the weekly Standard

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DISGRACE IN HELSINKI

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on the fallout from Trump's encounter with Putin

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Contents

July 30, 2018 • Volume 23, Number 44

Articles

Features

Books & Arts

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God and Party in America

An op-ed in the *New York Times* on July 14 caught our attention: "We Pick a Party, Then a Church." The author, Michele Margolis, an assistant professor of political science at Penn, contends that the common assumption about religious and political affiliations in America—that party affiliations are based on religious views—has it backwards. An abundance of sociological data suggests, she writes, that "most Americans choose a political party before choosing whether to join a religious community or how often to attend religious services. . . . It may seem counterintuitive, if not downright implausible, that voting Democrat or Republican could change something as personal as our relationship with God," Margolis concludes. "But over the course of our lives, political choices tend to come first, religious choices second."

So, for instance, a large number of Americans go through a more secular period in their late teens and early twenties, but many of those either return to religious observance or embrace it anew in later years, by which time they've already chosen their political identities.

And we hear he hasn't picked a church yet, either.

We suspect there's something to Margolis's point, even if religious affiliation is far too complicated and multifaceted a thing to treat as a single impulse as described in the *Times* piece. But it's probably true that the contentious nature of our politics plays a part in many people's choice of church or denomination. "Hearing evangelical leaders praise Mr. Trump and noting his persistent approval among white evangelicals," Margolis writes, "white Trump supporters may find themselves more and more drawn to the evangelical label and to churches they know will be filled with politically like-minded congregants. And 'Never Trumpers'—especially those raising children—may refuse to embrace the evangelical label and search for churches more in line with their politics."

Well, okay. But surely the biggest reason politics determines religious choices instead of the other way around in today's America has mainly to do with the fact that our political controversies trespass more and more on our deepest philosophical commitments. "Evangelical" or otherwise traditionalist churches are increasingly populated by people who until yesterday held only moderate or lukewarm religious views—or no religious views at all—but were shocked and appalled to perceive the aggressive hostility with which the nation's left-leaning political class and media treat traditional religion.

So maybe it's true at some superficial level that a lot of people end up identifying with one party before they settle on a religious identity. The more important reality is that in an age when our "political" disagreements have to do with the abortion of unborn children and the redefinition of marriage and the coerced offering of transgender bathrooms, one's choice of party is a—perhaps reluctant—expression of one's beliefs about God. ♦

Tolle, Lege—But Play This Game First

The Scrapbook is now at the middle station of life, and for as long as we can remember, bright people have been devising clever ways to get kids to read books. "Educational" television programs that encourage reading, ad campaigns promoting book-reading, kids' books full of flatulent humor, book giveaways . . . nothing seems to work. Pixelated screens keep winning. True, our proof for this pessimistic conclusion consists largely of anecdotal evidence—all the kids on the D.C. Metro are staring into their phones, not reading books—but we're pretty sure that book-reading among young people (and older people!) is still in decline.

The latest dumb idea is upon us: basing video games on classic children's books. A new version of the popular game Minecraft will mimic Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. An enthusiastic notice in the *Guardian* explains: "From Spyglass Hill to Ben Gunn's cave, children can explore every nook and cranny of Skeleton Island as part of Litcraft, a new partnership between Lancaster University and Microsoft, which bought the game for $2.5bn (£1.9bn) in 2015 and which is now played by 74 million people each month."

The Minecraft version of Skeleton Island

Litcraft isn't just a fun game, though. Not at all! It's "peppered with educational tasks that aim to re-engage reluctant readers with

TOP: MARIO TAMA / GETTY; BOTTOM: VIA TWITTER

the book it is based on." Indeed, the project's "lead researcher," Professor Sally Bushell, head of the English department at Lancaster University in England, assures us that Litcraft is "an educational model that connects the imaginative spatial experience of reading the text to an immersive experience in the game world." In other words: Kids will play the game, express just enough interest in Stevenson's book to keep the grant money flowing to Bushnell's project, and go back to playing on their phones.

Readers will have to pardon our skepticism, but it is our unshakable belief that the reading of books by young people will never be encouraged by the use of electronic media. There are, in The Scrapbook's admittedly hidebound view of these things, exactly two ways to encourage kids to read important works of literature. The first one is more difficult: Separate them from screens. The second is easy: Leave books lying around here and there—and whatever you do, *don't let on that you want the kids to read them.* ♦

Return of the Rhetorician

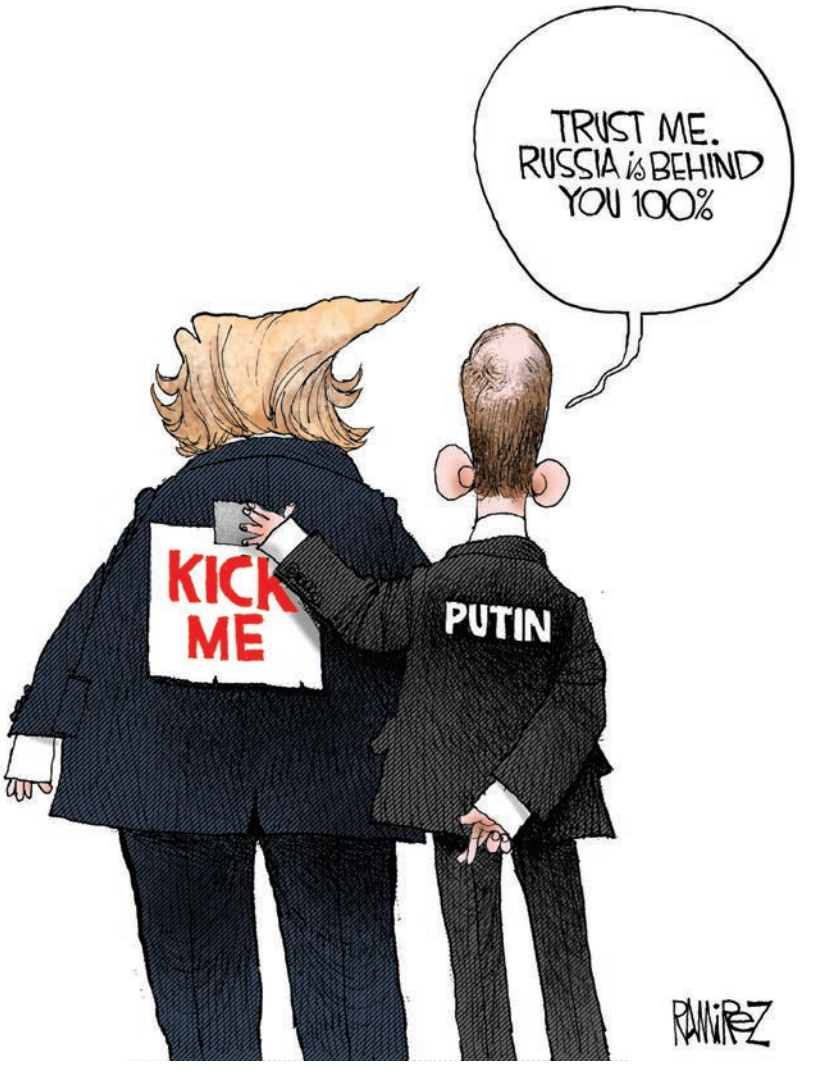
For more than a year and a half now, hundreds of intellectuals and historians and commentators have written books and articles and delivered lectures on the origins and meaning of Donald Trump's 2016 victory. A foreign observer could be forgiven for thinking every writer on politics and culture in America is required by law to produce at least one theory of the Rise of Trump. All of this has probably left the average literate American no wiser than before.

Him again.

But fret not, dear reader, we have a long disquisition from the one thinker who's guaranteed to give us an objectively true and unbiased explanation: Barack Obama.

His speech in Johannesburg to honor the 100th birthday of Nelson Mandela received lavish coverage in the American press (lavish, anyway, for a speech by a former president). The 44th president has been fairly quiet lately, but he evidently hasn't grown less fond of hearing his own mellifluous voice—the speech lasted a full 90 minutes.

Several lines from the oration were widely quoted in our media, sounding as they did like criticisms of the present administration, but these struck us as rewordings of what a thousand observers have already said, and better. "Strongman politics are ascendant suddenly," Obama let us know, "whereby elections and some pretense of democracy are maintained—the form of it—but those in power seek to undermine every institution or norm that gives democracy meaning." And there were the usual tired metaphors of everyday American speechmaking,



BOTTOM: CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY

made to sound eloquent and profound by Obama's dulcet baritone. "We now stand at a crossroads," Obama said—has any politician in the last 50 years failed to tell an audience at least once that we stand at a crossroads?—"a moment in time at which two very different visions of humanity's future compete for the hearts and the minds of citizens around the world."

We'll spare the reader more commentary, and instead suggest our own little theory on the Rise of Trump. Could it be that the current president's wild, fragmentary semi-coherent gibe-and-insult collections—that is, his routine campaign talks—sounded somehow refreshing after eight years of Barack Obama's measured and rhythmic platitudes? ♦

What Were We *Thinking*?

By historical standards, security and quality of life in 21st-century America are remarkably high. We may be on a slow decline, but the journey to the bottom is a very long one. And despite daily predictions of doom, Donald Trump has yet to turn the country into a hellscape where the few citizens who haven't been arrested wander the streets in a daze, desperate to get their hands on outlawed birth control.

Our elite are sure they know better, however. A *Washington Post* headline this week: "It's not wrong to compare Trump's America to the Holocaust." Another, in *Politico*, reads: "Putin's Attack on the U.S. Is Our Pearl Harbor." But perhaps the best recent contribution to this burgeoning genre of apocalyptic commentary appeared in the *New York Times*: "Raising My Child in a Doomed World."

Environmental devastation, climate change—it's all too terrible for this *Times* contributor not to regret having a child. "My partner and I had, in our selfishness, doomed our daughter to life on a dystopian planet, and I could see no way to shield her from the future," writes Roy Scranton, a Notre Dame professor of (what else?) English. If we hope to stop our mad march to destruction, he argues, we must seek "centralized control of key economic sectors." Well, obviously! He seems to think that David Buckel, the environmental activist who earlier this year committed suicide by self-immolation, made a reasonable choice. Scranton does, you'll be relieved to learn, repudiate the conclusion that "if you really want to save the planet, you should die," though not perhaps with the ardor one would wish.

BIGSTOCK

Actually, Dad, it's you we're worried about.

It's pretty bracing stuff, but the piece ends rather disappointingly: "I can't protect my daughter from the future and I can't even promise her a better life. All I can do is teach her: teach her how to care, how to be kind and how to live within the limits of nature's grace." We're not sure what that phrase "nature's grace" means, but we wonder if it occurs to Scranton that no one at any time in the history of the world could protect his or her children from the future or promise them a better life. It's pretty ordinary to worry about their prospects and to conclude that all you can do is teach them well. There, there, professor. We're sure your daughter will be fine. (Young parents are so adorable.) ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"'Having a vagina doesn't make a woman,' she said in an interview. 'Even if many people don't want to see me as a woman . . .'" ("Aiming for Miss Universe, and Transgender Rights," *New York Times*, July 14). ♦

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Cleanup on Aisle 9

One recent evening my wife wasn't feeling well and decided she needed some comfort food. She's fond of Chex Mix the way Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell is (reportedly) fond of cocaine. It was 10:30, and she felt bad asking me to run an errand so late, but before she could finish the sentence, I'd grabbed the car keys. As it happens, I love grocery stores and will happily take any excuse to go to one.

I spent my teenage years working at a grocery store, starting as a bagger when I was 14 and ending up a produce manager a few years later. I can't claim to have earned this meteoric ascent—speaking of illegal drugs, it was more likely the result of the meth-ravaged workforce in rural Oregon.

The work itself could be fairly tedious, but there was a lot of tomfoolery when no one was looking, such as turkey bowling. Set up the two-liter soda bottles like bowling pins at the end of the aisle, grab a Butterball, and let 'er rip. (Pro-tip: Pepsi products are for some reason less likely than Coke to shoot high fructose corn syrup everywhere when they're hit by 20 pounds of frozen carcass.)

Given the all-purpose nature of grocery stores, they're kind of the Star Wars cantina of retail. You see a surprising amount of fairly bizarre things. My sister put herself through several Grateful Dead tours—sorry, I meant to say "grad school"—working as a checker at a Safeway earning fat union wages. One day, an overeager teenage box jockey tried to hand deliver a 30-pound bag of cat litter to a customer by bypassing the line at the register behind them. Instead, he leapt over the bicycle cable cordoning off the adjacent unused register. Weighed down as he was, he tripped on the cable and fell forward, landing on the bag, causing it to explode and rain cat litter across five registers. My sister was still picking it out of her hair and laughing about it long after her shift ended.

But that was a comparatively tame mess to clean up. Remember when they used to sell gallon containers of cranberry juice in glass jars? We kept these on the lowest shelf to minimize the chances they'd be dropped, but some harried mother one day turned her back on her toddler, and before she knew it, three or four of these things went humpty-dumpty on him. Whenever a cleanup was announced on the juice aisle it filled me with dread, but this was an order of magnitude worse. I turned the corner and found Dennis the Menace splashing around in the hallway of blood from *The Shining*. I contemplated handing in my apron and box knife on the spot. Between the wet-dry vac and the mopping, that cleanup took the better part of an hour.

Though I haven't worked at a grocery store in 25 years, if I'm there alone, I will still stand in the aisles absentmindedly pulling products forward on shelves and making sure the labels are facing outward for minutes before I notice what I'm doing. (We in the biz simply call this "facing the shelves.") I also suppose I find a healthy comfort in being surrounded by material abundance. The modern grocery store is a marvel, and it sells so much more than food. Ever needed mousetraps or jumper cables after midnight? I have. Groceries are also a testament to the importance of global trade. My children have almost no concept of seasonal fruit, because when we need peaches in February, there's always a planeload from Chile headed our way.

An astonished Boris Yeltsin at a Houston grocery store in 1989

LARRY REESE / ©HOUSTON CHRONICLE. USED WITH PERMISSION

Speaking of which, I've been all over the world, and the quantity and quality of full-size grocery stores are about as good a barometer of the health of a society as you're likely to find. In 1989, when future Soviet president Boris Yeltsin famously visited an ordinary grocery store in Clear Lake, Texas, he was gobsmacked and told the Russian members of his entourage that "there would be a revolution" if Russians knew what abundance ordinary Americans enjoyed. It was not an inaccurate prediction.

So be grateful for your humble grocery store, because the old cliché about citizens in Communist countries standing in line for hours to get basic goods like toilet paper remains as true as ever. Last year, soldiers loyal to Venezuela's socialist dictator Nicolás Maduro were honored in special ceremonies where they took smiling photos as they were rewarded with toilet paper and other hygienic necessities that, thanks to Venezuela's "economic reforms," are almost impossible to buy there. If wanting stockpiles of Charmin and Listerine in every neighborhood makes me a decadent capitalist running dog, well, at least I won't smell like one.

Mark Hemingway

the weekly Standard

A Censurable Disgrace

Meddler and meddlee? The two presidents meet the press, after their private talks, July 16.

Donald Trump has long been loath to concede that operatives of the Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election, feeling as he does that the media like to talk about it mainly to suggest that he only defeated Hillary Clinton thanks to the aid of foreign troublemakers. It's understandable that he would feel some inner conflict about dealing with this subject. His adversaries on the left wouldn't give a fig about Russian interference if the presidential contest had gone the other way, and the obsessive manner with which many Democrats treat the issue is manifestly about delegitimizing Trump's presidency rather than holding Russia accountable. Even so, Trump is a grown-up and should be able to distinguish between (a) the now well-documented verdict that Russian operatives interfered in the U.S. election and (b) the as-yet unproven accusation that the Trump campaign actively participated in the Russian efforts. Yet Trump has consistently failed to distinguish between the two claims. That failure led to an appalling performance in Helsinki on July 16, where he publicly took the word of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin over that of his own intelligence personnel.

Asked at the joint press conference whether he credits American intelligence officials' conclusion that the Russian government was behind the hacking of the Democratic National Committee's server, Trump could have declined to answer or been vague. Instead the president complained again that the FBI didn't confiscate his 2016 opponent's email server and then took Putin's side: "My people came to me, [Director of National Intelligence] Dan Coats and some others. They said they think it's Russia. I have President Putin, he just said it's not Russia. I will say this, I don't see any reason why it would be."

It only got worse. When Putin was asked why Americans should believe that Russia did not intervene in the election, Trump jumped in to defend the dictator: "The whole concept of that came up perhaps a little bit before, but it came out as a reason why the Democrats lost an election, which frankly they should have been able to win, because the Electoral College is more advantageous for Democrats, as you know, than it is to Republicans. . . . We ran a brilliant campaign, and that's why I'm president."

That Trump said all this on foreign soil, and in the presence of one of this nation's chief adversaries, only adds to the outrage.

The president's defenders, incapable as ever of criticizing the man for any reason, immediately began comparing the president's remarks to Barack Obama's hot-mike remarks

CHRIS RATCLIFFE / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

to Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev that "after my election I have more flexibility." That was a deplorable moment in presidential history, to be sure, but it doesn't compare to what Trump did in openly crediting a foreign dictator's assertion over that of American intelligence officials. In any case, we are fully confident that if Barack Obama had expressed himself as Donald Trump did today, the latter's defenders would have condemned Obama as the stooge of a foreign power.

If we judge the administration by its policies rather than the president by his words, Trump isn't a stooge. The Treasury Department's sanctions on Russian oligarchs are clearly complicating Putin's ability to maintain his power, and the Defense Department is rightly arming the beleaguered fighters of Ukraine. But words have consequences—especially words spoken by the leader of one superpower about the leader of another in an open diplomatic forum. Trump encouraged the nation's enemies, insulted its intelligence officers, made himself look like a fool, and thus brought disgrace on the presidency and the country.

A number of congressional Republicans, and not just his usual critics, either distanced themselves from Trump's remarks or straightforwardly rebuked him—Speaker Paul Ryan, Peter Roskam, Liz Cheney, and Ryan Costello in the House; Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Lindsey Graham, Thom Tillis, Orrin Hatch, and Richard Burr in the Senate. The explosive reaction to the president's performance may have jolted him into his absurd assertion on July 16 that he had misspoken and had meant to say that he didn't see why it "wouldn't" have been Russia. In an interview with CBS, he followed up by asserting it was "true" that Russian actors had meddled in the U.S. election. We are deeply skeptical of Trump's claim in that interview that he told Putin privately that "we can't have meddling, we can't have any of that," but we're glad at least that he no longer denies the Russian's election-tampering malice.

