

**MEETING THE
CHALLENGE OF IRAN**
REUEL MARC GERECHT & RAY TAKEYH

the weekly Standard

AUGUST 13, 2018 • \$5.99



KID TRUMP

**Charlie Kirk, founder
of Turning Point USA,
has made it his business
to 'own the libs,'
and business is booming**

BY ADAM RUBENSTEIN



Contents

August 13, 2018 • Volume 23, Number 46



- 2 The Scrapbook *Too many shoes dropping, elite anti-elitism, & more*
- 5 Casual *Priscilla M. Jensen pays a visit to Miss Flannery*
- 6 Editorials *The Hard Part • Tax Cut By Fiat*
- 8 Comment
- Three leaders are better than one* BY FRED BARNES
- The FARA faucet: foreign agents are running scared* BY ERIC FELTEN
- We're still hearing the echoes from the Loud family* BY PHILIP TERZIAN
- Affirmative reaction* BY TERRY EASTLAND

Articles

- 15 It's Worse than Vulgar, It's Trendy *Washington, D.C., in 2018* BY P.J. O'ROURKE
- 16 May Stagger into August *Her days will grow short, when she reaches September* BY DOMINIC GREEN
- 18 Bland Spicer *The hometown briefing* BY ETHAN EPSTEIN
- 20 Working with Charles *Krauthammer's research assistants reminisce* BY DAVID HODGES



ASTRID RIECKEN / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

Features

- 21 Kid Trump *Charlie Kirk, the founder of Turning Point USA, has made it his business to 'own the libs,' and business is booming* BY ADAM RUBENSTEIN
- 27 The Preeminent Challenge *For Trump and his foreign policy team, cracking the Islamic Republic is job one* BY RUEL MARC GERECHT & RAY TAKEYH



COURTESY OF MIKE WATSON

Charles Krauthammer with research assistant Mike Watson

Books & Arts

- 34 'Let the Whorehouse Burn' *The euro and the damage it wrought* BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL
- 37 Leonardo the Enigma *Why it is so difficult to see the great polymath and his work clearly* BY DANNY HEITMAN
- 39 Cinematic Saint *The challenges of depicting Joan of Arc on the screen* BY TIM MARKATOS
- 41 Paradise Recycled *The lives of 19th-century utopians are more interesting than their utopias* BY JAMES BOWMAN
- 43 Man on a Mission *The latest installment of Tom Cruise's series is an instant classic* BY JOHN PODHORETZ
- 44 Parody *A new member of the Trump legal team*



Elite Anti-Elitism (or Anti-Elite Elitism?)

The nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court is proving a hard thing for liberals and progressives to counter. The man's qualifications are nearly unparalleled; he is highly regarded by judges and law professors at elite institutions; and so far the efforts to find unflattering particulars about his past have come to nothing. We knew things were going to be tough for Kavanaugh's adversaries when, a few days after his nomination, the *Washington Post* reported that he had racked up tens of thousands of dollars in credit card debt in order to buy . . . tickets to Washington Nationals baseball games for himself and his friends. So on top of everything else, he's a normal dude.

The credit cards, incidentally, are now fully paid off. Moreover, Kavanaugh has reported only a small amount of income from sources other than his salary—less than \$30,000, far below the hundreds of thousands and



even millions customary for other high-level judges.

We were prepared, even so, for the onslaught of tendentious allegations and hare-brained criticisms the nomination of conservative judges always seems to occasion these days. Among the best so far: an opinion piece on the left-leaning *Vox.com* by Penn State law professor Eleanor Marie Lawrence Brown. The piece's logorrheic headline tells you most of what you need to know: "Elite law professors are brushing politics aside to support fellow elite Brett Kavanaugh. That's inexcusable in the Trump era."

Brown, a former D.C. Circuit law clerk, concedes that she has "heard nothing but praise about [Kavanaugh] from my many friends who know him. He is, by all accounts, an extraordinary public servant and a kind and generous person." Yet she's worried

that Kavanaugh's fellow elites, including two liberal Ivy League academics, have praised him in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.

Why the worry? Because, writes Brown, a Jamaican national, elites praise other elites in Third World countries, too.

Development scholars who study the "Third World" often observe that it is rarely the poor who hamper the development and disrupt the functioning of institutions that must be strong and trustworthy in order for a nation to thrive. More often, elites are the problem. In my own region of origin, the Caribbean, the problem is endemic. Elites act to protect other elites, even when they belong to different political parties and have widely divergent interests.

So the fact that elites are *praising* Kavanaugh is the problem, since that's what happens in the patronage-based politics of Jamaica. No doubt if Ivy-educated elites were *condemning* Kavanaugh, that would raise a different set of worries in the minds of Brown and her concerned fellow professors. ♦



It's Raining Shoes!

Another prolix online headline recently caught our attention, this one at the Fix, the *Washington Post's* popular politics blog: "This may be the biggest shoe to drop from the Trump-Michael Cohen tape." The piece argued that the subpoena of Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg is likely an important development in the Trump-Russia

probe, but the author didn't mention shoes dropping—that was evidently the work of the Fix's headline-writers.

Come to think of it, shoes have been dropping all over the place since Trump became president. The expression, as readers likely know, refers to the common experience of hearing one's upstairs neighbor arrive home and remove his shoes—first one shoe (*thump*), then a pause, then the other (*thump*). Hence waiting for some

seemingly inevitable outcome is like waiting for the other shoe to drop.

In February, after Mueller's indictment of 13 Russian nationals, defense attorney William Jeffress told *Vanity Fair*, "It's hard to speculate" (which, in Washington, means it's easy to speculate), but if Mueller "has been able to uncover that same kind of evidence on the hacking that he has been able to uncover on these campaign-type activities, then we've got another shoe

BUTTON AND SHOES: BIGSTOCK

to drop.” Around the same time former director of national intelligence James Clapper, evidently imagining a number of upstairs neighbors taking their shoes off in succession, told CNN’s Anderson Cooper, “I think there are other shoes to drop here.” And in mid-July, when Mueller indicted Russian intelligence officers for hacking the Democratic National Committee’s emails, former Obama Justice official Matt Miller told Mike Allen of *Axios*, “This is the biggest shoe to drop yet.” Miller, like the *Fix*’s headline-writer, seems to think dropping shoes get bigger and bigger. The very next day in the *Post*, law professor Randall Eliason reminded readers that “if Mueller does have evidence of American involvement in any of the Russian wrongdoing, that would be the logical next shoe to drop.” Shoes dropping in logical order!

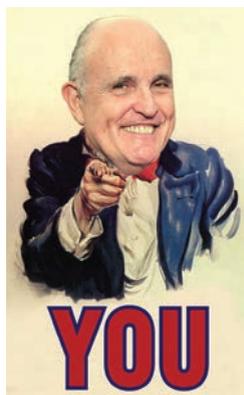
The Trump-Russia story isn’t the only one to attract all these shoes, either. Art Hogan, market strategist at the investment bank B. Riley, expressed his relief to a CNBC reporter that trade wars were temporarily out of the news. “The pattern in the market,” he said, “is we react to the announcement, and as time passes we wait for the next shoe to drop.”

We’re not sure what all these shoes mean, but perhaps it’s helpful to remember that the idiom isn’t supposed to signify just any newsworthy event. It’s supposed to signify *inevitability*. And if there’s one thing we should have learned after 2016, it’s that in politics, nothing is inevitable. ♦

Talking to Me?

Former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, now much in the news as the president’s legal counsel, recently gained attention (as if he needed more) by tweeting a single word: *You*

That’s it. Not even a period. We assume it was what’s colloquially known as a “butt-tweet,” similar to Trump’s famous



GIULIANI: SEAN ZANNI / PATRICK MCMULLAN / GETTY



KIM JONG UN PINOCCHIO

pronouncement “Despite the constant negative press covfefe” or then-White House spokesman Sean Spicer’s cryptic messages “n9y25ah7” and “Aqenbpuu”; or, more recently, British home secretary Sajid Javid’s tweet of the single letter “I.”

Twitter went to work on Giuliani’s monosyllable, some finishing the mayor’s message (“... make me feel brand new”), others offering acid commentary. The account @PopeHat, for instance, noted that Giuliani had finally made a public statement without

making things worse for his client.

It’s either a sign of our society’s insanity or a reminder that things aren’t so bad that we can all laugh at these meaningless electronic belches. Perhaps it’s both. ♦

Who They Believe They Is

In early July, the *Nation* magazine published a 14-line poem, “How-To,” by Anders Carlson-Wee. THE SCRAPBOOK holds rather old-school opinions on the matter of poetic form, and we found it hard to scan “How-To.” Still, the poem’s language is incisive, it has a distinctive rhythm, and

it ends with a punch. Its thematic idea, too—advice from one homeless beggar to another—grabs your attention. “If you’re young say younger,” the advice-giver says.

Old say older. If you're crippled don't flaunt it. Let em think they're good enough Christians to notice. Don't say you pray, say you sin. It's about who they believe they is. You hardly even there.

There were just two problems with the poem. The first is that line about being “crippled”—insensitive. The second is that Carlson-Wee is white, and the language sounds African-American; so the poet is guilty of racial insensitivity, not to mention “cultural appropriation.” Denunciations followed.

In the days when poetry was important, both the poet and the magazine would probably have been glad to offend the day’s cultural arbiters. No longer. The *Nation’s* poetry editors (there are two!) issued one of those apologies with which we’ve become nauseatingly familiar: “We made a serious mistake by choosing to publish the poem ‘How-To.’ We are sorry for the pain we have caused to the many communities affected by this poem. We recognize that we must now earn your trust back.” And so on, for another 125 words.

We were inclined to feel indignant on behalf of the poet, but then discovered that he, too, had issued a groveling apology: “I am listening closely and I am reflecting deeply. I am sorry for the pain I have caused. . . . I intended for this poem to address the invisibility of homelessness, and clearly it doesn’t work. . . . The fact that I did not foresee this reading of the poem and the harm it could cause is humbling and eye-opening.” How quickly and abjectly do our seemingly independent-minded artists submit to the dictates of political fashion!

It occurs to us that with just a little adjustment of language, Carlson-Wee’s

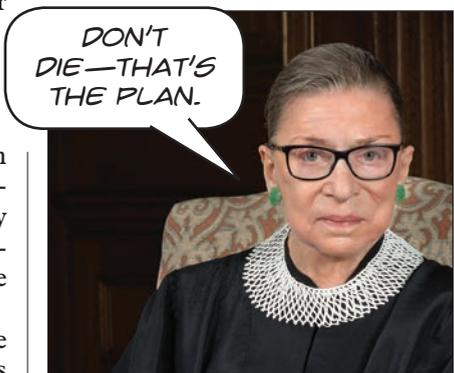
poem would make a fine commentary on the backwardness of modern America’s culture industry. The artist doesn’t matter. The work of art is void of intrinsic value. All that matters is whether the cultural pooh-bahs give or withhold their approval. It’s about who they believe they is. The poet hardly even there. ♦

Deo Volente

Washington is full of people who make self-assured pronouncements about what will happen next week or next year. We often caution against this tendency, thinking as we do of presidential candidate John F. Kennedy’s argument to his aides for picking the unscrupulous Lyndon Johnson as his running mate. “I’m 43 years told,” Kennedy said. “I’m not going to die in office.”

Death is an unpleasant topic, and we genuinely hope Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has plenty more years to enjoy life, but her recent remark about her retirement plans strikes us as ill-advised. “I’m now 85,” she said to an audience. “My senior colleague, Justice John Paul Stevens, he stepped down when he was 90, so I think I have about at least five more years.”

Perhaps we can all, and not just Justice Ginsburg, learn from the biblical injunction: “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” ♦



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The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of Clarity Media Group, is published weekly (except one week in March, one week in June, one week in August, and one week in December) at 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-274-7293. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 85409, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9612. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-386-597-4378 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, \$5.99. Back issues, \$5.99 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1152 15th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Copyright 2018, Clarity Media Group. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of Clarity Media Group.



SORRY POET: TWS ART.

A Trip to Milledgeville

In summer 1962, Georgia's back roads were all the roads there were, and a family of six didn't undertake a trip lightly. Ours didn't, often. But we'd all been invited to spend the day with a friend of my father's at her farm in middle Georgia, and we set out one morning before it got too hot.

There were lots of places where crews were working on the roads, widening them, I think, because I remember most the scalped expanses of red clay, gory with recent rain, and the bloody streaks across the pavement where the road was at a lower grade. In the stretches where the pines still came right up to the road, no beautification projects had yet been dreamt of. Frequently this meant that someone had tipped considerable garbage over the side, especially where there was a hollow or ravine. Not many bottles though: You could return your "cocola" bottle for the deposit, and entrepreneurs checked the roadsides for the leavings of folks too sorry to take theirs back themselves. Occasionally a wringer washer had been hurled to the mercy of the kudzu.

The signs were the best though. Smallish ones, much smaller than billboards. Some were made by pros: the soft drink signs of course, or Brown's Mule chewing tobacco or Martha White Flour. Some of the richer churches had invested in storebought Jesus Saves signs, but mostly they'd done them themselves; sometimes a Bible verse ran over onto a second sheet of plywood. The fancier, bigger signs might be nailed to a couple of upright posts, smaller ones to tree trunks. Peaches.

Firewood. Scuppernongs. Fresh eggs. John 3:16. And always and everywhere, boiled peanuts, which we were united in despising.

We didn't feel the same way about crackers. When we were almost where we were going, we stopped at a crossroads grocery for lunch. We may have had some sandwiches with us, but I remember only the package of Toast-Chee and the delicious coldness of plunging my arm into the ice water



Flannery O'Connor in the driveway of Andalusia Farm, 1962

of the cooler to find a Dr. Pepper. Cold rivulets ran through the orange dust that had settled on my arm along the way; the car windows were open and we were all powdery by that point.

Before we got back into the car we all washed our hands and faces with cool water and made a reasonable stab at hairbrushing. We put on fresh clothes and set off, turning onto the dirt and gravel drive and scattering guinea hens in all directions. My father parked the Rambler under a crape myrtle, and we trooped politely up the steps to the screened porch.

There was a round of introductions and the lavish experience of being offered cocola for the second time in the same day. And allowed to say yes, thank you, we would like some. It was such a heady experience

that when my younger sister spilled hers I indulged in a superior expression, which lasted until I caught my hostess's eye. Or she caught mine, considering me with the even and unsparing gaze of those Byzantine angels with the eyes on their wings. I lowered mine and joined the other children outside.

I think we dashed around a bit but mostly we strolled among the poultry, who made it clear that they'd been strolling first, and in their own territory. There were the guinea fowl, who make chickens look like intellectuals, and I believe some ducks and a goose or two. But oh, the unexpected splendor of the peacocks. I'd never seen one before and I've never seen them like that again, almost a dozen dragging their trains in the dust until something moved them to stop and shake a tailfeather. Then the shudder and the raising and the spreading out of all those eyes, and the beautiful curving inward like a frame or halo.

And then the cry. The peacock screams. It screams; it honks; it whistles; it combines

them all in a chaos of aggression and seductiveness. When there are almost a dozen peacocks discussing claim-jumping, the harshness is overwhelming. I took my book and sat on a low limb for a while, away from the pandemonium.

When it was time to go, we all washed our hands and went to say thank you. I had a question to put, as well.

The peacocks, I said, they're terrible. It's like they're broken somehow. How can they be so beautiful and sound so hideous at the same time?

My hostess smiled and looked thoughtful for a moment. Well, Priscilla, said Miss Flannery in that flat voice, that is exactly what I keep trying to figure out myself.

PRISCILLA M. JENSEN



The Hard Part

A trillion here, a trillion there—will we ever take deficits seriously?

The recent news that government revenues are down, combined with the Treasury Department's announcement that federal borrowing is up, has evoked howls of we-told-you-so from our friends on the left.

That last year's GOP tax cuts have played a role in widening the federal deficit is beyond dispute—revenues fell 7 percent in June of this year compared with the same month in 2017, and corporate tax payments have dropped steeply. Then, on July 30, Treasury announced that it will borrow \$329 billion over the next three months—a hefty increase of \$56 billion over earlier forecasts. The department announced further that borrowing would need to increase sharply in light of falling receipts and increased spending.

We strongly supported the 2017 tax-reform bill, but not in the belief that revenues would magically remain the same. We did so because the U.S. economy had limped along at about 2 percent growth for a decade and seemed unlikely to do any better for the foreseeable future. Given the Obama administration's regulatory follies and our highest-in-the-world corporate tax rate, there was little hope of reviving private-sector growth sufficiently to even think about narrowing the deficit—never mind paying down the debt—without major reform. The GOP passed its tax cut in tandem with the administration's noble efforts to jettison reams of Obama-era regulations. The result: Economic growth has improved and unemploy-

ment has fallen in 2018—and did so despite President Trump's hostility to our trading partners and regular attacks on U.S. companies.

There is now at least a hope of achieving the kind of sustained economic growth that two decades ago allowed a Republican-controlled Congress—together with an ideologically flexible president—to generate revenue surpluses. War, a brief recession, and a failure of principle led the GOP to squander that achievement, but the Republican Revolution of the 1990s proved beyond doubt that we need not surrender to the tyranny of permanent deficits.

Alas, nothing about today's GOP leads one to believe the party has regained the sense and conviction it lost in the 2000s. It's true that Republicans look sane compared to congressional Democrats, but that's saying very little. With entitlement spending overwhelming the federal budget and guaranteeing that future generations will devote much (perhaps most) of their wealth to the Sisyphean task of ensuring that Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid remain functional, an insurgency within the Democratic party is demanding we expand these programs.

Vermont senator Bernie Sanders's "Medicare for All" proposal would accomplish the progressive dream of nationalized health care, but it would do so through Obamacare's cockamamie system of government-funded third-party insurance providers—thus more expensively and less efficiently than even a fully nationalized system

EVA HAMBACH / AF / GETTY

could do. An analysis of the Sanders plan by Charles Blahous, a former member of the Medicare board of trustees, puts the cost at \$32.6 trillion over 10 years.

But the Democrats don't control both chambers of Congress and the White House; Republicans do. And the GOP, having done its work to release the private sector from a punitive tax structure, now sits silent and refuses to lift a finger to reduce the size of government and consequent expenditure of public money. There were hopeful signs 18 months ago—the White House proposed modest budget cuts, and the Education Department told Congress it needed less money than it did the year before. When Trump took office, he rightly censured the previous administration for piling on “more new debt than nearly all of the other presidents combined.” Yet in his State of the Union speech a year later, he omitted all mention of the nation's \$20 trillion debt and nearly trillion-dollar deficit. And the leaders of his party in Congress had nothing much to say either. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, gave Trump's speech an “A-plus.”

A few in the House recognize the party's opportunity and obligation to put expenditures in the same ballpark as revenue. Budget Committee chairman Steve Womack (R-Ark.) recently proposed sensible reductions to entitlement spending, but Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell—assuming the past is precursor—will quickly conclude that such a measure is too controversial and kill it in the upper chamber.

