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STUNT MAN

MATT LABASH on Sabo, right-wing guerrilla street artist

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COVER PHOTO BY EDWARD CARREON

11, Rounded Up to 240

This spring, not long after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, the Department of Education released a report showing that during the 2015-2016 school year there were an astounding 240 school shootings. The figure has been repeated endlessly by gun control activists and commentators. The report from which it was derived, however, got little scrutiny. Almost nobody thought to ask why the number was so high.

Almost nobody—which is why National Public Radio deserves enormous credit for doing what other media organizations didn't. After a few months of research—the government report is a massive document—what they found was pretty astounding. Of the 240 school shootings reported by the Department of Education, NPR was able to confirm that only 11 of them actually occurred.

The problem was bad methodology mixed with anti-gun ideology.

No need—NPR already did.

The question asked of each one of the country's 96,300 schools by the Department of Education was this: "Has there been at least one incident at your school that involved a shooting (regardless of whether anyone was hurt)?" The language is broad to the point of meaninglessness. "An incident that involved a shooting" could include any number of things—hearing what sounds like gunfire, rumors of a shooting, a "shooting" involving something other a gun, and so on. You may laugh, but the *New York Times*, as The Scrapbook recorded earlier this year, once included in its own compilation of "school shootings" a pellet shot at a school bus, shots supposedly fired at a community college without injury or suspect, and many other such non-events. Even if we take the report's methodology semi-seriously, however, it means that during the 2015-16 school year, about 1 out of every 10,000 schools reported any kind of a "shooting." In other words, shootings are extremely rare phenomena on America's schoolyards and campuses.

Whatever methodology we settle on to determine the number of school shootings in the United States, perhaps we can all agree that an event should only be classified a "school shooting" if there was, in fact, a shooting. ♦

Just Do It Badly

Colin Kaepernick, the former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, has signed a deal with Nike in which he will appear in some of the company's "Just Do It" advertisements. Kaepernick of course pioneered the practice of protesting racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem. The first Nike ad features Kaepernick's face behind the words "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."

This is an advertisement, bear in mind, for sports apparel.

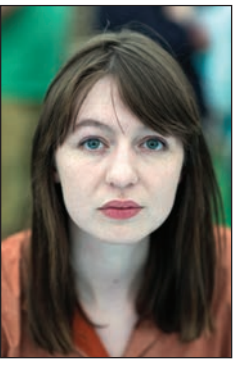
As to the substance of Kaepernick's message, we make no defense of the National Football League and its corporate leadership, which seems to have a policy of handling its problems by making them worse. Still, it's hard to find fault with the NFL for the fact that Kaepernick's playing career petered out. The whole regrettable controversy can be best understood, in The Scrapbook's admittedly fallible view, by remembering that he failed to become a good passer. A tendency to throw the football inaccurately does not lend itself to a long career as a starting NFL quarterback, and Kaepernick's ability to hit intended receivers diminished markedly during his last two seasons. It's a common circumstance. Defenses adapt to new quarterbacks, and players' capacities decline. Most move on to coaching or commentating. Colin Kaepernick moved on to secular sainthood. ♦

Oh well—there's always sanctimonious endorsements.

From Each According to Her Ability

Sally Rooney is a young Marxist novelist from Ireland, the author of *Conversations with Friends*, a celebrated debut novel. She has just published a second novel, *Normal People*, and already it's a bestseller. Both are being adapted for the big screen. Rooney is among the most successful millennial novelists, and so, the *New York Times* explains, her characters "are skeptical of the ability of markets to provide people with a decent life." They also "view human relationships—especially sex—as deeply political." Rooney's parents were socialists and frequently repeated Marx's slogan "from each according to his ability, to each according to

TOP: CARLOS BERNATE / SOPA IMAGES / LIGHTROCKET / GETTY
BOTTOM: EZRA SHAW / GETTY



Sally Rooney

his needs" (the *Times* inserts the ungrammatical "their" for "his"), and Rooney holds to the dictum still.

We'll take the *Times*'s word for it that Rooney and her fellow millennials consider sex "deeply political," but the part about her skepticism of markets makes us wonder: Will her newfound wealth cause her to reconsider her espousal of Marxism? If not, we assume her agent will get the accustomed 15 percent of her book and movie deals—and the rest will go to the poor. ♦

Trump Goes Too Far

Virginia GOP Senate nominee Corey Stewart is one of Donald Trump's most consistent and fervent supporters. The native Minnesotan is known for his sympathy for conspiracy theories and for his flirtations with the "alt right." Conservatives in Virginia have watched with amazement as Stewart cheers the 45th president at every turn, declining to criticize even his most craven and outrageous antics.

Corey Stewart

Behold, Stewart has finally found a reason to express apprehension about something Trump did. "I almost never differ with President Trump," he explained in a somber email to supporters, "but in this case I do." What was the disgrace that Stewart just couldn't look past? The president's proposal to freeze the pay of federal employees in 2019, which the White House put forward as part of its budget negotiations. Whether the administration sticks to its position is an open question, but most conservatives like the idea, believing that the federal workforce is too large and frequently overpaid, especially in the greater D.C. area.

Not Corey Stewart. "Federal employees in Virginia," he wrote in an email to supporters, "wake up early, face punishing traffic and work hard to serve their nation and support their families. These workers need and deserve a pay raise."

Let it never be said that Corey Stewart has no principles. He has at least one. ♦

Some Like It Room Temperature

We live in an age of hyper-trivial faux-controversies, almost all of them generated (if we speak just a little uncharitably) by overeducated progressives and left-wing politicos. If you follow politics on Twitter, you'll encounter so many of these moronic spats that you may be tempted to despair of Western civilization. At Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings this week, for example, a posse of progressive activists claimed that Zina Bash, a former clerk for Kavanaugh, could be seen displaying a "white power" sign from where she sat in the hearing room.

The Scrapbook was not familiar with this hand signal, and we strongly suspect Bash wasn't familiar with it either, inasmuch as her father is Jewish and her mother Mexican. Also, her grandparents fled Europe in the 1930s to escape the Holocaust. Such is the mass psychosis of left-wing Twitter, however, that the image was enough to make many seemingly functional adults believe the confirmation of

ROONEY: DAVID LEVENSON / GETTY
STEWART: JAHI CHIKWENDIU / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY

Brett Kavanaugh to be part of a white-supremacist takeover.

Or consider the fight between Democratic gubernatorial hopeful Cynthia Nixon and Gov. Andrew Cuomo over the thermostat setting at their debate last week. Evidently the governor is notorious for cranking down the temperature at indoor public events in which he participates; at his first State of the State speech in Albany in 2011, lawmakers complained they weren't inclined to clap because they had to sit on their hands to keep them warm.

Stop monkeying with the heat, you jerk!

Nixon wasn't putting up with it for the race's only debate, however; her chief strategist Rebecca Katz emailed WCBS-TV asking that the hall's thermostat be set to 76 degrees. Working conditions are "notoriously sexist when it comes to room temperature," Katz wrote, "so we just want to make sure we're all on the same page here." That comment, predictably, set social media ablaze with arguments about sexism and thermostats. The *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, CNN, MSNBC, and other media outlets hosted earnest debates about whether men monopolize thermostats and thus gain unjust advantage.

We missed the debate between Cuomo and Nixon and are unsure if Nixon took the stage in gloves and a fur coat, as we would have counseled, but the whole episode motivated The Scrapbook to look for the Weekly Standard thermostat so that we, too, could participate in this epic civilizational struggle. Alas, our large office block has deprived workers of control over the means of heating and cooling. If we now become Marxists, you'll know why. ♦

Conventional Unwisdom

On August 30, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* ran an unsigned editorial criticizing an editorial the same paper ran a century before. The offending piece: "Jass and Jassism," a denunciation of jazz music published in 1918. "Why is the jass music, and, therefore, the jass band?" New Orleans's paper of record once asked. "As well ask why is the dime novel or the grease-dripping doughnut? All are manifestations of a low streak in man's tastes that has not yet come out in civilization's wash." Jazz's "musical value is nil," the editors concluded, "and its possibilities of harm are great." Oops.

The *Times-Picayune*'s editors of a century ago weren't the first or the last important intellectuals to proffer idiotic opinions on music. It's worth remembering that Richard Weaver, in an otherwise penetrating book called *Ideas Have Consequences*, denounced jazz as "the clearest of all signs of our age's deep-seated predilection for barbarism." Recall, too, George Bernard Shaw's aggressively stupid judgment on Brahms's *German Requiem*: a "colossal musical imposture," "execrably and ponderously dull." Further back still, recall that the composer Georg Philipp Telemann was famous all over Europe while his contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach was ignored as derivative.

We mention the *Times-Picayune*'s refreshing bit of self-criticism simply in order to point out how often the most venerated opinion-makers of this or any age get things wholly, embarrassingly wrong. *Nota bene*. ♦

help the suffrage cause among the believers in states' rights.

JASS AND JASSISM.

Why is the jass music, and, therefore, the jass band? As well ask why is the dime novel or the grease-dripping doughnut? All are manifestations of a low streak in man's tastes that has not yet come out in civilization's wash. Indeed, one might go farther, and say that jass music is the indecent story syncopated and counter-pointed. Like the improper anecdote, also, in its youth, it was listened to blushingly behind closed doors and drawn curtains, but, like

D'oh.

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BPA WORLDWIDE

TOP: CRAIG RUTTLE / AFP / GETTY

Easily Amused

If you've been reading the business pages, you probably already know that Disney now owns both Star Wars and Marvel Comics. The predictable response to this as a parent is to wonder, "Am I giving this corporation enough opportunities to hijack my child's imagination?" Apparently not. I recently saw a video on the *New York Post*'s website about a family that's gone to Disneyland over 300 times.

Now I can't claim to be an expert on parenting, but I do think keeping your children's expectations low is a key to success. We head to Colorado every August to see the in-laws and beat the D.C. heat, and the kids usually start begging around May for a trip to Lakeside Amusement Park, just outside Denver. Built in 1908 on a natural lake just off I-70, Lakeside is one of the last remaining "trolley parks" in America. Around the turn of the century, amusement parks sprang up at the end of the trolley lines in cities all over the country. When the trolleys went away, so did most of the amusement parks.

Lakeside, along with dozens of other parks of the era, was originally called "White City" because it was built in the style popularized by architect Daniel Burnham at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, with the buildings and pavilions whitewashed. The park is defined by its 150-foot "Tower of Jewels," which was once lit up with 16,000 individual light bulbs and was one of the tallest buildings in Colorado when it was built.

The park was rescued from bankruptcy in the Depression by the Krasner family, who still own it. They added dozens of art deco structures and gorgeous neon signs that make the park what it is today. If you go there at night when it's all lit up, the place is a stunning bit of Americana that's seemingly frozen in time. If you go there during the day, well, there's not enough Purell in the world.

After 110 years, the park's upkeep leaves a little to be desired, and most of the rides aren't terribly special. If you've been to a county fair, you've probably seen them. There's a merry-go-round, Ferris wheel, bumper cars, the Spider, the Tilt-A-Whirl, the Loop-O-Plane, and the Museum of Ill-Conceived Tattoos. (Okay, that last one isn't an official attraction; it's what you get when the park's patrons are drawn from the first state to legalize weed.)

GARY HOVLAND

I haven't decided whether the fact that seemingly half the rides are closed on any given visit is proof of the park's commitment to safety or evidence otherwise. Adjacent to the parking lot is the ghostly and defunct Lakeside Speedway. There hasn't been a race since 1988, when an out-of-control car sent a tree into the grandstand, killing someone.

The park does have two roller coasters, though. The first one, the Wild Chipmunk, is referred to by locals as the Chipped Tooth. It's premised on the idea that violently moving around a track at abrupt right angles is enjoyable. The main attraction, however, is the Cyclone, a 90-foot-high wooden coaster built in 1940. It's a historic landmark, according to the society of American Coaster Enthusiasts, and a genuinely great ride.

Lakeside isn't Disneyland, in ways that are good as well as bad. Aside from a small parking fee, unlimited rides on weekdays are a whopping $17. You can also buy tickets for individual rides. That's why around 10 P.M., you'll often see a rush of teenagers and college kids getting off their shifts streaming into the park for one ride on the Cyclone before heading home.

They also encourage you to bring your own food into the park, and Lakeside's proximity to the freeway makes it a great meeting place. My wife and I plan family gatherings around the place, since it's hard to see all of the extended clan during our short trips. The adults lug in coolers and catch up around picnic tables while wild packs of younger cousins roam the park in search of mechanical thrills. We usually get there just in time to catch the sunset behind the Rockies on the other side of the lake and watch the neon signs come alive.

For years now, the closed rides and waning upkeep have had us worried about Lakeside's fate. But this year when we showed up, they were building a roller coaster—the first new ride in a long time. The announcement prompted a wave of relief that the park would be around a while longer and occasioned a series of reminiscences and tributes to Lakeside in the local press.

Maybe my kids have no idea what they're missing because they've so far been denied the pilgrimage to Orlando or Anaheim. As amusement parks go, Disneyland is impossible to top. But I see the looks on their faces every year at Lakeside as proof that the happiest place on earth can be wherever you want it to be.

Mark Hemingway

the weekly Standard

Activist Senators

At a press conference before the Senate confirmation hearings on Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court, Senate Judiciary Committee ranking member Dianne Feinstein said that Democrats were planning "silent protests."

If only.

Judiciary Committee chairman Chuck Grassley had barely uttered a full sentence on September 4 before Kamala Harris—not coincidentally a 2020 Democratic presidential hopeful—interrupted him. "Mr. Chairman . . . Mr. Chairman . . . we cannot possibly move forward, Mr. Chairman." So began a six-hour spectacle of disingenuous arguments and madcap playacting. Democratic senators Richard Blumenthal, Cory Booker, and Mazie Hirono joined Harris in an orchestrated performance of interruption and obstruction. Grassley could hardly get through a sentence of his opening remarks without a Democrat calling on him to postpone the hearing.

Your turn to interrupt: Cory Booker and Kamala Harris

Thanks to a supremely arrogant 2013 decision by then-majority leader Harry Reid to end the filibuster for judicial nominations, Democrats don't have the votes to stop Kavanaugh's confirmation. But they feel obliged to prove that they're doing something—anything—to stop what almost certainly can't be stopped.

The protests continued on succeeding days. When Democratic senators weren't interrupting the proceedings, one after another of their cobelligerents stood and shouted, "Kavanaugh can't be trusted!" or "Be a hero!" or "Cancel Kavanaugh!" Protester after protester was escorted from the room after what were supposed to look like spontaneous outbursts but were in fact a campaign coordinated by progressive groups and congressional Democrats. "What we've heard is the noise of democracy," Illinois's Dick Durbin pompously claimed after one outburst. "This is what happens in a free country when people can stand up and speak and not be jailed, imprisoned, tortured, or killed because of it. It is not mob rule. There have been times when it is uncomfortable. … But it does represent what we are about in this democracy."

By the third day of the hearings, the protests had mostly petered out, but at that point Democratic senators themselves were behaving like the activists. For weeks, they had demanded thousands of documents dating from Kavanaugh's work as staff secretary in the George W. Bush White House in a palpably disingenuous claim that not enough is known about the nominee's character and jurisprudential views (despite the lengthy paper trail left by his 12 years on the D.C. circuit court). Grassley tried to set down reasonable rules about which of the tens of thousands of documents could be seen by committee members, but of course the Democrats were never going to be satisfied because it wasn't documents they were after. They already had more than enough material with which to bluster about Kavanaugh's "troubling" views on racial profiling, prisoner detention, and so on. Their desire for more was solely intended to delay the hearings. Thus Booker, in a vain attempt to appear as though he were committing an illegal act on high principle—he called it his "*I am Spartacus* moment"—released some of the documents designated "committee confidential." But later that day, the official in charge of releasing Bush administration materials noted that he had previously told Booker he could release the documents. It was a stunt, as cheap and childish as it was ineffectual.

The documents Kavanaugh handled during his time in the White House would be relevant if the question before the committee were his policy views, but those are not relevant to his judicial philosophy. The judicial philosophy of Democrats and progressives may be that a judge simply imposes his political opinions, but it is not Kavanaugh's judicial philosophy—and Democrats know this.

Why, we wonder, are Senate Democrats so determined to delegitimize Kavanaugh and his confirmation hearings when they know he'll be confirmed anyway? A few may actually believe they can defeat the nomination, take the Senate in November, and deny President Trump any further Supreme Court nominations. But most realize that is a long shot. They're interested, instead, in proving to their most enthusiastic supporters and their donors that they are committed to the cause of opposing "conservative" judges. Several are running for president and need the publicity;

CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY

others face primary challengers who are sure to question their commitment to the cause. Hence the unlovely amalgamation of Democratic senators and their boorish agents shouting at a Supreme Court nominee.

The confirmation of Supreme Court justices has become one of the primary theaters of the culture wars, and neither party is guiltless. In 2009, only 9 of 40 Republican senators voted to confirm Sonia Sotomayor, and in 2010 only 5 voted for the vastly more qualified Elena Kagan. But the Democrats have gone far beyond mere opposition and are engaging in the sort of rancorous and disingenuous grandstanding that makes their constitutional duties appear nothing more than a cynical game. Their exhibitionism may give them an easier time in primary elections and may boost their name recognition in Iowa and New Hampshire, but it has turned deliberative hearings in which reasoned disagreement should still be possible into a series of matinees.

Through the whole idiotic charade, Brett Kavanaugh has maintained his composure and addressed even his most unreasonable inquisitors with intelligence and respect. We look forward to the confirmation he amply deserves. ♦

Rahm Steps Aside

"I've decided not to seek reelection." These words are spoken far too seldom in American politics, but few have spoken them with better reason than Rahm Emanuel. In his nearly eight years as Chicago's mayor, he has failed by almost any metric.

He was once a rising star of Democratic politics. Emanuel served as senior adviser in the Clinton White House, caucus chairman in the House of Representatives, and Barack Obama's first chief of staff. When he won the mayoralty of Chicago, Emanuel was commonly talked about as a potential presidential contender. He may still entertain such an opinion of his electability, but voters in Chicago certainly wouldn't agree.

Da mayor

The murder rate had steadily fallen during the 22-year tenure of Emanuel's predecessor, Richard M. Daley, and Emanuel campaigned on making the city even safer. Crime held steady for his first few years, but things fell apart in his second term. Between 2014 and 2018, the number of murders in Chicago increased by 43 percent. Criminal sexual assaults increased by 47 percent. In 2016, the city had 762 murders, more than the number in New York and Los Angeles combined—despite the far larger populations of both those cities. Rather than address this appalling state of affairs boldly by increasing the number of police officers, ramping up stop-and-search policies, and aggressively prosecuting gang leaders, Emanuel offered bromides and an equally ineffective increase in surveillance cameras.

Emanuel had campaigned on racial reconciliation, too, and Chicago is now debilitated by racial strife to a degree it hasn't seen since the riots of the 1960s. Every big-city mayor is accused of favoring some constituencies over others, but the accusation has some merit in Emanuel's case. In 2013, he shut down 50 public schools in predominantly black neighborhoods on the grounds that they had low attendance and the city budget couldn't sustain them. The affected school zones have degenerated in the intervening years—despite a mayoral promise to turn the shuttered institutions into facilities to aid the neighborhoods. Much the same happened when the mayor opted to shutter a series of mental health clinics in low-income and black communities. Understandably, Cook County's black population is declining—in 2017, more than 14,000 voted with their feet in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

Chicago's budget is usually in a state of disrepair, but Emanuel leaves it in crisis. A large pension-funding deficit will greet his successor, who won't be able to look to taxation. Emanuel's repeated hikes in property taxes, water and sewer fees, garbage-removal fees, cable-TV taxes, vehicle fees, and parking fees have angered residents across the city. The city's combined sales tax is 10.25 percent, tied with Long Beach, Calif., for the highest in the nation.