Only one president in history, Andrew Jackson, has ever been censured by Congress, but Republicans on the Hill would not be out of line in seeking a formal censure of Donald Trump. Such a measure would be largely symbolic, yes. But symbols matter. It would be no small thing for congressional Republicans to declare, in a formal manner, that a president who coddles and defends an anti-American despot doesn't deserve their support. It's hardly a farfetched idea: Many congressional Democrats, remember, advocated censure rather than the impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998. Passage of a censure resolution by the House or Senate would bring no concrete consequences to Trump, but it would be a powerful statement from the GOP that the party's leaders will not simply ignore or excuse a U.S. president's openly crediting America's enemies at the expense of its public servants—and of the truth. ♦

It's All About Trump

On July 17, Representative Martha Roby won a tough GOP primary runoff election in Alabama's 2nd District. It was a strange contest. Roby's challenger, Bobby Bright, was the Democrat she defeated back in 2010, only now he was running as a zealously pro-Trump Republican. Roby received just 39 percent in the June primary on a crowded ballot, but she easily won the runoff against Bright. What made this otherwise insignificant election interesting—interesting, at least, for the political scribes of Washington and New York—was that it was almost exclusively concerned with the question of which candidate was the more likely to vote in Congress as Donald Trump wishes.

Two years ago, after the release of the *Access Hollywood* tape in which Trump boasted of sexually assaulting women, Roby called on the GOP nominee to withdraw from the presidential race. That, of course, was a time when nobody thought Trump would win. In 2018, Roby was faced with the choice of either maintaining her distance from the president or embracing him. She chose the latter, stridently supporting his policies and earning his endorsement. Hence Bobby Bright's attempt to transmogrify from Democrat to Trumpian revolutionary came to nothing, and Roby stays in Washington for two more years.

Republicans in Alabama's 2nd District surely care about more than whether President Trump is doing a good job and whether their representatives in Congress support him with sufficient gusto. But regional elections have now become referenda on national phenomena—especially on the presidency.

In the Texas Senate race, Democratic challenger Beto O'Rourke is sharply criticizing Ted Cruz for the senator's response to the president's remarks in Helsinki—which O'Rourke insists are an impeachable offense. In California's 22nd District, Andrew Janz says he's running against Republican representative Devin Nunes "to see what I can do to make sure that there is never a Trump presidency again." Nunes, meanwhile, has raised more than $7 million in this election cycle, much of it coming from people and corporations far from his district who evidently believe he's besieged by the anti-Trump "resistance" in the safe GOP seat. In Wisconsin, Democratic senator Tammy Baldwin is sparring with her GOP challenger over the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. And in South Carolina, Governor Henry McMaster's campaign is based almost wholly on the fact that Trump enthusiastically

supports him—this despite the fact that McMaster is about as unlike the 45th president as it's possible to imagine.

Tip O'Neill famously said that all politics is local. It's no longer true. Local politics aren't even *local* in the age of Trump. House elections are now overwhelmed by the disputes of Washington, D.C. Partly this is the result of the federal government's arrogation of state power; there just aren't as many local issues to argue about anymore. But even more it's the decline in the power of incumbency and the rise of the primary wars. Republican Eric Cantor, the powerful House majority leader, wasn't upset by a Democratic opponent in 2014; he lost the GOP primary to an unknown Virginia economist, David Brat. The latter's support came initially from national media with knives sharpened for Cantor as a GOP establishment favorite. Incumbents are under assault from both left and right, and so the question of whether they "stand with the president" or are willing to "stand up to the president" are the ones that matter.

Rather than talking to the voters themselves and figuring out the three or four things that concern them most immediately, candidates listen mainly to their consultants and decide whether their campaigns will venerate the president or denounce him. For the press, arguing about the presidency and the future of the country is more interesting than arguing about the continued funding of a military base or the local effects of a federal environmental regulation. And so every election becomes a referendum on the man in the White House and his policies—which today means that everything becomes more about Trump than it already was.

One's attitude toward the president is important, but it's hardly the only relevant thing to know about a candidate for high office. There's no reason a principled congressional candidate can't say Trump's right sometimes and wrong sometimes—say, disagree with him on trade policy but praise him for withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal—and, with that out of the way, move on to discussions of greater local and regional concern. Yet we're hard-pressed to think of any candidate doing this year.

The 2018 midterms are about Trump and only Trump. In the wake of the Helsinki summit, former FBI director James Comey tweeted, "All who believe in this country's values must vote for Democrats this fall. Policy differences don't matter right now. History has its eyes on us." But there will be a referendum on Donald Trump in 2020. No one can predict if the GOP's loss of the House or Senate would help or hurt the president's reelection prospects. It's demonstrably unwise, however, to plump for candidates simply because they say they love or loathe the president. Character still matters; Americans still care about local controversies; and Donald Trump, despite what he and many others may think, isn't the only thing worth talking about. ♦

FRED BARNES

Trump's rules of disorder

Politics is rarely edifying, much less elegant. And the mayhem over President Trump's comments after meeting with Vladimir Putin and the response of his adversaries is an example of just how bad politics can get.

The argument brought all three of Trump's rules for political survival into play. Rule one is when you're right, you fight. Rule two is controversy elevates message. Rule three is never apologize. Trump stuck to his rules in Helsinki, where he and Putin met.

Trump's flips worked. Confusion had set in. And the president seemed intent on creating more of it. He contradicted himself. Perhaps causing confusion should be rule four.

Democrats and their leftist allies are less organized. On a big issue like U.S.-Russia relations, they like to spin conspiracies involving the president. They've also adopted disruption as a tactic. They used it in the House interrogation of disgraced FBI official Peter Strzok, a Trump hater. Democrats shouted "point of order" ad nauseam, then blamed Republicans for the commotion. It worked.

But it's different when Trump is personally engaged. He always thinks he's right. So he fights. He's difficult to disrupt. He dominates the debate because it's about him. When the disagreement became confused last week, it was a signal Trump was surviving.

It was during a 45-minute press conference, with Putin looking on from a few feet away, that Trump touched off the uproar. Did he do it intentionally? He must have. When you decline to defend the U.S. intelligence community's finding that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential campaign, it's not a casual lapse. He appeared to be more impressed with Putin's "extremely strong and powerful" denial.

So far as I know, this was the first time a president has taken Russia's side over his own country's. It was a historic moment. Trump also suggested that recent American presidents were responsible for bad relations with Russia. This wasn't a new thought. But saying it in public and in Putin's presence, that was momentous.

It created an anti-Trump furor. Democrats went ballistic. John Brennan, CIA director in the Obama administration, said Trump's words were "treasonous." House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said Trump was hiding something. Her Senate counterpart, Chuck Schumer, said Putin may have damaging information about Trump. Another critic said Russia might have secretly bailed out Trump when he faced bankruptcy and now held sway over him. But Democrats offered no facts. They insinuated Trump was being blackmailed. They were guessing.

Trump's friend Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, advised the president "to clarify his statements . . . on our intelligence system and Putin." Trump had made "the most serious mistake of his presidency and [it] must be corrected—immediately."

This was good advice, and Trump took it. He got behind his intelligence operatives who exposed Russian meddling. He said he'd misspoken when he said Putin had no reason to meddle. He meant the opposite. Did anyone buy these flips? I doubt it. But he didn't say, "I apologize." That would have shown weakness, which Trump dreads.

And he changed his tune on how he dealt with Putin in their meeting. He had told Putin, "we can't have this," Trump said on *CBS Evening News*. "We're not going to have it, and that's the way it's going to be." He hadn't mentioned tough talk in his earlier remarks about the one-on-one session.

Democrats didn't believe him. They demanded Trump's State Department interpreter be questioned about what the president had said in private. Chances the interpreter will be free to talk are slim to none. Democrats are stymied, for now.

Trump's flips worked. Confusion had set in. And the president seemed intent on creating more of it. He contradicted himself. Perhaps causing confusion should be rule four.

Democrats haven't given up on bringing Trump down. They have unearned faith in Robert Mueller. Despite his benign title of special counsel, they're sure he's a prosecutor whose job is to get Trump. But if Mueller is about to do that, he's disguised it well.

Though Trump survived, he's not triumphant. There's one word that ought to terrify Trump. It's "midterm." What's tied Democrats in knots is Republican control of Congress. Democrats don't have subpoena power. They can't schedule hearings. They can only scream, yell, and imagine scenarios of how Trump became Putin's tool.

But what if Democrats win the House this fall? There's probably a better than 50-50 chance they will. Trump may have escaped in the Russia fight, but he didn't improve GOP

LIKENESSES: DAVE CLEGG

prospects in November—far from it. Those who say he did are dreaming.

Imagine who would be subpoenaed by a Democratic House, starting with Trump's interpreter in Helsinki. There's a big field to choose from: Every official who's left the Trump White House from Reince Priebus on down; campaign advisers; business associates, including those involved in deals with Russians; private citizens he's consulted; Steve Bannon. And no telling who might come forward voluntarily.

The second half of Trump's term would be a nightmare for the president and Republicans. The news would consist of one story—Trump's peril. Reporters would be in high heaven. Queasy GOP members of Congress, perhaps only a few, would cut and run.

My advice for Trump is simple. Get rid of rule three and start apologizing to those you've abused. It's good for the soul. It's good politics. It's not weakness. It's what leaders do. ♦

COMMENT ♦ MICHAEL WARREN

Veering on script

Is there anything with a shorter shelf life than the official talking points of the Trump White House? For Donald Trump, it's the script to go off script, and any statement he makes today will be altered, contradicted, or undone tomorrow.

Consider Trump's rhetoric coming out of his July 16 summit in Helsinki with Russian president Vladimir Putin. Asked at their joint press conference about the discrepancy between the conclusions of the U.S. intelligence community that Russia interfered in the American election in 2016 and Putin's denials of any such interference, Trump repeated a version of what he's said before: that Putin's statements are good enough for him. "My people came to me, [Director of National Intelligence] Dan Coats, came to me and some others. They said they think it's Russia. I have President Putin. He just said it's not Russia," Trump said. "I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be."

Not long after the press conference, as Air Force One was flying back across the Atlantic, Republican offices on Capitol Hill received some White House talking points on the summit. The list highlighted just one line about Russian election interference from Trump's remarks and offered no indication of his position on the question: "During today's meeting, I addressed directly with President Putin the issue of Russian interference in our elections. I felt this was a message best delivered in person. Spent a great deal of time talking about it."

For Donald Trump, it's the script to go off script, and any statement he makes today will be altered, contradicted, or undone tomorrow.

Three hours later, shortly before Trump landed in the United States but after the outrage over his performance had metastasized, the White House sent GOP lawmakers a new set of talking points. "President Trump said in Helsinki that he had 'great confidence' in his intelligence agencies," read the new document. "For over a year and half, the President has repeatedly said he believes the intelligence agencies when they said Russia interfered in American elections." The email went on to cite four different instances in which Trump acknowledged Russian interference or affirmed his intelligence agencies' assessments. But what the White House left out is more illuminating than what it put in.

The first instance the memo pointed to came before the inauguration. "I think it was Russia," Trump said at a January 11, 2017, press conference. It is what Trump said immediately after that the White House failed to include: "But I think we also get hacked by other countries and other people."

Next was a July 6, 2017, press conference in Warsaw. "I think it was Russia," Trump acknowledged. But again, he continued where the talking points did not: "And I think it could have been other people and other countries. Could have been a lot of people interfering." At that press conference, in fact, Trump repeated two more times that while he thought Russia had interfered, it could also have been "other people" and "other countries."

The third instance the White House cited came in remarks Trump made on November 11, 2017, at a press conference in Vietnam. "I'm with our Agencies," the White House quoted the president saying, and that is what he said. But before aligning himself with the intelligence agencies, Trump felt obligated to note that Putin "feels that he and Russia did not meddle in the election." After that, Trump more than once said he was with his intelligence agencies before adding again, "I believe that President Putin really feels—and he feels strongly—that he did not meddle in our election. What he believes is what he believes." All context was left out of the quotation in the talking points.

Finally, the White House memo pointed to Trump's saying on March 6 of this year that "certainly there was meddling." But yet again, his full remarks were more equivocal: "The Russians had no impact on our votes whatsoever, but certainly there was meddling, and probably there was meddling from other countries and maybe other individuals."

The White House talking points were trying to suggest that Trump's words in Helsinki were an aberration rather than fully in keeping with his

consistent contention that the Russians may not have been behind the interference. The message was sent forth, and friendly media outlets dutifully repeated them. (*Fox & Friends*, inconveniently, played the full clips.)

Still, the thrust of the White House memo suggested where Trump himself would go the following day. During a brief press availability before a meeting with members of Congress at the White House on July 17, Trump read from a written statement in an attempt to "clarify" his view.

> In a key sentence in my remarks, I said the word "would" instead of "wouldn't." The sentence should have been: I don't see any reason why I wouldn't—or why it wouldn't be Russia. So just to repeat it, I said the word "would" instead of "wouldn't." And the sentence should have been, and I thought it would be maybe a little bit unclear on the transcript or unclear on the actual video—the sentence should have been: I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be Russia. Sort of a double negative. So you can put that in, and I think that probably clarifies things pretty good by itself.

Putting the absurdity of this statement aside, what is notable is that even here Trump couldn't help veering off script—and away from the entire point of his White House's latest talking points. The president allowed that while he "accept[ed] our intelligence community's conclusion that Russia's meddling in the 2016 election took place," it "could be other people also. There's a lot of people out there."

What has been lost in reaction to Trump's dismal performance in Helsinki is that what he said standing next to Putin is what he has said all along. No amount of message-massaging by the White House communications team seems able to keep the president on script—or, more accurately, to get Trump off the script he's been reading from ever since he took office. ♦

COMMENT ♦ WILLIAM KRISTOL

A case of the Mondays

On Monday, July 9, President Donald Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh to replace Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court. Kavanaugh is a serious and respected federal judge with a well-thought-through constitutionalist orientation. Based on what we know now, he deserves enthusiastic support from all who believe in a constitutionalist Supreme Court, and he should be confirmed by the United States Senate. President Trump deserves credit for the selection.

On Monday, July 16, President Trump stood next to Vladimir Putin in Helsinki and spoke in a manner correctly characterized by John McCain as "one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory." McCain continued: "The damage inflicted by President Trump's naïveté, egotism, false equivalence, and sympathy for autocrats is difficult to calculate." The United States and the free world could pay a high price not just for Trump's performance in Helsinki but for his ongoing attitude and policies toward Putin and, for that matter, other enemies of freedom.

So one Monday Trump does something praiseworthy. The next Monday he does something contemptible.

Different observers will weigh the pluses and minuses differently.

So one Monday Trump does something praiseworthy. The next Monday he does something contemptible. Perhaps people of good will can agree on this: Life is complicated.

They'll come to varying judgments on the Trump presidency. But perhaps people of good will can agree on this: Life is complicated. The good, the bad, and for that matter the ugly are not perfectly separated and distinguished here on earth. So a degree of intellectual modesty is called for. As Publius put it in *Federalist* 37:

> When we pass from the works of nature, in which all the delineations are perfectly accurate, and appear to be otherwise only from the imperfection of the eye which surveys them, to the institutions of man, in which the obscurity arises as well from the object itself as from the organ by which it is contemplated, we must perceive the necessity of moderating still further our expectations and hopes from the efforts of human sagacity. . . . Questions daily occur in the course of practice, which prove the obscurity which reins in these subjects, and which puzzle the greatest adepts in political science.

American politics in 2018 is no exception to this rule. So it may be a puzzle that some of us are anti-Trump and at the same time pro-Kavanaugh. Some might even call it a contradiction.

Well, as Walt Whitman asked, "Do I contradict myself?" His poetic answer:

Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I'm no poet. I do not contain multitudes. But like many other prosaic people, I can, in the spirit of *The Federalist*, try to contain two thoughts in my mind at the same time.

They are: Donald Trump is in many ways a bad president—bad for the country, bad for conservatism, bad for the Republican party. His sway over party and policy should be limited as much as is feasible and his dominance of our politics not extended any longer than necessary.

And Brett Kavanaugh is a good

pick and should be confirmed to the Supreme Court.

In this spirit, I would also say that one might have voted for Donald Trump. One might approve to some degree of his presidency so far. But that does not mean that one approves forever or automatically, or that one is impervious to evidence of unfitness.

Soon after the midterm elections, it will be worth a step back, a deep breath, and a hard look. It will be worth asking then—as Americans, as conservatives, as Republicans—do we want four more years of a Trump presidency? No need then to relitigate who was right about this or wrong about that in 2016 or 2017 or 2018. What will be needed is to be open-minded about the right course ahead.

As our greatest president put it: "As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." Can't we act in the spirit of Lincoln in the age of Trump? ♦

COMMENT ♦ PRISCILLA M. JENSEN

Russian revenants: The Romanov murders 100 years on

Whatever factual mystery still surrounds the fate of the Russian royal family in 1918 may finally have been resolved by its centenary last week, but how their deaths will be understood by Russians themselves seems more unclear by the moment.

It's important to remember that the romantic mythology of the slaughter in Yekaterinburg—the Romanov family rousted in the night of July 17 and herded at gunpoint into a basement room; the little tsarevich, so crippled by hemophilia that his father had to carry him; the women invulnerable to bullets and bayonets (they'd sewed diamonds into their corsets)—is a mythology largely, if not exclusively, known in the West. In the upheaval of the ongoing civil war and the Bolsheviks' consolidation of power, the Russian government disseminated conflicting accounts of the tsar's fate, and it was nearly a decade—1926—before it acknowledged that the whole family had been shot.

By that point it had been made abundantly clear to the Soviet populace that curiosity could kill more than cats, and they had lots of other things to worry about anyway. But the investigations by a White Russian lawyer that forced the 1926 confirmation, and local memory in and around Yekaterinburg—where people had been involved in the murders and disposal of the bodies, and a rich vein of fact and rumor flourished—were sufficiently accurate that in 1979 a group of area geologists, under cover of doing scientific research, were able to locate three skulls. They concluded, though, that the matter was still so delicate that they reburied them, and so things remained until 1990, when one of them contacted then-Supreme Council chairman Boris Yeltsin and "asked him to help me bring [the bones] back to history." The following year, investigators recovered nine skeletons from a single grave, and a forensic, political, and religious odyssey began.

The institution most hesitant to accept the Romanovs' identification and its implications has been the Russian Orthodox church, which is disinclined to rock the boat in the Putin era.