With the 2017 tax bill, Hill Republicans acted to create the economic circumstances necessary to maintain prosperity and meet the country's financial obligations. That was the first part, the easy part. The second and harder part—undoing the reckless errors of more than one generation of Washington policymakers—is no less necessary to the future of the republic. ♦

Tax Cut By Fiat

Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin on July 30 acknowledged to the *New York Times* that the Trump administration is considering a substantial de facto cut in the capital gains tax. The change wouldn't happen through legislation, the Republican majority being far too thin for that, but by regulatory fiat. “If it can't get done through a legislation process,” Mnuchin told the *Times*, “we will look at what tools at Treasury we have to do it on our own and we'll consider that.”

The idea would be to index capital gains for inflation. If you bought a stock for \$1,000 in 2000, say, and sell it in 2018 at the price of \$2,500, you pay a tax on the \$1,500 capital gain. But inflation has increased by about 46 percent over the

last 18 years, so that investment of \$1,000 was worth around \$1,460 in today's money. Indexing capital gains would mean you are taxed only on \$1,040, not the full \$1,500. In cases in which the asset has appreciated over a long period, the difference in tax liability would be substantial.

Treasury would effect the change by reinterpreting the term *cost* in the tax code—the cost of purchasing an asset would be adjusted for inflation. That is certain to invite legal challenges, but there are legitimate arguments for the change. The language of the statute doesn't specifically require *cost* to mean the amount of the original purchase. In *Mayo v. United States* (2011), the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Treasury had the right to interpret the word *student* in the tax code to exclude people working 40 hours a week or more. The High Court in *Mayo* relied on the 1984 *Chevron* decision that gives agencies flexibility in the interpretation of vague statutes. Hence, say supporters of regulatory indexing, Treasury can interpret *cost* in a way that accounts for inflation.

Yet the word *cost* in the tax code has little of the flexibility of the word *student*. The latter term might include almost anyone and, for purposes of taxation, requires a highly technical definition. The plain meaning of the word *cost*—the amount you pay for a thing at the time of purchase—needs little elaboration.

That's why, in 1992, the George H.W. Bush administration concluded that it did not have power unilaterally to reinterpret the word in this way. The *Chevron* doctrine, wrote then-assistant attorney general Timothy Flanigan in a memo agreeing with Treasury's conclusion, “does not furnish blanket authority for the regulatory rewriting of statutes whenever a dictionary gives more than a single definition for a statutory term. . . . Such a reading of *Chevron* would eviscerate the well-established rule of construction that statutes must be accorded their plain and commonly understood meaning.”

We don't doubt that lowering the capital gains tax on long-term investments would generate real benefits—and encourage the type of value investing that drives our economic success. But we wonder if these benefits are worth the practical and political costs of trying to set tax policy by regulation or executive order. On a practical level, the power of the purse belongs to Congress.

As a matter of politics, Republicans already struggle to overcome the accusation that they do the bidding of the very rich. This accusation can't entirely be avoided in a pro-business political party. But why give it credibility with a unilateral move that risks being reversed in the courts anyway? Indexing capital gains for inflation is a complicated policy to defend, and Democrats won't find it hard to criticize it as a tax cut for the wealthiest taxpayers.

There are cogent arguments for reducing capital-gains taxes and for indexing to avoid taxing inflated gains. We believe every tax ought to be reduced (and government scaled back accordingly). But the Treasury Department isn't the place to do it. Congress is. ♦

FRED BARNES

Three leaders are better than one

Democrats have tried to block the House Intelligence Committee's investigation of the FBI and its probe of the Trump presidential campaign. They have failed. And the Senate Judiciary Committee is investigating the actions of the FBI on its own.

Democrats made a fatal mistake. In their eagerness to quash scrutiny of the FBI, they embraced a dossier of unverified claims about President Trump put together by British ex-spy Christopher Steele. It blew up in their laps—and in the FBI's even more so—after it was used improperly to justify the wiretap of a minor Trump adviser, Carter Page. It was a partisan document, having been financed by Democrats.

The dossier was heavily relied on in the FBI's wiretap application. Only a part of that application has been released publicly, the rest redacted. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chairman of the House committee, has asked the Justice Department to unmask the redacted sections, or at least two dozen specific pages.

There are bigger questions that the full application cannot answer. Yet these are on the minds of Nunes and other Republicans on both committees. Who in the Obama administration authorized the request for the wiretap during the final months of the 2016 campaign? (It was approved on October 21.) Which officials were involved? How did they intend to use the material they might obtain? What laws might have been violated?

At a committee meeting on March 17, 2017, ranking Democrat Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), cited the dossier as if it were unquestionably true. He described Steele as “a former British intelligence

officer who is reportedly held in high regard by U.S intelligence.”

Steele's tales about Page were from Russian sources who had not been vetted. In other words, the items had not been checked out, which a thorough investigation would have required. “Steele has not been in Russia since his cover as a British spy was blown nearly 20 years ago,” according to Andy McCarthy of *National*



Until the Senate Judiciary Committee jumped in, Nunes was alone. And the Judiciary Committee's conclusions were often ignored by the media.

Review. The FBI later cut its ties with Steele for leaking information to reporters. Nonetheless, Democrats treated him as Mr. Reliable.

“The Trump campaign,” Schiff said, “is offered documents damaging to Hillary Clinton, which the Russians would publish through an outlet that gives them deniability, like WikiLeaks. The hacked documents would be in exchange for a Trump administration policy that de-emphasizes Russia's invasion of Ukraine and instead focuses on criticizing NATO countries for not paying their fair share.”

Once it turned its focus on the FBI, the Nunes committee was a target for Democrats and the media. The Senate Intelligence Committee and other Republicans were less interested in

the FBI wiretap. So until the Senate Judiciary Committee jumped in, Nunes was alone. And the Judiciary Committee's conclusions were often ignored by the media when they were much like the House committee's.

For instance, last winter when Nunes put out a memo that said the wiretap application had depended on the Steele dossier, he was pilloried. The Judiciary Committee agreed, but it got the cold shoulder. It was cost-free to attack Nunes. It was risky to clash with Judiciary chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), both political big boys.

It takes strenuous effort for a dissenting idea—like clashing with the FBI—to get traction. With Grassley and Graham on the same side as Nunes, the task got easier—three leaders rather than one. Ideas fade without leaders. Graham has been especially valuable. He's an engaging figure who's taken seriously by reporters and never hides from the press.

Nor can an idea emerge in a press blackout. That came close to happening. Next to Trump, Nunes is probably the most disliked Republican in Washington by the elite media and their hangers-on. While the mainstreamers echoed each other, there were five journalists who broke with the accepted narrative.

Without the many stories they broke, the idea that the FBI might have been involved in skulduggery could have vanished. Nunes would be a pariah. And congressional committees would be back to looking for Trump-Russia collusion, duplicating Robert Mueller's efforts. For the FBI story, there's no special prosecutor.

The five journalists are Byron York of the *Washington Examiner*, Mollie Hemingway of the *Federalist*, Kimberly Strassel of the *Wall Street Journal*, Chuck Ross of the *Daily Caller*, and McCarthy of *National Review*.

McCarthy wonders what the reaction would be if a Republican administration had used a “suspect agent” and a court to spy on the candidate of

the other party. “It would be covered as the greatest political scandal of the century,” he says. I couldn’t have put it better. ♦

COMMENT ♦ ERIC FELTEN

The FARA faucet: foreign agents are running scared

The first of a pair of Paul Manafort trials began this week in a courthouse in Virginia. The international lobbyist and onetime head of the Trump presidential campaign is charged with parking millions in cash offshore to evade taxes and otherwise launder his earnings. These are common enough charges in the shadier back-alleys of global high-finance and political fixing. The second trial, slated for later in the District of Columbia, deals extensively with a rather less common sort of allegation—that Manafort failed properly to register his activities under the federal Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

To say that FARA was, at least until recently, an obscurity would be a wild understatement. In 2016, the Justice Department’s inspector general audited the enforcement of FARA and “found that historically there have been hardly any FARA prosecutions.” And by hardly any, the IG meant hardly any. In half a century—from 1966 to 2015—there were “only seven criminal FARA cases.” One produced an actual conviction at trial, two resulted in guilty pleas, two of the accused pleaded out to other charges, and “two cases were dismissed.” So in 50 years, all of three people have been found guilty of FARA violations.

One other measure of what a backwater FARA enforcement has been: The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence website offers a helpful list of some two dozen “Major Intelligence Related Statutes.” The 1993

Central Intelligence Agency Voluntary Separation Pay Act makes the list; FARA does not.

But now, thanks to the various investigations of the special counsel, FARA seems to be everywhere. There are the Manafort charges, of course, but don’t forget the 13 Russian social media trolls and their alleged corporate



To say that FARA was, at least until recently, an obscurity would be a wild understatement: In half a century, just three convictions.

sponsors. They are accused of defrauding the United States by “impairing, obstructing, and defeating the lawful functions of the government.” One of the “lawful functions” specified by the Mueller team is FARA. And then there is Russian grad student and gun-rights advocate Maria Butina, who was recently charged with violating an even more obscure parallel to the FARA statute, 18 U.S.C. 951, which regulates “agents of foreign governments.”

All of these prosecutions have focused the minds of Washington’s lobbyist class and others who are wondering whether they might find themselves defined as “foreign agents.” They’ve been lining up at lawyers’ offices to register their activities.

“We have seen a significant uptick in FARA-related business, both from new clients wanting to ensure they are in compliance and from existing clients who are asking us to ensure that their prior filings are fully buttoned-up,” says Josh Rosenstein of Sandler Reiff Lamb Rosenstein & Birkenstock. “Many of them have told us that the new regulatory environment is prompting them to take a hard look at FARA compliance.” Sensible stuff, that.

Law firm Wiley Rein is at “a record pace in fielding inquiries from clients in regard to compliance with the Foreign Agents Registration Act,” says attorney Daniel Pickard. “We’re receiving lots of requests for guidance as to whether clients need to file.”

According to a Justice Department spokesman, there were 50 percent more FARA filings in 2017 than in 2016. And if anything, the pace has quickened since then. Asked if there’s been a boom in FARA work and whether the current prosecutions explain it, Thomas J. Spulak of King & Spalding is blunt: “Yes and yes.”

Savvy law firms are putting the word out to clients with international business that they need to get right with Uncle Sam. Jenner & Block produced a white paper in February titled “The Revival of the Foreign Agents Registration Act: What You Should Know and What to Do Next.” Covington & Burling warned, “The breadth of the statute, its criminal penalties, the absence of interpretive guidance, and the growing attention paid to the 1930s era law by federal prosecutors combine to create dangerous and difficult-to-manage risks for multinational companies, lobbying firms, and public relations firms.”

Which is an elaborate way of saying if you have to ask whether you need to file, chances are you might want to.

There’s no shortage of persons covered by the law, in no small part because of the circumstances of its passage. In the years before the United States entered World War II, Nazi propagandists and provocateurs actively infiltrated American social and political organizations. Their goal: to skew public opinion about the war in Europe. The Foreign

Agents Registration Act was drafted to empower the federal government to respond to that threat, and as with many wartime security laws, FARA was written as broadly as possible.

Consider the law's quite expansive definition of "person." The statute explains: "The term 'person' includes an individual, partnership, association, corporation, organization, or any other combination of individuals."

Then there is the "foreign principal" who makes a "person" into a foreign agent by giving him, her, or it direction. Several subclauses note who is included in the definition of foreign principals. The first is straightforward enough: "A government of a foreign country and a foreign political party." But what of the second subclause, which defines as a "foreign principal" any non-American "person outside of the United States." Just a bit broad, don't you think?

Given the expansiveness of the statute the better question than who is covered might be who isn't. Craig Engle heads the political law group at Arent Fox. He says most people even remotely covered by the act don't want to run afoul of FARA any more than they want to get themselves into any other sort of trouble. Of those who are conceivably covered by FARA but unregistered, Engle says the vast majority want to be in conformity with the law. "Now that FARA is in the papers, clients are calling." They're all asking, "Oh, does that apply to me?"

It's a good question. Let's say you are the CEO—or even just the press spokesman—for a U.S. business owned by a German firm, and you express to a reporter an opinion about tariff policies. Are you required to declare yourself and your company foreign agents and keep up twice-yearly filings with the FARA office? It can't hurt.

In our age of globalized business, this has all sorts of companies worried that a prosecutor in need of a handy statute with which to leverage them may learn from Team Mueller just how useful FARA can be. Business lobbyists have been looking to Capitol Hill to make FARA less encompassing and less elastic. A spokesman for Senate Judiciary chairman Chuck

Grassley says, "We've been working with stakeholders to find a way to thoughtfully address legitimate concerns raised by U.S. subsidiaries of foreign companies." Grassley has FARA reform legislation now before the Foreign Relations Committee.

Arent Fox's Engle says two things have come from all the publicity about FARA and its broad application: (1) more compliance with FARA; and (2) a new impetus for long-overdue reform

of the statute. "Controversy," Engle says, "sometimes creates progress."

Not that this will turn off the lawyers' FARA faucet: "We have certainly seen an uptick in the number of clients seeking FARA advice recently," says Christopher E. Babbitt of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr. "We would expect that to continue—particularly if any of the proposed FARA reforms are enacted." It's a win-win of a sort. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

We're still hearing the echoes from the Loud family

I was a little surprised last week to learn that Bill Loud, patriarch of the Southern California family depicted in the first reality-television show (*An American Family*, PBS, 1973), had died—at the patriarchal age of 97. But of course, I shouldn't have been surprised: A generation or more has passed since the Loud family's celebrity came and went, and the lifespan of celebrity is usually exceeded by human longevity. As with more than a few pop-cultural landmarks, *An American Family* must now be explained as well as remembered.

It seems difficult to imagine now, but there was a time when television programming was not only confined to a handful of commercial networks but almost invariably staged and orchestrated.

The successful launch of communications satellites in the early 1960s allowed for "live" broadcasting from distant locations—especially useful to news divisions—and the establishment of the publicly funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting (1967) gave America a pale imitation of Britain's BBC. Commercial TV had begun in the immediate postwar era of mass-market uplift, but by the time the Public Broadcasting Service com-

missioned and ran *An American Family*, the culture of television had long since taken a downward trajectory.

It is worth noting, incidentally, that while *An American Family* is credited with inventing reality TV, that is not quite accurate. A few years earlier a New York-based documentary film-



To what extent was the behavior on *An American Family* prompted by its inquiring cameras—and is there anything Americans will not do in full view of strangers?

maker named Robert Fresco had gained permission to film a minor criminal proceeding in a Denver county court. Almost no American trial had ever before been filmed, much less recorded and photographed, for any length of time, and the resulting four-part PBS series—*Trial: The City and County of Denver vs. Lauren R. Watson* (1970)—demolished that particular barrier.

I record this, by the way, for a

personal reason: Some months later I happened to work with Fresco on a project, and he seemed genuinely touched that I not only recalled having seen *Trial* but also remembered the (unforgettable) name of the presiding judge: the Hon. Zita Weinshienk—an early lesson in the evanescence of fame.

An American Family was an altogether different sort of enterprise. A husband-and-wife documentary team for several months followed around an affluent Santa Barbara couple, Pat and Bill Loud, and their five adolescent children, and then distilled hundreds of hours of raw footage into 12 hour-long episodes.

I was a senior in college at the time and, once again, it should be explained that my access to television in those halcyon days was limited to a semi-functional set in a common room in my dormitory. I had little interest in *An American Family*. But two of my best friends in the dorm were besotted by the series, and in their case, it's not hard to see why. Whereas the Louds struck me as exceptionally banal and annoying—conversation was devoid of ideas and ambition seemed to concentrate on fame—they saw wretched excess and irresistibly cheap melodrama. And like most of America, they were quickly addicted to each

installment and delighted, as well, when all seven Louds earned the official imprimatur of celebrity in bygone times: a cover portrait and analytical story in *Newsweek*.

Bill and Pat Loud seemed to have been recruited from central casting: He was a handsome, self-confident, Jaguar-driving manufacturer of machine parts and she was a boozy, chainsmoking, mildly frustrated character out of a John Cheever story. The Loud children, male and female, were largely encased in 1960s-'70s uniforms—big hair, garish colors, bell-bottom trousers—and seemed interchangeable to me. But the breakout star of the series was the eldest son Lance, flamboyantly gay, in love with the camera, habitually aimless, alternately laughing and weeping.

The viewing public, needless to say, was equally hypnotized and appalled. On the one hand, it was both shocking and inexplicable that anyone, much less a seemingly respectable family, would allow themselves to be recorded by a film crew, all day and every day, for months on end. To be sure, the Louds were devoted, one to the other, in mysterious ways and, in the fashion of families, deeply self-absorbed. Yet there was turbulence beneath the sun-drenched surface, which exploded in a famous on-camera revelation of

Bill Loud's infidelities and Pat Loud's demand for divorce.

So *An American Family* raised two questions about celebrity culture and its handmaiden television that remain current and are probably unanswerable: To what extent was the Loud family's behavior, especially its misbehavior, prompted by those inquiring cameras, and is there anything Americans will not do in full view of strangers?

To their credit, the filmmakers' claims for their project were comparatively modest: Despite the title of the series, they did not regard the Loud family as representative either of America or of families—not even in a decade when the chattering classes were largely persuaded that both had seen better days. They filmed, as it were; you decided. And in Bill Loud's defense, he complained that the footage was deliberately edited to present “only the negative, bizarre, and sensational stuff,” as it may well have been. Forty-five years later, his surviving four children—Lance died in 2001, at 50—and even Pat Loud seem to regard him with affection and gratitude.

The problem, of course, is that the primal instinct that drew Bill Loud toward the camera and pop-cultural immortality is a two-edged sword. Speaking of his father a couple of years ago, one of the younger Loud sons recalled that his business “provided a family of five kids with a very comfortable life, and took [us] around the world. As a kid I never thought much about it. As a middle-aged guy, I can only shake my head in awe and respect.” Indeed, Loud's life can be seen from another perspective: He had been a PT boat commander on D-Day, received a Bronze Star in Korea, and built a prosperous business enterprise from scratch.

And yet that same paragon of the American dream was a precursor of a coarsened popular culture that, in the decades since, makes the dialogue and set-pieces of *An American Family* seem like Molière by comparison. “But I'm really grateful,” he told an interviewer when the series was broadcast. “It was a very gratifying experience.” ♦

Worth Repeating from *WeeklyStandard.com*:

Among all the gifted people I have encountered, I am profoundly thankful to have accidentally fallen—albeit briefly—within the personal orbit of the world's most revered “neighbor,” Fred Rogers.

Like throngs of other parents, I first came to admire Mr. Rogers through his weekday children's television program, but I never imagined I would one day have lunch with him to discuss a child-care issue of mutual concern. And I never dreamed that Mr. Rogers in person would be a more perfect version of his remarkably warm and wise television persona, for an unexpected reason: There was no hint that his graciousness and goodness were scripted.

