

'BIMBO ERUPTIONS'
REVISITED
JOSHUA KENDALL

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Ratcheting Up the Incivility

BY BARTON SWAIM



Barton Swaim

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Least of the Mohicans

Readers will know the background already: Elizabeth Warren claimed to be Native American while she was a law professor at Harvard despite (a) appearing about as Anglo-white as one can appear and (b) having scant evidence that her claim of Native American heritage was true. She cited family lore about being Cherokee and having “high cheekbones” as proof of her heritage. Donald Trump memorably dubbed her “Pocahontas” (the original conservative joke was Fauxcahontas) and said he would donate \$1 million if she could prove she was Native American.

Warren finally produced that proof and now demands that Trump pay up.

While she can point to no specific ancestor or tribe, according to genetic test results released by Warren to the *Boston Globe*, the Massachusetts senator did in fact have a Native American ancestor . . . between 6 and 10 generations back. Her Native American ancestry is so distant, it turns out, that her closest Native American ancestor might actually have been Pocahontas. She is 1/64th Native American at most, and may

be as little as 1/1024th Native American.

In other words, she ain’t Native American, as the term is normally understood. Of course, that didn’t stop her fans in the media from pretending the test vindicated her preposterous claim: “Elizabeth Warren Fights Trump’s ‘Pocahontas’ Taunt with DNA Test Proving Native American Roots,” ran a *Daily Beast* headline. “Elizabeth Warren releases DNA results indicating she has Native American heritage,” announced NBC News. Commentators for the *Washington Post* and *Slate*, meanwhile, sidestepped the central fact of the story—namely that Warren once again looks like a fool—and preferred to insist that the “Pocahontas” nickname is somehow a racial slur.

Millions of ordinary Americans can of course claim as much Native American heritage as Warren and

wouldn’t think to trade on such a meager connection—much less contribute a plagiarized recipe to a cookbook called *Pow Wow Chow*, as Warren once did. The Cherokee Nation, for its part, issued a statement saying Warren’s stunt “makes a mockery out of DNA tests and its legitimate uses while also dishonoring legitimate tribal governments and their citizens, whose ancestors are well documented and whose heritage is proven.”

The funniest part of the whole silly dispute is that Warren thought

she could silence the jokes about her once and for all by revealing “evidence” that, when looked at for more than five seconds, proved her claim was laughable. Like many a politician before her, she seems to think that if she keeps defending herself from ridicule, the charge will go away. It won’t. She is Pocahontas, in perpetuity. ♦



Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others

Ordinarily THE SCRAPBOOK enjoys writing about the stupid things associated with modern politics and culture. It’s a touch irritating, though, to have to spend time and energy insisting that obviously true things are, in fact, true. Things like the differences between men and women.

In this instance we’re thinking of Rachel McKinnon, the College of Charleston professor who on October 14 won a women’s world championship cycling event in Los Angeles. Congratulations and all that, but McKinnon was born male. That McKinnon has a performance advantage because of that isn’t debatable.



The champ

Take a look at the photo of McKinnon on the podium after the race, standing about a head taller and

considerably more muscular than the two female runners-up.

Some have suggested that the playing field could be equaled a bit if transgender athletes were put on testosterone blockers, but McKinnon believes, according to one media account, that “subjecting trans women to testosterone blocking violates their human rights.” So if a female athlete takes a performance enhancing drug—testosterone injections, say—she is disqualified. But a male who naturally possesses much higher testosterone levels is allowed to compete against other women so long as he considers himself a woman. Got that?

“Focusing on performance advantage is largely irrelevant because this

TOP: GARY LOCKE. BOTTOM: VIA TWITTER

is a rights issue,” McKinnon explains. “We shouldn’t be worried about trans people taking over the Olympics. We should be worried about their fairness and human rights instead.”

Or maybe we should be worried that we’re turning into idiots who don’t know the difference between a woman and a big strapping guy. ♦

Domo Arigato, Ms. Roboto

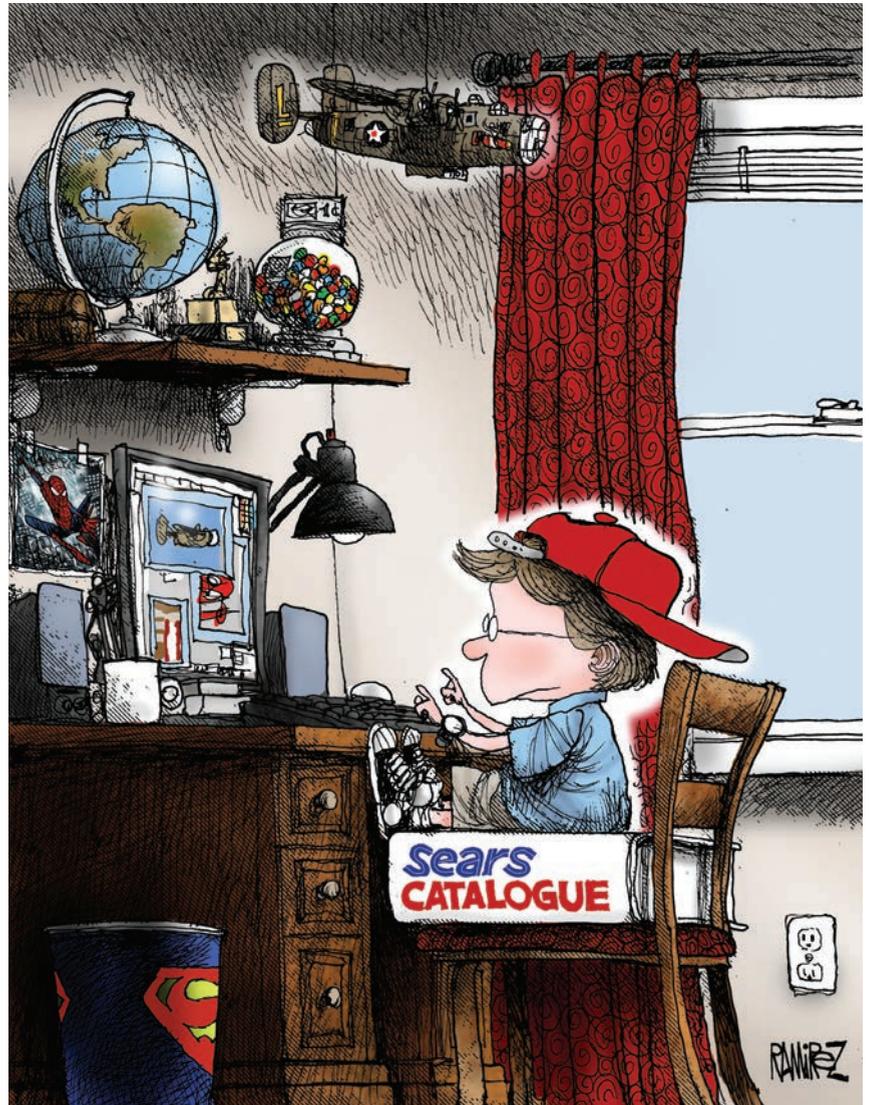
By the way, did you know we’re not supposed to notice the difference between male and female robots? In this month’s *Wired* magazine, we learn about the pressing question of whether we should assign certain gender traits to certain kinds of robots. Why do we care about this infinitesimal non-issue? Because “what we make of the machine reflects what we are.” Which means, in turn, that “we have the very real opportunity to screw up robots by infusing them with exaggerated, overly simplified gender stereotypes.”

The concern, though, isn’t with the robots, which the writer mercifully acknowledges don’t have genders, but with humans. The problem, we’re told, is that the manufacturers and programmers of robots tend to infuse their productions with “gendered” characteristics—voice, appearance, and so forth—according to the function those robots are supposed to perform. So, for instance, they may assign a scary male voice and broad shoulders to a security robot, or a friendly female voice and slim body to a receptionist robot.

In case you’re not following the logic of our new cisgendered wonderland, the idea is that we should give robots counterintuitive gender traits in the hope that we thereby influence human attitudes to sex roles. If we give the security droid a sweet girlie voice and the receptionist one a big bass-baritone, we’ll ... be better off.



VIA YOUTUBE



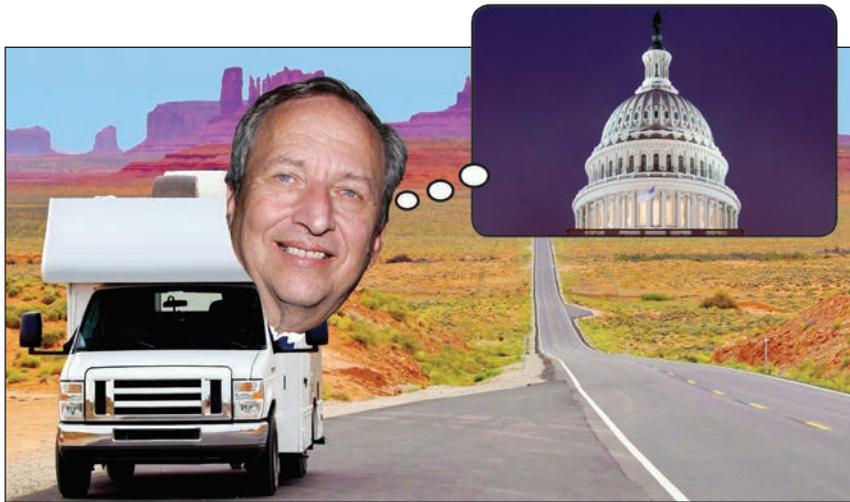
“It’d be great if somehow we could use robots as a tool to better understand ourselves,” says Julie Carpenter, a consultant who studies robot-human interaction, “and maybe even influence some positive change.” We are admittedly traditionalist on such topics, but it doesn’t sound to us

as though the people who care about robots’ gender traits are trying to “better understand” the human species. Change it, maybe. Or confuse it. But understanding is not the goal here. ♦

Larry Sees the World

Occasionally one reads an op-ed in one of the country’s big newspapers from an author, usually a Washington insider of some variety, who decided to get out and see the country he loves. The op-ed writer has taken a road trip across the country and wishes to tell his metropolitan readers about the amazing things he saw. The latest essay in this genre comes to us courtesy of Larry Summers. It ran in the *Financial Times* under the headline “I Discovered the Rest of America on My Summer Holiday.”

The New Haven-born Summers—professor at Harvard’s Kennedy



School of Government, former director of the National Economic Council, former president of Harvard University, former Treasury secretary, former chief economist of the World Bank—drove with his wife from Chicago to Portland, Ore. “We drove for two weeks on two-lane roads,” he writes, and passed through Dubuque, Cody, and Bozeman.

Golly, we hope he sewed his name to the inside of his underwear before he left New Haven!

There wasn’t much of a point to the op-ed except to say that most people in the hinterland don’t care that much about what’s happening in Washington from day to day (the things you learn!) and that “more appreciation of that on the part of those who lead our society could strengthen and unify our country” (duly noted). But the piece managed to provoke us all the same. We supply a representative passage:

Starting with the U.S. government’s 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France, and the federally funded Lewis and Clark expedition that was the first to cross the American west, the free market had little to do with the settling and the economic progress of the American west. The economy of many of the places we visited was the creation of the U.S. government. Depression-era programmes paid for power plants, built hiking trails, and helped cut roads through mountains. Western tourist economies are based around national parks, forests and monuments, and government land grants funded many of the universities.

We’re not sure we understand Sumners correctly, but he seems to believe that the “free market had little to do with the settling and economic progress of the American west” because the government bought the land from France. What exactly is “economic progress” if not the activity of the free market? Ah well. Leave it to one of our elite central bankers to take a road trip across the country, see the grandeur of its landscape, and encounter the rugged simplicity and exquisite heterogeneity of its people—and conclude from all of this that the U.S. government is really great. ♦

Sentences We Didn’t Finish

‘President Trump keeps saying that Democrats want to model the United States on Venezuela. But the only one actually trying to turn us into Venezuela is Trump. As stock markets plummeted Wednesday and Thursday, Trump lashed out at . . .’ (Catherine Rampell, *Washington Post*, October 12). ♦



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TOP: SCENE; BIGSTOCK; SUMMERS, MIKE COPPOLA / NEW YORKER; GETTY; BOTTOM: BIGSTOCK

Socket to Me

I have a new set of socket wrenches. If you knew me well, you might not be completely surprised, but nevertheless, this is a first for me.

It had been an event-filled weekend, complete with the failure of my car in a strange town; an appearance at a book festival; the transfer of three dogs into a rental car; four ferry rides; and a memorably unpleasant trip home, mostly from dog-related incidents. (I sold a lot of books, though.)

The upshot was that I needed to return the rental car to its home base 160 miles away. I called a sixth-grade classmate and announced that I was about to impose on our friendship. We travel well together, so with her usual grace she agreed to cancel her plans and follow me up north, in case my car was not ready. As it turned out, the car was not in a state to be driven and was not worth a new transmission. We left it there, and decided to make the most of our trip. My friend shopped. I watched the Brewers game—at a brew pub, appropriately. We met up and headed home.

It had been raining off and on all day and began to come down in sheets. We had a long drive ahead of us but were making good time, almost to Green Bay, when the engine light came on. “It’s probably an air filter or something,” I said. But then the power began to fail, and warning lights promising dire consequences lit up.

The rain made it difficult to see, but we made it to the closest oasis, the usual roadside combination gas station and quick-mart. My friend called her husband. “It’s done this before. You probably should disconnect the battery and reset the computer,” he added helpfully. We looked at each other in silence.

“Go inside,” he coached, “and see if they have a wrench.” But the closest thing they had to a wrench was

a Green Bay Packers bottle opener.

Unencumbered by tools of any kind—although I was secretly tempted by the store’s display of cheeseheads—we waited in the car as the rain poured down, hoping the engine would reset itself so we could proceed. Amazingly, it did. We set off again.

The rainstorm was of the monsoon variety, and my friend was nervous about driving, so she pulled over on an entrance ramp, and we performed a quick switch. Neither of us is in the



first bloom of youth, and my friend had loosened the top of her jeans to be more comfortable on the ride. As she ran around the car, the jeans began a slow slide downward. Soaked to the skin, we began laughing hysterically. My friend’s husband was still on the phone: “What’s all that cackling?”

We made it another 20 miles before the engine light came on again, and we knew it was a matter of minutes before we lost power. At least we were close to a truck stop. More hopeful this time, I went inside to see whether there was a tool we could use to disconnect the battery. I won’t go into the process of taking pictures of the battery connection and of the available tools and texting

them to friend’s husband. We were in the middle of rural Wisconsin, and the signal wasn’t good, so I made an executive decision. I splurged on a \$9.99 set of socket wrenches.

I ran back through the rain, got back into the car, tore off the plastic wrapper, and opened the case. They were things of beauty: lined up by size, metric in one row, English in the other. There were perfect little niches for each socket and three different wrench-attachment thingies. They were pristine and shiny, and I felt oddly pleased by them. All this for \$9.99.

“What can’t I touch while I’m taking the battery cable off?” I asked, but the phone signal had gone dead.

Abandoned by technology, we opened the hood and stared into the engine compartment. The battery was accessible, right in the front. Feeling like Tom Hanks in *Apollo 13*, I rested the wrench case on the front of the car and tested to find the right socket. My friend’s husband had been right: It was a 10 millimeter. Battery cable disconnected and reattached without incident, the car started up without a warning light.

Still fairly wet, we drove home the rest of the way in the pouring rain, singing songs from our childhood, cloaked in a heady sense of accomplishment. Friend’s husband, waiting in his pickup with the trailer attached, just in case, met us in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart, and we followed him home.

To be perfectly clear, I understand that removing a battery cable requires neither brilliance nor expertise. But everything in life is about context. We had stared adversity in the face—and won.

This morning I sat at the kitchen counter, drinking coffee and regarding my new set of sockets with a warm sense of pride. It’s unlikely I’ll ever use them again, but they will look nice in the trunk of the new car I’m going to have to buy. Some people have souvenir cheeseheads. I have souvenir wrenches.

J. F. RIORDAN

Don't Punish Republicans

A peculiar argument has begun to circulate on the right: Conservatives who care about the future of conservatism should not only refuse to vote for Republicans who share Donald Trump's worst traits on November 6, they should support Democrats across the board. Doing so, this reasoning goes, would precipitate major midterm electoral losses for the GOP and force the party to rethink its increasing loyalty to the president.

For the president's skeptics—a description that applies to us—there is a certain logic to this case. While the Trump presidency has seen gains for conservatives in a few specific policy areas, such as taxes, deregulation, and the judiciary, in many more ways he's done lasting damage to both the modern American right and the country's political culture.

Even by the standards of a politician, Trump lies at an alarming pace. He's taken the existing divisions in the country and, with malice and intention, made them worse. He's elevated and empowered some of America's most determined enemies and picked needless fights with some of our closest allies. He not only failed to “drain the swamp,” but the corruption and cronyism of his own people have made it even more fetid. He's largely abandoned America's role as leader of a rules-based postwar international order.

Rather than discussions about the urgent need to reform entitlements, our national debate today is dominated by pay-offs to porn stars, fiddled tax returns, and conspiracy theories about the motives of political foes. Many people share the blame for this ugly state of affairs, but few bear as much of it as Donald Trump.

Is the answer to punish the president by voting against Republicans? It is true that severe GOP losses would have consequences both broad and specific in Congress. But there's no guarantee a “blue wave” on November 6 would change the minds of Trump's boosters in Congress or that Democrats winning the House of Representatives and attempting to impeach Trump would oblige Republicans to acknowledge their folly in allowing such a man to lead their party. It's as likely they would circle the wagons and tie themselves further to the flailing chief executive.

And it could mean the loss of exactly the kind of conservative elected officials who can help the country through these challenging times. Should conservatives in Wisconsin's 8th Congressional District vote against Mike Gallagher, a combat veteran with a deep understanding of our most critical national security challenges? Would right-leaning voters in New York's 21st Congressional District advance conservatism by supporting Tedra Cobb, running on a platform

of “social justice” and disarming the police, over Elise Stefanik, a young, charismatic conservative?

The present-day Democrats are a warning against any notion of sending a message to Trump by depriving worthy Republicans of their seats. Democratic senators acted appallingly throughout the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation, elevating political exhibitionism above even the pretense of searching for truth or arriving at a just outcome. A Democratic takeover of the Senate would lead to a blockade of constitutionalist federal judges. At least 16 Democratic senators have come out for Bernie Sanders's idea of “Medicare for all”—that is, a full-on federal takeover of the health care industry. Democratic presidential hopefuls are utterly beholden to the political correctness of left-wing activists. In foreign policy, the Obama presidency left his party in a state of moral paralysis, willing neither to back our allies nor confront our enemies.

Many conservatives have sharp differences with the Trump administration on trade, North Korea, entitlement reform, and much else. And the president's character and deportment are as much a problem now as they were two years ago. But Trump is not on the ballot in 2018, and an empowered Democratic party can be counted on to ride roughshod over every conservative policy aim in the next Congress.

There is no reason for Republican voters to dismiss accomplished conservatives in order to send some nebulous and sure-to-be-misinterpreted message to Trump or the Republican National Committee. Voters, as always, should vote for the best candidate. ♦

Sasse Looks Homeward

Americans aren't getting along so well. Surveys suggest that we are as polarized as we've been for 150 years. “We can't fix this with new legislation,” writes Nebraska senator Ben Sasse in *Them: Why We Hate Each Other and How to Heal*. “We don't need a new program, a new department, one more election.” “If we could wave a magic wand and make all of the political acrimony disappear,” he adds, “it might bankrupt some of the cable news networks, but it wouldn't do much to fill the hole millions

of Americans feel in their lives right now.” Sasse’s book is an attempt to explain why, despite the country’s unparalleled prosperity, things seem so grim.

He takes a page out of *Democracy in America*. Describing his travels here in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of a country rich in associational life, “associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive,” that cut across class and creed. These types of associations build and preserve healthy relationships, Tocqueville thought, between those who come from different backgrounds and have different views about the way things ought to be. In *Them*, Sasse writes:

What Tocqueville discovered, much to his surprise, was that America’s power came from the bottom up, in what he called “voluntary associations.” He observed that in town after town after town, people discovered something they needed or wanted to do, and they didn’t wait for the government to give them permission, or instructions, or funding. They just got together and did it. . . . It was not Washington, D.C., that gave America its vitality; it was (updating Tocqueville for the twenty-first century) the Rotary Club, 4-H fairs, and GoFundMe campaigns that raise money online for victims of catastrophes like Hurricane Harvey.

Many of the seemingly insoluble troubles afflicting Americans, Sasse notes, stem from the decline in the

families and societies and associations and churches and synagogues that traditionally kept Americans together. The family unit has fractured. An overwhelming majority of children are born out of wedlock. Church attendance has cratered. Friendships, with technology and increased mobility, have fragmented. Politics has become the center of life instead of family, church, sports, and clubs. These associations once mediated between citizen and citizen, citizen and government, and all at lower stakes than the national stage.

Tip O’Neill’s famous dictum that “all politics is local” has been inverted: All politics is now national. In no small part, the rise of bad-incentive-driven “politainment”—not just on cable news but across all media—has created outrage on a national scale where little or none should exist.

Sasse sees what’s gone wrong and suggests how we might make it better. The remedy is at home: in our neighborhoods, our communities, and our houses of worship. Our divisions won’t be overcome by arguments—or Facebook posts or tweets—but by associating with, accepting, and knowing “the other”—knowing *Them*. This isn’t the kind of book that’s likely to light up cable news or set the talking heads aflutter. But Sasse’s book is a serious one, and we hope its author will consider leading not just our national conversation at this dangerous moment but also the country itself. ♦

Will You Vote for Jobs?

THOMAS J. DONOHUE

PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

In just over two weeks, voters will cast their ballots in one of the most important elections in recent memory. The entire House of Representatives, one-third of the Senate, 36 governorships, and a slew of state and local offices will be up for grabs—along with the power to set the agenda for the next two-plus years.

