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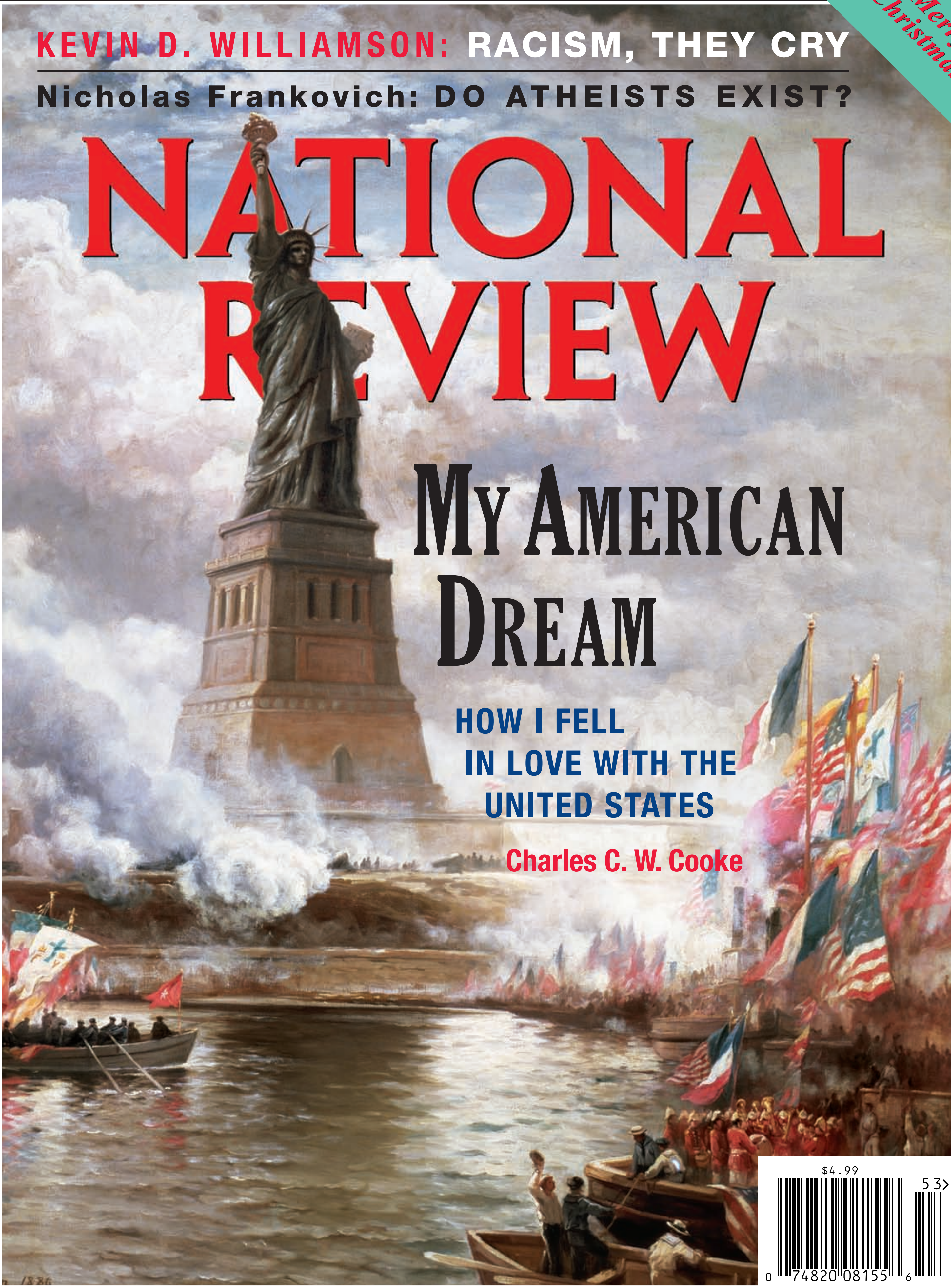
Merry Christmas!

KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON: RACISM, THEY CRY

Nicholas Frankovich: DO ATHEISTS EXIST?

NATIONAL REVIEW



MY AMERICAN DREAM

HOW I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE UNITED STATES

Charles C. W. Cooke

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COVER: PAINTING BY EDWARD MORAN; © MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK/CORBIS

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NATIONAL REVIEW

DECEMBER 31 ISSUE; PRINTED DECEMBER 19

Letters

Appalachian Immigration

Reading Kevin D. Williamson's article ("Left Behind," December 16) reminded me of my experience working with urbanized Appalachians in the Indianapolis neighborhood known as Stringtown back in the early '60s. I served on (then) Indianapolis mayor Richard Lugar's Appalachian-affairs council. Mr. Williamson makes several references to those leaving Appalachia and moving to larger cities; my work was at the other end—working with those who had immigrated to, in this case, Indianapolis.

Appalachian immigrants in Stringtown lived in very run-down single-family homes, and efforts to interest residents in bettering the neighborhood proved challenging, as "home" remained the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee. Only after rather thorough research and some innovative approaches to community organization was real progress made.

Those were exciting years for me and my associates. The article was appreciated.

Norm Marshall
Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Tragedy of the Reservations

Much of Kevin D. Williamson's description of Appalachia in the December 16 cover story, "Left Behind," could also be said of the New Mexico Pueblo Indian reservations. There, severe alcoholism and drug abuse, and sexual and physical abuse, are common. Often, more than half of the adults are unemployed, and in many cases unemployable. Industry does not find it attractive to locate in the area, and there is little opportunity in the pueblos or surrounding Anglo communities. People survive on their neighbors and continuous government-handout programs.

Norman Worth
Via e-mail

Churchill Numismatics

Regarding your note in the November 11 issue (The Week) on Winston Churchill now being on the five-pound note: This is not his first time on British currency. In 1965, just after his death, he appeared on a specially minted five-shilling coin. This coin was not meant for general circulation, as the highest-denominated coin in common use then was the half crown. This commemorative "full crown" was almost exactly the same size as a U.S. silver dollar, only slightly thicker. I was a boy then, and my father gave me several of these coins, which I still possess.

Ken Fasig
Kalaheo, Hawaii

Letters may be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com.

The Week

■ Maybe Kim Jong Un's uncle tried to talk to him about Obamacare over Thanksgiving.

■ Supporters of Obamacare decided to start saying that the website is now basically working, never mind its inability to communicate information reliably to insurers. Then the administration announced that it is asking insurers to accept payment after the start of the year for coverage starting January 1, to treat out-of-network doctors as in-network, and to keep covering prescriptions under people's old plans even if the new ones do not cover them. The administration hinted that insurers who comply will be more likely to keep being allowed to sell insurance on Obamacare's exchanges. The insurers are committed to this law and its promise of new, coerced customers, but their calculations may change if the administration keeps pushing them to take either losses or blame. Meanwhile the poll numbers on the law, and the president, keep dropping. The president told Chris Matthews that the law's difficulties do not reflect problems in his "personal management style" but rather the flaws of government agencies, "some of which are not designed properly." But why choose between those explanations? Whatever else the new year brings, it will not bring an end to the lawlessness and dysfunction of Obamacare.

■ *Time* made Pope Francis its "person of the year," a savvy marketing choice. A slideshow about the contenders on its website described him as having "rejected church dogma" and thus won hearts. He has done no such thing, although the wish of his journalistic fans that he would is palpable. He has, however, heartened the Left with the recent remarks about economics contained in his apostolic exhortation. There is much more to that document than his attacks on "trickle-down economics" and economic inequality, but they are predictably what got the headlines. In the pope's view, inequality is rising and therefore so is violence. On the global scale, actually, both are falling. Accused of "Marxism" as a result of his rhetoric, the pope replied that he rejected Marxism but is not offended by the claim because he has known Marxists who were good people. We are not offended by his remarks, either, since we have never known anyone who advocates "trickle-down economics." We do hope Francis widens his circle of acquaintances to include advocates of actual markets.

■ "There are too many leaders who claim solidarity with Madiba's struggle for freedom, but do not tolerate dissent from their own people," said Barack Obama at Nelson Mandela's memorial service. As well he knew, having just shaken hands with Cuban president Raúl Castro on his way to the podium. Fact checkers were quick to note that this was not a presidential first: Bill Clinton had shaken Fidel Castro's hand in 2000. That opened the doors of the Castro-family island prison, didn't it? If there were any sign that the administration was pursuing a

ROMAN GENN

successful carrot-and-stick strategy with Cuba, then shaking the hand of even an anti-American despot might have some point. But when the administration's foreign policy consists of sweeping statements, no follow-through, floating with the tide, and random left-wing impulses, better for the president to keep his hands to himself.

■ It was the selfie seen round the world: Barack Obama, Danish prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, and British prime minister David Cameron, caught by an Agence France-Presse photographer as they took a shot of themselves at the memorial service for Nelson Mandela. Their insouciance, like that of girls at the mall, sparked some grumbling; it was ironic that it should have been caught on camera. Live by the selfie, die by the snap. But the deed was done two hours into a four-hour ceremony. Maybe the statesmen and -woman recognized that even Mandela's exequies had gone on long enough. Maybe the South Africans themselves recognized it: The tone of the affair was celebratory. Is it possible for leaders to live in the panopticon of meta? Is it possible for ordinary folk? Maybe Nelson Mandela checked out none too soon.

■ The U.S. is preparing to return to negotiations with Iran, in the hopes of reaching a long-term agreement over that country's nuclear program. In November, the parties reached an interim deal that grants Iran significant relief from international sanctions

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in exchange for largely symbolic restrictions on its nuclear work. A number of U.S. senators are considering proposing the imposition of new sanctions on Iran if it violates the existing deal, or if no final deal is reached within the six-month negotiating period. The Obama administration has held off this possibility by persuading Democratic senators that such a measure would drive the Iranians away from the bargaining table (Iranian officials have said as much, too). If enforcing the terms of a weak existing bargain would imperil negotiations, that is as good a sign as any that, for now, negotiations are not worth holding at all.

■ When they voted to end the filibuster for most presidential appointments, Senate Democrats claimed they were only trying to end a procedural abuse and get middle-of-the-road nominees confirmed. Among the first nominees they have used their new power to confirm is Nina Pillard, who will now be a judge on the powerful D.C. Circuit. Pillard took a view of religious freedom that the Supreme Court unanimously rejected as too narrow in a case last year. She has argued that courts should use the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to determine whether schools' sex-ed curricula are sufficiently progressive. Some middle-of-the-roader. At the same time, Democrats have abandoned the longstanding practice of advancing Republican and Democratic nominations to bipartisan boards together. Without the filibuster, Republicans have no power to insist on that practice. The next Senate elections cannot come soon enough.

■ The American Civil Liberties Union has apparently decided that religious freedom is not a civil liberty. It is seeking through litigation to force Catholic hospitals to perform abortions. This is not a case about the legality of abortion or the regulation of abortion, but simply about the right of those who object to the procedure to decline to perform it. Simple-minded types on the pro-abortion side used to say mockingly: "If you don't like abortion, don't have one." Surely they'd extend the courtesy to "don't perform one" as well? Not if the ACLU has its way.

■ Jack Phillips is on his way to becoming a political prisoner in Colorado, an occupational hazard more often associated with human-rights campaigners and democracy activists than with men in his occupation: He is a baker. Phillips was asked to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding, and he declined, as such ceremonies run strongly contrary to his religious beliefs. But as with the ACLU and abortions in Catholic hospitals, the Left does not in fact value the "diversity" it is always going on about: It demands homogeneity. The two men took Phillips to court, where he was ordered to bake them a cake—and if he refuses, he is to be fined. If gay Americans really want a live-and-let-live regime, then they should look to their self-appointed leaders, who are making that impossible.

CBS

■ The first anniversary of the horrific massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School has now come and gone. Predictably, the event was marked by political posturing and willful dishonesty—and, too, by the scurrilous insinuation that Congress failed to demonstrate the requisite "courage" when, in April, it refused to pass new legislation (which wouldn't have prevented a Sandy Hook–type shooting anyway). In fact, legislators made the right call. As reality and calm have intruded upon emotion and ignorance, support for new regulations has plummeted. Back in January, 37 percent of Americans strongly favored new gun laws, while 27 percent were opposed. Now, the numbers are equal. Moreover, as Gallup's review of which issues are important to voters shows, gun control barely figures on most people's list of priorities. The bottom line: Over the past few decades, Americans have been broadly convinced that a lack of gun control is not the problem.

■ President Obama has an Uncle Omar, who has lived for many years in the Boston area. Two years ago, he was arrested for drunk driving, which meant he faced deportation back to Kenya. At the time, White House officials said that the president had never met his uncle. That recently changed, however, when Omar Obama said in a deportation hearing that his nephew had lived with him for a few weeks. This was just before the future president began law school at Harvard. They stayed in touch for a period thereafter as well. Jay Carney, the presidential press secretary, admitted that all this was true. So why the denials in 2011? "Back when this arose," said Carney, "folks looked at the record, including the president's book, and there was no evidence that they had met." (The press secretary seems to have adopted his boss's annoying habit of using "folks.") After Omar Obama's most recent testimony, Carney decided to take up the issue with the president himself. There is no great scandal here. But the ongoing mystique and delicacy about this president's past are absurd.

■ The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) is best known nowadays for having given American guns to Mexican drug cartels without having worked out a reason for doing so. A Milwaukee *Journal-Sentinel* study, released in December, demonstrates that such behavior is par for the course, showing as it does that the ATF does not so much fight known and real threats to public safety as it seeks to manufacture crime—and, too, that it has no moral qualms about how it does so. Among the bizarre tactics that agents have recently employed are the use of mentally disabled Americans to unwittingly broker crimes, the establishment of operations in supposedly gun-free zones such as schools and churches, and the provision of alcohol, drugs, and sexual invitations to minors. In all cases, the schemes were conducted on the off-chance that someone might be caught.

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When no one was, agents improvised, sometimes going so far as to urge individuals to illegally buy or modify weapons and then arrest them when they complied. Their broader philosophical differences to one side, most Americans can presumably agree: Whatever the federal government is for, it is certainly not this.

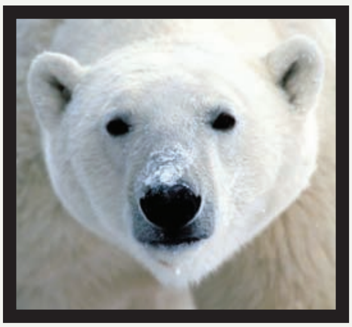
■ The Obama administration, which talks a great deal about the “investments” it wants to make on behalf of the nation, has sold the last of its shares in General Motors, at a loss of $10.5 billion—or a return of negative 21 percent. Put another way, that’s a loss of $136,363 for every GM employee in the United States. The GM bailout was a mess from the beginning, violating longstanding principles of bankruptcy law regarding the treatment of secured creditors and the treatment of asset sales in order to line the pockets of the president’s union supporters. The company’s shares have been stagnant, their value today roughly what it was in early 2011, and it employs fewer than half as many people as it did in 2001. It is in the news of late mainly because of the sex of its new CEO. It is well that the government is no longer in the business of being part owner of an automobile company, but the episode suggests very strongly that such “investments” are losers—because they are not really investments: They’re subsidies for politically connected business interests.

■ The so-called Volcker Rule, the centerpiece of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Act, will soon come into full effect, preventing banks from engaging in many kinds of “proprietary trading”—investing their own money rather than their customers’ funds. This is yet another non-solution to the underlying problems that produced the 2008–09 financial crisis. Proprietary trading was not a major factor in that episode,

You *Beast*, You!

“It’s trying to eat her face.”

That was my wife’s reaction to a credit-card ad showing a woman looking out the window of a tour bus in the Arctic at a polar bear, standing on its hind legs, its nose just inches below. Or at least I think it was a credit-card ad. It doesn’t really matter, because no matter what the product or the venue, if it features bears in a charming, friendly, or cartoonish light, the missus is quick to point out that bears eat faces.



When my daughter was three, we were watching a documentary in which someone is feeding grizzly cubs. My wife stumbles in like she caught me exposing my daughter to the director’s cut of the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake (“Now with even more desensitizing violence!”). “What is this?” she asks.

“Oh Mommy. Look at the baby!” my daughter replies.

“It’s bear propaganda. It will grow up to eat your face.”

Now, as many readers know, my wife has somewhat special dispensation to complain about bears; she’s from Fairbanks, Alaska, where bears aren’t an abstraction (though they do stay out of the city proper). Every summer when I head up there, the local newspaper has at least a couple of stories about bear attacks, occasionally with face-eating.

This all came to mind after I read a piece by Ross Pomeroy for *Real Clear Science.* Pomeroy, a zoologist by training, took it upon himself to fact-check a new short film about the Coca-Cola polar bears directed by Ridley Scott. As gently as he can, Pomeroy details how virtually every single thing about the film is, as my wife would say, “bear propaganda.” Polar bears—particularly vicious carnivores—don’t live as nuclear families. The fathers spend about a week with the ladies for a “last tango in the Arctic” and then live solitary lives. The moms chase off the cubs once they’re old enough. Oh, one other thing about the dads: If the supply of adorable and delicious seals runs low, the grown males can get peckish and, when that happens, they’ve been known to eat polar-bear cubs.

Odd how that scene didn’t make it into the Coca-Cola cartoon.

Animals have the best PR teams in the world. There’s nary a Muppet, Disney, Looney Tunes, or Pixar critter whose real-life habits aren’t bizarre, disgusting, or barbaric by human standards. Even chimpanzees—so like us, you noble citizens of the forest!—are pretty horrifying once they grow out of their human diapers. This is a family publication, but suffice it to say that you men out there should count yourselves lucky if a chimp attacks you and merely eats your face.

It seems to me that bear propaganda—as well as monkey spin, bunny agitprop, lion lyin’, and pig puffery—has increased as humanity has come to like itself less. In the Middle Ages, animals were creatures to be feared. It’s only when humans become the bad guys that the animals become the good guys. The irony, of course, is that the only way we can sell wild animals as better than humans is by making them act like idealized humans in animal costumes. There’s something oddly touching about that.

—JONAH GOLDBERG

a fact acknowledged by, among others, Paul Volcker himself. We've seen this before: Wall Street critics have long argued for the return of the Glass-Steagall Act, which forbade commercial banks to participate in investment-banking operations. No less a foe of financiers than Elizabeth Warren has conceded that Glass-Steagall would not have prevented the financial crisis or such troubling subsequent events as JPMorgan's $2 billion trading loss. Other liberal enthusiasms, such as limiting executives' pay, are still further removed from addressing the real, enduring problems in the financial system. The fact is that we have a political class that does not really understand finance and yet is disproportionately dependent upon Wall Street for financial support and personnel, as the rotating cast of investment-banking characters in Obama's White House demonstrates.

■ America's mental-health system is a failure, as the massacres perpetrated by deranged individuals in Newtown, Aurora, and elsewhere have made tragically clear. While 10 million people in America suffer from serious mental illness—including 200,000 on our streets, and 300,000 in our prisons—the federal government has in recent decades placed a higher priority on treating those with mild problems than on the worst cases. Representative Tim Murphy (R., Pa.), a psychologist, has introduced a bill that would finally begin to reverse this. The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act would focus federal funding on serious mental illness, rather than spread it across milder ailments, and empower families to seek treatment for those who cannot make such decisions for themselves. President Obama has boasted of allocating more funding for mental health; but spending more on a broken system, one in which Medicaid will not even pay for hospitalizing the mentally ill, will do little to fix the problem. Large parts of the federal government's mental-health bureaucracy question whether serious mental illness is even an affliction that can be treated, instead of just a different way to order one's mind. Deinstitutionalization and the rights revolution of the '60s and '70s distorted beyond recognition the federal government's efforts to address mental health. Representative Murphy's bill would be a big step back in the right direction.

■ New York City mayor-elect Bill de Blasio turned to the Giuliani era for his police commissioner: Bill Bratton, who had the job from 1994 to 1996. Bratton was an apostle of tough, intelligent policing. The second adjective was as important as the first, as he got cops to track daily shifts in patterns of crime and think proactively. Bratton had the support of Rudy Giuliani, the mayor who hired him, until their big egos drove them asunder. This time around, Bratton will need all his patience and cunning to lead his force, to please Mayor de Blasio, and to stroke the city's race hustlers sufficiently to ensure their acquiescence. For de Blasio to tap such a man shows that he knows the city's safety is a vital achievement. *Oremus*.

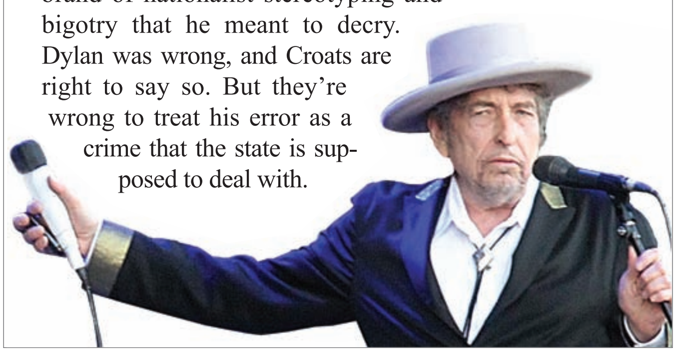
■ When China declared control over the airspace of the East China Sea in late November, the U.S. Air Force's decision to fly two B-52 bombers through the territory was a good start. But it was far from sufficient. All the countries surrounding the zone, and the U.S., have refused to recognize China's demand that aircraft flying through the area identify themselves to the People's Republic, but these are pro forma protests. Only Japan has told its airliners not to comply when traversing the area, while the U.S. has instructed pilots to submit. China's claim is an act of hegemony that goes beyond what any other country asks of those traveling through its international airspace. The U.S. could have supported its allies and stood up for freedom of movement by regularly flying joint military patrols through the area, or even agreeing to escort civilian flights that refuse to identify themselves to the Chinese. It has not, so China's brinkmanship will only continue. In the long term, ceding the Pacific as a sphere of influence to the Chinese will be a catastrophe for global security—especially if it coincides with ceding Eastern Europe to Russia, or the Middle East to Iran. China cannot dominate the region now, but if the U.S. does not increase its assertiveness and properly maintain its military might, that will change. Without a course correction, the supine posture we assumed in the wake of China's latest power grab may become a permanent one.