—Richard B. McKenzie, *My Chance Lunch with Fred Rogers*

Affirmative reaction

In 2016 the College of Charleston ended the practice of considering race and ethnicity in admissions decisions—affirmative action, as it is called. The change went unnoticed in the college community until the *Post and Courier*, the local daily paper, reported it on July 29. Whereupon, almost within the same news cycle, the school’s interim president, professing the college’s commitment to “diversity on campus,” wrote that the school had not made “any changes to its official admissions policies regarding race” and is using affirmative action.

It was as though nothing had happened, though it had. The College of Charleston had long employed the so-called “holistic” approach to admissions, in which a committee takes into account not just academic achievement but nonacademic factors like extracurricular activities—along with race and ethnicity. But in 2016 the committee removed race and ethnicity from the list of factors. And now, in the middle of the summer of 2018, the college has added them back to the list. Never mind that the freshman class of 2017 was the first in years to be selected without race-based affirmative action. The college will conduct “an additional review of students of color who [were] not initially recommended for admission,” reports the *Post and Courier*.

So the status quo ante is back. But the committee that eliminated race and ethnicity as factors taken into account in the holistic approach deserves a good word for its work. The committee ended the use of race apparently because of welcome trends in the college’s admissions. According to the chief enrollment officer, in an interview with the *Post and Courier*, the committee recognized that “our student-of-color enrollments were increasing substantially”—having doubled in the past decade—“while we were infrequently using race as a

factor” in admissions. In other words, more and more “students of color” were being accepted without race having been a factor in the reviews of their applications. Evidently there was no reason for the committee to think that those trends would have abated under a race-neutral holistic process.

Race-neutrality seems to have been



The Obama administration tilted in favor of the use of race in admissions. The Department of Justice now may tilt back.

a lodestar for the committee. In 2015 it began the implementation of a Top 10 Percent Plan similar to the one used by the University of Texas for more than 20 years. Under this plan, admission is guaranteed to students who finish in the top 10 percent of their classes. Top 10 is race-neutral. And while it is a pilot program in place in seven of the state’s southern-most counties—the South Carolina Lowcountry—it could be expanded throughout the state.

Meanwhile, the college’s resumption of affirmative action is a story not likely to die down any time soon. It may attract the attention of the Justice Department, which just last month reviewed several Obama-era “guidance” documents that “purport to explain the legal framework that governs the use of race” by postsecondary schools. The Obama administration’s analysis of that framework tilted in favor of the use of race in admissions decisions. “The documents were written to advocate where the law should go,” a senior department official told me.

Justice has now withdrawn the documents and may write new ones that are consistent with the law—and tougher about when the use of race in admissions may be justified. Note well that the Supreme Court’s cases on affirmative action have yielded the exacting doctrine of “strict scrutiny,” under which race may be used in admissions only if it is “narrowly tailored” to attain the “compelling interest” of educational diversity.

The college also may have to contend with a rejected applicant alleging that the “additional review” is racially discriminatory and a violation of federal law, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity. Such a lawsuit would go nowhere if the college weren’t competitive, which evidently it is.

Still, it is better not to be sued than to be sued. The risk of the latter has now increased, and a complaint could focus on the “color line” the college has just drawn. Thanks to that line, an applicant of color may get an “additional review,” but one who is not won’t, which means some rejected applicants may claim to have received unequal treatment by the college. And if the extra review of a declined applicant of color is based on race alone and does not involve an “individualized consideration” of the person, as the Court requires, that too could be a problem.

College of Charleston records show that more and more of the school’s “admits” identify themselves as being of two or more races. That is just another piece of evidence that ours is a multiracial, multicultural country that is remaking itself every day.

Set against this canvas of demographic change, affirmative action is, as Justice Sandra Day O’Connor once wrote, a “deviation from the norm of equal treatment of all racial and ethnic groups.” For that reason, she made clear that the deviation must be “temporary.” Hence “the requirement that all race-conscious admissions programs have a termination point.” Getting to that point is the urgent work of admissions committees struggling with affirmative action and hoping for its end. ♦

It's Worse than Vulgar, It's Trendy

Washington, D.C., in 2018.

BY P.J. O'ROURKE

I lived in Washington from 1988 to 2008, and I return frequently—six or eight times a year to see friends and doctors (to the extent there's a difference at my age) and to eat oysters and prime rib and drink whiskey at the Palm (sending me back to the doctors). But when I was in town for a few days last month I realized that I have been paying little or no attention to the city itself.

Paying little or no attention to Washington suits my classical liberal ideas. And—as the campaign slogan went for one Washington denizen who was best ignored—“Now More Than Ever.” But I am nonetheless embarrassed by how unobservant I've been.

I knew the city had changed, but I'd successfully ignored this until I went to stay with friends in a neighborhood where, in 1988, I would not have sent my worst enemy to run a daytime errand. (I lie. I would have gladly dispatched Noam Chomsky to the open-air drug market that was Lincoln Park 30 years ago, to get himself some crack to clarify his thinking.)

I was flabbergasted even looking out the taxi window on my way to “South-east beyond 8th Street”—once a region of the District as remote from my quotidian life as Helmand Province.

From whence came the balconied canyons of apartment buildings

around the Washington Navy Yard and Nationals Park? Whither went the Anacostia of yore? Who lives in all these shiny new places? And why?

The resplendent growth and glit-



tering wealth of modern Washington would baffle a free-market economist. The city is not founded, as great cities are, on a rock, a river, or a road. The “Landfill of L'Enfant” is not placed in a defensible position. The storm sewer Potomac is a river by courtesy title only. And Washington doesn't stand astride a great trade route. Rather, it squats athwart one, blocking with traffic jams the commerce of I-95.

Washington is no port or transportation axis or major marketplace for

anything but egos. It is the business center of no business, the manufacturing hub of making nothing and spending all, incubator of no innovation except in fibs, and core of international banking only in the sense of a Federal Reserve financed by air.

*Hog caller for the World,
Fool maker, Stacker of Decks,
Player with Logrolling and the
Nation's man-handler;
Whiny, feckless, appalling,
City of the Sharp Elbows.*

Yet in fact, Washington's growth and wealth are all too easily explained.

People are flocking to the seat of government power. One would say “dogs returning to their vomit” except that's too hard on dogs. Too hard on people, also. They come to Washington because they have no choice—diligent working breeds compelled to eat their regurgitated tax dollars.

The federal government has captured the economy of the United States, nationalizing and centralizing our labor and means of production to an extent not seen in avowedly Communist countries such as China and Vietnam.

The federal government has done this not with the iron grid of Marxist theory but with the silken threads of entitlement spending, the caress of funding, the enticement of subsidy, and the seduction of easy monetary policy.

All these baits and lures are placed in Washington at the crux of a spider web of regulatory and legislative interference in the marketplace. If we want something—anything—we must go to Washington and beg it from the arachnids in charge.

Hence the gentrification of the once half-derelected quarters of the District, with courtiers now living in splendor where slum-dwellers would not live in squalor.

Who is this new gentry? Are they squires with vast land holdings? (Sort

THOMAS FLUHARTY

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of. The federal government owns 640 million acres of land, though not put to very productive use.) Are they an intellectual elite? Cue laughter. A military aristocracy? The knights in camouflaged armor are in aforementioned Helmand Province, not the Pentagon. The new gentry may be robbers but they are hardly baronial.

Actually, they aren't even new. The gentry are, as they always were, just "Beltway insiders." The difference is that now they are much more numerous, and they make much more money because as the size of government benefits has grown, so has the labor of extracting them.

Meanwhile, what happened to the poor people? It was an apposite verse in old Washington, Matthew 26:11, "For ye have the poor always with you." There they were a couple hundred yards from the Capitol dome. And the verse was (or should have been) salutary. The weight of governance falls heaviest on the poor. Government could look around itself and see at close range what good its legislation and regulation and the toadying acolytes thereof had done for the poor. None. But that burden of biblical instruction has been lifted from the shoulders of governance. Nowadays Matthew 26:11 reads, "For ye have the poor always somewhere out in Prince George's County."

It's a rich man's city now. I accept that as inevitable under the *force majeure* circumstances. But something besides wealth and power was bothering me as I walked around safe, clean, and prosperous Capitol Hill. The coffee shops with their misplaced living room furniture, free WiFi, and exorbitant cups of joe admixed with untoward ingredients. The restaurants serving dishes that no one has heard of from countries where no one has been. The neck-bearded young men with sleeves of tats and the pierce-faced young women with heads shaved in some places and in other places not.

When governance becomes opulent, we can perhaps survive it. When governance becomes omnipotent we can perhaps endure it. But when governance becomes *hip* . . . All is lost. ♦

May Staggers into August

Her days will grow short, when she reaches September. BY DOMINIC GREEN

Virginia Woolf said that whenever Charles Dickens felt that a story was faltering in plot or wit, he threw "another handful of people on the fire." Character, she reckoned, was Dickens's substitute for the conventional virtues of organization and intelligence. You can go a long way in England on character—all the way to 10 Downing Street. But you cannot stay there without organization and intelligence.

In 1990, after pro-E.U. ministers had stabbed Margaret Thatcher in the back, John Major, a man untroubled by charisma, emerged as the consensus inheritor. After an organized and intelligent campaign, Major won more votes in the 1992 elections than any previous Conservative candidate. Not bad for a character so mild that he tucked his shirt into his underwear just to be on the safe side.

In 2016, after the Brexit referendum, David Cameron's resignation, and the bungled candidacy of the excessively characterful Boris Johnson, Theresa May tiptoed into Downing Street. She was supposed to be organized and intelligent; she had survived a term at the graveyard of ambition that is the Home Office. She claimed to be capable of holding together a party riven over Europe, of rebinding a nation divided by Europe, and of steering Britain through Brexit. She has turned out to be the worst prime minister in living memory.

First, May lost her parliamentary majority through a poorly organized and foolish electoral campaign in

2017. Then she pursued a disastrous negotiating strategy with the E.U. over Brexit—if, that is, a program of surrender by stages can be called a strategy at all. Finally, in early July, she summoned her cabinet to the prime minister's weekend home, Chequers, and secured its collective responsibility for a Brexit policy that reneged on her election promises of 2017 and subsequent policy statements.

The façade of unity lasted three days, until two of the stronger characters in the pro-Brexit camp, May's foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, and her Brexit negotiator, David Davis, threw themselves on the fire. The policy lasted four days, until it came before the House of Commons. The European Research Group, the anti-E.U. faction among the Conservatives, added amendments that would nullify May's proposal to keep Britain permanently under the E.U.'s legal suzerainty and partially inside its customs borders for goods. The remains of May's dignity went the next day, when pro-E.U. Conservatives counter-attacked with amendments designed to effectively keep Britain in the E.U. forever, a gambit that May defeated with the support of pro-Brexit Labour rebels. Next, Boris Johnson, who is usually given more to wit than intelligence, delivered a resignation speech so polite and reasonable that it can only have been a pitch for May's job.

To survive this double onslaught from her own party, May had to accept amendments that she opposed and oppose amendments that she wanted. This is the equivalent of negotiating the passage between Scylla and Charybdis by aiming for the rocks and then bouncing into the whirlpool.

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The vessel may still be floating, but the sailors know that the captain is a fool and that their fate is tied to hers. In case anyone still doubted that May was out of her depth, Michel Barnier, the E.U.'s chief negotiator, delivered a gratuitous insult by preemptively rejecting May's proposals.

The consensus in Westminster is that May is a person of good character, a vicar's daughter, trying to do the right thing. She is not Edward Heath, the Conservative prime minister who in 1975 persuaded Britons to vote to enter Europe's customs union while denying that this would commit Britain to the political union that the leaders of the European Economic Community were already planning and that Heath wanted. Heath was a clever liar. May is becoming a foolish and dishonest one. For her, commitment to duty seems increasingly indistinguishable from clinging to power and its perks.

May was a Remainer in 2016. Her Chequers plan was for Brexit in name only. She claims that it fulfills the terms for Brexit, but this is not true. The pre-referendum booklets sent to every household by David Cameron's government specified that Brexit would mean leaving the E.U.'s single market and customs union. May had endorsed this "clean Brexit" in 2016 and 2017. Now she is attempting to foist the worst of all Brexits on the public. Under the Chequers plan, Britain would pay nearly 40 billion pounds in dues to the E.U. and remain inside the customs union, but it would lose its voice in the councils of the E.U. and not recover its parliamentary sovereignty.

May has shown enough wit to retain her office but not the intelligence that Britain needs at its most critical juncture since 1945. The public voted for a revision of Britain's economic and legal relationships with the world. Instead of trying to reconcile parliamentary sovereignty with the global economy, May suggests that Britain become a vassal state of a corrupt and failing empire. Shamelessly, her team tried to bring Parliament's summer recess forward by five days,

in order to preserve her government until September. They abandoned the plan when it became clear that they didn't have the votes.

The word in Westminster is that May's enemies will call a vote of no confidence in September, when Parliament resumes, or in October, when Barnier formally rejects the Chequers proposal and, as he has at every stage, demands further concessions. This may seem like an intelligent strategy if you are Boris Johnson or a Conservative backbencher. But the longer this goes on, the worse it will be. Not just for May, who is a dead woman walking, or even for the Conservatives, who seem set on proving their unfitness for office, but for the country.

The Conservative party membership is in open revolt. Labour, despite being led by Jeremy Corbyn, a revolutionary socialist stained by friendship with Islamists and anti-Semites, is edging ahead in the polls. A majority of Conservatives in parliament, exposed by the 2016 referendum as out of touch with the public, are still out of touch. They distrust Boris Johnson more than they fear Corbyn, even though Johnson is the only Conservative with the wit to capture the swing voters.

Nor have a majority of parliamentary Conservatives accepted what the public has already grasped and what the Euroskeptics always said. The E.U. never had any intention of accommodating Britain with a bespoke deal. With Euroskepticism rising across the member states, it is both congenial and necessary for the E.U. to humiliate Britain *pour encourager les autres*. The character of the E.U. is fundamentally undemocratic, its policies are lacking in intelligence, and its leaders are witless. Everyone in Britain knows this, even those who prefer to be in the E.U. rather than out

of it. Still, the BBC and the Remainers in the Conservative party insist that they know better than the voters.

Britain now faces only two possibilities, to collapse backwards into the E.U. or crash forward into a "hard Brexit." The first would turn the current failure into a crisis of democracy, because it would betray the referendum result. The second would be a hard economic landing. But at least Britain would keep the 40 billion pounds and be free to negotiate trade deals with the rest of the world. It would also be a functioning democ-



racy, because its elected leaders would have honored their promises.

Last week, the newspapers speculated that a hard Brexit would mean chaos at the borders. Stocks of medicine would run out. Trucks would jam the motorway all the way from London to the port at Dover. The army would have to step in to keep the peace. None of this should even be conceivable: May's government promised to prepare for every contingency.

It is an index of how disgracefully May has acted in betraying her word, and how disgracefully her MPs have behaved in putting party before country, that this kind of fiasco remains conceivable. Worse, it is all too easy to imagine May still in charge as the ship goes down. Either the Conservatives do the right thing with a modicum of wit and intelligence, or this collective failure of character will sink them for a generation. ♦

Bland Spicer

The hometown briefing.

BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

Barrington, R.I.

Sean Spicer took about as much time writing a memoir of his tenure in the Trump administration as he did serving in it. The 46-year-old career Republican operative was President Trump's press secretary beginning January 20, 2017—though some might say he didn't *really* begin service until January 21, when he came out and claimed, despite copious photographic evidence to the contrary, that the inauguration crowd the day before had been the largest in American history. By September he was gone. Now, 10 months later, he's released a thin memoir: *The Briefing: Politics, the Press, and the President*.

It was to hawk this book that Spicer returned on Saturday, July 28, to his hometown of Barrington, Rhode Island. Barrington is a tony suburb of Providence, home to a sparkling country club, an attractive municipal beach, and a downtown that tends towards farm-to-table restaurants and independent bookstores. Spicer had a typical Barrington upbringing: His father, who died in 2016, owned a yacht brokerage company. (Sean says it was the 1991 luxury tax applied to yachts that first raised his political consciousness.) The younger Spicer attended Portsmouth Abbey, a Catholic boarding school, and then Connecticut College. He's been active in Republican politics ever since, while finding time along the way to serve in the Naval Reserve.

Spicer's event, held at downtown fixture Barrington Books, was advertised for 1:30, but by 2:00 the doors hadn't yet opened. So a long line formed in front of the store, which is situated in a downtown strip mall. There was a smattering of MAGA hats among the

assembled, and a few younger folks sported red caps that read "Rhode Island First." But the crowd was more curious than partisan. "I don't really care about politics, but it's cool when someone from your town writes a book," one middle-aged woman said.

What Barrington Books' logistical hiccup did afford was a greater opportunity for hecklers. "Fascists!" one shouted at the crowd. Others simply held signs in front of the line: "Sean Spicer Lied for Profit" and "Shame on Sean." The protesters were moved along by local cops—"This is a private parking lot," they said. The more clever protesters parked their cars in front of the line of ticket-holders and put big signs in their windshields. They then simply walked away.

Hecklers made it into the event as well. One man shouted, "Sean, any advice for the young people who want to make a profit from corroding the truth?" to a smattering of applause. It was presumably to avoid scenes like this that, the day before this event, BJ's Wholesale Club in nearby Seekonk, Massachusetts, canceled its planned Spicer signing. This is, after all, a heavily Democratic area, and Spicer's local roots buy him only so much slack. Here in Barrington, Spicer simply shrugged off the jab: "I think that young people should engage in government and be active," he said.

The event was mostly a mellow one. Spicer was interviewed by Joe Paolino, the former mayor of Providence and a dogged Democrat—he's DNC committeeman for Rhode Island. Paolino, tight with the Clintons, also served as Bill's ambassador to Malta.

The former mayor allowed that "many of my friends who are Democrats are asking, 'What the hell are you doing with Sean Spicer?'" But Paolino said that he views his role as

telling Democrats that "we have to talk to Republicans if we want to keep our country moving forward." This was a theme that came up time and again, with both Spicer and Paolino lamenting political polarization. "I'm a fairly fierce partisan, but I think we can have dialogue. We can learn from each other," Spicer said. "We need to have discussions in a civil and respectful way." The irony of this plea being made by a former Trump press secretary went unmentioned.

Like the book itself, the event was mostly a not-terribly-interesting biographical sketch of a genial fellow who, through a bizarre confluence of events, ended up as the public face of the Trump administration during its chaotic opening months.

Spicer dreamed of working in marketing before getting bitten by the "political bug," he said. He recalled his first job in Washington, in the office of the legendary Rhode Island Republican senator John Chafee ("pure class"), and the various campaigns he served on. ("You were winning or losing. Running a campaign, you knew whether you were running forwards or backwards.") And his time at the Republican National Committee from 2009 on. ("We spent a lot of time building a ground game and an operation. It's all in the book.") Strangely, the book is light on details about what it's like to work with Trump. Spicer falls back on hoary clichés about what an "honor and privilege" it is to work in the White House.