We fear things will get worse before they get better. A gaggle of Obama administration veterans are said to be lining up to take Emanuel's place: former education secretary Arne Duncan, former senior adviser Valerie Jarrett, former chief of staff Bill Daley (brother and son of Chicago mayors). Another Democrat, Garry McCarthy, the police chief Emanuel fired in 2015, wants to be mayor, too, but he is a proponent of the same tired orthodoxy on crime that put Chicago in its present chaotic state.

Emanuel did his best to wreck a great city, and the result is painful to behold. That he also wrecked the political ambitions of Rahm Emanuel perhaps spares the nation a similar fate. ♦

JOSHUA LOTT / GETTY

FRED BARNES

Desperate Democrats

One of the most revealing moments in the Senate hearings for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh involved Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.). He said Republican justices overwhelmingly side with corporations and right-wing interests in cases before the High Court. And so does Kavanaugh in his votes on the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Not shocking revelations, for sure. The press yawned. Fox News commentator Chris Wallace lamented, tongue in cheek, that Whitehouse had consumed a half hour or so of his life that could never be retrieved. But Whitehouse had actually said something quite interesting—about Democrats.

Dignity? Forget that. Better to turn any clash with Republicans into a shouting match. At the hearings, the screaming protesters were the Greek chorus.

It was how he spoke about dozens of cases won by conservatives that matters. He named the parties and the subjects but not the legal issues at the core of the cases. Other Democrats talked the same way time after time at the hearings and so did Republicans now and then.

Here's what I'm getting at: Leaving out the legal issues reflects how Democrats see the Court. They are results-oriented. Legal niceties are beside the point. Whatever strategy is most likely to win a case, as long as it comes out the way they want, they're for. They're not crazy about the Constitution. It limits their options.

Republicans are susceptible to this type of thinking, but less so. They're eager to win too. But my seat-of-the-pants view is they do pay attention to the law. The media are worst of all, which isn't surprising. They just take their cues from Democrats.

When I covered the Supreme Court years ago, I got the impression several of the justices decided cases based on the identity of the parties. And Whitehouse's data would lead one to believe it's not just Democrats. The senator's data, by the way, is both impressive and provocative. And it was a rare moment in these hearings that was thought-provoking in a good way.

From the opening seconds of the Kavanaugh hearing, Democrats unleashed a tactic that has increasingly become a favorite weapon in their political arsenal. They created a disturbance. They use it to throw Republicans off their game. And it sometimes works.

Democrats were in a weak position, so they had nothing to lose. Over the summer, Republicans had rebutted their attacks on Kavanaugh effectively, putting him in a strong position to be confirmed. So Democrats complained about having received 42,000 pages of Kavanaugh overnight and demanded the hearing be adjourned.

This went on for 90 minutes and fit the Democrats' plan perfectly. Their only hope for blocking Kavanaugh is delay. If they can somehow slow-walk the proceedings past the midterm election on November 6 and capture the Senate, they can kill the Kavanaugh appointment and force President Trump to compromise on a new nominee. It won't be a conservative.

The leaders of the putsch were senators Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) and Cory Booker (D-N.J.), both preparing to run for president in 2020. Harris is smart and unpleasant. If you're a Democrat, you'd want her on your side. Booker talks nonstop. With him, it's hard to get a word in edgewise.

To call Booker histrionic is putting it mildly. He's made a fetish out of documents that senators on the committee can see but not make public. He threatened to release them anyway, even if it means he could be ousted from the Senate. Fat chance.

Harris and Booker's Project Chaos was nothing new. In the 2012 vice presidential debate, Joe Biden acted like a meatball. He was rude and obnoxious and disrespectful to Paul Ryan. He guffawed, groaned, and gasped. The moderator was afraid to restrain him.

And four years later, we got more of this from Tim Kaine. He was the Great Interrupter. Halfway through every comment by Mike Pence, Kaine butted in, as if he had a crucial question that couldn't wait. He had nothing to ask. Zilch. It was pure interference. The equivalent in football gets you a 15-yard penalty.

Think about this: Would Democrats assign this nasty job to party leaders if they weren't serious about their new strategy? Dignity? Forget that. Better to turn any clash with Republicans into a shouting match. At the hearings, the screaming protesters were the Greek chorus.

I learned, after three days of watching Democrats badger Kavanaugh, that they are wonderful actors. Listening to Cory Booker, for a moment I thought he was genuinely outraged about being denied millions of irrelevant documents. Then he declared, "I am Spartacus," and other Democrats

LIKENESSES: DAVE CLEGG

joined in. That's when I knew the whole thing was fake.

And so were all the efforts by Democrats to get their hands on more documents and weeks more to go through them. All the pleas had one goal in mind: drag the process out.

What kept them from succeeding? The biggest factor was Kavanaugh, a witness with an amazing memory. He had learned the lesson of the Robert Bork hearing in 1987—don't blab, be vague, and never let down your guard. Right to the end, Kavanaugh was careful.

The other factor was Chuck Grassley, the Judiciary Committee chairman. He allowed the Democrats, even blowhards like Booker, to talk pretty much all they wanted. He seldom raised his voice. He was deferential to everyone. The aim was to let the Democrats' attempted coup wear itself out.

And sure enough, it did. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

The strangest progressive project of all: Elevating John Dean

Political archaeologists will have plenty of specimens and fragments to examine in the aftermath of the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. The incivility that greeted the Supreme Court nominee was among the worst in modern times—no small achievement while the Haynsworth, Bork, and Thomas hearings live in memory. We have grown accustomed to these (one-sided) partisan spectacles and must assume that they will endure as long as they serve a purpose.

It is, perhaps, a measure of the fury animating Senate Democrats that they should summon such a person as John Dean to make their case against Brett Kavanaugh.

What intrigued me about the Democratic strategy, however, was not a difference of opinion, or some procedural tactic, but a personnel choice. For among the witnesses called to impugn Judge Kavanaugh's character, and warn the faithful of the dire consequences of Justice Kavanaugh, was a face and voice from the past: John W. Dean III.

In some respects, the choice of Dean as witness was logical enough: He had once served in the White House as counsel to the president, and Kavanaugh had once served as an associate in the same office. But there the similarity ends: Whereas Kavanaugh in 2003 proceeded from the counsel's office to White House staff secretary and then the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, Dean in 1973 proceeded from the counsel's office to disbarment to conviction for obstruction of justice—and on to tenure in federal prison.

It is, perhaps, a measure of the fury animating Senate Democrats that they should have summoned such a person as John Dean to make their case against Brett Kavanaugh.

Then again, Dean has been historically useful for such purposes. It was Dean's sensational 1973 testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities—otherwise known as the Watergate Committee—that laid the groundwork for the resignation of President Richard Nixon the following summer. But that memorable season of televised proceedings was 45 years ago! In chronological terms, Dean's relevance to the Kavanaugh hearings is roughly comparable to a Watergate witness recruited from the era of Teapot Dome.

As a baby journalist, I attended a handful of Watergate hearings—including Dean's testimony—and then as now, my curiosity about a veteran of Teapot Dome would have exceeded my interest in Watergate. But it would have been difficult, even for me, to draw any useful or informative connection between the 1920s lease of federal oil reserves in Wyoming (Teapot Dome) and a 1970s break-in at the offices of the Democratic National Committee (Watergate).

Now, clearly, Dean's purpose and significance for the Kavanaugh nomination is symbolic: Democrats associate him with a shining hour of political success still fixed—with approximate accuracy—in folklore. And Dean himself, while once a faithful Republican soldier, long ago transformed into a Democratic warrior. Still, it bears repeating that any resemblance between the conduct of Dean in the Nixon White House and Kavanaugh's behavior in the Bush administration—apart from their comparable ages at the time—is nonexistent.

Yet Dean is symbolic in other ways as well. The Nixon era—and the Watergate Committee hearings, in particular—produced a handful of ancillary celebrities who have managed to maintain themselves in the public eye: Among others, Diane Sawyer, the ABC newsreader, was once a deputy to the White House press secretary; and Daniel Ellsberg, the defense analyst who pilfered and distributed the Pentagon Papers, emerges from the mists whenever national-security leaks are in the news. The late Fred Thompson, senator from Tennessee, television D.A., and presidential candidate, began his upward climb as minority counsel on the Watergate Committee.

Dean, however, was perceived in

his heyday as a serial opportunist—ingratiating himself with the Nixon apparatus, designing and conducting the Watergate cover-up, conveniently jumping ship—and has done little since to dispel that perception. To be sure, life's options are limited for disbarred lawyers fresh from time spent in federal custody. But Dean, upon his release, settled comfortably in Beverly Hills and while ostensibly employed as an investment banker spent his time on two memoirs, with mixed results. The first one, the bestselling *Blind Ambition* (1976), ghostwritten by Taylor Branch, had the virtue of a nominally engaging subject (Watergate)—unlike the second, *Lost Honor* (1982), about Dean's post-imprisonment adventures.

In the decades since, Dean has not only benefited from the embrace of his new friends in progressive ranks—just short of his 80th birthday he remains a fixture on the Watergate nostalgia circuit—but profited from their cousins in publishing as well.

To be sure, the caliber of Dean's scholarship is predictable. *The Rehnquist Choice: The Untold Story of the Nixon Appointment That Redefined the Supreme Court* (2001) mixed personal betrayal with conspiracy theory, and the old Kennedy mythologist Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. turned to Dean for a brief biography of Warren G. Harding (2004) in Schlesinger's presidential series. Dean's manic trilogy on George W. Bush—*Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush* (2004), *Conservatives Without Conscience* (2006), and *Broken Government: How Republican Rule Destroyed the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches* (2007)—probably tells us more about the author than his subjects.

Politics is an honorable calling, but it is no surprise that the rewards of political life and public office appeal to the lesser angels of our nature as well as to the statesmen in our midst. John W. Dean III's place in the pathology of our times is secure. To Democrats of the Watergate era, Dean was heroic only in the sense that he served as a means to an end. In the half-century since, that crucial distinction seems irretrievably lost. ♦

COMMENT ♦ TERRY EASTLAND

Harvard admissions on trial—the DoJ joins the game

The Justice Department didn't have to get involved in the private lawsuit brought against Harvard College alleging racial discrimination in admissions. But perhaps the department decided it could wait no longer, given what it already had learned about the school's admissions process. Harvard is going to have a hard time defending it.

The case arose four years ago when a group of students opposed to racial preferences sued Harvard, claiming that the college is biased against Asian-American applicants in particular. The trial in *Students for Fair Admissions* v. *Harvard* is set to begin on October 15 in the federal district court in Boston.

Earlier this summer Harvard asked the court to grant its motion to have the discrimination case dismissed. And now Justice has filed 'a statement of interest' opposing that request.

Earlier this summer Harvard asked the court to grant its motion to have the case dismissed. And now Justice has filed "a statement of interest" opposing that request. Justice is in the case, you could say, as a protector of a government interest—the enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. And this assistance, not incidentally, Harvard receives, thereby obligating it not to discriminate.

There is nothing unusual about statements of interest. Authorized by Congress, they have been used by attorneys general of Democratic as well as Republican administrations, with the interests at stake involving national security and, more recently, civil rights. Doubtless to the consternation of legal progressives, the current attorney general, Jeff Sessions, has added free speech and religious liberty to this growing list of interests, having entered such statements in at least four First Amendment cases in the past year.

Filed in cases in district courts, statements of interest don't reach the merits, and Justice's statement in SFFA doesn't, though it's not hard to predict which side the department would take in the case if it went up on appeal to the First Circuit or the Supreme Court. The statement argues that the case raises serious issues that must be tried—and not dismissed. The department filed the statement having had access to relevant information from its own ongoing probe of admissions at Harvard and also to the complete record developed by the parties in the SFFA litigation.

Harvard acknowledges that it voluntarily uses race as a factor in admissions and says it does so in pursuit of "the educational benefits of diversity," which it regards as a "compelling interest." At issue is whether Harvard's use of race is illegal under Title VI and the Constitution. The Supreme Court has said that racial classifications must satisfy "strict scrutiny," the most stringent test there is. Thus, racial classifications are illegal unless

they are "narrowly tailored" to attain a compelling interest.

The statement of interest says that Harvard "has failed to carry its demanding burden to show that its use of race does not inflict unlawful racial discrimination on Asian Americans. To the contrary, the record evidence demonstrates that Harvard's race-based admissions process significantly disadvantages Asian-American applicants." In sum, Harvard has failed to satisfy strict scrutiny by showing that its use of race is narrowly tailored to achieve a compelling interest.

In support of that assessment, the statement of interest cites evidence showing that Harvard, while providing at least three points in the admissions process where race may be taken into account, has "no meaningful criteria to cabin its use of race." The school has not said, for example, what it means "to provide a slight tip for some students"—as one admissions officer has described the use of race. The size of the preferences and whether they harm the chances of Asian-American applicants are among the issues that need to be resolved through a full trial, argues the statement.

The statement also notes evidence both "direct and circumstantial" that the process takes race into account in assigning a "personal rating," one of four "profile" ratings given to applicants, and one often influential in deciding whom to admit. Justice says that the personal rating correlates against admitting Asian-American applicants and "may be infected with racial bias." Harvard says it does not take race into account in scoring the rating. Here are more issues, in the government's view, that should be resolved through a full trial.

Noting that the Supreme Court has condemned the use of quotas in admissions programs as illegal, the government says there is evidence strongly suggesting that Harvard may be engaging in "racial balancing" in order to limit the number of Asian-American students when it chooses a class. Racial balancing is more or less the same as a quota and thus presumptively illegal. Harvard denies that it purposely seeks a racially balanced class, but the numbers admitted year to year for every major racial group have barely moved. Here again, in the government's view, there are issues that warrant a trial.

There is yet another argument for trial that the government makes—that there is evidence suggesting that Harvard has no intention of ever stopping the use of race in its admissions decisions. The unending use of race in admissions is not what the Supreme Court imagined when, in the 1978 *Bakke* case, it first ruled on the matter. Over the years it has set forth means of limiting and indeed ending the use of race. But from the statement of interest it appears that Harvard has rarely if ever been interested in ending the use of race in admissions. "It has never engaged in the serious, good-faith consideration of race-neutral alternatives for achieving its diversity-related goals."

Harvard's interest is Harvard, and it treats Title VI as though it were a set of suggestions about the use of race in admissions that need not be taken seriously. But a trial would be a serious matter, and on the issues in the case it is not obvious that mighty Harvard would prevail.

The Justice Department deserves credit for getting into the case by filing a statement of interest that makes a compelling case for a trial. The story of the litigation so far has been about the skirmishing between the parties. It could end in the Supreme Court as a landmark case confirming Title VI as an important bulwark against racial discrimination. ♦

COMMENT ♦ ERIC FELTEN

Mailing it in: Say goodbye to the secret ballot

In a Q&A session at a conference in India this spring, Hillary Clinton was asked why she had failed to win a majority of white women in 2016. "We do not do well with white men, and we don't do well with married, white women," she responded. So far, so true. But it was her explanation for the failure to connect with women that has been widely mocked: "And part of that is an identification with the Republican party and a sort of ongoing pressure to vote the way that your husband, your boss, your son, whoever, believes you should."

Hillary Clinton's complaints would seem to confirm that the voting booth is being systematically sidelined in elections across the country, thanks to 'reforms' such as voting by mail.

Here's how the argument goes: There she was, in late October 2016, closing the deal with voters to choose her over the boorish Mr. Grabby-Hands, when out of nowhere then-FBI director James Comey passed around a letter to Congress apprising members that the Hillary email investigation had been reopened. "All of a sudden white women who were going to vote for me, and frankly standing up to the men in their lives and the men in their workplaces, were being told, 'She's going to jail, you don't want to vote for her. It's going to be terrible—you can't vote for that,'" Hillary explained. "It stopped my momentum

and it decreased my vote enough."

This particular line of self-justification wasn't improvised. Hillary had been developing and repeating it for months. Last September, she told NPR that she now understood that women would be disinclined to support any female presidential candidate "because they will be under tremendous pressure—and I'm talking principally about white women—they will be under tremendous pressure from fathers and husbands and boyfriends and male employers not to vote for 'the girl.'"

But what if—and I know this may seem a stretch, given Hillary's whining over the last year and a half—what if she's actually on to something?

The knock-down argument in response to Clinton, of course, is that domineering men are powerless over wives, daughters, girlfriends, sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, nieces, and female cousins thrice-removed when those women take refuge in the sanctity of the voting booth. There, women can vote for whomever they please. If some male busybody tries to coerce them into voting for a bad old man, the women are perfectly at liberty to say, even if it's a lie, "Yes, dear, I did exactly what you said and voted for Mr. Trump."

So how, given the empowering secrecy of the voting booth, can it be that women are getting strong-armed into voting the way the men in their lives want? Maybe it is that the voting booth is being systematically sidelined in elections across the country, thanks to "reforms" such as voting by mail.

Voting by mail has been aggressively promoted by the left as a way to increase the number of liberal votes by getting rid of what are portrayed as barriers to the Democratic vote. "For all the talk of how the Democrats need to rethink their message, the simple fact is that their biggest problem is low turnout," vote-by-mail advocate Phil Keisling wrote last year in *Washington Monthly*. Voters who can't be bothered to go to the polls are a problem "far worse in midterm elections, the real killing fields for Democrats' dreams in recent years," according to Keisling. "It's time to get serious about eliminating the most powerful and ubiquitous voter suppression device of all: the traditional polling place."

If it weren't clear enough that balloting by mail is a stratagem for increasing votes from Democratic demographics, Keisling says that "vote from home" is "the most promising way to significantly increase voter turnout, especially among young people and minorities."

The National Vote at Home Coalition, which Keisling leads, is promoting its agenda primarily at the state level. Efforts to push a policy that explicitly benefits Democrats have, not surprisingly, been opposed by Republicans on Capitol Hill. But voting by mail has been spreading at state, county, and municipal levels, pitched as a good-government reform, not only convenient but sparing local jurisdictions the expense and hassle of turning school gyms and church social halls into polling places. The ongoing effort has been successful enough that *Vox* recently celebrated mail balloting as "the voting reform that is (very slowly) sweeping the nation."

There's one big catch, of course: Voting by mail eliminates the secrecy of the voting machine. This might explain any anecdotes Hillary has heard about women being pressured by men to vote this way or that. To the extent there are such men, getting to look over their partners' shoulders as they fill out their ballots can't help but open the way for them to control how the ballot is marked.

The vote-by-mail enthusiasts dismiss the notion of "spousal/partner coercion" in voting as an "electoral myth." They should tell that to Hillary. Because if there is even the slightest hint that any voters are coming under undue influence around the kitchen table, there is a proven technology for solving the problem—the humble voting booth. ♦

COMMENT ♦ ETHAN EPSTEIN

The spy who drove her: Dianne Feinstein and Chinese espionage

San Francisco is a hotbed of espionage and international intrigue. And why wouldn't it be? Strategically located near major West Coast ports, home to many large immigrant communities, and, perhaps most crucially, just up the road from America's most technologically sophisticated corporations, it makes perfect sense that America's geopolitical rivals would want to gain a foothold in the City by the Bay.

And gain it they have, evidently. Last year, when the president took the decidedly non-collusionish action of shuttering Russia's San Francisco consulate—its oldest in the country—black smoke billowed from the historic Pacific Heights building that had long housed the Kremlin outpost. Clearly, the Russians were burning evidence of misdeeds.

And we now know that China, a much more worrisome long-term threat to the United States than a declining Russia, has been active in the Bay Area as well.

Five years ago, Senator Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat who then chaired the Intelligence Committee, was approached by the FBI. The bureau had learned that a staffer in her San Francisco office was a Chinese operative "run" out of Beijing's consulate in that city. It appears that he had started as a legitimate employee but was at some point, likely on a visit to the East, turned by a member of the Chinese Ministry of State Security.

The staffer had served the senator for some two decades as a general

office lackey, a liaison to the local Chinese community, and, most important, the senator's chauffeur whenever she was in San Francisco, her hometown. Driving Ms. Feinstein would have been a plum assignment for an intelligence operative; it allowed the Chinese access to the senator's comings and goings and who she met with, as well as to any conversations she might have had in the car and any documents she may have left in it.

