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The Future of the Southern Past

PETER J. BOYER
on the battles dividing Lexington, Virginia

The recumbent Robert E. Lee in the Washington and Lee University chapel

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

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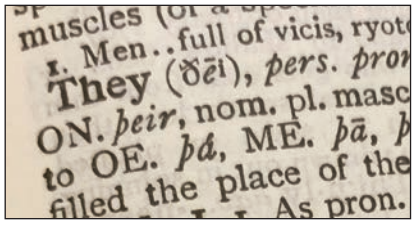
COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES PATRICK ALLEN

They Contain Multitudes

For generations, probably for centuries, Anglophone writers have struggled with the fact that our language lacks a gender-indeterminate third-person singular pronoun. In English, we have *he* for a man, *she* for a woman, and *it* for everything else. There is no option in the third-person for someone whose sex is unspecified. There are of course ways to get around the problem. Consider the sentence "A candidate for federal office must disclose his campaign spending." The writer may opt for *his or her* instead of *his* (though that can be cumbersome if done more than once in a short space), *her* in one instance and *his* in another (though that can confuse), or simply shift to the plural: "Candidates for federal office must disclose their campaign spending."

The lazy and ill-advised way to solve the problem—just pardonable in spoken English, less so in written English—is to use *they* and *them* when it's convenient: "A candidate for federal office must disclose their campaign spending at the end of each quarter." *Their* is plural, even though it's only one candidate.

Now, however, the dictionary of the young—namely Dictionary.com—has given its blessing to the lazy usage. "They," an unsigned piece posted last week on the site tells us, "is not only a plural pronoun." How do we know this is true? Because an anonymous writer at Dictionary.com says it is. The evidence mounted for this judgment, though, isn't the usual claim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that the misuse is so common as to make it correct, though the writer—whoever he is—does allude to the populist justification: "This chameleon word is also a singular pronoun, and it has been for centuries. Etymologists estimate that as far back as the 1300s, *they* has been used as a gender neutral pronoun, a word that was substituted in place of either *he* (a masculine singular pronoun) or *she* (a feminine singular pronoun)."

The real reason for the judgment is, as you might guess, that the author subscribes to the fashionable view that sex is nonbinary. Using the singular *they* is "a good way for people who don't identify with the binary genders of female and male to describe themselves because *they* and *them* are not gendered." Really? We would have thought referring to yourself as *they* and *them* would suggest a personality disorder. But the e-lexicographer is serious: "Sharing our pronouns is a way of sharing our gender identity with the world. You might identify as female and ask that people refer to you as *she/her*. Or, maybe you identify as male and your friends use *he/him* when they talk about you. For other folks, *they/them* are the appropriate pronouns to use."

Well, okay. But for writers who wish not to be thought of as maleducated—and for those who don't believe human beings are reducible to grammatical units—we supply H.W. Fowler's advice, first published in 1926. Fowler conceded that excellent writers have occasionally transgressed the rule (he quotes William Thackeray observing "A person can't help their birth") but insists that "few good modern writers would flout the grammarians so conspicuously." Emphasis on *good*. ♦

Self Service

"Are you running for president?" For aspiring presidents who haven't fully committed to running, the question is almost impossible to answer in a way that sounds genuine. "I haven't given it much thought" means "I've been planning to run since I was a teenager but haven't decided if this is the year." "I'm not sure my family is ready to make that kind of commitment" means "I'll be in Iowa next week and New Hampshire the week after that." "Right now I'm focused on the job of governor" means "Of course I am, you idiot."

The most unseemly answers, however, are the ones in which the

would-be commanders in chief pretend that running for president would be a form of self-renunciation: a sacrifice, yes, but a sacrifice that, given the grave circumstances in which the nation finds itself, they *just might* be persuaded to make.

In this category, we're not sure we've ever read a more cringe-makingly false answer than the one New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand offered to late-night show host Stephen Colbert. "It's an important question," she began. Indeed, "I believe it is a moral question for me." Ah, a *moral* question! "I believe right now," Gillibrand went on in a clearly rehearsed answer, "that every one of us should figure out how we can do whatever we can with our time, with our talents, to restore that moral decency, that moral compass, and that truth of who we are as Americans. So I will promise you I will give it a long, hard thought of consideration."

If Gillibrand sounds as though she'd been asked if she intended to

IMAGES ON THIS PAGE: TWS ART; OPPOSITE: GUN, BIGSTOCK

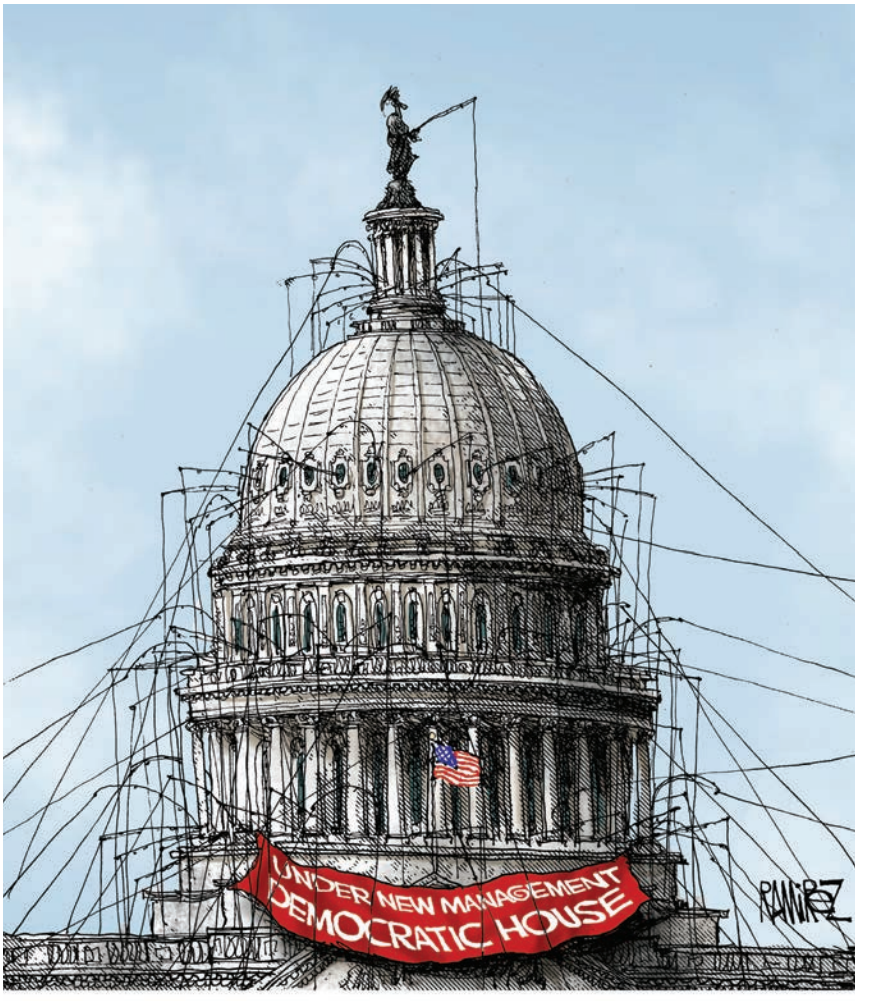
retire from politics and run a soup kitchen in the Bronx, that's because she's running for president. ♦

Tough on Logic, Too

The debate over gun control in America, if "debate" is the right word for it, has become stale and predictable to the point of parody—but a sad, bitter parody, not a funny one. That's true largely, if we may be permitted to generalize, because the measures gun-control supporters propose after mass shootings don't actually prevent mass shootings or, indeed, any kind of shootings. And since they don't prevent shootings, opponents of those measures assume, not unreasonably, that if they drop their opposition and allow a gun-control measure today, the restrictionists will be back tomorrow asking for more, the former measures having proven ineffective—and this routine will keep repeating itself until liberals, unable to admit any error in logic, at last propose a full-on nationwide gun ban.

Our liberal and anti-gun friends will dispute this characterization, but consider a news story in the *New York Times* of November 11, just after the Thousand Oaks shooting in which a former Marine killed 12 in a bar: "California Is Already Tough on Guns. After a Mass Shooting, Some Wonder if It's Enough."

> After a mass killing in Santa Barbara in 2014, California passed a law that let police officers and family members seek restraining orders to seize guns from troubled people. A year later, a shooting rampage in San Bernardino led to voters approving a ballot proposition to outlaw expanded magazines for guns and require background checks for buying ammunition.
>
> The state has also banned assault weapons and regulates ammunition sales—all part of a wave of gun regulation that began a quarter century ago with a mass murder at a San Francisco law firm.
>
> California may have the toughest gun control laws in the nation, but that still did not prevent the latest mass killing—a shooting on Wednesday that left 12 people dead at the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks.
>
> The community of Thousand Oaks is just starting to grieve its losses, and investigators are still combing through the background of the gunman, who was found dead after the shooting. But gun control activists and politicians in the state are already weighing what more can be done, and whether existing measures could have prevented the killing.



FISHING SEASON OPENS

The piece goes on at some length, analyzing state-by-state statistics on gun violence and quoting California politicos and activists about the practical likelihood of passing new gun laws. We were optimistic that someone—either the authors of the piece or one of the people they quoted—would suggest the possibility that perhaps more gun laws aren't the surefire solution liberals assume them to be. No luck.

Hands up, who's excited about more stale and predictable "debates"? ♦

Shouldn't Be Done—But

The contemptible Mr. Y

Last week, a group of anti-"fascist" or antifa thugs posted online the home address of Fox News host and former Weekly Standard writer Tucker Carlson. They then gathered outside his Washington residence and terrorized his wife, who was home alone at the time. Maybe these menacing shenanigans were condemned by most people on the respectable left, but mainly what we saw was the spiteful equivocation of the eminently respectable left-wing opinion-machine known as Matt Yglesias.

Yglesias, readers may be aware, is a top editor at *Vox.com*, a website with lots of corporate advertising. The left-liberal publication even employs a full-time reporter, Jane Coaston, whose job is, by our admittedly fallible reckoning, to complain about incivility on the right. And yet here's what Yglesias thought it appropriate to say about antifa's assault on Carlson's home: "I think the idea behind terrorizing his family, like it or not as a strategy, is to make them feel some of the fear that the victims of MAGA-inspired violence feel thanks to the non-stop racial incitement coming from Tucker, Trump, etc." Also, this: "I agree that this is probably not tactically sound but if your instinct is to empathize with the fear of the Carlson family rather than with the fear of his victims then you should take a moment to reflect on why that is." And then, as if he suspected some of his readers hadn't yet decided if he is the spiteful, self-serving boob he appears to be, Yglesias went on to assure them: "I honestly cannot empathize with Tucker Carlson's wife at all—I agree that protesting at her house was tactically unwise and shouldn't be done—but I am utterly unable to identify with her plight on any level."

"Shouldn't be done—but." That's a nice passive-voice encapsulation of the way in which many otherwise intelligent people find it impossible to lament the ill treatment of their political opposites. There's always some reason, some excuse, to say the guy had it coming.

Yglesias eventually deleted the tweets. But—out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. ♦

Only in 'Murica

A news item from Port Richey, Florida, submitted without comment—other than to say how much we love this country: "A Florida man was cited for speeding in a neighborhood while he donned a Fred Flintstone costume and was driving a real-life 'footmobile.' According to the Pasco Sheriff's Office, Mr. Flintstone (real name Don Swartz) was pulled over on Sunday. Authorities say after he was cited for speeding, he 'became unruly and had to be detained.' The vehicle was seized." ♦

Port Richey, Florida's Don 'Fred' Swartz and his footmobile

TOP: BODY, BIGSTOCK; BOTTOM: PASCO CO. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Yidiosyncrasy

Neologisms, words newly coined, are as necessary to language as water to land. New inventions, institutions, patterns of behavior require new words to describe them. Nor need all neologisms describe new phenomena. Some are required to cover long-established phenomena that have called out for but never received the word they need.

In the latter category, I hereby introduce—French horns and kettle drums, please—the neologism *yidiosyncrasy* to describe the odd behavior of my fellow Jews. "Idiosyncrasy," of course, describes the peculiar behavior, often the distinguishing oddity, of an individual, but yidiosyncrasy is meant to describe the idiosyncrasies of an entire people. By yidiosyncrasy I certainly do not include the too-long established, vicious anti-Semitic characterizations of Jews, for as a Jew I side, naturally enough, with that philo-Semite Mark Twain, who wrote that the Jew, having survived all other ancient civilizations, is "what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind." What I mean by yidiosyncrasies are those traits that give Jews their distinctive, often comic, quality.

Start with Chinese restaurants. Perhaps the most memorable thing that Justice Elena Kagan has said, or ever will say, was her reply when asked by Senator Lindsey Graham about her whereabouts on Christmas. "Like all Jews," she replied, "I was probably at a Chinese restaurant." Walk into any Chinese restaurant in America and you are sure to find Jews. (The same cannot be said of finding Chinese in Jewish delicatessens.) Jewish civilization dates back 5,778 years and Chinese civilization roughly 4,000 years, which is why, as the Old Testament neglects to mention, the Jews went hungry for nearly 1,800 years.

Almost as strong as the penchant for Chinese food is the Jewish regard for education. Diplomas, I have heard it said, are the Jewish religion. The Jewish fetus, an old joke has it, does not become viable until it graduates medical school. My friend Edward Shils years ago told me he thought the Phi Beta Kappa Society was really formed to recognize the achievements of neurotic Jewish mothers for hounding their children to do well in school. I once sat at dinner with a Jewish woman who seemed unable to utter a sentence without the name of a prestige university in it. The greatest restraint was required for me not to remark, "Daddy, you know, went to Leavenworth."

DAVID CLARK

Another yidiosyncrasy is familial argumentativeness. Rare is the Jewish family in which there has not been a falling out somewhere, so that one sibling doesn't speak to another, or a son chooses not to attend his father's funeral, or a daughter to take her mother's calls. My own parents' families were riddled with such disputes: brothers-in-law who didn't speak to each other, aunts who wore their resentments on their sleeves, cousins holding grudges that seemed to last slightly longer than the Roman republic. Sad though all this may seem, this particular yidiosyncrasy prevents Jewish family life from ever becoming dull, while adding a certain spice to holiday dinners.

The want of *sitzfleisch*, otherwise known as bottom patience, is another yidiosyncrasy, one that goes by the name of *shpilkes*, or needles in the pants. Jews do not wait well, whether in queues at restaurants or in airports or even at home. Jackie Mason does a bit about gentiles at an airport calmly awaiting the late arrival of a plane while "the Jew," marching up and down, "is *shvitzin*' and *shvitzin*'" (sweating and sweating). Extended periods of calm, let alone lengthy serenity, are apparently unavailable to my co-religionists.

The phrase is Henry James's, whom no one ever accused of attempting to pass for Jewish, but Jews also have a keen "imagination for disaster." In any enterprise they enter, they may hope for the best but are haunted by the possibility of the worst resulting. Cheerfulness is possible, but optimism is utterly alien to Jews. A man with whom I went to school, a Candide among Jews, sees all of his life as onward and upward, in the best of all possible worlds, and doesn't mind saying so repeatedly. I suspect he isn't really Jewish at all but was, though it was never revealed to him, adopted.

Other yidiosyncrasies could be cited. Nor in this brief scribble have I attempted to account for the origin of those I mentioned in Jewish lives lived in exile, under persecution, or for scores of other historical reasons. Yidiosyncrasies, though, they remain. Doubtless every people, the French, Germans, Swedes, has its own idiosyncrasies: Fridiosyncrasies, Gidiosyncrasies, Swidiosyncrasies, and more. Yet those of the Jews have an especially strong flavor, a pungency all their own. The reason I so enjoy them is that I happen to share every one.

Joseph Epstein

the weekly Standard

Democracy in the Dock

The last two years have seen a great deal of handwringing about the future of democracy. Scores of commentators, left and right, have claimed America's democratic institutions are under siege. Some, mostly on the left, advocate a variety of changes to the Constitution in order to make our electoral system more "representative," i.e., more conducive to Democratic victories. Others, especially those on the populist right, have a newfound enthusiasm for playing dirty, urging Donald Trump and other Republicans to secure victories at any cost. Still others, believing that Trump's election signaled a disease at the heart of democracy itself, have proposed moving from democratic republicanism to some form of rule by a technocratic elite.

Just getting started: election night results in Arizona

American political traditions and institutions are stronger than any of us realizes. Our ideological divides are gaping and growing, and yet elections in America are orderly, transfers of power are peaceful, and seriously disputed results are rare. Even so, partisans on both the left and right are doing their part to undercut American confidence in our elections—and by extension in our democratic institutions and government.

The populist right's obsession with voter fraud, encouraged by the grossly irresponsible claims of the president, plays a role. With elections in Arizona and Florida too close to call on November 10, Trump blabbed on Twitter about supposed conspiracies. "Trying to STEAL two big elections in Florida! We are watching closely!" When Kyrsten Sinema passed Martha McSally in Arizona's cumbersome vote-counting process (which is always slow thanks to the legal requirement to check the validity of every absentee ballot and, further, confirm that the absentee voter didn't also show up at the polls), the president grumbled to reporters that "all of a sudden, out of the wilderness, they find a lot of votes." He was wrong. It wasn't something "out of the wilderness"; the race was always too close to call and has now been settled correctly. But a lot of people on the right think McSally conceded unnecessarily and ergo that her victory was stolen.

In Florida, the election-night leads of Senate candidate Rick Scott and gubernatorial candidate Ron DeSantis, both Republicans, have diminished as vote counting proceeds. The situation is more problematic in Florida than in Arizona thanks to incompetence in Miami-Dade County and at least the appearance of fraud in Broward County. Both counties lean heavily Democratic. Broward's election board, led by supervisor Brenda Snipes, has fallen afoul of laws and regulations again and again—results being posted before polls closed, ballot misprints, discrepancies between official voter turnout numbers and the number of votes cast, and so on. Since election night, Snipes and company have failed to report ongoing return tallies, as state law requires, prompting a lawsuit from the Scott campaign.

These problems are serious and deserve the scrutiny of the courts and the news media. But Trump's blundering, fact-free responses seem calculated to keep fair-minded people from taking Florida's genuine irregularities seriously. "Large numbers of new ballots showed up out of nowhere," he tweeted on November 12, "and many ballots are missing or forged. An honest vote count is no longer possible—ballots massively infected." Sounding for all the world like your conspiracy-theorist Uncle Clyde at Thanksgiving dinner, Trump said in an interview with the *Daily Caller* on November 15: "When people get in line that have absolutely no right to vote and they go around in circles. Sometimes they go to their car, put on a different hat, put on a different shirt, come in and vote again."

All this recalls Trump's preposterous preelection warnings of massive vote-rigging in 2016 and postelection claim that "millions" had voted illegally. "I won the popular vote," he claimed, "if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally." Who were these millions, and where were their votes cast? Early in his presidency, Trump set up a panel to investigate these claims, but it was quietly disbanded in January, perhaps because it couldn't produce stories of "millions" voting illegally. To say voter fraud doesn't happen would be to say electoral politics is exempt from the human propensity to cheat—of course it happens, as the aforementioned Brenda Snipes reminds us. But the president's grossly irresponsible claims only renew the media's license to dismiss voter fraud as a partisan "myth."

