and the president's secondhand connections to organized crime—impelled him to warn them and offer private counsel, thereby protecting the brothers from embarrassment.

His loyalty was usually to principles, not men. Indeed, in close readings of correspondence and memoranda, Hoover will emerge as an unexpected voice of reason in the councils of government, especially in such episodes as the panicked aftermath of Kennedy's murder. Throughout the Cold War and into the Vietnam and civil rights eras, Hoover is at once the author of the domestic spying program (COINTELPRO) that damaged the FBI after his death, and an advocate for constitutional restraint about civil liberties. As is well known, Hoover regarded Martin Luther King Jr. with distaste; less well known is his status as Lyndon Johnson's smartest ally against the Ku Klux Klan.

In short, Hoover was a complicated and contradictory figure, with qualities and defects in abundance. But he did not endure as long as he did without reason, and while his judgment could be variable, his executive control and discipline—indeed, his knowledge of his powers and limitations, as well as his devotion to the FBI's prerogatives—were absolute. It is impossible to imagine Hoover mishandling the vexed matter of Hillary Clinton's private email server in the fashion of James Comey, much less publicly rebuking Clinton in a presidential election year.

The same might well be said of the Trump-Russia inquiry, which has now devolved into partisan combat, unhelpfully assisted by the White House and Congress. One Democratic talking point on the subject is that revelations about the FBI and other intelligence agencies have prompted Republicans to "revile" federal institutions they once "venerated." Yet the reverse is equally true: Democrats, especially on Capitol Hill, now venerate institutions they once reviled.

In any case, the ghost of J. Edgar Hoover must be smiling down on the spectacle—or more likely, looking on in dismay. For as his long and instructive career reveals, agencies of government, even those with storied histories, full of tenured civil servants, are merely human institutions fully capable of losing their way. ♦

Worth Repeating from ***WeeklyStandard.com:***

'For decades, the public schools of Edina were the gold standard among Minnesota's school districts. Not anymore. Today, academic rigor is unraveling, high school reading and math test scores are sliding, and students increasingly fear bullying and persecution. It all began in 2013 when school leaders adopted a strategic plan called "All for All" which reordered the district's mission to prioritize not academic excellence, but "racial equity." The result is an entire school system that's lost its mind.'

—Katherine Kersten,
'Inside a Public School Social Justice Factory'

The Ryan Machine

From wonk to fundraiser.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

When Paul Ryan agreed in October 2015 to become speaker of the House, some Republicans worried he couldn't handle the political side of the job. Known as a policy wonk and not a political fundraiser, Ryan had insisted that one condition of his taking on the job would be that he would spend his weekends at home with his young family—unlike outgoing speaker John Boehner, who spent his weekends raising money. "I don't think the speakership is a 9-to-5 job," said then-congressman Tim Huelskamp of Kansas. "You've got to work on weekends. John Boehner worked very hard . . . and I'm very concerned if you're not going to work weekends in this job, which is primarily fundraising, then that could hurt the Republican majority."

So when the fundraising totals for 2017 were reported in January, Ryan and his political team had something to crow about: The speaker had raised $44 million—more than any House leader of either party had ever raised in a nonelection year. How did he do it? "I don't golf," Ryan told me in a recent interview, alluding to one of Boehner's preferred time-consuming fundraising habits. "I do quick events. I do basically three-day sprints around the country when we're in recess on the weekdays. . . . I still stick to all my weekends [at home], so it works."

Ryan, of course, had some advantages Boehner didn't enjoy: complete GOP control of government, interest in tax reform, and the ability to draw on a network of donors from the Romney-Ryan presidential campaign, Boehner's network, and his own. But even in 2016, Ryan's fundraising outpaced Boehner's 2012 haul.

"We've basically broken every single fundraising record there is to break," says Ryan. "I had a week's notice before I became speaker. . . . I don't think I could've done it if I hadn't had that 2012 experience." Ryan is quick to credit his political team—led by executive director Kevin Seifert, deputy director Jake Kastan, and finance chairman Spencer Zwick. Seifert ran Ryan's congressional races and "knows me really well, knows my political instincts," says Ryan. "Jake [Kastan] was with me in Romney-Ryan and then ran my PAC afterwards, knows my political experience really well. Spencer was Mitt's national finance director."

How much the money will matter in 2018 is unclear. Despite the National Republican Congressional Committee's record-breaking off-year haul in 2017 of $85 million (of which Team Ryan supplied $32 million), energized Democrats had their own record-breaking year, raising $100 million for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The NRCC ended the year with several million more left in the bank than the DCCC, and the Republican National Committee outraised its embattled Democratic counterpart by $60 million in 2017.

"Republicans realize it will require a Herculean effort to save the House majority this year," says David Wasserman of the *Cook Political Report*. "I don't think the money matters so much unless one side has a lot more than the other" because "partisanship has become a stronger . . . cue than voters' perceptions of candidates, which is largely shaped through ads." A case in point, Wasserman says, is the 2017 Georgia special election Democrat Jon Ossoff and his allies lost despite spending $30 million—$10 million more than Republicans—in a race where 300,000 ballots were cast.

Still, raising money and running ads is the primary objective of a political operation and one of the few variables politicians can control. With President Trump's approval rating hovering at 40 percent, the outlook for Republicans in the 2018 midterm elections is bleak. But with nine months to go it's not unthinkable that Republicans could improve their standing just enough to hold on to their House majority. In December, when Republicans were trying to pass a controversial tax reform bill and had just been humiliated by Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, House Republicans trailed Democrats in generic ballot polling by a catastrophic 13 points, according to the *Real Clear Politics* polling average. But by the end of January, after a month of positive news stories and TV ads about how businesses were responding to tax reform, the gap had been narrowed to a bad-but-not-apocalyptic 7 points. Because Democratic voters tend to cluster in urban districts and because of gerrymandering, Republicans could lose nationwide voting in House races by about 6 points, according to Wasserman, and still cling to their majority.

Paul Ryan

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

Ryan and his team say they can win by running hard on tax reform and the economy—what NRCC chairman Steve Stivers is billing "the great American comeback." On tax reform, Democrats "overplayed their hand," says Ryan. "The media amplified it, and I think people are now actually seeing enormously positive benefits, which will accrue to us not just politically but . . . help the country." While Democrats said most Americans would get a tax hike, in reality 80 percent of households will get a tax

John McCormack is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

cut and 5 percent a tax hike, according to nonpartisan analysts. Changes to tax withholding will be seen in paychecks starting in February.

"Will we win the national dialogue and convince MSNBC to say nice things? No," says Ryan. "But can we win discrete congressional districts because we know how to raise money and how to target voters and how to motivate, and do we have good substance to do that on? Yes, we do."

While their positive message will focus on taxes and the economy, as well as a 2018 push to reform welfare and increase defense spending, Ryan wasn't hesitant to draw a negative contrast with Democrats when asked what the consequences of the return of Speaker Nancy Pelosi would be. "Could you imagine? It's going to be nothing but investigations. It's going to be nothing but political knife-fighting with the White House," said Ryan on January 18. "Congress will come to a screeching halt. Washington would shut down because they would do everything in their power to try to destroy the Trump presidency and move the country backwards. They want to go back to the Obama progressive days, which gave us the economic malaise we were in, which hollowed out our military and questioned America's role in the world. We're reversing that all pretty quickly."

Ryan's comments about the need to defend Trump in 2018 mark a contrast with his disposition toward candidate Trump in 2016. Ryan was slow to endorse Trump after he wrapped up the presidential nomination, and after the early October revelations of the *Access Hollywood* video, in which Trump boasted about groping women, Ryan said he would not campaign with or defend Trump and told members: "You all need to do what's best for you in your district."

As speaker, Ryan has had to build a relationship with the president and recently told Fox News: "All our conversations revolve around getting the big things done. . . . We don't really talk about what we disagree on." Ryan is still willing to speak out at times when he thinks Trump has crossed a line. In response to the president's recent comment about immigrants from "s—hole countries," for example, Ryan called it "very unfortunate, unhelpful" and said a similarly discriminatory view was widely held about his Irish-American ancestors, who went on to thrive in this country.

Republicans are now tied tightly to Trump, and a party's midterm election performance tends to correlate strongly with an incumbent president's job approval. When asked what Trump could do to improve his standing, Ryan simply encouraged him to "amplify the successes that are occurring." What House Republicans really need from the president, according to *Cook Political Report*'s Wasserman, is for him to stay "away from Twitter, which is really a euphemism for preventing the president from making inflammatory statements. His fitness for office is a chief concern among women with college degrees who have soured on the president and who will play an outsized role in the midterms."

Beyond the money and the messaging, the biggest task for the House GOP political operation is fielding strong candidates. Ryan's aides say they've been fortunate to avoid a significant number of divisive primaries. "In the Trump era, there's been this [idea]—'Oh my gosh, this is going to start a whole wave of rabble-rousers'—and we're not really seeing that," says Jake Kastan. "Many filing deadlines are fast approaching. So by this time in the cycle, if that were happening, we'd be seeing it," says Seifert. NRCC chairman Steve Stivers met with Steve Bannon, a force behind efforts to challenge Republican incumbents (before he fell out of favor with Trump), in the spring. Stivers wouldn't discuss the details of the meeting, but his colleagues seem to be spared the Bannonite challengers that some Senate Republicans have drawn.

Stivers's point person on recruitment is Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, who is now serving her third term in the House. Stefanik meets multiple times a month with an ideologically and geographically diverse group of House Republicans to discuss candidates and has worked on building relationships with a network of Republicans in state legislatures. Her conversations with recruits range from cold calls to explaining to enthusiastic volunteers how to run a race to answering logistical questions of fence-sitters. "Oftentimes with women candidates, we get questions about what is the work-life balance like: 'How do you do this if you have young children?'" says Stefanik. "What I've found useful is putting them in touch with other current members of Congress in similar circumstances."

The task of recruitment has been made somewhat more difficult by the large number of House Republicans who have left their posts or announced retirements this year—41 to date. Ryan points out that most of these departures are from safe seats, and a significant number of retirees are chairmen who were about to lose their posts due to term limits. "It's a fairly anti-climactic thing to be a former chairman in Congress," says Ryan.

A big lingering question for House Republicans is whether Ryan himself will stay in Congress beyond 2018. While Ryan forcefully dismissed the idea that he ever considered immediately retiring after the passage of tax reform, he hasn't squelched the possibility—first reported in December by *Politico*—that he may not run for reelection. Asked when he would announce his own intentions for 2018, Ryan simply said "before the filing deadline," which isn't until June 1. Asked again how certain he was about running for reelection, Ryan would only say he would make up his mind with his wife Janna later this spring: "It's something that Janna and I always do—honestly, I just push that stuff down the road. We'll talk about it in the spring like we always do." Announcing retirement would, of course, undermine the fundraising juggernaut he's built as speaker, which is one reason to believe Ryan will stick it out for one more election. ♦

A Lawyer in Demand

The trajectory from Kim Dotcom to Steve Bannon.

BY ERIC FELTEN

When I asked a top Washington defense lawyer a few weeks ago about William Burck, the answer was eloquent in its unambiguous simplicity: "Bill Burck is an excellent attorney." The context of the question was the rumors being floated by congressional Democrats that Burck was at risk of conflicts of interest in his representation of multiple key players in the Trump drama. He became lawyer, most recently, for Steve Bannon, adding to a client roster that includes current White House counsel Don McGahn and former chief of staff Reince Priebus.

Among the dark suggestions has been that Bannon could be guided in his testimony by McGahn at the White House with Burck as a furtive go-between. A source familiar with the whisper campaign says, "The Democrats have attributed every possible action by Trump officials to some preposterous evil plot, and this is no exception."

Politico recently picked up on the murmured complaints and ran an article titled "Russia probe's most popular lawyer risks conflicts." Among the conflicts suggested by *Politico* would be "if one of his clients should contradict—or even incriminate—another." Burck told *Politico* that he was conscious of the potential for conflicts, and were any to arise "everyone in good faith will try to figure out what the best way to proceed is."

Perhaps the concern on the Hill that Burck has a client or two too many may actually be about making sure each person being interviewed—whether by Congress or special counsel Robert Mueller's crew—has capable and unconflicted legal advice. It's possible. But maybe it's also a testament to Burck's legal skills that some lawmakers want to limit the number of important witnesses getting his advice.

If so, it wouldn't be the first time that the government tried to get Burck bounced from a high-profile case by asserting that he and everyone at his law firm, Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, suffered from inescapable conflicts of interest. That very thing happened, and not that long ago, in a case known as the *United States of America* v. *Kim Dotcom*.

William Burck

Mr. Dotcom was the owner of a renegade file-sharing service called Megaupload, which allowed some 150 million registered users to share and download music, movies, TV shows, software, and other copyrighted works. It was said that at its peak, the site accounted for "four percent of the total traffic on the Internet." The various content industries affected lobbied Washington to take Megaupload down. Which is just what the Department of Justice set out to do.

In announcing their indictment of the company in January 2012, federal prosecutors declared that their action was "among the largest criminal copyright cases ever brought by the United States." It also featured a lead defendant, the company owner who styled himself "Kim Dotcom," who at first glance appeared to be a prosecutor's dream come true.

Unashamed of his avoirdupois, boastful about the Croesan stash of cash his enterprise had produced, and gleeful about what he could procure with his riches (everything from yachts to bikinied lovelies to ornament them), Dotcom made for an outsized comic villain. The feds played it for all it was worth. They didn't just have him arrested; they waited for Dotcom to host a lavish birthday party at his New Zealand mansion and persuaded the local police to launch a raid with two helicopters and 72 officers from the military-equipped Special Tactics Group and the Armed Offenders Squad. (New Zealand police would later settle a lawsuit brought by Dotcom alleging overkill.)

The FBI claimed that Megaupload had generated "more than $175 million in criminal proceeds," and they weren't eager to see any of those resources used to pay for a vigorous defense. Accusing the company of money laundering and conspiracy to commit racketeering, the Department of Justice seized all of Megaupload's money it could identify and get its hands on.

Thus prosecutors were none too pleased when the company managed to scrape together enough unfrozen funds to hire real lawyers. Three different big law firms were approached by Kim Dotcom and considered taking on the case, but each backed out. Burck, who did take the case, thought he knew the reason why: After word got out that Quinn Emanuel was taking the brief, "we ourselves were contacted by the Government," Burck wrote in a fierce memorandum to the U.S. District Court. Though they dressed it up as a courtesy heads-up, "the Government noted its perception of a conflict and indicated it would be submitting its concern to the Court, just as it has." Burck argued that with the accusation of conflicts of interest, federal prosecutors were trying to deprive the accused of counsel: If

STEVE HELBER / AP

Eric Felten is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

"Quinn Emanuel is disqualified as the Government suggests that it should be, it seems dubious that any law firm with the necessary capacity and experience to defend Megaupload competently would meet the Government's self-serving standard."