According to a column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the FBI did not believe the driver had managed to nab anything confidential. And after being approached by the bureau, the senator promptly fired him. It also appears that, ultimately, no charges were filed against the driver. Feinstein's press secretary ignored requests for comment on this story; her office has issued standard boilerplate to media outlets saying that the senator was "mortified" by the revelation that she had a spy on her payroll.

Despite her efforts to brush matters aside, the Feinstein spy scandal is significant. It's hard to make out through the media and political class's myopic obsession with all things Russia, but Chinese espionage in America is epidemic. In June 2015, Chinese hackers stole the sensitive personal data (Social Security numbers, addresses, etc.) of more than 20 million Americans when they breached the Office of Personnel Management's servers. That provided Beijing a trove of information, not to mention copious blackmail opportunities. Military secrets have been targeted repeatedly, and college campuses are also host to scores of Chinese assets and operatives. Meanwhile, Beijing's plan to dominate the pharmaceutical, aerospace, artificial intelligence, robotics, self-driving car, clean energy, and sundry other industries of the future—"Made in China 2025," it's called—is largely based on espionage, notably the purloining of American technology. And those are just the operations we know about.

In other words, Dianne Feinstein's driver might not amount to a hill of beans compared to the OPM hack. But it's another star in a vast constellation of Chinese espionage against the United States; not to mention a clever way to get close to the chair of an important Senate committee, one privy to sensitive information. So it's puzzling that the *Washington Post* has mentioned the Feinstein matter only once, and this in an opinion column rather than the news pages. The nation's paper of record, the *New York Times*, hasn't seen fit to publish even a squib on the matter. I asked the *Times*'s deputy Washington editor, Jonathan Weisman, why his paper hasn't deigned to mention the story. Uncharacteristically for the garrulous Twitter-er, who this week has found time to weigh in on *Crazy Rich Asians*, the U.S. Postal Service, and the crowd capacity of Texas A&M's football stadium, Weisman declined to answer. Even the *Los Angeles Times*, catering to a readership that Feinstein represents, has ignored it.

Beijing's plan to dominate various industries of the future—'Made in China 2025,' it's called—is largely based on espionage, notably the purloining of American technology.

What makes Beijing's nefarious activities in the United States all the more worrying is that China, unlike Russia, is not just an intelligence and military rival to the United States, but presents a genuine *ideological* threat as well. Nobody wants to import the "Russia model"—that of a declining petro-state with a plummeting population, shrinking lifespans, low growth, and serious fiscal problems. Vladimir Putin can, and does, make mischief outside his borders, but his method of governance is not something that anyone wants to emulate.

China, on the other hand, has delivered 40 consecutive years of economic growth, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, and done it with only limited economic freedom—they call it state-directed capitalism—and essentially zero political liberalization. It's little wonder that nations as varied as Turkey, Poland, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Ethiopia are no longer just importing Chinese products—they're looking to import its system of political and economic management as well.

China wants to pilfer a lot from us: our technological prowess, our military sophistication, our tradition of academic excellence. But not, unfortunately, our democratic system of government. ♦

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

One program apparently on the chopping block is the Army's plan to improve and upgrade the existing fleet of CH-47F (Chinook) heavy-lift helicopters. This would be a reversal from the Army's position just two years ago when the upgrade to the Chinooks used by both regular and special operation forces was deemed an Army priority and the service stated that it had the resources to carry out the upgrade. What is at stake is the continued utility of a helicopter that has been an Army workhorse in recent military campaigns. —*Gary Schmitt, 'Don't Kill the Chinook'*



The Kavanaugh War

It's stupider than you can imagine.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Transport yourself back in time to any point in the last 20 years and imagine you were told there would be a Supreme Court nominee who could potentially provide a decisive fifth vote on the High Court to narrow or overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*. You'd imagine that the top headline out of the confirmation hearings would read something like: "Democrats Mount Fierce Defense of Abortion Rights." Instead, the top headline from the Brett Kavanaugh hearings reads something like: "Democrats Go Nuts Over Confidential Documents."

Democrats' decision to focus on process issues—repeatedly interrupting the Republican chairman's opening remarks and demanding that the hearing be adjourned until additional documents could be reviewed—was curious. As White House staff secretary for President George W. Bush, Kavanaugh saw a tremendous amount of paper cross his desk, some of which was subject to executive privilege. Not covered by privilege, Republicans noted, were 307 opinions Kavanaugh had written as an appeals court judge, over 400,000 pages of documents from his time in the White House, and 17,000 pages of speeches and teaching materials.

From another perspective, the Democratic strategy made perfect sense:

Kavanaugh arrives for Day 3, September 6.

They were playing the hand they had been dealt, and it was a bad hand. With Republicans holding a 51-49 Senate majority, Democrats' only hope of defeating Kavanaugh would require all Democrats and two Republicans who support a right to abortion (Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska) to vote against him. But Murkowski and Collins gave no sign they would subject Kavanaugh to a pro-abortion litmus test that no sitting Supreme Court justice has had to pass at his or her confirmation hearings. Kavanaugh explained how precedent is important for constitutional jurisprudence, but he declined to provide any hints about whether he might overturn any precedent, including *Roe* v. *Wade*, that might come before the Court.

With the hope of actually defeating Kavanaugh so dim, it made political sense that Senate Democrats would not want the hearings to overwhelmingly focus on abortion. Democratic hopes of winning the Senate in November depend on incumbents holding their seats in several deep-red states. Senators Joe Donnelly of Indiana and Joe Manchin of West Virginia are self-described "pro-life" Democrats. Incumbent senator Claire McCaskill is up for reelection in conservative Missouri, and she has a very liberal record on abortion and judges that might make her vulnerable.

On the second day of the Kavanaugh hearings, North Dakota GOP Senate candidate Kevin Cramer released a TV ad in which his two daughters, one of whom is visibly pregnant, criticize Democratic incumbent Heidi Heitkamp for opposing a late-term abortion ban that included an exception for when the mother's life is endangered. In 2012, Heitkamp said that "late-term abortions should be illegal except when necessary to save the life of the mother." That year, Heitkamp won her first term by less than 1 percentage point. In 2016, Hillary Clinton lost North Dakota by 36 points.

Heitkamp, Manchin, and Donnelly were the only Senate Democrats who voted to confirm justice Neil Gorsuch in 2017, and they're under pressure to vote for Kavanaugh in 2018. When asked if anything from the hearings had disqualified Kavanaugh, Heitkamp told CNN's Manu Raju, "Not so far."

"No, I haven't seen anything from that standpoint," Manchin told CNN, responding to the same question. "He's handled himself very professionally."

But Democrats still needed to show their base that they were fighting, so they put process issues front and

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GETTY IMAGES, TOP ROW FROM LEFT: SARAH SILBIGER / CQ ROLL CALL; CHIP SOMODEVILLA; MELINA MARA / WASHINGTON POST; MELINA MARA / WASHINGTON POST; CHIP SOMODEVILLA; AND WIN MCNAMEE. CENTER: CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY



center. That wasn't enough to satisfy many liberal activists. "The Supreme Court is on the line, and you are failing us," reads a letter to Minority Leader Chuck Schumer from 13 progressive groups. "Your job as Senate Democratic leader is to lead your caucus in complete opposition to Trump's attempted Supreme Court takeover and to defend everyone threatened by a Trump Supreme Court," they wrote. "But unbelievably, nearly two dozen Democrats have still not come out against Kavanaugh, and just last week, you helped Majority Leader Mitch McConnell fast track 15 Trump judicial nominees. That is not the leadership we need." As the liberal website ThinkProgress reported, activists were calling on Schumer to threaten to revoke committee assignments and cut off campaign funds to any Democrat who votes for Kavanaugh. But it doesn't make political sense for Schumer to force red-state Democrats to walk the plank in a hopeless effort to defeat Kavanaugh.

None of this is to say that the culture wars were absent from the Kavanaugh hearings.

Several Democrats questioned Kavanaugh about abortion, but the performance art of protesters who dressed up like women in the feminist dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* probably got more attention.

On matters of race, a principled legal discussion of affirmative action did not grab headlines. The greatest controversy on social media from the first day of the Kavanaugh hearings was whether a former White House lawyer sitting behind Kavanaugh was flashing a white nationalist hand-sign on television—by crossing her arms and letting her index finger touch her thumb while her other three fingers were extended. The controversy was insane.

On guns, Kavanaugh's thoughtful exchange with Democratic senator Dianne Feinstein about whether certain semi-automatic rifles were protected by Supreme Court precedent was similarly a snooze. What did grab attention were accusations that Kavanaugh had snubbed the father of a daughter who was killed at the Parkland, Florida, high-school massacre. Video of the incident shows Kavanaugh being approached by a man he doesn't recognize at lunch break, and walking away as someone rushes to escort him. The controversy was ridiculous, but it did provide liberal activists an opening for smearing Kavanaugh as insensitive to school-shooting victims.

So the culture wars are raging as intensely as ever. But as the Kavanaugh hearings demonstrate, their defining feature in 2018 is not their intensity but their stupidity. ♦

Innocence Presumed

DeVos undoes a major campus injustice.

BY KC JOHNSON AND STUART TAYLOR JR.

That campus Title IX sexual-misconduct tribunals are unfair to accused students is all but a truism. Since 2011, when the Obama administration forced a guilt-presuming reinterpretation of the 1972 law, more than 100 colleges and universities have been on the losing side in lawsuits filed by accused students protesting their treatment.

The Department of Education is planning to issue new regulations addressing the relationship between Title IX and fair procedures in cases of alleged campus sexual assault. The draft regulations are still under review, but as reported in the *New York Times*, they would in many ways produce a fairer approach to accusations of sexual misconduct on campus. If implemented, they would address many of the concerns that federal and state judges across the country have raised about campus tribunals. Based on the published material and information from a source familiar with the departmental development of the new policy, three salutary aspects of the proposed regulations particularly stand out.

First, they would complete Education Secretary Betsy DeVos's work to make transparent the training regimes for campus sexual-assault investigators and adjudicators that colleges and universities implemented after 2011. The few examples of training materials that have been made public (almost always through litigation) seem designed to ensure disciplinary

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panelists presume an accused student to be guilty. And the secrecy of these materials frustrates accused students' ability to defend themselves. We wrote about the issue of Title IX training last November; since our article appeared, biased training played a major role in another university legal setback, after the University of Mississippi employed training materials suggesting that an accuser's lying be interpreted as a sign that the accused is guilty.

Courts have responded skeptically to the secrecy preferred by schools for their training guidelines. In a decision from earlier this year, U.S. District Court Judge John J. McConnell Jr. of Providence, an Obama nominee, rejected Johnson & Wales's motion to dismiss an accused student's lawsuit against the university by citing "the fact that [the student] asked for training material during the appeals process and it wasn't obtained or given to him."

DeVos's interim guidance in September 2017 cautioned schools not to use training materials "that apply sex stereotypes." The draft regulations confirm this point and—in a major change—require schools to divulge their training materials, upon request, to an accused student or any other party to a Title IX complaint. Such transparency would provide a powerful incentive against unfair procedures.

Second, the proposed regulations clarify that under Title IX, schools must treat all parties fairly. Just as a university's biased treatment of an accusing student could constitute gender discrimination, so too could biased treatment of the accused student. This would be a welcome change from the Obama-era approach, which was geared almost exclusively toward helping accusers. One of the clearest explanations of why this change would matter came from Judge T. S. Ellis III of Virginia in a ruling against Marymount University. He noted that in evaluating an equity law, biased adjudication procedures "may well run afoul of Title IX" by "depriving students accused of sexual assault of the investigative and adjudicative tools necessary to clear their names." The process must determine which (if either) of the students is the victim, rather than presuming from the start that the accusing student is.

Finally, the draft regulations require schools that hold hearings to provide for at least some form of cross-examination. An accused student, at a minimum, must be allowed to submit questions for the accuser through a panel. This would be a major change from the Obama-era guidance, which "strongly" discouraged any cross-examination by accused students. It's unclear, however, whether the draft regulations would—as they should—require panels to ask all relevant questions requested by the parties. This flaw should be fixed before the draft regulations become final. Lawsuits against several schools, including Cornell, have exposed instances of panels unfairly limiting witness questioning.

Anti-DeVos Title IX protesters outside the Department of Education in Washington, January 25

ALEX WONG / GETTY

The draft regulations' bigger flaw is their failure to require schools to give accused students the right to have a hearing. As drafted, the regulations would still allow schools to use a practice, encouraged by the Obama administration, called a single-investigator model, where one person, hired by the Title IX coordinator, acts as investigator, judge, and jury—interviewing the parties and witnesses and writing a report that pronounces guilt or innocence. The Sixth Circuit, in a lawsuit filed by a University of Cincinnati student, held that "cross-examination takes aim at credibility like no other procedural device." As a result, "whatever the outcome, 'the greatest legal engine ever invented for the discovery of truth' will do what it is meant to"—help the adjudicator to determine credibility and render a decision.

Recent years have shown that in cases involving allegations against students, colleges in most circumstances—whether due to fear of bad publicity, criticism from campus or faculty activists, or well-meaning assumptions that all accusers must be believed to rectify the injustices of the past—will adjudicate Title IX complaints through one-sided procedures. If the new regulations give schools the opportunity to continue to bypass cross-examination and other procedural protections by simply abolishing hearings, they will abolish them and an unfair system will be entrenched.

The draft regulations are, nonetheless, an important step in the right direction. After their publication, expected this month, will come a period of around 60 days for public comment, to which the agency is required by law to respond. Whether the resulting public discussion will be at all productive remains an open question. The draft proposals have already received hyperbolic criticism from accusers' rights groups and prominent Democratic legislators. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi claimed they would create "extraordinary new barriers to justice for survivors." To New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand, the new regulations amount to siding with "predators." There can be little doubt that if the regulations are adopted in their current form, Pelosi, Gillibrand, and their allies will pressure colleges to eliminate hearings in Title IX cases as a way of avoiding even the minimal due-process protections that come from indirect questioning of the accuser. ♦

Russia's Hacks

Exaggerating the threat from Moscow.

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

Given the attention accorded to Vladimir Putin's efforts to undermine American politics, one might think that Russian intelligence has the most accomplished spooks and computer geeks in the world. That is surely not the case. Its successes in the United States surrounding the 2016 election have much more to do with American weakness—how much liberals and conservatives loathe each other—than with Moscow's prowess and planning. It's an excellent guess that Putin's men had no idea that their actions would become such grand theater.

We need to decompress and soberly assess the threat that Moscow actually poses to the foreigner-resistant, gladiatorial sport that is American elections. Driven by the shock of Donald Trump's victory, many Americans are caught in an Internet nightmare in which Russians ruthlessly attack and we lamely defend. Whatever the investigations of special counsel Robert Mueller reveal, this mania is, unfortunately, likely to get worse.

A historical perspective: During the Cold War, nonmilitary covert action—clandestine operations that seek to advance a political mission—was a peculiar endeavor. Intelligence services had to invest time, effort, and sometimes significant amounts of money in work of very uncertain return. The Central Intelligence Agency usually had a pretty sensible approach to this in the "golden era" of covert action before the 1970s: It would find anti-Communist democrats and simply let them do what they did, just with more money to do it.

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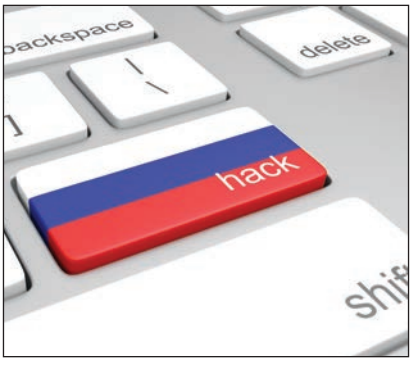

The Soviets were more brusque and certainly more controlling, though how much handling fellow-travelers needed is debatable. In the Old World, in the twilight of European empires, militant leftists were everywhere. Conversely, this probably made it more difficult for Moscow Centre to assess its operations. We know from defectors and reflective former operatives that by the 1970s the KGB's intelligence reporting and covert action were often based on assets who were recruited in a numbers game to further the careers of case officers (the CIA, a more honest, self-critical organization, experienced the same phenomenon). Recruited agents often offered little to no value.

Even though the Soviets likely outspent the United States in such activities, they certainly lost the capacity to seduce, propel, or guide decisive numbers of Europeans and Third Worlders. The sins of the USSR were too large and the soft power of an American-led West, always fortified by the United States' resilient military, was too great. The American left may have become blasé about countering Moscow by Jimmy Carter's presidency, but this was not because the Soviets were masters of propaganda. Operation for operation, the CIA may well have beaten the KGB in effective actions. We will never know, of course, how crucial any of these machinations were to the denouement between the free world and Russian communism.

Which brings us back to current Russian operations. Do email hacks, bots, and social media trolling really add a new history-changing dimension? Does the technical ease of these operations translate into greater effectiveness? In and of themselves, no. The unspoken premise behind greater Russian success is that a bigger slice of the American electorate, because of the Internet, is more susceptible to foreign distortion. American history, with its regular eruptions of conspiracy-fond, religiously driven populism, certainly suggests that Americans can be credulous—but now more than they have always been? The Internet highlights well that vast matrix of the American character, especially its darker side, but it's by no means clear that the Internet makes thoughtful people less discriminating, the intellectually inquisitive hidebound, or the patriotic America Firsters. It is amusing how many folks in Washington, particularly on the left, believe that the social media are a Rasputin-friendly game changer, although they, as a class, probably spend more time on the Internet absorbing information than others. Those most likely to be susceptible to Russian falsely flagged propaganda are not people who voted for Barack Obama in 2012 and Trump in 2016, that is, the mostly middle-class Americans who decided the election. Those who stroll the Internet and its social-media platforms the most are the young, who aren't, as a rule, politically and culturally savvy. They weren't, however, notable fans of Trump.

Who really cares whether ardent right-wingers became, because of stolen emails from Hillary Clinton's campaign and the Democratic National Committee, more animated? To be effective in America electorally, Russian covert action would have to move significant numbers of people from one political column to the other. But as Curt Levey pointed out in the *Wall Street Journal*, the Internet in the United States offers such a smorgasbord, from

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the estimable to the calumnious, that Russian provocations can easily disappear like "a drop in the ocean." "Their content is intentionally indistinguishable from the authentic ads and political expression we hear and see every day in our democracy, making their marginal impact something like adding a marble to a jar of marbles." Or as an ex-KGB officer more wryly put it to me in Moscow when I queried him about how his former employer approached all the exuberantly nonsyncretic, sometimes warring, Communist parties in India, "If they hated America and China, that was good." At best, Russian influence-peddling via the Internet is a game of unknowable small gradations; Democrats and some Never-Trump Republicans, however, somehow see covert-action certainty in the last election.

Russian malice on the Internet—and it's always good to realize when talking about their malign actions how crude the Russian political and security elites are—seems like small potatoes compared with more old-fashioned Russian efforts to fund political parties in Europe, seduce through their greed the British or Czech political and monied elites, or use dirty tricks against truly annoying European politicians. Because of our rules and the nature of America's expensive, free-for-all politics, such small-scale targeted operations just don't work well across the Atlantic.

If the Russians could break into American voting machines and change the ballots of thousands, that would be a threat to our democracy. If they could engage in effective character assassination of likely presidential candidates, that would be something, too. So far as we know, they haven't been able to do either—probably haven't even come close. Nevertheless, Putin, who is a bold, aggressively malevolent former KGB officer, now operates in an almost ideal setting. His intelligence services benefit enormously by just being traceable: Large segments of America's political and intellectual classes freak out when Moscow's hand is detected. Convulsing American politics through open "covert" actions is a gift President Trump and his critics have given Putin. Adults in the administration—and there are more than a few—just can't talk soberly about Russian covert action (how it is and is not a threat) given the behavior of Trump towards Putin and the president's continuing fascination with the "realist" fantasy of a Russo-American entente.