Rediscovery of the remains, and government openness to investigating their provenance, coincided beautifully with forensic advances in DNA testing; in 1990 scientists were able to recover nuclear DNA from each of the nine skeletons and to conclude via familial comparisons that they indeed had the bones of Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, three of their children, and (from other evidence) the four attendants known to have been murdered with them.

Almost as soon as the project began, it attracted emphatic detractors. Aged Romanov cousins around the world thought it might all be a KGB plot. (They'd seen a few at least as far-fetched.) Some scientists and academicians second- and third-guessed the scientists and academicians who were testing and comparing DNA. Some of the dwindling band of Anastasia-lived enthusiasts were dubious that the bones were Romanovs because there were only five of them, not the seven that there should have been. (In 2007 a local historian returned to the area where the bones had been found, determined to locate the missing family members, and find them he did, only feet away from where the others had been buried.)

Fluctuations in Russian politics over the next decade—for example, the waxing and waning of anti-Soviet feeling that affected public nostalgia for both the Romanovs and the Communists—helped draw out the project. Despite this, by January 1998 a government commission headed by then-deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov reported that there were "no longer any doubts" of the bones' authenticity and announced that plans were being drawn up for their permanent interment.

That may have been when it became clear that the institution most hesitant

to accept the identification and its implications was the Russian Orthodox church. When the bones were first discovered and tested, the church hesitated to accept their provenance, citing the importance of certainty in regard to the physical relics of saints—plans had already begun for the 2000 canonization of the Romanovs, and the church wished to avoid an unseemly and theologically dubious mistake.

The upshot of this episode was that when an interment was finally arranged for July 17, 1998, in the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg where Russia's rulers for centuries have been laid to rest, neither Boris Yeltsin nor then-patriarch Alexy II were in attendance, and the officiant didn't name the dead, instead referring them to God. "You know their names," he said.

If that early ambiguity can be explained as prudence, its survival is much harder to figure out. That service was 20 years ago, and the investigation of the remains has kept pace with scientific developments. Remains of Nicholas's father and brother have been exhumed and their DNA matched with his, as has material from the blood-stained clothing of his assassinated grandfather Alexander II. At least one study is said to have found evidence of the famous genetic error that transmitted hemophilia through the family of Queen Victoria to the tsarevich.

The Russian Orthodox church, from time to time, has agreed that all this is very interesting and will be taken into consideration. As recently as last week its spokesman said that the latest findings (from a study the church itself ordered) will be examined "with attention"; he praised the investigation for its "atmosphere of openness."

If that's the case it's a step up; a church-convened meeting last November agreed to investigate the theory, posited by a bishop close to Vladimir Putin, that the tsar and his family were victims of a Jewish ritual killing. Bishop Tikhon asserted that "a significant part" of the commission has "no doubt" that such is the case. Patriarch Kirill, though, was said to have expressed concerns that such allegations might "provoke uncontrollable outbursts of ultranationalism" and discouraged rapid acceptance of the idea.

Fear of "uncontrollable outbursts of ultranationalism"—positive or negative—is key to understanding the church's irresolution about the Romanovs. While the theological question—relics or not?—is a real one, much more of its dilemma lies in its relationship to the state, and to Putin. Historically the Russian church and its state have been congruent in ways that are unfamiliar to Westerners; that remains the case in the Putin era, with the church inclined to avoid rocking the boat. Enthusiasms are dangerous things in an authoritarian arrangement—too much zeal for a royal martyr, too much nostalgia about anything, can unleash forces that would be better off restrained. When the state sends mixed messages about its preferences, or no message at all, temporizing is probably the best approach to the temporal realm.

Vladimir Putin has been circumspect in regard to any commemoration or observance of the events of 1917-18,

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

The election of Donald J. Trump, bon vivant and game-show host, to the presidency of the United States occasioned a great deal of talk about "normalization." All the best people instructed us that we were not to "normalize" Trump, that we must treat him instead as an illegitimate outlier. One wonders if those people ever have visited the United States of America, where the Trump style and Trump mentality require no "normalization" at all, being as they are (and long have been) the dominant strain of pop culture. You might as well argue against the "normalization" of Big Macs, Camaros, and the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. Barack Obama spent eight years offering himself as the American super-ego, and Americans responded by electing their id. President Trump is as normal as diabetes.

But we ought to be concerned about the normalization of treason claims. . . . [President Trump] is not engaged in treason or anything like treason. He is engaged in hypocrisy and moral illiteracy. He is a frank admirer of *caudillos* such as Vladimir Putin, because in his mind ruthlessness, grasping, and amorality are associated with effective leadership. Hence the praise for Kim Jong-un. . . .

Donald Trump admires Vladimir Putin. There's plenty to criticize in that without making up ridiculous claims about treason. Trump and many of his Republican enablers are irresponsible. Unhappily, they are not *uniquely* irresponsible. Whatever depths they sink to, the left is ready to meet them there with a steam shovel.

—Kevin D. Williamson, "Stop Calling It 'Treason'"

revolutionary or royal. But he doesn't seem to have discouraged the centenary observance in Yekaterinburg, a religious procession led as it has been for years by Patriarch Kirill, from the site of the massacre 13 miles to one of the initial burial sites. A reported 100,000 people from all over the world gathered for the pilgrimage, where the patriarch warned them against the temptation "to embrace some new, unknown happy future through the destruction of our life, our traditions, and our faith."

Perhaps he was speaking of Bolshevism. In the meantime, the remains of Maria and Alexei await their reunion with their family, and they all await being given their names in this world. God knows all of them already. ♦

COMMENT ♦ VICTORINO MATUS

A company that bans meat deserves to be grilled

Last week the cofounder of WeWork issued a company-wide memo, exclusively obtained by *Bloomberg*, explaining that from here on in, catered events will not feature any morsel of meat. No chicken, no beef, no lamb, no pork. What's more, meals containing these ingredients may no longer be expensed. "New research indicates that avoiding meat is one of the biggest things an individual can do to reduce their personal environmental impact," Miguel McKelvey informed his employees, "even more than switching to a hybrid car."

If this were a small outfit, the story wouldn't deserve more than an eye roll. I once met a distiller who bragged that his vodka was the only one of its kind—"we're gay-owned and operated," he told me. This would have been bigger news had there been more than four employees. WeWork, on the other hand, is an office-space giant with 6,000 employees spanning the globe, valued at $20 billion. Its decision to go meatless in order to bolster its sustainability could influence (or guilt) other big businesses into doing something similar.

It *could*, mind you, but it shouldn't.

To be clear, WeWork isn't preventing its employees from eating meat—it's just not paying for it. And obviously it is not the first company to boldly signal its virtues. Remember when Deutsche Bank chose not to expand hiring near Raleigh, N.C., because of a transgender bathroom bill in the state but maintained its lucrative business in Saudi Arabia? In addition, as Nate Lanxon observed in *Bloomberg*, "Juicero, a failed maker of high-priced juice machines, had instituted a similar ban on reimbursing employee expenses for meals at non-vegan restaurants," while "American Airlines Group Inc. and Starbucks Corp. recently joined the chorus of companies pledging to phase out plastic straws and drink stirrers." But a multibillion-dollar corporate giant's attempts to curb personal meat consumption brings to mind the Office of Price Administration's rationing of meat in 1943 in the midst of a world war. WeWork's executives, no doubt, would argue that they too are at war—to save the planet.

So how effective is the current meatless campaign? "It bans lamb, for instance, and it bans chicken, but it doesn't ban eggs. Eggs cause just as much environmental damage as chickens do, and much less than lamb does," writes Felix Salmon in *Slate*. "It's hard to see much environmental logic in a policy that's fine with factory-farmed salmon but that forbids people from eating pigeon. (There are far too many pigeons in the world, eat as many as you want.)" WeWork might as well go full vegan or even—just to be safe—full fruitarian, like the girl from *Notting Hill*. "We only eat things that have actually fallen from the tree or bush and that are, in fact, dead already."

Even assuming submitted receipts must be itemized, problems persist. Will WeWork's expense monitors know that any order of pasta carbonara contains pancetta—and will they know pancetta is pork belly? Or that, as a cooking instructor informed Michael Ruhlman in *The Making of a Chef*, "Classical chowders always have pork"? In other words, any orders of New England, Manhattan, and maybe even Rhode Island clam chowder are suspect and therefore should not be expensed. The same goes for that side order of peas and onions at the Palm Steakhouse, which are bathed in au jus.

And forget about receipts from ethnic establishments—I'm betting an order of *vitello saltimbocca* or Ethiopian *tibs* will be able to slip past the expense guards. If you are truly daring, order the Happy Family at a Chinese restaurant. Can you tell from the name if it contains beef, chicken, or pork? (Trick question: The answer is all three!) So there are going to be serious flaws in the verification process.

If WeWork is truly concerned about reducing its environmental impact, there are alternatives. "It manages 10 million square feet of office space in 76 cities around the world, including Warsaw and Chengdu; across its 406 locations, some have much higher carbon footprints than others," Salmon points out in *Slate*. He recommends the company "confine itself to LEED-certified buildings. That way, landlords would have a strong economic incentive to make their buildings energy-efficient and therefore attractive to WeWork and other environmentally conscious tenants." Of course, that might cut into the bottom line—rents would no doubt be higher.

Instead, we have virtue signaling from a company that describes itself as "a place you join as an individual 'me,' but where you become a part of a greater 'we.'" Which sounds like something the Borg from *Star Trek* might say, right before they turn you into a drone. "From now on you're eating exclusively quinoa and kale. Resistance is futile." ♦

Paul Ryan, with GOP colleagues after Trump's press conference in Helsinki: 'The president must appreciate that Russia is not our ally.'

Cool on the Hill

A muted reaction to Helsinki from the GOP Congress. BY JOHN MCCORMACK & JENNA LIFHITS

Would this time be different? Would Republicans really hold the president of their own party accountable for what he had done?

Standing alongside Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Finland, on July 16, President Donald Trump cast doubt on the U.S. intelligence assessment that Russia hacked Democratic National Committee emails in an effort to influence the 2016 U.S. election. He did not offer criticism of Russia's illegal activities during the 45-minute press conference. Instead, he blamed both America and Russia for the current sour state of affairs and trained his focus on special counsel Robert Mueller's probe, which he described as "a disaster for our country."

When asked who he believed about election interference, U.S. intelligence agencies or Putin, Trump said, in part: "I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today."

"My people came to me, [Director of National Intelligence] Dan Coats came to me and some others, they said they think it's Russia," he said. "I have President Putin; he just said it's not Russia. I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be. But I really do want to see the server. But I have confidence in both parties."

Republican condemnations poured in.

"Today's press conference in Helsinki," Arizona senator John McCain said in a statement, "was one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory. The damage inflicted by President Trump's naïveté, egotism, false equivalence, and sympathy for autocrats is difficult to calculate." McCain concluded, "No prior president has ever abased himself more abjectly before a tyrant."

Nebraska senator Ben Sasse said that Trump had given Putin a "propaganda win he desperately needs," telling CBS News:

> We should tell the American people and tell the world that we know that Vladimir Putin is a thug. He's a former KGB agent who's a murderer. He's been involved in shooting down an airliner that killed almost

TOM WILLIAMS / CQ ROLL CALL

John McCormack is a senior writer and Jenna Lifhits a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

300 civilians. He's invaded Georgia and Ukraine. He's committed cyberattacks on Estonia. He's now trying to destabilize Germany and France. He committed an attack against the United States and the American people in 2016, and we say in no unequivocal terms that we will expose that kind of attack against America and we expect to respond to it with cyber. Right now, the president isn't leading. We negotiated from a position of weakness yesterday and Vladimir Putin walked away from Helsinki with a win. It's a disaster.

But Sasse and McCain are, of course, the usual suspects—two of the dwindling number of Republicans who are willing to speak out forcefully against the president when he's wrong.

What made the reaction to Helsinki different was that even some of the president's closest allies felt compelled to speak out. Former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich tweeted: "President Trump must clarify his statements in Helsinki on our intelligence system and Putin. It is the most serious mistake of his presidency and must be corrected—immediately." Fox News host Neil Cavuto called Trump's behavior "disgusting." "It's not a right or left thing to me, it's just wrong," Cavuto said. "A U.S. president on foreign soil talking to our biggest enemy or adversary or competitor . . . is essentially letting the guy get away with this."

But back on Capitol Hill, Republican leadership and most of the president's allies weren't nearly that harsh. A small number defended his remarks—most prominently Kentucky senator Rand Paul, who pinned the intense pushback to the president's press conference on "Trump derangement syndrome."

Many Republicans contradicted Trump without explicitly condemning him. "U.S.-Russia relations remain at a historic low for one simple reason: Vladimir Putin is a committed adversary of the United States," Arkansas senator Tom Cotton said in a statement that didn't mention President Trump. "Until Russian behavior changes, our policy should not change."

Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell took a similar tack, disagreeing with the president on NATO, Putin, and the 2016 elections. "I'm not here to critique anyone else," McConnell said at a press conference. House speaker Paul Ryan went a bit further than his Senate counterpart. "The president must appreciate that Russia is not our ally," he said in a statement noting that the House Intelligence Committee had concluded Russia interfered in 2016.

Both McConnell and Ryan raised the possibility of further sanctions against Russia. McConnell specifically mentioned a bill sponsored by Florida GOP senator Marco Rubio and Democratic Maryland senator Chris Van Hollen, introduced earlier this year, that would trigger new Russia sanctions if Coats concludes that the Kremlin interfered in another federal election.

'The damage inflicted by President Trump's naïveté, egotism, false equivalence, and sympathy for autocrats is difficult to calculate,' said John McCain. 'No prior president has ever abased himself more abjectly before a tyrant.'

"In the end, we can present people with information. But you can't force anyone to say what you want them to say, especially the president of the United States," Rubio told *Politico*. "Our job is to pass laws and do things that are for the good of the country . . . and one of those things should be [imposing] strong deterrence measures with pre-positioned penalties should [Russian meddling] ever happen again."

There has also been renewed interest in a bill introduced by Colorado senator Cory Gardner that would require the State Department to determine whether Russia should be designated a state sponsor of terror. "This fervor wasn't around last week," Gardner said, when asked how the president's remarks are affecting the debate over new Russia legislation.

Whether or not Congress passes any further legislation, what many congressional Republicans seem to want most is to put the incident behind them as quickly as possible.

On Tuesday, July 17, Trump read a statement at the White House saying he "misspoke" the day before in Helsinki: He'd meant to say the word "wouldn't" instead of "would." "The sentence should have been, 'I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be Russia.' Sort of a double negative," Trump said. "I accept our intelligence community's conclusion that Russia's meddling in the 2016 election took place," he said, before adding more uncertainty. "Could be other people also. A lot of people out there."

The spin was implausible. Trump had also said of Coats and Putin: "I have confidence in both parties," adding that we couldn't really know the truth "without finding out what happened to the [DNC] server." But some Republicans appeared eager to believe him.

"The president admitted he made a mistake," Iowa senator Chuck Grassley told The Weekly Standard. "Very few politicians do that."

"We have to take him at his word, he's the president of the United States," said Alabama senator Richard Shelby. "We all make mistakes and we walk back things," he added. "I'm glad he's clarified what he said."

Others said something along the lines of: *Well, he's trying*.

"It was important that he clarified that he trusts the U.S. intelligence agencies," said Ohio senator Rob Portman. "And he did that to your satisfaction?" asked one reporter. "Well, I'm glad he did that," said Portman. "I wish that he had done that the day before, in front of President Putin and the public."

"He attempted to clarify it, but ineffectively," South Dakota senator John Thune told reporters. "I agree with Dan Coats and the intelligence community."

Asked if he was happy with Trump's clarification, Kansas senator

Pat Roberts said, "I didn't even read it." When a *HuffPost* reporter told Roberts what Trump had said, Roberts replied, "I'm trying to get the farm bill done, I work on things where I can make a difference. … That's not within my purview."

On July 19, Arizona Republican Jeff Flake and Delaware Democrat Chris Coons tried to force a Senate vote on a (symbolic) nonbinding resolution affirming the U.S. intelligence community's assessment of 2016; calling for Senate hearings to learn more about the Helsinki summit; commending the Department of Justice for its investigation leading to the indictment of 12 Russian intelligence agents; and supporting the full implementation of Russia sanctions provided for by existing law. But Senate majority whip John Cornyn blocked the vote. "My concern with this resolution is that [it] is a purely symbolic act," Cornyn objected, adding that committee work was needed "before we go on record as to a resolution like this."

Democratic reactions to Helsinki have ranged from sensible calls to pass further sanctions to hysterical accusations of treason and absurd arguments that the only way Republicans can hold Trump accountable is to reject his well-qualified Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

In its effects, this episode wasn't much different for congressional Republicans than other low moments of the Trump presidency. A handful of Republicans spoke out forcefully, but most were resigned to the notion there's not much they can do about Trump. And why would anyone expect things to be different?

During the 2016 campaign, candidate Trump encouraged violence against disruptive but non-violent protesters; he launched a racist attack against a Mexican-American judge; he mocked American POWs and a Gold Star mother; he promoted conspiracy theories about the JFK assassination and Barack Obama's birth certificate; he faced multiple accusations of sexual assault following the release of a 2005 video in which he bragged about groping women. Most congressional Republicans backed him despite all of that, as did enough voters to hand him the presidency.

In the 18 months since his inauguration, President Trump has, among other things, said there were some "very fine people" participating in a neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Va., and blamed "many sides" for violence after a neo-Nazi killed a peaceful protester there; stood by a Senate candidate in Alabama who faced credible accusations of molesting a 14-year-old girl; praised North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un last month, saying Kim "loves his people" and they love him with "great fervor."

Trump listens to Putin in Helsinki, July 16.

Trump's behavior in Helsinki may have been a uniquely low moment for the presidency, but it was also completely in character. It was Trump being Trump.

As most congressional Republicans see it, they faced a stark choice in 2016 and they're trying to accomplish what good they can with Trump as the leader of their party. What more can really be expected of them, they think, in terms of holding the president accountable?

Arizona's Flake, a staunch GOP Trump critic, has been urging his colleagues to speak out and tell the whole truth when Trump is wrong and to pass legislation if they believe his policies are wrong. Flake has also been pointing out that there's nothing that requires Republicans to renominate Trump when the primaries kick off 18 months from now. "It would be a tough go in a Republican primary. The Republican party is the Trump party right now. But that's not to say it will stay that way," Flake said on *Meet the Press* in March. As Flake noted at the time, the reason he isn't running for reelection in Arizona is because "I couldn't be reelected in my party right now. Somebody who voices reservations about where the president is or criticizes his behavior … it's tough to be reelected in the Republican party."