On the left, meanwhile, the idea has circulated since 2016 that the nation's political institutions are rigged in favor of Republicans. In this mindset, on display in a raft of books by left-liberal authors and throughout the op-ed pages, the

RALPH FRESO / GETTY

Democrats have consistently underperformed at the polls not because their message is out of step with many American voters but as a result of outmoded constitutional and statutory mechanisms. The Electoral College is a "countermajoritarian" institution designed to give an advantage to low-population rural states over large, populous ones. The GOP's decade-long ascendancy in the House of Representatives is explicable mainly by gerrymandering—the drawing of district lines in ways favorable to Republicans. The *New York Times* recently editorialized that the House should add 158 new members in order to make it "proportionally similar to most modern democracies": that is, more Democratic. The Senate is said to be an "unrepresentative" body: California has 39 million residents, Wyoming only half a million, but both send exactly two senators to Washington—two Democratic senators in California's case, two Republican senators in the case of Wyoming. Liberals have seriously floated the idea of giving an extra senator to more populous states.

The GOP, they claim, even has an unfair advantage over the judiciary: Thanks to the Electoral College's giving us presidents without majorities and senators from states where there are tiny numbers of people, judicial nominees do not represent the wishes of the country. *Washington Post* columnist Philip Bump summed this argument up just before Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation vote: He "will be the first justice nominated by someone who lost the popular vote to earn his seat on the bench with support from senators representing less than half of the country while having his nomination opposed by a majority of the country."

Such objections are silly—a more sophisticated version of the we-wuz-robbed grousing one associates with the populist right. Our constitutional order is as old as our country and has long been the envy of the world. Nobody forced people of liberal dispositions to congregate in highly populous urban areas where their votes are diluted. And in any case, unless the critics are advocating for direct democracy, electoral power must always be distributed geographically and thus unevenly. If the voters of Wyoming are to be granted any representation at all in Congress, that representation must be disproportionately potent.

Liberals see a system rigged against them. Trump and his acolytes complain that they've been robbed. Both mindsets, though proceeding from immensely different ideologies, arise from a similar un-American impulse—the desire to blame others for one's own failures. The most obvious lesson of November 6 is that our country's electoral system is vibrant and strong. Candidates, both good and bad, won across the country, and those who lost gave way to the winners. Concession speeches are often painful to watch, but they remind us that we are a magnanimous and law-abiding people. Martha McSally knew this when she conceded the race to Kyrsten Sinema. "I wish her all success as she represents Arizona in the Senate," McSally said. "I am convinced Arizona is the best state in the country and our best days are still yet to come." ♦

A Ceasefire in Gaza

On November 11, Hamas, the political and terrorist organization that governs Gaza, was shocked to find that the Israeli military was conducting undercover missions inside the Palestinian territory. A Hamas spokesman said that Israelis were discovered about two miles into southeastern Gaza, where they fatally shot a militant commander. Hamas soldiers chased the car and killed one of the Israeli officers. In response, the Israelis called in airstrikes that killed at least two Palestinian soldiers. The Israeli military has not confirmed the killing of the Hamas commander but did allude to a "very meaningful operation to Israel's security."

So began another round of missiles launched from Gaza indiscriminately into Israel and highly discriminatory Israeli strikes on Hamas military targets—deliberately housed in civilian areas. Hundreds of rockets have rained down on Israeli towns, several Palestinians have been killed, and scores of Israelis have been injured. So far, only one person has died from the rocket attacks—a Palestinian man from the West Bank, working in Israel.

On November 13, Israel said it will continue to carry out "wide-scale strike[s] on military targets throughout the Gaza strip." This is an entirely justified response to the rocket attacks. For Israel to rely solely on its Iron Dome to intercept rockets is to normalize the terror coming from the Gaza Strip. The missile system has an 86 percent rate of efficacy, but rockets still make it through and kill and wound civilians. In Israeli towns like Nahal Oz, Sderot, Be'er Sheva, and Ashkelon, civilians live a fair proportion of their lives in bomb shelters. The young are raised in constant fear of rockets.

Israel and Hamas reached a ceasefire on November 13, but it will not last. Palestinian militants do not believe in Israel's right to exist. For them, ceasefires are strategic, not substantive. In 1994 in a mosque in Johannesburg, Yasser Arafat said that the Oslo process was merely a *hudna*—a temporary quiet or calm—and could be broken any time.

This one will be broken, too.

From March through May, Hamas-led suicide riots, as we called them at the time, aimed to break through Gaza's border with Israel using humans as battering rams. They attempted to light Israeli fields on fire using incendiary kites. Their goals were (a) to steal across the border to sow more havoc and (b) to provoke Israeli soldiers into firing on them, stirring up international sympathy for the beleaguered Palestinians. These are not peace-seekers.

What about the clandestine Israeli operation inside Gaza—assuming something close to the events described by Hamas took place? Was that not the provocation that led to the hostilities? In a superficial sense, yes; in reality, no. Gaza is run by militants who dream of the destruction of the Zionist entity, as they call Israel. It is worth noting the lightning speed with which rockets filled the skies once Hamas gave the word. Gaza is not an independent state in any ordinary sense; it is a terrorist-occupied territory perpetually ready to shed the blood of its neighbor's civilians. Hamas pays the families of suicide bombers. That Israel runs clandestine operations inside Gaza will only shock those who think it an easy thing to protect civilian lives against the imminent threat of carnage.

Rubble in Gaza after a retaliatory Israeli airstrike

This latest *hudna* was brokered by Egyptian and U.N. officials. The cessation of violence is a good thing, but it is no resolution, and a ceasefire that only heralds the recommencement of hostilities isn't much of an achievement. Israeli defense minister Avigdor Lieberman seemed to recognize this point, and he resigned from the government in protest. His apprehension about the ceasefire is wholly reasonable: Why should Israel make peace with an enemy that's certain to keep its word only until the moment it regains the capacity for more bloodshed?

The very existence of Israel is a perpetual source of shame for Palestinians. What they need most is not to put aside their rocks and knives and bomb-vests for a few days but to acclimate to the reality of the neighboring Israeli state. That won't happen until the Palestinians find a leader willing to renounce the honor-cult of Jew-hatred and to seek peace and prosperity in earnest. Neither Hamas in Gaza nor Fatah in the West Bank is likely to produce such a leader, although hoping for one is not entirely in vain. Across the Middle East—in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait—Arab leaders are increasingly attuned to the benefits of acknowledging Israel's legitimacy. In time, even the Palestinians may enjoy those benefits. In the meantime, Israel will deal with wanton rocket attacks and bogus ceasefires in the only possible way. ♦

ALI JADALLAH / ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY

FRED BARNES

Bipartisanship Is Overrated

In two phone chats after Democrats won the House in the midterm election, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell and likely House speaker Nancy Pelosi broached the subject of bipartisanship—or as McConnell put it, "ways we might be able to find a way forward."

There aren't many. Vengeful House Democrats would rather make life miserable for President Trump by investigating his entire administration. They figure the most effective way to go after the Trump team is to abuse them with subpoenas followed by hostile House hearings.

Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the incoming chair of the House Oversight Committee, has said he wants to know how Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner got a security clearance. And he's eager to look into the case of the two men who separately told Senate Judiciary Committee staffers they'd sexually assaulted Christine Blasey Ford, the woman who alleged Brett Kavanaugh had been her attacker.

Then there's Adam Schiff of California, the incoming Intelligence Committee chair. He's ready to grill the Trump crowd to discover if they colluded with Russia in the 2016 campaign, though special counsel Robert Mueller, other committees, and the media have covered that ground extensively.

And who knows what Maxine Waters of California, who will run the Financial Services Committee, might have in store for GOP witnesses. House committee chairs have wide latitude—wider than their Senate counterparts. And they tend to exploit the opportunity it gives them.

LIKENESSES: DAVE CLEGG

To get along at all, there's a hitch that McConnell and Pelosi will have to contend with. It could prevent bipartisan compromises from even being considered. Trump has threatened to boycott any cooperation with Democrats if he is investigated by House Democrats. If Democrats insist, the next two years could be a dead time for new policies and projects. President Obama's dull second two years would seem like a time of excitement in comparison.

Trump may not be serious about stiffing Democrats. He's fickle about threats: He makes them and forgets them. But if he won't back down, Washington would experience 24 months of super-gridlock.

Trump may not be serious about stiffing Democrats. He's fickle about threats: He makes them and, when convenient, forgets them. But if he won't back down—Democrats won't, for sure—Washington would experience 24 months of super-gridlock while governing remains on autopilot.

Gridlock has its virtues. It prevents ambitious Republicans and Democrats from making big policy mistakes. I'm referring to the two issues both parties agree on: infrastructure and reducing drug prices.

Spending on infrastructure—roads, bridges, government buildings, mass transit, stadiums—creates favorable press clippings. That's one reason politicians like infrastructure so much. And they're willing to go ahead with a dubious project even if it fails to meet two important tests.

Is it needed? That's the first test, and few projects are able to pass it. Think of the fascination with streetcars in recent years. They look great, have a nostalgic appeal, the media love them, and the federal government usually pays most of the tab (at least before Elaine Chao became Transportation secretary).

Streetcars now move slowly along many city streets. Mayors get political credit. But there's a problem. Ridership is invariably lower than promised. They don't go where people want to go. They're a costly urban ornament.

The interstate highway system is one of the greatest examples of successful infrastructure. For the most part it was needed. It made driving across the country safe, speedy, and sometimes congestion-free. But not all the interstates were needed, especially those routed through downtowns. They often caused more congestion than they curbed, and scarred city landscapes.

The second test is cost. Is there money to pay for a national infrastructure effort? At the moment, the answer is no. Many politicians would like to rely on borrowing. That merely puts off the day of financial reckoning.

The good news is that an infrastructure bill passed by Congress must be paid for. And that makes it less likely to pass. Tolls on highways and bridges could pay for some of it, but only a small fraction.

The second possible area of cooperation—reducing the price of prescription drugs—passes the need test easily. If the market doesn't deliver the drugs people need at a price they

can afford, government will step in—but the less it does, the better. Price controls and regulation could destroy the investment and medical innovation that leads to miracle drugs and longer lives.

When political parties hate each other as they do today, it can feel good when they agree. But agreement doesn't mean good legislation. Take the Republican tax bill of 2017. If Democrats had joined, it wouldn't have improved the legislation. Instead, economic incentives would have been lower, tax rates higher, and growth not nearly as strong.

So the odds of good bipartisan legislation in the upcoming Congress are very low. The less it does the next two years, the better. ♦

COMMENT ♦ BARTON SWAIM

Drowning in a morass of entangling metaphors

For a full year, maybe more, Americans who follow national politics were subjected to the unabating use of a single metaphor: the "blue wave." Would there be a blue wave? If so, how big? What would the blue wave, if it turned out to be a wave, mean for the Trump administration?

The term, as readers will have gathered, is derived from the more general descriptor *wave election*, an election in which (leaving aside the more precise definitions of pollsters and political scientists) one party makes overwhelming gains in both House and Senate. Waves apply only to congressional elections, not to presidential elections; in the latter we trade an oceanographical metaphor for a geological one: landslide. The blueness of the wave, of course, referred to the color we've consistently applied to Democrats since the blue-and-red map of the 2000 presidential election. In the intervening 18 years we've witnessed at least one wave election—in 2010 the GOP gained 63 seats in the House and 6 in the senate—but I don't remember anybody that year talking about a red wave.

By the end of election night 2018, it seemed that the wave was not a wave. A wavelet, maybe, or a ripple. Democrats had taken the House, for sure, but they had only gained somewhere from 23 to 27 seats. As election returns were posted over the next several days, however, their total reached 35 seats. That's wave-ish. But how can it be a wave if Republicans gained at least one and probably two seats in the Senate?

Maybe no one acted fatally on the strength of the blue wave metaphor, but I fancy that some made poor decisions as a consequence of taking it too seriously.

I often think, when the chattering class becomes preoccupied with some metaphor or other, of a passage in the greatest of all Victorian novels, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, in which the narrator observes of the aging scholar and bachelor Mr. Casaubon that he had doomed himself with a metaphor. "Poor Mr. Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment, and that large drafts on his affections would not fail to be honored; for all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them."

Maybe no one acted fatally on the strength of the blue wave metaphor, but I fancy that some made poor decisions as a consequence of taking it too seriously. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate of my home state of South Carolina, for instance—James Smith, a longtime member of the state House with an impressive record of military service—defied expectations by not running against Nikki Haley in 2014. I don't know what made Smith decide to run against Henry McMaster this year, but it must have seemed like a savvy decision at the time. McMaster was not invulnerable, and anyway there was constant talk on CNN and MSNBC of a "blue wave" in 2018, so the chances were good, right? Smith lost by 8 points.

The power of an effective metaphor is that it coerces the mind into perceiving a thing—a problem, a theory, an activity—in a way that may or may not accord with truth or wisdom. The metaphor does not draw a comparison, as the simile does, but equates one thing with another. Often it doesn't even bother with a predicate—this thing *is* that thing—but simply describes one thing with language ordinarily appropriate to the other thing. The great Welsh socialist Aneurin Bevan in 1953 dismissed his centrist colleagues in the British House of Commons with the metaphor of a bustling road: "We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run down." Unlike the simile, the best metaphors don't allow for questions or disagreements, which is what makes them so dangerous.

Government programs are often spoken of in metaphorical language, because to do otherwise would be to highlight their inadequacies. The metaphorical name urges, almost forces, the uncommitted and skeptical observer to think of these govern-

ment schemes more sympathetically. Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty was a failure by almost any measurement, but it was hard to think ill of a "war" on something as sad and painful as poverty. American liberals have for years spoken of Medicaid as a "safety net," a metaphor that allows no room for traditional criticisms of massive government-run social welfare programs: You can't abuse a safety net or become addicted to it.

People in politics are always trying to define their adversaries with unflattering metaphors, but there are few good writers or poets in politics, and mostly these attempts sound stupid. Only this week, after President Trump announced that he would nominate to the federal bench Neomi Rao, heretofore the president's "regulatory czar" (another metaphor!), the left-wing Center for American Progress issued a predictably hostile statement on the nominee: "Neomi Rao is an anti-regulation zealot who has been the tip of the spear in President Trump's efforts to gut important protections for millions of Americans." The metaphor doesn't work—not so much because Rao isn't a "zealot" (she is not) but because it's hard to know how one would "gut" something—a fish or a pheasant—with the tip of a spear. Law professor Jonathan Adler noted that the remark reminded him of Chuck Schumer's description of Miguel Estrada, the Bush judicial nominee, as "a stealth missile—with a nose cone—coming out of the right wing's deepest silo." I'm told that stealth missiles are air-to-surface and so are not launched from silos, deep or otherwise, and I doubt even Schumer knows why he gave Estrada a nose cone.

Some metaphors sound effective but aren't. Lawmakers and governors who worry about the consequences of runaway deficits and unfunded liabilities like to orate on the dangers of "kicking the can down the road." The phrase, which I gather is of recent vintage, is supposed to signify putting off painful decisions to a later time. It has a nice iambic rhythm to it: Once again, the legislature has decided to *kick* the *can* down the *road*. The alliterative *kick* and *can* evoke an immediate and vaguely unpleasant image. But why does kicking a can signify procrastination? Should we pick the can up instead? What does the can represent—duty? obligation? Maybe American voters can't get exercised about their government's $832 billion budget deficit and $21 trillion debt because they're encouraged to think of these dangers as some nonsensical game of can-kicking.

Sometimes politics feels like studying ancient religions or modernist poetry: The metaphorical and the literal wind themselves around each other and you can't tell which is which. Politics is a place of fishing expeditions and level playing fields and circular firing squads and steps in the right direction and whistleblowers. And very small waves. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

Demography isn't destiny

Since most political journalism tends to be wishful thinking, most of the post-midterm analysis this year followed predictable paths.

Liberal partisans were pleased to note that the closely divided House of Representatives returned power to the Democrats for the first time in nearly a decade. Conservatives, by contrast, were gratified to pick up a couple of Senate seats, which will limit the range of the new House majority. You can judge the mixed outcome of gubernatorial races, or the Trump Effect, or the likely results of the next presidential election, by your own lights: There is evidence for nearly every interpretation.

Most of the post-midterm analysis this year followed predictable paths. There is evidence for nearly every interpretation.

It is certainly true that based on the 2018 balloting, Republicans have their work cut out for them appealing to suburban—specifically suburban female—voters next time around. Similarly, Democrats could not fail to have noticed that most of their successes were achieved by center-left, rather than hard-left, candidates. While President Trump undoubtedly helped Republican candidates in some places, he proved a liability in others. The coalition of voters that elected him two years ago broke down this past month; but then again, the circumstances that elected him in 2016 were significantly altered in 2018.

All of which emphasizes the obvious: Sometimes elections presage larger trends, and sometimes they do not—yet no one but God seems to know which "trends" endure; and as the late Harold Wilson once observed, a week is a very long time in politics.

How long? Well, I was peripherally involved in the midterm elections of 1970 and, by any measure, they were good news for Democrats. It is true that Republicans picked up two seats in the Senate, as well as a Conservative (James Buckley, and in New York, of all places); but the Democrats gained 12 seats in the House to expand their prohibitive majority, and the Democratic stranglehold on governors' mansions and state legislatures was tightened.

Richard Nixon had campaigned widely and vigorously that year, proclaiming that the vote was a referen-

dum on his policies and presidency. Sen. Edmund Muskie (D-Maine) delivered a much-admired nationwide television address on the eve of the balloting, which was credited with pushing innumerable Democrats over the top.

Once the dust had settled, Nixon was seen to have been personally rebuked—he was, after all, a minority president who had been elected in a three-way race—and *Newsweek* guessed that he might be tempted to cut his losses and decline to seek a second term. Muskie, by contrast, emerged overnight as the Democratic presidential frontrunner for 1972 and began to marshal his party's establishment behind his candidacy.

Of course, knowing what we know now, the conventional wisdom of that moment seems quaint, even surreal. But it made sense at the time. The Republicans were, then as now, the party of older, whiter, wealthier males in the midst of the resurgent women's movement and a flood tide of immigration from the Third World. Moreover, the 26th Amendment to the Constitution, which would reduce the voting age from 21 to 18, was about to be ratified. In the era of massive antiwar demonstrations, campus violence, and Woodstock, an influx of new postadolescent voters was perceived as a windfall for Democrats.

But events, as always, bend the arc of history in unexpected ways. It is nearly impossible now to recall the dramatic effect of Nixon's subsequent pilgrimage to Mao Zedong's China, reopening a door resolutely shut for a quarter-century—and reframing the Cold War. Similarly, in 1972, Nixon was fortunate in the fact that the Democrats rejected Muskie and his ilk to choose a (comparatively) hard-left candidate, George McGovern, as their presidential nominee.

The gods of politics are not mocked: Just as the newly enfranchised women of 1920 helped to elect Warren G. Harding to the White House, the 1972 youth vote went strongly, and decisively, to the (comparatively) conservative, unhip Richard Nixon.

This is not to suggest that the world of 2018 bears a close resemblance to 1970 or that the conventional wisdom is invariably wrong. But it does introduce a cautionary note for both parties.

For some decades now, we have been told, changing demographics will ensure a bright, nearly limitless, future for Democrats and portend imminent obsolescence for Republicans. Yet it has never quite worked out as planned: Women don't necessarily vote in conformity with what the press describes as "women's issues"—notably abortion—and discrete populations don't always respond to what the press considers their interests. The youth vote, whatever that means, is predictably unpredictable.

Just as geography in politics is changeable—who in 1950 would have guessed what would become of the Solid South a few decades later?—voting populations are not static. The electoral habits of blue-collar workers, affluent suburbanites, Irish Catholics, and Ivy Leaguers are not what they once were, and giant constituencies—women, evangelicals, Midwesterners, Italian-Americans—evolve with time. The affluent don't always vote to protect their wealth, and poor immigrants beget rich first-generation offspring, and on it goes.

