

A HIGH-CULTURE
COMMUNITY
JOSEPH HOROWITZ

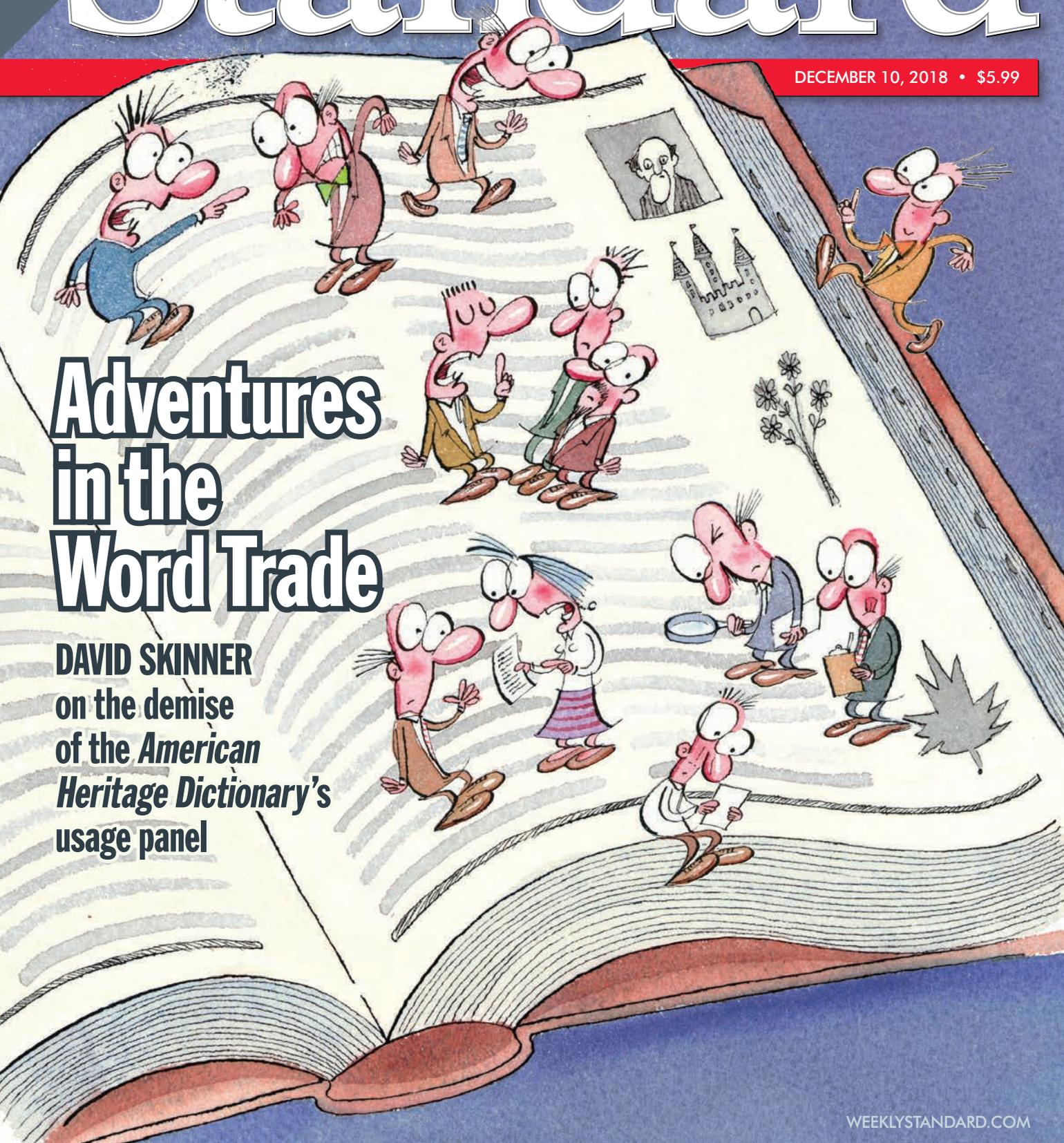
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Adventures in the Word Trade

DAVID SKINNER
on the demise
of the *American
Heritage Dictionary's*
usage panel



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Criminally Negligent

In late September, FedEx driver Timothy Warren was driving through a neighborhood in Portland, Ore., when Joseph Magnuson shouted at him that he was going too fast. When Warren, who is black, got out of the truck, Magnuson berated him with numerous insults, including, according to witnesses, a series of racial insults. When Magnuson took a swing at Warren, Warren hit back, whereupon Magnuson lost consciousness and died a few hours later. Prosecutors declined to charge Warren, saying he was acting in self-defense. (And from our reading of the story, the prosecutors got it right).

We mention the story because we read about it in the *Washington Post*, and there would seem to be little reason for the *Post* to cover what is in every sense a local crime story. Not even that, since there were no criminal charges. Readers of the *Post*, however, or at least of the new Jeff Bezos-owned *Post*, will have noticed how frequently the paper covers local stories about

rumpuses and altercations when those stories have anything to do with somebody's being a racist. If some idiot in Topeka or Syracuse or Lubbock shouts a racial insult and somebody else catches it on a smartphone video, you can be pretty sure that a young reporter from the *Post* will dutifully explain all the details. Indeed, you could be forgiven for thinking that the *Post's* editors and reporters are deeply invested in the proposition

that America is still a racist nation.

The savvy reader may have suspected our use of the phrase "local crime story" is just a little mischievous. In April 2013, when the trial of serial killer and abortionist Kermit Gosnell drew to a close with multiple guilty verdicts, Sarah Kliff, then the *Post's* health policy reporter, explained to Mollie Hemingway on Twitter that she had not covered the Gosnell trial because she did not cover "local crime." The revelation of Gosnell's murder and abuse factory was, for Kliff, of a piece with a news item about a robbery at the Circle K in Waco.

To her credit, Kliff later said she was wrong to characterize the case as local crime. She has since moved to the left-wing news site *Vox.com*. Still, the glaringly selective partiality of the *Post's* coverage rankles. Maybe if someone had been caught on video calling Gosnell a racially insensitive name, then the paper would have given him some attention. ♦



Liberté, Égalité, Inclusivité

Edmund Burke famously ridiculed the radicals and revolutionaries of his day for justifying violent and unjust acts by simple-minded appeals to abstract values. The abstract value he had in mind was liberty, which the mountebanks of France and their cheerleaders in England used to justify murder and sedition. Wasn't Burke for the revolution? his adversaries wanted to know. Wasn't he for liberty? "I cannot stand forward and give praise or blame to anything which relates to human actions and human concerns, on a simple view of the object, as it stands stripped of every relation,

in all the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction," Burke wrote in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. "Am I to congratulate a highwayman and murderer, who has



broke prison, on the recovery of his natural rights?"

Today's radicals are a much more peaceable lot (most of the time), but

the habit of using abstractions as all-purpose moral guides is still very much à la mode. The word *du jour* is *inclusion*. Use it, and you can defend just about anything you want to do.

Consider: At Rider University in New Jersey this week, campus administrators decided to remove Chick-fil-A from a list of potential campus franchises on the grounds that the restaurant chain is "widely perceived to be in opposition to the LGBTQ+ community." "We sought to be thoughtful and fair in balancing the desire to provide satisfying options for a new on-campus restaurant while also being faithful to our values of inclusion," explained Rider's president, Gregory G. Dell'Omo, and the school's vice president for student

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affairs, Leanna Fenneberg, in a letter.

This little intellectual pirouette surely equals anything the Jacobins pulled off: By proclaiming the virtues of *inclusion*, you can literally *exclude* people and organizations you don't like. We're inclusive around here—now get out!

Rider's Center for Diversity and Inclusion is organizing a campus forum "so that the voices of students, faculty, staff and others can continue to be heard" and that all involved can "grow from this experience." What a relief to know that the school's students are working through such momentous problems. Annual tuition: \$42,000. ♦

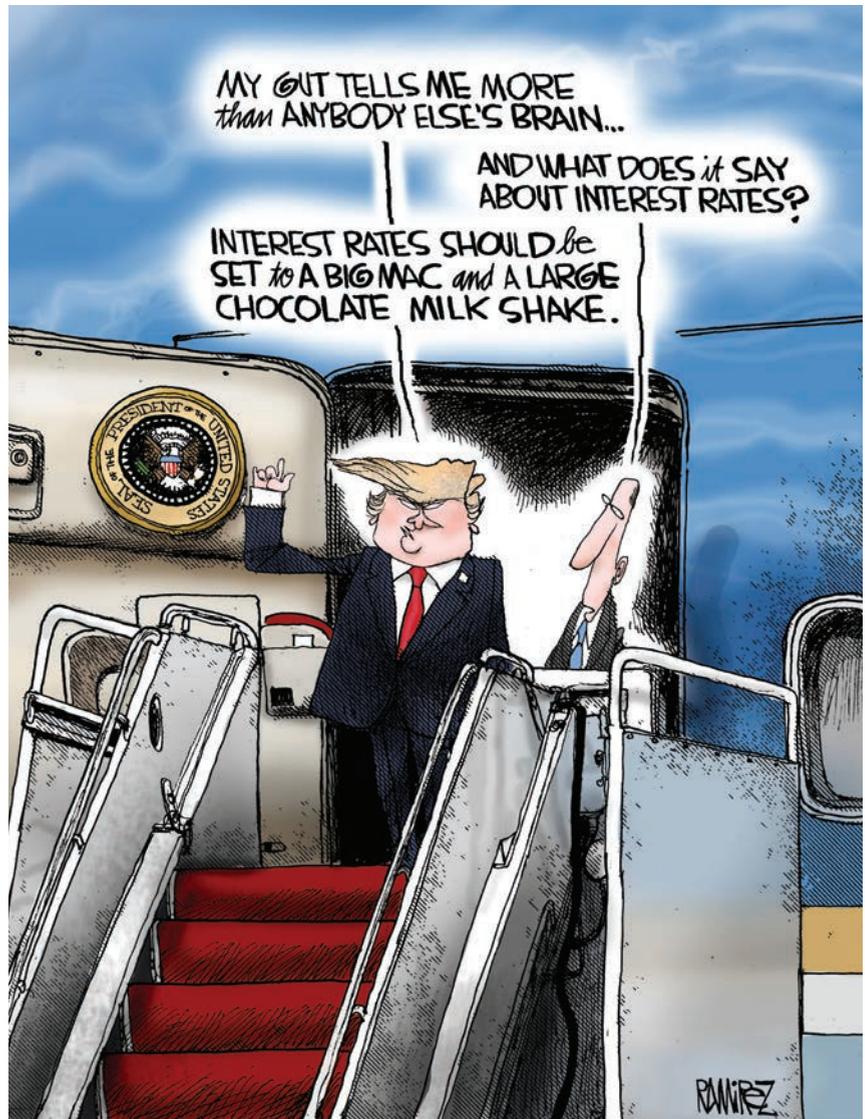
Leave That Unsaid

Much has already been said about Donald Trump's rambling, semicoherent statement on the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia in light of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder. We would only like to say a quick word about a single phrase in that strange document: "That being said." It occurs at the beginning of the statement's penultimate paragraph: "That being said, we may *never* know all of the facts surrounding the murder . . ."

THE SCRAPBOOK wishes to go on record as loathing this phrase and its miserable siblings—that said, having said that, with that said, that having been said—and to plead with readers neither to use it nor tolerate those who do. The phrase serves no legitimate purpose except to suggest that everything prior

to it was stated only to get it "said" and so may be safely forgotten. If it's a transition you want, the language offers a smorgasbord of alternatives: *but, yet, however, on the other hand, nonetheless*, and so on.

If you have already said it, you don't need to point out that you said it—unless you're afraid your readers are not paying attention. And who can blame them, if you persist in using pointless filler phrases? ♦



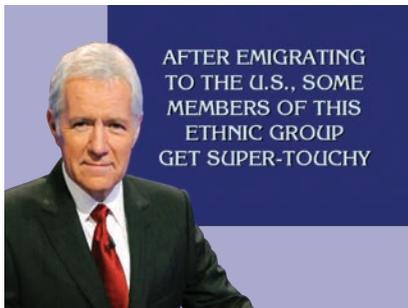
Articles We Tried Not to Read

We tried to look away, but it was no use once we read the headline: "Why It Matters That Alex Trebek Mispronounced The Name Of My People On 'Jeopardy!'" The piece ran, fittingly, at the *Huffington Post*. The author, Ngozi Nwangwa—Shirley, to use her anglicized name—is a New York-based writer and "a queer Nigerian-American who is passionate about giving marginalized folks a space to be heard." She grew up watching *Jeopardy!* with her family. While recently binge-watching old episodes of the show, Nwangwa heard

host Alex Trebek mispronounce the name of the ethnic group from which she is descended: the *Igbo* people.

Trebek pronounced it *Ig-boh*, with a hard *g*. But it's pronounced *Ee-boh*. The *g* is silent.

Whereupon the author banded out a 900-word complaint about how Trebek flawlessly pronounces European names and words like *La Rochefoucauld* and *Reichsmarschall* but can't say the name of a marginalized Nigerian ethnic group correctly. All through her childhood, she recalls, Americans mispronounced her name and the name of the Igbo people, but not until she was older was she "able to



contextualize the term ‘microaggression.’” Watching old shows from her younger years, Nwangwa writes,

“has a whiplash effect. . . I don’t remember this hurting so much—when did I get this old?”

The question is touching, in a way. But of course she didn’t just get old. She got manipulated and jaded by the American left’s grievance racket, and now the poor woman can’t even watch a game show without searching for microaggressions and carping about being branded “other” by Euro-American ignoramuses.

We’ll take “Liberalism & Its Discontents” for \$1,000, Alex. ♦

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Generation No Name

For some reason yet to be fathomed, the 50 million Americans born between the greatest generation and the baby boomers were never assigned a name—at least not one widely recognizable.

I'm in it, and that's just fine by me. Living in demographic obscurity is one of my generation's virtues. Sure, those marketers, journalists, and, ugh, sociologists who coin generational labels tried to tag us the "silent generation." But it hasn't stuck because, well, who cares? Besides, the moniker is so insulting that I prefer "no name."

As if to prove our irrelevance, the presidency skipped over us, going directly from George H. W. Bush of the greatest generation to baby boomer Bill Clinton. But who has noticed our absence in the White House?

According to the Center for Generational Kinetics (I'm not making that up), my generation's birthdays run from 1925 to 1945, the end of World War II and the official beginning of the baby boom generation, which concluded in 1964. (Mine is in 1942.)

The impulse to hang names on generations is just another form of stereotyping, the goofy obsession with herding each and every one of us into clusters of sweeping clichés. Baby boomers, for example, are described variously as goal-oriented, hardworking, self-assured, individualistic, rebellious (in a positive way), open to change, idealistic, etc., etc. All good stuff.

We no-namers, on the other hand, are said to be risk-averse. We kept quiet when growing up because children should be seen and not heard. We are (overly) respectful of authority. As adults, we also keep our mouths shut and refuse to rock the boat. We believe hard work gets you ahead in life, oblivious to the current dogma that privilege and whiteness are determinants of advancement. We're tradi-

tional and conventional, more likely to want to work within the system than to overthrow it. We supposedly took to heart the warnings that we shouldn't do stuff that will leave a black mark on our permanent records.

An unsigned, oft-cited *Time* magazine essay labeled us the silent generation in 1951, before we even had an opportunity to show our stuff. It called our generation "a still, small flame." Historian William Manchester piled on: "Never had American youth



been so withdrawn, cautious, unimaginative, indifferent, unadventurous—and silent."

Ge, what a pathetic lot we must be, deservedly bumped aside by boomers, millennials, Gen Ys, Gen Zs, and whoever else is about to follow. By the way, some might be inclined to assign President Donald Trump to my no-name generation, which would be wrong on two counts: He's never silent, and he was born in 1946, which makes him all yours, boomers.

Right about now, you might expect to hear me plead that someone should do something about our generation's deplorable state: government grants to behavioral and social scientists to study how to end the victimization of the no-names. Inclusion in a protected class to provide a boost up and out of our sorry condition. New programs to meet our desperate needs.

But that's not us. We don't whine. We're content to be ignored. We don't need approval to be proud. We're unlikely to talk about our achievements, but I'll make an exception, just this once.

Early members of our generation survived the Great Depression and many fought in Korea (the forgotten war) and a few of us latecomers in the Vietnam war. We helped grow America's economy into perhaps the most productive and prosperous ever. We set the stage for an unprecedented explosion of creativity in the arts and technology—otherwise known as the '50s. We saw the free world through the Cold War. Despite all the credit given to the boomers for the civil rights movement, we no-names started it.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Gloria Steinem were no-namers, but they were hardly silent. Elvis Presley ushered in the age of rock and roll. No-name Beatles advanced it. Jimi Hendrix redefined it.

Our Neil Armstrong was the first man to step on the moon and 11 of the 12 astronauts who walked on the moon were no-namers. There's Dustin Hoffman and Muhammad Ali. Robert and Ted Kennedy. Generals Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf Jr. Warren Buffett and Michael Eisner. Liz Claiborne.

I could go on, but the point is made. If people can characterize us as buttoned-up and mousy, we could peg boomers as the most coddled American generation ever. Or are the most coddled ones the generations just arriving? Broad brushes can sweep many ways.

But who needs this? If we're to generalize about generations, consider some other words for silent: reserved, placid, modest, serene, and we don't give a flying fig. Ignore us, please. We're content without a name. As John Updike, also a member of my generation, said, we're quietly grateful.

DENNIS BYRNE

Putin Poses a Test

On November 25, Russian military forces opened fire on three Ukrainian ships off the coast of Crimea, rammed one of them, and seized all three. The ships were manned by 23 crew members. Ukrainian authorities say between three and six were injured.

Russia claims the boats had illegally entered its sovereign waters, but this is untrue. The Ukrainian vessels—two gunboats and a tugboat—were sailing from Odessa around the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea toward the Kerch Strait and Mariupol on the north bank of the Sea of Azov. A 2003 treaty between Ukraine and Russia guarantees both nations the right to use the Kerch Strait and Azov Sea for commercial purposes. The same treaty allows both nations to use the waters to transport military vessels so long as the transporting nation notifies the other. A Russian oil tanker nonetheless blocked the ships from passing through the strait, fighter jets passed overhead as if the three were an invading force, and Russian troops boarded and took control of the ships.

Ukraine insists that it notified Russia of the tiny flotilla, and there is no reason to doubt its statement. Russia claims, in typically melodramatic fashion, that the ships “crossed the Russian state border and illegally entered the temporarily closed waters of the Russian territorial sea.”

This stunt isn’t about protecting Russia’s borders from aggression. It is a test. Vladimir Putin wants to know how far the United States is willing to go to check Russian expansionism.

The testing began in earnest in March 2014, during the previous administration, when Moscow annexed the Crimean peninsula under the pretense of protecting a pro-Russian minority. (Russia now considers Crimea part of Russia, although Ukraine and most of the rest of the world hold it to be an illegal annexation.) At the same time, Russian-backed mercenaries streamed into eastern Ukraine to back pro-Russian separatists for the purpose of taking eastern Ukraine for Russia. More than 10,000 have died in the conflict. The fighting goes on despite the Minsk II cease-fire signed in February 2015.

Ukraine has responded to this quiet invasion by vastly increasing its military preparedness. The East European nation has doubled the size of its army in just four years: It now has around 250,000 active-duty soldiers and roughly 80,000 reservists. They are also better equipped. In 2017, the Trump administration approved the sale of lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine.