In other words, if a lawyer or a law firm were capable of handling the biggest criminal copyright case to come down the pike, chances are good they would have honed the necessary skills by handling copyright cases involving innumerable clients with interests in how the law protects intellectual property. If the government were to succeed in having every such lawyer bounced for supposed conflicts of interest, then the defendant would never be able to get competent counsel. The "Government appears unwilling to litigate fair and square," Burck wrote in his memo to the court, "seeking to disqualify any counsel positioned to represent Megaupload effectively."

He made his case: A few months later, Burck was arguing before the court that the indictment was void because prosecutors had failed to follow simple procedural rules for sending a summons to a corporation being criminally charged. Burck called for the case against Megaupload to be thrown out: The "due process claims trump all the other issues," he said.

Arguing for the United States was prosecutor Ryan Dickey, who said government lawyers would be more than happy to deliver a summons to Kim Dotcom once they had their hands on him. "[W]e've intended from the beginning of this case when it was first indicted, to extradite the individual defendants," Dickey said. "And then when we get them here to the district, to serve a summons on them."

What makes this bit of legal back-and-forth more interesting these days is that prosecutor Ryan Dickey, now a senior lawyer in the DoJ computer crime section, was recently tapped to join special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe.

Which raises the question: Who would get the better of whom, should Burck and Dickey clash in the coming months? If the argument over the service of summons to Megaupload is any indication, it will be a close-run thing. The judge closed the hearing by complimenting both men: "I appreciate the quality of the arguments today." When he made his ruling he split the difference, saying that Megaupload did need to be properly served, but giving the government a chance to figure out a way to get the summons into Dotcom's hands.

Six years after Kevlar-clad police swooped in on his birthday party, Kim Dotcom is long out of the local clink and still fighting extradition to the United States, where he continues to be wanted on charges he mega-violated copyright laws. In the meantime, the Internet entrepreneur is suing the New Zealand government for some several billion dollars for its part in allegedly ruining his business and his reputation.

And here in Washington, William Burck is representing at least one client—Steve Bannon—whose public image as a cartoonish villain is coming to rival that of Kim Dotcom. And as the Mueller investigation proceeds, Burck may well find himself sparring again with Ryan Dickey, the prosecutor who was his foil in the Megaupload fight. ♦

When Allies Get Nervous

Will South Korea or Japan go nuclear?

BY THOMAS KARAKO

In a nuclear world, nuclear weapons are needed to deter major attacks, but who should possess these instruments of deterrence? The United States has long been committed to stemming nuclear proliferation by both potential adversaries and friends. Today the challenge of keeping nonnuclear states from going nuclear may be growing, perhaps nowhere quite as much as in northeast Asia.

Andrew Marshall, former head of the U.S. Defense Department's Office of Net Assessment, which is charged with identifying threats the nation might face in upcoming decades, once wrote that any realistic national security strategy must consider the possibility that efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation will fail. But policymakers, legislators, and publics too often take for granted the nuclear status quo.

Sustaining nonproliferation and extended deterrence—that is, deterring not just an attack upon us but also any on our allies—has never been easy or automatic. Early in the Cold War, for instance, France chose to acquire nuclear capability amid doubts about American promises. One can hardly blame South Korea or Japan for their whispered nuclear desires when they have Kim Jong-un living next door. In the face of North Korea's nuclear advances and China's maritime aggressions, those whispers are growing louder.

As a presidential candidate last year, Donald Trump said he'd consider accepting South Korean and Japanese nuclear weapons. But formally endorsing them would be a major strategic departure for the United States, and it is highly unlikely that we would aid in their acquisition. The Pentagon's forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review seems sure to reaffirm the nation's strong commitment to extended deterrence and nonproliferation.

Thomas Karako is a senior fellow in the international security program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Japan and South Korea live in a rough neighborhood, surrounded by increasingly adversarial nuclear-armed states with grudges spanning centuries. China's strategic capabilities and ambitions are on the rise as it continues to assert questionable claims in the South and East China Seas and elsewhere in the Pacific. Since 2013, Japan has been forced to scramble fighter aircraft over 4,000 times to intercept potential incursions by Russian and Chinese aircraft.

A 2016 Center for Strategic and International Studies report catalogued factors that could lead to a cascade of nuclear proliferation. They included an erosion of U.S. extended deterrence, increasing threats from nuclear-armed adversaries, and the availability of relevant technology and knowledge. Unfortunately, some of these very factors are now evident in northeast Asia.

Last year, North Korea detonated a rather large nuclear weapon, with a yield many times that of the Hiroshima bomb, demonstrated a no-kidding intercontinental ballistic missile, and continued work on perfecting a nuclear missile capable of reaching the U.S. homeland. Allies are again asking the perennial question of American willingness to trade Boston for Berlin or Los Angeles for Taipei if U.S. cities are held hostage. In the absence of strong U.S. leadership, Japan or South Korea could become convinced it is alone.

As Henry Kissinger said on the eve of the 2016 election, "It cannot be that North Korea is the only Korean country in the world that has nuclear weapons, without the South Koreans trying to match it. Nor can it be that Japan will sit there."

Several South Korean politicians have publicly urged their country to develop nuclear weapons. In 2016, the floor leader of the Saenuri party (which has since been renamed the Liberty Korea party) said, "North Korea has been pointing a gun at our head for years. It's time we stop defending ourselves with a mere sword and have nuclear weapons to challenge its destructive nuclear weapons." A former top government adviser told the *New York Times* last year, "If we don't respond with our own nuclear deterrence of some kind, our people will live like nuclear hostages."

This impulse has some domestic backing. One 2016 poll showed that 64 percent of South Koreans support their country's acquiring nuclear arms. Another from September 2017 found that 68 percent of South Koreans support the reintroduction of U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons onto the peninsula. The Liberty Korea party has adopted a platform calling for just that. A more cautious statement came from the current defense minister, in the ruling center-left Korean Democratic party, who said, "The redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons is an alternative worth a full review."

Even if South Korea were to request such weapons, it is far from clear that the United States would provide them. Among other things, storing such weapons farther away from the likely theater of conflict makes them more secure and less subject to preemptive attack. But then the question recurs whether weapons a world away would really be wielded. The perceived value of forward deployment is partly why the United States still keeps a modest number of nuclear gravity bombs at several sites in Europe.

The Japanese government has long been vocal in support of nonproliferation, and public opinion remains strongly against nuclearization. Yet Japan has already quietly acquired a sort of nuclear hedge.

Japan has one of the largest nuclear industries in the world, with stockpiled nuclear material sufficient for many hundreds of weapons. In short, Japan has what the United States and others have worked to keep from Iran—the ability to "break out" and acquire nuclear weapons in a short period of time. Some commentators count Japan as a de facto or virtual nuclear power.

Japan's status as the world's only victim of a nuclear attack and its nonbelligerent constitution provide major cultural barriers to nuclearization. But this could change, either through gradual evolution or with sufficient strategic shock. Already the proposed growth and improvement of conventional military forces enjoys deep support. Coming off a huge electoral victory in October, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may seek a reinterpretation of Japan's constitution that would allow further expansion of its conventional military forces.

STR / AFP / GETTY

North Korean ballistic missiles on parade in Pyongyang, April 15, 2017

So what would a more proliferated world be like? It could be quite anarchic. Instead of being the primary security guarantor and enforcer of a rule-based global order, the United States might assume a very different role. The international order could be more sharply characterized by spheres of influence, brutal power politics, brinksmanship, and greater instability.

More nuclear powers means a multiplication of the number of deterrence relationships, creating more chances for miscalculation. On one hand, power disparities would remain, so states like China or Russia might be tempted to press their interests against smaller nuclear states. On the other hand, the belief of a smaller power that nuclear weapons bring "automatic deterrence" could send it blundering into conflicts it couldn't win.

In a crowded nuclear world, strategic stability would require more of the ever-elusive understanding of one another's intentions, red lines, and core interests. Does China truly know the lengths to which Japan would go to maintain its control of the Senkaku Islands (near Taiwan), which China considers its own? Does Japan understand how far China would press its claims to those islands? Does either know the circumstances in which America would intervene on Japan's behalf?

Clear communication is critical to avoiding misperception and doubt. The administration's recent National Security Strategy (released in December) and National Defense Strategy (released in January) presented a realistic rearticulation of America's role in a world characterized by great power conflict, as well as a blunt list of core national security interests.

To preclude further proliferation in the Asia-Pacific region, at least three lines of effort, all briefly touched on in these documents, should be pursued: modernizing the U.S. nuclear force, boosting allied strike and missile-defense capabilities, and improving military integration. If we want to keep our allies convinced that they do not need their own nuclear weapons, we must ensure they have faith in ours. At a minimum, this means continuing the nuclear-modernization efforts begun during the Obama administration. All three legs of the triad (nuclear-armed submarines, bombers, and ICBMs) are in desperate need of recapitalization, and putting it off further is no longer an option. Indeed, additional adjustments may be required.

Press reports suggest that the Nuclear Posture Review, expected out this week, will recommend modifying current systems and reviving old capabilities, such as developing nuclear weapons with lower yields and restoring the sea-launched cruise missile capability that was formally retired in 2013. Both would contribute to boosting U.S. flexibility and credibility. Continued deterrence dialogues with allies are also essential, so that they understand some details of U.S. capabilities and appreciate the intensity of U.S. resolve.

What would a more proliferated world be like? It could be quite anarchic. Instead of being the primary security guarantor and enforcer of a rule-based global order, the United States might assume a very different role. The international order could be more sharply characterized by spheres of influence, brutal power politics, brinksmanship, and greater instability.

A second priority should be building partner capacity for conventional strike and missile defense. Missile defenses fielded by Japan and South Korea remain quite few in number, but several signs point to the prospect of serious expansion. Continued Patriot and THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) deployments as well as the introduction of several Aegis Ashore sites in Japan, with a more diversified set of missiles than those at the Aegis Ashore site in Romania, would go a long way here. In addition to F-35 stealth fighters, allies like Japan and Australia (and those in other regions, such as Poland) might acquire long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles for deterrence and even preemptive self-defense. In the cooperative development program for the latest version of the Standard Missile-3 missile defense interceptor, Japan's work on the booster has enhanced industrial skills that could be redirected to other purposes, such as developing ballistic or cruise missiles of its own. South Korea, too, must continue to expand its strike capability in the form of ballistic and cruise missiles. Each time North Korea launched an ICBM last year, South Korea launched its own salvo of missiles into the sea within minutes, demonstrating its alert status and readiness to respond in an actual crisis. The Pentagon's forthcoming Missile Defense Review will presumably consider how partner capacity can help counter the full suite of missile threats.

A third path involves tighter military cooperation and integration. Improved information-sharing and a single common picture tracking all airborne objects would make the combination of military forces more effective while allowing each to retain separate and distinct sovereign command and control. South Korea appears to have agreed recently to severely limit missile-defense cooperation with America in exchange for normalizing relations with China following a yearlong spat over THAAD. Such concessions could prove deeply problematic. If assurance is to be improved with conventional forces, the watchword should be more integration, not less.

It's unlikely that South Korea or Japan will go nuclear anytime soon—assuming that the regional security situation remains more or less constant. The leadership of both countries have repeatedly rejected nuclear acquisition, and the potential blowback of any change in this policy would weigh heavily on political and economic interests. If its bullying reaction to the

limited THAAD deployment is any indicator—boycotts, travel restrictions, hacking of government websites—China might impose massive economic and military coercion to preclude a nuclear newcomer.

Nevertheless, national survival is the factor that could lead states to pay all those costs and more. Global nonproliferation efforts over the years have thus far been successful in keeping all but the most determined nations nonnuclear—which is to say they have worked, except when they haven't. A more highly proliferated world is not desirable, but it is conceivable. ♦

Surely You Don't Believe *That*

Name-calling, feelings, and science.

BY JOEL ENGEL

Person A isn't completely persuaded that human activity is the greatest contributor to climate change. Person B believes men can give birth. In 2018, guess which person is more likely to be decried as "anti-science."

That political fashions can influence what is and isn't acceptable in the world of science was pointed out to me nearly 30 years ago by David Plotkin, an iconoclastic physician-cancer scientist I met while pursuing a possible book about a man whose life he'd saved. Complementing his clinical practice as one of the first physicians to specialize in oncology, Plotkin had spent two decades researching the nature of different cancers to learn why the injected doses of poison we call chemotherapy sometimes worked and usually didn't. Could there ever be a magic bullet, he wanted to know.

At the time we met, breast cancer was much in the news and on Plotkin's mind. From 1935 to 1990, its reported incidence had doubled, with 180,000 American women expected to develop the disease annually. Worse, after half a century of relative stability, mortality had started to rise.

No wonder mammography was being marketed so aggressively as a lifesaver to every woman 40 and over. Early detection equals lives saved, studies had implied, until the largest trial, conducted in Sweden in the 1970s, concluded that annual mammograms could lower breast cancer's mortality rate by 25 percent or more. Almost overnight, "Mammography saves lives" became both conventional wisdom and slogan.

All in the name of science

EDWARD KIMMEL

Plotkin's particular interest in breast cancer dated to 1960, when as a new physician he'd examined a distraught young woman who had undergone a radical mastectomy. Sobbing, she opened the gown to reveal what he described as a diagonal slash of red-pink scar tissue running from armpit to lower rib cage.

"I had to keep myself from crying," he recalled.

Plotkin didn't believe early detection through annual mammograms for all women 40 and over would save lives. He said that the majority of cancers typically found in screening are slow-growing and might never become lethal anyway, but their discovery needlessly alarms the patient and often subjects her to unnecessary treatments that are devastating both physically and emotionally. Then there's the high false-positive rate.

As for the deadly cancers, human physiology, he reasoned, was the culprit: The malignant cells of virulent, lethal breast cancer rapidly double into an invasive, destructive mass, one that has the ability to spread and create havoc almost anywhere in the body. While mammography, compared to palpation, does lower the detection threshold of those masses, the smallest tumor it can detect is still a giant in terms of potential destruction. Even at a quarter of an inch, a tumor may have been growing for years, with abundant opportunities to split off metastatic clones.

Plotkin believed that the overwhelming majority of cancers that will prove deadly metastasize early in the tumor's life, long before they can be detected by any means, even mammography. While some of these cells fail to thrive, many—enough to become lethal—breed successful colonies. The eventual cause of death is typically not the primary tumor, which was removed through either lumpectomy or mastectomy, but metastases elsewhere in the body.

