

**JIMMY CARTER'S  
LEGACY OF FAILURE**  
PHILIP TERZIAN

the weekly

# Standard

JUNE 11, 2018

\$5.99



## Biking the Border

A month-long trek  
from El Paso to Brownsville  
reveals a region with  
bigger problems than people  
trying to get across the Rio Grande

BY GRANT WISHARD

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June 11, 2018 • Volume 23, Number 38



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# Austerity Bites

‘After Years of Belt-Tightening, Weary England Is Feeling the Pinch,’ announced a front-page, above-the-fold headline in the *New York Times* on May 28. It’s a lengthy article—more than 3,000 words—replete with stories about declining public services and attendant growth in social ills.

The message, of course, is one the average *Times* reader will have no trouble deciphering: Decreases in public spending, such as those advocated by fiscally conservative parties in Europe and North America, generate ruin and despair. But the story’s author, Peter Goodman, makes it explicit just to be sure: “For a nation with a storied history of public largess, the protracted campaign of budget cutting, started in 2010 by a government led by the Conservative Party, has delivered a monumental shift in British life. A wave of austerity has yielded a country that has grown accustomed to living with less, even as many measures of social well-being—crime rates, opioid

addiction, infant mortality, childhood poverty and homelessness—point to a deteriorating quality of life.”

We confess we only made it half-way through Goodman’s story of woe. And so we never made it to the 65th paragraph. That, as Joseph Bishop-Henchman of the Tax Foundation pointed out, is where Goodman slipped in this little detail: “Britain spends roughly the same portion of its national income on public spending today as it did a decade ago, said Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies.”

Well, there’s that!

On closer inspection, the story is a pretty routine one. When Labour took power in 1997, Britain effected enormous increases in public spending. Those increases soon outstripped revenues by a wide margin. When the Conservatives took over in 2010, they were obliged to bring public expenditures back into line with revenues. Those spending cuts, necessary



Stop the inanity

though they were, have generated some resentment.

If we live long enough to see our country’s Republicans mimic their British counterparts’ crazy insistence on aligning spending with revenue, we hope Peter Goodman will still be around to blame the GOP for all the crime and poverty and drug addiction brought about by “austerity.” ♦

## OMG No It's Not

Social media are full of people who, under the impression that their political fulminations are witty, spend much of their days collecting likes and retweets from the hordes of barking-seal partisans. And so it was that Yvonne Mason, a retired English teacher in South Carolina, wrote a letter demanding that President Trump visit each of the families that lost a child in the Parkland, Florida, school shooting. Mason, who says her initial letter was written in anger, was further incensed by the letter she received in response from the White House bearing the president’s signature. She deemed the president’s letter poorly written and so “corrected” it as if it were a school assignment and put the marked-up results on Facebook. Mason’s corrected letter went viral—so viral, in fact, that the *New*

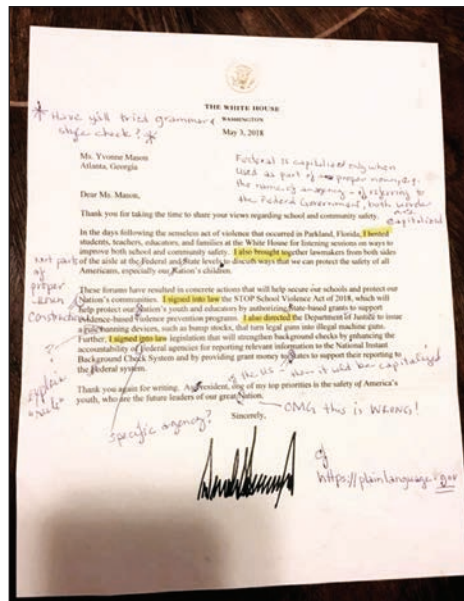
*York Times* deemed it sufficiently newsworthy to publish a story about it.

Now, we readily concede that written products issuing from the Trump White House have sometimes fallen below standards set by previous administrations. Team Trump

is known for its typos. But nearly all of Mason’s objections relate to capitalization of nouns, and it turns out the White House style guide specifically calls for capitalizing certain words, for instance “federal,” “state,” and “nation,” depending on the context. Nor, incidentally, do some of Mason’s marginal glosses exemplify the sort of professionalism she believed lacking in the White House letter. “Have y’all tried grammar & style check?” And: “OMG This Is WRONG!”

The *Times* does eventually get around to pointing out that Mason’s corrections weren’t, well, correct, but somehow still frames the story as if the White House were at fault instead of the schoolmarm.

Jacob Sullum of *Reason* magazine puts the point more sharply. “Mason’s showy but erroneous



Ms. Mason’s letter

pedantry illustrates the tendency of Trump's opponents to cast policy disagreements as questions of competence and to delight in everything that reflects badly on him, even when that thing is not, strictly speaking, true," Sullum writes. "These tendencies, which mirror Trump's own fondness for ad hominem attacks and recklessness with facts, alienate potential allies while confirming his supporters' conviction that he is sticking it to a supercilious elite that holds them in contempt." ♦

## Crime Is Up, and Now We Can Watch It Live!

Since the invention of videotape, law enforcement across the developed world has fallen prey to the same folly: If you install enough security cameras, criminals won't do bad things because they'll know the cops are watching. The trouble with that view is that it ain't so, as anybody who's spent time in a British rail station late at night will attest—security cams are everywhere and so are aggressive hoodlums. The presence of cameras doesn't deter them. Criminals don't mind being seen doing bad things if they believe, as they often do correctly, that it'll take the cops forever to track them down, if they ever do at all.

We were therefore saddened to learn that Chicago has invested some undisclosed but no doubt enormous sum on thousands of high-tech surveillance cameras, to be installed all over the city. We find the idea of donut-eating cops peering at us from behind a desk somewhere creepy. But we'd tolerate the idea if it actually cut crime. It won't. Surveillance is a tool, and often not an effective one, for catching a bad guy *after* he's committed a crime. It does virtually nothing to stop him from committing it—and stopping it is what the Chicago Police Department can't seem to do right now.

"The idea," says Eddie Johnson, Chicago's police superintendent, "is



PLANET of the APE

to put technology in the hands of the officer. Sometimes we arrive in time to see the guy still shooting."

Well, if you're the guy getting shot, it's not much comfort to know the cops saw it. THE SCRAPBOOK tries to avoid nostalgia, but sometimes we can't help longing for the old days—when cops patrolled their beats on foot, hoodlums feared the men in blue, and you could walk the streets without feeling spied on. ♦

## Rapid Reaction Force

THE SCRAPBOOK remembers the days before social media and the Internet, and they weren't marked by civility and well-informed dialogue.

Even so, when someone in the pre-Internet era responded in print to an article or essay, he or she had usually read the article. Nowadays you just read the headline, if that, and sound off.

A few weeks ago, for instance, an item appeared on the Bloomberg news site headlined "Finland's Basic Income Test Wasn't Ambitious Enough." Bloomberg's Twitter account tweeted a link to the article with the teaser, "A lack of ambition is ending Finland's experiment with a universal basic income." The article suggested that Finland's universal basic income, or UBI, wasn't large enough to live on. But hundreds of thousands of Twitter users assumed the article was about

BOTTOM: BIGSTOCK

UBI making people lazy or unambitious. Next came a million wise-acre comments based entirely on a misreading of a tweet.

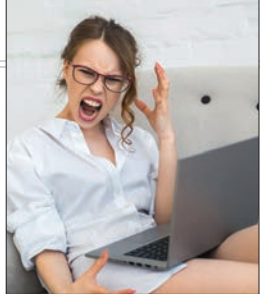
Why actually read the article? It's so much more fun to ridicule a non-existent claim.

All this came to mind this week when we read about a four-minute monologue by Colion Noir that ran on NRA-TV, the National Rifle Association's online streaming service. Noir argued that the news media's neurotic obsession over school shootings tends to inspire other troubled young men to seek glory and fame by perpetrating more school shootings. The observation strikes us as plainly true, and indeed our colleagues have said as much in these pages.

But Noir went on: "It's time to put an end to this glorification of carnage in pursuit of ratings, because it's killing our kids. It's time for Congress to step up and pass legislation putting common-sense limitations on our mainstream media's ability to report on these school shootings. . . . Pass a law preventing the media from reporting the killer's name or showing his face."

Noir, as you may have guessed, was using heavy-handed irony—suggesting facetious regulations on the First Amendment in order to question the constitutionality of real ones on the Second. He went on explicitly to disavow any desire to limit what the media can say and to suggest that gun-control proponents ought to be equally hesitant about limiting the constitutional right to bear arms.

But you had to listen for three minutes to get his point, and that was far too long for Twitter. Aaron Rugar, a tweeter with the left-liberal organization ThinkProgress, summarized Noir's video in this way: "NRA death cult now openly calling for 1st



*It's an outrage!*

Amendment to be curtailed so people won't be able to learn full extent of the gun violence problem they perpetuate."

Left-wing Twitter, which often suffers from irony deficiency, went berserk with the news that the NRA was now "openly calling" for a rollback of the First Amendment. At this writing, a full week after Noir's video went live, a million progressives must think freedom of the press is in danger simply because some nitwit only watched half of a video. Oh, but it must have felt good to sound off. ♦

## Identity Politics

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who famously and without evidence claimed Native American ancestry and thus minority status in her pre-Senate days—and whom Donald Trump still calls "Pocahontas"—now wants badly to put the whole controversy to rest. Who wouldn't? Our advice would be to ignore the past and pretend it never happened, but Warren is embracing her faux-identity with the enthusiasm of a convert. From CNN.com:

Since March, Warren has met 16 times with Native American groups and tribal leaders, at times bringing up the issue in those meetings. Warren also attended Cherokee Day in Washington and toured Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma. Warren has also signed onto 13 bills directly affecting Native American tribes in the last year and in April introduced a bill that would provide \$800 million annually to tribal governments . . . to fight the opioid epidemic.

And her digital team finally solved a two-year-old, Trump-inspired problem: Pocahontas.com no longer goes directly to her campaign homepage.

If the Massachusetts senator decides to run for the presidency in 2020, she'll have at least one constituency locked up. ♦



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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except one week in March, one week in June, one week in August, and one week in December) 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 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. 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 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, \$5.99. Back issues, \$5.99 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit [www.weeklystandard.com](http://www.weeklystandard.com) or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Copyright 2018, Clarity Media Group. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of Clarity Media Group.



## 'Jaws,' Interrupted

Never again will I have such a perfect setup for summer reading as my grade-school and early-teen years in Phoenix. Most days would start with mowing a lawn or two before the temperature reached a full sizzle. The day's enterprise done, I would retire to my room, where, as in the whole house, the shades were drawn to keep out the noontime glare. My room benefited from being on the same end of the house with the evaporative "swamp cooler," which blew icy, damp air. There in the dim chill, defying the blistering heat outside, I would settle into a big orange Naugahyde beanbag chair (the comfort of which has never been equaled) and read the day away.

Perhaps my happiest memories are of the books that were age-appropriate. I was 13 when I consumed the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, an ideal age for gobbling up Tolkien and all his goblins. When my kids were young I bought a copy of *Rifles for Watie* in the hope they would, around 9 years old, enjoy it as much as I had. (They read *Harry Potter* instead.)

Sometimes, though, I got ahead of myself. In second grade, having seen some World War II movie on TV, I was curious to learn what the whole shebang was about. I found a copy of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and I set about reading it. I don't think I got through a dozen pages.

And occasionally my choices were decidedly (and traumatizingly) age-inappropriate, as when, at 10, I found my mother's copy of *Jaws*.

The book was suitably terrifying from the get-go. It starts with a skinny-dipper whose leg is bitten off so quickly and efficiently that she doesn't quite know what's happened. By the time she figures out she only has one leg left, the shark has "swallowed the woman's limb without chewing" and come back for more. "This time the fish attacked

from below," Peter Benchley writes. "The jaws snapped shut around her torso, crushing bones and flesh and organs into a jelly . . ." And so it goes for a couple of hundred pages of grand watery guignol.

Phoenix being in the middle of a desert, why did I have to worry? There was no nearby shore at which to be fearful of what lurked beneath the waves. But the book did scare me



enough that when over at the houses of friends who had pools, I would find myself perusing the deep end to make sure it was 100 percent shark-free.

The great white wasn't the only thing in *Jaws* alarming to my 10-year-old self. In the movie version (which my parents wouldn't dream of letting me see even a couple of years later), police chief Brody's spouse is an admirably honest woman, all sturdy wifely support and maternal concern. In the book, by contrast, she's a bored housewife eager for a little extramarital excitement. She finds some with Hooper (the character played sexlessly in the movie by Richard Dreyfuss). This entails naughty bits. These involve the couple fantasizing about

getting busy while driving; they imagine the resulting accident that would leave both dead, thrown from the car, their private parts exposed "for the world to see." *Yikes!*

I rather suspect it was this section, not the detailed descriptions of swimmers as shark smorgasbord, that had my mother worked up when she popped in to see what I wanted for lunch. Realizing what I was reading, she gasped, hesitated a moment, snatched the book from my hands, and wordlessly left.

Her reaction to *Jaws* notwithstanding, my mother was less censorious than my father. Long before I was a teen, sitting in the backseat on long family road trips, I would read until carsick, alternating between *Encyclopedia Brown* mysteries and pulpy Mack Bolan paperbacks. It was on one such trip I remember being in some store's checkout line; the lady behind us began chiding Mom about the novel with the lurid cover I was about to buy. I don't remember exactly what my unfailingly courteous and soft-spoken mother said, but it was strictly mind-your-own-beeswax stuff. Years later, by contrast, when my prep school's summer reading list for rising freshmen included *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, my father had words with the headmaster. When it came to naughty bits, Peter Benchley had nothing on John Updike.

This summer I'm setting out to re-read books that I read at the wrong age. For example, I've been of the opinion that John O'Hara is the true chronicler of the jazz age, not F. Scott Fitzgerald. But I've never properly compared their work, having read *Appointment in Samarra* and *BUTterfield 8* as an adult and *The Great Gatsby* in junior high—what did I know then about the book's themes of love and loss? So I think I'll give *Gatsby* another go. I hope to finally find time for William Shirer. I might even read *Jaws* all the way to the end.

Now, if only I had an orange Naugahyde beanbag chair.

ERIC FELTEN

# Missouri Takes a Stand

After a grinding four-month scandal, the political career of Eric Greitens has come to a richly deserved end. On May 29, he announced his decision to step down as Missouri's governor, effective June 1.

In 2016, many Republican insiders saw in Greitens the perfect candidate: a Rhodes scholar and former Navy SEAL, articulate and well connected, conservative and politically astute. He leaves office an embarrassment to his party and his state, bereft even of the capacity to acknowledge wrongdoing. His quick rise and fall brings to mind a simple principle of politics—that men of low character will eventually betray their principles, defile their offices, and humiliate their supporters.

Greitens's problems began in January, when a St. Louis television station aired a recorded conversation in which his hairdresser—who evidently did not know she was being recorded—claimed that he had taken a compromising photo of her and threatened to publicize it if she told anyone about their sexual encounters. Greitens admitted to the extramarital relationship, which lasted some months and ended before he was elected governor, but characterized it as a “personal” and “private” matter he and his wife were trying to “work through.”

This wasn't some regrettable “affair.” There was a sickness about it. It involved bullying and blackmail. To their credit, statehouse lawmakers of both parties mounted an investigation and, at a hearing in May, read aloud transcripts of the woman's testimony in which she alleged Greitens had bound, blindfolded, and unclothed her before snapping the photo.

As if this weren't enough, a St. Louis prosecutor brought an invasion-of-privacy suit against Greitens for the explicit photo, and the state's Republican attorney general announced that the governor might have committed a felony by using the donor list of his veterans' charity to solicit political donations. Whatever the merits of these cases, Greitens's political career was over weeks ago; only his arrogance kept him from resigning.

It's no easy thing to evict a man from the governor's mansion if he refuses to resign. And Missouri Republicans did not go easy on their party's governor. They deserve rich credit for their stance. Many of them will likely pay a price in November for a downfall they helped to bring about, but their consciences are clean.

Their conduct stands in sharp contrast to that of Alabama Republicans who, in 2017, faced with a senatorial nominee shown to have solicited the attentions of girls in their mid-teens when he was in his 30s, couldn't muster the strength to push him out of the race. Perhaps state politics is less prone to the neurotic miseries of national elections. Or perhaps Missouri Republicans are just healthier than their Alabama cousins. In any case, Missouri's Republicans deserve praise for doing what politicians at all times and places ought to do: When one of their own behaves in an abominable way, make it impossible for him to remain in public office or to seek it.

The name of Donald Trump lurks beneath this topic. It isn't necessary to draw specious comparisons between Trump's personal behavior and that of Greitens. The latter's guilt is unique and uniquely disgusting. But no serious observer denies that Trump has engaged in behavior that would have destroyed any other Republican candidate or officeholder. How to make sense of the inconsistency?

Charles Kesler, the editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, wrestles with this question in an essay headlined “Thinking about Trump” in the spring issue. We have profited from Kesler's work for many years and, disagreements on Trump notwithstanding, commend his essay to our readers' consideration. He argues, if we may be permitted to oversimplify, that the American Constitution envisions the likelihood that bad men will often hold the reins of government. It's for that reason, Kesler says, that our system of government counterposes ambitious officeholders with other ambitious officeholders. The Framers created a system of checks and balances precisely because they anticipated the rise of morally bad leaders in the American republic.

That is a fair point, but Kesler goes seriously wrong when he compares Trump with other “bad” men who accomplished good ends in American political history—the serial adulterers Gouverneur Morris and Martin Luther King Jr., the sometime drunkard Ulysses S. Grant, the one-time injudicious Grover Cleveland. He even mentions King David, guilty of judicial murder and adultery, and the apostle Peter, who at one point denied knowing his savior. The difference between these men and Donald Trump—do we really need to say it?—is that their follies were peripheral to their characters and public deportment. Trump's are central



Ex-governor Greitens

to his. They did not boast openly of their sins and market themselves through them. He has done precisely that.

Trump wasn't just an unrepentant adulterer in his earlier days—he boasted of bedding other men's wives. He didn't just engage in quiet indiscretions—the overgrown playboy was his public persona. Hoodwinking business adversaries wasn't just a subtext of his biography—it was his brand. Wild misstatements of fact weren't occasional lapses—they were, and remain, his signature rhetorical device.

It's true, as Kesler and others contend, that the Trump administration has generated far sounder policies than conservatives could have hoped for in a Clinton administration. Tax reform, the scuttling of the Iran nuclear deal, the nomination of constitutionalist judges, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital—these would not have been possible under a third Clinton administration.

But at what price have Republicans purchased these victories? Leave aside the administration's policy-level failures on trade and spending, its praise of international criminals, its hamfisted misadventures on immigration, its idiotic and discrediting palace intrigues. The more enduring question has to do with the standards of character and fitness Republicans have established as a consequence of nominating and electing Donald Trump to the presidency.

Trump was elected fairly, and his presidency is a reality to which public-spirited Americans must daily adjust. But adjusting to Trump doesn't oblige conservatives to excuse low character and malign behavior in any leader with an "R" after his name. Missouri's refusal to compromise shows us the way forward—or perhaps we should say the way back. ♦

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# Putin Contra Mundum

**T**he tension between peaceable nations and the Russian Federation intensifies with each passing week.

It is the path Vladimir Putin has chosen. The latest development is more serious than it may sound: Russian billionaire and Putin crony Roman Abramovich has had his visa renewal application postponed by the British Home Office. Abramovich isn't just any Russian businessman doing business in England. He owns the Premier League soccer team Chelsea F.C., on which he has spent hundreds of millions of dollars. He keeps a residence in London and conducts business deals there—or at least he used to.

No reason for the Abramovich delay has been given, but it's been widely interpreted as part of the retaliation for the Russian regime's attempt to murder Sergei

Skripal on British soil in March. The Home Office has announced it will "review" the immigration status of hundreds of Russians working in the United Kingdom. It's a courageous move on the part of prime minister Theresa May—and very likely a better one than expelling Russian diplomats. One of the most effective means by which the West can weaken Putin's power at home is to disrupt the symbiotic relationship between Putin and his wealthiest cronies—between the oligarchs who use their wealth and influence to further Putin's aims, on the one hand, and the regime that offers them favor and protection, on the other.

Over the last six years the United States has imposed a variety of diplomatic and financial sanctions on scores of these oligarchs and on high-ranking government officials. We have targeted not only Russians who supply rogue regimes (Syria, Iran, North Korea) with financing and weaponry, but also those who abet the regime's domestic abuses. Only when these powerbrokers are forced to choose between the regime's president and their wealth will they begin to withdraw their support by taking their money elsewhere.

By in effect denying Abramovich's visa renewal—he has since taken up Israeli citizenship and withdrawn his application—the British government has made it extremely difficult for Chelsea's owner to superintend and enjoy the world-class soccer club that is one of his most prestigious possessions. Already he has scuttled plans to renovate the club's stadium in London, on the understandable grounds that it makes no sense to spend money on a project in a country in which he's barred from working.

Abramovich and Putin are particularly close; it is said that the financier suggested Putin to Boris Yeltsin as his successor. Abramovich long ago concluded that friendship with Putin is worth it. But we can hope that others among Putin's powerful chums, as the list of sanctioned Russians grows long, will tire of having their investments blocked, their assets frozen, and their travel plans ruined.