In short: At any moment Crimea and eastern Ukraine could explode into a large-scale hot war between proxies of

the United States and Russia. Vladimir Putin wants to consolidate his gains in Ukraine—wants to make them de jure instead of merely de facto, as they are now—and has every reason to precipitate low-level crises in order to find out how feasible this is. President Trump has only encouraged such testing by fawning on the Russian dictator at every opportunity, even to the point of publicly taking Putin’s word over that of his own national security advisers.

Trump likes authoritarians who like him—or at least pretend to. In recent months, he’s had kind words for China’s Xi Jinping, the Philippines’ Rodrigo Duterte, North Korea’s Kim Jong-un, and Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed bin Salman. Trump publicly contradicted the assessment of the U.S. intelligence community that MbS directed the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and made clear that whatever punishment follows the brazen murder of the prominent Saudi regime critic, the Saudi monarchy will escape serious consequences. If Putin had concerns that the president might take a real stand against new Russian aggression, Trump’s figurative shrug of the shoulder over the Saudi crime had to ease them.

How will the United States respond to the Black Sea incident? It’s anybody’s guess. U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley issued a robust criticism of Russia’s aggression. But she’s leaving the administration. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s condemnation included forceful language but lacked any specific promise of consequences. As Russian dissident Garry Kasparov put it on Twitter: “Translate this US statement on Russia’s latest act of war against Ukraine into dictator-speak, Putin’s language: ‘We aren’t going to do anything about it.’ That’s how he will read it. Putin will scan this looking for ‘unless Russia ...’ or ‘if Russia doesn’t comply ...’ and, seeing nothing like that, no deterrence, he will continue as planned.”

Trump’s own comments gave Putin no reason to take a different view: “We do not like what’s happening either way,” Trump said while leaving the White House on November 26. “And hopefully it will get straightened out.”

Either way? Hopefully it will get straightened out? In response to widespread international condemnation of the Black Sea incident, Putin upped the ante: restricting maritime traffic into the Sea of Azov (which a Kremlin spokesman blamed on “bad weather”), beefing up the Russian military presence on Ukraine’s border, and deploying more S-400 missile systems to Crimea. Moscow also aired confessions from three sailors that were obviously forced.

On November 29, Trump sensibly canceled his summit with Putin set for the G20 meetings in Argentina. But

getting this “straightened out” will require much more than putting off a meeting. It will require insisting Russia immediately free the vessels and release the crews. It will require Ukraine to have full rights to traverse the seas around its borders and a clear message that failure to afford Ukraine these rights will result in diplomatic and military consequences. More than anything else, it will require the president to lead rather than follow. ♦

The Second Time as Farce

On November 28, Democrats officially nominated Nancy Pelosi to be the next speaker of the House. No one ran against her; she received 203 yeas against 32 nays. Democrats who vowed during the campaign to vote against the former speaker were always a small group. Their opposition—largely rhetorical, since nobody else threw a hat in the ring—had less to do with ideology than arrogance. Pelosi’s progressive credentials are almost unimpeachable. What the mostly young and further left members want is power, and they’re not interested in waiting for it.

With all races in the House of Representatives accounted for, Democrats have a commanding majority of 35. The party gained 40 seats in the recent election. Republicans will pass no significant legislation in the next Congress, and the White House will almost certainly spend the preponderance of its energy responding to subpoenas and investigations and staying off Democratic threats to impeach the president.

Many conservatives are bracing for the worst, but we are more sanguine. The incoming Democratic majority is no cohesive, unified crew. Indeed, the 116th Congress looks a lot like the 112th, in which Republicans held a 49-seat majority. The 2010 election had been a blow to Barack Obama, but the GOP on the Hill was hopelessly divided between “establishment” Republicans, Tea Party Republicans, and establishment Republicans trying to pass as Tea Party Republicans. It led to the creation of the House Freedom Caucus, a group of around 40 members whose chief aim, it often seemed, was to block any legislative reform on the grounds that it “didn’t go far enough.” What began as a good and necessary corrective to the unprincipled transactionalism of the GOP leadership turned into obstructionism for the sake of obstruction.

House Democrats seem determined to reenact this drama, but the divisions are more or less the inverse. As Republicans were dominated by lawmakers whose chief aim was staying in power but who were thwarted at every point by a vocal minority increasingly preoccupied with its own

righteousness, so today’s Democratic powerbrokers in the House are united only by opposition to Trump and appear destined for conflict with a young and arrogant minority who consider the senior members of their own party to be just as much the enemy.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus, in which this bellicose band of left-wing ideologues resides, grew by 18 in the recent election and now numbers 96. Many of them campaigned on the abolition of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, ending private health insurance, and, of course, the impeachment of the president at the earliest opportunity. As one of the Democrats’ young guns, Jahana Hayes of Connecticut, put it to the *New York Times*: “I’m not so wedded to this seat or a seat in Congress to now begin to compromise the things that I believe in.” For Republicans who watched for eight years as their party failed to achieve major victories and even struggled for the little ones, the sentiment sounds familiar.

The real challenge for Democrats, though, and for liberals generally, isn’t so much political as intellectual. Progressives have no new ideas—which is rather a problem for a philosophy based on novelty. On domestic policy, they’re content to dress up old failures as though they were cutting-edge innovations (“Medicare for All”) and to engage in culture-war radicalism on issues of racial and sexual identity that alienate much of the public. On foreign policy, their one original contribution—an alliance with Iran and concomitant cooling toward Israel and Saudi Arabia—was an unqualified disaster that obliged them to side with the regime in Tehran against hundreds of thousands of Iranians demanding human rights and representative government.

The deficiency of ideas is one reason Democrats attribute their losses to anything and everything but their own party. Whereas Republicans blame each other for their defeats—this side was too rigid on abortion and same-sex marriage, that side was too lax on immigration—Democrats blame everybody but each other: Russian trolls, gerrymandering, voter suppression, white racism, or whatever other conspiracy theory looks momentarily plausible.

If the rise of the Tea Party and the Freedom Caucus was the tragic version of the play, the next two years are likely to be the farce: a reenactment, only with unworkable ideas and vastly more hatred. The progressive left will simultaneously push the party toward a fanatical and unpopular radicalism—“free” health care and higher education, a \$15 minimum wage, a dramatic expansion of the welfare state, a rollback of military spending, a slew of identity-based laws and regulations—and undermine any attempt to work with Republicans. Meanwhile the one thing both leftists and pragmatists are likely to agree on is the need to cripple the president with their investigatory powers. There will be plenty of action, but little if any of it will move the plot along.

As Pelosi ascends the speaker’s rostrum, worried conservatives can take heart: She takes charge of an ungovernable mess. ♦

CHRISTINE ROSEN

A cutthroat competitor like any other

Facebook has had many moments of supposed reckoning in recent years. Is this one different?

After the *New York Times* reported on November 14 that the company had hired Definers Public Affairs, an opposition research firm headed by a former Republican operative, to engage in skullduggery against its critics, and that it had refused to acknowledge or stop the spread of fake news during the last presidential election, Facebook found itself once again facing global criticism for its business practices.

It was especially shocking to some observers to learn that Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg was heavily involved in all of these questionable goings-on. Wasn't Sandberg, maven of corporate "lean-in" strategy and feminist hero, supposed to be the "adult in the room" at Facebook? She was—only it turns out she's the kind of adult who, like the mom of "Affluenza Teen" who helped her son flee to Mexico after he killed four people while driving drunk, does everything she can to help her wayward kid avoid punishment.

If the latest Facebook scandals have revealed anything with certainty, it's that behind the sunny rhetoric of making the world "more open and connected," Facebook is as ruthless as any other major corporation hellbent on maintaining its market dominance and that its leader, Mark Zuckerberg, has transformed seamlessly from hipster millennial founder to skilled political operative. In fact, his response to this most recent crisis proved his inside-the-Beltway bona fides: He refused to take responsibility, passed

the blame to underlings, and issued a press release (strategically dropped into the news void on the day before Thanksgiving) announcing that the token head on a pike would be that of Elliot Schrage, the communications and policy chief who had already announced his intention to leave Facebook ("Schrage is effectively jumping on the grenade here," *Tech-*



Facebook has deftly exploited tribal politics for years by behaving like a free-market conservative in its business practices while talking like a well-intentioned progressive.

Crunch noted). Zuckerberg and Sandberg remain in charge, and Facebook emerges, yet again, free from meaningful consequences for its actions.

For the growing number of people concerned about Facebook's power, however, there are some potential silver linings to be found. Facebook's recent problems have elicited responses that blur the usually clear boundary lines that define left and right in our politically polarized age. Facebook has deftly exploited tribal politics for years by behaving like a free-market conservative in its business practices while talking like a well-intentioned progressive. It was considered a compliment to the company when Barack Obama was dubbed "the Facebook president" and, more recently, when incoming Rep.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was called the "Instagram candidate" (Instagram is owned by Facebook). And unlike other PR-challenged large corporations (alcohol, tobacco, firearms, or pharma, for example), Facebook was viewed by many on the left as a wildly successful expression of capitalism that nevertheless embraced progressive values—the corporate hooker with a socialist heart of gold.

But as the *Times* piece revealed, Facebook wasn't purely the progressive, anti-Trump, pro-immigrant, pro-lefty place so many hopeful progressives (including its own employees) thought it was. Zuckerberg could denounce Trump's Muslim travel ban on his personal Facebook page by talking earnestly about his and his wife's immigrant relatives ("My great grandparents came from Germany, Austria, and Poland. Priscilla's parents were refugees from China and Vietnam") while doing nothing to stop Facebook's being used to encourage ethnic genocide in Myanmar, for example. He could wax philosophical about diversity and liberal values while his hired minions spread anti-Semitic-inflected conspiracy theories about liberal activist George Soros. Hypocrisy: It's not a bug, it's a feature!

But these revelations offer a rare opportunity for bipartisan cooperation going forward. "Instead of turning this into another lazy debate about the left, the right, and the 2016 election, Silicon Valley and Washington should be working to combat the very real threat that information operations can pour gasoline on nearly every culture war that divides the American people," Sen. Ben Sasse told *Recode*. Senators on the other side of the aisle raised similar criticisms. It's a "chilling reminder that big tech can no longer be trusted," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal.

Even conservatives who support markets free from burdensome government regulation should consider the impact companies like Facebook and Google and Amazon might be having on innovation and competition. If you're a budding entrepreneur in the "tech space," you don't invent the next Instagram to make something cool (and independently profitable). You do it with the hope of getting bought by Facebook (which will then turn your creation into yet another engine for advertising). Discussing Facebook on *Face the Nation* back in April, Republican senator John Kennedy said he wasn't looking "to regulate them half to death, but we have a problem. Our promised digital utopia has minefields in it."

American lawmakers could take a cue from Parliament, which recently seized a trove of legal documents related to an American lawsuit against Facebook and called on Zuckerberg to testify about the company's privacy policies. In hearings on November 27, British lawmakers questioned Facebook vice president of policy solutions Richard Allan, who failed to assuage their concerns. Labour MP Ian Lucas compared Facebook's practices to the approach of Captain Renault in *Casablanca*, who ostentatiously shut down gambling activity in the bar only to pocket his own roulette winnings on the way out.

And what of Zuckerberg, who not long ago embarked on a nationwide listening tour many observers believed was a first step in a planned move to enter national politics? Has he been chastened by events? It's worth revisiting the commencement address he delivered at Harvard in 2017. He talked about the principles he embraced as he built Facebook, from a whim in his Harvard dorm room into the behemoth it is today. "It's good to be idealistic," Zuckerberg said. "But be prepared to be misunderstood. Anyone working on a big vision will get called crazy, even if you end up right." He went on to urge Harvard's graduating class to find purpose in their lives—and once they'd found it, not to be overly

cautious about obstacles that might impinge on their efforts to achieve it. "In our society, we often don't do big things because we're so afraid of making mistakes that we ignore all the things wrong today if we do nothing," Zuckerberg said. "The reality is anything we do will have issues in the future. But that can't keep us from starting." If Zuckerberg's views have evolved since then, it's in a more bellicose direction. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that earlier this year, Zuckerberg told his executives that the company was "at war."

As the recent (and likely not the last) scandal at Facebook reveals, having a purpose isn't the same thing as having a system of ethical practices that prevent people from doing the wrong things and making the wrong

choices when they "have issues." In Silicon Valley, ethics, if present at all, tend to be like a vestigial tail, dropped when a company grows past the embryonic stage. Which is why Zuckerberg's vow that Facebook will develop new "transparency tools" and never, ever hire shady opposition research firms to do mischief on its behalf again, as well as his claims that the company is very, very sorry for its sins, aren't persuasive.

The platform that handed a megaphone to purveyors of fake news and genocide while touting its progressive values, and that eagerly churned out fake news of its own (or at least some questionable PR) to undermine its critics, is unlikely to reform. There can be no dark night of the soul for a company that's never had one. ♦

COMMENT ♦ FRED BARNES

President Trump's precarious position

President Trump is in deeper political trouble than he thinks. And I'm not talking about whatever special counsel Robert Mueller has up his sleeve. Trump has real-life reelection trouble.

The midterm results were clear about this. Millions of voters whom Trump needs to win a second term in 2020 expressed their disdain for him in the only way they could—by voting against Republicans. Those GOP candidates were his surrogates, like it or not.

Voters were willing to brush aside Trump's successes on taxes, judges, and deregulation. This was unprecedented. And it shows how strongly they felt about his personal behavior.

Trump doesn't appear to understand this. Telling losing Republican House members they'd have won had

they accepted his "embrace" shows how off-kilter his sense of political reality is. And relying on Democrats to nominate an unelectable oppo-



The midterm results were clear: Millions of voters whom Trump needs to win a second term in 2020 expressed their disdain for him in the only way they could.

nent in 2020 is risky in the extreme.

As luck would have it, a political recovery by Trump is not only possible, it would be easy. It takes three things. And these include neither a

personality transplant nor a month at a monastery where no one speaks.

First, he needs to recognize he's headed for defeat. He didn't get to this point in 2016 until the *Access Hollywood* tape leaked a month before the election and his campaign almost collapsed. He saw doom ahead, had to clean things up quickly—with teleprompters and nicer talk—and did.

Second, he's got to jettison the most unhelpful of his rules of political combat—that is, never apologize. Trump's fear is that apologizing shows weakness. For most politicians, including a few presidents, it might. But not this one. Trump has persuaded the entire world he's not a wimp.

What would apologizing entail? It wouldn't require him to abase himself by saying, "Please forgive me, I'm so sorry," though uttering those words a time or two wouldn't be a bad idea.

I'd start with Mexico. It's unwise for an American president to be on bad terms with a populous neighbor with whom we do business. And Trump has gone beyond that by insulting the Mexican people. But Trump's luck has struck again. A new Mexican president will soon be inaugurated, providing Trump with an opportunity to make amends and move ahead.

A deal has already been worked out, tentatively, for Mexico to keep all those illegal immigrants in caravans from Central America from crossing the border. Their asylum hearings will be held while they're in Mexico and few are expected to qualify to enter the United States.

That's not all Trump can do. I suspect the Mexican president isn't expecting to be love-bombed with attention from Trump. Why not surprise him by announcing you no longer expect Mexico to pay for the wall? His explanation: Mexico is helping more than ever at the border and paying for it.

Third, Trump doesn't have to stop tweeting. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell says tweets aren't the problem. It's what some of them

say that is. A suggestion: seize opportunities to act in positive ways and tweet about them. How painful could that be for the tweeter in chief?

For instance, the president could have responded to a report last week that life expectancy in this country declined again in 2017. The president isn't being blamed for this. But what if he declares (or tweets) his distress and says: "We cannot let this continue in America. We haven't done enough to stop it. I haven't done enough."

The point here is Trump and his aides should be on the lookout for legitimate opportunities for the president to involve himself in a positive way. The model for this was created by President Reagan when a highly publicized report on the growing shortcomings of American schools was issued. His administration leaped to embrace solutions and thereby avoided any political harm.

The notion that Trump can't change is ridiculous. People change in many ways, especially politicians who are always looking for better ways to present themselves. One of

Reagan's great lines was that having been an actor really comes in handy in politics. He wasn't kidding.

People who meet privately with the president invariably say how congenial he is. I doubt he's faking on these occasions or has a double personality like some Jekyll and Hyde character. I'm no psychologist, but I think he simply acts differently in different situations, a quite normal trait of most people.

The hardest thing will be convincing him he's in a political ditch and won't be able to climb out unless he alters his act. He's not likely to believe negative polls or advice from anyone. What's needed is what a political strategist referred to as a "moment." That's when something unplanned and unexpected happens in a flash with the whole world watching and it instantly changes how millions regard the person involved.

One happened with George W. Bush in his visit to Ground Zero. He seized the moment and his reputation as a leader soared. Trump ought to pray for a moment where he can shine. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

A political lesson often forgotten: There's no such thing as an overnight transformation

I used to write a fair amount about West Germany and report on the federal elections. Like most American journalists, historians, political analysts, and politicians—and most Germans, for that matter—I could not imagine the collapse of the Soviet empire and the unification of the two Germanies.

Not in my lifetime, at any rate: The Berlin Wall, which was built when I was 11 years old, seemed destined to remain a permanent fixture. But of course, as we know now, the Soviet Union *did* disintegrate, the wall came tumbling down—I keep a few frag-

ments in a glass receptacle—and "the former East Germany" joined the Federal Republic in 1990.

In retrospect, it was a surprisingly swift transition; and it is often forgotten now that a unified Germany, the cause of much sorrow and tragedy in the 20th century, was controversial at the time. Still, the process was irresistible: Central and Eastern Europe had suffered under Moscow since the end of World War II, and the languishing East Germans were eager to join their free, prosperous brethren in the West.

Yet I was always surprised, when visiting Germany in subsequent years,

by the widespread sense of disappointment and impatience. Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who underestimated the economic backwardness of the East, had promised “blooming landscapes” (*blühenden Landschaften*) once Germans were rid of their Russian tormentors and working together again.

But it was not so easy: The cost of absorbing impoverished East Germany into the booming West German economy was (and remains) high, and easterners felt like second-class citizens in their new land. I well remember a (West) German financier telling me, with wonder in his voice, that revitalizing an industrial project in the East was like “operating a factory in Indonesia, but everyone speaks German.”

To my mind, anyone who had spent time in both East and West Germany, as I had done, could harbor no illusions about the costs or timetable for unification. Kohl was right about the blooming landscapes, but the process was bound to be slow, very arduous, and expensive. Yet the Germans, in their understandable excitement, seemed to have expected an overnight transformation.

I was reminded of this elementary lesson in human nature by a recent *Washington Post* story about Zimbabwe. The southern African republic’s autocratic leader, 93-year-old Robert Mugabe, had been forced from office in 2017 after 37 years of terror and misrule. “Euphoric tears are what many Zimbabweans remember shedding a year ago,” wrote reporter Max Bearak, on “the most momentous day in the country’s post-independence history.” But one year later:

Zimbabwe’s optimism has dimmed. Depending on whom you ask, things are as bad, or perhaps slightly less bad, as before. The current government says reform takes time and asks for patience.

I have no doubt that the report is accurate: Zimbabwe is desperately poor

and politically isolated, and Mugabe was displaced not by popular uprising but a kind of palace coup. The current regime is headed by a man named Emmerson Mnangagwa, who was one of Mugabe’s most fearsome lieutenants. Things could well get worse, if possible, before they get better.