"The ultimate survival rates for women whose invasive cancer was diagnosed through mammography," he said, "are statistically identical to women whose cancer was discovered after palpation. Earlier diagnosis equates only to earlier diagnosis."

Studying the Swedish trial's data, Plotkin found math errors to go along with biology and logic errors and compiled his findings in a paper for submission to prestigious medical journals. Yet even before licking the first stamp, he predicted that his work

Joel Engel is the author, most recently, of L.A. '56: A Devil in the City of Angels.

would be returned without comment.

"Fighting the medical establishment," he joked, "is like Galileo trying to convince the pope that Earth moves around the sun."

A few months after every leading journal had rejected him, Plotkin suggested that we collaborate on a book intended to be his Grand Unified Theory of Cancer. Though I had no background in science, he knew how to translate for laymen—his ultimate audience anyway. Maybe with his ideas in the public arena, he said, the professionals would have a go at trying to debunk the book's conclusions and reasoning.

We wrote a short proposal titled "When Cancer Can't Hurt You As Much As the Treatment Can," and editors at two publishing houses expressed serious interest, both of them women. In our two meetings, Plotkin focused his remarks on breast cancer, having assumed they'd be acutely riveted by some of his ideas that had not been included in the proposal.

It was a painful irony, he began, that progress in women's rights and equality in the work world were indirect contributors to the rise in breast cancers.

How so, they asked.

His answer: In a woman's menstrual cycle, the breast is bathed monthly in estrogen and progesterone, which can cause cells to multiply. With delayed childbearing, modern women experience far more of these of these "unrequited ovulations":

> The average age of menarche has fallen to twelve in Western industrialized nations. Meanwhile, the age of first marriage has risen. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, it now averages twenty-four for women in this country; many educated and affluent women do not marry until their thirties, partly because of the increased opportunities to have careers outside the home. Pregnancy, too, has become much less common, as lost working time drives up the cost of having babies. Marriages produce an average of two children, which women nurse briefly if at all. And menopause does not occur until age fifty or later. Women today are thus exposed to reproductive hormones over a much longer span than in the past. They may have 300 to 400 periods—fifteen to twenty times as many as their ancestors had, exposing their breasts to historically unprecedented numbers of estrogen-progesterone cycles.

In both meetings, Plotkin spoke like a dispassionate instructor to students hungry for knowledge. But these women were not his students, and judging both by their perturbed faces and how quickly we were shown the door, this was not knowledge for which they were hungry. Nor, we later heard from the agent, did they want any part in exposing Plotkin's "offensive" ideas to the public. There would be no book.

'Fighting the medical establishment,' he joked, 'is like Galileo trying to convince the pope that Earth moves around the sun.'

David Plotkin in 2009

A year later, in June 1996, Plotkin wrote a cover story for the *Atlantic Monthly* titled "Good News and Bad News About Breast Cancer," a lengthy summary of what he understood about the disease (including the passage quoted above). Owing to long lead times back then, the first angry letters to the editor appeared in October, then continued into November.

One woman, the mother of a breast cancer victim, was "appalled at his lack of understanding, his brazen thoughtlessness, his disregard for the impact his words might have on those who are already suffering." Because of him, her daughter "now believes that she is absolutely doomed." Another writer was "sorry" that the magazine had published his "biased polemic." Yet another asked, "Does David Plotkin seriously believe, as his article suggests, that better nutrition, increased job opportunities, longer life expectancy, and the natural processes of the female body (menstruation) are the root causes of increased rates of breast cancer among women today?"

Plotkin died, of bone cancer, 16 years later. In a cosmic coincidence, on the morning of his memorial service came mainstream news reports about an article in the *BMJ* (formerly *British Medical Journal*) that accused a powerful breast-cancer charity, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, of vastly overstating mammography's benefits in its ads. The authors were two Dartmouth Medical School professors, Lisa M. Schwartz and Steven Woloshin, who had studied the subject for years and concluded there was little difference in survival rates between screened and unscreened patients.

Finding an email address, I wrote to Dr. Woloshin and asked if he'd heard of Dr. David Plotkin. Yes, he said, he and Dr. Schwartz remembered the *Atlantic* article from when they were finishing their fellowships. "It had a big influence on us."

Today, the United States Preventive Services Task Force no longer recommends annual mammograms. It now advises women 50-74 "at average risk for breast cancer" to get one every two years and women 40-49 to consult with their doctors "about when to start and how often to get a mammogram." Meanwhile, the American Cancer Society has raised from 40 to 45 the age at which it recommends women begin having annual mammograms, with biannual ones beginning at age 55.

Plotkin didn't live to see himself vindicated on mammography, and the consensus reasons for breast cancer's rise do not (and may never) include his notion of "unrequited ovulations." But physiology, like physics, doesn't accede to politics, so someday the truth or truths will out. It would be nice, though, if someday came sooner rather than later in all the sciences—which it can't as long as name-calling and feelings impede scientific inquiry. ♦

COURTESY OF DAVID FINER

The Case for Free Money

Universal basic income looks like a big-government redistribution scheme, but it may be the best way to rein in entitlements

By Tony Mecia

At first blush, universal basic income sounds like something dreamed up on a California commune or in a late-night college bull session. The idea: Just give people money. Ask nothing in return. Impose no requirement to work or to look for work. And don't just give taxpayer money to people living in poverty, give it to everybody—from gazillionaire to gig-worker—no questions asked.

Yet universal basic income is an idea that is having its moment. Enthusiasm for a government-guaranteed income for all seems to be percolating across the country. Groups backed by Silicon Valley luminaries are forming to devise political strategies. Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign flirted with the idea. There's scholarly and popular interest in the small-scale attempts that have been made, and new experiments are being launched to try to answer some of the questions about how it could work.

Advocates are fond of noting that the idea draws support from people of all political stripes, including conservatives and libertarians. Part of the support stems from the reality that existing government antipoverty programs don't work. Both sides agree on that—though they disagree on whether the roots of the failure are insufficient funding, government mismanagement, or poor design. The proof is in the numbers: The government spends more than $1 trillion each year helping the poor, yet one in eight Americans lives in poverty. A lot of economists and social scientists think it is time to examine other options.

One of the most vocal proponents of universal basic income is Charles Murray, who has spent the better part of the last four decades studying and writing about social policy. In 2006, he published *In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State*. It is less a philosophical treatise than a nuts-and-bolts blueprint, with detailed financial analysis, that specifies how a universal basic income could be implemented in the United States and what would be its positive social effects. At the time, the little attention it received came chiefly from people on the left who were already interested in the topic. But the idea gained steam in the following decade, and Murray revised the book, releasing a new edition in 2016 that updated the numbers. His plan: Give everybody over age 21 $13,000 a year. Compel them to use $3,000 of it on catastrophic health insurance. The payment starts to be taxed when annual income hits $30,000. The recipient decides how to spend the rest.

Murray has long been an intellectual hero to the right, but this idea of a basic income for all would seem to ask a lot of conservatives. It sounds a lot like a big-government redistribution scheme, a fulfillment of a socialist dream to take money from those who are successful and spread it around equally. Murray argues that conservatives should support a basic income because the trend lines of the current system are financially unsustainable. The numbers would work, he estimates, if the government eliminates $2.2 trillion worth of annual benefits—including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare programs, and other transfer payments—and replaces them with his plan, which he estimates at $2.6 trillion (using 2014 numbers). Entitlements are projected to grow faster than the projections of his plan, so in time it would save money. (The government currently spends about $4 trillion a year.)

Murray tells me that many of the common objections to the idea come from a failure to understand the reality of the existing crisis. "In the case of 'You're just giving people money,' well, we're just giving people money now, for heaven's sake," he says. "And we have a huge problem of able-bodied young males sitting in front of video boxes

GARY LOCKE

Tony Mecia is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

'A wholly legitimate protection against a risk common to all'

Over the years, an ideologically diverse collection of historical figures has spoken favorably of a basic income or a variant of that idea.

"I shall now proceed to the plan I have to propose, which is, To create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of 21 years, the sum of £15 sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property: And also, the sum of £10 per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of 50 years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age. . . . It is proposed that the payments, as already stated, be made to every person, rich or poor. It is best to make it so, to prevent invidious distinctions. It is also right it should be so, because it is in lieu of the natural inheritance, which, as a right, belongs to every man."

—Thomas Paine, 1795

"We have in America today more wealth, more goods, more food, more clothing, more houses than we have ever had. We have everything in abundance here. . . . We propose to limit the wealth of big men in the country. . . . There should be a guarantee of a family wealth of around $5,000; enough for a home, an automobile, a radio, and the ordinary conveniences, and the opportunity to educate their children; a fair share of the income of this land thereafter to that family so there will be no such thing as merely the select to have those things, and so there will be no such thing as a family living in poverty and distress."

—Huey Long, 1934

stoned and unemployed. We already have a huge problem there. This will not make it worse. It will diminish it."

Issuing all adults regular payments straight to their bank accounts would, he adds, have all kinds of positive effects conservatives find palatable. More people would get married, as it becomes possible to live a middle-class lifestyle by sharing distributions and combining them with a little bit of income. Women in bad relationships would have financial independence from ne'er-do-well boyfriends. The middle class could save for retirement. Workers wouldn't be tied to soul-crushing jobs. Entrepreneurs would have a cushion to try something new.

Murray knows Congress won't be acting any time soon—"the ability of Congress to kick the can down the road seems inexhaustible," he says. And he doesn't trust politicians to keep the government's role limited, which is why he favors a constitutional amendment barring all transfer payments except the distribution.

As to criticism that basic income is a pipe dream that politicians could never pull off, Murray says he's floating an idea. "Let's be real," he says. "It's never going to be enacted the way I want it to be enacted. My job is to say this is a system that could actually work. It could actually accomplish good things if it were implemented. My responsibility is to make that case. The fact it's not politically possible right now—that's not my job."

A NEW ENTITLEMENT

Big ideas have a way, over time, of growing more acceptable. They can eventually manifest themselves in government policy. Notions that at one time in our history sounded radical—racial equality, gay marriage, guaranteed health care—found increasing public acceptance, and our political system eventually enshrined them into law. It is not clear if the move toward a basic income will follow the same path. But at universities, think tanks, and in the business world, leaders are embracing it as a revolutionary idea. They've working to fill out some of the details today, in hopes that politicians will debate them tomorrow.

Recent books arguing for a minimum basic income include *Basic Income: A Guide for the Open-Minded* by British economist Guy Standing; *Raising the Floor: How a Universal Basic Income Can Renew Our Economy and Rebuild the American Dream* by union leader Andy Stern; *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few* by Clinton Labor secretary Robert Reich; and *Utopia for Realists: How We Can Build the Ideal World* by Dutch journalist Rutger Bregman. There are also plenty of think tank white papers and blogs extolling the virtues of the idea.

Proponents like to say that the idea has been around for decades, if not centuries, and its champions have included such ideologically diverse figures as Thomas

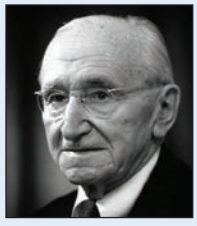
"One of the answers, it seems to me, is a guaranteed annual income, a guaranteed minimum income for all people, and for all families of our country. It seems to me that the civil rights movement must now begin to organize for the guaranteed annual income—begin to organize people all over our country and mobilize forces so that we can bring to the attention of our nation this need, and this something, which I believe will go a long, long way toward dealing with the Negro's economic problem and the economic problem which many other poor people confront in our nation."

—Martin Luther King Jr., 1967

"The proposal for a negative income tax is a proposal to help poor people by giving them money, which is what they need, rather than as now, by requiring them to come before a governmental official, detail all their assets and their liabilities and be told that you may spend x dollars on rent, y dollars on food, et cetera, and then be given a handout. The idea of a negative income tax is to treat people who are poor in the same way as we treat people who are rich. Both groups would have to file income tax returns and both groups would be treated the same."

—Milton Friedman, 1968

"The assurance of a certain minimum income for everyone, or a sort of floor below which nobody need fall even when he is unable to provide for himself, appears not only to be a wholly legitimate protection against a risk common to all, but a necessary part of the Great Society in which the individual no longer has specific claims on the members of the particular small group into which he was born."



—Friedrich Hayek, 1979

Paine, Huey Long, Martin Luther King, John Kenneth Galbraith, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman. The truth is a little more complicated, as some of these ventured little beyond the idea of the poor receiving stipends, while others detailed plans far different from those now under discussion. But the fact is that people with very different ideas about how society should be organized see universal basic income as a step in the right direction. Where they differ is in how they want to pay for it.

Thinkers on the left see basic income not as welfare reform but as part of their quest for "economic justice" and human rights in a time of "increasing inequality." They oppose the wholesale elimination of transfer payments to fund the idea and mostly envision a basic income as existing in addition to Social Security and Medicare. They propose wondrous new funding sources, such as value-added taxes, taxes on carbon, taxes on robots, taxes on financial transactions, taxes on wealth, taxes on inheritance, cutting the military, eliminating corporate tax breaks, and cracking down on tax avoidance by the rich.

And they don't share Murray's views of the corrosive nature of entitlements. In *Raising the Floor*, for instance, Andy Stern chides Murray for believing that replacing traditional welfare with an annual payment will cause people to take responsibility for their lives. "Murray seems to want to teach poor people a lesson," he wrote. Yet Stern, former president of the country's second-largest labor union, the Service Employees International Union, winds up sounding like a free-market economist: "Some people will choose to take more responsibility for their lives, and some will not, which to my mind is just fine, because that's how people behave when they are allowed to choose freely." Stern's proposal is a basic income of $12,000 a year for everybody aged 18 to 64, plus seniors receiving less than $1,000 a month in Social Security. It would be paid for by a host of new taxes and by ending many antipoverty programs, but not Social Security. He estimates his plan would cost about $2.5 trillion a year (essentially doubling present entitlement spending).

Stern and Murray have held friendly debates on the topic, and last year they teamed up against two Obama administration economists, Jason Furman and Jared Bernstein, who oppose the idea, which shows how basic income scrambles the conventional political framework.

With such high costs associated with a basic income program, it might seem logical to limit the payouts of money to those who need it. Why give $1,000 a month to Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett, and millions of others who are thriving economically? Advocates insist that the idea works only if everybody receives the money. This is not charity. It is an equitable way to compensate everybody for being part of a wealthy society. And as a practical matter,

it greatly simplifies the distribution of money, with no applications or income tests. It also removes any stigma attached to receiving government benefits and limits the disincentive to work that comes with benefits tied to income thresholds.