In other words, the allegiance of certain voters at a certain time works to the advantage of certain candidates and parties; but electoral cycles more closely resemble a kaleidoscope than a still life. And to this, of course, must be added the personal factor: Just as the triumphs of Ronald Reagan (1980) and Barack Obama (2008) might have seemed outlandish not long before their time, the appeal of 2016's Donald Trump may yet revive. We simply don't know. Events might well consign Trump and Trumpism to the dustbin, or they may anticipate some enduring realignment.

In that sense, Republicans might enjoy—perhaps may even be tempted to exploit—one advantage. The Democratic hierarchy seems increasingly to rely on tribalism to motivate its base. Apart from hostility towards Donald Trump, their strong message in the midterm elections was not so much ideological as personal: You *must* vote Democratic because you are a [fill in the blank].

Biology, however, is seldom destiny, and in a liberal democracy ideas matter. One enduring mystery of modern politics is that voters don't always endorse their perceived interests. But the interests of voters are usually determined not by blood but principle: You don't have to be a union rep to vote Democratic or a Mayflower descendant to vote Republican.

I would be the first to acknowledge that President Trump is a unique, even volatile, factor in our politics. But in the voting booth, as his own electoral victory proved two years ago, emotional factors—ethnic identity, picturesque family, personal charm—tend to take a back seat to political conviction. Republicans used to call themselves the party of ideas. A couple of new ones would do them no harm. ♦

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

We're halfway through the Trump administration and there is no wall. Instead, the president is getting ready for a kabuki fight with Democrats in the lame-duck Congress over funding for construction of a wall that will never be granted. You can bet the milk money that after he fails to get Dems to agree to pay for The Wall That Mexico Was Supposed to Pay For, construction will be punted until 2020. At which point Trump will try to sell voters on the idea that they need to re-elect him to 'finish the wall.'

—Jonathan V. Last, 'The Vaporware Presidency'

Deals with the Devil

Tolerating scoundrels is a bipartisan weakness.

BY JERYL BIER

The downfall of Harvey Weinstein in October 2017 birthed the MeToo movement, which continues to turn predator into prey, exposing and often disgracing powerful men who, sometimes for decades, used their positions to take advantage of, abuse, and even sexually assault women in their spheres of influence. But more than a year later, two of the most powerful figures in America with reputations for unwanted sexual advances and more than a few allegations of inappropriate and even criminal behavior between them continue to avoid the same fate: Bill Clinton and Donald Trump.

Governor Clinton visits the Arkansas nursing home of Juanita Broaddrick, right, circa 1978.

Trump is currently the leader of the free world and Clinton is about to kick off a nationwide speaking tour as an elder statesman along with his wife Hillary, the most recent Democratic candidate for president. But due to the potential political consequences of the takedown of the Clintons and Trump, and the willingness of their supporters to overlook or rationalize massive character flaws and multiple credible allegations of misconduct, the stories of the erstwhile and current chief executives are inextricably linked.

Even before Bill Clinton achieved national prominence, he was known around his home state of Arkansas as a womanizer. A 2016 *New York Times* story noted that when pollster Stanley Greenberg worked with the Clintons on strategy for the 1992 presidential campaign, Greenberg "recalled Mrs. Clinton's acknowledgment that her husband had strayed." Shortly thereafter, the same *Times* story reports, Connie Hamzy told *Penthouse* magazine that Clinton "had once propositioned her at a hotel in Little Rock, Ark." Rather than ignore the story as ludicrous or beneath addressing, Hillary Clinton, according to former Clinton aide George Stephanopoulos, said, "we have to destroy her story," which the campaign proceeded to do via affidavits from aides and others vouching for Clinton's version of events.

The infamous quelling of subsequent "bimbo eruptions" remained a prominent feature of the '92 campaign. And rather than ditch their candidate (and eventual president) as the stories mounted during the campaign and throughout Clinton's White House tenure, many Democrats dug in and practiced a perverse inversion of the present day slogan #BelieveWomen: They pursued a policy of #RidiculeWomen, which reached its zenith with Clinton campaign adviser James Carville's execrable statement aimed at one of Clinton's accusers, Paula Jones: "If you drag a hundred-dollar bill through a trailer park, you never know what you'll find."

But beyond the harassment allegations of Paula Jones and Kathleen Willey and the abuse of power manifested in the sordid Monica Lewinsky affair, the Juanita Broaddrick allegations against Clinton loom largest. Broaddrick alleges that then-Arkansas attorney general and gubernatorial candidate Clinton raped her in a hotel room. Joshua Kendall recently wrote for THE WEEKLY STANDARD a devastating and detailed account of Broaddrick's accusations, along with a laundry list of other indiscretions and transgressions—some consensual, some forced, some admitted, some denied.

Since the MeToo movement took off, several prominent publications have also featured articles taking a second look at the Broaddrick matter; they've largely found Bill Clinton's and his defenders' explanations, excuses, and denials wanting. While the Clintons' stock may have fallen recently, Bill Clinton has met with nothing like the fate of others caught in the MeToo whirlwind. Along with the planned nationwide tour, Hillary Clinton has even hinted at another presidential run in 2020. The Clintons may be down, but they are far from out.

While Democrats have been rationalizing the personal foibles of Bill Clinton for nearly three decades, Republicans are relative newcomers to the but-he-gets-things-done game. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 was perhaps even more surprising when contrasted with the party's previous, squeaky-clean nominee in 2012, Mitt Romney. Trump's nomination by the GOP was the political version of a 1970s vengeance movie: The nice guys just couldn't take it anymore. Donald Trump was more than willing to play the part of the aggrieved, avenging victim, but it was obvious from the beginning that he was no white knight.

While Trump is best known for the infamous *Access Hollywood* "grab 'em" video that emerged during his campaign, as well as for his consensual infidelities (which his defenders largely brush off as "locker room talk," with Clintonian everyone-lies-about-sex excuses), more serious charges have been leveled as well.

In a way, the president's reputation for fabulism and his penchant for

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associating with those with reputations similar to his have worked in his favor. And yet, if it can still be said that we haven't seen flames, there is an awful lot of smoke.

A recent *Business Insider* compilation of Trump accusers puts the total at 22, with charges ranging from inappropriate comments to sexual assault. Unlike Clinton's penchant for indignant denials and harsh rebuttals by surrogates, Trump often brands accusers directly as liars, even crudely dismissing one accusation of groping with "Believe me, she would not be my first choice." Trump has even denied behavior he previously bragged about on tape, suggesting that taking his confessions at face value is not the clearest path to discovering the truth.

Concerns over Trump's character, however, extend far beyond his physical actions. Evidence suggests then-candidate Trump was actively involved in paying off two alleged mistresses in the closing months of his presidential campaign. He has repeatedly attacked all parties involved in the sordid narrative, including his own lawyer, and his story regarding his knowledge or lack thereof about the payments has undergone a Clinton-like evolution.

Supporters of President Trump have largely adopted the Democrats' philosophy that personal behavior is irrelevant in a politician, particularly a productive one. Many evangelicals, aghast at the blasé reaction to Clinton two decades ago, have taken an unconventional approach to the apostle Paul's rhetorical question contemplating whether evil might be done that good may come of it. They say it depends—how much evil and how much good are we talking about?

Bill Clinton's boosters, even secular ones, faced a similar dilemma with Clinton's deplorable womanizing and the potential gains he might have ushered in on behalf of progressive feminism and other liberal causes. Even the worst of history's rulers are at times credited with advancements that benefited their societies, which in turn allowed some people to rationalize or justify their support in spite of obvious and glaring moral deficiencies.

So as things stand, this pair of Faustian bargains defines the American political landscape. Trump is the unchallenged head of the GOP and there is no clear successor to Mrs. Clinton and her husband to lead the Democrats. There are signs of discomfort and agitation with the status quo, perhaps more so on the part of Democrats. But neither party seems willing to be the first to nudge its larger-than-life scoundrel president off the plank.

After a stunning loss in 2016, the Democrats have to be wondering about the efficacy of their deal, while many Republicans remain sanguine over the possibility that after a long winning streak, the devil has finally met his match. Indeed, the Trump administration's impact on the federal judiciary will be significant and long-lasting, and Trump has implemented other conservative agenda items as well, though largely by fiat and with few legislative accomplishments to date.

As well, the midterm elections have moved the Republican party closer to Trump, with candidates showing little willingness to put daylight between themselves and the chief executive. With more GOP gains in the Senate, the judiciary will continue to move in a conservative direction, the holy grail that makes many willing to rationalize Trump's conduct.

Is it possible that both parties could simultaneously reach the toleration tipping point? Can the country defy political gravity and clamber its way back up the slippery slope? No bipartisan, smoke-filled backroom exists where such a deal could be hammered out. Rather, politicians and laypersons on both sides of the political spectrum who believe the pendulum has swung too far toward amorality must be willing to face down the true believers in the current ends-justify-the-means political culture. It may be a bloody fight, but if it is fought on both sides simultaneously, it may help restore our politics to a higher plane. ♦

Scrutongate

An unlikely outcry over a U.K. government architecture committee.

BY DOMINIC GREEN

Scrutongate is not a means of ingress to Sir Roger Scruton's farm in Wiltshire, England, but a digital witchhunt against the English-speaking world's most eminent public philosopher. The mob already know where Scruton lives: The witchfinder-generals of the left have been "no platforming" him since the early 1980s. The novelty is that this time, the digital denouncers are massing at Scruton's virtual gate because of architecture.

In early November, Britain's Conservative government appointed Scruton the unpaid chairman of its Building Better, Building Beautiful commission.

Dominic Green is the Life & Arts editor of Spectator USA *and a frequent contributor to* The Weekly Standard.

Scruton has long campaigned against Britain's postwar penchant for building badly: throwing up hideous public housing in a cheap and unpopular pastiche of modernist styles. The problem recently has been that governments are failing to keep up with demand for homes of any style at all. In the decade between 2007 and 2017, immigration increased Britain's population by nearly 10 perecent, from just over 60 million to just over 66 million. The cost of housing has risen by more than 5 percent in every year since 2014, and faster in desirable areas of London and the commuter belt towns protected from further development by a "Green Belt" of woods and legislation.

The Englishman increasingly struggles to buy the home that should be

his castle. After the war, Labour established itself as the builder of sprawling public housing projects it called "council estates": The socialist architecture was part of the architecture of state socialism. Later, Margaret Thatcher established the Conservatives as the patrons of the aspirant working class by allowing council tenants to buy their homes. Now, the Conservatives under Theresa May have committed to refreshing the vote-winning compact between government and affordable housing.

Above, public housing in Wales; inset, Roger Scruton

It is a British tradition that the arbiter of official taste in municipal construction lives in a Georgian townhouse but condemns the poor to live a hundred feet off the ground in a concrete box. So it was greatly to the credit of May's otherwise discreditable administration that James Brokenshire, the communities secretary, picked Scruton, an advocate of indigenous architectural traditions, to advise Building Better, Building Beautiful.

The prospect of the government's building homes that reflect the desires of the people who live in them rather than the taste of people who think they know better enraged Labour's hard left. So its digital myrmidons assailed Scruton as a homophobe, an apologist for date rape and eugenics, and, in a touching display of interfaith harmony, as both an anti-Semite and an Islamophobe. Some of this selectively misrepresented his statements, and much of it was simply fictional.

"It's complete nonsense," Scruton told me when I phoned him last weekend. Sir Roger had raised the drawbridge and was taking a philosophical view from the battlements.

"It's all fine. It's only social media, isn't it?" he said. "Social media has no purchase on real life, because it's designed to replace real life. The whole purpose of it is to re-create networks of human relationships in which reality has no part, so that people can live in fantasy worlds of their own and never encounter the real things like death, starvation, and conflict on the ground."

Still, he had not expected so vehement a volley of loathing. "I was surprised," he admitted. "There's obviously a big dossier kept on me." Since when? "Probably since birth! Certainly since the early eighties. There's a sentiment on the left that architectural modernism and revolutionary politics belong together. There's a fear that I'm going to be putting a spoke in the wheel of the whole modernist vision of what things should look like. I'm an advance guard of the bourgeoisie."

Anyone who has admired an Italian train station and then discovered that it was part of Mussolini's vision for Italy, or who knows how Le Corbusier saw his designs for a new urban architecture in terms of fascist and occult solar worship, will understand that the kind of revolutionary politics associated with architectural modernism is the wrong kind of politics. Have none of Scruton's Labour attackers considered that fighting for Le Corbusier-style council estates puts them in strange ideological company?

"They might, but that would require a level of education somewhat higher than they've achieved," Scruton observes. "They'd have to know about Le Corbusier's association with the Vichy government and what his plans for Algiers really were—essentially to eliminate the whole Islamic conception of how to build."

Scruton, the alleged Islamophobe, is in fact a defender of Islamic architectural traditions. Similarly, Scruton. the alleged anti-Semite and supposed partisan of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, took George Soros's side in 2016, petitioning Orbán's government not to close the Soros-funded Central European University, whose creation Scruton considers "an initiative for which George Soros deserves credit."

The sources of the anti-Semitism allegations are Scruton's 2013 lecture "The Need for Nations" and his 2017 interview with *Hungary Today*. In the lecture, Scruton explained the Hungarian nationalism that drives Orbán's support, and Soros's hostility to Orbán, in an analysis touching on Hungarian history and language and the legacies of the Holocaust and the Cold War. Speaking to a Hungarian audience, Scruton specifically noted that "indigenous anti-Semitism still plays a part in Hungarian society and politics, and presents an obstacle to the emergence of a shared national loyalty among ethnic Hungarians and Jews."

Scruton also described how historical experiences and recurring hostilities map onto Hungarian politics. Many of the "Budapest intelligentsia" are Jewish and "rightly suspicious" of Hungarian nationalism. This aligns them with the "networks around the Soros Empire." As Scruton observed in the *Hungary Today* interview, Hungary's Soros-funded NGOs function as "an unofficial opposition to the

TOP: EAMONN MCCABE / GETTY; INSET: MATTHEW HORWOOD / GETTY

government, a compensation for the lack of opposition in parliament." In the same interview, Scruton criticized Orbán as "an illiberal democrat."

The Labour member of parliament Luciana Berger, who is Jewish, accuses Scruton of "peddling anti-Semitic conspiracy theories." Yet this is a pernicious fallacy: If Scruton criticizes Soros's politics, and Soros is Jewish by origin, then Scruton opposes Jewish politicking.

"If you take one sentence out of context, you can make it look like I'm talking about a Jewish conspiracy," Scruton says. "That's what they wanted to do, to accuse me of that sort of thing."

In the curious case of Scrutongate, the fantasy architecture of social media is being abused to defend the fantasy of the union of modern architecture and socialism. It is ironic, though, to hear accusations of anti-Semitism emanating from the Labour party of Jeremy Corbyn. For no one since Oswald Mosley has done more to make anti-Semitic expression acceptable in Britain than Labour in recent years.

"There is a caricature view of what it is to be on the right now," Scruton says. "And that view is that you're a populist, a nationalist, you're about closing borders, xenophobia, et cetera. Any way of putting together a picture that would fit someone like me is a way of confirming these deep prejudices on the left. The left now identifies itself as cosmopolitan, internationalist, borderless, and deeply hostile to indigenous feelings of nationhood—and therefore hostile to the indigenous working class."

Scruton ticks off every box of the caricature. Worse even than advocating traditional architecture, he is the most prominent intellectual advocate of Brexit and shares some of the credit for it. I ask Scruton if the outcry against him fits the pattern of current British politics, in which every issue is a proxy for Brexit.

"It's all political obviously, to embarrass the government," he reflects. "I'm sure that has made me a target. . . . To intellectuals, I represent something dangerous, a threat to the stability of the left. So I think I'm always going to be targeted." ♦

The Long Shadow of the Great War

How J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis defied the spirit of the age. BY JOSEPH LOCONTE

In the spring of 431 B.C., Athens and Sparta went to war. Their dispute soon enveloped the entire Greek world. Thucydides, an eyewitness to the fighting, wrote that it would be "more momentous than any previous conflict." He was right. Dragging on for 27 years, the Peloponnesian War anticipated the suffering and deprivation associated with modern conflicts: the atrocities, refugees, disease, starvation, and slaughter. The war destroyed what remained of Greek democracy and left the Greek city-states vulnerable to demagogues and foreign invasion.

A hundred years ago, on November 11, 1918, another war begun by two European states—a local squabble that escalated into global conflict—came to an end. Struggling to describe its scope and destructive power, the combatants called it the Great War. Like its Greek counterpart, the war ravaged soldiers and civilians. Over the course of four years, roughly 20 million people were killed, another 21 million wounded. National economies were ruined; empires collapsed. The war to "make the world safe for democracy" left European democracy in tatters.

And more than that: The core commitments of Western civilization—to reason, truth, virtue, and freedom—were thrown into doubt. T.S. Eliot saw the postwar world as a wasteland of human weariness. "I think we are in rats' alley," he wrote, "where the dead men lost their bones." Many rejected faith in God and embraced materialistic alternatives: communism, fascism, totalitarianism, scientism, and eugenics.

Yet two extraordinary authors—soldiers who survived the horror of the trenches—rebelled against the spirit of the age. J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who met at Oxford in 1926 and formed a lifelong friendship, both used the experience of war to shape their Christian imaginations. In works such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Space Trilogy*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Tolkien and Lewis rejected the substitute religions of their day and assailed utopian schemes to perfect humanity. Like no other authors of their age, they used the language of myth to restore the concept of the epic hero who battles against the forces of darkness and the will to power.

One of the most striking effects of the war was an acute anxiety, especially in educated circles, that something was profoundly wrong with the rootstock of Western society: a "sickness in the racial body." Book titles of the 1920s and '30s tell the story: *Social Decay and Regeneration* (1921); *The Decay of Capitalist Civilization* (1923); *The Twilight of the White Races* (1926); *The Need for Eugenic Reform* (1926); *Will Civilization Crash?* (1927); *Darwinism and What It Implies* (1928); *The Sterilization of the Unfit* (1929); and *The Problem of Decadence* (1931).

The promotion of eugenics—from the Greek for "good birth"—began in Great Britain in the years leading up to World War I. But it gained international support in the period between the two world wars, just as Tolkien

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and Lewis were establishing their academic careers. The aim of the movement was to use the tools of science and public policy to improve the human gene pool: through immigration restriction, marriage laws, birth control, and sterilization. The movement's first task was to educate and persuade a potentially skeptical public. Sir Francis Galton, the British sociologist and cousin of Charles Darwin who coined the term, explained that eugenics

> must be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion. It has, indeed, strong claims to become an orthodox religious tenet of the future, for eugenics co-operate with the workings of nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly.

The success of the movement was breathtaking. In *The Twilight Years: The Paradox of Britain Between the Wars*, historian Richard Overy writes that eugenics advocates soon represented mainstream science, becoming affiliated with leading academic and scientific organizations on both sides of the Atlantic. "The concept appealed," he writes, "because it gave to the popular malaise a clear scientific foundation." At an international eugenics conference in Paris in 1926, Ronald Fisher, later a leading Cambridge geneticist, suggested that the new science would "solve the problem of decay of civilizations." Two years later, at University College London, Charles Bond argued that biological factors were "the chief source of the decline of past civilizations and of earlier races." At the 1932 Congress of Eugenics in New York, an international cast of geneticists, biologists, and doctors were assured that eugenics would become "the most important influence in human advancement."