This is a form of war that Putin's regime has long engaged in. The arrest of Bill Browder in Spain on May 30 is only the latest example. The American-born financier and Putin critic was detained on the strength of a Russian-requested Interpol warrant but released almost immediately. The Spanish police referred vaguely to an expired date limit on the warrant. Browder had his own interpretation: "Spanish National Police just released me after Interpol General Secretary in Lyon advised them not to honor the new Russian Interpol Red Notice," he tweeted. "This is the sixth time that Russia has abused Interpol in my case." In other words, the Europeans aren't going to do Vladimir Putin's dirty work for him.

The Russian government hassles its foreign opponents when not attempting to murder them with military-grade nerve agents. The oligarchs are an extension of Putin's effort to gain leverage around the world. European nations are finally acknowledging the realities of this new Cold War. ♦

FRED BARNES

# Remembering Gerald Ford

If you're tired of being overwhelmed by the presence of President Trump, you've come to the right place. The subject here is Gerald Ford, the so-called accidental president who took over when Richard Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974, and served until January 20, 1977.

Ford was never elected vice president or president. He was a historical anomaly. But he was different in other ways, too. He was kind. He was humble. He sought to get along with everyone and usually succeeded. He was conservative, though more pragmatic than ideological.

His greatest success was healing a bruised nation after the Watergate scandal and Nixon's demise. Indeed, Ford's presidential memoir is titled *A Time to Heal*. Put another way, he's gotten credit for putting a divided country back together.

But credit for vague achievements is insufficient, says Donald Rumsfeld, Ford's chief of staff then his secretary of defense. "To this day his crucial service to our nation during an unprecedented time of testing has neither been fully understood nor appropriately valued." Correcting that oversight is why Rumsfeld has just written *When The Center Held: Gerald Ford and the Rescue of the American Presidency*.

It's a wonderful book, serious, important, and very readable. Ford and his aides are funnier than you might think. As president, Ford was relaxed and rarely upset. "His instinct was to be the same person he had always been," Rumsfeld writes. He never became a Washington creature, as so many have.

This leads to a question: Was Ford

too nice a guy to be a tough, decisive president today? Rumsfeld isn't explicit, but his gist points to no, and after reading his book I'm inclined to agree. I learned more from it than in covering Ford's presidency from beginning to end for the Washington *Evening Star*. Readers will have to make up their own minds.

Let's look at three categories—



**Ford was never elected vice president or president. He was a historical anomaly. But he was different in other ways, too. He was kind. He was humble. He sought to get along with everyone.**

Ford and the getting-along business, dealing with a hostile Congress, and politics. The idea isn't to compare Ford with other presidents, but to judge him on his own. Since Rumsfeld was often at Ford's side, he has revealing stories to tell.

Ford had met Soviet general secretary Leonid Brezhnev only once, when he was still House minority leader, before their first summit in Vladivostok in 1974. The president broke the ice.

"I understand you are quite an expert on soccer," Ford said while they shook hands.

"Yes, I play the left side, but I

haven't played in a long time," Brezhnev replied.

"I haven't played football for a long time, either," Ford said. "I wasn't very fast, but I could hold the line."

They didn't become friends for life, but their chat eased the way into negotiations.

When they arrived at their dachas, Brezhnev joked about Ford's secretary of state. "Why did you have to bring Henry Kissinger here?" the Soviet leader asked mischievously.

"Well, it's just very hard to go anywhere without him," Ford said. To which Brezhnev said, "Kissinger is such a scoundrel."

"It takes one to know one," Ford shot back. Rumsfeld doesn't say whether that prompted guffaws, but I suspect it did.

One might worry that this chumminess could lead to disastrous concessions in arms talks. In Vladivostok, Ford signed a treaty in which the Soviet bid to block production of B-1 bombers was denied. The treaty went nowhere. Brezhnev did get a gift. It was Ford's coat that Brezhnev had admired.

After the Democratic landslide in the 1974 midterm election, Ford faced an unfriendly Congress. The hottest issue was further military aid to the South Vietnamese government, which was on the brink of collapse as North Vietnamese troops advanced toward Saigon.

Democrats and the media regarded the war as a lost cause. Yet Ford went to Capitol Hill to lobby for the bill. It was soon clear the bill wouldn't pass. The president was advised his best move, politically, was to give up.

Ford refused. "If South Vietnam goes down the drain, I want a record of having gone up there [to Congress] even if I lose," he told Rumsfeld. "There's no way to make

a record to the public if you haven't gone and instead just say, 'I wish I could but I know I won't get it, so I didn't even try.'

An aide advised Ford he would wind up being the villain in Vietnam, but he wasn't fazed by that possibility. "Ford held to his course valiantly and with determination for one reason only," Rumsfeld writes. "He believed deeply, regardless of the politics, that it was the right thing to do." He lost heroically. Villain? No.

Ford was committed, in his own mind, to run for election in 1976. But he balked at announcing officially and creating a campaign organization. He wasn't worried about rumors that he actually wasn't running. "I don't want to worry about it," he said, referring to a presidential race.

He had a reason, it turned out. "Nixon had this great big organization and they did everything wrong," he told Rumsfeld. Worse, Nixon's huge victory may have encouraged aides to commit dirty tricks such as bugging Democratic headquarters in the Watergate building.

Rumsfeld couldn't change Ford's mind. "We are going to have to think about whether or not we can find some outside vehicle to take care of it because I'm going to be spending my time doing my job [as president] and not the other," he said.

But Ford had the shadow of Reagan hanging over him and eventually announced, days before the ex-California governor did. The president's effort to discourage Reagan from running had consisted of offers of cabinet positions. Reagan wasn't interested.

Ford's aides had been right. A better strategy was to quit dawdling, set up a campaign team, and prepare to confront Reagan in the GOP primaries. That worked. Ford fooled his doubters, beating Reagan and almost knocking off Democrat Jimmy Carter.

So was Ford too nice to be a strong and capable president nowadays? He surely made the best out of a bad situation, when America was at its weakest. Don't you think? ♦

COMMENT ♦ CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

## Italy's establishment runs out of tricks

A political establishment of long standing always suffers from a kind of mental illness. No matter how unambiguously it is repudiated or how joyously it is driven from office, its members will continue to remember the episode as accidental, temporary, and unjust. This week in Italy such arrogance nearly provoked a financial panic and an international crisis. In elections in March, two parties relatively new to the national scene had blown away all their establishment rivals and taken a majority of the seats in the national assembly. Because one of them, the League, was a nationalist party of the sort associated with France's Marine Le Pen, while the other, the Five Star Movement (M5S), was founded by a mad-cap comedian, observers snickered at how entertaining it would be to watch these two collections of losers try to cobble together a coalition.

They wound up doing fine, though, because they have one big thing in common. They both hate the multinational European Union, which has hamstrung most of the continent's economies and stripped its member states of much of their sovereignty. By May, the parties were ready to roll, with a broad coalition agreement and a full team of cabinet members. But at that point Italy's mostly ceremonial president, Sergio Mattarella, stepped in. He blocked the appointment of economics minister Paolo Savona, on the grounds that Savona had long been skeptical about the common European currency, the euro.

The vast majority of Italians are skeptical about the euro, too, of course. Their skepticism is part of what brought M5S and the League to power in the first place. But confronted with an assertion of official authority, politicians and the public have tended to roll over. Yes, the establishment *did* run up too much



**On May 28, there was the beginning of a run on Italy's bonds. The market was more nervous about the 'responsible' Cottarelli than it had been about the 'irresponsible' Salvini and Di Maio.**

debt in the past—about \$2.7 trillion, as it happens. But that means one false move could spell catastrophe! There was a lot of warning about "*lo spread*," as the obsessively charted difference between German and Italian bond rates is called. President Mattarella asked Carlo Cottarelli, a longtime employee of the despised International Monetary Fund, to lead a technocratic government, hopefully until 2019.

But this time was different. The two new anti-establishment leaders did not fall into line. They called the Cottarelli appointment a scam. Matteo Salvini of the League called for fresh elections in the fall. Luigi Di Maio of M5S called for nationwide demonstrations on June 2 and the impeachment of Mattarella. Strange that Savona's opposition to the euro was a disqualification

to serve in government, Di Maio said, since, to judge from governments past, being a liar or a thief was not. So much of the country rallied behind Di Maio and Salvini that not even the pro-euro Democratic party (PD), chased out of office over the winter, dared to back Cottarelli.

On Monday, May 28, there was the beginning of a run on Italy's bonds. The market was more nervous about the "responsible" Cottarelli than it had been about the "irresponsible" Salvini and Di Maio. The reason is not far to seek. Once Salvini and Di Maio's majority had been denied the right to form a government on the grounds that one of its ministers was a europhobe, the impending election appeared to be a referendum on the common European currency. It would be like Brexit: ExItaly was the snappy portmanteau making the rounds. And it would be a rout: On one side, a majority growing more popular by the day, plus the principle of Italian self-rule and national self-respect. On the other side, the European bureaucrats who had messed up Italy's economy and turned the country into a vassal of Germany, plus Mattarella's autocracy. Mattarella now had to reopen negotiations at all costs.

This meant dealing with Di Maio. Both he and Salvini have been called "populist," but really they have different preoccupations. Di Maio is anti-corruption. Salvini is pro-sovereignty. Up till now, the two have been evenly matched. Di Maio's M5S is twice as big as Salvini's League, but it is not as big as the center-right bloc (which contains two other parties) that Salvini commands. The present spat over Europe favored Salvini. He was rising in the polls while Di Maio stagnated. Salvini was thus content to wait for elections in the fall; Di Maio needed to act soon.

As we went to press, the situation was approaching resolution. Giuseppe Conte, the candidate for prime minister whom Salvini and Di Maio preferred, will take his post as originally planned. Savona will

become the minister for European affairs. The negotiation will have taken 88 days, longer than it has taken to form any postwar Italian government, but not so long as recent

coalition negotiations in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The problem is not that parties have been getting more obstreperous but that Europe is getting harder to govern. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PRISCILLA M. JENSEN

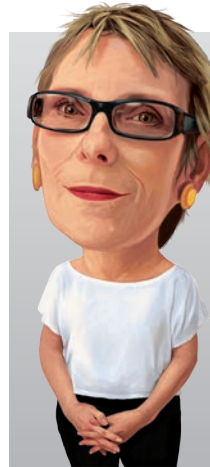
## Babchenko *not* assassinated: legerdemain in Ukraine

In a development seemingly torn from a bargain-basement spy novel, Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko appeared alive at a press conference in Kiev last week, less than 24 hours after his death.

On May 29 Babchenko was reported by Kiev police to have been shot and mortally wounded in his apartment. According to accounts, Babchenko's wife was in another room "when she heard what sounded like several loud claps" and entered to find her bloodied husband; it was announced that he died in the ambulance en route to hospital.

Babchenko has long been a thorn in the side of the Putin regime. A Russian journalist who served in Chechnya, he is widely known for his 2006 memoir *One Soldier's War*, which includes detailed descriptions of the brutal system of *dedovshchina*, the murderous hazing of army recruits. He has spoken widely about the Russian propaganda of dehumanization that encouraged the elimination of Chechens and Georgians and, potentially, the people of Crimea and the Donbas. But Babchenko burned his bridges entirely, he thinks, when he committed the unpardonable *lèse-majesté* of publicly announcing, via Facebook, his refusal to offer thoughts and prayers regarding the December 2016 crash of the airplane carrying the Alexandrov military choir (formerly the Red Army Chorus) on its way to entertain Russian troops in Syria.

Instead he declined to exempt the choir from his judgment of the Russian armed forces as a whole. He reminded his readers that in Syria, Russia was an aggressor, bombing civilians in Aleppo, and that by the end of 2016 at least 10,000 people had been killed in attacks in eastern Ukraine. He condemned what he memorably called the "hyper-trophied tolerance" that excused the



**Babchenko's status as a walking nose-thumb to the Kremlin can't have made him safer; Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko is said to have ordered round-the-clock protection.**

Alexandrov on the grounds that members were "just singers and dancers." And unsurprisingly, he was not only accused of insufficient patriotism—the choir, after all, echoes the Great Patriotic War in common memory—but was threatened with murder, threatened with legal action, and made a target of online "beat 'em up" rhetoric. Soon afterward, he relocated to Kiev.

On Wednesday, May 30, Vasyl Hrytsak, head of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), called a meeting to brief journalists on the assassination plot. According to Hrytsak, the SBU determined some time ago that

a Ukrainian citizen had been paid \$40,000 by the Russian security service (FSB) to organize the assassination of Babchenko and some 30 others in Ukraine. In the plot against Babchenko, the unidentified man hired a veteran of the war in eastern Ukraine to carry out the hit, taking a cut of about \$10,000, and also undertook the purchase of numerous weapons per instructions received.

After eight minutes of video and slide illustrations of the plot evidence, Hrytsak startled his audience with a brief announcement, and to a chorus of gasps and applause produced an emotional Babchenko, who explained his participation in what was said to have been a successful sting operation.

Babchenko began by apologizing to his friends, colleagues, and especially his wife for their distress, as one who knows only too well the “sickening feeling” that follows sudden violent death. He thanked the SBU for saving his life, crediting them twice with having “worked hard like bulls” over the past month to foil the operation. “The crime is a proven fact. All the evidence is there,” he said, noting that “apart from saving my life, for which I’m very thankful, bigger and more serious terrorist attacks have been prevented.” “A week or two ago,” he added, “Russia announced that [Islamic State] were preparing terrorist attacks before the Champions League [soccer tournament in Kiev]. I think it was going to be my [assassination].”

Babchenko said that the origins of the plot were obvious. “I was shown my passport details and photo that exists only in my passport. I had this photo taken when I was 25. It exists only in my passport and [Russian] registry office. So it was clear that this information comes from Russian governmental services. Only special forces can obtain that kind of information.”

He finished by implying that he didn’t have much choice in the matter of the deception. “There were no other options: Either we do it or we do it anyway. There was pressure from [those who ordered the killing]. They only gave three weeks to do it.”

The most intriguing short-term consequence of the Babchenko affair may be the Russian response. Only hours before Babchenko appeared alive, presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov condemned accusations of FSB involvement as “anti-Russian smears,” saying they reflected the “highest level of cynicism amid such a brutal murder, to shake the air in such a Russophobic way.” “We strongly condemn this killing and hope for a real and not a sham investigation into determining who ordered it,” he said.

Considering the vehemence and rapidity—not to mention the escalating ludicrousness—with which Russia denied involvement in the March poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in England, Peskov’s calling this a “brutal murder” sounds downright tenderhearted. And credulous. Foreign

minister Sergey Lavrov, whom Reuters quoted as having called the killing a tragedy, also seems to have believed sufficiently to reject Ukraine’s allegations in his usual manner.

In other words, it appears plausible that the Ukrainians may have pulled off their hoax without a leak to the Russians, which must be reassuring to the SBU. A glance at Putin’s habitually implacable expression, however, can’t be very reassuring. Imagine how much he and the FSB enjoy being fooled about anything at all, and figure out the exponent on this equation.

And if, as seems to be the case, there was indeed a Russian hit out on Babchenko, his status as a walking nose-thumb to the Kremlin can’t have made him safer; Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko is said to have ordered round-the-clock protection.

Vladislav Davidzon, the Russian-American editor in chief of the English-language monthly *Odessa Review*, says the episode shows the “Russia-Ukraine conflict at its purest: grotesque, farcical, duplicitous, surreal,” and he cautions against drawing conclusions from it. It’s certainly plenty surreal. Early in the evening of May 30, Moscow authorities detained people who showed up for a planned commemoration of Babchenko, suggesting that they’d done so in bad faith, since he is, after all, not dead.

And Babchenko’s friends, family, and colleagues, glad to see him and certainly wise to the world’s many choices between doing something and doing it anyway, aren’t the only ones recovering from the events of May 29. Babchenko is a serious journalist, a sophisticated and ironical man who values his hard-earned reputation for probity. For a man who’s repeatedly risked his life to be truthful, being forced to participate in the promulgation of such a fundamental untruth before the eyes of the world must have been excruciating.

Babchenko materialized, revenant at the press conference, wearing a Journey hoodie. If he intended a subliminal suggestion that we don’t stop believing, one suspects he’s leaving it up to the observer to decide what, or whom, or when. ◆

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

‘Kim Yong-chol was previously North Korea’s top spy, as head of the Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB). That’s an innocuous name for what could be better thought of as the *juche* KGB. It’s a ruthless organization implicated in spying, cyber warfare, assassinations, and kidnappings. The 72-year-old Kim is also thought to have masterminded the sinking of the *Cheonan* (an unprovoked attack on a South Korean naval vessel in 2010 that killed 46) and the shelling of a South Korean island that murdered four civilians that same year.’

—Ethan Epstein, *North Korea’s Spymaster Is Coming to America*

# The Dragon in Our Midst

The real action with spies nowadays lies not with Russia but with China. BY TONY MECIA



Washington has lately been awash in spy talk—most recently from the revelations that the FBI dispatched an operative in 2016 to make contact with two Trump campaign officials suspected of ties to Russia. And if you don't follow politics closely, maybe you at least know that the latest seasons of TV spy dramas *Homeland* and *The Americans* are wrapping up.

Yet the real action with spies nowadays lies not with Russia but with China. For years, American counter-intelligence officials have been sounding the alarm about Chinese theft of U.S. intellectual property and the threat it poses to national security.

*Tony Mecia is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

These concerns seem to be reaching a critical point. That's because of changes within the Chinese economy and a newly aggressive U.S. posture toward the country.

China itself is changing. Its economy is no longer the agrarian and industrializing behemoth that it was 15 years ago when its exports started pouring into the United States. It is an industrial powerhouse, yes, but also has larger ambitions to become the world leader in high tech—and it has no compunction about violating international norms to achieve that objective.

The “Made in China 2025” plan, announced in 2015, outlines the country's strategy to become the global leader in 10 high-tech fields, including information technology, robotics, alternative-energy vehicles, aerospace,

and biotechnology. Last year, artificial intelligence was added to the list. China sees developing these high-brainpower industries as an economic imperative, because decades of restricting birth-rates will leave it with too few younger workers to keep up the labor-intensive factories. Unlike the clothing and toy manufacturers of the past, these high-tech fields are also brimming with military applications—which moves this development from the realm of international economics into the center of the Venn diagram that overlaps with U.S. national security.

If you're China, with a lackluster history of innovation and a weak entrepreneurial culture, how do you accelerate such a transition? You subsidize it and acquire the technology however you can, while handicapping your foreign rivals. A 148-page report in January from the office of the U.S. Trade Representative details the many ways China seeks to secure its advantages, often in violation of international trading rules and commitments:

Major areas of specific concern continue to include: the Chinese government's prolific use of industrial policies that promote, guide and support domestic industries while simultaneously and actively seeking to impede, disadvantage and harm their foreign counterparts; massive subsidies; severe excess capacity; investment restrictions; “secure and controllable” [information and communications technology] policies; overly broad and discriminatory cybersecurity restrictions; data transfer restrictions; serious problems with intellectual property rights enforcement.

It's a coordinated effort among government, industry, and individual Chinese citizens. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) had it right in late May when she described the Chinese approach as a “longtime whole-of-government strategy that keeps driving toward an end”—an assessment she intended as contrast to Trump administration inconsistency but that came off as showering praise on the Communist regime.

The approach to becoming a world power in high-tech fields includes

GARY LOCKE

economic espionage—stealing trade secrets from U.S. companies either by human means or through cyberattacks. Analysts say it's hard to know precisely how severe the problem is. Companies might not know that they have suffered a security breach. Those that do are unlikely to report them for fear of negative publicity. A report last year by the bipartisan Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property labeled China “the world’s principal IP infringer” and estimated that such theft inflicts as much as \$600 billion a year in costs to the U.S. economy.

When it comes to foreign operations in the United States, Russia has lately received most of the attention, in large part because of its efforts to influence the 2016 presidential campaign. But FBI director Christopher Wray has said that in terms of the scope of the effort, there is no parallel to China.

“There is no nation that targets America’s assets more aggressively than the Chinese government,” Wray told NBC News in March. “The Chinese government works hand in hand with Chinese companies and others to do everything they can through all sorts of means to try to steal our trade secrets, our economic assets. ... It’s a real issue, and it ultimately is going to have a real impact on American jobs, American businesses, and American consumers.”

One of the tactics that sets China apart, Wray told the Senate Intelligence Committee in February, is its “use of nontraditional collectors, especially in the academic setting, whether it’s professors, scientists, students.”

A Taiwan-born U.S. citizen, Allen Ho, pleaded guilty in 2017 to conspiring to provide technical assistance to China’s largest nuclear-power company without Energy Department approval, as required by law. Prosecutors say Ho recruited nuclear technicians to help, telling one of them, “China has the budget to spend. ... They want to bypass the research stage and go directly to the final design and manufacturing phase. They said budget is no issue.” Ho was sentenced to 24 months in prison.

A Chinese scientist working at a Kansas biopharmaceutical research

facility was convicted last year of conspiring to steal genetically modified rice seed. Prosecutors said the scientist, Weiqiang Zhang, hosted visitors from a Chinese crop-research institute in the summer of 2013, and customs officials found the rice seeds, which have potential medical uses, in the visitors’ luggage. Zhang was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

In January, a federal jury in Wisconsin convicted Chinese wind-turbine manufacturer Sinovel of stealing trade secrets from a U.S. company, American Superconductor. Prosecutors said

**‘The Chinese government works hand in hand with Chinese companies and others to do everything they can through all sorts of means to try to steal our trade secrets, our economic assets,’ says FBI director Christopher Wray. ‘It’s a real issue.’**

the Chinese company hired away an engineer from American Superconductor, who then stole turbine-operating software and passed it along to his new bosses. After the theft, American Superconductor lost \$1 billion in shareholder equity and had to cut 700 jobs. Sentencing is scheduled for early June.