One of the problems with existing welfare programs is that they create few incentives to take a job and are "hopelessly complex and opaque," says Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A basic income would empower individuals and remove government-knows-best paternalism, he says: "Poor people are poor because they don't have money, but almost none of these programs give people money. We treat people like they are 10 years old. We pay their landlord, their doctor, their grocery store." He says he is "skeptically sympathetic" to a universal basic income—believing it would remedy some of the drawbacks of existing programs but that it is far too expensive to be practical.

A 2015 study by McKinsey & Co. found that 45 percent of work tasks could be done by existing technology, especially predictable physical work, data collection, and data processing.

The relationship between work and money is one of the perplexing questions about universal basic income, because it sounds like the government providing a financial incentive to be lazy—why work if the government will pay you for not working? Proponents reply that work comes in many forms, such as caring for a household or volunteering, and that a basic income can free people to live fulfilled lives when the fulfilling choice is not the highest-earning one. In any event, the amount is supposed to be, as its name suggests, a "basic income" to cover necessities. People are free to work for additional money—or not.

In the 1960s, economist Milton Friedman proposed a "negative income tax" based on the idea that people with income below a certain level should receive help from the government. In 1969, the Nixon administration tried to put this into law. The Family Assistance Plan, crafted in part by presidential aide Daniel Patrick Moynihan, guaranteed a minimum income to poor families with children but also included a work requirement for those who were able. The plan passed the House but Democrats blocked it in the Senate. Opposition came from both sides of the political spectrum: Conservatives, including Friedman, argued that the plan as designed provided too little incentive for people to leave welfare. Liberals liked the idea of a basic income but found the plan's guaranteed annual minimum of $1,600 a year (about $10,400 today) too meager.

Democrat George McGovern floated the idea of a "Demogrant"—a $1,000 tax credit to everybody—in the 1972 presidential primary campaign but withdrew it after criticism from rival Hubert Humphrey. At the same time, economists were setting out to test the effects of a negative income tax in a series of small-scale experiments. In one, involving 5,000 low-income families in Seattle and Denver, researchers guaranteed a minimum level of income just above the poverty line, taxing any amount earned over that level and subsidizing anything below it. A review of the data by the Department of Health and Human Services found the experiment had "a significant negative effect on hours worked per year." Surprisingly, researchers also found that couples in the study separated at higher rates than control groups, theorizing that "a cash transfer program that provides financial alternatives to marriage for low-income women also tends to destabilize marriage." Similar studies in the Canadian province of Manitoba were not much more encouraging.

The results disappointed proponents of a negative income tax and basic income. In 1978, Moynihan, who was by then representing New York in the Senate, said: "We must now be prepared to entertain the possibility that we were wrong." The idea stalled for a couple of decades as social scientists reexamined the studies and discovered methodological shortcomings. For instance, the research subjects in the Seattle and Denver experiments self-reported their outside income and therefore had an incentive to under-report their earnings in order to receive more money from the researchers.

EXPERIMENTING WITH A BASIC INCOME

With knowledge of the weaknesses of these earlier studies, researchers today are undertaking new efforts to understand how a basic income affects decision-making. Perhaps the best-known in the United States is the study launched last year by Y Combinator, a Silicon Valley venture capital firm. Its president, Sam Altman, likes the idea of a basic income but wants to test how it might work. The company's research arm has already done a feasibility study in Oakland, Calif., and now plans to recruit 3,000 people from two states to participate in an experiment in which 1,000 people receive $1,000 a month for three to five years, and the rest is a control group whose members receive $50 a month. While researchers in the older experiments sought mainly to gauge labor participation, the Y Combinator study seeks to measure the effect on a much broader range of indicators, including health, happiness, time use, personal finances, political and social behavior, and crime.

A similar test is underway in Finland, where the government is sending 2,000 unemployed residents nearly $700 a month for two years. It is tracking how they spend the money and whether they look for work, as a prelude to restructuring the country's social welfare system. Stockton, Calif., a city that declared bankruptcy as recently as 2012, is about to test a basic income—providing $500 a month to a few hundred of the city's lowest-income residents. There are also experiments underway in Kenya and the Netherlands.

Researchers acknowledge the limits of such studies. They fail to gauge the true effect of a basic income because subjects know at the beginning of the studies that they will end in a few years. In some cases, the subjects collect benefits in addition to the money researchers pay them. And it is tough to discern the effects on an entire society when only a small portion of that society is the subject of social-science research.

There are some examples, though, in which every member of a society receives a payment, and those are now attracting attention. One is the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in rural western North Carolina. In 1997, the Cherokee opened a casino, run by Harrah's, and agreed to split half the profits equally among their members, including children. Today, the tribe has 16,000 members, and payments total $12,000 a year per person. In addition, each child has a "minor's fund" and receives a windfall of more than $100,000 when they come of age: $25,000 at 18, $25,000 at 21, and the rest at 25.

The tribe has used some of the casino money to build roads, health care facilities, schools, and more, but there have been few academic studies on the effects of the direct payments. A Duke researcher found that the money has improved health and has lifted some families from poverty. A UCLA researcher found little effect on overall employment. There is still crime, and there is still chronic poverty. But tribe members have said they enjoy having extra money to pay bills. The jury is out.

On a smaller scale, Alaska has for 35 years been returning a portion of its oil-lease revenues to state residents in the form of annual payments. Last year, the state set the amount at $1,100, which goes to Alaskan adults and children who haven't been convicted of felonies and meet residency requirements. (The payment has ranged between $878 and $2,072 over the last decade.)

As with the Cherokee, there hasn't been much study of the effects of handing everybody money. "The Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend can tell us quite a bit about how we should proceed with this universal basic income conversation," says Mouhcine Guettabi, an economics professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage. "Unfortunately, as of now, I don't think there is enough work that answers some of those pressing questions about how it affects labor-force participation or crime or any of that." His department is starting to study the effects, but it is too early to draw any conclusions.

Another factor in the basic-income debate is the rising role of technology in the workforce. Unemployment is at its lowest level in nearly two decades, and it isn't easy to imagine that robots are coming for American jobs. But looking ahead five or 10 years or more, we can expect that advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence will allow machines to handle a much broader array of responsibilities than they do today. Tech leaders like Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Tesla's Elon Musk favor a basic income in part because of worries about how to provide for people displaced by technology. In his commencement address at Harvard last year, Zuckerberg, 33, said his generation "will have to deal with tens of millions of jobs replaced by automation like self-driving cars and trucks."

If that's the lens you're looking through, the signs are all around us: Technology companies are experimenting with driverless cars. Amazon is trying home delivery by drone. Companies are hiring robots as security guards. Patrons at Japanese restaurants order from computers with no waiters in sight.

A much-cited 2013 study by two Oxford professors (an economist and an engineer) showed that 47 percent of U.S. jobs are at high risk of being replaced by computers "over some unspecified number of years, perhaps a decade or two." The fields most at risk are office work, sales, service, construction, and manufacturing; the jobs that seem safer are in health care, education, the arts, computers, and the sciences. A 2015 study by McKinsey & Co. found that 45 percent of work tasks could be done by existing technology, especially predictable physical work, data collection, and data processing.

Worries about machines supplanting jobs have been around since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. The mainstream economic view is that advances in technology help society by freeing workers from drudgery and enabling the creation of new and more sophisticated fields of work. Yet the old fears are finding new currency among supporters of a basic income. They say it would help people displaced by technology navigate an uncertain future. Having the ability to fall back on a regular small payment would encourage risk-taking and entrepreneurship and provide succor to those whose jobs are taken over by robots. It's not clear that the latest technological revolution will result in mass unemployment, but certainly the nature of work is changing. Technology is linking people together to find new sources of income, from driving cars to walking dogs to taking online surveys. But these gig-economy services tend to lack the security and benefits of

full-time employment. A basic income, advocates say, can help people who choose that kind of work.

ENTER THE POLITICIANS

While a basic income has been kicked around by academics for decades and tested in small ways, the idea is now entering the political sphere—especially in Europe. Swiss voters in 2016 rejected a basic-income referendum by three to one, though an organizer called the move successful for "getting a broad public debate started." The Socialist party's candidate for French president in 2017 ran on a platform that included a basic income. He finished fifth. A 2017 poll found that a majority of the population in eight European countries favors a universal basic income, including the United Kingdom, Finland, and Ireland.

In the United States, the idea languishes on the political fringes. Progressive standard-bearer Bernie Sanders, for instance, refuses to endorse it. Consumer advocate and perennial presidential candidate Ralph Nader supports it, though, as does Zoltan Istvan, a futurist who is running for governor of California as a Libertarian. The Black Lives Matter movement embraced a universal basic income, along with a reparations bonus payment, in its 2016 policy platform. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee, said last year on Twitter that he supports a guaranteed basic income. Yet the idea runs counter to every popular conception of welfare, which mainstream politicians say should be to encourage people to find work and become independent of government assistance.

Adopting a basic income need not be an all-or-nothing proposition. Advocates say there could be incremental measures such as consolidating some of the 80-plus federal programs that provide assistance to low-income Americans and replacing the ones that offer vouchers for food and housing with direct cash payments. House speaker Paul Ryan, for instance, has spoken favorably about allowing states to combine antipoverty payments into a single funding mechanism.

Policymakers could also lift work requirements—though polls show most Americans favor requiring welfare recipients to do something for their benefits. The federal government could modify existing programs to allow states flexibility to experiment with cash payments in lieu of traditional welfare. It could combine existing tax breaks into a single allowance or refundable tax credit, or provide a "baby bond" to children when they're born—an idea Hillary Clinton suggested when running for president in 2008. None of these policies is the endgame for basic-income advocates, but steps in the right direction as they build support.

"It's very grassroots right now, and it's very much in an awareness stage," says Scott Santens, a New Orleans writer who has raised money online to provide himself a $1,000-a-month basic income while he advocates for a universal basic income. "It's an idea that can have a reflexive effect on people, where if they immediately think it's an idea from the other side, they wonder why they should support it. It's a matter of reading more and more and discovering it's a good idea." He sees the movement progressing as people begin to worry about automation taking their jobs. They will read about the basic income experiments underway, he says. They will start asking candidates about it. And the political debate will begin.

"We'll reach a point where it's going to be a major question for politicians to have a stance on," Santens says. "They'll be for it or against it, and they'll win or lose elections because of it." Andy Stern, the former SEIU leader, would agree. In his book, he argued that raising the visibility of universal basic income is ultimately about encouraging its supporters to run for office.

In New York City, a group called Basic Income Action holds monthly "movie nights" to discuss the idea. Last month's meeting attracted nearly 20 people, says cofounder Diane Pagen, a city social worker. She knows of other groups in Minneapolis, Seattle, and San Francisco but says the movement is only loosely organized. "The missing ingredient is people who will run for office on this platform," she says. "It's building. It's growing. We are very excited." The universal basic income discussion group on Reddit has almost 50,000 subscribers.

It can be hard to visualize such a monumental policy shift taking place. Maybe it's absurd to believe politicians can devise the perfect plan—one that overhauls programs accounting for more than half the federal budget—when they can hardly agree to fund the government for the following month. And maybe it's unwise to expect federal workers to implement such a plan flawlessly or for citizens to trust the government to provide for their basic needs. But with grassroots activism, dedicated believers, tech titans' enthusiasm, experiments popping up worldwide, growing fears about automation, and momentum building in Europe, how can we say with confidence that today's kooky idea won't become the next generation's reality?

"The civil rights movement is a parallel," says Charles Murray. "It's like the mid-1950s, when you started to get a really raised consciousness across the nation among whites as to how blacks had been treated. We may be in the consciousness-raising phase right now. We have to worry about an era in which jobs are not defined the same way as they are now, in which people find satisfying work that doesn't involve a nine-to-five job. As time goes on, things that are not realistic now become realistic." ♦

China Ventures into Europe

Where Brussels is weakest, Beijing moves in

By John Psaropoulos

Over the past five years, the State Grid Corporation of China has come close to performing a feat that the European Union, despite its 13 trillion euro economy, has failed at for two decades: create an electricity grid stretching across much of Europe, introducing efficiencies and economies of scale that national transmission operators are incapable of. With a 4.75 billion euro acquisition spree, China's State Grid has acquired stakes in the grids of Greece, Italy, Portugal, and, shortly, Spain, making it Europe's leading investor in electricity transmission.

State Grid's astonishing foray into what were until recently jealously guarded national assets has been a wake-up call to the European Union. For years, the E.U. has been trying to decouple the transmission of electricity from its generation, as it broke up old state monopolies. When the eurozone directed its indebted Mediterranean members to raise money by privatizing state power companies (among other assets) in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, few imagined that these would be snapped up by a single state-owned company.

Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras with Chinese president Xi Jinping in Beijing, July 5, 2016

NG HAN GUAN / GETTY

Meanwhile, China moved in the opposite direction. State Grid was formed in 2002 as an experiment in state capitalism. The galloping pace of China's economy over the past two decades helped ensure its growth. It is now the world's largest utility by revenue (it operates 60 subsidiaries in China alone). Released into the free market world, State Grid has been devastatingly effective. Its ambitions have made it a stakeholder in electricity generation and transmission in Brazil, Australia, and the Philippines. Today it has revenues of $315 billion and controls assets of almost half a trillion dollars. Most of these assets are still in China, but it is halfway to its goal of buying up to $50 billion in assets abroad by 2020.

This clash of economic agendas has also exposed Europe's private sector to competition from other state champions. Last September, the continent's two largest train manufacturers, France's Alstom and Germany's Siemens, announced that they would merge their rail operations in order to fend off competition from another Chinese state giant, the China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC), today the world's largest manufacturer of rail transit equipment. "A dominant player in Asia has changed global market dynamics," announced Siemens's chief executive, Joe Kaeser.

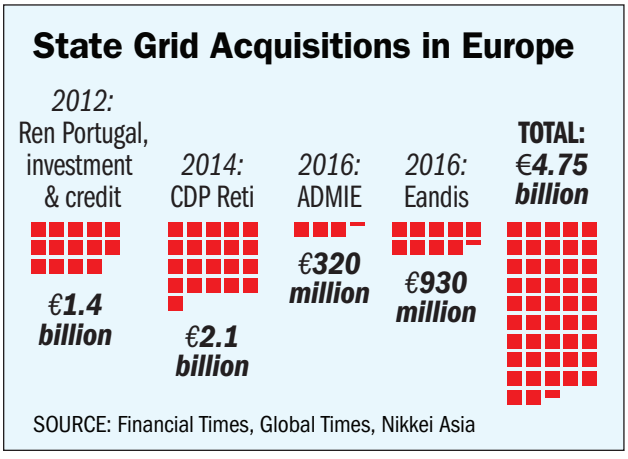
Until the turn of the century, investment between Europe and China was virtually nonexistent. European firms started investing in China in 1992. China entered Europe in earnest with strategic timing—after the 2008 financial crisis had drained investment capital from the continent—and it has moved with speed and purpose. Plotted on a graph, the investment relationship looks like a pair of crossed swords. Europe's outbound investment to China peaked at 12 billion euros in 2012, just as China's took off. In 2016, Chinese investments in the E.U. reached a record 35 billion euros, while E.U. investments in China fell to 8 billion euros. It is this asymmetry that is keeping European policymakers awake at night. That's because it is increasingly clear that while Europe welcomes the economic benefits of China's strategic initiative, the political implications are potentially destructive to Europe's inchoate political union.