■ Protesters have occupied Ukraine's national square, the Maidan, for weeks now, despite the best efforts of that country's thuggish president, Viktor Yanukovych, to remove them. They took to the streets to protest Yanukovych's hostility toward a free-trade agreement with the European Union, and his increasing intimacy with Russia. They now have a new problem: Yanukovych went ahead and signed a pact with Moscow that provides $15 billion

AP PHOTO/SERGEI GRITS

worth of government loans and years of discounted gas for eastern, Russophile Ukraine's heavy industry. Bankrupt as "Europe" is, it or the IMF could have stepped in to provide the former. The question of whether Ukraine is to sign a trade deal with Russia or the West is still to be decided, and Europe must make every effort, and offer every financial, economic, and political guarantee, to persuade Yanukovych and his supporting cast of oligarchs to break with Putin. The crisis has shown as well as any the problems of trying to present a strong, common foreign policy on behalf of a number of disparate and timid actors. Which might leave the United State to intervene, and snatch Ukraine back from Putin's growing influence. But for now, despite the importance of ensuring that Eastern Europe does not return to Russia's orbit, the U.S. has been no more assertive than the EU, which should not be a hard hurdle to clear.

■ For speaking strong words in an interview published in the French edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine last year, Bob Dylan faces legal charges of committing "public injury" and "incitement to hatred." He implied that Croats are to Serbs as Nazis are to Jews. Offended, a group representing Croats in France brought their case to the Paris Main Court, where Dylan will be tried on a date not yet determined. During World War II, hundreds of thousands of Serbs died at the hands of Croatia's Nazi-supported Ustashe government. Most Croats living today were not yet born. Dylan imputed to them the sins of their fathers or, an even greater stretch, the sins of their neighbors' fathers, perpetuating exactly the brand of nationalist stereotyping and bigotry that he meant to decry. Dylan was wrong, and Croats are right to say so. But they're wrong to treat his error as a crime that the state is supposed to deal with.



■ For the past 15 months, Iranian-American pastor Saeed Abedini has been imprisoned in Iran—first at Tehran's Evin Prison, now at the deadly Rajai Shahr—for his involvement with Christian house churches. On December 12, his wife, Naghmeh Abedini, testified at a joint congressional subcommittee hearing: "My husband is suffering because he is a Christian. He's suffering because he's an American. . . . Yet his own government did not fight for him when his captors were across the table." Although President Obama mentioned Pastor Abedini when he phoned Iranian president Hassan Rouhani in September, neither the pastor's release nor that of other American captives in Iran was part of recent nuclear negotiations. "Each day he remains in that dreadful place could mean a death sentence," Mrs. Abedini said. "Any day could be execution day." Since his incarceration, Pastor Abedini has been threatened, robbed, subjected to psychological torture, and repeatedly commanded to convert to Islam. Malnourished and covered from head to toe in lice, he's stood firm in the face of pain and pressure. If only his country would do likewise.

■ It is the totalitarian myth of Icarus: Some No. 2 or No. 3 rises too high for the comfort of No. 1, and is cast down. The history of the 20th century is full of examples: Ernst Röhm (destroyed by Hitler), Genrikh Yagoda and Nikolai Yezhov (by Stalin), Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao (by Mao). But this month the consummation was televised. Kim Jong Un's uncle by marriage, 67-year-old Jang Song Thaek, was filmed being rudely seized under the arms at a meeting of North Korean top brass, then bowing under duress to inquisitors. Official press releases trumpeted his evils in the gibberish of despotic exorcism ("anti-state," "human scum"). Execution followed swiftly. The dead man was thought to be Kim Jong Un's mentor, and the regime's liaison with China (either one reason enough for his removal in the realm of dog-eat-dog). Nameless ordinary North Koreans, if they had ever doubted it, know again that no one is safe in their country.

AP PHOTO/DAVID VINCENT, FILE

■ While the British media were exhausting the lexicon of superlatives for Nelson Mandela, finally likening him, on the BBC, to Jesus Christ, a Mr. Neil Phillips, a 44-year-old shopkeeper in rural Staffordshire, turned dyspeptic. He posted, "My PC takes so long to shut down I've decided to call it Nelson Mandela," and also, "Free Mandela—switch the power off." It is dangerous to make jokes, especially if they are tasteless. A Mr. Tim Jones, on the bottom rung of British politics as a member of the local council, complained. The police arrested Phillips and held him for eight hours, took fingerprints and DNA, and examined his computers. "Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee; she is a fen of stagnant waters." Things have hardly changed since Wordsworth wrote those lines. Amid outcry, the section of the Public Order Act that gave rise to Mr. Phillips's persecution is to be repealed this coming February. Unwittingly, Mandela's last gift has been this bolstering of free speech.

■ Hunter Yelton, age six, had a crush on a girl in his school in Cañon City, Colo. In reading group one day, he leaned over and kissed her on the hand. He was promptly suspended for two days for "sexual harassment," an offense to be entered on his record. Hunter's mother, in an interview with a local news station, was incredulous: "How can you do this? How can you say this about my child?" The school superintendent explained that Hunter's behavior met the definition of "unwelcome touching" under the district's sexual-harassment policy, and furthermore, it was a repeat offense—he had previously been disciplined for kissing the girl on the cheek. After a few days of negative media coverage, the district agreed to downgrade his offense to "misconduct." One news report noted that "no criminal charges have been brought against the first-grader." How reassuring.

■ The issue of black quarterbacks has been touchy from time immemorial, or so it seems. When Doug Williams was the Super Bowl MVP at the end of the 1987 season, that was held to be an important milestone. All these years later, the touchiness continues. Williams quarterbacked the Washington Redskins, and so does "RG3," or Robert Griffin III. Coach Mike Shanahan benched him, however, for poor play. This led a couple of ESPN commentators to suggest that the benching was racial. At this juncture, it ought to be possible for coaches to be coaches and quarterbacks to be quarterbacks without the specter of racism over their heads.

■ If a keen satirist were to roll all of modernity's asinine cultural pathologies into one grand story, he might end up with the case of the arrested sock monkey. In early December, a woman at a TSA checkpoint inside a Missouri airport was pulled over by an agent after a toy monkey dressed as a cowboy was discovered in her hand luggage. The monkey, named "Rooster Monkburn" after the John Wayne character of the almost-same name, came with a tiny two-inch pistol in a fabric holster. This, authorities said, wouldn't do: "This is a gun," an agent told the woman. "If I held it up to your neck, you wouldn't know if it was real or not." The woman suggested that, not being blind, she would, in fact, be able to tell. But she declined to press the matter. "I understand she was doing her job," the monkey's owner informed local news, "but at some point doesn't common sense prevail?" Alas, in a country in which children are routinely sent home from school for pointing pencils at one another while saying "Bang!" it would appear that the answer to this question is "No."

■ A professional spends a career moving from gig to gig, and if he is talented and fortunate he can look back on two or three memorable achievements. In 1962 Peter O'Toole starred in *Lawrence of Arabia*, one of Hollywood's last great epics, exciting, gorgeous, and serious. His own performance went over the top now and then (if you had been any prettier, Noël Coward famously told him, the movie would have been called *Florence of Arabia*). But no matter: When a film hits the sweet spot all its parts lift each other to greatness. Then in 1982, in *My Favorite Year*, he did a comic turn, wry and self-mocking, as a fading star, dimmed in the new glare of television. Time sends us all offstage, but to how many of us is it given to pre-enact our own exits, and with such good humor? Dead at 81. R.I.P.

THE BUDGET

A Disappointing Deal

A PREDICTABLE consequence of Republicans' losing a shutdown fight is exhaustion with spending fights. It's what we saw in the 1990s, and the Ryan–Murray budget deal is, in part, a reaction to the GOP defeat of early October. Republican appropriators and defense hawks sick of the sequester felt empowered by the shutdown debacle, and Paul Ryan and the leadership are desperate to forestall yet another one.

Hence the House's passage, by an overwhelming margin, of a disappointing deal. The agreement rolls back a portion of the sequester over the next two years in exchange for other spending cuts over the long term. The sequester is a blunt instrument that hits defense much too hard, but it had provided a rough-and-ready discipline on spending. If the deal passes, it means that there won't be a third straight year of declining spending in 2014. The history of budgeting is that once budget caps are breached the first time, it becomes a habit. It is also a bad practice, as a general matter, to trade more spending in the short term, $65 billion over the next two years, for promised spending cuts in the long term. The deal supposedly reduces the deficit by $23 billion over ten years—in other words, by the 2020s, when the Obama years will be a distant memory.

The savings are gimmicky. The deal doesn't raise income taxes, but it does raise taxes on airline flights. The spending reductions come from entitlements, but not any entitlement you are likely to have heard of. Supporters of the deal argue that it creates the precedent for replacing cuts to discretionary spending with cuts to entitlements, but that's not a precedent that will mean anything to Democrats in the future.

The deal has some upside. It raises defense spending, as its Republican advocates say—although the need for this increase was created by the sequestration bargain they themselves struck with President Obama in 2011. It very modestly pares back the lavishness of future federal employees' pensions and increases fees for federal subsidies for some companies' pension plans. These changes will be written into law, and thus harder to reverse than discretionary spending cuts, which are revisited in each year's budget. And it makes another shutdown much less likely, and therefore diminishes the chances of Republicans' rescuing President Obama from various political problems of his own making, foremost among them his catastrophic health-care law.

At the moment, though, it is causing a bigger fight among Republicans than among Democrats, and both sides of that fight are losing perspective. The deal is not a sellout or a betrayal, as some of the critics say. It is also not "ridiculous" and a sign of bad faith for conservatives to oppose it, as Speaker of the House John Boehner said in a fit of pique. Perhaps the best that can be said for the deal is that it is much too small to justify such drama.

20TH CENTURY FOX/GETTY IMAGES

PUBLIC POLICY

Unequal to the Task

'ECONOMIC INEQUALITY" is to be the great theme of the remainder of the Obama administration, the president announced in a speech that combined rank economic ignorance with shallow demagoguery. And the first item on Barack Obama's new economic agenda is an increase in the federal minimum wage to $9, higher than the minimum wage in any state excepting Washington.

A higher minimum wage is a cruel sentence of unemployment for young and low-skilled workers, for whom the real minimum wage is $0.00 per hour. It is also a poor way to help poor people. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the last minimum-wage increase (to $7.25 per hour) would increase wages by some $11 billion in the subsequent year but only by $1.6 billion for poor families, meaning that it would cost $6.88 to provide $1 in economic gain to poor households. Some of that additional income no doubt flowed to families that are low-income but above the official poverty line, which is to the good, but many minimum-wage earners are nowhere near poor; rather, they are low-earning members of reasonably well-off households, including young people and parents working part-time. If our policy goal is to make work more rewarding for people at the lower end of the labor market, raising the minimum wage is a clumsy and inefficient instrument. Wage subsidies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit certainly have their problems as well, but they are economically less destructive, as are more straightforward measures such as the reduction of payroll taxes, which eat away at the wages of the poor disproportionately.

The main problem facing poor families is not a low minimum wage, but high unemployment. While the president likes to cite poorly understood income figures (which tell us little or nothing about the incomes of actual households at any given economic level, because the people who are in the top 20 percent or bottom 20 percent change from year to year and significantly from decade to decade), he ought to be looking instead at the data concerning household net worth and continuity of employment, which reveal problems connected tangentially at most with statutory wage floors.

In his minimum-wage speech, the president declared: "If you're a progressive and you want to help the middle class and the working poor, you've still got to be concerned about competitiveness and productivity and business confidence that spurs private-sector investment." This we agree with. Unhappily, though, the president has moved in the opposite direction, for instance making part-time workers more attractive than full-time employees through his expensive health-care mandate. And in

the one key field in which the president enjoys almost full autonomy from Congress—regulatory reform—he has done nothing at all.

Raising the minimum wage is a symbolic project, the main point of which is to engage in cheap demagoguery when Republicans vote against it, as they will and as they should. There is much the president could be doing to help the working poor, from regulation to school reform, but he does little more than make the occasional misguided speech.

OBITUARY

Nelson Mandela, R.I.P.

AMONG world leaders, Nelson Mandela had unmatched moral authority. When George W. Bush awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2002, he said, "It is this moral stature that has made Nelson Mandela perhaps the most revered statesman of our time." Bush could have done without the hedge-word "perhaps." Mandela was by far the most revered statesman of our time. Every July 18 is Nelson Mandela Day. The United Nations declared it so, in 2009. Mandela was born on July 18, 1918. He has died at 95.

The reverence the world feels for him has to do, in part, with the nature of his adversary: the white, racist apartheid government of South Africa. A Havel or a Sharansky could not achieve equivalent stature: Hatred of their adversaries is far less universal. The United Nations would never declare a global Havel or Sharansky Day. In our time, white racism is held to be the greatest of all evils. And Mandela was a lion against it.

He was a founder of Umkhonto we Sizwe, or Spear of the Nation—the military wing of the African National Congress. When he was apprehended, he narrowly escaped the death penalty. He was sentenced to life in prison, and he spent 27 years there. Because he advocated the armed struggle, he could not be counted a prisoner of conscience. He was imprisoned, not for what he thought or said or wrote, but for what he was doing. He never renounced violence. But in 1990, the government, led by F. W. de Klerk, released him anyway.

REX FEATURES VIA AP IMAGES

For the next few years, he and de Klerk engaged in painstaking negotiations. They ultimately worked out a transition to full, multiracial democracy—whereupon they won the Nobel Peace Prize. Accepting the award in Oslo, Mandela famously declared, "Let a new age dawn!"

It did, and Mandela's inauguration on May 10, 1994, was one of the great political occasions of the age. Some 45 heads of state attended. Then Mandela rendered his greatest service: his presidency. This was a presidency of truth and reconciliation. South Africa could have gone the way of Zimbabwe, with the attendant thuggery, murder, and tyranny. Many feared it would, and not unreasonably. Instead, South Africa took a democratic path, however stony. And that was largely thanks to Nelson Mandela, who set a shining example.

Is there more to Mandela than his democratic greatness? Sadly, yes. During his long imprisonment, he was supported by some of the worst actors in the world: the Soviets, Qaddafi, Castro, Arafat, and so on. They did not support him because they were kindhearted, democratic gents; they supported him because they were at war with the "West," of which the apartheid government was considered a part. It was only natural for Mandela to appreciate support wherever it came from, and whatever the motive. But it should also have been natural, especially after his release, to recognize that his supporters had their own political prisoners. And these prisoners were kept in infinitely worse conditions than those he had to endure.

He chose not to use his moral authority in behalf of these prisoners. That was one thing. But he used his moral authority to defend, hail, and perfume their jailers and torturers. He praised Qaddafi's "commitment to the fight for peace and human rights in the world." Of Fidel Castro's Cuba, he said, "There's one thing where that country stands out head and shoulders above the rest. That is in its love for human rights and liberty." A word from Mandela, the most revered leader in the world, would have done a lot for the prisoners.

His moral sense could be horribly askew. He opposed the Iraq War, as many did, for various reasons. But he would admit no moral value at all in removing Saddam Hussein from power. "If there is a country that has committed unspeakable atrocities in the world," he said, "it is the United States of America."

Nelson Mandela, like many another great man, had blind spots and other defects. His selectivity where human rights were concerned was hard to fathom. But he certainly knew that apartheid was wrong. And the good he did, especially as president of the new South Africa, was enormous. The continent of Africa could do with more such leaders, and so could the world at large. His Nobel Peace Prize was richly deserved, and so is the gratitude of his country.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next issue of NATIONAL REVIEW will appear in three weeks.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Obama's Massive $100M Brain Research Initiative Targets Memory Loss

Drug-free memory discovery yields 'shocking' results in clinical trial; restores brainpower equal to those up to 15 years younger, all within 30 days!

PHOENIX, ARIZONA —

For readers who fret about their less-than-perfect memory, or worry about steadily worsening mental powers, your life is about to change.

Thanks to President Obama's massive $100 million B.R.A.I.N. initiative, millions of frustrated Americans who not only lose their car keys, but also forget where they have parked may soon have real, lasting relief.

Science Attacks Memory Loss

The multi-year program called Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies, or BRAIN, will as part of its initiative, target the symptoms premature mental decline, including poor memory, the inability to maintain focus and concentration, mental fatigue, and brain fog.

It has been called the "next great American project," drawing comparisons to the wildly successful 1990 scientific discovery initiative, the Human Genome Project.

Over an estimated ten-year period, Brain Research scientists will 'map' the human brain in an unprecedented quest to unravel its mysteries.

What's the Catch?

What President Obama and administration officials failed to tell Americans is that, for many, they don't have to spend $100 million or wait ten-plus years for a fix for their foggy, forgetful mind.

In fact, evidence of a genuine, clinically tested, real, memory pill is here, now.

Real Memory Pill Exists!

A US-based research firm, Brain Research Labs, has developed and conducted successful human testing on a genuine memory pill.

Over a period of a few weeks in a landmark, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial, published in a peer-reviewed journal, scientists observed the formula helping older brains function more youthfully.

In many cases, the formula allowed users to match the memory recall speed and brainpower of those up to 15 years younger, all within a 30-day time period.

It's no secret either. The US Patent and Trademark Office has granted the drug-free natural formula a United States patent.

Over the years, the sophisticated three-part formulation has gained the trust of medical doctors, a top clinical pharmacist, and is even a recommended component in an updated version of a legendary Medicare-reimbursed brain health protocol.

Preventive Gerontologist, Dr. Arnold Bresky, the man responsible for the Medicare-reimbursed brain tune-up protocol recommends this prescription-free memory compound as an integral part of his new *Four Pillars of Brain Health* program.

'Pharmacist of the Year,' Dr. Gene Steiner, recommends a patented, natural memory compound

With more than 45 years behind a pharmacist's counter, and 25 years in a radio show booth, if Dr. Gene Steiner had a nickel for every time someone asked, "Do you have anything that can improve my memory," he would be a rich man today.

A Crystal-Clear Memory

It's a question he's heard many times. "This natural memory pill is to an aging, sluggish brain, what a breath of fresh air is to your lungs," he says.

Before prescribing the pill to patients, Dr. Steiner decided to first try it himself.

Within a few days, I can tell you without reservation that my memory became crystal clear," he says.

"I had such marvelous results that I not only started recommending it to my customers, I even shared it with other physicians!"

A Pharmacy Best-Seller

"It became the best-selling brain health product in my pharmacy and customers were returning to thank me for introducing them to it."

"It felt great to see so many people whose lives were enriched by taking a simple, natural formula."

"With this simple, drug-free formula, we finally have something that we can recommend that is safe and effective. And you don't need a prescription either!"

Recently, Dr. Steiner relocated to another state and was apprehensive about taking the state board of pharmacy jurisprudence examination, a daunting examination that tests a candidate's mastery of pharmacy law.

"I began taking the natural memory compound for two weeks prior to the test, and I passed with flying colors!" "The recall I personally experienced was fantastic," says Steiner.

"It's a unique process," he adds, "that pumps the brain full of energizing oxygen, helping improve blood circulation to the brain, while helping to boost key neurotransmitters in the brain responsible for cognitive functioning."

Alternative medicine pioneer, and retired medical school professor, Dr. Robert Heller, personally uses and recommends the formula.

Perks Up Tired, Sluggish Brains

"It's not a drug," smiles Dr. Heller, "it's a nutritional supplement that can help a foggy, sluggish brain become sharper, quicker, and healthier."

Head and neck surgeon and psychologist, Paul Nemiroff, PhD, MD, FACS, agrees, adding, "It is truly an amazing breakthrough for memory!"

Kasey L.* from Olathe, Kansas says, "I was having trouble finding words in my brain and remembering things. Now I am as sharp as a tack and I have a memory like an elephant. I will never stop taking it."

Grace K.* of Alabama was in the same boat.

"I was having concentration problems and difficulty remembering things. After only one week, I felt mentally energized and more confident in myself! Now, I enjoy reading again. I've regained confidence in myself!"

Crossword puzzle fanatic, Bobby D.* from western Nevada can't say enough about his super-fast mental abilities.

"Working four crossword puzzles in the morning paper, quicker, has amazed me with the answers just popping into my head! I stand outside myself and wonder where those answers come from!"

Anyone who has ever stood in front of a crowd and then, forgot what they were about to say, knows the horror of "drawing a blank." Professional speaker Sylvia. P.* from California found Brain Research Labs' memory discovery just in time.

On April 11, 2013, President Barack Obama announced a ten-year, $100 million brain research project.

"I started having a hard time staying focused and remembering important information."

"As a professional speaker in front of hundreds of people, I found these senior moments very embarrassing. Plus, it was threatening my career. Since taking this, I can now conduct a whole seminar without relying on my notes. I feel like my old self again!"

Many are asking the question, does the government's $100 million scientific discovery initiative ignore the existence of a patented memory restorer?

You don't have to spend million of dollars or wait ten years to do what Brain Research Labs has already done for you. If you are ready to do something about your mind and memory, here's your risk-free chance.

Get a Free 30-Day Supply of this Pharmacist-Recommended Memory Formula!

Call the toll-free number below to see how you can reserve your free 30-day supply of the same, patented memory formula used by Dr. Steiner and other doctors mentioned in this article.

It is the #1-selling memory formula in the US, and it is also mentioned in the medically acclaimed book, *20/20 Brainpower: 20 Days to a Quicker, Calmer, Sharper Mind!*

Claim Your Free Copy of the Top-Selling Book, 20/20 Brainpower

When you call the toll-free number below, ask how you can also receive a free copy of the medically acclaimed book, *20/20 Brainpower: 20 Days to a Quicker, Calmer, Sharper, Mind!*, plus Dr. Bresky's easy-to-follow *Four Pillars of Brain Health* at-home program.