This means that the state of our economy, as well as many of the issues that accelerate or undermine growth, is also on the ballot.

It’s worth taking a look back at 2016 to consider what’s been accomplished and what’s at stake. In the last national election, Americans voted for the most pro-growth Congress in many years. With the help of the administration, and at the urging of the business community, elected officials delivered long-elusive victories on tax reform, regulatory

relief, policies supporting responsible energy development, and more.

The result? Much faster GDP growth, up about 50% from a rate of below 2% to near 3%. An unemployment rate of 3.7%, the lowest since 1969. Layoffs at a 50-year low. The fastest growth in manufacturing jobs since the mid-1980s. A surplus of 650,000 open jobs. Rising wages. Higher business confidence and record-high small business optimism.

We’re urging business leaders, employees, and anyone who wants to see our economy continue on this upward trajectory to vote for the candidates who support policies for greater growth in this high-stakes election. If the pro-growth agenda is halted or stymied, we could be looking at a very different picture next year and beyond.

Gains in regulatory relief could be reversed, and our energy industry could once again be shackled with rules and regulations that put thousands of U.S. jobs at risk. Policies that are antithetical

to a free enterprise-driven society could gain traction, including single payer health care and the nationalization of business. A “you didn’t build that” mentality could reemerge, depressing America’s entrepreneurial drive. And endless politically motivated oversight hearings could dish up more distractions and divisions on Capitol Hill.

No one can afford to sit this election out. As of today, early voting is already underway in 27 states. Other states will follow in the coming days. It’s not too late to learn about the candidates in each race and the issues at hand. We encourage voters to visit VoteForJobs.com to get information on voter registration, polling locations, and early and absentee voting.

The bottom line is that elections have consequences. The single most powerful tool each one of us has is our voice and our vote. In this vital election, every vote in every race matters.



Learn more at
uschamber.com/abovethefold.

FRED BARNES

What Trump knows that Obama didn't

We now know why President Obama had to struggle so hard to spur the economy and allow it to grow more than 2 percent a year. And that was the high-water mark. In the last quarter of his presidency, growth had slipped to 1.5 percent. Today it's obvious what Obama's problem was. He had the wrong policies, lots of them.

How do we know this? Obama's successor, Donald Trump, and the Republican Congress reversed Obama's policies. The result, from the day Trump was elected, has been a more robust economy. Nearly 4 million jobs have been added, and unemployment has dipped to the lowest point in nearly a half-century. Let's compare what Obama did with what Trump is doing.

Obama raised taxes. Trump cut them. Obama was a regulatory zealot. Trump is passionate about deregulation. Obama's Clean Power Plan killed the coal industry. Trump is reviving it. Obama downgraded the role of entrepreneurs and free markets in boosting the economy and lauded the wonderful things government does.

Obama's biggest breakthrough was the Affordable Care Act, a big step toward a single-payer, government-run health care system. Trump got rid of the individual mandate that forced everyone to buy expensive insurance or be fined—a big step toward a return to free markets in health care.

The entire Obama economic agenda was “systematically reversed,” says economics writer Stephen Moore, a Trump adviser in the 2016 campaign. He and Arthur Laffer are authors of the new book *Trumponomics: Inside the America First Plan to Revive Our Economy*.

Presidents love to tout their achieve-

ments. In Trump's case, a White House report issued last week said his administration had produced 289 accomplishments in 20 months. We all know Trump exaggerates and brags. But many of the economic gains were impressive, especially the fact that job openings outnumber job seekers for the first time on record.

Being a liberal himself, Obama relied on liberal economists. They led him astray, as they did President Ken-



Trump exaggerates and brags, but many of his economic gains are impressive, especially the fact that job openings outnumber job seekers for the first time on record.

neddy in the 1960s. They favored higher taxes and increased spending, policies that caused an economic downturn.

Kennedy was smarter than Obama. He finally turned to his Republican Treasury secretary C. Douglas Dillon, who recommended tax cuts. JFK grabbed onto them and the result was an economic boom, the Roaring '60s.

President Reagan's advisers persuaded him that tax cuts—championed by Jack Kemp—would do far more for the economy than spending cuts. They even used JFK's as an example. The sweeping tax cuts of 1981 brought about years of strong growth known as the Reagan Revolution.

Trump didn't need to be convinced. He and Republicans on Capitol Hill, led by Paul Ryan, believed it was time

for deep cuts in the corporate tax rate. Trump initially proposed a 15 percent rate before settling for 21 percent.

The Obama school of economists and commentators, embarrassed by anemic results, argued that economic growth was stuck, perhaps permanently, at 2 percent annually. That meant Obama was doing the best any president could do. Certainly far better than Trump, about whom they issued dire predictions:

■ “We are very probably looking at a global recession, with no end in sight. I suppose we could get lucky somehow. But on economics, as on everything else, a terrible thing has just happened.” Paul Krugman, Nobel winner and *New York Times* columnist.

■ “Under Trump, I would expect a protracted recession to begin within 18 months. The damage would be felt far beyond the United States.” Larry Summers, former Harvard president and Treasury secretary.

■ “President Trump could destroy the world economy.” *Washington Post* editorial.

■ “Trump's budget assumes 3% annual growth. . . . That's extremely unlikely.” Jason Furman, chairman of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers.

■ “If Trump thinks he can get more than 3% growth, he's dreaming.” Michael Hiltzik, Pulitzer-winning economics writer for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Wrong, wrong, and wrong. Trump's economy is expected to grow by more than 3 percent this year.

Barack Obama is a proud man and it was somewhat endearing when he stooped to claim he had created the ground on which Trump's economy was growing. The media sided with Obama, no surprise.

Trump counterpunched—no surprise there either. “If the Democrats had won the election of 2016, GDP

which was about 1% and going down, would have been minus 4% instead of up 4.2%,” Trump tweeted. The 4.2 percent he referred to was the growth rate for the second quarter of 2018.

“I opened up our beautiful economic engine with Regulation and Tax Cuts,” Trump wrote. “Our system was choking and would have

been made worse. Still plenty to do!”

Trump is correct about the condition of the economy in late 2016. It was weakening. The shift in economic policy to the right changed the direction of growth from down to up, just as it had with JFK and with Reagan. That’s what tax cuts deliver and tax hikes don’t. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

Nikki Haley and her illustrious predecessors on the East River

I was awakened out of my reverie the other morning by a shocking news flash: Nikki Haley was resigning from her post as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations! According to initial reports, the envoy’s announcement was “sudden” and “unexpected” and “caught Washington”—certainly caught me—“off guard.”

Given the protocol of breaking news stories, and the breathless way they’re reported, I assumed that Ambassador Haley, who is generally regarded as one of the shinier lights in the Trump administration, had reached the limits of her endurance with our mercurial president and quit overnight. I guessed that Donald Trump had blundered into some diplomatic briar patch, making Haley’s thankless task more burdensome than usual, or that Haley had (at long last) recovered her conscience after an inflammatory White House tweet.

I pictured the demure, dignified ex-governor of South Carolina firing off a more-sorrowful-than-angry letter of resignation, thanking the president for the opportunity to serve but letting everyone know that she’d reached the end of her tether.

Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I switched on the television to find Ambassador Haley and Presi-

dent Trump seated beside one another in the Oval Office, trading compliments and downplaying the significance of her impending departure. It turned out that far from being “sudden,” Haley’s intention had been com-



Nowadays, the average citizen is unlikely to be able to identify the secretary general of the organization, but the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. still enjoys a certain celebrity.

municated to Trump as long ago as the spring and was, therefore, “unexpected” only by the assembled press corps. She had not, as the bulletins suggested, marched (or been shoved) out of her office onto the pavement but planned to step down at the end of the year, three months hence.

At this point, speculation switched immediately from why Haley was leaving to what she intended to do as a private citizen. Far be it from me to have the slightest idea: She has already been a two-term governor of her home state, both of whose incumbent senators (Lindsey Graham, Tim Scott) seem

in place for the long haul. Perhaps she has a presidential campaign in mind, or another high-ranking post, or the presidency of something other than the United States.

In any case, Haley’s future seems bright. And the only conclusion I could draw with confidence about this episode was that the media are so intent on revealing discord in Trumpworld that a standard-issue news story with a happy ending was initially cast as a White House implosion.

What intrigues me about it, however, is not so much what it reveals about Nikki Haley as what it tells us about our complicated relationship with the U.N. Inasmuch as the United Nations, since its birth in the postwar euphoria of 1945, has fallen considerably in public esteem in the past seven decades, it is interesting to note that the American representatives remain, almost invariably, public figures of consequence. Nowadays, the average citizen is unlikely to be able to identify the secretary general of the organization—for the record, it’s António Guterres of Portugal—but the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. still enjoys a certain celebrity.

There are two reasons for this. The first is strictly vocational. Being the American representative to the world organization is, in practice, a signal of intent—why has the president appointed *this* person?—and a sign of the nominee’s status in political life. Some of our better-known envoys have been statesmen rewarded for past services: Henry Cabot Lodge (1953-60), Adlai Stevenson (1961-65), William Scranton (1976-77), Vernon Walters (1985-89), Richard Holbrooke (1999-2001), John Danforth (2004-05). Others have been professional diplomats capping distinguished careers: Charles Yost (1969-71), Donald McHenry (1979-81), Thomas Pickering (1989-92), John Negroponte (2001-04), Zalmay Khalilzad (2007-09).

A more intriguing category has been the appointee in mid-career whose tenure at the U.N. may be seen as a kind of proving ground. George H.W. Bush (1971-73), Madeleine Albright (1993-97), and John Bolton (2005-06) passed their respective tests; Andrew Young

(1977-79) and Bill Richardson (1997-98) were less successful. And in that sense, the alignment of the stars has a certain significance.

A natural opportunist like Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1975-76) shrewdly parlayed his brief diplomatic tenure into an unlikely campaign for the Senate. Moynihan had arrived at just the moment when public disenchantment with the United Nations—this was the era of the Zionism-is-racism resolution (1975)—was reaching critical mass. Accordingly, his performance as a bull in the U.N. china shop played well to American audiences, enabling him in the following year to fend off a left-wing challenger (Rep. Bella Abzug) in New York's Democratic primary and to defeat the Conservative incumbent (Sen. James Buckley) in the general election.

Sometimes, however, the cup is a poisoned chalice. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson's famous persuasive powers managed to induce Justice Arthur Goldberg to abandon his lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court and succeed the recently deceased Adlai Stevenson at the U.N. Whatever Goldberg may have thought (or been promised) about future prospects, his tenure coincided with the flood tide of the Vietnam war—and his career in public service essentially ended with LBJ's.

Which brings us to the second reason. Nikki Haley's success during the past two seasons has had little to do with diplomacy and everything to do with American policy. No one is under the illusion that the United States exercises anything resembling the influence it wielded at the U.N. a half-century ago or that Haley would have had much effect on the institution. In the present epoch, the point of being envoy is not to shape the United Nations but to represent the United States, emphatically and without apology, in the world forum.

Like her predecessor Jeane Kirkpatrick (1981-85), Haley has been a steady, skillful, and formidable advocate for the policies of the president who appointed her and for the interests of the country she represents. Whatever effect this has had on the General Assembly, Amba-

sador Haley's performance has been helpful to her patron, impressive to her colleagues, and deeply satisfactory to American opinion.

As it happens, Jeane Kirkpatrick's public career never advanced beyond her U.N. tenure. The jury is just being impaneled on Nikki Haley's. ♦

COMMENT ♦ ERIC FELTEN

How the elections will affect the investigations

Glenn Simpson did a grim march down a House hallway October 16 to a committee room where he invoked his Fifth Amendment right not to testify. The Fusion GPS honcho lacked the swagger of his previous congressional turns—he testified before a closed-door session of the Senate Judiciary Committee in August 2017 and again in November before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In the House testimony, Simpson bragged of the Boy Scout instincts that guided him and Christopher Steele in taking their oppo dossier on Donald Trump and Russia to the FBI in 2016. “The client didn't instruct us to do that,” he said. “It was viewed as reporting a crime in progress, sort of a citizenship obligation.”

Now, House Republicans continuing the investigation are suggesting that Simpson needed to take the Fifth because the crime in progress was his own testimony.

In his November 14, 2017, House interview, Simpson was asked whether he had ever “heard from anyone in the U.S. government in relation to [the Steele dossier] matters, either the FBI or the Department of Justice?” Simpson responded that he hadn't until after the election: “during the election, no.” But it turns out he had been in contact months before the election with associate deputy attorney general Bruce Ohr (whose wife Nellie worked for Fusion GPS). Simpson's claim that he hadn't heard from anyone at Justice before the election “is in direct contradiction to what Bruce Ohr told me under oath,” Texas Republican John Ratcliffe said on Fox Business. A

member of the House Judiciary Committee, Ratcliffe said, “I'm not surprised that Glenn Simpson is taking the Fifth. He probably should. He's in real legal jeopardy.”

It was a busy week for the Judiciary Committee and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, which are operating a joint investigation into “Decisions Made by DoJ in 2016.” House investigators on October 18 grilled the former FBI general counsel James Baker. Nellie Ohr was scheduled to testify the following day. Judiciary chairman Bob Goodlatte has tweeted that those witnesses are hardly the only ones he wants to hear from in the coming weeks. He's “invited” James Comey, Obama attorney general Loretta Lynch, former deputy attorney general Sally Yates, former deputy assistant attorney general Stuart Evans, former DoJ deputy chief for counterintelligence Richard Scott, and former head of public affairs at the bureau Michael Kortan. “Will subpoena them if necessary,” Goodlatte wrote.

Why the crush? In the House, one of the most significant powers that comes with a majority is the ability of committee chairmen to issue subpoenas. Goodlatte and Oversight Committee chairman Trey Gowdy are moving as fast as they can, knowing that Democrats stand a good chance of taking the House in the midterm elections.

What happens if Adam Schiff becomes chairman of House Intelligence, Elijah Cummings takes Oversight, and Jerrold Nadler helms the House Judiciary Committee? “Schiff is vowing to investigate Trump for money laundering if the House flips.

Cummings says he'll go after Trump for corruption, and Nadler says he'll pursue campaign finance violations," says a Republican aide involved in the Russia investigation. "Under Democrat control, it's crystal clear that every House committee will open permanent investigations to find a pretext to impeach the president."

Schiff has made it clear that a money-laundering investigation would focus on accusations about Trump and Russia: "There are serious and credible allegations the Russians may possess financial leverage over the president, including perhaps the laundering of Russian money through his businesses," Schiff wrote in the *Washington Post* last week. "It would be negligent to our national security not to find out." Needless to say, a House Intel Committee led by Adam Schiff will have very different priorities than the same committee led by Devin Nunes.

But what if, as polls suggest may happen, the GOP holds on to the upper chamber? Three Senate committees—Judiciary, Homeland Security, and Intelligence—have investigations of their own into the myriad issues raised by the Trump-Russia allegations. Aren't they in a position to pull on any investigative threads left dangling if Republicans lose the House?

Yes and no. Senate committees have all the investigative powers that House committees do and often more experienced investigative staff. But Senate rules "delegate to the chair and ranking minority member together the power to authorize subpoenas," in the words of the Congressional Research Service. Needing the buy-in of their ranking members to subpoena witnesses and documents, Senate committee chairmen are far more constrained than their House counterparts in what they can achieve unilaterally.

What will the investigative landscape look like if Republican efforts are focused in the Senate? Judiciary Committee chairman Chuck Grassley proved with the showdown over the

nomination of Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh that for all his folksy ways, he's formidable in a knife fight, as Fred Barnes has noted in these pages ("Chuck Grassley's Moment," September 3, 2018). Judiciary has already done an admirably thorough and transparent investigation into Donald Jr.'s Trump Tower meeting with a Russian lawyer promising dirt on Hillary Clinton. And on the Fusion GPS front, Grassley not only secured the first congressional testimony by Simpson, he and Lindsey



As one GOP House aide puts it, 'Under Democrat control, it's crystal clear that every House committee will open permanent investigations to find a pretext to impeach the president.'

Graham together officially called for the Department of Justice to consider prosecuting dossier author Steele for lying to the FBI.

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is doing its own oversight of the FBI, and committee chairman Ron Johnson has made it his mission to acquire key documents. FBI director Christopher Wray appeared before the committee this month, and Johnson pressed him on recent reports that during the 2016 campaign, the FBI's top lawyer met with Michael Sussmann, a partner at Perkins Coie, the law firm that funneled payment from the Clinton campaign to Fusion GPS. In all his document requests, Johnson has pushed hard for unnecessary redactions to be removed.

Richard Burr heads the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, where partisan rancor has been noticeably absent. The committee produced

this year, without fuss, the initial findings of its investigation into "Russian Targeting of Election Infrastructure." The summary of the report stayed so far away from politics that it mentioned neither Donald Trump nor Hillary Clinton.

Senate Intel may seem a little sleepy compared to its more combative counterparts, especially in the House. But that doesn't mean it hasn't advanced knowledge of the Russia affair in important ways. Most of the other congressional committees with an interest in Fusion GPS's efforts to spread the Trump/Russia collusion narrative have investigated Simpson's and Steele's extensive interactions with the FBI and the DoJ. By contrast, Burr's committee has dug into Steele's efforts during the election to spread his dossier around the State Department. Investigative staff looked through months of Foggy Bottom visitor logs and found that in the last days of the campaign, "Mr. Steele visited the State Department, briefing officials on the dossier in October 2016," according to Burr.

And what of the investigations not run from Capitol Hill? Robert Mueller has shown no tolerance for FBI misbehavior in his shop (the special counsel sent former FBI agent Peter Strzok packing without hesitation) but has apparently shown little interest in investigating questions of whether the FBI or Department of Justice abused their powers in investigating candidate, then president, Trump. That is a mandate, however, of DoJ inspector general Michael Horowitz. The IG produced this summer an impressive and thorough report documenting "Various Actions by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Justice in Advance of the 2016 Election." Horowitz's team is now looking at the controversial FISA warrant applications that allowed surveillance of Trump campaign adviser Carter Page and at the FBI's interactions with Steele. The inspector general's inquiry is the least likely to be affected, either in content or timing, by the outcome of the midterms.

As for Mueller, speculation abounds (as always) about what he

will do next and when. There are no few prognosticators predicting the special counsel will make some sort of

move shortly after the midterm elections are over. Then again, he may not want to rush things. ♦

COMMENT ♦ TERRY EASTLAND

Handicapping the prospects of a *Roe v. Wade* reversal

Concluding her Senate floor speech in behalf of Judge Brett Kavanaugh—her vote for him was the decisive one—Republican Susan Collins expressed “her fervent hope” that he “will work to lessen the divisions in the Supreme Court so that we have fewer 5-4 decisions and so that public confidence in our judiciary and our highest court is restored.”

This is a lot to ask of Kavanaugh, and while there might be fewer 5-4 decisions thanks to his efforts, the far more important question about his service will concern the fate of a single case, *Roe v. Wade* (1973), in which the Court created a constitutional

right to abortion extending through all nine months of pregnancy. About no other right did Collins say, “protecting this right is important to me.”

Roe was a 7-2 decision, the Court’s opinion written by Justice Harry Blackmun. The majority said that fetuses are not “persons in the whole sense.” Of course, if the majority had recognized that they are persons, period, they would have been persons with rights—including the right to life—that government is obliged to protect. Using dubious doctrine from the 1965 case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the majority instead created a right to abortion that was effectively absolute.

Roe did not immediately arouse organized opposition, but by the early 1970s the sides that have done battle ever since were solidifying. Together with the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857, which effectively created a consti-

tutional right to slavery and pushed the country to civil war, *Roe v. Wade* stands as the most divisive of the Court’s rulings. It has been divisive in every way—legally, politically, and



***Roe* has been divisive in every way—legally, politically, and socially. Morally, too: *Roe* makes possible a culture of prenatal death in which more than 60 million lives have been taken.**

socially. And morally, too: *Roe* makes possible a culture of prenatal death in which more than 60 million lives have been taken.

Abortion cases have been on the Court’s docket since the 1980s. Narrow majorities have upheld some regulations of the abortion right. In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) the Court reviewed regulations of that right from Pennsylvania. It was reported at the time that at least six justices disagreed with *Roe*. But the case was not overruled, notwithstanding its serious defects—including its lack of support in constitutional text and history, and the fact it took from the people their right to decide abortion policy. *Roe* nullified the disparate abortion laws of 46 states.

In her floor speech Senator Collins did not concern herself with that aspect of *Roe*, but instead discussed

Kavanaugh’s views of *Griswold*, which voided a state law banning the use and sale of contraceptives. The Court relied then on the right of privacy that eight years later, in *Roe*, it would expand to include the abortion right. No nominee of a Republican president has dared to challenge *Griswold* since Robert Bork did in 1987, as a failed Reagan nominee. It is therefore understandable that Kavanaugh stayed far away from any fight over the case. Collins said Kavanaugh had told her when they spoke before the hearings that *Griswold* was “settled law,” the correct application of cases from the 1920s. And she reminded her national audience that in his testimony Kavanaugh “noted repeatedly that *Roe* had been upheld by . . . *Casey*, describing it as ‘precedent on precedent.’”

Precedent is a judicial decision, and adhering to precedent is also known as letting the decision stand (*stare decisis*, in Latin). A decision that is allowed to stand may govern the resolution of similar issues in future cases. Adherence to precedent, Kavanaugh told Collins, can provide stability, predictability, reliance, and fairness. But not all decisions are good ones, and overruling a decision may sometimes be called for. Collins pointed to *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which legalized segregation and was overturned, of course, by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Kavanaugh agreed with that overruling, describing it to Collins as the correction of a “grievously wrong” decision that had upheld racial inequality.