John Psaropoulos is an independent journalist who has covered Greece and the Balkans for two decades. He writes and broadcasts for, among others, the Daily Beast*, the* Washington Post*, the* American Scholar*, and Al Jazeera English. His blog is thenewathenian.com.*

TWO AXES OF EUROSKEPTICISM

Almost half of Chinese investment in Europe has taken place along two axes. One runs north from Greece to Poland, through the former Yugoslavia and Warsaw Pact countries. The other runs west, from Greece to Portugal—the northern Mediterranean rim targeted by State Grid.

China has included both axes in its Belt and Road Initiative, a global, trillion-dollar investment program in port, road, and railway infrastructure aiming to lower the cost of Chinese exports to the rest of the world, in Asia, Africa, and Europe. In 2008, the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) bought a lease to operate most of the container traffic through the port of Piraeus and has already increased it sixfold (see my article "Shipping News" in this magazine's issue of August 7, 2017). Within the next five years, Piraeus is expected to rival Hamburg and Rotterdam, Europe's busiest ports, in container throughput. Chinese companies have already committed roughly 8 billion euros on port infrastructure, roads, and railways designed to help ship those containers from Piraeus as far north as Budapest, a route called the Balkan Silk Road.



On a purely practical level, China is funding badly needed public works. Eastern Europe is estimated to need infrastructure investment of four times the 150 billion euros the E.U. has spent there. Beginning in 1994, the E.U. designed transport corridors crisscrossing the continent, envisioning hundreds of projects in road, rail, air, logistics, and waterway infrastructure; but it can only afford grants subsidizing a fraction of the work. States must supplement these, and banks would in theory finance competitive private bids for the remainder. Since 2008, though, governments have often chosen to award these projects to Chinese contractors, for the simple reason that these contractors could finance 85 percent of the cost or more with Chinese state bank or government lending.

Eastern Europe's "financial needs are much bigger than the E.U. can offer, in terms of funding," and the funding comes with "plenty of red tape and all those Brussels procedures, which are really off-putting," says Plamen Tonchev, head of the Asia Unit at the Institute of International Economic Relations in Athens. "The Chinese turn up with their checkbooks and suitcases full of money, very few questions asked, and that's what matters."

In former Yugoslav Macedonia, for example, Sinohydro Corp. is building two motorways along the corridor linking the Black Sea to the Adriatic. As in many Chinese overseas projects, the financing is provided by China's Export-Import Bank (Exim), based in Hong Kong, to the tune of 574 million euros.

In Serbia, the Chinese government has directly provided 350 million euros in official lending to construct part of a motorway corridor that will eventually connect Belgrade to the Montenegro port city of Bar, on the Adriatic. In Montenegro, the China Road and Bridge Corp. (CRBC) is working on a 75-mile stretch of the same highway thanks to 680 million euros that Montenegro has borrowed from China's Exim. Controversially, Montenegro sacrificed 50 million euros in loans from the World Bank in favour of the massive loan from Exim, despite warnings that this would put it in China's debt.

The European Union is belatedly taking notice of the political symbolism of Chinese finance and engineering dexterity on its turf. What were once European Union corridors are being rebranded as parts of the Belt and Road Initiative. What was once a symbol of European connectivity and federalization is now a display of Chinese connectivity and largesse.

China has taken this symbolism a step further. In 2012, it launched a political forum called the 16+1, comprising all 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Balkans, plus Greece as an observer. It created two China-CEE Investment Co-Operation Funds worth 10.5 billion euros and launched a series of mutual high-level visits with CEE leaders. When China launched its Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015 to finance Belt and Road Initiative projects, 14 E.U. member states became shareholders despite U.S. exhortations to ignore it.

Independent economist Jens Bastian has discovered that the return on these investments has an enormous indirect benefit for China. In a July 2017 report for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Bastian details a correlation between the amount of Chinese investment in a country and that country's trade deficit with China. During the last five years, Eastern Europe's trade deficit with China rose from 26 billion to 44 billion euros.

From the European Union's point of view, there is a more unsettling correlation. Some of the countries benefiting most from Chinese investment are also among the most

CHARTS: THE WEEKLY STANDARD

Euroskeptic. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic are at odds with Brussels over a slew of issues. All three have rejected an E.U. scheme to resettle incoming refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Poland and Hungary are undermining freedom of speech in the media, and Poland's government has defied the E.U. in passing a law allowing the government to dismiss senior judges.

China seems to be exploiting the very fault line the George W. Bush administration exploited in 2003, as it searched for European allies in the second Gulf war. Already assured of E.U. membership, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic broke ranks with the E.U. majority and sided with Bush, in a clear setback to a common E.U. foreign and defense policy. China quietly took note.

"I think there is a sense of, 'We can finally again be part of something bigger, and we know the Europeans won't give it to us, but we can find it elsewhere, and that will open windows of opportunity,'" says Bastian of Eastern Europe. "This sense of constantly being lectured by the Europeans and 'Look how smooth sailing it is to do business with the Chinese,' and then getting this impression of, 'Look, they're rolling out the red carpet for us, they're inviting us to the forum in Beijing . . . they're setting up a China-CEE cooperation forum—they want us. Do they in Brussels really want us?'"

Both for Southern and Eastern European countries, the mere suggestion of being in parlance with Beijing appears to bestow a certain mystique, which could translate into political leverage with Brussels and Washington. Governments have competed to win China's favor.

In March last year, Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Czech president Milos Zeman signed a memorandum for projects worth a fantastical 231 billion euros—a sum greater than the country's annual GDP. Among them is a scheme to insinuate the Czech Republic into China's Belt and Road Initiative by connecting the Black Sea with the Baltic through the construction of canals linking the Danube, Oder, and Elbe rivers. Zeman's China pivot came with an anti-Western attitude. During an interview with China Central Television, he described Czech policy towards China as no longer being "submissive to pressure from the United States and the European Union."

No country in Eastern Europe, however, seems to have made more headway in winning Chinese favor than Hungary. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán allowed Hungary to issue a government bond in April last year denominated in Chinese currency, and in July this year to issue another such bond in China. This made Hungary the first country to have sold renminbi-denominated debt onshore as well as offshore China.

"You look at the specifics in terms of how it is structured, in terms of maturity, interest rate—and you say, okay, it's not exorbitant, but it's not cheap either," says Bastian. "You could place a U.S. dollar bond or a euro bond . . . on cheaper conditions than you've done it with China. Why are you doing this? Because you obviously want access. You want name recognition. You want also first-mover status. And Hungary is at the forefront. Poland is following close behind."

The relatively small size of the bonds—a mere $154 million each—seems to confirm that the point of issuing them was political symbolism. Hungary receives European Union funding of about 3.5 billion euros a year.

The Bank of China may have been rewarding Orbán by choosing Budapest last year as its regional headquarters. "They are showing financial markets but also they are showing the E.U., multilateral organizations like the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development], the [International Monetary Fund], the [European Investment Bank], 'We are looking for and are successfully finding alternatives,'" says Bastian.

EUROPE'S SOUTH: THE POLITICS OF DEBT

After 2008, the sovereign debt crises of Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland demonstrated the raw political power of creditors over debtors, opening a new fault line across Europe. The eurozone's wealthier north imposed a diet of fiscal discipline on all four, a move that framed the dilution of national sovereignty as a punitive act rather than a cooperative measure in a political union. The European Court of Auditors is the most recent body to have found serious flaws in the design, management, and effectiveness of the adjustment programs that were imposed, and those flaws have hurt the authority of Brussels.

China's Belt and Road Initiative investments in Europe thus have the potential to bring Beijing foreign policy benefits as well as increased trade. Greece most dramatically demonstrates how disaffection with the E.U. can pay dividends to its new infrastructure partner. In June 2016, China lost an arbitration brought by the Philippines to the International Court at The Hague over fishing rights in the Spratly Islands—a disputed territory between the two. Greece, which had recently sold the Piraeus Port Authority to COSCO, blocked a common E.U. statement calling on China to respect the International Law of the Sea.

Then, last summer, Greece blocked a common E.U. statement at the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva calling on China to respect freedom of speech. It was the first time the E.U. had failed to make its unanimous annual statement.

Greek foreign minister Nikos Kotzias told The Weekly Standard that other E.U. member states "accused us of doing this for China because we have economic interests. But we have 0.7 percent of China's investments in the European Union. Britain has 25 percent. Germany has 20 percent. Why do we have economic interests and not them? . . . For them it's business as usual, but if we sell something it affects our political stance. This is hypocrisy and doublespeak, and I have told them so."

Kotzias went on to state a more startling position: "I respect that the Chinese have a different opinion on human rights. There is a philosophical issue here. Are human rights as the West perceives them generally applicable? Or do some people have a different understanding? One has to respect that. We believe that they are generally applicable. But not everyone believes what we believe."

Greece has consistently in the past called upon others, especially neighboring Turkey, to respect international law and human rights. Its modification of both standards within a year is unprecedented.

Last summer, Greece blocked a common E.U. statement at the U.N. Human Rights Council calling on China to respect freedom of speech—the first time the E.U. had failed to make its unanimous annual statement. Upon criticism, Greek foreign minister Nikos Kotzias asks, 'Are human rights as the West perceives them generally applicable? Or do some people have a different understanding? One has to respect that.'

THE E.U. FIGHTS BACK

Europe's indignation at Chinese encroachment is neatly summarized by a remark from German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel in September. "If we do not succeed . . . in developing a single strategy towards China, then China will succeed in dividing Europe," he told a gathering of French diplomats. He cited the disunity on The Hague's South China Sea ruling as an example.

The E.U. is beginning to fight back. In his state of the union address, also in September, Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, announced that he would look into setting up a common investment screening process. "We are not naïve free traders," Juncker said. "If a foreign, state-owned company wants to purchase a European harbor, part of our energy infrastructure, or a defense technology firm, this should only happen in transparency, with scrutiny and debate. It is a political responsibility to know what is going on in our own backyard so that we can protect our collective security if needed."

As if to fire the starting gun on the screening process, the commission launched an investigation into a 2 billion euro Chinese contract to build a high-speed rail link between Belgrade and Budapest. This contract had bypassed the E.U.'s mandatory competitive bidding process. The result was dramatic. Last December, Hungary's Orbán unilaterally scrapped the deal and opened the project to new offers.

Juncker is also greasing the wheels of integration. The commission is doubling the size and duration of a European Fund for Strategic Investments Juncker created, whose aim is to close the investment gap, to provide at least half a trillion euros in investments by 2020. In October, Juncker targeted the Balkan region, saying the EFSI would back a freight-rail link stretching from the Danube to the Black Sea and the Aegean, linking three Greek ports with three Bulgarian ones.

Europe is also hardening its diplomacy towards Beijing. Last year, the E.U. and Washington refused to recognize China's transition to a market economy 15 years after joining the World Trade Organization. During the first Belt and Road Forum in Beijing this year, Germany, France, and the U.K.—recipients of half of Chinese investment in Europe—rejected a final summit statement on trade because it did not clearly address the need to uphold environmental and social standards.

These are not just diplomatic slaps in the face. Last year, the European Commission put in place 21 anti-dumping measures against Chinese steel products. This year, the European parliament toughened those measures.

E.U.-CHINA COOPERATION

Unlike the United States, however, the European Union does not feel it can go too far down the road of protectionism. Until the turn of the century, the E.U. and China were worlds apart. Mutual trade was worth only 1 percent of the E.U.'s GDP, and mutual investment was virtually nonexistent. Last year trade topped half a trillion euros, making the E.U. China's top trading partner and China the E.U.'s second largest after the United States, while mutual investment was worth 43 billion euros. The E.U. is so heavily invested in the globalized economy, it is now the leading source and destination for foreign direct investment, topping even the United States.

Since Donald Trump's election, the E.U. is more openly engaging in positive reinforcement in areas of agreement with Beijing. Preserving the openness of trade and investment through multilateral organizations and treaties, rather than returning to bilateralism, is an area in which many Europeans now see greater hope of collaboration with Xi Jinping than with Trump. "The [Chinese] are not interested in becoming the world's policeman as the U.S. was in the early 1990s. They're interested in globalization with Chinese characteristics," says Tonchev. "The U.S. is on the back foot, that's clear. The Chinese are stepping into the void, that's also clear."

As Trump announced that he would pull the United States out of the Paris climate accord on June 1, the E.U. and China issued a joint statement saying that climate change "will become a main pillar" of their relationship.

China, for its part, shows some signs of easing on protectionism. This year it cut the number of restrictions on foreign investors from 122 to 95—a number the West still considers unacceptably high. More substantially, in the wake of Donald Trump's November visit, Beijing announced that it would allow foreign investors to own majority stakes in Chinese financial institutions.

"There's a growing degree of pragmatism in Europe," says Tonchev of the E.U.-China relationship. "It won't be a walk in the park. There will be disputes. That's a given. It does not mean we should neglect or downplay important areas of common interest, where we can join hands with the Chinese—climate change, globalization. We have to live with that disagreement." In seeking to teach the Chinese how to invest in Europe and to learn from Chinese strategy, the E.U. seems to be embracing that complicated relationship. How far China will reciprocate is the unanswered question. ♦

Louis and Woody

What's the way forward for an exposed creep? After the scandal that saw his latest film shelved, will Louis C.K. try to make art that honestly confronts what he did? Or will he go the way of Woody Allen?

BY NOAH MILLMAN

Late last year, some friends and I gathered at my apartment to watch a forbidden movie.

The very sentence feels somehow displaced from another time, another country. In America—where bus passengers can be glimpsed watching hardcore pornography on their smartphones, where the president retweets fake videos produced by white nationalists, where more movies than ever before are readily available to the casual cinephile—how can a movie be forbidden?