It's a $35 value, yours free! But don't wait. Supplies are limited!

Free Brain Detox Formula, Too!

Be one of the first 500 callers, and find out how you can also receive a free supply of the brain detox formula that is scientifically designed to help increase mental clarity and focus even further by helping flush away toxins in the brain. Call now while supplies last!

Call Toll-Free! 1-800-530-0527

AP PHOTO/BRUCE SMITH

Is the Contraception Mandate Legal?

To answer, consult the Religious Freedom Restoration Act

BY RAMESH PONNURU

PEOPLE forget it now, but the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—the law that companies are using to fight the Obama administration's requirement that almost all employers cover contraception, sterilization, and drugs that may cause abortion in their insurance plans—was controversial among conservatives in its first years. The old debate over it should remind us of two truths that, while compatible, are in tension with each other: The principle for which conservatives are fighting in today's cases is important, and it is not absolute.

The story starts in the 1980s, when two drug counselors in Oregon were fired from their jobs for the sacramental use of peyote. The state denied their applications for unemployment benefits on the ground that they had been fired for misconduct, and they sued on the theory that what the state called misconduct was actually the constitutionally protected exercise of religion. Some Warren Court decisions gave the men hope of winning.

They lost. The Supreme Court, in a 1990 opinion written by Justice Antonin Scalia, ruled that religious belief cannot create a constitutional entitlement to an exemption from a generally applicable law that was not designed to limit religious freedom. Holding otherwise "would be courting anarchy, but that danger increases in direct proportion to the society's diversity of religious beliefs, and its determination to coerce or suppress none of them."

The decision came in for substantial criticism. The liberal legal academy was mostly hostile. So was the conservative movement. The late Father Richard John Neuhaus wrote in these pages that the "fear of anarchy . . . is the conventional argument against all freedoms." Other conservatives argued that the decision was right, and that we should stick with the traditional, pre–Warren Court practice of letting legislatures grant accommodations in particular cases, known as "conduct exemptions," rather than having judges try to devise a rule and apply it across the board. (The Volstead Act implementing Prohibition, for example, exempted the religious use of alcohol, as in Catholic communion.)

The opponents won the political argument. Three years after the Court's decision, a bipartisan majority of Congress enacted, and President Clinton signed, a law to undo it—a law titled to suggest, hyperbolically, that the Court had delivered a grave blow to religious freedom.

The Supreme Court did not overrule the Oregon decision: Justice Scalia's ruling on the meaning of the First Amendment stood. But it accepted the new law as a statutory, rather than constitutional, protection for religious dissenters. If a generally applicable federal law—such as the prohibition on peyote use in the Oregon case—imposed a "substantial burden" on someone's exercise of religion, judges would have to determine whether applying the law to that person served a "compelling governmental interest" using the "least restrictive means" possible. If the answer was no, the believer would get an exemption. Whether or not the law was right to make this inquiry the job of the courts, it seems hard to dispute that it is the right inquiry.

The current dispute arises from the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as Obamacare. It authorizes the secretary of health and human services to set a list of preventive health services that employers have to cover. The administration determined that contraceptives should be on that list. (Which appears to make pregnancy akin to a disease, but let's skip over that.) Some employers object to those forms of contraception that may in some cases cause abortion. Some follow Catholic teaching in objecting to contraception in general, and even more to abortifacients. Both groups further believe that it would be sinful to facilitate the behavior they deem immoral, or to create the impression that their opposition to it is weak or nonexistent.

Some opponents of the administration's rule have said that the First Amendment requires that religious objectors receive an exemption. If Justice Scalia's Oregon decision was right, though, that's a hard case to make. The liberal *Washington Post* columnist Harold Meyerson has raised the possibility that Scalia might vote in favor of the religious dissenters anyway, because "he's being confronted with a case where the religious beliefs in question may be closer to his own" than the beliefs of the Oregonians. More likely, though, is that Scalia will decide the case under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which of course did not exist at the time of the Oregon decision, rather than under the First Amendment. (Meyerson shows no evidence in the column that he knows this law exists.)

Applying the law requires, first, determining whether it covers corporate "persons": Can people organized in the corporate form be said to face a "substantial burden" to their religious consciences? The Dictionary Act stipulates that laws that refer to persons should be understood to include corporations unless otherwise specified, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act contains no such exclusion. Reading the act to exclude corporations would have perverse results, as conservative legal writer Ed Whelan notes: It would mean that a kosher deli, if

it were incorporated, would have no claim against a law that forced it to serve pork.

The rest of the analysis should be pretty straightforward. The administration's rule requires the objectors to do something they believe their religiously informed consciences forbid, or else pay a steep fine for each employee they do not cover. That's a substantial burden. The only way to conclude otherwise is to reject the employers' religious views, which are not on trial before the courts.

It cannot be seriously maintained that forcing employers who object to contraception to provide it is the least restrictive means of advancing a compelling governmental interest. The government could, for example, increase its direct subsidies for the distribution of contraception, involving objectors only to the extent that they pay taxes to the general federal pot. Or the government could allow oral contraception to be purchased over the counter, without a prescription, involving objectors not at all.

Supporters of the administration's legal position in the press have largely avoided engaging these points (except for corporate personhood, which they gleefully attack without noticing that in many cases it is what allows the law to hold corporations accountable for misconduct). Instead, they have created rhetorical diversions.

The editors of the *New York Times* say that the dissenting businesses have asserted "an unprecedented right to impose" their views "on workers who do not share them." That framing of the issue may be effective, as undecided voters often instinctively side against whoever seems to be the aggressor in a culture-war debate.

But of course the employers are not going to court to stop employees from using contraception (or even resorting to abortion) should they wish to do so; they are merely trying to keep themselves from any complicity in it. A right not to be coerced into such complicity had never previously been asserted in court only because it had been taken for granted through the first two centuries of our country's existence.

Feminist writers have tried a variant of the same claim, saying that the dissenting employers are placing their right to act on their religious beliefs above the rights of their female employees. To the extent these feminists are making a legal claim, it is vacuous: Yes, the employers are asserting that their right to act on their beliefs, protected by statute, trumps the right to employer-provided contraceptive coverage created by the regulation. So much is obvious.

If it's a moral claim, it's false. Let's assume that the employers believe that governments should respect a right to contraception of the sort the Supreme Court has protected: a right to produce, purchase, and use contraception free of governmental interference. That right does not conflict with their own right not to provide such coverage. It conflicts only with a right to employer-provided contraceptive coverage. The employer litigants do not believe that this right of employees should be set aside because of their religious scruples; they don't believe this right exists in the first place.

Defenders of the law who avoid such flimsy arguments usually end up making some sort of slippery-slope case: Let employers with religious objections opt out of the contraceptive mandate, for example, and pretty soon you'll be letting other employers opt out of covering blood transfusions, or medical coverage altogether. Or letting Quakers get out of paying taxes to support the military. If religions that believe in human sacrifice make a comeback, should they get an exemption from murder laws?

The more outlandish scenarios ignore the terms of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and thus state the principle behind the lawsuits too broadly. The principle isn't "Never impose a burden on the practice of faith." It's "Don't impose a substantial burden on the practice of faith unless you have to, that is, unless it's the least restrictive way to advance a compelling governmental interest." No neo-Aztecs can take shelter against the murder laws under that principle.

Maybe the anti-medicine employers could—but would anyone step forward to make the case? For almost all of American history, employers were perfectly free to deny all kinds of coverage for religious or any other reasons, and yet religious conflict over health care in the workplace has been nearly absent from American life. Nobody cites actual cases in which employees were denied coverage for transfusions because their bosses were Jehovah's Witnesses.

So long as the principle behind the lawsuits is defined precisely, the arguments against it and them are very weak. Whether that will be enough for Justice Kennedy is anybody's guess. **NR**

Four Myths About Pope Francis

The man in full should be read in full

BY GEORGE WEIGEL

WHEN he was elected bishop of Rome this past March 13, more than a few people wondered just who Jorge Mario Bergoglio was—which was precisely the reaction to the election of Karol Wojtyla as bishop of Rome on October 16, 1978. That night, Wojtyla described himself to his new diocese as having come "from a far country"; nine months ago, Bergoglio told the crowds gathered in the Roman dusk that the cardinals had gone "to the end of the earth" to find a new pope. Wojtyla, taking the name John Paul II, went on to become the most consequential pope in centuries; Bergoglio, taking the name of the beloved *poverello* of Assisi, quickly seized the public imagination, reminding the world in the process that the world needs a pastor's care, and a pastor's challenge, whether the world admits it or not.

Yet many still wonder just who Pope Francis is. To which the answer is: He is a man of many parts. He is a radically converted Christian disciple who has known the mercy of God in his own life and who wants others to know that experience. He is an old-fashioned Jesuit, steeped in the Ignatian idea of spiritual combat, committed to an austere way of life, willing to take risks for the sake of the Gospel. He is a reformer who is calling the Catholic Church to recover the missionary zeal of its origins, and who will make structural changes in the Church in service to that evangelical imperative.

He is a man of compassion for the "peripheries," who will not let the world forget what the world often wants to forget about the abuse of power, the instru-

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mentalization of the poor, the cheapening of human life, the personal and social costs of the cult of the autonomous self. Surprising those who have known him longest, and who thus knew his longstanding reticence, he has become a public personality, with an uncanny ability for the caring gesture that embodies that love which, as Saint Paul taught two millennia ago, is the more perfect way.

Yet myths about him continue to abound. Four come quickly to mind.

Myth 1. Pope Francis is making a radical break with the pontificates of his two predecessors.

On the contrary, Francis is accelerating the evolution of Catholic identity that was at the center of the program of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, in their authoritative interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. In his apostolic letter closing the Great Jubilee of 2000, John Paul II called the Church to leave the shallow waters of institutional maintenance and to go out "into the deep" (Luke 5:5) of what the Polish pope had long styled the "New Evangelization." Benedict XVI summoned the world Synod of Bishops to consider just what that "New Evangelization" might mean, especially for the de-Christianized parts of a once-vibrant Christendom.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio took these counsels to heart and, at a 2007 meeting of all the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, became the intellectual architect of the revolutionary Aparecida Document, which called Latin American Catholicism out of the complacency of cultural "establishment" and into a vigorous proclamation of the Gospel, centered on personal encounters with Jesus Christ. Now, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), his apostolic exhortation completing the work of Benedict's Synod on John Paul II's "New Evangelization," Pope Francis, in clear continuity with his two predecessors, is calling the Church to what he describes as "permanent mission." It is all of a piece.

Myth 2. Pope Francis is a liberal.

"Liberal," of course, means different things to different people. But a pope who, in a daily Mass homily, cites with appreciation Robert Hugh Benson's 1907 apocalyptic novel, *Lord of the World*, and uses Benson's imaginary future to illustrate his own papal warning against "adolescent progressivism," is no "liberal" in any of the word's conventional American meanings. (Indeed, Francis's "adolescent progressivism" is but another name for Benedict XVI's "dictatorship of relativism.") Similarly, when the pope told an Italian Jesuit journal that he was "not a right-winger," he meant that he was not enthralled with Latin American generals dripping with faux decorations; he did not mean that he was deploring Paul Ryan (although he may or may not agree with Ryan on matters of prudential judgment).

Attempts to capture Bergoglio in the typical ecclesiastical or political meanings of "liberal" are bound to fail. He is a churchman; his deep Christian conviction and his judgment are tethered to the settled teaching of the Church (as he reiterated in *Evangelii Gaudium* on the question of whom the Church can and cannot ordain to the ministerial priesthood). And as a public figure, he is not a "man of political ideology," as he stated bluntly in that same document, but a pastor.

Myth 3. Pope Francis is anti-business.

If he were, why would he write in *Evangelii Gaudium* that business is a "noble vocation" when business serves the common good—a description that well fits those American companies and American entrepreneurs who take job creation and philanthropy seriously? Like John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and indeed like all of Catholic social doctrine since Leo XIII in the late 19th century, Francis knows and teaches that economic activity, like every other form of human activity, is subject to what he called, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "critical thinking" and "moral discernment."

From his Argentine experience (which can hardly be described as an experience of well-functioning markets regulated by law and moral culture), Francis knows that cupidity is a personally and socially destructive vice. As a pastor, he is challenging the business world to do all it can to include the poor in what John Paul II described as networks of productivity and exchange. At the same time, he challenges governments not to fall prey to what *Evangelii Gaudium* deplored as a "welfare mentality" in which the poor are human ciphers, mere problems-to-be-solved; rather, this man of the "peripheries" is calling the world and the Church, as John Paul II did, to see the poor through the lens of empowerment, as people-with-potential-to-be-unleashed.

Myth 4. Pope Francis is soft on the hot-button social issues.

Virtually no attention has been paid to the pope's multiple defenses of the right to life from conception until natural death in his daily Mass homilies and in a notable address to Italian physicians. Similarly, *Evangelii Gaudium* under-

scores the unchanging (and unchangeable) moral teaching of the Catholic Church on abortion, even as the pope called the world Church to complement its right-to-life advocacy with effective and compassionate service to women in crisis pregnancies—thus paying tribute to what the American pro-life movement has done since *Roe v. Wade*.

In the midst of the battle over the nature of marriage in Argentina, Cardinal Bergoglio wrote a convent of cloistered nuns, asking them to pray that "gay marriage" legislation would be defeated, since that project was an effort of the "father of lies" to deceive the children of God. (One of the striking, and typically unremarked, things about Francis's papal preaching and catechesis is the number of times he has referred to Satan.) Both of

AP PHOTO/ANDREW MEDICHINI

these longstanding concerns of Jorge Mario Bergoglio were summed up in *Evangelii Gaudium*'s description of the traditional family as the "fundamental cell of society," a classic Catholic social-doctrine theme with which he is in obvious accord.

To be sure, Francis wants the Church's pro-life advocacy to be firmly located within its healing ministry to a wounded culture. And his pastoral sense tells him that postmodern humanity scoffs at the Church's necessary "No" to some acts because contemporary culture has forgotten, or has not been taught, the "Yes" to the dignity of the human person that stands behind every "No" the Church must say to death-dealing actions. But that the pope is a man of rock-solid orthodoxy on the "social issues" no one should doubt.

The dangers lurking beneath the remarkable approval ratings Francis has garnered in his brief pontificate have largely to do with the ongoing incapacities of Vatican communications, which permit various interested parties, in the press and among politicians, to "narrativize" the pope to their liking. *Evangelii Gaudium* was a remarkable document; it may well have marked the decisive turning point from the Counter-Reformation Church to the Evangelical Catholicism of the future.

Yet I'd bet that no newspaper in the world led the story, the day after *Evangelii Gaudium* was released, with the lede the pope would likely have wanted: "Pope Francis today called the Catholic Church to rediscover its missionary nature, challenging Catholics in all walks of life to think of themselves as missionaries who enter mission territory every day." And as it becomes more and more clear, through his decisions in appointing bishops and his disciplinary actions, that Pope Francis is not the left-leaning creampuff that some imagine him to be, there will be a danger that the "narrative" on the pontificate will change, such that "the system got him" becomes the dominant storyline—thus further burying the pope's central message, which is the call to the New Evangelization.

But that need not happen, and won't, if this man in full is read in full, and if the Holy See manages to create a communications apparatus and strategy for the 21st century. **NR**

Al-Qaeda Renewed

It is decentralized and dangerous

BY KATHERINE ZIMMERMAN

THE recent crisis in Syria has driven the growth of al-Qaeda groups in that country; in Iraq, al-Qaeda has killed dozens at a time in coordinated car bombings. The broad network of al-Qaeda affiliates now threatens the United States from safe havens across the Middle East and North Africa. But it is far from the same beast that attacked the U.S. in 2001: It has evolved and adapted, and is much more resilient than before.

Twelve years ago, al-Qaeda was on the run. When the U.S. overthrew the Taliban government in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda lost its safe haven. Its operatives there fled to neighboring Pakistan and Iran, and its operatives worldwide had a target on their backs as countries responded to President George W. Bush's ultimatum that "you're either with us or against us in the fight against terror." That fight relied heavily on authoritarian regimes to crack down on al-Qaeda-linked cells from Algeria to Egypt to Yemen.

In 2001, al-Qaeda's senior leadership guided operatives worldwide in their support for local militant Islamist factions. Like-minded groups received support from Osama bin Laden but were not fully integrated into his al-Qaeda network. In the following years, al-Qaeda adapted to increased pressure, especially from the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Pakistan, by further decentralizing its decision-making and operational planning. Bin Laden recognized regional groups that became their own centers of operation but still received overall direction from al-Qaeda's leadership.

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As al-Qaeda was adapting, U.S. counterterrorism strategy was stagnant. The majority of America's military and intelligence assets focused on degrading the senior al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The United States' local partners in the Middle East and North Africa served as the front line against al-Qaeda's expansion.

American dependence on regional governments was a strategy that worked, until it didn't. There was little tolerance for al-Qaeda sympathizers under Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. By the mid 2000s, even Moammar Qaddafi had backed away from supporting terrorists. The commitment of Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh to the fight against al-Qaeda was inconsistent but responsive to international pressure. Bashar Assad cracked down on Islamists in Syria, though al-Qaeda was able to run foreign fighter networks through Syria into Iraq. And the Iraqi government partnered with American military forces to combat al-Qaeda. The successive fall of the Ben Ali, Mubarak, Qaddafi, and Saleh regimes and the outbreak of the Syrian civil war pulled the rug out from under the U.S. in 2011.

Quick to seize the opportunity but wary of provoking an international response, al-Qaeda renewed its efforts in the region. It benefited from the breakdown within government security forces in these countries and from the slow and confused response of the West. The release or escape of Islamist militants, including former leaders of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, has also been a key factor in al-Qaeda's expansion. These once-incarcerated terrorists are among the founders of new al-Qaeda-linked groups in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. Al-Qaeda no longer relies on its senior leadership in Pakistan for survival. Affiliates—al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—established relations among themselves. AQI's founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, facilitated the full incorporation of AQIM into the al-Qaeda network. Other relationships were kept covert, including the one between AQAP in Yemen and the al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab in Somalia. This set of groups is now a robust network extending from the Sahel eastward to South Asia.

At the start of 2011, when the "Arab Spring" took hold, AQAP was already strong: Its core leadership included members of Osama bin Laden's inner circle, former Guantanamo detainees, Afghanistan-training-camp veterans, and tested al-Qaeda operatives. Between 2009, when al-Qaeda's Yemeni and Saudi branches merged to form AQAP, and 2012, the group attempted three attacks in the U.S. By mid 2011, AQAP fielded an insurgent force that nearly controlled two Yemeni provinces and threatened Yemen's second-largest city, Aden. It continued to expand northward from there, toward the capital, before local security forces partnering with tribal militias pushed AQAP back into the Yemeni hinterlands.

The effect of the Arab Spring, and of bin Laden's death, has been the strengthening of local al-Qaeda-linked groups and of their relations to one another.

AQAP threatened American diplomatic posts abroad in August 2013, prompting the unprecedented closure of over 20 embassies and consulates. Nothing happened, but AQAP still maintains the operational capabilities that originally elicited the U.S. response. AQAP's threat to the U.S. and its interests endures, even as the "Yemen model"—U.S. reliance on local security forces—is held up as an example.

But Yemeni security forces have not eradicated AQAP's extensive networks within the country. Unresolved political issues in Yemen leave open the possibility of a renewed crisis, which would play into AQAP's hands. In the meantime, the group has sustained an assassination campaign targeting military and intelligence officials, especially those in Yemen's already restive south. Though not all of the assassinations can be traced to AQAP (there are other militant groups that could be carrying out attacks), the campaign has killed scores of individuals this year.

AQAP has also played a role in establishing the al-Qaeda-linked Jamal network in Egypt. The former operational head of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Mohamed Jamal Abu Ahmed, was released from an Egyptian prison in 2011 and became the key node between the new network and AQAP. Mohamed Jamal knew a handful of AQAP's Yemeni leaders from his time in Sudan in the 1990s and reached out to them, securing an initial source of funding and the deployment of AQAP militants from Yemen to form the core of his group. Though Mohamed Jamal is again in an Egyptian prison cell, al-Qaeda's presence has not been erased from Egypt, and there is growing concern about militancy in the Sinai.

In the Sahel, AQIM has recently mounted a terrorist threat. An AQIM-linked attack on a gas facility in southern Algeria killed three Americans in January 2013 and, five months later, a coordinated double bombing targeted a French-run uranium mine in Niger and a Nigerien military barracks.

AQIM has also secured a presence inside Libya. It runs training camps in the southwest of the country and is alleged to have connections to Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi. Ansar al-Sharia, led by a former Guantanamo detainee, operates freely in the Benghazi area. Its training camps are reportedly funneling fighters into Syria.

During and after the 2012 Tuareg uprising, AQIM expanded its network in Mali. The AQIM leaders planned an Islamic emirate: One of its groups, Ansar al-Din, held Gao to the southeast of Timbuktu, and another, MUJWA, held Kidal to the northeast. Ansar al-Din overplayed its hand by marching on the capital, and French troops launched an offensive against the groups in January 2013. A handful of key AQIM leaders were killed, but much of the core group remains dispersed in the Sahel. The French remain embroiled in Mali today, since there is still no Malian, United Nations, or African Union force capable of preventing AQIM's return in the north.

AQIM's connections extend beyond the Sahel to Yemen's AQAP and Egypt's Jamal network. Correspondence recovered in Timbuktu reveals the exchange of advice between AQAP's and AQIM's leaders in the summer of 2012. It was not the first time the two had worked together: In 2010, bin Laden had instructed leaders of both groups to support a centrally directed al-Qaeda plot to attack European targets; AQIM was to fund the operation while AQAP was to conduct it.

Al-Qaeda's expansion is made much more dangerous by the existence of such relationships. The effect of the Arab Spring, and of bin Laden's death, has been the strengthening of local al-Qaeda-linked groups and of their relations to one another. Today, each of the affiliates presents a unique threat to American interests.