The U.S. government has spies in China, of course. In May, the Justice Department charged a former CIA case officer, Jerry Chun Shing Lee, with conspiracy and unlawfully retaining top-secret documents—including the names and phone numbers of assets and covert CIA employees in China. The indictment says Chinese agents promised Lee \$100,000 and to “take care of him for life.” The arrest followed the jailing or killing of 18 to 20 CIA sources in China between 2010 and 2012, as the *New York Times* reported last year, citing anonymous former U.S. officials. Lee’s lawyer disputes the charges. There are at least two other cases

underway involving former CIA or State Department officials accused of working with Chinese agents, the *Wall Street Journal* reported last month.

When a U.S. trade delegation heads to China later this month, negotiators will have a lot to talk about. There’s the trade deficit, the steel tariffs, the threatened \$50 billion in tariffs on Chinese goods (intended as retaliation for China’s closing off its economy), and the fate of the Chinese telecom company ZTE, which the Commerce Department sanctioned for trading with Iran and North Korea. And the talks take place against the backdrop of such significant geopolitical concerns as China’s military designs on the South China Sea, its increasing pressure on Taiwan, and the proposed June 12 U.S.-North Korean summit.

That’s a lot of levers. And it is easy to see a modest deal emerging from the talks, one in which China agrees to buy more U.S. goods, to take firm steps to allow greater and freer U.S. investment, and to help with North Korea—in exchange for the United States’s dropping the most punishing tariffs and providing some sort of lifeline to ZTE. That would help reduce the U.S. trade deficit with China, a Trump priority.

But knocking off the rampant economic espionage? That’s a much tougher objective.

“We are not going to get them to stop unless we really hurt them,” says Derek Scissors, who studies U.S. economic relations with Asia at the American Enterprise Institute. “The evidence shows they’ve been stealing for a long time, for decades. You don’t get them to change by talking to them. You put up with it or you retaliate, and the retaliation has to be serious.”

Tariffs, Scissors says, seem to be the Trump administration’s weapon of choice. But a smarter, more targeted approach would be to sanction individual Chinese companies that have benefited from stealing U.S. secrets.

Until now, Trump has chosen to confront China mostly with hot rhetoric. We should soon know if the new administration is a force to reckon with or a paper tiger. ♦

# Here Come the Judges

There's not much else Congress will do from now till November. **BY JOHN McCORMACK**

With five months left until the 2018 elections, Congress's legislative agenda is sure to produce, well, a whole lot of nothing. The reasons for legislative gridlock are simple. The Senate is divided 51-49 (effectively 50-49 with John McCain in Arizona undergoing cancer treatment), the 60-vote hurdle for most legislation remains intact, and there is little interest in bipartisan dealmaking. The recently-passed bill reforming the Dodd-Frank banking law, on which some Democrats and Republicans were willing to compromise, is probably a high-water mark for 2018.

When it comes to the budget reconciliation process—the Senate's special procedure to bypass the filibuster with a simple majority—Republicans likely enacted most of what they could get on a party-line vote in December 2017 when they passed tax reform, scrapped Obamacare's individual mandate, and opened up energy exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. On May 20, White House budget director and former congressman Mick Mulvaney was asked at a WEEKLY STANDARD conference what the odds are of major legislation passing Congress before the midterm elections. "Zero," he replied, adding later that something "might" pass on immigration.

With the prospect of legislative

victories dim, Senate Republicans would appear to have plenty of time to focus on confirming federal judges. It's a priority of both conservatives and the GOP establishment and about the only way congressional Republicans can achieve something tangible. Since the inauguration of President Trump, the Senate has confirmed a record 21 judges to the powerful federal appeals courts—more than double the number of appellate judges confirmed under the previous three presidents during their first 16 months in office.



*Ryan Bounds, a Trump nominee for the Ninth Circuit awaiting Senate approval*

"It's quite consequential," says Leonard Leo of the Federalist Society. "These are relatively young appointees and individuals who have very demonstrated records of being committed to a more conservative, originalist jurisprudence." The Trump-appointed judges haven't yet swung any particular court of appeals from a minority of Republican appointees to a majority, notes Ed Whelan of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, but their effect on jurisprudence will be felt for years to come. For that success, a great deal of credit goes to former Democratic Senate majority leader Harry Reid, who abolished the 60-vote requirement for executive branch nominees and federal judges in 2013. (Republicans finished what Reid set in motion for the Supreme Court when they confirmed Neil Gorsuch with a simple majority in 2017.)

But Senate rules still allow the minority party to stymie the majority

party and the executive branch, and Democrats have taken full advantage. They have chewed up the clock by dragging out votes on appointees—an assistant secretary for mine safety at the Labor Department, for example—who would have sailed through under previous administrations. "It's taking an average of 85 days for a Trump nominee to clear the Senate, compared with 67 days for former President Obama and 44 days for former President George W. Bush," the *Hill's* Jordain Carney reported on May 22.

Republicans have pushed to reduce the amount of debate time allowed on some nominees, but Democrats are unlikely to go along with that plan. After all, the first duty of the Democratic resistance is to resist. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell responded to Democratic obstruction in May by signaling the Senate will likely cut the August recess short or cancel it, an unusual move, especially in an election year when incumbents want to be home campaigning. But Democrats this year have more to lose than Republicans by being stuck in Washington: While several Democratic incumbents are in tight races, just one Republican senator (Nevada's Dean Heller) is in a toss-up. The two other vulnerable GOP Senate seats (Arizona and Tennessee) are held by retiring senators.

The upshot of the fight over Senate floor time for judicial confirmations is that there will likely be just enough time to fill most or all of the existing appeals court vacancies by the end of 2018, but dozens of (less powerful) vacant district court seats will remain unfilled. Those latter vacancies are, of course, still a problem. "The district court vacancies are in crisis," says Tom Jipping, a legal expert who recently left the Senate Judiciary Committee staff for a job at the Heritage Foundation. "Courts can't handle cases if they don't have judges."

But courts of appeal set legal precedents, and Republicans have understandably focused on them. They've curtailed what's known as the "blue slip" privilege, which had effectively given senators veto power over judicial nominees from their home states, in

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favor of a policy of extensive consultation with home-state senators. There are still seven vacant appeals court seats (mostly from Democratic districts) with no nominee named yet. “Anybody who gets nominated by sometime in mid-June has a real good shot at getting confirmed,” says Leo. “If you get nominated after that, I think the odds diminish in terms of being confirmed by the end of the year.”

Trump has been widely praised by conservatives, including his critics, for the appointments of Neil Gorsuch and other federal judges. But shake-ups in his administration do hurt the judicial-confirmation effort. Time spent confirming a new secretary of state and CIA director this month is time that could have been spent confirming judges.

While Republican legal efforts are focused on appeals court vacancies right now, that effort will seem relatively inconsequential should Supreme Court justice Anthony Kennedy announce his retirement at the end of the court’s term, likely the week before July 4. Speculation about a possible retirement by Kennedy, who turns 82 in July, remains just that—speculation. Even when a justice has a clear preference on the type of successor he or she would want, that doesn’t always guide retirement decisions. In 2014, liberal ideologue Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was 81 at the time, passed up the opportunity to have her successor named by President Obama and confirmed by a Democratic Senate. With Kennedy, it’s unlikely there exists a judge who shares his idiosyncratic judicial views. Since he was appointed by Ronald Reagan and took his seat in 1988, Kennedy has pleased judicial conservatives with his votes in cases involving gun rights, religious liberty, and Obamacare’s individual mandate, but he also cast the deciding vote upholding *Roe v. Wade* and declaring a constitutional right to same-sex marriage. It’s anyone’s guess whether Kennedy would prefer his successor to be a Republican or Democratic appointee, and whether he thinks his 30 years on the Supreme Court have been enough. ♦

# The Migrant Crisis, American Style

An eyewitness account from an unmanned border crossing. BY CANDICE MALCOLM

Crossing the southern border was more difficult than I expected. After telling the border officer that I’m a journalist coming down to report on illegal border crossings, I was sent to another building for more questioning. Accompanied by an intern and a local freelance photographer with dual citizenship, we were brought into a holding room for secondary screening. After a few rounds of questions and a thorough search of our car, the border officials finally let us cross. We drove less than three miles down an inconspicuous country road and arrived at a popular illegal border crossing—the location where upwards of 95 percent of illegal border crossings take place, according to recent statistics.

When we pulled up, we were greeted by a group of activists who had mistaken us for migrants. I spoke to two people from Amnesty International and a humanitarian activist who later told me she was also a local government official. Within 10 minutes, the first car arrived: a taxi carrying an African family of four. The activists handed out water and hats as the family gathered their belongings and went straight across the unmanned border. Within a few minutes, another taxi, carrying another African family, did the exact same thing. Another journalist was at this location a few days later, and in her 31-minute Periscope video she captured dozens of migrants—including people from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Haiti, and Jordan—forming a steady flow across the border. She recorded two different limousine buses dropping

off well-dressed migrants with piles of suitcases to walk across the border. Some refused to be interviewed; others happily recounted the steps they had taken to get to the border to claim asylum. One woman described in detail why she was taking this risk—for my children, she said, for their safety and their education.

We were witnessing the global migration crisis, unfolding on our porous southern border, with our own eyes. But this is a different southern border than the one you might see and read about in the news. My colleagues and I are Canadian, and this is the scene at Roxham Road in Champlain, New York, where migrants illegally cross into the rural community of Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Quebec, Canada.

More than 600 migrants crossed at this one location over Easter weekend, and border officials expect as many as 400 per day during the summer months. Last year was a record year for illegal immigration. Canada received 50,440 asylum applications—double the number of the previous year and five times higher than in recent years. Approximately 20,500 of these asylum seekers crossed the border illegally into Canada, most right here at Roxham Road. And 2018 looks to be an even more challenging year. During the first four months of 2018, about 7,500 migrants crossed into Canada illegally—a pace three times higher than last year.

This has forced the Liberal government, led by pro-immigration, pro-diversity prime minister Justin Trudeau, to backpedal on its previous messages of openness and inclusion to all. One top official recently warned

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that illegal entry is no “free ticket” into Canada, while another stated that “we estimate that a bit more than 90 percent of irregular migrants do not meet our criteria, and that they must leave.”

The official later clarified that his “90 percent” figure was specifically referring to Haitian migrants who streamed into Canada last year after hysteria and misinformation swept through the diaspora communities in New York and Florida. Following the 2010 earthquake that devastated the poverty-stricken Caribbean nation, both Canada and the United States created special temporary immigration programs for displaced migrants. Canada’s protected status program expired in 2016, and Canada once again began deporting migrants back to Haiti. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security similarly announced that its protected status program for Haitians would come to an end in 2019. Rather than returning to their country of origin, or facing eventual deportation by the Trump administration, some 8,286 Haitian nationals heeded the advice of YouTube videos and WhatsApp messages telling them to go to Canada—described as a “haven” for all migrants.

Canada’s prime minister months earlier had sought to define his country in similar terms. “To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada,” Trudeau declared on Twitter on January 28, 2017, the day after Trump issued his heavy-handed travel ban. The tweet made international news, and the liberal intelligentsia praised Trudeau for his compassionate position towards migrants and refugees. Several media outlets, however, interpreted Trudeau’s virtue-signaling as a legitimate policy announcement.

Misinformation began to spread, and many people believed that Canada had committed to accepting those who were being turned away or deported by the Trump administration. No such policy changes were announced by the Trudeau government, but public documents revealed chaos and confusion at Canadian consulates and embassies



*‘Don’t be the victim of misinformation,’ Canada warns arrivals in both the country’s official languages (above). ‘Claiming asylum is not a free ticket into Canada.’ Below, some of the African migrants who don’t need a ticket to cross the border from America into Canada.*



around the world. “Clients are asking if it is true that Canada will accept the refugees the U.S. are rejecting, and what is the process to do so. I would imagine that missions all around the world are seeing these enquiries increasing since the weekend,” wrote one Canadian diplomat. “We are receiving an increasing number of enquiries from the public about requesting refugee status in Canada, and a number clearly having links with our Prime Minister’s tweet,” wrote another. The following 15 months would see 67,000 unscreened and un-vetted

aspiring refugees arrive in Canada.

Contrary to rumors being spread through social media, Canadian immigration law is strict; and it explicitly prohibits migrants coming from the United States from applying for refugee status in Canada. The Safe Third Country Agreement, a bilateral treaty signed by the United States and Canada, requires migrants to make their asylum claim in the first safe country they arrive in, either Canada or the United States. If a migrant attempted to cross into Canada from the United States at an official Port of Entry with

the intention of claiming asylum, Canadian border guards would simply turn that migrant away. At an unofficial border crossing like Roxham Road, however, there are no border guards to turn migrants away. Instead, Canadian police arrest illegal border crossers and send them to a holding center in Canada to be screened and vetted. At this point, once safely inside Canada, migrants make their asylum claims. Canada's international treaty obligations prevent officials from deporting self-proclaimed refugees once they're in Canada, and Canadian law entitles eligible migrants to due process in a refugee hearing.

This is all an elaborate loophole to circumvent the Safe Third Country Agreement. Human smuggling rings charge thousands of dollars and promise clients a new opportunity for safety and freedom in Canada. And while the media focus their attention on families crossing in desperation—fleeing war or fleeing Trump—there are plenty of nefarious actors attempting to hide

amidst the asylum seekers. In early May, Canadian officials intercepted a registered sex offender wanted in Texas. The Nigerian man had recently pleaded guilty in the United States to possession and distribution of child pornography but disappeared before sentencing—only to show up at Roxham Road. He's not alone. An August 2017 report from Canada's Global News stated that "multiple refugee claimants have been found in possession of child pornography."

While Canadian officials desperately try to stop the flow of illegal migration, Canadian laws and public policy create major incentives for these migrants to come to Canada. Illegal migrants are arrested and detained by Canadian officials who do brief initial screening and background checks. As long as migrants meet Canada's broad eligibility standards, they are released into Canada and free to travel wherever they wish as long as they return for their refugee hearing date—now being scheduled 20 months hence.

In the meantime, they receive gold-plated access to Canada's public health care system through a program called the Interim Federal Health Program. This program remarkably—thanks to well-organized refugee activists and lobbyists—provides asylum seekers with better care than Canadian citizens receive. The program offers the basic care given to all Canadians, free of charge and funded by taxpayers, but it also includes additional services such as dental care, vision care, prescription medication, and home care—services Canadians pay for out of pocket.

On top of this general health care coverage, asylum seekers also receive social welfare payments, government housing, and access to Canada's public education system. The Canadian immigration department revealed that migrants receive up to C\$20,000 per person, per year in government handouts, from public education to welfare payments.

One of the unintended consequences of Canada's generous welfare

## America Seizes Control of Its Energy Destiny

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Many Americans have likely noticed a spike in gas prices just as we enter the summer driving season, which is fairly typical due to the changeover from winter to summer crude oil. While higher prices are always a headache and a burden for families, the situation has yet to become as dire as many of the price spikes from decades past—and it likely never will. The days of the world's biggest oil producers having the U.S. over a barrel, literally, are unlikely to return, thanks in large part to a renaissance in U.S. energy production that has been bolstered by the Trump administration's emphasis on pro-growth energy policies.

Ten years ago, in June 2008, you and I were paying just over \$4 per gallon for gasoline. Today, even with

the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, attempting to tamp down much of the global supply to push prices higher, American consumers are weathering the storm with gasoline hovering around \$3 a gallon. This is far better than many European countries, where gas prices are well over \$6 and rising.

We owe much of this to a dramatic energy renaissance in America that has given us greater control over our own supply. In a short period of time, our country has gone from a major energy importer to a major energy exporter of oil and natural gas. In fact, today the U.S. is the world's top producer of these critical resources.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is proud of the role our Global Energy Institute has played in this remarkable turnaround. The Institute has fought misguided regulations, run effective policy campaigns, and mobilized our members at every level. It led efforts

to lift the oil export ban, unleash production in previously restricted areas, and speed up the permitting process. And it has worked on behalf of the entire industry, uniting the sector behind a common strategy and moving all forms of energy forward.

The Institute is now working to tell the story of the American energy renaissance through *EnergyInnovates*, a multiplatform initiative spotlighting the ingenuity behind our ongoing energy revolution.

America's energy revolution hasn't solved all of our energy challenges, but it certainly has given us a comfortable hedge against a volatile global energy system. It is good for jobs, the economy, and geopolitics. Best of all, our energy industry is poised to continue to grow significantly to reduce our vulnerability—and the U.S. Chamber will be there every step of the way.



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

state is that it invites free-riding. Concerns about foreign free-riders were once minimal thanks to Canada's remote location and the fact that it shares a border only with another advanced Western liberal democracy. But because of the modern ease of world travel, free-riders now come from every corner of the planet to take advantage of Canada's generosity—and many of them make their way into the Great White North from the United States.

America's southern neighbor is often accused of being complicit in facilitating illegal immigration into the United States. Mexican border officials have developed a laissez-faire attitude towards unwanted migrants entering at their border, based on an apparent assumption that these migrants are just passing through on their way to America. But likewise, U.S. embassies in Africa are issuing tourist visas to Nigerian nationals who, upon landing in New York, make their way directly to Roxham Road to claim asylum.

Canadian officials, including Prime Minister Trudeau, have taken up the habit of blaming the problem on the country's southern neighbor. "Trudeau pins Canada's illegal-immigration woes on Trump administration," read a recent headline in the *Washington Times*. The article quoted a Canadian official alleging that the "White House is not co-operating" with Canadian efforts to secure the border. It's always easier to blame the problem on someone else; the reality is that Canada bears responsibility for protecting its borders and upholding the integrity of its immigration system.

But America, too, has an interest in stopping the illegal flow of migrants crossing its northern border. If nefarious actors can slip north into Canada, it means they can also return south.

Canada and the United States share the world's longest international border. We also share a tradition of ordered liberty and common law that dates back to the signing of Magna Carta. If North America is to remain a fortress of peace, security, and liberty, it's in everyone's interest that we secure both countries' borders. ♦

# Obama's Surprising New Foes

A community organizes against his library plans.

BY DENNIS BYRNE



Barack Obama points out features of his proposed presidential center in Chicago, May 3, 2017.

**I**n Chicago, of all places, his \$375 million Obama Presidential Center is running into growing headwinds from a few gutsy souls.

Ironically, the winds aren't gusting from the usual direction—Republicans and others the left often labels racist Obama-haters. Rather, it's blowing from the very people who have long lionized Obama: white Chicago lakefront progressives, University of Chicago professors, environmentalists, African-American activists, and a community organization of the kind that once employed Obama as an organizer.

On May 14, a preservationist group called Protect Our Parks filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Chicago, seeking a court order that would bar local government agencies from building Obama's center in the revered and beautiful Jackson Park, which served

as the site of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The group also wants to bar the city from giving control of the center's site to the Obama Foundation. They are opposed by a phalanx of avid Obama supporters headed by Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel and including local labor unions, businesses, newspaper editorial boards, and a range of do-gooders who have uncritically embraced Obama's library plans.

Imagine if Republicans had concocted a scheme to sell public land for a song to build a Donald Trump presidential library. Protect Our Parks argues that this is what the city of Chicago has done with Obama's library, asserting that the Chicago Park District and the City of Chicago don't have the authority to transfer public parkland to a nongovernmental entity such as the Obama Foundation, especially for a nominal amount of money and in violation of state law that bars the "illegal taking of public park land." The suit claims the sale is "a short con shell

Dennis Byrne is a writer in Chicago.

game, a corrupt scheme to deceive and seemingly legitimize an illegal land grab.”

If Obama had selected another, better site for his library, there would likely be no fight. But it’s hardly a surprise that his choice of the leafy, peaceful lakefront Jackson Park, designed by the esteemed 19th-century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, ignited a fire under lakefront protection, environmental, and other progressive groups. It’s the place many residents of the nearby

open, free and clear.” It is why the gorgeous and popular Millennium Park and its centerpiece *Cloud Gate* public sculpture (known as The Bean) command the downtown lakefront instead of the railroad yards, warehouses, factories, and garbage dumps commonly found in other cities.

Yet over the years the rich and powerful have tried to bend the ordinance to suit their own interests. Most recently, in 2016, lakefront preservationists drove the proposed Lucas Museum of Narrative Art out

at Red Lobster.” At 235 feet tall, the structure destroys the human scale of the surrounding parkland. In response to early criticism, the Obama-approved design was modified, although you have to look closely to see the alterations. It would still loom over the park like a dystopian power plant.

Among the early objectors to the initial Obama plan was a diverse group of more than 120 University of Chicago professors, faculty, and staff whose campus is near the site. They released an open letter on January 8 opposing the museum’s placement in the park and listed more than a score of community, labor, environmental, open space, and other groups whose objections to the project “taken together . . . form an intelligible whole.”