In contrast to some other entries in the burgeoning genre of Trump Lit, *The Briefing* has not, apparently, been a major commercial hit. Unlike recent works by Michael Wolff, James Comey, and Jeanine Pirro, Spicer's hasn't rocketed up the *New York Times* bestseller list (it's No. 13), and on the Amazon charts he's been languishing in the high triple digits. That's because Trump books are, commercially at least, the opposite of Aristotle's Golden Mean: To succeed they need either to be slavishly pro-Trump or hysterically opposed. Spicer's book sits there flacidly in the middle.

Perhaps that's why, even in a cozy

Ethan Epstein is associate editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

hometown venue like Barrington, there are a smattering of empty seats. Though it's always possible that the day after

the event, Spicer reappeared to declare that his crowd was Barrington's largest book signing in history. ♦

Working with Charles

Krauthammer's research assistants reminisce.

BY DAVID HODGES

Like many longtime readers of Charles Krauthammer, I was heartbroken to see his farewell column in the *Washington Post* in June. I was fortunate enough to spend two years as his research assistant, and since then I have relied upon his writings to make sense of the world.

After Charles's passing, a group of his former research assistants came together to reminisce and compare notes about our experiences working for him. Knowing how he was revered by his readers, we wanted to share our observations of his writing process. As *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat wrote, there was "no greater master of the form." While we will never read another new column from Charles, our hope is that others might get a sense of how he worked and from that understand how he might approach an issue.

As any writer knows, it is not always easy to come up with an idea. Charles, who filed a weekly column for more than 30 years, was no exception. Sometimes he knew in advance exactly what he would write; other times, he would discard a hard-written and time-consuming column at the last moment so he could write a new one, just hours before deadline.

Most of the time, however, things were somewhere in the middle. He

would think over an issue until he felt he had something to say, he would gather research, and he would create an outline. Mike Watson, his last research assistant, observed that he would go where his writing took him. "He would try to have two ideas in his outline so that he could pick the one that he found the most interesting as he edited down from the initial draft."

When thinking about the column, it also helped him to picture his audience. "Charles said he often imagined he was at a dinner party—in a friendly audience, but mixed with those sympathetic and skeptical of his position," according to Hillel Ofek, his assistant from 2007-08. In reading his columns, that tone of respectful argumentation is evident throughout. "The style is almost conversational ('Why, you ask . . .')," said Peter NeCastro (2011-12), "but never pompous." Beyond that, he "wrote to make you see," said Borden Flanagan (1997-99), "the crux of an issue, the most important levers of power at work in a situation, the salient ground in human nature of these."

To that end, columns would frequently have their origins in a fact or quotation that was hiding in plain sight. "He homed in on minute details that revealed a greater principle hiding behind them or that gave his arguments more color," Watson said. Jeffrey Bloom (1993-94) seconded that observation: "He was a master at finding a quote buried deep in a *New York Times* or *Washington Post* story and building a column from it." ♦

Any editor who worked with Charles knew that he had not truly finished fine-tuning his piece until the last second before the deadline passed. Words—and their meanings—were of profound importance to him. No one ever cared more than Charles about the placement of a comma. This was not merely because he was a master word-smith (though he was). It was because he knew that his words held meaning for millions of people, and it was his responsibility as a public figure to take great care in how he expressed himself.

Such precision was part of his method of persuasion. While he was not one to pull his punches, Charles knew that if his column contained a minor factual error or some superfluous flare of hyperbole, it would weaken his case. He wanted each column to be as precise and logical as possible and his readers to make no mistake about the thrust of his argument. Bloom noted that "he wanted the facts in the columns to be unimpeachable so people couldn't distract from his arguments by contradicting a fact, however minor it might be."

Writing with precision did not mean being mechanically confined by the rules. Like many good writers, Charles delighted in sometimes bending—or breaking—certain conventions to make his point. Jonathan Fluger (2009-11) remembered sparring with him over the proper application of a grammatical rule. "I want it to sing!" Charles told him.

A final observation about working for Charles: One of the first things we all learned was that Charles insisted that calls from his immediate family be routed to him without delay. This was a rule that did not always apply to the luminaries who rang.

There was a reason for this. "Charles's sense of responsibility was to his family and to the country that was its shelter and home," said Flanagan. "This afforded him the intellectual independence to see what he saw and say what he said." We who had the privilege to work for Charles learned from his example the right way to write about Washington and, more important, the right way to live here too. ♦

David Hodges, director of the nonprofit Governor's STEM Scholars program, was Charles Krauthammer's research assistant from 2005-07.

Kid Trump

*Charlie Kirk,
the founder of
Turning Point USA,
has made it his business
to ‘own the libs.’*

*Business is
booming.*



BY ADAM RUBENSTEIN

On July 23, hundreds of students gathered at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., for Turning Point USA’s fourth annual High School Leadership Summit. The four-day event was a sequence of workshops on campus activism and student leadership punctuated by speeches by prominent conservatives, from House whip Steve Scalise and Education secretary Betsy DeVos to rabble-rousers like Sebastian Gorka and Anthony Scaramucci.

Backstage at TPUSA events you’ll find facsimiles of both the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Placed on a table with cellophane overlays, the pages aren’t just symbols—and they aren’t there for reference. TPUSA’s speakers and celebrity guests are asked to sign the documents. Scan the pages and you’ll see the John Hancocks of Ann Coulter, Judge Jeanine Pirro, Donald Trump lawyer Jay Sekulow, ex-Fox News star Kimberly Guilfoyle, Donald Trump Jr., and Lara Trump right on top of the Founders’ words. You’ll find the scribbled signatures

of *Gateway Pundit*’s Jim Hoft, Ohio congressman Jim Jordan, Brexit evangelist Nigel Farage, and the NRA’s Dana Loesch. Ginni Thomas, the wife of Clarence Thomas, wrote “TPUSA ROCKS” above her name. RNC spokesperson Kayleigh McEnany printed a Bible verse below hers and added “MAGA.” The documents are a memento of TPUSA events but also a who’s who of the powerbrokers of conservatism in the age of Trump.

Charlie Kirk, TPUSA’s founder, calls himself “the luckiest 24-year-old ever to exist.” He started the group six years ago instead of going to college and now has 130,000 high school students, undergrads, and recent college graduates on board in what he calls the fight “to save Western civilization.” He sees himself as a general in the “culture war” and TPUSA’s members as “culture warriors”—effective “disrupters” of the left on campus and eventually across America. Kirk travels nonstop; he spent more than 300 days last year on the road giving speeches and meeting with donors, students, and politicians. Everywhere he goes he spreads the message that “Big Government Sucks” and “Socialism Sucks.” This fall he’s thinking of selling a T-shirt that says, “Bring Back ISIS, Vote Democrat 2018.”

Hanging out with Kirk is like being backstage at a cross between a political convention and a reality-television show. The cameras are perpetually rolling. Everything at the

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HANNAH YOEST / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

summit is livestreamed, and the audience is always present, always interacting, always commenting. Kirk's the star of this show. The donors—Kirk prefers to call them “investors”—are the producers. The contestants are the celebrity speakers Kirk invites (and it is a battle of survival as former CIA director James Woolsey gets canceled this week when Kellyanne Conway confirms she can make it). The crew is Kirk's healthy entourage of protectors and wannabes.

Kirk says yes to virtually every request made of him—and when he doesn't say yes, it seems as though he wishes he could. He introduced me to those with him backstage. Candace Owens, TPUSA's communications director, is usually tied to her phone. While I was with them, she was tweeting praise of Ivanka Trump at the first daughter's request. Owens recently achieved some fame for her influence on Kanye West's politics. There is Mike Gruen, the heavysset enforcer who makes sure everything runs smoothly and on time. And there's Kyle Kashuv, a Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivor, who serves as TPUSA's high school outreach director and is the summit's emcee. All venerate Kirk. He's not just the boss but the means toward political fame.

When Kirk hits the stage early in the conference's first full day, the students stand up, applaud, and holler his name. “The left destroys everything it touches,” he tells them: “sports, comedy, schools, fun, people, everything.” The applause is rapturous; Kirk knows his crowd. “By the way, there are two genders,” he announces, and the students leap to their feet, crying out in agreement. Kirk is a skilled performer. He speaks for just as long as it takes for the next act to arrive, freewheeling from one topic to the next. Talking about capitalism and market pricing, Kirk asks, “Is there a price you won't pay for a Chick-fil-A sandwich?” “\$100,” a student shouts from his seat. Whether you realize it or not, “You're having this conversation with Chick-fil-A everyday.” “Except Sundays,” another student yells in jest. “God bless America,” Kirk replies. “We love our sabbath.”

Kirk reminds the crowd that there are three things all TPUSA-ers agree on: “America is the greatest country in the history of the world.” “The Constitution is the greatest political document ever written.” And “free market capitalism is the most moral and proven economic system to lift the most people out of poverty into prosperity.” As Kirk wraps up his pitch, students jump out of their seats and pour into the theater's aisles, seeking the summit's most coveted bit of swag: a selfie with the face of TPUSA. But Kirk quickly

gets offstage to make way for the next speakers: Pence confidant Marc Lotter and Trump surrogate Gina Loudon on a panel moderated by the *Daily Caller's* Benny Johnson. They spend 40 minutes discussing the Trump victory and showing a video presentation with a Pepe the Frog meme. For four days, speaker after speaker, hour after hour, the audience is enraptured by such political entertainment and by the performative politics they've come to D.C. to join in.

YouTube vlogger Hunter Avallone tells the students that after the last election, the left “went as far as to curse us all with that stampede of unshowered feminists, also known as the Women's March. I don't think I've seen this many

Democrats act out and get violent since we took away their slaves.” “Universities offered support to students after Trump won the election,” he goes on. “Some elite campuses even offered coloring books and puppies to help students cope. I wonder how many liberals saw this and thought to themselves, ‘Wow: validation, coddling, gifts. Are my parents getting divorced again?’” His act draws applause and laughter—and primes the crowd for the political decadence that was to follow. The nation's villains are obvious at TPUSA: liberals and the media that twist every conservative event and utterance

to suit their tastes. It is something we see in action.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions speaks to a boisterous and participatory morning group. When he compliments the students' energy, they begin to chant, “Lock her up.” Sessions smiles, repeats the phrase, and says, “I heard that a long time on the last campaign.” Some in the media pick up the story and word quickly spreads that Sessions had led the chanting. He hadn't, and while standing in the Chick-fil-A line at lunch, all the students could talk about was “fake news” and the biased media. “We were there,” one says to me. “Did you see this clip online taking it out of context?” “I bet CNN will cover it tonight as ‘Jeff Sessions chanted *Lock her up* at Nazi conference.’”

The “lock her up” chant was repeated dozens of times over the course of the conference. I ask Kirk if he worries that students are too focused on an old battle and an old enemy. “No, not whatsoever,” he replies. “They're frustrated at the misapplication of justice. It's less about Hillary and more about if a Republican did what she did, that person would be in jail.” But wouldn't “locking her up” constitute the silencing of political opposition? Again: “No, not whatsoever. I hold conservatives to the same standard.”

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It was William Montgomery who discovered Charlie Kirk speaking at “Youth Government Day” at Benedictine University just outside Chicago in 2012. The 72-year-old was active in the local Tea Party movement. He was mesmerized by the 18-year-old Kirk’s rhetorical gifts and the crowd’s reaction to him. Montgomery, who was semi-retired after making a pile in real estate and advertising, approached the Baylor-bound Kirk and said, “You don’t know me, but you can’t go to college.” Montgomery wanted him to “take some time off” and “to start an organization that reaches out to young people” during a crucial campaign year. They met several times over the next month. Montgomery tried to persuade Baylor to give Kirk credit for starting this organization and sought to sway his parents, an architect and a mental-health professional. Baylor didn’t budge, but the Kirks did. In June 2012, Kirk started TPUSA with “investments” from several donors he met through Montgomery. Among the early backers were Christian conservative investor Foster Friess and Bruce Rauner, now the governor of Illinois. Friess gave TPUSA \$10,000 after meeting Kirk at the Republican National Convention and Rauner, through his family foundation, gave \$100,000 in 2014.

Kirk’s fundraising has largely been through word of mouth. Jaco Booyens, a Dallas businessman and philanthropist, tells me that he doesn’t just invest in TPUSA but actively looks to help Kirk expand his organization. Each of Kirk’s donors seems to want to introduce him to all his friends, and so on. Kirk has assembled a cabinet of advisers with deep pockets to advance his mission. Kirk and Montgomery, who is the organization’s secretary and treasurer, believe that this year they’ll raise close to \$15 million.

The money will fund its namesake groups on campuses across the country—over a thousand of them so far, Kirk estimates. The groups bring speakers to campus, canvass on the quads, and agitate in student government. TPUSA sends “activism kits” to every affiliate. These include flyers, booklets, buttons, stickers, and rally signs printed with some of its signature slogans, such as “Taxation Is Theft,” “Facts Don’t Care About Your Feelings,” and “You Are Entitled to Nothing.” Other campus conservative groups

can also apply for “activism grants” and promote TPUSA’s mission by hosting related events. Lately there’s been controversy over the role that TPUSA plays in campus elections—encouraging students to run for office and, in some cases, it has been said, financing campaigns. The majority of TPUSA’s charitable giving is through a nonprofit that has 501(c)(3) status. The recipients can’t engage in the real-world politics of elections or TPUSA gets in legal trouble.

One of the keys to the organization’s success is Kirk’s perceived closeness with the first family. Montgomery tells me about an event where Donald Trump Jr. was slated to speak to 800 students. Kirk and Montgomery were meeting with donors and advisers, and Don Jr. came in and announced, “If it weren’t for Charlie Kirk, my dad would not be president of the United States today.”

Gentry Beach can take credit for introducing Kirk into the Trump circle. The Dallas-based financier was a groomsman at Don Jr.’s wedding and national vice chairman of Donald J. Trump for President. Three years ago, he brokered a meeting between Don Jr. and Kirk in Texas. Kirk says he ended up spending around 90 days straight on the campaign trail with Don Jr., whom he considers a “close friend.” When I asked the president’s eldest son about Kirk, he had only nice

things to say. “I think he does a great job,” he explains to me while standing at a cordoned-off bar in a side room at his father’s D.C. hotel. “I think he’s one of the few people on the conservative side who are [fighting] for the next generation. He’s making it okay to be conservative on campus.”

Kirk’s inroads in Trump’s Washington are deep. “If there’s one person this president admires, it’s Charlie Kirk,” House majority leader Kevin McCarthy tells a roomful of high school students on the summit’s third day. Back in March, the White House hosted an event for young conservative leaders. “Generation Next” featured a panel on jobs and tax cuts with Secretary of Labor Alex Acosta and Ivanka Trump and one on the “crises on campus” with Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and the Justice Department’s Sarah Flores. But the forum’s main draw was Kirk interviewing the president.

Don Jr. and Kirk have talked about writing a book



The Constitution, Turning Point USA's autograph board



Above: Donald Trump Jr. taking his seat at the Turning Point USA dinner gala at Trump International Hotel, with his girlfriend Kimberly Guilfoyle and Sen. Rand Paul. Below: students posing for pictures with U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley.



together about the campaign. “Don and I are exploring the idea,” Kirk tells me. “It’s not definitive, nothing’s agreed upon. You tell a couple people and all of a sudden it’s leaked to the *Daily Beast*.” “If there were a book, you know,” he goes on, “one of the things that we’d want to talk about is: What does the future of the Republican party look like? What are the ideas behind it? What are some of the philosophical, doctrinal defenses of the Trump agenda? Which, of course, is something I’m very interested in, right? What is a nation-state? Borders? Security? Free-market capitalism?”

“Trump, Trump, Trump” is the most consistent chant at the TPUSA summit. Everyone here supports the president in no uncertain terms, and everyone plans to vote for him in 2020. “I have some great news for you guys,” announces more than one

speaker over the four days, “Hillary Clinton is still not our president.” Thunderous applause, every time. Few things rouse the group as much as a Hillary punch line.

Stephen Bak, 18, drove down from Lancaster, Pa., for the summit. He was too young to vote in the last election, but that didn’t stop him from following it like a superfan. He started out on Team Ted in the primaries and only made his way to Trump when Cruz dropped out of the race. “I became an avid supporter of anyone but Hillary,” he tells me over lunch. He was one of the many people chanting “Lock her up” during Sessions’s speech at the summit and says the media coverage of it was incredibly unfair. Bak wore a Trump T-shirt the day after the election, and “I had an American flag in my backpack.” A lot of the students and teachers at his private school were in mourning. One girl dressed in a black shirt came up and gave him a hug. “Okay, this isn’t going to do anything, but whatever you say,” he says, remembering her gesture. He looks up to both Ben Shapiro and Milo Yiannopoulos. “Milo’s more entertaining, Ben is more suited for political life. Milo’s just entertainment.”

“Owning the libs” is one of the constants of the summit. This form of political *schadenfreude* is a big part of the TPUSA playbook. The term originated in campus pranks designed to upset, i.e., “trigger,” liberals. “Trigger the libs” quickly morphed into “owning” them. At the University of New Mexico, a TPUSA group in 2017 held an “affirmative action bake sale” where it charged Asians more than whites and whites more than blacks. The bake sale is suggested in the eighth section of TPUSA’s “chapter handbook.” Other ideas include creating your own “safe space” or constructing a “unionized hot dog stand” to show the excesses of liberalism.

At Kent State the same year, members of the TPUSA chapter wore diapers in a simulated safe space. It’s the triumph of the put-down as political principle.

“Owning the libs is easy,” Bak says. “It’s fun. It’s my favorite pastime.” He came to the conference to be among like-minded people. He’s heading to Temple University in the fall to study medicine. He doesn’t yet know if there’s a TPUSA chapter on Temple’s campus, but “if they don’t have one, I will definitely start one. I’ll be happy to.” Bak thinks Trump has fared pretty well in his first two years: “I mean, the numbers speak for themselves. The economy, the way it is, a lot of people who are negative towards him in his presidency don’t really know how good of a job he’s actually doing compared to past presidents.” His favorite book is *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which he sees as relevant today, “with everyone misrepresenting facts.”

Charlie Kirk himself made a similar journey. Initially he supported Scott Walker for president and then turned

HANNAH YOEST / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

to Cruz. The decision that many Republicans faced during the general election—to brace for Trump or to embrace him—Kirk took with unqualified enthusiasm. TPUSA identifies itself as conservative but nonpartisan and holds the self-proclaimed remit to “identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of fiscal responsibility, free markets, and limited government.” It is a mission that suggests some dissent from the Trump agenda. But Kirk tells me that it is not his job to criticize those with whom he agrees “on the big things.” Maybe that’s the price of politics today—one can’t call balls and strikes anymore without attracting the enmity of fellow conservatives. Intra-party debate on the right is “sinking one’s own ship” or “siding with Hillary.” Kirk happily rationalizes every aspect of the Trump administration and its policies. Protective tariffs? Trade wasn’t free to begin with, and Trump is making it more free: “Fair *and* free,” Kirk insists. He does add the caveat, though, that he usually wouldn’t support tariffs.