The addition of the Syrian group Jabhat al-Nusra to the al-Qaeda network is an alarming development, especially given the renewal of AQI's operational capabilities: AQI (now calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is operating at levels similar to those seen in 2007. The Iraqi security forces do not have the necessary intelligence capabilities to conduct operations against AQI as they did when partnered with the U.S. military. AQI has also secured territory in eastern Syria that can serve and has served as a staging ground for attacks. These al-Qaeda groups are the dominant opposition forces in Syria today.

America's strategy to counter al-Qaeda has failed to prevent its expansion in the region. It is now sharing finances, fighters, and tactics across large geographic areas. Not all members of the al-Qaeda network have announced an intention to attack the United States. Not all will. But the entire network is stronger, including groups with both the intent and the capabilities to kill Americans. The fight against terror, by whatever name, is not over, and we must develop a new strategy to counter the new al-Qaeda. NR

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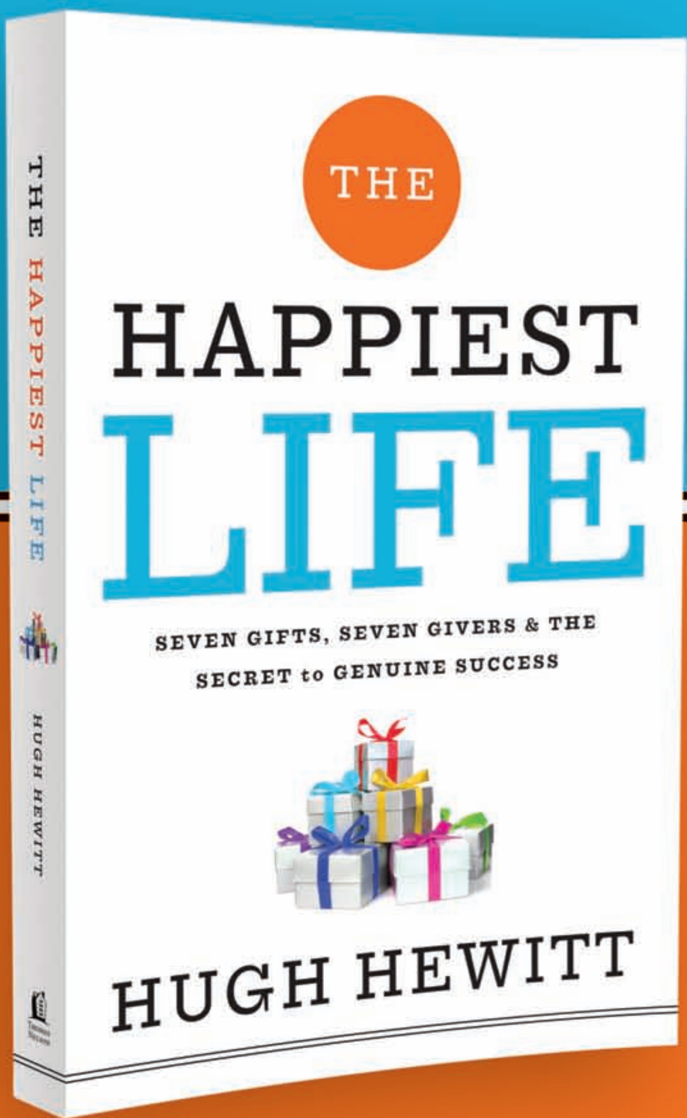

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Looking For Lefty

The problem of what, or whom, to read

BY JAY NORDLINGER

ABOUT ten years ago, a friend of mine who works in public life made an announcement at lunch: "I've been reading newspapers and magazines since I was a kid. I'm very well informed. From now on, I'm not going to read anything I'm not going to agree with. At this stage, I'm entitled." I grinned at this, and was tempted to go my friend's way. I still am. But I know there must be fiber in our diets. We cannot just consume journalistic and political ice cream.

Being a conservative, I should seek out "progressive" opinion. But I have had a tough time of it. I have long tried to have a go-to lefty, someone who will give me the best arguments of the other side. The problem is, I keep running into simple invective and sneering.

For a while, I made it a point to read Michael Kinsley, the vaunted purveyor of "smart liberalism." Bill Buckley appreciated him, making him a regular on his television show, *Firing Line*. I appreciate him too, I guess—but he said such nutty and unfair things about George W. Bush during the Iraq War, I did not keep up with him. Possibly, I missed out.

I made it a point to read Richard Cohen, every column of his. But here again, the Iraq War was my Waterloo. It's not that I disagreed with Cohen, or with Kinsley. What's the point of reading the other side if you want to be agreed with? It's that they too often struck poses and sneered and played to their crowd (as I saw it). They would not take the other side, namely me and my allies, seriously. They made cartoons of us.

In a column of my own, I vented some frustration. "Richard Cohen," I said, "imagines conservatives who do not exist. He seems unwilling to debate, or consider, conservatives as we truly are. He is a caricaturist, and I'm looking for a columnist." I should pause here to say that I'm picking on Cohen for a reason: He's just about the best of them. If he were run-of-the-mill, I wouldn't bother.

At a conference abroad, I met Anthony Grayling, the British philosopher and journalist. This was in 2004 or 2005. Grayling assumed that I was on the left, like most everyone else (including him). When he found out I was not, he could not have been friendlier. We talked over the issues on that occasion and subsequent ones. Here was a man I could "do business with," to borrow Mrs. Thatcher's language about Gorbachev. I determined I would read Grayling, which the Internet makes easy to do. (The Internet makes it easy to read anyone.) I fell off the wagon, somehow. Maybe I should get back on.

Early in life, I read nearly everything under the sun, as young people should. I looked at *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, and *In These Times* on the left, and NATIONAL REVIEW, *Commentary*, and *The American Spectator* on the right. I found myself drawn to one side, obviously. And gradually my reading narrowed. I didn't make a decision to give up certain publications. I just did, barely aware of it.

Actually, I can tell you when I gave up *The New Yorker*—it wasn't that long ago, relatively speaking. I can tell you almost like a reformed alcoholic who remembers the date of his last drink. It was in late 2002, when the magazine published a review of a movie called "8 Mile." The star of this flick was Eminem, the rapper, and it was set in his hometown of Detroit. I myself grew up in the orbit of Detroit. I know this particular milieu fairly well.

A lot of conservatives objected to Eminem for his vulgarity, his depravity—you know, the usual. But *The New Yorker*'s critic wrote, "People who are convinced that Eminem is destroying America might want to consider the delicacy of the white-black friendships in '8 Mile.' (Perhaps the spectre of such friendships is what right-wingers actually hate most.)"

I was not the type to be easily stunned, and I am even less stunnable now. But I must say, those sentences stunned me. I thought, "Is that what they think of us? Do these *New Yorker* types know us so little? Have they ever met any of us? Do they ever get out?" And "if they won't bother with *us*, why should I bother with *them*?" It wasn't one lousy film review that repelled me; it was a pervasive attitude.

False accusations of racism, I think, are what is most repellent about the Left. They seem unable to stop throwing white sheets over us. Show me a lefty who won't tar his opponents with racism, and I'll show you a virtual hero! That man is my friend for life. Do conservatives have similar nasty habits? If so, they, we, should cut them out.

For about 20 years, starting when I was in college, I read the *New York Times* every day, from cover to cover (or the newspaper equivalent). I would no more have gone without reading the *Times* than I would have gone without dressing myself. It was automatic. Buckley once wrote that going without the *Times* would be "like going about without arms and legs." (He said this as a prelude to some complaint about the paper.)

In 2004, I wrote a piece called "Going *Times*less: Who dares give up the 'newspaper of record'?" The answer was: Plenty of people. And not just crotchety conservatives, but nice mainstreamers, too. I canvassed a number of writers and public figures. A veteran Washington reporter told me that bias and partisanship infected "every nook and cranny of that paper." Not just the news reports but "the arts pages and the food pages and the headlines and the photo selection and the captions"—everything.

At the end of that piece, I wrote that "some of us can't wean ourselves away" from the *Times*, "and may never." Yet wean myself I did. Though not really consciously: I just read less and less of it until I read almost nothing. I like to read the obits, however, via the *Times* app on my phone. I have this in common with the late Robert Bork—not the app, but he, too, gave up everything in the *Times* except the obits.

Don't think that conservatives who concentrate on the right-leaning press have lives of peace and quiet. Oh, no. You can spend 90 percent of your time stewing about the failings of other conservatives. Your own side can exasperate you more than the other side. Conservatives are very good at infighting and splintering. There are always people who present themselves as the One True Conservative, next to whom everyone else is a heretic.

Democrats, oddly enough, sometimes think that Republicans and conservatives are a monolith. At least they pretend to do so. We're all lined up like Rockettes,

This piece arose from a shorter piece by Mr. Nordlinger in the British monthly Standpoint.

Diogenes, looking for his man

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHANN HEINRICH WILHELM TISCHBEIN

while they are gloriously independent. President Obama peddled this notion to a group of his donors in 2009: "Democrats are an opinionated bunch. You know, the other side, they just kinda sometimes do what they're told. Democrats, y'all thinkin' for yourselves." (The president, like most of us, enjoys slipping into the vernacular from time to time.) My experience of Republicans and Democrats has been completely different. We righties do an excellent impression of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, or the Trotskyites and Shachtmanites.

Everyone should have a balanced media diet, I suppose, but maybe not too balanced. Some narrowing down, some imbalance, is permissible, especially after ample experience. How long should you keep reading *Mother Jones* if a) you know what's in it and b) you think it's all bunk? (The same goes for NATIONAL REVIEW or other conservative publications.) Buckley would occasionally say, "The purpose of an open mind is to close it on some things." He was paraphrasing Chesterton, I'm sure: "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."

We are always warned against "preaching to the choir." But, as I once heard Midge Decter say, preaching to the choir gets a bad rap: It is very, very important. The choir needs consolation, reminding, bolstering—the sense that they are not alone. I could not agree more, mainly as a choir member, but also as a sometime preacher.

I further make this contention: It's more important that lefties seek out right opinion than that righties seek out left opinion. "Liberalism"—though I choke on the corruption of that word—is in the air we breathe. We all go to school, and most people go to college, I think, and many of us go to grad school. We all go to the movies and watch television shows. Liberalism is almost the soundtrack of our lives. The conservative case often has to be sought out.

All this said, it's possible for a conservative to ghettoize himself, in the journalism he reads. I confess to being surprised by Mitt Romney's loss to Obama in the last election—certainly by the margin of that loss. And I was irked at being surprised. Was I in a conservative bubble? Did I need to get out more? I resolved to change my media diet: I would cut out some candy and add some fiber. This resolve lasted several weeks—until I fell back into old habits.

A new year is upon us, however, and one could make resolutions. For many years, I have been told by a British conservative friend that the *Guardian*, whatever its ideological coloration, is "the only serious newspaper in Britain." Maybe I should look at this famous left-wing daily online. But there is always a column by Thomas Sowell or Charles Moore or Mark Steyn to read—delicious, and nutritious, too. **NR**

The True Sprit of Christmas*

BY ALOÏSE BUCKLEY HEATH

MANY persons our ages of 12, 10, 8, 6 think the Sprit of Chrismas is about toys and presents instead of about the real sprit. These persons are immature and childless. As will be seen.

Today at Assembly, everybody got a copy and got read to, the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which turned out it was the Chrismas present from the United Nations to all the children in the world, also which Pam, 12, and John, 10, have to write down about constructively, and Priscilla, 8, and Buckley, 6, be prepared to explane in there own words by Monday. This is our freethinking thoughts, for nothing is black and white but grey.

The first part, before the Principles start, is very oratory and good except for puctuation (commas not periods after paragraphs) and reptitous (absolutely 5 paragraphs in a row begin with "Whereas"). Persons that are always tearing down, tearing down would probbly mock this instead of saying the United Nations did pretty good, spelling the long words this composition is absolutely full of.

PRINCIPLE 1: *The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration. Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.* Those who *think* will easly see that who their talking about is none other but the U.S.

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* Composed by Pamela, John, Priscilla, and, sometimes, Buckley Heath; Typed by There Mother.

A Christmas story by the late Aloïse Buckley Heath is an NR tradition. This story was first published in 1967.

of America (world smelting pot), for in other countries from us (Europe, England, Russia, Wildest Africa, etc. etc. etc.) there isn't enough different population from the main to do discrimination at. (Except by inmost feelings, hard to wipe out, unforch.)

Why do they drag in sex, one asks ourself? Because the United Nations regard sex purely, like dictionaries, where sex is if you are a boy or a girl (you can look it up)—not the reason children are not allowed to see practicly every movie in the whole world. It is a well-none fact that most parents comitt discrimination on children by sex (by wether they are male sex or female sex, other words.) Ex:—:Sataday mornings, boys (M. sex) have to clean out cars in a icecold subzero gerage, wile girls (F. sex) only have to vacume warm & cozy carpets. And yet again about color (sometimes meening race, but they already said race in this PRINCIPLE so they now meen color.); Why? Because, Ex:—:Some persons, who dirt shows on more than other persons because of there snow white color, are all the time getting it in the neck (like parents saying: "Good God, your angkles!!" venial sin) when that happens to be the exact night one washed with soap! All this shall end.

One thing the United Nations forgot:—:discrimination by age, like:—:In 2 years, could Pam, now age 12 drive a car in S. Carolina? Yes!! In Conn.? No!! Could Jim, our brother of 14, marry Linda who he loves in India? Yes!! In Conn.? No!! Showing that the U.N. forgot the main thing the child get's discriminated for. BUT: after all: nobidies perfect:

PRINCIPLE 2 (really getting going): *The child shall enjoy special protection and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.* Their going to start some laws, and unless quite a few parents wise up, we happen to know quite a few parents (including by marrage) that will end up incarserated. Because when the U.N. finds out, surely soon, that every single child in the world spends absolutely the best years of his life from infantry to adultery sitting on a hard seat, bending his head over books that is rooning his eyes and with the most absolutely boaring stuff poaring, poaring, poaring into his ears. At the same time when they breathe in constantly sniffing germs of namonia, chicken pocks, nefritus so they practicly only dare breathe *out* (practicly impossible):—all of which contrary to health and freedom:—then the U.N. will edict that this situation must CEACE!

PRINCIPLE 3: *The child shall be entitled from his birth to a name and a nationality.* This is also in the Sprit of Chrismas because it portects children from being called Blooper and Kiki even when big, which can become absolutely humalating. Ex:—:When John was born our brother Jim was 4 (dificult age) and Jim liked our Uncle Reid so he absolutely made every one call John "Uncle Reid" after him (Uncle Reid). Funny then, but how would John feel nowadays if Mrs. McLeod said in class: "Uncle Reid, suppose you take the next passage?" Like a fool. PRINCIPLE 3 also portects people from the fate of Philip Nolan, who had to live on boats and not have a nationality for having got mad at the Government once, tho not till grown-up. But children's fate, through the passage of years is to become grown-up or else dead. So look before you leap, which the U.N. does.

PRINCIPLE 4: *The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow up and develop in health; to this end special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate prenatal and postnatal care.* This sounds like mostly for Mothers, but *think*, *think*, just exactly where would children be without prenatal Mothers? NOWHERE. And prenatal Fathers are not so absolutely necessary. The first Nowell would have been in a sanidary, recently-modern hospital if people had only had the U.N. then. The Massacre of the Holy Innocents would be absolutely an object of forbiddance and mortal sin, under penalty of the law.

PRINCIPLE 5: *The child who is physically, mentally, or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education, and care required by his particular condition.* In the intersts of the questioning mind, one has to admit that this principle is hard: because:—"physically handicapped" means

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crippled and those children, they say, have to go to special schools for crippled children:—"mentally handicapped" means retarded, and those children have to go to special schools for retarded children:—"socially handicapped" means Negro in the South, but, as is well-known, those children have to come *out* of special schools for Negro children in the South. Does that make sense for physicals and mentals to go *in* yet for socials to come *out*? Not that who are we to critisise, never less, may be grown-ups should clarify there thinking on the topic.

PRINCIPLE 6: *The child, for the full and harmonious development of his personality, needs love and understanding. He shall, wherever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents, and in any case in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material security. Payment of state and other assistance toward the maintenance of children of families is desirable.* This one may seem to say a lot of things one already knew, like "love and understanding," etc. etc. etc., but the important thing after all, is that it is still on the side of children, other words: Sprit of Chrismas. One may well ask ourself, although, about assisting (paying) people of large families (personally in our favor), which if they do, they have to make there mind up about populations exploding. For, besides the joys of parenthood, if you get paid too, where will it all end?

PRINCIPLE 7: *The child shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him on a basis of equal opportunity to develop his abilities. The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which shall be directed to the same purposes as education.* It is hard to see how the U.N. missed the things wrong in this, unless there wrist was getting tired from writting. *Wrong thing No. A:*—There absolutely just isn't anything equal in people's opportunity to learn culture that would be general. Like in West Hartford, U.S.A., culture is French, Mythology, Music, Hiawatha, and things like that but in Wildest Africa culture is Hunting lions, Shrinking heads, Building huts of clay and wattles made, and things like that, none of which there is any of in West Hartford. (Even if there was some way this could be arranged, it would not be very fair to Wildest Africa children.) *Wrong thing No. B:*—(the part about play and recreation). Unforch, as even the dumbest know, play and recreation that is directed always turns out into one thing:—RELAY RACES.

PRINCIPLE 8: *The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief.* Vere dignum et justum est. (Altarboy's joke by John. Others except priests look it up.)

PRINCIPLE 9: *The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty, and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic in any form.* (It is a known fact that sometimes children run right strate across *without* looking *both ways*: *Think*: nothing is black and white: all is grey.) Next part: *The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age.* This is one of the most absolutely Sprit of Chrismaslike things the U.N. ever said in its life. For NOTE:—Employment means working for *money*. How far far worse indeed, therefore, is the involatory slavitude children have to do Satadays, not only for no money, but not getting their riteful allowance if they don't. This also shall be changed by law.

PRINCIPLE 10: *The child shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace, and universal brotherhood, in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.* These sweet and nobble words show how the Uniteds have even *improved* the Sprit of Chrismas. For in olden days, you were supposed to love your fellow men (even the ones you couldn't stand) yet use your energy and talents for you and yours, which you had to, the world being such a mess. In our day, you only have to have a sprit of tolerace, friendship, etc. etc. etc., and even that you only have among peopleS, much more practical than among peoplE, if you get our meaning (see letters we put in capitals). Also, the new laws of the Governments of the U.N. will take care of things like nutrition, housing, and other postnatal care of you and yours, so there will be nothing left to do except be devoted to the service of your fellow men.

Thus we see, the U.N. Declaration of Rights of the Child is in the true Sprit of Chrismas, and also cinchy. **NR**

My American Dream

How I fell in love with the United States

BY CHARLES C. W. COOKE

If you hang around a British person long enough, you are practically guaranteed to hear him make a derisive quip about Americans.

In all likelihood, he won't even notice that he's done it. I have been at many dinner parties at which it has been baldly stated, without embarrassment or regret, that Americans are "all fat" or "all stupid," or . . . well, you can pretty much choose your epithet at random, and I have watched with irritation as the line was met with general agreement. It is a peculiar thing that reflexive anti-Americanism is tolerated in Britain and beyond to a degree that no other rudeness is. On occasion, I have tried to point this out, puckishly inquiring as to whether the speaker would make the same charge with a different nationality. "Nigerians are all stupid," perhaps? I think not.

Ugly as it is, this tic is unlikely to change anytime soon. Making jokes about Americans has been endorsed and indulged by the British literary and political classes for over 200 years now. Here is a fairly typical crack, from Oscar Wilde: "America had often been discovered before Columbus, but it had always been hushed up."

Ha ha! Europeans knew it was there, you see, *but they kept it quiet*. Why? Because the inhabitants are so frightfully uncouth, daaahling.

Here's another one: "America is the only country that went from barbarism to decadence without civilization in between."

That's from Oscar Wilde, too. And it's funny because somebody witty and sophisticated said it, and because everybody just *knows* that Americans aren't witty or sophisticated. Indeed, even witty and sophisticated Americans are happy to confirm this . . .

Casual discourtesy of this sort has been a staple of the European chattering classes since pre-Revolutionary days. The most famous European scientist of the 18th century, the spectacularly named Count Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon, wrote earnestly in his seminal *Histoire Naturelle* that North America's climate must inevitably make all of its animals and people weak, diminutive, and degenerate. Beyond anecdote, Buffon had no evidence for this—something that an irritated (and tall) Thomas Jefferson pointed out masterfully in *Notes on the State of Virginia*—but that didn't really matter because Buffon's audience, possessed of the same powdered-wig derision that led

Buffon to make the claim in the first place, didn't know any better. Worse: They didn't *want* to know any better.

The sad truth is that, at one level or another, a majority of Europeans still believe in the inherent inferiority of the United States and its people, and they reject all evidence to the contrary. In the public imagination, America is the brash young houseguest: violent, forthright with opinion, unimpressed by pretentious tradition, and permanently unable to shake off an unfortunate background in trade. Europeans sigh patronizingly at the United States as a knowing parent would at an unruly child. They are envious of America's success, yes. But envious in that peculiarly hateful sort of way in which a man might resent his ex-wife's newfound riches.

With the notable exception of my parents, I grew up around people who displayed these prejudices openly. My schools, in Cambridge and in Oxford, were interesting places: beautiful, old, sometimes unkind, and often eccentric. They were also hotbeds of upper-middle-class condescension and—at least when it came to America—conventional wisdom. And yet, for whatever reason, none of the reflexive anti-American bias of my peers ever much resonated with me—even when it was justified with what I believed to be legitimate criticism. At six, at ten, at thirteen, at fifteen . . . I just never bought into the disdain. I would think, "Well *that's* not true."