Russian money may well have saved Trump, the oft-bankrupt real-estate developer. Mueller may be able to answer definitively legitimate questions about possible ties between the president and Russia. But we need to get a grip on our conspiratorial imagination. CNN and MSNBC really do seem, at times, unwitting accomplices of Moscow. It would be healthier for the nation if these networks, and others, just thought that half the country were blithering idiots than that the decisive voters in 2016 were also rats in a Russian-run laboratory. ♦

Blazing an Early Trail to the White House

In Iowa, the presidential campaigns never really stop. BY TONY MECIA

Maryland Democratic congressman John Delaney chats in Dubuque, February 2.

Sioux City, Iowa

Rick Mullen recalls the night in 1991 when he and his wife returned from meeting Democratic candidates at the local convention center. It was months before Iowa's crucial first-in-the-nation presidential caucuses. He asked his wife her opinion of a young, Southern governor named Bill Clinton. Her reply: "I don't know, but he sure smells good." Mullen says he had missed that detail.

In Iowa, the race for the presidency is a feast for all the senses. The voters repeatedly get to see, touch, and smell the candidates months before they are loosed on the rest of the country. In this largely rural state, there is a seemingly unending schedule of county picnics, fairs, and dinner meetings available for candidates to attend, and the sky is the limit for impromptu visits to pizza parlors, greasy spoons, and union halls to meet ordinary Iowans.

It may seem ridiculously early to be talking about the Iowa caucuses. Most political activists here are focused on November's midterm elections, with three competitive House races in the state and the governorship up for grabs. But people in Iowa know the groundwork-laying process of running for president never really ends. As soon as one election finishes, the jockeying for the next one begins. It's already underway though the caucuses won't be held until February 2020. That's in 17 months.

The better-known likely candidates on the Democratic side—senators Kamala Harris of California, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, and Bernie Sanders of Vermont—are mostly avoiding Iowa, perhaps to skirt distracting questions about what message they are sending by visiting here. The less-established figures, though, are making repeated trips to Iowa in a tactic political strategists call "Jimmy Carter 2.0." In this context, the comparison is a compliment: Carter got an early start campaigning in the 1976 caucuses, won them, and went on to the presidency.

Those making frequent Iowa appearances so far include congressmen John Delaney of Maryland, Eric Swalwell of California, and Tim Ryan of Ohio, plus former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley. Delaney, who announced his candidacy more than a year ago, has been to Iowa 15 times already. He has been to all 99 Iowa counties. He's preaching a centrist message and calling for national civility. Others are taking a more bare-knuckles approach. Michael Avenatti, the porn-star-representing-lawyer-turned-political-candidate, told an Iowa audience last month that his approach to Republicans would be: "When they go low, I say we hit harder."

Pat Rynard, who runs the political website *Iowa Starting Line*, thinks the caucuses will be a free-for-all and that candidates are wise to start early. "The 2020 field is going to be competitive and huge," he says. "Do you have to come out early to Iowa to be in a position to win the Iowa caucuses? No, but it certainly doesn't hurt. With the field this large and undetermined, why wouldn't you want every advantage you can get? The sooner you are here, the sooner you have these activists all to yourself, which is going to be hard when bigger names are out and going around."

In Sioux City, population 83,000, O'Malley attended a Labor Day picnic at a public park, and Ryan is on the calendar for an October dinner at the local carpenter's union. Closer to the caucuses, candidates will likely fan out to restaurants to encounter potential supporters. A favorite in the past has been Pizza Ranch, a Midwestern chain with 76 Iowa locations. A 2012 headline in the *Sioux City*

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IMAGES: DANIEL ACKER / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

Journal declared: "Pizza Ranch Again Blazes Trail to White House."

Sitting at a folding table in the Woodbury County Democratic headquarters, located in a strip mall anchored by an IHOP in downtown Sioux City, Mullen, 65, says he's not sure which candidate he will back. A former chairman of the county Democrats, he got his start in politics going door-to-door for George McGovern in 1972. He believes in the process and wants to evaluate the candidates firsthand. He says he doesn't agree with Delaney's approach but is open to fresh voices in a party whose leaders are mostly septuagenarians.

"Personally, I'd like to see younger candidates," he says. "We have a lot of great older people, but I don't think they should all be out there running for president."

Inevitably, fair-minded people in other parts of the country ask themselves every four years why America has anointed this small farm state as gatekeeper to the presidency. Its caucus goes first, followed a week later by the New Hampshire primary. Then come Nevada, South Carolina, and Super Tuesday, when nine states are scheduled to hold primaries.

Democrats tend to do best in coastal states and with minority voters. Iowa is in the middle of the country and is 91 percent white. Yet Democrats here insist that the issues that are important to the party nationally are important to Iowans. They are even comfortable embracing some of the party's more extreme voices, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the self-identified democratic socialist in New York. She has called for abolishing Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, enacting government-paid universal health care, and providing a federal jobs guarantee and a "living wage."

"Most Democrats don't disagree with what she's saying," Mullen notes. "She calls herself a democratic socialist. I don't know what that means, but most of us agree with her big ideas"—like higher minimum wages and erasing student loan debt—"and all the big things [we need] to have a civil society."

Another self-described democratic socialist, Sanders, did well here in 2016. He lost the caucuses to Hillary Clinton by the narrowest of margins, 49.9 percent to 49.6 percent. There's still affection for Sanders inside Pierce Street Coffee Works, a café decorated with porcelain fish, black-and-white photographs, an old Coke machine, and a purple ceiling. Asked if any presidential candidates had stopped by in recent years, a barista says, "Bernie was here last time."

A second barista turns and gasps, her face lighting up: "Was he?"

Much of the political talk around town centers on the midterm elections. The local Democrats say they're seeing a lot of anti-Trump enthusiasm. They have crews knocking on doors and staffing phone banks. They've marched with Parkland students for stricter gun control and held rallies opposing the border separations of Latino families who come to the United States illegally. A progressive women's group has become active. "We're getting people who have never been in and paid attention before," says Jeremy Dumkrieger, 41, a teacher who serves as the Woodbury County Democratic chair.

Iowa Democrats would love to knock off Republican Steve King, who represents Sioux City and the rest of northwest Iowa in the state's 4th Congressional District. Most political pros consider that a long shot. Democratic odds are better in the 1st and 3rd districts, held by Republicans Rod Blum and David Young. The *Cook Political Report* rates both contests toss-ups.

The governor's race is close, too, and offers a stark contrast in candidates. Kim Reynolds, a Republican who ascended to the job last year when Terry Branstad became U.S. ambassador to China, is the state's first woman governor. She has a record of conservative achievements, including signing the largest tax cuts in Iowa history and approving pro-life legislation that bans abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected. (Courts have blocked the abortion measure.) Her opponent is Fred Hubbell, a millionaire insurance executive making his first run for office. He's a big Democratic donor who served on the board of Planned Parenthood. *Cook* rates this race, too, a toss-up.

Tim Hagle, a University of Iowa political science professor, says the tight races will further draw some of the big national names to Iowa in the next couple months.

Although the presidential nominating process can be criticized for handing too much importance to a handful of early states, the repeat visits to Iowa have advantages for candidates. They can polish their messages, practice meeting voters face-to-face, and learn from early missteps before the media spotlight shines too brightly.

"It's a good opportunity not just to meet them and ask them questions, but also for the candidates to actually find out what voters are thinking about," Hagle says. "Sometimes they get in a bubble, and they don't understand what the issues are, even though they talk about them."

Soon, the pace of candidate visits will pick up, and Iowans will have even more chances to watch, listen—and sniff. ♦

Visiting Iowa

Potential Democratic candidates for president, ranked by the total number of visits to Iowa between the 2016 presidential election and Labor Day 2018

15: John Delaney, Maryland congressman
10: Eric Swalwell, California congressman
7: Martin O'Malley, former Maryland governor
5: Jeff Merkley, U.S. senator from Oregon
4: Tim Ryan, Ohio congressman
3: Steve Bullock, governor of Montana
Bernie Sanders, U.S. senator from Vermont
2: Michael Avenatti, California lawyer
Tom Steyer, former hedge-fund executive from California
Ro Khanna, California congressman
Amy Klobuchar, U.S. senator from Minnesota

Source: Iowa Starting Line

Republican Is the New Punk

Street artist Sabo may just be 'some guy who lives in some dump,' but he is taking on and taking down the likes of Jimmy Kimmel and Meryl Streep

By Matt Labash

Los Angeles

It's not much to look at from the outside, a dingy apartment building in a downwardly mobile stretch of burglar bars, psychics, and coin laundries. When asked the name of the neighborhood, one inhabitant classifies it as "no place in the middle of every place."

It's not much better on the inside. The guy I have come to see answers the door of his cheerless one-bedroom shirtless, in camo shorts and Chucks, while pulling on a white polo in order to appear less feral. He's not a down-on-his-luck porn producer, though he used to work in the industry. He's not some middle-aged gangbanger, though he could pass for one: solidly built with his name tattooed on his knuckles and a branding-iron mark singed into his chest. He is Sabo, America's preeminent right-wing guerrilla street artist.

Sabo relaxing at home with his favorite Obama Drone, Gwyneth Paltrow, 2014

This sounds impressive. Yet being the Banksy or the Shep Fairey of the right is not a high pile to climb. It's a bit like being the foremost reggae singer at the Grand Ole Opry or the premier scuba outfitter in the Kalahari. There's not a lot of competition.

In this most liberal of cities (where even unaffiliated voters outnumber registered Republicans) and out of these modest digs, Sabo runs a one-man torture emporium. His victims include everyone from lefty politicians and Big Tech overlords to smug celebrities who never cease to subject us to the hot blasts of their virtue-signaling.

When inspiration strikes, Sabo might hijack a billboard, as he did last year with one advertising the film *The Greatest Showman*. It featured the actress Zendaya on a trapeze, and Sabo added a smirking Al Franken behind her with his lechy come-hither hands outstretched. Or he might crank out cheeky T-shirts with the letters "DOU" next to a picture of Che's face.

The fashionable hypocrisy of the left drives Sabo bonkers, which explains the "F— Tibet" sign in his living room. It's not that he doesn't feel for the Dalai Lama's oppressed people. But he'll see some L.A. fashionista in a Mao shirt hauling a Free Tibet tote bag, "And I'm like, 'You realize the reason Tibet needs to be freed is because of the f—ing Communists?' These are the idiots I have to deal with." No Third Way-ist, Sabo calls leftism a "mental disorder." But whatever his stunt, he has been earning national headlines of late. Not too shabby for a lone street artist with a surly streak and a copy of Photoshop.

From the moment you step inside Sabo's place, you get the sense that artistic violence is committed here. Amidst the skateboards and racks of spray-paint that adorn the hovel of this 50-year-old man-child, there's a tattered Koran, which serves as his doorstop. It's missing pages, since he's used a few when out of toilet paper. If a visitor didn't get the point that he's not a fan of Islam, one wall also features Beyoncé in a burka.

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IMAGES COURTESY OF SABO UNLESS INDICATED OTHERWISE

Next to the coffin-sized printer that cranks out the posters that he plasters all over Los Angeles, there's a wall-sized depiction of Elizabeth Warren in a Pocahontas headdress. There's also the Hillary Clinton *Wizard of Oz*-style flying monkey campaign placard (with which he blanketed Brentwood before one of Hillary's deep-pockets presidential fundraisers) and the tin of "Planned Parenthood Baby Dick Sausages by Vienna" (his nod to the unborn, though he's ambivalently pro-choice).

Sabo's also pro gay-marriage. But just when you think he's going bleeding-heart on you, his bathroom door features the traditional ladies' room silhouette of a woman, but from under her skirt is protruding, like a turtle head from a shell, a man's unit. The bathroom is marked neither "Men" nor "Women," but rather "It." Though Sabo hastens to add that with their high rates of attempted suicide, he has nothing against "trannies." "I hurt for them in a good way … just don't try and tell me that it's normal."

Then there's the MAGAphone—a megaphone inscribed with Donald Trump's favorite acronym, as well as "Eat Shit Commie" around the horn. This comes in handy at rallies where Sabo and his winger pals square off with the masked ninjas of antifa, who like to combat what they consider fascistic forces by invading their free-assemblies and beating them down in the street with no regard for parade permits or irony. Keeping with the fecal theme, there's the Obama-face toilet seat (Sabo was once paid a visit by the Secret Service after tweeting that he wished Lee Harvey Oswald would come back as a zombie during the Obama years). And there's the tire-sized brown plastic turd in his kitchen, along with a tchotchke-sized one nearby that's stabbed with toothpicks and a small banner reading "Bernie Free Shit." When out for a walk, he's not above planting such flags in real-life dog droppings to lampoon America's favorite socialist.

Sabo preps his enlarged cutout of #MeToo-doomed Al Franken, above, before introducing the then-senator to Zendaya, below, in 2017.

Sabo thinks of himself as occupying the same lane as George Carlin or Lenny Bruce, proudly saying the unsayable. His critics see him more contemptuously. A *Forbes* writer, perhaps auditioning for an associate professorship of grievance studies at Swarthmore, provided a handy representative grab-bag, calling Sabo's work a "a celebration of whiteness, homophobic, anti-feminist, anti-immigration, pro-Trump and generally bombastic, heteronormative propaganda that does with images what Richard Spencer does with language."

A fact checker might have a few qualms with this. For starters, Sabo's not white. He's of Mexican and mixed-Hispanic heritage and calls himself "brown." For another, he's done plenty of pro-gay pieces. But Sabo seems constitutionally incapable of passing a racial grenade without pulling the pin and suggesting someone use it as a suppository. Take his rather free 'n' easy use of the N-word—which he wants to explain repeatedly. He abhors the word, he says, along with all racial prejudice. He grew up in rural Louisiana, where he saw people abused with it firsthand and where he himself was called a "wetback" and "beaner." But he likes to think he makes a distinction between regular ol' black people and, well, N-words.

Being the ruthlessly transparent type, he published a 3,105-word essay about his use of the N-bomb on his website. He thinks the word "repugnant" but believes "there are some who've earned being called that. As an artist, I reserve the right to use whatever word I feel appropriate to the project. If Chris Rock, Tarantino, and every hip-hop artist alive can use it, then so can I."

Sabo's recent smashmouth stunts include posting

"F— Zuck 2020" posters across several cities in California, which saw Sabo sent to "Facebook jail" for a while. (He's been permanently banned from Twitter for his numerous infractions.) He slapped up "She Knew" posters of Meryl Streep with sexual deviant Harvey Weinstein. Streep claims she didn't know, but Sabo doesn't much care, telling the *Guardian*, "she's swiping at us so we're swiping back," after the actress took shots at Donald Trump during a Golden Globes speech. He covered bus benches with posters of Jimmy Kimmel as the Johnny Depp character from the 1990s film *Cry-Baby* after one of the late night host's political-emotional outpourings on his show. Sabo's headline: "The Jimmy Kimmel Estrogen Hour."

It may be emblematic of the caliber of today's political discourse that Kimmel had a picture of himself taken sitting on one of Sabo's benches with his middle-finger extended and sent it to the *Hollywood Reporter* (which religiously covers Sabo's hits). It's a modern version of the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

If it all seems a little ugly, bordering on Neanderthalish, that's the idea. You can accuse Sabo of having snapped from being surrounded by so many Hollywood libs. But on his website, unsavory-agents.com, he beats you to the punch, freely admitting it in a short manifesto:

> There was no place I could go where I wasn't punched in the face by some sort of art defining who I was for being a Republican. Evil, Bigoted, Homophobic, Out of Touch, Rich, Greedy, on and on. And then I snapped. Why was the Left allowed to define me and where are the dissenting voices from the Right setting the record straight? Creatively speaking, no one. … My aim as an artist is to be as dirty, ground level, and mean as any Liberal artist out there, more so if I can. Use their tactics, their methods, appeal to their audience, the young, urban, street urchins with a message they never hear in a style they own. My name is SABO, I'm an UNSAVORY AGENT.

If that last sentence has the ring of an AA meeting gone wrong, it's no accident. Sabo has attended plenty of them. He went cold turkey for years, but now sees no reason to be such a stickler. "I know the dragon's tail that I'm pulling," he says. No quitter myself, we drink to his sobriety throughout several boozy meals, in which I try to sort Sabo's biographical particulars. This isn't so easy, since he's a discursive fellow who's never met a rabbit hole he won't disappear down.

He was born in Brownsville, Texas. His father was gone by the time he was 5—after Sabo's mother stepped out on him. "She wasn't a wild woman, but she was a strong woman," Sabo says. "There was a seductive nature about her, there's nothing more attractive than confidence."

What Sabo lacked in stature—he stands 5'5"—he made up for in scrappiness. When he was 5, a 7-year-old started pushing him around. "I'm like, 'What the hell do I do, man? I'm the smallest kid here.'" He saw his mom walk by with a basket of laundry, his little sister trailing behind like a baby duck, quacking, "Mommy. Mommy. He's gonna get in a fight!" His mom coolly assessed the situation and said, "He can take care of himself." "My heart dropped," remembers Sabo, "and that's when I got pissed and knocked the shit out of that guy."

'My aim as an artist is to be as dirty, ground level, and mean as any Liberal artist out there, more so if I can. Use their tactics, their methods, appeal to their audience, the young, urban, street urchins with a message they never hear in a style they own. My name is SABO, I'm an UNSAVORY AGENT.'

His mom remarried a much younger white guy—only eight years Sabo's senior. "He was more like a brother," Sabo remembers. Once, he took Sabo and his two siblings out to buy school clothes, telling them they could split a hundred dollars. Sabo did the math. "We ain't gonna have shit for school clothes. I was 10 years old, and at that point, I knew I gotta start working." He did everything from cutting wood to shrimping while his cousins ran around smoking weed and getting drunk. He figures that reality formed him politically. "I looked at my cousins and said, 'Well, they must be Democrats because they're a bunch of freeloaders.'"

The family moved to rural Louisiana, and his stepdad worked for peanuts at a small-engine repair shop, supplementing his income selling pot. They were still poor enough to need to live in a trailer planted in his step-grandfather's cow pasture. "We were trailer trash that couldn't even afford to live in a trailer park," Sabo says.

One day, an old black man pulled up on their property on a tractor. Sabo asked, "Hey mister, how's it going?" The man said it was awfully hot, did he think he could get some water? Sabo ran inside and grabbed a cup. "I went to pour it. Bam! My step-grandmother slapped it from my hand. She said, 'You don't give that n— a good cup. Give a Dixie cup.' I handed it to him, I felt so bad. That's Louisiana. She looked at me like I was a bug forever, until one day, she just accepted me. You know, her son married a Mexican woman. I was a f—in' brown kid. That's life."

After high school, Sabo joined the Marines when a friend wanted to enlist together. He figures he got screwed twice, once when his buddy went AWOL before boot camp. The second time was when Sabo, who wanted to go into

communications, was honest with his recruiter, telling him he'd recently smoked a joint—the only time, since he liked it too much and figured drugs would do him in. The recruiter tore up his communications contract and said, "You're gonna be a grunt."

Sabo became a tank crewman, from which he derives his handle. A "sabot" is a type of armor-piercing round—"pretty much a bullet for a tank." The *Call of Duty* nerds like to test him on this, claiming, Sabo says while imitating their pedantic whine, that it "*isn't the round, it's one of the things that cup the round*." Disgusted, he adds: "I'm like, 'Bitch, I only slept on one for four years. Shut up. I used sabot rounds as a goddamned pillow.'" He doesn't let his real name out there, since antifa types would chronically harass him, possibly worse, and he doesn't need any help in the paranoia department: "I wouldn't be surprised if celebrities have witches trying to f— me with spells. Sometimes when I do [a job], I get really sick."

Flying Monkey Hillary art, posted near the 2016 Democratic convention in Philadelphia

It was in the Corps that Sabo became a drunk. Everyone was a two-fister. "They literally had Coke machines filled with beer." He never saw combat, but there was plenty of fighting. "When I got into a bar fight, the whole bar fought," he says, suppressing a grin. He was once slam-dancing at a bar, and some Navy killjoy said, "Dude, you spilled my drink."

Sabo responded, "Dude, it's a slam-dance song."

"It's Barry Manilow," said his rival.

They squared off, and Sabo knocked him out. After he was marched outside by bouncers, he did round two with five of his dance partner's Navy buddies. It didn't go as well. The next morning, he says, "I felt like I had been in a tumble cycle in the dryer."