This just isn’t a time for policy debate, as Mark Cuban discovers. The *Shark Tank* billionaire is on the bill for the summit’s second day, and he tells me that he flew in just for the event. It seems like he’s

here to scout out what conservative youth activism looks like in advance of his own presidential run. Cuban and Kirk make national headlines when they debate climate change (Cuban affirming its existence, Kirk questioning it). Cuban implores the students “to be curious and to want to learn more.” “I’ve given President Trump a hard time,” he says to an audience that, almost uniquely for the four days of the summit, falls silent, “and you can argue rightfully so or not. But one thing I will give him credit for—and he’s the only president ever really to have done this, and I think it’s because he’s a business guy at heart, and I’m hoping each and everyone one of you adopt this approach—he always challenges the status quo. Always. No matter what.” Cheers finally break out.

The two also spar about health care, which Cuban thinks is a “right.” The self-identified “conservatarian” Kirk doesn’t agree—“My Healthcare, My Choice” is another big TPUSA slogan. They also argue about the role of the party system. Kirk says he is a Republican, but Cuban believes political parties are outdated and no longer need to exist. There are better ways of collecting that data, he says: technological methods. They debate, spar, and hold to their convictions.

Cuban’s presence, Kirk believes, offers a type of viewpoint diversity that his critics claim is absent from

Here’s What a Bailout for the Trade War Would Cost

THOMAS J. DONOHUE
PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

President Trump last month set aside \$12 billion to help offset the economic impact of tariffs on America’s farmers. While this measure will serve as a temporary Band-Aid for the agricultural sector, most farmers and ranchers have responded that they want “trade not aid.” More broadly, it does nothing to help the numerous other industries that have taken a hit from the trade war. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has crunched the numbers to determine how much it would cost American taxpayers to do a comprehensive bailout for every industry affected. The result? A staggering \$39 billion.

As the scope of the tariffs has widened to include more and more products from more places—and more retaliation against U.S. exports—so has the scope of the economic damage on American businesses.

Companies are reporting layoffs and price hikes across a wide range of industries, and the cost of papering over these damages would be steep. For example, the auto industry alone would require \$7.6 billion. Producers and manufacturers of iron and steel would require \$6.4 billion. Dozens of other industries from beverage manufacturers to shipbuilders would require government payouts in the hundreds of millions.

The Chamber is also tracking the cumulative impact of the trade war on TheWrongApproach.com, which features an interactive map showing the total value of each state’s exports impacted by tariffs. Not a single state is spared from the damage, with the industrial Midwest and the agricultural heartland states hit especially hard. Indeed, the retaliatory tariffs appear to target states where close elections are expected this fall.

The breadth of the trade war’s impact on American businesses is evidence of the way trade is woven

deep into the fabric of our economy. Almost 98% of exporting firms in the U.S. are small businesses, and they represent about one-third of all merchandise exports. These companies rely on trade to stay competitive. When it becomes more expensive to sell goods abroad, they are forced to raise prices on American consumers and even cut jobs to compensate.

For the administration, it’s a slippery slope to decide that one economic sector gets government help and another doesn’t. Far simpler and more cost effective would be to lift these self-damaging tariffs and work to open markets for American exports. The Chamber is eager to work with the administration and all our leaders in government on a better way to strengthen our trading relationships to benefit the American people.



Learn more at
uschamber.com/abovethefold.

TPUSA. Stephen Bak enjoyed the back and forth but also found it silly. “I do like the change of pace. I just don’t agree with Mark Cuban. In general, eccentric billionaires like that, they’re not actually experts in anything. So he was talking about his health care reform plans and AI, and I’m like, ‘You don’t know anything about that, so why are you trying to propose these things to government? You’re not an expert. And you’re not a politician,’” says Bak.

During the question-and-answer portion of Cuban’s program, a student asks him if Kirk “had come on *Shark Tank* six years ago, would Turning Point USA be something you’d invest in?” Cuban, with a smile, responded, “Absolutely.” “Sometimes you invest in the horse and sometimes you invest in the jockey. I’d invest in the jockey, for sure,” he announces.

Backstage after the panel, Cuban, wearing a rainbow Dallas Mavericks T-shirt, chats with Kellyanne Conway and Fox News host Jesse Watters. Conway asks Cuban how the panel went. “It was fun,” he says. Conway, dressed in something silk and pink, quips that this is usually what she says when something has gone awkwardly. “No, it was great,” Cuban insists. “Just not what I expected.” It certainly did seem like Cuban was having fun out there jousting with the ebullient Kirk and his followers.

Watters agrees that TPUSA is a fun audience. “When I give a speech to YAF, I gotta watch what I say, but here I’m like, *Lock . . . her . . . up*.” If the Young America’s Foundation, or YAF, represents the older, pen-and-paper conservative order of William F. Buckley Jr. and Ronald Reagan then TPUSA codifies the new—the emotive, populist, and in-the-moment qualities of social media and Trump.

Part of the allure for high school and college students is the omnipresent confidence of its leader: a man with an answer for everything. Kirk has over 600,000 Twitter followers and loves to batter the political opposition. Consider his tweets: “Fact: There are zero Democrats on Mount Rushmore” or “If Elizabeth Warren really has a Native American background, why does she refuse to take a DNA test? If Maxine Waters was really so smart, why does she refuse to take an IQ test?” Kirk’s tweets cross the fake-news line, too. On July 3, he claimed, “83%, 10 out of 12, of all rapes in Denmark are committed by migrants or their descendants,” which is in no way accurate. On June 21, he tweeted out a list of tariffs Canada imposes on U.S. goods—from cars to steel to cable boxes—and announced, “We have never had free trade with Canada. Trump is leveling the playing field with Canada who has been ripping us off.” Except that under NAFTA, there are zero tariffs on such goods. Kirk’s critics frequently point to such tweets when they claim he’s just a provocateur—nothing more than a purveyor of political pranks and Trumpian falsehoods. TPUSA’s Facebook page and

YouTube channel are full of videos with chyrons announcing, “Charlie Smashes College Marxist” and “Charlie Kirk DESTROYS Ignorant Socialist Protester.” The latter has been viewed two million times.

Kirk likes to say that what plagues public discourse today is that the left hates the idea that there *are* other ideas. But U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley makes headlines at the TPUSA summit by suggesting that the rising faction on the right hates the idea there are other ideas just as much as the left. She asks attendees to raise their hands if they “ever posted anything online to ‘own the libs.’” Most of hands in the audience proudly shoot up, and everybody claps. But Haley is remonstrating against this mentality. “I know that it’s fun and that it can feel good,” she says. “But step back and think about what you’re accomplishing when you do this. Are you persuading anyone? Who are you persuading? We’ve all been guilty of it at some point or another, but this kind of speech isn’t leadership—it’s the exact opposite.”

Haley, whose teenage son Nalin is involved in TPUSA, seems to be calling into question the group’s very *raison d’être*. “Real leadership is about persuasion. It’s about movement. It’s bringing people around to your point of view,” she says. “Not by shouting them down, but by showing them how it is in their best interest to see things the way you do.” Her message is a call to mature in one’s own politics, to “be better than the other guy,” and she gets cheers from the students. Utah senator Orrin Hatch conveys much the same message later in the conference, also to applause.

As the conference closes, Kirk takes final questions from attendees. One student asks him if he plans to run for president. Wild sounds of approval burst from the audience along with chants of “Charlie, Charlie, Charlie.” Bill Montgomery, too, tells me he hopes Kirk will one day be president of the United States. He thinks the world of Kirk after six years of working with him on TPUSA. Kirk is only 24, and he tells me he has no plans to run for anything. I ask him about the further growth of TPUSA and whether he’d be interested in bringing the organization abroad. “I wouldn’t rule it out,” he says. “It’s something we’re considering. We have groups in Canada.” Is it something you could see in Europe? “Oh, without a doubt. I would love to take this global. Yes.”

Kirk was leaving Washington for New York early that evening. He would be appearing on *Fox & Friends* and then taping an episode of *Watters’ World*. And just like that, the Charlie Kirk Show rolls on: TV hit by TV hit, tweet by tweet, donor meeting by donor meeting, conference by conference. Next up on the agenda: TPUSA’s Young Latino Leadership Summit in Miami the first weekend in August. ♦

The Preeminent Challenge

*For President Trump and his foreign policy team,
cracking the Islamic Republic is job one*

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT
& RAY TAKEYH

The biggest foreign-policy challenge before Donald Trump isn't North Korea, where the usual pattern of diplomacy and deception persists. Nor is it Russia; it doesn't have the muscle to take on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which isn't dead yet. Nor is the most imminent problem China, which doesn't have the navy and air force to tempt fate in the South and East China Seas. It will one day *really* challenge the United States and East Asia's democratic and anti-Chinese authoritarian states—the type of fascist confrontation that could lead to carnage—but Washington probably has years to check Beijing's ambitions.

The most troublesome, immediate challenge comes from Iran. Trump's decision to walk away from his predecessor's deeply flawed arms-control agreement will likely soon consume the administration's attention since, depending on what the mullahs do, war may once more be on the horizon. If the president fails to corral the clerics and the Revolutionary Guards through sanctions and the threat of force, the reverberations will surely weaken, if not gut, the administration's capacity to play hardball elsewhere. Barack Obama punted the Iranian nuclear problem down the road slightly (and didn't really pivot to Asia). Trump has probably eliminated the possibility of punting. He now may have

to deal with Iran more decisively than his predecessors.

So far, the administration has developed a somewhat contradictory yet potentially successful Iran policy. The White House has all the elements of a regime-change strategy despite its denials; yet Donald Trump aspires to new nuclear negotiations, even suggesting a meeting could take place with Iranian president Hassan Rouhani without prerequisites. Some have called this Reaganesque. After all, Ronald Reagan sought the end of the Soviet empire. “While we must be cautious about forcing the pace of change [inside the Soviet bloc], we must not hesitate to

declare our ultimate objectives and to take concrete actions to move toward them,” he declared at Westminster in 1982. “It is time that we committed ourselves as a nation—in both the public and private sectors—to assisting democratic development.” Putting “Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history” clearly meant regime change in Mother Russia. Yet Reagan welcomed nuclear talks with an array of Soviet leaders, from Leonid Brezhnev to Mikhail Gorbachev.

Can Donald Trump tailor-make an approach to an Iran that is suffer-

ing from many of the same kind of authoritarian afflictions that the Soviet Union did in the 1980s? Can he, his senior staff, and the essential worker bees understand enough Iranian history—its peoples' long quest for representative government—to realize that what Reagan envisioned for the Soviet empire is applicable to the Islamic Republic? Reagan's vision—“The objective I propose is quite simple to state: to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences



Tires burn in street protests in Iran, August 2.

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through peaceful means”—is within reach in Persia if the clerical regime starts cracking. Iran is an empire that has, at least at its core, become a coherent nation-state. It carries many of the Middle East’s cultural liabilities, but it manifestly isn’t a land of tribes and oil wells. That it had the Muslim world’s only Islamic revolution 39 years ago is actually an enormous asset in its continuing religious and political evolution. Unlike most Muslims, Iranian Shiites and Sunnis know what it’s like to live in a theocracy. Most have found it wanting.

Post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan, the primary American question is whether Washington’s political elite is capable of imagining interventionism. A successful regime-change approach isn’t likely if one doesn’t really believe, as Reagan did, that American aid to those seeking freedom is both good and strategic. The loss of faith in this idea within the United States is profound and dovetails with an analysis that depicts the Middle East as no longer a compelling strategic theater (killer drones and American military bases in Bahrain and Qatar can handle the post-9/11 threat and the oil of the Persian Gulf). Even the Iranian nuclear quest doesn’t disturb this mindset. The Iraq syndrome has convinced the foreign-policy establishment and a not inconsiderable segment of the American public that the Muslim Middle East is a hopeless mess.

AN IRANIAN EXCEPTION?

Can Trump carve out a democratic exception for Iran, where religious dictatorship appears to be secularizing the society it rules? Trump seems to have a serious animus against the Islamic Republic—he isn’t in the revisionist right-wing and libertarian camps (see Tucker Carlson, Patrick Buchanan, the *American Conservative*, and the Cato Institute) that veer toward Obama in their reassessment of, or disinterest in, the mullahs’ ambitions. Can Trump energetically try to collapse the clerical regime and advance democracy there while forging a détente with the repressive Sunni states? Such a contradiction isn’t difficult to handle operationally. The issue is whether the White House can overcome those within the bureaucracies who resist anything too forward-leaning. It’s a good bet that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and Emirati ruler Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who don’t want to see democracy bloom in their kingdoms, would be fine with American efforts to foster representative government in Persia.

Much of the Washington bureaucracy wants new

nuclear negotiations with Tehran. Trump and secretary of state Michael Pompeo have said they do, too. But the odds are poor that North Korean-style summitry will elicit flexibility from Tehran. It is possible to imagine the circles around Rouhani encouraging Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to authorize new talks with Washington. Given the way Rouhani sold the nuclear deal (that the agreement would allow the clerical regime to keep and then expand its atomic program, significantly increase the country’s wealth, and prevent Americans from using sanctions in the future),

he is on the precipice of political oblivion. The nationwide protests that started last December and continue despite arduous efforts to squelch them have further wounded the mullah, trashing what was left of his dwindling support among the Iranian middle class and the young. It will be challenging, however, for Khamenei to grovel before Trump since any American-Iranian meeting would produce a volcano of discontent inside the ruling elite. The Islamic Republic’s overlords are capable of considerable

hypocrisy and duplicity and have been willing, long before Obama, to communicate and meet with U.S. officials they loathe. Backtracking now, however, would be *very* tough given what the supreme leader has said since Washington withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The administration has its own dilemmas: It relishes harsh rhetoric and sanctions against the Islamic Republic but is restrained by an Iraq syndrome that argues against confronting Iranian imperialism with boots on the ground. Containment is not in the cards. A Soviet parallel to the Islamic Republic, in which the United States wears its enemy down through wars on the empire’s periphery, isn’t going to happen. The clerical regime’s ambitions in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq may get checked, but that task will fall to the natives sans U.S. support or, in the Levant, to the Israelis, who are already de facto at war with the mullahs. Imperial overstretch may still doom Tehran’s attempt to craft its own Co-Prosperty Zone in the region.

America will either lose or win its struggle with the clerics at the center: by collapsing Iran’s economy, thereby paralyzing the atomic advance, or by meeting Tehran’s nuclear challenge head on, which may happen soon if Khamenei gives the green light to increase significantly uranium enrichment. The clerical regime could reinstall the primitive IR-1 centrifuges in large numbers, put the more advanced IR-2ms back in the under-the-mountain

The telling question is what Khamenei and his praetorians, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, think Washington will do if they start reconnecting centrifuges or obstructing International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors.

plant at Fordow to complete their development, or put the stress on the development (clandestine or open) of the more advanced IR-6s and IR-8s, which when perfected could operate with small, easily concealable cascades. The clever approach would be to opt for slow, clandestine progress, which would test the West's intelligence services, while publicly playing the aggrieved victim of Trump's unilateralism. The regime would wait for the next U.S. presidential election, hoping the Democrats win and restore what was lost. But such an approach may not be emotionally satisfying to the supreme leader and senior Revolutionary Guard commanders.

The telling question, then, is what Khamenei and his praetorians, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, think Washington will do if they start reconnecting centrifuges or obstructing International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. The ruling elite, especially Rouhani's circle, is still waiting to see whether Europe can stand against the United States. Foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has spoken of a European banking and oil package, insulated from U.S. sanctions, being delivered to Tehran. Iranian commentary on the Europeans has, however, become increasingly despairing—despite the best efforts of Federica Mogherini, the European Union External Action boss, to keep the Iranians hopeful. The Europeans have, so far, failed to meet the demands that Khamenei issued in May. Those demands—that they keep investing in Iran while blocking U.S. sanctions—appear beyond the capacity of even the Western European governments most angered by the president's decision. Adventurous and, for the Iranians, vital European companies, like the energy giant Total and the German engineering behemoth Siemens, have shown they have no intention of risking their access to the American market or the U.S. dollar for the JCPOA.

European resistance is, of course, fortified by the administration's "national-security" tariffs. And many former Obama officials are advising Europeans to hang tight to the JCPOA. They want Berlin to use the German central bank, the Bundesbank, as a tool to increase German-Iranian trade, especially for midsize and small German firms without a significant presence in the American market. An E.U. plan to use the European Investment Bank in a similar commercial fashion is also taking shape. Such actions, if they actually happen on a certain scale, would oblige the White House to sanction a European central bank, the lending institution of the E.U., or European VIPs associated with these banks. Such U.S. designations would likely work (the power of the dollar and the political predilections of America-centric European business would probably win out), but they would be a convulsive first for transatlantic relations.

No matter what happens, it ought to be clear to Trump and his administration that regime change is the *only* pragmatic course open to them *unless* they are prepared to accept a nuclear-armed Iran. And if they are prepared for military action, they obviously should work seriously on advancing Iran's internal rebellion. Sooner, not later. The option to punt, to repeat, is gone. The Europeans, most of whom have punting in their DNA, keep coming back to administration officials, hoping to discover that Trump is somehow willing to accept some equivalent of the JCPOA,



Ali Khamenei at an IRGC graduation ceremony earlier this year

differently named. The administration would have to eat a skyscraper's worth of crow to find a diplomatic solution to the Iranian atomic conundrum that essentially reestablishes Obama's nuclear concessions.

We need first to better understand the past to see clearly why an American strategy to collapse Iran's theocracy makes sense. Misreading Persian history has almost become de rigueur in Washington, on both the left and the right. Too often Westerners have looked at Iran as an island of autocratic stability. This is even true today: Most American and European officials see the mullahs' tools of repression as indomitable—just as they were for Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The true story of Iran for much of the past century is, however, of a convulsive struggle between rulers wanting to maintain their prerogatives and the ruled seeking freedom. It is this volatile tug-of-war that will define not just the future of Iran but the Middle East.

Regime change isn't an abstract and mad idea: It's what the Iranian people have sought through massive protests in 2009 and again beginning last December, when popular protest hit cities and towns across the country. The continuing unrest, which has helped to produce a tidal wave of vitriol and dissension in the ruling elite, may have convulsed the regime's internal nuclear deliberations. The only sensible approach towards the mullahs is to focus on this

caldera of popular anger. Secretary Pompeo's speeches on May 21 in Washington and July 22 at the Reagan Library highlighted the plight of Iranians under theocracy—as well as any speech by any American official since the Islamic revolution has done—and set the stage for a coherent plan.