It is unlikely Republicans could successfully replace Trump in 2020 (only once since 1884 has a primary challenger prevented an incumbent president from securing renomination, and that was in 1968 over an issue as consequential and divisive as the Vietnam war). But Flake's point still stands: If Republicans are genuinely disturbed by Trump's character and temperament, they could nominate any other Republican who likes conservative judges but wouldn't side with an anti-American autocrat on foreign soil.

For Flake, Helsinki simply confirmed his view that Trump needs to face a GOP primary challenger. "Yes, I've said that consistently," Flake told The Weekly Standard as he jumped into a Senate elevator. Asked if he'd thought any more about running himself, he chuckled a bit. "Somebody needs to," he said.

The problem for Flake—or whoever that "somebody" might be—is that polls suggest the Helsinki summit did little to change Republican views of the president: A CBS News poll released on July 19 found that although only 32 percent of Americans overall approved of how Trump conducted himself at the Helsinki summit with Putin, 68 percent of Republicans approved of the president's behavior. ♦

VALERY SHARIFULIN / TASS / AFP / GETTY

Dictator Diplomacy

The unhappy track record of happy talk.

BY JAMIE FLY

President Donald Trump likes to claim that he represents a break with the past, veering away from the failed policies of his predecessors in an "America First" direction. Yet as shown in vivid detail by his meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, President Trump's handling of rogue regimes is eerily reminiscent of President Barack Obama's approach to America's foes.

While Democrats may want to deny it now, talking to antagonists was a key tenet of the Obama doctrine. As Ben Rhodes writes in his new memoir, "It. Is. Not. A. Reward. To. Talk. To. Folks." Rhodes recounts candidate Obama pounding "his open palm on the table as he spoke" to enunciate the point during a strategy session for his 2008 run. During that campaign, Obama chastised the Bush administration for its standoffish approach toward rogue regimes, saying "the notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them—which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of this administration—is ridiculous."

"I will meet not just with our friends but with our enemies, because I remember what Kennedy said, that we should never negotiate out of fear but we should never fear to negotiate," he said at another point.

Hillary Clinton went so far as to accuse Obama of being naïve for such views, and Republicans roundly criticized this approach to the world in 2008 and in 2012 when Mitt Romney derided what he called the president's global "apology tour."

Yet throughout his presidency, President Obama stuck to his belief in the power of diplomacy with despots, pursuing a "reset" with Russia that morphed into promising "more flexibility" after his reelection, conversing with Chinese leaders, concluding a nuclear deal with Iran, and personally engaging with Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Raúl Castro of Cuba.

North Korea's Kim Jong-un with Trump in Singapore, June 12

Like President Obama, President Trump seems to have few hesitations about engaging totalitarian leaders. In addition to his meeting with Putin, he recently concluded a historic summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and has spoken proudly of the relationship he has developed with China's Xi Jinping. After his disastrous press conference with Putin, he tweeted that their confab was "even better" than his meetings with allies that led up to it.

Despite his withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, Trump has even speculated about modeling Iran negotiations on his outreach to Kim Jong-un. One State Department official recently went so far as to express hope that the Iranian mullahs—men with the blood of hundreds of Americans and Israelis on their hands—would become "statesmen wise enough to recognize and respond to what Secretary Pompeo described as our 'commitment to diplomacy to help solve the greatest challenges, even with our staunchest adversaries.'"

Why has the Trump administration embraced this Obama obsession with diplomatic engagement of totalitarians? Some of it likely stems from their shared fatigue with America's international commitments. A country focused on "nation-building at home" can't dictate terms to foreign adversaries. Standing up to thugs requires a willingness to use force, or at a minimum to deploy forces to strategic locations and keep them there, something that both President Obama and President Trump have shown an aversion to. President Obama allowed Russia to insert itself into Syria's civil war and now President Trump is negotiating the consolidation of that fact.

It is also a byproduct of a view that America is just one among many in a crowded global landscape. Just like Obama with Iran, Cuba, and Russia, Trump seems willing to set aside America's traditional focus on universal values and to ignore the nature of hostile regimes in his ardent pursuit of deals. Just as the Obama administration claimed that Iranian human rights would become a priority once a deal was inked with Tehran, and then promptly did little to advocate for the Iranian people, it's hard to believe that the Trump administration will ever press Kim Jong-un for better treatment of his people, much less the likes of Putin or Xi Jinping, given the issues he hopes to work with both on.

Recall that when given the

SAUL LOEB / AFP / GETTY

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opportunity to speak directly to the North Korean people during the Singapore summit, Trump's response was to say that their oppressor was "smart, loves his people, he loves his country." He has made similar naïve and damaging statements lauding Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping and undermining long-term American support for Russian and Chinese dissidents. Even President Obama was more circumspect, at least for the most part, in praising the oppressors he did business with. Cuba and Venezuela are the only two dictatorships that the Trump administration has consistently attempted to isolate.

The renaissance of dictator diplomacy that has now dominated two presidencies appears to be driven by a modernization myth. The pitch from Washington goes like this: Negotiate with us and great wealth and prosperity will follow as your country opens up to the world. Foreign investment will pour in; we might even send a few pallets of cash your way. In President Obama's case, he wasn't so brash as to propose condos on the Iranian coast, although Secretary of State John Kerry did at times try to act as the de facto head of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce.

This appeal betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of how totalitarian regimes work. Totalitarian leaders are not often in a position to deliver the reforms asked of them, even if they might want to. Their aura of absolute power may appear alluring to President Trump. Yet as President Reagan said of the Soviet leadership in a speech on East-West relations in 1982, they maintain their grip on power because "they fear what might happen if even the smallest amount of control slips from their grasp."

Reagan's views are worth noting because he is the president most often cited by defenders of the Obama-Trump dictator engagement doctrine. If Reagan could negotiate with the Soviets, why shouldn't an American president at least talk to this or that dictator?

Well, for one thing, the tyrant in Pyongyang doesn't rule the Soviet empire (nor does Putin). Kim's country is an isolated backwater. And the human rights situation in North Korea is in many respects even worse than that of the Soviet Union. As a 2014 U.N. Commission of Inquiry found, the Kim regime's violations of fundamental human rights "constitute crimes against humanity. . . . The gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world."

Nor is North Korea comparable to Vietnam, an example Secretary of State Pompeo has tried to promote to his North Korean interlocutors. Vietnam and China have gone through slow, methodical openings completely unlike the transformation that is being suggested for North Korea. The ruling parties in those countries still live on a knife's edge, worried about their future on a daily basis.

There are many unexplored ways to pressure Pyongyang if President Trump so chooses. In the broad sweep of history, North Korea is a minor nuisance to U.S. national security compared with the more pressing challenge of China's rise. Similarly, while President Putin cannot be ignored, the United States and Russia will both be fine if each side defends its interests in Syria and new arms control agreements are postponed until Russia stops cheating on those it has already signed.

Much as President Trump has decided that Cuba and Venezuela are not worthy of his diplomatic time and attention, other dictatorships can be isolated and pressured through means besides military force or a Trump charm offensive. The power of totalitarians is always more fragile than it appears to those on the outside. These are regimes run by leaders keeping the masses at bay with purges while themselves cowering behind loyalist security forces. These are not strong, confident individuals.

This fundamental insecurity, not the NATO-led intervention, was what brought about the bloody downfall of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya after he gave up his nuclear program yet failed to open up politically. Nuclear weapons can't protect you from your own people, and neither can noninterference pledges from the United States. Freedom will eventually win.

That is why Kim Jong-un is not interested in giving North Koreans a better life or more access to the outside world. Doing so would likely be the beginning of a bloody end for him and his family. Thus without fundamental regime change in Pyongyang, the journey President Trump began with Kim last month is likely to be a fruitless one.

President Trump would do well to heed President George W. Bush's conclusion in his memoirs after eight years of dealing with Kim's father: "In the long run, I am convinced the only path to meaningful change is for the North Korean people to be free." It is a relevant lesson that applies to all totalitarian states.

American presidents are shortsighted to ignore the power of freedom. Their status as duly elected representatives of the American people can be their greatest asset when dealing with undemocratic negotiating partners. It is not, as President Trump appears to believe, a liability that limits his power.

Compare Reagan's summitry with the Soviets with that of Trump gladhanding Putin in Helsinki and one immediately sees the fundamental difference. Reagan knew that it was he, not the despot across the table, who held the most power in the relationship.

The Obama-Trump approach to dictators may seem alluring in a time of increased distaste for an engaged American leadership in the world. Yet it ultimately ends up empowering rogue regimes at the expense of American security and that of our allies.

Better to isolate the rogues and marshal our resources to help those on the inside who, as Reagan noted, embody "man's instinctive desire for freedom and self-determination." It's strategically smarter and morally more in line with America's founding purpose to undermine dictatorships from within rather than to empower oppressors.

It is also, as President Trump is starting to find out, easier than attempting to cut a deal with the devil. ♦

One of a Kind

Why the success of the Federalist Society is unlikely to be replicated. BY TOD LINDBERG

With President Trump's nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court seat Justice Anthony Kennedy is vacating, the influence of the Federalist Society—the membership organization of conservative and libertarian lawyers, legal scholars, and law students—remains at the absolute peak it attained during the administration of George W. Bush with the nomination of Samuel Alito to the nation's highest court.

Founded in 1982 and led by the indefatigable Leonard Leo, the Federalist Society launched as a counterbalance to the leftward tilt among law school faculty nationwide. Part of the idea was to ensure that the progressive hegemony on campus met serious resistance at least at the level of intellectual debate, if not the numerical balance among faculties. But within 20 years of its establishment, the Federalist Society had also emerged as the premier vetting institution for Republican appointments to the federal judiciary, especially at the appellate level.

The Federalist Society established itself in that role not through some gradual consensus-building process—nor, as the conspiracy-minded left likes to suggest, through a cabal of right-wing lawyers determined to hijack judicial nominations. Rather, it rose to the top the old-fashioned way in politics: by taking down someone of whom it did not approve.

Her name was Harriet Miers, and from managing partner at a 400-lawyer Dallas firm of no special distinction she traveled to Washington in 2001 with President George W. Bush to serve in several increasingly senior White House positions, culminating as White House counsel—the president's top lawyer. Then in 2005, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor announced her retirement from the Supreme Court. The partisan balance in the Senate was 55-45 in favor of the GOP, but the quaint convention of the filibuster still applied to judicial nominees, prompting concerns about confirmability. To arrive at the 60 votes needed to end debate and get to an up-or-down majority vote, you presumably needed to keep your party together and recruit a few senators from the other side.

George W. Bush introduces Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers, October 3, 2005.

This challenge arose in a likewise antiquated time when senators (some of them, at least some of the time) expressed the view that a president's choice was due considerable deference and that the Senate should confirm nominees of requisite competence, experience, and good character. Even so, you can't be too careful, and a nominee with a little special sauce might enjoy preferment over yet another white guy just starting to gray at the temples—especially because John Roberts, just having been confirmed as chief justice, was exactly that guy.

It was at this point that Bush experienced a flight of fancy of the sort that used to be rare in presidents. His eye lighting upon the very person in the White House who typically serves as the president's top judge picker, he had a moment straight out of a Taylor Swift song: "You wake up and find / that what you're looking for has been here the whole time." On October 3, 2005, he nominated Miers.

This came as a surprise to everybody, not least Miers, who was in no way ready for a confirmation process that is at best an ordeal for even impeccably qualified and experienced nominees. Initially, tepid supporters said she would at least bring a little diversity of legal background to the Supreme Court. But this was perhaps too reminiscent of Sen. Roman Hruska's defense of Nixon High Court nominee G. Harrold Carswell: "Even if he is mediocre, there are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers, and they are entitled to a little representation, aren't they?"

Well, no. Democratic opposition to Miers was swift in coming, but predictable. Less expected and far more compelling was the gathering revolt of the conservative legal community the Federalist Society represents (though the organization takes no position on such matters): Presented with a second rare and important opportunity to shape the Court, Bush simply had to do better. He had available the best legal minds of their generation—sober, talented, tireless men and women who had spent their entire lives preparing themselves for such a chance. Over the course of three weeks, the anger mounted. On October 27, the White House announced it was withdrawing Miers's nomination.

Bush got the message, standing

MATTHEW CAVANAUGH / GETTY

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up in her stead Samuel Alito (special sauce: Italian—albeit unoriginal after Antonin Scalia, still tasty). From the majority viewpoint of Federalist Society members, he was a choice as impeccable as Roberts had been for chief justice (disappointment with the latter over his ruling saving Obamacare was still seven years away).

The Federalist Society reigned supreme over the process, as it does to this day. A key strategic move on the part of candidate Trump in 2016 was effectively to outsource his Supreme Court picks to Leonard Leo and his colleagues, who developed a list of Supremables from which Trump promised to pick (a list that didn't originally include Kavanaugh or Neil Gorsuch, Trump's first appointment, but was expanded in timely fashion to get them into consideration). In response to another body with the proven power to derail a GOP Supreme Court nominee, Trump sought the Federalist Society's advance "advice and consent."

The Federalist Society is a remarkably effective institution, a collective effort among conservative and libertarian women and men of the law to band together and promote their best and brightest for the highest positions in the federal judiciary. So effective is it that some nonpartisan admirers have proposed it serve as a model for promoting excellence in other endeavors as well.

In fact, that's unlikely. The Federalist Society's role in judge-picking is ultimately a product of the unique place of the judiciary in the constitutional order of things and of the emergence of the judiciary as an ideological battleground.

A self-described political "independent" can count on never being nominated as an appeals court judge. Republican presidents pick Republicans and Democrats pick Democrats. This fact alone accounts for the (perpetually contested) balance of Republicans and Democrats serving as judges.

The path to a black robe typically begins at an elite law school, with the next stop an appellate court clerkship, then a Supreme Court clerkship, then some mix of government service, private practice, and scholarship, then a nomination to the appellate bench and confirmation (or rejection). In their selection of clerks, the role that key sitting judges of both parties play in this winnowing process can hardly be overstated. But Democrats have something that Republicans don't, which is dominance among faculty at elite law schools, where Republicans enjoy only tokenish representation (one is tolerable, maybe two—but that will do nicely, thank you).

The Federalist Society goes a ways toward filling that gap. It might also deserve credit for the presence of even token conservatives on law faculties, through its promotion of intellectual excellence. But with appointment powers at law schools, unlike the presidential power of appointment to the federal judiciary squarely in the hands of left-wing faculty, don't expect the Federalist Society's influence ever to extend so far. For the same reason, no equivalent society of conservative-leaning political scientists could bring balance to those departments—let alone one of English Ph.D.s promoting critical interpretation of a literary canon and argument over who belongs in it on the literary merits.

And that's why there are no such societies outside the field of law. The Federalist Society is a remarkable success story unlikely to be replicated. ♦

Both Sides Now

The National Park Service's skewed teaching on Japanese internment. BY DAVID DEVOSS

Manzanar, Calif.

Revisionist history once was associated with Soviet Russia, where leaders repeatedly erased the names of disfavored revolutionaries like Trotsky and Kamenev from the nation's collective memory and airbrushed rivals from old photos. Today it is increasingly prevalent in the United States, whether it's students agitating for the removal of Woodrow Wilson's name from buildings at Princeton University in the name of racial justice or the American Library Association stripping the name of Laura Ingalls Wilder from a literary award because she failed to anticipate 21st-century standards of inclusiveness in her attitudes about Native Americans.

One organization you might expect to dispense unadulterated history is the National Park Service, but its "interpreters" readily inject p.c. bias. Certainly this is the case at the Manzanar National Historic Site in California's Eastern Sierra. I visited Manzanar the day after the Supreme Court's *Trump* v. *Hawaii* ruling that found the executive branch had the authority to limit travel from countries posing a national security risk. California's papers were full of angry editorials comparing the decision to *Korematsu* v. *United States*, the 1944 ruling that said the forced internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II did not violate the Constitution. Largely unmentioned was *Korematsu*'s companion case, *Ex parte Endo*, which ordered the immediate release of all Japanese-Americans loyal to the United States.

The internment of Japanese was wrong. A 1983 report entitled "Personal Justice Denied," by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, concluded that the incarceration beginning in 1942 of 110,000 Japanese-Americans, in 10 relocation centers in seven states, resulted from "wartime hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

Most National Park Service sites

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aim for historical balance. At the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Montana, the NPS not only tells the story of the annihilation of George Armstrong Custer's Seventh Cavalry but also explains why the Sioux and Cheyenne were so ferocious in their attack. At Manzanar, however, there is little attempt to put internment into its wartime context. Japanese were "dehumanized" because unrelated families were forced to live together in barracks, use communal toilet and shower facilities (like those that existed on every U.S. Army forward operating base in Iraq), and eat apple butter and mutton (like many other Americans during the war, since butter and beef were rationed at that time).

Bernadette Johnson, the National Park Service superintendent at Manzanar, walked us into a rough wooden barracks similar to what any lake house or rural cabin might have resembled during that period. "Entire families were put in here without partitions that would provide privacy," she says. "Manzanar even had an orphanage. It was a prison within a prison."

According to Johnson, Manzanar should forever be remembered as a "stain on the history of America." The adversity visited upon American and British civilians interned in Manila and Singapore is never mentioned. "That's not a story we tell here," she says. "Several years ago we asked people in California what themes should receive interpretation, and that point never came up."

At Manzanar, Japanese internment is portrayed as motivated by racism pure and simple. Johnson knows about but does not publicly discuss Japanese pilot Shigenori Nishikaichi, whose Zero fighter crashed December 7, 1941, on Hawaii's Ni'ihau Island after ground fire from Oahu punctured his aircraft's fuel tank. The first person he met was Yoshio Harada, a farmer of Japanese ethnicity who, along with his wife, helped Nishikaichi evade capture for six days. After local Hawaiians killed the pilot, Harada committed suicide, but the fact remained that the first time a Japanese-American had the opportunity to help a Japanese soldier he did.

Restored barracks at the Manzanar National Historic Site

Did internment stem from racism alone or was Ni'ihau a contributing factor? "Well, it's complicated," says Burl Burlingame, historian at the Pacific Aviation Museum on Pearl Harbor's Ford Island, where the remains of Nishikaichi's Zero are on display. "There was racism, no doubt, but government policy and public comments probably resulted more from the fact that Japan was our enemy than that they looked differently." Adds Burlingame: "At the same time we were demonizing the Japanese, we were glorifying the Chinese," who were allies in the war.