The film was Louis C.K.'s *I Love You, Daddy*, whose scheduled theatrical premiere was canceled when a series of women alleged that the filmmaker and comedian had exposed himself to them without their consent, confirming rumors that had been in the air for years. These accusations were leveled in the immediate aftermath of the revelations about Harvey Weinstein's alleged history of repeated and persistent sexual harassment and assault. To top it off, the film itself centered on a relatedly creepy subject: a relationship between a teenage girl and a much older and more powerful man. The film plainly alluded both to Woody Allen's film *Manhattan*, about a similar relationship, and to Allen's own interest in much younger women, and even made passing reference to Louis C.K.'s own rumored transgressions.

Noah Millman is a filmmaker, a columnist for the Week, *and a senior editor at the* American Conservative.

At its festival premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival last September, before the storm broke, Manohla Dargis of the *New York Times* called *I Love You, Daddy* "a multipronged debate that circles, again and again, around the question of whether it is possible, permissible and morally justifiable to love the art and loathe the artist." The rumors of the filmmaker's own transgressions even contributed to the artistic frisson she experienced. But watching it again after those rumors were confirmed, the same critic admitted that "the jokes no longer landed; its shocks felt uglier, cruder." The movie was the same, but the viewer had changed, awakened to a consciousness that not only was she looking at a movie, but other people were watching her watching it, the filmmaker very much included. And she no longer liked the complicity of her laughter.

Nor was she alone. In the new climate, nobody wanted to be seen promoting or even making available a film that looked like a perfect storm of entitled-male apologetics. If Louis C.K. stood accused of exposing himself to numerous women who had no desire to see *that*, and of exploiting his power in the industry to avoid any consequence for doing so, his film seemed itself to be another version of the same thing, roping the audience into a kind of abusive complicity. So *I Love You, Daddy* was shelved by its distributor, The Orchard. Only movie critics and others lucky enough to have received advance screeners would have a chance to see it.

When I put out word that I had gotten my hands on one of these screeners, several friends expressed an immediate interest, whether because they were fans or just for the cachet of seeing something forbidden. The ease with which I was able to fill my living room suggests that lack of audience was not a primary factor in The Orchard's decision to pull the film. But by washing their hands of the film, they had changed its context yet again.

From a darkly funny exploration of our relationship with creepy men who make great art, the accusations had turned it into a self-justifying work by one of those very creepy men. Now, after being pulled, it had become a furtive peek under the rock, a glimpse inside a mind we were no longer supposed to examine but merely to condemn. My friends and I saw something we weren't supposed to see, about a relationship that isn't supposed to be allowed, and about everyone's inability to really speak or do anything about it once it's out in the open. The film's suppression had made it an essential commentary on the very cultural moment that it seemed to exemplify.

So what are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to speak about what's under the rock? One answer—and a very good one—is that this is the wrong question. In this moment of #MeToo and #TimesUp, the most important people to hear from are women, both those who were abused or silenced by the men who are now rightly being exposed for their behavior and, more

OPPOSITE: JASON SEILER


F N
0 0
3 0 0

generally, all those who have been champing at the bit to take the lead. Take the lead they should, and the erstwhile gatekeepers of our cultural industry should finally just give them room to run and let the race go to the swiftest rather than the familiar old warhorses.

But the work of those men isn't actually going anywhere, and the history of revolutionary suppression should not incline anyone to optimism about that approach to directing people's attention. Whether we want to admit it or not, a lot of people are still interested in what's under the rock.

Dargis has it backwards. The question isn't whether one can love art by an artist one loathes, nor even if one can love a person whose behavior one loathes. In 1992, when his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn burst into the open, Woody Allen defended it by saying, "The heart wants what it wants," and as far as that goes his statement is correct: The heart does want what it wants; it doesn't ask whether it may before it loves. The question is, how may that love be expressed? What kind of art can a person who does or wishes to do loathsome things actually make? And what *do* we see, when we look, and keep looking, whether at this kind of art or, if we find a kinship with it, at ourselves?

I Love You, Daddy
Directed by Louis C.K.

The most basic measure of a film's success is whether it keeps the viewer's interest. Did you stay in your seat, immersed in the created world? Or did your attention wander? And, afterward, did you keep thinking about it, arguing with it and with those who also experienced it? Or did it fade quickly into memory's wallpaper? On these measures, at least in my experience, *I Love You, Daddy* was a smashing success. But it also wasn't exactly the film I had expected.

It is worth describing the plot in some detail, since readers may not get to see the movie themselves for some time. *I Love You, Daddy* centers on Glen (played by Louis C.K. himself), a television writer and showrunner at the peak of fame, with one hit show on the air and a pilot for another that gets picked up in the first 10 minutes of action. Glen has a jet (or, as he protests, a share thereof), an infinite-ceilinged Manhattan apartment, a bitter ex-wife (Helen Hunt) over whom he lords his success, and a gorgeous daughter who says she loves him every time she sees him (hence the title).

He has everything, and so we know that this is going to be a story about losing. And there is every evidence that down is where we are headed. Glen barely inhabits the life he's in. He shows no signs of actually living in his gorgeous apartment. His relationship with his daughter, China (Chloë Grace Moretz), is passive and empty; she has only just arrived (she normally lives with her mother) when she begs permission to leave again, back to the beaches of Florida, where she had just spent spring break.

Under the surface, 'I Love You, Daddy' is a story not about losing one's status, nor even one's talent, but about losing one's authority—artistic and parental—and only after losing it truly understanding where it came from in the first place.

The professional and creative realm in which Glen is apparently succeeding isn't going any better. Glen doesn't want to make the show he's just sold. He's doing it because this is what you do—when you have a chance to make a show, you make the show. So before much of anything has even happened in this movie, we already know that this is not going to be a film about a bad man who makes great art, but rather a film about an artist—and a man; good, bad, who knows?—who has lost touch with his art, and what he does instead.

What he does is fire his lead actress so he can cast a movie star, Grace (Rose Byrne), even though her visible pregnancy creates obvious problems for the series—because he wants to sleep with her, which he then proceeds to do. He tells her that he needs her inspiration to write the part, and perhaps he even believes this, but what he winds up eventually writing is unworthy of his talents—a failure she is the first to call him on.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, Glen dithers while his daughter begins a flirtation and then a relationship with Glen's film-director idol, Leslie Goodwin (John Malkovich). Leslie has a well-known interest in underage girls; he admits this frankly to China when she asks about it, averring with disarming cynicism that his interest is widely shared and that what distinguishes him is his willingness to own up to it. He seduces the 17-year-old with a deft combination of flattery and condescension, and before you know it he has whisked her off to Paris in the face of Glen's ineffectual refusal of permission.

After his daughter's absurdly over-the-top 18th-birthday party, Glen finally takes his best friend Maggie's advice and lays down the law to China. For his pains, he is rejected by her. Rejected by Grace as well, he never manages to get his new series off the ground. And in the penultimate scene, he watches his artistic idol Leslie Goodwin collect the awards and praise Glen used to win.

Summarized this way, it sounds like quite the self-pitying narrative (and also quite like the arc of a Woody Allen film from the director's heyday). Poor Glen: He had it all, and now he has nothing. But under the surface, this is a story not about losing one's status, nor even one's talent, but about losing one's authority—artistic and parental—and only after losing it truly understanding where it came from in the first place.

When, in a post-coital argument with Grace, Glen worries that China doesn't

have the emotional resources to be able to hold her own with Leslie, Grace says, in so many words: *Well, whose fault is that?* If she's so helpless, Glen must not have done a very good job preparing her for the world. In which case, from Grace's perspective, maybe China is better off being taken under the wing of a cultured and sophisticated older man like Leslie (whatever his intentions) than being left to the ministrations of the sorts of frat boys she has been hanging out with on her jaunts to Florida.

But why is that the choice? How did China wind up being the kind of girl whom a guy like Leslie would know was a good prospect? The answer to that turns us back, inevitably, to art and the cost of making it.

Claire Dederer, in her much-discussed *Paris Review* essay "What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?" grasped the essential selfishness of the artistic life, the necessity of rejecting obligations to parents, communities, spouses, and children and unblocking the dark wellsprings of one's own passion and desire in order to complete the act of creation. That selfishness doesn't have to manifest in infidelity or in damaging neglect, much less in rape or abuse. But its very necessity means that one cannot know for certain what will be the consequences of putting the work first or where those desires will flow once the well is unblocked. And the track record—at least of a variety of much-lionized male geniuses—does not inspire confidence in the artist's ability to remain consistently faithful to anything beyond his art.

The selfishness necessary for the creation of great art hovers in the background of *I Love You, Daddy*. It's there in Glen's professional life, in his relationship with his long-suffering producing partner, Paula (Edie Falco). After Glen backs her into an impossible logistical corner, Paula rants about the crazy things he has made her do over the years in the name of art—most notably, suspending a poor frightened horse above the ocean for a shot that didn't even make the final cut. But when he decides to fire his lead actress to hire Grace, Paula calls him out, asking whether that decision was really about making art. If Glen is in the thrall of the muse's tyranny, that's one thing, but if the muse has departed and Glen has decided just to be a tyrant, Paula is not going to respect that abuse of authority.

Glen is as muddled about what legitimates his parental authority as he is about what legitimates his artistic authority. He thinks that authority is about making rules, while having a good relationship with his daughter means indulging her so she'll say she loves him, and so they are inherently in conflict. We see the baleful consequences of this mistake when Grace tells him that as a teenager she herself had an affair with an older man. Glen has the gall to say with authority that she was raped even if she doesn't think so—and thereby closes off the avenue to trust that could have been the foundation of a real relationship.

The essential selfishness of Glen's indulgence of his daughter comes back in China's lament, late in the film, when her father finally decides to assert his authority—and in the process attacks his own daughter for the spoiled, shallow life he let her lead—that he truly gave her nothing, because she has nothing of her own. One reason for that is that he wasn't around to be the father she needed, because he was off suspending poor frightened horses above the ocean.

Glen comes face to face with his failures as a father at the same moment that he comes face to face with the departure of his muse. Without the art, all he has is his selfishness. To have anything at all, he'll have to learn to be something like a human being again: respectful of his producer, appropriate with his actors, available to his daughter. As Paula tells him at the Emmys, if he's no longer a great writer, at least he's a competent craftsman. If he can be a human being, he'll work. And he needs to work, if only to have something to do.

That's what the movie I saw was about: an artist who loses his way, artistically; engages in gross sexual power games to compensate; and discovers not only that the art cannot be recovered but that, in the course of being an artist, he's also lost the most important human relationship he might have had.

Louis C.K. and Chloë Grace Moretz as Glen and China in I Love You, Daddy

Is that self-justifying on Louis C. K.'s part? To some degree. He seems to be saying to the audience, *Yeah, maybe those rumors about me are true, but you'll accept my behavior as the price you pay for my genius*. In the world of the movie, Leslie Goodwin is an unquestionably great artist and his awfulness is very much rooted in his selfishness. He professes no intentions in his life, no particular responsibility to China or to Glen or to anyone. His only responsibility, the only place where he has an intention, is in his work. Otherwise, it's all just experience. Stuff happens, or it doesn't, and he takes some emotion from whatever he experiences, savors that, and turns it into art.

But on another level, the movie is aware that this isn't the whole picture. Leslie says the best part of his

PIG NEWTON, INC.

relationships with young girls is being rejected by them when they mature (though it is he who shows minimal interest in China when she finally approaches him sexually, right after her 18th birthday). But Louis C.K. knows, and Glen seems to have figured out by the end, that a relationship between two grownups—more specifically, between himself and his adult daughter, treated as an adult—is much deeper and more meaningful than the exquisite pain of rejection. Which, I suspect, is the key to understanding where *I Love You, Daddy* came from.

Louis C.K.'s own daughters, on whom he famously dotes, are approaching China's age. They've probably heard the bit from his standup where he talks about fathers' confusion about their role in their daughters' becoming sexual beings—in his view, that role is: nothing. "But what if she has a bad sexual experience?" his imaginary confused father asks. "Oh, she's going to have a number of those," Louis C.K. replies, before describing life for women as basically walking around with an umbrella to deflect a rain of unwelcome phalluses.

The image was hilarious when I first heard it, precisely because of its knowingness. And yes, it's become a lot less funny now that we know just how specifically knowing it was. But the bit wasn't actually about men and women. It was about fathers and daughters, and it was a declaration of abdication.

Men get a lot of deserved flak for making the argument that you should treat women well because "how would you feel if it were your daughter?"—the flak being: Women are people in their own right; they don't only have worth or value in terms of their relation to men. But the point is more fruitful if it is turned around. How can you be a good father to your daughter, particularly as she becomes a sexual being, if your relationship to women is so screwed up? What can you give her if that's all you've got?

In that comedy bit, Louis C.K.'s answer is: nothing. *I Love You, Daddy* seems to me to be a complication of that "nothing," a wondering whether that "nothing" is a function of being an artist, or of being powerful, or of his own particular demons.

It's far from a completely honest confrontation with those demons. But a completely honest confrontation may be in him. I hope, when he returns to work, he undertakes it. Because we already know what that return to work looks like for an artist resolutely determined to use art to escape the darkness within rather than to explore it. That's the story of Woody Allen's career, and its arc isn't a happy one, artistically speaking.

Louis C.K.'s 'I Love You, Daddy' recalls and comments on a particular Woody Allen film: 'Manhattan.' Both movies involve relationships between young women and much older men—and explore what it means to be an artist.

I Love You, Daddy has a multilayered relationship with Woody Allen and his work. Leslie Goodwin is clearly a Woody Allenesque figure, a critically admired and extraordinarily productive American film director who has succeeded in spite of an aura of sexual creepiness, specifically a rumor of having had sexual relations with a minor. John Malkovich makes the character his own and is in no sense doing a Woody Allen parody (it's hard to imagine Allen prancing about in an ornate Chinese robe, as Malkovich does), but the allusion is nonetheless apparent, and in that respect, *I Love You, Daddy* does revolve around questions of how we relate to artistic heroes who are also creepy guys.

But *I Love You, Daddy* also clearly recalls and comments on a particular Woody Allen film: *Manhattan* (1979), which centers on the relationship between the 42-year-old Isaac (played by Allen himself) and Tracy, the 17-year-old high school student he's dating (played by Mariel Hemingway). Allen's lush black-and-white cinematography and gorgeous Gershwin score are more alluded to than mimicked in Louis C.K.'s movie, but again, the allusions are clear.

The obvious thematic similarity between the films involves relationships between young women and much older men. But the more important connection is on the level of the story of the artist and his art. Isaac, like Glen, is a television writer and is on the brink of a decision that is the opposite of the one Glen makes in *I Love You, Daddy*. Early in the film, Isaac gets fed up with the dreck that he's making and impulsively quits his job to write a book. As a consequence, he has to give up the beautiful apartment he can no longer afford. Whereas Glen goes for the money and loses sight of what it is to be an artist, Isaac quits for the sake of artistic integrity.