But in my view, it’s also a besetting sin of journalism to overestimate the promise of resistance, upheaval, liberation, and regime change. Or misread it entirely. Joy at the downfall of Mugabe was understandable, but joy



The sad fact of history, ancient and modern, is that revolutions don’t necessarily make people happy, or improve their lot, any more than legislation alters human character.

quickly dissipates in the cold light of dawn—especially when the names change while the system prevails.

Of course, this was not the theme of last year’s reporting, which largely consisted of images of street celebrations and analysts predicting a swift infusion of foreign capital to revive the economy—Zimbabwe is especially rich in mineral resources—thereby lifting Mugabe’s long-suffering subjects out of oppression.

In that sense, however, Zimbabwe’s new autocrat is correct: Political reform, if it ever happens, will indeed “take time [and] patience.” And if the example of rich, industrialized Germany is any guide, the transition of the onetime colony of Rhodesia from Mugabe’s long tyranny to blooming landscapes will take a *very* long time, near-infinite patience—and considerably more reform than President Mnangagwa seems inclined to tolerate.

The sad fact of history, ancient

and modern, is that revolutions don’t necessarily make people happy, or improve their lot, any more than legislation alters human character. Uprisings, especially against the Mugabes of the world, appeal to the emotions, and there is a kind of ecstasy in mass demonstrations. But you would think that the example of Paris in the 1790s or Moscow in the 1930s might prompt would-be insurgents (and the people who write about them) to pause and reflect. The Batista regime in Cuba was surely unpleasant in many respects; but the *New York Times*-certified romance of his replacement, Fidel Castro, only yielded a deeper, and infinitely crueler, tyranny.

This is not to suggest that there is no point in resisting oppression or battling dictators. But it is to say that journalists, writing their much-advertised first drafts of history, ought to strive for less romance and more realism. The intoxicating Arab Spring of 2010-12 was both surprising and, to some degree, unprecedented; but while its promise was realized in some places (Tunisia) its perils were revealed beyond measure in others (Syria). The collapse of the Soviet Union was a Good Thing, by any measure; but in its aftermath, there have been varying degrees of goodness (Germany, the Czech Republic, Lithuania) and its opposite (Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia itself).

Poor Zimbabwe, in the meantime, will be lucky if its agony attracts much press interest. In the 1950s and ’60s there was no more widely reported story, or cause for editorial optimism, than the independence movements in colonial Africa. But while imperialism remains a term of opprobrium, the verdict on postcolonial Africa (when it’s rendered at all) is decidedly mixed.

There was much excitement about Rhodesia-turned-Zimbabwe in the media when the British handed over power to Mugabe and friends (1980)—and four decades later, even more excitement when Mugabe’s friends placed him under house arrest (2017). But shouldn’t journalism do more than chronicle excitement? ♦

The ACLU's J'Accuse

The group comes out against equal treatment before the law. BY KC JOHNSON AND STUART TAYLOR JR.

More than four years ago, 28 members of the Harvard Law School faculty publicly criticized the sexual-assault adjudication procedures adopted by the university under pressure from the Obama administration. They noted that these were “overwhelmingly stacked against the accused.” The law professors, including some with stellar feminist credentials, said that the university’s goal should “be to fully address sexual harassment while at the same time protecting students against unfair and inappropriate discipline, honoring individual relationship autonomy, and maintaining the values of academic freedom.” Similar expressions of concern about the basic unfairness of the federally dictated Title IX procedures, which most colleges had adopted enthusiastically, would also come from groups of law professors at Penn and Cornell.

Since April 2011, when the Obama administration sent thousands of schools its “Dear Colleague” letter reinterpreting Title IX to mandate guilt-tilting sexual misconduct procedures, colleges and universities have been on the losing side of 117 court decisions in lawsuits filed by accused students; 53 more lawsuits (at the federal level alone) were settled before a court could render any decision. Summarizing judicial concerns about universities’ one-sidedness in a 2016 decision involving a student from Brandeis University, U.S. District Judge F. Dennis Saylor wrote, “It is not enough simply to say that such changes are appropriate because victims of sexual assault have not always

achieved justice in the past. Whether someone is a ‘victim’ is a conclusion to be reached at the end of a fair process, not an assumption to be made at the beginning.”

As all of these developments occurred, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) remained silent. For more than seven years, the ACLU never criticized the evisceration of due process and fundamental fairness in campus Title IX tribunals—although it also never endorsed the Obama-era standards. But in case after case, it ignored egregious unfairness to accused students who had strong claims of innocence. The organization finally broke its silence on November 16, after Education Secretary Betsy DeVos proposed new regulations on campus sexual misconduct designed to make campus procedures fairer to both parties. In an inflammatory Twitter thread, the ACLU described the new regulations as “inappropriately favoring the accused.”

It was a broad attack, and the ACLU did not exempt the fundamental protections that DeVos’s effort is designed to restore—the right of accused students to be presumed innocent; the right of accusers and accused alike to cross-examine witnesses through a lawyer or an advocate; and the right of the accused to examine all the evidence uncovered in the campus investigation and all the materials used to train campus adjudicators. The thread closed with a promise: “We will continue to support survivors.”

Ten hours after the tweets (which were surely posted before the ACLU had fully digested all 149 pages of DeVos’s proposed rule), the organization issued a broader analysis by Emma J. Roth, a fellow at the ACLU’s Women’s Rights Project, and Shayna Medley, a fellow at its LGBT & HIV

Project. Though their article claimed that the ACLU “is equally committed to ensuring students can learn in environments free from sexual harassment and violence and to guaranteeing fair process for both respondents and complainants,” its tone and contents confirmed the thrust of the Twitter thread. They closed by characterizing the proposed rule as just another in “a long line of actions taken by the Trump administration to attempt to roll back civil rights for some of the most vulnerable students.”

Roth and Medley alleged three specific problems with the proposed regulations, only one of which directly addressed the procedures afforded to accused students: that the regulations would allow schools to choose between “preponderance of the evidence” (50.01 percent) and “clear and convincing evidence” (around 75 percent) as the standard of proof in adjudicating the innocence or guilt of accused students. (It is worth noting that the ACLU has not criticized the *existing* use of the clear-and-convincing standard mandated by some schools’ union contracts to adjudicate sexual harassment complaints against professors.) The two further problems they adduced are that the proposed regulations use the Supreme Court’s definition of sexual harassment, rather than the far more expansive language of Obama-era guidance, and reduce the number of university administrators legally obligated to act if they receive a Title IX complaint from an accuser. The official ACLU statement, issued by the organization’s deputy legal director, simply summarized the points raised by Roth and Medley.

It is difficult to discern a connection between the wildly inflammatory claim in the ACLU’s tweet—that the proposed regulations would be “inappropriately favoring the accused”—and these three specific complaints.

In practical terms, it’s unlikely that any of the three provisions would have much effect on students who experience sexual misconduct on campus. Since September 2017, DeVos has allowed every college and university in the country the option of using

KC Johnson and Stuart Taylor Jr. are the authors of The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America’s Universities (2017).

the clear-and-convincing standard of proof in Title IX cases—and, as far as we have been able to determine, not one has chosen to do so. In the current campus climate, any university president who moved in the direction of protecting possibly innocent accused students would almost certainly be subjected to a wave of campus protests and risk losing his or her job.

While it's possible that a tighter definition of sexual harassment would exclude some Title IX complaints, the ACLU didn't cite a single campus complaint against an accused student over the past seven years that would have qualified as sexual harassment under the Obama-era standard but not under the Supreme Court's definition. Colleges, of course, could retain the Obama-era definition in their own disciplinary codes. And the mandatory reporting issue focuses mostly on bureaucratic minutiae rather than broader questions of principle.

In short, after spending seven years ignoring myriad and severe due-process deprivations on campus, the

ACLU resorted to unlikely hypotheticals to criticize the proposed remedy.

The ACLU's position is odd for an organization that purports to be devoted to civil liberties. Roth and Medley argued that for colleges to use the clear-and-convincing standard would "weight the scales against complainants in civil disciplinary proceedings." But this view imagines the Title IX process as a contest between accuser and accused, rather than what it is: a process in which representatives of the college effectively investigate and prosecute the accused, with the accuser as the chief witness. As the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE)—which has become the nation's preeminent champion of civil liberties on campus and been tireless on the issue of the 2011 guidance—noted, "Given the marked lack of core due process protections in the vast majority of campus judicial systems, the adjudication of such serious, life-altering accusations requires more than our lowest standard of proof." The American

Association of University Professors has made a similar point. So has the American College of Trial Lawyers.

This year, moreover, federal judges hearing lawsuits against the University of Colorado and the University of Mississippi suggested that the preponderance standard in Title IX sexual-assault proceedings is itself unlawful. U.S. District Judge James Browning of New Mexico went further, holding that "preponderance of the evidence is not the proper standard for disciplinary investigations such as the one that led to [the accused student's] expulsion, given the significant consequences of having a permanent notation such as the one UNM placed on [his] transcript."

Perhaps there are other occasions in the ACLU's history in which it maintained that multiple federal courts were worrying too much about the rights of the accused. But there can't be many. The *Atlantic's* Conor Friedersdorf observed that ACLU "staffers weighed what most meaningfully excludes someone from equal treatment in

Hope and Help for California

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

In recent weeks, communities in Northern and Southern California were ravaged by wildfires. The Camp Fire in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains was the most devastating fire in this country in a century, burning the entire town of Paradise to the ground. The Paradise Ridge Chamber of Commerce was one of more than 4,200 buildings destroyed. Yet in the aftermath of the blaze, local business and community leaders vowed to rebuild.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is committed to helping them do it. Our message to all those who have been impacted: Paradise as it was once known may be lost, but hope is not. And more help is on the way.

For years, the U.S. Chamber Foundation's Corporate Citizenship Center has helped marshal support and coordinate private sector recovery efforts following disasters. Our team

provides guidance, assistance, and resources to local businesses harmed or destroyed. More than 2,000 businesses have been impacted by the Camp Fire, including nearly 1,400 that are located in the burn areas.

As the fires began to escalate, the Chamber began activating our resources. We set up our 24-hour Disaster Help Desk to field questions and supply information to area business leaders. We distributed our Recovery Quick Guides, outlining practical steps businesses can take to help their employees, seek financial assistance through insurance and other means, and eventually restore operations.

Now that both fires have been contained, we're helping lead longer term recovery efforts. Last week we hosted a disaster coordination call with FEMA, state officials, and local chambers of commerce. More than 160 companies also joined the call to learn how they can help.

Many companies have already been involved in relief efforts. Comcast

NBCUniversal has pledged \$1.1 million in cash and in-kind support for firefighters and victims through local relief organizations, and it opened 51,000 XFINITY WiFi free hotspots. IBM donated \$250,000 in cash and is allowing employees to use three additional days of paid time off to volunteer. And besides a cash contribution, United Airlines launched a new Crowdrise by GoFundMe campaign to award up to 5 million bonus miles for individuals who make donations of \$50 or more to support affected communities.

This is a great start, but much more is needed, especially in the weeks and months to come. This is only the beginning of the recovery process. The people of Paradise face the daunting task of rebuilding their city, businesses, and homes from the ground up. As efforts proceed, all of those affected must be able to count on the enduring support of the business community.



Learn more at
uschamber.com/abovethefold.

education—and they decided new due-process protections are *more problematic* than expelling someone after a process wherein they were unable to see evidence, or question their accuser, or be judged by a neutral party.”

As to the definition of sexual harassment, schools’ aggressive applications of the Obama administration’s more expansive definition have been denounced by many civil libertarians as infringing on constitutionally protected speech. And for good reason. Federal agreements settling investigations of the University of Montana and the University of New Mexico indicated that “sexual harassment should be more broadly defined as ‘any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature,’” including “verbal” (speech)—even if the allegedly harassing statements of the accused student or faculty member would not be offensive to an “objectively reasonable person of the same gender in the same situation.” It’s hard to fathom a civil liberties organization—especially one that decades ago stood up for the free speech rights even of Nazis—showing such hostility to federal protection of speech.

Roth and Medley provided a final reminder of the ACLU’s newfound indifference to the plight of the accused by asserting that the ACLU is especially concerned about “students of color” and other vulnerable campus populations. Yet there is ample evidence in the reporting of Emily Yoffe, Ben Trachtenberg, Jacob Gersen, and Jeannie Suk Gersen that the Obama-era Title IX guidance has disproportionately harmed accused students of color. At the few universities for which race-based campus statistics exist, such as Findlay and Colgate, men of color are dramatically overrepresented among those punished for sexual assault. “If we have learned from the public reckoning with the racial impact of overcriminalization, mass incarceration, and law enforcement bias,” Suk Gersen wrote in the *New Yorker* in 2015, “we should heed our legacy of bias against black men in rape accusations.”

As the *Washington Post*’s Radley Balko observed after the group’s Twitter attack, “The ACLU still does some

great work. But damn is it ever disappointing to see this organization, with all its history, use the phrase ‘inappropriately favoring the accused.’”

Whatever the merits or flaws of the rest of the ACLU’s activities, it has become an adversary of due process and free speech on campus. ♦

Nevertheless, She Persisted

Theresa May’s Brexit deal means the end of sovereignty and democracy. **BY DOMINIC GREEN**

Every leader dreams of uniting the people, but Theresa May is the only postwar British prime minister to have pulled it off. It has taken time, hard work, toughness of



Perhaps up there: May in Northern Ireland in search of support, November 27

character, mastery of detail, skin thick as tortoiseshell, and a willingness to do or say anything. Nevertheless, Theresa May persisted. Today, the British people are about as united as they can be.

No one likes her Brexit deal with the E.U. On November 28, a telephone poll found that only 16 percent of respondents support the draft deal that May announced in late November. The other 84 percent presumably

Dominic Green is the Life & Arts editor of Spectator USA and a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

prefer the subjugation of a return to the E.U. or the economic disorder of leaving the E.U. without a deal or to continue looking skywards for assistance while mumbling, “I don’t know.”

Admittedly, the anti-deal consensus still has 16 percentage points to go. But that sort of unanimity is only obtainable under a dictatorship or banana republic. Which might be exactly what May’s Brexit deal would create: a Parliament without legal sovereignty and elections without meaning.

The draft withdrawal agreement for Britain’s March 2019 departure from the E.U. betrays the voters who approved the 2016 Brexit referendum and puts the lie to May’s own policy statements and electoral promises. As Christopher Caldwell wrote last week in these pages, the deal would cast Britain into an open-ended “transition period” that means “all the taxation of being in the E.U. with none of the representation” along with ingesting into British law whatever legal delicacies strike the E.U.’s fancy.

The deal also commits Britain to maintaining regulatory alignment and open borders between Northern Ireland, which is part of the U.K., and the Republic of Ireland, which is part of the E.U. In effect, the deal threatens to sunder Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. The negotiators of the E.U., abetted by domestic grandstanding from Irish premier Leo Varadkar, have succeeded in extracting from Theresa May by trickery and

LIAM MCBURNEY / WPA / GETTY

threats what the IRA failed to obtain by murder.

Britain will not be able to escape its juridical limbo until the E.U. allows it. If Britain objects, it will have to appeal to the European Court of Justice, which is a Potemkin court for the furthering of E.U. policy.

The one question on which May does deliver is on freedom of movement. For the last two years, Remainers have accused Leavers of masking anti-immigrant sentiment with talk about sovereignty. May, a Remainer herself in 2016, seems to believe this. She reckons that if she gives the white plebs what they want on immigration, they'll be too thick to notice the surrender of sovereignty.

So this is not a deal for withdrawal, but BRINO: Brexit in Name Only—which is to say, Remain, the option that lost in the 2016 referendum. It is a conditional surrender, and the conditions include the dismemberment of the United Kingdom. Nations defeated in war have obtained better terms from their conquerors.

Britain's Conservative party is the oldest and most successful party in the history of Western democracy. How it managed that is beyond reckoning. The party's great achievement of 1938, "Munich," is now a byword for diplomatic treachery and self-delusion; Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sold out the Czechs, only to discover that Hitler's promise of peace was a bouncing check. Its great achievement of 1956, "Suez," is now a byword for the imperial folly of managing to shoot oneself in the foot while trying to punch above one's weight. Prime Minister Anthony Eden was so busy mistaking Nasser for Mussolini that he forgot to ask for American permission before invading Egypt.

Since Munich and Suez, Conservatives have been in and out of office but have kept up their diplomatic batting average, contriving to club themselves on the back of the head every other decade. In 1975, it was Edward Heath, tricking the public into retroactively endorsing Britain's entry into what was then the European Economic Community (EEC). Prime

Minister Heath claimed that the EEC was just a customs union and that Britain's laws and sovereignty were not at stake. Privately, Heath admitted the economic borders of the EEC were, like Bismarck's *Zollverein*, destined to become political borders too.

That duly happened two decades later with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 that birthed the European Union, beloved today by its subjects for its undemocratic deliberations, stagflating currency, and sub-Kantian delusions of legislative grandeur. In 1992, when John Major, erstwhile bank clerk, told the British that they couldn't afford not to jump aboard the Eurotrain, he insisted that Britain's sovereignty would be unimpaired by the Maastricht Treaty—despite the fact that Europhilic Conservatives had found it necessary to throw Margaret Thatcher overboard in order to make Britain's appointment with Eurodestiny.

After another two decades of the E.U.'s insidious annexations of national sovereignty, Euroskepticism among Conservative backbenchers, party members, and voters forced Prime Minister David Cameron to attempt to recover some of it. In 2016, when the E.U. rebuffed him, Cameron called a referendum on Britain's membership in the E.U. He expected to win, which is to say for Britain to continue losing its independence and for Britain's leaders, especially the Conservative ones, to continue treating their voters like serfs. But by some freak of democracy, the referendum's outcome represented the will of the British people. And thus it fell to Theresa May to push Britain's foreign dealings back onto the traditional Conservative path of error and duplicity. She has failed beyond our wildest dreams.

May pretended not to notice the wave of ministerial resignations that followed the announcement of the draft withdrawal agreement. Instead, she did what all clever diplomats do and channeled Neville Chamberlain. By the end of that week, she had in her hand a piece of paper—actually, 13 pieces of double-sided, close-printed paper. This was a draft of the "political declaration" concerning post-Brexit

relations between Britain and the E.U.

On Sunday, November 25, the leaders of the other 27 E.U. states took all of half an hour to agree to the withdrawal agreement and the nonbinding, non-specific nonstarter that is the political declaration. This typifies how the E.U. stage-manages its deals and agreements and declarations. From its postwar origins to its current imperium, the E.U. has seen itself as a bulwark against popular sovereignty, just like the Holy Roman Empire or the Dual Monarchy. In Brussels, the fix is always in.

In London, however, the fix no longer is. As usual, a Conservative prime minister has promised security and stability while signing away sovereignty. But Brexit has squeezed the red, white, and blue toothpaste out of the tube. In the next two weeks, probably on December 11, May must bring her deal to the House of Commons. Labour and the Liberal Democrats have already said they will vote against it. The Ulster Unionists, on whose informal support May's minority government depends, are against it. More than 80 Conservative MPs have said they will ignore the whips, and no more than 30 Labour MPs are thought to be willing to defy their own whips and vote for the deal.

May doesn't have the numbers for a deal that hardens the borders to immigration but erases the legal and parliamentary borders entirely. So Brexit isn't just about immigration or racism. It really is about democracy and sovereignty. Yet again, a Conservative prime minister has misread the public and misled the voters.

What happens next depends on the scale of May's defeat in the Commons vote. If she can lose by only 20 or 30 votes, she could obtain some small and theatrical "concessions" from Brussels and then try to whip through a second vote. Her team is said to be hoping for a panic in the markets like the one that encouraged Congress to consent to an emergency financial bailout in the fall of 2008.