Bigotry is the only explanation offered at Manzanar for FDR's February 1942 executive order, which authorized the War Department to "prescribe military areas . . . from which any or all persons may be excluded." As interpreted, military areas meant California and parts of Oregon, Washington, and Arizona. As applied, the directive targeted only persons of Japanese ancestry.

But the order was written barely two months after the Imperial Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in a period of tremendous anxiety and justifiable national security concerns, notes Ken Masugi, a senior fellow at California's Claremont Institute whose parents were among the 110,000 Japanese-Americans relocated under FDR's order. When Tokyo's Imperial Army invaded neighboring Asian nations, Japanese immigrants already there often assisted the arriving troops. Remittances from Japanese-Americans continued to flow back home even after Japan's brutal invasion of China. Before December 7, 1941, most ethnic Japanese newspapers in the United States had been effusive in praising Japan's military. Even more troubling was Washington's knowledge that Tokyo had drawn up plans to collaborate with ethnic Japanese, who comprised almost half of Hawaii's population, if it ever conquered the territory.

Masugi objects to the term "internment" except as it pertains to Japanese nationals, some of whom, like German and Italian nationals in America, were detained for the duration of the war. Ordinary Japanese-Americans "in the camps always had the option of leaving," says Masugi. "My parents would leave for seasonal employment." Other relatives left permanently for jobs outside the West Coast exclusion zone.

The National Park Service is right to retell and preserve the stories of people forced to live at Manzanar. But ignoring the events and fears leading to their internment and telling the story as a simple morality tale about racial prejudice does a disservice to America's Greatest Generation. Says Masugi: "The laziest historical fallacy is for those who know how the story ends to judge those who were writing it as if the conclusion was inevitable and obvious." ♦

DAVID DEVOSS

The Moral Ledger

The pitfalls of weighing Trump's actions one at a time and hoping thereby to arrive at a judicious assessment

By Andy Smarick

In recent months, a consensus has emerged among the conservative dissidents of the Trump era: We'll continue to oppose the president when his policies and practices are counter to our principles, they say, but also be sure to publicly give credit whenever he stakes out an agreeable position on any issue that matters. During the campaign, obdurate opposition served the purpose of challenging his candidacy and elevating his competitors, but now, with Trump sitting in the Oval Office, the thinking goes, it smacks of sour grapes—and, given that he does do things with which we agree, it amounts to cutting off our noses to spite our faces. So, serve as the loyal opposition as necessary but join the cause when possible.

Maybe there's a limit.

It is a coherent approach. It is the pragmatic one. But it is unsatisfying and unsettling. And with each casual lie, crude insult, attack on the media, slight of the intelligence community, and example of grotesque servility to Russia's dictator, it increasingly appears morally misguided.

The first problem with itemizing and compartmentalizing is that actions can't be treated as discrete. In politics, they are the direct result of a system's arrangements and a leader's philosophy. They reflect the larger enterprise. We deceive ourselves by separating quiet streets from the oppressive police state that brought them about. We shouldn't laud an initiative to aid the impoverished if it's part of a Rawlsian undertaking that continuously impinges on liberty. Support for modernizing an outdated social convention is irresponsible if the larger agenda aims to replace all traditions with state-controlled institutions. In other words, we have to be mindful of a position's pedigree and its role in a broader program. If President Trump has a modus operandi, it is the control, manipulation, and distortion of information: hiding his tax returns, meeting with Putin alone, firing the FBI director investigating him, lying habitually, undermining the media, pitting staff against each other. We are being purposely obtuse if we don't assess his executive actions in this context. Our constant need to cordon off specific Trump actions from others is a red flag waving in the wind.

Almost every leader in history has had some redeeming characteristic or some defensible initiative. Even profoundly objectionable figures and the profoundly objectionable systems they created were often able to persist because they provided some good to some number of people—the making-the-trains-run-on-time argument. But time judges unkindly those who cheered the timely trains. Some of history's most ghastly arrangements have been defended by relentlessly pointing to some number of their benefits and turning a blind eye to their costs. This does more than debase debate, it does long-term harm: It serves as a conscience-protecting strategy exactly when our consciences shouldn't be protected.

But even when we openly acknowledge the price of bad leadership, questions about duty and justice may not be well served by creating a list of positive and negative effects. That's doubly true when the stated purpose of the exercise is to find areas of agreement. On virtually any matter, we can populate the positive side. Stealing stimulates a rush of adrenaline, makes you look tough, and provides some immediate profit. The danger lies in falsely equating the value of the ticks in both columns.

MICHAEL B. THOMAS / AFP / GETTY

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Obviously, items carry vastly different weights, a fact that is easily lost when we take great pains to offer praise—*Yes, Trump defended racists in Charlottesville and endorsed the morally compromised Roy Moore in Alabama, but, in fairness, he is speaking out on the opioid crisis.*

Worse, the line separating the columns artificially quarantines the negatives. It treats as separable the indivisible effects of an activity. In actuality, a sound moral system would recognize that some negatives infect all associated positives. The desire for peace with Russia is not a plus when purchased with sycophancy to a despot. We must substantially discount the upside of attempts at normalizing relations with North Korea when a brutal dictator is legitimized by appearing in a photograph alongside our head of state. It is shrewd for a bad actor to ask that we detach his various choices from one another and focus on the positives of each. We needn't, and shouldn't, acquiesce.

A leader's choices produce credits and debits, and these must ultimately be reconciled. Even a strictly utilitarian approach to Trump demands that we do more than note the existence of different entries; we also have to tally them up, to have an accounting. That means we need to evaluate the positives in light of the negatives. It's not enough to give credit in isolation—*well, unemployment has remained low*. The banker isn't impressed by a bunch of deposits if your withdrawals exceed them; he'll still send the repo man.

Though this point may seem obvious, it's worth underscoring. The nature of the four-year term allows us a delay in the reckoning. And the nature of our polarized, binary parties encourages us to avoid any accounting detrimental to our team. The itemize-and-compartmentalize approach focuses our attention on the entries, not the balance. The problem in the case of the Trump administration is that its moral debits are skyrocketing. Material and irreparable harm is being done to our nation, our institutions, and our norms, as well as to conservatism and the Republican party. It is instructive that Trump is not unfamiliar with the use of bankruptcy proceedings to avoid the consequences of accumulating financial debts. He seems to understand profits as bankable and losses as expungeable. But since the rest of us will foot the bill for his administration's moral profligacy, we don't have the luxury of confining our attention to just one line of the ledger.

But even the ledger approach has two major flaws: one related to the past, the other to the future. Both are traditionally addressed by elements of the conservative disposition—which, unfortunately, is currently in abeyance.

The first problem is that in assessing the effects of immorality, it is impossible in real time to account for costs. We typically reap immediately the benefits of, in the language of game theory, "defection." Whether lying or embezzlement, infidelity or illicit drug use, hiding income or abusing welfare programs, social offenses can seem utterly inconsequential in the immediate term. It can even be difficult to imagine how they could prove corrosive to society at large. And certainly, in the moment, we have no means of assessing their costs.

But conservatives have always known that prior generations grappled with these very same types of problems. They are simply expressions of the human condition. The conservative appreciates that our predecessors, through ages of trial and error, developed laws and conventions in response. It is precisely because we know the long-term dangers of certain categories of behavior but lack the capacity to quantify or explain them that we have social rules against things like mendacity, lassitude, and lasciviousness and in favor of selflessness, judiciousness, and initiative.

The itemize-and-compartmentalize approach focuses our attention on the entries, not the balance. The problem in the case of the Trump administration is that its moral debits are skyrocketing.

It is no coincidence that such rules are consonant with the instructions of our faith traditions—from the Ten Commandments to the Golden Rule and beyond. For the purposes of public action, it is immaterial which came first, secular conventions or religious commands. What matters is that they tell us the exact same things in the exact same way: Follow these rules of behavior, even if they seem quaint or troublesome, because they reflect the wisdom of authorities that you cannot subject to cross-examination—countless previous generations or the Almighty. These precepts aren't ancient, now-useless vestiges waiting to be shed; they're robust features that have stood the test of time because of their immeasurable wisdom.

Of course, there's a certain adolescent glee in deriding and dismissing old, stuffy things like modesty and prudence—in laughing off Trump's Twitter taunts, congenital dishonesty, and breaches of protocol. *Stop being so dramatic*, they say: *None of that really matters—we got tax cuts!* They cry *Gorsuch* as if it were downright silly to handwring when the plus-side entries are tangible bonanzas and the minus-side entries are intangible norm-breakers like "attacking the media" and "insulting longtime allies." But we are only able to scoff at the violation of longstanding

conventions if we believe standards of behavior are just polite society's decoration, the moral frippery of prigs. But norms are our community's load-bearing walls. Undermine them too often, and the edifice will collapse.

The second flaw of the moral ledger is that it appears perfectly designed, at least during the Trump era, to facilitate our slowly succumbing to temptation. If we're prevented from invoking a NeverTrump-style "This entire endeavor is off the rails," we're consigned to making a series of episodic mini-assessments. We might celebrate a positive and then balance it against a recent negative. Even if the cost is higher than the payoff, as long as the debit isn't too large, we won't be seriously chastened. The pleasure of four drinks on a Tuesday night doesn't make up for the pain of the Wednesday morning hangover, but they're roughly comparable. So maybe next time it can be five drinks. Then six. Like the frog that steadily acclimates to—but ultimately dies from—water rising to a boil, we can be oblivious to the gradual escalation of costs.

Few tragic figures go from saint to scourge overnight. Instead, they engage in a long pattern of compromises that grow in size: riskier affairs, a few more pills, increasingly shady deals. So long as short-term rationalizations are possible, decline can proceed unabated and largely unnoticed. This is why *But Gorsuch* is so insidious. It is the pro that excused so many cons: the growing attacks on the media, the callous border policy, the belittling of the intelligence community. Have no doubt that *But Kavanaugh* will justify an even more alarming set of behaviors. Should another seat on the Court open, we could find ourselves *But Barrett-ing* into the abyss. Trump himself alerted us to this path when he proudly noted, back in January 2016, that his behavior to that point had produced loyalists who'd support him even if he shot someone on Fifth Avenue. What even worse sins, we have to ask ourselves, would his behavior since then compel his supporters to disregard?

Perhaps when dealing with officious neighbors or prickly colleagues, finding silver linings in dark clouds is practical, a kind of survival technique for just making it through the day. When the stakes are low, itemizing and compartmentalizing may be sensible. But given the enormity of the stakes, placing a gold star on the president's occasional successful assignment is unwarranted and unwise. The road to Hell is paved with a piecemeal, situational approach to morality. ♦

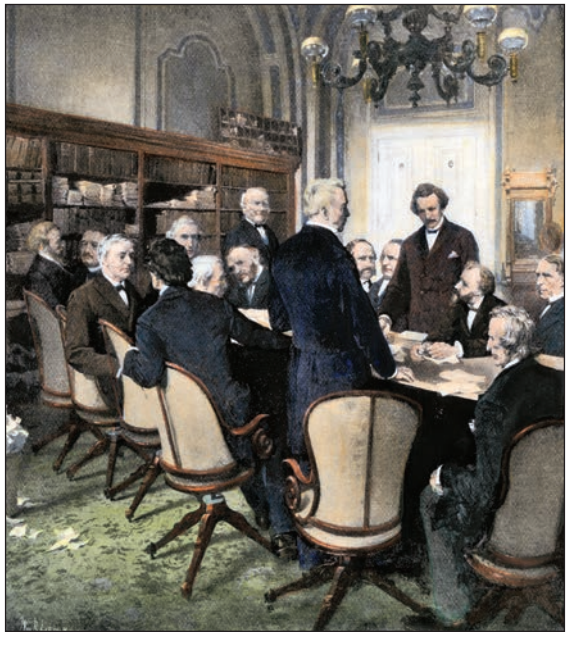
1868 and All That

Was the Fourteenth Amendment a new Constitution?

By Allen C. Guelzo

If getting legislation through Congress is comparable to making sausage, then the best comparison for constitutional amendments is the dropping of a nuclear bomb. Acts of Congress can be vetoed, struck down, and even neutered by executive hostility. But amending the Constitution is lengthy, unpopular, and (for most practical purposes) final. Amendments might well come with a warning label: Be careful what you wish for.

The Fourteenth Amendment, which was ratified 150 years ago at the fever-pitch of Reconstruction, is exemplary. It is, for one thing, the longest and most oddly constructed of the Constitution's 27 amendments, since it contains not one but *five* unrelated provisions. It is also the first place where the Constitution was finally made to address a question that ought to have been of prime importance to the original Constitutional Convention in 1787—*who is a citizen of the United States*? Yet it introduced language into that definition, about the "privileges or immunities" of those citizens and their "equal protection," which has fueled judicial confusion ever since.



The House and Senate Joint Committee on Reconstruction, creator of the Fourteenth Amendment

Ask a liberal, and you will be told that the Fourteenth Amendment enacted "a second American constitution" that stands "in radical contrast to the Constitution drafted in Philadelphia and amended by the Bill of Rights in 1791." Ask a conservative, and you may hear that the Fourteenth Amendment has become the Trojan horse for "living constitutionalism," while at the same time offering the best shield against affirmative action.

Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce professor of the Civil War era at Gettysburg College.

The Fourteenth Amendment was the offspring of Reconstruction, and like much of what happened at the end of the Civil War to reintegrate the states of the breakaway Southern Confederacy into the federal Union, it was less of a plan and more of an improvisation. The war actually ended with a constitutional amendment—the Thirteenth, abolishing slavery—and in the euphoria that ensued over the Union's victory, it was easy for Abraham Lincoln and his triumphant Republican party to believe that this would be the "king's cure for all the evils" slavery had brought on the nation.

It wasn't. After Lincoln's murder, his vice president and successor, Andrew Johnson, allowed the Southern states to write their own rules for readmittance to the government—which they did, and in the most defiant fashion possible. They elected to Congress a solid phalanx of Southern Democrats, including 13 ex-Confederate generals, onetime members of the Confederate Congress, and the former vice president of the Confederacy. On the state level, they enacted a series of "Black Codes" to ensure that none of the freed slaves was permitted to vote, run for office, or even own firearms.

In fact, since slavery was now abolished, the three-fifths clause of the Constitution (which permitted slave states to count three-fifths of their slave populations toward determining the number of representatives they sent to Congress) ceased to operate, and the onetime Confederate states would henceforth be entitled to count *five-fifths* of their African-American populations, without conceding to them a single civil right worth the name. The same secessionists who brought on the Civil War could thus be reelected to Congress, and in greater numbers than ever before. Nervously, Republicans realized

NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES / ALAMY

that it would not take much before these newly returned Southerners reestablished their old prewar alliances with northern Democrats, repealing wartime Republican legislation on banking, tariffs, and a transcontinental railroad, and maybe even voting for the federal government to assume the Confederacy's wartime debts.

To head them off, the Republican majority in Congress refused to seat the new Southern representatives and then began passing legislation protecting various civil rights for the freedmen, creating a new federal agency, the Freedmen's Bureau, to help implement them. But statutes are only statutes, and President Johnson unhesitatingly vetoed the Freedmen's Bureau bill and every other piece of civil rights legislation that crossed his desk. In frustration, the Republican-dominated Joint Committee on Reconstruction turned once again to the amendment weapon and proceeded to design a document that would plug the holes the Thirteenth Amendment hadn't.

The Fourteenth Amendment was the offspring of Reconstruction, and like much of what happened at the end of the Civil War to reintegrate the Confederate states into the Union, it was less a plan and more an improvisation.

Some of the hole-plugging was relatively straightforward. When the Joint Committee reported the text of the new amendment to Congress in April 1866, it clearly banned payment by the federal government (or any state government) of "any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against the United States." Likewise, Confederate generals, congressmen, judges, and vice presidents would be ineligible to hold federal office without an explicit congressional pardon. Above all, no Confederate state would be able to inflate its representation in Congress by counting the newly freed slaves unless those freedmen were also granted equal political participation as citizens in electing those representatives.

But what made someone a *citizen*? The term was used five times in the Constitution's text, but the usage was divided between references to citizens of the states and citizens of the United States, and without defining either. The Supreme Court's infamous *Dred Scott* v. *Sanford* decision of 1857 tried to impose a definition—*jus sanguinis*—which, like ancient Athens, established citizenship by biological descent. Hence, an African-American like Dred Scott could have no standing before the U.S. Supreme Court because, being of African descent, he was incapable of being a U.S. citizen. "A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves," announced Chief Justice Roger Taney, "is not a 'citizen' within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States," nor could he ever be entitled "to any of the privileges and immunities of a citizen."

Thaddeus Stevens, the most powerful member of the Joint Committee, believed he could decapitate these legal obstacles simply by adding to the proposed amendment a single sentence: "No discrimination shall be made by any state, nor by the United States, as to the civil rights of persons because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." But Ohio representative John Bingham, who had made the original call for a new amendment, objected that this would actually clarify nothing, or at least nothing necessary to the fundamental problem of who was a citizen and what rights citizens were to enjoy. So the Joint Committee offered an alternative: first, define national citizenship, which it proposed to do on the basis of an entirely different rule, *jus solis*. *Jus solis* determined citizenship not by blood or biological descent, but by place of birth. Hence, "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." That would include virtually all of the freed slaves, without any further ado.

But what, exactly, would this citizenship confer on the citizen? Bingham answered that in a second clause aimed directly at any effort to strip away political participation from the freedmen through the Black Codes. "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." The Senate passed the new amendment by a majority of 33-to-11 on June 8, 1866, followed by a whopping 120-to-32 margin in the House of Representatives on June 13.

Ratification, however, proved more rocky, especially since none of the former Confederate states wanted to strip itself of powers it thought Andrew Johnson had promised to protect. Even though Congress had begun installing new state governments in the South under the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, only 22 states had ratified the amendment by its first anniversary, six shy of the needed two-thirds. It took a blunt threat from Congress to refuse seating in the House or Senate to any ex-Confederate state failing to ratify the amendment to move five Southern states (and Iowa) into providing the clinching votes. (Even then, Ohio, Oregon, and New Jersey attempted to rescind their ratifications when their state

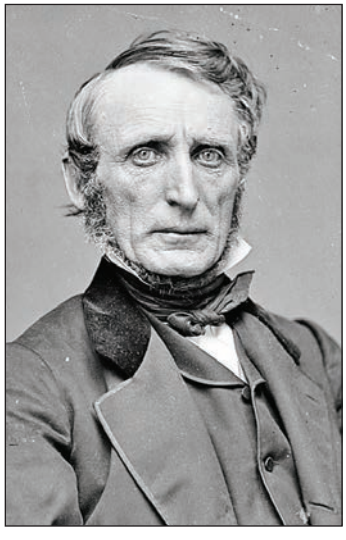
legislatures passed into Democratic hands.) The final ratification came on July 9, 1868, from South Carolina's newly reconstructed Republican legislature.