The military wasn't for him, with all the rules. "I felt like I was in prison and hadn't broken any laws." Sabo punched out after four years. "We were both fine with the divorce," he says.

He'd been introduced to art by a tank-buddy in the Corps and decided to try becoming a commercial artist. He put together a portfolio and got accepted into Pasadena's respected ArtCenter College of Design. He lasted several semesters, until he was going into debt and feeling that he was not getting much bang for his buck. In need of a job, he joined the porn world. At first, he provided design assistance for one of *Penthouse*'s photographers. It was all downhill from there, with gigs like shooting backstage footage on a porn-reality show. "No one came out of that shoot undamaged," he shudders. The nadir was a web-design job that included launching a granny-porn site.

Feeling guilty, he confessed his vocation to his little sister, a mother of five married to an overbearing Mormon. She cut off all contact with him. Then 9/11 happened, and, rocked by events, he got out of the porn business, figuring there had to be more to life. But on Christmas Day 2001, his sister, who was stuck in a deep postpartum depression, swiped a family member's pills and killed herself.

Prone to depression himself, Sabo nearly capsized. "Have you ever had something you lost, and you don't feel whole?" he asks me. He chronicles a family haunted by early deaths. His stepfather drank himself to death, finishing himself off by choking on a wad of chew. His beloved mother died in her 60s, and he hates that he couldn't make her comfortable at the end: "She wanted [new] teeth. I couldn't give her teeth … because I had no money." His birth father kicked, too, from unhealthy living. A fitness buff who crashes marathons to dodge the entry fee ("if I'm going to pay somebody 100 bucks to torture me, it'll probably be a chick with a whip or something"), Sabo once asked his dad if he took care of himself, maybe lifting weights. "Yeah," his dad said, "12 ounces at a time."

After his sister's death, Sabo spent several years in the equivalent of a fetal tuck. Rebounding a bit, he took new-media startup jobs, using his design and coding skills. He didn't last long at any of them; he couldn't bear all the flim-flam artists buying $700 chairs with VC money while having no idea what they were doing. "I hated being around a lot of very smart, stupid people," Sabo says. He did freelance corporate gigs, but that didn't suit him much, either. He doesn't care for the detail work, such as invoicing clients. "I like to jump on the battlefield, swing the axe, then go home. I don't want to clean the axe, put the axe on the shelf, make sure it's ready for the next battle." These were lean times. Between gigs, he might rely for sustenance on cookies and coffee at AA meetings. Other times, he'd fish out whatever quarters he could find and decide at the McDonald's dollar-menu board whether he'd go with a hamburger or ice cream. "I always went with ice cream."

These days, his bills are paid, and he's socking money away. If a political piece goes viral—and his often do—he can sell $20,000 worth of merchandise online. One hit was his "Republican Is the New Punk" T-shirt, featuring Donald Trump sitting in the lotus position, eyes closed and lips pursed in spiteful serenity, with two middle-fingers raised. If Zoloft and alcohol couldn't fix what was broken in Sabo, political combat did. It reordered his life. It gives him purpose to, say, drill Gwyneth Paltrow as an "Obama Drone." He plastered her L.A. neighborhood with posters of Obama's favorite weapon hovering around Gwynnie's head the day she hosted a fundraiser for the president.

Sabo did his first bits of political street art way back in the Clinton years, when he grew disgusted at Dems circling the wagons around the man that he simply called, in one poster, "Rapist." He marks the Lewinsky scandal as his "first slap in the head," his awakening. The second came during the George W. Bush years, when everyone in Los Angeles seemed overnight to grow savagely nasty toward all things Republican. Like the "full-blown Commie" he was dating at the time (she taught Brazilian film at UCLA), who asked him not to speak at parties so as not to embarrass her. After breaking up, he saw her walking down the other side of the street and simply yelled "W!" She snarled back.

Sabo did his first bits of political street art way back in the Clinton years, when he grew disgusted at Dems circling the wagons around the man that he simply called, in one poster, 'Rapist.' He marks the Lewinsky scandal as his 'first slap in the head,' his awakening.

He floundered with his art for years, but always expected the miracle—as they say in AA. He got it with Trump. He may still be "some guy who lives in some dump," but he has an equal footing with Jimmy Kimmel and Meryl Streep in the political conversation. Sabo's fond of the late Andrew Breitbart's dictum that "politics is downstream from culture." And he's freely taking a leak in that stream.

Let Shepard Fairey, Obama's Leni Riefenstahl, congratulate himself for being anti-establishment when it doesn't get more establishment than having your art hanging in the Smithsonian and the National Portrait Gallery as you pull corporate gigs for Google and Pepsi. Sabo is hitting from the other side of the plate. He claims his is the *real* street art. Actually dangerous. Actually unacceptable. Street artists like to fancy themselves trollers. But in this day and age, you can't out-troll the troller-di-tutti-trollers, Donald J. Trump, whose average afternoon of tweeting is more anti-establishment than anything Nerf revolutionaries like Fairey have dreamed up in years (even if Trump now technically *is* the establishment as Leader of the Free World). In *Godfather* parlance, Sabo is like Trump's Luca Brasi, the muscle on the street when pixels aren't lethal enough.

Trump is the straw that stirs everyone's drink, and Sabo argues with me about him for hours. Here, I feel for the artist. There's surely nothing drearier than a Never-Trump moralist deciding to tell Luca Brasi a fact or two about This Thing of Ours, except for one who becomes even more convinced of his righteousness with a snout full of firewater. It's not that I'm so bothered by Trump's habitual lies (the *Washington Post* has counted 4,229 in 528 days), florid narcissism, below-the-belt personal attacks, and all-purpose degradation of the office. And I frequently agree with him on policy, on the off chance he cares to make any before growing distracted and heading back to Twitter to attack basketball players. Trump is who he is and never pretended to be otherwise. My trouble is that plenty of other people are pretending. Trump's liberties with truth aren't as bothersome as the liars he makes out of others, saddled with the unenviable task of defending often indefensible behavior. Take my fellow evangelicals, who, like Pharisees, have historically condemned every moral lapse in the public square, but who now largely cut Trump a pass as God's avenger. Or take Sabo himself, who started off a Ted Cruz guy. One of his most popular pieces contains Ted Cruz's head on a heavily tattooed prison body, cigarette dangling from his mouth—perhaps the only time in his life Cruz ever looked cool. Even so, Cruz ruined it by championing the poster while announcing that he doesn't smoke.

During the campaign, Sabo was on record calling Trump "a man without a core" and a "circus freak." He did a piece with a Mussolini-esque character wearing a Trump hair-helmet, captioned "Il Douche."

So who changed, I ask Sabo: Trump or you?

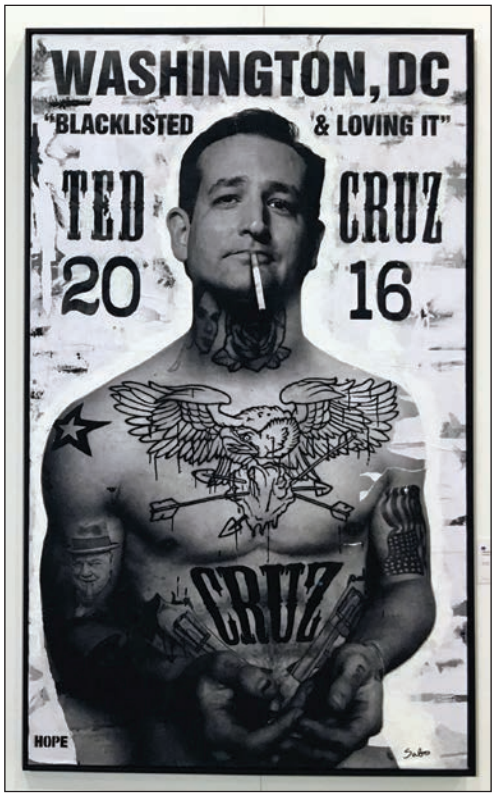
Surprisingly, Sabo concedes many of my points: "Trump is thin-skinned. He's a demagogue," he allows. "But you know what? It works for him. What you're wanting is what everyone on the right wanted."

"Moral consistency? Lack of hypocrisy? Not setting your hair on fire?" I snap back.

"No," he says. "You wanted a comfort zone. What you were familiar with. What you thought was going to deliver the things you believe in. That Southern Baptist dude who wears a jacket in the Oval Office and never takes it off. But see, what you don't understand is that dad f—ed a hooker

when he visited Cleveland, and he's just as dirty as everyone else." With Trump, Sabo says, the usually secretive dark tendencies of most politicians are transparently on display. But meanwhile, he's still "kicking the teeth in" of everyone who needs their teeth kicked in.

"How can I say it, dude?" he goes on about people like me criticizing Trump while still enjoying the spoils of his Supreme Court picks, his pushback on the thought police, and his promoting of America instead of apologizing for it. "It's like grow the f— up. You're not a child. We're dealing in an awful world. You're bitching about the carpet not matching the drapes while all the hordes come down on you. Trump was the furthest thing from perfect," Sabo concedes. But asking Trump not to act like a jackass is "like asking a zebra to not have stripes. You deal with the f—ing zebra on the zebra's terms." It's like the Serenity Prayer, he says, falling back on his AA training. "Once you understand that the world isn't the way you wish it could be, but the way that it is, you find peace."



Ted Cruz, 'Blacklisted and Loving' his new prison body at Politicon in Los Angeles, 2016

It's a world never short of targets for Sabo. In mid-July, it's Sacha Baron Cohen, who's made a career of pranking people in the guise of such characters as Ali G and Borat. He's got a new show, *Who Is America*, and viral clips have been spilling out (such as one with Cohen getting Dick Cheney to autograph a fake waterboarding kit) in advance of the premiere. Sarah Palin is also making noise, as only Palin can, about the "evil" comedian, the "shallow Sacha boy" (Palin's never had Trump's aptitude for nicknaming), who had her fly cross-country purportedly to do an interview that would provide a "'legit' opportunity to honor American Vets and contribute to a 'legit Showtime historical documentary.'" "Yup, we were duped," the former Alaska governor folksily Facebooked.

Cohen, she charged, disguised himself as a disabled vet, "fake wheelchair and all." Thinking she'd be honoring people in uniform, she was, instead, subjected to "Hollywoodism's disrespect and sarcasm." Showtime denied that Cohen was portraying a veteran—it wasn't a wheelchair, apparently, but a motorized scooter. Cohen himself responded to Palin as the character he played while interviewing her: Dr. Billy Wayne Ruddick, a conspiracy-nut yahoo who is the "founder/CEO/accountant" of truthbrary.org. While tipping his hat to Palin for "TELLING THE TRUTH about Obama's birth certificate," Ruddick/Cohen said in his statement: "I did NOT say I was a war vet. I was in the service—not military—but United Parcel, and I only fought for my country once—when I shot a Mexican who came onto my property."

The story is muddled, to say the least. But that doesn't keep cable-news jockeys from tearing each other's lungs out over stolen valor vs. not being able to take a joke. As yet another culture-war wave swells, Sabo grabs his board. The plan is to hijack a billboard—one that sits kitty-corner from CBS headquarters in L.A.'s Fairfax district (CBS is Showtime's parent company)—and cover it with anti-Cohen art. Sabo and his crew have done this sort of gig before. To torture Hollywood over its myriad sex scandals, they hit three billboards simultaneously in February, right before the Oscars (aping the Best Picture-nominated *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*). Sabo's signs read: AND THE OSCAR FOR BIGGEST PEDOPHILE GOES TO … WE ALL KNEW AND STILL NO ARRESTS … NAME NAMES ONSTAGE OR SHUT THE HELL UP!

The Cohen prank is not an impossible job, but it is not necessarily an easy one. There's lots of logistics, lots of heights (Sabo gets spooked on tall ladders), and lots of opportunities to get caught. We are slated for takeoff in the dark of night—to avoid authorities—on a Sunday, which coincides with *Who Is America*'s debut. Sundays are better than Fridays, since if you get arrested, you don't sit in jail all weekend while the courts are closed.

As Sabo preps, his crew drifts in, coming together slowly and dramatically as in a heist film. There's a high-flying graffiti artist who asks to remain nameless, but who'll make for a good pair of extra hands when traversing the heights. There's some L.A.-chapter Proud Boys, the hard-drinking-and-fighting social/political outfit launched in 2016 by *Vice* cofounder Gavin McInnes, who regularly lock horns with antifa at free-speech rallies. There's Sabo's chum Maytor wearing a Smurf shirt. He dabbles in street art, but in civilian life runs three cemeteries in Delaware,

which keeps him fairly flush. "People are dying to get in," he says, obligatorily. "Everyone I work with is a character," Sabo explains. "But that's okay, because we're not exactly working for Avon."

But before we really get cooking prep-wise, Sabo receives a call for help. He yells that we have to go—the Proud Boys are getting accosted down the street at a 7-Eleven. He grabs tennis shoes as he runs out the door. If there's a fight, he doesn't want to have to do battle in flip-flops. We are just in time to catch the denouement.

L.A. chapter Proud Boys Galt (as he prefers to be called after the character from *Atlas Shrugged*) and Levi Romero had met up with a local Fox reporter for an interview about an encounter with a gang of lib-activist Twitter-mobsters

An antifa member rips down a Sabo anti-fascism poster in Berkeley, April 2017.

who'd shown up the night before to make trouble for Proud Boys when they'd gathered at the Griffin Bar in Atwater. No real violence occurred. But words were exchanged, MAGA-hats snatched, shoving ensued, and everyone bounced. The bar owner was roundly raked online for admitting "Nazis," a common lefty euphemism these days for anyone who wears a Make America Great Again hat in public, as the Proud Boys proudly do. They've been branded a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center—but then, who hasn't? Everyone from the Family Research Council to Ayaan Hirsi Ali shares that distinction.

When we catch up to them, however, Levi is less Proud Boy than Abashed Boy, holding his MAGA hat under his arm. In the course of the last hour, it's become a red cape waving in front of angry bulls. While they were setting up for the interview, an enraged black guy saw Levi's hat, spat in their direction, fake-apologized, and then flew at them, Galt tells me. The guy shouted, "F— you and your hat and everything you're about."

The only thing Angry Guy could have ascertained that they were about, from their appearance, was being pro-Trump. And while Trump inflames passions—often by design—he is also the duly elected president of the United States. Should wearing his merchandise be enough to get you assaulted in the bars and streets of Los Angeles, as if a MAGA hat were a Klan hood? Galt tells me it's par for the course: "I've had countless friends lose their jobs and get jumped. I've had bricks thrown at me and been pepper sprayed." Though he supports Trump now, Galt didn't vote for him. He considers himself "a true liberal—meaning I believe in liberty. I'll be friends with anyone. But the left tends to think the right is evil. We just think they're wrong."

Galt invited Angry Guy over to thrash out their differences in dialogue, but the man instead went to his car and started blasting the YG and Nipsey Hussle song "FDT (F— Donald Trump)." Galt went over and talked to him and after a few minutes, and some uneasiness, things settled down. Angry Guy, softening, even admitted he had friends who were conservative. He apologized for making assumptions. One of the assumptions he probably made was that the Proud Boys were white supremacists, though Galt is of mixed Chinese-Hawaiian stock and Levi is Mexican-Japanese.

But shortly thereafter, Galt says, a Korean guy jumped out of a Mini Cooper and started yelling insults at Levi because of his hat in the middle of his interview. When he asked Galt if he was with Levi, and Galt said yes, he yelled, "F— you too, then." He told him he was stupid, regarding Trump. Galt told him he didn't even vote for Trump. The guy threatened to "f— you up" anyway.

By now, Galt had had it. Proud Boys generally don't shrink from a fight (note the name). He followed Angry Guy 2 into 7-Eleven and got-nose-to-cheek with him, encouraging him to strike first. His bluff called, AG2 headed for the Slurpee machine, chastened. But when another bystander intervened on his side, he found courage, and it looked to be a two-on-one hoedown. (Levi was still outside talking to the reporter.) When we roll up, Galt is being escorted out—for his own well-being—by a middle-aged good Samaritan in a Golden State jersey, trying not to break his vape in all the hubbub.

His name is Joe, and when I ask what he just witnessed, he tells me "ridiculousness." Since Trump was elected, everyone's blood is running hot—he gets that. "I'm a black guy. I don't like Trump either," he says. But Galt and Levi

getting targeted isn't right. "Say whatever the f— you want," believes Joe. "But dude, calm down! Have a different opinion, fine. You don't like Trump? Fine, I'm the same way. But don't touch—don't spit on, for sure—and we won't have a problem. I have friends who voted for Trump, close friends. … This is like gangland. It's almost like we're living in the '80s back in Compton: Crips and Bloods."

I explore this gangland theme in a postmortem with Levi. Sabo and Galt have to head to the hardware store to pick up some gear, and we decide to get pizza and beer. On the surface, he's a laconic, charming, self-deprecatory goofball, who calls everyone "Doggy" or, if he's trying to show respect, "Big Dog." Levi is 24 and wears a cheesy mustache that makes him look like a fourth Beastie Boy from the *Sabotage*-era. Sabo told me Levi is a bit of a legend in Proud Boys subculture. The Internet is rife with videos of him drinking and fighting and getting arrested. Levi preemptively warns me I'll find saltier stuff—like him threatening a lib-activist rival, vowing to cut his heart out and rape his wife.

Maytor and Sabo commandeer an L.A. bus stop with 'Stolen Valor' poster in July.

Already divorced with a kid, Levi jokes that he's a young guy with middle-aged problems. He's trying to go legit, apprenticing as an electrician. But between traveling to rallies for antifa battles, working Sabo gigs, keeping up his Proud Boy duties, as well as servicing all his online beefs, partisan combat has taken up the better part of his last year. He tells me of the times he's been assaulted. Shows me scars on his torso and hands from getting slashed with a beer bottle. He doesn't take the Proud Boys overly seriously. They bill themselves as "Western chauvinists" who think the "West is the best," which draws charges of racism, even if both he and Galt tell me the L.A. chapter is about half Latino. Galt, upholding Proud Boy political incorrectness, gives their diversity breakdown: "We've gotta lot of heebs, spics, and beaners, a few nips, some gooks. We've got chinks, we've got white trash. We've got micks—I'm part Irish. One of our guys is a black-dude cop who wears a cowboy hat and rocks a Confederate flag."

Levi details the Proud Boy initiation rites, such as the "beat-in" rule where people whale on you until you can name five breakfast cereals. During Levi's initiation, he clocked out in about 30 seconds. He has command of his Kellogg's. At a Proud Boys convention, though, he agreed to another beat-in for fun and took a solid three minutes, for which he is revered. "Everyone was all-impressed, buying me more drinks." I tell him it's all well and good but that this stuff—from the beat-ins to the antifa wars—is starting to sound slightly preposterous, like gangbanging for liberal arts majors. He laughs and agrees. "Pretty much," he says, "especially on their side. … I'm just a normal dude trying to live. But that's what it feels like, like *The Warriors*." Here, he is making reference to the '70s gang film, citing its most famous line, said in a drawn-out high-pitched screech: "*Warriors, come out and play-ayyyyyyy*."

Still, he allows, things have gotten too intense. It's as though Trump's election has allowed everyone to become his basest self. Levi understands that by many objective criteria, Trump is a jerk. He doesn't particularly care. He just likes that Trump pushes the limits, almost to a fault. What happens when the other side gets in power and exacts revenge times five, I ask. "I don't care," he says. "I'm going to give them a little taste of their own medicine. I'm tired. I'm only human. I can't lose with grace anymore." Though he does wonder what will happen when Trump, who consumes everyone's thoughts 24/7 now, is no longer president: "We're going to need to invent new f—ing monsters."