If May loses by more than 50 votes, she won't have the credibility to push on to a second vote. Preparations for a "No Deal" exit will accelerate, and an extension past the March 2019

deadline may be sought. Conservative MPs will launch a party vote of no-confidence if only to forestall Labour from calling a parliamentary one, which would mean a general election that Labour could well win. The Conservative leadership contest would be a death match between Leavers and Remainers. If the Remainers were to win, the Conservatives would rally around a diluted version of May's deal.

May could preempt both of these no-confidence votes by calling a general election first. Remainers have been calling for a second referendum, the People's Vote—as opposed to the non-people who voted the wrong way in the 2016 referendum. May could present her general election as a referendum on her deal. That would mean her way or the highway of Jeremy Corbyn and Labour. This is a choice between disaster in the long term and the short. May has an impeccable record for picking the worst option. A general election would present the two worst options. She may well find the combination irresistible.

Two personal observations about what might happen in the medium term: One is that since 2016, the markets have been betting on Brexit, despite the apocalyptic predictions of Remainers, the governor of the Bank of England among them. I'd take the serious money of the markets over the dishonest comedians of May's government any day. The other is that if you want to find a true Brexiteer among Britain's party leaders, look left.

Jeremy Corbyn is a lifelong enemy of the European superstate. His Stalinoid grip on his party also makes him the only party leader capable of delivering a Commons vote for Brexit. The electoral cycle is against the Conservatives, too. In power since 2009, they can retain the premiership until 2022 but are unlikely to win a third election in a row. The price of a Corbyn Brexit would be economic collapse.

Conservatives still have a chance to deliver a market-friendly, democratically accountable Brexit, providing they ditch May as soon as possible. But then, the Conservatives are the party of Munich, Suez, and Maastricht. ♦

No Easy Repeat

Trump will struggle to win Michigan again.

BY RICHARD E. BURR



Trump rallies supporters in Washington Township, Michigan, April 28.

Detroit
President Donald Trump's expressed "love" for Michigan will be tested during his 2020 reelection bid if trends from the midterm election are any indication.

Trump won his slimmest victory of 2016 here, edging Hillary Clinton by 10,704 votes, or about two-tenths of a percentage point, 47.5 to 47.3 percent. He did so in part, Michigan pollsters say, because of a drop in turnout among independent and Democratic voters as well as the presence of third-party candidates: the Libertarians' Gary Johnson and the Green party's Jill Stein.

But in a record-setting midterm turnout, Democrats elected a governor, attorney general, and secretary of state, their first such trifecta since 1986. Two issues helped drive the intense interest in voting in 2018: an unpopular president and an initiative to legalize recreational marijuana, which voters approved.

Of course, the president will have

Richard E. Burr is assistant city editor for politics and government at the Detroit News.

the advantages of incumbency. Only Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and George H.W. Bush have lost re-election bids since World War II, notes Steve Mitchell, pollster and Republican strategist at Mitchell Research & Communications in East Lansing. The Democrats choice will also be important for Trump's prospects, as an unpopular Clinton proved in 2016.

Still, Trump faces serious challenges, some of them of his own making.

n Trump's style. While the president can take credit for a strong economy and a traditional conservative foreign policy that has slapped sanctions on Iran for its nuclear weapons ambitions, treated Israel like a "true ally," and improved the climate with North Korea, his "unpresidential" bearing is a problem, says John Truscott, a Lansing-based consultant who worked for three-time Republican governor John Engler.

"Many people are turned off by his attitude and approach," Truscott says. "The very things that have brought him success are also the same things that turn many people off. In a

campaign environment, it may be difficult to distinguish between the two.”

About 57 percent of likely voters have viewed Trump unfavorably during the past three years, says Rich Czuba, head of Glengariff Group in Lansing and a pollster for the *Detroit News* during the past two elections.

Besides the marijuana ballot proposal, the subject most on Michigan voters’ minds this year was Trump. Both supporters and opponents brought up Trump unprompted with *Detroit News* reporters outside polling places. Republicans lost two U.S. House seats and a Michigan supreme court seat and suffered their largest loss of state senate seats since 1974.

n Democratic turnout. There’s a myth that a GOP surge propelled the New York magnate to victory in 2016, the first time a Republican had won in Michigan since 1988. But Michigan Republicans always turn out in strong numbers, as Czuba and *Detroit News* editorial page editor Nolan Finley have noted. The wild cards are Democrats, who have the clear registration edge in the state, and independents.

When Democrats are highly motivated to vote, their candidates at the top of the ticket usually win by 9 to 10 percentage points, as gubernatorial candidate Gretchen Whitmer did in November, Czuba points out. On a scale of 1 to 10, *Detroit News* polls found that Republicans, Democrats, and independents all said their desire to vote was higher than 9 in 2018, which spelled widespread GOP defeats.

Independents also are a potential problem for Trump, and they usually help decide races in Michigan. College-educated independent women voted mostly for Democrats in November, Czuba says, noting that the former Republican stronghold of wealthy Oakland County “was the epicenter of this shift.” Equally troubling: College-educated men also are backing Democrats in southeast Michigan, where the bulk of the state’s votes are cast. Republicans lost state house and senate seats in cities like Birmingham and Troy that used to be synonymous with the GOP.

Democrats have assembled an

informal coalition with independents in the Trump era, “making them an unbeatable force in pure numbers” if they are motivated to turn out, Czuba says.

n A double-edged trade war. While getting tough on trade plays well in Michigan, the tariff wars with China and other countries could cost more votes than they gain.

If the auto industry continues to be hurt by tariffs, it could be a problem in the greater Detroit area, where the state’s dominant auto industry is concentrated. This issue was heightened during the past week when General Motors said it might lay off as many as 5,750 salaried employees and perhaps some union workers as it prepared to idle five factories, including three in Michigan and Ohio, as part of a competitive restructuring. The Democratic National Committee pounced, repeating a quote from Lordstown, Ohio, factory worker Bobbi Marsh: “I can’t believe our president would allow this to happen.”

“Union men are increasingly becoming attracted to the GOP, but a bad economy could stop that attraction,” Czuba says.

Still, Trump has been adept at using auto industry executives as foils. He attacked Ford Motor Co. for its production of vehicles in Mexico during 2016 and hit back hard at GM’s plant announcements, saying he would somehow cut off the automaker’s electric vehicle subsidies if it didn’t reverse course. But scheduled auto union contract talks next year may produce a face-saving compromise in which GM “saves” certain factories and blue-collar jobs, as has happened in recent contracts. These factories haven’t been shut down yet, as some have reported, but are targeted.

The tariffs also pose a problem among Trump’s supporters in rural areas. Michigan soybeans, pork, apples, and cherries have been hit by China’s retaliatory levies, and Trump strongholds in rural areas are increasingly dependent on agriculture.

“If farmers and rural voters reliant on the ag industry in Michigan start recoiling at the trade war, Trump will

be in very deep trouble if he cannot hold his margins in the smaller rural counties,” Czuba says.

n The third-party factor. The Green party likely sapped votes from Clinton in 2016 as much as the Libertarians cost Trump support. Having someone like a Ralph Nader or a Jill Stein on the ballot would aid the president. “Michigan will be a heavy lift [for him] without a strong third-party candidate,” says Mitchell. “But until the Democratic candidate is learned, it is hard to predict what will happen here in Michigan or nationally.”

Former vice president Joe Biden is a potentially formidable candidate who could siphon off voters now attracted to Trump. Progressives such as senators Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Kamala Harris, and Cory Booker would have a tougher fight with Trump and be dependent on high turnout by African-American voters in Detroit, says Dave Dulio, head of the political science department at Oakland University.

Without unity among the Democrats, Trump’s prospects improve markedly. “If Democrats can give both the mainstream and the liberal wings of the party a reason to be excited as they did in Michigan in 2018, they can win simply on the volume of Democrats over Republicans in Michigan,” Czuba says.

West Michigan could be a barometer for the president’s chances. Trump and Mike Pence spent a lot of time during the last two weeks of the 2016 campaign in the region, trying to calm traditional conservative voters spooked by Trump’s bombastic style and lewd remarks on the leaked *Access Hollywood* audiotape.

Trump’s final 2016 speech occurred in the early morning hours on Election Day in Grand Rapids in the GOP stronghold of Kent County. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos hails from that area. But Democrats have been making gains, and Whitmer won there by three points in November.

Says Czuba: “If Trump has trouble in Kent County and motivation to vote is high, then the new realignment will deliver Michigan to the Democratic column.” ♦

Going High (Culture)

Orchestras and universities are working together to feed our hunger for community and a shared American identity

By JOSEPH HOROWITZ

In his thoughtful new book *Them: Why We Hate Each Other—and How to Heal*, Nebraska senator Ben Sasse writes: “More Republicans and Democrats are placing politics at the center of their lives. Both sides seem to believe that a grand solution to our political dysfunction can be found inside politics. ... But nothing that happens in Washington is going to fix what’s wrong with America. ... The problem is that our ever more ferocious political tribalism and mutual hatred don’t originate in politics, so politics isn’t going to heal them.”

Amen to that.

What needs to heal, Sasse continues, is the nation’s torn fabric. The agents of destruction he adduces include the digital age, which undermines “any sense of place by allowing us to mentally ‘escape’ our homes and neighborhoods.” He observes the diminishing pertinence of friends, church, and community. He cites studies documenting an epidemic of “loneliness.” In Fremont, his hometown, immigrants are moving in and wealthier Nebraskans moving out. The senator and his wife are vigorously engaged in social service—“one person-to-person relationship and one local institution at a time.”

That all sounds laudable and feasible for rural Nebraska. But as a secular American living in Manhattan, I’m a stranger to the senator’s world of church and picnics. I worry that religion may be as much divisive as binding in America’s map of red versus blue. My professional world is one of orchestras (with which I work) and cultural history (about which I write). My perspective suggests another opportunity for healing—regaining a lost

Joseph Horowitz directs Music Unwound, a national consortium of orchestras and universities funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and is executive director of PostClassical Ensemble, the ensemble-in-residence at the Washington National Cathedral. Both groups seek to re-envision the orchestra as a humanities institution. He is the author of 10 books about the history of classical music in the United States.

“sense of place” and shared American identity via our history and culture. And, yes, I mean high culture.

Our colleges don’t teach much history any longer. Many cultural institutions seem increasingly adrift. And yet I have stumbled upon an unlikely alliance that works: orchestras in partnership with universities.

This may sound risible. But there was a time when the symphony orchestra was a civic bulwark. Before World War I, it was already a certified and admired American



Joseph Horowitz, center, with students during Music Unwound’s February 2017 program with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra and the University of Texas at El Paso

specialty, distinct from the pit orchestras of European opera and theater. Over a period of mere decades, orchestras of consequence proliferated throughout the northeast and Midwest: Every self-respecting city established one.

Theodore Thomas is the Johnny Appleseed in this story. His itinerant orchestra rode the “Thomas Highway” coast to coast. “A symphony orchestra shows the culture of the community” was his credo. Americans believed him.

Many musically inclined Americans were European immigrants for whom Beethoven and Schubert were already a necessity. But there was also widespread anticipation of an American canon; it was assumed that by the 21st century American orchestras would mainly perform American music. And this cause, peaking with a tidal wave

ARMANDO TRULL

of “American Composers Concerts” at the turn of the 20th century, was popular and exciting. It possessed urgency.

An ignition point was the U.S. sojourn (1892-95) of the Czech composer Antonin Dvorak. His Ninth Symphony, written in 1893 and subtitled “From the New World,” provoked a fierce national debate over American identity. Keying on Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha* and on the “Negro melodies” he adored, Dvorak enshrined in his symphony the notion that African Americans and Native Americans were self-evidently representative Americans. In New York, his idea was taken to heart. In Boston, he was denounced as a “negrophile.”

This symphony, a pivotal part of the early history of classical music in the United States, illuminates the countless ways in which cultural expression can powerfully foster personal and national identity. So does Longfellow’s poem. And so do the canvases of Frederic Church; the elegiac majesty of his iconic New World landscapes forecast the sublime Largo of Dvorak’s symphony. For good measure, the Czech composer’s American sojourn also furnishes a complex and timely study in cultural appropriation.

According to stereotype, the orchestra is an elitist institution. But look at its early history in the United States. Henry Higginson, who created the Boston Symphony in 1881, insisted on reserving blocks of 25-cent tickets for nonsubscribers. Leopold Stokowski, who made the Philadelphia Orchestra matter, produced the American premiere of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony in 1916 partly because he knew it would require many hundreds of amateur singers. The performance was an epochal community event. Remember that symphonic conductors once stayed put—there were no airplanes to fly them from one musical capital to another. In Chicago, Frederick Stock was not an international celebrity. He was, instead, something of greater civic consequence: a *local* celebrity, a popular favorite who in summertime led his orchestra in outdoor concerts at which multitudes sang along.

But over the course of the 20th century, American classical music disappointed expectations and remained a Eurocentric import. Orchestras succumbed to formula. They sacrificed local identity based in community for itinerant star power. They squandered their potential to instill a sense of place.

Today, the marginalization of the orchestra in American culture is a pressing cause for concern within the shrinking classical-music milieu. Emergency measures are afoot. The latest remedies of choice are “inclusion” and “diversity.” Women composers are belatedly being programmed and celebrated. Both the League of American Orchestras and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (the lone survivor of a national philanthropic community once dedicated to sustaining orchestral performance) are

funding a “pipeline” to propel young musicians of color into the ranks of major orchestras. These are important initiatives. But they attack symptoms, not causes. And they risk exciting the same divisive energies that afflict identity politics more generally.

If orchestras are ever to regain their role as agents of national unity, they will need to undertake a larger mission and curate the American past. Dvorak, in 1893, prophesied a “great and noble” school of American concert music: a foundation for the future. It’s too late to revive that. But our orchestras can nevertheless engage in a mission of American self-understanding. And that’s where universities come in.

Eight years ago, I launched Music Unwound, a national consortium of orchestras supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The idea was to remake orchestras as humanities institutions. They would curate our musical past in the form of multimedia concerts exploring key components of the American experience. Scholars would take part. So, I hoped, would museums and universities. The result would be immersion experiences lasting days and even weeks.

Music Unwound has explored four topics: “Dvorak and America,” “Copland and Mexico,” “Charles Ives’s America,” and “Kurt Weill’s America.” Issues of American identity are ambitiously investigated. The Dvorak program is intended to connect to African-American and Native American audiences, and also to Longfellow and to the painters of the Hudson River School. The Copland program links to the Depression and to the composers and muralists of the Mexican Revolution: political art. The Ives program links to the Transcendentalists that the Connecticut composer cherished, Emerson above all. The Weill program, about a German-Jewish opera composer who became a leading creator of Broadway musicals, probes immigration.

We’ve enjoyed successes and suffered disappointments. But there has been a central surprise—that universities are more eager to participate than orchestras. And where the two have collaborated, the results have been transformational.

It must be understood that orchestras in the United States have evolved very differently from museums. There are no scholarly curators on staff. The American musical past is little known or exhumed, nor is any cultural context outside of classical music. With the exception of Aaron Copland, the composers we feature via Music Unwound are little played—the American Dvorak (how is it possible that we don’t regularly hear his vividly observed *American Suite* of 1894?), George Chadwick, Arthur Farwell, Silvestre Revueltas, Weill, Ives. But they

form a vital narrative of New World cultural development. It is the intellectual heft of this programming that opens the door to the university classroom.

The synergies have been obvious in El Paso, Texas—a city of immigrants, 80 percent Hispanic, at the crossroads of today’s immigration debate. Here the quarterback for Music Unwound has been Lorenzo Candelaria, a music historian who was until recently associate provost at the University of Texas at El Paso. There have been three El Paso Music Unwound festivals, beginning with “Dvorak and America” in 2016—which so penetrated the graduate and undergraduate classrooms of UTEP that hundreds of young Hispanics attended their first symphonic concerts thanks to the partnering El Paso Symphony. Many brought their families. (Music Unwound furnishes free tickets to participating students.)

Their keen appreciation of what they heard—including the full *New World Symphony* with a visual presentation extrapolating its American accent—had been honed by campus talks and concerts. The festival pervaded the curriculum. Brian Yothers, a specialist in 19th-century American literature at UTEP, explored the significance of Longfellow to Dvorak in a variety of music classes. Kevin Deas, a leading African-American concert singer, arrived with Music Unwound both to sing with the symphony and to teach and perform at UTEP. When Deas signed CDs during the intermission of two El Paso Symphony subscription concerts, the line both nights trailed down the lobby and around a corner. Most of the people waiting were under 25 years old.

“Copland and Mexico,” celebrating a decade of Mexican cultural efflorescence wholly unknown to El Paso’s young Mexican-Americans, followed in 2017. But it was the 2018 Weill festival—about a refugee from Hitler’s Germany who “felt American” from the day he landed in Manhattan—that seemed to most strike home. It lasted seven days and included five concerts, three master classes, seven classroom presentations, and a trip to a local high school. The first class I visited was Selifa Chew’s Afro-Mexican history at UTEP. The immediacy of Weill’s story for Chew’s students was electrifying. One asked with a trembling voice: How was Weill able to do it? She missed Mexico intensely. Another wanted to know if Weill ever composed music in America that alluded to his German past. The students had me thinking about Weill in new ways.

All Music Unwound events incorporate discussion. At one of the symphony concerts, a Jewish El Pasoan remembered her childhood in South Dakota, where her father

sold automobiles in Sioux Falls and supported the local NAACP. Her family housed Harry Belafonte because no hotel would take him. Black workers were resented as outsiders. Anti-Semitism was virulent. Her father’s favorite recordings included Weill’s anti-apartheid musical *Lost in the Stars*. Only now, she told us, did she understand why.

Toni Torres, a UTEP undergraduate, wrote that the fes-



Above, the El Paso Symphony Orchestra in February 2017 during Music Unwound’s ‘Copland in Mexico,’ looking at Mexican creativity during the 1930s; below, the orchestra performs the score of iconic Mexican film *Redes*.



tival “gave me a new perspective on my citizenship: I need to be doing way more for my country and its music. I have no excuse, because Weill, an immigrant, devoted his life to it, and what he left is breathtakingly beautiful.” Candelaria said: “I found a real hunger for Kurt Weill here in El Paso. Its intensity (even among high school students) surprised me. I was very moved by audience reactions. Even though I grew up here, I wasn’t prepared for the surge of patriotic feeling. It was a unique experience for me—I’ll never forget it.”

Another orchestra-university partnership initiated by Music Unwound is in Las Vegas, where the Las Vegas Philharmonic and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas are about to undertake their second festival. Here the key players are the orchestra's music director, Donato Cabrera, and Nancy Uscher, the dean of the university's College of Fine Arts. For "Dvorak and America" this coming April, the Las Vegas Philharmonic and the UNLV orchestra will give linked concerts—both scripted and with visual accompaniment. In Sioux Falls, the South Dakota Symphony's Music Unwound festivals have connected with Augustana University, South Dakota State University, and the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation. In Buffalo, the philharmonic's Music Unwound festivals have included the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the Burchfield Penney Art Center, and the University at Buffalo.