Among those objections are the excessive public costs of at least \$175 million for related infrastructure, the surrender of public land to a private entity, and the consumption of 21 acres—the equivalent of two large city blocks—of public space currently under the guardianship of the National Register of Historic Places. The plans for Obama’s center also initially included an above-ground parking lot that would gobble up a section of another historic public park, the Olmsted-designed, mile-long Midway Plaisance. Critics raised such a stink that the planners redesigned it as a below-ground garage within the boundaries of the center.

The list of objections from the University of Chicago group and others goes on: The project would require the relocation of a major thoroughfare linking downtown with the South Side, at a cost of tens of millions of dollars. The location “privileges cars and those who can afford them. Parking is expensive and though public land is being given away all the profits from the parking lot will go to the Obama Foundation. None of the funds go back to the city to improve train lines and public transportation infrastructure.” Visitors who take the train would have to walk across a busy street to get to the center.

Moreover, the president who got his start as a community activist faces



A model of the Obama Presidential Center’s three buildings—a museum, library, and forum

economically challenged communities flee—to toss around a Frisbee, grill some ribs, take in the spectacular lakefront view of the downtown skyline, or just lollygag in the shade—away from the gunshots and murders all too prevalent on their neighborhood streets.

But the plans for the Obama Presidential Center also appear to violate the city’s Lakefront Protection Ordinance, which has often been invoked to protect the 19-mile-long string of Chicago lakefront parks from exactly the kind of intrusion the Obama Foundation is proposing. The century-old mandate, first championed by Chicago retailer and civic leader A. Montgomery Ward in the 19th century, seeks to ensure that the lakefront would remain, as Ward described, “forever

of town because the supremely ugly, 300,000-square-foot museum would have devoured 17 acres of lakefront property south of Soldier Field. Sadly, some of the same people who so vigorously opposed the Lucas Museum proposal are suddenly mute when it comes to the Obama Presidential Center.

Soaring above the trees and blocking cherished views of Lake Michigan’s south shore lakefront, the drawings of the proposed Obama library’s main structure show a huge concrete monolith. Call it a menhir, the phallic ancient monumental stone, or call it, as some commenters on the *Chicago Tribune*’s website did, a “butt ugly building,” “the Tower of Mordor,” “a mausoleum,” or “a giant air freshener, the kind you see in the men’s room

criticism from a group of predominantly black community activists who form the Obama Library South Side Community Benefits Agreement Coalition. They say the hiring of five construction firms, mostly African-American owned, was insufficient to meet the crying need for minority employment in the area. They want Obama to sign a community benefits agreement that would guarantee jobs for the center's neighbors. In other words, they don't trust Obama unless his foundation puts it in writing. "We cannot take the president's word on the fact that they're not going to push African-Americans out," said activist Jitu Brown at a press conference, as reported by the *Chicago Tribune*. Brown noted Chicago's history of hiring minority front firms owned by whites to circumvent minority ownership requirements.

And then there's the Obama golf course, which as initially proposed would have meant the conversion of two adjacent affordable public golf courses into a Tiger Woods-designed course that would host professional tournaments and cater to the country club set. The golf course also faced enough criticism to force a redesign. In addition to costly infrastructure improvements such as pedestrian underpasses for golfers, there's concern that the course would impinge on and partially destroy the beloved 4.27-acre South Shore Nature Center. Again, the Obama Foundation claims it is at work on a redesign and that neighborhood golfers won't be priced out of play.

All of these criticisms give the lie to the Obama Foundation's endlessly repeated claim that its presence will be a boon to the struggling South Side—potentially "transformational," we're told. In fact, if Obama wanted to transform communities in Chicago, he could do so by moving his library to a site farther away from the lake. Plenty of better sites exist on vacant land in needy communities.

Along the Dan Ryan Expressway, block after block of land once occupied by decaying and crime-infested highrise public housing buildings

sits invitingly vacant, crying out for someone, anyone, to rescue this forlorn resource. This site is more accessible than the park site: Two Chicago Transit Authority train lines provide a direct connection to O'Hare International Airport, Midway Airport, downtown hotels, and many Chicago neighborhoods. An Obama Presidential Center within rather than outside the community would also be closer to restaurants and other spin-off economic activities that might encourage economic revitalization. The Jackson

that of the combined total cost of the center, golf course, and infrastructure improvements the Obama Foundation is proposing to make.

As usual in Chicago, cost estimates are squishy and sometimes contradictory. For example, the center's architects, husband-and-wife team Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, told the *Chicago Tribune* that the center alone would require a private endowment of \$1.5 billion as opposed to an earlier estimate of \$1 billion. Constructing the new golf course would cost about



Crowds protest in Chicago outside a planning commission meeting, May 17, 2018.

Park site is isolated from those neighborhoods by busy streets and railroads; virtually no sites for ancillary activities are available adjacent to the center.

Obama's proposed Presidential Center is a textbook example of how the public interest can be subverted by egos and greed. The good of its neighbors and the city as a whole is giving way to the desires of Hollywood celebrities, wealthy backers of assorted liberal causes, and people who want a dusting of the Obama charisma. From them blindly flow millions of dollars for the Obama Foundation, while information about just how much Illinois taxpayers will have to pay is lost in a fog of generalities and vague promises. In the rush to break ground, too many questions remain unanswered, especially

\$30 million, and it would take an additional \$30 million to make infrastructure improvements, Michael Kelly, Chicago Park District general superintendent and CEO, said at a public hearing. That apparently is not included in the \$175 million estimate of center-related infrastructure improvements.

But no matter how many redesigns the center, parking garages, and golf course go through, this project, if located where it is proposed, will never be the best it can be. The Chicago Park District, which is to say the public, owns the land. But ownership seems only incidental to the need of so many in Chicago and elsewhere to kowtow to the Obama legend. Never mind the dispossessed communities to whom Obama promised so much but is now delivering so little. ♦

# Political Parties Do Sometimes Crack Up

Will we witness the strange death of conservative—or liberal—America? BY STEVEN F. HAYWARD

C.S. Lewis used to say that for every new book you read, you should read an old one. Lately I've been re-reading a classic, George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, published in 1935. This marvelously written book tells the story of how England's Liberal party fell from a dominant position in the first decade of the 20th century to practically ceasing to exist just a decade later. By the 1920s, the Liberal party had been displaced by the new, and much more left, Labour party. As Dangerfield explained, "the burden of Liberalism grew more and more irksome; it began to give out a dismal, rattling sound; it was just as if some unfortunate miracle had been performed upon its contents, turning them into nothing more than bits of old iron, fragments of intimate crockery, and other relics of a domestic past. . . . [The Liberal Party] died from poison administered by its Conservative foes, and from disillusion over the inefficacy of the word 'Reform.'"

Dangerfield's account is not entirely coherent, but his prose sparkles with wit and rapier jabs at the leading figures of the era. (He describes David Lloyd George, for example, as "less a Liberal than a Welshman on the loose.") Fascination with the premise of his title has inspired a number of imitators in recent decades. Geoffrey Wheatcroft offered up a bouncy account of the decline of the post-Thatcher Conservatives in his 2005 book *The Strange Death of Tory England*,

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at a moment when it seemed as though the Labour government of Tony Blair was invincible. Historian H. W. Brands gave us *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* in 2001, which reads today like a prequel to Karl Rove's hope that the 2004 reelection of George W. Bush was a harbinger of enduring Republican domination.

But there is nothing especially strange about a once-dominant party suddenly finding itself deeply out of favor with voters, and both Wheatcroft and Brands saw their themes quickly falsified by subsequent elections, which saw the return to power of Tories under David Cameron and Democratic party liberalism under Barack Obama. And although the Tories are today mired in the agony of Brexit, Labour is in disarray under the leadership of the seemingly unelectable Jeremy Corbyn, just as the Democrats may well throw away their shot at ousting Donald Trump by choosing a far-left candidate like Kamala Harris or Bernie Sanders.

Are there cautionary lessons for our time? Mark Twain is supposed to have remarked (he likely didn't) that "history doesn't repeat itself—but it rhymes." The best rhyme with the U.K. Liberals' extinction might be that of the American Whigs, who went from a strong position following the election of 1840 to dissolving a decade later. Still, it is possible to make out some rough parallels between our parties and the issues and dynamics of the Liberal party's demise. Will someone be writing *The Strange Death of Conservative America* in a decade or two? Or perhaps the opposite—*The Strange Death of the Democratic Party*? Either outcome seems plausible, because both parties are under intense internal

strain that might be enough to break them apart.

Early in the first decade of the 20th century, the Conservative party broke with London's prevailing orthodoxy on free trade, calling for quasi-protectionist management of trade, which it euphemistically termed "imperial preference." Sounds a bit like someone's trade views today, no? Winston Churchill "crossed the aisle" from the Conservative party to join the Liberals over free trade, and the Liberals routed the Conservatives largely over this issue in the election of 1906, whereupon the Liberals pushed ahead with their reformist agenda of establishing the early building blocks of the British welfare state. In 1910, following a budget impasse between the House of Commons and the House of Lords that resembled our periodic government shutdowns, the Liberals called an election in hopes of smashing the Conservative party again at the ballot box, and especially targeting the power of what could be called the bastion of Britain's "deep state"—the House of Lords. But like Theresa May's recent general election miscalculation, the election ended in a tie between the two major parties, with Irish unionist parties providing a tenuous working majority in the House of Commons for Liberal prime minister Herbert Asquith.

Between 1910 and the onset of the Great War in August 1914, the Liberal party temporized through one political tumult after another, with their inclination for moderation and compromise increasingly whipsawed by the growing intransigence and radicalism of rising factions, such as trade unionists, Irish nationalists, and militant suffragettes. The simmering controversy over Irish home rule, which reached new heights during those years, resembles in some ways the bitterness and deep anger of our long-running debate over immigration, involving some of the same arguments about identity, ethnicity, and sovereignty. The violence of the British suffragettes during this period makes Black Lives Matter look like a tea party. The physical assaults on politicians and vandalism of their residences, the widespread

shop-window smashing and arson (107 buildings set ablaze in the first seven months of 1914) are matched only by the government's treatment of imprisoned suffragettes, whose brutal force-feeding makes waterboarding seem tame. And the series of rolling strikes in major industries was as much about politics—building up the nascent Labour party—as it was about wages and working conditions, like the wave of teachers' strikes rolling from state to state right now in an obviously coordinated effort to assist the Democratic party in the midterms. In the background there were mounting worries about the rising power of Germany, for which today we can substitute the worry over China.

Underneath was the perception of economic trends and problems that sound very familiar to our time. Despite healthy economic growth, real wages were falling, and the profits from productivity gains seemed to be captured more by capital than labor. New business formation was said to be lagging. Dangerfield's report reads like a tolerable anticipation of Thomas Piketty: "The independent small *entrepreneur*—that dream of Liberal economics—had vanished from the earth; the great illusion of the middle class was over; wealth was in the grip of other and fewer and more formidable hands." He discerned the rise of what today is often called the "Davosie" or the "globalist" class: "The new financier, the new plutocrat, had little of that sense of responsibility which once sanctioned the power of England's landed classes. He was purely an international figure, or so it seemed, and money was his language, like a loud and glittering Esperanto; it was a language, moreover, which England's upper classes seemed unable to resist."

The grievances of different causes and interests were starting to congeal into a broad-based movement armed with the rising ideologies of socialism and radicalism. The "profoundly conscience-stricken state of mind" of the Liberal party was inadequate to the moment. The party's habitual method

of moderate reform proved unequal to the insatiable appetites of the aggrieved. The Conservative party was happy to exploit every Liberal agony, often refusing parley over reform measures they might have supported in other circumstances. As Dangerfield characterized the moment, it was the spectacle "of a democracy passing from introspection into what looks very like nervous breakdown. . . . The two parties were no longer on speaking terms. Their leaders communicated with one another only through *liaison* officers."



David Lloyd George, resisting irrelevancy in 1927

Just about the whole catalogue of today's American scene can be found in this century-old story: a barely elected government that targets the power centers of the opposition party; the inter-party bitterness and complete lack of cooperation; the breakdown of democratic norms; and a heightened restiveness among protest groups who took to the streets. About the only thing missing from the parallel is a figure comparable to Donald Trump, but such a figure is impossible in British parliamentary politics.

So all of the current frothy talk about how American democracy is under supreme strain, if not in crisis; how democratic norms have been shredded; that we're seemingly just an executive order away from jackbooted authoritarianism is hardly a new spectacle in modern democratic life. But historical consciousness is in short supply, especially among liberals who think the world began the day before yesterday.

The coming of World War I in August 1914 interrupted the Liberal

party meltdown and restored at a stroke the unity of Britain's political class, though party conflict and intrigue still intruded into the administration of the war effort. But the normal national unity that comes with the sudden onset of war does not permanently alter underlying political divisions, as the United States rediscovered after 9/11. World War I only postponed the Liberal party's obsolescence, and by the early 1920s the rising Labour party administered last rites. A lot of Liberal voters migrated to Labour, but enough went over to the Conservative party to enable its dominance for the next 20 years.

The parallels may not be exact, and the dynamics of American party politics seem more stable than Britain's, but it is not a great stretch to see the Democratic party emulating the agony of the Liberal party over a longer time horizon—say, from the 1960s to the present moment. The old moderate liberals have gradually lost out to the incoherent ideological fanaticism of the identity-politics left.

The Democrats' large victory behind Obama in 2008 and its subsequent steep fall look a lot like the Liberal party after its 1906 landslide. It is conceivable that a loss to Donald Trump in the 2020 election by an identity-politics candidate or radical campaign will convulse the Democratic party down to its foundation.

The wild card in the deck—or is it a joker?—is Trump, who is still unproven in a serious foreign crisis, let alone as the commander in chief in a wartime situation. A botched foreign crisis, an economic calamity, or some other catastrophe could yet wreck the fortunes and structure of the Republican party, as could a credible primary challenge to Trump in 2020. At the current time the prospect for either party's cracking up cannot be excluded. As Churchill liked to say, the future, though imminent, is obscure. But one thing we should stop saying is that the intense frictions and party stresses of our moment are extreme or unprecedented. ♦



# All Along the Rio Grande

The view eastward from Langtry, Texas

*Our southern border is safe. It's secure.  
The region has far bigger problems  
than people trying to get across the river to find work.*

BY GRANT WISHARD

*Brownsville, Texas*

**M**arta Todd lives happily with her husband and an adopted stray dog on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. They are content with their small town, Zapata (pop. 5,089), their RV home on the edge of Falcon Lake, and the eBay business they run out of a nearby storage container. A cool breeze is always blowing off the water, rustling the tall grass and the palm trees that shade the trailer park. Weekend campers and anglers flock in and out, but the Todd family stays put.

She was raised on the Mexican side of the river, however, where things are different, she tells me. She avoids visiting her hometown, Reynosa, but sometimes it can't be helped. Family comes first on both sides of the border, and Todd has relatives living on the other side. So she goes, and despite scorching temperatures year-round, drives with the windows rolled down and the AC off. She's listening for gunshots. If she sees people running or hears

“fireworks,” she knows to find cover quickly. Cartel violence has calmed down significantly throughout Mexico, but not in the Rio Grande Valley, the southernmost tip of the United States. Todd's been caught up in three gunfights in recent years and has had several nephews kidnapped and forced into work for drug gangs.

For me, she personifies the Texas half of our border with Mexico. I just spent two months pedaling the nearly 2,000 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. If my first month, trekking on the Mexican side from Tijuana to Juárez, was characterized by optimism and an appetite for risk, my second, riding from El Paso to Brownsville, was characterized by stagnation and small-town charm.

## TEXANS LIKE THE ISOLATION

**I** started my second trip in the westernmost corner of Texas, where El Paso and its Mexican counterpart, Juárez, are straining toward each other with the wave force of concrete and urban sprawl. Similar to the like poles of two magnets, they are kept just apart by the force of the Rio Grande. I pedaled southeast, sticking as close as I could to the river. It was a civilized country at first. High peaks in nearly every direction disguised the economic power of

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at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

the El Paso-Juárez border machine. Millions of gallons of clear river water run through trenches along the rural highways, making farms and orchards possible in the middle of the desert. Interstate 10 fulfills a similar purpose, bringing tourists and truckers to a series of small towns—Clint, Fort Hancock, Sierra Blanca, and Van Horn. I stayed at a motel/gas station in Clint the first night and found myself next door to the most clichéd honky-tonk bar I could ever have imagined—cowboy hats, boots, and Wranglers. But I had to bail on I-10 as quickly as possible. The nation’s southern cross-country route is famous for its cheek-flapping 80-mph speed limit, and at that point a Styrofoam bike helmet is just a bucket for your brains.

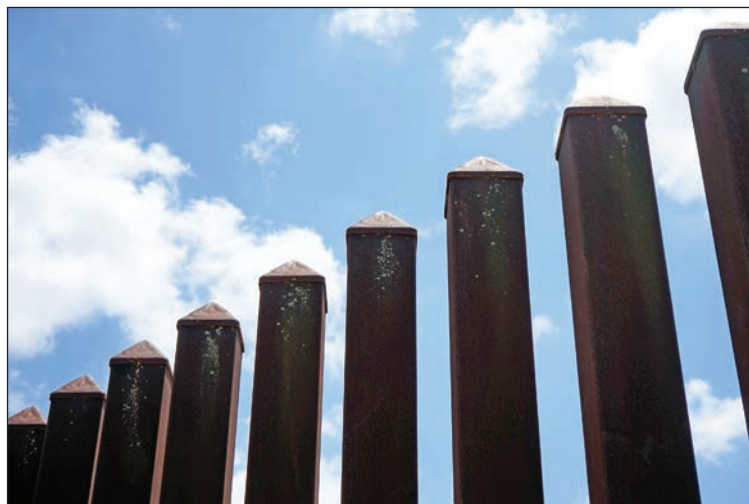
It wasn’t until I turned onto Route 90 and pedaled a few hundred miles south on that small, two-lane belt of asphalt in the middle of nowhere that I saw the real desolation of the border. Ghost towns, some of which appear only on maps, outnumbered the spots where I could get food and water. You can expect to find fewer than 10 people per square mile along most of the border in West Texas. Biking in northern Mexico should have been an equally lonely proposition, but the Mexicans I met were curious to know who was crazy enough to be pedaling through their remote towns and keen to help me find food and shelter. The Texans were more likely to keep to themselves. Those I did manage to hunt down were always yeehaw, thumbs-up to be living away from everything and everyone. As a woman I met in Valentine, Texas (pop. 134), said of her town: “Well, it’s not the big city like El Paso, so it’s not lonely!” Jumping in the car and driving for hours to run errands in a “big city” like El Paso, San Antonio, or Brownsville is commonplace all along the border.

My friend Devon Powley took a week of his vacation to bike Big Bend National Park with me, and he was the one who noticed how many of the people we met had never been outside Texas. Raúl, for example, had lived his whole life in Marfa (pop. 1,981) and had never traveled beyond Austin. Charlene, the driver of Marfa’s “Topsy Taxi,” who took us over to the next town, Alpine (pop. 5,905), to get our bikes repaired, had never been further than Dallas. If someone tells you they’re “headed up north,” there’s a good chance they’re referring to one of those two Texas attractions.

Our bikes needed some working over as we prepared for the rigors of Big Bend, and that gave us plenty of time to chat with the mechanic, John Belsbury, known far and wide as the “Alpine bike man.” He is not just the only bike mechanic in Alpine, as the nickname implies, he’s pretty much the only one in the region. His nearest competitor is 150 miles away. John moved to Texas 35 years ago and

still refers to himself as a “carpetbagger.” He was born in Greenfield, Indiana, in 1954. “My little farming community got eaten up in the smear of eastern Indianapolis,” he says without rancor, and he’s visited home only a few times since leaving for college. He finds it hard to shed a tear for central Indiana—which he describes as cold, flat, humid, and “boring, you know?”—having discovered this great thing called Texas.

He first visited the border region on a motorcycle trip in 1986 to see Halley’s Comet. “I came out here and looked around and said, ‘Oh yeah. *Oh yeah.*’ This place; it just spoke to me.” I asked him what he liked so much about Alpine. “Well,” he said, after thinking a minute, “everything.” He



*A border fence outside McAllen in the Rio Grande Valley*

loves the climate and the isolation, and one of the first things he noticed about the town was how excited everyone was for whatever their kids were accomplishing. The weekly newspaper breathlessly cheers on the high school weightlifter going to state or the most recent student test scores. Alpine is a “very healthy” community, made “interdependent because of all the vast distances,” Belsbury explains, betraying his first career as a psychotherapist in Del Rio.

Devon and I cycled down to the border at Presidio and then along the Rio Grande and slogged through hilly Big Bend National Park over the next three days. Even by West Texas standards, we were in the middle of nowhere. West Texas is defined by the Chihuahuan Desert, the second largest in North America. But where we biked along the border is often more accurately referred to as Far West Texas, or the Trans-Pecos, a mountainous and arid area five times the size of Connecticut. Big Bend provides the most dramatic proof of just how desolate, isolated, and beautiful the borderlands can be. The park is officially recognized as one of just ten places worldwide where dark-sky stargazing is possible, free from all light pollution and smog. Roadrunners



and jackrabbits jogged the road ahead of us, and mule deer moved cautiously in the fading light. We crossed the Rio Grande to drink tequila at the famous Boquillas crossing, and we camped in a ditch on the side of the highway before we pedaled north and parted ways in Sanderson.