In one form or another, I suppose, I have been in love with the United States for as long as I have been in love with anything at all. As a small child, I watched in awe as the Space Shuttle took off from Cape Canaveral in Florida. I had a stencil of *Apollo 11* on my lunchbox and a photograph of the Grand Canyon on my bedroom wall. We took regular family holidays to California and Arizona to see a couple of retired sisters, both of whom I called "Grandma" even though they were not blood relations. I collected postcards featuring skyscrapers.

Insofar as I was political at all, as a teenager I was probably of the Left. As my mother puts it, I had "some pretty funny ideas" in my awkward phase, and I found the aesthetic of socialism and of leftist rebellion to be pleasing. The National Health Service made perfect sense to me when I knew nothing else, and I believed the politicians who told me that it was the "envy of the world." I wasn't really sure why anybody "needed" a big military, and I instinctively sided with those who would have traded guns for butter. I never questioned whether global warming was real or inquired as to the motives of those for whom it was an obsession. I didn't like school.

All told, I absorbed the British distaste for America's politics even as I continued to love the country. Until I took the time to look into the issue, I believed as a matter of course that America's gun laws were inherently ridiculous; until I bothered to know better, I thought that Americans routinely died on the steps of hospitals; until I was a young adult, I accepted that American presidents were all both insipid and dangerous. But, I suppose, I never much cared.

"Most human beings," Aldous Huxley noticed, "have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted." I was no different temperamentally, and I wasn't helped by the ritual abundance of the era in which I grew up. The 1990s were an astonishing time to be a child in the West. For a time, we lived in those broad, sunlit uplands to which Churchill alluded desperately in the darkest days of the 1940s, and nothing seemed much to matter. By the time that I was seven, history had been declared to be over. The Cold War was won. Budgets were balanced. Economies were booming. You could almost feel the confidence in the air. Who had time for politics?

AND then, on a day that at first felt like any other, terrorists flew four planes into my innocence and changed my life forever.

I was 16, and living just outside Cambridge. I had never considered the possibility that anyone in the West might equivocate after such an atrocity, let alone that some would side with the perpetrators. Nor had it occurred to me that there would be anything but full-throated support for the United States in the aftermath. At first, I was correct. Most people I knew were respectful, and most of my friends were horrified. We knew something big had happened when even the French national newspaper *Le Monde* took a break from worrying about "Anglo-Saxon economics" and ran an astonishing headline: *Nous sommes tous Américains*, or "We are all Americans." I remember writing to my American "grandmother" with a similar sentiment—and meaning it more than ever.

But, as we moved toward the end of September, I started to hear ugly comments here and there. "It was awful," people would clarify, "but you have to wonder if the United States *had it coming*." By October, voices on the radio that was always on in my parents' kitchen began to articulate this sentiment less guardedly—sometimes to applause, sometimes to boos. I found to my surprise that the public figures who were supposed to be "stupid" and "simple-minded" were the ones who were making sense, while the people I was supposed to look up to were not. I heard a lot about "nuance."

I was still stunned, and I suppose I was looking for leaders who shared my disposition. Rudy Giuliani's defiant speech to the United Nations is burned into my mind:

> Look at that destruction, that massive, senseless, cruel loss of human life, and then, I ask you to look in your hearts and recognize that there is no room for neutrality on the issue of terrorism. You're either with civilization or with terrorists. On one side is democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human life. On the other, it's tyranny, arbitrary executions, and mass murder. We're right and they're wrong. It's as simple as that.

George Orwell wrote admiringly of Rudyard Kipling's poem "Tommy" that "it would be difficult to hit off the one-eyed paci-

In one form or another, I suppose, I have been in love with the United States for as long as I have been in love with anything at all.

fism of the English in fewer words than in the phrase, 'making mock of uniforms that guard you while you sleep.'" Coming from a family with deep roots in the military, I had certainly never made mock of uniforms or of the people who wore them. But I had taken them for granted. I'd taken *everything* for granted.

I quickly realized that the West's position was the product of concrete choices and explicit sacrifices. Before September 11, it had never occurred to me that the stability of global trade, international peace, and the integrity of transnational communications were in some regard the product of a naval supremacy that the United States silently inherited from the British. It had never occurred to me that the world would look dramatically different if another country or axis enjoyed this power, and that it was in my interest to ensure that this never happened. I had never considered, in other words, the importance of the *Pax Americana*. From now on, I would never forget it.

Neither, until when, three years later, I took a course in British colonial history at Oxford, did I have much of an idea as to quite how exceptional and extraordinary the United States was in world history. Reading through all the documents that I could find, I quickly gained an appreciation for the classical liberalism of which I had never quite realized I was an adherent. It is no exaggeration to say that, discovering the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the *Federalist* and *Anti-Federalist* papers, and the men who, in Frederick Douglass's immortal words, "preferred revolution to peaceful submission to bondage," I felt as the heathens of old must have when they discovered the Bible. This, *this* was my cause—not all that teenage fluff.

I was hooked. However vehemently my leftist friends tried to relegate the virtue of a nation to the sum of its spreadsheets, the fact remains that the United States is the only country in the world that was founded explicitly on a proposition, and that in consequence has a set of values to which it can return and to which its immigrants may hew. The Declaration of Independence, Chesterton wrote, is "perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature."

It is true that, at its heart, the American Revolution was really a restoration—the moment at which "his Majesty's subjects in the colonies," as the Massachusetts House of Representatives referred to themselves until the very last moment, chided the mother country for "abolishing the free system of English laws" and set about resuscitating them in the New World. But, because the Revolution was eventually hijacked by a group of extremists, it was so much more than that. "All honor to Jefferson," Lincoln wrote in 1859 as the ongoing evil of slavery loomed large, for he

> had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to embalm it there, that to-day, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling-block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression.

A few buildings away from my rooms, the Oxford University Labour Club met on Thursday evenings for astonishingly dull weekly debates in which speaker after speaker took to the podium to contort the English language into ever more jejune forms, and to say without the slightest embarrassment things such as, "I'm in favor of freedom of speech, but . . ." or, "Well, we really have to think about the collective."

Compare this with, say, James Madison's enthusiasm for "the advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation," whose "governments are afraid to trust the people with arms."

If you have been accustomed to this idea from birth, it might feel insignificant—prosaic, even. But I would venture that this is among the most radical sentences written in the history of mankind—and not only when put into the context of the time. Until I looked into it properly, I had never quite managed to get on board with the Second Amendment, and I am ashamed to say that I had not so much remained neutral as bought hook, line, and sinker into the fallacious conceit that it protected only a collective right that was inextricable from its time.

How wrong I discovered myself to be. How abjectly, completely, *dramatically* wrong. As I read and read, I realized that there was simply no way to honestly look at the Second Amendment—or its drafting, or the jurisprudence and common law of the time, or the attitudes of the men who debated it—and to conclude that it was anything other than an individual right. I recognized, too, that the idea of an armed and, ultimately, sovereign public is a beautiful and radical thing, and one that needs protecting above all others.

In comparison, all of that posturing from Robespierre and Marx and Keir Hardie—and my undergraduate peers, for that matter—struck me as abject nonsense; as another way of saying "trust *us* to live *your* lives." Read the founding documents and you will see free men declaring in no uncertain terms that they are free men, and affirming too that they must be neither treated as subjects nor expected to submit to the caprice of the powerful or to the zeitgeist as the condition of entering into the social compact.

Here are men who were willing to fight a revolution over abstract legal theory—for principle and for birthright. "You are not to inquire how your trade may be increased," argued Patrick Henry at the Virginia Ratifying Convention in 1788, "nor how you are to become a great and powerful people, but how your liberties can be secured; for liberty ought to be the direct end of your Government." How refreshing are these words when one is accustomed to hearing one's prime minister asked in earnest to account for an increase of 3 percent in the instance of influenza at the hospital in Brighton.

'It's sometimes easy to forget how special America really is," Marco Rubio says in almost every speech, regardless of the topic. And then he thanks his parents for raising him to "clearly understand how different America is from the rest of the world." Rubio is a Cuban American, and his parents watched a fanatical regime destroy their country. It is no surprise that Cubans have historically been so much in love with America.

But I'm not Cuban. I'm not even French. I'm *British*. I grew up in a country with regular elections and solid institutions. I grew up with food in my mouth and a roof over my head. Most important, perhaps, I never feared that midnight knock at the door. And yet, like Marco Rubio, I understand how peculiar this place is—how necessary and how particular.

Trying to articulate this, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in "The Swimmers" that

> France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter—it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered. It was a willingness of the heart.

The "idea" is obvious—it is written down in one place, accessible for all to see. The "willingness of the heart" stuff, however, is where things start to get trickier—where things, you might say, become "harder to utter." Being asked to explain why I love America is sometimes like being asked to explain why I love my fiancée. There are all the tangible things that you can rattle off so as not to look clueless and sentimental and irrational. But then there is the fact that you *just do*, and you ultimately can say little more than that.

I don't know why I love the open spaces in the Southwest or Grand Central Terminal or the fading Atomic Age Googie architecture you see sometimes when driving. I don't know why merely glimpsing the Statue of Liberty brings tears to my eyes, or why a single phrase on an Etta James or Patsy Cline record does what it does to me. It *just does*. I have spoken to other immigrants about this, and I have noticed that there is generally a satisfactory explanation—religious freedom, the chance at self-expression, the country's size—and then there is the wistful stuff that moistens the eyes. Show me a picture of two canyons, and the fact that one of them is American will make all the difference. Just because it is *American*. Is this so peculiar? Perhaps.

Irritating as this must be to the hyper-rationalists of the consequentialist Left, I have come earnestly to believe in all of that stuff I'm not supposed to. When Ronald Reagan accepted the Republican nomination in Detroit in 1980, he took a bit of a risk. "I have thought of something that is not part of my speech and I'm worried over whether I should do it," Reagan said. Then he did it anyway:

> Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe freely? Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain, the boat people of Southeast Asia, of Cuba and Haiti, the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters of Afghanistan and our own countrymen held in savage captivity.

I am not a religious man and I cannot put my finger on why exactly I find myself nodding each time I read these lines, but I pretty much believe this too. I believe that America is the last, best hope for mankind, the "shining city upon a hill," as Winthrop's famous sermon put it.

I have been told on more than one occasion by people who do not know that I am foreign-born that I believe these things only because I know nothing else. This is a variation on a theme by George Bernard Shaw, who quipped that "patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because you were born in it." For some people, I am sure that this is true. But Shaw should have known better, for this conviction could not explain the millions of his own countrymen who, during his lifetime, streamed away from Ireland, bound for the promised land. And it cannot explain me, either. NR

Racism! Squirrel!

The ancient evil and the politics of distraction

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

A VIRAL video making the rounds in December bore the very descriptive title "Ten Germans Try to Say the Word 'Squirrel'"—and nobody seemed to think that it was racist or xenophobic, even though our Teutonic friends were being held up as figures of fun for something that is deeply embedded in their culture. Indeed, the Germans seemed to be as much amused as anybody else. The phenomenon is nothing new to students of linguistics: Not every phoneme exists in every language, and it is extraordinarily difficult for adults to process phonemes that are not part of their linguistic patrimony. Anglophone adults learning Sanskrit have a desperately hard time with the difference between aspirated and non-aspirated "d" sounds, just as somebody who had been raised hearing nothing but Japanese would find it difficult or impossible to distinguish between "r" and "l" sounds in English. Native speakers of non-tonal languages have a rough time with Chinese. Welsh, Romanian, and Dutch all contain sounds that are famous for being unpronounceable by the Anglophone. A "burro" is an ass, and a "burrow" is a hole in the ground, but your typical English-speaking person can't tell one from the other.

This sort of thing is terribly distressing to Matthew Salesses, fiction editor at *The Good Men Project*, an online magazine, who published a hilariously self-parodic essay titled "Racism in the Classroom: When Even Our Names Are Not Our Own." He began with this tale of pearl-clutching terror, his soul pierced by the unsettling childhood recollections of a classmate:

> He described how, when he was a boy, he couldn't figure out what a certain newscaster's name was. The student complained that because the newscaster pronounced his name with a "Mexican" accent, he couldn't understand it.

There are many possible explanations for this episode. But, *racism*?

Setting aside the sneer quotes around "Mexican"—as though there were no such thing as a Mexican accent—it is very likely that the boy complained that he could not understand the pronunciation of the broadcaster's name not because he was a budding ethnolinguistic chauvinist but because he *could not understand the pronunciation of the broadcaster's name*, any more than the typical English-speaking man walking the streets of Bakersfield can tell the शूर from the सुर. The story calls to mind a pained book chapter in which linguistic anthropologist Harriet Joseph Ottenheimer considers the famous *Saturday Night Live* skit in which a bunch of painfully correct Anglos in conversation with Jimmy Smits's "Antonio Mendoza" use ever more lamely Hispanic-ish pronunciations of common English words and phrases—"Loh-HANG-ee-less" for Los Angeles, "kah-MAHRRR-oh" for the Chevy sports car, etc. Professor Ottenheimer writes that the skit expresses "the extreme ambivalence and complexity of ideologies about Spanish in the United States," and she worries that under some interpretations Mr. Smits might be seen as "playing into the hands of anti-Spanish sentiment." This discussion takes place under the heading "Mock Spanish: A Site for the Indexical Reproduction of Racism in American English." *Calvin and Hobbes* takes a beating, too, when the racially insensitive stuffed tiger imagines himself as a fearsome potentate called "El Tigre Numero Uno."

We have set the bar for racism pretty low.

Rather than detecting in the story above the invisible background radiation of racism that so appalls Mr. Salesses, I myself sympathize with the boy's linguistic frustration; I have an unusually detailed recollection of my very early childhood, and vividly remember the intense irritation I felt at my limited ability to understand verbal communication and to make myself understood in turn. I recall my mother asking me if I wanted a "half sandwich" and trying to figure out where "half" fit into my known categories of sandwiches—a universe consisting of bologna, Spam, pimento cheese spread, and fried hot dogs halved vertically—unable to understand the word and also unable to explain my inability. The unfamiliar surname pronounced with a Mexican accent would have presented a similar sort of frustration: It would sound like gibberish, but the context would suggest that it was not. Such perplexing situations are what make childhood such a terrifying time. (That terror, I suspect, is related to why we forget so much of our earliest days, the neural settling of later childhood acting as our own personal Piper at the Gates of Dawn: "Lest the awe should dwell / And turn your frolic to fret / You shall look on my power at the helping hour / But then you shall forget!")

The emotional aspect of linguistic development is an interesting subject: Compare the first sentence of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to the novel's final pages to appreciate James Joyce's sensitive treatment of the subject. It takes more than being vulgar to consider the great swath of human experience and within its every fold and surprise to see everywhere and always *racism*—it takes faith. In the civil religion of the United States, racism is not only a deplorable set of beliefs, but a mythic character in its own right, the great antagonist of all things good, the eternal enemy, "curse of all creation, winged serpent of the pit, monstrosity." In the American secular scripture, racism is Satan.

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It is no accident that American progressives put so many of us in mind of our Puritan ancestors: not for their virtues, such as they are, but for their sanctimoniousness, their humorlessness, their grim little mouths set permanently in rictuses (surely Mr. Salesses would insist on "ricti") of self-satisfaction biting down on disgust. Like the accusers in 17th-century Salem or the contemporary Wahhabist eager to behead such witches as may be found lingering upon Saudi soil, the progressive sees the work of the Archnemesis everywhere at all times—especially when there is something to be gained from doing so.

As in the case of witchcraft, trials on charges of racism admit spectral evidence. Martin Bashir on the IRS scandal: "Republicans are using [it] as their latest weapon in the war against the black man. 'IRS' is the new 'nigger.'" Touré on Mitt Romney's vocabulary: "[He] said 'anger' twice. . . . I don't say it lightly, but this is niggerization." Jonathan Capehart: Mentioning that Obama went to Harvard is racist "because it insinuates that he took the place of someone else through affirmative action, that someone else being someone white." Lawrence O'Donnell: "The Republican party is saying that the president of the United States has bosses, that the unions boss him around. Does that sound to you like they are trying to consciously or subconsciously deliver the racist message that, of course, of course a black man can't be the real boss?" Janeane Garofalo: "Do you remember teabaggers? It was just so much easier when we could just call them racists. I just don't know why we can't call them racists, or functionally retarded adults. The functionally retarded adults, the racists—with their cries of, 'I want my country back.' You know what they're really saying is, 'I want my white guy back.'" Karen Finney on Herman Cain: "They like him because they think he's a black man who knows his place." Chris Matthews: "It's the sense that the white race must rule . . . and they can't stand the idea that a man who's not white is president. That is real, that sense of racial superiority." Etc., ad nauseam.

Touré's concept of "niggerization" is very subtle, so subtle, in fact, that only the most discerning of sensibilities—presumably Touré's—can detect it, like one of those world-class master sommeliers uncovering notes of burnt pencil shavings in an '82 Bordeaux. The less subtle forms of that phenomenon—for example, using the famous racial epithet on national television—have been in the 21st century restricted to members of the political party that Touré supports, for reasons that are no doubt subtle beyond the brute understanding of the uninitiated. And that is the state of play today: When Robert Byrd, a Democratic senator and Exalted Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan, helpfully elucidates the concept of "white niggers" on the evening news, that's an unfortunate episode that demands sympathy for the wretched old coot. But when the Associated Press accurately transcribes the current president's faux-folksy "g"-dropping—"Stop complainin'," etc.—the verdict from MSNBC is not just "racist" but "inherently racist."

Except he really does talk that way. Sometimes. And if you've ever noticed that Barack Obama's propensity for slipping into ersatz southern cornpone preacher-speak correlates with the complexion of the audience being addressed, you might wonder who, exactly, is behaving in a way that is "inherently racist." But such thoughts are unthinkable.

It isn't just politics and the president. Jesse Jackson on Dan Gilbert's dealings with LeBron James: His actions "personify a slave/master mentality." A Dallas county commissioner flipped out over the "racist" name of devil's food cake, and insisted that the astronomical term "black hole" was similarly "racist." (Challenged by some constituents on his acuity, he replied: "All of you are white. Go to hell." Still in office, not a racist.) The NAACP doesn't think "black hole" is racist, but it thinks that a space-themed Hallmark audio card is actually saying "black whore." In a Buzzfeed piece on racial "microaggressions," a young woman complained that she was victimized by racism in the form of having been picked to play the part of Dora the Explorer in a school skit "just because I'm Mexican." Dora the Explorer, for the record, is not Mexican, but instead belongs to a demographic cohort of recent vintage: generic Latina.

The question of the nationality and ethnicity of fictitious characters known to us mainly through cartoons is a hot zone of bizarre 21st-century racial politics, as Megyn Kelly of Fox News found out when, in the course of pretending to believe that Santa Claus is real, she noted that he is a white man. This was in the context of a discussion about a daft column by *Slate*'s Aisha Harris, headlined "Santa Claus Should Not Be a White Man Anymore." In that column, Ms. Harris describes the pain and humiliation she felt at having the image of a white Santa inflicted on her as a child, noting with disapproval that "even some black families decorate their houses with white Santas." She suggested replacing the jolly old saint with a penguin. Penguins are awesome, even if there are none near Santa's North Pole HQ, but unlike Dora the Explorer, Santa Claus has a pretty well-established point of origin: The character is not only white but Dutch, which makes him so white that if it weren't for his rosy cheeks you'd lose him in a snowstorm. In other news of fictitious ethnicity, Hamlet is a Dane and Othello is a Moor, and Stephen Dedalus is an Irishman with a non-Irish surname. But things being what they are, Ms. Kelly's affirmation of Santa's white-guy status was a national mini-scandal, while Ms. Harris's odd confession of being disturbed by images of people who are racially unlike her was not. One of these things is much closer to racism than is the other.

"G"-dropping, phoneme deafness, dessert, playing hardball with LeBron James: Practically anything can be racism in the 21st century—except racism. Internal memos from Senator Dick Durbin's office reveal that he took special care to sabotage the court nomination of Miguel Estrada because "he is Latino," a fact that made him "politically dangerous." Jesse Jackson can use anti-Semitic epithets all day, Philadelphia mayors can attest that "the brothers and sisters are running the city" (small boast!), Joe Biden can mistake Apu from *The Simpsons* for documentary evidence about the lives of Indians in the United States, and Robert Byrd can use the most offensive racial epithet in the English language in front of millions of people, but . . . can we talk about "microaggressions" instead?

THE Left needs racism, because unlike their good, old-fashioned Marxist forebears, the postmodern Left's politics is not rooted in economics or history but in narrative—the most adolescent narrative: Good Guys and Bad Guys. (You could call it Cowboys and Indians, but that would be . . .) If the other side is Hitler, then almost anything is acceptable, because Hitler can't win. But, unfortunately for the inventors of national crusades, you don't get a lot of Hitlers. So Hitlers must be invented. This is one of the reasons every social issue adopted by the Left (and a few adopted by the Right) becomes the "moral equivalent of war"—War on Poverty, War on Drugs, etc. Hitler was many things: nationalist, socialist, central planner, advocate of substantial "investments" in national infrastructure projects, in favor of generous spending on the arts. And, of course, a racist. The GOP checks off none of those boxes, the Democrats check off a few, but Republicans are Hitler because somebody on Fox News said Santa is white. It makes sense, if your worldview depends on its making sense.

At this point in history, the Left needs a spectral standard of evidence when convicting its opponents of racism because there is so little actual evidence to be found. RIGHT = RACIST is an article of faith on the left, facts be damned. The Republican party has relatively few black officeholders, which is taken as evidence of Republican racism. But the Republican party is also extraordinarily solicitous of its black officeholders: Mia Love is in many ways an impressive mayor, perhaps the best mayor Saratoga Springs, Utah, ever has had, but it is difficult to believe that a middle-aged white male Mormon Republican who could not manage to win a House race in Utah would have become a superstar of comparable incandescence. But the Left's story is that Republicans have few black officeholders because they are racist, and if they try to encourage black candidates, that's racist, too, just another quest for a "black man who knows his place." So Republicans are racists both when opposing affirmative action in the public sphere and when practicing it in the private sphere. And Democrats are pursuing virtue when they block a judicial nominee simply because he is Latino. Those are the new rules.