If Music Unwound receives funding for its next cycle, an expanded consortium will also include the University of Arizona Fred Fox School of Music, in partnership with the Tucson Symphony, and the State University of New York at Purchase. The latter institution will join thanks to Lorenzo Candelaria, who is the incoming dean of the School of the Arts. He is intent on building on his experiences in El Paso and refashioning SUNY Purchase's music conservatory as a humanities laboratory. He wrote to me:

We're in a "now or never" moment in the arts and I'm feeling a sense of urgency. The pressures of research agendas fueled by antiquated tenure systems have created siloed mindsets in higher education for a long time now. Social media have isolated us even further. The performing arts offer a necessary counterbalance because the success or failure of a project depends on how well people can set aside personal and creative differences and work together to create something new—in front of other people, and in real time. Orchestras, bands, and choirs create priceless opportunities for this type of community-building in our K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. But these resources are typically dismissed as entertaining or ornamental. As budget pressures increase, they become regarded as expensive, extravagant, and expendable. That's a big mistake. Relevant arts programming—thematic, planned in close consultation with humanities faculty, and strategically engaging students across campus—has the power to transform individuals and the communities they serve. I've seen this first-hand. But this type of transformative work requires something that humans are getting worse at with

every text or tweet—informed, earnest, and extended conversation. This doesn't bode well for the arts or for society as a whole. I'm of the radical mindset that orchestras, bands, and choirs can do something about this and should.

The most fortifying aspect of Music Unwound has been the intensity of the public discussion it engenders. When the Las Vegas Philharmonic undertook "Copland and Mexico," everyone knew it would be controversial. Copland traveled far to the left in the 1930s—and paid for it when he was subpoenaed in 1953 by Senator



Horowitz, left, with South Dakota Symphony music director Delta David Gier, center, and Lorenzo Candelaria in January

Joseph McCarthy. The philharmonic concert told the story of Copland's politicization ("Mexico turned out to be even grander than I expected—and I expected pretty grand things. The best is the people—there's nothing remotely like them in Europe. They are really 'the people'—nothing in them is striving to be bourgeois," he wrote in 1932). The centerpiece was the film *Redes* (1936), a tale of fishermen uniting to overthrow an

unjust system. The galvanizing musical score (performed live) was composed by Silvestre Revueltas. The cinematographer was Paul Strand. Both were restless artists bent on igniting social and political change.

When the concert was over and we gathered onstage to talk with the audience, a woman in the front row was eager to speak. "I *hated* it!" she announced. Our presentation had failed to "entertain." We all answered as best we could. An hour later, when the hall began to clear, she ventured to the lip of the stage to talk some more with Roberto Kolb, Mexico's leading Revueltas scholar, who had joined us from Mexico City. Their conversation settled nothing, but it all felt terribly worthwhile. It was red; it was blue; it was thoughtful and sincere. A divide was bridged.

Ben Sasse, in his new book, writes of "an almost permanent state of dissociation, punctuated only by the most urgent demands of life, to which we tend halfheartedly"—"a growing vacuum at the heart of our shared (or increasingly, not so shared) everyday lives." Theodore Thomas took his orchestra throughout the American West. And readers of Willa Cather know of the importance of prairie opera houses. I have no idea to what degree these efforts at cultural infusion (which were not perceived as elitist) fed a Nebraska hunger for Beethoven or Gounod. But I'm certain that they fed a hunger for community. With some fresh thinking, they still can. ♦

TORY STOLEN

How He Played the Game

Ex-NFL receiver Anthony Gonzalez's impressive political debut in the suburbs of Cleveland, Akron, and Canton

BY DANIEL MCGRAW

Wooster, Ohio

In late October, a few weeks before the election that would send him to Congress, retired NFL player Anthony Gonzalez informed an Ohio pastor that he wanted to check out the church's food pantry distribution center. A former wide receiver for Ohio State University and the Indianapolis Colts, Gonzalez stopped by the Wooster Hope Center on a Wednesday afternoon, put on a sweatshirt, and hauled food for two hours to the cars and trucks of the working poor.

Richard Frazier, a non-denominational pastor who's been running the food pantry for about seven years, saw something different in Gonzalez. "First, he wasn't there to just shake hands and do a photo-op," Frazier says. "He worked alongside our volunteers and acted like he was one of them. In fact, he didn't even call up any media to say he was going to be there. I had to call the local paper to come by because I thought it might help us get more donations."

"You couldn't even tell, unless he told you, he was running for Congress," Frazier continues. "He repeated that he was there to learn about what we do and how we operate. And that maybe he could be helpful to us in the future."

"He never mentioned anything about Republicans or Democrats," Frazier adds. "I never felt like he was trying to sell me something. He seemed very much compassionate and down-to-earth. What I got from him is that he thinks all of us should use our intellect and the need to care about others as a way to evolve. To bring good ideas together, not separate people from good ideas."

Daniel McGraw is a writer living in Lakewood, Ohio.

A novice politician in his first campaign, Anthony Gonzalez, 34, easily won Ohio's 16th Congressional District and will start his term in January. It was a seat already held by a Republican and a district Donald Trump won in 2016, so not the sort of victory to make a lot of news. Yet the district is also an agglomeration of suburbs—of Cleveland, Akron, and Canton—and many Republicans struggled in the suburbs this year.

"White, suburban women are 'fleeing the Trump party'" ran a fairly typical headline going into the midterms. Of course, those stories tended not to drill down to specific districts.

About 40 percent of the votes in Gonzalez's heavily gerrymandered district came from the western suburbs of Cuyahoga County, and Hillary Clinton did take two-thirds of the votes in that county in the 2016 election. However, it's the upper-middle-class and white side of the county, with a history of voting GOP, that's drawn into the 16th District.

But Gonzalez's 57-43 margin came down to more than a favorable district. He distanced himself from President Donald Trump and the GOP on occasion, especially during the primary.

He called the budget bill passed by the Republican-led Congress "a complete disaster" and described himself as "embarrassed by the Republican party." He said he wanted to use "rainy day fund" taxpayer money in Ohio for opioid addiction treatment.

And when asked by *Canton Repository* editors if the office of the presidency was above scrutiny by the special counsel, Gonzalez sounded more like Adam Schiff than Jim Jordan: "No, it's not," Gonzalez said. "Nobody in the country is above the law."

But Gonzalez is far from being a RINO who changes his positions based on the fashions of the day. His father is a



Gonzalez, right, is brought down after a catch by Zavier Adibi of the Houston Texans, November 16, 2008.

Cuban immigrant, yet he supports a border wall and “merit-based” standards on immigration. He blasts former president Barack Obama on his economic policies and blames him for the decline of manufacturing in the Midwest. And he thinks Obamacare needs to be repealed completely.

Gonzalez’s father, Eduardo, fled to America from Fidel’s Castro’s Cuba in 1961 and today owns a steel processing factory group based in Cleveland. The congressman-elect has backed the Trump tariffs on steel but was against Trump’s restricting travel to Cuba after the Obama administration opened it up. His father has been somewhat politically active in the Cleveland area, sponsoring events “to promote federal immigration reform and local ‘immigrant-friendly’ cities.” Eduardo, as it happens, played football in the early ’70s for the University of Michigan, Ohio State’s archrival. Ohio families can break up over such splits. What father and son have in common, though, is that both weighed in at under 200 pounds and less than six feet—little guys who played against the big boys.

So what kind of Republican is Anthony Gonzalez? In some ways he may be the sort of hard-to-categorize talent the party will need in the post-Trump world. The key issues, he tells *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*, are “generational challenges that I haven’t seen much thinking on at the congressional level.”

“We really need to emphasize that we are about everyone getting that opportunity to participate in the American dream,” he says, admitting Republicans have sometimes not taken that goal into communities they avoid because of age and race differences. “We have an educational system that is about as outdated as it can be,” he continues. “Is it an educational system that prepares students to work in an economy that is disrupted and changes continually? Of course not.”

“What we really need to do in this country is to find a way to come together, and even though we might sometimes disagree, we need to never let that move into hate. Unless we heal that cultural divide, we won’t get anywhere near the policy decisions.”

The reason Gonzalez ran for Congress has less to do with healing cultural divides and more to do with a sudden opportunity presenting itself. He was born and raised in Cleveland, graduated from Ohio State with a degree in philosophy in 2007, was an Academic All-American, and then was drafted in the first round by the Colts. He played well his first few years, but knee injuries put him out of action more often than not and he retired in 2012. He decided to get an MBA at Stanford and began working as the chief operating officer for an educational technology development company in San Francisco.

The political door opened when Rep. Jim Renacci, who had held the 16th District seat for four terms starting in

2010, announced in January he was running for the Ohio Senate seat held by Democrat Sherrod Brown. Renacci lost to Brown, but his Senate bid opened up the House seat. Gonzalez, never previously mentioned as a possible candidate, saw a unique opportunity “where the stars started to align.” He was recently married, and his wife was pregnant with their first child. So they moved back to the Cleveland area and took up residence in the open district.

From the beginning, Gonzalez seemed to know how the political campaign game was played, even though he had no experience with it. His opponent in the Republican primary was Christina Hagan, 29, an Ohio house representative whose family has a long history in Ohio politics. She got the endorsement of Freedom Caucus members Jim Jordan and Mark Meadows, as well as backing from Steve Bannon acolyte Sebastian Gorka and short-term White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci.

That front-and-center, pro-Trump message ended up hurting her more than it helped, and it also opened up an opportunity for Gonzalez. He could create a contrast by pursuing the endorsements of suburban mayors, middle-of-the-road GOP state legislators, and main street business leaders. The Trump-praising Hagan did well in the district’s outlying rural areas but not so well in the more populous suburbs. Gonzalez won the May primary 53-41.

Hagan “tried to be Trump personified, and Gonzalez took a different tack, one where he came off as himself and not someone else,” says Robert Alexander, a political science professor at Ohio Northern University. “She wasn’t compelling enough being the Trump candidate, and I think in some of the Midwest swing states [voters think] that less Trump might be better going forward. Anthony Gonzalez seems to have figured that part out.”

And “that part” is pretty basic politics. “People in this area are not very concerned about Russian collusion or journalists being killed or tweets about the media,” says North Canton mayor David Held, who backed Gonzalez. “They think about having their toilets flushing properly and streets plowed of snow, safety and security, good jobs. Sometimes the East Coast media thinks we are stupid for thinking that way. We aren’t. Gonzalez understood that.”

Gonzalez didn’t pop off against Trump; he mostly just kept quiet about the president. That tactic appeared to open the fundraising doors, bringing \$1.8 million into his campaign (about five times as much as his two opponents). It was enough to crush both Hagan in the primary and Democrat Susan Moran Palmer in the general election.

Of course, Gonzalez had one undeniable asset not available to most candidates: his fame as a former pro athlete and Buckeye star. Name recognition matters in the voting booth, and Ohio State fans still talk about “The Catch”—Gonzalez’s leaping, less-than-a-minute-left-in-the-game

reception in a victory over Michigan in 2005. In most of his ads, he appeared either in scarlet and gray football uniforms or in a factory hard hat. Both of those play well in Ohio.

Will Gonzalez use his sports background as a way to move Congress on his generational policy issues? It is hard to see him doing so, as he does not seem to play up his short pro-football career as his calling card in life. In the past, ex-athletes like Jack Kemp and Bill Bradley made a huge splash with their sports fame, using it to open doors and entertain presidential aspirations. But most ex-jocks—think Dave Bing, Steve Largent, Jim Ryun, Heath Shuler, Jim Bunning—have had relatively nondescript political careers.

Gonzalez's sports fame might even have become a political liability had he not deftly sidestepped the great NFL controversy of the year. When President Trump railed against NFL players who kneel during the national anthem and said team owners should fire them, Gonzalez quietly posted a message on his Facebook page that said hearing the national anthem at games made him realize “how lucky I am to be an American, endowed with all the freedoms that she gives us.”

When Trump insulted then-Cleveland Cavaliers star LeBron James on Twitter for making political comments, and Fox News host Laura Ingraham told James and other athletes to “Keep the political comments to yourselves. . . . Shut up and dribble,” the sports world—athletes, reporters, and many team owners—was up in arms. Gonzalez had nothing to say.

This deft political touch would be impressive in a veteran candidate. Along with his astute assessment of the lay of the land in the 2018 midterms, it shows that Gonzalez has real skills for his new game.

The political media intelligentsia kept talking about a “blue wave,” but they didn't quite get the geography of how the wave would break. It crested impressively on the coasts but dwindled as it moved inland.

Of the 36 House seats that flipped for Democrats (not counting the 4 Pennsylvania flips aided by a court-ordered redistricting), 18 were in Virginia, New Jersey, New York, Maine, California, and Washington, all coastal states that voted for Clinton and will likely go for the Democratic presidential candidate in 2020.

In the Midwestern states that will be in play and critical in the 2020 presidential election—Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan, notably—the wave is harder to detect. In statewide races, for U.S. Senate and governor, the only change in party for those three states was for Wisconsin governor. In Ohio and Wisconsin, there were no party changes in any House districts. In Michigan, two House seats (out of 14) changed from Republican to Democrat, but both were in the Detroit area and one was because of retirement.

At this point, Gonzalez's election may mean only that he was an attractive candidate who ran a smart campaign. He denies he went against Trump in any way; he based his campaign plan on who the opponent was. Others, though, may see in his low-key example—neither running away from nor toward Trump—a way for millennial Republicans to run and win in the suburbs.

As for how Ohio will trend in 2020, the state looks to be as unpredictable as ever, especially with retiring governor John Kasich waiting in the wings. “If you see a poll right now about how the 2020 presidential race will be going in Ohio and the rest of the

country you should just look at it and laugh,” says Barbara Palmer, professor of political science at Baldwin Wallace University and director of the school's Center for Women and Politics of Ohio.

She thinks it's still a bellwether state, though that could be changing. “Ohio used to be on the cusp of population and economic changes,” she says, “but it's not anymore. But it will be interesting to see how Trump plays here in a few years. I think the undecideds that got him elected are getting a little tired of him. But it will all depend on the economy. It always does.”



Defining Characteristic

A ‘usage panel’ of writers and other experts distinguished the American Heritage Dictionary. Now that the panel has been shuttered, a look back at the dictionary’s evolution.

BY DAVID SKINNER

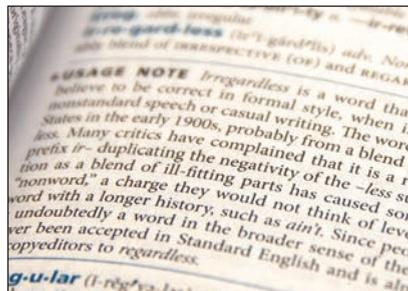
One evening in the spring of 1977, at the elegant St. Regis Hotel in New York, 40 or so intelligent, distinguished persons came together and, with drinks in hand, talked about the English language. They were especially interested in words and phrases that reflect poorly on people who use them. On this peculiar subject—of what not to say and when—several attendees were reputed to be experts. All of them, however, could claim at least some degree of authority as members of the usage panel of the *American Heritage Dictionary*.

It may have been the only time the usage panel—which was terminated, without ceremony, on February 1 of this year—met in person. Fortunately, a reporter for the *New Yorker* was on the scene, and to him or her we are indebted for the unsigned article that appeared in the Talk of the Town section a few weeks later.

Guests made light of the term *collectible*, which had appeared on the most recent usage ballot. Was it in bad taste? Bruce Bohle, who wrote the ballots for the usage panel, played the “harmless drudge,” which is how Samuel

David Skinner is the author of The Story of Ain’t: America, Its Language, and the Most Controversial Dictionary Ever Published. He was also a member of the usage panel of the American Heritage Dictionary.

Johnson once defined *lexicographer*. Bohle was stirring his drink with his index finger when the reporter asked him what it means to be the usage editor. He said, “It means that I get used a lot.” Usage panelist Theodore Bernstein, former copy chief of the



Above, the usage note for ‘irregardless’ in the fifth edition of the American Heritage Dictionary. On the facing page, every edition of the dictionary, from the first (1969, atop the pile) to the fifth (2011, on the bottom). The second edition (1982) was strikingly different, inside and out.

New York Times, discussed the controversy surrounding *hopefully* and then, by accident, dropped his wine glass. “Hopefully, that won’t happen again,” said another guest.

The chairman of the usage panel, Edwin Newman, was on hand. His book *Strictly Speaking* was the *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* of its day, a number-one bestseller. In it, Newman lodged the usual complaints against *hopefully*,

malapropisms, redundant phrasing, and cliché-mongering (*marathon talks, swank hotel, uneasy truce*). He asked in the book’s first sentence, “Will American be the death of English?”

American English, however, was not really the problem, as any careful reader would have discerned. What truly bothered Newman was the scripted melodrama of press secretaries, speechwriters, and journalists. He disapproved of how these spokesmen of the educated class recycled favored tropes and hyped their own minor insights into major revelations. And he reserved a special contempt for the legalese of the Watergate proceedings, not just the infamous banality “at that point in time,” but the whole pompous subspecies of circuitous Nixonian blather.

“In Watergate,” Newman observed, “nobody ever discussed a subject. It was always subject matter. The discussion never took place before a particular date. It was always prior to. Nor was anything said, it was indicated; just as nothing was done, it was undertaken. If it was undertaken, it was never after the indications about the subject matter; it was subsequent to them.”

To an outsider, the usage panel would seem to be an important institution within the *American Heritage Dictionary*. The impression they made together, of a well-bred snobbery about correctness and a willingness to take pains in the name of getting things right, was an

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essential part of the dictionary's marketing. Yet inside the dictionary's leadership the value of the usage panel was a point of contention. Even as the publisher maneuvered to place usage panelists on *The Today Show*, internal documents reveal that the modest cost and effort of keeping the panel going was scrutinized and debated.

And it was not just the green eyeshades who questioned the value of the usage panel. There were also complaints from the full-time editorial staff: Quite often the dictionary's publisher, Houghton Mifflin, let stand or even promoted the idea that the usage panel played a major role in the making of the dictionary. In fact, the panel played a very modest role that quietly factored into the creation of a couple hundred usage notes, written not by the usage panelists themselves but by the dictionary's editors.

The working stiffs on the masthead possessed much more influence over the dictionary than the usage panel, especially after the first edition, published in 1969. "We report, but do not always endorse, their findings," said executive editor Alma Graham in 1973 in a memo where she also objected "to Houghton's crediting them with work they did not do."

The *New Yorker* did not mention Graham in its short article, so I don't know whether she was there, chatting with her colleague Bruce Bohle or trading peevish words with Edwin Newman and Ted Bernstein. As it happened, Graham was a big linguistic story in her own right, one that touches on another piece of political history.

Starting in 1969, as the first edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* was hitting bookstores, editor Peter Davies and Graham began work on the *American Heritage School Dictionary*. In an article for *Ms.* magazine, Graham described how American Heritage lexicographers used computers to examine 10,000 passages of 500 words each, drawn from textbooks and readers for children. This corpus, though tiny by today's standards, was examined to answer questions about word frequency, vocabulary, grammar, and other interesting topics, such as

how men and women were represented in classroom literature.

"Overall," Graham wrote, "the ratio in schoolbooks of *he* to *she*, *him* to *her*, and *his* to *hers* was almost four to one. Even in home economics, the traditional preserve of the female, the pronoun *he* predominated by nearly two to one." One might ask whether the totals were at all distorted by sentences using a generic *he*, but a separate examination of 100,000 words found that only 3 to 4 percent of *he*'s referred to an unspecified gender.

"The reason," said Graham, "most of the pronouns in schoolbooks were male in gender was because most of the subjects being written about were men and boys." Thus began an extensive effort to achieve gender parity in the dictionaries and textbooks brought out by American Heritage and Houghton Mifflin, pointing the way for many other publishers to follow suit.