### THE BORDER IS A REGION

Cut off from the American mainstream, the border is a culture all its own. Family, as I already mentioned, is extremely important. Walk into any restaurant, and you'll find mom, dad, grandparents, and siblings crammed into the same booth. Children live with their parents until they find a spouse. They raise their own families and then turn right around to take care of their parents in their old age. Even the most deviant character I met, Marcos Alveras from Nuevo Casas Grandes, an old Mormon colony in Mexico—a guy who joined a rock band, rides a motorcycle, proclaims the virtues of hard drugs, and told me, “The church is freakin’ evil!”—said he loves his mom and dad too much to even think of moving away.

The law is also disregarded down here in all sorts of ways. And it is not just that the border is ground zero for a lot of nasty businesses—drugs, weapons, human trafficking. That has little to do with the way everyday people don't wear their seatbelts, don't use their turn signals, but do drive on the shoulder to let faster vehicles pass. Drinking and driving is common. The people I met simply shrugged their shoulders if I mentioned all the casual rule-breaking.

Race is another key to understanding the area. Many of the towns and cities are indistinguishable from those I'd seen in Mexico. Everyone I met on the border, Hispanics and Anglos alike, on both sides, brushed aside race with cosmopolitan disinterest. I witnessed exactly one instance of racial insensitivity. A woman visiting from the Midwest asked me in hushed tones in the only restaurant in Valentine if she and her boyfriend needed to “watch out for the Hispanics down here.” I told her they didn't have anything to worry about. When the man, who had just finished a joint and a beer, suggested her question might be offensive, she reminded him, “It's America, I can f—ing say what I want.” Fair points all around, I thought. Both of them were making it abundantly clear they weren't from around these parts.

A lot of my thoughts about the border came into focus because of a chance meeting in Langtry, a dime-sized town about halfway between Sanderson and Del Rio with a total population of 13. I was standing in the shady spot where Langtry's hanging tree used to stand (the town's fame, such as it is, rests on its having been the site of the saloon and court of Judge Roy Bean, who in the late 19th century declared himself “the law west of the Pecos”), resigning myself to bedding down that night without dinner or a shower, when a woman drove up in an ancient Jeep and asked if I wanted a ride to the river. “Why would I want to go to the river?” I asked, thinking she was commenting on my need for a bath and densely failing to realize she was

MAP: THE WEEKLY STANDARD, BASED ON IKONAC

referring to the Rio Grande. “I just thought you might want to go and see it,” E. J. Billings said, not answering my question, but still charming me into the passenger seat. Billings had a grandmotherly air and was obviously worried about a lone biker who seemed to have turned up in Langtry hoping for some sort of desert oasis. On the high cliffs overlooking the river, she mentioned something about some “Tecate journals.” My ears perked up. I had read a book called *The Tecate Journals* in preparation for my trip. The author, Keith Bowden, spent an epic 70 days canoeing the length of the Rio Grande. He’s a hero of mine. I hadn’t set out to find the guy, but here he was in Langtry, and he was happy to swap notes about the border.

Bowden took me to another portion of the river, where feral hogs crashed through the underbrush in the trees below. Ancient people once lived in the surrounding cliff-side caves, he said, and archeologists have found perfectly preserved tools and mummified bodies. We watched the sunset over the Rio Grande and chatted over some Tecate. I asked him what the rest of America misunderstands about life on the line. “I can answer that one pretty quick,” he said, draining his can. “The border is not just a line in the middle of the river, it’s a region.”

Laredo, for example, where Bowden spent his career teaching English at the community college, “has much more in common with and does a lot more business with Nuevo Laredo than anywhere in the American interior.” Nuevo Laredo has the same estranged relationship with the rest of Mexico. This is why you can find American football in Tijuana and pay with pesos in Brownsville. All of the problems associated with the border, Bowden said, start with the extreme differences between Mexico and the United States. International borders rarely provide such a stark contrast. “This is unique, in the sense that you have the first world and the third world on either side of this river: different languages, different customs, different laws, different purposes,” he explained.

It’s not uncommon to meet people from families that have lived on the border since the 1800s, he said. Those caught in the grind between the United States and Mexico learn to pick and choose the rules and norms that they find convenient. “Border people aren’t absolute rigid rule followers,” Bowden went on. Their mentality is “If it doesn’t suit me I’m going to follow the Mexican way” or “If I don’t really like what the Mexicans are doing I’m going to do it the American way.”

### THE REGION IS POOR

Small towns and big ranches defined my trip through West Texas, but all that changed when I crossed the Pecos River, which marks the definitive beginning of South Texas. It might as well have been a different state



*Rolling along Route 90 (top). Langtry’s E.J. Billings out for her evening drive in her vintage Jeep (above). She introduced the author (below right) to Keith Bowden (below left), author of *The Tecate Journals*.*



entirely. Green grass and short trees replaced the harsh desert landscapes I’d seen for hundreds of miles. Small cities such as Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and Laredo are thriving thanks to the cross-border traffic. Over 2 million semis cross annually from Mexico into the United States at Laredo, where the busiest trucking corridor in the country, I-35, gets going.

Most cities along the border are poor by national



The Rio Grande in Big Bend

standards, but the problem is especially acute in the Rio Grande Valley. In fact, the four counties that make up the Rio Grande Valley—Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron—are among the poorest 100 counties nationwide, with an average per capita income of \$13,981. Over 45 percent of children live below the poverty line in these counties.

Frank Garcia, the manager at the hotel where I stayed in Del Rio, was the only person I met on the trip who admitted to liking the idea of Trump's wall. He remembered a simpler time when "it was not uncommon for you to get hungry and just run across the border at 3 A.M. to get some hot dogs." Today, that's no longer possible—or even advisable—thanks to the drug trade. "It gets dark, you better get out of there," he warned me. Frank was born in Brownsville and has spent most of his 62 years living in different places on the border. "I think a wall is good as long as you have doors where you can come in legally," he said, referring to family and friends who spent years waiting in line for legal admission to the United States. Crime, however, isn't what most concerns Frank. In Del Rio, he said, "You either have a mansion or a shack. The economy here is not good. Minimum wage here is not all that uncommon."

The cost of living is low on the border, but so are the economic opportunities. Texans work low-wage jobs at places like Walmart for decades. The high school-dropout rate is high. Few people go to college, and even fewer succeed in earning a degree. Sure, build that wall, said Frank, but "I don't think closing the borders is gonna help the homeless. It's not gonna help the unemployed. There are people here, generations, that have lived off the government." None of his young housekeepers has a college degree, he told me, but they all already had babies to take care of.

Everyone I talked to in the Rio Grande Valley thinks

something has to change. The border is a blend of Mexican and American cultures, but the American side is far more pessimistic about the future. In Mexico, I met people who were putting themselves through school, working 80 hours a week, and, in extreme cases, risking their lives for a shot at a better life north of the border. In southern Texas, the people were more content to stay where they are—even if that means being stuck.

In Brownsville, I talked to Alan Govea, a bike mechanic who's working toward a degree so he can become a high school history teacher. (Yes, when you bike a couple of thousand hard miles, you end up meeting a lot of bike mechanics.) "I want to be able to change some of the thinking that we have here," he told me. "Most people don't leave, man. To them, there's no world outside the valley." He's also frustrated by how others take advantage of the safety nets. "There are people who live over there but who have government assistance from here, as far as food stamps, Medicare, Medicaid. That's some of the changes that people want to see." Alan's dad was from Mexico and earned his U.S. citizenship. The way that border people flout the law always frustrated his father—"They think they're untouchable now that they're in the U.S." Govea hopes that will change, but also sees that friction as part of life on the border.

Keith Bowden had a similar view of the students he taught at Laredo Community College. "Laredoans, they don't do many things. There's a lot of family, work, family, buy rims for the truck, work, family, buy new rims for the truck. They don't travel. They love the Dallas Cowboys or they hate the Dallas Cowboys." The American Dream, Keith said, "is a belief that if you do A, B, and C there's going to be a reward. There's no belief in that in Laredo. Or very little. They go more by the Mexican model," which he

summarizes as “What’s the point? If God wants me to be successful, God will make me successful.”

Those living on the American side of the border are, by every concrete measure, wealthier than those living on the Mexican side. Their attitudes, however, are completely the opposite of expectations.

### ABOUT THAT WALL

There are 650 miles of pedestrian and vehicle fencing along the U.S.-Mexican border. When I could, I made it a habit to bike along the wall. Sometimes this was as easy as a right turn off the highway and a short ride between fields of onion and cabbage to the rust-brown barrier. The wall is always a graffiti canvas in Mexico, but it’s all business on the Texas side. Twenty-foot tall steel beams, perfectly symmetrical, can be found in fits and starts. They are often a significant distance away from the actual border. Mainly this is the Rio Grande’s fault; it creates soft marshlands unsuitable for wall building and randomly changes course. Wide gaps in the fence allow farmers to drive their tractors to their valuable acreage on the other side.

Trump’s wall came up a lot in conversations down here. On the Mexican side, people understood the need for border security but were sick of the way Donald Trump belittles their country. On the American side, people didn’t see much point in spending billions on something that is never going to be effective. Marta Todd summed up the most common opinion neatly: “I’m glad we have the border patrol, because if not it would be a really bad mess. But about the Trump wall? It’s not gonna work.” Actually she found the whole idea rather amusing. Several times I heard a Mexican joke about the wall that is a pretty good summary of the way people think on both sides of the fence—“I wish they’d go ahead and build this wall so we know how much to charge people to cross it.” As long as Mexico is poor and the United States is rich, enterprising people will find a way.

Seeing the region first-hand made it clear that building a 1,900-mile wall is a waste of time and money. And everyone seemed to know this already, including Trump’s local supporters. Heavily populated areas like San Diego, Nogales, and El Paso already have their fences, put up in the first years of this century, and these have brought enormous benefits. Instead of tens of thousands of people wading across the Rio Grande or running through rough, dangerous terrain to commute to their jobs in the United States every morning, they apply for work visas and border-crossing cards that allow the holder to travel anywhere within 25 miles of the dividing line. These fences have made the border a more dignified place to live and work.

There are places, though, that could benefit from

increased security. Apprehensions have dropped steadily all along the border over the past decade, with the exception of the McAllen-Brownsville area. Assaults on border patrol agents there have risen dramatically. A wall might help, but the return on investment would be far lower than with the original fences. It’d be difficult to build more barriers in Texas, anyway, because the federal government doesn’t own the land along the border like it does in California, Arizona, and New Mexico. Texans own it, and they took President George W. Bush to court over his 2006 Secure Fence Act.

Increasing the number of border patrol agents would be cheaper and would likely help more. But even this idea has its problems. In December 2017, President Trump signed



*Migrants detained by border patrol agents on the Old Mines Road*

executive orders directing Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to bring on 15,000 new recruits. Yet a Department of Homeland Security study found that neither of the agencies charged with guarding the border could demonstrate a need for additional agents. Neither can even maintain the minimum level of personnel mandated by Congress right now; agents are quitting faster than they can be hired. Despite recruitment efforts, the size of the border patrol has shrunk every year since 2011.

There’s also the problem of corruption. Most CBP agents, of course, are on the straight and narrow, but the few that go rogue do a lot of damage. Last year, James Tomscheck, a former head of internal affairs at the agency, said his “conservative” estimate is that 5 percent of the agents are compromised—leading him to believe that the largest police force in the country is also the most corrupt law-enforcement agency within the federal government. The people that I talked to along the border were uniformly grateful for CBP’s presence, but many also had a story or anecdote about agents on the take.

I often heard people distinguish the old border patrol and the new. The old agents were generally mean and racist. Kenneth Halfmann, a trapper for the U.S. Fish



*The decade-old border fence, just outside McAllen*

and Wildlife Service who grew up in Sanderson, said he remembers driving with his father-in-law on his ranch and spotting a five-foot rattlesnake on the side of the road. The older man told him to get out and kill it. Kenneth did, but was surprised to find that the snake didn't have a rattle on the end of its tail. It had been removed. The next day he was describing this snake to a group of border patrol agents. "That was probably mine," one of them said, explaining how he cut the rattles off and released the snakes because "It's a hell of a lot easier ... to do a toe tag than it is to do the paperwork, give them free meals, and ship them back."

The force is drastically different today. Latinos now hold over 50 percent of border patrol jobs. I had nothing but positive interactions with the force, and CBP officers frequently rolled down their window to offer me water or packets of electrolytes as I cycled the torrid region. And I found plenty of reasons to think our border security is working well.

I rode the Old Mines Road, a 114-mile gravel track between Eagle Pass and Laredo. It took two days to bike and gave me the strongest sense I have of what it might be like to cross the border illegally. Thick, tall underbrush lined the road on both sides, creating a suffocating jungle trench. It was impossible to tell where you were. Sand and gravel made pedaling difficult, but also revealed wherever snakes had crossed the road. I saw a burned and bullet-riddled shell of a Mercedes pushed off to the side in one spot. Dump trucks lumbered by at regular intervals to a nearby fracking operation. I was close enough to Mexico that I could hear trucks on the highway, but was never able to see the Rio Grande. Ranch and game fencing separated me from the trees, so there was no shade. Fortunately, I spotted a blue barrel on

the side of the road with a faded Red Cross flag. Inside were jugs of water and on the lid, phone numbers, GPS coordinates, and warnings in Spanish about the area's dangers and how to call for help. A border patrol agent later told me there were several such barrels on the road, charitably stocked by a local church. In a rare moment of clear thinking, I took an extra gallon and tied it to my handlebars. It was a good thing as my estimate of how far I had to go was way off.

The second day was even hotter than the first. It reached 93 degrees, making it one of the worst days I endured in over two months of cycling. I got on the bike at 8:15 A.M. and didn't reach Laredo till 12 hours later. Every few yards it was obvious someone had jumped the fence, bending the wire down with a foot. Articles of clothing and empty bottles littered the road. Midday, I came over a hill to find a border patrol agent with six men in his custody. They were all standing in the shade of a CBP vehicle's raised trunk. Two white and green pickups and a van soon arrived in a cloud of dust to take the men away. The Mexicans smiled and waved for my camera. The agent told me he was relieved to have found this group. A trucker had spotted them near the road and called it in. The men were lost and had wandered around for three days without water. They had only survived because they found a trough of water meant for cattle. One member of their group was still out in the brush, either lost or refusing to come in. The agent, one of many specially trained EMTs in the CBP, feared the man was already dead.

The success of border security over the last couple of decades has pushed migrants away from urban areas toward far riskier routes through the desert. At least 294 people died crossing the border in 2017, even though the number of migrants apprehended dropped overall. Experts believe

that calculation of the dead is far too low. Most areas of the border experience eight to ten months of summer temperatures, and last July was especially horrifying. Ten people were baked to death in a semi-truck packed full of migrants from Mexico and Central America.

I got in contact with a ranch owner whose employees I met on the Old Mines Road. Stewart W. Stedman lives in Houston but owns and operates the Faith Ranch, a 40,000-acre cattle and game ranch that's been in his family since the 1930s. He is quick to describe himself as a conservative, but one frustrated by the current immigration debate. People are always running through his ranch, and the border patrol agents giving chase by trucks, helicopters, and horse are "ubiquitous." He doesn't really mind the cat-and-mouse games on his property, but he does wish the United States would enforce its immigration laws differently. Instead of spending so much energy on the border why not punish the employers who hire illegal workers? Like most Texans, he sympathizes with those who come here to work. If you reduce the demand for illegal labor, he said, people will stop attempting to cross altogether.

"My wife calls me a liberal when I talk about this," he admitted, but he would rather his tax dollars were spent on a border patrol that chases more bad guys and fewer people looking for work. "And I'm all for that, I mean, the drug runners, the terrorists, you know, all that stuff. But they're chasing people who risked their life to get a job. That's really, to me, not a good use of government dollars." Punishing employers is easier said than done, but Stedman just sounded fed up with and saddened by the border debate. In the past year, he and his employees have found 13 dead migrants on the ranch, mostly victims of heat exhaustion.

## FROM COAST TO COAST

Most of the ranchers I met in Texas had voted for Trump, but not because they want him to build a wall. They haven't been able to hire ranch hands from Mexico for decades because of the CBP's constant presence. They wanted Trump because of issues like the inheritance tax—which the president has reformed in a way that should allow more family ranches to pass on to the next generation. For South Texans like Stedman, there are just more pressing problems to deal with than people crossing the border. If South Texans feel the friction of living on the dividing line, West Texans were basically unfazed by it. The border hardly affects their lives at all. The conditions are too harsh for it to be much of a crossing point and the region too empty to attract folks looking for work. Overall, Texans are satisfied with the border as is, making them square pegs in the round political categories that people think organize American voters.



*Above, sticking close to the river along FM-170 in Big Bend; below, journey's end in the Gulf of Mexico*



Our southern border is safe and sound. That's what I found tracing it by bicycle. The one thing I didn't find on the border that I expected to find everywhere, growing like scrub brush in the desert, was anger. I assumed Mexicans would be angry with Americans, intruders like me. I assumed Texans would be angry with Mexicans. I was wrong on both counts. These are generous people with centuries of a shared culture.

It was encouraging to find that the border is a different place than the one cut and edited for the news. It's a region caught in the middle. The people who live there are optimistic, but concerned for their neighbors. If there are "bad hombres" in this story, the people on the border think they live in Washington and Mexico City. Both governments ignore those who dwell on the line, and if they do pay attention, they lie or miss the point entirely. "Elections are rigged," my Mexican friend Davi Rivera told me. "The corruption is absurd. You can see it. It's not like it's hidden!" Stewart Stedman was equally skeptical of the bureaucrats. He wants "limited government" and to just get on with his business. "The farther away my tax dollars go," he said, "the less enthusiastic I am about sending them there." ♦

# No, the Child Welfare System Isn't Racist

*Or, how to make the duties of social workers even more difficult*

BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

Are child welfare authorities racist? That was the conclusion of an article in *Slate* about a white lesbian couple from Oregon who killed themselves and their six black adoptive children by driving off a cliff in California in March (two of the children are still missing but presumed dead). “The way in which Sarah and Jennifer [Hart] managed to continually evade the notice or action of officials is a luxury that is by and large only provided to white parents,” Rachele Hampton argued.

The Harts had come to the attention of child welfare authorities in three states before this tragedy. They had been reported for beating one child and for withholding food from others, with few consequences. But white parents aren't the only ones who have been able to evade child welfare services.

Remember Zymere Perkins of Harlem, the boy whose family was the subject of multiple child welfare investigations before he was beaten to death with a broom handle by his mother's black boyfriend in 2016? Or 2-year-old Tariji Gordon of Sanford, Fla., who was sent back to live with her black mother after her twin brother had suffocated, only to be found dead and buried in a suitcase in 2014? There is a long and tragic record of black children suffering abuse, neglect, and death even after child protective services were aware of the dangers these children faced in their own homes.

And yet the claim that black parents are subject to greater scrutiny by child welfare agencies simply by virtue of their race is a trope that is easy to find in academic circles, the media, and the world of child welfare.

The statistics are clear: According to a 2016 report from the Children's Information Gateway, white children made up 51.9 percent of the child population and 46.4 percent of

children identified by child protective services as victims. By contrast, black children made up 13.8 percent of the child population and 22.6 percent of those identified as victims. The percentages of those who are in the foster care system are similarly disproportionate, with blacks making up 24.3 percent of kids in foster care and whites 43.4 percent.

By contrast, Hispanic children are represented in the child welfare system in almost exact proportion to their share of the population. They are 24.4 percent of the population, 24.0 percent of those identified as victims, and 22.5 percent of the kids in foster care. Asians are underrepresented in the child welfare system, making up 4.8 percent of the population of children but only 0.9 percent of those identified as victims and 0.2 percent of those in foster care.

When I ask Sharonda Wade, an African-American woman who works as a supervisor in the Department of Children and Family Services in Los Angeles, what she makes of the claim that racial bias is responsible for the disproportionate rate of child removal among black families in Los Angeles, she tells me, “Racism exists inside our system—in health care, mental health, and criminal justice.” Wade says that “because black parents have had not-so-good relationships with other agencies, when our agencies come knocking, they witness us as someone they can't trust.”

Indeed, Wade tells me that a black person working for child protective services (CPS) may actually make the situation worse from the perspective of black families. “Some people—even black people—feel like a black social worker won't do a good enough job, that they're not as educated, not as professional.” Even worse, “They see me as being a traitor.” During the four years she was an emergency response worker, clients would call her supervisor to complain. “They wanted a white social worker.” Others attacked her for working for CPS at all. “Some of the moms would be screaming: ‘How dare you work for CPS? You're going to get your ass whupped for working for the man.’”

And then there are the conspiracy theories. Wade has heard people accuse her of “selling black kids.” She has even seen flyers circulating in the community to this effect. When her agency started a program to send a public health nurse to

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visit kids (after a call about a 2-year-old who hadn't received immunizations), a Facebook group formed, telling people not to let CPS in because "they're going to take your babies."

Wade says that this demonstrates the level of misunderstanding in the black community about her job and its incentives. "If I remove a child, it is so much paperwork for me. It's an exhausting process. I would prefer you keep your child. We don't want your babies. We want your babies to be safe."

Such accusations and conspiracy theories sound familiar to Randall Wilson, who has worked for the Philadelphia Department of Human Services for 21 years. Wilson is black, but he says the racial makeup of workers doesn't matter because they "work in a system and tend to reflect dominant discourses of power." If you are a child welfare worker, "you are an agent of systematic power." He raises the example of emergency room doctors who may be more likely to report suspicion of abuse in a black family than in a white family, even for two kids presenting with the same kind of injuries, for example.