The barbarism of the First World War seemed to have put civilization on trial. In the desperate attempt to rescue humanity from itself, the science of eugenics appeared to provide

Above, a 1930s U.S. magazine cover speculating about 'breeding or sterilizing defectives'; at right, Francis Galton, an early eugenicist

an answer. What it supplied, instead, was a pseudoscientific rationale for racist ideologies. Benito Mussolini, who swept to power in Italy in 1922, was the first European leader to exploit the language of eugenics to establish a fascist regime. Science and government would work together to improve the Italian race. One of Mussolini's earliest admirers, of course, was Adolf Hitler. Nazism, according to Hitler's deputy, Rudolph Hess, was "applied biology." The Aryan race was the eugenic ideal, and maintaining its purity became the focus of Hitler's national policy.

What's astonishing in retrospect is how little resistance the eugenics movement met as it captured the imaginations of the best and brightest in the West—scientists, clerics, academics, jurists. But among the motley crew of holdouts were two instructors in English literature at Oxford, Tolkien and Lewis, who enlisted their literary talents to confront eugenics. In *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the concluding book of his *Space Trilogy*, Lewis takes direct aim at the assumptions underlying the eugenics agenda. He tells the story of an English couple threatened by a demonic force, represented by the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E), attempting to take over the university town of Edgestow. The aim of the N.I.C.E. is to reeducate and remake humanity using the instruments of modern science, in a bid for world domination.

Lewis's fictional antagonists wage an all-or-nothing contest for the future of the human race. Consider this exchange between Lord Feverstone, a leader of the Progressive Element at the university and collaborator with the N.I.C.E., and Mark Studdock, a university professor drawn into its orbit:

> FEVERSTONE: "Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest—which is another reason for cashing in on it as soon as one can. You and I want to be the people who do the taking charge, not the ones who are taken charge of. Quite."
> STUDDOCK: "What sort of thing have you in mind?"
> FEVERSTONE: "Quite simple and obvious things, at first—sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races (we don't want any dead weights), selective breeding. Then real education, including pre-natal education. . . . But we'll get on to biochemical conditioning in the end and direct manipulation of the brain . . . "
> STUDDOCK: "But this is stupendous, Feverstone."
> FEVERSTONE: "It's the real thing at last. A new type of man."

Lewis links eugenics with the totalitarian impulse. The devaluation of individuals—justified by scientific materialism—can only proceed through the coercive machinery of the state. Lewis was criticized for being "anti-science." He denied the charge. "Under modern conditions," he wrote in response to a critic, "any effective invitation to Hell will certainly appear in the guise of scientific planning."

Although Tolkien shared Lewis's

TOP: FOUND IMAGE HOLDINGS / CORBIS / GETTY; INSET: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

disdain for the eugenic vision, he has been accused of promoting racism in his fictional works. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the free people of Middle-earth, mostly white, do battle with beast-like orcs sometimes described as "black-skinned." Some of the races in his story, critics say, are presented as good and others as irredeemably evil.

But the most evocative and moving character in his story is the hobbit—from a race often ignored, underestimated, and denigrated by others—who emerges as the hero in the fierce struggle against Mordor. "My dear Frodo!" exclaims Gandalf the wizard. "Hobbits really are amazing creatures. . . . You can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you at a pinch." One of the moral triumphs of the work is the willingness of the disparate races of Middle-earth to put aside their differences and sacrifice for one another in the war against Sauron.

Tolkien began writing his epic story in 1937—just as fascist ideologies were dominating international politics—and continued working on it throughout the Second World War. Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia two years before. And by 1938, Germany's Jews had been stripped of their civil liberties. The Munich Agreement, signed that year, surrendered a portion of Czechoslovakia to Hitler in exchange for a promise of peace. Although Tolkien denied that his work was allegorical, he acknowledged in a 1938 letter to his publisher that his new story "was becoming more terrifying than the Hobbit. . . . The darkness of the present days has had some effect on it." One of the narrative threads of *The Lord of the Rings* can be read as a conscious assault on the entire racist-totalitarian campaign.

The key to understanding the moral universe of Lewis and Tolkien can be found in a brief exchange in *The Lord of the Rings*, in Aragorn's answer to Éomer, who asks how they ought to respond to the storm of evil thrust upon them. "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them." The same vision animates Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. All of its various creatures (bears, badgers, horses, moles, mice), along with a group of English children, are summoned to rescue Narnia from despotism and restore its rightful line of kings. "I'd rather be killed fighting for Narnia," says Jill, "than grow old and stupid at home and perhaps go about in a bath-chair and then die in the end just the same."

The perspective of these two Oxford friends is remarkable when we consider another of the pernicious effects of the First World War: the widespread erosion of the concept of individual freedom and moral responsibility. Literary critic Roger Sale has called the war "the single event most responsible for shaping the modern idea that heroism is dead."

Consider what the soldiers at the Western Front were made to endure. The mortars, machine guns, tanks, poison gas, flamethrowers, barbed wire, and trench warfare: never before had technology and science so catastrophically conspired to obliterate man and nature. On average, more than 6,000 men were killed every day of the war. Their mutilated remains were consigned to graves scattered across Europe. The helpless individual soldier chewed up in the hellish machinery of modern warfare became a recurring motif of the postwar literature. In his *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Erich Maria Remarque described a generation of war veterans "broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope."

But the purveyors of fatalism found in Tolkien and Lewis implacable opponents. In the worlds they created, everyone has a role to play in the epic contest between Light and Darkness. No matter how desperate the circumstances, their characters are challenged to resist evil and choose the good. "Such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world," wrote Tolkien. "Small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere."

As soldiers of the Great War, Tolkien and Lewis endured the most dehumanizing conditions ever experienced in a European conflict. Their generation then watched with dread as totalitarian ideologies threatened to dissolve the weakened moral norms of their civilization. Others, such as Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, raised the alarm but seemed pessimistic about the outcome. A *New York Times* review of *That Hideous Strength* discerned in Lewis a different spirit: "When Mr. Huxley wrote his bitter books his mood was one of cynical despair. Mr. Lewis, on the contrary, sounds a militant call to battle."

Tolkien and Lewis possessed two great resources that helped them to overcome the cynicism of their age. The first was their deep attachment to the literary tradition of the epic hero, from Virgil's *Aeneid* to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. What matters supremely in these works is remaining faithful to the noble quest, regardless of the costs or the likelihood of victory. "The tragedy of the great temporal defeat remains for a while poignant, but ceases to be finally important," Tolkien explained in his 1936 British Academy lecture on *Beowulf*. In the end, "the real battle is between the soul and its adversaries."

The second great resource was their Christian faith: a view of the world that is both tragic and hopeful. War is a sign of the ruin and wreckage of human nature, they believed, but it can point the way to a life transformed by grace. For divine love can reverse human catastrophe. In the works of both authors we find the deepest source of hope for the human story: the return of the king. In Middle-earth that king is Aragorn, who brings "strength and healing" in his hands, "unto the ending of the world." In Narnia, it is Aslan the Great Lion, who sacrifices his own life to restore "the long-lost days of freedom." In both we encounter the promise of a rescuer who will make everything sad come untrue.

As the world marks the centennial of the end of the Great War and remembers the many lives swallowed up in its long shadow, here is a vision of human life worth recalling, too. ♦

My Fat Relentless Ego

Another good reason not to drop acid.

BY STEPHEN MILLER

When I was a grad student more than a half-century ago, I had a roommate who smoked pot—now called weed—during the week and took LSD on the weekend. I tried weed twice, but I didn't like to put smoke in my lungs. I also found weed smokers—indeed the whole drug culture—solemn and boring. I was leery of trying LSD because I had heard stories of people going on "bad trips."

Maybe I was wrong to be afraid of a psychotic episode. In a recent issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*, the eminent British philosopher Galen Strawson says that "people can . . . have bad experiences [taking LSD], but the positive consensus is extremely robust."

Many famous people have taken LSD, including Steve Jobs, Cary Grant, Bill Gates, Aldous Huxley, and André Previn, but I don't plan to take it because I'm not keen on its purported effect. According to Strawson, in taking it "we lose what Iris Murdoch calls 'the fat relentless ego.'" Why would I want to lose my ego?

LSD is called a psychedelic drug. The word "psychedelic," which was coined in the late 1950s by the English psychiatrist Humphry Osmond, means "mind revealing." Osmond called an LSD trip "an enlargement and expansion of mind," but most trippers speak about the joys of losing their mind. Cary Grant said: "I've had my ego stripped away."

Strawson says psychedelic drugs "dissolve the standard self-system, interrupting what [William] Hazlitt called the 'long narrowing of the mind to our own particular feelings and interests.'"

LSD, though, seems to encourage grandiose personal feelings. Strawson quotes Michael Pollan, the author of *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*, who says that psychedelic drugs—LSD is the main one—return us to the wonder of "unencumbered first sight, or virginal noticing, to which the adult brain has closed itself." Strawson also quotes another tripper who says: "My awareness was flooded with love, beauty, and peace beyond anything I ever had known or imagined to be possible."

GARY LOCKE

Reading what trippers say about their experience, I remember what Samuel Johnson said about James Macpherson's poetry: "Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it." Strawson admits that "there's a terminally weary group of words used to characterize psychedelic experience." He prefers to use X to denote "whatever it is that is most powerfully positive in psychedelic experience."

LSD enthusiasts would probably say that words cannot describe what it feels like to drop acid. One woman who calls herself a "solid atheist" said that when she was tripping she felt "bathed in God's love."

LSD is clearly a mind-altering drug—not a mind-revealing one.

Reviewing Pollan's book, Tom Bissell says many trips "begin with an ordeal that can feel scarily similar to dissolving, or even dying. What appears to be happening, in a neurological sense, is that the part of the brain that governs the ego . . . drops away."

My grad-school roommate gave me five pages he had written when on LSD. I read them and said: "This is gibberish." He replied: "You have to be on LSD to appreciate it."

Strawson doesn't say that he has taken LSD, but he is persuaded that it may be good therapy for depression and alcoholism. Clinical studies, he adds, show that it "can have extraordinary value in allowing people who are terminally ill to live what remains of their lives well."

But I like my fat relentless ego—at least most of the time. I might take LSD when I am dying, but until that time I prefer to live a non-psychedelic life. I have no desire to feel cosmic love; I'm okay with loving family and friends. When I hear about cosmic feelings, I always think of the following joke. Question: What did the Buddhist say to the hot dog vendor? Answer: Make me one with everything. ♦

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Where the Past Isn't Even Past

A university named for George Washington and Robert E. Lee wrestles with its traditions and heritage

By Peter J. Boyer

Three weeks before Donald Trump's inauguration, another presidential swearing-in quietly occurred 200 miles south, in the historic town of Lexington, Virginia, deep in the Shenandoah Valley. William C. Dudley became the 27th president of Washington and Lee University, one of the oldest and most esteemed liberal arts colleges in the country.

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Lexington could not have seemed more distant in its setting and, especially, in its character from Washington, D.C., at the dawning of the Trump era. The old town has an outsized cosmopolitan flavor, with arty boutiques and restaurants catering to the latest culinary fashions. But what distinguishes Lexington, setting it wholly apart from other college towns, is its conspicuous civility. Visitors strolling through town are regularly greeted by strangers with a smile and a hello or encounter young people in uniform, who step aside at the approach of a woman, touch their caps, and say, "Ma'am."

This ritual comity is spillover from the two colleges situated adjacently in the town of 7,000, Washington and

Portraits of Washington and Lee—now in civilian attire—flank the monument in Lee Chapel.

ALL IMAGES: JAMES PATRICK ALLEN

Lee and the Virginia Military Institute. Each is a deeply traditional, deeply Southern institution, with cherished customs and honor codes that are regarded as sacrosanct. VMI is home to the hat-tippers, while W&L students have for generations been steeped in what's called the "speaking tradition," the custom of meeting a passerby with eye contact and a friendly greeting.

As he settled into his new job, Dudley, a philosophy professor who'd spent his undergraduate years and teaching career at Williams College in Massachusetts, often remarked upon the singular qualities of the place he'd come to. "What a positive impression you all make on a newcomer," he told a meeting of the school faculty and staff a few days after his swearing-in. "People here are friendly, helpful, dedicated, and take pride in their university and pride in their town."

But below Lexington's surface harmony lay the same deep and bitter divisions that had lately come to afflict the broader national culture. This would be made plain in June when one of the town's trendy little eateries, the Red Hen, made national headlines by refusing service to White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders and her party because Sanders, in the view of the restaurant's proprietress, served in "an inhumane and unethical" administration.

Well before the Red Hen incident, Will Dudley had already had to reckon with the harsh divisions of his new life. He'd not been on the job for eight months when he and the institution newly in his charge were drawn into a controversy that threatened a genuine crisis for the 270-year-old school.

The precipitating event did not directly involve Washington and Lee, but occurred 70 miles away in another historic Virginia college town, Charlottesville. There, on an August weekend in 2017, white supremacists marching against the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee from a city park clashed with counter-protesters. Dozens were injured, and one young woman was killed.

As a horrified nation watched events unfold in Charlottesville, Dudley thought of Lexington, which could easily become the next flashpoint. In the two years since the murder of nine black worshipers at a Charleston, S.C., church by a racist who embraced Confederate symbols, statues of Lee and other Civil War memorials had been toppling across the South. The national discussion about the tension between heritage and contemporary mores, not a notably nuanced debate, figured to eventually land squarely in his new home.

To some, Lexington may seem less a town than a history exhibit. There are 17 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and W&L and VMI are both considered National Historic Landmark Districts. The flavor of Lexington's history is decidedly Confederate. Not only are Lee and his most trusted battlefield lieutenant,

Above, president William C. Dudley, across the lawn from Lee Chapel; at right, Lee House, the presidential residence

Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson buried there, but their war horses, Lee's Traveller and Jackson's Little Sorrel, have their own shrines. (Little Sorrel, stuffed and mounted, is on display at VMI, where Jackson was an instructor at the outbreak of the war.)

When Dudley retires to bed at night, it is in a residence called Lee House, which was built for the general when he served as president from 1865 until his death in 1870. The oath of office he'd taken, with only slight amendment, was the same Lee had sworn. When Dudley welcomes new students at orientation ceremonies and presides over other important events on campus, it is from inside Lee Chapel, an ivy-covered brick structure with a distinctive sloping tower, the design and construction of which Lee had personally overseen. Lee and his family are buried beneath the chapel.

Lee isn't just one of the university's namesakes. He can be credited with saving what was then Washington College and putting it on the course toward becoming a great university. His son, George Washington Custis Lee, succeeded his father as president and served for 26 years. So inextricably bound together are Lee and the university that when a statue of him was unveiled in Charlottesville in 1924 (at what was then Lee Park), the president of Washington and Lee, Henry Louis Smith, was asked to preside over the ceremony.

Excising Lee from W&L, as would inevitably be suggested, wouldn't just be a matter of taking down a statue or renaming a building or two. It would require cutting into the bone and sinew—some would say the heart—of the place.

Before the bloody weekend in Charlottesville had ended, Dudley sent a message to the school community noting that because of W&L's "complex history" regarding Confederate symbols, the university had "a special obligation to be absolutely clear about what we stand for as an institution." The following week, he announced that he was appointing a commission on "Institutional History and Community" to examine the university's past and how its physical campus is presented. The commission would be composed of representatives from faculty and staff, alumni, and current students.

The process launched by Dudley in the summer of 2017 lasted for just over a year. The self-examination unearthed deep divisions within the university community and revealed the startling degree to which many faculty members were put off by the school's traditions and culture. Among the common themes sounded during the process was that Lee Chapel, with its marble statue of a recumbent Lee in bivouac repose, "causes discomfort, and sometimes harm" to members of the community. Some suggested that Lee's name be removed from the university altogether. There was even an argument that the school's regard for honor and civility, long considered its core values, was itself a flaw, "an attempt … to stifle dissent." The town was not spared from the faculty critique, which found Lexington wanting in diversity. "The LGBTQI community is hidden," according to one complaint.

The commission issued its report in May, and the university's interested parties had the summer to offer comment on the report's recommendations. Dudley promised

that he would make his own recommendations to the board of trustees before classes resumed this fall. As the moment neared, progressives wanting dramatic change at the school hoped that Dudley, an academic from one of the "Little Ivies" up North, would sympathize with their concerns. Conservatives on campus, and many of the school's devoted alumni, feared that the progressives were right.

The discord at Washington and Lee had been foreshadowed in events two years earlier at another venerable Lexington institution, the R.E. Lee Memorial Church. After a small but vocal minority of the Episcopal church's congregants, led by a few academics from Washington and Lee, objected to the name of the building, there began a long and painful debate over whether to rename it. By the end, the rector had been dismissed, several members had quit the church, and many of those who remained were left exhausted and dispirited by the dispute.

One of the most persistent voices for change was Howard Pickett, a professor of ethics and poverty studies at W&L, who had been bothered by the church's name since arriving in Lexington a decade earlier. Most Episcopal churches that are named for people are consecrated in honor of Christian saints. What was the theological reason, Pickett wondered, for naming a church after a Confederate general?

Excising Lee from W&L, as would inevitably be suggested, wouldn't just be a matter of taking down a statue or renaming a building or two. It would require cutting into the bone and sinew—some would say the heart—of the place.

Lee Memorial opened its doors in 1840 as Grace Church. It was the first Episcopal church in the Shenandoah Valley, which was dotted with the hardy Presbyterian tabernacles planted by the Scots-Irish settlers who'd arrived in the valley over the previous century. Grace was just a two decades old when the war emptied its pews of its young men, and the pulpit, too, as the rector became a Confederate artillery officer.

When Lee, a pious Tidewater Episcopalian, arrived in the valley to assume his duties at the college, one of his first acts was to join Grace Church. He was immediately elected to the vestry, the body of parishioners that attends to church business, and over time he served as senior warden and chairman of the church's finance committee. Money was foremost among the church's temporal concerns, as was the case with most Southern institutions after the war. When Lee joined, the church had resorted to renting out its Sunday school room and charging fees for its worship pews. Lee toiled mightily over the church's financial difficulties to the end.

On the last day of his public life, September 28, 1870, Lee followed his almost ritualistic daily routine. He arose, read the morning psalter, then took his customary place in the school chapel for the 7:45 morning service. In the afternoon, after attending to his duties at the college, Lee made his way through a steady rain to Grace Church, where the vestry was, as usual, wrestling with the budget. Among the challenges facing it was a $55 shortfall for the rector's salary. "I will give that sum," Lee said, before adjourning the meeting, which had lasted three hours, and heading home for supper.

With his family gathered at the table, Lee stood to say grace, but the words didn't come. He collapsed back into his chair. Doctors were summoned, and the dining room of what is now called Lee House was transformed into a makeshift hospital room, where, two weeks later, Lee died.

Grace Church immediately added "Memorial" to its name, honoring Lee, and in 1903 renamed itself R.E. Lee Memorial Church. The church prospered and grew for more than a century.

Then, in the summer of 2015, the letter arrived. Parishioner Holly Pickett, an English professor at W&L and Howard Pickett's wife, wrote to the church's rector and lay leaders urging a "frank, Christ-centered discussion about the name that our church has borne since 1903."

The letter was in reaction to the murder of nine parishioners at Charleston's historic "Mother" Emanuel AME Church by a white supremacist named Dylann Roof, who'd hoped to touch off a race war. At the killer's bond hearing, the family and friends of the slain confronted Roof and offered forgiveness, as well as prayers for his soul. It was a remarkable display of Christian charity—and to the militantly secular press covering the killing, a nearly incomprehensible one.