Philosophically and operationally, such a policy shift would be recognizing a basic truth: The Islamic Republic isn't going to evolve peacefully into a nonthreatening Middle Eastern state. Or as Khamenei pithily put it: "*Ma doshmani ba Amrika ra lazem dareem*" ("We require hostility towards the United States"). Obviously uncomfortable with the religious dimension of this clash, American officials have had a hard time accepting this irreconcilable conflict. Both Democrats and Republicans have *really* wanted to believe that Thermidor isn't far off. (Thermidor briefly arrived with the presidential election of the cleric Mohammad Khatami in 1997; he and the reformist movement behind him got stuffed by both Khamenei and the "pragmatic" revolutionaries around Rouhani and his patron, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who helped Khatami rise to power and then turned on him.)

The Iranian struggle against religious dictatorship ought to ring our inner chimes since Westerners, above all others, ought to appreciate how religious overreach produces a secularizing, liberalizing backlash. Though often too timid or politically correct to say so, most Westerners surely would want to see Iranians freed from theocrats. It has become an article of faith for many, however, that Washington shouldn't try to aid the Iranian people, that American actions are inevitably baleful. Often lurking in the background is the guilt-ridden *tiers-mondiste* view that the type of overt and covert support that Republicans and Democrats once gave to the peoples of Communist Eastern Europe is somehow morally wrong when applied to Iranians. (On the left, there are, of course, doubts about the wisdom, let alone the efficacy, of our support for the Eastern Europeans.)

First-worlders, the argument goes, just shouldn't politically interfere in Muslim societies. But a serious glance at Iranian history ought to tell us the opposite: that we shouldn't treat Iranians any differently than we treated Poles under communism. The intellectual, social, and political common ground between Eastern Europeans and Iranians ought to incline President Trump to let his national security adviser, John Bolton, start planning the containment, contraction, and collapse of the Islamic Republic.

THE RULED VS. THE RULERS

Modern Persian rulers' absolutism was always tentative and incomplete. It was the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 that first injected ideas of popular representation into Iran's bloodstream. During the first half of the 20th century, feisty parliaments had little compunction about flexing their muscles. The local gentry would marshal the peasants, laborers, and tribesmen into polls that would choose each parliament. This wasn't Jeffersonian democracy, but the system was not without legitimacy. Local leaders conveyed the concerns of the peasants and labor force to the ruling class. The center and periphery knew each other. Bound to each other by land, family, tradition, and the vote, the governing class and the people created mechanisms for addressing grievances. Despite massive illiteracy, considerable ethnic division, and judicial corruption, a functioning sociopolitical network evolved. The diffusion

of power meant bargaining among stakeholders, elections that mattered, and a parliament sensitive to local concerns.

The first Pahlavi monarch, Reza Shah, challenged and increasingly overruled this consultative system, imposing his will in the name of modernity. When the Allies forced his abdication in 1941 because of his flirtations with the Third Reich, constitutional rule again gained strength as his son was too weak to resist. This was the golden age of Iranian statesmen. Such men persuaded invading Russian and British armies to preserve the Pahlavi dynasty even as they dispatched the elder shah into exile. In 1946, when Joseph Stalin sought to claim the northern province of Azerbaijan, it was the wily premier Ahmad Qavam who convinced him that the only way he could have an oil contract was to uphold his wartime agreement to withdraw his troops. (Harry Truman also helped.) Stalin left but he never obtained his oil. The 1953 coup ended this epoch, but not in the way that Americans have come to understand.

The two men who unwittingly conspired to halt Iran's democratic interlude were Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his antagonist, prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq, who fell in the '53 "coup." It may be difficult for Americans, raised on a Hollywood diet of nefarious Central Intelligence Agency intrigue, to appreciate, but one of the most fabled tales of the Cold War was actually an Iranian initiative, not a CIA-run plot. We need to better understand what happened in '53 if we are to understand a fundamental rule about American interventionism today: It takes two to tango.

It ought to be clear to Trump and his administration that regime change is the only pragmatic course open to them unless they are prepared to accept a nuclear-armed Iran.

What happened then—the key to Mosaddeq’s fall (he lost both elite and popular support)—would be truer today for any regime-change policy, because Iranian society is bigger and more modern. American policy supporting internal change can only succeed if it parallels and complements what would likely happen in a free vote.

There was a “coup” in 1953 because Iranians willed it. If the clerical regime collapses tomorrow, no matter the American effort, it will be because Iranians will it. The American left, and perhaps more than a few on the right, has a “coup allergy” that springs from ’53. It inhibits creativity. It prevents us from seeing the Islamic Republic’s internal contradictions. We need to go backward to go forward.

In the 1950s, an age of postcolonial nationalism, the notion of British control of Iranian petroleum was anachronistic. The aristocracy that was the custodian of Iran’s nascent democracy offered up one of its own to reclaim its oil. Mosaddeq had long been a champion of the rule of law, parliamentary power, and national sovereignty. He was also a stubborn and vain man who feared that any compromise agreement with Britain would tarnish his reputation. As Truman and secretary of state Dean Acheson mediated the oil dispute, Mosaddeq turned down successive offers. Iran could not produce or sell its oil. In trying to navigate his financially ruinous policies, Mosaddeq started to eviscerate the country’s institutions: He rigged elections, sought to disband parliament, and usurped the powers of the monarchy.

It was Iran’s politicians, military men, and mullahs who came together to down the premier. The shah was just a figurehead around whom diverse forces gathered. The public mostly rallied to the monarch. The CIA was involved in the coup planning, but once the initial operation failed, Washington threw in the towel. Iranians, however, took control and removed Mosaddeq. In doing so, they sought to revive their economy and protect their political institutions. What they had not counted on was that the diffident monarch whom they returned from exile would soon transform himself into a despot.

Given the recklessness of the clerical regime, it is hard to recall just how nutty the shah became. He crowned himself the *Shahanshah*, the king of kings, recalling the Achaemenid Empire, in a lavish celebration and declared himself the policeman of the Gulf. He wasted much of Iran’s oil wealth on arms that his country didn’t need and his military couldn’t use. He reduced Iran’s venerable parliament to a rubber stamp. He created a secret police that was as incompetent in practice as it was notorious in reputation. He alienated the clergy, an ally of the monarchy. But his greatest crime was to eviscerate the old elite that had served Iran well and replace it with a coterie of sycophants. Iran was reduced to a country of venal rich, a beleaguered middle class, and alienated youth.

But the Islamic revolution was bound to disappoint a public clamoring for democracy. The mullahs proved vicious street fighters as they showed little mercy toward the liberals and secularists who had fought the shah. During the first two years after the revolution, Iran was rocked by a civil war that pitted different revolutionary factions against one another. The mullahs eventually won: Saddam Hussein came to their rescue with an invasion that helped focus domestic energies on Arab invaders.

The postwar years, however, proved uneasy for the Islamic Republic as successive waves of protests continuously chipped away at the regime’s legitimacy. The first constituency to give up on theocracy were the students, whose protest in 1999 ended the attempt by the regime to reform itself. Mohammad Khatami, an intellectually curious cleric fascinated by Western power and ethics, came to the presidency in 1997 with a pledge to empower civil society and harmonize faith and freedom. The conservative backlash was swift as the regime’s enforcers murdered intellectuals and liberal politicians, negated parliamentary legislation, brutalized dissenting clerics, and shuttered reformist newspapers. It was that last act that sparked the riots of 1999 on university campuses. In this showdown, the “moderate” Rouhani, then secretary of the national security council, threatened the students with death. The regime imposed order and lost the young.

Then came the titanic Green Revolt of 2009. A fraudulent presidential election returning Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power sparked a massive protest, millions strong, that further discredited the regime among the middle classes and college-educated. This was a much closer thing than the West understood. Khamenei later admitted that the regime had come to “the edge of the cliff.” Once more the Islamic Republic survived using brute force. The revolt caused many of the regime’s own stalwarts to give up on its ideological claims. The reformers, always the theocracy’s most palatable face, were excised from power.

Today Iranians are the most secular people in the Middle East, with the mosques empty even on religious commemoration days. Young men don’t wish to join the clergy and women don’t want to marry mullahs. Even senior ayatollahs appreciate that forcing religion into everything has caused their faith to suffer. The government of God is drowning in corruption while cloaking itself in an ideology that convinces few.

And then came last December. More than 100 Iranian cities and towns erupted in protest. This was in part a revolt of the dispossessed. The poor were thought to be the regime’s last bastion of power, tied to theocracy by a sense of piety and the provisions of the welfare state. But shanty towns have grown enormously in the Islamic Republic. Demonstrators hurled damning chants against

Khamenei, Rouhani, the entire regime, and its imperialism. Most Iranians today have multiple jobs and rely on retirement benefits devoured by mismanagement and inflation. The average Iranian is 15 percent poorer than he was a decade ago, while double-digit unemployment plagues the country. The real inflation rate may now be over 200 percent. All this is taking place at a time of provocative class cleavages resembling the last days of the shah, when the elite flaunted their wealth while the middle class and the poor nursed their grievances.

Rouhani, a lackluster apparatchik of the security state, once thought that his arms-control agreement would generate sufficient foreign investments to revive the economy and placate the discontented. That aspiration failed even before the advent of the Trump presidency. The Islamic Republic is too politically turbulent, too divided against itself, too lacking in a reliable banking system or anything resembling the rule of law to be an attractive place for sufficient international commerce to compensate for the regime's systemic problems.

COLLAPSING THEOCRACY

The clerical regime today stands strangely naked, without a convincing ideology or a reliable constituency. In every decade since assuming power, it has lost a segment of society. Its overlapping security organs create the impression of power, but this could well prove a façade should a nationwide protest movement once more engulf the country. The only remaining questions are whether America has the insight, will, and a strategy for aiding the Iranian people against their overlords. The Islamic Republic is seriously ill, as was the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. But the theocracy may be healthy enough to continue its imperialism for years. Precisely because of the Islamic Republic's internal problems, the regime will probably double down on its aggression. Legitimacy denied at home will be sought abroad. The Iranian ruling elite's sense of foreign mission—it sees itself as the Islamic paladin—has combined with Shiite chauvinism and large, deployable non-Iranian Shiite militias. We should want to see, as we did with the Soviet Union, the mounting crisis at home sap the will and resources of the state, sooner not later.

And it's not that hard to devise a sensible, uncomplicated, patient approach to cracking this theocracy. We shouldn't be developing a regime-change policy according to some atomic clock: The clerical regime may build a

nuclear weapon before its contradictions cripple it. And if the Revolutionary Guards get the bomb, we undoubtedly will want to see the Iranian people dispatch the mullahs and their praetorians.

Obviously we need to keep starving Tehran of hard currency. Before Obama came to the rescue with the JCPOA, the mullahs stared at a liquidity crisis—insufficient hard currency to pay the bills. And although Washington will be operating without the assistance of a European Union oil embargo and (for now) the de-listing of Iran on SWIFT, the international financial transaction cooperative, the most effective fiscal weapons remain American-made. They are being brought to bear. The Trump administration's Treasury undersecretary of terrorism and financial intelligence, Sigal Mandelker, may be the most dogged and clever financial warrior the clerical regime has ever confronted. Major European businesses have already signaled that they

have no intention of crossing Washington regardless of E.U. or national measures to protect European investments in Iran. The value of the rial has plummeted.

Washington can certainly do better in the battle for Iranian hearts and minds. A lot is known about the Iranian ruling elite's corruption, inside the country and abroad. Secretary Pompeo is right to highlight malversation among the regime's many sins; it is a volcanic issue inside the country. Much more research can be done. We should see a steady stream of reporting on corruption, via the Internet and the Persian services of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty. Washington has *never* let loose the bully pulpit—the White House, Congress, and the foreign-affairs and intelligence agencies together—in favor of democracy in Iran. From the president down, the administration should speak often and clearly on America's intention to support Iranians fighting for free elections. The president, secretary of state, and national security adviser—and these three have to carry the weight—face the challenge of doing this while so much of the American right is so hostile to the idea of democracy-promotion.

Personnel always matters in Washington. The National Security Council, the State Department, and Treasury should have more officials tracking Iran's finances and human-rights abuses with the intention of devising new sanctions and moving information collected into the public domain. The White House would be well-served to appoint one individual, who has clout with both Pompeo and Bolton, as an Iran czar who can oversee the portfolio

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and do the enormous legwork that is required in Washington and overseas.

The CIA has a role. Langley should aim unrelentingly at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the nuclear establishment, and the clergy by formulating plans to encourage defections and clandestine-reporting relationships. So far as we know, Washington has never seriously attempted to get Revolutionary Guards to defect. America's capacity to target Iranian VIPs—the information publicly available to do this has grown enormously in the last 20 years—is substantial and in all probability woefully underdeveloped at Langley.

The CIA also has a place in supporting those inside the country who risk their lives to oppose the regime. There are a wide variety of ways for Langley to do this; the operational details of how one does this are less challenging than locking into existing Iranian networks that need financial assistance. (America has long been on the receiving end of the informal *havala* system, used by millions, including Islamic radicals, to transfer untraceably moneys across borders; the Iranian version, *havala*, is an open door for Langley to play hardball in reverse.) The opportunities for the CIA to help—in labor unions, among students, professors, and writers, in the clergy, or at the National Iranian Oil Company, to name just a few—could be tremendous. As always in covert action, it takes time to reach out. If the Trump administration started now, Langley would be lucky to have functioning covert-action networks by 2020. There will always be reverses—Langley doesn't have a brilliant track record in the Islamic Republic—and even under the best of circumstances mistakes happen and people die. If there isn't an appetite inside Iran for the CIA's assistance, then none of these programs will get off the ground. But if we don't try, we won't know. We absolutely shouldn't believe the left-wing mantra that Iranians, because of 1953, don't want or need the agency. The odds are excellent that's not true. We should find out.

Ideally, Washington should try to shrink the Islamic Republic's imperial frontiers, especially in Syria. That is obviously going to be difficult, if not impossible, for post-Iraq America. Containing and rolling back the theocracy's Co-Prosperty Zone is important for undermining its power at home—in the same way that reversals for the Soviets abroad spiritually and materially weakened Moscow. The regime sees its *mission civilisatrice* as much abroad as it does at home. Denying the regime foreign accomplishments can't help but thin its esprit and make the regime's front-line forces—the Revolutionary Guards and the Shiite foreign legion—question their leadership if not the cause. This

ought to be elemental power politics for the United States.

The Islamic Republic today is a weak, wobbly regime barely surviving successive domestic headwinds. The regime is still adhering to the JCPOA because it cannot afford another shock to the system; it is most certainly not a gesture of pragmatism purchased by a lingering hope that Europe, Russia, and China will come to the rescue. If the mullahs cannot muster a response to President Trump's affront to the regime's dignity, it's because the ruling clergy and the Revolutionary Guards don't know what



Shuttered stores at Tehran's Grand Bazaar in June: As the protest began, Iranians shouted to retailers who wouldn't close, 'Coward!'

they should do. They appear deeply uncertain about how aggressive actions against the United States will reverberate inside a society that has grown more openly hostile to its rulers. It is striking that the clerics and the security establishment have so far dared not do what they have so often done with their lower-class supporters: orchestrate large demonstrations in Tehran denouncing America and its president. The Islamic Republic appears to be so unpopular with its own people that the regime cannot even demonize Trump.

Contrary to what is written so often and so erroneously by academics, the United States has *never* deployed a regime-change strategy against the Islamic Republic. Contrary to what has been said by so many so often, the Trump administration actually has a tolerably coherent "Plan B" for a post-JCPOA foreign policy *if* subverting the theocracy is its ultimate, guiding goal. Khamenei, like his predecessor, firmly believes that the United States has always sought to topple the Islamic Republic in favor of Westernized Iranian democrats who would usher in a decadent, ungodly age. He knows—even if much of Washington does not—that the clash between the United States and the Islamic Republic is the defining battle of the Middle East. The cleric's nightmares should be our battle plan. ♦



Demonstrators protesting E.U.-imposed austerity measures dashed with police outside the Greek parliament in Athens in 2010.

‘Let the Whorehouse Burn’

The euro and the damage it wrought. BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

‘As of this evening,’ said Pierre Moscovici in Luxembourg in June, “the Greek crisis is over.” Moscovici, a French Socialist politician who serves as the economics commissioner of the European Union, was making quite a claim. At the turn of the century, Greece was the weakest and most corrupt of the countries to join the euro, the currency of most E.U. member states. When the American subprime meltdown resulted in tightened credit

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Euro Tragedy
A Drama in Nine Acts
by Ashoka Mody
Oxford, 651 pp., \$34.95

markets 10 years ago, Greece’s entire economic system collapsed, threatening to take other European countries down with it. The episode revealed flaws not just in the way Greece’s government had run its economy but in the design of the euro itself.

The single currency had already undermined Greece’s prosperity, albeit while making Greeks *feel* rich. The abil-

ity to borrow at rock-bottom interest rates more suitable to venerable corporations in Stuttgart had brought inflationary pressures. Greece’s manufacturing and export sectors had lost their competitiveness, with a couple of exceptions, like olive oil. The country’s economy was reduced to tourism and real-estate speculation. Once the crisis hit, an E.U. plan to rescue “Greece”—by which was meant the Western European banks that did business there—destroyed the Greek economy altogether.

A currency of one’s own is a great thing to have in a crisis; a country can regain competitiveness by devaluing it.

LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / AFP / GETTY

Lacking one, Greece was at the mercy of eurozone authorities in Brussels and the International Monetary Fund. Together they imposed a plan to strip government benefits, cut wages, and sell off assets. The Greek government sold the fabled Athenian port of Piraeus to the China COSCO Holdings Company and Thessaloniki's port to a Russian tobacco oligarch who made the newspapers in March when he protested a referee's call that went against the Greek soccer team he owns by descending onto the field with a gun. The internationally imposed austerity led, as a majority of economists had warned it would, to a dramatic shrinkage of Greek GDP. Greece handed over precious assets and wrecked institutions of long standing ... and wound up owing more. Its debt-to-GDP ratio did not fall but rose, from 127 percent at the start of the crisis in 2009 to 172 percent two years later. Then Greece paid with its democracy. In November 2011, just as those numbers came out, the country's prime minister, George Papandreou, announced a referendum on the E.U. austerity measures. German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Nicolas Sarkozy summoned Papandreou to Cannes to warn that they would shut off funds to Greece should he do so. He resigned.

Today, despite what Pierre Moscovici and his colleagues said in Luxembourg, Greek debt, at 179 percent, is higher still. The latest E.U. deal requires Greece to run large budget surpluses until the year 2060 to repay the debts brought on by the E.U.'s own mismanagement. The country is in some respects worse off than it was when Greek protesters mobbed the parliament in May 2010, howling, "Let the whorehouse burn!"

There is a profound mystery about the euro, according to the Princeton economist Ashoka Mody. "Why," he asks in *Euro Tragedy*, his authoritative new history of the currency, "did Europeans attempt such a venture that carried no obvious benefits but came with huge risks?" There is an answer to this: Often what economists call risks politicians see as opportunities.