Kavanaugh is hardly an authority on the doctrine of precedent. He has written little on the subject and as a federal appeals court judge he had no experience in applying it, fully complying with the Supreme Court’s demand that lower court judges not overrule its precedents. But Kavanaugh is a quick study, and he impressed Collins in their conversations about precedent. She thinks that someone who believes precedent is rooted in the Constitution “would follow long-established precedent except in those rare circumstances where a decision is grievously wrong or ‘deeply inconsistent with the law,’” another Kavanaugh phrase.

Clearly, the senator regards Kavanaugh that way. As Collins explained, Kavanaugh sees precedent as not merely a policy or practice or tradition but as part of the judicial power located in Article III. He's the first Supreme Court nominee to find precedent in the Constitution, she said, but his reading doesn't appear to be an activist one: In *Reconciling Originalism and Precedent*, legal scholars John McGinnis and Michael Rappaport write, "The Constitution as a matter of judicial power incorporates a minimal notion of precedent." Moreover, they say, "the Constitution treats precedent as a matter of federal common law that is revisable by congressional statute."

Like previous confirmation struggles, the Kavanaugh fight ultimately concerned the abortion-rights precedents and their prospects in a newly

composed Supreme Court. *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* are certainly "long-established," but so was *Plessy*. *Roe* and *Casey* were likewise "grievously wrong" and "deeply inconsistent" with the law, arguably even more so than *Plessy*. In their conversations Collins asked Kavanaugh whether it would be sufficient to overturn a long-established precedent if five current justices believed it was wrongly decided. His answer: "No." Apparently, as Kavanaugh sees the matter, at least six would be needed to overrule *Roe* and *Casey*. And that would require the replacement of a liberal justice with a conservative who believes that *Roe* and *Casey* were wrongly decided, with the new appointment effected by a Republican president and a Republican Senate. It could be a long time coming. ♦

deaths. The prize originated in 1901 when Leo Tolstoy was almost universally regarded as the greatest living writer. And so the first Nobel Prize in literature went to Sully Prudhomme, a poet not even the most ardent Francophile knows as anything other than the first writer to win the Nobel. Tolstoy didn't die until 1910, but the academy never saw its way to giving him the prize before he got pneumonia at the Astapovo rail station. Chekhov, Ibsen, Zola, Hardy, James, and Twain were all alive and acclaimed in the first decade of the 20th century. None won the prize, and the course of the literary Nobel was set.

The prize's 114 winners include some of history's greatest writers—Yeats, Mann, Faulkner, Kawabata, Camus—but not many. The problem lies in the Swedish Academy. Founded in 1786, the academy's mission is to promote Swedish literature. It's a worthy task, if a small one. Depending on one's tastes, when one thinks of Swedish literature, one is likely to think of Astrid Lindgren (creator of Pippi Longstocking) or Stieg Larsson (creator of the girl with a dragon tattoo). The country has produced a single writer of world-class stature: the playwright August Strindberg. He died in 1912 without, of course, ever receiving the Nobel. There have, though, been seven Swedish literary laureates. There are not even 10 million speakers of Swedish in the world, and the Swedish national encyclopedia lists it 91st among world languages for number of native speakers, below Kazakh, Haitian Creole, and Quechua. Yet the country has won the fifth-most Nobel Prizes in literature—just behind Germany.

The parochialism and literary backscratching of the Swedish Academy reached its nadir in 1974 when two Swedes shared the prize, the novelist Eyvind Johnson and the poet Harry Martinson. Both were, yes, among the 18 members of the Swedish Academy. Like all of you, I've no knowledge of Johnson's work, but I did encounter Martinson's poetry once. He's known for a science fiction epic about a ship lost in space, *Aniara*. The vessel is carrying survivors of a wrecked Earth off

COMMENT ♦ ROBERT MESSENGER

What if they didn't give a Nobel Prize and nobody noticed?

The *Times Literary Supplement* has a Jean-Paul Sartre Prize for Prize Refusal, named after the French writer who declined the Nobel Prize in literature in 1964. Sartre didn't want institutional authority for his opinions and stances: "A writer who takes political, social, or literary positions must act only with the means that are his," he announced. "These means are the written word." Sartre had informed the Swedish Academy, the body that chooses the winner of the literary Nobel, that he wouldn't accept the prize, but it went ahead anyway. Karl Ragnar Gierow, the academy's secretary, replied: "The academy's award is not guided by the possible winner's wishes but only by the decision of the academy's 18 members."

Sartre was wrong about most things, but in this he was prescient. The Nobel Prize in literature gilds no one's laurels. It is a club no one should want to belong to. Fifty-four years later, the Swedish Academy

came to the same conclusion and voided the 2018 prize. This decision was made not out of intellectual modesty or chagrin at the long list of mediocrities it has chosen, but due to a #MeToo scandal involving the husband of one of the 18 academicians. Back-and-forth accusations, resignations, and counter-resignations left the academy without a quorum. The husband, Jean-Claude Arnault, was convicted of rape on October 1 and sentenced to two years in prison. It is not to excuse his terrible acts or belittle his victims to say that the academy's decision to take a year off rings an appropriate curtain down on more than a century of foolishness, parochialism, and melodrama.

It should be easy to award a lifetime achievement award in literature. Writers have long working lives, and there is plenty of time for reasonable opinion to coalesce. The vast majority of the great writers of the last century were amply feted well before their

to colonize Mars, and the passengers get existential lessons from the ship's computer. The poem was made into an opera in 1959, and a couple of decades back a copy passed through the used record store I was working in. I was interested in modern classical music and especially the idea that new operas could be written. I gave it a spin. Let me just say that the electronic tape loop was an instrument in vogue when composer Karl-Birger Blomdahl got his commission, and it's not an instrument that has worn well. And the verse? Dreadful is not the word.

A Google Books search brought this passage to hand:

*In any glass
that stands untouched for a
sufficient time
gradually a bubble in the glass
will move
infinitely slowly to a different
point
in the body of the glass, and in a
thousand years
the bubble makes a journey in its
glass.*

I'm sure it calls tears from stone in the original Swedish.

As the century wound along, leftist politics and anti-Americanism began to further disfigure the prize. That the Swedish Academy believed in 1964 that Sartre was the only possible winner suggests a tendency to value political concerns over literary ones. If Sartre did at least have some literary distinction as a philosopher and novelist, what explains the choice of Dario Fo in 1997 other than the Italian's hard-left politics? His work is a literary achievement on par with Lenny Bruce's—something to talk about, never to read.

In 2004, an Austrian mediocrity named Elfriede Jelinek got the prize, and the only possible explanation is the academy's relishing her public role in opposing Austria's anti-E.U. firebrand Jörg Haider—or maybe it was her opposition to the Iraq war. Reviewer Joel Agee in the *New York Times* remarked of her tenth novel, *Greed*, “Nothing is farther from Jelinek's mind than advancing a plot or even just telling a story. Her busi-

ness is social dissection. Not vivisection, for none of her specimens are alive.” I am happy to take his word for it. In a typical Nobel oversight, Jelinek is the sole representative of a great Austro-Hungarian literary tradition to receive the Nobel. Not Rilke, not Kafka, not Altenberg, not Zweig, not Hofmannsthal, not Schnitzler, not Musil or Bernhard or Broch. Not Heimito von Doderer. Not Joseph Roth. Not Paul Celan.

In recent years the academy has veered between absurdity and pre-



The prize originated in 1901 when Leo Tolstoy was almost universally regarded as the greatest living writer. And so the first Nobel Prize in literature went to France's Sully Prudhomme.

dictability. The defining moment came two years ago, when Bob Dylan was awarded the prize. Now, I admire Dylan's songs and think “She Belongs to Me” a pop masterpiece, but a Nobel winner he ought not to be. Even if you believe him to be the most significant American literary figure of recent decades—that knocking at your door is Cormac McCarthy wanting a word—he is disqualified on the rare grounds that the Nobel Prize in literature is smaller beer than Bob Dylan. The prize is at its best when it tells us of a distinguished writer we wouldn't otherwise know of. Naguib Mahfouz is a literary giant, but it took the prize to bring his works into English. Svetlana Alexievich and Patrick Modiano might never have seen the light of foreign-language publication without the Stockholm laurels. They are not giants, but it is good to have their work pouring into English. Dylan can fill any stadium anywhere any night he likes. He

made this plain by leaving the academy blowin' in the wind for day after embarrassing day and then failing to show up to accept the award. Ungracious: maybe. But Dylan is well-known for going his own way and ignoring the public's desires. If they had wanted someone to preen in Stockholm, there was always Philip Roth.

Looking to rebound in 2017, the committee went for the thoroughly unremarkable British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro. His claim to fame is that his books have proved useful fodder for the movies. It's unimaginable that people a century hence will revel in *The Buried Giant* (2015), just his seventh novel and a weird Arthurian pastiche that it took him a decade to produce.

Which brings us to this October and the voided prize. No one missed the flurry of literary breathlessness or the spectacle of publishers rushing to buy rights to books they could have had for nothing the day before. Something called the New Academy in Stockholm, intending to fill the void, gave a prize to a Guadeloupean novelist, but isn't it time to give up the Swedish literary preening? Writers, vainest of the vain, will always want the Nobel (and the million-odd dollars that come with it). We should spare them the temptation. Cancel the prize. Let the Swedish Academy reconstitute its membership and focus on its original work. Yes, there's Alfred Nobel's money. But it can be dispersed to academies just like the Swedish one and do some good encouraging translation in languages from Arabic to Zulu. Let a thousand academies bloom and spare us Swedish blushes. ♦

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Tennessee Tossup

Marsha Blackburn finally seems to be pulling ahead in the Senate race. **BY MICHAEL WARREN**

Johnson City, Tenn.

It might seem like a waste of time for a Democrat to campaign here in the Tri-Cities. This region of northeast Tennessee is among the most consistently Republican areas in the country. Voters in this nearly all-white district have not sent a Democrat to Congress since 1878. All but one member of the state legislature north and east of Knoxville is a Republican. The local state senator in Johnson City, Rusty Crowe, was elected as a Democrat via write-in in 1990, but he quickly switched parties and is now one of the most senior Republicans in the state senate. In 2016, Donald Trump won 76 percent of the vote here.

So why is Phil Bredesen, the Democratic party's 74-year-old nominee for the U.S. Senate, stumping in this GOP stronghold with less than a month to go before the election? Bredesen, speaking to supporters at a meet-and-greet at local party headquarters in Johnson City in mid-October, seemed surprised by the show of enthusiasm. "I thought there might be five to six people here working," he said to a crowd of nearly 50. "Obviously, I'm overwhelmed with this."

The former mayor of Nashville, Bredesen won his 2002 bid for governor by closing the margin with his Republican rival in East Tennessee and even winning a few counties here. In his 2006 reelection campaign—his last race before 2018—Bredesen won every county in the state, including nearly 62 percent in Washington County, home of Johnson City.

"The area I grew up in is up in western New York state, up in the Finger Lakes, and interestingly very much like northeast Tennessee," he

told the group. "The people are similar, the topography is similar, so it's always been a part of the state I've felt especially at home in." If any Democrat should feel comfortable here, it's



Bredesen greeting voters, May 30

Bredesen. It's also where he'll have to mine votes if he has any chance of beating his Republican opponent in November, Marsha Blackburn.

These days, it's difficult to win statewide in Tennessee as a Democrat. Bredesen was the last candidate to do it. When Bredesen's term was over, three of Tennessee's five Democratic House seats flipped to the GOP. Like Bredesen, the three House members were centrist Democrats, the likes of which have all but disappeared from the national party. Both of Tennessee's Senate seats have been in Republican hands for more than two decades. Republican Bill Haslam is finishing his second term as a popular governor, following the business-friendly, center-right path of other successful Tennessee Republicans.

Despite a national climate advantageous to Democrats, there's little sign those winds are blowing through Tennessee. There's no danger Republicans will lose control of the state

legislature or any of their seven (out of nine) U.S. House seats. The GOP's nominee to succeed Haslam as governor is businessman Bill Lee, who is running 13 points ahead of Democrat Karl Dean, the liberal former mayor of Nashville. The Senate race, however, is one Republicans have long feared they could lose and where Democrats see an opportunity.

Bob Corker, the one-time mayor of Chattanooga, was the only Republican Senate candidate to win an open seat in the Democratic wave of 2006. Last year, Corker announced his retirement after two terms and national Democrats recruited Bredesen, widely seen as the only possible contender. "When Bob Corker said he wasn't running again, people started calling me, and I kind of feel like I had some unfinished business," Bredesen said.

Corker's retirement concerned Republicans worried about defending a seat in an otherwise advantageous year. For Tennessee's less centrist conservatives, however, this was a chance to finally have one of their own. Corker and the state's senior senator, Lamar Alexander, are relatively moderate establishment Republicans who have rankled the more conservative members of their party. In 2014, Alexander got a primary challenge from state senator Joe Carr, who made a proto-Trumpian argument charging Alexander with being soft on immigration. Carr, who earned a high-profile endorsement from Fox News host Laura Ingraham, got within nine points of Alexander in the GOP primary, coming uncomfortably close to toppling a Tennessee institution.

So it was no surprise that Marsha Blackburn, the eight-term House member from the wealthy suburbs of Nashville, was the consensus choice for the Republican nomination after Bill Haslam declined to run. Blackburn, who is 66 and prefers to be called "congressman," has cultivated an image as a tenacious right-wing fighter. She made her mark early in her political career as a loud voice in the state senate against a proposed state income tax. The Republican governor who was pushing for the new tax, Don Sundquist, failed,

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DREW ANGERER / GETTY

leaving office unpopular and scandal-plagued in 2002. That same year, Blackburn parlayed her role in the income tax fight into a successful bid for Congress—for Sundquist’s old seat.

Over the next few terms, Blackburn compiled a very conservative voting record and embraced the Tea Party movement. In 2009, she was one of several House members to co-sponsor a bill requiring presidential candidates to disclose their birth certificates—a not-so-subtle nod to the conspiracy theory that claimed Barack Obama had not been born in the United States. The “birther” issue was Donald Trump’s first real entry into far-right politics, and Blackburn was one of his staunchest supporters in 2016. She was a frequent cable-news surrogate for his campaign. After the release of the *Access Hollywood* tape in which Trump boasted about groping women, when even many conservative female Republicans were abandoning Trump, Blackburn stood by the GOP nominee, albeit a little more tepidly than before.

“I think Donald Trump’s comments were indefensible,” she told CNN on October 10, 2016, while reiterating her support. “We have a binary choice here. . . . You’re going to have one or the other as president of the U.S.; they are both flawed candidates.”

Since his inauguration, Trump has had an unwavering ally in Blackburn. At a rally in Nashville this May, he gave her his highest form of praise—“a very, very early supporter of ours”—and she reciprocated by listing his administration’s accomplishments. “A Supreme Court justice, 40 federal judges, repealing a record number of regulations, tax cuts, decreasing illegal immigration, standing up to China and North Korea, defeating ISIS in Syria,” Blackburn said, the crowd cheering while Trump stood behind her nodding. “And I’m going to tell you right now, Tennessee needs a senator who is going to support President Donald Trump, and I am going to be there to stand with President Donald Trump.” When I asked her in an interview if she disagrees with the president on any issue, Blackburn mentioned she opposes

tariffs and believes he has not done enough to curb federal spending.

An otherwise full embrace of Trump seems like a safe bet since he won more than 60 percent of the vote in Tennessee and has maintained more than 50 percent approval there since. But Blackburn’s fealty hasn’t automatically redounded to her benefit. Bredesen led Blackburn in the polls throughout the summer, and the Republican only began to close the gap in mid-August. Blackburn finally pulled ahead at the beginning of October, which she attributes to the controversial confirmation fight over Brett Kavanaugh. According to *Real Clear Politics*’s average of polls, Blackburn now has a solid, if not impenetrable, nine-point lead.

In our interview, Blackburn downplayed her campaign’s slow start. “This is his fourth statewide race,” she said of Bredesen, who lost a 1994 race for governor against Don Sundquist. “And he served two terms as governor, so he had name ID.”

His familiar name may have bought him some initial interest from swing voters, but Bredesen now seems to be suffering from a case of Republicans coming home. Blackburn has earned ridicule from the mainstream press for her performance in the two televised debates in which she repeated the names “Chuck Schumer” and “Hillary Clinton” over and over, but it’s a consistent theme for her campaign. “If Phil Bredesen had his way, Hillary Clinton would be president,” she tweeted in August, and during an October 10 debate in Knoxville, she mentioned the 2016 Democratic presidential nominee nearly 20 times. It’s a simple, even inane message, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t working.

Consider how Bredesen has responded. One TV ad features Republican supporters of Bredesen. Another focuses on his lifelong backing of gun rights. Perhaps sensing that the Kavanaugh hearings weren’t working in the Democrats’ favor in Tennessee, Bredesen announced the day before the final confirmation vote that he would have voted to confirm Trump’s Supreme Court nominee.

His pitch to swing voters in the final weeks before Election Day has been that Blackburn is too extreme and too partisan—and that he’s not as liberal as she’s claiming he is.

That’s been Bredesen’s task the entire campaign: peel off enough GOP-leaning voters and count on a depressed Republican turnout. But Trump’s interest in the race—he returned to the state on October 1 for a rally for Blackburn in Johnson City—and the Kavanaugh episode may be enough to get the conservative faithful to turn out at the polls. Bredesen has also given his opponent some easy shots. The night before the final debate in Knoxville, for instance, Bredesen attended a fundraiser for his campaign with Michael Bloomberg, the former New York City mayor who is best known nationally for his gun-control advocacy. Blackburn took the opportunity at the debate to “welcome” Bredesen back from his trip up north to visit America’s foremost gun grabber.

Speaking to reporters after the debate, Bredesen defended his decision to get financial help from out of state. “Michael Bloomberg is the head of one of the largest media companies in the world,” he said, shrugging. “I don’t agree with him on everything, certainly not about guns.” The next day, in Johnson City, one of the first people I see at Democratic headquarters waiting for Bredesen is a woman wearing a T-shirt from Moms Demand Action, a Bloomberg-backed gun-control group.

That Bredesen supporter is an outlier in East Tennessee and throughout the state, however. Tennessee is a conservative place that went big for Donald Trump and where Republicans enjoy supermajorities in the general assembly. When the Mississippi-born Blackburn says, as she often does, that she will take “Tennessee values” to Washington, it’s not only a dig at Bredesen’s Yankee roots. It’s a blunt reminder to voters: You’re Republicans, so don’t forget to vote accordingly.

That message would be insufficient in a campaign about ideas and issues. But in Tennessee, as in much of the country’s contested elections, this is a race about political identity—and nothing else. ♦

The Bitter End in Afghanistan

The Trump administration's talks with the Taliban signal victory—for the jihadists. **BY THOMAS JOSCELYN**



Lt. Gen. Miller, seated at center left, at a security conference in Kandahar, October 18. Guards at the conference would open fire on the attendees, killing three Afghan officials and injuring at least three Americans. Miller was unhurt in the attack.

America has lost the war in Afghanistan. Washington may not want to admit it, and the U.S. military insists the conflict is a “stalemate.” But make no mistake: The original 9/11 war has been lost.

On October 18, the Taliban attacked a meeting between Afghan officials and the top U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. Austin S. Miller. Americans in attendance were wounded, but Miller was unhurt. At least two Afghan officials, though, were killed, including Gen. Abdul Raziq, a key American ally and powerbroker in southern Afghanistan. The U.S. military's initial statement on the attack was a good example of its cognitive dissonance. Instead of a

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full condemnation, Col. Dave Butler, a spokesman for U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, claimed it was merely an “Afghan-on-Afghan incident.” This is an absurd characterization given that the Taliban quickly claimed responsibility, a crucial anti-Taliban commander was killed, and Americans were wounded, all in the presence of the U.S. general in charge of the war effort.

The U.S. reaction makes more sense when you realize that America isn't trying to defeat the Taliban but desperately searching for a way out, whitewashing the Taliban to justify an exit.

It has been left to America's diplomats to negotiate a face-saving deal—one in which the United States can leave without the appearance of losing. But there are many reasons to think this diplomatic gambit is misguided.

Earlier this month, an American delegation led by Zalmay Khalilzad,

who was recently appointed U.S. special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, met with Taliban representatives in Doha, Qatar. This was not a sitdown between two sides equally committed to winning the war. The Taliban, which contests or controls more than half of Afghanistan, knows the United States is desperate to leave and not even trying to win.

When President Trump announced his strategy for the war in August 2017, he emphasized that the U.S. approach would be based on conditions on the ground, not arbitrary timetables. Trump argued correctly that President Obama had made a mistake in declaring from the outset that a short-lived surge in troops would end by a definitive date. The Taliban and its allies knew they had to wait just 18 months, after which the American reinforcements sent by Obama would be gone. Theoretically Trump's strategy was going to be more realistic—driven by the progress of the fighting. But the situation on the ground has not improved.

And while Trump preached patience, it was always in short supply. The president has not yet announced a timetable for withdrawal, but that could soon change. Senior U.S. officials tell THE WEEKLY STANDARD that President Trump could announce a drawdown within months. The mercurial president could always change his mind, but administration officials are acting as if time has already run out.

The president's behavior only reinforces this perception. Trump hasn't visited Afghanistan once since becoming commander in chief, not even after he announced his commitment to “win” the war last year. During an October 16 interview with the Associated Press, the president was asked why he has avoided visiting the troops under his command in the field. “Well, I will do that at some point, but I don't think it's overly necessary,” Trump responded. “I've been very busy with everything that's taking place here. We have the greatest economy in the history of our country.” After changing the subject, he added that no one “has been better” for “the military,” but the point

ASSOCIATED PRESS

remains—he has been disconnected from the war effort in Afghanistan.

Indeed, Trump says little to nothing about the war these days. There are no major speeches, press conferences, or op-eds explaining to the American people why the United States must prevail. In fact, America’s military leaders are arguing just the opposite.