Back at Sabo's place, on the driveway of his building's carport, the crew lays out clamps, tie-down straps, and other equipment, as well as the 48-by-14-foot banner that will serve as the billboard replacement. Everyone takes a look at Sabo's handiwork, which features a Photoshopped picture of Sacha Baron Cohen in a wheelchair, with prosthetic legs, wearing an Army T-shirt. Next to him is a silhouette of the United States, over which is the inscription "Sacha Baron Cohen Walks Away With a Hit … And a Touch of Stolen Valor." Beneath the images are the date and time the show airs, "Saturday at 9 P.M. on CBS." Though in actuality, it airs on Sundays on Showtime. Deliberate misinformation.

By Sabo standards, the thing is pretty complicated. Observers will have no idea what they are seeing unless they know the whole convoluted story. Levi surveys it and asks, "What's the joke?" Sabo seems a little hurt, and Galt offers, "Levi didn't read the news." Sabo grows defensive, saying, "It's subtle. It's not intended to slap you in the face," and goes inside. Levi keeps eyeing the banner, saying facetiously, "He's like, beyond meta. Sometimes, I think Sabo started the whole post-satire genre."

Inside, Sabo's tooling around on his computer. He

now wants to supplement the billboard with a poster at a nearby bus stop that he vows will "hit harder." It's the same doctored photo of Cohen, but this time with the insignia of the Wounded Warrior Project in an upper corner. It contains the stripped-down headline: "Who Is America? Stolen Valor."

Sacha Baron Cohen by drone: The crew gets ready in Sabo's driveway, above, for the overnight billboard job in July; below, Levi and Galt unfurl the slap at Cohen.

I hate to be an editorial scold, but I point out to Sabo that if people don't know the name of Cohen's show, they'll have no idea what he's talking about. And "Stolen Valor," as laid out, sounds like the answer to the question "Who is America?" He considers my advice, switches the order of the two phrases, then prints it. He peeps outside to check on his crew like a fussy mother. They're supposed to be packing their hooks and harnesses and toolbelts, while folding the banner in a complicated origami pattern that will make it easier to lay out on site. But they keep checking their phones to see if Levi and Galt made the evening news from the earlier kerfuffle. We're running way behind schedule.

Sabo uses the delay to tell me about something he's got on the drawing board. He needs to update his merchandise and is considering a teddy bear with Trump-hair wearing an "Adorables" (as opposed to "Deplorables") onesie. As he shows it to me, he seems to think better of doing so, as someone would act if they'd just let you read their diary. "Am I getting soft?" he asks.

The gear is finally packed, and we shove off, ready for war. We convoy to the site. I ride with Levi and Tony (Tony being one of Sabo's old friends from startup world). Tony flips on the radio and is about to change the station when Levi commands him to stop. "This is a good song!" he says of Hall & Oates's "Out of Touch." I volunteer that "She's Gone" is one of the best blue-eyed-soul songs of all time. Tony's partial to "Sara Smile" and "I Can't Go for That." Levi informs us that he and a pal dressed up for Halloween in high school as Hall & Oates. I point out that it's a good thing Levi is Mexican or this would be the whitest conversation I'd ever been involved in. "I'm a coconut, dog," Levi says.

It's after 1 A.M. when the cars pull up into an alley behind a decrepit building on the corner of Fairfax and Beverly, right down the street from Canter's Deli. Galt and Levi put on hardhats and fluorescent vests to look official. They carry a ladder around front, which they climb to get to another hopelessly tall and rickety ladder attached to the building. It is so precarious a proposition that it has a safety bar in the middle so repair people can attach a safety harness. Levi and Galt go without.

They lower a bucket down from the roof for the rest of us to load up equipment. Then we have to strap up the 150-pound billboard banner, so they can hoist it to the roof. The rest of us go around to the street and contemplate the ladder situation ourselves. Sabo takes a pass with his fear of heights. He'll eventually climb up the mobile ladder to a first-story roof on another building and ascend another ladder to join his troops—a good general never leads from the rear. But he'll only stay up for 20 minutes or so. Galt and Levi are extremely competent high-wire workers and have the hours-long job well in hand.

I'm on street-lookout. In the middle of the night, in seedy L.A., there's plenty to look out for: the deranged homeless guy having a violent argument with his blanket. The his-and-hers meth heads, him pushing her along in a shopping cart as she yells, "Wheeeeee!" The roller-skating transvestite who looks like Dennis Rodman tries to pull off a double-axel and takes a hard spill on the pavement, nearly ripping her jorts. The guy sitting nonchalantly in the driver's seat of his Camry, hoping nobody can see the working girl bobbing up and down. Bad news: We can.

Then of course, there are the cops. L.A.'s not-especially

BOTTOM: MATT LABASH / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

finest drive by five or six times and never seem to notice the four guys looking up at a billboard, with a ladder that's headed to the roof in the middle of the night. We look so out of place that I feel like we should sell some meth to fit in and not attract suspicion. But Maytor, wearing his Smurf shirt while he suckles his peach-lemonade vape, says not to worry. Even if they catch us, "Most cops are Republicans!"

Sabo figured the job would be done in two hours. But it takes closer to six. No matter—Galt and Levi are fearless and look like they've been doing this their whole lives. If beating up antifa doesn't pan out as a career, they have a trade to fall back on. They've prepped and measured well and clamped the Sacha Baron Cohen banner on tight as a glove—over an existing ad for some Kevin Hart-hosted game show. Sabo fires up a drone, takes some victory pictures, and yells congratulations to his men.

The job is finished as the sun rises over the corner of North Fairfax Avenue and Beverly Boulevard.

The gear packed, Sabo and the gang all walk back to his ancient Jeep Wrangler. He pulls some celebratory Modelos out of the back just as the sun's coming up and offers a toast: "To all you guys. This is a definite team f—ing effort!"

Levi cracks that we'll have gotten through all this "only to get open-container tickets." "And they'll only arrest the Mexicans," Sabo adds. "The white guys will get away with it."

As a stunt, Sabo's feat is impressive. It hits the *Hollywood Reporter* about an hour after completion and *Drudge* shortly thereafter. *Drudge* gets 30 million hits per day, and Sabo gets not just a headline on the site, but also a photo of his handiwork. The work is torn down a few hours later, but thanks to the Internet he's made a billboard for the world rather than just a seedy corner of Los Angeles. Cohen's premiere has a dismal showing. Though by the following week, he doubles his ratings, with all the word-of-mouth and controversy. So I'm not sure if any of this matters. With our five-news-cycles-a-day, controversy-junkie metabolisms, I'm not sure anything does. I ask Sabo if, after all this trouble, it concerns him that we're still not positive that Cohen even represented himself as a veteran to Palin. He shrugs: "I didn't even read the f—ing article."

These days, it isn't necessary for your outrage to be justified; outrage all by its lonesome will do just fine. Still, it can be a drag on a man. One night, tearing down the Pacific Coast Highway in Sabo's Jeep on our way to dinner, he makes a confession about the burdens of being himself: "It's not easy being mean. It's like, I don't want to be Sabo 24/7. One, it's not who I am. Two, to truly be Sabo, I have to be pretty f—ing vicious. And I don't want to be vicious. It just takes too much out of me." Still, he adds, "You can't be a daisy and expect to get the kind of attention you may want. People are so damn desensitized these days, you almost have to be brutal. That resonates with people. I don't know why, but it does."

I make what I take for a beautifully simple suggestion: How about not being brutal? How about taking people as they come? How about treating ideological adversaries as you'd want to be treated? The Golden Rule and all that corny stuff we seem to have deliberately flushed from the national memory bank. You can disagree with your enemy, but you don't have to slaughter him. Maybe your enemy doesn't even have to be your enemy.

Sabo waves me off like I'm a child. For all his dark nights of the soul, he is certain he knows what needs doing: "I feel comfortable in the battle and that's going to make me bloody and dirty and calloused. I know what you want. You want the good, clean guy to win. And you want to be able to say that you did it following certain standards. And that's fine. But the fact of the matter is that even you don't live up to those standards. It's not that I'm not a nice guy. It's not that I'm not a good guy. But these are ideals. And I gave up those ideals. Sometimes the dirty fighter is the one that's going to win." ♦

Iran's Long Game

Tehran's growing influence in Iraq is no accident, newly declassified interrogation transcripts show

By Bill Roggio

Iran has its tentacles all over Iraq, and the United States has no one to blame but itself. It is a bipartisan failure dating back to the March 2003 invasion. Even after the Bush administration adjusted its course in Iraq, waging a large counterinsurgency campaign, the United States was so eager to wash its hands of a messy insurgency that it did little to roll back Iran's gains. Nearly seven years after President Obama's disastrous withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, Iran and its Shia militias wield an enormous amount of power, and the militias' political arms are set to play a major role in Iraq's next government.

The seeds of this failure can be seen in the interrogation transcripts of Qais Khazali, the leader of an Iranian-backed militia, one of what the U.S. military used to call the "Special Groups." Khazali's interrogation logs were declassified by U.S. Central Command and released via the American Enterprise Institute on August 30. The hundreds of pages of files are part of the U.S. government's push to designate Khazali, a militant with American blood on his hands, a terrorist. Khazali is now a politician, and his group, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, holds 15 seats in the Iraqi parliament. His rise was no accident. Khazali, who was in U.S. custody from 2007 to the end of 2009, told his interrogators then that Iran had long-term plans to infiltrate Iraqi society at all levels. And the Iranians have done just that.

The Special Groups were paramilitary units embedded in Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. Sadr has long been a Shia powerbroker in southern Iraq. The newly released files confirm that Khazali, who worked for Sadr, came to view his superior as a rival. They also confirm that Sadr's Mahdi Army received funding, weapons, training, and advice from Iran and its chief proxy, Lebanon's Hezbollah. The Shia militants primarily targeted coalition forces, killing hundreds of American soldiers. Khazali himself led such operations.

In March 2007, British commandos raided a compound in Basra, Iraq, and captured their targets: Qais, who led the Special Groups at the time, his brother Laith, and a Hezbollah military commander known as Musa Ali Daqduq. Qais was responsible for issuing the order to kidnap and kill five American soldiers in Karbala. Laith was Qais's deputy, while Daqduq was responsible for organizing, training, and advising the Special Groups.

Qais Khazali during a military operation to retake the city of Tikrit, March 7, 2015

U.S. military interrogators interviewed Qais at least 70 times during his almost three years in detention. Qais often played coy, pretending not to know about key figures and groups in the Shia insurgency. Yet at other times he divulged important details about his leadership of the Mahdi Army Special Groups, as well as Iran's role in fueling the fire in Iraq.

Qais was one of several figures with inside knowledge of Iran's plans for Iraq. During one interrogation, he "let slip" that he had "direct contact with Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) General [Qassem] Suleimani." As commander of Quds Force, the infamous Suleimani is tasked with directing Iran's expansion throughout the Middle East.

Iran wasn't interested merely in giving the U.S. military a bloody nose in Iraq, although surely its leaders enjoyed watching American soldiers be killed and wounded by the militias they sponsored. "The ultimate goal of Iran is to destroy the Americans," Qais said, according to one interrogation summary. In addition, Qais indicated, "Iran is using both the U.S. and the Iraqis to keep each other busy

IMAGES: AHMAD AL-RUBAYE / AFP / GETTY

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through fighting while Iran pursues their own agenda and most importantly, nuclear ambitions."

Qais provided copious information concerning Iran's use of a vast network of Shia militias, many in competition with each other, to achieve its goals. Yet his interrogators seemed far less interested in the big picture of Iranian expansionism in Iraq than in extracting tactical information they could exploit, as well as how Qais might be used as part of an Iraqi reconciliation process.

The interrogations thus come across as shortsighted. Little effort was made to exploit Qais's knowledge of the petty jealousies and rivalries within the Mahdi Army and among various Shia factions. And virtually nothing was done to target the network of training camps, weapon supply hubs, and other infrastructure inside Iran that supported the Shia militias. Iran never paid a price for its meddling in Iraqi affairs and its direct responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of American soldiers, even though Tehran's culpability was obvious.

Campaigning in Baghdad this May

Many of the interrogations focus on Qais's ideas for ending the Shia insurgency. He seems to have sensed his interrogators' desire for reconciliation and positioned himself as the only man who could play a major role in dialing back the violence and ending Iranian involvement in Iraq. At times, his captors appear to have accepted Qais's views uncritically. In June 2009, the U.S. military released his brother Laith and more than 100 Asaib Ahl al-Haq commanders and fighters. Qais was released six months later. The reason given: Qais and company were freed so they could take part in a reconciliation plan. The U.S. military believed that the Khazalis and their Iranian-backed terror group would lay down their arms and join the political process.

In exchange for Qais and his men, the U.S. government secured the release of a British hostage, Peter Moore, and the bodies of three of the four men who were kidnapped with him in the spring of 2007. Moore's compatriots had been murdered by Khazali's men; three of the bodies that were returned were riddled with bullet holes; the fourth was never recovered.

The U.S. military also handed over Daqduq, the Hezbollah special forces commander who had the ear of Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah and Suleimani, to the Iraqi government in 2011 under the promise that he would remain in prison. Daqduq was freed within a year. Qais and Daqduq never paid for the kidnapping and murder of the five U.S. soldiers in Karbala or any of the other attacks they had orchestrated against U.S. forces.

Daqduq's whereabouts are unknown, but he is thought to have returned to Hezbollah and resumed a senior leadership position with the group. The U.S. government promptly designated Daqduq a global terrorist after he was freed by the Iraqis.

Qais, his brother, and his militia never laid down their arms. He would later lead a portion of his militia into Syria to fight alongside Bashar al-Assad's regime, at the behest of Suleimani. By 2014, the militia was battling the Islamic State, as well as terrorizing Iraqi minorities in areas it liberated from ISIS.

Qais Khazali is but one player to emerge from the Shia branch of the Iraqi insurgency as a major figure. Iranian-backed commanders Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Mustafa Abu Sheibani, Akram al-Kabi, Abu Duraa, and others lead their own militias and dominate what is known as the Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF. Khazali mentioned these men and their connections to Iran numerous times during his interrogations.

Muhandis is the most notorious of them all. Khazali said that Muhandis's "closest ties with Iran are with the IRGC" and that he resides in Tehran. The State Department listed Muhandis as a global terrorist, described him as "an advisor to Qassem Suleimani," and detailed his extensive involvement with the Special Groups. Today, Muhandis leads the PMF, which is dominated by Iranian-backed militias who cut their teeth fighting U.S. forces in Iraq. These militias remain hostile to the United States to this day, even though America has backed the PMF in its fight against the Islamic State.

The PMF was formed in 2014 to battle Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's ISIS goons, but it has since become an official military institution answerable only to Iraq's prime minister. In many ways it is analogous to Iran's IRGC, which takes its orders from Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, outside the military chain of command.

As with Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are more than paramilitary formations. They are political actors and scored a major victory in Iraq's parliamentary election in May. Running as the Fatah Alliance, they finished second behind Muqtada al-Sadr's Saairun Coalition and will likely ally with Sadr's party in parliament. While Sadr maintains a degree of autonomy, Qais noted repeatedly in his interrogations that Sadr and his men were supported

in various ways by the Iranians. These two Iranian-backed movements will form the next Iraqi government and select the next prime minister, who will have exclusive control over the PMF.

Iran has played the long game in Iraq, but one whose outcome was by no means assured. The U.S. military heavily targeted Iranian-backed proxies between 2007 and 2009, forcing many of their leaders and fighters to flee to Iran. But President Obama was determined to fulfill his campaign promise to end all U.S. involvement in Iraq, whatever the cost. In 2012, he claimed that "we have responsibly ended the war in Iraq."

However, the war in Iraq did not end just because Obama declared it was over. After he withdrew U.S. troops in December 2011, Al Qaeda in Iraq reorganized and took advantage of the growing insurgency in neighboring Syria. Khazali had warned his interrogators about the nefarious influence of the "salafis" and "wahhabis," by which he meant groups like Al Qaeda in Iraq. But he also warned that Iran was ecumenical when it came to fighting Americans. "Detainee [Khazali] said that every group that is fighting in Iraq trained in Iran, including al Qaeda," one log reads. The passages that followed are redacted, likely indicating that some in the U.S. government are still uncomfortable discussing this Shia-Sunni cooperation against their common foes. Other newly released interrogation files, which have also been redacted, allude to this anti-American arrangement as well.

By early 2014, Al Qaeda in Iraq controlled the Iraqi city of Fallujah and many towns in Anbar Province. By that summer, the terrorist group had seized nearly one-third of Iraq, including the city of Mosul. It renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Thus the Islamic State was born. But the Sunni jihadists weren't the only ones who capitalized on America's retreat.

Buoyed by Obama's precipitous withdrawal from Iraq, Iran expanded its influence there. Support for the Shia militias and their political parties continued unabated. Iran was able to enlist many of these militias, including Khazali's Asaib Ahl al-Haq, to fight on the side of the Syrian regime against rebels and Sunni jihadist groups. This built their stature in Shia communities in Iraq, while raising fears among Iraq's Sunnis that the militias were merely tools of the Iranian government.

When the Islamic State rampaged throughout central and northern Iraq, threatening Baghdad during the summer of 2014, Iraq's military was on the brink of defeat. The Iranian-backed militias came to the rescue and spearheaded every major operation against the Islamic State. Iranian generals and IRGC officers embedded with the Shia militias to increase their effectiveness. Militia commanders were frequently photographed with Suleimani on Iraqi battlefields. Suleimani reportedly created battle plans and directed operations in some theaters.

The Shia militias, with Iran's help, were instrumental in liberating Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah, Tikrit, Baiji, and Sinjar. But the operations to liberate Iraqi cities from the Islamic State came at a high cost to Iraqi civilians.

Ironically, the U.S. military, which had been forced to reengage in Iraq by the rise of ISIS, abetted the militias by providing them air support—the same Shia militias that had killed American soldiers.

Ironically, the U.S. military, which had been forced to reengage in Iraq by the rise of ISIS, abetted the militias by providing air support during their operations to clear the Islamic State from Iraq's cities. U.S. airpower, in other words, supported the same Shia militias that had killed American soldiers and abused their own countrymen.

There is one aspect of Iran's primacy in Iraq that has gone virtually unreported: its access to a vast recruiting base among Iraq's Shia population. In Lebanon, Iran stood up Hezbollah, which has waged proxy war against Israel for over three decades and lived to tell about it. Today, Hezbollah is the most influential player in Lebanon, and its military eclipses the Lebanese Army. Iran was able to set up Hezbollah by recruiting from Lebanon's 1.65 million Shia. Iran has more than 24 million Shia to recruit from in Iraq.

Iraq's Shia militias have not been content with fighting the Islamic State inside of Iraq and Syria. As Jonathan Spyer noted in the *Jerusalem Post* last December, Qais Khazali visited the village of Kafr Kila on the Lebanese border with Israel, where he gave a speech highlighting his desire to take the fight beyond Iraq and Syria and provide direct support for Hezbollah.

"I'm at the Fatima Gate in Kafr Kila, at the border that divides south Lebanon from occupied Palestine. I'm here with my brothers from Hezbollah, the Islamic resistance. We announce our full readiness to stand as one with the Lebanese people, with the Palestinian cause, in the face of the unjust Israeli occupation," Khazali declared.

Khazali's threat is real. With Iran's help, he branched out from a localized Shia insurgency in Iraq and expanded his operations into Syria. The rise of Khazali and other Iranian-backed Shia commanders was abetted by a feckless U.S. policy in Iraq. That war never really ended, and the United States and its allies will be paying the price for that failure for years to come. ♦

Charles de Gaulle in a BBC studio in London, June 1940

ADOC-PHOTOS / CORBIS / GETTY

Le Grand Charles

How de Gaulle turned himself into a symbol. BY LAWRENCE KLEPP

It's easy to see why you might get annoyed with Charles de Gaulle. It's not that he didn't have impressive qualities. He was valiant in action in both world wars and prescient as a military theorist and denouncer of appeasement between the wars. He read two or three books a week most of his life and was probably better informed about literature and philosophy than any other leader of a major modern country. If he didn't have a Voltaire-caliber wit (and he didn't like Voltaire anyway), he still had a gift for the occasional droll remark: "How can one govern a country which has 258 cheeses?"