The old rules were better. To accuse a person or a movement of racism is a serious thing. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. had a deep appreciation of that fact, which is one of the reasons he often pointed out that Barry Goldwater was not himself a racist, though he opposed civil-rights measures for which the Reverend King and his associates fought and bled. Perhaps there is something about the literal bleeding for a cause that makes men more serious. Another reason that MLK did not call Senator Goldwater a racist is that he did not wish to look like a fool, the charge being utterly unsupportable. But, really, how reliable was the Reverend King on this issue? His heavily Anglicized pronunciation of German names suggests, to the educated ear, a lack of full appreciation for "the extreme ambivalence and complexity of ideologies about German in the United States," and perhaps more than a bit of pandering to "anti-German sentiment."

Squirrel! **NR**

Do Atheists Exist?

A new "godless" church makes you wonder

BY NICHOLAS FRANKOVICH

FOR people who like church except for the parts about God, a British couple have bodied forth a new denomination that cheerfully excludes him, raising the volume on the question "What is atheism?" several decibels overnight. The Sunday Assembly, a "godless congregation" founded in East London last January by standup comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, now boasts affiliates in Brighton, Bristol, Melbourne, and New York. Look for more to follow if the momentum continues.

"Church has got so many awesome things going for it (which we've shamelessly nicked)," Jones and Evans confess in a short piece that appeared in the *New York Times* to mark the launch of their venture. Stuart Balkham, an earnest convert, told the *Guardian* that at a London meeting he attended the Assembly was "unashamedly copying a familiar Church of England format," which he thought was great.

Half ironically, the founders allow that the Assembly is a church, dedicated to benevolent acts and the search for transcendence. Though they draw the line at "religion," insisting that it and atheism are mutually exclusive, the openness with which they borrow ecclesial atmospherics and nomenclature suggests that they see their atheist outfit as not entirely secular either. You might call it a third way, an alternative to religion and secularity both, much as the Church of England was historically a "via media" between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Speaking the language of the many who identify as "spiritual but not religious," the Assembly draws on an increasingly widespread understanding of religion as something like what "the letter" of the law was for Saint Paul—"The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). If "religion" remains the inevitable word for a certain moral and philosophical seriousness, however, atheism is, or should be, counted as religious after all. Among the latest to advance that thesis is Ronald Dworkin, whose *Religion without God* was published posthumously in September. His argument is solid at least insofar as it's not original; his readers may be quicker to grasp it than he anticipated. Citing *Torcasco v. Watkins* (1961), Dworkin quoted Hugo Black, who in a clarifying footnote to that Supreme Court decision had commented that "among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism and others," a list to which the casual observer could be forgiven for adding several mainline Protestant denominations whose vanishing theism quotients have haunted the landscape of organized religion in America for half a century or more. And so the Sunday Assembly, its rejection of the label "religion" notwithstanding, joins a distinguished parade of institutions demonstrating that religious practice persists as an anthropological fact even where belief in God is muted or absent.

WE live in a post-secular age, having run up against the limitations of procedural liberalism, which, while regulating the market on which God and the Devil compete for souls, remains scrupulously disinterested in the outcome. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, an atheist, created a stir twelve years ago when he began to argue that the secular state has an interest in the distinctive contributions that Judaism and Christianity make to the political order. The Italian philosopher Marcello Pera, also an atheist, goes further, proposing a Christian civil religion to replenish the Judeo-Christian matrix from which the West derives the moral values on which liberal democracy depends. The values uprooted from their native religion are like cut flowers, good for a time but not sustainable. The Sunday Assembly is hardly the first attempt to keep them going a while longer.

In embracing altruism, the Assembly touches on moral theology, as do Habermas and Pera, but unlike them it does so from a position it has staked out on the near outskirts of metaphysics, which lends the godless church much of its warmth. The third part of the Assembly's motto, "Live better, help often, wonder more," reflects a value attractive to souls seeking relief from the cool, or chill, as they experience it, of the secular climate in which they live. "Our modern culture is restless at the barriers of the human sphere," Charles Taylor writes in *A Secular Age*. "The sense that there is something more presses in."

Wonder more: No one disputes that atheism is compatible with wonder at the physical universe and how it works. Wonder at how it came to be just so, however, soon leads to wonder at how it came to be at all, a question that atheists typically sidestep. The pleasure of contemplating it is forbidden fruit to which the Sunday Assembly approaches nearer than a good atheist ought.

Philosophically if not historically, the theism of Judaism and Christianity, as well as of Islam and major religious currents outside the Western tradition, begins with the observation that the mystery of being is irreducibly mysterious, absolutely immune to attempts at demystifying it. The articulation of thought about what that mystery is—"Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is," in Wittgenstein's succinct rendition of the matter—has been so honed by succeeding generations of thinkers descended from the union of Greek philosophy and Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theology that it's now difficult for anyone, whether theist or atheist, to improve on their exact formulations. So the atheist seeking to communicate an accurate answer to the question "Why is there not nothing?" will find himself borrowing theologically inflected terminology. Inescapably, he affirms the most fundamental of theological precepts. He agrees with it implicitly. He asserts that he doesn't. His disagreement is first of all with himself.

A dramatic declaration of atheism is usually an assertion of disbelief in a god no one else believes in either. Judging the shadowy masculine presence at the center of the Hebrew Bible to be a tyrannical father figure and a lie—Richard Dawkins calls him "the most unpleasant character in all fiction"—atheists who cross over into militant antitheism make quite the show of manfully defying the Lord's authority to command them. They plant their flag in the ground. There they stand, they can do no other.

They lose their footing when they recoil as they do, reflexively, from classical theism as well. They don't trust it. If it's related to Him, they're not interested; they won't be seduced. They plug their ears to keep from hearing too distinctly the siren song of sweet reason, which they dodge, rather than confront. Either they see plainly or they intuit that God in his aspect as God of the philosophers is ground on which reason offers no apparent means of escape or resistance. We might as well try to refute the multiplication tables. They are what they are.

"I Am That I Am" is the conventional translation of the enigmatic Hebrew expression by which God in the burning bush identifies himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14). In the Greek of the Septuagint, "I am" is *egō eimi*. Jesus scandalizes his critics when, shifting to the present tense in a context in which you would expect the past tense, he answers them, "Before Abraham ever was, I am"—*egō eimi* (John 8:58). In first-century Jerusalem, that statement is either blasphemous or a theophany.

Greek philosophy influenced this turn toward equating God with Being itself, as Hellenistic culture spread across the eastern Mediterranean, and the influence was reciprocal: Classical theism is the cumulative achievement of generations of theologians reading scripture in the light of Plato and Aristotle, but also vice versa. From the New Testament we can estimate the extent to which Jews by the time of Christ had come to understand that Yahweh was not a god—not, at any rate, in the sense in which their ancestors had spoken of "strange gods," "household gods," or the gods of other nations. The discernment of God as what Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century would term "ipsum esse subsistens"—the "Ground of Being," in the parlance of Christian mysticism and theology—developed organically over the course of more than a millennium, with no clear moment of birth, although it was mature certainly by the High Middle Ages. Where the approach to God had been anthropological, it was now also philosophical—ontological, to be more precise.

So now we know that something of what Moses experienced when God visited him on Mount Horeb is available to anyone who will only take enough thought. The mystery of being induces wonder, or awe, commensurate with our willingness to engage it. It's astonishing, when you think about it, that anything exists.

Q: Why is there something rather than nothing?
A: God, although maybe we need a new name for him.

Many people who would never think to participate in the rancor of public antitheism are nonetheless susceptible to the zeitgeist in which atheism flourishes. It's what they know. Doesn't it speak well enough for them too? They start from the proposition that God is a person and rule it out as implausible. The argument that God can only be personal because he can't be less than we are may be cogent in itself, but it needs a lot of unpacking. It has as its premise the God of the philosophers. To begin to make theism intelligible to a modern atheist, you have to bracket the God of the patriarchs and start from the premise.

Atheism is religion for people in a hurry. They're quick to assume they understand someone who, engrossed in the question of why there isn't nothing, says a few words to indicate what he sees the question pointing to. They mistake his verbal gesture for an answer that's intended to close the question or do it justice. To see what he's trying to get at, they would have to enter into the wonder that the question elicits in him and dwell there for a moment. The closest thing the question has to an answer is the wonder itself.

Sanderson Jones, right, and Pippa Evans sing a song at a Sunday Assembly meeting on November 10, 2013.

AP PHOTO/JAE C. HONG

RELIGIOUS culture adorns our collective understanding of God but also conceals it. The Psalms, the Sistine Chapel, the terms of art employed by philosophers and theologians—all those noble efforts at representing God can be helps to someone who speaks their language. To someone who doesn't, they can be a hindrance. For their rejection of all "gods" in the familiar sense of the term, Christians in ancient Rome were sometimes accused of being atheists. Now the misunderstanding is turned on its head: Atheists hold the Christian, and indeed any modern theist, to be most glaringly wrong in his understanding that God is a person, like a god of pagan antiquity. Training their sights on the notion of an anthropomorphic god, they excite and distract themselves. God as Being itself barely registers with them.

"Why don't you see the extraordinary beauty of the idea that we can explain the world, life, how it started, from nothing?" Dawkins asked the archbishop of Canterbury at the time, Rowan Williams, during a debate at the Cambridge Union Society last year. "Why clutter it up with something so messy as God?"

"I'm not thinking of God as being shoehorned in," Williams answered.

But "that is exactly how I see God," Dawkins replied, helpfully, illustrating how the sound and the fury that is the New Atheism—and the old atheism, for that matter—is generated mostly from confusion about the terms of the debate. That the world comes "from nothing" is an idea that Dawkins finds to be of "extraordinary beauty." To ask what he means by "nothing" will provoke some eyeball-rolling at first, but the longer you think about it, the more you realize just how stubbornly inscrutable a concept "nothing" is, like "time," which gave Saint Augustine so much trouble: "I know what time is until you ask me for a definition of it."

To define "nothing" is to say what it is, when what it's intended to convey is an absence of being. You can't talk about nothing without treating it as something. And so, on close inspection, the question "Why is there not nothing?" turns out to be paradoxical—as we should expect, given that "when the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question," as Wittgenstein observed. Still, it's hard to let the question go; we intuit the intended meaning even as it eludes our ability to capture it in precise language. While the word "nothing" is self-contradictory and irrational when strictly interpreted, it does, like the number zero in mathematics, serve a purpose when used gingerly or with enough qualification.

Used loosely, "nothing" is put to practical use every day. Dawkins makes it a placeholder for "God." By invoking "nothing," he can point to the source of the universe without implying that You Know Who had anything to do with it. So much anxiety rides on the "G" word and what Dawkins evidently regards as the undue respect it might connote. He treats it as if it were a proper name, which it isn't, as David Bentley Hart patiently points out in his gem of a new book, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. Still, on their own terms, antitheists are correct to be mindful of the halo that surrounds "God" in everyday usage; some observant Jews omit the vowel, for example, treating it almost as if it were the Tetragrammaton itself.

It's become too familiar, this ordinary English word for what we tend to talk around rather than talk about. So forget "God." Call him "Nothing," if you prefer:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Nothing, and the Word was Nothing." The key to understanding John 1:1 turns on the verbs, not the nouns. Dawkins in his awe before the Nothing sounds like Heidegger but without Heidegger's awareness of the unfathomable profundity of what it means "to be."

Notice how "nothing" can function for the atheist as "God" does for the theist. Are the two only using different linguistic tokens in parallel efforts to express the same ineffable thought? Their fear and trembling at the prospect of the "eternal nada," Jones and Evans explain, moves them to cultivate their appreciation for the physical world (Christians call it "Creation") that tickles our sense organs in the here and now: "Transcendence can be found in a breath of wind on your face or in a mouthful of custard tart," they write. They pronounce nature "awesome," a word whose recently acquired colloquial sense still shades into its older, literal sense. Open the door to just that much transcendence, however, and all of it comes rushing in, like a strong wind. Atheists instinctively try to resist it, while those of us who have been blown away by it recommend the experience.

"Wonder more," the Sunday Assembly urges, and adherents of monotheistic religions echo the advice back to them. No, following wonder to its logical conclusion does not by itself make an atheist suddenly Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. It only means he's not an atheist. Someone should tell him. **NR**

Athwart BY JAMES LILEKS

The New Inequality

For about 47 minutes the president successfully moved the conversation to income inequality, the very existence of which proves that the fundamental transformation of America into a grey smear of equally compensated workers has a long way to go. The news cycle, whose attention span makes a housefly look like a Galapagos turtle, was Very Concerned for a while, but then a sign-language guy at Mandela's funeral was revealed to have been miming the instructions for complex nautical knots, and that was that.

In a few months the president may indeed be informed that incomes are still unequal, and make no mistake—and for the love of all that is good and decent, let him be clear—no one will be angrier than he is. He made a speech, for heaven's sake.

It's worse than he may suspect. When it comes to income levels, the bad news keeps getting worse. According to an AP "analysis"—i.e., a few facts extruded through the Play-Doh Fun Factory of preconceived wisdom—it's this bad:

> Fully 20 percent of U.S. adults become rich for parts of their lives, wielding extensive influence over America's economy and politics, according to new survey data.
>
> These "new rich," made up largely of older professionals, working married couples and more educated singles, are becoming politically influential, and economists say their capacity to spend is key to the U.S. economic recovery.

That would seem to be good news. Let us now drop a BUT like an Acme safe on the coyote's head: "But their rise is also a sign of the nation's continuing economic polarization."

Why? Because! Let's look at how one paper headlined the study: "More Socially Liberal, America's New Rich Are Wielding Power but May Foil Income Equality."

Ask yourself how the foiling will be done. The left hand votes for Democrats, but the right hand cuts checks to the Cato Institute? There are several possibilities:

1. The "new rich," including older professionals, will go into poorer neighborhoods and take their money, shouting "Yoink!" and cackling as they prance away with the sawbucks.

2. By pooling resources and forming solid economic units that can maximize the fruits of their labor, "working married couples" may make more money than other people, and may refuse to get divorced no matter how it might help the statistics look better.

3. "More educated singles," leveraging their skills in competitive industries, may make more money than people who graduated from college with a master's based on heteronormative assumptions in 19th-century translations of Sumerian tablets, have $97,000 in debt, and work at Starbucks, where they draw a cuneiform script that says "Bleep you" in the foam of the latte.

4. Socially liberal people who clear $200K, then watch the state gather half of it like a croupier scooping in everything you put on a losing number, realize that the guy who said he wanted to "spread the wealth around" not only meant their wealth but would make their annual salary with one speech once he got out of office.

You make the call. The AP analysis continues:

> In a country where poverty is at a record high, today's new rich are notable for their sense of economic fragility. They rely on income from their work to maintain their social position and pay for things such as private tutoring for their children.

We're in uncharted territory here: People who make money rely on work to continue to make money. It's that vicious cycle you've heard about.

> That makes them much more fiscally conservative than other Americans, polling suggests, and less likely to support public programs, such as food stamps or early public education, to help the disadvantaged.

"Support" is not defined. It could mean "funding at current levels." It could mean "an ever-increasing claim on your property to prop up a dollar-gobbling Brobdingnagian bureaucracy that abets multi-generational dependency."

The article, to be fair, cites a Nigerian immigrant who did the bootstrap thing and thinks others can help themselves too, but of course now he wants to reduce public subsidies for ladders and cut back the budget for the Bootstrap Awareness Council, which got awards for its viral Facebook ads. Demon. More:

> The group is more liberal than lower-income groups on issues such as abortion and gay marriage, according to an analysis of General Social Survey data by the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But when it comes to money, their views aren't so open. They're wary of any government role in closing the income gap.

Got that? If you're gung-ho for abortion, it ought to follow that you embrace the efficacy and morality of redistributing property by force. Otherwise you're the "new" rich. Why, you're probably the sort of fiend who doubts that the Center for Public Affairs Research coordinates with the Public Affairs Research Center, and whether the former organization's AP-NORC data, generated by the General Social Survey, jibe with the UPI-CRON Socially General Survey, produced by the Research Center for Affairs of the Public.

The article chatters on with experts and data and quotes from the mulish "new rich," as if they never existed before and will be rich forever. You can't help but feel grim delight: Many of these people believed that striking the proper moral pose insulated them from the hand that scrabbles in their back pocket. But I believe that married gay couples should be able to have an abortion, and it should be covered by single-payer. Isn't that enough? Why am I bad? Because the president made a speech. Put your money where his mouth is. **NR**

Mr. Lileks blogs at www.lileks.com.

The Long View BY ROB LONG

From the Twitter feed of Kim Jong Un, @youthcaptain . . .

@unclesongthaek Trying to reach out to you. Please read my Tumblr. Hard to talk to you when all you do is yell. I know I'm not perfect. Neither are you. #isanyone? Tmblr.co/cgrs.0945

I'll come right out and say it. Don't care if it's controversial. Do not understand what Katniss sees in Peeta. Found that part of @thehungergamescatchingfire totally unbelievable. He's such a wuss. #teamgale #gokatniss #cannotwaitformockingjay

They say Obamacare website wait times are now somewhere between two and three hours. Impressive! Kudos, @barackobama! Don't let the haters get you down.

@mileycyrus Guurrl! Totes get what you were going for with the twerking performance! I'm also trying to "be my own person" and would love to talk to u! Follow me back so I can DM you! Ttyl!

Finally making real progress with some family issues during a very honest and emotional therapy session. If anyone out there in Twitter land wants to know if family therapy works, I'm here to tell you: IT DOES!!! #itgetsbetter #humble #gratitude

@oprahwinfrey Can. Not. Believe. You got shut out of Globes. Loved loved loved "The Butler" and think Hollywood Foreign Press is probs racist. Come to NoKo! Would love to host your show on my network!

Any #millennial Tweeps have advice on how to talk to old dudes about why change is important? Feel like I'm trapped in a totally whack generational thing and trying to feel my way. Hit me back! Thnx!

Weird how in America the leader is so skinny but the country is so fat. Complete opposite here in DPRK. Would love to know how my country stays so slim! Personally, I cannot say no to the carbs. #ironyalert

It's not wrong to cry when you're being honest with your family about your weight issues and your trust issues. Being laughed at by certain older family members when I'm trying to be transparent and vulnerable in therapy session is NOT HELPING. #lookingatyou @unclesongthaek

New Rachel Maddow column in WaPo about Bush legacy of destruction in the Rep. party. Smart take! http://rftsWaPo.3256

Looking at pictures of my dad @kimjongil's funeral procession. Feeling #grateful and #blessed but also mad. Dudes carrying his coffin don't "get" me or new media. Wish there was some way to "youngify" my posse. #thinking #outsidethebox

Hot tub selfie! Twitpic.2309.vfg #thankyoudratkins #waterwascold #dontjudge

The person holding the Talking Stick is the person who gets to talk in the therapy session. DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY @UNCLESONGTHAEK DOES NOT RESPECT THAT. Thinking that maybe we need a new family therapist. This one is not respecting the rules and letting certain family members dominate the session.

Open offer to all members of the @obamacare website task force: Please check out my blog on @squarespace. See what I can do? Like the GIFs and the visuals? Let me know if I can help! #reachingout #buildingbridges #we'renotsodifferent

Impossible to understand how anyone manages to rule a country without the use of #instagram or #facebook or #massexecutions. Hey, @vladimirputin! Follow me back so we can DM. #greatminds

Hey! Medical Tweeps! Please tell me: Is this an animal bite or a zit or something else? Oozing something and itches like crazy. But how did it get there? pic.twitter.com/zhbbt.T6HYh #needsecondopinion #notcrazyaboutDPRKdocs #itscoldinthebathroom #dontjudge

Difficult to make progress in family therapy because the reality is that after each session I have to execute the therapist. Tough finding new ones.

Hey, @dylansprouse! Stay strong, bro. We've all been there!

Advice from my Tweeps on dealing with old dudes so far: start writing honest and transparent Tumblr (did that), sit down and have guided discussion with facilitator present (did that), or kill them all. #thinking

Ever have a family situation you think will get better if you just sit down and communicate honestly and halfway through you realize that it's never going to change? Gives me a sad. #notsurewhattodo

Hey, @unclesongthaek, meet me at my office later tonight. Please come alone. Don't wear anything special.

Hey, @auntkyonghui, don't think @unclesongthaek is going to make it back in time for dinner. Just go ahead and eat. Will catch up with you later.

Hey, @uncleleungma, meet me at my office later tonight. Please come alone. Don't wear anything special.

Hey, entire @peoplesrevolutionarycouncilDPRK, meet me at my office later tonight. Please come alone. Don't wear anything special.

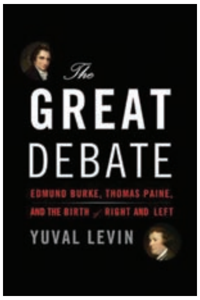
OMG! OMG! OMG! OMG! Brody dies??? Please tell me this doesn't happen. Will never watch the show again if it does. #homeland

Sorry, Tweeps! Should have put a SPOILER ALERT on that last one. #mybad

Books, Arts & Manners

Two Roads Diverged

DAVID PRYCE-JONES



The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left, by Yuval Levin (Basic, 296 pp., $27.99)

EDMUND BURKE and Thomas Paine were contemporaries who shared the view current in the Age of Enlightenment that government and society could and should be perfected. Coincidentally, both were also masters of language. From the storms and upheavals of their day, however, they drew very different conclusions about how to achieve the desired social perfection. In short, Burke argued for reform, Paine for revolution. In most parts of the world today the political process still veers between the opposing poles of continuity and the clean break.

In public life, there are frequent references and compliments to both men as well. At a moment when Margaret Thatcher, as prime minister, was confronting a strike with a revolutionary potential, I happened to hear one of her advisers lament, "Mr. Edmund Burke, where are you now we need you?" And, in a set-piece address, President Reagan—of all people—showed himself captivated by language rather than the thought behind it when he appropriated with approval one of Paine's most rousing challenges: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again."