During his farewell speech in early September, General John W. Nicholson Jr., who first oversaw the war effort for Trump, announced: “It is time for this war in Afghanistan to end.” But wars are not “ended”—they are won or lost. And the Taliban certainly hasn’t been defeated. In many ways, the organization is stronger than at any time since late 2001. Acting as if America can simply “end” the war is the same approach pursued by President Barack Obama, who claimed to have brought the Iraq war to a “responsible end” in 2011. Of course, that wasn’t true either. The vacuum left by America’s withdrawal, in combination with the war in Syria, created an opportunity for jihadists that mushroomed into the self-declared ISIS caliphate.

The Trump administration wants to believe that the story can have a happier ending in Afghanistan. The Defense and State departments say a “political settlement” with the Taliban is necessary. But that is not realistic. Consider three basic facts that will likely stymie Khalilzad’s efforts.

(1) *The Taliban seeks to resurrect its Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.* When the Taliban confirmed its participation in the Doha talks earlier this month, the group said representatives from the “political office” of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” had met with the Americans. This may not seem like a big deal, but it was a slap in the face.

The Obama administration, which was also desperate to negotiate, agreed to allow the Taliban to open the Doha office in 2013, under certain conditions. Among them: The Taliban’s Doha arm wasn’t supposed to call itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. That is the name of the Taliban’s totalitarian regime, which ruled over Afghanistan until late 2001. There is no room for an elected government allied

with the West in the Taliban’s emirate. The Obama administration assured the Afghan government that the Taliban wouldn’t refer to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. But that was the first thing they did. When the Taliban opened the Doha office in June 2013, its men unfurled a banner that read “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan,” thereby embarrassing the United States and its Afghan allies.

More than five years later, the Taliban is still calling itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan—both in Doha and at home. This simple fact undermines the entire premise of the U.S.-led negotiations. Washington wants the Taliban’s leadership to reconcile with the Afghan government. But the Taliban has consistently argued that President Ashraf Ghani’s government is illegitimate. According to the Taliban, only an “Islamic” system—meaning its Islamic Emirate—is legitimate. The Taliban has been building up a parallel governance structure for years, with so-called “shadow governors” overseeing its efforts throughout the country. In August, the Taliban’s emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada, told his men they should prepare to rule more ground in the near future. The Taliban has also rejected Afghanistan’s upcoming parliamentary elections, saying it is a “religious duty” to disrupt them.

None of this is consistent with the idea that the Taliban will reconcile with the Afghan government and participate in a political process. Instead, the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is prepared once more to rule over much of the country, or all of it. It is possible that the Taliban will agree to some sort of temporary partition, but no one should trust that this arrangement would last long.

(2) *Pakistan continues to harbor the Taliban’s senior leadership.* The Trump administration has withheld military aid to Pakistan in an attempt to get tough on the putative ally’s duplicity. For years, Pakistan’s military and intelligence establishment has harbored the Taliban’s senior leaders, including members of the so-called Haqqani network. The Haqqanis remain closely allied with al Qaeda

and have gained more power within the Taliban’s hierarchy over time. The Taliban’s number two leader and warlord is Siraj Haqqani, who oversees the group’s military operations.

In September, the State Department confirmed that the Trump administration’s tough love hasn’t changed Pakistan’s behavior. As a result, many of the Taliban’s leaders are free to direct the Afghan insurgency from across the border. They are under no immediate threat and have no real incentive to order their men to lay down their arms. This makes it even more unlikely that the Taliban will agree to a game-changing deal. We mustn’t forget that Pakistan fueled the Taliban’s initial takeover of Afghanistan in the 1990s. More than two decades later, the Pakistanis could do so once again.

(3) *The Taliban hasn’t renounced al Qaeda.* The U.S. government originally demanded that the Taliban forswear al Qaeda before sitting down for talks. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton jettisoned that demand years ago, after it became clear that it was a nonstarter. The Taliban has had more than 17 years to distance itself from al Qaeda and has refused to do so. Al Qaeda’s leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, remains loyal to the Taliban’s emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada. Zawahiri’s men are fighting under the Taliban’s banner to resurrect its Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda loyalists around the world will be emboldened if they succeed. Even if the Taliban releases some statement addressing this issue, the devil will be in the details. The Taliban could employ vague language that sounds promising but is ultimately meaningless. It is highly unlikely that the Taliban will unequivocally renounce al Qaeda now.

The United States is no longer trying to defeat the Taliban. Instead, the Trump administration, like the Obama administration before it, wants out. The Taliban knows this and is more than happy to dictate the terms of America’s withdrawal. That’s what is now being negotiated. The jihadists also know that wars end in victory or defeat—and their victory is at hand. ♦

She Persisted

If Katie Arrington wins her race, it will be just the latest triumph in a life of struggles. **BY TONY MECIA**

Mount Pleasant, S.C.

Katie Arrington can still see the headlights coming at her. She can still recall the face of the woman driving the wrong way that night in June, a split second before impact. Just 10 days earlier, she had won a stunning primary victory over Rep. Mark Sanford, who had never lost an election and had been one of the few Republican critics of President Trump. She did it by embracing Trump's agenda and by old-fashioned hard work. But that night, on a quiet stretch of highway between Charleston and Hilton Head Island, she found herself in a fight for her life.

The high-speed, head-on crash killed the driver of the other car, whom police later determined was legally intoxicated. It left Arrington and her friend who was driving with serious injuries. Doctors later said that had the ambulance arrived at the Charleston hospital just minutes later, Arrington would have bled to death. As it was, she spent two weeks in the hospital recovering from abdominal bleeding, fractures in a vertebra and in her feet, two broken ribs, a damaged artery in her leg, and internal injuries that required several surgeries. Friends say she recovered with the characteristic toughness and determination that she has exhibited all her life—and that is now on display on the campaign trail in her effort to become the first Republican woman elected to Congress from South Carolina.

Her rehabilitation was just one more struggle for Arrington to overcome, and she says the tragedy stoked within her a renewed sense of urgency: "Time is precious. Every life matters.

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Every life has a finite amount of time on this planet to get something done. God gave me a rally call—'Get 'er done'—and that's my intent."

If Republicans have any chance to hang on to the House in November's elections, they will need a strong



Arrington before the accident, June 12

showing from female candidates like Arrington who are defending Republican seats. This year, a record 235 women won House primaries, according to Rutgers' Center for American Women and Politics. Although about three-quarters of those are Democrats, Republicans are fielding a number of compelling female House candidates in races where there are no incumbents, including Maria Elvira Salazar, a former Telemundo host running against Donna Shalala in Miami; Young Kim, a Korean-American former state assemblywoman running for Ed Royce's seat outside of Los Angeles; and Arrington, a first-term state legislator running in South Carolina's coastal 1st Congressional District.

If you're guessing that Arrington, 47, is some soft-spoken, demure Southern belle accustomed to high-society Charleston, you couldn't be

more wrong. She grew up in Virginia and upstate New York. Her mother expected her to make a difference in the world, and at an early age she drew encouragement from an unlikely source when President Jimmy Carter replied to a letter she had written and told her if she saw something wrong, to stand up and fix it. She dropped out of college at age 20, married an army man, and had a son who was born with a serious cranial birth defect that required costly medical treatment. She started a home daycare at an army base and took a night-shift job at Denny's to pay the bills. With debts mounting, the family also relied on food stamps. Arrington and her husband eventually divorced. She moved to the Charleston area, remarried, and began working for defense contractors. She's endured some bumpy times but has also shown resilience and perseverance.

"I do not have a college degree. I have been on public assistance," she explains in an interview. "If you looked at everything, [you'd say], 'She should be a Democrat.' And I'm an ultraconservative Republican. I think every person out there today that's waiting in line to pay for their food with an EBT card, they yearn for the day they don't have to have that. We've just got to make sure we give them equal opportunity."

In the primary, she beat Sanford in part by hewing closely to Trump. In a debate, she said, "Our job is to support our president." She told a newspaper reporter: "I guess I'm just like Trump. I'm very upfront, honest, and I learn." Trump rewarded her loyalty with an election-day endorsement on Twitter, while taking a dig at Sanford's infamous extramarital affair with an Argentine soulmate when he was governor: "Mark Sanford has been very unhelpful to me in my campaign to MAGA. . . . He is MIA and nothing but trouble. He is better off in Argentina. I fully endorse Katie Arrington."

In the general election, Arrington's opponent, construction lawyer Joe Cunningham, is laboring to implement one of the few possible strategies for Democratic victory in a district Trump carried by 12 points

KATHRYN ZIESIG/POST & COURIER/AP

and Sanford won by 22 in 2016. He's attempting to play the role of the earnest and moderate uniter willing to reach across the aisle to devise common-sense solutions, regardless of party—while linking Arrington to Trump's incivility and to his most controversial policies. In coastal South Carolina, Trump's support of offshore oil drilling is unpopular. Arrington has said she supports Trump's energy policy but firmly opposes any plans to drill off the South Carolina coast. Some small-town Republican leaders have crossed over to endorse Cunningham because of the issue. He has even cut a commercial of himself swimming in the ocean while warning of the dangers of oil leaks to the state's beaches. He's also said he won't support Nancy Pelosi for speaker of the House.

Cunningham, 36, is trying to sink Arrington by highlighting some of her older supportive statements about Trump as well as fresher statements he calls divisive, such as her comments to a radio show this month that the election is a "fight of good and evil." The local media are abetting his framing of the race. This month, a male columnist for the local *Charleston Post and Courier*, a voice of genteel conventional wisdom, said he found Arrington "shrill" and suggested she'd do better to be less combative and "just keep her mouth shut." That view might not be seen as quite so overtly sexist here as it would be elsewhere in the country, but keeping quiet because powerful men think she should isn't Arrington's style.

In a mid-October lunch meeting of the East Cooper Republican Club, held in a hotel ballroom in the Charleston suburb of Mount Pleasant, Arrington delivers a pointed 10-minute stump speech exhorting Republicans to vote. Wandering between tables, she eschews the microphone—"I'm pretty loud. Y'all know that, right?" At 4'11" she's barely taller than some of the seated guests who are feasting on chicken fajitas and rice. "There will be no blue wave in this town! Are we clear?" she says. She runs through a litany of issues like protecting freedom, lowering taxes, creating jobs,

protecting gun rights, and building a wall, and warns of the stakes in this election: "If we don't keep my seat red, you will get Nancy Pelosi as speaker of the House and Maxine [Waters] running finance." The crowd boos.

She says she's been a victim of lies and smears, such as a "whisper campaign" from political opponents who questioned if she was telling the truth when she identified herself as a breast cancer survivor in a political ad this fall. "The reporter from the *Post and Courier* came out in the parking lot and said, 'So you haven't brought up breast cancer before. Did you have it?' I said,

'Would you like to go in the restroom and look at the scar?' I'm done playing these games."

In an interview later, she says she recognizes Washington is a rough-and-tumble place. Is she tough enough to handle it?

"Oh, please. Please. If I can take on a car going head-on, beat breast cancer and not even blink an eye, take care of a wounded warrior, help a mother and grandmother pass out of this lifetime," she says, her voice trailing off. "Congress is hard. But I'm harder. I'm tougher. I have literally been preparing for this my entire life." ♦

A Different Kind of Democrat

Can Rhode Island's tax-cutting governor win another three-way race? BY ETHAN EPSTEIN

Providence, R.I.

At Three Sisters coffee shop, Gina Raimondo is announcing a bonfire of the regulations. Flanked by small business owners and the head of the local chamber of commerce, Rhode Island's governor boasts that her administration has successfully implemented a first-in-the-nation program.

Starting two years ago, she says, "We charged every state agency with doing a full inventory of all their regulations. And we gave them two years, and they either have to justify every regulation's existence . . . or eliminate it." The upshot? "I'm here to announce that in the past two years, we've cut 8,000 pages of regulations, almost 30 percent of all state regulations." Raimondo brags that she "cut taxes for small businesses," too.

Incidentally: Gina Raimondo is a Democrat. An unorthodox one, to be

sure. Raimondo, 47, locked in a tight reelection race, made a national name for herself as Rhode Island general treasurer from 2011 to 2015.

Refreshingly for a Rhode Island politician, her notoriety was not for corruption but for policy derring-do. When the former venture capitalist took office, the state's public employee pension fund was less than half funded. Rhode Island was looking at a future of ever-higher taxes and diminished services. So Raimondo spearheaded a politically courageous plan to remake the pension system: Annual increases were suspended, and she curtailed defined-benefit plans, instead compelling government workers to convert part of their pensions into 401(k)-style investment accounts. The pension reforms drew praise from the likes of the Manhattan Institute and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board.

But the reforms were less popular in Rhode Island, where the state government is one of the largest

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employers and the workforce is heavily unionized. When Raimondo, a native of Smithfield, a small town near Providence, decided to run for governor in 2014, she had a tough go of it. The unions essentially sat it out, and she won with only 40.7 percent of the vote in a three-way race pitting her against Cranston mayor Allan Fung, a Republican, and the Moderate party candidate Robert “Cool Moose” Healey, since deceased.

The first female governor of Rhode Island, Raimondo was a trailblazer by virtue of that fact alone. But she went on to govern as a highly unorthodox Democrat—cutting taxes repeatedly, for instance. At a moment when Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are in the ascendant, Raimondo is arguably even more of an outlier today.

“As a governor I have the luxury of not having to locate myself on that kind of a partisan spectrum,” Raimondo tells me in an interview, reflecting on her party’s leftward lurch. “I have to do what helps Rhode Island. So if that means cutting thousands of pages of regulations, which [is] ‘to the right,’ then I’m going to do that, because it creates jobs in Rhode Island,” she says.

Raimondo points to her “Rhode Island Promise” program, passed last year, which grants free tuition to the state’s community college. “I essentially took that from [Tennessee governor] Bill Haslam, who is a Republican in a Southern state,” she says. “I spent a lot of time with Bill . . . and I *did* have people saying, ‘Gina, what are you doing? He’s a Republican governor of a Southern state.’” Raimondo has cut taxes every year since her election, including the car tax and the corporate tax. The Tax Foundation—which is ideologically more Milton Friedman than Paul Krugman—gave her an award this fall for outstanding achievement in state tax reform. “And I’m proud of it!” she says.

More controversially, she has used

tax incentives to lure businesses to the state. “It’s created almost 20,000 good-paying jobs,” she says referring not just to the tax incentives but her policies generally. Ideally, “you really want to have a generally good business environment: low taxes, fair and limited regulations, excellent talent pool, great education system. And we’re trying to do that.” But on the matter of tax incentives, she argues, “To be perfectly honest, every other state uses them, and I can’t let Rhode Island be disadvantaged.”



Raimondo in Washington, D.C., October 13, 2015

Raimondo refers often to the fact that when she ran for governor, Rhode Island had the nation’s highest unemployment rate. The state is indeed a perennial economic laggard, a one-time industrial hub stuck between the financial and tech powerhouses of Connecticut and Massachusetts. These days, though, the unemployment rate is in the middle of the pack—31st in the country as of last month—and last year Rhode Island had the nation’s fastest wage growth.

But despite a pragmatist’s record with results to show for it, Raimondo has hardly cruised to reelection. She first faced a primary challenge from Rhode Island’s former secretary of state Matt Brown, who ran as a crusading liberal (not to mention

a panderer: He promised to reverse Raimondo’s pension reforms). She turned that challenge away, showing again that while Rhode Island is heavily Democratic, it isn’t particularly liberal. Rhode Island is basically a one-party state, which means that Democrats there are very ideologically diverse. Cases in point: The state’s heavily Democratic legislature implemented a voter ID law, and Rhode Island was the last state in New England to implement gay marriage.

Now she’s in a race that once again pits her against Fung and another independent candidate, former Republican Joe Trillo. Fung, who nearly won in 2014, is weaker this time around: Not only does he have to fight off a challenger to his right, but in the intervening years a scandal wracked the police department of Cranston, Rhode Island’s third-largest city. The state police issued a report blasting Fung’s poor leadership. Making matters worse, with Raimondo’s moderate record, Fung doesn’t have much of an ideological way to go after her, so he’s focusing more on her competence. For her part, on some issues Raimondo is running to Fung’s right—she’s

torching him in TV ads for raising taxes in Cranston.

Trillo, a 75-year-old former state representative whose Rhode Island accent is thicker than clam chowder, also criticizes Raimondo’s technical aptitude. He points to the United Health Infrastructure Project, a \$364 million computer system supposed to manage the state’s benefits program, which had a disastrous rollout in 2016. People couldn’t get their food stamp payments, for instance. “That’s her greatest downfall,” Trillo says. (Raimondo has apologized repeatedly for the mess.) Fung, meanwhile, “has too many skeletons in his closet [too],” Trillo says. “When you walk into his closet it’s like a laugh-in-the-dark house in an amusement park.”

But Trillo has competence problems of his own. This summer, the candidate was campaigning on his yacht. He unfurled a huge banner and sailed along the shore, blasting John Philip Sousa marches. Too close to the shore it turned out: The ship ran aground and Trillo required a Coast Guard rescue. He claimed he was a safe distance from shore, but dozens of witnesses said that he was obviously way too close. Trillo brushes aside the incident, dubbed “Trilligan’s Island,” in an interview. “I’ve run a boat tens of thousands of miles. Allan Fung couldn’t do a rowboat in his bathtub!” he says.

With Raimondo’s approval rating below 50 percent, she’s obviously lucky to be facing two conservative challengers—so much so that there is speculation that Trillo will expect a

favor or two should she be reelected. One recent poll has her leading Fung, her closer competitor, 48 to 34 percent. Another shows Raimondo at 40, Fung at 32, and Trillo at 17.

A prodigious fundraiser and former Rhodes scholar, Gina Raimondo clearly has her eyes on a prize larger than governing America’s smallest state. Insiders here suggest that she was counting on getting a job in the Hillary Clinton administration and Trump’s victory scuttled her well-laid plans. In our interview, Raimondo disavows any interest in being a senator. But it’s not hard to see her vying for vice president. Could she aim higher? Given the leftward march of her party, it’s hard to imagine Gina Raimondo, champion of tax and regulation cuts, winning the Iowa caucus in our lifetime. ♦

has highlighted the race in its “Red to Blue” fundraising campaign.

Despite this, Webber exudes optimism. “It’s a right-of-center district,” he tells me, asserting that most people here prefer lower taxes and stronger immigration laws. “My opponent’s got a lot of money, sure. But it’s a Republican district, and we’re going to be a tough out. This is a race that I feel good about winning.”

He’s right that a victory will be hard-won, but he does have reason to hope. Among registered voters in the district, Republicans outnumber Democrats. Webber won the primary by nearly 10 points despite being significantly outspent, and he has managed to keep the race close even though his opponent, former federal prosecutor and Navy helicopter pilot Mikie Sherrill, has outspent him four to one.

Webber has also secured crucial endorsements. President Trump gave his enthusiastic support via Twitter in late September, and Vice President Mike Pence followed suit twice. House Speaker Paul Ryan has campaigned for Webber in the final weeks before Election Day.

Webber’s confidence is also fueled by his conviction that Sherrill is out of touch with constituents’ interests and needs. “I’m talking about issues that families are concerned about at their kitchen table every night,” he says. “I talk about taxes, affordability, jobs, opportunity.” He contrasts his platform with the “divisive social issues” Sherrill endorses, such as support of sanctuary cities. “She’s a culture warrior,” Webber continues. “Families and voters in the 11th Congressional District see that . . . and they’ll prefer my approach to Mikie’s every time.”

To reinforce his image as the candidate who understands New Jersey families, Webber often incorporates his family history into his campaign. A native of Clifton, he emphasizes his “middle-class upbringing” by hard-working parents who encouraged him to “pay it forward.” Now a father of seven (whose wife Johanna frequently appears with him in his television ads), he describes himself as a

Trying to Keep His District Red

In New Jersey’s 11th, GOP candidate Jay Webber promises to be ‘a tough out.’ BY SOPHIA BUONO

Whippany, N.J.

Jay Webber’s law office doesn’t look like much. The faded directory by the door of the drab red and gray building near Route 10 simply lists “Webber McGill LLC.”

Past a tiny, empty lobby and through a hallway I find Webber, who at 6’3” towers over most people he meets. The Republican candidate for the U.S. House in New Jersey’s 11th District is smartly dressed in a white button-down shirt and green tie. His small yet tidy office is untouched by campaign paraphernalia, but his no-frills style doesn’t distract from the fact that this lawyer-turned-politician has been charging through the

most competitive race the district has seen in 32 years.

Webber, 46, was a member of the New Jersey general assembly for 10 years but jumped into the congressional race only last February, days after Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen announced his retirement. Frelinghuysen had held the seat since 1996, succeeding another Republican, Dean Gallo, who represented the district for nearly a decade. But what was once a reliably red district is now rated “lean Democratic” by the *Cook Political Report*. Trump won the district by less than 1 percent in 2016. The shifting political grounds have made this race a key target for Democrats aiming to take back the House in November, and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee

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“husband and father” first, as well as a “tax-cutter and leader.”

A family-oriented mindset has been a consistent part of Webber’s message since he entered the political arena 15 years ago. As an assemblyman, he won the Defender of the Family Legislative Award from the New Jersey Family Policy Council. In conversation he has the easygoing personality of a dad who loves coaching baseball (which

replies, “She sounds like a high school girl—so shrill!”

Webber soon greets the cheering crowd with an enthusiastic “All right!” before diving into a lively speech. “Do you like an economy that’s roaring? Do you like low unemployment?” he asks. To each question, the audience responds with a resounding “Yes!” The energy level of the candidate and the crowd resem-

friendship with Webber dates back 21 years, to an intramural basketball team at Harvard, pairs a confident spirit with a sobering nod to the high stakes of this congressional race. He calls Sherrill one of Pelosi’s “hand-picked, darling candidates” and lists the dangers if the 11th seat flips. “She’ll vote to raise your taxes, to give amnesty to illegal immigrants, to let criminals out of jail, to weaken our defenses, to weaken protections for the unborn,” Cotton says.