For Republicans like John Bingham, the most dramatic part of the Fourteenth Amendment was the shift in defining national citizenship from Chief Justice Taney's *jus sanguinis* to *jus solis*, followed closely by the sharp limitations on the damage resulting from the end of the three-fifths clause and the refusal to assume the Confederate debt. All modern legal argument, however, has been about the phrases Bingham wrote into the second sentence of the amendment, about privileges or immunities, due process, and equal protection.

The Constitution already contained language about "privileges and immunities" in Article IV, and about "due process" in the Fifth Amendment. But it was far from clear whether Bingham intended merely to reaffirm that usage or to introduce something new. "Privileges and immunities" was a phrase borrowed from English common law and appeared to mean nothing more than that residents of one state who did business in, or who traveled through, another state should not be denied access to the opportunities and protections of that other state. (This might seem obvious today; it was much less so before 1787, when states like New York attempted to impose tariffs on goods from other states.) In the same way, concerns about "due process" were confined to questions about correct judicial procedure, not about the substantive "fairness" of the laws.

But Bingham's language about "privileges or immunities" was different, since the Fourteenth Amendment spoke not about state-to-state comity but about what seemed to be an entirely new category, the "privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States." Bingham offered differing explanations of what these new "privileges or immunities" were, but he thought they involved at least some of the Bill of Rights, and perhaps even parts of Article IV, and that these overruled state laws. "That great want of the citizens and the stranger, protection by national law from unconstitutional State enactments, is supplied by the first section of this amendment," Bingham announced.

All modern legal argument regarding the Fourteenth Amendment has been about the phrases John Bingham wrote into the second sentence of the amendment, about privileges or immunities, due process, and equal protection.



Ohio congressman John Bingham

On the other hand, there is less evidence that Bingham's "privileges or immunities" intended to justify federal involvement in a wide range of state-based civil rights, such as voting. The amendment, Bingham explained, aimed only at enforcing "the bill of rights as it stands in the Constitution today. It 'hath that extent—no more.'" Five years later, Bingham added that "the privileges and immunities of citizens . . . are chiefly defined in the first eight amendments," but exist "contradistinguished from" the civil rights belonging to "citizens of a State."

In the 20th century, however, the Fourteenth Amendment became the rationale for an "incorporation" doctrine that used "privileges or immunities" and "due process" to hold state laws increasingly accountable to the Bill of Rights. The incorporation doctrine has been notorious as the foundation for much of modern "judicial activism," beginning with *Gitlow* v. *New York* in 1925, which saw the Supreme Court consider New York's Criminal Anarchy Law as a violation of the First Amendment, and blossoming under the hand of Justice Hugo Black. On the other hand, incorporation has also become an ally of conservative defenders of gun-ownership rights, since the two landmark cases that struck down municipal gun restrictions (*District of Columbia* v. *Heller* and *McDonald* v. *City of Chicago*) were based on the Supreme Court's invocation of the Second Amendment. Conservatives, in fact, were infuriated when the Court failed to apply the takings clause of the Fifth Amendment in *Kelo* v. *New London*; they had more reason to rejoice last month when *Masterpiece Cakeshop* v. *Colorado Civil Rights Commission* invoked the First Amendment to overturn a state administrative ruling.

Looking back over a century and a half, it is difficult to see the Fourteenth Amendment as a radical document, since (at least in its original intent) it made no explicit effort to federalize any broad range of civil rights. What is also true is that once the amendment was in place, it proved difficult to prevent that from happening. Perhaps the time may be at hand for the Supreme Court to clarify just how expansive it really wishes John Bingham's amendment to be. ♦

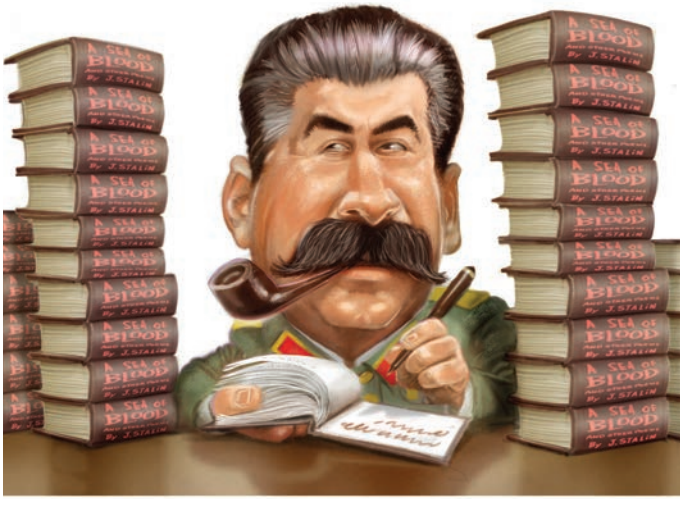
Author Authoritarians

The literary talent (or lack thereof) of tyrants at the typewriter.

BY ANTHONY DANIELS

The Infernal Library
On Dictators, the Books They Wrote, and Other Catastrophes of Literacy
by Daniel Kalder
Henry Holt, 400 pp., $30

There was a time when despots were content to be despots rather than philosopher-kings. The military dictator General Mariano Melgarejo, for example, is supposed to have once explained his title to the office: *I'm going to rule in Bolivia as long as I like, and if anyone tries to stop me I'll have him hanged from the nearest tree*. As he was reputed personally to have shot his predecessor, General Belzu, immediately afterwards asking the crowd that had just acclaimed Belzu as a hero whom they were shouting for now, his threat was taken seriously. He was not a man to be trifled with.



Latin American literature would have been much the poorer without despots (at least three Nobel laureates have been inspired by them), but this is not the kind of dictator literature that Daniel Kalder examines in *The Infernal Library*. Instead, books *by* rather than *about* despots are his subject, and by its end one is full of admiration for a man who, over a period of many years and with dogged perseverance, has ploughed through whole shelvesful of what must be among the dullest prose ever written. I am no enthusiast for the concept of the banality of evil, but if it has application anywhere, it is here, in books by dictators, especially totalitarian dictators. It is a sobering thought that men who consigned millions to their deaths usually expressed themselves in print with mind-numbing woodenness, waging war on imagination and triumphing in the struggle. Whether they were below average in natural literary ability is a question that cannot be answered without a scientific trial controlled for upbringing, intelligence, level of education, and so forth, but it is clear that they had little regard for the welfare of the reader and it is even possible in some cases that they desired nothing more than to drive him mad with boredom while also compelling him to read and memorize what they had written (or had had written at their behest, for not all dictators actually wrote what appeared under their names). Here, indeed, was something to satisfy the most refined sadist: to torture people with banality piled on cliché piled on falsehood.

For those of us for whom books and reading have been an integral part of existence, perhaps even thinking ourselves superior because of it, it is well to be reminded that literacy and authorship are not in themselves unequivocally good. Kalder points out that if Stalin had remained illiterate, as he might easily have done, the world would have been saved a lot of trouble; nor would the world have been much the poorer without *Mein Kampf* or *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. The country churchyard may contain many a mute inglorious Milton, but it might likewise contain many a mute would-have-been Hitler.

The prestige of the book as a cultural artifact has declined steeply of late, as is daily observable almost everywhere, but in the totalitarian century it was undiminished. Every tyrant wanted to publish a book; to have written one (or at least have his name affixed to it as the author) was proof of intellectual gravitas. In the Romania of the Ceausescus, for example, Elena's great work, a dissertation called *Stereospecific Polymerization of Isoprene*, was widely available, even when most other commodities were in short supply. As with Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, this was a book more to be seen with than read; it was the proof of loyal belief in the Ceausescus' superior intellect (Elena's husband, Nicolae, was known as the "Danube of Thought").

GARY LOCKE

Anthony Daniels is the author, most recently, of Grief and Other Stories *(as Theodore Dalrymple).*

According to Kalder, it was Lenin who was the founder of dictator literature, and if he was not yet a dictator when he started writing—it was 20 years, in fact, before he became one—his style was from the first perfectly suited to that of a totalitarian panjandrum for whom debate was treason or worse. To the very slight extent that his prose is readable at all, it is because of the hatred, scorn, and contempt of others that it breathes from first to last. It was as if he had bile, not blood, flowing through his veins. No one who has read Lenin's prose will find it at all surprising that one of his favorite literary genres once he achieved power was the death warrant.

A first edition of Hitler's Mein Kampf

Yet there was another side to Lenin. Underneath his adamantine exterior there beat a heart of the purest utopian mush. Once the cleansing sea of blood that he spilt had receded, a fairy-tale world would emerge in which Man would become truly Man (as against what he had been before) and live thenceforth in perfect harmony. How anybody older than 14—let alone someone as intelligent as Lenin—could have believed such a thing is a mystery, but he did believe it.

When it comes to bile among dictator-authors, perhaps only the Albanian Enver Hoxha could equal Lenin and Hitler. Stalin, for whom Hoxha retained the kind of reverence Muslims reserve for Muhammad, was the only person who, in his opinion, never betrayed him: Everyone else he ever knew turned out to be a traitor. As one might expect from a man who is said to have strangled one of his own ministers with his bare hands, there was for him no such thing as honest disagreement—and, actually, there is a plausible warrant for this belief in Marxist epistemology. Hoxha's prose, like Lenin's, oozes murder.

However, it would a mistake to think that there is absolutely no variety in dictator literature. Kalder, who occasionally descends to the demotic facetiousness that so many authors now seem to feel it necessary to adopt in order not to appear too elitist, is a good literary critic and makes proper distinctions between his authors. The book would have been a dull one if one dictator's writing had been as bad as another's, and bad in precisely the same way, but it was not. The fact that Kalder sometimes finds merit in a dictator's writing—usually, it must be admitted, *before* he became dictator, for power corrupts words among the many other things that it corrupts—is testimony to his laudable open-mindedness. His judgments are not facile.

He does not, for example, present Stalin as an intellectual nullity who somehow found himself, as if by pure chance, ruling a sixth of the world's land surface for a quarter of a century. One of Stalin's early poems entered anthologies of Georgian poetry *before* he had reached the kind of prominence in which he could dictate what went into anthologies; he read voraciously and with great care, and had an excellent memory; he was an artful exegete of Lenin's words to produce any conclusion he wanted, as and when he wanted it; his prose style, which a native Russian speaker told me was the best of all the old Bolsheviks' (not a high standard, admittedly), had at least the merit of directness and comprehensibility without, of course, elegance, to which it had no pretensions; and he certainly had a high enough opinion of the importance of literature to kill many authors, cunningly sparing others to heighten the tension among the literati. Like many another powerful autodidact, he was coarse and cultivated at the same time; he had a deep insight into the lowest characteristics of human nature, which, with his great intelligence, he used in the service of absolute evil.

Of all the dictators whose writings are examined in this book, by far the most talented—from the literary point of view—was Mussolini. One is reminded of what Valéry said of Napoleon: "What a pity to see a mind as great as Napoleon's devoted to trivial things such as empires, historic events, the thundering of cannons." I do not mean to draw an exact comparison, of course, but if Mussolini had not set his heart upon dictatorship he might well have been a significant writer. His First World War diary, for instance, has examples not only of fine writing, but of finer feeling:

> A little farther away an Austrian corpse—abandoned. The dead man still gripped in his teeth a part of his uniform which, strangely enough, was intact. But beneath it his flesh was decomposing, and I could see his bones. His shoes were missing. That was easy to understand. Austrian shoes are much better than ours.

This, in its economy, is about as far removed from Fascist bombast as it is possible to imagine. Or again:

> There is one of our missing men, a *Bersagliere* of the motorcycle corps. He lies with his head still stretched forward as if he was going to attack. Near him is his musket with the bayonet raised. He lies there alone. Why does no one bury him? In order to allow his family to keep the illusion that that he is "missing"? Perhaps.

It seems, then, that Mussolini squeezed the talent and humanity from himself in his thirst for power. This was something that other dictators did not have to do.

Unlike early Latin American caudillos, the 20th-century tyrant needed a doctrine to justify his power and so he elaborated or distilled one from his mostly mediocre mind. Again, one is full of admiration for an author who has plowed his way through such works as Nasser's *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Qaddafi's *Green Book* (which manages to combine brevity with tedium), and the *Rukhnama* of Saparmurat Niyazov, the bizarre post-Soviet dictator of Turkmenistan, whose vast tome is a mélange of the purest Soviet *langue de bois* and incomprehensible spiritual verbiage. No doubt these texts are of historical significance, but I am glad that someone else has performed the duty of reading and digesting them for me. The nadir of nadirs is perhaps reached by Kim Jong-il, by comparison with whom his father, Kim Il-sung, was P.G. Wodehouse:

> The Juche idea [that is, Kim's ideology of self-reliance] has established

DANIEL BEREHULAK / GETTY

> the viewpoint and attitude of dealing with everything in man's interests and approaching all changes and developments on the basis of man's activities.

Imagine having this stuff inescapably beamed at you for years on end and having to read, learn, and regurgitate it as if it were the acme of human thought and reflection! North Korea is not so much a country as a vast torture chamber, in which the torture ranges from the acutely murderous to the lifelong.

There are surprises in *The Infernal Library*. Kalder describes the plotting of Franco's only novel, *Raza*, as not wholly incompetent; even more surprisingly, he finds that Franco (in 1942) was not wholly without sympathy for the republican villain of his story. Kalder also finds that Ayatollah Khomeini's *Islamic Government* is "well constructed and clear; lucid, even":

> Within its pages, Khomeini is methodical and scholarly, but also deeply concerned with communicating clearly. … It is as if Khomeini actually wanted to *persuade* his readers rather than browbeat them into submission (Lenin), rant at them until they nodded in assent (Hitler), or conceal his own ignorance through forbidding jargon (Mao).

And this is nevertheless quite without sympathy for Khomeini, or any denial of the viciousness of his dictatorship.

The book is not comprehensive, though it is certainly long enough for the average reader. Not included, for example, are the high-minded drivel of Africans Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere and the outpourings of Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sékou Touré. Nor does Kalder point out the one universal characteristic of all the writing that he has examined so dutifully for us: the complete absence of humor.

Has dictator literature a future? If the absence of a sense of humor in public life is anything to go by, it very well might. Indeed, dictator-like literature seems to be increasingly common in academe, as a genre to be imitated rather than eschewed. It is either self-imposed or a manifestation of ideological conformism in the face of social pressure. The author of this most valuable book concludes with Solzhenitsyn's famous words: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." ♦

B&A

Fraught Figures

The surprising resilience of Giacometti's spindly statues.

BY JAMES GARDNER

Alberto Giacometti painting in his Paris studio (1958)

Giacometti
Guggenheim Museum
through September 12

The term "cultural hero" has occasionally been bestowed on an artist whose moral prestige reached beyond the narrow circles of his profession to inspire society as a whole. Over the past century, a number of painters have earned the status of cultural heroes, but only one sculptor stands among them, Alberto Giacometti, the subject of a new retrospective at the Guggenheim. Although David Smith and Richard Serra loom large among their followers in the art world, beyond that restricted orbit their influence and prestige are immediately diminished. But it may be doubted whether any sculptor since Rodin, who died in 1917, has won the admiration of as large a swath of society as Giacometti, who is in so many ways his polar opposite. There was a time in the sixties and seventies when it seemed as if the cover of every paperback was adorned with one of Giacometti's nervous stick figures confronting the futility of his existence. Giacometti was sculpture's answer to Sartre and Camus and maybe even to Che Guevara. In general, cultural heroes need to look the part, and here too Giacometti did not disappoint: Dressed in threadbare browns and grays, with his wrinkled face and hooded eyes and unkempt hair, he seemed like a character in a play by Samuel Beckett—

James Gardner is completing The Louvre: A History, *to be published by Grove Atlantic in 2019.*

Alberto Giacometti, *Walking Man I* (1960)

another cultural hero of the day—but even more like one of his own stick figures improbably animated into life.

Today, however, even if Giacometti's prestige remains about as high as it ever was—his *Pointing Man* became in 2015 the most expensive sculpture ever sold at auction, and a Giacometti biopic starring Geoffrey Rush was released earlier this year—he is no longer the cultural hero he once was. In part this is because we no longer have cultural heroes as we did in the postwar era; perhaps we no longer need them. But even if we do need them, it is unlikely that Giacometti would qualify. Today our collective imagination is paltry and scattered, whereas that of the postwar era was focused on the dismal aftermath of the Second World War and the vivid possibility of a Third. Giacometti's stick figures literally embodied that specific moment in human history in a way that would have made little sense before 1945 and that makes somewhat less urgent sense today. We may live in an age as ironic as Giacometti's, but we have lost that tragic sense of life that so crucially defined his art and the general culture of the postwar years.

Giacometti was born in the Graubünden canton of Switzerland in 1901 and he died there in 1966. Most of the time between those two dates, however, was spent in Paris, in a dreary, drafty studio at 46 rue Hippolyte-Maindron. The idiom that we most associate with him, the one that secured his status as a cultural hero, evolved only in the last two decades of his life. As the Guggenheim exhibition makes clear, his career can be readily divided into two parts: from about 1927 to 1935 and from about 1946 to his death two decades later. The reader will notice a gap of about 11 years: On the evidence of the Guggenheim exhibition, Giacometti does not seem to have done much of anything during that lost decade. And while there are certain formal and thematic links between the two periods of his career, it is only in the latter period that he emerges as the heroic figure whom the world continues to admire. (It must also be stated that in the second part of his career, as the Guggenheim show reveals, Giacometti proved to be a superb painter and draftsman, although he mostly limited these febrile congeries of lines to depicting his younger brother Diego and his wife Annette.)

If Giacometti had died in the late 1930s, he would still be seen as one of the most gifted modernist sculptors, but his gift would have consisted in the canny and skillful use of the dominant style of the day, rather than in the creation of an entirely new way of depicting the human condition. In this first half of his career, he is a surrealist, and whether in metal, stone, or clay, he is working in an inherited idiom that seems fully adequate to his purposes at the time. He is inspired, like most Parisian artists of the day, by Sigmund Freud and André Breton. His titles are expressive of this fact: *Woman with Her*

Throat Cut, *Disagreeable Object*, *Woman Who Dreams*. There is an element of subversive irony to these works that is hard to square with the pulsing seriousness of his postwar sculptures. At the same time, the young Giacometti is more purely formalist: His *Spoon Woman* of 1927 and *Cube* of 1934 reveal an almost Brancusian love of fluid form for its own sake, with few or no references to anything beyond form itself.