For her part, Wade is unsure that CPS is adding "fresh" bias to the equation. And she is skeptical that her colleagues are taking children away from families for arbitrary reasons. After all, a disproportionately high number of child welfare workers in the United States are black. In New York City, for example, 65 percent of Administration for Children's Services (ACS) employees are black and 15 percent are Hispanic.

Moreover, CPS workers are often responding to complaints made by people of color who live and work in the same neighborhoods as these minority families, such as mandated reporters like teachers and doctors. In New York, for instance, 40 percent of public school teachers are nonwhite. And in Washington, D.C., almost half of all teachers are nonwhite. It is not nosy racist white ladies who are interfering in the lives of these black families. More often than not it is black people concerned about the welfare of black children.

Of course, there are cases in which CPS didn't need to be called. Recently, a school called Wade's agency after a mother (who was black) refused to provide the school with an EpiPen even though her child had severe allergies. The mother said she couldn't afford two of the pens and so had to keep the one at home. Rather than help her find a social service agency to help pay for the second pen, school officials reported that she was "hostile" and claimed they were concerned that "if she was hostile with them she was hostile with her kids." Wade found no evidence for that.

But she says the inability or unwillingness of some black

parents to deal calmly with CPS workers makes things more difficult for everyone. Her agency has done plenty of sensitivity training to defuse these situations, but she says it's still not enough.

When she was responsible for approving foster placements for kids who had been removed from their homes, Wade says, parents would often become frustrated that a child couldn't be placed immediately with a member of the extended family. But extended family members have to pass background checks and meet other requirements in order to foster children. One of her black colleagues



*Just doing their jobs: A Los Angeles police detective and a social worker interview the nephew of a man whose children were placed with child protective services.*

questioned the need to jump through so many hoops: "So Grandma has got domestic violence on her record. What's wrong with that? I've had a little domestic violence too." Says Wade, "That's not the kind of sensitivity I'm looking for."

Wilson also worries that it is harder to place black children with extended family members because of the many other issues that affect these family members. He tells me: "If you don't address poverty, unemployment, and lack of stable housing, then when you go to look for a suitable caretaker, one of those issues could impede that child to be placed there."

This gets to the heart of the problem with the claim that the child welfare system is racist: It fails to acknowledge that certain social factors are correlated with child abuse and neglect—and those factors are more likely to be present in minority communities.

According to a report from the Child Welfare Information Gateway, these factors include economic challenges like poverty and unemployment, which disproportionately affect black families. Parents in these situations are more

likely to experience high amounts of stress, a contributing factor for risk of abuse.

Another commonly correlated factor in child abuse is domestic violence between partners. As an article in *Time* pointed out in the wake of the video of football player Ray Rice beating his wife, “Black women are almost three times as likely to experience death as a result of [domestic violence/intimate partner violence] than White women. And while Black women only make up 8 percent of the population, 22 percent of homicides that result from DV/IPV happen to Black Women and 29 percent of all victimized women, making it one of the leading causes of death for Black women ages 15 to 35.”

Family structure is another major predictor of child abuse. Single parenthood, and especially the presence in the home of a man who is not the biological father, is a common theme in a significant percentage of abuse cases. According to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the incidence of physical abuse for a child living with a single parent and a “partner” is 19.5 per 1,000. That’s almost twice as high as for children living with unmarried biological parents or a parent married to a nonbiological parent, and almost 10 times as high as for married biological parents. The data are similar for sexual abuse.

According to data from Child Trends, in 2014, 70 percent of all births to black women occurred outside of marriage, compared with only 29 percent of all births to white women. For Hispanics the rate is 54 percent and Hispanic couples are more likely to remain together even if they don’t marry (which could explain some of the difference between black and Hispanic families with regard to interactions with child protective services). Family structure is a deeply important factor in determining the likelihood of interaction with child welfare officials, and it is one that disproportionately affects black children.

These statistics are not difficult to find, but like so many other claims about disparate impact’s being the result of implicit or explicit racial bias (whether it’s 4th grade reading scores or elite college admissions or school suspension rates or incarceration rates), there is a reluctance to talk about the many other factors that might lead to these outcomes when it comes to child abuse and neglect.

Instead, advocates claim the laws themselves are suspect. Writing in the *Atlantic* about a “free-range child” law proposed in Utah, Indiana University sociology professor Jessica McCrory Calarco argued, “What counts as ‘free-range parenting’ and what counts as ‘neglect’ are in the

eye of the beholder—and race and class often figure heavily into such distinctions.” In a letter responding to the *Atlantic* story, Diane Redleaf, legal director of the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare in Chicago, wrote, “Neglect laws currently are sweeping in millions of poor and minority families under amorphous standards. These laws and policies allow child-protection caseworkers to declare healthy and happy children to be ‘neglected.’ Often, parents get their names registered in child-abuse blacklists on the say-so of caseworkers without so much as a scintilla of evidence of neglectful care.”

Similar claims have been made in other publications. For example, a 2017 article in the *New York Times* cited interviews with lawyers working on behalf of parents caught up with ACS in New York City, who claimed that ACS is engaged in the “criminalization of their parenting choices,” a practice the *Times* calls “Jane Crow.”

Critics of the system often cite the fact that of the three million reports of abuse or neglect made each year, only about a third are “substantiated.” But as Harvard Law professor Elizabeth Bartholet notes in her book *Nobody’s Children*, “Fully 60 percent of the parents named in cases of suspected but unsubstantiated maltreatment show up in the CPS system again based on new allegations.”

**I**t is true that the majority of families investigated by child welfare are poor, and disproportionately people of color, but the growing consensus that this is the result of systemic racism or groundless accusations should be challenged, particularly in light of new legislation proposed in Minnesota.

The Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act, which was introduced in both chambers of the state legislature in March, would create a special council inside the state Department of Human Services to oversee how black children and families are treated. It would make it harder to terminate the parental rights of black parents and force child protective services to place black children with other relatives or provide evidence for why such placement should not occur. And it allows parents to petition for families to be reunified when kids are older.

This kind of language has great appeal for politicians on both sides of the aisle. And if you knew nothing about the child welfare system today, you would wonder why anyone could object to the legislation’s stated

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**Family structure is another major predictor of child abuse. Single parenthood, and especially the presence in the home of a man who is not the biological father, is a common theme in a significant percentage of abuse cases.**

purposes— “To protect the best interests of African American children” and to “promote the stability and security of African American families by establishing minimum standards to prevent arbitrary and unnecessary removal of African American children from their families.”

But neither Wade nor Wilson think the legislation will have much effect on the system. Wilson cites the Indian Child Welfare Act as evidence that race-specific laws seeking to keep children with members of their own family (or tribe) fail to have the intended effects. “ICWA has not significantly reduced the disproportional number of Native American children in foster care” because the underlying factors of poverty, substance abuse, and other social challenges have not really changed.

Wade agrees that Minnesota’s plan holds little promise for limiting abuse or reuniting families. There are already rules governing when and how children who are in danger of severe neglect and abuse should be removed from a home; merely encouraging social workers to think extra-hard about whether to do so doesn’t seem like much of a solution. Wade says she wouldn’t mind seeing the creation of some kind of advocacy center that black parents could call. “If these parents had concerns about social workers or wondered why [child protective services] was called in on them, they could call in and get help. Someone could explain to them: This is the process. This is how you get your kids back.” Such a service could help them fully understand the problems that led to the removal and connect with resources such as parenting classes or drug rehabilitation services. Wade and many of her colleagues do this already, but “for some of them, you can’t tell them nothing.”

Wilson is correct in his comparison with the Indian Child Welfare Act. Like the legislation in Minnesota, ICWA was meant to right a historic wrong. The institution of slavery did tear apart black families and the U.S. government’s policies toward Indians did much the same. But the solution has only made the problem worse. ICWA has prevented children who are clearly the victims of serious physical and sexual abuse and extreme neglect from being placed in stable homes simply because of their race.

There are several reservations where incidents of physical and sexual abuse have been numerous and egregious. According to a 2012 report in the *New York Times*, for example, the Spirit Lake reservation included:

38 registered sex offenders among its 6,200 residents, a rate of one offender for every 163 residents. By contrast, Grand Forks, N.D., about 85 miles away, has 13 sex offenders out of a population of 53,000—a rate of about one in 4,000. In one

home on the reservation, nine children are under the care of the father, an uncle and a grandfather, each a convicted sex offender, a federal official said. Two of the children, brothers who are 6 and 8, were recently observed engaging in public sex, residents said.

And Spirit Lake is not alone. At the Red Lake Chippewa reservation in Minnesota, one mental health professional received reports of 75 children between the ages of 5 and 15 who were mimicking (and in some cases actually having) sexual relations with each other on a school play-

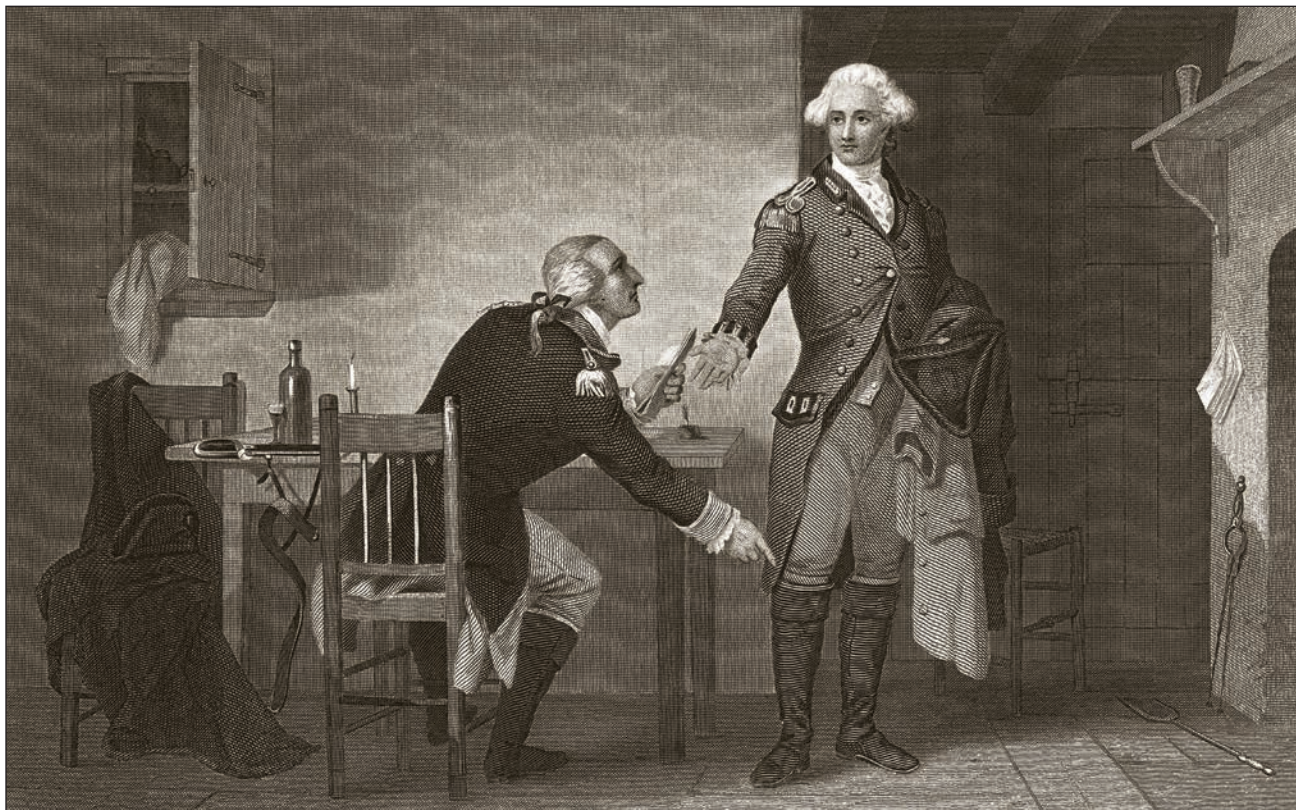


*A San Antonio woman leaves a magistrate’s office after having eight children removed from her care by child protective services, April 29, 2016.*

ground. Astonishingly, child welfare officials have been sanctioned for reporting these problems, and ICWA has made it all but impossible to remove these children from their communities and find safer homes for them. Keeping these children with their tribes is considered more important than their individual rights to safety and security.

Legislation like the Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act would likely do the same. Not only would it effectively encourage social workers to keep children in abusive homes longer (can you imagine a law that would encourage battered African-American women to stay with their husbands longer to preserve black families?), it would also encourage them to place black children with less safe and stable family members rather than having the option of a non-black family fostering or adopting them.

The claims of systemic racial bias in the child welfare system are pernicious not only because they will result in more limited—and potentially more dangerous—options for minority children, but because they affect black parents’ opportunity to properly understand the accusations against them and, if possible, work with CPS to change their behaviors and reunify their families. ♦



American general Benedict Arnold—seated because of his injured leg—persuades British major John André to hide documents in his boot.

# Villainous Perfidy

*Benedict Arnold's path from hero to resentful traitor.* BY GORDON S. WOOD

It was once common knowledge, the story of Benedict Arnold—that extraordinarily successful patriot general who abruptly turned against the American Revolution. Because he had been so trusted by George Washington, Arnold was regarded as the worst of traitors. Indeed, his very name became synonymous with treachery and treason. Not so anymore. Nowadays many young Americans have no idea who Arnold was, and even those who have vaguely heard of the name have little sense of what he did and why “Benedict

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**Turncoat**  
*Benedict Arnold and the Crisis of American Liberty*  
 by Stephen Brumwell  
 Yale, 372 pp., \$30

Arnold” has been a byword for betrayal through much of our history.

This loss of memory comes in part from a changing view of the revolution. In the hands of present-day teachers and professors the revolution is no longer the glorious cause it once was. It is now mostly taught—when it is taught at all—as a tale of woe and oppression, redressing what many academics believe was an overemphasis on the patriotism of great white men. “Those marginalized by former his-

stories,” writes the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Alan Taylor in a recent introduction to current scholarship, “now assume centrality as our stories increasingly include Native peoples, the enslaved, women, the poor, Hispanics, and the French as key actors.” In his own narrative of the revolution, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804*, Taylor has painted a bleak picture of the event. Most of the patriots were not quite as patriotic as we used to think. The Southern planters, for example, engaged in the revolution principally to protect their property in enslaved Africans, but “implausibly blamed the persistence of slavery on the British.” Ordinary white men were even worse. In the West, where the fighting was especially vicious and bloody,

BETTMANN / GETTY

they tended to run wild and slaughter Indians in pursuit of their “genocidal goals.” In the end, writes Taylor, it was a white man’s revolution whose success came at the expense of everyone else—blacks, Indians, and women.

No doubt this dark and sordid side of the revolution needs to be exposed. But unfortunately, this exposure has become so glaringly dominant nowadays that there is little room for the older, more patriotic story to be appreciated. Modern scholars haven’t gone so far as to describe Benedict Arnold as a hero for turning against this rather squalid and nasty revolution—after all, the side to which he defected was by their standards of judgment not appreciably different from the side he left—but since patriotism doesn’t have the appeal it used to have, Arnold’s treason seems not to matter as much anymore.

Yet of course it does matter, which is all the more reason to welcome another account of Arnold’s career, written, as many of the best and most readable histories of the revolution are written these days, by an independent scholar who is not caught up in the academic world’s obsessions with race and gender.

Stephen Brumwell is a British scholar who has written a number of important works on 18th-century military history, including a prize-winning book on George Washington. With his new book *Turncoat: Benedict Arnold and the Crisis of American Liberty*, Brumwell has added one more account to the multitude of works written over the past two centuries on this incident of treason. Perhaps Americans’ long fascination with Arnold and his treason can be explained in part by our need to define and emphasize our patriotism and nationalism. But its continual retelling can also be chalked up to the sheer drama of the story and its cast of extraordinary characters. There are spies and counterspies, suspense and close calls, a beautiful woman, a handsome and charming British major, and Alexander Hamilton. It’s amazing that Hollywood hasn’t made a serious effort to adapt the story for the screen.

**B**enedict Arnold was born in Connecticut in 1741, the son of a struggling petty merchant. From

the outset Arnold was determined to make something of himself and establish his gentility. He was headstrong and prickly and not averse to cutting corners in order to make money. He quickly joined the revolutionary movement and at once displayed his capacity for aggressive military leadership. But he always felt his military achievements, which were considerable, were not properly acknowledged. Although he demonstrated his courage and his fighting spirit at Lake Champlain and Quebec—where his left leg was wounded by a ricocheting musket ball—his pushy and arrogant manner earned him a full share of enemies. In the spring of 1777 the Continental Congress promoted five brigadier generals to the rank of major general; Arnold was not among them, even though he had seniority in the Continental Army and a remarkable combat record. Although George Washington, as commander in chief, told Brigadier General Arnold that there must have been some mistake and begged him not to take “any hasty steps” before things could be worked out, Arnold, sensitive to any snub, was ready to resign his commission.

Arnold was slighted once again following the battles of Saratoga in September and October of 1777. Although General Horatio Gates, the cautious American commander, got credit for the surrender of thousands of British troops under General John Burgoyne, it was Arnold’s aggressive leadership that had actually determined the outcome. He was again wounded in action, having suffered another musket ball to his left leg, with the injury worsened when his killed horse fell on him. Saratoga was the turning point in the Revolutionary War. It led to the intervention of the French and to a major change in British command and strategy. But despite having done so much to bring about Burgoyne’s defeat, Arnold felt that his countrymen had not given him the recognition he deserved. (In fact, the British officers more fully took the measure of Arnold’s presence in the battle than did his fellow Americans.)

By 1778 Arnold’s sense of grievance and resentment had deepened.

Because of his shattered leg, he could not take a field command; instead, he was appointed military commandant of Philadelphia. The city was not a healthy environment for inspiring patriotism. Hustling and shady business deals were everywhere, and Arnold, who had never been scrupulous about making money, sought to take advantage of these entrepreneurial opportunities. Politically the city was severely divided. During the year of British occupation in 1776-77, loyalist sentiment had flourished and was still very much present. But now austere radical patriots were back in control of the government, and they did not take to Arnold’s loose ways and his mingling with wealthy families of loyalist tendency. Arnold moved into the same elegant house on Market Street that the British commander had used, and he continued to host the same kinds of balls and dinners and patronize the same kinds of luxurious entertainments as the British had. The ascetic patriot radicals were not happy with this behavior, and they made Arnold’s life miserable by bringing criminal charges against him. Why, Arnold responded, should a wounded war hero have to suffer such harassment?

Inevitably the 37-year-old Arnold met Peggy Shippen, the beautiful 18-year-old daughter of one of the eminent loyalist-leaning families of Philadelphia. He persistently courted and finally married her in April 1779. Arnold’s restless ambition and his deep desire to amass wealth, especially to satisfy his wife’s expectations, led him into many devious dealings—for example, using government wagons to move private property. When he was severely criticized for his corrupt behavior, his accumulating resentments led him to rethink the meaning of the revolution. He concluded that his countrymen’s rejection of the Carlisle Commission in 1778, which had offered the Americans everything they had wanted in 1775, had been a mistake: America should never have left the British Empire.

**A**rnold then began to embark upon treason. Brumwell thinks that many historians have too readily attributed Arnold’s motivation to his thirst

for gold. He quotes, for example, historian Willard Wallace's observation that "more certain than any of Arnold's reasons for selling himself to the British was his desire for money." But actually Wallace wrote a few pages earlier in the same volume, his 1954 book *Traitorous Hero*, that "it is a distortion to contend that, simply because he needed money, he decided to sell out to the British." Arnold certainly wanted to be well paid for turning his coat—£10,000 regardless of the outcome of the plot, plus an annual pension—but his motives were necessarily complicated, a product of years of accumulated gripes and resentments and jealousies. Brumwell emphasizes Arnold's "gradual disillusionment with the Patriots' political leadership, matched by a growing disenchantment at the changing nature and scope of the Revolutionary War," especially the alliance with France. Brumwell tends to take Arnold's explanations for his actions at face value.

The opportunity for committing treason came with his appointment to command West Point, a crucial fortification on the Hudson River north of New York City. Arnold worked out a plan not only to turn over the fort and its men to the British but at the same time to connive at the British capture of George Washington. By this point he wanted £20,000 for his treason.

Arnold's British contact was Major John André, an attractive young officer whom Peggy Arnold knew from the British occupation of Philadelphia. Following a meeting with Benedict Arnold in September 1780, André was forced to flee over land and thus had to shed his military uniform. When caught in civilian clothes with incriminating papers hidden in his boot, he was found guilty of spying, which meant execution by hanging. In the days following his capture André's stoical behavior won the admiration of his captors, including Hamilton, who begged Washington to have André shot by a firing squad rather than hanged. Washington ignored such pleas and stood by the customary punishment for spying. As Arnold became the infamous American traitor, André emerged as a British martyr who in his final hours demonstrated the dig-

nity and character of a real gentleman.

Learning of André's capture, Arnold quickly fled to New York City, barely escaping Washington and his staff who were rushing to West Point. When the commander in chief arrived, Peggy went hysterical and convinced him and his entourage that she was innocent of Arnold's plans. Washington and other patriot officers were stunned by Arnold's treason. He was a senior officer who had fought valiantly on behalf of the cause; could anyone be trusted now? But the failure of the plot convinced Washington that once again Providence had saved the Americans from a disaster.