De Gaulle
by Julian Jackson
Harvard, 887 pp., $39.95

The problem was that he could be brusque, distant, disdainful, obstinate, and overbearing. And that was on a good day. During his wartime exile in London, as the creator and leader of the Free French forces, he regularly infuriated Churchill, his usually good-humored sponsor and ally, and most Foreign Office officials, including two future prime ministers, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan.

Drawing on the letters and diaries of these men and others, the British historian Julian Jackson, in this tenaciously researched, nuanced, largely sympathetic biography, describes how hard they tried to accommodate their touchy French guest, up to a point, and beyond that point kept wondering if he had gone mad. In the position of a backseat driver during most of the war, the general was capable of saying things like: "You think I am interested in England winning the war? I am not. I am only interested in France's victory."

He conducted himself as France incarnate, but the France he personified was largely one of his history-steeped

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imagination. It was the France of Joan of Arc, Louis XIV, and (though he didn't really approve of him) Napoleon—France as a heroic actor in history, a great power, not the humiliated nation that had been quickly overrun by the German Army in May and June 1940 and, under the Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain, had negotiated an armistice with Hitler that turned it into a neutered, half-occupied country.

But this epochal sense of himself is precisely what allowed him to defy all the odds and all the Vichyites. His eloquent BBC radio appeals rallied the French to his cause, giving them back a sense of national purpose and pride and spurring the Resistance.

He never explained himself. I recall him extolling, somewhere in his memoirs, the power of silence. André Malraux, the most prominent literary convert to Gaullism after the war, wrote that an "inner *remoteness*" was de Gaulle's most striking trait. It reminded him of the inscrutability of "distinguished men of religion." And in an early book quoted by Jackson, de Gaulle identified "mystery" and "ruse" as two of the essential attributes of a great leader. He sometimes seems as remote and as mysterious in his motives as a king or saint of the Middle Ages. Like them, he was half-legend, and this carefully cultivated mystique was the secret of his success.

"General de Gaulle symbolizes that France which did not despair, which did not give in," Pierre Brossolette—a prewar socialist journalist who joined the Resistance—reported from London during the war. "France needs a myth, and for the moment France has fallen so low that this myth cannot be found in a formula or an idea: it needs to be incarnated in a man."

Myths are, of course, somewhat hard to live with at close quarters. And solitude was another attribute that de Gaulle associated with greatness. He had a long placid marriage with his wife Yvonne and was devoted to his three children, especially his younger daughter Anne, born with Down syndrome, but he had few friends and kept allies and associates at a frosty distance. He might have adopted as a motto the line from Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*: "The strongest man is he who stands alone."

He was never more alone than when he arrived in London on a small plane from Bordeaux in June 1940 with a couple of suitcases, a handful of francs, and almost no acquaintance with the English language. "I appeared to myself," he wrote in his memoirs, "alone and deprived of everything, like a man on the edge of an ocean that he was hoping to swim across." But Churchill, as immersed in the glories of British history as de Gaulle was in the historical "grandeur" that was for him inseparable from France, must have recognized in him a kindred spirit, endowed with a "quixotic nobility." Churchill decided to gamble on him, approving his first inspiring (if largely unheard) BBC speech directed at France on June 18.

Generals-turned-presidents Eisenhower and de Gaulle in Paris, September 1959

The towering (6-foot-4) 49-year-old general had written four books, incisively opposed the defensive Maginot Line strategy of the French general staff, led some of the most effective counterattacks against the Germans in May 1940, and taken a minor post in the government of his friend Paul Reynaud, which collapsed before it could flee, as de Gaulle was urging, to North Africa to continue the fight there.

Yet he was almost as unknown in France when he arrived in London as he was in London. That changed when the Pétain government, after he refused its orders to return from England, condemned him in absentia to death and added public attacks on him. Soon the French across the occupied and Vichy zones were furtively tuning their radios to hear him.

For all his quixotic nobility, de Gaulle had an instinct for the art of the possible. Jackson points out that he admired the underlying realism in the foreign policy of the Old Regime—the spirit, you might say, of Cardinal Richelieu. He thought Napoleon had exhausted France with imperial excess, a hubristic refusal to acknowledge limits. He made, Jackson notes, the same point about German philosophy and German geopolitical ambitions—they both lacked the classical French sense of moderation and balance.

He seems to have derived from his favorite philosopher, Henri Bergson, a modern version of Pascal's *esprit de finesse*, a trust in intuition and a distrust of rigorous a priori rationalism. This made him immune to any dogmatic, systematic ideologies, such as the absolutist royalism of Charles Maurras, the dominant ideologue of the French right before World War II. A vehement anti-Dreyfusard and founder of the proto-fascist *Action Française*, Maurras ended up a diehard Vichyite.

De Gaulle, born into a family of scholarly provincial gentry that had been discreetly royalist and devoutly Catholic for generations, was a monarchist at heart. "The regret of my life," Jackson quotes him as saying at the end of it, "is not to have built a monarchy, that there was no member of the Royal House for that. In reality I was a monarch for ten years."

But unlike Maurras, de Gaulle didn't want to annihilate the entire

GAMMA-KEYSTONE / GETTY

legacy of the Revolution, and he wasn't anti-Semitic and conspiracy-minded. He probably just wished the Revolution had stopped in 1791 so that France, like England, could have had a stabilizing, symbolic constitutional monarchy. The Fifth Republic, with its strong presidential system, is the bastard child of his intuitive royalism, and the current president, Emmanuel Macron, openly emulates the general.

Jackson's meticulous account of de Gaulle's postwar exile from power and his presidency (1959-69) can't help feeling like an anticlimax, as it may have to de Gaulle himself. The main drama came from his cutting the Gordian knot of Algeria, conceding its independence and surviving the subsequent assassination attempts and an abortive army coup, and confronting the one-month wonder of the student rebellion of May 1968. The latter was drama in the literal sense of theater. The students, with their vacuous slogans, more Rousseau than Marx, scrawled on Parisian walls—"It is forbidden to forbid," "Beneath the pavement, the beach," etc.—were playing at revolution. De Gaulle, to his credit, couldn't understand them. Many of them drifted into a trancelike fascination with, at a safe distance, Mao's Cultural Revolution.

De Gaulle indulged in a few quixotic gestures while president, e.g. *Vive le Québec libre!* (an imprudent exclamation that cut short his state visit to Canada in 1967). But he mostly practiced realpolitik on the smaller scale that France's diminished role in the world allowed him. He always believed that perennial national interests (and national characters) would prevail over the ideologies that temporarily concealed or distorted them, and he was usually, sometimes uncannily, right in his geopolitical fortune-telling—predicting, for instance, the violent rupture of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet-Chinese clashes of the early sixties, and the American failure in Vietnam.

Jackson's tactful, generous examination of de Gaulle's literary and philosophical affinities is one of the most unexpected and illuminating aspects of the book. The favorite writers of de Gaulle's youth were two lyrical Catholics, Chateaubriand and Charles Péguy; a brooding nationalist, Maurice Barrès; and, more surprisingly, the *poète maudit* Paul Verlaine. Among contemporary novelists, he admired the classical-minded Marguerite Yourcenar but had little use for Gide or Proust. He drew some writers, like Malraux and the Catholic novelist Georges Bernanos, to his side and repelled others, notably Sartre.

From these affinities and his long residence in the tiny, remote northeastern village of Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, you get the impression that de Gaulle's deepest impulse was a romantic nostalgia for a classical France, a love of the landscape and history, of *la France profonde*. Like Churchill, he belonged in some ways to another age and was out of step with the times. But being out of step with the times in June 1940 was both honorable and vital. De Gaulle's mad dash to London to keep France in the war helped preserve Europe and its heritage from apocalyptic futurists. In the process, as Jackson says in the last sentence of the book, "He saved the honor of France." ♦

B&A

House Hostility, Senate Smackdowns

Violence in the antebellum Congress.

BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.

If you've ever thought that pretty much everything that could be said about the coming of the Civil War had already been said, this book will prove you wrong. In adding significantly to what we thought we knew, it changes what we did know. What's more, it brings to the fore a subject—verbal abuse and physical violence, rooted in politics, on the floor of the United States Congress—that has never received the attention that Joanne Freeman brings to it. A superb, serious, authoritative, lively, occasionally amusing work of scholarly bravura, her book is also timely—although today's circumstances, not the author, make that so. Only a few paragraphs hint at our present discontents.

The Field of Blood has been in the making for almost two decades. Its origins lie in the author's long-held interest in the history of violent behavior and our national government. Her previous book, *Affairs of Honor* (2001), covered the subject during the early history of the republic. Here, she picks up the story in the 1830s. The results are revelatory.

The Field of Blood
Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War
by Joanne B. Freeman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 450 pp., $28

Few people can be unacquainted with reports and photos of brawls in other countries' legislatures. *But not here* is our reassurance to ourselves when we see such spectacles. We prefer to think that, save for an errant verbal assault—like the "You lie!" that South Carolina's Joe Wilson launched at President Barack Obama during a congressional address in 2009—our representatives are beyond such outbursts. And that with the exception of a stray incident here or there—as when Alaska's Don Young pushed John Boehner against a wall and held a knife

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to his neck—they are certainly beyond physical assault.

Yet as Freeman shows, in pre-Civil War congresses, especially in the House of Representatives, "fighting was common enough to seem routine."

As early as the 1790s, members of Congress took up cudgels against each other. In 1798, two weeks after Vermont congressman Matthew Lyon spat in Connecticut congressman Roger Griswold's face during debate, Griswold went after Lyon with a cane. The most infamous such incident occurred in 1856 when South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks entered the Senate and caned Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner senseless for having repeatedly taunted the South over slavery.

Yet as it turns out, there were many more such incidents. Freeman seems to have exhumed the records of all of them. No Congress after the 1830s until the war was without a physical assault, and they rose in number as time went on. Heavy drinking increased their severity. Most of them—with fists, bricks, bowie knives, pistols, and rifles—were initiated by Southerners increasingly agitated by antislavery petitions to Congress, the growth of antislavery politics, and the antislavery press. The sheer number and violence of the incidents that Freeman brings to light, all-out brawls as well as individual combat, reveal an institution often out of control, only brought back from the brink of collapse by members with superegos stronger than those of Griswold and Brooks. Freeman's Congress is scarcely the arena of soaring rhetoric and classic argument that we associate with the names of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun. It's a pit of violence.

The violence was not limited to indoors. When congressional rules and sober representatives succeeded in prevailing against threats to life and limb in the House and Senate, attacks often spilled onto the capital's streets. Some of them, like duels—a frequent resort when honor was impeached—followed rough, age-old conventions, the kind that Freeman dealt with more comprehensively in her earlier book. The most notorious duel of the antebellum era was fought in 1838 between Maine Democratic congressman Jonathan Cilley and Kentucky Whig William J. Graves, an affair of honor that, Freeman suggests, helped initiate an almost quarter-century of growing partisan, then inter-sectional, violence. Freeman's unsurpassed knowledge of duel culture is in evidence in her telling of this confrontation. Fought with rifles, it cost Cilley his life.

Less formal out-of-doors set-tos were more frequent. Representatives attacked other representatives, and members of the public, some waiting in ambush, went after elected officials on city streets. Provocations were not limited to one party or section: Southerners had frequent recourse to the honor defense only because some Northerners—John Quincy Adams and Sumner the standouts among them—were masters of the clever taunt, brilliant orators, and manipulators of congressional rules whom intimidation couldn't silence.

The caning of Senator Sumner by Representative Brooks, as depicted in a detail from an 1856 print drawn by Winslow Homer

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To bring to light this forgotten history, Freeman has burrowed deep into the archives—from the often taxing-to-read pages of the *Congressional Globe* (that era's version of the *Congressional Record*) to collections of members' preserved correspondence. Frequently, however, these documents hide facts behind conventions of discretion and circumlocution. To go beyond the hints of threatened and successful assault, Freeman has masterfully teased out what she can from other sources. In doing so, she places most attention on a likable figure whom she clearly admires and makes her readers admire, too.

He's Benjamin Brown French, a native of New Hampshire, a newspaperman, a writer, a Democrat, and a little-known figure of pre-Civil War Washington. While never holding federal elective office, French was close to New England Democrats (including President Franklin Pierce) and long served on the House staff before becoming clerk of the House. Widely admired, he served as president of the District of Columbia city council, grand master of the District's Masons, and grand master of the Knights Templar of the United States. He laid the cornerstones of the Smithsonian Institution building and the Washington Monument and composed the poem read at Gettysburg the day that Abraham Lincoln delivered his celebrated address there. He also had "an uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right time"—the day's Zelig, a spectator at Andrew Jackson's near-assassination, John Quincy Adams's fatal stroke on the House floor, and Lincoln's bedside after he was shot by John Wilkes Booth.

For years, French saw events close up in the House and came to know everyone in town. A clubbable, witty man of sunny disposition, disenthralled by human nature, liked and trusted by almost everyone, he was also a fair appraiser of public affairs. Most important for posterity's use, he recorded most of what he witnessed in a diary—one that amounted to 11 volumes. Mining the diaries for everything they're worth, Freeman places French at the center of her tale.

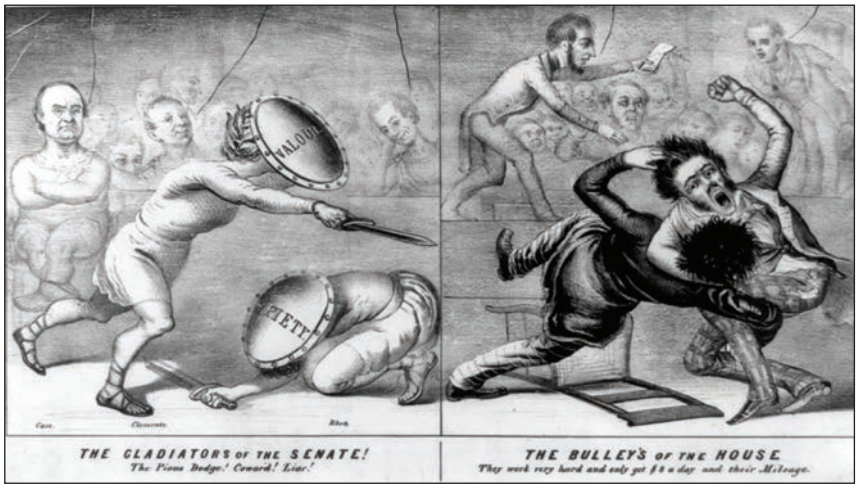
It's a many-faceted tale. It's about the institution of Congress: its workings, its culture, and its rules. We see how its members had to adapt to the increasingly sectional, partisan press whose national reach grew with changes in reportage, technology, and distribution and whose editors often had to face sectional fury and threat. We're introduced to Congress's rowdiness, noise,

and drunkenness, its galleries filled with onlookers, many of them women, to whom senators and representatives played. All come alive under French's pen, to which Freeman adds her own perceptive, often humorous, glosses.

The tale is also about honor culture—a subject that Freeman knows as well as anyone else. We witness the growing brittleness of men caught on the horns of the dilemma of escaping possible death or being dishonored, shamed, and humiliated for choosing a wiser course and standing down.

And it's about bullying—members, overwhelmingly Southerners, trying to silence their opponents by threat. Never again will historians be able to write about the coming of civil war without taking account of the role of bullying abuse on the floor of Congress and outside. It was everywhere, especially in the House. Some, like the notably egregious Southerners Henry Wise and Henry S. Foote, were trigger-happy masters of invective who could send their adversaries into paroxysms of rage and despair. Bullying, especially by Southerners, became a method of governance by threat. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, but it was always in the air, poisoning relationships, heating debates, and inescapably embittering the nation's increasingly toxic politics. In reading this book, you wonder whether the union might have been saved but for unbridled congressional intimidations.

Here is where *The Field of Blood* gains its greatest significance. It puts honor culture and Southern bullying at the heart of the course to the Civil War. It doesn't diminish the causal importance of slavery and abolitionism in bringing on the conflict. It doesn't remove territorial expansion, the spread of slavery, the market economy, or differences between Northern and Southern culture from the mix. Instead, in Freeman's words, the story is not so much about the rules of the game but about "the game gone awry."



Caricatures by John L. Magee of the different modes of fighting in the somewhat genteel Senate and the 'bear garden' House (ca. 1852)

And here's where Benjamin Brown French is illustrative. His trajectory from nationalist Democrat to Northern Republican, from the loyal member of one party to the adherent of a new one, from a nationalist who saw things in partisan terms to one who saw things in sectional ones illustrates how the fraying of the norms of governance helped bring on civil war. French both added to and was swept along by the momentum toward war.

He started out his political career as a "doughface" Democrat—a Northern partisan who, dodging realities, tried his best to accommodate Southern slave power so as to maintain his party's hold on federal offices. Over time, however, a spectator to growing Southern truculence and bullying, his sectional identification began to take hold. Even as it did so, he had to watch Northern congressmen continue to give way before Southern threats. Not until the late 1850s, with the emergence of the Republican party—an emergence significantly fueled by Brooks's caning of Sumner—did congressional Northerners of both the Democratic and Whig parties begin to stand firm against Southern bullying. They did so first by meeting "strut with strut," then by invoking their right of free expression. They would be silenced no more.

Much of the North's newfound confidence was born on the floor of Congress. This was, writes Freeman, "the most dramatic innovation in congressional violence after 1855: Northerners fought back." It proved a bracing strategy, even if it made Congress an "armed camp." It forced French to become a Republican, albeit a moderate one, and cost him his lifelong friendship with Franklin Pierce. With Lincoln's election, it became a strategy that evinced the determination to yield no more. The North would fight for its own rights.

Freeman's research is prodigious, her scholarship unimpeachable. By shifting her gaze from the conventionally cited causes of the Civil War, she has deepened our understanding of its coming. She doesn't discount these other sources of disunion. Instead, she draws attention to the realities of governance—its rules, processes, and ethos—and to the way their degradation can spill beyond institutions to affect, in this case fatally, wider public life. "Congressional violence didn't cause [the] sectional standoff, but it intensified it." America, she writes, "was backing its way into civil warfare."

It remains for Freeman or someone else to bring together how the two eras that Freeman has now covered can, or should, be seen as a whole in respect to violence among federal and other officeholders. And whether the mid-19th-century congresses were any more violent than other countries' legislatures, then or since, is a subject yet to be explored—one that could greatly enrich our understanding of representative government and of human nature itself. ♦

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B&A

To Write a Predator

Did a real-life kidnapping case inspire Nabokov's Lolita*?*

BY KATRINA GULLIVER

Sally Horner leans on her mother's shoulder minutes after they were reunited.

In June 1948, 11-year-old Sally Horner was lured from her Camden, New Jersey home by a man named Frank La Salle, who claimed to be an FBI agent. She spent nearly two years as his captive, living in different places around the country. He told people she was his daughter. In March 1950, she used a neighbor's phone to call home and was rescued.

Sarah Weinman's new book presents Sally's plight as the "real" tale behind Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. There are obvious similarities—the novel's narrator, Humbert Humbert, takes 12-year-old Dolores around the country. Weinman goes down two tracks: the story of how Nabokov came to write the novel and the story of Sally's kidnapping. We see Nabokov juggling teaching, writing, and driving around the United States to catch butterflies. At about the same time, Sally is being hauled from one part of the country to another by La Salle.

The Real Lolita
The Kidnapping of Sally Horner and the Novel That Scandalized the World
by Sarah Weinman
Ecco, 306 pp., $27.99

Weinman argues that Sally Horner's fate has echoed through our culture. That seems like an overstatement—how many people have even heard her name?—but it's true that tales of girls like her, abused and abducted, have a lurid fascination.

It's true, too, that our culture deals awkwardly with sexuality and adolescence—a weak point that Nabokov targeted perfectly. We generally frown on grown men who leer at young women, even while companies market T-shirts saying "PORNSTAR" for children and glossy magazines encourage teen readers to experiment with sex. This cultural confusion is reflected in the law. It is possible for teenagers who have consensual sex before the age of legal consent (which varies by state from 16 to 18) to end up permanently on the sex-offender registry. Meanwhile, as *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof and activist Fraidy Reiss have exposed in recent years, child marriage is disturbingly persistent in the United States—typically between a young girl and an older man. These include cases in which the parents of a pregnant 12-year-old see marriage to her rapist as a good outcome for their daughter. So a young teen or even pre-teen girl can, depending on how her parents feel, be treated legally as a married mother-to-be or as the victim of a child rapist. Our cultural inability to draw clear lines between childhood and adulthood is part of why we find *Lolita* so resonant and uncomfortable.