That choice is one the real-life Allen made early in his career. From the start, Allen raised money for his projects without even giving investors the scripts, and he still demands complete artistic freedom. In the late 1970s, Allen took that money and ran, making a string of films that took very real artistic chances to explore something important to Allen the artist. Beginning with *Annie Hall* (1977), a remarkably experimental film in formal terms, particularly for a romantic comedy, and extending through *Interiors* (1978), his foray into serious drama, to *Stardust Memories* (1980), his raised middle finger to his critics and fans for rejecting his dramatic effort, Allen sought to shake his reputation as a "mere" comic and establish himself as a serious artist.

No film in this period was riskier than *Manhattan*, precisely because of the creepiness of the romance at its center, a creative choice that Allen himself feared might have opened the kimono a bit too far. As it turned out, in 1979 Allen needn't have worried. *Manhattan* was nominated for a host of prestigious awards, including Oscars for Best Original Screenplay and Best Supporting

Actress, and won a wide array of accolades, particularly from foreign critics. Honesty had proven the best policy. But did audiences at the time see just what he was revealing?

To some extent they did; witness Pauline Kael's remark, "What man in his forties but Woody Allen could pass off a predilection for teenagers as a quest for true values?" But it isn't an absurd thing to try, if you realize what those values *are*. Recall that Isaac, Allen's character, has two relationships in the film, one with Tracy, the teenager, the other with Mary, played by Diane Keaton. Isaac spends much of the first part of the film holding Tracy at an emotional distance, claiming that it's for her own good; she should treat the relationship as an education and then move on to a more age-appropriate lover. Meanwhile, he warms to Mary, who begins the film as the mistress of his married best friend, and warms her to him through the pickup artistry of negging: insulting her, belittling her, and otherwise cutting this opinionated woman down to what he considers her proper size.

Isaac and Mary's relationship is ugly, but it's real, with an obvious chemistry between the two performers. When it ends, it ends in an ugly but adult way: Mary leaves Isaac for her former lover. By contrast, Isaac's relationship with Tracy is a blank. He has essentially no interest in her as a person and barely talks to her about anything except how she shouldn't get too attached to him. When Mary first becomes available to him, Isaac dumps Tracy unceremoniously, and when he decides he wants her back he says the most selfish and emotionally manipulative things, with no regard for her welfare, in order to reclaim her.

It's not hard to look down on Isaac for being shallow, sex-obsessed, and manipulative, or for preferring a teenager to an adult because then he's more completely in control. But *all* the characters in *Manhattan* are shallow, sex-obsessed, and manipulative. The journey Isaac takes over the course of the film is from resisting Tracy emotionally (while still sleeping with her) because he knows they can't have a mature relationship to realizing that having a mature relationship isn't all it's cracked up to be. The film's very overt style, the burnished silver tones, the soaring Gershwin, all are making the case for the values Isaac comes to see as central, which are ultimately aesthetic, rooted in his own taste—one subject on which he is completely confident.

Why should Louis C.K. have used *Manhattan* as the basis for his own movie? The obvious connection tells us nothing about why Allen is an important figure for someone like Louis C.K. to consider or why the "Woody Allen problem" should matter to him in particular. *Manhattan* is the film Louis C.K. riffs on precisely

Above, John Malkovich and Chloë Grace Moretz in Louis C.K.'s I Love You, Daddy. *Below, Mariel Hemingway and Woody Allen in Allen's* Manhattan.

Where does that leave relationships with women? From the beginning, women in *Manhattan* are prizes for men to contest. But Tracy in particular is little more than a beautiful art object. Isaac lists her face along with the particular books, movies, music, and food that make life worth living. Tracy's face even has theological significance; God, Isaac intimates while on a carriage ride with her, may do horrible things, but if He can make a Tracy, then at least He's a great artist, and that justifies the rest.

because its flamboyant aestheticism throws the problem of the selfish artist into sharp relief. It feels like Louis C.K. is asking himself, *If I keep going the way I'm going, am I going to turn into Woody Allen? And am I okay with that?*

Speaking purely in artistic terms, if you followed the progress of Allen's career after *Manhattan*, you probably *would* be okay with that. In his great run through the mid-'80s, Allen made a series of finely crafted and nostalgia-tinted pieces that were the most durable

TOP: PIG NEWTON, INC.; BOTTOM: MGM

works of his career: *Zelig*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Broadway Danny Rose*, and *Hannah and Her Sisters*. There is a level of confident control in these films that Allen never achieved before or since. They are the work of a man who knows what he believes and why he believes it. And what he believes is that life is fundamentally miserable; that trying to connect in an emotional way with other human beings is an invitation to deeper misery; and that immersion in art and beauty is the best way to distract oneself from those cruel facts about existence. Allen did not so much discover or reveal in these films as expound, but he expounded masterfully.

But there was one time at the end of this stretch—probably the only time—that Allen explored and revealed, as he had in *Manhattan*, by delving into himself. That was in his 1992 film touching once again on themes of recombining couples and intergenerational romance: *Husbands and Wives*. Inspired, as Allen's work so often was, by Ingmar Bergman—in this case by Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*—the film is a caustic portrait of marital collapse. And that collapse feels significant, feels like it matters to the author—likely because it was created and released in the context of Allen's own marital collapse: the end of his relationship with Mia Farrow and the exposure of his relationship with Farrow's daughter, Soon-Yi Previn, hard upon which came the explosive accusation that he had sexually abused his adopted daughter Dylan Farrow.

At the end of *Annie Hall*, Alvy Singer writes a play within which he can rewrite the ending of his relationship with Annie so that it comes out happy. This, Alvy explains, is one reason to make art: to revise reality in a more pleasant form. No one would accuse Woody Allen of having made a pleasant movie in *Husbands and Wives*, but the film does have the feel of self-justifying revisionism. It's notable that Gabe, the character Allen himself plays, declines to pursue a relationship with a much younger woman while Allen himself began a relationship with his longtime lover's daughter when she was still in her teens; meanwhile, Jack (played by Sydney Pollack) does leave his wife (Judy Davis) for a younger woman only to repent and return to a relationship that remains distinctly unfulfilling on a physical level. These are perfectly reasonable dramatic choices, but they are also ones that read quite differently once you know about Allen's own activities at the time. Still, despite the air of self-justification, the film has considerable power, perhaps because even the act of constructing such a justification requires access to the feelings that need to be justified.

It would have been completely unremarkable, after such a personally tumultuous year, for Allen to take a break from filmmaking, at least to discover what would motivate him artistically going forward. Regardless of whether you believe or doubt Dylan Farrow's accusations, regardless of whether you find Allen's relationship with Soon-Yi understandable or monstrous, the emotional turmoil of that year must have been significant. But Allen continued to make movies, typically putting out a movie a year; and while some were better and some were worse, he never again made a movie that felt deeply rooted in any kind of authentic feeling. Rather, over time he retreated into a sterile aestheticism, until eventually he was making lovely tourist postcards of romantic European locales and fooling himself that they were works of the intellect.

No film is more emblematic of late Woody Allen than *Midnight in Paris* (2011), which was also his highest-grossing hit. It is a pure wish-fulfillment fantasy in which Gil, standing in for the audience and the author, is flattered by the transparent stupidity and vulgarity of every person he knows. The film's pretensions to consequence depend on its central conceit: At midnight, Gil (Owen Wilson) is transported back in time to other eras in Paris's storied artistic history, only to find that, at all times in the past, the great artists he admires were dissatisfied with the state of art, culture, and conversation in their world and looked back longingly to a golden age further past. Gil—and Allen—are thus further flattered that they truly belong in the company of these greats and that the painful awareness of pervasive stupidity and vulgarity is just the price you pay for genius. Having learned this, Gil can leave his awful fiancée and instantly take up with a Parisian girl of whom he knows literally nothing but the beauty of her face and who needs to know nothing about him before walking off with him into the romantic Paris drizzle (the Woody Allen equivalent of a sunset).

How does a once-compelling filmmaker come to make a film like that? Consider the ending of *I Love You, Daddy*, as Glen contemplates a future in which he will continue to work not because he believes in it, nor because he needs the money, but because he needs to be working, because work is all he's really got. Perhaps the reason Louis C. K. is thinking about coming to such a pass, in a film all about Woody Allen the artist and Woody Allen the problem, has something to do with why, and how, Woody Allen makes movies.

Start to Finish
Woody Allen and the Art of Moviemaking
by Eric Lax
Knopf, 353 pp., $28.95

As it happens, a good guide to why and how Woody Allen makes movies was published just last year. In *Start to Finish: Woody Allen and the Art of Moviemaking*, Eric Lax, Allen's friend and biographer, takes the reader behind the scenes, following Allen through all the stages in the creation of one of his films. The film he shadowed Allen on, *Irrational Man* (2015), is a mediocre creation, though Lax could not have known this at the time: It's an unfocused musing on Allen's familiar nihilism that never finds its genre and was ignored by both critics and audiences. But the unexceptional nature of the film in question turns out to be a blessing, because it lets the reader observe the process without being distracted by the product. The resulting book is at turns insightful and infuriating but most of all an impressive reproduction in prose form of the way in which filmmaking engrosses one in the tedium of repetitive and monotonous detail.

The book is divided broadly into the same sections as filmmaking itself:

writing the script, raising the funds, attaching the cast, scouting locations, designing and building costumes and sets; then shooting the film, location by location and, within each location, scene by scene, and then post-production: editing, selecting music, correcting color, and marrying all these elements together. Lax walks through each phase in turn, letting the reader observe how Allen approaches each and offering some observations on how Allen's approach is distinctive.

Some distinctions are more notable than others. Allen is far from the only writer who has a lengthy file of everything from jotted-down premises to partially complete scripts into which he rummages when looking for his next project. It is hardly surprising that the octogenarian Allen relies on his casting directors to keep him aware of new talent or that he leans heavily on the skills of some of the best cinematographers and designers working. What may be more surprising to readers is how little guidance he appears to give these artists, other than a general knowledge of his taste. He guides his actors even less, generally declining to share the script as a whole, or to discuss their parts in any detail, or to rehearse. As Lax describes it, Allen seems to come to the set with a very clear idea in his mind of what he wants but little plan for how to communicate that idea and a peculiarly fixed notion that filming with little preparation is the best way to get from actors a relaxed, natural, and unmannered performance.

What emerges is a portrait of Allen as a kind of control freak, the kind who fancies himself an improviser. He won't block a scene in advance, preferring to figure out how to move in a space on the day of the shoot, and he often tells his actors to improvise lines. But he also berates them and gives them line readings if they aren't giving the reading he heard in his head, and his instruction to his actors resembles Hamlet—another anxious writer—in his advice to the players: Don't do too much acting.

Early in the book, Allen compares himself to Picasso, another ferociously productive artist, pointing out that Picasso made plenty of lousy works of art along with his greatest work, because he was just always working and let the public sort out after the fact which work was great. Allen doesn't explicitly compare himself to Picasso in another telling way: Both artists were able to turn themselves into brands. When you look at a Picasso, you always know it's a Picasso; a great deal of what he's selling is a signature style. The same is very much true for Woody Allen and has much to do with why he has been able to continue to get his films financed and why actors are so eager to work with him. But the comfortable predictability and social signaling power of a brand are detractions from great art, if they aren't antithetical to it.

Later, Allen contrasts himself with his hero, Ingmar Bergman. Bergman, Allen says, wrote without really understanding what he was writing. He'd shoot a film thinking he knew what something meant but knowing from experience that only afterwards would he come to understand what he was really doing. Allen, by his own self-description, is thoroughly in control on a cerebral level. He has a very clear idea of what he wants, because what he started with was that idea. And when he gets something different, he sees that as a happy accident if it worked out—or a failure if it didn't—rather than a discovery.

It's hard to believe that this is the mentality that could produce such a structurally weird film as *Annie Hall* or elicit such a memorably delightful performance from Diane Keaton as the title character. Nor can I see, in this book, much of the Allen who directed *Husbands and Wives*, a film that departed radically from Allen's preferred style of cinematography because the choice was necessary to tell that particular story, and where the story itself seemed to spring from somewhere visceral and personal. But I can certainly believe that the film Lax followed, *Irrational Man*, was written and directed by the person Lax describes. It feels like a very old idea from the file (fleshed out with embarrassingly out-of-date intellectual references) and on the screen never manages to show the audience why it needed to be a movie in the first place.

TRISTAR

In Woody Allen's visceral Husbands and Wives *(1992), Jack (Sydney Pollack) fights with his much younger girlfriend, Sam (Lysette Anthony).*

So why did Woody Allen make *Irrational Man*? The answer seems to be that it was time to make a movie. As Allen himself describes it, a major reason he makes movies in the first place is to beguile the time and distract himself from the meaninglessness of existence. *Irrational Man* is a film about a man who commits murder in order to be able to reliably have an erection, made by a man who claims to make movies not so much to feel alive as to avoid feeling the approach of death. And not once in this highly detailed book about the making of the movie does Allen or his amanuensis note the irony or how the film failed to mine that irony for the black comedy that could have been.

Take Allen at his word, and say it is meaninglessness he is fleeing. Filmmaking is certainly engrossing enough

to distract one from much else. Even the tedium (and there is a vast amount of tedium in filmmaking) is engrossing, energizing, the "hurry up and wait" of a battlefield but without the physical casualties. But I can't shake the feeling, from reading this book, that it is casualties of another sort—the emotional casualties of broken relationships and of the ongoing battle with oneself—that he is truly fleeing; not the meaninglessness of life, but what its meaning is, at least for him.

In other words, Woody Allen has turned into precisely what it looks like Glen has turned into at the end of Louis C.K.'s film, *I Love You, Daddy*: a talented craftsman who is no longer a great artist, who must keep writing and directing because that's just what you do—because you have to work or you'll be left alone with nothing but yourself.

Until recently, I would have said that Woody Allen will keep making movies until he drops dead in the director's chair. In the #MeToo era, though, Allen's brand has finally been dented, with an ever-lengthening list of actresses who appeared in his earlier films declaring that they would not do so again. Time will tell, though Allen himself has only so much time left. But I am cynical enough about both the moviegoing audience and Hollywood to suspect that, if he wants to, Allen will still be able to raise the money for a film—and if he raises the money, people will work with him, even if the most heinous allegations can no longer be swept aside. People need the work. They don't even need to believe in their own hearts that they are working for a great artist.

But his work won't truly matter to anyone else if it doesn't matter to him as something other than work, if it doesn't spring from something essential. And the time when that was the case has long since passed.

It hasn't for Louis C.K., though.