In Virginia, two Episcopal churches made their own gestures of healing and reconciliation. At St. Paul's Church in Richmond, where Lee had worshiped during the war, symbols associated with the Confederacy were removed from the church, over the objections of those who believed history was being sacrificed to a political impulse. At Christ Church in Alexandria, where George Washington worshiped and which was the site of Lee's confirmation, plaques honoring Washington and Lee, installed in 1870, were removed. The rector, Noelle York-Simmons, said she wanted the church to be seen as "radically welcoming."

At R.E. Lee Memorial in Lexington, Pickett's letter triggered an agonizing debate that would last for more than two years. Among those advocating for the name change

was Doug Cumming, a vestryman at the church and a popular professor of journalism at W&L. (In the interests of the modern taste for disclosure, I will note that I have given talks to his journalism classes.) Cumming knows something about the Southern sense of the past. He was reared in Augusta, Georgia, where many members of his family live on a road named for their forebears, including the first mayor of Augusta and a Confederate general who led one of the brigades of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. As a boy, Cumming had been awestruck by the towering granite-and-marble monument to the Confederate dead on Augusta's Broad Street, with its life-sized statues of Confederate generals, including Lee, at its base.

But Cumming also harbors ambivalence about the Southern inclination to hold the past too dear. After high school, he'd gone north for his schooling, to Bennington, and stayed there after college, building a career as a newspaperman in Providence. "I graduated from as progressive and Northern a college as it gets," he says. "I think I was probably trying to turn myself into a New Englander."

Cumming comes from a long line of Episcopalians and, when he became an instructor at W&L, joined R.E. Lee Memorial. He wasn't especially bothered by the name. But as talk of it stirred, he sympathized with those who raised theological questions about honoring a Confederate general at a church. He says he was particularly concerned that outsiders would see the devotion to Lee as a kind of idolatry. "It seemed to make perfect sense to us that scripturally, we should be concerned about threatening the potential faith of others, who look at us as a shrine to the Confederacy," Cumming says.

But some of the 465 parishioners at Lee Memorial saw in their progressive brethren more a call to social justice and political correctness than faith. "They feel like they're guilty white people because their ancestors, or the ancestors of people in the South, were slave owners," says Woody Sadler, a retired Marine colonel, who was a senior warden in the church at the time of Pickett's letter. "And they just feel that in order to be free of this, they've gotta knock down all that is Southern."

Sadler makes no claim on Southern aristocracy—he is a military brat—but he holds fast to heritage and tradition. He attended VMI and returned to Lexington with his wife (also a Marine colonel) to run the school's ROTC program in 1992. Sadler has always held Lee in high regard as a military leader—"he and Jackson stand out as among the most brilliant minds in military history"—and since returning to Lexington, he's come to hold Lee in even greater regard due to his postwar efforts at reconciliation. "We were not glorifying a military leader, though I wouldn't mind that," he says. "We were actually remembering a parishioner that meant so much to so many people."

Liberal parishioners had won their long fight to change the name of R.E. Lee Memorial Church, but to parish vestry member and W&L professor Doug Cumming, it didn't quite feel like triumph. 'It's heartbreaking for a church that's supposed to be the body of Christ to divide on things like this.'

A few months after Holly Pickett's letter, the vestry took a vote and decided against changing the church's name—a decision reflecting a survey showing that two-thirds of parishioners wished to remain congregants of R.E. Lee Memorial.

That should have ended the controversy, but it didn't. Those wanting change persisted and found sympathy from Mark Bourlakas, the diocesan bishop, who made clear his belief that the church should change its name as an act of racial conciliation. With the bishop's encouragement, the church formed a "Discovery and Discernment Committee," chaired by Cumming, to further explore the issue and hired an outside consulting team of "peacebuilding practitioners" to examine the sources of underlying conflict within the church—although to some, including the rector, Tom Crittenden, the divide within the church was pretty clearly political.

The peacebuilding exercise brought to the surface issues in the church not directly related to the topic at hand, including criticism of Crittenden's leadership style. Following the Anglican tradition of *via media*, or the middle way, Crittenden had not urged his congregation toward one position or the other in the naming controversy, much to the annoyance of those who thought that he should have taken the lead in the battle to change the church's name. In the end, the consultants did not arrive at a resolution of the matter. They did, however, leave a tab of $16,000. Cumming's committee held countless meetings and group sessions and finally, in April, presented its recommendations, which included changing the church's name. The vestry said it had already voted on

the name change and rejected the recommendation. At that point, Cumming says, he was ready to give up the fight and just leave it at that. "And then," he says, "Charlottesville happened."

He was in New York with his wife and their daughter, who was about to undergo a serious medical procedure, when news of the violent events in Charlottesville broke. As they read through the news stories and comments on their laptops, Cumming says he felt a sense of personal remorse. "I felt deeply ashamed, almost personally ashamed, that I hadn't done more," he says. "That the alt-right, the Unite the Right rally, had come to a town just up the road. And what had happened and what people were saying about it, I just thought, 'Oh, my God.' And my attention turned back to the church, and the name R.E. Lee."

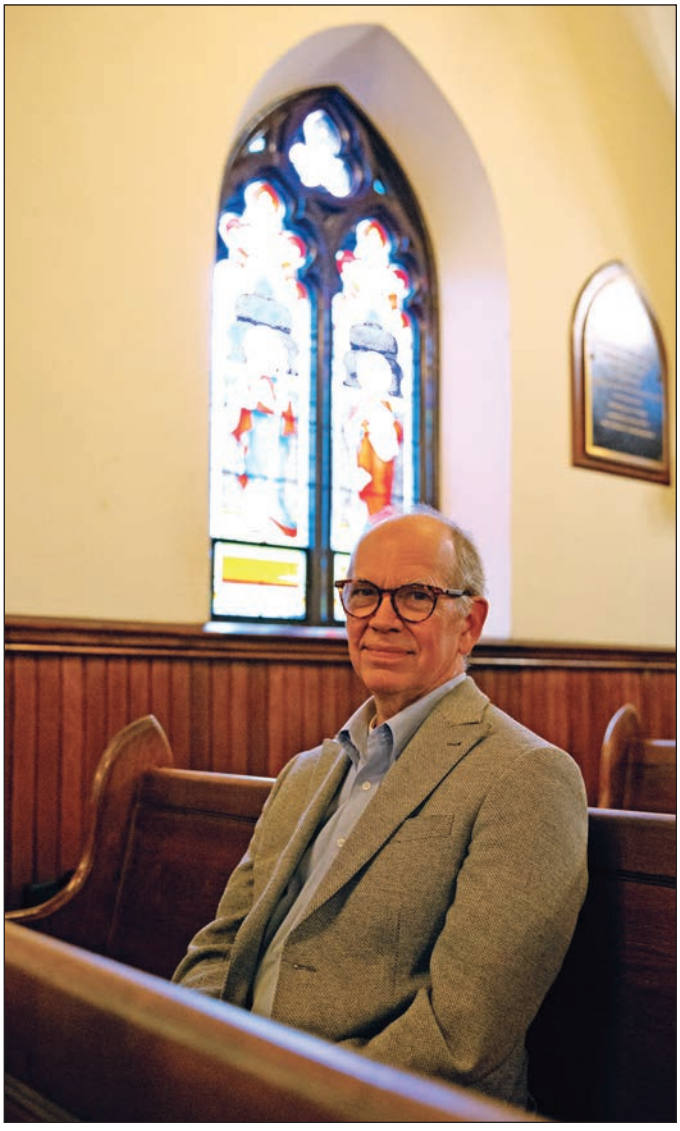
Once again the vestry took up the issue of the name change, and this time, Sadler says, the other traditionalists knew the change was inevitable. They agreed to a name change, but asked that it be delayed, hoping to postpone wounded feelings, especially among some of the older members of the church. One parishioner had been baptized at R.E. Lee more than a century ago. That argument did not prevail, and in September 2017, the vestry voted to return to the name the church had when Lee attended, Grace Episcopal Church. A plaque honoring three of the church's historic leaders, including Lee, would be placed out front. A few weeks after the vote, Crittenden left the parish, as did several parishioners.

The liberals had won their long fight, but to Cumming it didn't quite feel like triumph. "It's heartbreaking for a church that's supposed to be the body of Christ to divide on things like this," he says. "We have been completely focused on healing and reconciliation, which mostly means you just don't talk about it."

Sadler says the experience has changed his feeling for the church and for some of his fellow parishioners. "It's really hard for me, now that this is over, I don't feel the love in that church," he says. "I get upset when people hurt other people, especially for no good reason. And that's exactly what I saw happen at R.E. Lee."

The unalloyed opprobrium now assigned to Robert E. Lee in the mainstream press could be seen in the reaction to President Trump's casual mention of the Confederate general at an October rally in Ohio. In the course of telling an anecdote about Lincoln's frustration in trying to find an equal to Lee, Trump described Lee as "a true great fighter and a great general," but one who finally met his match in native Ohioan Ulysses S. Grant.

The *Washington Post*'s report of the event called



Above, Doug Cumming in Grace's sanctuary; below, the new parish sign

Trump's anecdote "an unexpected and provocative monologue on America's Civil War history" that "threatened to reignite a highly divisive debate over America's racial history." The *Post* also noted, meaningfully, that "Trump appeared buoyant" when mentioning Lee. Those themes were widely sounded in other reports and on social media, making clear that even the slightest approbation of Lee is now controversial on its face.

What's striking about that reaction is that until relatively recently, Trump's was the common view of Lee, both in the culture and in historical scholarship. Admiration for him extended beyond his military skill, which is still conceded, to his essential character. Dwight Eisenhower kept a portrait of Lee in the Oval Office and later explained why. "Through all his many trials, he remained selfless almost to a fault and unfailing in his faith in God," Eisenhower wrote. "Taken altogether, he was noble as a leader and as a man, and unsullied as I read the pages of our history."

Ike's lofty estimation of Lee reflected a century's worth of similar such assessments, beginning with those of his contemporaries of every rank. "He had the quiet bearing of a powerful yet harmonious nature," wrote James Power Smith, a young aide-de-camp to Stonewall Jackson who went on to serve Lee at Gettysburg. "Essentially a man of character," said Charles Francis Adams Jr., descendant of two presidents and a Union officer during the war, speaking at Lee's centennial celebration in Lexington in 1907. A few years earlier, the abolitionist Julia Ward Howe, who had penned the lines of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," published a poem eulogizing Lee as "A gallant foeman in the fight / A brother when the fight was o'er / The hand that led the host with might / The blessed torch of learning bore."

This idealized view of Lee was nowhere more keenly embraced than at the bedraggled little mountainside college in western Virginia whose presidency Lee assumed five months after Appomattox.

In the fall of 1865, both man and school were near ruin. Lee had lost his fortune and his property in the war, he had an invalid wife to care for, and he knew no occupation but soldiering. He'd had many offers to trade on his name, including $50,000 from an insurance company and the presidency of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway, all of which he had declined. He signed his oath of allegiance to the United States on the same day he took the presidential oath at Washington College—October 2, 1865—but he remained an unpardoned parolee for the rest of his life.

The college offered Lee an annual salary of $1,500, but even that small sum was a reach for an institution so badly straitened by war. A Union raid on Lexington had destroyed VMI and much of the town. Washington College had been plundered, its library and laboratory sacked. A 116-year-old educational establishment had been effectively reduced to a prep school, with an enrollment of 40 boys who were below fighting age and a faculty of 4.

Yet Lee's years in Lexington can be seen as his most satisfying and are considered by many to be, as Adams noted in 1907, "the most useful to his country of his whole life." This was partly because Lee's time in Lexington is associated with his unswerving urging of national reconciliation, the best-known example of which came in his response to the offer of the college presidency: "I think it the duty of every citizen," Lee wrote to the trustees, "in the present condition of the country, to do all in his power to aid in the restoration of peace and harmony, and in no way to oppose the policy of the State or General Governments directed to that object."

Lee's later years in Lexington can be seen as his most satisfying and are considered by many to be, as Adams noted in 1907, 'the most useful to his country of his whole life'—in part because of his unswerving urging of national reconciliation.

From the school's perspective, there was little doubt that Washington College owed its survival to Lee. He had refused to use his name for his own gain, but he eagerly worked his connections to benefit the institution. His first touch was Cyrus McCormick, the inventor and businessman, who began his benefaction with a $10,000 donation in Lee's first year as president and followed with gifts through the years that eventually totaled more than $350,000. While taking the waters at White Sulphur Springs in 1869, Lee met the industrialist and financier George Peabody, America's first great philanthropist, who had a particular interest in promoting education in the prostrate South. Peabody died later that year, leaving a sizable inheritance to the college in his will.

Lee also proved an able, even visionary, educator. Before the war, Washington College had been essentially a classical academy. Lee expanded the curriculum in applied sciences, added programs in journalism and business (the first in the country), and affiliated the college with a local law school, effectively transforming Washington College into a modern university. By the time of Lee's death in 1870, the school was on sound financial footing and had an enrollment of 400 students, making it one of the largest colleges in the South. In its first meeting after his death, the board of trustees voted to rename the school Washington and Lee.

But Lee's most meaningful contribution to the college

was the imprint he placed upon its character. "We have but one rule," Lee told the young men in his charge. "That every student must be a gentleman." That dictum and its corollary—that a gentleman doesn't lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do—encapsulated what became the college's honor code. Lee placed its enforcement in the hands of the students, where it remains today. A violation of the duty of honor is determined entirely by a student committee and carries only one possible punishment: expulsion.

"What's different about Washington and Lee is the honor code really works," says the broadcast journalist Roger Mudd, a member of the class of 1950. "You could leave your bicycle anywhere, and it would still be there in the morning." More remarkably, students are allowed to take exams in their own residences, unsupervised as long as they affix their pledge ("On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this exam") to the work. "The professors loved it because they could pass out their final exams and then leave," Mudd says. "They didn't have to monitor what was going on in the classroom as the students wrote their finals. And it made life better and easier for everybody."

The honor culture has a bonding effect on students, between themselves and with the school. Mudd says that it shaped his life, and after his broadcasting career, he returned to Lexington to teach a politics course. In 2010, he made a $4 million donation to the university for what became the Mudd Center for Ethics.

By the time Mudd arrived in Lexington, Washington and Lee had come to be a highly regarded Southern men's college, deeply traditional (at least one professor insisted upon a jacket and tie for boys entering his classroom long after the school's dress code was relaxed in the 1960s) and with a conservative approach to education. This began to change when the school developed the ambition to be ranked among the nation's elite colleges.

The most jarring change came in 1985, when W&L became coeducational. The Ivies had been coed since the 1970s (except for Columbia, which only admitted women in 1983), and the board was convinced that W&L could not survive, much less join the ranks of the elite, as a men's school. Other changes inevitably followed, including the introduction of a gender-studies program with such non-traditional courses as "Gender Role Development" and "Queering Colonialism." As W&L began to compete with upper-tier schools in hiring, its faculty and administrative staff became ever more susceptible to the trends and attitudes sweeping through academia, including an approach to history that would cast the school into its current identity crisis.

Scholarship had long been focused on the past as a fixed thing, knowable by the actions and words of historical figures who were to be considered within the context of their own time. The method that supplanted traditionalism sees history as a fluid thing, highly subjective and interpretive, with the people of the past being fair game for present-day judgment. This approach, historical pre-

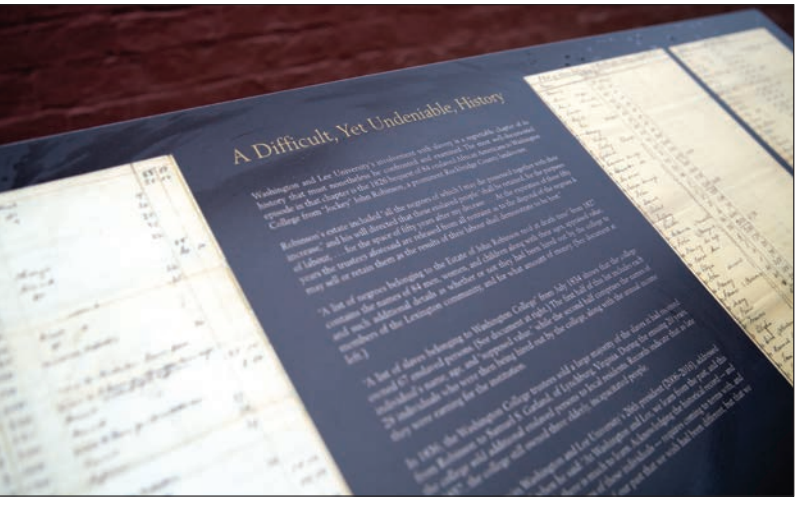
Above, Lee's office at the time of his death, preserved in an exhibit beneath the chapel; below, the Lee family crypt, including the remains of Lee and his fabled ancestor Revolutionary War general Henry 'Light Horse Harry' Lee

sentism, is inherently inclined toward revisionism, and there is perhaps no figure in American history whose profile was more susceptible to revision than Robert E. Lee.

The seminal moment was the publication of Thomas Connelly's *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* in 1977. The conventional view of Lee regarded him as an exemplar of personal honor, a peerless soldier who'd agonized over his decision to fight for the

Confederacy and then sought reconciliation at war's end. The fact that he was himself a slaveholder was generally contextualized. Lee was considered as a man of his time and place whose view of the South's "peculiar institution" was, if anything, relatively moderate. His father, Revolutionary War hero Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, had soldiered alongside George Washington (another slaveholding Tidewater aristocrat), who, after all, was himself the commander of a rebellious army fighting to establish what was, at its birth, a slaveholding nation.

Connelly argued that the noble, heroic Lee was a fiction, consciously contrived by a clique of postwar Virginians to deflect blame for Southern defeat from their native son. Far from the "harmonious nature" observed by James



An outdoor display on campus detailing an 1826 bequest of 84 slaves, left to the college by local landowner 'Jockey' John Robinson

Power Smith at Gettysburg, Lee's psyche, Connelly posited, was deeply disturbed, rendering him a morose, depressive, even suicidal figure given to violent outbursts of temper.

The Marble Man opened the gates of Lee revisionism, through which a host of other historians streamed. Gone was the Lee who merely tolerated slavery, which he'd described in a letter to his wife "as a moral and political evil," replaced by Lee the wicked master who was personally cruel to his servants. To Lee's supposed flaws of character was added a new, critical view of his military ability, which saw a reckless strategist whose hubris doomed countless thousands of Americans to unnecessary death and who brought on a crushing defeat that an abler commander might have avoided.

The fact that so many people, from Julia Ward Howe to Dwight Eisenhower, had for so long regarded Lee as a paragon was ascribed to the pernicious power of what the revisionists call the "Lost Cause" narrative. This was a deliberate effort in both the North and the South, the argument holds, to romanticize the Confederate cause in the hope of facilitating sectional reconciliation—described by the *Atlantic* in October as "a shared commitment to white supremacy."

This is the prevailing view in academia and in much of the media, a conviction that is reinforced when Confederate symbols are embraced by a Dylann Roof or torch-bearing white nationalists in Charlottesville. And it is why, when statues start toppling and monuments are defaced, appeals to heritage and history are largely unavailing.

It was against this background that Will Dudley assumed the office once held by Robert E. Lee, heading a university that had ostentatiously revered Lee for a century and a half and taking up residence in the house where Lee had breathed his last.