Germany has been the main actor in this story since the euro was conceived a half-century ago. Back then, the country's neighbors, above all France, resented the strong German currency, the deutsche mark, and the devaluations into which Germany's more productive and disciplined economy so often forced them. But Germany, too, had an interest in unifying Europe economically. The resolution of the Second World War had deprived it of many of the attributes of national sovereignty—and this gave it an interest in weakening the sovereignty of its neighbors. It's funny: "European unity" was a project

There is a profound mystery about the euro, according to economist Ashoka Mody. 'Why,' he asks, 'did Europeans attempt such a venture that carried no obvious benefits but came with huge risks?'

that advanced because a lot of parochial politicians hoped to pull a fast one on their rivals in other countries.

Mody parts ways with David Marsh's 2009 book *The Euro*, which up till now has been the standard reference. Marsh, a British journalist who for many years covered Germany's Bundesbank, defends the euro and the Germans. He paints the early political champions of the common currency, German chancellor Helmut Schmidt and French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, as macroeconomic sophisticates who bequeathed a seaworthy vessel to their less money-minded successors, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand. In particular, Schmidt was attuned to the threat of American macroeconomic irresponsibility, recalling how Lyndon Johnson's attempts to simultaneously build out a welfare state and rescue Vietnam inflicted inflation on European economies. In Marsh's telling, the

euro was almost an act of transatlantic self-defense.

For Mody, who represented the IMF in its program to rescue the Irish financial system a decade ago, the euro was an "economic absurdity" from the start. Germany is the villain, although of a strange kind—the villain of something it had to be dragged kicking and screaming into doing. Words in a German's mouth mean different things than they do in the mouths of others. When most Europeans talk of "banking union," they mean the Europe-wide pooling of liability in order to lower risk. When a German says "banking union," he means having German accountants lay down the law to banks in Greece. "We as Germans do not want to pay into a big pot," says Germany's former finance minister Peer Steinbrück, as if it were an aesthetic matter.

The strange thing about the euro is that it is an incomplete currency. "Germany plays the role of a hegemon in Europe," Mody writes, "but is unwilling to bear the cost of being a hegemon." What he means is that countries that share the euro do not share a fiscal policy. Fans of the euro often claim that the American dollar, too, is "shared" between states. But really the two systems have nothing in common. The United States is in every respect a single economy. Its states are not really sovereign. It has a single banking system. It does not (yet) have any language barriers that would preclude workers from moving from one place to another. It has "automatic stabilizers"—constant transfer payments that moderate economic imbalances. For instance, if Ohio is booming while Florida is stagnating, the former will pay out more in taxes while the latter will receive more in unemployment benefits. The E.U. has none of these advantages.

Mody explains the arguments of those economists who were most perspicacious about the design flaws of the euro. They are a heterodox lot. There is Maurice Obstfeld of Berkeley, who early saw that, in Mody's words, "the eurozone's financial framework encouraged investors to lend cheaply to governments with shaky public finances." Forgetting that not everyone is equally

creditworthy is the great common thread that runs through the American (subprime) and the European (euro) crises.

And Mody credits Alan Walters, an adviser to British prime minister

ances, making about 10 million refrigerators in 2001. By 2013 it was down to 2 million. Italian incomes, which had on average been 91 percent of German ones in 2007, had fallen to 77 percent in 2014.

and former head of the finance ministry's Europe division Klaus Regling, alluded to the lack of a Europe-wide bailout fund as a *Konstruktionsfehler*, or "design mistake." If so, it is a design mistake that offers extraordinary political advantages to those guilty of the misdesign. The single currency is doomed to failure on every front except one—it is devilishly difficult and risky to dismantle. As long as the euro survives, its designers will hold onto the hope of provoking a crisis that forces European unity on recalcitrant nation-states, that achieves what Mody calls "fiscal union by the back door."

Mody often makes clear that he would applaud a European Union that was agreed on by the *front* door. Perhaps it adds to the credibility of his economic opinions that his political opinions are so very conventional. But to the extent he believes the euro is an aberration, a mismanaged exception to a generally noble European project, he is wrong. The euro is imbued with the ethics of the E.U.

"If the euro fails," Angela Merkel warned the Bundestag in 2010, "Europe fails." But in this construction, is the euro a cause or an effect? Did it drive the various members of the E.U. into trouble and decline? Or is it the kind of folly to which troubled and declining peoples are susceptible? It is both. Having devoted their their lives and their sacred honor to the common currency, the leaders of the European Union have come to think of themselves as the continent's Jeffersons, its Madisons, its Lincolns. They are unlikely to be convinced by an alternative narrative, no matter how well argued, that paints them as its Quislings.

During the acute phase of the euro crisis in 2010, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas exhorted Angela Merkel to be a true leader, one who "took domestic political risks for Europe." Did he not see that European leaders were already taking the craziest risks for Europe, or at least in the *name* of Europe, and that they might actually be its problem? Or did he, too, forget that politics concerns not just those who take risks but also those who bear them? ♦



Happier days: Italians hold their first euros when the currency began circulating in 2002.

Margaret Thatcher, for seeing in 1986 that a fixed exchange regime such as the champions of the euro envisioned would amplify credit booms by sucking money into those countries where inflation was high and productivity falling.

The most farsighted hero among Mody's forebears is Nicholas Kaldor, the Anglo-Hungarian economist. In March 1971, as the first dreams of Europe-wide money were being sketched out at conferences, Kaldor warned not only that such a currency would be economically inefficient but that it would undermine the political unity it was intended to promote. If there is a diversity of economies in the group, then the currency will be overvalued for some and undervalued for others. Without stabilizers and transfers, pressure will build up. Strong countries will receive stimulus overheat while weak ones will go into debt deflation and their economies will grind to a halt. That is mostly what happened in the European countries this century. Italy entered the E.U. with debts totaling 120 percent of GDP. That alone was a parameter that would render it less creditworthy and lead to imbalances. At the turn of the century, Italy was the world's leading exporter of home appli-

Forcing different peoples to live together in a confederation is hard to do. Even with political good faith and vast resources, it may yet fail. Yugoslavia failed, Czechoslovakia failed, and it is only with great difficulty and much transferring of money that Italy, after a century and a half, still holds its northern cities and its southern provinces in one political unit. What made the Europeans so arrogantly believe they could execute a union of 28 nations where other, more modest projects had failed?

The euro was a big part of the answer. It was intended to serve not as an economic amulet but as a political trick. European leaders provoke crises and emergencies that they use to seize power from democratic electorates. That has always been their preferred model of continental consolidation. Jean Monnet, one of the E.U.'s founding fathers, was quite open about it. "I have always believed," he wrote in his memoirs, "that Europe would be built through crises, and that it would be the sum of their solutions."

Speaking to *Die Zeit* in late June, two of the German architects of the euro, former finance minister Theo Waigel

Leonardo the Enigma

Why it is so difficult to see the great polymath and his work clearly. BY DANNY HEITMAN

Biographer Walter Isaacson's *Leonardo da Vinci*, which became a bestseller when it was published last year, had many good things to recommend it, although Isaacson sometimes seemed intent on domesticating the wild genius of his subject by depicting it in a series of tame, teachable moments. That sensibility culminated in a closing section called "Learning from Leonardo" that attempted to distill the enigmatic legacy of perhaps the world's most famous artist into what read like a PowerPoint slide from a motivational speaker. "Be curious, restlessly curious," Isaacson intoned, channeling the great Renaissance painter and inventor. "Seek knowledge for its own sake. ... Retain a childlike sense of wonder."

There is surely nothing wrong with embracing such ideals, but Isaacson's tutorial tack suggested a reluctance to let his readers draw their own conclusions about his subject's life and work. It sometimes felt, as I have noted elsewhere, as if Isaacson was using Leonardo as a stand-in for Dale Carnegie.

Whatever its drawbacks, Isaacson's approach proved commercially shrewd. His *Leonardo* is being adapted as a screen project with Leonardo DiCaprio, who was named after the artist, in the starring role. The screenplay is reportedly being written by John Logan, whose writing credits include a couple of James Bond movies. One can already imagine the marketing bonanza as the movie and its related merchandise make Leonardo (1452-1519) into a hot Hollywood commodity.

Of course, he is already as much a

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A flattering portrait of Leonardo da Vinci by his apprentice Francesco Melzi (ca. 1510)

Living with Leonardo
Fifty Years of Sanity and Insanity in the Art World
by Martin Kemp
Thames & Hudson, 314 pp., \$34.95

Leonardo
A Restless Genius
by Antonio Forcellino
translated by Lucinda Byatt
Polity, 351 pp., \$35

brand as a historical figure. Leonardo's *The Last Supper* can seem as ubiquitous as the Apple logo, and to millions of people around the globe his *Mona Lisa* is as instantly recognizable as a Coca-Cola bottle.

Isaacson's packaging of Leonardo as a self-help guru points to a broader challenge in apprehending his art. For generations, Leonardo's paintings have been so commodified and reflexively revered that it's difficult to see them with fresh eyes.

Perhaps no one is more aware of the problem than Martin Kemp, an emeritus professor of art at Oxford and an expert on Leonardo's work. Kemp explains why pilgrims to the Louvre aren't always—or even usually—overwhelmed by their up-close meeting with the *Mona Lisa*, noting that its curation works against any real sense of intimacy with the masterpiece. The painting's presence within a glass case sets it at a cold remove from the visitors who file past in a posture of perfunctory homage, the experience often a dry exercise in bucket-list tourism.

In *Living with Leonardo*, a memoir of his years studying the artist, Kemp recalls getting a better look at the *Mona Lisa* because of his special role as an expert. "Meeting Lisa outside her prison is an incredible privilege," he tells readers. "The framed picture first has to emerge from its specially constructed, alarmed and air-conditioned closet, with its viewing window of specially toughened glass. The frame is laid face down on a table. The wooden panel is removed with tender care, and lifted clear of the glass. It is carried gingerly to an easel by the staff charged with handling it, and firmly clamped into place."

If Kemp's detailed account of the *Mona Lisa's* undressing reads like a seduction, the effect is surely intentional. One of the reasons for the painting's fame, he suggests, is its underlying sensuality. It evokes in us a "sense of presence" that is "truly uncanny," he writes of seeing the *Mona Lisa* unboxed. "It is alive. The sitter seems to respond to us no less than we respond to her. Through the insistent cracks, grimy varnish and splotchy retouching, her teasing glance and inviting smile invade our space with astonishing vibrancy."

But Kemp argues that along with the physical barriers distancing most viewers from *Mona Lisa*, cultural barriers present their own obstacles:

Whatever our reaction, we come to the picture via a dense haze of popular manifestations: advertisements, parodies, cartoons, souvenir mugs, fridge magnets, T-shirts, bikini bottoms, pornographic subversions, and millions of reproductions in every kind of printed and electronic medium. I

have accumulated, mainly by gift, an unsystematic collection of *Mona Lisa* paraphernalia. My personal assistant, Judd, recently gave me a pair of *Mona Lisa* socks, which seem to go down well at the start of talks.

Despite being reproduced as routinely as one of Warhol's soup cans, the painting can still, incredibly, convey an air of mystery. Kemp sees that as the painting's abiding appeal. We think we know *Mona Lisa*, but she teasingly reminds us that we really don't. She's alternately familiar and aloof, which is, Kemp concludes, a perfect expression of the period in which Leonardo worked. "The overall presentation—the lady is present before our eyes, yet for all her apparent reaction to us, she remains elusive—is profoundly consistent with the characterization of idealized devotion in Italian sonnets," he writes. "Renaissance poets' tormented love was not destined to be requited."

The subtitle of Kemp's book mentions insanity, a reference to what he calls "Leonardo loonies"—a subculture of obsessives who create elaborate, unsubstantiated theories to explain the master's pictures.

That element of intrigue informed the plot of *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown's fictional thriller. "Would *The Michelangelo Code* have sold anything like as well?" Kemp asks, assuming that the answer is self-evident.

Citing one of the more fanciful speculations about the painting, Kemp notes that "it has been claimed that Leonardo himself posed for the *Mona Lisa* in drag." If Leonardo didn't cross-dress to create his most beloved image, the kooky notion that he is *Mona Lisa*, as with most myths, points to a larger truth: Like the lady herself, he can first seem vividly close to us, and yet just out of reach.

Leonardo left behind some 7,200 pages of notebooks, ostensibly an exhaustive expression of self-disclosure. They are famous, of course, for their visionary conceptions of tanks, flying machines, and other gadgets far

ahead of their time. But Leonardo's recorded thoughts are full of runic obscurities, creating a paper trail more riddling than revelatory.

His Tuscan origins are vague, as are other basic biographical details. He probably speaks most directly to us in his paintings, which is why Antonio Forcellino, an Italian authority on Renaissance art, is such a promising Leonardo biographer. His *Leonardo: A Restless Genius*, first published in Italy in 2016, is now available in an English translation by Lucinda Byatt.

Forcellino's *Leonardo* won't get nearly as much attention as Isaac-



Tourists strain to see the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre.

son's book, although it should. While Isaacson was a breathless enthusiast, occasionally crafting observations that sounded like jacket blurbs, Forcellino is less enraptured, more reportorial in his tone. Even so, he's keen to the possibilities of a good story.

Forcellino opens his narrative in Milan in 1490 at a grand matrimonial feast—the highlight of which is a mechanical tableau representing the movement of the planets. It was the handiwork of 37-year-old Leonardo, who was, long before the birth of Hollywood, celebrated as a special-effects artist. "The man responsible smiled quietly, satisfied at the astonishment he had kindled among guests of all ranks and from all parts," Forcellino writes.

Leonardo lives in popular imagination as a mad scribbler dashing off visions of the future in the candlelit solitude of a table littered with paper. In beginning his biography at a party,

Forcellino usefully underscores the degree to which Leonardo thrived as a part of a larger creative community. In other ways, the book is bracingly counterintuitive. Much is made, for example, of Leonardo's forward-thinking sensibility. But Forcellino concludes that in many of his ideas, the artist was more a medievalist than a modern, as in his view of "a world where everything was the mirror of something else, and thus the human body was the mirror of the body of the cosmos. ... Despite his extraordinary intuitions ... Leonardo was not the new man but, if anything, the last of the old men."

And while the Old World endures in our common understanding as a settled place, Forcellino points out that Leonardo's childhood village of Vinci "lay on the edge of the wooded ravines of the foothills to the Tuscan Apennines, where farmed countryside gave way to large areas of wilderness."

That is why, one gathers, Leonardo's paintings are far from settled, too. *Mona Lisa*, Isaacson deftly observed, seems to be in motion, as if she has just turned to see us. The river behind her evokes a restless world, too. And *The Last Supper*, with its furrowed brows and anguished asides, speaks of a world touched by the divine but nevertheless painfully unresolved.

Leonardo's genius defies easy summary. His detailed grasp of anatomy made the people in his pictures compellingly authentic, but they're most memorable, perhaps, for their *psychological* reality. *Mona Lisa's* smile, touched by a wry ambivalence, suggests a casual gesture, not a formal pose.

Leonardo appears to have been unhappy with his handiwork, periodically refining the painting, started in 1503, until shortly before his death. Maybe that's the biggest reason Leonardo lives so durably in the culture some five centuries after his death. He clearly saw himself—and, by extension, us—as an eternal work in progress.

FRANCESCO VANINETTI / CLICKALPS / REDA&CO / UIG / GETTY

Cinematic Saint

The challenges of depicting Joan of Arc on the screen.

BY TIM MARKATOS

How do you adapt the life of a saint for the silver screen? In 1928 the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer provided an enduring response to that question with *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, re-released on Blu-ray by the Criterion Collection earlier this year.

Even in its 90th year, *Passion* retains its awe-inspiring power. Dreyer's film is silent (though talking pictures were already in production by 1928) and its intertitles are based on the historic record of Joan's trial. Renée Falconetti, who plays Joan, has a face unparalleled in its expressive power in all of cinema. To watch her eyes bulge with the fear of either God or death—which is unclear—is surely to bear witness to the making of a saint.

That gerund, *making*, is doing a lot of heavy lifting at the intersection of cinema and sainthood. Film by its nature isn't well suited to depicting the life that goes into the making of a saint—or of any person of faith, for that matter. Recall that line of St. Paul's to his disciple Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Faith is not static trust or mere assent to a set of ideas about God or religion attained at a distinct moment in time, fired in a kiln once and preserved unchanged forever after. It's a dynamic process of becoming; it asks work of us in the long haul. But with a movie, you've got two hours tops (unless you're one of the more adventurous Eastern European types,

in which case you've got maybe seven or eight hours in a single sitting). The options available to filmmakers have traditionally been rather limited. You could condense the timeline of a saint's



Joan of the Arc Lights: Renée Falconetti in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 film

life, omitting the everyday minutiae that form the bedrock of faith. Like Dreyer, you could focus on a single, representative episode in the saint's life, typically a moment in which faith is tested. Or you might try a combination of the two, compiling the greatest hits of stories from the life of the saint in question, as Roberto Rossellini did in *The Flowers of St. Francis*.

Born in 1412 or thereabouts and burned at the stake in 1431, with several years on the battlefield in between, Joan led a life that was short and exciting enough to warrant multiple film adaptations. Angelic voices, late medieval warfare, an unjust execution—what more could a moviegoer want? And so, besides Dreyer, Otto Preminger made a film adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan* in 1957; poor Ingrid Bergman was burned at the stake twice, once in

1948 for Victor Fleming's *Joan of Arc* and again in Italian six years later for Rossellini's *Joan of Arc at the Stake*; Robert Bresson, not a fan of Dreyer's film, made his own edition of *The Trial of Joan of Arc* in 1962; French New Wave pioneer Jacques Rivette in 1994 put together a two-part saga about Joan that, all together, runs to just under six hours (making it only his second-longest production); and Luc Besson gave Joan the war-epic treatment in 1999's *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*. Dreyer wasn't even the first to stake his claim on Joan's story. Cecil B. DeMille beat him to the punch

by a dozen years with *Joan the Woman* in 1916, which was already 16 years behind Georges Méliès, who had made his own film about Joan, 10 minutes of which survive, at the start of the century. (I will note in passing the existence of a 1935 German film about Joan, which Graham Greene in his capacity as a film critic for the *Spectator* described as being "of greater interest to students of Nazi psychology than to film-goers.")

So it isn't because Dreyer got there first nor because his film was the only one about Joan in circulation but rather because of the combination of his audacious filmmaking and Falconetti's unforgettable visage that his film has come to be regarded as a cinematic masterpiece.