Weinman's retelling of Horner's experience is heartbreaking. It is the story of a girl made vulnerable by the social expectation that children defer to adults. In her day, before the attitude of "stranger-danger" was routinely inculcated in young people, monsters like La Salle preyed on children because they could. Weinman's meticulous research has traced where Sally was moved to by La Salle, and she does her best to imagine what Sally went through.

But what we miss is anything from Sally herself about the experience. Today we would have an interview on *60 Minutes* and commentary from psychologists about her condition. Our understanding of Stockholm syndrome has changed how we think about victims who have stayed with their abductors even when there were opportunities to flee. (Public awareness of Stockholm syndrome emerged with a later and more famous kidnapping, that of Patty Hearst.) But after Sally's rescue, she went back to a community where she was regarded as a slut. That judgmental attitude toward a young teenager who had suffered a horrific crime today seems monstrous.

Unfortunately, Weinman only gets

INTERNATIONAL NEWS / COURTESY OF SARAH WEINMAN

Katrina Gulliver is writing a history of urban life.

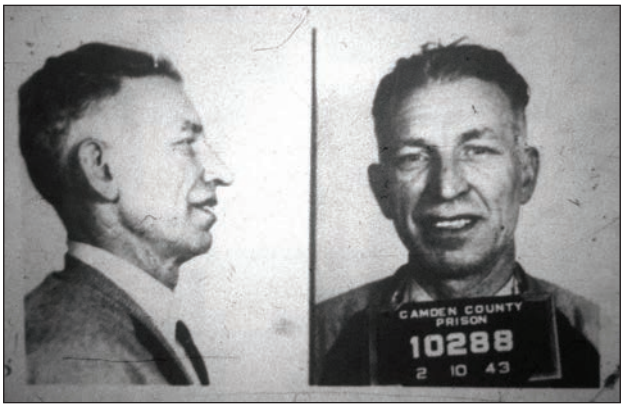
any of this secondhand. Sally died in a car accident when she was 15. Her family is dead, too, except for a niece too young to remember her. Weinman interviews school friends, but after seven decades their memories only give us so much.

Sally Horner's story is tragic, but her connection to *Lolita* is more tenuous than Weinman suggests. The idea that Nabokov was inspired specifically by this case, an argument somewhat undercut by the fact that he had been writing stories with pedophilic themes for decades, is hardly revelatory: Authors are often inspired by true crime. That he apparently denied it when asked about the Horner case—following a magazine article in the early 1960s—tells us little one way or another.

Even if Nabokov did draw on Sally's experience, he had only slight knowledge of the basic facts. He did have a notecard—he wrote everything on notecards—on which he had jotted down some details from a newspaper account. But the case wasn't widely covered in the press (Sally's rescue, Weinman acknowledges, wasn't even reported in the *New York Times*), so it's hard to see how it could have been a major inspiration.

Nabokov does explicitly mention Sally Horner's case in an aside toward the end of the novel. At that moment, Humbert Humbert is considering whether he was no different from predators like La Salle. In a sense he is posing the question to readers, who have been led to see him somewhat sympathetically.

Lolita's literary value is in its wit and verve—in the way Nabokov makes us forget that our narrator is a villain. Nabokov made Humbert Humbert handsome and in his late 30s, a man at whom women threw themselves. He doesn't fit our image of a child molester (and looks nothing like Frank La Salle, to judge from the mug shots). We begin to accept Humbert's self-justifications and hate ourselves for it. Of course, most child molesters are not suave, erudite, and handsome (any more than serial killers are opera-loving Ph.D.s engaging in cat-and-mouse games with brilliant detectives).



Above, mug shot from Frank La Salle's prison stint on statutory rape charges in 1943, five years before he kidnapped Sally Horner; below, Vladimir Nabokov holding a butterfly at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, where he was a fellow, 1947

More interesting than whether Nabokov used Sally's experience as some of the basis for his story is why his novel struck such a nerve. How did *Lolita* come to be so popular, such a subject of wide controversy, and so enduring? Nabokov's agent told him that the publisher of the book's 1955 first edition actually hoped *Lolita* would encourage a change in "social attitudes toward the kind of love described in *Lolita*"—that is, the publisher, who mostly published smut, not literature, hoped Nabokov's book would make society more accepting of desires like Humbert Humbert's. (Shades of every creepy guy who's ever given a teenage girl a Malibu and Coke and told her that "Age is just a label" and "You're obviously an old soul" while stroking her thigh.) In *Lolita*, Humbert is full of the same kind of self-justification that you find from sweaty-palmed lechers in the grimier corners of the Internet, with florid discussions on the ages at which girls reach puberty. Their defense is framed in terms of evolution and biological imperative, and anyway aren't there countries where girls are married at 11?

The way we commodify young girls' bodies, our social veneration of virginity—and the notion that if a child is not a virgin it's less of a crime to rape her—all this is in the pages of Nabokov's novel. So is the cry of pedophiles everywhere that the child somehow was the seducer. *Lolita* challenges the boundaries of our morality, and our fascination with sex crimes is at least as strong today as it was in the 1950s. We even have a television show devoted to them: *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, about to start its 20th season. We are intrigued; we wonder about dark impulses and taboo urges; we are horrified; we cannot look away.

To call Sally the "real" *Lolita* is to overstate the influence of her case on Nabokov. And it's a claim undermined by the fact that we know so little about her: We don't know how she felt or how she understood her experience. But she deserves to be remembered—not as a literary footnote, nor even just as the victim in a tragic case, but as one who was brave enough to escape. ♦

TOP: NEW JERSEY STATE ARCHIVES; BOTTOM: CONSTANTINE JOFFE / VOGUE / GETTY

B&A

Jack Attack

Tom Clancy's hero returns in a new Amazon series, but with less geeky charm. **BY NICHOLAS H. LOYA**

John Krasinski as the eponymous CIA analyst and Wendell Pierce as Jim Greer in Amazon's series Jack Ryan

Tom Clancy, the prolific author of bestsellers about war and espionage, died five years ago, but spinoffs set in the universe he created have continued to come out at a rate of about two per year, with Clancy's name appearing more prominently than the real authors' names and the titles of the books. Even in death, it seems, Tom Clancy won't slow down.

Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan never stops running, either—even to let its characters catch a breath and explain themselves to one another. Across Europe, the Middle East, and back at home in the United States, they are a blur of constant motion. Jack Ryan—now played by John Krasinski, best known for his years on NBC's *The Office*—is an updated version of the character Clancy created in his first book, *The Hunt for Red October*, back in 1984. In the original Cold War novels, Ryan began as a CIA analyst dragged despite himself into bullets-flying situations involving the Soviets. In the later, post-Cold War novels, Ryan faced off against different malefactors while rising absurdly through government ranks; he eventually becomes the president of the United States. The various screen incarnations of the character—memorably played by Alec Baldwin and Harrison Ford, forgettably by Ben Affleck and Chris Pine—started out relatively faithful to the books but over time have increasingly been adapted to the changing world situation.

In the new Amazon series, Ryan is again a low-level CIA wonk, working in the agency's terror, finance, and arms division. He has noticed a series of curious financial transactions involving Mousa bin Suleiman, a terror-cell leader based in Syria. Ryan bucks his new boss to cut Suleiman off from his finances—forcing Suleiman to go underground and accelerate his devious plot. Without revealing too many spoilers, the story that unfolds over the first season's eight episodes involves the assassination of a Catholic priest in France, a church bombing, and the threat of attack by weapons of mass destruction.

If Alec Baldwin's smart-but-bewildered Jack Ryan represented end-of-Cold-War America, and Kiefer Sutherland's hypercompetent Jack Bauer in Fox's decadelong hit series *24* represented the aggressive assuredness of war-on-terror America, this new take on Clancy's character is well suited for our moment of persistent terror threats amid uncertain international leadership. Krasinski is ill-served by writing that rarely gives his character the opportunity to think through the intelligence and reach reasoned conclusions about it. Admirers of the Clancy books and even the first three movies will recall the enormous difficulty analysts like Ryan had in hunting down actionable intelligence; one of the joys of the books and the movies was in following their laborious trail of reasoning. In Amazon's *Jack Ryan*, though, we don't get to see the thinking unfold; we just move from one hot lead to another. Krasinski's Ryan starts out the first episode explaining a bit about what international banking transactions can reveal, but by the end of the season, he is prone to inappropriate outbursts.

Clancy's books were not known as deep character studies. Neither is the new show, although we do get some sense of Ryan as a person: a retired Marine badly wounded in a chopper attack in Afghanistan, a former finance guy, and practically a Boy Scout when it comes to his personal integrity—which well suits Krasinski's congenitally honest and down-to-earth demeanor. There aren't many well-fleshed-out relationships. Ryan flirts with and starts dating a doctor (played by Abbie Cornish); her specialty in infectious diseases becomes important over the course of the show. But the most interesting relationship in the show is the one Ryan has with his new boss, Jim Greer. This character is loosely based on the Jim Greer of Clancy's books, an

AMAZON STUDIOS

Nicholas H. Loya is a writer living in Annapolis.

admiral-turned-CIA-official depicted by James Earl Jones in the first three movies. In the Amazon series, Greer is a hard-charging intelligence official who only landed atop Ryan's division as a demotion. He is played by a salty Wendell Pierce, best known for his years as a Baltimore detective on *The Wire*; Pierce brings a certain buddy-cop feel to the role of Greer. The show's creators have decided to make Greer a convert to Islam, one of several strange wrinkles intended to highlight that culture, religion, and socioeconomic status do not point clearly to good or evil.

In the opening episodes, Ryan protests weakly when Greer whisks him across the world to join in interrogating a captured member of Suleiman's terror cell. The Yemeni black site to which they fly embodies much of what the public has heard about in recent decades, complete with American government personnel using foreign soil (and Toby Keith music) to pry intelligence from enemy combatants. When the base comes under attack at the end of the first episode, Ryan transforms from a mild-mannered analyst into full-fledged action hero. The transition is so quick and so complete that it undermines any sense of the character as an analyst dragged into the muck. "For a guy who works behind a desk, you seem to like the field," a French cop later tells him. "I think you have everyone fooled. I think you are a wolf."

As an extended action flick—sustained by bursts of manic energy and little talking, shifting from crisis to crisis—*Jack Ryan* loses clarity of purpose. But two major subplots bring to life some of the strange and sad aspects of the fight against terrorism.

In one, we see a drone operator based outside Las Vegas grappling with his profession. Victor Polizzi (John Magaro) is troubled by the deadly strikes he executes on the other side of the globe. He and one of his operator buddies have a deal in which she gives him a buck for each successful strike; he now has more than a hundred. Depressed and drinking, he takes all these dollar bills and gambles with them—surreally making $29,000. After a sexual misadventure, he returns to work a few days later to find that one of his successful strikes was really just an innocent man going about his day in Syria; Polizzi must bear the burden of having killed this man and taken him from his family. Collateral damage is addressed in *Jack Ryan* as alternately necessary-but-evil or soul-destroying, depending on how great the potential harm; for Polizzi, this grim incident is in the latter category.

Harrison Ford, right, as Jack Ryan and Willem Dafoe as John Clark in Clear and Present Danger *(1994)*

The other subplot involves Suleiman's wife, Hanin (Dina Shihabi). Focused on protecting her children from her husband and his underlings, she flees the family compound with some of her kids only to find that life as a refugee does not carry the same privileges as wife of an important terrorist. A distraught Suleiman sends fighters to recover Hanin, one of whom attempts to assault her. Hanin's subplot and Polizzi's intertwine and then connect to the main Ryan-Greer storyline in a series of grim moral compromises that eventually has Ryan facing off with a Turkish sex trafficker. "You don't like me," he says to Ryan. "You think you're the good guy, I'm the bad guy. Maybe you're right. But maybe, if I was born in a nice city in America. … I could be the good guy, too. Geography is destiny."

This comment could stand as a summary of this season's take on radicalism: Had villains not been born where they were, they too could be redeemed. This morally equivocal emphasis on characters being determined by their surroundings is a disservice to the longstanding premise of Clancy's Jack Ryan. In the better novels and films, Ryan makes his transformation from analyst to hero not because he is a good shot or is willing to make morally messy decisions, but because he is smart, well-trained, and seeks to understand the motivations and desires of an apparent foe like Marko Ramius in *The Hunt for Red October*. This new Jack Ryan rarely comes close to that standard.

As an action thriller, *Jack Ryan* features impressive stunt work; as a Clancy-inspired series, it features lots of technical language. The show is enhanced, at least for viewers on computers and handheld devices, by Amazon's "X-Ray" function, which brings up a sidebar filled with trivia related to the plot and the production. For other movies and shows the X-Ray function can feel like a distraction, but it is weirdly well suited to this show packed with the kind of technical phrases and terms that Clancy's books had room to explain at length.

For the first few episodes, *Jack Ryan* is arguably the closest in spirit that audiences have come to a Tom Clancy novel adaptation. But as the action rises, the dialogue degrades and Ryan becomes much less interesting than supporting characters on either side of the action. The secret sauce of Tom Clancy's original Jack Ryan comes when he is interested in not only *what* his foe is doing but *why*. John Krasinski makes a fine action hero and Wendell Pierce is an excellent boss-sidekick, but the first season disappoints in its failure to showcase Jack Ryan as a thinker and not just a man of action. As Amazon prepares for the show's second season, already ordered, the writers would do well to remember that Jack Ryan has real brains, not just brawn. ♦

PARAMOUNT

B&A

Suburban Style

High fashion and low blows in a sequel to The Devil Wears Prada. **BY CHRISTINE ROSEN**

"Chick lit" is often unfairly maligned as feminine, lowbrow escapism, the literary equivalent of an episode of *The Real Housewives*. This overlooks its mild charms and (I daresay) occasional sociological insights.

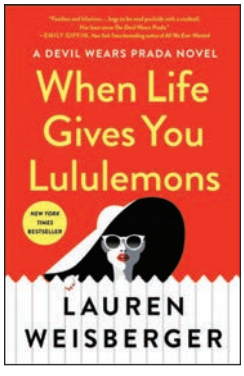
Luckily, Lauren Weisberger is happy to embrace the chick-lit market. Her new book, *When Life Gives You Lululemons*, is the perfect length and tone for a day of leisure reading (or, in my case, a day spent stuck on a delayed train).

The story focuses on Emily Charlton, the caustic, ambitious assistant to Miranda Priestly featured in Weisberger's 2003 bestseller, *The Devil Wears Prada* (respectively played in the screen adaptation by Emily Blunt and Meryl Streep). Some time has passed since Emily was at Miranda's beck and call at *Runway* magazine. She's now married, pushing 40, and a successful Los Angeles-based celebrity image consultant who fears she is losing her edge and her clients to a younger rival.

After a disastrous New Year's Eve, which takes her from a pornographic pool party in L.A. to the New York apartment of a Justin Bieber-like singer with impulse-control issues, she lands in the tony suburbs of Greenwich, Conn., at the home of her friend Miriam, a former attorney turned stay-at-home mom to three kids. Miriam enlists Emily to help Karolina, a famous former Victoria's Secret model who is married to a U.S. senator with presidential aspirations. Karolina has just been spectacularly and publicly dumped by the senator after being wrongly arrested and accused of driving under the influence with her stepson and other children in the car.

When Life Gives You Lululemons
by Lauren Weisberger
Simon & Schuster, 343 pp., $26.99

That's the narrative setup (and as the story progresses, it becomes clear that the DUI was in fact a setup) but managing Karolina's crisis is really just an excuse for Weisberger to unleash Emily on an unsuspecting suburban population. Like a Manolo-shod Margaret Mead, Emily stalks the local haunts and observes the ladies of Greenwich's 1 percent with anthropological rigor and a satirist's eye. She realizes immediately that their perfectly manicured homes and bodies mask deep insecurities, and the reader is soon exhausted by the sheer number and detailed descriptions of the alterations undertaken by these women to keep their husbands happy and their self-worth at optimal levels. The phrase "bespoke vagina" appears more than once, and a great deal of Xanax and late-afternoon cocktail consumption occurs throughout.



These are evidently the medications needed to cope with the socioeconomic one-upmanship of the elite. The Lululemon of the book's title refers to the expensive athleisure brand favored by the ladies of Greenwich, who spend a lot of their time working out and obsessing over their weight. This isn't a Dove "Real Beauty" ad: A celebrity is described as "getting older and fatter by the second"; another character is horrified by "the sensation of her stomach fat rolling over the waistband" of her extra-compression yoga pants; a pregnant woman "looked like she'd swallowed a whole goat." And if you don't care what a Chopard purse or Diptyque candle is, you will likely find the endless status-signaling of brand-name clothing and accessories tedious.

The main characters' insecurities, however, are humanizing. Miriam frets constantly about the 20 pounds she's gained since having children and wonders if her husband is cheating on her; Emily worries that her sex appeal is fading, but after impetuously sexting a Greenwich man she met at a party, she feels confused and rejected, not empowered; and Karolina still nurses disappointment about her inability to conceive a child. The conceit that Emily is the world's greatest crisis manager doesn't always hold up, of course: At one point she asks Karolina, "Do you want your hair to say 'drunk seductress' or 'dependable mom'? Because right now it's screaming the former."

But such quibbles don't detract from an entertaining story that contains some unsparing, accurate, and poignant observations about the realities of being an almost-middle-aged woman in the 21st century. Readers don't need to have the lavish homes or plastic-surgery budgets of the characters to relate to their anxieties about aging and the challenges of marriage and raising small children. Nonfiction writers like Pamela Druckerman have been exploring similar themes in recent books such as *There Are No Grown-Ups*.

There is also something satisfying about the twist Weisberger offers on the classic tale of the *male* midlife crisis. In the traditional story, women are the victims of men; in Weisberger's book, they are triumphant (albeit often quite tipsy) and ultimately sympathetic. It's a lively, funny, and at times uncomfortably honest portrait of middle age and female friendship, even if the elitist Greenwich wonderland of pressed-juice bars and shopping and SoulCycle classes is not at all the way most of us live now. ♦

Christine Rosen is managing editor of The Weekly Standard.

"John Dowd was convinced that President Trump would commit perjury if he talked to special counsel Robert S. Mueller III. So, on Jan. 27, the president's then-personal attorney staged a practice session to try to make his point."
—Washington Post, September 4, 2018

PARODY

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 27, 2018
OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT (cont'd):

behind her ears!

MR. DOWD: Honestly, Mr. President, I would take that part out.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: That's what *she* said!

MR. DOWD: Okay, moving right along. On July 8, 2017, aboard Air Force One, you crafted the response for your son, Don Jr., regarding his meeting with the Russians. Is that right?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Was it a good response? Because if it was, I'll say yes. If it wasn't, I'll say it was Reince.

MR. DOWD: The letter said the meeting in June 2016 was primarily about adoption. But you knew the meeting was about getting dirt on your opponent, Hillary Clinton.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: It was Reince.

MR. DOWD: On *Meet the Press*, your own lawyer Rudolph Giuliani said the meeting was "originally for the purpose of getting information about Clinton." Do you agree?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Rudy got hypnotized by Chuck Todd's sleepy eyes, which is why I call him "Sleepy Eyes" Chuck Todd. "You're getting sleepy!" I sure am and so is the rest of America, which is why no one is watching his fake news show on that failing network. Someone revoke their license!

MR. DOWD: So you're saying you didn't know this meeting was about getting information on Secretary Clinton?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: I told you he was hypnotized. You gotta watch out for Ol' Sleepy Eyes—he's good. But he's no David Copperfield, believe me. David's a terrific guy, I hired him for my daughter's birthday party. He made the Statue of Liberty disappear. I'd pay him a million dollars to make this investigation disappear or at the very least Jeff Sessions!

MR. DOWD: Okay, I think we're done here.