The process of bringing Dudley to Lexington had taken nearly 18 months, involving a nationwide search and a lengthy transition, and the W&L board of trustees was certain that it had found its man. Dudley had served as provost at Williams College, one of the most prestigious liberal arts schools in the country, a credential that fitted W&L's ambitions perfectly. He was also a native Virginian, born in Charlottesville and reared in Arlington. His family had been in the Old Dominion for 300 years.

Even so, Dudley was in some ways a fish out of water in his new job. While Williams and W&L are peer institutions, each situated in a picturesque small town up against the Appalachians, in key ways the two schools could not be more different. Williams is quite secure in its heritage, while W&L is wrestling with its own. And even apart from the honor code and speaking tradition, numerous other aspects of campus culture in Lexington would not be recognizable in Williamstown. For one, social life at W&L is dominated by Greek social organizations, 21 of them, whereas at Williams fraternities have been banned since 1962. The school handbook warns that any attempt to organize a fraternity could result in expulsion from the college. And at Williams, Dudley had certainly never confronted a controversy of the sort he encountered in March with the arrival of a letter from a Lexington local named Don Samdahl.

The retired head librarian of VMI, Samdahl wrote to complain that a book authored by his wife Margaret, a longtime employee of W&L, had been banned by the school in violation of its policies ensuring freedom of expression. The work in question, "*My Colt": The Story of Traveller*, was a 32-page, illustrated children's book focused on the famous bond between Lee and his horse, who is buried just a few feet away from the general's own grave in Lexington. It does not romanticize the Confederacy, which is scarcely

mentioned in a tale told from the horse's perspective; if anything, Traveller comes off as a bit of a pacifist for a war horse ("I have to say I did not miss the bullets, bombs, or confusion of the war").

But at least one member of the W&L faculty, politics professor Robin Le Blanc, was apparently of the view that Traveller should have been portrayed as having served in the unjust cause of preserving slavery and perpetuating white supremacy. She registered a complaint about the book, and within a few days, a book signing at W&L was canceled and *My Colt* was removed from display at both the Lee Chapel shop and the university store. (Le Blanc did not respond to a request for comment.)

Dudley responded to Samdahl's letter by assuring him that *My Colt* had not been banned by W&L, merely suspended from sale while the matter was investigated. Three weeks later, the book returned to the shelves of the school's stores.

Samdahl remained convinced that W&L had fallen under the sway of a group of academic Jacobins. "Unless you denigrate and attack Lee and all Confederates and Southerners, you are an evil person," he says. "There is only one permissible view—that Southerners and Lee and Jackson and Washington, all these men who had slaves, are evil people, and if you ever say a kind word about them, or even a neutral word, then you are an enemy."

Some W&L traditionalists worried that Dudley was more Massachusetts than Virginia. "My fear is that Dudley has been brought in to push this politically correct metamorphosis of the school," said Jeffrey Southmayd, '73, an attorney who is very active in the school alumni network. "I've been told by people who've met with him and sat with him that he's really not attuned to W&L and the traditions, and nor, I fear, does he respect them."

That fear seemed to have been realized when Dudley's commission on institutional history and community released its report in May. It made 31 recommendations, several of which suggested that the revisionist view of Lee would prevail at the university named for him.

The commission did not recommend changing the name of the school "at this time," but its key proposals would dramatically diminish Lee's presence in the school's culture and on the physical campus. The commission urged that Lee Chapel, which had long been the site of important school functions, be converted into a museum, with official school events being held elsewhere.

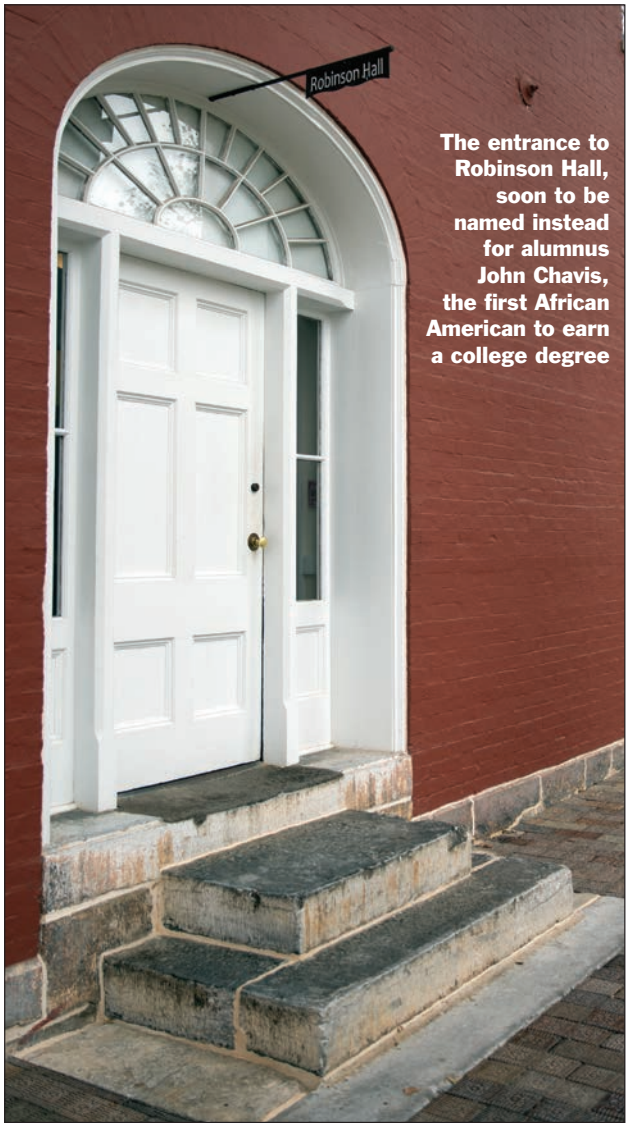
The report recommended that references to Lee in school materials drop the title "General," instead referring to him only as "President Lee." Portraits of Lee showing him in military uniform should be taken down, replaced by pictures of Lee in civilian attire or portraits of other individuals "who represent the university's complete history." The commission also called for a standing "naming committee" to conduct a review of the school's buildings, programs, and departments. This was an apparent response to a faculty complaint that "the campus tells the story of white, male patriarchs."

Perhaps the most striking of the recommendations was that the school's cherished honor code be distanced from Lee in order "to ensure [its] credibility." The orientation of new students into the honor system, which traditionally includes signing a copy of the code, should be removed from Lee Chapel, the commission suggested, and references to Lee given "a more proportionate place."

Traditionalists in the W&L community were appalled by the report, and they let Dudley know it. Among the most outspoken of them was a rising senior, Hayden Daniel, a history major from Mississippi attending W&L on an academic scholarship. "Washington and Lee's history, its identity, its essence will be lost," Daniel told me this summer. "Without it, we become just like everybody else. We become another self-flagellating northeastern liberal arts college that no one's ever going to want to go to because we're in the middle of nowhere. It's our history and our traditions that bring people here."

He was particularly aggrieved by the proposed changes to the honor book ritual. "It is a very visceral experience. It's the first time your honor is tested at Washington & Lee," he said. "Everyone in your incoming class is with you, and you make the pledge, and then you sign the White Book, which is the honor code book, and you can look up and see Lee in his recumbent pose as you're signing the White Book. … And then you look behind you and you see all those pews where everyone comes and gathers, and you think of all the previous W&L classes that have signed the White Book. You're connected to the history of the honor system itself. You're there with the man who personified it, and you're there in spirit with all the people who came before and signed it, too. So you're inducted into this sort of fraternity of honor there when you sign that book."

Daniel published a stinging critique of the report in the campus conservative newsmagazine, the *W&L Spectator*, helping to rouse sympathetic alumni to the fight—not that much help was required. "It's an uprising, believe me," said Jeffrey Southmayd, who was one of several hundred W&L alumni who attached their names to a point-by-point review of the commission's report. The alumni expressed support for several of the commission's recommendations, such as new efforts to increase diversity and finding ways to more fully tell the story of the school's history. But, the alumni warned, "We are opposed to any recommendation which tends to diminish, tear down, obscure, or eliminate our history, values, and traditions." Among those unwelcome proposals, the alums made clear, were the diminishment of Lee



The entrance to Robinson Hall, soon to be named instead for alumnus John Chavis, the first African American to earn a college degree

Chapel and the proposal to strip the title "General" from Lee, "which, frankly, we consider almost silly."

The alumni pointedly expressed their belief that implementation of some of the recommendations would "result in a significant decline in support, both financial and otherwise, for the university." "These tend to be alumni who graduated in the '60s, who are doing their estate planning, and who have been very loyal alumni," Southmayd said. "What I hear is 'I've given my last dollar to W&L, I'm going to have to redo my will because I'm not going to make the bequest I was going to make.' There's a lot of that sentiment brewing."

As students, faculty, and staff arrived in Lexington for the fall term, Dudley sent a message, nearly 4,000 words long, to the school community, in which he revealed his decisions on the commission's report. Recipients did not have to read far before arriving at the most telling passage. "We will neither distance ourselves from our history," Dudley wrote, "nor oversimplify it."

He said that the school's namesakes and other important figures in its history needed to be remembered for who they were and what they did, whether or not their actions and decisions would gain contemporary approval. "The point is not to sit in judgment, but to understand them in all of their human complexity and with an appreciation of the contexts in which they lived," Dudley wrote. "The interminable messiness of historical inquiry is an educational virtue that advances our mission by honing the ability of our students to think freely and critically."

Regarding Lee Chapel, Dudley decided, "We can and will continue to use Lee Chapel, as our community has done for a century and a half, in the service of the life of the university." The honor code orientation ritual would continue to be held in the chapel—or not; it would be entirely the decision of the students, as Lee himself would have had it, Dudley said. But both the chapel and Lee House would retain their names.

Dudley announced his intention to appoint a director of institutional history, reporting to the president, who will oversee Lee Chapel, the school's art and history collections, and the design and operation of a new museum devoted to the school's history. "We have to move forward together," Dudley announced, though he noted the difficulty of doing so in an era when the school's core values are being called into question and "'civility' has become a loaded word."

The traditionalists had won. But some worried that, as with the former R.E. Lee Memorial Church, the victory would not be final. "I think Dudley's hope is things will die down, we'll have this director of institutional history, and he can do some of these things that the commission wanted to do," says alumni activist Jeffrey Southmayd.

Indeed, a month after Dudley sent his message out, some of the changes proposed by the commission were adopted by the school's board of trustees. Chief among them was fulfillment of the commission's most urgent recommendation, the renaming of Robinson Hall, whose namesake, "Jockey" John Robinson, had been an important early benefactor, leaving his entire estate—which included several dozen slaves—to the school. Robinson Hall will now be called Chavis Hall, after John Chavis, who became the first African American with a college education when he graduated from Washington Academy, as the school was then called, in 1799.

Lee-Jackson House, in which the two Confederate generals had each briefly lived, will be renamed to honor Pamela Hemenway Simpson, an art historian who spent her entire career at W&L and was instrumental in its transition

to coeducation in the 1980s. The board also decreed that when university functions are held inside Lee Chapel, the doors will be closed on the statue of the recumbent Lee, hiding him from view. And the portraits of Washington and Lee in military uniform inside the chapel will be replaced with pictures of the two men in civilian attire. That objective came closer to fruition on November 13 when W&L agreed to loan to Mount Vernon the painting of Washington that had long hung in the chapel—the 1772 Charles Willson Peale depiction of Washington as a colonel in the Virginia Regiment, the only portrait of him predating the revolution—for two years. In exchange, one of Gilbert Stuart's replicas of his famous "Athenaeum" portrait of Washington (the countenance famous from the $1 bill) will be hung in Lee Chapel.

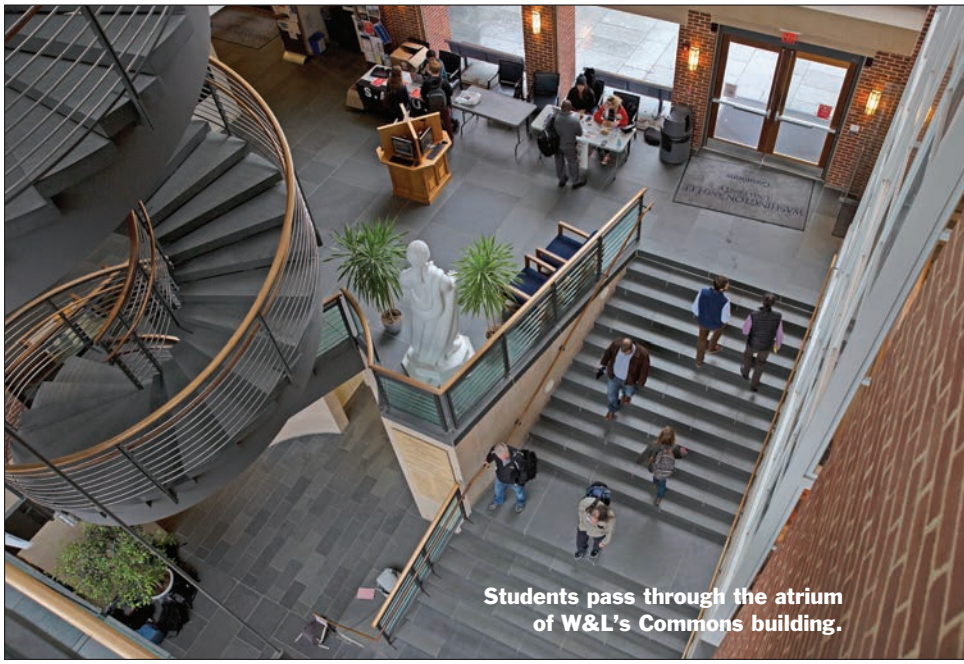
In the *W&L Spectator*, Hayden Daniel editorialized against the chapel changes, saying that those uncomfortable with Lee's presence on campus would not be mollified with gestures. "Giving in to demands formulated based on how a certain group feels leads to radical change after radical change until we will not be able to recognize ourselves anymore," he wrote. "We will end up erasing the history, both good and bad, that makes Washington and Lee such a unique place in favor of becoming a safe-space ridden clone of Davidson or Wellesley that attempts to coddle its students rather than expose them to the harsh realities of history and reconcile the complexity of the figures who made that history."

Dudley acknowledges that there are faculty members who don't believe that he went nearly far enough—some have reportedly threatened to leave the school. "I do live in the real world, and I know that those folks are there," he says. But he is determined to hold the line. He believes the goals of inclusion and diversity can be achieved "without the kinds of symbolic changes that some of them think are necessary."

When he initiated the agonizing self-examination exercise, he'd said he hoped that W&L would "set a national example for how this work should be done," and the school may have done just that. In the end, with the board's backing, Dudley has arrived at an elegant, even wise, resolution to W&L's identity crisis, one suiting an institution of higher learning. Washington and Lee will undertake to resolve the tension between history and contemporary mores by adding to history, not subtracting from it—or, worse, erasing it.

And there is, in the end, a most practical motivation to succeed. "I'm pretty sure this university will always be called Washington and Lee," says Doug Cumming, who successfully advocated for the renaming of R.E. Lee Memorial Church but has no such ambition for the school. "What else would you call it? We're building a reputation. You know, it's a brand." Cumming endorses Dudley's decision on the commission's report, too, and the subsequent actions of the board of trustees. "I think it's a good first step, to get some of these names on the buildings, at not much of a loss to the shades of the two generals," Cumming says. "Our mascot remains the Generals."

But even so careful an approach to the past holds peril, as was made evident in late October when a group calling itself the Loyal Knights of the Ku Klux Klan distributed leaflets around campus, claiming biblical authority for racial segregation and warning, "K-K-Keep the name the same." Dudley condemned the group and the leaflets in another letter to the community, saying (as he had after Charlottesville), "The views espoused by the KKK and other hate groups are abhorrent and antithetical to the values of Washington and Lee."



Students pass through the atrium of W&L's Commons building.

The one-time Williams philosophy professor is teaching a course this semester examining W&L's core ideals—"honor, integrity, civility, citizenship, and thinking freely, critically, and humanely," as he lists them—from the perspective of Aristotelian ethics. Cumming has a bit of advice for his university's president: "I don't know if he's also drawing on Stoicism, but that's always been a strand of the Southern way of getting through polarization like we see now." ♦

In September 2010, two years after Lehman Brothers went bankrupt, the signs and artwork from the firm's London office were auctioned off.

OLI SCARFF / GETTY

Crash Course

Ten years after the financial crisis, here are the best books on what went wrong and what still should be fixed.

BY ROBERT F. BRUNER

A decade ought to be enough time to make sense of the financial crisis of 2008—to unearth the relevant facts and sort through, with some scholarly distance, the most important debates.

While there is no shortage of books that have sought to explain the causes and events of the crisis and offer lessons for the future, many of them amount to little more than "crisis porn" meant to stimulate the emotions; they are lurid, pandering, and dripping in *schadenfreude* or grievance. But the vast literature also includes solid, smart books, artfully written.

A reader wishing to get a handle on the financial crisis, what was done about it, and what the future might hold should start with one or more histories of the episode (to learn what happened), dip into some memoirs (for depth about the dilemmas that decision-makers faced), and then study some critical analyses of causes, consequences, and policy recommendations.

The financial crisis was not a single event in one place. It occurred across time: The cycle of contraction began with the bust of the housing bubble in early 2006 and its aftershocks can still be felt today. It occurred across space: It was largely a North Atlantic crisis, reverberating between the United States and Europe. No single book can treat the complexity of the crisis with finality.

The completist or the historian might start with reading books by the prophets who cried in the wilderness—the economists whose pre-crisis writings seem prescient, like Yale professor Robert Shiller, whose *Irrational Exuberance* (in its 2005 edition) noted the bubble in housing prices and the decline in lending standards. *Subprime Mortgages* (2007), by the University of Michigan's Edward Gramlich, is dry and academic in tone but reading it evokes a sense of foreboding like that felt when reading about Sarajevo in 1914.

The most entertaining book about the lead-up to the crisis is Michael

Robert F. Bruner, a professor of business administration at the University of Virginia and a senior fellow at the Miller Center of Public Affairs, is coauthor, with Sean Carr, of The Panic of 1907.

Lewis's *The Big Short*, which was adapted into an Oscar-winning movie. To be "short" in this context was to have sold claims on subprime housing debt in anticipation of the collapse of that market—in other words, to have bet against the over-optimism of the crowd. Lewis profiles a handful of individuals who saw the massive overpricing of mortgage-backed securities and decided to act: "The people on the short side of the subprime mortgage market had gambled with the odds in their favor. The people on the other side—the entire financial system, essentially—had gambled with the odds against them."

Where Shiller, Gramlich, and Lewis go deep into particular antecedents of the crisis, Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera go broad. Their *All the Devils Are Here* is an excellent survey of decades of innovations in government policy and the business behaviors they elicited. The government-sponsored lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac receive special attention as promoters of the housing boom and credit expansion that ultimately led to the bust.

Andrew Ross Sorkin's *Too Big to Fail* gives the best summary of the agonies of business and government leaders at the epicenter of the crisis in 2008. Sorkin acknowledges those leaders' plight but finally draws a stern judgment:

> If the government had stood aside and done nothing as a parade of financial giants filed for bankruptcy, the result would have been a market cataclysm far worse than the one that actually took place. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that federal officials … contributed to the market turmoil through a series of inconsistent decisions. … What were the rules? There didn't appear to be any, and when investors grew confused—wondering whether a given firm might be saved, allowed to fail, or even nationalized—they not surprisingly began to panic.

Sorkin's book, rich in interviews, was adapted into a movie for HBO.