Watching *Passion* today is still a remarkable experience. The sufferings of Joan, her unwavering (even, perhaps, overconfident) trust in God's salvific powers, and the grotesqueness of her persecutors—all painstakingly adorned, sans makeup, in period-accurate dress, right down to the tonsures—puts the viewer vividly in mind of the Passion of Christ. Dreyer cuts between shots with disorienting disregard for visual continuity and an abandon verging at times on hyperactivity. The only peace to be found is that which radiates from Falconetti herself. Whether she's drawing upon God for this peace or whether we're merely witnessing total exhaustion is a question Dreyer leaves provocatively unanswered.

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Given Joan's illustrious cinematic legacy, we've been due for a new take on her life after the almost 20 years since Besson's movie. Lo, here comes French director Bruno Dumont with *Jeannette: The Childhood of Joan of Arc*, a punk-rock musical drawing from the writings of 19th-century French poet Charles Péguy, now playing special engagements around the country. Extrapolating from the chatter I overheard after the screening I attended, most people will hate *Jeannette*. By all accounts it's a terrible musical. The music, by French artist Gautier Serre (credited here as Igorrr) seems composed to be forgotten. There are no hooks, no rhymes, no elegantly phrased lyrics. Whenever a character opens his or her mouth to speak, five minutes of autotuned theological disquisitions pour out while discordant percussion and guitars erupt seemingly from behind the sheaves of grass (it's either that or the sheep) in the sparsely inhabited fields of dust where nearly three-quarters of the film is shot.

I've never met a film that was too bizarre to at least attempt to comprehend, and all things considered, *Jeannette* is rather easy to get a handle on. When the film begins in 1425, Joan is a wee preteen. We see her first as a speck of blue fabric on the horizon of a shallow river, her body forming a bridge between an oversaturated sky and the equally blue earth below. As she draws nearer, we begin to make out her singing: some variation on the Lord's Prayer, improvised in the way of children with unadulterated imaginations. The closer she comes to the camera the further south her ditty turns; by the time she reaches the foreground (the camera never cutting away in the interim), she stops, staring us straight in the face. Her nursery-rhyme supplication has turned into a full-on death-metal dirge. Everyone in France is dropping dead and still the kingdom of heaven is not at hand.

Though Dumont is an atheist, *Jeannette* gets right two very important things about Christian life: Prayer at

its most sincere is weird and having faith in God does not preclude occasionally wanting to throw sharp objects at Him. The first half of the film sees Jeannette through her period of anger and doubt. She gets a lesson in humility from Madame Gervaise, the village kook who ran away from home to join a convent, inexplicably and wondrously played by two actresses who are always onscreen and in character at the same time (no one *ever* acknowledges that Madame Gervaise is being played by



Jeanne Voisin in Bruno Dumont's *Jeannette*

two people simultaneously; that would break the spell). Les Gervaises upbraid Jeannette for trying to take on a burden that Christ has already shouldered for her: Christ already knew infinite agony when Judas hanged himself and separated himself from God's eternal love, so "why would you want to save the souls of the damned further than Jesus?" This is all rather heady theological stuff, if you ignore for a moment that it's accompanied by a knowingly ridiculous punk soundtrack and—yes—a little bit of habit-dropping head-thrashing.

In the second hour, Joan has grown up (she's in her teens now and played by an older actress) and Dumont has expanded the purview of the film beyond the sheep fields. We visit Joan's family in one of only two set changes in the whole film. Her uncle dabs his way through all his lines; her mother stands off to the side vigorously plucking a chicken to the beat. By now Joan's fiery adolescent anger has cooled into a no-less-irritating impatience

as she waits for the fulfillment of the promises the angelic voices have been making to her since childhood. When will she get to ride off to war and fulfill her God-ordained destiny? Though Dumont loses some of the magic along with the focus of the film's stronger first half, he does hit on a third truth about faith: It takes patience, oftentimes more of it than you can muster by yourself. Watching Jeannette receive the fruits of the spirit through much toil and frustration in her youth in Dumont's film, it's easier to fathom where the placidity of Falconetti's Joan might have come from in Dreyer's.

Whatever else it may do, art that focuses only on the most notable events and deeds in the lives of history's holiest people runs the risk of misleading us into forgetting that saints were human, too. Joan of Arc is one of our more unusual examples, since for so many modern, non-Christian artists she was more an object of historical or aesthetic fascination or pity than

a model of piety and obedience we can still learn from today.

The saints can seem like distant figures—but what if the conditions of sainthood are just as attainable today as ever? What if the transformative grace that made saints of holy men and women in Christian history is still available for us, waiting for input on our end? The instructions for Christians seeking holiness are fairly clear and simple: Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself. Few of us have any difficulty paying lip service to that last part; it's the prerequisite God stuff that's scary. Whether it's God Himself we're afraid of or whether we're just frightened of looking ridiculous if we loose our lips to address Him, we could all stand to be a little less self-conscious. At least we, unlike Dumont's Jeannette, don't need to worry that our praises and doubts will summon choirs of badly tuned bass guitars to grate on the Almighty's ears. ♦

ROGER ARPAJOU

Paradise Recycled

The lives of 19th-century utopians are more interesting than the utopias they imagined. BY JAMES BOWMAN



Paul Signac, *In the Time of Harmony: The Golden Age Is Not in the Past, It Is in the Future* (1893-95)

The strangest thing about Michael Robertson's *The Last Utopians* is its title, which would seem to suggest that there have been no more utopians since the days of the four figures he chooses as his subjects: Edward Bellamy, William Morris, Edward Carpenter, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In fact, as Robertson well knows, our world remains full of utopians, though they don't always describe themselves that way anymore. As he makes clear in a seemingly self-contradictory postscript titled "Utopianism in the Twenty-First Century," Robertson sees the utopians of today as inheritors of the "legacy" of his four—as a way, perhaps, of keeping fresh their relevance to

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our own times, which might otherwise appear to be obscure, to say the least.

For even more curious than his misleading title are the author's constant attempts to disguise or palliate what would be instantly apparent to most of us if we went back to the books by Bellamy, Morris, et al. themselves, instead of reading his secondhand account of them: namely how laughably bad they are. The task of utopian literature has always been to provide an excuse or a pretext for people to believe in what would otherwise be unbelievable, but such pretexts tend to wear out rather quickly—as more recent ones, mostly based as they are on swiftly obsolete technologies, should warn us. This stuff dates, in other words, and if we look back to the utopian literature of the 19th century, it takes a very special kind of naïveté to find anything remotely believable about it.

And yet even today people find their reasons for believing. The historian E.P. Thompson, for instance, looked upon the idealized Middle Ages of Morris's *News from Nowhere* as an exercise in "the education of desire," by which he presumably meant education in *not* desiring—or not desiring anything that postdates the Wars of the Roses. But the books are bad not only in the sense that they are poor predictors of the future, which arguably they weren't trying to be anyway. They are also aesthetically bad: badly written, badly plotted, and with badly drawn characters as remote from ordinary experience as only those made to illustrate a utopian thesis can be. They do not look like real people but like specimens of some alternate version of humanity that has never existed and never could exist and therefore come across as literally inhuman.

Moreover, apart from its summaries of other books that few people not duty-bound by scholarship would ever want to read, *The Last Utopians* tends to concentrate less on the works than on the lives of their authors. This is fortunate for Robertson's readers, since the utopians' own lives are inevitably more interesting than the lives that they imagined. It's easy to forget about the difficulties with utopia when you concentrate on the difficulties faced by the intellectual utopians. In that respect, Robertson, a professor at the College of New Jersey, is trying to do for his utopian projectors what Edmund Wilson did for Marx and his pioneer socialist predecessors in *To the Finland Station* and Tom Stoppard did for various Russian figures in *The Coast of Utopia*. There is an obvious poignancy in the contrast between the ordinary human frailties and failures of such people and the visions of perfection and happiness to which they devoted their lives. They may have got a lot wrong, but we are asked to honor them for the sake of their good and presumptively liberal intentions.

True, it's hard to see the lives of the Robertson Four on quite the same heroic scale as Wilson's Karl Marx, though William Morris comes close—mainly because he produced other

work that was more interesting and valuable than *News from Nowhere*. But the attempts to connect these interesting things with the wasteland of banality that is utopia are not often persuasive—as when it is said of Morris’s wallpaper designs that they “are imbued with a utopian desire for harmony with nature that suffuses his work in every medium.” Since when is “harmony with nature” utopian? The trouble with utopia is precisely that it is *not* in harmony with nature—especially with human nature.

Typically, utopians get around this awkward fact by denying that there is any such limiting thing as human nature. Well before Marx posited his idea of man as a mere product of historical and economic circumstances, Robert Owen established his “Owenite” communities in the belief that “human nature would be transformed” by them. Focusing on the hopeful future thus becomes a way of forgetting the failures of the past. Any history of utopianism is fraught with paradox, since utopians can hardly be utopians without first abolishing history—or claiming it, as Marx did, as their own property, which comes to the same thing. The past is not only an irrelevance to any projected future utopia but a positive danger, since unless it is constantly rewritten, as in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it serves as a reminder both of the failure of past utopias and of the fact that the future never turns out the way we expect or plan for it to do.

Here again, the idea of the Victorian utopians as having a legacy in the present strikes me as paradoxical, since utopianism by its very nature imagines a wholly new start to the nation, or even to the species, which would necessarily turn any history that might otherwise be *ours* into a kind of anthropology: a study of alien but merely primitive and untutored societies belonging to an entirely different order of humanity—a hard case to make when the supposedly real people are only imaginary. Robertson reports that William Morris criticized Bellamy’s hugely popular *Looking Backward* for



William Morris, author of *News from Nowhere*

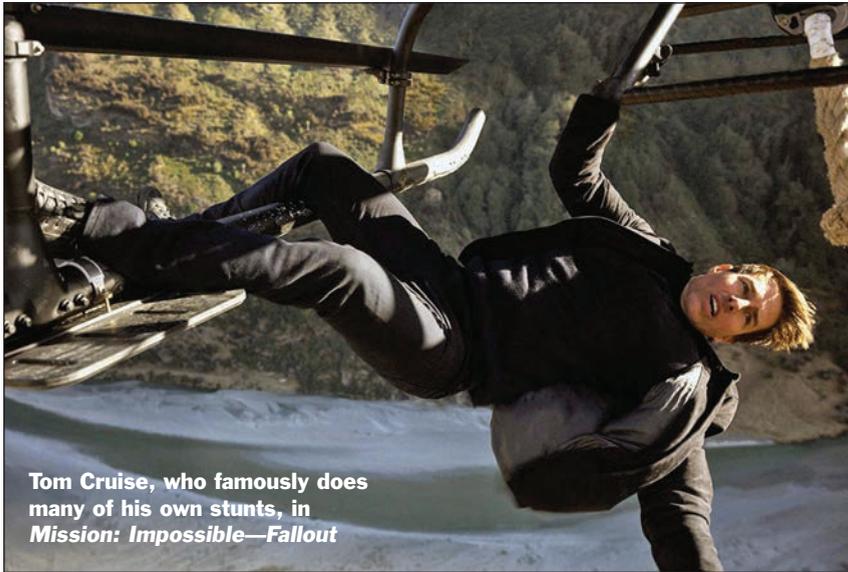
only going halfway with change and not recognizing that it is “modern civilization” itself that was responsible for all the evils he thought could be extirpated from his medieval dreamland. Robertson would seem to concur when he writes that Bellamy “suggested that once class differences disappeared, everyone would naturally conform to Victorian middle-class norms.”

Yet Gilman’s feminism in *Herland* and Carpenter’s idealized homosexuality and what Robertson calls its “appealing post-Christian mystical spirituality” represent avowed breaks with the past as well as providing Robertson with a link to present-day assumptions that allow him to take even the most bizarre of utopian manifestations seriously. He doesn’t acknowledge that such assumptions must cut him off from the past he is ostensibly adumbrating. When he writes, for instance, of “social justice” in the *Utopia* of Thomas More or of “gender ideology” and “gender anxiety” in Victorian times, he does not hint that such concepts were quite unknown to the people who allegedly embodied them in their lives or works. How far can he be said, then, really to be writing about the past, and how far is he projecting 21st-century ideas onto the past in order to give them a kind of pedigree?

Robertson makes no bones about his own utopianism, which may not make him the best person to write this history, and he makes the usual utopian’s assumption that a better world means an utterly transformed world, although the transformation may be, for the moment, only on the scale of the various hippie communes he has visited or Occupy Wall Street. After paying due respect to Karl Popper, John Gray, and Frédéric Rouvillois (“All utopias are totalitarian. ... And, conversely, all totalitarian states are fundamentally utopian”), he goes on to give “my own definition” as “the envisioning of a transformed, better world,” which, though he admits it may also be applied to Stalin, Hitler, or Pol Pot, is assumed to be “crucial to shaping a better future.” His

own ideas seem to have been inspired by Davina Cooper’s *Everyday Utopias*, which sees utopianism as a way of “engaging with spaces, objects, and practices that is oriented to the hope, desire, and belief in the possibility of other, better worlds.”

Consider for a moment that use of the word “worlds” and its plural number—as if worlds were as plentiful and as easy to be picked as blackberries. Back in Victorian times, people had some excuse for utopianism, which had not had very much in the way of a real-world tryout at that point. Now it has. Now we have no excuse for an easy faith in other, better worlds, as opposed to slightly improved versions of this one. This must be why other utopian theorists tend *not* to look to the past but to disguise their utopianism as “progressivism.” But towards what are they progressing if not utopia as they conceive it? Robertson himself quotes Martin Green as comparing the late-Victorian period to a British “New Age”—a reminder, if any were needed, that utopian schemes for the redesign of society are constantly being rediscovered and recycled in some putatively more plausible form than those of their discredited originals. That is what he himself turns out to have been doing in *The Last Utopians*. If only they *were* the last! ♦



Man on a Mission

The latest installment of Tom Cruise's series is an instant classic of the action-adventure genre. BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The new *Mission: Impossible—Fallout* is the sixth entry in the Tom Cruise franchise in 22 years—a franchise in which the first was fine, the second lousy, the third a silly effort to inject some personal drama into the life of Cruise's Ethan Hunt, the fourth (directed by the animation master Brad Bird) pretty entertaining, and the fifth kind of meh. So imagine my surprise when *Fallout* proved to be not only the best in the series by a country mile, but one of the most astounding action-adventure pictures ever. This is the best James Bond movie never made. It's what most ticking-time-bomb international spy pictures have wished to be. You want gripping? This thing is as gripping as a giant squid.

Forget the plot, which I didn't understand even while I was watching it—something about a network of fanatics with no defined ideology wanting to

blow up the world for no clear reason I could make out. People double-cross each other, intelligence agencies fight with each other, and Tom Cruise has a rival in Henry Cavill, who's 14 feet taller. You can also forget the movie's two love stories, with Cruise feeling guilt about saving the world rather than being with his wife and also having to deal with the reappearance of his girlfriend from the fifth movie, who seems hostile even as she keeps saving his bacon. The banter between Cruise and his Impossible Missions Force sidekicks, Ving Rhames and Simon Pegg, is good, but it's not what makes the movie special.

Fallout is an instant classic of the action-adventure genre because it's likely that Cruise (who also produced) and his longtime collaborator Christopher McQuarrie (the writer-director best known for the Oscar-winning screenplay of *The Usual Suspects*) sat down and made a deliberate and ambitious decision to take various types of action-movie sequences and try to make the definitive versions of them.

And they come close to succeeding in every case.

A chase through the streets of Paris with Cruise on a motorcycle is an old chestnut given thrilling new life. Later, Cruise pursues Cavill through London on foot by running through buildings, smashing windows, landing on roofs, and crossing the Thames atop a rail bridge—and I don't care if he's 56 and was running in slow motion that got sped up to make him look like he was Steve Prefontaine, the scene is dazzling. A fight in a glistening white bathroom at the Musée d'Orsay that leads to its destruction is just about the best fight in a bathroom ever.

Good as all of that stuff is, it pales before the movie's two head-spinning set pieces. The first is a skydive from 35,000 feet that goes wrong, during which you hold your breath and shake your head at the wonder of it all, even though you know Cruise's character isn't going to get hurt because there's still 90 minutes to go in the movie. The second, the movie's edge-of-the-seat climax, features Cruise in hot pursuit of a villain at the helm of a helicopter through the cavernous mountains of Kashmir—a series of action stunts and tricks that builds and builds and builds over about 15 minutes until you could almost pass out from excitement.

And to give McQuarrie credit for one nifty bit of writing, there's a series of interlocking plot twists in the middle of the film (in which a terrific Alec Baldwin plays a pivotal role) that manages to startle and surprise in a way no previous *Mission: Impossible* ever has. Even the patented ridiculous *MI* specialty—"I will now rip off my face and show I was wearing a mask all along"—is approached in a fresh fashion not once, but twice.

There's nothing serious to be said about *Mission: Impossible—Fallout*. It doesn't have politics. It doesn't mean anything. It's just a surpassingly competent piece of moviemaking, surehanded and determined the way Cruise is determined—to make you enjoy yourself, come out of the theater, and tell other people they should drop everything and buy a ticket. It's the most entertaining picture of the year so far.

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

**"I don't even know if that's a crime—colluding with Russians."
—Rudy Giuliani, July 30, 2018**

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Dispensers of Strange New Respect

TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2018 • \$2

Unfrozen caveman lawyer joins Trump legal team

**'I'M JUST A
CAVEMAN'**

*'Frightened and
confused' by legal
system, iPhones*

BY PAUL RANDALL

As the investigation headed by Robert Mueller intensifies, President Donald Trump's legal team added a new member yesterday, with chief counsel Rudolph Giuliani introducing Keyrock, the Unfrozen Caveman Lawyer, at a press event outside Trump Tower.

"Keyrock has spent his entire career fighting for justice, ever since he was thawed out by scientists after being frozen for a hundred thousand years," Giuliani said. "And while his caveman brain struggles to understand our complex justice system, nobody is more passionate about defending the innocent."

Keyrock becomes the latest



Keyrock, now Unfrozen Caveman Trump adviser

high-profile attorney to join the president's legal team, and yesterday he indicated he would lead a new approach to fighting Mueller's investigation into Russian election meddling.

"Ladies and gentleman, I do not understand the charges being levied against President Trump," Keyrock said. "I don't even understand what a 'president' is or

why this stick in front of my face is making my voice louder," he continued. "I'm just a caveman. I don't understand complex ideas like 'democracy' or 'national sovereignty' or 'collusion' or 'guilt,'" he explained, making liberal use of air quotes.

"I don't know if it's illegal when a 'candidate for president' in some place called 'the United States of America' decides to work with agents of a 'foreign government' to win an election," he insisted.

"As I said, I'm just a caveman. Your modern world frightens and confuses me. When the sun sets each night, I'm pretty sure it's gone forever. When there's an earthquake, I think a giant named Krot is trying to break out of the Earth like an egg. When somebody FaceTimes me, I am terrified they will suffocate inside my iPhone. I don't know how any of these things work. But there's one thing I do know: The only thing President Trump is guilty of is wanting to make America great again

MAGA CONTINUED ON A6

the weekly
Standard

AUGUST 13, 2018