Born in 1729 in Ireland, Burke was the child of a Protestant father (a lawyer by profession) and a Catholic mother. Apparently he spoke with an Irish accent. Talent alone took him to the top as a writer, and as a member of Parliament from 1765 to his death in 1797. Most of this time he was in opposition, and he never held executive office. Politics was in a state of flux. King George III was out of his depth, and ruled by interference; he was not quite an absolute monarch, nor was he a constitutional one. The historian Sir Lewis Namier long ago exposed in detail the shortcomings of the House of Commons in this reign. Limited electoral representation and an extensive system of patronage kept power in the hands of the aristocracy and encouraged corruption. Burke first took an official position in Dublin and then became private secretary to the Marquis of Rockingham, leader of a faction of Whigs.

In general terms, the Whigs favored reform. Burke's objective was to establish parliamentary supremacy in conditions of stability, which allows Yuval Levin to call him an unusual Whig, because the party was indifferent to any social disturbances reform might cause. Generations of British schoolchildren have been educated to admire Burke for his lengthy (but ultimately aborted) campaign to impeach Warren Hastings for maladministration while governing India. When he got going on technicalities to do with finance or criminal law, it has been said of him, members of the House went out to dine. His high reputation rested on his moral positions, for instance, arguing for the abolition of slavery. The crisis in the American colonies might have had a different outcome if his advice—to treat and tax Americans like all English people—had been followed.

Eight years younger than Burke, Paine was at a social disadvantage, the son of a working-class corset maker. Like the poet Robert Burns, he became an excise officer. It is not clear whether he was fired from the job for financial irregularity, as his detractors say, or because he had made himself a nuisance lobbying for better pay on behalf of his colleagues. Yuval Levin gives him the benefit of the doubt. What is certain is that Paine arrived in Philadelphia in 1774 single-mindedly determined to be revenged on England for wrongs real or imagined that it had done to him. A long-standing fantasy of his was that a few thousand troops would be enough to invade Britain and overthrow its order.

Temperamentally an angry outsider, he had nothing in common with the popular Burke except the ability to write pamphlets "crucial to the great events of the age," as Yuval Levin puts it. Publication of Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* preceded by a few months the 1776 Declaration of Independence. George Washington himself noted that the pamphlet was "working a wonderful change" in public opinion. The choice before Americans, according to Paine, was slavery or independence. Monarchy was a tyranny that could not be borne. No epithets were too extreme for George III, "the Royal Brute of Great Britain," "the sceptered savage," and much more. Burke was for compromise, Paine for the battlefield. The colonists and their revolution had found a publicist brilliantly able to raise the level of hatred and pass it off as love of liberty.

From the outset of the French Revolution, Burke saw in it only mob rule with attendant chaos and terror. As he wrote to his son in October 1789, after Parisians had marched on Versailles and manhandled the queen, "the elements which compose human society seem all to be dissolved, and a world of monsters to be produced in the place of it." A year later, in November 1790, he published *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. A masterwork of rhetoric and political thought, it is, in Levin's judgment, "the first sustained assessment and dissection of the claims of liberal radicalism in the age of revolutions."

Always the activist, Paine had moved to Paris. Angered by Burke's *Reflections*, Paine set about answering it with his *Rights of Man*, published in March 1791, and described by Levin as "a logical, sustained, focused, passionate, and powerful argument" in defense of the principles of the French Revolution. He spoke no French, but on the strength of his revolutionary reputation he was elected to the National Convention. Although he despised and mocked Louis XVI as he had done George III, he voted against his execution. Eleven days after the king was guillotined, Paine's abiding interest became plain when he drafted a call to the British to revolt. He was to donate the large sum of one thousand pounds of royalties from his bestselling pamphlets to buy boots for the French soldiers supposed to invade simultaneously. During Robespierre's Reign of Terror, he was arrested and spent ten months in prison under sentence of death. By his own account, he survived through luck alone: The firing squad failed to notice the chalk on his door that marked him down for execution. Spending his last years on a farm near New York requisitioned from a loyalist, he was morally compromised as a profiteer from the American Revolution that he had encouraged.

At the outset of this perceptive essay in politics, Yuval Levin states that it is a case study in how ideas move history. Levin is the editor of a quarterly journal about domestic policy, a combatant in policy debates, and, above all, a conservative, but he bends over backwards to be fair to both of these men, whom he calls "two giants of the age of revolutions." The central chapters of *The Great Debate* are rather briskly theoretical. Change is inevitable in human life, and what's to be done about it is the question. Paine took it that each generation starts afresh, everyone is equal, and all make of circumstances what they want. The idea of rights, Levin says, is at the core of Paine's political philosophy. People therefore have the right to choose who is to govern them. The past doesn't necessarily influence behavior, never mind compel it. But injustice is intolerable, it leads to unhappiness, and in such conditions revolution has to do what law is unable or unwilling to do. These principles apply everywhere. "My country is the world," Paine wrote, "and my religion is to do good."

In Burke's view, generations form a chain from the past through the present and into the future. In the last resort, order, stability, nationhood, birth, identity, beauty, and familiarity form a complex web of obligations that unify society and without which there will be no justice. He recognizes that injustice has to be addressed, but fears that Paine's revolutionary approach must commit yet greater injustice. Paine's counter to that objection is that Burke's attachments to the past are sentimental and self-interested, designed to protect his own privileged circumstances.

With hindsight, it seems straightforward to conclude that Burke is the deeper and more persuasive thinker because he is more realistic about human nature and makes allowances for it. Conservatives and everyone who values the parliamentary process are in debt to Burke. In spite of Levin's best efforts to be impartial, Paine looks like his own victim, possibly psychotic, whose inhuman dream of enforced happiness gets what it deserves. When reason has to be prescribed, is it then anything more than a synonym for policing? Paine's heirs are the totalitarians, Communists, and socialists of every stripe. What began as clashing reactions to the American and French revolutions on the part of two brilliant individuals evolved in the end into the ideologies of Left and Right. In one of his flashes of historic prescience in *Reflections*, Burke wraps up what revolutionaries had in store for mankind. "In the groves of *their* academy," he wrote, "at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows." **NR**

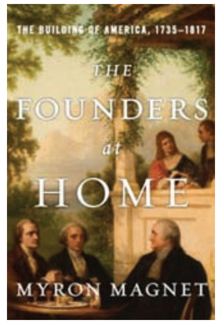
PICTURESQUE

Rising ambitiously, they set a goal
Of smoking out the red, reluctant sun,
Which smolders like some just-embarrassed coal.
Whatever looks to start has not begun,
But still the clouds' bombastic undersides—
All glowing pearl and sulfur, rose and nacre;
Tinged by the star their mass elides—
Are banking blazes over every acre.
Puffed up with all the threats one could expect,
The two contend who'll be the one to burst.
Dawn finds sky watchers pausing to reflect:
That on *this* earth, the burning may come first;
That somewhere, yearning arsonists aspire;
That something's trying to set the world on fire.

—LEN KRISAK

Built To Last

RICHARD BROOKHISER



The Founders at Home: The Building of America, 1735–1817, by Myron Magnet (Norton, 481 pp., $35)

HAS the Founders' revival peaked? The big bios of the big names, now in big paperback editions, still sit on bookstore shelves, like Pleistocene megafauna, yet the subject stimulates feelings of both satiety and constriction. We have read a lot about the most famous Founders—the first four presidents (Washington to Madison) plus the two others who made it into our wallets (Hamilton, Franklin). The rest, however, struggle in their backwash; although there have been good recent books about Sam Adams, John Dickinson, Nathanael Greene, and others, they never seem to make 18th-Century Page Six.

Myron Magnet has found a delightful way out of this cul-de-sac. *The Founders at Home* is subtitled "The Building of America, 1735–1817." "Building" is a pun: All the men he writes about left homes that, centuries later, are still intact and visitable. But, by a shrewd selection of subjects, Magnet also covers the construction of a country, from first thoughts to finishing touches—from the Zenger trial to the Battle of New Orleans. His cast of characters allows him to erase the dichotomy between overexposure and obscurity. The heavyweights are well represented: Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison. But joining them are Founders most of us have barely or never heard of: William Livingston, the Lees of Stratford Hall, sober John

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Monticello

Jay. *The Founders at Home* gives the pleasures of biography, while putting us back in the texture and complexity of a world.

Begin with the little-knowns. William Livingston, born in 1723, was a sprig of a wealthy Colonial New York clan. The Livingstons jockeyed for position in the elected assembly while baiting Crown-appointed governors. Much of their tussling was conducted in print: The Livingstons backed John Peter Zenger, the printer whose 1735 acquittal on a charge of seditious libel would unshackle Colonial American newspapers. In 1752, young William Livingston, a successful lawyer, launched a journal of his own, *The Independent Reflector*, to comment on a proposal to found a taxpayer-supported Anglican college in New York City. New York was religiously diverse even then, with all sorts of Protestants and a handful of Jews. Livingston hated the scheme. A "tax ought to be considered as the voluntary Gift of the People," he wrote. "The civil Power hath no Jurisdiction over the Sentiments or Opinions of the Subject, till such Opinions break out into Actions prejudicial to the Community." The college—King's College, now Columbia—got founded, but Livingston had injected a dose of applied Locke into the American bloodstream.

The Lees were a brood of proud, eccentric gentry reared at Stratford Hall, 70 miles down the Potomac from Alexandria. In the musical about the Continental Congress, *1776*, Richard Henry Lee is depicted as a genial boob, Jethro Bodine with manners. Magnet gives us the real deal. R.H., as he was known to his family, was hunting swans one winter day in 1768 "when his gun blew up, blowing the four fingers off his left hand. Ever after, he wore a specially made black silk glove to cover his disfigurement." But it made him so cool. "In time, he practiced gesturing dramatically with it, which, with his Roman nose, high forehead, tall, gaunt frame, [and] aristocratic bearing . . . added to his command as an orator." R.H.'s great gesture was to move, in June 1776, "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

R.H.'s younger brother Arthur, studying medicine and law in Britain, became a friend of James Boswell and John Wilkes and a propagandist for the American cause, then moved on to diplomacy in Paris, where he annoyed Benjamin Franklin by complaining that the American mission there had been penetrated by spies (he was right). The brothers had a cousin, Henry, one of Washington's dashing cavalry officers. In peacetime he made up for the thrill of battle with an orgy of land speculation that sent him to debtor's prison. (His son, Robert E., would become famous in a later war.)

Stratford Hall, as befits such a family, looks odd. Its lines strike me as rather East German, as if it were a factory for making surveillance equipment. But the bricks of which it is built give it a warm, rich glow.

Of the prima donnas in *The Founders at Home*, perhaps the two most striking are Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, in part because of their homes. Magnet is a partisan: He admires the young colonel from St. Croix, and he seems rather suspicious of Mr. Jefferson. But when their houses face off, Monticello wins—though it is a near-run thing.

Hamilton, whom Magnet calls "the upwardly mobile young immigrant of dubious parentage," sought security as well as fame in his adopted country. After retiring from his post as the United States' first Treasury secretary, he felt his private career as a lawyer had prospered enough to allow him to build a summer house, which he called the Grange, on the northern heights of Manhattan (then countryside). Hamilton enjoyed it for only a few years before dying in his duel with Aaron Burr. As the land was developed, the Grange was moved, and it sat for over a century wedged between a church and an apartment building. In 2008, the National Park Service moved it to a nearby park, restoring its original colors and mirrored doors: "A perfect embodiment," writes Magnet, "of his elegant, logical, complicated Enlightenment mind."

The premier Enlightenment house of the Founding, though, has to be Monticello. It "seems to be saying," Magnet writes, "as Goethe supposedly cried on his deathbed, More light! It's not just that there are few dark corners in a house made up of so many demi-octagons, but that Jefferson has designed it so that light pours in from everywhere—through oversized, triple-hung windows and lots of them, through glass doors, through multiple skylights made up of glass louvers . . . all reflected and bounced back across the lofty rooms by mirrors everywhere."

But even Monticello has its darkness. Two wings connect the main house to flanking pavilions; but the wings "are in fact covered passages that lead out of the cellar of the house and contain the semi-subterranean kitchen, dairy, and other rooms for those who waited on Jefferson. Since those latter were slaves, it's hard not to [think] of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, with its airy, playful creatures of light enjoying the surface of the earth, while the dark Morlocks toil hidden."

Magnet rubs Jefferson's nose in this, but ends, as he must, by giving him his due, for it was to Jefferson that Lincoln would turn to explain what the Civil War was about. Writes Magnet: "The abstraction, not the history, was at that moment our true national identity. And in the ever-growing consciousness of man's freedom that is the true meaning of history . . . so it became."

Perhaps the best of Magnet's portraits is that of his man in the middle, John Jay. There he is, on the cover of your college paperback of *The Federalist Papers*. Yet when you open it, as you surely do, you notice that he wrote only five of the 85 essays (he fell sick early on, then was knocked unconscious in a New York City riot). You may remember that he negotiated a treaty that bears his name, and for which half the country execrated him. What does this man have to offer us?

A lot that needed doing and that was not pretty. Jay's hardest service came during the Revolution. Son of a family of New York Huguenot merchants, he ran the ominously named Committee for Detecting Conspiracies. New York was split between patriots and loyalists, and each side had guerrilla enforcers (Skinners and Cow-boys, respectively). "Punishments must of course become certain," Jay wrote, "and Mercy dormant, a harsh System repugnant to my Feelings, but nevertheless necessary." He also ran a Hudson Valley spy ring,

Mount Vernon dining room

whose adventures he later recounted to a young family friend, James Fenimore Cooper, who turned them into his first bestseller, *The Spy*.

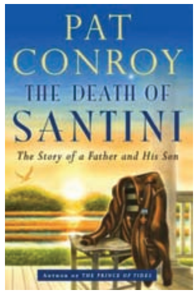
Later in the war, Jay served as a diplomat in Spain and France. There he learned that allies can be as bad as enemies. When it came time to negotiate the Treaty of Paris, he encouraged Britain to give the United States a good deal, to keep it independent of France. Treaties, he explained, "had never signified any thing since the World began." The former colonies and former mother country should base a new relationship on common interest.

He directed the same clear gaze on the *lacrimae rerum*. The letter he wrote Hamilton's father-in-law after his friend was shot is saved from bitterness only by grace. "The philosophic topics of consolation are familiar to you, and we all know from experience how little relief is to be derived from them. May the Author and only Giver of consolation be and remain with you."

The pictures in Magnet's book are splendid, 32 pages in full color. Read about these houses, and their owners—you will find a mix of men who did their country proud. **NR**

Generation Gaps

FLORENCE KING



The Death of Santini: The Story of a Father and His Son, by Pat Conroy (Nan A. Talese, 352 pp., $28.95)

A COUPLE of times while writing this review I almost typed "Bill Clinton" instead of "Pat Conroy." That's not surprising. The former president and the bestselling novelist who wrote *The Great Santini* have a lot in common. Their names sound similar, they are the same age, they look alike, both are southerners, and both have gotten into situations that require a lot of explaining. For years Clinton was the unrivaled master of this exhausting art form but he has been toppled by Conroy, whose new book, a nonfiction sequel to *The Great Santini*, is such a prolix apologia for his nonstop search for private demons that he has become the Great Explainer.

Ironically, what brought him to this questionable point was a string of good luck. He was born at the perfect time to be a product of the Sixties, and everything he did and wrote hit a bull's-eye on the zeitgeist. In the civil-rights arena he became the first white teacher of blacks on the remote South Carolina sea island of Daufuskie, a Gullah-Geechee time capsule, where the direct descendants of the state's original slaves had lived in such isolation that they had kept their African language and customs. Conroy wrote a self-published book on his experience, which ruffled the segregationist establishment, won him the appellation "n****r lover," and got him fired. He rewrote his book as *The Water Is Wide*, sold it to a real publisher, and was profiled in *Life* magazine. Then Hollywood came calling and produced the movie *Conrack*, starring Jon Voight. Conroy said all the right things ("the cruel-eyed South," "the apartheid South") and the zeitgeist welcomed him as one of its own.

His next cultural bull's-eye was the 1970s, with its peace movements, antimilitary demonstrators, and early feminism's obsession with what it called the patriarchy. Conroy had what it took to hit all three at once without leaving home. His father, Marine Corps fighter pilot Colonel Donald Patrick Conroy, whose nom de guerre was "the Great Santini," was a harsh disciplinarian and believer in corporal punishment who regularly slapped or slugged his wife and as many of their seven children as he could catch, "backhanding" anyone left standing as he stalked from the blood-speckled room.

What a blockbuster bestseller this story would make in a country where everyone was saying "My father never said he loved me," when "macho" was coming into vogue as an all-purpose libel, when the name "John Wayne" meant emotions shot full of novocaine, when hugging was approaching hysteria, and when the military was blamed for everything. Now was the time to write *The Great Santini*. "If I was going to be truthful as a writer," the Great Explainer reasoned, "I had to let the hate out into the sunshine. I owed it to myself to let my father know how much I hated every cell of the body that had brought mine to life." He began writing, and it worked. "I felt what truth tasted like, and it rolled like honey off my tongue," he explained. "Every word seemed summoned and anointed with a limitless power over which I had no control. It delighted me, the ease with which the words appeared, with me as some involuntary instrument taking dictation from the stars."

Conroy should resist navigating by the stars and get himself a good sextant, because his present book is an overwritten mess crammed with so much purple prose that it resembles a bruise with pages. He eats dinner "as the sun entered on the soft-gliding slipstream of the fierce Western horizon." His father-dominated childhood was lived among "the caves and coral reef where the

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morays wait in ambush." While a student at The Citadel, "I had forged my soul in a fire pit of cruelty and discipline and was not expecting those darkling, black winds." Realizing that the military academy with its brutal plebe system was a stand-in for the Great Santini, who had forced him to go there, "my anger was now playing busboy to my anxiety." Readers who are confused by dirty dishes in the imagery can try again when he confesses that the phrase *dysfunctional family* "has traveled with me as though a wood tick had attached itself to my armpit forever."

The Great Santini always announced himself by bellowing "Stand by for a fighter pilot!" and then strode in. When the Great Explainer announces himself, readers must stand by for far-fetched metaphors and analogies. If he announces his "rage" at this or that, we must stand by for volcanoes, lava, forges, crucibles, and anything white-hot. A "truth" announcement? Stand by for cleansing, rising, soaring, flying, gliding, and anything feather-light. "Nowhere to turn?" Stand by for the thwarts-and-all landscaping of classical mythology: labyrinths, cul-de-sacs, mazes, and anything to get lost in. The book that was designed to write finis to paternal domination becomes instead one designed for sophomores who write "How true!" in margins.

It also reveals, intentionally or not, just how captive to his larger-than-life father he was and still is. His first two wives were widows of men who had served in Vietnam, which Santini did and Pat did not, and he adopted the children of the first. Under the guise of displaying his fashionable liberalism, he assays ever-so-subtle challenges to Santini, who was a conservative Irish Catholic: "I'd been set on fire by Vatican II and saw a church I could fall in love with. With the death of John XXIII, I began to lose the faith of my forefathers." This has nothing to do with religion or politics; it's an adult kid talking back.

The same can be said for his even more subtle answer to his own rhetorical question "How does God make a fighter pilot?" He replies: "He sends him seven squirrely, mealymouthed children who march in peace demonstrations, wear Birkenstocks, flirt with vegetarianism, invite cross-dressers to dinner, and vote for candidates whom Dad would line up and shoot." This can be read merely as a generic description of a hippie, but it acquires significance in light of how often Conroy describes his shoes. Even if it's the middle of the night and he is rushing to one of his many family emergencies, he almost invariably writes "I threw on my Docksiders." The reader knows a crisis has struck and doesn't need to be told anything else, but Conroy, who has done all of the other things in his rhetorical list, is compelled to mention the shoes.

The adult kid talking back turns undeniably mealymouthed when it comes to his nervous breakdowns. I'm not sure how many he had; I counted eight before I had to give up. Conroy must be the only memoirist who mentions his nervous breakdowns in passing, so that they read like footnotes that accidentally got printed in the main text instead of at the bottom of the page.

He never quite admits it, but he psychoanalyzed himself in his eulogy to his father in 1998: "Donald Conroy is the only person I have ever known whose self-esteem was absolutely unassailable. There was not one thing about himself that my father did not like; nor was there one thing about himself that he would change. He simply adored the man he was and walked with perfect confidence through every encounter in his life. Dad wished everyone could be just like him."

After the publication of *The Great Santini*, a heated national debate arose over whether he was as brutal as his son made him out to be. *Atlanta* magazine came out with a cover story, "The Great Santini Talks Back," in which Pat's first wife praised him for being a wonderful grandfather to her children, and Pat was attacked by Santini's Chicago relatives, including his priest-uncle Father James Conroy, who called his novelist nephew "a sack of Southern s***." Constitutionally incapable of staying out of the brawl, Santini sat for an interview and said: "Pat's an opportunist. Look at his record. He found out by writing the way he does, he has a captive audience . . . all the women of America, all the do-gooders, all the bleeding hearts, all the psychiatrists. They love that kind of crap."

Divorced by now from Pat's mother, he moved to Atlanta and showed up at an autographing session. When book buyers found out who he was, they asked for his autograph too. What was Pat to do? He couldn't very well have him thrown out, so he invited him to sit down. Besides, it was good for sales: Santini's line was longer. What started as a stunt became a custom; readers insisted on having both autographs, so they kept up the dual appearances through two more books. He attended writers' conferences and was a frequent guest on Atlanta's most popular radio show, where he gave advice on child-raising: "Don't spare the rod. America is falling apart because parents are afraid of their own children. The father is the center of the family unit. He gives out the guidance and the punishment. He is judge, jury, and king. From him, all good things flow."