U.S. markets would not hit bottom until March 2009, when the economy began an anemic recovery. Alan Blinder's *After the Music Stopped* carries the story through to 2012. "The strangest legacy of the financial crisis," he writes after describing the rise of Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party, may be "the stunning combination of policy success and political failure." (In work published after the book, Blinder gave evidence of a considerable economic return after the government bailouts and rescues—showing, for instance, government earnings of $25 billion on the Troubled Asset Relief Program [TARP] bailout.)

SPENCER PLATT / GETTY

Protesters on Wall Street in September 2008

Meanwhile, as the United States slowly recovered, Europe headed toward the cliff. Neil Irwin's *The Alchemists* is one of the best treatments of the international dimension of the financial crisis, vividly written and drawing on many interviews. The book's most important insight is that the European crisis was not simply imported from the United States. French president Nicolas Sarkozy (among others) scorched the United States for causing the European crisis. But, as Irwin shows, the depth and duration of the European crisis owed much to Europe's own lax regulation, poor coordination among government agencies, fraudulent reporting, asymmetries in economic performance among members of the eurozone, and ultimately the fact that the eurozone is a currency union, not a fiscal or political union. Irwin is largely sympathetic to the "alchemists"—the technocrats from the European Union and the European Central Bank, and the finance ministers of Germany and France, who managed the crisis—but criticizes them for "hesitation and delay in the face of the Eurozone crisis" and for "moving slowly and timidly in addressing [Greece's] deteriorating financial position." In the United States, the Federal Reserve launched its program of quantitative easing (the predominant economic stimulus in response to the crisis) in 2008; not until late 2010 did the European alchemists commit to strong collective action to fight the crisis.

Notable for its synthesis but not for objectivity or nuance is the latest major account of the crisis, Columbia University historian Adam Tooze's *Crashed*. Tooze understands that financial crises have deep roots—his history goes back to the Nixon shock of 1971—and that their ramifications extend for years afterwards. But his book offers little insight beyond Neil Irwin's. Tooze colors his narrative with sentiments reminiscent of an older ideology: capitalism as exploitation, the crisis as a manifestation of class conflict in the tottering globalist economy, and corruption and conspiracy among the elites as the cause. *Crashed* is foremost a polemic, sometimes right but never in doubt, that wears thin long before its last page.

There have been at least 14 memoirs of the crisis written by government figures; 5 of those written by Americans stand out for being both readable—far from a certainty in writing about economics—and substantive.

Timothy Geithner's *Stress Test* is the best in class for its intellectual insight, style of exposition, humility, and candor; if you read only one memoir of the crisis, it should be this one. Geithner, who was president of the New York Fed in 2008 and then Treasury secretary in the Obama administration, is the most articulate advocate of the controversial view that to prevent another Great Depression, the government first had to rescue distressed institutions, let executives collect their bonuses, and inject billions into financial markets; reform and relief for stricken homeowners and the unemployed would have to come later, after the system was stabilized. Even a decade later, the decision to prioritize rescue over relief remains the focus of bitter debate about the U.S. government response to the crisis.

As Federal Reserve chairman during the crisis, Ben Bernanke took enormous heat for his innovations in Fed policy. But the special value of his book, *The Courage to Act*, is in its comparison of the Great Depression and the crisis of 2008. Bernanke is a leading authority on the Depression, and his insights lend intellectual justification to the government's actions during the crisis.

On the Brink is Henry Paulson's brief for the defense of his policies as Treasury secretary during the George W. Bush administration. Paulson depicts himself as a dynamic action hero. Compared with the books by Geithner and Bernanke, Paulson's makes a rather lame case in support of his decision to let Lehman fail and of his hasty preparation of a proposal for TARP. Perhaps he decided too much too soon; historians will judge after the archives open years from now.

From 2006 to 2011, Sheila Bair was chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the entity created during the Great Depression to insure money deposited in American banks. During the financial crisis, she was a thorn in the sides of both the Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department. In her memoir, *Bull by the Horns*, she describes how she resisted the liberal deployment of taxpayer money to rescue the financial system, withstood the pressure of lobbyists seeking to influence the actions of agencies, fought against the drive to permit financial executives to receive bonuses, and bucked the general "overreaction."

Paul Volcker, now 91, was a prominent figure in the Nixon shock of 1971. As chairman of the Federal Reserve, in 1980 he instigated the Volcker shock, which helped bring on the savings and loan crisis. He survived an "attempted coup" by Fed governors in 1986. And he helped lead the Obama administration's response to the 21st-century crisis. Given his long experience, it's no surprise that in his just-released memoir (written with Christine Harper), *Keeping At It*, he writes about crises with equanimity, even gravitas. In April 2008, Volcker said that the Fed had acted at "the very edge of its lawful and implied powers" when it had funded the takeover of Bear Stearns by JP Morgan Chase—remarks that were an apparent rebuke of Bernanke, Geithner, and Paulson for exceeding the Fed's mandate. Volcker elaborates in his memoir: "The Fed should not be looked to as the lender of last resort beyond the banking system." Volcker instead favored the creation of a separate agency to buy assets and recapitalize distressed firms, rather like the Resolution Trust Corporation created to clean up the S&L crisis.

In scathing 2009 remarks, Volcker derided financial innovation as a contributor to the crisis—he said that "the most important financial innovation that I have seen" banks create in recent decades is the ATM—but he adds nothing on that subject here. Indeed, the reader is likely to hanker for more color from Volcker, more scoops, more insight into policies for future crises. He has little to say about his successors at the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan and Bernanke, although he does bless Geithner for his "character and competence." Volcker affirms commitments to both zero inflation *and* the Democratic party, but he doesn't explain how he squares that circle. His memoir reads like he speaks: tersely and without flair. One imagines a cigar in his hand as he dictated into a recorder.

Europe has produced two compelling memoirs of the financial crisis. Alistair Darling's book, *Back from the Brink*, recounts his experience as Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer from 2007 to 2010. He argues that the crisis should be understood not merely as a story of bankers' actions but in the context of "a crucial point in history"—a shift toward economic globalization. He is candid about the stresses of dealing with the avalanche of bad news and of collaborating with monumental personalities, especially his prime minister, Gordon Brown. They had "an often fraught and increasingly difficult relationship"—although they were sometimes allied in frustration against Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England (whose own book we shall turn to later). Darling's account of the chaos of events makes for dramatic reading, and his worries about the actions of other countries' governments—especially in Ireland, where the banking crisis was particularly dire—illustrate his point about economic globalization.

The most engaging memoir of the crisis is one that focuses not on 2008 but on subsequent events in Greece. Yanis Varoufakis was Greece's finance minister for 162 days in 2015. An academic and political outsider, he was appointed by the far-left Syriza party on the strength of his criticisms of the waves of austerity imposed by bailouts from the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. With each new round of bailout money came demands for more budget cuts—cuts that, Varoufakis argued, only accelerated the debt-deflation spiral exacerbating the economic and humanitarian crisis in Greece. His book, *Adults in the Room*, focuses on his failed negotiations to replace the bailout terms with a new debt-reduction scheme. Bargaining from a position of weakness, he ultimately brought Greece to the brink of exit from the European Monetary Union—nearly to "Grexit." At that point, his prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, dumped him. As a latecomer

to the Greek disaster, Varoufakis is perhaps to be forgiven for understating the extent to which the Greeks were the authors of their own fate: Corruption was endemic in Greece; economic inefficiency was legendary; at one point, tax evasion amounted to almost a third of the country's budget deficit; and the government willfully cooked its books in 2009 to underreport the national deficit (the highest in the world as a percentage of GDP). Still, his book, filled with searing condemnations of European officials, reads like a thriller and warrants top honors for elegant prose. Once begun, it will be difficult to put down. Read it with ouzo.

All these memoirs reveal the high stress associated with leadership during a crisis. They also show the difficulty of mobilizing collective action. Financial crises are not engineering problems; they cannot be solved with finely wrought outputs of economic models. Such solutions as are possible result from a process of bargaining in which power, persuasion, threats, bluffs, cognitive biases, and risk aversions all play a part. Compare the narratives of Geithner, Bernanke, Paulson, and Bair at critical moments—they fought in shifting coalitions over what to do about Lehman, Wachovia, Citigroup. Notable in the Bernanke-Geithner-Paulson memoirs is a "band of brothers" spirit of fraternity that Sheila Bair seems to have resented. Yanis Varoufakis wanted to lead Greece to Grexit; his prime minister did not. Alistair Darling, too, clashed with his prime minister and central banker. And of course all these authors placed different values on the aims of rescue, relief, recovery, and reform. Given all the drama, it's a wonder that we emerged from the crisis at all.

Even after devouring histories and memoirs, you are likely still to hunger for understanding. Why did the crisis happen? What should we do differently hereafter? Three themes stand out in the immense literature of analysis and prescription: the problem of overconfidence, the failure of governance, and the abuse of leverage.

First, *overconfidence* biased the decisions of consumers, investors, business executives, and government officials. Investing in real estate seemed like a sure thing; prices could only go up. As Sir John Templeton, the famous investor, once said, "The four most dangerous words in investing are 'This time is different.'"

The latest book to address the danger of overconfidence is *A Crisis of Beliefs* by economists Nicola Gennaioli and Andrei Shleifer. Their book is extremely wonkish in certain sections, but the general reader can skip those without losing the argument: that we should pay more attention to investor "sentiment," not only in financial markets but in the real economy. "People tend to overweight future outcomes that become more likely in light of incoming data," Gennaioli and Shleifer write. "Good macroeconomic news makes good future outcomes more representative, and therefore overweighted, in judgments about future states of the world. The converse is true for bad macroeconomic news." Distorted beliefs lead to excessive leverage in the upswing of a bubble and to panic exiting of the market in the downswing.

The books of Yale economist Gary Gorton illuminate why overconfidence reliably precedes financial crises. In *Slapped by the Invisible Hand* and *Misunderstanding Financial Crises*, Gorton argues that information asymmetries are a cause of runs, panics, and crises. Banks are complex institutions, making it difficult for depositors and investors to discern their condition. In normal times, a bank's creditors tend to be sleepy: As long as the bank's assets (the collateral) are high grade, creditors tend to feel indifferent about the details of the bank's condition. After all, government guarantees and the bank's equity holders will absorb the shock of losses, up to a point. But when a sudden shock—such as the collapse of house prices—casts doubt on the value of a bank's assets and its solvency, the sleepy creditors quickly become information-sensitive and with the arrival of adverse news, they begin to run.

All the participants in this recent Brookings Institution panel—Ben Bernanke, Timothy Geithner, Henry Paulson, and Andrew Ross Sorkin—have written books on the 2008 crisis.

WIN MCNAMEE / GETTY

Perhaps banks can be made more information-*in*sensitive by having bigger capital bases or by enlarging government guarantees of their liabilities. But Gorton argues that the problem of runs on banks is not really a problem of capital adequacy; it is one of illiquidity. Misunderstanding this, he says, has resulted in some misplaced metrics of systemic stability. A related problem is that in 2008 the worst runs occurred mainly outside of the regulated banks, among dealer banks, where regulators were not expecting them.

Which brings us to the second big lesson to be gleaned from the post-crisis literature: that

governance failed us. Regulators slept; private watchdogs did not bark; CEOs and boards of directors chased returns while ignoring risks; and market discipline proved lax. Activity moved from the sunlight into the shadow financial system, where guardians could not see. Financial innovations deepened linkages among firms and made it harder to know what was going on.

One critique holds that government regulators were "captured" by the bankers, forming a powerful oligarchy that thwarted democratic will. This is the central thesis of Simon Johnson and James Kwak's *13 Bankers*. The remedy Johnson and Kwak propose is to break up (or nationalize) the large banks—to reduce both their threat to the stability of the financial system and their power to capture the regulatory machinery.

Or perhaps the failures of governance arise from the very efforts to regulate. Charles Calomiris and Stephen Haber argue in *Fragile by Design* that populist policy resulted in an over-banked U.S. financial system. At the peak, early in the 20th century, the United States had nearly 30,000 banking institutions, most of them small and undercapitalized. Although that figure is now under 10,000, it is still much higher than in other countries, leaving the American financial system vulnerable to systemic shocks. By comparison, Canada's financial system consists of a small number of very large banks with nationwide branches—and the Canadian financial system sailed through the crisis of 2008. "Why can't all countries construct banking systems capable of providing stable and abundant credit?" Calomiris and Haber ask. Their answer is that "political conditions constrain what is possible. … Every country's banking system is the result of a Game of Bank Bargains, which determines the rules that define how banks are chartered, how they are regulated, and how they interact with the state. Those outcomes, in turn, determine how well the country will perform along two key dimensions: the degree of private access to credit and the propensity for banking crises." The failure of governance in the United States is owed to balkanized regulators, regulatory capture, and the inability of the regulatory regime to keep up with the financial services industry.

Peter Wallison's *Hidden in Plain Sight* expands upon his dissenting opinion to the report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission (2011). He describes the role of decades of government policy and regulations in promoting homeownership and the liberalization of credit, arguing that "the U.S. government's housing policies caused the crisis." The "bumbling of government officials made a bad situation considerably worse," he writes, and a "false narrative about the causes of the financial crisis"—that the crisis was caused by lax regulation—"has both saddled the financial system with the Dodd-Frank Act and made it likely that the same mistakes in housing policy that were responsible for the crisis will be repeated in the future." Wallison's riposte to the dominant narrative is a helpful reminder that well-intentioned government policies can lead to very bad ends.

Some critics assert that the bailouts and other government actions were illegal or even unconstitutional. But Philip Wallach points out that the long history of government responses to financial crises is characterized by a certain degree of flexibility, especially in moments when it is impossible to distinguish insolvency from illiquidity. In *To the Edge*, Wallach argues in favor of "adhocracy"—agile government responses that extend to "the very edge of … lawful and implied powers," as Paul Volcker said after the Bear Stearns rescue. Wallach argues that four factors determine the legitimacy of such responses: legality, widespread agreement (or "democratic legitimacy"), trust, and accountability. More than just a book about responding to financial crises, *To the Edge* is a bracing exploration of resilient governance.

However, if we allow for "adhocracy," what prevents the takeover of democratic governments by technocrats? This is the subject of *Unelected Power*, Paul Tucker's exploration of the benefits and dangers of the delegation of authority to independent agencies, which over time have come to make up a massive "administrative state" within the U.S. government. Congress delegates authority to agencies because it lacks the time and expertise—or the political courage—to set rules itself. In the case of the financial crisis of 2008, the improvisations of central bankers stunned some democratically elected representatives into asking whether the powers delegated needed to be curtailed. With the exacting care of an engineer, Tucker examines how authority can be yielded to independent agencies while still protecting democratic prerogatives. "Broad public discussion and acceptance" are essential for the credibility and legitimacy of central banks, he concludes—but putting that notion into practice would require open debate about the profound authority granted to central banks and greater constraint for central bankers "to go no wider than is necessary to preserve stability in the monetary system."

The third overarching lesson of the crisis books is that borrowers at every level *abused financial leverage*. Homeowners borrowed against the equity in their homes, then borrowed more to speculate irresponsibly in condominiums and second homes. Financial firms operated on thinner capital bases. Governments borrowed to fund deficits. Financial innovations increased systemic risk in unexpected ways. In *House of Debt*, Atif Mian and Amir Sufi give an excellent analysis of the role of mortgage debt as a cause of the crisis. The authors, both professors of economics and public policy, observe that "economic disasters are almost always preceded by a large increase in household debt." This is such a "strong pattern"—"the correlation is so robust that it is as close to an empirical law as it gets in macroeconomics"—that Mian and Sufi argue we need to "fundamentally rethink the financial system" to take it into account.

I am always skeptical of efforts to boil the ocean into a quart of wisdom; financial crises are so idiosyncratic that grand efforts to generalize from them can trivialize the differences among them. But Ray Dalio avoids that fatal error in *Principles for Navigating Big Debt Crises*, his just-published book that synthesizes 48 case studies to offer a

template for anticipating future crises. He presents the crucial roles of inflation and overleveraging in the creation of bubbles and busts, and he sees clearly the interdependencies among politics and economics, financial markets and the real economy, discretion and commitment. Dalio's prose style is that of a busy CEO. For instance, he writes, "The worst thing a country, hence a country's leader, could ever do is get into a lot of debt and lose a war because there is nothing more devastating. ABOVE ALL ELSE, DON'T DO THAT." For breadth of review, empirical grounding, simplicity of exposition, rich use of graphics, and integration of fiscal and monetary perspectives, Dalio's book warrants attention among the best texts on crises.

Adair Turner, chairman from 2008 to 2013 of the U.K.'s Financial Services Authority, takes up the vulnerabilities induced by rising debt: myopia, the susceptibility to "sudden stops" in credit supply, plummeting asset prices, and ultimately a debt-deflation spiral. His recommendation, powerfully argued in *Between Debt and the Devil*, is to curtail growth in the supply of credit. Inveighing against "debt pollution," he advocates that banks hold 100 percent reserves against deposits, that the shadow banking system be reined in, and that the supply of credit for speculative purposes be generally curtailed. He knows how this will sound: These suggestions "will be criticized as dangerously interventionist, replacing the allocative wisdom of the market with imperfect public policy judgments." But, he writes, "free markets do not ensure a socially optimal quantity of private credit creation or its efficient allocation." Our goal should be "a less credit-intensive economy."

Two other provocative books also tackle the problem of leverage inherent in banks. Typically, banks operate on a base of equity (the shock absorber in case of trouble) of around 10 percent of all the assets they carry—meaning that for every $1 of cushion, they carry $10 of assets. Anat Admati and Martin Hellwig argue in *The Bankers' New Clothes* that unrealistically low capitalization requirements for banks render the system unstable. They advocate policies that would almost triple the required capital for banks. Morgan Ricks goes even further in *The Money Problem*: He proposes radical reform of banking and the imposition of capital requirements equal to 100 percent of bank assets.

If these bank-reform advocates are far on one side of the interventionist spectrum, John A. Allison, the famously libertarian former CEO of BB&T bank, is far on the other side. He argues in *The Leadership Crisis and the Free Market Cure* that the solution is less, not more, government regulation of the financial sector. And he is sharply critical of the moves made by Bernanke, Geithner, and Paulson to prevent economic spillovers from the financial crisis: "Almost every governmental action taken since the crisis started, even those that may help in the short term, will reduce our standard of living in the long term." Allison's view brings to mind Andrew Mellon's remedy for depressions (as reported by Herbert Hoover): "Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers, liquidate real estate. It will purge the rottenness out of the system. High costs of living and high living will come down. People will work harder, live a more moral life. Values will be adjusted, and enterprising people will pick up the wrecks from less competent people."

Banks appear to engage in sleight of hand: They accept a relatively small amount of deposits and churn out a relatively large amount of credit. This is the "alchemy" to which Mervyn King—the governor of the Bank of England who clashed with Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling during the crisis of 2008—refers in his book, *The End of Alchemy*. (Don't confuse it with Neil Irwin's indictment of the technocratic Euro-banker "alchemists.") In contrast to mainstream economics, which relies on assumptions of rationality, King makes the case for an economics of "radical uncertainty," which accepts that the future is essentially unknowable. It's an admirably humble acknowledgment of our limited ability to predict the future—or even to understand the present. An absence of this kind of radical uncertainty led to "expectations of continued steady growth" that proved "self-reinforcing" in the run-up to 2008.

Barney Frank, Sheila Bair, and Paul Volcker in 2010.