Cotton is correct to raise the issue of abortion. Among supporters at the event are many who back Webber primarily because of his pro-life stance. One attendee tells me that although he and many of his friends can’t vote for Webber because they live outside his district, they turned out tonight because abortion is a crucial issue for them and they felt compelled to lend Webber’s campaign financial and personal support.

But the MAGA hats that dot the room also suggest that Webber has attracted some hardcore Trump supporters as well. When I bring up his association with Trump during our interview, Webber keeps his distance but doesn’t directly criticize the president. “It’s no secret that I don’t agree with everything the president says . . . but I agree with a lot of what he does,” he tells me. “I think I’ve shown I can be an ally with someone who is heading in the same direction I am . . . but then I’m not afraid to stand on principle and work against or oppose certain priorities that allies might put forward that I think might be detrimental to our state.” Noting his years working with former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, he adds with a wry smile, “I have some practice with this.”

Still, Webber and his team are aware he is in a close race. “I’m pleading with you . . . pull out all the stops,” Cotton tells the crowd. “The word of a trusted friend is the best advertisement that money cannot buy.”

Given that Mikie Sherrill’s friends have much deeper pockets, trusted personal connections might be Webber’s best hope in November. ♦

SOPHIA BUONO



Tom Cotton, left, with Harvard hoops teammate Jay Webber

he does) more than the well-rehearsed demeanor of a candidate repeating his talking points.

If the tiny gray office doesn’t scream political hub, the fundraiser he attends that evening makes up for it. At a nearby hotel featuring a large “Webber for Congress” banner, hundreds of well-dressed, mostly middle-aged and elderly supporters gather in a room splashed with red lighting. The crowd seems hopeful that Webber has both the political skill and the personality to take his leadership talents to the national level.

One attendee, Phyllis Randall, a short, rosy-cheeked woman in her 50s, nods toward the stage with an excited smile. “Wait till you hear him speak!” she says. “He speaks so well, much better than Mikie Sherrill.” I ask her what she dislikes about Sherrill. With a slight cringe, Randall

bles a political rally rather than that of a sit-down dinner.

Still, Webber’s optimism doesn’t restrain him from making some sharp critiques of his opponent. “Montclair Mikie is here to fool everybody,” he tells the crowd (Montclair is Sherrill’s current hometown), pointing to her relationship with House minority leader Nancy Pelosi. Although Sherrill has said publicly she will not support Pelosi for speaker if the Democrats take the House, the Webber campaign released a recording of Sherrill calling Pelosi “the most effective speaker of the House that we’ve seen in decades” during a closed-door meeting in September.

“If Nancy Pelosi needs her vote on January 3, Nancy Pelosi will get her vote,” says Republican senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, the guest speaker at tonight’s event. Cotton, whose

Why China Shouldn't Run Interpol

It's not because Beijing disappeared
Meng Hongwei. BY TED R. BROMUND

The disappearance and enforced resignation of Meng Hongwei, the Chinese secret policeman who headed Interpol until early October, has provoked a wave of hand-wringing about whether China is fit to lead international organizations. All of a sudden, deep thinkers have begun to doubt the wisdom of welcoming China into every nook and cranny of international society in the hopes that the delight of being welcomed would cause the Chinese Communist party to reform itself.

One of the helpful aspects of this latest Interpol scandal—following on the bad publicity it received over the past several years for acting as a cat's-paw in the Kremlin's pursuit of its political opponents—is that a few basic facts about Interpol are becoming more widely known. Interpol doesn't have agents around the world, it doesn't make arrests, and no one carrying an Interpol badge has ever broken down a door or tackled a fleeing suspect. Interpol is, in essence, just a bulletin board on which the police agencies of the world pin their wanted posters. As the Russian example has shown, it is definitely possible to abuse Interpol—but Interpol is not as Hollywood depicts it.

The concept of Interpol abuse is only meaningful because Interpol has standards that are supposed to govern how its systems are used. These standards are set out in its constitution, adopted in 1956, and in a raft of subsequent amendments, refinements, and supplementary rules—most notably, Interpol's Rules on the Processing of

Data. The most relevant of the standards is Article 3 of Interpol's constitution, which, in the stilted language of the French bureaucrat, states that “it is strictly forbidden for the Organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character.” In plain English, Interpol's member nations—all 192 of them—are supposed to use it only to pursue ordinary criminals, not political ones.

Unfortunately, applying this standard is not quite as easy as stating it. There are edge cases, such as terrorism, which often has political motivations but is carried out by criminal means. But the broader difficulty is that Interpol can only regulate its own systems; it cannot police the conduct of its member nations. In other words, Interpol cannot stop Vladimir Putin from charging his political opponents with politicized crimes; it can only seek to ensure that those crimes are not pinned up on its bulletin board for everyone to see.

That bulletin board has a lot more on it than it used to. Interpol has a confusing welter of initiatives, databases, and communications, but two kinds are relevant here. There are Interpol's colored notices—most famously, its Red Notice. Often described as an international arrest warrant, it is a formal request from an Interpol member nation that other member nations locate and detain, pending extradition, a named suspect for a described offense. Then there are “diffusions”—a confusing term of art for what are

essentially email messages sent by an Interpol member nation to one or more other nations over Interpol's network. Diffusions can contain the same information and the same requests as the colored notices. The difference is that they do not get routed via Interpol's headquarters in Lyon, France.

As recently as 1998, Interpol published only 737 Red Notices. In 2017 it published 13,048. Information on the number of diffusions is harder to come by, but their growth has, if anything, been more explosive: In 2015, nations sent over 22,000 diffusions. All told, Interpol is responsible for something like 35,000 requests to detain annually. This growth is the direct result of the agency's launch in 2003 of its I-24/7 electronic communications network,



Meng Hongwei

which allows police agencies around the world to connect directly to each other or to Interpol. This network improved the efficiency of Interpol's operations, leading to a rapid increase in Red Notices and diffusions. And that, in turn, made abusing the system for political purposes much simpler—both because

the network functions so smoothly and because the resulting flood of notices makes it easier to conceal the abusive ones. Interpol cannot hope to examine upwards of 13,000 Red Notice requests a year, and since it sees diffusions only after they are transmitted, it cannot screen them at all.

All of these difficulties are compounded by one further fact: Interpol treats all of its member nations as equally worthy of respect. This was illustrated by the way Interpol responded to Turkey's request for 60,000 Red Notices on purported participants in or sympathizers with the July 2016 coup attempt. Under Interpol's rules, Turkey's action was clearly abusive—indeed, it was attempted abuse on a scale that dwarfs anything Russia or China have done. But after commendably blocking the Turkish requests, Interpol issued the mealy-mouthed statement that it “supports

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MIKHAIL METZEL / TASS / GETTY

each and every one of its 190 members as part of security cooperation benefits.” In other words, not only does Interpol’s I-24/7 system facilitate abuse, but Interpol is systemically unwilling to acknowledge that some nations operate under a rule of law and others do not. This blindness is built into Interpol’s DNA: It presumes that all of its member nations are equal.

The fact is that they are not all equal. And that is what is at stake in Meng’s leadership of, and removal from, Interpol. The issue is not that by charging a Chinese national who happened to be the president of Interpol with a crime, Beijing has done something inherently wrong: If Meng were credibly accused of a genuine offense, his position should not have protected him. Nor is there any evidence that Interpol became more solicitous of China’s Red Notices after Meng took office in 2016. Indeed, by canceling an abusive Red Notice on Uighur activist Dolkun Isa in February 2018, which led to an angry outburst from Beijing, Interpol has if anything pushed back against Chinese abuses.

China is not commonly recognized as one of Interpol’s most abusive member states, but that may be because its victims don’t dare to complain about it for fear of what will happen to their families. China continues to be what it was before Meng took over: an assiduous abuser of Interpol, targeting both purportedly corrupt officials and dissidents, and coupling this with forced repatriation (others would call it kidnapping) and other forms of harassment, along with a relentless campaign against any Taiwanese participation in Interpol. Indeed, the manner of Meng’s removal only sharpens the contrast between the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan: one an irresponsible bully that bars the gate, the other a mature democracy that deserves to be inside the fence. Just maybe, the fact that Beijing has made fools of every other member nation in Interpol will encourage a few of them to think twice about going along with Taiwan’s exclusion.

But that is likely too optimistic. When Interpol’s General Assembly, its one-nation, one-vote governing body,

voted by a 3 to 1 margin to admit the Palestinian Authority to Interpol in 2017, it became all too obvious that a majority of Interpol member nations are uninterested in drawing any distinction between lawful governments and lawless regimes. Nor does Meng’s fall soften the folly that the General Assembly displayed in electing him, after a major Chinese lobbying campaign, as its president. It was as wrong to have a Chinese secret policeman heading Interpol as it is to have, as is currently the case, a Russian official with a history of facilitating Interpol abuse serving as Interpol’s vice-president for Europe. The best that can be said of Meng is that while he didn’t set out to make China abuse Interpol less, he doesn’t seem to have made the abuse any grosser than it already is.

It’s conceivable that Meng got the axe in part because Beijing thought he was going soft. A much more likely explanation is that he was a protégé of now-disgraced Zhou Yongkang, formerly head of the PRC’s central politics and law commission. As the *South China Morning Post* noted, Meng’s removal completes a reshaping of the state security apparatus, which is now dominated by allies of President Xi Jinping. Just as Vladimir Putin targeted Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the richest man in Russia, in 2003 to make clear to other oligarchs what he expected by way of loyalty, Xi has eliminated Meng—who as president of Interpol was China’s highest-profile international official—to demonstrate that he will not be put off by international niceties in enforcing his political will.

That demonstration of political will is precisely the problem. Interpol rests on a distinction between common crime and political crime that the Chinese regime does not respect. Meng is predictably accused of corruption, and there is every likelihood that he is corrupt, if that word has any meaning inside the star chambers of the Chinese Communist party. But if Meng is corrupt, so is the entire Chinese government that raised him to power and now has pulled him down. Interpol is not set up to deal with a regime like Beijing’s, where the law is merely a

means to an end, or like Putin’s, where the criminals run the shop. Interpol assumes that while its member governments might on occasion be political, they are not fundamentally lawless. But with regimes like Beijing’s or Moscow’s, abuses are not occasional: They are ad hominem. The only difference in Meng’s case is that, this time, Interpol itself is the victim of the abuse.

Interpol has seen all this before. That much-quoted Interpol constitution of 1956 was drafted because, in March 1950, 10 Czechoslovakian dissidents hijacked a plane and flew to West Germany, where they were granted political asylum. At the request of the Communist Czechoslovak government, Interpol published a Red Notice on the dissidents. In response, director J. Edgar Hoover ordered the FBI to withdraw from Interpol. The loss of U.S. participation was such a disaster for Interpol that it drew up its 1956 constitution to entice the United States back in by making clear that Interpol would pursue only common criminals, not anti-Communist dissidents.

Today, the dissidents are on the run again, this time joined by any businessman, from Moscow to Caracas, who makes enough money and is enough of a nuisance to be worth expropriating. The problem with Interpol is not, thanks to Hoover, that it lacks good rules. The problem is that good rules need to be enforced, and for that, American and democratic leadership are necessary.

If such leadership is not forthcoming, Meng won’t be the last inconvenient man to disappear at China’s behest. I’m not crying for him: As a political policeman, he sent tens of thousands of people to whatever hell he’s currently inhabiting. But seeing Interpol reduced to desperately asking what the heck is going on as an authoritarian state bats it back and forth as a plaything is pathetic. Then there is the fact that by removing Meng, China has made it perfectly clear that it views Interpol as merely a means to an end—and that end is power, not law. Worst of all, though, there is this: A majority of Interpol’s member nations don’t agree with me. They agree with China. ♦

The Madness Returns

The ferocious incivility Americans have witnessed for decades has arisen largely from the left—and for good reason

BY BARTON SWAIM

‘You cannot be civil with a political party that wants to destroy what you stand for, what you care about,” Hillary Clinton said recently in a CNN interview. “That’s why I believe if we are fortunate enough to win back the House and/or the Senate, that’s when civility can start again.” The remark was quintessentially Clintonian in its brazen arrogance: *We’ll act like adults when you give us our power back.* She was roundly condemned for the statement on the right, coming as it did after a series of both outrageous rhetorical attacks and criminal physical assaults on Republican officeholders. In June of last year a crazed leftist attempted to murder GOP lawmakers while they played baseball—and nearly succeeded in the case of Steve Scalise. Five months later, Rand Paul was throttled by an irate neighbor and suffered several broken ribs. In 2018, Republican officials have been chased out of restaurants, targeted by a failed ricin attack, criminally “doxxed” online, nearly stabbed by a knife-wielding assailant, and shrieked at by deranged protesters. Conservative intellectuals have been assaulted, threatened, and bullied by students on campuses across the country. If we associate the extrajudicial antics of Antifa with the left’s drift toward incivility, the situation begins to ring alarms.

The news media are attempting to draw parallels between these recent events and spectacles that appear to cast Republicans and conservatives in the role of delirious demonstrators or would-be assassins—the 2011 shooting of Democratic congresswoman Gabby Giffords or angry voters shouting at congressmen after the passage of the

Affordable Care Act in 2009. The parallels don’t work. Giffords’s assailant wasn’t any kind of conservative or Republican. The anti-Obamacare protesters did not appear to hold partisan or ideological allegiances (Republican lawmakers got earfuls, too) and their protests were nothing close to the shrill malevolence and outright violence carried out by today’s more strident progressives.

The commentators have a whiff of an argument when they complain about Donald Trump’s boorishness and incivility—in particular a couple of instances in which he urged his supporters to play rough with protesters (“If you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, would you? ... I will pay for the legal fees”). But a single presidential candidate condoning violence isn’t the same as hordes perpetrating it, and candidate Trump said these things in reaction to being heckled, not to or about people minding their own business.

The prevalence of vicious and defamatory rhetoric in our politics is a product of what’s commonly called *polarization*. One popular interpretation holds that it all began in the 1990s with the “polarizing” figures of

Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich. Steve Kornacki’s *The Red and the Blue* (just published by Ecco) offers a version of this thesis. Another view, expressed with great clarity by Jonathan Rauch in the *Atlantic* in 2016, holds that well-meaning reforms of the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s that did away with political machines and pork-barrel politics made governing impossible and gave rise to sociopathic politicians. These are valuable accounts, but they avoid one crucial point: that in the United States the political left is much readier to use vicious and defamatory rhetoric than the political right.

No serious observer would deny that people on the right—even some very prominent people on the right—say unparadigmatic things about their political foes. But



Reagan nominee Robert Bork testifies, September 18, 1987.

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there's no reason to pretend that the ferocious incivility Americans have witnessed for decades has arisen in equal part from the left and the right. That is not true. It has arisen mainly from the left. And not just from the nutjobs and fringe personalities of the left, either. We have just witnessed an attempt by the Democratic party's top leaders to defame a man for no other reason than that his ascension to the Supreme Court would give the court a slim conservative majority.

I use the term *defame* loosely. To qualify as defamation in most American jurisdictions—*slander* when spoken, *libel* when written—a claim must be (a) false, (b) knowingly false, and (c) damaging to the reputation or livelihood of the object. Public officials usually cannot successfully sue for defamation. Kavanaugh would not win a defamation lawsuit against the Senate Judiciary Committee's Democrats even though they had a clear hand in trumpeting unproven or demonstrably false allegations of sexual misconduct made against him. Yet by any common understanding of defamation, virtually the whole of the left—congressional Democrats, scores of commentators and editorialists, and hundreds of screeching, placard-waving protesters—defamed a decent man for political gain by portraying his youth as a sequence of sexual assaults, gang rapes, and drunken violence. And they did so *when they had no firm evidence that these things were true*. They repeated the allegations again and again. They did not care if the claims were true—the benefit of their being *thought* true was enough if it meant the defeat in the Senate of a nomination to which Democrats had already expressed savage hostility.

Supreme Court confirmations are a useful metric to gauge political defamation. The supposition that conservatives are as prone to making defamatory attacks as their liberal correlatives is upended by the last three decades of hearings on choices for the High Court, beginning with the Democrats' slanderous attacks on Robert Bork in 1987. Ted Kennedy worded his accusation on the Senate floor in a way that avoided any straightforward claim that Bork himself was a racist, a misogynist, and a fan of police-state brutality, but the accusatory intent of his remarks was clear:

Robert Bork's America is a land in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, rogue police could break down citizens' doors in midnight raids, and schoolchildren

could not be taught about evolution, writers and artists would be censored at the whim of the government, and the doors of the federal courts would be shut on the fingers of millions of citizens.

The Democrats' reward for defaming an honorable man was the ascension of the far more amenable Anthony Kennedy. Three years later, wishing to avoid another brawl, George H.W. Bush chose David Souter, about whom almost nothing was known. Souter turned out to be one of the Court's decided liberals.

After Souter, Senate Democrats subjected every Supreme Court nominee of a Republican president to defamatory accusations. In 1991, Clarence Thomas was accused without evidence of sexual harassment. In 2005, John Roberts was falsely accused by NARAL, a pro-abortion group, of defending abortion-clinic bomber Eric Rudolph. In 2006, Democrats on the Judiciary Committee labored to associate Samuel Alito with racist and otherwise bigoted statements to which he had no significant connection. In 2017, Democratic senators broadly suggested that Neil Gorsuch was guilty of sexist hiring practices and of holding "unjust" views on race. The nominee was, further, asked to explain his membership at Columbia University

in the fraternity Phi Gamma Delta, which was supposedly known for racism and date rape. And of course in 2018 those same Democrats all but openly called Brett Kavanaugh a gang rapist and a lush.

Senate Republicans, by contrast, even when they strongly opposed a Democratic nominee, refrained from engaging in anything close to such tactics. Nothing remotely similar was done to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, or Elena Kagan. Merrick Garland, Obama's third Supreme Court nominee, appointed late in the president's second term, was denied a vote on his nomination but accused of no crimes or of holding retrograde opinions. Liberals complained bitterly about the Garland nomination, but who wouldn't rather be garlanded than borked?

Unless we're prepared to believe that Republican presidents tend to nominate bigots and sexual criminals whereas Democratic presidents do not, we are left to conclude that Democrats and liberals are more comfortable with imputing base motives and dishonorable conduct

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liberals still dominate
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print and televised news.**

to their adversaries than Republicans and conservatives. The question is: Why?

POLITICAL POWER VS. CULTURAL POWER

Conservatives may relish the thought that their ideological opposites are peculiarly prone to defame their adversaries and otherwise speak and act uncivily. We should avoid preening. A fine argument can be mounted that conservatives tend more often to act on irrational fear than liberals do. We see the right's susceptibility to fear in the rise of Joe McCarthy at midcentury, the paranoia of extreme anti-Communist groups in the 1960s and '70s, the arming of local police with military gear and equipment a decade ago, and the rise of the "alt-right" today. The emotion generating these phenomena was fear, not hatred. Likewise, the nomination of Donald Trump on the grounds that he expressed a sharp aversion to progressive excesses of the previous eight years was born of reactive panic rather than proactive hatred.

There are circumstantial reasons for the frenzied and unreasonable behavior of today's left-liberal officeholders and activists. The proximate cause would seem to be Trump. Many, perhaps most, do not consider him a legitimate president, just as many did not consider George W. Bush a legitimate president. Democratic presidential frontrunner Howard Dean could therefore say in 2003 that it was an "interesting theory" that Bush had known about the September 11 attacks before they happened and did nothing. A large majority of the Democratic party believed the same and furthermore believed that the 2000 election had been "stolen." Few on the left expressed apprehension about this and other loose, defamatory allegations of treason. The ideal of honor is weak to the point of death in Western societies. In an earlier era, a public official accused of treasonous conduct would have challenged his accuser to a duel. The duelers might have deliberately missed each other, or not, but the accused would have demonstrated his readiness to defend his reputation to the point of dying or shedding blood, and that would have been the end of it. Dueling seems bizarre in an age without honor—about as bizarre as our casual defamation would have seemed in an earlier one.

But there is far more to the present situation than a chief executive whose policies and personality liberals don't like. Their hostility is frenzied, apt to become violent, and directed at everything and everybody on the other side, not just the hated president and his administration.

Think of power in two parts: cultural power and political power. Liberals hold nearly all the cultural power the

United States has to offer. They dominate the universities, even the universities in the South, where liberalism is anemic. Cultural institutions—museums, arts agencies, opera houses—belong almost exclusively to liberals. Their control of the entertainment industry is nearly complete. The media, too: Fox News and talk radio notwithstanding, liberals still dominate the most eminent and authoritative divisions of print and televised news. How they acquired



Culture power: Actress Debra Messing, Senator Bob Casey, singer Katy Perry, and Hillary Clinton in Philadelphia, November 5, 2016. Below, actor Danny DeVito with Bernie Sanders, March 13, 2016.



all this cultural power is a dense topic; suffice it here to say there was no concerted effort to get it. The sphere of cultural power attracts a certain kind of person—a person who believes society ought to be arranged along rational lines and in keeping with the most advanced thought of the day—and such persons are, almost by definition, liberal. To put it less charitably, the cultural sphere attracts people who view themselves as part of an elite, and most elites believe that society should be run by elites.

Political power is something altogether different and, in a republic modeled on universal suffrage, cannot be dominated by the elite simply because they are elite. To

achieve the kind of hegemony in the political sphere liberals have achieved in the cultural sphere, they would need a philosophy of government and a field of candidates capable of appealing to people who live in places they would rather not visit. They would need people who can win elections, not just in the boroughs of New York and in L.A. County, but also in Kentucky and Arizona and Nebraska and Alabama.