Time, obviously, makes its own decisions about what is right and wrong in

usage, and tracking the many changes wrought by history as it comes barreling through a dictionary is a major part of the work of professional lexicographers. In 1972, for instance, usage editor Bohle pointed out that the courtesy title *Ms.* had become common enough that it could no longer be ignored by a standard English dictionary—this was shortly before *Ms.* magazine popularized the term even further. Graham wrote the entry, and *Ms.* appeared for the first time in a dictionary, along with the first definitions for *sexism* and *liberated woman*.

Graham took up the argument for female equality outside the dictionary as well. The *New York Times* refused to use *Ms.* for women of unknown or ambiguous marital status. On March 8, 1974, about 50 feminists lined up outside the *New York Times* building on West 43rd Street to protest this editorial policy. Graham issued a press release on American Heritage letterhead, saying, "*Ms.* is in the dictionary,"



and “it is the *New York Times* that is behind the times.”

Working on the second edition, Graham warned her supervisors in 1974 that usage notes reflecting the findings of the panel needed to be updated or else they would become painfully out of date. For example, in 1965, only 48 percent of the usage panel had approved of the transitive verb *bus* as in the phrase “to bus children.” As the logic of *Brown v. Board of Education* reverberated across school systems, however, it became much harder to ignore this usage, to which 91 percent of the usage panel gave its approval in 1970. But this dramatic shift in opinion, Graham noted, had not yet been captured in the usage note of their marquee dictionary.

Graham also pointed out that 57 percent of the panel had once disapproved of the term *sexism* “because they didn’t know what it meant.” Writing just a few months after she had called out the *New York Times* on *Ms.*, Graham added, surely with some satisfaction, “that situation has changed.”

Progress and change were not on the calling card for the first edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Correctness and authority were, in answer to a growing complaint that dictionaries and grammars were unable and, increasingly, unwilling to deliver clear advice on what constituted good English.

In 1956, an English professor named Austin C. Dobbins wrote a journal article called “The Language of the Cultivated.” A simple piece of research, it highlighted confusion and disagreement among college handbooks and popular dictionaries on words and phrases of questionable respectability—by which I mean those words usually called slang.

To illustrate the farrago of advice between one desk reference and the next, Dobbins made a list of 10 terms, any of which might be considered out of place in a formal piece of writing: *boondoggle*, *corny*, *frisk*, *liquidate*, *pinhead*, *bonehead*, *carpetbagger*, *pleb*, *slush fund*, and *snide*.

Now came the problem. In the *American College Dictionary*, the first

five were labeled slang, but the second five were not labeled at all. And in *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, the first five were not labeled at all but the latter five were all labeled slang.

“How is the student,” an exasperated Dobbins asked, “to recognize these terms which are inappropriate to the highest level of usage and style—inappropriate to the writing of cultivated people?”

It is easy to see why Dobbins was frustrated. Was it really so hard to say categorically that *bonehead*—so juvenile and insulting—was once and for all slang? Wasn’t it just, you know, written down somewhere?

The answer is yes and no. Some lexicographer or grammarian may have written down that *bonehead* is slang, but that by itself wouldn’t make it so, and it wouldn’t stop some other expert from clearing her throat and saying, “Ahem, I disagree.” Worse yet, it wouldn’t stop the word’s status from shifting all on its own, making the label utterly misleading.

A “slang” label may, in the best scenario, help by addressing the great likelihood that a blunt term like *bonehead* will come across as impertinent and humorous, i.e., slang, but labels also carry an air of certainty that makes the careful lexicographer nervous. And in the 1950s, smarting from the many instances when their confident pronouncements were shown to have been ill-informed or even prejudiced, lexicographers were very nervous indeed.

In an acute case of lexicographical hesitation, Philip Gove, the editor in charge of *Webster’s Third*, whose production was underway at the time, responded by dropping the “colloquial” label out of *Webster’s Third*, radically reducing the use of “slang,” and employing a “substandard” or “non-standard” label. When the dictionary was published in 1961, language guardians were scandalized by its reluctance to pass judgment.

The direct descendant of Noah Webster’s pioneering work in American lexicography, *Webster’s Third* became notorious for describing *ain’t* as “though disapproved by many and more common in less educated speech,

used orally in most parts of the U.S. by many cultivated speakers esp. in the phrase *ain’t I.*”

The latter part irked, especially “used orally ... by many cultivated speakers.”

Was there really room in the language of the cultivated for *ain’t*, which for decades had been, in classrooms and at kitchen tables, the most ill-regarded and censured non-expletive in the English language, possibly the most condemned of all words?

“Cultivated, our foot,” said the *Chicago Daily News*, one of countless newspapers and magazines to shake its masthead at the new unabridged dictionary. “*Ain’t* still makes its user stand out like Simple Simon in a roomful of nuclear physicists.”

Yet the controversy over *Webster’s Third* was about much more than its awkward, equivocating usage note for *ain’t*. A major issue it raised again and again was the disintegrating consensus among educated people regarding proper usage and good English.

On the one hand you had linguists and lexicographers such as Philip Gove, pointing to the record of usage itself as the only legitimate source of authority. In which case, if educated people sometimes said *ain’t*, well, then *ain’t* had some standing, some measure of respectability, however hard to delineate.

On the other hand, you had traditionalists such as Dwight Macdonald in the *New Yorker*, Wilson Follett in the *Atlantic*, and Jacques Barzun in the *American Scholar* insisting that Gove’s refusal to carry the flag for proper usage was an abdication, a failure of conviction, and a crisis of authority that, in the case of *Webster’s Third*, had enabled a dangerous sneak attack on the language itself.

While the denunciations continued, publisher James Parton mounted an increasingly serious attempt to buy a controlling share of stock in Merriam-Webster. President of the American Heritage Publishing Company, Parton had been sniffing around the dictionary business for years, looking for a way in. Strange as it may sound today, the book business, especially the college market, was hot stuff in the late fifties and sixties, as returning veterans

took advantage of the GI Bill and baby boomers began their ascent through higher education.

Parton was a buccaneering entrepreneur with a genuine feel for history. He thought Merriam-Webster, the greatest brand in American dictionaries, was ripe for a takeover. It didn't turn out that way, but the startling controversy over the new edition had shown that people were clamoring for what Philip Gove and Merriam-Webster had refused to give them: clear and forthright guidance on what language was cultivated and what was not. After considering his options James Parton decided that American Heritage would bring out its own dictionary.

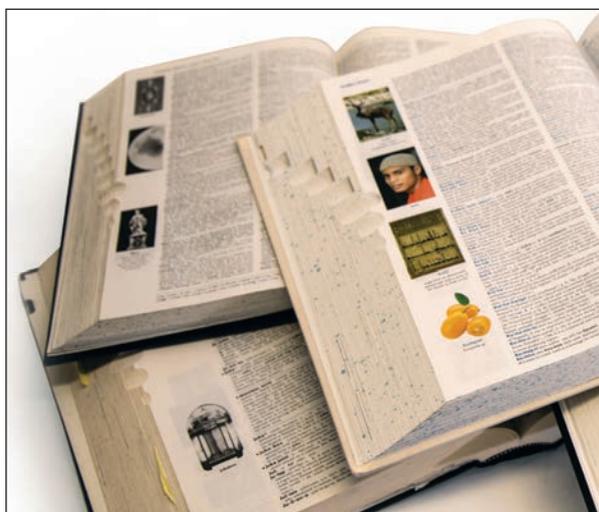
The circumstances of its birth led many a linguist to raise a wary eyebrow at the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Professors of linguistics, by and large, had rejected the overheated criticism of *Webster's Third*. It is even fair to say they were wounded by the overheated criticism of *Webster's Third*.

In a 1964 report to the National Commission on the Humanities, the Linguistic Society of America stated that because of the furor over *Webster's Third*, "a fair portion of highly educated laymen see in linguistics the great enemy of all they hold dear." But given the chance to take revenge on the *American Heritage Dictionary*, many linguists found there was not all that much in it to complain about.

Anyone expecting an encyclopedia of stock wisdom and tired old shibboleths must have been surprised by how up-to-date *American Heritage Dictionary* was in its methods. One of the first dictionaries to benefit from corpus research conducted by computer, its editorial team knew more about word frequency than possibly any lexicographers before them. It was also an exceptionally readable dictionary: Well written and well illustrated, with generous margins and legible type, the first edition was designed to make this dictionary "an agreeable companion,"

as editor William Morris put it. No mere reference work, its pages were designed to "invite reading."

Even its defining method was congenial: Working off definitions copied out of the old but esteemed *Century Dictionary* among other sources, *American Heritage* definers began with what they took to be the "central meaning," after which they presented other meanings of the same word. This helped distinguish the new dictionary from the elaborately nerdy style of *Webster's Third*, an unabridged dictionary that,



Color images first appeared in the *American Heritage Dictionary's* fourth edition (2000).

like the *Oxford English Dictionary* and other historical dictionaries, began with the earliest meaning and moved forward from there.

Though marketed to squares, the *American Heritage Dictionary* was hip to the F-word and willing to report the most common non-Latin used for sex acts such as fellatio (see *blowjob*) and cunnilingus (see *eat*, sense 4). No doubt this spread of lexical coverage led to an increase in sales as the new dictionary sat on the bestseller list for months. Morris took to saying that if he had only known that putting *fuck* in a dictionary would help him sell so many books (an estimated five million copies by the time the second edition was published), he would have demanded royalties.

But what always seemed most remarkable about the *American Heritage Dictionary* was its promise to be

more discriminating than other dictionaries, and the evidence for this was always its panel of expert language users whose opinions were solicited on many contentious points of usage. This usage panel was presented as a major feature of the dictionary and became a point for endorsement and criticism.

The history of debate over good English is mostly written in the pages of grammars, textbooks, professional style guides, and that whole genre of single-author monographs that can be lumped under the banner of *How You Really Ought to Speak and Write Your Own Native Language*. Yet, apparently, this is not enough. Every once in a while, some well-meaning soul has to come forward with the bright idea that what the English language really needs is an academy along the lines of the Académie française, an official body of so-called immortals who expound rules and maintain an official dictionary for the French language.

Fed, apparently, by the same impulse that leads to blue-ribbon commissions, innocuous motions in favor of the metric system, and arguments for a two-person presidency, these proposals for an academy of English embody an otherwise sane observation, which is that certain people know a lot more about usage than others. But none of these proposals, from Jonathan Swift's in the 18th century to Jean Stafford's call in 1973 for "a new kind of censorship" to fight unwelcome euphemisms and jargon, has succeeded in establishing a body of any authority or landed any punches stronger than a glancing blow on the language itself. The usage panel of *American Heritage Dictionary*, though modest in scope, may be the closest anyone has come to establishing such an academy. Its purpose was to discover and present an enlightened consensus on "how the language is used today," as editor Morris put it, "especially with regard to dubious or controversial locutions."

Although Parton himself understood the commercial advantages of recruiting intellectual all-stars to his roster, it was Morris who came up with the idea, according to American Heritage correspondence with the usage panel.

From its first ballot in 1964, the usage panel survived through February of this year, when Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the dictionary's sole publisher since the second edition, announced that it was ending the usage panel, citing the "continuing decline in consumer demand for print dictionaries." This news caused hardly a yawn, even in lexicography circles, yet it marks the end of a striking episode in the history of American English when the idea of organizing a distinguished group of expert users to provide guidance on disputed usages was put to the test.

If you imagine that the point of an academy is to uphold classroom rules, especially those trampled by the young and the careless, the original American Heritage panel would have been to your liking. Its biases were writ large with the inclusion of Jacques Barzun, Sheridan Baker, Dwight Macdonald, and several other critics of *Webster's Third*. A handful of others came armed with usage guides of their own. Theodore Bernstein of the *New York Times*, also a critic of *Webster's Third*, was the author of a few popular books on usage. Roy Copperud, the words columnist for *Editor & Publisher*, had written his own dictionary of usage.

The usage panel was more august than representative. It included several Pulitzer Prize winners (Walter Lippmann, Katherine Anne Porter, Virgil Thomson), one Nobel Prize winner (Glenn T. Seaborg), a gaggle of poets (John Ciardi, Langston Hughes, Marianne Moore, Allen Tate), and the usual overstock of former association presidents and suspiciously prominent journalists.

The group was very male and very old and, of course, very white. Of 105 members, only 11 were women. The scholar Patrick Kilburn investigated the ages of the original panelists and discovered that 28 had been born in the 19th century. Only 6 of the 105 were under 50 years old. "What," Kil-

burn asked, "could such a huddle of arthritic ancients tell about the language of 1970?"

It was a good question: The usage panel was so old that just a couple years after the dictionary was published, more than 10 percent of the panelists had died and needed to be replaced.

But the panel was never marketed as an up-to-the-minute weather report on the state of American English. Instead it was described as a body of "professional speakers and writers who have demonstrated their sensitiveness to the language and their power to wield it effectively and beautifully." A good bit of gray hair and the occasional walking stick were perfectly consistent with the desired image of a fairly large body of experts all of whom qualified as Persons of Consequence.

What else they had in common was a foreboding about the future of the language. "They tend to feel," wrote usage panel member Morris Bishop in an essay at the front of the first edition, "that the English language is going to hell if 'we' don't do something to stop it." Whether this was hyperbole or paranoia is hard to say, since eternal damnation is a common reference point for the worriers of our linguistic culture.

In preparation for the first edition, usage panelists reviewed 600 items, organized alphabetically and portioned out over the course of several questionnaires. It was a slow march and the selection of items was not entirely systematic, as more than one critic later pointed out. Yet it did capture the most prominent language peevs of the time, starting with those items singled out in the clamor over *Webster's Third*: *ain't*, *irregardless*, *uninterested* versus *disinterested*, *like* versus *as*, *due to*, *imply* versus *infer*, and several others. The usage notes in the first edition all came down firmly against more permissive interpretations of these disputed terms, and the usage panel's reaction was reported in percentages.

Ninety-nine percent of the panel disapproved of the example sentence "It *ain't* likely," though a not-trivial 16 percent approved of *ain't* used orally in the first person (ain't I?), thus agreeing with the notorious usage note in *Web-*

ster's Third. Where the usage panel split, many of its most interesting and useful opinions were found. Panel opinion was 50-50 on the split infinitive in "To better understand the miners' plight, he went to live in their district." Using *will* instead of *shall* to indicate futurity in "We will be in London next week" was acceptable to 62 percent. Sixty-one percent disapproved of *comprise* in "Fifty states comprise the union."

As a snapshot of educated opinion on disputed usages, the usage panel warned the conscientious writer that some might disapprove of a given word while also letting peeveologists know, especially in later editions, when the ground was moving beneath their feet.

Linguists sometimes profess a completely neutral attitude toward language. Yet spotting errors, flabbiness, and questionable assumptions in other people's words is an important part of how we educate ourselves as language users. William Morris and the editors of the *American Heritage Dictionary* collected favored putdowns and observations by panelists and circulated them to other panelists. On the topic of *myself* as in "He invited Mary and *myself*," Katherine Anne Porter called the usage "detestable," while Gilbert Highet complained about "prissy evasions of *me* and *I*."

These brickbats read like so many tweets—brief, intensely judgmental, dismissive even—but quite smart in a likably old-fashioned way. About the term *nicely*, as in "The dinner turned out nicely," the usage panelist Basil Davenport said, "This is a lost battle. *Nice* had ceased to mean anything at all by the time of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*." To which the only proper response is to draw on your pipe and say, "Quite right, sir."

Opposite, the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) archives in Boston house many paper ballots from the usage panel's final years as well as a scrapbook of clippings about the American Heritage Dictionary. This page includes newspaper articles noting the dictionary's launch. Pictured in the article at right is founding editor William Morris.

William Morris grew so fond of usage panel comments that after he left American Heritage he started co-editing, with his wife Mary, Harper's *Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*, which had its own rival usage panel whom the Morrises quoted for pages and pages as one illustrious writer after another set torch to countless expressions.

Not everyone liked this kind of thing. It didn't help that when the first edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* came out, several panel members published reviews of the new dictionary, praising it. And to some, the very idea of a usage panel was offensive. Wasn't a "non-randomly chosen panel," asked Anthony Wolk, an English professor at Portland State University, "inevitably a biased and hence suspect instrument"?

Where William Morris once held up the *American Heritage Dictionary* as a defender of "linguistic propriety," Professor Wolk accused the usage panel of "linguistic racism." Wolk wrote that he had taught a class of about 40 black students who frequently used *ain't*, and not for folksy or humorous effect but because it was a mainstay of their working vocabulary. "I see," wrote Wolk, "the AHD on *ain't* linguistically disenfranchising just about all those students I worked with."

Today, of course, Wolk's words sound absolutely *woke*, but they misunderstand—intentionally, perhaps—the aims of a dictionary. For good or bad, popular dictionaries like *American Heritage* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate* are not warehouses of American English in all its earthy and dialectal variety like, say, the great *Dictionary of American Regional English*. They are products of our print culture, sold as guides to standard American English or what that English professor Austin Dobbins called "the language of the cultivated."

A desk dictionary or collegiate dictionary need not apologize for fixating on the standard language, even as it "disenfranchises" nonstandard usages: A single dictionary, even an unabridged one (which *American Heritage* once aimed to become but never was), can only serve so many purposes. Word lovers may applaud every pos-

sible expansion of the lexicographical project, but the only reason that an ever-shrinking number of people were ever able to earn a living making dictionaries is that there is a market in helping the young and ignorant sound smart and educated. Consider that in Thackeray's great novel *Vanity Fair*, a certain ladies' school owes its entire reputation to the fact that Samuel Johnson once paid a visit.

Wolk's complaint also overstated the influence of the usage panel on the dictionary as a whole. Examining the 1971 printing, the scholar Thomas J. Creswell counted 502 usage notes, only 226 of which reported the opinions of the usage panel, and sometimes only in passing, while the remainder, like the rest of the dictionary, were written on the staff's own authority.

Inside American Heritage during the 1970s—after founding editor William Morris had moved on—the usage panel did not get a lot of respect. As Houghton Mifflin bought the usage panel drinks at the St. Regis, it was shelving a plan to publish a stand-alone volume on usage that would have expanded on the dictionary's usage notes and comments from the panel. In the second edition, published in 1982 (for this article, I relied on a 1985 reprint), many usage notes were rewritten to minimize the impact of these crotchety outsiders. Actual percentages were replaced with simple mention of a minority or majority; lively comments from the usage panel were deleted; many usage notes that might have been updated were summarily dropped or had their usage information integrated, without any special emphasis, into the text of the definition.

That was not the only change. The second edition was a shrunken and faceless descendant of the first. The font became scrawny and the page cramped. Instead of listing proper names and place names in the main lexicon, the second edition repackaged all this highly readable material into appendices.

Designed to compete with *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, the *American Heritage Dictionary* became merely

a corporate product. Anne Soukhanov, a lexicographer who had worked at Merriam-Webster for several years before joining American Heritage in 1979 to work on the second edition, told me it was "a marketing decision and one of the stupidest things anyone ever did." Commercially, she added, "it was a big flop."

Former editor William Morris had a very low opinion of the second edition as well, and it is easy to see why. Take *irregardless*, a malapropism that the first edition treated with an admonitory usage note: "*Irregardless*, a double negative, is never acceptable except when the intent is clearly humorous." The second edition shortened this usage information to one word, "non-standard," sounding exactly like *Webster's Third*, the all too curt dictionary to which *American Heritage* was supposed to be the antidote. Gone was the air of cultivation, of people talking to one another and thinking about words. The result was yet another categorical label that did nothing to explain to the person who needed, or simply wanted, more information on what exactly was wrong with *irregardless*.