KELVIN MA / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

As stimulating as King's critique is, though, his prescriptions are anodyne: coordinate better among central banks; let exchange rates float; improve productivity as the source of all real growth; make stimulus, not austerity, the vehicle for growth; remember that economic growth reinforces democracy while contraction strains it. Perhaps King hopes that a reader will come away from these nostrums with an optimistic outlook. But it is striking that the creation of credit—the "alchemy" that supposedly interests King—is but a smallish contributor to the economic future he has in mind.

Dodges, pivots, and departures have characterized government policy since 2008—including, most prominently, the decision to lend no support to the rescue of Lehman Brothers. Ben Bernanke asserted that the Fed had no authority to support Lehman's survival in the absence of a qualified buyer and sufficient collateral to support a loan. A new study by Johns Hopkins economics professor Laurence M. Ball challenges that explanation. Drawing on information available at the time and on evidence presented later in Lehman's bankruptcy proceedings, *The Fed and Lehman Brothers* argues that Lehman's collateral *was* sufficient and concludes that the decision to withhold support arose from political opposition to financial rescues. This is a controversial finding: Some critics think Ball's estimates of Lehman's solvency are wrong, and moreover Ball seems to shrug off the difficulties of analysis in the middle of a maelstrom and to discount political leaders' legitimate concerns about moral hazard.

'We could not have picked a worse day for it': Alistair Darling (left), the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, describes in his memoir the awkwardness of having a courtesy meeting with his U.S. counterpart, Henry Paulson (right), on the same day Darling had to announce that Britain's failing Northern Rock bank would receive major government support.

The major U.S. policy response to the crisis was the passage in 2010 of the Dodd-Frank Act. This law quickly became a piñata for critics from all over the political spectrum, and even its lead sponsor Barney Frank would go on to express regrets about it.

Among the handful of books written about this controversial legislation, two stand out. *Connectedness and Contagion* by Harvard law professor Hal Scott is an impressive (if dry) overview of America's financial regulations. Scott criticizes Dodd-Frank for focusing too much on connectedness among banks as a source of systemic instability—especially the bill's aim of preventing "too big to fail" institutions—when regulators should instead have focused on the need to fight contagion—that is, on the ways crisis spreads and on the supply of new liquidity. In Scott's interpretation, the Dodd-Frank approach is something like putting a febrile patient on a diet instead of trying to lower his temperature.

Meanwhile, University of Pennsylvania law professor David Skeel criticizes Dodd-Frank as an unnecessary complication of bankruptcy law. Dodd-Frank's "orderly liquidation authority" was intended to reduce uncertainty for depositors and investors in a failed bank, on the belief that such uncertainty drives panic. But in *The New Financial Deal*, Skeel argues that the standard bankruptcy procedures work just fine and would have resolved plenty of uncertainty if they had been allowed to function in 2008. Skeel also worries that the designation of "systemically important financial institutions," created as part of Dodd-Frank to help make sure that large financial institutions are structured responsibly and won't have to be treated as "too big to fail," actually has the opposite effect: It enshrines a banking oligopoly that will enjoy lower cost of funds because of the implied government assurance of "too big to fail."

These stacks of histories, memoirs, and analyses make clear that the 2008 financial crisis was what is sometimes called a "wicked problem": confusing, difficult, and constantly morphing. The books to avoid are those that would offer a simple explanation for what happened or suggest a single measure to prevent future crises. Like war, poverty, and climate change, global financial crises are tremendously complicated and can have dire consequences: Global GDP fell below trend, according to one estimate, by between $6 and $14 trillion following the crisis. From peak to trough in 2008, 8.8 million jobs were lost and $19.2 trillion in household wealth evaporated.

Government officials muddled through, and their efforts probably allayed another Great Depression—albeit only with a mindboggling commitment of resources and the violation of longstanding norms and expectations. Still, doing nothing was not an option. In the midst of financial crisis, leadership is needed. As Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz wrote almost 50 years ago,

> The detailed story of every banking crisis in our history shows how much depends on the presence of one or more outstanding individuals willing to assume responsibility and leadership. … In the absence of vigorous intellectual leadership … the tendencies of drift and indecision had full scope. Moreover, as time went on, their force cumulated. Each failure to act made another such failure more likely.

The 2008 crisis exposed deep vulnerabilities in our financial system that have not yet been fixed, that might never be fixed, and that presage future instability. Markets have a propensity toward overconfidence. Systems of governance—the front-line defense against crises—can weaken. And credit will be abused. As a result, there will be

JOHN STILLWELL / AFP / GETTY

more financial crises. In fact, as Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff have documented, from 1800 to 2012 almost no year was free of financial crisis somewhere in the world. Financial crises are a fact of life. Familiarity with their causes, consequences, and remedies is valuable preparation for future leaders in business and government.

Sadly, memories are short. Today's MBA students were in high school in 2008; today's undergraduates were in middle school. Even among the older set there seems to be a desire to move on from the late unpleasantness. But collective memory is the bedrock of wisdom. Walter Wriston, the former CEO of Citibank, famously said, "Good judgment comes from experience; and experience comes from bad judgment." Remembering the bad judgments that contributed to previous financial crises is essential to acting more wisely in the future.

Moreover, to understand crises is to know capitalism better. Karl Marx (among others) pointed to the recurrent financial crises in capitalist economies as proof of the terminal illness of the capitalist system. But Joseph Schumpeter (among others) argued that periodic slumps and crises are necessary cleansers of economic inefficiencies and therefore presage growth. Financial crises reveal the worst, and sometimes the best, in markets, institutions, instruments, entrepreneurs, and leaders.

Finally, to understand crises is to better understand ourselves. The Great Depression was *the* major economic event of the 20th century, one that profoundly affected national and world history, directly touching millions of families. It is too early to tell how—or even whether—the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath will settle into our collective memory. The books described here not only inform us about past events and suggest how we might act differently in the future but also help us better understand what it means to be human beings and citizens—who we are, how our characters and our limitations shape our communities, and how we ought to strive to live well and wisely together. ♦

B&A

Short Sweets

The slender volumes of Notting Hill Editions are treats for the mind. **BY DANNY HEITMAN**

E. B. White, who died in 1985 at age 86, was one of the most celebrated essayists of the 20th century, but he surely knew that most people wouldn't remember him for the sublimely expressed first-person reflections he published in the *New Yorker* and *Harper's*. Those pieces, collected in such volumes as *One Man's Meat* and *Essays of E.B. White*, remain reliably in print, treasured by an ardent band of devotees. But it's White's children's books, including *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*, that really keep his name before the reading public. For many decades now, fiction, not nonfiction, has been the surest path to literary immortality.

"I am not fooled about the place of the essay in twentieth-century American letters—it stands a short distance down the line," White told readers in 1977:

> The essayist, unlike the novelist, the poet, and the playwright, must be content in his self-imposed role of second-class citizen. A writer who has his sights trained on the Nobel Prize or other earthly triumphs had best write a novel, a poem, or a play, and leave the essayist to ramble about, content with living a free life and enjoying the satisfactions of a somewhat undisciplined existence.

From White we can derive a useful corollary—namely, that publishers seeking quick fame and fortune had best stay away from the essay, too. Essay collections are, with few exceptions, also-rans on the bestseller lists, not huge moneymakers for the publishing houses willing to bring them out.

That makes Notting Hill Editions, launched in 2011 by the late entrepreneur Tom Kremer, all the more audacious. Headquartered in England, Notting Hill not only publishes essays; it publishes *only* essays. Kremer's scheme might sound quixotic, but before his death last year at age 87, he had faced tougher odds. Born in Transylvania, Kremer survived the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen, then fought in Israel's war of independence. After beginning his career in business, Kremer popularized the Rubik's Cube, which became a global sensation. His interest in writing and reading led him to the essay, and he fell in love with the form. Kremer founded Notting Hill Editions "to revive the art of the long-form essay, and to create exceptionally beautiful books that would be lingered over and cherished," according to the company's catalogue.

Notting Hill has continued under the management of his daughter, Kim Kremer. It's a small house with a modest profile, although the idea of a former toy magnate turning to book publishing has proven irresistible to journalists. Comparisons between Notting Hill's editions and playthings tend to come up in reviews. The books are "memorable, collectible, akin to erotic, brain-teasing toys for the tactile reader," *Time Out* magazine noted with approval.

Notting Hill Editions titles are, indeed, lovely—almost compact enough to fit in a breast pocket, with beautiful linen bindings, designer-quality paper, and, in some volumes, ribbon bookmarks stitched into the spines. The books look, at first glance, serenely antiquarian, although a few flourishes throw a whimsical wink in the reader's direction. *All That Is Worth Remembering*, Notting Hill's selection of writings from 19th-century man of letters

Danny Heitman, a columnist for the Baton Rouge Advocate*, is the author of* A Summer of Birds: John James Audubon at Oakley House.

William Hazlitt, features sensible green panels enlivened by pink lettering across the front. The aesthetic scheme doesn't seem like it would work, yet somehow it does. Page numbers for all Notting Hill books are bright red. *On Christmas*, a Notting Hill anthology of yuletide essays from contributors as varied as Charles Dickens, C.S. Lewis, and Anton Chekhov, has a crimson binding vivid enough to toast the retinas like holiday chestnuts. This is obviously a publisher that likes to have fun.

Fun has lately been distanced from the tradition of the essay, which is at least one reason the genre hasn't found more favor with modern audiences. In a culture that compels students to write essays, as more than one commentator has pointed out, a grudging air of obligation tends to hang over their creation—and their consumption. It hasn't helped that contemporary essays often indulge the morosely confessional, coming across not so much as literature but group therapy.

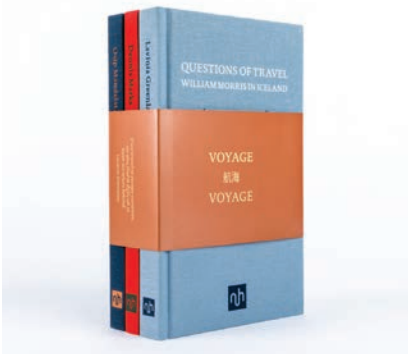
Consider last year's edition of *The Best American Essays*, an annual anthology from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. The 2017 collection includes ruminations on racism, rape, combat, police brutality, political refugees, cerebral palsy, murder, alcoholism, natural disaster, poverty, bipolar disorder, HIV, and pornography. There is also, for good measure, an essay on penises.

None of these topics should be off-limits; the underlying promise of any essay, after all, is its ability to embrace anything and everything. But variety is precisely what seems lacking in *The Best American Essays* in recent years. An almost uniform focus on the tragic and the outré suggests a literary tack that exhaustingly equates darkness with sophistication.

Notting Hill's essay collections connect with a more hopeful tradition, highlighting writers who have used bright disquisition to relieve the human condition, not merely record its grimmest aspects. Dark realities inform the essays of Notting Hill's authors but don't prevail over them. Hazlitt suffered through failed romances and financial collapse. Virginia Woolf, the voice behind Notting Hill's *Essays on the Self*, battled mental illness much of her life. Another Notting Hill title, *Grumbling at Large*, surveys the curmudgeonly musings of J.B. Priestley (1894-1984), the wry Englishman, too little read today, who grappled with the implications of the Cold War and consumer culture.

No Pollyannas here, to be sure. But with wit and humor, these writers, like the old master Montaigne, another Notting Hill author, showed that essays could provide an affirming agency over the conflicts and contradictions of personal experience—a way to clarify, through the power of language, life's looming complications.

The personal essay's abiding virtue



A three-volume gift set of books on travel

has always been its intimacy—not the cheap kind created by ceaseless disclosure, but a sharing based on what the writer and reader are assumed to have in common.

Priestley, in a 1923 essay called "All About Ourselves" that is reprinted in *Grumbling at Large*, suggests that the most basic connection between an essayist and his audience is the bond of culture. He is silenced by a woman's casual request to "tell me all about yourself," feeling that he would rather offer his opinion on "whether I approved of William Shakespeare or liked early rising." It's the exploration of such questions, he argues, that builds real relationships:

> But even if we only need the merest shadow of an excuse to talk about ourselves, there must be something interposed between the universe and our bare selves; there must be bounds assigned to our flow of egotism; we must be given some idea of ourselves to work upon, to build up or knock down.

As the idea of a common culture has lost currency, writer Phillip Lopate concluded some three decades ago, the personal essayist has had a harder job bending a reader's ear. That challenge, he hinted, has tempted modern essayists into the kind of tabloid exhibitionism now so common to the genre—what Lopate called "cannibalizing oneself and one's privacy."

Notting Hill's lineup of period essayists, on the other hand, provides a potent reminder of what an essay can be when it points to something larger. Woolf's *Essays on the Self*, though ostensibly an invitation to interior monologue and navel-gazing, casually draws upon Jane Austen and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, Horace Walpole and Charles Lamb. Her essays are a conversation not only between her and her readers but among Woolf and previous generations of genius. She recognizes the essay's basic requirement—a lone voice, however idiosyncratic, through which multitudes manage to speak.

That ideal isn't yet dead, as evidenced by *Five Ways of Being a Painting and Other Essays*, Notting Hill's collection of winners from its third essay contest to promote new writers. William Max Nelson, who took top honors with the title essay, explores how we can mentally and spiritually inhabit a work of art, using painter Claude Joseph Vernet and philosophers Walter Benjamin and Denis Diderot as his muses.

Nelson lives in Canada, and several of the other winners live in the United States. Notting Hill's reach across the Atlantic extends to its book sales, too: The publisher has a partnership with New York Review Books to promote and distribute some of its titles in North America. Those not available through NYRB can be purchased at Notting Hill's own website.

White's modest claim for the essay—that despite its low stature, it offered a writer compensating freedoms—is a promise that also extends to readers, as Tom Kremer's eccentric experiment in publishing reminds us. An evening with these little books from Notting Hill Editions is, in its own way, a liberation. ♦

COURTESY OF NOTTING HILL EDITIONS

B&A

Why We Wall

Border barriers and the human future.

BY MICHAEL M. ROSEN

"We weaken our greatness," the late senator John McCain wrote in his farewell statement, "when we hide behind walls, rather than tear them down."

This theme—that we are morally obliged to demolish the barriers dividing us—is also that of Tim Marshall's new book, which, while cleverly constructed and elegantly argued, devalues the protective function of walls and at times unfairly impugns the motives of those who build them. It is an effort at deconstruction, literal and literary.

Marshall, a longtime foreign correspondent for the BBC and Sky News, argues that "walls tell us much about international politics, but the anxieties they represent transcend the nation-state boundaries on which they sit."

He opens by contrasting the separation barrier on the West Bank, which he hyperbolically labels "among the most forbidding and hostile in the world," "overwhelming and dominating," and a "blank expanse of steel and concrete," with the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that heralded "a new era of openness and internationalism." The building of the Israeli wall signifies a "fortress mentality" to which the world has returned of late: Half of all border walls erected since World War II have gone up in the last 18 years, he reports.

Marshall discusses walls meant to control migration, as in the United States, Europe, and India; to promote nationalistic unity, as in China, the U.K., and Africa; and, more nebulously, to signify "the intersections of religion and politics," as in the Middle East.

Michael M. Rosen is an attorney and writer in Israel and an adjunct fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

The Age of Walls
How Barriers Between Nations Are Changing Our World
by Tim Marshall
Scribner, 288 pp., $26

The construction of Israel's West Bank wall

He nicely encapsulates a history of China from the Great Wall ("only ever partially successful militarily" but "a symbol of defense, of dividing the Han [Chinese] from the 'outsiders'") to the Great Firewall (how today's China sets the boundaries of acceptable expression on the Internet).

But his analysis falters at the U.S.-Mexico border. Marshall suggests that fear of the cultural "otherness" of foreigners fuels the "Build That Wall" crowd—and there does indeed appear to be an ethno-racial motivation driving its fiercest advocates. Yet every country, including the United States, is entitled to determine who may and may not enter its borders; every nation has deployed immigration policy to preserve its culture, values, and unique national character.

Marshall's examination of contemporary Europe is similarly flawed. While he acknowledges legitimate reasons to build walls on the continent and in the U.K.—security, culture, values, integration—he lavishes more attention on Brexit and the (admittedly alarming) growth of hard-right nationalist parties than on the policies that nourished them.

On the other hand, Marshall's look at the seething cauldron of identity and religion in Israel, Palestine, and the broader Middle East is (perhaps surprisingly) balanced and nuanced. He penetrates the fog of Kumbaya nostrums, correctly observing that "liberal democracy, as understood in the West, does not exist in Palestine" and that "governments in the Middle East have only ever used the Palestinians as political tools, while discriminating against the refugees they host and ensuring that they remain in squalid camps." He also astutely recognizes that the theory that resolving the Israel/Palestine conflict would usher in regional peace, long regnant among the bien-pensant foreign policy establishment, "has been blown apart by the convulsions of the Arab world over the last few years."

At the same time, however, he baffingly doubts that Israel's security fence in the West Bank has saved thousands of lives. And he strangely blames President Trump's relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem for phantom "unrest throughout the region."

Marshall is at his most interesting in describing border conflicts his readers are less likely to know about, including India-Bangladesh, where the bloody history of East Pakistan still resonates; the "wall of sand, of shame, and of silence" in Morocco and the western Sahara demarcating the tribal and linguistic boundaries in North Africa; the dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula; and even Welsh and Cornish separatist movements. Unfortunately, these passages occupy all too little space in his wide-ranging book.

More importantly, Marshall's studied distrust of boundaries and those who construct them leads him astray. His fear of a dystopian world riven by millions of miles of border walls (in his view, "our worst nightmare is a future in which we retreat into our various enclaves") eclipses his learned, though at times tendentious, retelling of how and why they were established—and will remain. ♦

DAVID SILVERMAN / GETTY

"Pelosi secretly showed up at the Congressional Progressive Caucus' freshman orientation session on Monday to try to ingratiate herself with about 20 members-elect in attendance."
—Politico, November 13, 2018

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Pelosi ramps up campaign aimed at freshmen

Minority leader pops up in cafeteria, ladies' room

By TOM BRADFORD

Rep.-elect Veronica Escobar (D-Texas) was browsing the lunch selections at the Longworth cafeteria when a woman behind the counter asked, "How about some delicious roasted Brussels sprouts?" The woman offering the sprouts was none other than Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the House minority leader. Clad in an apron and holding out a ladle, Pelosi told the incoming freshman, "I can tell you that roasted Brussels sprouts are only served on Mondays and they go quick. Please consider voting for me for House speaker—now here, take this last scoop before it's too late!"

NANCY PELOSI

Pelosi spent the past week running an aggressive campaign to secure enough votes to lead the House in the next Congress. She made a surprise appearance during the Congressional Progressive Caucus' orientation meeting. "I remember all of my own fears and excitement at my orientation like it was yesterday," said Pelosi, who first entered the House in 1987. As the meeting concluded, the minority leader handed out gluten-free cupcakes and urged incoming members to "think of me with every bite."

Rep.-elect Jennifer Wexton (D-Va.) said she had a productive conversation with Pelosi in the ladies' room. Standing on the other side of the door, Pelosi told Wexton, "If you ever need extra toilet paper, just come to me. I know where they keep it in the closet." Pelosi then added, "Hey, we all need friends in here. I could be a friend to you."

As Rep.-elect Max Rose (D-N.Y.) was exiting the Rayburn parking garage, the attendant told him, "It'd be a shame if you lost your ticket—then you'd have to pay the full $24." Rose then realized the attendant was Nancy Pelosi. Rose, who was not planning to support Pelosi as speaker, is having second thoughts. "I just don't want any trouble, and believe me, I know trouble," said Rose, who will be representing Staten Island. Meanwhile, building engineers were trying to fix a gas leak in the office of incoming congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-

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