By the time Giacometti emerges from his decade of self-imposed silence, however, he is a changed man. He has rid himself of his earlier irony and formalism—indeed, he has become anti-ironic and anti-formalist. In purely formal terms, his stick figures are quite insignificant, even meaningless: It would be foolish and beside the point to admire them, say, as so many verticals rising from a horizontal base. Only when we import into the equation the knowledge that these are *human* forms do they acquire meaning and resonant beauty. There are, it is true, certain formal and thematic correspondences between the two phases of Giacometti's career. His *Walking Woman I* of 1932—impossibly thin and tall, not to mention bereft of head and arms—presages the radically schematic forms of the postwar years. Meanwhile, a very different work of the same year, *The Palace at 4 A.M.*—simple wooden figures and architectural forms on a flat plane—equally anticipates the terrain over which the later stick figure will move.

But who is this creature—usually a man, but often a woman—who dominates the later art of Giacometti? The embodiment of humanity itself, battered and bowed, but quietly unconquerable in the face of all the bullying ideologies that in living memory have sought to beat him into submission. Each of those ideologies assails that frail humanity by presuming to offer something greater and more heroic. But the necessary heroism of Giacomettian man consists in his silent but indestructible refusal to assent to any of those dismal doctrines. He reminds us that man is only man, that he will never be more than that, that he can never be more than that, and that he will never need to be more than that. ♦

COURTESY OF ROBERT ANTHONY SIEGEL

B&A

Sins of the Father

A memoir of outlaws, love, and family.

BY ALICE B. LLOYD

Criminals
My Family's Life on Both Sides of the Law
by Robert Anthony Siegel
Counterpoint, 240 pp., $26

Sometimes a father leaves his son no choice but to become a novelist. New York criminal attorney Stanley Siegel loved his clients, even though they were evildoers, almost as much as he loved his wife and children. And he became nearly as entangled with his clients' lives as with his family's—enough to face charges stemming from the DEA sting that inspired his son Robert Anthony Siegel's first book, the 1997 novel *All the Money in the World*. With his third book, *Criminals*, a memoir made of essays, Siegel the younger moves on to a medium better suited to a subject too strange for fiction. Glimpses of filial insight add up to a portrait of a big-hearted and brilliant but bizarre father's devotion to his clients. These drug traffickers, murderers, pimps, and Hells Angels are transfixing characters. But they're far simpler people than the patriarch himself. Siegel's mother, who was a lawyer too until marriage and only went back to work when the DEA went after her husband, says of Stanley what seems the book's mission: "Oh, it's never too late to understand people. That was one of his problems—he lived the unexamined life. Now I'm examining his life *for* him." And now, so is her son.

Robert Anthony Siegel (right) with his parents and brother David

Robert Anthony Siegel writes with the intense care of an adult child who will never make sense of the manner in which he was raised but can't give up romancing it. He describes his childhood in the 1970s, the family's legal drama in the '80s, his early days as a writer in the '90s, and the years leading up to his father's 2002 death. The essays aren't chronological; they untidily slide back and forth in time, evoking the sense of futility we all feel at our trying and failing to straighten out the messes that made us.

Mrs. Siegel invited her husband's criminal clients into the family circle as though they were orphans and runaways, victims rather than perpetrators. She whisked her son away on lavish European tours of a quality her husband, she said, could never appreciate: The entire family ate compulsively, but Siegel's mother insisted that she and her son at least did so with discrimination.

When his parents noticed how fat their habits were making him, they took Siegel to judo lessons—which led to his learning Japanese and taking up residence, twice, in the Far East. But any desire for a geographical buffer between him and their dysfunction was short-lived. He hurried home to New

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York and found work as a tour guide for Japanese businessmen. He was writing about his dad at the time, working on what would become *All the Money in the World*, and found himself channeling Stanley's sloppy ethics and courtroom charisma, spinning lies about the landmarks his tour groups would pass, lies he couldn't correct once his creativity had won him a promotion.

Sly symptoms of a son's inherited character and his struggle to make sense of it tie together stories that otherwise wouldn't belong in the same book: Stanley Siegel dropping LSD at the height of his career and, decades later, delivering a dying ex-drug trafficker from abusive hospice care blends into Robert Anthony Siegel teaching a writing class his mother enrolls in, learning to drive as recklessly as a local in Taiwan, and remembering how it felt to miss his father all through the week as a little boy at the summer house.

In one essay, Stanley rises from his depressive post-prison fugue to embrace his son's plan to novelize his legal troubles. Robert's embarrassment at this typically generous show of trust unsettles his resolve to write what happened to his dad. Now, two decades later, it's clearer what his subject should be: all the material left unexamined when Stanley Siegel died of Alzheimer's.

The family misread the signs of Stanley's decline as symptoms of his manic depressive moods or senescent mutations of his already eccentric personality. He'd always overeaten and never quite managed to hide the habit. In the years when he dressed smartly for court he was flamboyant—later leaving his sons a closetful of pink pinstripe suits and a pair of oxblood wingtips Robert can't bring himself to wear. When Stanley let himself go, the family reasoned, *of course* he'd go about it extravagantly: eating a steak with his hands and doing back stretches on the floor in fine restaurants. The family had always reveled in life on the margins, shaking off judgmental stares with a perverse pride—a kind of joyful boldness not unconnected to their shared ritual of rationalization and self-deceit.

In a passage especially revealing of Robert's growing self- and Siegel-consciousness, he describes a gift his father received from a client, a fake Lichtenstein that for years dominated the living room of their New York apartment. A blown-up comic-strip cell shows a man and woman embracing: "I'm a criminal attorney, honey!" he says. "Stan, Darling," she purrs. The Siegels' guests would say, *Hey isn't that by what's his name?* They'd answer only, *You mean Lichtenstein?* "We would smile with great modesty, letting the mistake vibrate around us, uncorrected." But later on, all alone, "I would sit on the couch and stare at the painting, trying to figure out what it said about us."

Lies large and small held the family together. This essential dishonesty set Robert Anthony Siegel on his mission to find some semblance of truth in his memories of them. He can't deliver them moral redemption in the end; that would be *too* dishonest. But this collection of loosely connected yet inseparable essays is strangely successful as a criminal defense. Like one of his father's famous courtroom orations, it's a logically inconclusive but emotionally complete absolution. Siegel's life's work, suddenly so much like his father's, is not to look for blame but to love and irrationally defend the one subject he can never avoid. And isn't everyone's, when it comes to those we love? ♦

B&A

If You Build It, Presidents Will Come

When the commander in chief takes the mound.

BY ADAM J. WHITE

On October 30, 2001, with Americans nursing the national wounds of 9/11, President George W. Bush took the mound in Yankee Stadium to deliver the first pitch in Game 3 of the World Series. Feeling the weight of a nation upon his shoulders—not to mention the weight of a bulletproof vest under his FDNY blue jacket—Bush stood atop the pitcher's mound, hoisted a thumbs-up, and delivered a perfect strike to catcher Todd Greene. The packed stadium erupted into applause as the president strode back to the dugout.

Reflecting on the moment some years later in a beautifully produced ESPN documentary, Bush admitted, "I didn't realize how symbolic it was, though, until I made it to the mound." His national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, saw the moment's power: "He spoke to the American people in a way that no speech could ever have done."

The Presidents and the Pastime
The History of Baseball and the White House
by Curt Smith
Nebraska, 469 pp., $29.95

No doubt. In that moment America brought together with unprecedented poignancy two of its most deeply rooted and distinctive institutions: the nation's presidency and its pastime. Bush's perfect pitch reminded us once again of the deep ties between those two institutions, which extend back to the origins of the republic and the sport themselves.

In his new book, Curt Smith captures this history in great detail, reaching back all the way to George Washington, who was "thought to have played 'rounders,' … [a] baseball antecedent

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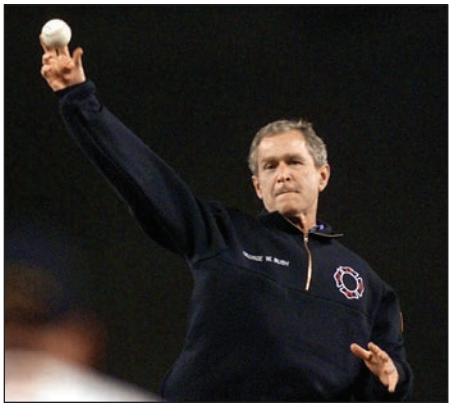
from Great Britain," at Valley Forge. "He sometimes throws and catches a ball for hours with his aide-de-camp," an American soldier apparently wrote. Smith's account ends with our current president, noting the irony that Donald Trump "truly likes baseball"—before his election, he threw out first pitches, sang "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" at Wrigley Field, and heckled Alex Rodriguez on Twitter, all noble pursuits—yet since becoming president he has unsubtly avoided throwing a first pitch on Opening Day or any other day.

Smith, whose narrative is as affectionate as it is exhaustive, is uniquely well suited to the task of writing this book: Before a journalism career writing books like *Mercy!* (2012), a centennial history of the Boston Red Sox television and radio broadcasts, he was a speechwriter for President George H.W. Bush, both during and after his presidency; he wrote the senior Bush's 2004 eulogy for Ronald Reagan, one of the most beautiful speeches of recent memory, and also wrote Bush's biography.

But Smith evidently intended his latest effort's subtitle literally: The book is, indeed, a history of baseball and also a history of the White House. Often the two themes intersect. But much of the book is devoted to extended digressions on baseball stories unrelated to the president and vice versa. Wonderful anecdotes about, say, Harry and Bess Truman's joint love affair with the sport ("Bess's childhood position was third base," Smith reports, "baseball's 'hot corner,' perhaps an augury of her husband's fiery rhetoric") are hidden among pages of descriptions of Truman's 1948 reelection bid and his presidential library. In that respect, the book sometimes seems a 22-inning marathon: No matter how many hits and home runs might occur from inning to inning, it's still a rather long day at the ballpark.

Given the breadth of the history covered in his book, it is no surprise that Smith relies heavily on secondary sources. And while even the best shortstops make their share of errors, Smith boots some easy ground balls—as when he mistakenly says that it was Yankee catcher Jorge Posada instead of Todd Greene who caught George W. Bush's first pitch in that post-9/11 game. And in his promotional discussions for the book, he has said that the Phillies and the Red Sox "both wanted to sign" Donald Trump for the majors before he started college. This claim is implausible—although it is not difficult to imagine its source.



George W. Bush threw out the first pitch at Game 3 of the World Series in Yankee Stadium weeks after 9/11. Decades earlier, FDR urged the major leagues to keep playing in wartime.

Still, Smith's book makes clear baseball's indelible mark on our national life and the president's own role in baseball's annual cycle. This comes through most clearly in his account of FDR—the president who more than any of his predecessors forged a personal bond with the American people, primarily through their radios but also through baseball. Especially on Opening Day: "From 1933 through 1941," Smith writes, "FDR threw out the first ball every year but one with his unorthodox, overhand lob." When the nation went to war in 1941, baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis asked FDR whether the leagues should keep playing games. In his reply, which Smith reprints in full, FDR urged

> that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before.

The game could bind us together in 2001 precisely as it had—and in part *because* it had—in 1942.

Football may have overtaken baseball as our national sport, but no job in sports more closely reflects that of the president than a major-league baseball pitcher. Standing atop the mound, alone before the eyes of a stadium (along with, in the World Series, a nation and a world), everything hangs on his next move. Until he acts, we all hang in suspense. And when he finally acts, he sets into motion events to which all others—his foe, his teammates, and even himself—must then react.

By surveying 200 years of history, Smith reminds us that our nation sees and reveres baseball much as it does the presidency. For each, the basic rules were written long ago—and for that very reason, changes in technology or culture do not prevent us from judging current players and presidents against the achievements of their predecessors. "Baseball records reach back into the distant past," Diana Schaub observed in a 2010 *National Affairs* essay. "Baseball lengthens memory. … It has a constitutional soul that secures the future by preserving the past." We grade the Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw by reference to Sandy Koufax, modern presidents by reference to Abraham Lincoln. And by endeavoring to grade the present in the light of the past, we recognize that we ourselves will be judged in similar terms.

"So much does our game tell us, about what we wanted to be, about what we are," baseball commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti once reflected. "Our character and our culture are reflected in this grand game." ♦

TOP: ROBERTO BOREA / AFP / GETTY; BOTTOM: IRVING HABERMAN / IH IMAGES / GETTY

B&A

Fatal Favorite

Did the Duke of Buckingham conspire to kill King James?

BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.

Upon the death of the childless Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the English crown passed to her closest heir, James VI of Scotland. James inherited the English throne as the son of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's cousin and the favorite of English Catholics, whom Elizabeth had ordered beheaded in 1587. Becoming James I of England, he ruled until his death in 1625. Benjamin Woolley's book trains its focus on the finale of James's 22-year reign, along the way trying to explain how Britain's first Stuart monarch, who combined three crowns (including Ireland's) into "Great Britain," managed his kingship.

In relating the complex tale, Woolley once again proves himself an adept sleuth among complex sources. He is also a gifted storyteller. His 2001 book *The Queen's Conjuror*, about a protoscientific adviser to Queen Elizabeth, won deserved praise for its narrative and Sherlock Holmesian qualities. These traits are again in evidence here, even if, in the end, Woolley fails to fulfill the promise of his book's title.

Woolley's approach is to toggle between his two main characters—the king and his leading minister, the Duke of Buckingham. It's the latter who steals the show. Born to a minor rural gentry family as George Villiers, he ascended, with the help of his indomitable and domineering mother, into the king's favor at an early age. Handsome—"the beauty of his beauty" was overwhelming, one contemporary wrote—emollient, devious, and smart, he caught the king's eye at 21. He then began his journey from Villiers to Buckingham, the only duke in the kingdom, a man ennobled in successive stages by his royal patron. (Woolley often inadvisedly refers to Villiers by his given name "George," as if the dependent ranked equally with the head of state and James's younger brother and successor, Charles I.)

Much of Villiers's climb has the qualities of a telenovela. There are family and office politics, a plotting parent, tangled genealogy, and a twist made for our times: Villiers early on became the king's cupbearer, then gentleman of the bedchamber—yes, that was his title—and possibly not someone who merely laid out the monarch's clothes. Here's the first of two instances in which Woolley, failing to be straight about the strongly inconclusive evidence of sexual shenanigans, turns mere possibility into asserted fact. It's anyone's guess whether the king and his leading minister were lovers.

The narrative then takes us from Villiers's ascent to his dukedom and his historically significant state responsibilities; then to his growing disillusionment with the king; next to his strengthening bond with Prince Charles, who became the luckless (eventually beheaded) Charles I; and finally, after James's untimely death, to Buckingham's own violent end.

The duke has rarely won plaudits from historians, and the author doesn't try to redeem him. During his 10 years by James's side, Buckingham amassed a near monopoly on state patronage and became hated for that, as well as for his greed. What's more, unlike his peaceable king, who sought to avoid war, Buckingham wished to embroil the realm in conflicts with Spain and France. He did so after unsuccessfully trying—in an escapade-in-disguise in Spain with Prince Charles that was as laughable as it was ill-fated—to arrange a marriage between Charles and the Spanish Infanta. That effort's failure put Britain on a war footing against the Iberian power, which had hoped for peace under James's watchful superintendence. Then Buckingham rashly led British forces in another failed military campaign, this one against France.

Because of the enmities he'd built up, it's not surprising that after James's death in 1625 Buckingham was immediately suspected of contributing to it. In fact, it took Charles's dissolution of Parliament in 1626 to prevent Buckingham from being impeached—an act that only contributed to charges that the new king himself was in on his brother's death. These charges, with which Woolley closes his tale, dogged Charles during his own star-crossed reign.

The King's Assassin is more than a narrative. It's also a set of arguments. The principal one is embodied in the book's title: "The King's Assassin," we are boldly told, is the book's subject—as if the assassination is a proven fact and the murderer was Buckingham. But this, it turns out, is another of the author's unsupported contentions. It's not at all certain that Britain's first Stuart monarch was murdered.

The King's Assassin
The Secret Plot to Murder King James I
by Benjamin Woolley
St. Martin's, 342 pp., $29.99

James I

James M. Banner Jr.'s second edition of The Elements of Teaching, *coauthored with the late Harold C. Cannon, was recently published by Yale.*

A well-received scholarly work by Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I*, concludes, despite its similarly misleading title, that James died of natural causes from an illness and wasn't assassinated. There is no indisputable evidence that James was assassinated by purposeful poisoning instead of dying of poor medical treatment, the general historical view. There is scant evidence, too—to use the words of the book's subtitle—that there was a "secret plot" against the king. Yet, even though he waffles a bit, Woolley has no doubt of Buckingham's complicity. "It seems more than likely," he writes,

> that George Villiers, assisted by his mother, was James's killer if not his murderer. His insistence on interfering with the king's treatment at a vital point in the patient's recovery from a familiar disease seems to have helped the king into his grave, whether intentionally or not.

Woolley goes on, in light of "recent medical research conducted in Asia," to identify aconite as the poison Buckingham used. He then ventures to suggest, even more wildly and without supporting evidence, that Buckingham conspired with the throne's inheritor, Charles I, to hasten James's death.

To further compound the problems with *The King's Assassin*, the book does in fact hang on an indisputable assassination—but not of James. Instead, it was Buckingham himself who was murdered by an aggrieved army officer on suspicion of being a regicide.

This is not to redeem Buckingham from historians' condescension. It can't be done, and Woolley doesn't try to do so. James, however, has had better recent luck at historians' hands. He is of course recognized as the patron of the celebrated eponymous edition of the Bible that so many people in the English-speaking world were reared on for centuries. The age of Jacobean—that is, Jamesian—literature and arts is scarcely less notable than the Elizabethan age that preceded it; Shakespeare was still writing his great works and James himself has been recognized as a serious scholar and decent poet. And perhaps most notably, James succeeded in keeping his realm out of continental wars despite Buckingham's efforts to embroil Protestant Britain in conflict with Habsburg Spain and Catholic France.