The second edition was at odds with its own mission. It was and was not James Parton's or William Morris's dictionary. Neither Edwin Newman's nor Alma Graham's dictionary, it was no one's dictionary, really, and it made this fact plain by listing no one as its editor.

Whoever was in charge did not think of the usage panel as the dictionary user's "presumed betters," which is how usage panelist Morris Bishop had described them in his essay in the first edition. Instead of regarding them as ornery yet interesting, staff editors treated the usage panel like the crazy mean uncle you were embarrassed to be seen with.

In the first edition a usage note for *bimonthly* had insisted, with 84 percent of the usage panel supporting, that its meaning was restricted to every two months and should not be used to mean every two weeks. The editors of the second edition simply removed the usage note and said the word meant both every two months and every two weeks. Another usage note had reported that

the panel was divided 55 percent to 45 percent over using *boast* to mean “to take pride in possessing”; in the second edition, the controversy went unmentioned and the example sentence that had divided the usage panel (“The college boasts one of the finest auditoriums in New York”) was turned into an example sentence, without comment.

It was better to forget: Such was the attitude of the second edition toward the first. My own close examination of half the usage notes in the first edition shows that approximately 40 percent were jettisoned in the second edition.

The second edition was also less eccentric. A usage note at *balding* in the first edition said that, as an adjective, *balding* enjoyed the support of only 55 percent of the usage panel. It quoted Isaac Asimov, who thought the word “distasteful but necessary” and Katherine Anne Porter, who dismissed *balding* as “entirely vulgar.” This odd but entertaining digression was dropped by the editors of the second edition. In the first edition, only 47 percent of the panel considered *senior citizen* acceptable, with several complaining that it was an irritating euphemism for old people like, well, the members of the usage panel. In the second edition, *senior citizen* was defined without any usage note at all.

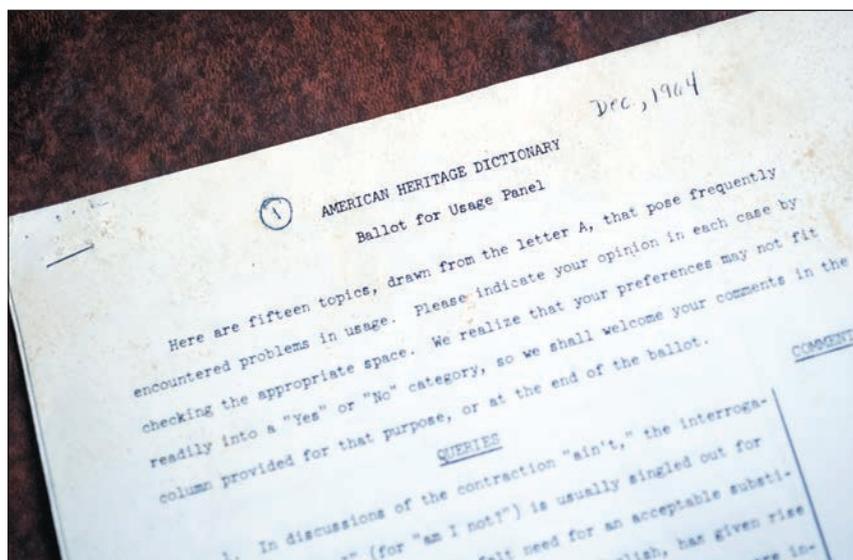
In several cases when the second edition preserved a usage note from the first, it reported on the feelings of the usage panel with open disapproval: “*Première* as a verb is unacceptable to a large majority of the Usage Panel, despite its wide usage in the world of entertainment.” The first edition had reported that only 44 percent of the usage panel accepted *hopefully* in “Hopefully, we shall complete our work in June.” The second edition asserted that this same usage was “justified by analogy to the similar uses of *happily* and *mercifully*. However, this usage is by now such a bugbear to traditionalists that it is best avoided on the grounds of civility, if not logic.”

Where the second edition proved expansive and interesting was on the editors’ own preferred set of usage problems. A couple years before the conservative language columnist Wil-

liam Safire gave up the fight over *Ms.* (Geraldine Ferraro’s candidacy for vice president had made, Safire said, all other courtesy titles seem inadequate), the second edition provided a fine usage note, without ever saying where the usage panel came down, on *Ms.*

A usage note at *everyone* never mentioned the panel but argued for five paragraphs in favor of a more liberal understanding of singular versus plural in pronouns referring to subjects of uncertain number and gender. Thus the same dictionary whose usage panel in 1969 had disapproved, by a landslide of 95 percent to 5, of *their own* in

The second edition presented itself not as the heroic voice of civilization but as a neutral party interested in both sides of the debate. The linguist Dwight Bolinger wrote, in an introductory essay, a painfully careful defense of the idea that “the prevailing usage of its speakers should be the chief determinant of acceptability in language.” With more wit, William F. Buckley Jr. defended authority and expertise: “The other way is mobocratic, undifferentiated.” A dictionary needed to embrace its lawgiving role, wrote Buckley. “It is not a sign of arrogance for the king to rule. That is what he is there for.”



In 1964, the editors used this sheet to tally results from one of the first usage panel ballots.

“nobody thinks the criticism applies to their own work,” was in 1982 staking out a bold position in favor of the gender-neutral “singular *they*.” (I happen to favor the arguments for “singular *they*,” but still.)

A generous interpretation would be that the dictionary was developing new strengths; a more sensible interpretation would be that it was doing so at the expense of its old strengths. But even in its diminished state the second edition contained the seeds of renewal for both the dictionary and the usage panel. It was, after all, a book that drew, to varying degrees, on the formidable talents not only of William Morris, but also of the Edwin Newmans and the Alma Gramhams of the world: bunk-spotters and timekeepers, critics and lexicographers.

Geoffrey Nunberg, later made chairman of the usage panel, closed the discussion with a longer essay casting the idea of good usage as a doctrine that developed, historically, with the fall of the aristocracy and ever since had been making it difficult to justify one set of usage preferences over any other. The usage panel, Nunberg wrote, was an obviously flawed attempt to deliver answers to a public hungry for guidance. It was, in short, better than nothing.

Nunberg went on to become a well-known critic on usage matters and semantics, his commentaries broadcast on NPR’s *Fresh Air* program and distilled in several witty, readable books. Under his leadership, but even more importantly that of the *American Heritage* staff, especially executive editors

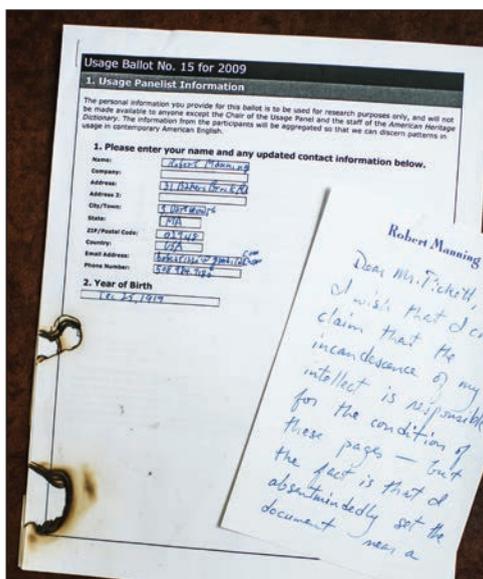
Anne Soukhanov, Joseph Pickett, and Steve Kleinedler, the dictionary recommitted itself to many aspects of William Morris's original vision for the dictionary and the usage panel, whose membership was expanded and diversified in several directions. In some ways, the changes jerked the dictionary in a vaguely progressive direction, but that didn't keep it from being Antonin Scalia's favorite modern dictionary. (The late justice also favored *Webster's Second*, a graceful dictionary published in 1934 that is all but stuck in the 19th century yet has become an unlikely object of veneration among certain literary conservatives.)

At Houghton, the second edition came to be viewed as a regrettable mistake and the values of the first edition were held up once more as "a gold standard." The original *American Heritage Dictionary* had done four things well, according to Soukhanov: (1) well-written definitions; (2) usage guidance; (3) interesting and understandable etymologies; and (4) good typography and design. These would be the guiding lights of the third and later editions.

Soukhanov was put in charge of the third edition (1992) and given the resources and authority to conduct fresh research and rebuild the brand. Pages became larger and more spacious. A celebrated feature of the first edition, an essay and materials about Indo-European roots by the scholar Calvert Watkins, was brought back and expanded after being dropped from the second edition. Encyclopedic information about people and places was expanded and returned to the main lexicon. Usage notes became more discursive and interestingly historical, as it was now possible to discuss how the usage panel's feelings (reported more often in exact percentages) had shifted over time. Once again, the dictionary page was written and designed to "invite reading." The fourth edition (2000) introduced color imagery. And William Morris's quixotic attempt to build an informal academy, augmented by lexicographical thoroughness and

the scholarly insights of Nunberg, among many others, started paying real dividends to the dictionary user.

I confess that I did not take a great interest in the *American Heritage Dictionary* or the usage panel before being invited to join in 2004. My work as a staff editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD, however, had made me a close reader of the Merriam-Webster dictionaries at the office and deeply interested in what is revealed unintentionally by one's



In 2009, journalist Robert Manning, then aged 89, submitted this scorched usage panel ballot. 'I wish that I could claim,' he wrote, 'that the incandescence of my intellect is responsible for the condition of these pages—but the fact is that I absentmindedly set the document near a burning candle.'

choice of words. One day an article in the *Washington Post* about a contested PSAT question caught my eye. An English teacher had successfully argued that according to some authorities, there was a grammatical error in the sentence "Toni Morrison's genius enables her to create novels that arise from and express the injustices African Americans have endured." On the multiple choice question where this sentence appeared, the official correct answer was "This sentence contained no errors."

Whether it was acceptable to use *her* when the only possible referent

was *Toni Morrison's genius* as opposed to *Toni Morrison* (a question of possessive antecedents) did not delay me as I wrote a short essay attacking the logic of the sentence—in short, the idea that merely writing about a given subject ("the injustices African Americans have endured") was an act of genius. This brought me an invigorating pile of hate mail, especially from Toni Morrison fans, and numerous accusations that I was a "prescriptivist authoritarian." I vaguely remember one blogger writing that he simply could not get over the fact that a person like me lived and breathed and that, of all things, I had woken up that morning and decided that mocking socially approved literary preferences as stated in insipid example sentences was a reasonable way to spend my time. I still smile at the memory.

A week or two later I opened the *New York Times* to discover that I was now being schooled on the grammatical aspect by no less an authority than Geoffrey Nunberg. Not knowing much about him, I read several of his commentaries for NPR and other outlets. Impressed by his work, I reached out to him and we talked by phone and then began an email correspondence. I continued looking for usage stories to write about and the next year I was invited to join the usage panel.

Clearly I had not been chosen for my prestige, having no major or even minor prizes to my credit. That I was both young and politically conservative counted in my favor: Not long afterward, I was asked to recommend other conservatives and Republicans who might make good usage panelists. The irony of a once-conservative body making a special effort to recruit conservatives did not, at the time, register with me.

Although I felt honored to be on the panel, it made me nervous to fill out the surveys, which arrived in the mail the first few times, maybe once a year, before they were sent out via email. The first ballot I received contained a question about possessive antecedents, and I could certainly handle that one, but often I felt like the

slow kid in class. Example sentences in which I saw nothing wrong drove me to ransack other dictionaries and usage guides, looking for whatever the problem might be.

Even as I matured in my knowledge of usage and grammar, one difficulty stood out: In example sentences, it was hard to focus on the ostensible usage problem when there was anything else in the sentence that smacked of bad writing. “Members of the League of Women voters will be *manning* the registration desk,” read one example sentence, with the survey asking if *manning* was acceptable in this context. Acceptable? I wondered. Only if the writer was trying to gently mock the League of Women Voters.

The performance anxiety I experienced about being a good panelist helped make me, over time, a better student of usage controversies and, as it happened, more forgiving of others’ shortcomings in putting thoughts into words. But while I became less of a snob about other people’s usage (and less likely to troll fans of famous writers), I tried to become more discriminating in my own usage, not by slavishly following any old rule handed down by Fowler or Strunk and White or Theodore Bernstein, but by reading more carefully and listening more closely to American English, especially but not exclusively of the standard variety.

Another thing I noticed, from this and other work involving dictionaries, is how rarely the failure to be articulate is caused by a single word or phrase. Yes, jargon, euphemisms, and ill-chosen clichés can gum up the works, but writing that is thoughtful and interesting to begin with can overcome any number of little flaws. We often think about writing as if excellence were the same thing as being free of error. They are, I came to think, very different, actually. Studying the dreary history of fruitless, irrational groaning over terms like *hopefully* and “singular *they*” helped me see beyond such modest concerns.

Even as the usage panel was coming back to life in preparation for the third edition, the terms of the debate were

changing. The very idea of a traditionalist usage panel became incrementally less relevant as preferred usages of gender, race, and ethnicity grew into the most prominent features of a new prescriptivism on the left. The source of this trend could be traced to those 1970s feminists investigating, airing, and prosecuting a case against sexist assumptions encoded in the language. In this way, Alma Graham’s importance went well beyond the internal history of the textbook industry. She was hardly alone, but her work at the *American Heritage Dictionary* and on a McGraw-Hill guide to gender-neutral writing might



Usage panel ballots stored in the HMH archives

even serve as early sketches for the ideas of those who monitor language for evidence of unsavory attitudes towards women and minorities and seek to use language prescriptions as a lever to reverse those attitudes.

Today’s liberals may not recognize themselves as the heirs of Lindley Murray and Richard Grant White, to name two influential 19th-century American grammarians, or as the descendants of the tradition-mad Wilson Follett and Dwight Macdonald, both of whom saw great blows to civilization in the lexicographical peculiarities of *Webster’s Third*, but theirs is the court where the rules of usage are promulgated. Theirs are the original writings positing usage conventions as a moral and cultural code for *The Good and The Decent*. No one gets busted for splitting an infinitive anymore, but choose the wrong pronoun in some places and serious tut-tutting will ensue.

Yet on many such questions of

usage and identity the American Heritage usage panel has played a productive role. The usage notes for *he*, *man*, *they*, and other key terms in the fourth and fifth editions exemplify how a dictionary can provide thoughtful guidance on usage debates without a heavy hand, while acknowledging differing and shifting views. Of course, this and all of *American Heritage’s* other triumphs have been realized in an era when the book business is not a hot market. As the *American Heritage Dictionary* has become more beautiful and intelligent, dictionary content, though usually of a degraded sort, has become free for the googling.

American Heritage, as its fiftieth anniversary is celebrated with a new printing of the fifth edition, gives away most of its content on its website and app and, like other dictionaries, licenses its databases to other websites and software developers. Wordnik, the well-regarded search engine dictionary, spits out definitions from the fourth edition of *American Heritage* minus its usage guidance. The super-brief entry for *hopefully* mentions a “usage problem” but says no more than that.

It may seem faintly ridiculous to mourn the passage of an inconsequential panel of writers and intellectuals whose bookish opinions can seem like molehills next to the mountains of linguistic and technological change wrought by time itself, but the usage panel ultimately provided an example of traditionalist critics in conversation with lexicography. Thus was the panelist—and more importantly, the dictionary reader—confronted with the reality of *ought* versus *is*. Which was good not only for the language critic. Lexicographers, too, need to be reminded that feelings about usage can be as important as the record of usage itself.

The demise of the usage panel, though, especially after so much progress had been made in returning to William Morris’s original vision and upgrading that vision with relevant linguistic scholarship, is unfortunate. Possibly the only kind of English language academy many of us can live with has been toppled and is no more. ♦

BCA

Strange Saddles

Watching the Coen brothers' new Western on screens large and small. BY JOHN PODHORETZ



Tim Blake Nelson as Buster Scruggs

There has been some confusion about whether the series of filmed tales joined together under the title *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* and just released for public view is a movie at all. It was made for Netflix, and the original reporting about the project in 2017 said this Coen brothers production was going to be a TV series somewhat in the mold of the dreadful show Woody Allen made for Amazon for which he received a reported \$80 million. It was called *Crisis in Six Scenes*, and now that you know it, forget it immediately.

Indeed, the idea of a six-part Western anthology seemed so defiantly pointless a storytelling gambit in the second decade of the 21st century that one hoped Joel and Ethan Coen were

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

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs
Directed by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen



taking Netflix for the same kind of ride—cashing in extravagantly on the capital of their reputations with junk they'd stashed in the bottom drawer because the streaming service wanted their imprimatur to send a signal to the world it was willing to do whatever it might take to work with great artists in its relentless pursuit of eyeballs.

Well, the Coens say their six-part compendium is a movie and they always intended it to be a movie, but they are notoriously unreliable interviewees whose rare conversations with the media are full of trickery and guile. In the end, the running time of *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* comes to 2 hours and 4 minutes of actual

storytelling. The first tale runs all of 15 minutes, the second only 12. And these are perfect lengths, because both segments are live-action cartoons, very funny ones at that, and over and done in just the right amount of time. It's possible Netflix decided this thing couldn't be released as a series. Who knows?

What we do know is that the Coens insisted *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* be released in theaters as well as online. Netflix has done so in what appears to be an extremely grudging fashion, stashing it in just a few theaters in a handful of cities for very limited runs. Netflix says openly that its own model has nothing to do with conventional Hollywood measures of success and that it produces work to serve its online audience through its proprietary algorithm.

The act of dumping *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* seems foolish on first blush; after all, the last time the Coens made a Western it was *True Grit*, which grossed \$171 million. But Netflix has bigger fish to fry. After all, why make a few million in profit at the box office when your company is in debt to the tune of \$12 billion? (I say a "few million" because *Buster Scruggs* is too offbeat a piece of work to have been anything more than an art-house success.)

I decided to view *Buster Scruggs* twice. I watched it on streaming first and then went to see it in a theater. And here's what I have to say about that.

I found it difficult to surrender myself to the Netflix stream, in part because I watched it the way I watch anything online now. I saw some of it on my phone on a plane, some of it on an iPad in a hotel room, and some of it on my big-screen TV at home. I was distracted by the things that distract one when watching things in this fashion, and my attention wavered when I was trying to focus on it.

Then I went to the theater. Having sat through *Buster Scruggs* once, albeit in multiple sittings, I knew the plots, knew the characters, and knew the performances. Only I didn't. Seeing it on a big screen in a dark auditorium was a magical and spellbinding

NETFLIX

experience. *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* has a dark and deep beauty to it, and its stately pacing allows you to sink deep down into it.

The defiant nihilistic silliness of the opening chapter, in which Buster Scruggs proves to be both a cheerful singing cowboy and a crazed psychopath, gives way to the sensational deadpan joke of the second part, in which a hapless bank robber keeps finding himself at the end of a noose. The black humor turns positively obsidian in the third part, with Liam Neeson as the impresario of a traveling theatrical troupe made up of a single performer—a gorgeous-voiced boy with no arms and no legs who declaims Shakespeare and Shelley and Lincoln beautifully but is drawing smaller and smaller crowds by the day.

Then we find ourselves in a gorgeous valley with a lone prospector played by Tom Waits who is sure he has found a motherlode of gold. His good cheer and serious intent make you dread the bad news that will come his way, and it does, but it's not what you think. The same is true in the fifth segment, "The Gal Who Got Rattled," a tale about a lonely young woman alone in a wagon train going to Oregon that compresses a novel's worth of story into 25 minutes. And finally, we get the classic "six characters on a stagecoach," only this one is more Sartre than John Ford.