The problem for liberals is that they believe their political power should correspond to their cultural power. At any one time, Republicans are likely to hold more state legislatures and more governor's mansions than Democrats, and they are slightly more likely to hold the two chambers of Congress and the White House. That is a remarkable paradox and a testament to the almost perverse independent-mindedness of the American electorate: About half of them just don't care that much what the most influential people in their country say about politics. Indeed, liberals will protest that the proportion is less than half, since Democratic voters pay an electoral price for their tendency to congregate in large metropolitan areas where their votes are diluted. This is a constant source of pain for liberals, but the pain has become acute since Trump's victory. Hence the complaints about the Electoral College being a "countermajoritarian" institution; the earnest theorizing about whether populous states like New York and California should be given a third senator; and the sudden obsession with gerrymandering and voter suppression, which Democrats believe must be responsible for Republicans' otherwise unaccountable majorities.

All this helps to explain why Supreme Court nominations by Republican presidents (and to a lesser extent their federal court nominations) have become so rancorous. For many years, the federal judiciary was the one area of political power over which liberals held pronounced influence. The judiciary, though dependent for its members on the political branches, especially the executive, functions in practice more like an arm of cultural power—and the vast majority of its members are drawn from elite universities. It is not subject to elections. Ordinary voters outside the capital, even people who follow politics closely, know almost nothing about federal judges; their decisions seem to come from nowhere.

With the defeat of the Bork nomination and three years later the ascension to the Court of a furtive liberal in David

Souter, Republicans figured out the game and began more deliberately to create a class of "conservative" judges—judges who would refrain from the sorts of results-based left-liberal eisegesis for which "liberal" judges are known. With the nomination of Clarence Thomas in 1991, therefore, and especially with George W. Bush's federal court nominations, conservatives began to deprive liberals of the one arm of political power they had come to count on (and that had supplied many of their greatest policy wins—*Lochner v. New York*, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, *Roe v. Wade*).

Their unhappiness with this unforeseen deprivation has expressed itself in some of the ugliest smears in modern American politics. One is not likely soon to forget the spectacle of Democratic grandees slowly reciting salacious and uncorroborated accusations before television cameras in the evident hope that the public would forever associate a collection of obscene images with Brett Kavanaugh.

The problem for liberals is that they believe their political power should correspond to their cultural power. But it is a testament to the almost perverse independent-mindedness of the American electorate that about half of them just don't care that much what the most influential people in their country say about politics.

THEY NEED THEIR DRAGONS

The ease with which Democrats and liberals defame their enemies isn't entirely a recent circumstance, however. Just as conservatives are inherently prone to fear and must guard against it, modern liberals tend at all times to traduce their adversaries. The

urge to defame is intrinsic to modern liberalism.

Modern American liberalism is a messy combination of two major strands of thought. The first and older of these is the Anglo-American Protestant and Puritan heritage of the 16th and 17th centuries. Today's liberals don't much appreciate the Christian component of their inheritance, preferring to think of themselves exclusively as children of the Enlightenment, but the British Enlightenment was always an expression of the Protestant culture from which it sprang. Liberals' emphasis on society's duty to protect the weak and vulnerable, and especially their obsession with individual autonomy, didn't come from nowhere. The modern liberal's tendency to view everything as a moral struggle against the forces of darkness began as a religious impulse.

The second strand of modern liberalism is the radical Marxian one. This is the source of the modern liberal's rationalist economics (sometimes called state planning

or statism) and historical determinism (sometimes called progressivism). There is a contradiction at the heart of Marxian thought about the origins of evil, and the contradiction affects everything. On the one hand, man is born innocent and innately good. On the other, there are terrible things in the world and we must find and punish whoever is responsible for them. Where did these bad things come from if man is born good? This is a mystery that no Enlightenment or post-Enlightenment philosopher has ever solved. Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed he had solved the problem by locating man's "fall" at the moment when he first discovered the possibility of owning property; from that discovery sprang greed and corruption and violence (see the famous opening passage of his second *Discourse*, on inequality). For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, similarly, man naturally seeks the good, but the division of labor brings about the class system and thus the opportunity to exploit the masses. Again: Man is essentially good, indeed perfectible, but human life is terrible; someone therefore is responsible. There is plenty of disagreement in early Marxist thought about who is responsible for exploitation—the wealthy capitalists alone? the bourgeois too? those who ran the institutions of the capitalist state?—but all agreed that these groups would have to be shamed and eliminated.

These two traditions, the Christian and the Marxian, amalgamated in the 20th century into a creed in perpetual need of bad and immoral things to oppose and destroy—and, by extension, bad and immoral people to vilify.

There is no better description of the excesses to which this creed is prone than the first paragraph of the political philosopher Kenneth Minogue's masterpiece, *The Liberal Mind* (1963). "The story of liberalism, as liberals tell it," Minogue began, "is rather like the legend of St. George and the dragon."

After many centuries of hopelessness and superstition, St. George, in the guise of Rationality, appeared in the world somewhere about the sixteenth century. The first dragons upon whom he turned his lance were those of despotic kingship and religious intolerance. These battles won, he rested a time, until such questions as slavery, or prison conditions, or the state of the poor, began to command his attention. During the nineteenth century, his lance was never still, prodding this way and that against the inert scaliness of privilege, vested interest, or patrician insolence. But, unlike St. George, he did not know when to retire. The more he succeeded, the more he became bewitched with the thought of a world free of dragons, and the less capable he became of ever returning to private life. He *needed* his dragons. He could only live by fighting for causes—the people, the poor, the exploited, the colonially oppressed, the underprivileged and the underdeveloped. As an ageing warrior, he grew breathless in his pursuit of smaller and smaller dragons—for the big dragons were now harder to come by.

By the mid-1990s, liberalism accomplished all it was ever going to accomplish. Occasionally it stumbles into easy victories—think of the *Obergefell* decision on same-sex marriage, which liberals either opposed or didn't care about just a few years before—but by and large liberalism is a spent force. Everything it wanted to try, it has tried: social-welfare policies, affirmative action and related social engineering, liberal internationalism, the expansion of the franchise and civil rights to everyone. Sometimes it succeeded, sometimes it failed, but liberalism has no new ideas. It has slain all the dragons it's destined to slay.

During the Obama years, liberals roamed the country looking for beasts to slay and found only tiny ones that weren't dragons at all. By the end of his second term, we found ourselves arguing about microaggressions, cultural appropriation, and transgendered bathrooms.

With the election of Donald Trump, suddenly there appeared a fierce and detestable dragon, and liberals have thrown all their energies into the morally redeeming work of destroying it. Trump often jokes that he has saved the "failing *New York Times*," meaning he has given the newspaper's staff and readers something to get excited about in opposing him. I don't know if his claim is true, but in a real sense he has saved liberalism from despondency. Suddenly liberals have turned against the identity politics on which they were wasting their energies just a few years ago—note the number of prominent left-wing intellectuals who've publicly condemned identity politics since Trump's victory—and given themselves completely to the morally uplifting work of saving the nation and the world from this unlikely tyrant. In an inversion of an old evangelical dictum, liberals hate the sinner but love the sin—they hate the man Trump with all their souls but love what he's done because it has given them new life.

This newly revived liberalism doesn't use swords but words—strong words. It is no defense of Trump's sometimes egregious conduct in office or his administration's fitful competence to acknowledge that today's liberal will write and say just about anything to pierce the president's scaly exterior. Every day the opinion pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are little more than recitations of his awfulness, as if liberalism itself consists in whatever brings about his humiliation. The need to destroy has returned to American liberalism like an old madness, and those who show up in the wrong place at the wrong time will find themselves maimed by the lunatic lancer—slandered, screamed at, assaulted. Brett Kavanaugh can attest to this with chagrin.

Hillary Clinton was basically right. Democrats can't behave civilly. To do so would be to renounce their purpose. ♦

Him Too

Reassessing ‘bimbo eruptions’ in the #MeToo era

BY JOSHUA KENDALL

For decades, Leslie Millwee has been haunted by a series of traumatic memories. As she alleges, on three occasions between March and August 1980, when she was just 20, the governor of her state sexually assaulted her at work. The three attacks, spaced roughly two months apart, were all similar. On his visits to the small town where she held a job as a newscaster, the governor, whom she had previously interviewed at various local events, would head over to her TV station. He would then dash into the small room where she edited her stories. Standing behind her, he would grab her breasts. The first attack, Millwee says, lasted two or three minutes. The next two both lasted five to seven minutes and ended with him ejaculating. A couple of years ago Millwee, who now works in community relations for a hospice in Palm Springs, Calif., finally summoned up the courage to go public with her story. These days she often tweets about these painful incidents. Surprisingly, even in the era of the #MeToo movement, which marked its first anniversary a few weeks ago, the mainstream media continue to ignore her.

The reason for this radio silence may well have something to do with the identity of the powerful man Millwee claims victimized her. A dozen years after the alleged assaults, that governor was elected president of the United States. His name is Bill Clinton. “There seems to be a double standard that protects prominent liberals,” says Millwee. “All of America listened carefully to the Senate testimony of Christine Blasey Ford, who claims that she was violated by a conservative over 30 years ago. But few people seem interested in what I have to say. And in contrast to Brett Kavanaugh’s accusers, I can give a specific time and place for the assaults and supply lots of corroborating evidence.”

Joshua Kendall is the author of First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama (Grand Central). He is writing a book about how the #MeToo movement will affect our view of presidential history.

Clinton has never responded to Millwee’s accusations.

In the 20 years since the House of Representatives voted to impeach Clinton, a dominant narrative about his sexual misconduct has been sustained—that it was all much ado about little. This view is rarely challenged, even though it’s essentially the one authored by Clinton himself. In his autobiography *My Life* (2004), Clinton admitted to two consensual affairs—with Gennifer Flowers, who, like Millwee, worked as a TV journalist in Arkansas, before becoming a cabaret singer, and with Monica Lewinsky, whom he met during her stint as a White House intern. Clinton also acknowledged lying under oath about what he called his “immoral” and “foolish” behavior with Lewinsky—the infraction that led to his impeachment and eventually resulted in the suspension of his law license for five years.

As Hillary Clinton began to pursue her own presidential ambitions, most Americans assumed that the sum total of her husband’s sins amounted to little more than that. Perhaps Clinton was an inveterate womanizer whose fessing up to just two adulterous relationships constituted a white-wash—so went the common refrain—but if

his wife was at peace with his sexual past, the details were nobody else’s business. This governing assumption took a hit last fall after Ronan Farrow published his *New Yorker* piece exposing numerous allegations of sexual harassment against Harvey Weinstein. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, the New York Democrat, said she now believed President Clinton should have resigned in 1998. And a few influential journalists—including *New York Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg—argued that the rape allegation of Juanita Broadrick deserved a second look.

In early 1999, just a couple of weeks after Clinton’s acquittal by the Senate, in an extended interview with NBC’s *Dateline*, Broadrick, the former owner of an Arkansas nursing home, gave a harrowing account of an assault in a hotel room in 1978. “I met Clinton at 8:30 in the morning for a business meeting,” Broadrick recently told me. “He attacked me within five minutes of entering my room.” Other than having his lawyer issue a brief denial of the allegation back in 1998, Clinton has said



Leslie Millwee

VIA YOUTUBE

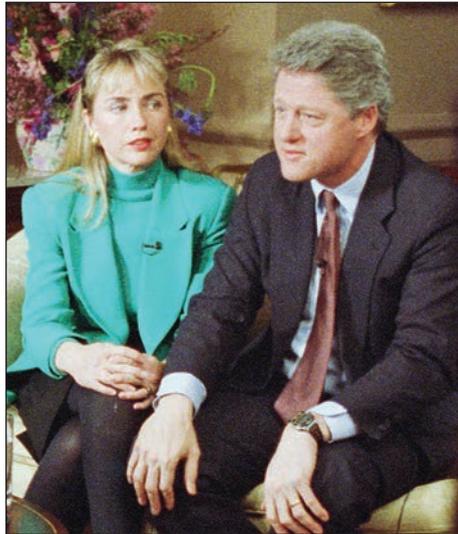
nothing about Broaddrick, who, like Millwee, does not get a mention in his memoir.

By June 2018, when Clinton, along with his coauthor James Patterson, the mega-bestselling novelist, toured the country to promote their thriller *The President Is Missing*, the status quo ante reigned supreme once again. In book-tour interviews by the national media, Clinton received mostly softball questions. The one exception was when Craig Melvin of the *Today* show asked Clinton if he owed Lewinsky a personal apology. After responding that this was not necessary since he had already issued a public apology, the former president played the victim: “And nobody believes that I got out of that for free. I left the White House \$16 million in debt. . . . This was litigated 20 years ago.” While Clinton was widely rebuked for his tone deafness, just about everyone agreed that the Lewinsky scandal had indeed been discussed ad nauseam and that it was time to move on.

But the credible assault allegations raised by both Millwee and Broaddrick suggest that the former president’s affair with a 22-year-old intern, which Lewinsky recently termed “a gross abuse of power,” may well be just one link in a long chain of predatory behavior that dates back to the late 1960s. In fact, the complete list of Clinton accusers alleging sexual assault or harassment is far longer than many realize. It includes not only Kathleen Willey, a former White House volunteer, and Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, who both aired complaints that circulated widely during his presidency, but also at least a half dozen other women who received just a brief flurry of media attention in the 1990s: Eileen Wellstone, who claimed that Clinton tried to rape her at Oxford in 1969; an unidentified Arkansas lawyer who told a Clinton biographer that he tried to force himself on her in 1977; Carolyn Moffet, an Arkansas legal secretary who reported that Clinton demanded oral sex in 1979; Elizabeth Ward Gracen, who told friends that Clinton tried to rape her shortly after she was crowned Miss America in 1982; Sandra Allen James, a political fundraiser who stated that Clinton put his hand up her dress in 1991; and Cristy Zercher, a flight attendant who charged that Clinton fondled her breasts during the 1992 campaign.

In the #MeToo era, the mainstream press would not hesitate to do a deep dive into the sexual history of any other internationally known former head of state facing such a string of disturbing allegations. Remarkably, the two lines

of defense that team Clinton trotted out during his presidency still seem to protect him from such scrutiny. One was the farfetched contention that *all* his accusers belonged to a “vast right-wing conspiracy.” This was the expression that Hillary Clinton whipped out in the infamous *Today* interview in January 1998 in which she denied the initial reports of her husband’s affair with Lewinsky. When asked last week by CNN about how the assault allegations against her husband compare to those against President Trump, the former first lady reverted to the same talking point: “There’s a very significant difference, and that is the intense, long-lasting, partisan investigation that was conducted in the ’90s.” She also rejected the idea that her husband’s affair with Lewinsky was an abuse of power, telling a CBS interviewer that Lewinsky “was an adult.”



Hillary and Bill discuss ‘pain in their marriage’ on 60 Minutes, January 26, 1992.

The other line of defense was the Clinton camp’s misogynistic slime machine, which most Americans forgot about years ago (or are simply too young to have witnessed or remembered). This widespread amnesia was on full display a few weeks ago at the Atlantic Festival when Lindsey Graham, in response to a question about whether President Trump had made disrespectful comments about Christine Blasey Ford, repeated the notorious line that Clinton aide James Carville had used to discredit Paula Jones: “This is what you get when you go through a trailer park with a \$100 bill.” The crowd gasped, assuming

that the Republican senator from South Carolina was casting aspersions on the character of Ford rather than attacking Democratic hypocrisy when it comes to women making accusations of sexual assault.

Carville’s comment about Jones was not a throwaway line but part of a carefully orchestrated strategy that dates back to the early days of the 1992 campaign. That’s when the candidate asked aide Betsey Wright to head up a quick-response team designed to fend off what Wright called “bimbo eruptions.” Wright, in turn, funneled over \$100,000 to a San Francisco private detective, Jack Palladino, to dig up dirt on Jennifer Flowers and the roughly two dozen other women whom she determined might talk to the press about sexual encounters of one sort or another with Clinton. Dubbed “the bimbo buster” or “the president’s dick” by Clinton aides, Palladino would use the threat of character assassination to intimidate the women into signing affidavits denying any sexual involvement with the candidate. He

would also try to induce news outlets to spike potentially damaging stories before publication. As Ronan Farrow noted last fall in the *New Yorker*, Palladino is the fixer Harvey Weinstein hired two decades later to compile hefty dossiers on accusers such as actress Rose McGowan, though in his Pulitzer Prize-winning stories, Farrow never got around to mentioning Palladino's prior (and highly effective) work for Clinton.

To understand how Bill Clinton has surmounted allegations of sexual assault serious enough to have doomed many a powerful man, we have to go back to the early days of his career in Arkansas. Clinton's rampant infidelity was already an open secret in both political and media circles in the state by the time he was first elected governor in 1978. In 1980, when Millwee began working at the TV station in Fort Smith, she was well aware of his history. "Everyone in the newsroom knew about his affair with a TV reporter in Little Rock, though we didn't know Gennifer Flowers by name. When he started becoming excessively flirtatious with me on his various trips to the station before the assaults, my colleagues started joking that he was now looking for another lover in Fort Smith," she says. "But all this talk made me very uncomfortable, as I wasn't at all interested in that."

Dolly Kyle, an Arkansas lawyer who met Clinton while they were both in high school, testified under penalty of perjury in the Paula Jones case that she had engaged in an on-again, off-again consensual affair with Clinton for nearly 20 years beginning in the early 1970s. "During an overnight tryst in May of 1987 at an airport hotel in Dallas, Clinton confided in me that he was a sex addict," says Kyle. "He claimed that women threw themselves at him, and he didn't know how to control himself. He admitted that by then he had already had at least a few hundred sex partners since his marriage." About a month after this discussion with Kyle, Clinton made the surprising announcement that he would not run for president the following year. This was not long after Democratic senator Gary Hart's once-promising presidential campaign suddenly collapsed amid news reports of adulterous behavior, and the Clinton camp was concerned that their candidate could well meet the same fate.

Though Clinton's relentless pursuit of extramarital sex continued more or less unabated, it did not cause any political problems for a few more years. The first sign of trouble came in October 1990 when Larry Nichols, a disgruntled former state employee, filed a \$3 million lawsuit against Clinton, claiming the governor had misused state funds

to carry on affairs with Gennifer Flowers and four other women. In a *New York Times Magazine* article in early 1997, journalist Philip Weiss would call Nichols's lawsuit "the declaration of war by those I've come to think of as Clinton crazies." But while Nichols and other Clinton enemies would latch on to a slew of conspiracy theories over the years—including wild charges of drug-smuggling and gun-running—there was nothing glaringly delusional about these particular sexual allegations.

The Clintons are correct in maintaining that political opponents repeatedly tried to use sex scandals to their advantage; that's what political opponents do. However, it does not follow that all the stories of sexual liaisons were manufactured out of whole cloth. As one biographer noted, "There were simply too many women and too many stories to be a matter of a temporary lapse or of smears by opponents." Clinton soon got all five women to sign affidavits denying Nichols's allegations, but those documents were hardly proof of anything. In fact, a taped phone conversation from 1991 reveals that Clinton urged Flowers to lie, telling her, "Hang tough . . . all you got to do is to deny it." In early 1992, Flowers flipped, claiming in a story she sold to a tabloid that she had had a 12-year affair with Clinton. Right



Paula Jones in 1994

before the New Hampshire primary, Clinton was forced to do damage control. In a widely watched *60 Minutes* interview after the Super Bowl, with Hillary sitting by his side, he admitted that he had "caused pain in my marriage." This vague confession of limited adulterous behavior managed to quell the furor and clear his path to the White House.

In late December 1993, Clinton's reckless sexual past came back to haunt him once again when both the *Los Angeles Times* and the *American Spectator* reported that as governor, he had asked Arkansas state troopers to procure women for him. Entitled "His Cheatin' Heart," the *Spectator* story set out to discover something about the roughly two dozen "bimbos" whom the Clinton campaign feared might "erupt" before the 1992 election. Except for Gennifer Flowers, author David Brock did not identify any of the women by name. Based on 30 hours of interviews with four state troopers, Brock wrote of a governor who, in addition to asking his staff to set up assignations with strangers, was juggling a half-dozen steady girlfriends.

Team Clinton, which would eventually come to include Brock after his political conversion memoir *Blinded by the Right* (2002), never pushed back against specific allegations. Instead, they spoke of right-wing smears. As the former president argued in 2004, Brock's article could be traced back to "extraordinary efforts made to discredit me

CYNTHIA JOHNSON / THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION / GETTY

by wealthy right-wingers with ties to Newt Gingrich and some adversaries of mine in Arkansas.” Some of the salacious details may well have been embellishments. However, the overall portrait of Clinton’s predation is consistent with what numerous other people have reported—consensual partners like Flowers, Kyle, and Lewinsky, as well as the various women alleging assault.

The *Spectator* story included a brief allusion to a woman named Paula whom Clinton had asked the troopers to set him up with soon after he spotted her at Little Rock’s Excelsior Hotel in May 1991. Three years later, that woman, Paula Jones, filed a sexual harassment suit against the president for the crude proposition that she alleges happened inside that hotel room. Jones’s lawsuit dragged on until November 1998, when Clinton agreed to pay her \$850,000, though he never acknowledged any wrongdoing. Along the way, as Jones filed appeal after appeal, news of the Lewinsky affair made it onto the radar screen of Ken Starr, the independent counsel initially charged with investigating the Whitewater scandal, a failed Arkansas real-estate investment implicating the Clintons. And Starr, in turn, recommended impeachment for perjury and obstruction of justice, stemming from Clinton’s attempt to cover up the Lewinsky affair in his Jones case testimony. To pay her legal costs, Jones relied on financial support from conservative groups such as the Rutherford Institute, but, again, that does not impeach her testimony in the “he said/she said” debate she waged with the president, as the Clinton camp repeatedly insisted.