Like so much European history of 400 years ago, the dynastic and political complexities of a tale like Woolley's sometimes seem overwhelming. American readers can be forgiven a certain impiousness about the ins and outs of early-17th-century British nobility and political factionalism. Yet Woolley's highly readable book is very much a popular history for our own time, many of its themes and characters recognizable from life as well as from literature and film.

A Rubens portrait of the Duke of Buckingham, ca. 1625

It's about an androcentric social-political class—men gathering, hunting, and scheming together, in kinship and competition, to run a nation-state. The principal female figures who enter the story—Villiers's mother, the young queens of Spain and France—are all strong, even if most of the others, like Buckingham's cuckqueaned wife, play supporting parts. While you sometimes think you need a shelf of *Burke's Peerage* at your elbow to follow the links among the titled figures, you can probably keep your bearings if you're a follower of the BBC on PBS.

What's more, its theme is Horatio Algerish: of a man rising if not from rags to riches then at least from modest circumstances to be the king's right-hand man. Reading the book, I was cast back to my school-day vacations when the lunchtime radio was tuned to *Our Gal Sunday*, the soap opera whose well-known opening question was "Can this girl from a small mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?" The answer then was "more or less," just as it proved earlier with George Villiers.

And then there's the titillating possibility of a carnal relationship. Did this scion of the minor gentry, as we might say, sleep his way to the top? Whether Villiers was ever the king's lover isn't clear. (He is not the only of James's reputed male lovers.) There can be no doubt, however, of women's appeal to Buckingham and vice versa. His own marriage yielded numerous children. That he may have slipped between the sheets with men and women alike—at least enough so as to help him rise to prominence—can only add to today's interest in him.

All this having been said, a great deal of context and interpretation is missing from Woolley's book. You wouldn't know from its pages, for instance, that starting in 1618, late in James's reign and extending well into Charles's, one of the most horrific wars in history, the Thirty Years' War, raged throughout most of Europe. Nor would you discover that it was that war, and not just a minor embroilment with Spain, from which James kept Britain, much to its commercial benefit. You wouldn't learn that it was under James that Britain's earliest North American colonies were firmly planted and its interests in India greatly expanded through the East India Company. Then there was James's encouragement of English and Scottish settlements in northern Ireland, a policy that dogs Britain as well as Ulster to this day. *The King's Assassin* is old-fashioned, public-events history with many important public events left out.

Still, what a story! A son of the country gentry makes it into the king's bedchamber and perhaps into his bed! Yet what, besides the often salacious narrative itself, are we to take away from the facts? The author doesn't give us much help. Treat this book as a good story but not dependable in its claims or a full history of that far-off day. ♦

B&A

Djokovic's Djourney

The Serbian star's Wimbledon comeback.

BY TOM PERROTTA

Wimbledon, England

Two weeks ago, the men's tournament at Wimbledon started like everyone expected. Roger Federer kept winning without losing a set. So did Rafael Nadal. No one thought much of Novak Djokovic. He looked better than he had in recent months, but everyone assumed he still wasn't like his old self. Too many errors. Too many weak serves. And too little confidence. Djokovic hadn't won a tournament in more than a year and hadn't captured a major title since the French Open in 2016.

Wimbledon itself treated Djokovic like an afterthought. Gone were the days when Djokovic, then ranked number one in the world, played almost all of his matches on Centre Court, the most prestigious stadium in tennis history. His first round was scheduled on the No. 1 Court. In the second round, he played on No. 2 Court. He only got to Centre Court for his third-round match because his opponent, Kyle Edmund, is British. The crowd was eager to frustrate Djokovic. At one point in the match, the chair umpire gave Djokovic a time violation for taking too long to serve. He couldn't resist arguing, while everyone in the stands hissed and booed.

"They were coughing and whistling while I was bouncing the ball," Djokovic said. "I didn't deserve to be treated as I was treated by certain individuals. That's one thing I didn't like."

Djokovic soon went on to beat Kei Nishikori in the quarterfinals, but not without another argument. This one came when he received a warning after he lightly bounced his racquet on the grass. "Nishikori did the same in the fourth set and he didn't get a warning," Djokovic said later. "That's not fair."

Novak Djokovic on Wimbledon's Centre Court, July 15

From that moment I thought Djokovic might be back after all. His swagger and defiance had returned; so had his expectation of winning. Djokovic has always wanted love from those who adore tennis, but on court, misused rules and talented opponents usually motivate him.

Why did Djokovic decline and how did he come back? I'd never seen him look so uncertain and so lacking in resolve as when he lost his last set at the 2017 French Open 6-0. His elbow was part of the problem; after losing at Wimbledon last year, he took off the rest of the season with the hope of recovering. It didn't work, and so he had surgery in February—and came back too soon and continued to struggle. But at Wimbledon, he looked different from the start. And then he passed the hardest test of them all: He beat Nadal in a classic match that began late Friday evening and resumed the next day. Djokovic and Nadal each hit 73 winners. They rallied long and hit the ball in corners and on lines. In the end, after 5 hours and 17 minutes, Djokovic won 195 points to Nadal's 191.

"It's been a long 15 months for me, trying to overcome different obstacles," Djokovic said after the match. "So to be where I am at the moment is quite, quite satisfying."

The men's final at Wimbledon was no contest. Kevin Anderson, the 6-foot-8 slugger from South Africa, was exhausted after two five-set matches, one to topple Federer and another to beat American John Isner. (The latter match took 6 hours and 36 minutes, the longest ever on Centre Court.) In the final, Djokovic dominated from the beginning. And when he faced five set points late in the third set, he protected himself with aggressive play, not luck. The victory—his fourth Wimbledon title in all and his 13th Grand Slam title—couldn't have pleased him more. After he won, he watched the older of his two children, 3-year-old Stefan, appear in the stands.

"It's really hard to compare this year's victory and trophy with any of the other three because they're all special," Djokovic said. "But if I can pick one, that would be probably the first one and this year's winning because my son was at the trophy ceremony."

As for Serena Williams, she lost the final against Angelique Kerber, yet this Wimbledon was the most impressive—and inspiring—of her career. After having a child last September, Williams has returned to tennis and performed better at Wimbledon—just her fourth event of the year—than anyone could hope for. Williams has 23 Grand Slam titles to her name, one shy of Margaret Court's all-time record of 24. I have no doubt Williams will get there, even though she'll turn 37 in September. She wouldn't say the same, but she sounded like anything was possible.

"I didn't know a couple of months ago where I was, where I would be, how I would do, how I would be able to come back," Williams said. "I feel like I have a ways to go. This is literally just the beginning." ♦

VISIONHAUS / GETTY

Tom Perrotta writes about sports for the Wall Street Journal, FiveThirtyEight, *and other publications.*

B&A

Rockslide

Dwayne Johnson's poorly chosen star vehicles risk squandering fans' affections. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

For the most part, movie stardom is fleeting. Guess who the number-one box office attraction was in the United States from 1962 through 1965. I'll wait. You'll never get it. It was Doris Day. A few years later she was starring on a failed sitcom. The top box office attraction of 1958? Glenn Ford. *Glenn Ford*? In his book *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, William Goldman recounts an acid comment made to him in the mid-1960s by one of Paul Newman's agents when he was being difficult: "Someday Paul will be Glenn Ford, but right now they'll wait for him." The agent was wrong. Newman never dimmed. But he was the exception rather than the rule. Ford is the rule. People who rise to the top in the movie business mostly fall from the heights, even after they have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

But why? What separated Paul Newman from Glenn Ford? You might think Ford couldn't hold a candle to Newman, but Newman's glitter didn't just come from his eyes. He made better movies. He was in clunkers but he was also in classics—enough of them that one doesn't associate his name with garbage like *Quintet* or *When Time Ran Out.*... For whatever reason—his own good taste or the wisdom of his handlers—Newman followed in the footsteps of Jimmy Stewart, who was both wonderful himself *and* made more good movies than any actor in Hollywood history.

Stars fade when the clunkers seem to define them more than the classics. This is true especially of what you might call "populist stars"—the ones who have made it by seeming to be the kind of guy you'd want to be your buddy and get into bar fights with. That is a powerful bond, but it can be broken quite easily. Burt Reynolds's redneck romps delighted audiences in the mid-1970s, and the movies that made him a huge star were unexpectedly fresh and fleet, like *Smokey and the Bandit*. But by the early 1980s he had worn out his welcome; his car flicks became privately staged jokes for Burt and his friends. And his efforts to expand to A-list fare didn't go very well. That was it for him.

Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson in *Skyscraper*

Sylvester Stallone wrote himself an Oscar-winning movie in *Rocky*, but by the time *Rocky IV* rolled around he had become a steroided joke. Arnold Schwarzenegger had an amazing run—as a hero and a villain and a comedian—until his *Last Action Hero* seemed almost an attack on his own audiences and poisoned the well of goodwill he had built up.

The performer most like these men today is Dwayne Johnson, and not only because he has an absurdly fit and trained body that at times makes him seem more like a flesh sculpture than a living, breathing person. He combines a superhuman physical authority with a personality both dynamic and charming. There's probably someone somewhere who doesn't like The Rock, but either he's keeping his head low or he lives in Greenland, because no one has met him. There has even been talk—which Johnson has not discouraged—of his desire to parlay his fame into a political career.

But The Rock has never quite made it to the summit of American pop culture, and the reason is simple: Dwayne Johnson makes not-very-good movies. Unlike Newman and his team, Johnson doesn't have good taste when it comes to the projects he chooses. *San Andreas*, his earthquake disaster film, was mildly entertaining but pretty lame. So was his 2016 effort at a Schwarzeneggerian buddy comedy, *Central Intelligence*—as opposed to his version of *Baywatch*, which was an utter horror. These are movies audiences might have enjoyed a little in the moment, but I don't think they generated enthusiasm for what he might have coming down the pike. He joined the *Fast and Furious* franchise with the fourth film in the series, and those are enormously successful, but it's hard to credit him for their success.

Last Christmas, Johnson finally broke the mold. His action comedy *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* proved to be original, funny, touching, and altogether terrific—and it was a gigantic hit, grossing $400 million in the United States alone. It could have been his springboard into Schwarzenegger territory. But his inability to choose good projects reared its ugly head yet again. A few months later he was toplining *Rampage*, the adaptation of an early video game in which Johnson found himself dealing with a gigantic, albino, mind-controlled evolving gorilla. (Yes, you read that right.) It was bad and performed in mediocre fashion. And Johnson has just released *Skyscraper*, in which he has a prosthetic leg but can still jump into a burning building at its 130th floor. (Yes, you read that right.) In its opening weekend, it made an anemic $25 million at the domestic box office.

Dwayne Johnson is wasting the goodwill he has earned and is on the verge of becoming Glenn Ford. I'm not sure he has it in him to be Paul Newman instead, but he could certainly be the best possible version of himself. ♦

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

Lord Carrington, left, with Margaret Thatcher in 1980

PA IMAGES / GETTY

The Old Breed

Lord Carrington, 1919-2018.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

Since there is nothing new under the sun, Lord Carrington, the British politician-statesman who died earlier this month, age 99, will not be the last person to be called the last of his kind, whose like we shall never see again. In Carrington's case, however, it may approximately be true.

Peter Alexander Rupert Carington, the sixth Baron Carrington and descendant of 19th-century Whigs and Liberals, was the sort of public-minded aristocrat who used to dominate Britain's Conservative party. Indeed, within living memory, Tory cabinets were bursting with lords of the manor and public-school boys and sons of bishops and ex-subalterns in elite regiments. All that changed in the mid-1960s, however, when Labour broke a 13-year Conservative run in power and the Tories decided to modernize.

From my perspective, the jury is still out on whether that was a good idea. But in any case, the 14th Earl of Home (aka Sir Alec Douglas-Home) was replaced as party leader by Edward Heath, and a half-century later the Conservative party—while still home to more than a handful of toffs—is now a proper meritocracy.

In that sense, Carrington played an interesting role in the transition. His grandfather had been the sort of feckless spendthrift who populates the novels of P.G. Wodehouse; probably in reaction, or perhaps in penance, Carrington's father picked the Army as his career but died in early middle age. Our Lord Carrington chose to emulate his father, moving from Eton to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (Britain's West Point) and on to the posh Grenadier Guards, where he distinguished himself in northwest Europe during World War II and won the Military Cross.

At the end of the conflict, like more than a few returning officers from both world wars, Carrington decided to enter politics. As a hereditary member of the House of Lords he had an automatic sinecure in Parliament. But the balance of power in Westminster had long since shifted to the House of Commons—no peer had been prime minister since Lord Salisbury at the turn of the century—and Carrington understood that his prospects might be limited.

It is no great surprise that he

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prospered in the postwar Conservative party. Gallant ex-officers of noble birth appealed to Winston Churchill, who was one of the tribe himself, and Carrington was the last survivor of Churchill's second government (1951-55). He was also close to Churchill's most estimable successor, Harold Macmillan. Yet Carrington was more than an amiable country squire. He early acquired a reputation for smooth competence and integrity in his chosen specialties of defense and foreign policy. Better yet, he was personally popular among the rank and file of parliamentary Tories who rose to power with Heath.

Among them, of course, was Margaret Thatcher, who deposed Heath as leader in 1975. It is sometimes forgotten how audacious and radical her challenge to Heath appeared at the time within Conservative ranks. This was only partly due to her obvious status as the first female leader in British political history: Mrs. Thatcher was also an "ideologue" in a party accustomed to think of governing as a form of noblesse oblige. So it says something about Margaret Thatcher that she chose a largely non-Thatcherite shadow cabinet during her years in opposition. And it says something about Lord Carrington that, as Tory leader in the House of Lords, she should have chosen him as confidant and strategic ally.

Indeed, in her memoirs, Thatcher acknowledged that Carrington was not, by nature or conviction, much of a Thatcherite. But she valued him for his wit, even temperament, courteous manner, wide experience—and, without apology, for his status as a Tory grandee among her middle-class Conservative brethren. Nor were her feelings a matter of expedience: When in 1979 she became prime minister, she rewarded Carrington by making him foreign secretary despite the fact that he sat in the House of Lords and was absent from the rancorous Commons debates.

By any measure, Carrington was an able and successful foreign secretary, nicely balancing power with diplomacy and finessing the transatlantic shift from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan. In one of the instructive ironies of politics, however, he is best remembered today not for any particular achievement but for his resignation from office.

In 1982, Britain and Argentina were negotiating over the status of the Falkland Islands, and Carrington, while committed to talks with the junta in Buenos Aires, was steadfast in his view that the wishes of the islands' inhabitants—who had no desire, then or now, to live under Argentine rule—should be paramount.

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To that end, he opposed any gesture that might signal to the Argentinians that British sovereignty was negotiable. In particular, he argued against the withdrawal of HMS *Endurance* from the south Atlantic as part of a program of naval budget cuts. Of course, the inevitable happened: British intelligence counseled that if the *Endurance* were withdrawn, Argentina would not take action. So the *Endurance* departed from the south Atlantic—and Argentina invaded the Falklands.

This was a plain, unprovoked act of aggression by an arguably fascist dictatorship against an outpost of British democracy, complicated by a strenuous and embarrassingly prolonged debate within the Reagan administration between Secretary of State Alexander Haig and U.N. ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick (in Argentina's corner) and the Anglophile Defense secretary Caspar Weinberger, who prevailed.

If any one player in this drama had acquitted himself with prescience and integrity, it was Lord Carrington. But that wasn't the way he saw it. The (temporary) Argentine conquest of the British Falklands was, as he wrote in his memoirs, perceived as a disgrace, and "the disgrace must be purged. The person to purge it should be the minister in charge." And so he resigned.

Carrington's sudden and irrevocable withdrawal from political office was shocking and, over here at least, incomprehensible. No American secretary of state would have stepped aside in similar circumstances: To do so would be seen as an admission that the official in question had been mistaken or incompetent—which Carrington was not—or perceived as a sign of weakness or irresolution. By way of illustration, George W. Bush's cabinet remained wholly intact after September 11, 2001, while questions of culpability and performance were deferred. Carrington's resignation on principle dramatized the code by which he had lived and practiced politics, as well as his sense of obligation to duty. He did not quit in protest, which is the usual spur to action, but as a matter of honor.

Honor, of course, prevails in the New World as well as the Old. And Carrington, despite his great age, went on to serve as a genial and effective secretary general of NATO in the years before the breakup of the Soviet Union and chaired an unsuccessful attempt by the European Community to stave off Yugoslavia's descent into chaos. Well into his 90s, he continued to make himself useful in Parliament and spent his last years puttering contentedly, rewarded for decades of service to the state and remembered for the graceful surrender of power. As Malcolm said of Cawdor in *Macbeth*, "Nothing in his [political] life became him like the leaving it." ♦

"Sarah Palin incensed over being 'duped' by Sacha Baron Cohen, calls his humor 'evil'"

—News item, *July 10, 2018*

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Palin 'outraged' over Showtime interview airing 'tonight at 9ET/8CT'

'DESPICABLE' SERIES...

...available 'on a wide array of devices'

BY AGANDA MASTON

NOME—Sarah Palin today continued her scathing attack on comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, posting an outraged message on Facebook decrying the comedian's "twisted comedy," which she said "will be on tonight at 9ET/8CT on Showtime."

"Golly, I have never been so insulted in my entire life," Palin said. "I ask anyone who doubts me to sit down and watch the entire segment tonight, TiVo it, check it out online, do whatever you can to see just how disgusting this Baron Cohen fella is. Gadzooks!"

Palin made no secret of her outrage when the existence of the prank show was revealed last week, but stepped up her offensive, taking direct aim at the network. "Jeepers creepers, Showtime! You guys put this thing on TV, On Demand, on a wide array of devices and streaming apps, including Apple TV, Roku, Amazon Prime Video, even on smartphones and laptops! It's available everywhere! Holy moly, that's despicable!"

GAGE SKIDMORE/

Sarah Palin in Nome on Monday

In fact, Palin worried the show could be available to an even wider audience. "Heck, you don't even need to subscribe, you can just borrow a login! I mean, gosh, you could just go on Showtime Anytime and type in username 'HockeyMom08' and password 'wolfchopper,' and you'd be able to watch it!"

And Palin saved more anger for Cohen himself, who has made a career out of this "gotcha"-style comedy. "Well, I think it's just sad that he would do this to me. I didn't even want to be back in the public eye! I'm happy just to be a grandma minding my own business!" She added, "I'm also outraged by that sicko Johnny Knoxville, who duped me into being in his new *Bad Grandpa* movie, which you can see in theaters nationwide starting

FRIDAY CONTINUED ON A6

the weekly Standard

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