The British offered Arnold £6,000 and a royal commission as a brigadier general with an opportunity for promotion while fighting his former countrymen. And fight he did, spreading terror throughout Virginia and Connecticut with his aggressive raids. This took courage, for if he had been captured he would surely have been executed. But after Yorktown he could not persuade the British to continue the fight. They never used his considerable military talent elsewhere in the empire. It seems that he was never quite able to convince his new countrymen that he had always "acted from principle." He died deeply in debt in 1801; Peggy followed three years later, of cancer at age 44.

Since this story has been told so many times over the past two centuries, it is difficult for any new work to alter the tale in any major way. But Brumwell suggests that Arnold's plan to turn West Point over to the British, if successful, could have proved decisive in destroying the patriot cause. He argues that Arnold's defection was not unique to him but was a symptom of a "widespread malaise affecting the patriot cause—a true *crisis* of American liberty." By the early 1780s the Continental Army was underfunded, starving, and suffering from numerous desertions and mutinies. In order to properly understand Arnold's treason, Brumwell says we must realize "that by 1780 many other Americans were equally disillusioned with the struggle for independence from Britain." The revolution, he

points out, was a civil war; allegiances were often fluid and shifting. Arnold was a peculiar sort of traitor: He always maintained that he had his country's well-being at heart and that his fellow Americans should have accepted the terms of the Carlisle Commission and never allied with the obnoxious French. He was convinced, Brumwell writes, that his surrender of West Point to the British would "resolve a bitter, brutal, and divisive conflict with one devastating blow." Brumwell admits that such an interpretation is "totally at odds with the prevailing consensus verdict on Arnold and his defining treason," yet he says it "merits careful consideration within any balanced re-examination of America's most infamous traitor."

In his final chapter, "The Reckoning," Brumwell concludes that "the loss of *either* West Point or Washington would undoubtedly have been a major setback for the patriot cause: the elimination of *both* might have forced Congress to capitulate." This was Arnold's view and one shared as well by many loyalists and British officials, including Sir Henry Clinton, the British commander in chief. But it was never accurate. Too many loyalists and too many British officials from the beginning to the end lived with the illusion that the revolutionaries' commitment to independence was superficial at best and that if the rebels ever suffered a serious setback they would surely seek reconciliation with the mother country. Arnold even suggested that Washington might be won over with the promise of a title. But by 1780 no matter how much discontent existed in the army, no matter how unwilling the states were to spend money, no matter how inflated the currency had become, most Americans were never going to surrender to British sovereignty. Even the capture of Washington would not have ended the struggle. Arnold was an aberration: No senior military officer followed his example and the desertions of American soldiers were never as great as the British expected. The American corporal that Arnold tried to bribe into joining him during his escape spoke for most common soldiers: "No, sir, one coat is enough for me to wear at a time." ♦

# Malaise Days

*A defense of Jimmy Carter's presidency reveals how his supposed strengths became liabilities.* BY PHILIP TERZIAN

**N**inety-three-year-old Jimmy Carter has now been a former president longer than anybody else and, as his admirers like to say, in the four decades since he left office has “redefined” what it means to be an ex-president. This may well be true, bearing in mind that people tend to live longer than they used to and Carter was comparatively young (52) when he defeated Gerald Ford in 1976. Most living ex-presidents have concentrated on organizing their legacies and steering clear of politics. Carter, by contrast, has been a faithful partisan warrior since Ronald Reagan forced his retirement and has transformed his own presidential library, the Carter Center in Atlanta, into a combination museum-NGO. His indefatigable globetrotting won him a Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

All this is very admirable in its way. Yet presidents are judged not by their retirement projects but by their tenure in office—and while Carter’s energetic ex-presidency is no doubt an expression of his deepest convictions, it is also a self-evident gesture toward redemption. Like the correspondence between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, or Theodore Roosevelt’s expedition up the Amazon, Jimmy Carter’s ex-presidency is likely to be regarded by posterity as an interesting footnote to a stint in the White House.

Enter Stuart Eizenstat, an earnest and capable Atlanta lawyer who first encountered Carter when the future president was serving as governor of Georgia and was recruited by Carter in 1974 to join his insurgent presidential campaign. A Jewish graduate of Har-

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**President Carter**  
*The White House Years*  
by Stuart E. Eizenstat  
Thomas Dunne, 999 pp., \$40



*Unsuited for the job: Carter's cozy cardigan*

vard Law School, Eizenstat felt himself to be something of an outlier in Carter’s “Georgia Mafia” inner circle. But he admired the governor, in particular his early commitment to civil rights, and Carter valued Eizenstat’s judgment and acumen.

In the White House, the thirtysomething Eizenstat served as the president’s chief domestic policy adviser—and inevitably, political counselor. Accordingly, *President Carter* is not a biography of his old boss but an exhaustive refutation of Carter’s current status as (in Eizenstat’s words) “a weak and hapless president.” Carter’s one-term presidency, he insists, “was one of the most consequential in modern history,” and Carter left the White House not with a

legacy of failure but “concrete reforms and long-lasting benefits to the people of the United States as well as the international order.”

It’s no reflection on Eizenstat—or on Carter, for that matter—to suggest that, in staking such a claim, the author is defending his own legacy as well as burnishing Carter’s. And how could it be otherwise? The judgment of posterity can be arbitrary, capricious, and, of course, retroactive. Presidents are neither elected nor defeated unanimously, and in 1980, 35 million Americans cast their ballots for Carter and against Reagan. Indeed, you could argue (and Eizenstat does) that with a slight adjustment in circumstances, Carter might have won reelection. He had, after all, decisively fought off Edward Kennedy’s churlish primary challenge, and it is often forgotten that for many months, the issue that is now regarded as ultimately fatal to Carter’s prospects—the Iran hostage crisis—had worked to his advantage in public opinion polls.

*President Carter* is a useful, even interesting, brief for the defense. All presidents enjoy some measure of success, and most exert influence one way or another. Jimmy Carter is no exception. His initiatives included a Wilsonian recommitment to human rights in diplomacy, which became and remains bipartisan policy; and while the blessings of the Camp David Accords have been mixed, they constitute an undeniable and enduring achievement. The long process of economic deregulation, lately accelerated by Donald Trump, was initiated not by Ronald Reagan but Jimmy Carter. Even Reagan’s refreshment of the American defense posture in the 1980s began with Carter’s commitment to deploy the new medium-range Pershing II ballistic missiles in Western Europe.

Put another way, if you tend to agree with what we might call the Carter-Eizenstat view of contemporary history—and you have lots of company—you will find much here to buttress the author’s argument that Carter was not only “consequential” but right on the issues. The problem, however, is that Carter’s reputation is not quite the mystery that Eizenstat believes it to be,

and as his book reveals, its causes and origins are easily perceptible. That is to say, as candidate and president, Jimmy Carter had many qualities and virtues—all of which were regularly celebrated in the press—but his weaknesses and defects, above all his equivocal political talents, conspired with events to undermine and ultimately shorten his tenure.

For one thing, the qualities that first attracted Eisenhower—Carter's acute intelligence, personal piety, deep sense of rectitude, and commitment to principle—proved, in the long run, to be political liabilities. Trained as a nuclear engineer, Carter's close analysis of problems and issues, impressive in depth and attention to detail, tended to convince him that his conclusions were self-evident. This is a president, after all, whose campaign autobiography was entitled *Why Not the Best?* Having settled on a course of action, Carter was naturally impatient with both the demands of politics and the natural obstacles of democratic government.

Like more than a few "outsider" aspirants to the presidency, Carter arrived in Washington determined not to achieve harmony but to change the culture of an entrenched political class and govern not by consensus or political maneuver but proclamation. A moralist in his personal and public life, he was quick to cast issues in righteous terms—his solution to the energy crisis was "the moral equivalent of war," the federal tax code was "a disgrace to the human race"—and was often angered by the countervailing forces in political life. At a time when his own party enjoyed prohibitive majorities on Capitol Hill, Carter not only deliberately failed to cultivate Congress but alienated natural allies in both parties.

Even in the symbolic gestures of his presidency, Carter fell victim to his rectitude and amateur status. Having enchanted the press with the folksy gesture of his Inauguration Day walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, the cardigan sweater he pulled on two weeks later for his televised energy-crisis address appeared to be the awkward prop it obviously was. Even his commitment to fiscal integrity and budgetary restraint—a conviction at odds

with his Democratic base but appealing to independents—manifested itself in well-publicized but hopelessly trivial savings in White House expenditures. Television sets were removed from offices; magazine and newspaper subscriptions were canceled; retiring cabinet members' oil portraits were replaced with photographs.

In the end, however, what was most damaging to Carter was not the slow disaffection of his party's left wing or his startling complaint about Americans' "inordinate fear of communism" but a gathering perception that the president, while capable of action and enjoying consistent support in the

*In the end, what was most damaging to Carter was a gathering perception that the president was slowly and inexorably overwhelmed by events.*

media, was slowly and inexorably overwhelmed by events. The headlines of the day surely undermined confidence: The Carter years were marked by persistent economic stagnation and high inflation; the Iranian revolution caused a shortage of oil and long lines at gas stations; the Soviet Union advanced on innumerable fronts; even the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island seemed to capture the sense, in the 1970s, that the long upward trends in American life were pointing downward.

The consensus view that the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-81 was the calamity that turned American voters against Carter may well be right. The prolonged standoff between the United States and the revolutionary regime in Tehran certainly featured all the elements that could transform Carter's ostensible strengths into shortcomings: his public insistence on moderation and restraint, which in due course resembled paralysis; his desperate attempt at a rescue

mission ending in failure and death. For me, however, events of the previous summer seem more decisive. In July 1979, as the country was plunged into its second energy crisis in less than a decade, and long lines at gas pumps painfully suggested the erosion of American power, Carter retreated to Camp David, summoning dozens of friends and associates, sages and confidants alike, for prolonged consultations on what he described as a national "crisis of confidence." At the end of the process, Carter returned to Washington and delivered a televised address—the famous "malaise" speech, although Carter did not use that term—designed to rally Americans toward energy independence and demanding "a rebirth of the American spirit."

Eisenstat had at the time been skeptical about the message, with its implied rebuke of unhappy consumers. In retrospect, however, he marvels that its purpose was so quickly realized by a dramatic boost in the polls. And then, almost as quickly as Carter's prospects had been enhanced, in one swift, maladroitness gesture he managed to nullify all the effects of his speech. Seeking to project strength as well as resiliency, he reorganized his White House staff to grant unprecedented power to a new chief of staff and, accusing his assembled cabinet of "disloyalty," demanded their resignations, firing half of them.

It is both astonishing and instructive to read Eisenhower's anguished account of this curious episode. The nation was manifestly in crisis, perhaps even a "crisis of confidence," yet the president's instinct was not to lead but reproach. Carter found himself assailed by the various factions within his own administration, veering indecisively from one to the other. The message in his speech—the message in his hasty cabinet execution—was the product not of Carter's convictions but a panicked distillation of competing ideas.

Whatever Americans expect in a president, at that moment they ceased to find it in Jimmy Carter. The man who had moved from virtual obscurity to the White House seemed visibly to shrink into irrelevance, even pathos—and the key to his legacy of failure was revealed. ♦

# Unforgetting Big Bill

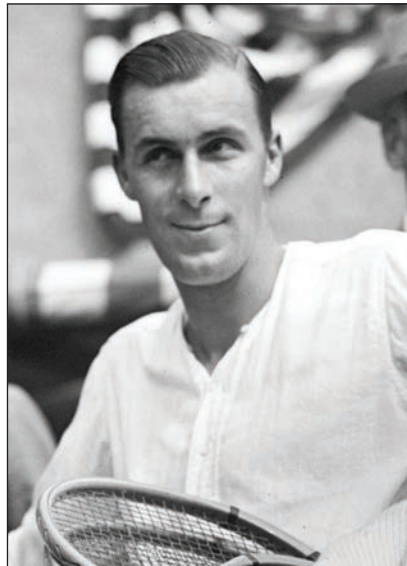
*The tennis great's career ended in ignominy—which creates a challenge for biographers.* BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

At the death in 1953 of Bill Tilden, generally acknowledged to have been the best tennis player in the history of the game, the sports columnist Red Smith wrote: “And so it ends, the tale of the gifted, flamboyant, combative, melodramatic, gracious, swaggering, unfortunate man, whose name must always be a symbol of the most colorful period American sports have known.” That period, the 1920s and early '30s, was a time when, in their various sports, Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Jim Thorpe, Bobby Jones, and Red Grange were also in their glory. While the fame of these other athletes was largely American, Tilden's was international. Great as Ruth, Dempsey, Thorpe, Jones, and Grange were, only Tilden changed the nature of the game he played. Al Laney, a sportswriter famous in his day, called Bill Tilden “our greatest athlete in any sport,” *tout court*. In a 1950 Associated Press poll of the nation's top sportswriters and broadcasters, he was selected as the best tennis player of the first half of the 20th century—and by a far wider margin than any of the athletes selected for other sports.

The reason that Red Smith, always a careful writer, ended his list of seven adjectives with “unfortunate” has to do with the scandal that marked Bill Tilden's last years and marred much he had accomplished on the courts. One likes to think that achievement outlives scandal, that the former is permanent, the latter ephemeral, but in Tilden's case it is far from certain that this has been so. In an otherwise storied life, the Fates wrote Bill Tilden a dark last chapter.

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**American Colossus**  
*Big Bill Tilden and the*  
*Creation of Modern Tennis*  
by Allen M. Hornblum  
Nebraska, 465 pp., \$39.95



*Big Bill Tilden in 1922*

In November 1946, Tilden's 1942 Packard Clipper was pulled over by a Los Angeles policeman for zigzagging on Sunset Boulevard in Beverly Hills. The policeman discovered Tilden in the passenger seat, his arm around a 14-year-old boy at the wheel the four fly buttons on whose trousers were undone. Homosexuality in that less tolerant day than ours would have been troubling enough for Tilden's reputation, but sex of any kind with a minor was, then as now, unforgivable. Richard Maddox, Tilden's lawyer, said at the time that the toughest cases to defend were those that entailed crimes against dogs and children.

Tilden pled guilty not to “lewd and lascivious behavior with a minor” (a fel-

ony) but to “contributing to the delinquency of a minor” (a misdemeanor). He was sentenced to five years' probation, the first nine months of which were to be spent in jail. Not quite three years later, Tilden found himself in front of the same judge for similar charges: sex with a minor boy. This time he was sentenced to a full year in jail. All but a few of his old friends deserted him, his earnings through giving tennis lessons to celebrities were greatly curtailed, and in many of his old haunts—country clubs, Hollywood society, his birthplace of Germantown, Pennsylvania—he became non grata. The mighty have rarely fallen further.

As for Bill Tilden's mightiness, one need only consult the record book for certification: He is the only man to have won the American singles title six years in a row and seven times in toto and the U.S. Clay Court title another seven times. He was America's top-ranked player every year between 1924 and 1934. He played in more Davis Cup matches—28—than any other amateur player and was the first American to win at Wimbledon, which he did on three separate occasions, the last time when he was 38. His various doubles and mixed-doubles championships are nearly beyond counting as are his victories in lesser tournaments. Along the way he invented the drop shot; was the first player precisely to formulate court strategy in a book (said to be the best on its subject ever written, called *Match Play and the Spin of the Ball*); and early advocated open tennis, in which professionals and amateurs could meet in the same tournaments and which is in place today. He found tennis an upper-class, rather prissy country-club weekend activity and left it a sport that captured worldwide attention.

“Big Bill” was Tilden's sobriquet, though at 6-foot-2 and 155 pounds he wasn't as big as all that. (Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal are both 6-foot-1, and 5 of the currently ranked top-10 male players are 6-foot-5 or above.) The reason for the sobriquet is that Tilden's most insistent rival during his competitive years was a Californian named William Johnston, who was 5-foot-8 and 130 pounds—not as small as all

that either—which nonetheless allowed journalists to confer upon him the moniker “Little Bill.” Nor did Tilden play, or indeed care for, “big game” tennis, which is built on a powerful serve followed by a rush to the net for a quick kill on the volley. Tilden commanded a thunderous cannonball serve, which he used infrequently, but he much preferred to win from behind the baseline with devastatingly accurate ground strokes, which arrived with a bewildering assortment of chops, slices, spins, and blistering drives that could twist the racquet out of his opponents’ hands.

Astonishing in his ability to retrieve shots that appeared to be clear winners, possessing a double-jointed wrist that gave him more than normal racquet control, Tilden was above all a brilliant strategist, able to depress opponents by demonstrating to them that against him, their best wasn’t near good enough. Known for his sportsmanship, if a bad call went against the man he was playing, he would sometimes purposely lose the following point or give away the game in which the call was made. He could be gracious in (his rare) defeat. He was nevertheless, as all great athletes are, imbued with an intense desire to win. And win he did, over and over, relentlessly, almost boringly, once winning 57 straight games (not sets) in tournament play, a statistic up there with Joe DiMaggio’s famous 56-game hitting streak.

Because not many people are alive today who saw Bill Tilden play the game at which he was supreme—a few snippets of him in action are available on YouTube—most people who remember him at all are likely to recall his scandal as the first, and thereby the primary, thing about him. That dreary scandal, coming at the close of a brilliant career, also poses a serious problem for biographers. The problem is how great an emphasis to place on his homosexual pedophilia in recounting his life. In one of the leading biographies of Tilden, Frank Deford’s *Big Bill Tilden: The Triumphs and the Tragedy* (1976), sex is front and center. In the most recent biography, *American Colossus: Bill Tilden and the Creation of Modern Tennis* by Allen M. Hornblum,

Tilden’s pedophilic scandal is treated as ultimately peripheral, and in fact the subject is only introduced on page 383 of the book’s 405 pages of text.

Who is correct, Deford or Hornblum, and how might we judge? Before attempting that judgment, though, two questions arise: In biography, do we really need to know much of a detailed kind about the subject’s sex life? And, even if we feel we do, can we truly expect to acquire such knowledge—of longings, fantasies, and above all the peculiarities of practice—with anything resembling useful precision? Homosexuality makes both questions even more complicated, for much about the nature of homosexuality, including its origin, remains unknown. What is known is that in its practice homosexuality is quite as various as heterosexuality. Bill Tilden’s own homosexual practice, or what from friends, enemies, and at least one psychiatrist we have been told about it, is a case very much in point.

William Tatem Tilden Jr. was his parents’ fifth child. The first three died of diphtheria in 1884. A fourth child, a seven-years-old brother, Herbert, was his father’s favorite son. William Junior, or June as he was known when a boy, fell under the tender care of his mother, who, given the death of her first three children, worried greatly about his health. His mother was, in the old-fashioned term, musical and conferred on her son Bill Jr. a lifelong aesthetic yearning.

The Tildens were wealthy and socially prominent in Philadelphia. Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft were houseguests at Overleigh, the family mansion in Germantown, then a posh suburb of Philadelphia. William Tilden Sr., the dispenser of many civic good works and often mentioned as a candidate for mayor of Philadelphia, after his death had a grammar school named for him.

After suffering with Bright’s disease, Tilden’s mother died in 1911, when he was 18. Four years later his father and older brother died, a few months apart. He was left alone in the world with an inheritance of some \$60,000—a substantial sum that would have been

greater but for his father’s mistaken investments late in life—and no clear vocation. Tilden’s first job, after dropping out of the Wharton School of Business, was working on a newspaper. He would later write plays, in some of which he acted; after establishing fame through tennis, he also occasionally acted in plays on Broadway. He wrote fiction, much of it about tennis (and moralistic in the young-adult mode), and autobiographies and was perhaps at his best writing instruction manuals about how to play tennis.

In *American Colossus* Allen M. Hornblum earnestly sets out Tilden’s off-the-court accomplishments in a manner that might make one think the great tennis champion, in that overused and hence much cheapened term, a Renaissance man; in fact, he comes right out and calls Tilden “as close to a Renaissance man as the American athletic community ever produced.” Frank Deford, were he alive, might chime in, yeah, sure, the renaissance in the microstate of Andorra maybe. Deford has a considerably less charitable opinion of Tilden’s aesthetic achievements and quotes resounding critical put-downs of his dramatic performances: A critic in the old *New York Herald-Tribune*, for example, writing of one of his acting stints on Broadway, noted: Tilden “keeps his amateur standing.”

Deford writes confidently about Tilden’s sex life, sometimes on matters he cannot have known with any certainty. By the time of his mother’s death, Deford writes, “he understood, surely, by now, that he was a homosexual.” Elsewhere he writes, again about what he could not know, that “for as much as Tilden was a homosexual, it was because he chose to be one, not because he had to.” Nor could Deford know, as he writes, “that it is clear that Tilden was never an intensely sexual person.”

Reporting the conversation and opinions of others about Bill Tilden’s homosexuality, Deford seems on solid ground. Ty Cobb, never noted for his exquisite sensitivity, on first seeing Tilden is supposed to have said, “Who is this fruit?” Henri Cochet, one of the French tennis players, known as the Four Musketeers, who dominated

tennis in the 1930s, said that Tilden “was always having difficulties with the police for soliciting little boys. But Americans are so sensitive about questions of morality. It was his business and it didn’t interfere with his tennis.” The journalist Adela Rogers St. Johns allowed Tilden to give lessons to her son only after he promised to keep his hands off the boy. In *Sporting Gentlemen*, his history of tennis in America, E. Digby Baltzell notes that “Tilden’s effeminate mannerisms became more and more obvious as he grew older.”