The Clintons are also correct to point out that his sex scandals were litigated in the late 1990s when, after careful consideration, the vast majority of Americans sided with their president—at least on the narrower issue of whether he should be removed from office for lying about them. But that’s actually a compelling reason to revisit them in the #MeToo era.

Twenty-five years ago, journalists were still searching for the proper conceptual lens through which to examine the sexual behavior of presidents. As the *Los Angeles Times* noted in its 1993 article on “Troopergate,” “Allegations about the personal lives of Presidents are not new. While President, Thomas Jefferson was publicly accused by a disgruntled former supporter of having an intimate relationship with one of his slaves. . . . For most of this century, propriety generally required that such matters be discussed only after the individual leaders were no longer alive.” Until very recently,

presidents were often idealized, and allusions to the extramarital affairs of any president—particularly widely revered ones like Jefferson and John F. Kennedy—still made most Americans uncomfortable. That’s why nearly all presidential scholars failed to pursue the historical evidence pointing to Jefferson’s long-term sexual relationship with his slave Sally Hemings. And given that sexual harassment was, in the 1990s, just beginning to be acknowledged as a social ill, the possibility that any head of state—past or present—might have been guilty of it still seemed somewhat fantastical to many.

Over the past couple of decades, a consensus has emerged that during the Clinton administration the mainstream media went too far in the other direction, throwing propriety to the wind. As Marvin Kalb, the founding director of Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on the Media, Politics and Public Policy, put it in *One Scandalous Story* (2001), “When the story broke on January 21, 1998, that President Clinton had had an affair with . . . Lewinsky, the press plunged into the scandal, disclosing every tasteless detail. Its self-justifying explanation was that it had no choice.”

The press certainly deserves criticism for its obsessive focus on the most titillating aspects of the Lewinsky scandal. However, it’s important to locate the lust responsible for the media frenzy primarily within the former president himself—and not project it entirely onto journalists, as the Clintonistas were wont to do. In *The War Room* (1993), a documentary about Clinton’s first presidential run, deputy campaign director George Stephanopoulos, now the chief anchor of ABC News, urges a radio talk show host not to cover some new sexual allegations about Clinton, barking into his phone, “People will think you’re scum.”

While the #MeToo movement has detractors who worry about its excesses, it’s hard to find any American who denies its important lesson that throughout history, a small but significant percentage of men in high places—of all races, faiths, and political persuasions—have had little compunction about forcing themselves upon women and then lying about this criminal behavior.

It’s time to listen carefully to what Leslie Millwee and all of Clinton’s other accusers have to say. With Bill and Hillary Clinton now embarking on an extended tour of North America—live events begin in Las Vegas next month and end in Los Angeles next May—the time is ripe for a deliberate and dignified national conversation about whether our 42nd president is actually a sexual predator who has long been hiding in plain sight. ♦

The overall portrait of Clinton’s predation is consistent with what numerous other people have reported—consensual partners as well as the various women alleging assault.



On a recent Halloween, revelers in Salem pose near a statue depicting Elizabeth Montgomery in her role as Samantha on *Bewitched*.

Walking with Witches

In 1692, Salem's constables were arresting accused witches.

Today, there are witch cartoons on the city's police cars.

How a legacy of fear and injustice gave rise to a kitschy way of life.

BY CHRIS R. MORGAN

It is just before seven o'clock on a warm September evening, and I am waiting in front of a black house at the corner of Essex Street and Hawthorne Boulevard in Salem, Massachusetts. It is situated between a pub and a store with Harry Potter paraphernalia in its front windows. The black house is just one of many witchcraft shops in Salem, but this one, called Crow Haven Corner, has the distinction of being the old-

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est. I'm here to go on one of the "witch walks" they offer several times a day for \$16 a head.

It's a Monday so my tour group is a small one. Very small, in fact; there are only two other people, a couple from Utah whose daughter attends Harvard. The tiny turnout does not discourage our guide, Tom, in the least. If anything, the intimate group better allows his particular talents to shine.

Tom is a young, wiry-framed man with shoulder-length brown hair. He greets us with a sprightly voice that

slips into a singsongy cadence each time he signals us to move to a new destination. Now in his mid-thirties, Tom has been a resident of Salem since he was in his teens and he is a veteran guide, having worked on several tours of the area. Initially called to the city by his love of Halloween, Tom later became a practicing witch, which is, at least for me, the tour's main draw. Coming to Salem with many questions about the discrepancy between the city's past and present relationship to witchcraft, I hope Tom's two crafts—

JIM DAVIS / BOSTON GLOBE / GETTY

sorcery and “explaining things”—will help me get some answers.

The tour starts in the “enchanted alleyway” next to the Harry Potter store. A narrow pathway leads to a tiny courtyard, almost a patio, containing a winged gargoyle and a person-sized, colorful plastic dragon; a rotating green light casts a spotted pattern. In the center of the courtyard is a table set with candles, crystals, a pile of leaflets discussing the victims of the 1692 witch trials, statuettes of various mythical figures, a stuffed bird perched on top of a skull, and a knife. Off to the side, planted in the ground, is a sword, but Tom doesn’t like the sword so he goes back into the store to get one he prefers.

Once he returns, Tom commences with the grounding spell, a simple ritual to demonstrate the basic practices of Wicca, the most popular contemporary form of witchcraft in the United States. He starts with breathing exercises, not unlike those done during yoga, he says. He then tells us to concentrate on the weight of our feet planting us to the ground—an easy task as I’d spent much of the day walking around. He is about to prepare a “sacred space” for the spell, which he describes first as “a kind of force field” and, more interestingly, as “an invisible witch church.” He points the sword upward and spins it over our heads to create the parameters of the sacred space. “I’m going to do a lot of spinning,” he says. Then he takes up the ritual knife—called an *athame*, I later learn—which he will use to call on the four elements of life: earth, air, fire, and water. We hold up our left hands as he points the *athame* north, west, south, and east for each element. After each rendition we are instructed to say “so mote it be”—an archaism for “so it must be.”

Next is the visualization spell. Tom explains that witches are pantheists rather than atheists and that all the gods of pre-Christian times never entirely faded into oblivion. Tonight’s spell is performed in honor of Hermes, a favorite of Tom’s, the god of travel—the god of tour guides. He lights an orange candle and has us close our eyes as he

describes in lush terms the flame rising above us and dissipating into the sky. Tom then undoes the sacred space by turning the *athame* to the right. He waves his hand in front of the dragon, which, equipped with a motion sensor, now moves its head and roars. Tom then points to a pile of crystals that have been blessed in the process of the spell and offers them to us if we want to carry the magic with us. “Everybody gets one.”



Candles, crystals, and a stuffed crow set the mood for the ‘witch walks’ offered by Crow Haven Corner.

In the preface to the 1851 edition of *Twice-Told Tales*, Nathaniel Hawthorne warns the reader that “if you would see any thing in it,” the book must “be read in the clear, brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages.”

I arrive at the author’s hometown via commuter rail—a 30-minute ride from Boston—at five o’clock the evening before my tour with Tom. Walking along the platform and up to the street, the unobstructed sun is only just about to set and the weather is still very much above mild, so I already feel like I’ve failed in my excursion: This isn’t the clarity of twilight that Hawthorne advises. Then again, Hawthorne’s work isn’t really what

I’ve come to Salem to investigate.

There is a trope in the horror genre that probably has a proper name, but I haven’t heard it and wouldn’t know how to look it up. It’s a dark twist on the fish-out-of-water narrative, let’s say. A single central character travels to some far-off place in search of leisure or research or escape, only to meet certain doom at worst or become privy to maddening, inexplicable visions at best. H.P. Lovecraft wrote quite a few stories with this framework, though the template is probably M.R. James’s 1904 story “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad,” in which a stiff academic taking a coastal vacation finds an ancient whistle that, blown unwittingly, summons an apparition into his bed-and-breakfast room. My favorite tale of this type is Thomas Ligotti’s “The Last Feast of Harlequin” (1990), in which an anthropologist who specializes in clowns travels to the small town of Mirocaw to study its winter festival only to discover, in Ligotti’s patented lyrical detail, that one festival is hiding another more sinister one.

I had arranged to stay at a bed and breakfast called the Stepping Stone Inn, located at the Y-shaped intersection where the statue of Salem founder Roger Conant stands cloaked and imposing as if he were rising angrily from the ground. The inn is a Greek Revival house built between 1846 and 1847 for naval and customs officer Abraham True. As the co-owner Matt shows me the parlor, he informs me that True’s funeral was held there. Not half an hour into my time in Salem and I’ve already discovered a morbid detail.

Matt hands me paperwork before showing me to my room with some instructions: Smoking is *absolutely* forbidden on the grounds, as are weapons, drugs, incense, and Ouija boards.

There’s no small amount of expectation in Salem of encounters that can qualify as “weird.” That the businesses and residents in the city are equipped and eager to help make such encounters possible is perhaps its most notable aspect. Salem’s official

tourism website (Salem.org) includes standard planning suggestions for the *foodie*, *engaged*, *art appreciator*, *beer/wine lover*, and *LGBTQ+* considering a visit. So far, so normal. But two other categories on the site stick out: the *Halloween enthusiast*, signified on the site by a witch's broomstick, and the *modern witch*, signified by a lunar symbol.

Heading from the center of town

from *It*; the Tall Man from *Phantasm*; Regan from *The Exorcist*; the Predator from, well, *Predator*; Elvira; and Alfred Hitchcock with a disproportionately small head set up next to a screen projecting *The House on Haunted Hill*. In the gift shop there is a Michael Myers mask (a William Shatner mask spray-painted white) priced at \$41.

While I'm perusing the selection of

all others. It is made up of the type of person for whom one day, even one month, of Halloween is not enough—the type of person for whom every day, as the Ministry song goes, is Halloween. And while, for the rest of the country, haunted hayrides, horror-movie marathons, and pumpkin-spiced everything are confined to the “fun month,” Salem is one of the few places offering Halloween-friendly attractions all year round. Or at least it is the one location uniquely qualified to do so.

The Salem Witch Museum is next door to the Stepping Stone Inn in what used to be a Gothic Revival church. With my complimentary ticket from the inn, I'm led into an auditorium where life-sized wax tableaus are set up near the ceiling. When the show starts, each tableau lights up in turn and we look up and follow while a narration recorded many decades ago—with a voiceover artist doing his level-best Vincent Price impersonation—tells how the Salem witch panic of 1692 unfolded. It is like the Disney Hall of Presidents but for suffering and death.

It begins with a replica of the Devil, red and menacing, with glowing eyes. Europe, we are told, through centuries of disease and political and theological strife, was haunted by this figure. Witch hunts were common throughout the continent. “In the town of Ratisbon,” goes a passage from *Malleus Maleficarum*, a guide to witchcraft published in 1487, “a certain young man who had an intrigue with a girl, wishing to leave her, lost his member, that is to say, some glamour was cast over it so that he could see or touch nothing but his smooth body.” “I have ever believed, and do now know, that there are witches,” wrote Sir Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici* (1642). “They that doubt of these do not only deny them, but spirits: and are obliquely, and upon consequence, a sort, not of infidels, but atheists.” Browne gave testimony in witch trials held in Suffolk 30 years before the trials in Salem.

The story of the Salem witch trials, as told in Salem today, is always the same. The Puritans brought with them a grave worldview that made life difficult for



Visitors to Salem will find its four centuries of history layered with contemporary camp.

on Essex Street out towards the wharf, many of the businesses in Salem are dedicated to the spooky, the occult, and the gothic. “Wear black. We can help,” reads a flyer for Die With Your Boots On, a store dedicated exclusively to gothic fashion, with products like Viking sword leggings, a Sylvia Plath-inspired typewriter necklace, and a varsity jacket that reads “See You in Hell” on the back. Vampfangs started in 1993 as a door-to-door service offering custom-made vampire fangs. This year it opened its own Essex Street location, where it sells colored contact lenses, ready-made teeth veneers with names like “Night Walker,” “True Breed,” and “Cletus Deluxe,” and books like *Biting Back: A No-Nonsense, No-Garlic Guide to Facing the Personal Vampires in Your Life*. “If you have any questions, just scream,” is what I'm told in a pleasant customer-service tone after paying my admission to Count Orlok's Nightmare Gallery, a museum displaying life-sized replicas of horror icons like Pennywise

athames at the Cauldron Black, one of the many witch shops in downtown Salem, two employees discuss the merits of Libras while cold-wave music plays in the background. Over at Hex: Old World Witchery, I case a shelf of cheeky seven-day candles like the Break Bad Habits candle for “banishing sinful vices,” which pictures a pregnant, smoking nun. By burning a marriage breakup candle, you help ensure an end to “a relationship—yours or someone else's.” The shop also offers dolls, powders, crystals, herbs, handcrafted journals, and other ingredients for today's occultists.

This is to say nothing of the numerous walking-tour booths set up along Essex Street, where a man in a top hat will escort you through the city, divulging its dark secrets. There is also a *Hocus Pocus* tour, inspired by the Salem-set 1993 Bette Midler film, which I saw once in a theater and never again.

In the modern world there is one cultural demographic whose general annoyingness seems to stand above

anyone not adhering to their version of Christianity. Girls of Salem Village were amused by tales told by Tituba, a black slave of the orthodox minister Samuel Parris. Parris's daughter Betty, his niece Abigail Williams, and other girls began to exhibit strange symptoms—babbling incoherently and making animal noises. With no clinical diagnosis available, they were deemed bewitched, leading to numerous accusations, complicated interrogations, and ultimately 19 deaths by hanging, 1 by rock-pressing, and 4 more while the accused were in custody.

The Puritans are usually spoken of in broad terms in today's Salem. Tom, though, is more pointed. The Puritans, as distinct from the Pilgrims of Plymouth Rock, were “kind of crazy,” he says; they were “the Taliban of Christianity.” Those accused of witchcraft, everyone in town accepts, were not genuine witches. No evidence beyond the accusations and comparatively mild acts of superstition could be attributed to them. Rather, their guilt lay in their inability to conform. “From infancy,” Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum wrote in *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, “a Puritan was raised to distrust his private will, to perceive it as the ‘old Adam’ which, above all, constituted original sin. It was this innate self-interest ... that had to be tamed if it could not be eradicated.”

Boyer and Nissenbaum's version of the story of 1692 matches the one held by most of the Salemites I encounter. In this telling, the trials were the unfortunate outcome of a culture clash between two factions. Salem Village (modern-day Danvers) lived in the shadow of Salem Town, then a burgeoning port colony that would prosper thanks to trade with East Asia. One faction of Salem Village wanted greater connection with Salem Town, while the other—made up of more traditional Puritans like Parris—wanted to remain independent of it. “Unable to relieve their frustrations politically, ... the pro-Parris faction unconsciously fell back

on a ... more archaic strategy: they treated those who threatened them not as a political opposition but as an aggregate of morally defective individuals.”

The Witch Dungeon Museum on Lynde Street gives some idea of the heights of cruelty the trials reached. The replica is in a dingy basement where very little is clearly visible—which is part of the point. “All prisoners endured



Inscription on a bench in the Salem Witch Trials Memorial

huge physical suffering,” Frances Hill wrote in *A Delusion of Satan*:

But accused witches were worse off than the other unfortunates. Their limbs were weighed down and their movements restricted by manacles chained to the walls, so that their specters could less easily escape to wreak havoc. ... Body searches for “witches’ teats” afforded ample opportunities for rough treatment. Such teats, supposedly nipples for familiars to suck on, consisted of any mole, wart, pimple, or growth that could be considered unnatural.

The cells in the replica dungeon vary in size, some large enough to hold several inmates, others only slightly wider than caskets. Prisoners were billed for their accommodations, and so, as a costumed guide tells visitors, the wealthier among the accused took the larger cells, though they sometimes had to share them. Families of the accused were also obligated to pay the fee for the hangman.

Among the most tragic victims of the Salem story was Dorothy Good, just 4 years old. Her mother, Sarah Good, was one of the earliest women to be accused. Little Dorothy—whose name is often listed as Dorcas thanks

to an error on her arrest warrant—was accused of witchcraft and readily confessed and gave evidence against her mother. (Sarah gave birth to a baby, Dorothy's sister, while incarcerated; that child died before Sarah was hanged.) Dorothy was imprisoned in both Boston and Salem Town, “loaded with irons and chained to a wall” for as many as eight months without sun or space to walk. Of all those accused, Dorothy's ordeal feels the most contemporary. The afflicted and the accusers “had no special desire that Dorcas should suffer,” Hill writes. “But their satisfaction in the witch-hunt made them indifferent to Dorcas's pain. The same seems to have been true of the rest of the populace; no protests were made on the child's behalf.”

Back on our town tour, Tom walks us over to the Salem Witch Trials Memorial. Erected in the tercentennial year of 1992, it is a large courtyard with

a stone wall around it, from which protrude 20 stone benches. Each bears the name of a person executed, the date of his or her execution, and the method. Mourners leave flowers and notes. Over Sarah Good's stone is a note, on Hawthorne Hotel stationery, apparently from her sixth-great-granddaughter. Just on the other side of the wall is the Burying Point, considered the second-oldest settler graveyard in North America. Respect for the dead, Tom tells us, is an important tenet of the witch. That has extended to the city itself, which forbids entry into the cemetery after dusk.

I go to the Burying Point during the day. Among those interred there is John Hathorne, the harsh judge who oversaw the witch trials. His descendant would famously write in the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* that Hathorne had

made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him. So deep a stain, indeed, that his dry old bones, in the Charter-street burial-ground, must still retain it, if they have not crumbled utterly to dust!

Most of the stones in the Burying Point are too deteriorated to read. I do find a small headstone for one Nathanael Mather, died in 1688. “An Aged person,” the epitaph read, “that had seen but Nineteen Winters in the world.”

Walking around the Burying Point one gets a sense of modern Salem’s spatial quirks. The antiquated and the contemporary blend into each other, and not always seamlessly. Imagine William S. Burroughs’s cut-up technique but applied to city planning. The location of the dungeon where the accused were jailed and interrogated now hosts an office building. The property of Bridget Bishop, the first to be executed and the only one explicitly charged with witchcraft, is now a seafood restaurant frequented by paranormal investigators. Across from the far wall of the Burying Point is a gas station; at the side of it is a gourmet pizza restaurant. At the grass just beneath the wall are the remains of two miniature liquor bottles, two 7-Eleven drink cups, a pizza box with two paper plates, a magazine, and scratch-off lottery tickets.

There is at least one book that pushes against the current narrative of the Salem witch trials. Chadwick Hansen’s *Witchcraft at Salem*, published in 1969, puts forth the theory that evidence against some of the accused was, at the very least, plausible. Frances Hill included a chapter of Hansen’s book in her own *Salem Witch Trials Reader* for its “excellent explanation of the onset of the girls’ fits as due to clinical hysteria,” albeit from “fear of witchcraft.”

New England, it turns out, was a hotbed of occult practice. But where Bridget Bishop and others purportedly practiced malicious “black magic,” many others, including even medical professionals, dabbled in more benign “white magic.” Popular countercharms in New England included boiling or burning the ear of a bewitched animal or boiling the hair of a bewitched child. Hansen records one instance in which a family, in order to expel a ghost, tried boiling a pot of urine and crooked pins, to no avail:

As the Liquor begun to grow hot, a Stone came and broke the top or mouth of it, and threw it down, and spilt what was in it; which being made good again, another Stone, as the Pot grew hot again, broke the handle off; and being recruited and fill’d the third time, was then with a third Stone quite broke to pieces and split; and so the Operation became frustrate and fruitless.



Bela Pratt’s 1917 statue of Nathaniel Hawthorne, with Fatima’s Psychic Studio in the background

Throughout the witch walk, Tom complains about the adverse effects of movies and pop culture, which have long shared Hansen’s view of witchcraft. He has a point. Films like *Black Sunday*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, and stories like M.R. James’s terrifying “The Ash-Tree,” to name a few, all depict witchcraft as real, powerful, and far-reaching.

Before coming to Salem I thought of using the 2015 movie *The Witch* as a kind of icebreaker. Or maybe not. While Robert Eggers’s film is justly praised for its meticulous portrayal of 17th-century New England (though it was filmed in Canada), it depicts witchcraft from a Puritan’s point of view: as a Satanic endeavor, replete with sacrificing of infants and the signing of the Devil’s book, a common charge in the times of the witch trials. Not that this prevented the film from being endorsed by the Satanic Temple as “a criticism of a theocratic patriar-

chal society and a fair representation of the stresses that puts on a community.”

The Satanic Temple, by the way, is based in Salem, though Satanism goes unmentioned during the witch walk. Tom explains the Wiccan pentagram’s Pythagorean roots, and decries film and TV for corrupting it—though it is Anton LaVey and his Church of Satan that hold the copyright for the inverted goat-shaped pentagram.

Just past the Burying Point is a complex called the Salem Witch Village, another source of tours, exhibits, and a Halloween haunted house called Frankenstein’s Castle. On the side of the building are three windows, each decorated with a female figure: the maiden, the mother, and the crone. These make up the “triple goddess,” a sort of Wiccan trinity that represents the waxing, full, and waning lunar cycle as well as youth, adulthood, and old age. Sometimes they are considered parts of one Mother Goddess, who is co-deity with a male Horned God.

By the time I leave Salem, I have more questions than answers as to what constitutes the contemporary pagan’s theology, a thoroughly post-modern mishmash of many pre-Christian traditions. Some of the confusion is, apparently, my problem: “Part of what is so uncanny about American paganism,” Alex Mar writes in her 2015 book *Witches of America*, “is the image of mostly white Middle Americans worshipping multiple gods and goddesses: we’re a vastly Christian culture, and that means *one* God. ... The license and prerogative to choose your own gods and goddesses—or to allow them to choose you—remains a foreign thing for me, for *most* of us.”