At the end of *I Love You, Daddy*, Glen watches his hero Leslie Goodwin taking the accolades Glen thought would be his own, and propounding an aesthetic creed as the basis for his success. Feelings, good or bad, are truffles, Leslie says—things to be savored as pure experience. Making art means shooting a scene set in California in Morocco instead, because of the exquisite color of the walls, and damn the suits. Glen, meanwhile, girds himself to work again; after all, work is just work, the muse has departed, and he no longer has the authority of a great artist to justify his whims and fancies.

But then, in a final scene, he is reunited with his daughter. As he listens to China talk about the life she has started to make for herself, he is clearly delighted merely to be in her presence. It is not an aesthetic delight; it is not a truffle. It is a human feeling—the delight of being connected to another person whom you love.

Woody Allen has turned into precisely what Glen turned into at the end of 'I Love You, Daddy'—a talented craftsman who is no longer a great artist but who must keep writing and working because that's just what you do.

The scene is unearned, because we don't see Glen do anything to get there (his best friend Maggie arranges the meeting without warning either Glen or China). Nor has he earned any credit for China's emergence as a responsible adult; to get there, she had to leave him behind. The scene is there as a declaration of independence from Leslie's aestheticism. But it's not clear that the film sees how one can be human that way *while also making great art*. That may well have been why Louis C.K. was brooding on Woody Allen and why he made the film. Is he still brooding in the same manner now that his own hidden transgressions have been exposed? And if so, where will that take him in his next chapter?

We'll find out. I'm at least as sure that Louis C.K. is going to work again as I am about Woody Allen, probably sooner than he ought to. He has repurchased the rights to *I Love You, Daddy* from The Orchard and is likely just waiting for the right opportunity to release it himself. He's probably got an idea file as large as Allen's and at least as interesting, and when he decides to dip into it, he'll put his own money down again, and people will work with him. If they'll work with Mel Gibson and Roman Polanski, they'll work with Louis C.K.

The question is whether that work will be driven by an engagement with his experience or as a way to distract himself—and his audience—from it. In his open letter addressing the allegations against him, Louis C.K. said he would now "step back and take a long time to listen." I hope he does that—I hope he doesn't go back to work too quickly. But most of all, I hope he remembers the only really important words he said in that letter: "These stories are true."

Louis C.K. struck a chord with audiences from the beginning because it seemed like he was speaking truth, even ugly, uncomfortable truth, and that truth resonated. We know now that we didn't get the whole truth. But the whole truth is still there. And judging by the ever-widening circles of men being exposed, I think the rest of the truth will resonate pretty strongly too. And if there is an artist out there more capable of an unflinching exploration of that truth from the inside, I don't know who that is. All Louis C.K. has to do is not flinch and keep listening.

Great art, contra Alvy Singer, is not about rewriting your life in a more pleasing or self-gratifying form. It's about emotional truth and conveying that truth to other people. And you can't convey a truth that you are trying to hide from others or yourself. For that reason, I hope Louis C.K. comes to see his humiliation as a blessing. And while his personal redemption is really of no particular concern to anyone but himself, for my part, I hope that the way he finds it involves making art out of the truth and not art designed as an escape from it. ♦

B&A

Remembering Le Guin

A writer of imagination and integrity. **BY MICHAEL DIRDA**

Ursula K. Le Guin, who died on January 22 at the age of 88, lived most of her adult life in Portland, Oregon, where she and her husband Charles—who taught French at the local university—quietly brought up their three children. I suspect that Le Guin, who herself majored in French at Radcliffe, must early on have taken to heart Flaubert's dictum: "Be regular and ordinary in your life like a bourgeois, in order to be violent and original in your work." For there is no question about it: This humorous, outspoken woman, who once told a feminist conference that she actually enjoyed housework, was one of the essential writers of our time. As I sit at this keyboard, the whole world, especially the science-fiction world, is mourning her passing—and a certain committee in Sweden is, I hope, kicking itself for having neglected to award her the Nobel Prize for literature.

Ursula K. Le Guin

Yes, Ursula Le Guin wrote science fiction and fantasy, but we've come a long way since people reflexively dismissed these two related genres as simply that Buck Rogers stuff or kiddie stories about elves. That we finally take ambitious "fantastika" seriously is due in no small part to Le Guin. After all, there's nothing in the least pulpish about her moving exploration of gender, race, and love in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, while one has only to read the opening lines of *A Wizard of Earthsea* to recognize prose of assured and understated power:

> The island of Gont, a single mountain that lifts its peak a mile above the storm-racked Northeast Sea, is a land famous for wizards. … Of these some say the greatest, and surely the greatest voyager, was the man called Sparrowhawk, who in his day became both dragonlord and Archmage. His life is told in the *Deed of Ged* and in many songs, but this is a tale of the time before his fame, before the songs were made.

You don't write that utterly simple opening sentence, let alone perfectly set up that last cadence—"before the songs were made"—without knowing exactly what you are doing. Little wonder that Le Guin's innumerable admirers include writers as accomplished and varied as Michael Chabon, Robert Silverberg, Margaret Atwood, Junot Díaz, Walter Mosley, and David Mitchell.

I first heard about Le Guin from Joanna Russ, author of the SF classic *The Female Man*. The two of us had met in the mid-1970s when I was a grad student in comparative literature at Cornell and Joanna was teaching at nearby SUNY Binghamton. Around 1979 I wrote to her for advice: As a young editor at the *Washington Post*'s Book World, I'd inaugurated a monthly fantasy and science fiction column, but my own knowledge of these genres was spotty at best. As a teenager I'd read a few Robert Heinlein novels and Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy, but not a whole lot else. What writers and books should I look for to bring myself up to speed? Joanna sent me an annotated list.

On it were Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*, Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, and more recent works by Samuel R. Delany, someone with the unlikely name Philip K. Dick, and Ursula K. Le Guin. I soon tracked down a copy of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, initially published in 1969 and, as the cover told me, the winner of both the Hugo and Nebula Awards. The novel hooked me immediately with its seemingly paradoxical first sentence:

> I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination.

A decade after my reintroduction to science fiction, Book World set up a monthly book club, each of the editors moderating an online discussion of a favorite novel or work of nonfiction. For my first selection, I chose *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Why? First and most important, it is a gravely beautiful and powerful work of art. More practically, however, it also readily elicits intense discussion. A black emissary from Earth arrives on a diplomatic mission to the planet Gethen, where the otherwise human population is androgynous—except during certain periods of "kemmer," when a person's body passes into either a female or male condition. By the end of this short, intense book, Le Guin has compelled you to think hard about every aspect of what it means to be human, told a thrilling story—no one ever forgets the desperate journey across the ice—and, not least, made you cry.

Being dazzled by her work, I naturally sought out Le Guin as a reviewer. Even now I recall her praise of Carolyn See's California novel *Golden Days* and her magnificent piece on Virginia Woolf's essays—which I've just now looked up: "All through the book the reach and stretch of that splendid mind, its leap, its sureness, are amazing, delightful, ennobling." Did Le Guin identify with Woolf? Maybe just a little. She once described Philip K. Dick—her high school classmate in Berkeley, California, though, amazingly, the two didn't then know each other—as "our own homegrown Borges." To me Le Guin sometimes seems our own homegrown H.G. Wells. The two writers' private lives were utterly dissimilar but Le Guin was comparably pioneering and prolific as a novelist, short-story writer, political essayist, visionary, and public intellectual.

Consider just three of her novels. To many readers, *The Dispossessed* (1974)

DAN TUFFS / GETTY

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

is her greatest achievement, depicting the conflicts in the heart of her hero Shevek who is caught between two competing "ambiguous utopias," one anarchist, one capitalist, neither wholly satisfying. In 1979 she brought out *Malafrena*, which focuses on 19th-century politics, art, family, and revolution in the imaginary country of Orsinia; it is written in the high-realist mode of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* or Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, the latter one of Le Guin's favorite novels. Then in 1985 she published her most ambitious, albeit not entirely successful, work, *Always Coming Home*, which takes the form of a faux anthropological dossier describing the culture of the pastoral Kesh of northern California. It came in a box and included a cassette.

During much of her career, Le Guin also composed poetry, produced lighthearted children's books about flying cats—I reviewed a couple of the Catwings titles—and regularly collected her many essays and talks into books, starting with 1979's *The Language of the Night*, which included "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" and other cogent essays about fantasy and the imagination. All this time she was also writing short stories, the most famous of which, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," has become a staple of high school classrooms. It raises a troubling moral and philosophical question: If the unremitting torture of a child deep in an underground dungeon would assure the happiness and prosperity of millions, would you consent to that child's torture? Something of the same muted polemicism marks her 1972 novella about colonialism and the despoliation of the environment, *The Word for World Is Forest*.

To the end of her life, Le Guin remained fiercely feminist, anti-capitalist, and forthright in expressing her political views. In the essay "Lying It All Away"—from her last book, the 2017 collection of blog pieces titled *No Time to Spare*—she writes scathingly of "growth capitalism" returning to its origins and "providing security for none but the strongest profiteers." She mourns that "I have watched my country accept, mostly quite complacently, along with a lower living standard for more and more people, a lower moral standard. A moral standard based on advertising." Can America, she wonders, continue "living on spin and illusion, hot air and hogwash, and still be my country? I don't know." After all, the country is now run by corporations "of which Congress is an almost wholly owned subsidiary." It may surprise readers to learn that she wrote these sentences when Barack Obama, not Donald Trump, was president.

Though often outspoken, Le Guin in person was gentle, kind, polite, and often slyly funny. For instance, in the talk "Making Up Stories"—collected in *Words Are My Matter* (2016)—she implores her audience not to ask where she gets her ideas: "I have managed to keep the address of the company where I buy my ideas a secret all these years, and I'm not about to let people in on it now."

Back in 1990, Le Guin produced her unexpected masterpiece *Tehanu*, a fourth book in what had long been dubbed "The Earthsea Trilogy." In *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), her focus had been on psychic maturation, on the hero Ged discovering the full complexity of who he is. *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970) and *The Farthest Shore* (1972), in their turn, emphasized sex and death. All three novels were replete with archetypal imagery—light and dark, labyrinths, night journeys, dragons (the mightiest and oldest of these, Kalessin, is a major character). Each also explored the proper use of power and urged the Taoist principle of balance. In the case of *Tehanu*, Le Guin boldly imagined the late middle age of her protagonists, when Ged and the former priestess Tenar have used up or repudiated their once-formidable powers. Women predominate as characters and the novel is, in large part, about the making of a family.

Tehanu could have been a dreadfully earnest book, but Le Guin's own magic never fails her. At the climax, the frail Ged and Tenar are standing on a stony cliff high above the sea, their heartless enemies about to push the couple over the precipice. Tenar, rendered mute by a spell, suddenly points up to the sky, then laughs:

> In the gulfs of light, from the doorway of the sky, the dragon flew, fire trailing behind the coiling, mailed body. Tenar spoke then. "Kalessin!" she cried, and then turned, seizing Ged's arm, pulling him down to the rock, as the roar of fire went over them, the rattle of mail and the hiss of wind in upraised wings, the clash of the talons like scythe-blades on the rock.

Le Guin would go on to write even more stories set in Earthsea.

In 2008, she received deserved acclaim for her late novel *Lavinia*, about the woman who marries Aeneas. In 2016 her best novellas and stories were collected in two mammoth volumes while her early fiction began to appear in the Library of America. To a younger generation of writers, especially female writers of fantasy and science fiction, she had long been revered as the feistiest and best of fairy godmothers.

Just last February I lectured on Le Guin in Helena, Montana: I was invited there because, a decade earlier, under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts's Big Read program, I had worked up companion guides to *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Then this past Christmas I was visiting Portland, where my eldest son and his family live, and one idle afternoon thought of calling on Le Guin. But I didn't. I knew she'd been in ill health and there was no real reason to disturb her. All I wanted, after all, was simply to touch the hem of her garment and mumble how much her work had meant to me, as it has to so many other people.

So we never met. Still, my friend David Streitfeld, a business reporter for the *New York Times*, did visit Le Guin last fall. He passed along my warmest wishes and she, in her turn, asked him to give me a present—a hardback reprint of her early 1967 novel, *City of Illusions*. It lies before me now, open to its inscription: "To Michael, For auld lang syne, Ursula Le Guin." In those "times long past," this irreplaceable writer brought out one wonderful book after another, including many I haven't mentioned here. If, by some mischance, you've never read Ursula Le Guin, put down that ephemeral bestseller and get started. ♦

"The president was silent for a moment and then turned on [then FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe], suggesting he ask his wife how it feels to be a loser—an apparent reference to a failed campaign for state office in Virginia that McCabe's wife made in 2015. McCabe replied, 'OK, sir.' Trump then hung up the phone."

—NBC News, January 29, 2018

PARODY

ork Time

RUARY 6, 2018 — ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

MCCABE ACCUSES PRESIDENT OF MAKING PRANK CALLS

'I didn't order a pizza with "loser" toppings at 3 a.m.'

By OLIVER CLOZOV

WASHINGTON — Ever since Andrew McCabe announced he was retiring from the FBI, the former deputy director claims he has been on the receiving end of multiple prank calls at his home. "No one by the name of Amanda Hugginkiss lives here!" he told the unidentified caller after receiving the same query three nights in a row.

According to McCabe, the caller is without doubt President Donald Trump. "After every prank call, whether it be asking me about a pizza I didn't order, ordering a pizza, or wanting to speak with Ben Dover, the call always ends with 'Oh, and by the way, your wife is a loser.' " (It was alleged that in a previous conversation, the president asked McCabe how his wife, who lost a local election, felt being a loser. The White House has denied the claim.)

On most occasions McCabe's caller ID has indicated "Unknown Caller," but twice it showed "202-456-1414," the main line for the White House. "I tried calling back," said McCabe, "but a switchboard operator told me the president was not available. I heard giggles in the background."

The former deputy director said the nuisances have become routine, the calls coming between midnight and 5 a.m. "Sometimes the voice will say, 'Your wife should be on a reality show—The Biggest Loser.' Other times it's just, 'Your wife is still a loser.' But as it gets closer to sunrise, the caller simply says 'Loser' and hangs up."

McCabe described the pranks as "straight from Bart Simpson," with the person asking for individuals named "Hugh Jazz," "Al Coholic," and "I. P. Freely." But on one occasion the voice, which McCabe said could barely contain its laughter, asked for a "Heywood

Continued on Page A16

MCCABE: MARK WILSON / GETTY

Andrew McCabe shows a printed photo with handwritten slurs that he says he found taped to his car Monday.

Out of Six Democratic Responses, Biden's Shines

Former Vice President's Remarks Aired on C-SPAN4