In Hornblum’s *American Colossus*, Bill Tilden is, until the book’s final pages, sexless. Relations with women are scant; the prospect of marriage is never in question. After filling in the Tilden family’s history and Bill Tilden’s early years, Hornblum concentrates almost wholly on his subject’s on-court accomplishments. Hornblum provides a lengthy chapter on Tilden’s having lost, owing to an infection, half the middle finger on his right hand (his playing hand) and his heroic return to tennis after what many thought a permanently disabling accident. Hornblum also devotes several pages to Tilden’s work developing a slashing backhand, an offensive weapon that vastly improved his game. Tilden, who barely made his college team so erratic was his play, did not attain his tennis supremacy until he was 27, late for a player in that or in any other time, and it was his deadly backhand that made this supremacy possible. “I have never regretted the hours, days and weeks that I spent to acquire my backhand drive,” Tilden wrote, “for to it, and it primarily, I lay my United States and World’s Championship titles.”

As does Frank Deford, Allen Hornblum expends many pages on Bill Tilden’s career-long battles with the United States Lawn Tennis Association. More than once, the USLTA attempted to suspend Tilden because he was earning money writing newspaper articles about tennis while himself playing it. Tilden also fought with the USLTA over expense money allowed amateurs, for he was himself always a big spender—“He traveled

like a goddamn Indian prince,” said Al Haney—a man who, when it came to travel and dining, knew none other than first-class. Throughout his career Tilden was a consistent opponent of the USLTA’s “shamateurism,” the arrangement whereby everyone but the players profited from the game.



Bill Tilden in the L.A. County jail in 1949, after his second arrest

A leitmotif in *American Colossus* is Bill Tilden’s work coaching young players. Early in his career he returned to coach his old high school tennis team. He claimed he learned much himself through teaching. Throughout his career he cultivated promising young players, attempting to imbue them with his own strategic approach to, and passion for, the game. He would have some among them while still in their adolescence—the future champion Vinnie Richards is a notable example—play as his doubles partners in major tournaments. Allen Hornblum reports all this in the most straightforward way. In doing so, he quite forgets that a dirty mind never sleeps, and readers who come to his book aware of Tilden’s scandal cannot but wonder if along the way he didn’t

attempt to seduce these boys, or if his experiences with them aren’t foreshadowings of the scandal that lay ahead.

In Frank Deford’s pages we learn that Tilden did not sexually abuse any of these boys, but remained “scrupulously proper.” His sexual taste, Deford reports, ran to the adolescent equivalent of “rough trade”: bellhops, newspaper boys, and the like. Even here, though, perhaps owing to his fear of venereal infection, his activities, again according to Deford, were restricted to fondling and being fondled. Hornblum mentions none of this.

But, then, Allen Hornblum is not greatly attentive to his reader’s interest or patience. He recounts several of Bill Tilden’s important five-set matches at a length that feels only slightly shorter than the matches themselves. Nor is he highly attentive to the English language. He misuses the words “enormity” and “peruse,” “replicate” and “definitive,” and greatly overuses “iconic.” He specializes in the flaw that H. W. Fowler termed *Elegant Variation*—calling the same thing by several different names. So Bill Tilden is at one point the “Penn netman,” at others “the long-limbed, multi-talented Philadelphian,” “the lanky Philadelphian,” and “the tall, cocky Philadelphian.” Bill Johnson, it will not surprise you to discover, was also “the diminutive Californian with the big heart.” Switzerland is elegantly varied to become “the mountainous country.” Whenever Hornblum encounters an infinitive, he generally pauses to split it.

Hornblum is also either inordinately enamored of, or more likely fails to recognize, clichés. William Tilden Sr. was born in a town that “nestled along the banks of the Delaware River”; after his death, his son was left in “the capable hands” of his cousin Selena. Summer matches in his pages are played in heat that is “sweltering,” dies are “cast,” professors “stodgy,” and with rain in the offing skies, yes, you will have guessed it, “grow more ominous.” Bill Tilden, meanwhile, was a man in whom “there was no quit,” clearly “not one for throwing in the towel”; he was “special,” and the rest, you might say—

Allen Hornblum, alas, does say—“is tennis history.”

In his last pages, Hornblum argues with Frank Deford’s interpretation of Bill Tilden in the biography Deford published 42 years ago. (Deford is not around to respond, having died last year.) He allows that Deford’s book is “entertaining,” adding “how could a book about Tilden not be,” without realizing that he himself has come perilously close to bringing off this difficult task. Hornblum argues against Deford’s claim that Tilden’s last years, the years after his scandal, were dark and desolating. He was, Hornblum claims, nowhere near as broke as Deford reported, nor so gone to seed in appearance, nor so bereft of friends.

Allen Hornblum’s real complaint is about what he calls “Deford’s melodramatic psychobabble” in his interpretation of Tilden’s homosexual pedophilia. Here Hornblum fails to distinguish between psychology and psychobabble, for the former does not invariably issue in the latter. Deford does not use the language of the Freudian or any psychological school. Nor are all Deford’s interpretations defaming or iconoclastic. He attributes Bill Tilden’s cultivating young tennis players, for example, to a fathering instinct. Tilden received very little attention from his own father, and he had no children of his own. That he wished to shower fatherly attention on younger players seems, far from psychobabulous, acting upon a generous emotion.

Lives, at least those deserving of biographies, require interpretation. Sometimes even an incorrect interpretation is better than no interpretation at all. (Freud said that biographical truth doesn’t exist, by which I gather he meant we cannot finally plumb to the depth of any human soul.) But *American Colossus*, industrious though its author has been in collecting material, by forgoing serious interpretation of its subject rarely rises above the level of fan admiration.

Great athletic prowess is not so much a gift as a temporary loan from the gods—one usually called in no later than the age of 40. Greatness in any other line—art, philosophy, politics—

is longer-lived. That the athletic gift is shorter-lived is what gives even the greatest of athletes, no matter how extensive their fame, how grand their emoluments, a touch of sadness. No longer to be able to do in midlife what one once did supremely is a cruel punishment.

When Don Budge, the next great American tennis player after Tilden, asked him what he would do when

he was no longer able to play tennis, Tilden looked at him and replied: “Hmmmph. Kill myself.” Bill Tilden did not of course kill himself. But without tennis to sustain him, he gave way to his worst and apparently long-repressed impulses and thereby came close to killing his own reputation as the greatest player in the history of tennis. ♦



# The Avocado Boom

*From toast to fancy guac, the green fruit’s moment is ripe at last.* BY VICTORINO MATUS

It’s June, which means it’s California Avocado Month again. Nearly all the avocados grown in the United States come from the Golden State, and the monthlong celebration, which coincides with the peak season for harvesting avocados there, is the brainchild of marketers at the California Avocado Commission. But insofar as their aim is to raise the profile of the creamy, big-pitted green fruit, the promotional month hardly seems necessary: We are already eating avocados in record quantities. In 2016, Americans consumed an average of seven pounds’ worth of avocados—up from a mere pound in 1974. U.S. avocado production alone (172,630 tons) was valued at \$316 million. And domestic sales of avocados in 2016 came to \$1.6 billion.

And we’re finding new ways to eat them. According to the payment-processing firm Square, Americans shelled out almost \$900,000 a month on avocado toast last year, a staggering increase from the \$17,000 a month we spent on this simple treat in 2014. Square estimates avocado toast can cost anywhere from \$2 to \$18, depending on the venue. (Cork Wine Bar in downtown D.C. features one for \$13.)

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And perhaps most telling, Starbucks has recently added avocado spread to its permanent menu.

It wasn’t always like this. In the first half of the 20th century, avocados were not commonly consumed in the United States. In Irma Rombauer’s *The Joy of Cooking* (1931) there are precisely two recipes that call for “avocado pears”: avocado pear salad and avocado pear, orange, and grapefruit salad. (They also used to be called alligator pears, which did them no favors.)

There was, of course, a far better recipe: “Best known of Mexico’s contributions to avocado lore is the piquant spread, guacamole,” writes June Owen in a 1953 *New York Times* article. “North of the border, where it has become increasingly popular, it may serve as a dip for potato chips or strips of raw vegetables such as carrots, cauliflower, celery, sweet red onions or green peppers.”

Guacamole, which is a combination of the words for “avocado” and “mixture” in the Nahuatl language, was further popularized by Diana Kennedy in her seminal *The Cuisines of Mexico* (1972). “Never, never use a blender for the avocado to turn it into one of those smooth, homogeneous messes!” she warns. And it’s best eaten the moment it is made. “Almost immediately the delicate green will darken and the fresh, wonderful flavor will be lost.”



Some 90 percent of U.S. avocados come from California and are of the Hass variety, at left. At right, a different variety, grown in Florida.

There are over 900 varieties of avocado but the one we mostly eat—the one we use to make guacamole—is the Hass. “Over 90 percent of the avocados on shop shelves are Hass,” writes Lara Ferroni in her cookbook *An Avocado a Day*. They “ship and store especially well and have a great flavor and mouthfeel to boot.” (The Hass cultivar was first grown in the 1920s in LaHabra Heights, California.)

I can still picture my father eating a creamy Hass avocado—topped with cornflakes—before he headed out to work. This was in the late 1970s, not long after Kennedy’s *Cuisines of Mexico* came out. But one day my mother just stopped making it for him. When I asked her why, she said at the time, “Well, you know, it has too much fat.”

My mother wasn’t alone: Consumers everywhere were turning their backs on the fruit because of its fat content. This was of course before any distinction was made between the “good” (monounsaturated) fat found in avocados and “bad” (saturated) fat found in, say, lard. Even the *Times* warned in 1987 that “prepared salads may contain high-fat ingredients like cheese, nuts, seeds, olives, avocados, eggs, croutons and creamy dressings. You can do better at a serve-yourself salad bar, as long as you stick to fresh or steamed vegetables, tuna without oil, chicken, turkey, ham or shrimp and a dribble of salad dressing.”

The result was a major supply glut. “In 1982,” writes Bee Wilson in the *Wall Street Journal*, “California avocado growers had so much of the fruit



Avocado toast at the Alchemist’s Kitchen in New York City

that they considered marketing it as a food for dogs (not a great idea since it contains persin, a substance that gives some dogs an upset stomach).” During that decade, the price of avocados plummeted to 10 cents a pound.

It was at this critical juncture that the California Avocado Commission, which represents the interests of the state’s growers, enlisted the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton (now H+K Strategies). Bonnie Goodman, who was then general manager at the firm, recalled the marketing efforts on behalf of her client during the late 1980s into the mid-’90s. “The key to our plan was to ‘humanize’ the fruit—make it relatable and fun—as a way to remove the mystery,” she told me. “Our programs included creating a larger-than-life avocado costume, staffed by an H&K team member, that was the centerpiece for contests, retail appearances, special events, holiday cel-

ebrations, and the like.” (The costumed character was known as Mr. Ripe Guy.)

And then there was the Super Bowl tie-in known as the Guacamole Bowl, “a nationwide contest that pitted NFL teams against each other through the power of the guacamole recipes associated with a player, coach, player’s wife, etc.” The campaign was a massive success.

“The use of the Internet for food marketing was in its nascent years,” Goodman pointed out. “There were a handful of food companies (the major ones like Kraft) that had websites—but we knew we were really onto something.” Goodman, who is currently senior vice president of marketing for the Music Center, Los Angeles County’s performing arts center, called it a “strategic integrated plan”: “We saw the potential to provide consumers with a wide variety of information online, from information and facts about avocados to recipes and uses for the fruit. Guided by research about consumer insights and attitudes, we developed a plan that would extend beyond traditional food marketing; that was critical since consumers had not yet embraced the avocado as a staple and had little familiarity about the fruit.”

Just as Diana Kennedy had to explain when it was best to eat guacamole, Goodman said there was a need to teach consumers simply how to shop for avocados. “Key to our strategic approach was to make the avocado accessible and to help consumers to understand that they needed to buy the

fruit when it was ripe (or teach them how to ripen it) so they would always be satisfied with their purchase.”

Eventually the health experts also came around. As Olga Khazan noted in a 2015 chronicle of the avocado boom in the *Atlantic*, the California Avocado Commission

formed a Nutrition Advisory Committee in the late 1980s, bringing together nutrition experts from around the country to find and tout research that might help promote the healthful qualities of avocados. They funded studies, for example, which showed that the fat in avocados helps them act as “nutrient boosters,” enhancing the absorption of lycopene in other vegetables.

tion.) Efforts were made to lift the ban after the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994. “The avocados will be subject to a nine-step program of monitoring in Mexico and at the border, which is designed to forestall entry into this country of any potentially lethal pests,” the *Los Angeles Times* then reported. “Only avocados from approved orchards will be allowed.” Suddenly avocados were available to Americans year-round and not just during California’s growing season (February to September). And luckily there was no weevil infestation.

But there have been shortages. Just last year a smaller California crop coincided with a Mexican drought, resulting

department at Whole Foods Market,” said Kevin Doty, senior global produce coordinator for the Austin-based organic chain. “When it comes to avocados, we offer multiple stages of ripeness to cater to the needs of our customers. As one of our customer favorites, we also offer amazing everyday pricing on both loose and bagged avocados, and each store creates their own in-house-made guacamoles.” The chain, which was recently acquired by Amazon (so now they really do have amazing everyday pricing!), was not at liberty to discuss actual sales or volume.

Chipotle Mexican Grill, however, was more willing to share information about volume. “We used about 80 million pounds of avocados in our restaurants last year,” said Chris Arnold, head of public relations for the fast-casual giant. “We use about 48 avocados per batch of guacamole in our restaurants and make thousands of batches a day (we have 2,400 restaurants, and make guacamole from scratch in all of them every day).” So popular is the guacamole, said Arnold, “we’ve even published the recipe so people can make it themselves.”

Now it seems like everyone is in love with the green fruit. “I’ve rarely ever been with someone who didn’t like the avocado,” said Todd English, owner of MXDC and other restaurants around the globe. I asked him to recall his first encounter with the fruit. “I was on a farm, at a friend’s house in California. And they picked the avocado off the tree, in the warm sun, cut it in half, poured some olive oil made from that same farm, and sea salt, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, what is this?’” He was around 10 or 11 years old at the time. “It was like pudding, you know? It was like avocado pudding.”

As to whether our yearning for the avocado is a fad, English replied, “No, no. It’s not going anywhere.” Someday, he said, “We’re going to rub it on us. We’re going to stick it everywhere.” He was joking, but some people already swear by avocado-based massage oil, fragrances, and skin- and hair-care products. What’s next? Jewelry made of avocado pits? Avocado couture? It sounds crazy, but so does paying \$13 for avocado toast. ♦



This ultimately led to the wider embrace of the Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes more “good” fats and fewer carbohydrates.

“The Mediterranean diet offered a means of embracing the beauty and deliciousness of food—so much more enticing than the previous nutritional regime based on self denial and abstinence,” writes Nina Teicholz in *The Big Fat Surprise: Why Butter, Meat & Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet*. “The diet soared in popularity because diners were delighted to eat, guilt-free, all those previously banned fatty foods, such as olives, avocados, and nuts.” (And yes, my parents are back to eating avocados.)

From here, the green fruit’s fortunes only got better. In 1997, the Department of Agriculture lifted its 83-year-old ban on Mexican avocados. It had been in place since 1914 and was meant to prevent the spread of weevils. (It also served handily to protect California growers from foreign competi-

tion.) Efforts were made to lift the ban after the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994. “The avocados will be subject to a nine-step program of monitoring in Mexico and at the border, which is designed to forestall entry into this country of any potentially lethal pests,” the *Los Angeles Times* then reported. “Only avocados from approved orchards will be allowed.” Suddenly avocados were available to Americans year-round and not just during California’s growing season (February to September). And luckily there was no weevil infestation. But there have been shortages. Just last year a smaller California crop coincided with a Mexican drought, resulting in an overall decline in the avocado supply. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the cost of a case of 48 Hass avocados shot up 75 percent. “The prices were too high,” recalled Aniceto Castillo, chef de cuisine at MXDC, a high-end Mexican eatery in Washington, D.C. “I think we paid like \$100 a case. Previously it was like \$30-\$35.” The restaurant, which serves both a traditional as well as a lobster-and-corn guacamole, goes through between 14 and 16 cases each week (meaning about 100 avocados a day, roughly 700 a week). “Now it’s \$50 per case,” Castillo told me last March. (Prices have since dropped again. A crop boom has been forecast for the coming year, guaranteeing an abundance of affordable Mexican and California avocados to come.) Even the higher price was worth paying, considering that customers are more than willing to pay up to \$15 for guacamole at MXDC.

Needless to say, the high demand extends to the supermarket. “Avocados are a key sales driver in the produce



# Garbage Shoot

Why *Solo*, the latest *Star Wars* movie, flopped.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**T**he postmortems have been flying fast and furious after *Solo: A Star Wars Story* earned, at most, two-thirds of what Disney expected it would make in its opening couple of days. Let's go through some of these excuses, shall we?

ITEM: Star Wars fans were upset because *Solo* switched directors in mid-stream. "When you have fans that are that religiously enthusiastic about the 'Star Wars' property, any change can cause a shift in the force," box-office analyst Paul Dergarabedian told *Variety*. Oh, for God's sake. Phil Lord and Chris Miller, the directors who were replaced, aren't known for their work on Star Wars movies—they made *The Lego Movie* and *21 Jump Street*. Films switch out directors very rarely and it's never a good sign, but how many people actually know or care about such things? Not many. I'd bet every fanboy went to see *Solo* this weekend anyway. The problem is that non-fanboys didn't.

ITEM: Moviegoers had just gone to the multiplex a couple of times—you can't expect them to go *again!* "There's a question of frequency, and how many times people will go to the movies," Disney distribution head Dave Hollis told the *Hollywood Reporter*. "Is this too much and too soon for a third time in a five-week period?" This is, of course, patently ridiculous. People went to see the other two movies Hollis is alluding to—*The Avengers: Infinity War* and *Deadpool 2*—because they were excited to do so, and judging from repeat business and Cinemascore numbers, they were happy with their decisions. If they had been excited to see *Solo* they would have shown up again.

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Alden Ehrenreich as Han Solo, Joonas Suotamo as Chewie

ITEM: There are just too many Star Wars movies. "*Solo* comes a mere five months after *The Last Jedi*," said Dergarabedian, echoing a point made in many other articles—Disney should have spaced out the movies more. And now it will do so, since the next one isn't coming out for another year. This, too, is patently ridiculous. The Marvel movie *Black Panther* preceded the Marvel movie *Infinity War* by just 10 weeks. *Black Panther* made \$800 million and *Infinity War* is at \$627 million. Now the semi-Marvel movie *Deadpool 2* has already passed the \$200 million mark—and it came out just three weeks after *Infinity War*.

So let me explain why *Solo* bombed.

It's the fourth Star Wars film to be released since 2015. The first, *The Force Awakens*, marked the return of the franchise to movie theaters a decade after the ghastly *Revenge of the Sith*. So everybody had to see it, and everybody did. *The Force Awakens* sold about 110 million tickets in the United States, the most since *Titanic* in 1997. The following year saw the release of *Rogue One*—which told a story ancillary to the central Star Wars plot. The audience fell off dramatically; *Rogue One* grossed about \$400 million less domestically than *The Force Awakens*. Much of that dropoff

was glibly assigned to the fact that it wasn't a direct sequel. Then the direct sequel, *The Last Jedi*, came out late last year. It made \$90 million more domestically than *Rogue One*—but \$300 million less than *The Force Awakens*. Now *Solo* will be lucky to make half what *Rogue One* made.

Weirdly, every one of these movies centers on an orphaned young hero from nowhere, with nothing, who becomes a player in a major interplanetary game. Rey from *The Force Awakens* is a scavenger; Jyn of *Rogue One* is part of a rebel gang. The uniquely uninspired idea behind *Solo* is that he's basically Dickens's Artful Dodger, growing up in a slum stealing things for a local crime boss. Does that strike you as Han Solo's back story? Doesn't he seem more like the louche son of an upper-middle-class family who became a small-time smuggler because he found bourgeois life too dull?

There's no bad boy to Alden Ehrenreich's young Han; he's a boy scout who is determined to save the love of his life. All he does is sacrifice things and help people. But the Han we know and love from the original Star Wars movies is someone who sticks his neck out *for the first time* when he shows up in the last act to help blow up the Death Star and transforms his life as a result. *Solo* should be a movie about what made him so cynical yet charming in the first place. It isn't. It isn't really about much of anything, actually.

The downward trajectory from *The Force Awakens* should have told Disney something about how much the audience was actually *enjoying* these movies. I suspect it did; there was a reason Disney replaced the *Solo* directors midstream, after all. The miracle of Marvel's astonishing success is that its movies really deliver, and in unexpected ways. The disappointment of the recent Star Wars movies is that—with the major exception of the thrilling return of Harrison Ford in *The Force Awakens*—they haven't delivered. And if the next one generates the same sort of "meh" emotion in audiences, that will be the end of the franchise.

Until someone comes along with a better idea.

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**“As this year’s best-seller list continues to be crammed with books on the Trump administration, Page Six has learned that Donald Trump Jr. wants to add his name to the list. Publishing insiders tell Page Six that Trump Jr. is shopping a tome, and is being repped by top agent David Vigliano’s literary firm, AGI Vigliano.”**

**—New York Post, May 24, 2018**

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