Wicca is the most popular variant of neo-paganism partly because it is the least ominous—its chief precept is “For the good of all; harming none”—but also because its introduction to the wider public perfectly matched certain twists and turns of postwar culture.

Its history can be traced back to Gerald Gardner, a British civil servant by profession, an anthropologist and

HENRY ZBYSZYNSKI VIA FLICKR (CC BY 2.0)

archaeologist by hobby, and a publicist by spiritual calling. He worked for decades in East Asia as an inspector of opium shops and spent his off-hours studying the native rituals of the Malay and digging for relics. In 1939, by Gardner's telling, he returned to England and was initiated into a witch cult that had survived centuries of persecution. By the 1940s, Gardner and his collaborator, a drama teacher who went by the name Dafo, had started a coven with members of a naturist (i.e., nudist) group Gardner ran in. After 1951—the year Parliament repealed the Witchcraft Act of 1735—Gardner became the “resident witch” at the Folklore Centre of Superstition and Witchcraft in Castle-town, Isle of Man.

Much of the ritual and theology of Wicca is taken from Gardner's circa-1950s *Book of Shadows*. Gardner claimed that its contents were handed down directly from ancient pagan practices, but the reality is more complicated, as Mar explains: “Several elements of Wicca's *Book of Shadows* ... were pulled from pre-existing grimoires, or spell compilations; from *Aradia*, a ‘witches’ gospel’ published by an American folklorist in 1899; and even from a poem by Rudyard Kipling.”

Nevertheless, Gardner's more anthropological book *Witchcraft Today* brought Wicca in the 1960s to the United States, where it mingled with the burgeoning counterculture and then proceeded to outlive it. Once in America, Mar writes, practicing Wiccans “improvised and expanded on Gardner's original *Book of Shadows* and oral teachings. Some covens gave Wicca a Celtic, Saxon, or feminist Dianic slant; others were brazenly ‘eclectic,’ picking and choosing rites and flourishes in the way that only Americans feel entitled to do.”

Beneath its plethora of gods (which seem about as numerous as Catholic saints) and its diversity of practices (which seem no less confusing than the multitude of Protestant denominations) there is a simplicity to modern

witchcraft, at least as it is presented in Salem. On the one hand everything ties back to nature: There is no good or evil, only what nature dictates. If science disproves a witch's belief, witches don't argue. There *is* a dark magic, apparently, but it is not evil, only lunar, and tied to the witch's own idea of honoring the dead. On the other hand, witchcraft

hexing, which is meant to inflict harm”:

In other words, this is not the equivalent of magically punching a Nazi; rather, it is ripping the bullhorn from his hands, smashing his phone so he can't tweet, tying him up, and throwing him in a dark basement where he can't hurt anyone.

The binding spell received a publicity boost when the pop singer Lana Del Rey tweeted the lunar-dates spell and added that “ingredients can b found online.” Since then, the document has been amended to include a spell against the NRA and an “emergency ritual” against Brett Kavanaugh. The extent to which these rituals actually *work*, in the tradition of the boiling urine, is rather beside the point: This sort of witchcraft-for-politics is an extension of theatrical protests, such as the 1968 “levitation” of the Pentagon, or what Satanic Temple founder Lucien Greaves calls “symbolic expressions of ritualized discontent.”



Laurie Cabot, Salem's ‘official witch,’ founded the shop now called Crow Haven Corner in the early 1970s.

follows a social vision of simplified libertarianism that swaps out sadistically boring economic policy with rituals and magic: harm none, think for yourself, don't give in to mob mentality, etc.

“You hear a lot about the ‘occult,’” Tom tells us. “But ‘occult’ just means ‘secret.’ And the secret is out; it's on your phone, on the Internet. There is no occult; magic is everywhere.” He's right.

Witchcraft's most recent high-profile moment came just after Donald Trump's inauguration, when a document “making the rounds in a number of magical groups both secretive and public” was posted online laying out a “binding spell” to be cast against “Donald Trump and all those who abet him.” The instructions call for the ritual “to be performed at midnight on every waning crescent moon until [Trump] is removed from office.” Applied correctly, the binding spell “seeks to restrain someone from doing harm” and thus “is differentiated from *cursing* or

The reason for magic's special abundance in Salem today can be found at the corner of Essex and Washington, site of a statue of Elizabeth Montgomery in her familiar pose, seated on a crescent moon as Samantha Stephens in *Bewitched*.

By the middle of the 20th century, Salem bore little distinction from other midsized American cities whose economic prime was behind them. Its branding as “Witch City” was mostly to its detriment and, despite a few modest occasions of remembrance, that part of its past was kept in the past. When researching for *The Crucible* in 1952, Arthur Miller was frustrated because he “couldn't get anyone to say anything about it.”

That changed in the summer of 1970 when the producers of *Bewitched*, while filming its seventh season, decided to center its first eight episodes on Salem, filming five of them on location. The “Salem Saga,” as the episodes are called, sets much of the tone and understanding of the witch trials that Salem has subsequently adopted. “The people

that you persecuted were guiltless,” a time-traveling Samantha tells the original Puritans. “They were mortals, just like yourselves. You are the guilty.”

In the early 1970s, the opening of Crow Haven Corner officially brought witches back to Salem. The store’s first owner, Laurie Cabot, holds the distinction of being Salem’s “official witch,” conferred upon her by Michael Dukakis. Cabot was featured on a 1980 episode of the Leonard Nimoy-hosted *In Search of...*, which filmed her walking around the modern city in a black cloak, carrying a scepter.

Today’s crop of Salem spokeswitches follows Cabot’s example. Crow Haven Corner’s current owner, Lorelei, is “Salem’s love clairvoyant.” For \$90, she will hold a private 30-minute session in the Egyptian room just above the store—for couples it’s 45 minutes for \$150—that includes a tarot card and palm reading, a personal witch circle, and mediumship with passed loved ones if necessary. She has made several television appearances and has hosted Katy Perry in the store.

Christian Day co-owns both the witch shop Hex and psychic parlor Omen. His website lists media appearances on *Ghost Adventures*, *TMZ*, *CNN*, and *Fox News*. Along with Lorelei, Day, billed as “the world’s best-known warlock,” appeared on a Boston news broadcast in 2011 to cast a cleansing spell on Charlie Sheen, who had appropriated “warlock” for his own, now largely forgotten, purposes. “Charlie Sheen is not a warlock, for a warlock is a wise person who understands the ways of the spirit world,” Day tells the news crew. “And so no truly wise person would betray their own soul in the way that he’s done.” Personally I prefer the etymologically accurate explanation I saw on a wax figure in the Witch Museum: that *witch* is a gender-neutral term and that *warlock* actually (and awesomely) means *traitor*.

In any case, the context of “Witch City” has taken on a new meaning. Today’s Salem *owns* it. There is a Witch City Mall and a Witch City Taxi service. A witch appears on the logo of

the local newspaper. There is even a goofy cartoon witch silhouette slapped on the side of the patrol cars of Salem’s police—the latter-day successors of Judge Hathorne’s constables.

It rains on my last full day in Salem—it pours, in fact, as the remnants of Hurricane Florence blow northward and directly over us. Once the skies clear—that is, once the tornado warning passes—I go back out, meandering along Derby Street, in between Essex



A Salem police car bearing the city emblem

Street and the wharf. I approach the New England Pirate Museum as an employee in full pirate costume exits, presumably for his lunch break. The museum has a charming front-window diorama of pirates gallivanting around a random beach. (The compendious website *Atlas Obscura* trashes the kitschy wax figures and other antiquated displays on which Salem museums are so dependent, but I can’t help but appreciate the resistance to screens, augmented reality, and other “interactive” sorcery.)

A little further along I come to a narrow, quiet side street that hides a sliver of literary history. Tucked away is 10½ Herbert Street, known to Nathaniel Hawthorne as “Castle Dismal,” where he spent much of his early life and wrote some of his early tales. It’s just a couple of blocks away from

Hawthorne Boulevard and its statue of Hawthorne. On one side of the bronze author is Fatima’s Psychic Studio. On the other is Artemisia Botanicals, yet another witch shop with a pentagram in its front window.

“Witches are rebellious,” Tom declares early in the tour—echoing Mar’s words in *Witches of America*: There is a “separateness” between the pagan and the rest of society, “but it’s one that many Pagans cling to with pride. Tell people we are not perverts—although we *are*, if by ‘pervert’ you mean someone who proudly rejects the religious mainstream.” Of course, by that definition, the Puritans were similarly, even proudly, perverse.

Soon enough, Salem seems to me less like Witch City and more like *The American City*. It is the birthplace of part of our national character—the part in which every individual is a seeker, every community a counterculture, every conflict rife with the highest moral stakes. William Faulkner’s lines about the past—it’s “never dead. It’s not even past”—merely verbalize what Salem established by example and sewed with its scarlet threads into the country’s fabric.

The tour ends sometime after 8:30. Tom takes us into the store, says something about circles that I don’t quite remember, politely suggests leaving a tip—I did not have cash on me, to my regret; but for what it’s worth, if I go to hell after I die, I imagine someone like Tom cheerfully walking me through my eternal torments would take the edge off to a considerable degree—and concludes for questions. After asking him how *athame* is spelled, I head to a nearby bar with a glowing orange countertop to decompress and gather my notes. Walking back to Stepping Stone on Essex, I pass Tom and another Crow Haven Corner employee walking in the other direction. They both smile at me and Tom wishes me a happy Halloween. I’m too impaired to give more than a wave in return, but not too impaired to know that the season that never ends has begun. ♦

LOUISE OLIGNY / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY



One Giant Flop for Moviekind

Neil Armstrong biopic is a joyless schlep.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

In a photograph taken by Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong works near the Eagle lunar module.

First Man, a movie about the greatest technological achievement in human history, is utterly unenthralled by technology, achievement, or human history. Instead, it tells a story about an emotionally remote, repressed, grieving, and angry couple, one of whom happens to be the man who would emerge from the lunar module and take the first step on the moon. Forget *The Right Stuff*. This is *The Neurotic Stuff*. *First Man* drains the triumph, the exhilaration, the excitement, and the meaning from Neil Armstrong's exemplary life in favor of a jittery, anxious, tragedy-soaked account deliberately designed to deny its audience any sense of transcendence.

Which is bizarre, because what Armstrong and the NASA scientists, engineers, and astronauts achieved on July 20, 1969, was literal transcendence—transcendence from the earth, from its atmosphere, from the limits of human imagination. Instead, the story *First Man* tells about Armstrong (Ryan

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First Man

Directed by Damien Chazelle



Gosling, not at all compelling) is that he was depressed due to the death of his toddler daughter, Karen, from cancer in 1962, held himself remote and aloof from almost everyone else in the space program, turned his marriage into an emotional desert, and was a distant father to his two sons.

The space program we see here is a reflection of Armstrong's personality: It's a world of hidden anxiety. There's very little joy, a great deal of worry about bad press and losing the race to the Soviets, and a general sense not of engagement with the most exciting adventure the world had ever seen but rather of fire, death, doom. And when Armstrong lands on the moon, in a sequence that is as technologically remarkable as it is thematically gratuitous, the movie has him flash back to his dead daughter, shed a tear for her, and secretly toss a bracelet with her

name on it into the Sea of Tranquility.

Now, one can't say this didn't happen, because it might have, the same way Armstrong might have jumped in the air and sung "Sweet Sue" on the lunar surface when nobody was watching. But it almost certainly didn't. It was pretty clearly invented out of whole cloth from a few speculative sentences in James R. Hansen's authorized 2005 biography, on which the movie is based: "Did [Armstrong] take something of Karen with him to the Moon?" his sister June asks rhetorically, then answers: "Oh, I dearly hope so."

The movie begins and ends with Karen's death, and the moon landing becomes the way Armstrong finds, as we say in our mad onrush to idiocracy, "closure." The idea of taking one of the great events in human history and reducing it in this fashion to the private inner drama of a very private man is not only bad storytelling; there's something immoral about mining Armstrong's life in this fashion to tell his story in this way.

When Armstrong is being interviewed for a position as a Gemini

NASA

China on the Moon

Kim Stanley Robinson's latest novel lacks his work's usual spark. BY ADAM ROBERTS

The new novel from Kim Stanley Robinson—best known for his 1990s science fiction trilogy *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars*—starts low-key. An American courier called Fred Fredericks is on his way to the moon to deliver a new model “quantum” phone. On the flight he befriends the noted Chinese poet and travel writer Ta Shu. But when Fred makes lunar touchdown and meets Governor Chang Yazu, head of the Chinese Lunar Special Administrative Region, something goes wrong.

“Nice to meet you,” Fred said.

Chang extended his hand and Fred took it, and they shook hands. Chang looked surprised; he peered over Fred's shoulder with a puzzled expression. Then he crumpled to one

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Red Moon

by Kim Stanley Robinson
Orbit, 447 pp., \$27

side. Fred followed him down, wondering why his balance had chosen that moment to fail him. The scent of oranges.

Chang dies, and Fred—the unwitting vector for the poison that killed him—nearly dies too. He recovers to find himself under arrest, a suspect in Chang's death, sharing his jail with the feisty young Chan Qi, whose family connections (she is the daughter of the Chinese minister of finance) make her a lunar VIP. By getting pregnant Qi has broken the law, pregnancy being forbidden on the moon because no one is sure how the low gravity might affect a developing fetus.

It's a promising set-up, and Robinson's laid-back opening, by suggesting that his story will ramp up its pace and immediacy into who-knows-what exciting developments, works pretty well. But laid-back is the whole novel.

Red Moon never really sits forward, let alone gets to its feet. Mystery dissipates and narrative momentum stalls as, in a series of weirdly un-urgent set-pieces, Fred and Qi get broken out of jail, are pursued across the moon, fly to China, are pursued around China, fly back to the moon, are pursued across the moon again, until the whole run-around suddenly stops mid-chase in what is either Robinson aiming for modish incompleteness or just a writer running out of steam.

The fact is *Red Moon* is not vintage Robinson. The elderly travel writer Ta Shu has a series of inconsequential adventures that only occasionally intersect with Fred and Qi's. There are intimations of political revolution in China but they're all told rather than shown. A third plot strand follows a moon-based supercomputer slowly becoming self-aware, presumably an homage to Robert A. Heinlein's 1966 classic *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. There are many descriptions of lunar infrastructure, some observations about the unique

astronaut, a NASA official expresses condolences over Karen's death, to which Armstrong responds, “Is there a question?” It is impossible to imagine the real Armstrong, who was a man with exquisite manners, speaking those words. But the demands of a movie that distorts a grand story by subsuming it beneath a private tragedy required no less.

Neither the known history of the space program nor the contours of Armstrong's own life story demanded it be told this way. I doubt the first Hollywood person who optioned Hansen's book thought the movie would eventually turn out to be this one. Hansen's *First Man* is totally hagiographic, offering us a portrait



Ryan Gosling as Neil Armstrong

of Armstrong's self-sacrifice, quiet good humor, utter self-assurance, and innate nobility. Hansen's Armstrong is an engineer, a problem-solver, a classically reticent man who believes his deeds speak for themselves—and stunningly unpretentious and remarkably unassuming even after becoming one of the world's most famous people.

For example, Armstrong chose to accept a professorship at the University of Cincinnati in the early 1970s and moved there to the astonishment of almost everyone in town, pretty much because it was the only school that thought to offer. And only in 1979, a decade after his “small step for man,” did he take a commercial endorsement deal—for Chrysler, then

Chinese blend of aggressive capitalism and old-school communism, and Robinson certainly makes the right call in not turning Fred and Qi's enforced companionship into a romantic relationship. But though it has the flavor of a young-adult novel, *Red Moon* is too long and infodumpy to work as YA; and taken as adult fiction it's stretched all too thin. *The Moon Is a Sparse Missed Opportunity*.

All this would matter less if the book lived up to Robinson's usual standard of thought-provoking ideation. But it doesn't. There's no sense here of the buzzing interplay of concepts and analysis that characterized Robinson's last novel, the masterly *New York 2140*—amounting to a comprehensive blueprint for the renovation of humanity's economic and social logic. *Red Moon* is a novel with basically three ideas in it: one (that China will likely dominate the coming century) over-obvious; one (that complex computers might become self-aware) second-hand—for Robinson told precisely this story much more effectively in his 2015 novel *Aurora*; and one borderline woo-woo (that the economic future belongs to cryptocurrency, the fiduciary



mirage beloved of libertarians and drug dealers). “If money as it exists now,” says one of Robinson’s characters, “is just feudalism liquefied, maybe this carboncoin is a try at something better.” Maybe the moon is made of Red Leicester.

There are various blots and clumsinesses, unusual for a writer as meticulous as Robinson. “There were no big *mare* on the far side, Ah Q said; it was entirely rough highlands blasted by a zillion overlapping craters.” Ah Q might not know that the plural of *mare* is *maria*, but Robinson really ought to. Or take the following passage:

Eclipses were fairly common on the moon, Valerie and John were told. The red annular band surrounding Earth was sunlight bending through the atmosphere; this phenomenon explained why people on Earth looking up at a lunar eclipse saw the moon turn a dusky red. And indeed the land around them was now that same color. When they finally looked down from the mesmerizing sight of the red ring in the sky, they saw that the land around them had turned both dark and distinctly red. It was somewhat like the color of a red sunset on Earth, but darker and more intense, a subtly shifting array

of dim blackish reds, all coated by a dusty copper sheen. The previously pastel patches of rare earths were now shifted to purples and forest greens and rusty browns. But these were highlights in what was for the most part a dark red land, strong in both color and mood. It reminded Valerie of the last scene in a *Parsifal* she had seen in New York the year before, in which the chorus had waded across a stage knee-deep in blood. The Harbinger Mountains now reared like a bloody dragon spine out of an ocean of blood. Harbingers indeed! War—chaos—bloodshed—

Seven repetitions of the word *red* over a few lines isn’t good prose (not to mention the other repetitions: *dark, darker, dark; color, color, color; and blood, blood, bloodshed*). And beyond that overinsistent crimsonness I’m not sure this passage creates any especially vivid mental pictures. Robinson usually writes better than this.

Red Moon is a sort-of sequel to Robinson’s Earth-set 1997 novel *Antarctica*. The imagined near-future is the same, and the poet character appears in both novels. But this new work doesn’t advance the earlier story or do very much on its own terms. That Robinson has done all these things in earlier novels (and done them better) makes this book less *Red Moon* than *Retread Moon*. ♦

in deep trouble, in part because he thought it was good for the country that the car company be saved.

One thing Armstrong does not seem to be, in Hansen’s account, is an intrinsically interesting person. He was a literal-minded man who believed his greatest contributions to NASA came from his practical skills and whose long-time ambition seemed to be to write an engineering textbook.

The movie goes out of its way to find fault with Armstrong’s reticence. Janet Armstrong, who was married to Neil for more than three decades before they divorced in the early 1990s, told Hansen that on the eve of the flight she had “said to Neil there is a possibility you might not come back. It was right

in front of the boys when I said that. I said, ‘I’d like *you* to tell the boys.’ I don’t think that went very far.” She explains that one of his sons couldn’t bring himself to ask the hard questions and the other “was off in another world.”

In the movie, this moment is turned into a horrid confrontation when Janet (an astoundingly charmless Claire Foy) basically screams at Neil as he is packing to leave—trying to sneak away without waking the kids and saying goodbye, maybe for the last time. He bows to her demands. We see him sitting in front of them at the kitchen table mumbling something formal about how he and NASA expect him to return before saying, “Does anyone have any other questions?” We are to

understand he has failed his boys emotionally—as though anybody would have any idea how better to conduct such an impossible conversation with his or her children.

The genuinely troubled and obviously tormented man on the Apollo 11 flight was Buzz Aldrin, who has long been admirably frank and outspoken about the depression that consumed him following the moon landing and who is portrayed rather nastily in the movie by Corey Stoll. You might say that *First Man* is a movie about Neil Armstrong that wishes it were a movie about Buzz Aldrin. And that does both men an injustice.

I can’t tell you how much I hated *First Man*. ♦

“Senator Elizabeth Warren has released a DNA test that provides ‘strong evidence’ she had a Native American in her family tree dating back 6 to 10 generations, an unprecedented move by one of the top possible contenders for the 2020 Democratic nomination for president.”

—Boston Globe, October 15, 2018

PARODY

right. So doesn't that make you happy?

OCTOBER 23, 2018

ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

DNA TEST IN HAND, WARREN EMBRACES NATIVE HERITAGE

Senator Purchases Jeep Cherokee

By JOHN DUNBAR

AQUINNAH, Mass. — “It is great to be back with my family!” Elizabeth Warren exclaimed. The Massachusetts senator made a surprise visit to this tiny town on Martha’s Vineyard known for its ties to the Wampanoag tribe. “I have always loved vacationing on Martha’s Vineyard, but now I can call this home.”

With teary eyes, Warren told customers at Menemsha Fish Market that “Papaw would’ve been proud to see me back where I belong, with my fellow indigenous tribes-peoples.” The senator then explained the results of her recent DNA analysis, revealing she was between 1/64th and 1/1,024th Native American. “I just knew it, deep down inside, beneath my high cheekbones, that I was one of you,” she said, in between calls of “Your lobster roll is ready.”

“This revelation has put a feather in my cap—quite literally,” said Warren, who is now fond of wearing a war bonnet. She then left the fish market, saying that she was going to have “a powwow” with various members of the gaming industry.

Over the weekend, Warren announced that from here on in, she will only drive Jeep Cherokees, “as a nod to my Cherokee ancestry, which is now backed by solid science.” The genetic study confirms Warren is related to a Native American dating



CAR: CHARLEY GALLAY / WIREIMAGE / GETTY; WARREN: DAVID SHANKBONE

Senator Elizabeth Warren celebrates her new car and license plates on Monday.

back 6 to 10 generations. The senator did not, however, comment on the rest of her DNA analysis showing she has just as much

Pakistani, Laotian, Uzbek, and Kenyan

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