At the risk of sounding horribly pretentious, I'd say the subject here is nothing less than the remorselessness of the universe and the mostly hapless efforts men undertake to (as we Jews say on Yom Kippur) "avert the evil decree." The Coens speak of it in six different ways in six different styles from six different perspectives, and the overall result is nothing short of magnificent.

Since you will probably not be able to see it in a multiplex, and since it was in some sense made to be seen on Netflix, my advice is to do what you can to simulate the theatrical experience. Watch it all at once. Turn the lights off. Put your phone away. Help *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* work its magic on you. It will be worth the effort. ♦

LARRY ELLIS / EXPRESS / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY

BCA

High-Altitude Hideout

A Bond villain's Alpine lair now houses a museum for 007. BY TONY MECIA

A *Mürren, Switzerland* s our gondola ascends to a high Alpine peak, above the waterfalls and lonely mountain goats, there appears to be no 7-foot-tall James Bond villain waiting to snap the cable with his steel teeth.

No, that's a scene from the 1979 film *Moonraker*, where a menacing bad guy named Jaws battles with Roger Moore's character high above Rio de Janeiro. But you can't blame me for being in a Bond state of mind. Here in the Alps, among majestic snowy

mountains, the gondola lift is heading to the world's leading pilgrimage site for Bond fans: a peak known as the Schilthorn. It was the lair of Bond supervillain Ernst Blofeld in 1969's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

More than three million visitors came here last year—most, presumably, for the Alpine views. In a quirk of marketing, Switzerland's peaks compete against each other for visitors, so each looks for strategies to stand out. At 13,600 feet, the nearby Jungfrau sells itself as the "Top of Europe," site of the continent's highest-elevation railway station (at 11,300 feet), though nowhere close to its highest peak. The Schilthorn, at

Tony Mecia is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



George Lazenby and some of the 'Bond girls' take a break from filming On Her Majesty's Secret Service to pose for a picture in Mürren.



Blofeld's supposed 'allergy-research institute' in On Her Majesty's Secret Service (1969) is now the site of the Bond World 007 museum.

just 9,700 feet, proudly embraces its 007 heritage.

The two dozen films in the Bond canon follow a formula: Create a villain bent on world domination. String together a barely plausible plot that features gadgets, fist-fights, chase scenes, cool cars, explosions, and attractive young women. Then—spoiler alert—have James Bond improbably save the day. Oh, and set all the action against some of the world's most beautiful backdrops, including Egyptian pyramids, Caribbean beaches, and Venetian canals.

In 1968, as producers were scouting locations for their sixth Bond film, they came across central Switzerland's Bernese Oberland region, about 70 miles south of Zurich. In the Ian Fleming novel on which the movie was to be based, the fictional 10,000-foot-high location called Piz Gloria is in eastern Switzerland near the border with Italy. But filmmakers found the peak above Mürren ideal for their purposes, as construction had been underway for five

years on a project to build a cable car and mountaintop restaurant. Producers agreed to help with the financing to complete construction in exchange for the right to shoot here.

In the book and film, Piz Gloria masquerades as an allergy-research center. But Bond infiltrates it and discovers that the supposed allergy patients—young women who happen to wear scanty clothes—are actually being hypnotized by Blofeld to spread biological weapons. Bond escapes by skiing down the mountain, then enlists help to attack the building and blow up Blofeld's lair. A farfetched plot, yes, but one with plenty of entertaining action. The movie version stars George Lazenby as Bond, Telly Savalas of *Kojak* fame as Blofeld, and Diana Rigg—then known as a star of the British TV show *The Avengers* and today known to younger audiences as Olenna Tyrell in HBO's *Game of Thrones*—as the main Bond girl. In rankings of Bond films, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* usually lands near the top.

In real life, the filming location called Piz Gloria was not destroyed. For decades, it was merely an observation point and restaurant. In 2013, its owners decided it needed more. They added a small museum, known as "Bond World 007," and have been adding Bond-related features ever since.

Among serious Bond fans, the site "is the Holy Grail of Bond film locations," says Martijn Mulder, a Dutch journalist who leads occasional Bond tours and coauthored *On the Tracks of 007: A Field Guide to the Exotic James Bond Filming Locations Around the World*. That's because filmmakers bankrolled construction of Piz Gloria, which looks just as it did in the late 1960s.

Bond enthusiasts list other prime destinations, too, such as a site near Phuket, Thailand, that has come to be called "James Bond Island" after appearing in 1974's *The Man with the Golden Gun*. Last year, Mulder led 40 people on a two-week tour of Japan to visit locations used in 1967's *You Only Live Twice*. He was forced to scrap

a two-hour hike to a volcano crater that was an earlier Blofeld hideout because the volcano showed signs of erupting. In July, a new Bond museum opened in the Austrian Alps at a spot where scenes from the most recent Bond movie, *Spectre*, were filmed.

Mulder, 46, says he watched the Bond films repeatedly as a kid. As he grew older, he became curious about how the movies were shot. “Obviously, as a guy, you want to be like James Bond,” he says. “But the older I got, the more interested I got in how these films were made.”

Next year, to mark the 50th anniversary of *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, he’s arranging an 11-day tour of filming locations in Portugal and Switzerland, including Piz Gloria. The price: \$3,100 (double occupancy, airfare not included).

The first sign that you are near a Bond mecca comes upon boarding the aerial tram up the mountain, as the electric-guitar riff of the James Bond theme music plays on loudspeakers. Upon reaching the summit, you can head upstairs to the restaurant and observation deck or to the museum on the lower level. The July weekday morning I was there, everybody else headed upstairs, leaving my wife and me to explore the museum by ourselves for about 15 minutes—really about all the time we needed.

After walking down a hallway lined with Bond movie posters in different languages, we reached the beginning of the exhibit: a red telephone you pick up to receive instructions from “M,” Bond’s MI6 boss, to locate Blofeld. “He plans to destroy the world. Set off immediately. Find him,” the voice says in a British accent. “Hunt the man down, Bond, quickly. A license to kill is useless unless one can set up the target.”

The museum includes interactive features that simulate flying a helicopter and racing a bobsled. You can graft a photo of your face onto Lazenby’s body as he aims a pistol. There are also plenty of memorabilia, a map of filming sites, and photos and displays of the several months the crew spent on location around Mürren. A walk

through the museum finishes with a short film showing action highlights from *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. The attention to detail continues in the restrooms, which won—no joke—an International Toilet Tourism Award this year and feature Bond and Bond-girl silhouettes on stall doors and signs encouraging men to “Aim like James.” A recording of Bond in the women’s restroom whispers: “Tonight. My place. Just the two of us.”

The real draw, of course, is to be found upstairs past the restaurant and gift shop, where there’s a stunning

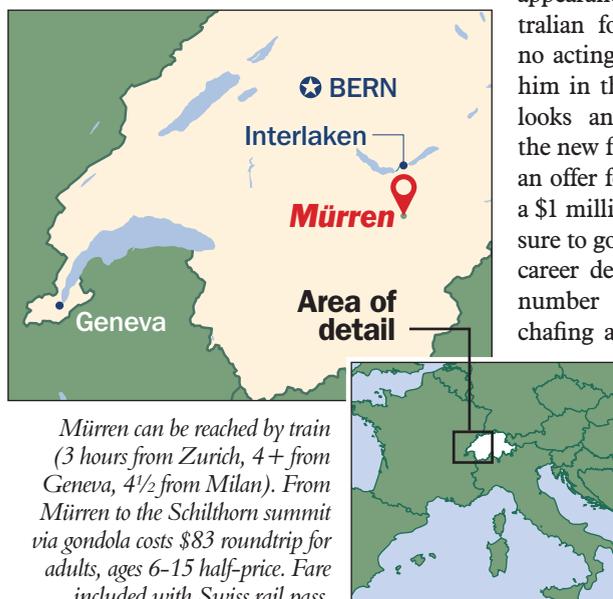
say, the Schilthorn’s director of sales.

As Lazenby admitted in the 2017 Hulu documentary *Becoming Bond*: “There were a lot of women on the film. Thank God for that, because I was there nine months. And you get to know them, like, which one do you fancy first? ... I’d find somewhere to go every night. I was drinking at least a bottle of vodka a day, smoking as many weeds as I could. I didn’t go to bed until 3 or 4 in the morning every night.”

One of the top-grossing movies of 1969, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* is also notable for being Lazenby’s only appearance as Bond. He was an Australian former auto mechanic with no acting experience. Producers cast him in the role for his rugged good looks and self-confidence. Despite the new fame and fortune, he refused an offer for six more Bond films and a \$1 million signing bonus in a move sure to go down in the annals of poor career decisions. He has provided a number of explanations, including chafing at the onerous terms of his contract, believing Bond films were becoming anachronisms, and speculating he could make more money elsewhere. Lazenby’s acting career never recovered. His refusal led to the debut of a more durable Bond, Roger Moore, in 1973.

Piz Gloria has endured, too. There’s plenty else to do in the Swiss Alps, of course, like hiking, mountain biking, and skiing. Only the most die-hard Bond fans will design a vacation around a mountaintop restaurant, overlook, and museum tied to a 50-year-old movie. But should you find yourself in Switzerland, and the weather forecast is clear, you might consider spending a couple of hours enjoying the views and whimsical Bond nostalgia.

“The thing is, for the James Bond movies, they always use the top locations, the best hotels, the most beautiful houses,” Mulder explains. “It’s always very high class. When you visit these places, you step into that lifestyle a little bit. It’s the closest you can get, I suppose.” ♦



Mürren can be reached by train (3 hours from Zurich, 4+ from Geneva, 4½ from Milan). From Mürren to the Schilthorn summit via gondola costs \$83 roundtrip for adults, ages 6-15 half-price. Fare included with Swiss rail pass.

360-degree view of snow-capped mountains. The owners have added Bond accents there, too. In 2015, they introduced the 007 Walk of Fame honoring the movie’s actors and stuntmen, many of whom, including Lazenby, returned for the ceremony. The museum exhibit depicts villagers as happy to return to their lives free of the production’s avalanches, explosions, and gunfire. By most accounts, the filming was a raucous time.

The filming certainly benefited Mürren, which today has a population of under 500 but offers roughly 2,000 hotel beds. “The village profited from people spending vast sums of money keeping the actors happy with alcohol and food and women and the rest of it,” says Alan Ram-

Celebration of a Curious Character

Ricky Jay, 1946-2018.

BY DAN ALBAN

Magician, actor, and scholar Ricky Jay, who passed away on Saturday, November 24, at age 72, was a one-of-a-kind entertainer who lived out of step with the modern age but managed regularly to evoke awe—genuine, gobsmacked awe—in an era beset by casual cynicism.

Jay was a prodigious polymath who achieved renown in at least four different areas: magic, card-throwing, acting, and scholarship on the history of trickery, peculiar people, and puzzling events—topics he sometimes called “anomalies.”

On stage, Jay was one of the greatest sleight-of-hand artists. He was also a first-class raconteur who delivered riveting performances filled with incredible tales and bawdy wisecracks. He combined his profound skills of prestidigitation, his gift of gab, and his wicked sense of humor with a deep knowledge of the history of conjuring and con artistry. He would unleash mind-boggling wizardry with playing cards while delivering a colorful, ribald patter about the history of magic and mountebanks, filled with charmingly antiquated terminology and sly double-entendres.

Richard Jay Potash began learning his craft at age 4, from his grandfather, Max Katz, a magic enthusiast who introduced Jay to many famous magicians of the era, including Slydini, Cardini, Al Flosso, and Francis Carlyle. By age 7, Jay was performing publicly.

Dan Alban is an attorney at the Institute for Justice who has been reviewing Jay's work since 2005.

By his twenties, he had begun to achieve renown under the stage name Ricky Jay, a long-haired, bell-bottom-wearing illusionist who performed at venues ranging from rock concerts with Ike and Tina Turner to television

Jay was a prodigious polymath who achieved renown in at least four different areas: magic, card-throwing, acting, and scholarship.

programs such as *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson, *Saturday Night Live*, and even his own TV specials. But unlike other famous magicians, who indulged in increasingly absurd grand stunts such as making a Learjet or the Statue of Liberty disappear, Jay continued to focus on performing close-up magic that was far more dependent on his dexterity than high-tech artifice.

After establishing himself on television as one of America's leading magicians, Jay appeared in three live, one-man shows directed by David Mamet, including the brilliantly named *Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants*. His shows typically fused sublime soliloquies about famous charlatans and sideshow performers with an intimate performance featuring card effects, a cups-and-balls routine, and his famed card-throwing. Promotional images for Jay's shows frequently featured him posed in the famed “Kubrick Stare,” with his head tilted down, glowering

up over his sagging eyelids—quite effectively portraying him as a dark, menacing figure of mystery and danger.

Jay's mystique was further enhanced by seemingly impossible yet apparently spontaneous conjuring stunts that he sometimes pulled off to satisfy impromptu dares by friends or merely his whimsy. Profiles of Jay—such as Mark Singer's must-read 1993 *New Yorker* article “Secrets of the Magus”—are replete with mind-boggling tales of his legerdemain derring-do.

One such incident—recounted by British journalist Suzie Mackenzie in the documentary *Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay*—brought its viewer to tears (of amazement). On their way to an outdoor café for a lunch interview, Mackenzie and Jay spent over an hour stuck in Los Angeles traffic together on a hot summer day. When they finally arrived and were seated, Jay—who had been in plain view of Mackenzie the entire time—suddenly lifted his menu to reveal a large block of ice on the table in front of him. In the heat, the ice began melting immediately, but no tell-tale drips could be found under the table or nearby. Mackenzie was left wonderstruck.

Jay's skills of dexterity were not limited to the dark arts of deception. The author of the strange-but-true *Cards as Weapons*, Jay could throw playing cards at up to 90 miles per hour to distances of nearly 200 feet, according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*. He could accurately hit a variety of targets with cards from across a room and was especially known for throwing cards so powerfully that they would penetrate a watermelon rind, which he memorably described as the “thick, pachydermatous outer melon layer.” He could also make thrown cards return to his hand like boomerangs, sometimes slicing them in half with scissors as he did so.

As an actor, Jay mostly played small roles—often gamblers, con men, and, of course, magicians—appearing in several films by Mamet and Paul Thomas Anderson, including *House of Games*, *The Spanish Prisoner*, *Heist*,

Boogie Nights, and *Magnolia*. Jay also had success with fictional roles on television programs, playing The Amazing Maleeni in a 2000 *X-Files* episode and card sharp Eddie Sawyer on the first season of HBO's *Deadwood*, for which he also wrote an episode.

Jay's deep, gritty voice was used to great effect as the narrator in Anderson's *Magnolia*, in which he delivered a particularly powerful opening monologue about chance that neatly summarizes his interest in weird phenomena. After describing three increasingly unnerving coincidences, he intones that "it is in the humble opinion of this narrator that this is not just 'Something That Happened.' This cannot be 'One of Those Things.' This, please, cannot be that. And for what I would like to say, I can't. This was not just a matter of chance." Noooo. These strange things happen all the time."

Although he routinely played ominous underworld characters, his vulnerability as soft-hearted thief Don "Pinky" Pincus in Mamet's *Heist* was particularly poignant. He plays a rueful criminal who likes to talk tough ("My motherf—er is so cool, when he goes to bed, sheep count him") but wants to avoid any violence—a doting uncle who will do anything to protect his niece from harm. Jay's watery eyes, soft features, and understated delivery of cryptic lines like "Cute as a pail full of kittens" make Pinky a believable, relatable, and endearing figure struggling to survive in a bleak, merciless world of backstabbing grifters.

Finally, as a scholar, Jay was a Renaissance man who relished raconteurs, rogues, and rascalions. A bibliophile and collector of antique ephemera, magical props, and other curiosities, Jay assembled a massive private library filled with manuscripts on all sorts of bizarre topics related to magic, oddball entertainers, card sharps, and the like, sometimes loaning them out to museums for display. He also had a particular nostalgia for vaudeville performers and the carnies of Coney Island, many of whom served as his mentors and friends in his early

years as a magician and whom he continued to associate and share research with for as long as they lived.

Jay himself authored nearly a dozen books on topics such as the history of conjuring, confidence games, card cheats, and outlandish people and amusements, including the classic *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women* and *Celebrations of Curious Characters*. Four years of his brief-lived quarterly journal of such wonderments, *Jay's Journal of Anomalies*, were collected in a volume of the same name. He also delivered lively, laugh-filled lectures on



these and other esoteric topics at museums and universities.

Among the many ludicrous characters Jay chronicled was 29-inch-tall Matthias Buchinger, who was born without hands or lower legs. Despite his disabilities, Buchinger was an artist and calligrapher of tiny illustrations known as micrography, as well as a skilled magician and musician. Jay liked to note that Buchinger had been married four times and fathered at least 14 children. Jay's final book, *Matthias Buchinger: "The Greatest German Living,"* was devoted to this subject.

There was substantial crossover between Jay's scholarship and his magical performances. In one prominent example, Jay would take a break from card effects to recite "Villon's Straight Tip to All Cross Coves," a racy nine-

teenth-century poem about con men filled with evocative Victorian slang that features a refrain about how no matter how successful a grift may be, all the money will soon be blown on alcohol and women. The line appears in the final stanza, entitled The Moral: *Until the squeezer nips your scrag / Booze and the blowens cop the lot.*

In addition to his natural talents, Jay's preeminence in his various fields of expertise can be credited to his obsessive devotion to his niche hobbies to the exclusion of virtually all else, as reflected in his relentless pursuit of perfection through thousands of hours of practice manipulating (and throwing) playing cards. In interviews, he talked about spending so many hours every day shuffling and playing with cards alone in a room that he considered the cards his friends. (He married quite late in life, in 2002.) He was so devoted to collecting and reading arcane tomes on the ancient history of magic, card play, confidence games, carnie acts, and many other obscure topics that he joked with a Harvard audience in 1999, "I know absolutely nothing about the twentieth century ... and I'm not just talking about magic."

This claim comes from the man who taught coin magic to Robert Redford for *The Natural*, appeared as a card dealer in a Bob Dylan music video, designed the wheelchair that hid Gary Sinise's legs in *Forrest Gump*, played a Bond villain in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and was involved in two high-profile feature films about magicians in the same year (2006), appearing as Milton the Magician in Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*, while creating magical effects for Neil Burger's *The Illusionist*.

Fortunately for us, Jay enjoyed showing off his hard-earned skills. After performing a particularly difficult card-throwing trick to win a proposition bet with actor John C. Reilly at the end of *Ricky Jay Plays Poker*, Jay turns to the camera, beaming, and chortles, "Ain't life grand?" Then the credits roll.

Sadly, the squeezer has finally nipped his scrag. There will never be another Ricky Jay. ♦



REPORT CARD

PRESIDENT	GRADE
DONALD TRUMP	A+ MAGA, PEOPLE!!!
BARACK OBAMA	F FOR FORIEGNER
GEORGE W. BUSH	C- AT LEAST HE'S NOT JEB!
THEODORE ROOSEVELT	A- NERDY GLASSES
GEORGE WASHINGTON	B WOODEN TEETH
MARTIN VAN BUREN	D RIDICULOUS HAIR
RICHARD NIXON	D- QUITTER!
WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON	F- DIED OF A COLD!
ABRAHAM LINCOLN	B+ STUPID BEARD, GOT ASSASSINATED
JAMES K. POLK	
FRANKLIN PIERCE	<u>WHO?</u>
JOHN TYLER	