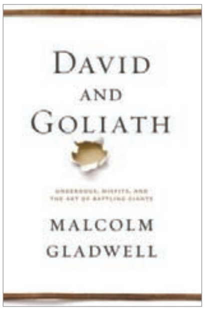
The Great Santini may have been a tough customer and not a man to cross, but his political incorrectness is like a breath of fresh air.

Pat Conroy paints his strange eleventh-hour armistice with his father as best he can, as he must, calling it their "journey together" and a "pursuit of redemption." Well, maybe. I am not entirely convinced by any of it, including the extent of the childhood abuse, but it doesn't matter because it all led to the delightful final section of this sorry book. The Great Santini may have been a tough customer and not a man to cross, but his political incorrectness is like a breath of fresh air.

When hospitalized for his final illness, he yelled at his doctor: "Hey, Sinbad! They got any medical schools in Iran?" You gotta love this guy. NR

The Rules Of the Game

SARAH RUDEN



David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants, by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown, 320 pp., $29)

MALCOLM GLADWELL has had quite a different career than might be expected from a mathematician's son who grew up mainly in a Canadian Mennonite community. For at least a decade, he has been America's most popular social-science journalist. His fifth book, however, ventures much farther than his previous ones into political, historical, and religious matters, in its exploration of the meaning of the Biblical story of David's triumph over the Philistine champion. This venture proves a distinct problem.

The dominance of the social sciences in our thinking is too great, if you ask me; we're too used to being told where we need to go in our lives, and how to get there, and we're too used to complying. But often the priesthood of expertise is quite limited, serving cults of success, fame, wealth, beauty, youth, fitness, or shopping, cults that don't impinge much on serious people's lives; and it can be great to have a guide to the shrines who is a believer, an insider, who has the priests' confidence and so can tell us what's going on. (I've found Gladwell's past meditations on, for example, how hair coloring and small kitchen appliances are marketed useful and entertaining.) But when, as in this new book, the priesthood's vehicles (the slogan, the arresting image, the statistical surprise, and so on) run up against civilization—that deeper, more solid structure on which humanity either depends or impales itself—then the clank and rattle are loud and disturbing.

The main point of the David and Goliath story, as Gladwell tells it, is that bigger is not necessarily better. He goes on to apply this principle to, among other far-flung situations, those of a novice coach of a girls' basketball team who made the full-court press his dominant strategy; of a wealthy Hollywood director who is worried that his children don't have to work hard, in the way that toughened him; of an undergraduate who chose Brown over a school where she would have had less competition in science courses; and of a civil-rights leader who acted like the trickster Brer Rabbit of southern folklore.

Only in the echoing absence of context can such examples all fit into the single idea of smallness's advantages. The context most undeniably missing is civilization's typical concern for lessons of the past and plans for the long term; and more recent civilization's concern for rules that are broadly fair as well as efficient. The flash and blare of the advertising mode, in contrast, urging that a legitimate "dream" is only what I want right now for myself or my family or friends, have pretty low mileage and certainly don't make for a thoughtful essay.

One of Gladwell's crucial exhibits in *David and Goliath*, Vivek Ranadivé, an Indian immigrant to Silicon Valley who tried to revolutionize basketball for his own purposes, gets a bizarrely stripped-down presentation. Ranadivé was in reality puzzled by a lot more than "the way Americans play basketball." He clearly had no sense of what basketball is about—what kind of game is exciting for both sides to play and fun to watch, what kind fairly rewards the talents and tactics peculiar to the sport. If the full-court press Ranadivé favored ever did become commonplace, it would threaten to turn basketball into a contest in stampeding and looming, and the rules would have to change.

Ranadivé seems to have been—with Gladwell's approval afterwards—indifferent to the anger of other teams' coaches and parents and miffed at the intervention of a referee who called numerous touch fouls ("Ticky-tacky stuff," comments Gladwell). The tragedy, in the author's eyes, was that "Ranadivé called the press off. He had to. . . . [His team] played basketball the way basketball is supposed to be played, and in the end they lost—but not before proving that Goliath is not quite the giant he thinks he is." Somehow, I don't imagine that everybody in National Junior Basketball shared that conclusion.

There is an even stranger presentation, as a David and Goliath fable, of an anonymous Hollywood multimillionaire's past struggles and his present ambivalence about his wealth, as a bad influence on his children. I read between the lines that the children are, at the least, spoiled. So how does this lesson work? The father, as a David, overcame hardships, his Goliath, through the very toughness and adaptability they created; fine. So the money he made on the way is an independent monster, another Goliath, and this time one who will inevitably defeat the young Davids in his home? He has no say in this? Many parents (I'm thinking of Mormons in particular) take care to limit the influence of money—no matter how much there happens to be—on their young children. In this connection, it is good to be part of a community with traditions and ideals that help in imposing limits—such as, most often, a religious community.

It's also a head-scratcher that Gladwell didn't look beyond the personal frustration of the Brown undergraduate with the competition she claimed deprived her of a career in science. He takes a typical freshman crisis very seriously, never considering its typical sources and its long-term and general purposes. There is an immense gap between, on the one hand, the demands of high schools in this country that pass as pretty good, and, on the other, the demands of our elite universities. But the issue isn't the crushing of talent and dreams in an overly competitive environment as much as the sorting of kids who will work like fiends from those who expect a better social life than in high school, but the same high grades too, while dealing with multivariable calculus and organic chemistry.

Those subjects are the same everywhere: They have to be strafed with study, and if students at mid-tier schools

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have any advantage, it's in thinking less of themselves and wanting to move on to somewhere more prestigious. The we-need-more-scientists-and-engineers-not-more-lawyers whine that Gladwell deploys, with the implication that it can and should be academically easier to get the requisite degrees, wouldn't survive the experience (which I had in South Africa) of a higher-education system that "manages" competition. There is no honest and efficient way to do that. Our techies are the best: They invent at a blinding rate, and pillage Nobels; that we don't have more of them, of the same quality, is largely the fault of public schools that don't prepare young people,

Malcolm Gladwell

either with knowledge or with discipline, to major in science at college.

The civil-rights movement *was* a sort of David and Goliath story, in which intelligence, energy, courage, and the consciousness of right on the part of the materially weak won out over all the practical power of bigotry. It's therefore downright perverse of Gladwell to highlight, as if it were characteristic of the whole movement, the antics of Wyatt Walker, a Baptist minister who was Martin Luther King's fixer but sometimes worked underhandedly. (Gladwell: "Walker knew better than to tell King all that he was doing. King would disapprove. Walker kept his mischief to himself.") Walker was not even a pacifist ("By this time, you know, if I'd had my razor I'd have cut him," he said of an attacker), and his tactics echo the moral degradation that slavery created (and that gave a perpetual excuse for oppression), the opposite of King's determination to confront wrongdoing with principled resistance.

In the quest for sympathetic publicity for the movement, Walker "succeeded" by luring black schoolchildren into confronting the brutal Birmingham police, their attack dogs, and their willingness to jail hundreds of peaceful protesters of any age. It was the classic Brer Rabbit/slave tactic of throwing those who were more susceptible into the breach, and if the tactic had predominated, if the civil-rights leaders had not normally confronted evil with their own bodies, taken the risks themselves, and shrugged off the personal price, their movement would have failed. As it was, Walker did a great deal of damage. Even Malcolm X, no great fan of scruples in the face of racism, was among the disgusted, remarking that "real men don't put their children on the firing line."

A book that pays so little attention to such important values as the common reluctance to place anyone beyond the rules of decent behavior is bound to have problems with definition and proportion. Martin Luther King and his movement *were* big, *huge* in the ways that count, whereas their opponents were puny and petty; nor was the marchers' and boycotters' bigness in essence about coming out ahead in any worldly sense. The overall leader, after all, was assassinated; the political goals were achieved, but not the economic ones. The people were great because, in their sacrifices, they became part of us, bled into the whole in imitation of Jesus, whom most of them espoused. Gladwell's gestures, almost toward the Prosperity Gospel, his claims that faith can help make you come out on top, really do not cut it. NR

A Strenuous Life

JOHN DANIEL DAVIDSON

Jack London: An American Life, by Earle Labor (Farrar, Straus, 480 pp., $30)

THE epigraph of *Martin Eden*, arguably Jack London's most philosophical and autobiographical novel, proclaims, "Let me live out my years in heat of blood! / Let me lie drunken with the dreamer's wine! / Let me not see this soul-house built of mud / Go toppling to the dust a vacant shrine!" If you wanted to write a biography of London in four lines of verse, that would be it.

London's short life was as wild and adventurous as his fiction: Even his exploits as a teenager almost strain credulity. At 15, London quit a full-time factory job to become an oyster pirate in San Francisco Bay—stealing oysters from beds owned by the big railroad companies and selling them on the black market. At 16, he fell in with a gang of "road kids" from Sacramento who taught him how to beg and steal and hop trains without losing his legs (as one unlucky boy in the gang did). A week after his 17th birthday, he joined the crew of a sealing ship bound for the Bering Sea—a voyage in which he survived a typhoon off the coast of Japan that would be the subject of his first published story.

During those early years, he also learned to drink—and drink hard, once almost dying of alcohol poisoning and

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another time almost drowning after he fell off a dock and got swept out to sea, and was rescued at the last moment by a passing fisherman. By 20, London had hoboed his way to the East Coast and back, done a stint in jail, lived in the slums, toiled as a "work-beast" in a coal-fired electricity plant, and emerged from it all an avowed socialist hell-bent on making a fortune.

Here is a biographer's treasure trove, and London scholar Earle Labor sets about his task with both relish and care, ever conscious that the tale he's telling is at once outlandish and tragically real. For as much as London offers rich material for a biography, any book-length account of his life is bound to feel incomplete. He was dead at age 40, seemingly at a turning point in his prolific writing career, his life cut off abruptly at the opening of the second act.

Nevertheless, he accomplished much, and it is a testament to London's toughness and commitment to his craft that, under almost all circumstances, he kept to a rigorous writing schedule of producing at least 1,000 words a day—even when he was at sea, or ill, or both. This steadfastness would pay off for London, who would at one point be the highest-paid writer in America. It was a good thing it paid off, because while his income soared so did his expenses, and in his later years London increasingly resorted to churning out potboilers to keep up with mounting debt.

This spate of work has earned London a reputation in some literary circles as a popular hack, a writer of boy's stories whose overblown status in American letters was secured only by his early death. Labor rightly rejects this view and advances London as the American author par excellence of the Strenuous Age, a man who overcame immense personal and professional obstacles through sheer willpower, intelligence, and charisma to become a writer and artist of the first order. That his writing was mostly aimed outward, at the rough world he knew from hard experience, is not grounds for dismissing London as a serious artist. He would not be the first and certainly not the last writer whose stories were plucked, sometimes verbatim, from the pages of his own life.

There seemed to be no end of exotic and harrowing experiences from which London could draw for his writing. A sojourn north in 1897 (at age 21) to strike it rich in the Klondike Gold Rush gave a young London years of material for short stories and, later, his most celebrated work, *The Call of the Wild*, which displays what Labor calls London's "rare psychological empathy" for animals, especially dogs. Labor quotes one of London's companions, Marshall Bond:

> [London's] manner of dealing with dogs was different from anyone I ever knew. Most people, including myself, pat, caress, and talk in more or less affectionate terms to a dog. London did none of this. He always spoke and acted toward the dog as if he recognized his noble qualities, respected them, but took them as a matter of course. . . . He had an appreciative and instant eye for fine traits and honored them in a dog as he would in a man.

His time in the north would shape his early writing as much as his time at sea, especially in the South Pacific, would shape his later work. He covered the Russo–Japanese War for Hearst in 1905; the war ended, for London, in a Japanese prison, and it took an appeal from President Theodore Roosevelt to secure his release.

Beginning in 1907, he attempted to sail around the world in a poorly built 42-foot sailboat. The ensuing two years would open a new world to London and his wife, Charmian. They fell in love with Hawaii, which became a haven for them later in life; nearly died of thirst when their boat ran out of water en route to Tahiti; and explored the dangerous islands of Melanesia, where cannibalism was still the custom among headhunting bushmen.

London's health suffered terribly during the voyage. The entire crew was stricken with fever, malaria, and infected insect bites that turned into flesh-eating yaws. London also suffered from hives, dysentery, and other tropical diseases that eventually forced him to abandon the cruise and undergo emergency medical care in Australia. His health would never fully recover; upon his return to California in 1909, a silent character, death, begins to haunt the pages of Labor's book. By the time London slips into a coma and succumbs to a "gastro-intestinal type of uraemia," at his ranch in November 1916, one wonders how he ever lasted so long in such a shattered physical state.

If London had lived longer, he would perhaps have turned his artistic genius more deeply inward, to explore the undiscovered country of the human heart with as much fervor as he had explored the wide world. At the time of his death, he had only just begun to delve into the work of Carl Jung and grapple with the ideas set forth in *Psychology of the Unconscious*. London was an avowed materialist throughout his life, but Labor makes the case that toward the end he had embarked upon a spiritual sea change. Charmian, who knew London better than anyone, thought the change remarkable and noted in her diary that, in Jack's copy of Jung's book, he "underscored Jesus' challenge to Nicodemus, cited by Jung: 'Think not carnally or thou art carnal, but think symbolically and then thou art spirit.'"

Despite his newfound interest in spiritual truth and the unconscious, bitterness and depression plagued London as his health deteriorated. He complained to Charmian that "every person I've done anything for . . . has thrown me down, near ones, dear ones—and the rest." Despite mounting signs that he was gravely ill, London would not rest or change his diet; the stubbornness and drive that had propelled him out of anonymous poverty into literary immortality would ultimately be his ruin.

Sadly, London seems to have departed life without comfort in either body or soul. Labor, to his credit, does not try to spare his readers from the difficulty London had in his personal relationships and the recklessness with which he sometimes treated those closest to him. His eldest daughter, Joan, from London's first marriage, often bore the brunt of his animosity and resentment toward her mother. The last time she saw him, he flew into a rage over her request for an increase in her monthly allowance. At their parting, "my impulse to run to him, to fling my arms about him, died at the sight of his set, unsmiling face," she would later recall. "He turned then, pushed open the door and went inside. We were never to see him again." **NR**

Film

Broken Heartland

ROSS DOUTHAT

I WAS not entirely looking forward to Alexander Payne's *Nebraska*, mostly because I worried that the movie, about an old man taking stock of his life on a Plains-state road trip, sounded an awful lot like Payne's last movie about an old man taking stock of his life on a Plains-state road trip—2002's *About Schmidt*, in which Jack Nicholson delivered a performance so depressing that the movie theaters should have spiked their sodas with Wellbutrin.

Payne has a unique style—a blend of comedy and tragedy, satire and realism—that tends to sharpen, in good ways and bad, when the setting is his native heartland. (He was born in Omaha, and still keeps a home there today.) Sometimes this sharpening produces something peerless, like *Election*, his near-perfect 1999 film about the battle for a high-school presidency. But sometimes it leaves a nasty aftertaste—a mix of condescension, disappointment, and misanthropy that can feel like the too-harsh judgment of a made-good native son.

Partway through *Nebraska*, I thought we were headed for exactly that kind of place—somewhere even darker and danker than *About Schmidt*, not least because this movie is shot in a clinical, depressing black-and-white. A bone-deep unhappiness permeates the first half of the film—the unhappiness of Bruce Dern's Woody Grant, a seventysomething alcoholic sliding into dementia; of his long-suffering wife Kate (June Squibb), alternating beratings and complaints; and of his younger son, David (Will Forte, late of *Saturday Night Live*, and a typical Payne casting-against-type), a midlife mediocrity with a dead-end job selling audio equipment and a girlfriend, plain and heavyset, who's just dumped him because he won't commit.

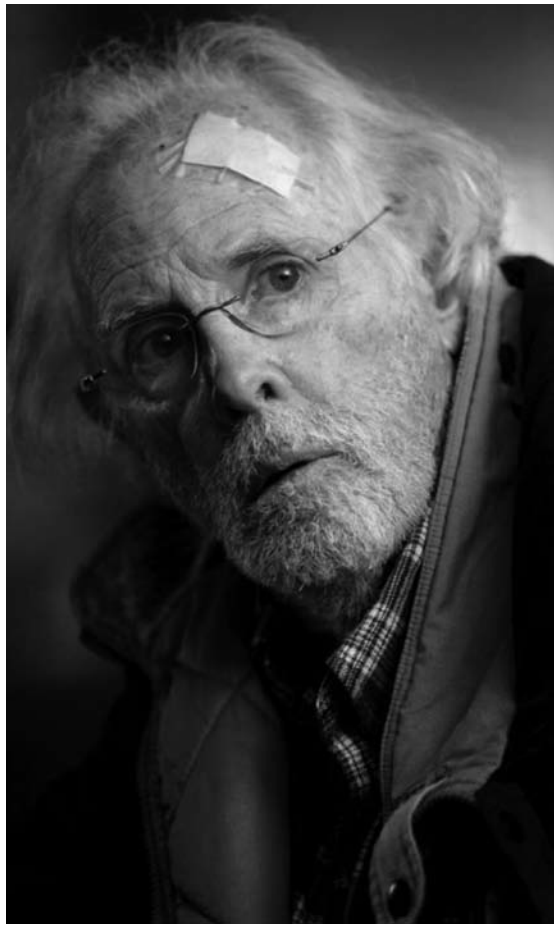
The Grants now live in Billings, Mont., but they hail from a small town in Nebraska, Hawthorne, where Woody's father farmed and Woody himself once kept an auto-repair shop. And Hawthorne is where they all end up, thanks to the half-senile Woody's conviction that a Publishers Clearing House–style come-on is really a million-dollar-winning lottery ticket. This delusion inspires him to set out on foot, repeatedly and hopelessly, for the sweepstakes headquarters in Lincoln, until the exasperated David finally agrees to drive him there—hoping to snap him out of the delusion, to snap himself out of his own torpor, and perhaps, just perhaps, to make some last connection with a father slipping away into the dark.

The road trip goes badly: Woody is recessive, embittered, unreachable, with nothing good to say about his life, no interest in his son's attempts at kindness. He gets stone-drunk somewhere in South Dakota and ends up in a hospital, at which point David decides to let him recuperate at his brother's home in Hawthorne, in the bosom of the extended Grant clan. Kate joins them via Greyhound bus, and their older son, a semi-successful TV reporter (Bob Odenkirk), comes down for the weekend as well. But when they arrive, they find a clan, and a town, that have bought completely into Woody's million-dollar fantasy—simultaneously hailing him as a local hero and circling him like sharks.

This confusion sounds like the plot of a giddy screwball comedy, but while *Nebraska* has laughs throughout, everything about the setup is pitch-black. Hawthorne is recession-ravaged; Woody's extended family are taciturn, unpleasant, or (in the case of his heavyset nephews, both unemployed and one on probation for sexual assault) simply stupid; his "old friend" and former business partner Ed Pegram (Stacy Keach) is sinister behind the bonhomie. The performances are wonderful—Dern is getting all kinds of deserved praise, and the supporting cast matches his standard—but for a time it seems as if they're all just in the service of the grimmest possible depiction of intergenerational unhappiness and heartland decline.

But then comes a small scene in the Hawthorne newspaper office, where David meets the paper's editor (Angela McEwan), an old flame of his father's whose own life has actually been happy, and who remembers Woody warmly, nostalgically, and perceptively, as someone somewhat different from the man David thinks he knows. This scene works as a kind of crack in the story, through which faint rays can enter, casting everything we've seen in a somewhat more forgiving light.

The change doesn't alter Woody's essential characteristics—he remains



Bruce Dern in Nebraska

crabbed, inaccessible, half-deluded, overfond of drink. There is no sudden epiphany or transformation, just a gradual reorientation of how we see his life, his family, his wife, his past. It isn't that he ceases to be the person we've followed through the movie's grim first half, but rather that we come to see a little better how that person came to be—and through that understanding, to respect, admire, forgive.

None of this eliminates the movie's tragic element: *Nebraska* remains, at its heart, a story about an unsuccessful, disappointed life. But it's a story that also shows that there can be love and grace even in a life that doesn't turn out as one would hope, and that such a disappointment need not be the last or only word on something as complicated as the human heart. **NR**

Happy Warrior BY MARK STEYN

Heading South

WHETHER or not Nelson Mandela was emblematic of the new South Africa, his memorial service certainly was. Thamsanqa Jantjie, the lovable laugh-a-minute sign-language fraud who stood alongside President Obama gesticulating meaninglessly to the delight of all, was exposed in the days that followed as a far darker character. A violent schizophrenic charged over the years with burglary, rape, kidnapping, and murder, he was also a member of a "necklacing" gang—necklacing being the practice of placing a gasoline-filled tire over the head of the victim and setting it alight.

Nevertheless, Mr. Jantjie was merely the ne plus ultra of the South African state's shambolic security operation for the service. My fellow congregants at this parish have been arguing in recent weeks over whether Mandela was a great man (Deroy Murdock) or a Commie terrorist (Andrew McCarthy) or on balance a mild disappointment (Conrad Black). But beyond such assessments is the daily reality that a lot of things in South Africa simply don't function anymore. As revealing as Mr. Jantjie's extensive and violent criminal background is the fact that the National Prosecuting Authority cannot reliably state which offenses he has been convicted of, and, for the one crime for which he seems definitively to have been sentenced, whether in fact he served the sentence.

Before Mandela's, the last South African funeral to have commanded international attention was that of Field Marshal Smuts, the greatest South African of the pre-apartheid era and the only man to sign the treaties ending both the First and Second World Wars. He is a forgotten figure now, but he was the only South African with a statue in Parliament Square at Westminster until Mandela's was put up, and his funeral in 1950 attracted numbers comparable to and perhaps even surpassing those in Soweto. Smuts would have been astonished by the chaos and ill discipline of Mandela's farewell six decades later. He took it for granted that South Africa was a First World nation, on a par with her sister dominions in Canada and Australia. The line between these two funerals is one of racial progress, and precipitous decline by every other measure.

Since the 1990s, life expectancy has fallen back to where it was in Smuts's day. South Africa is the murder capital of the world, with around 50 homicides every day. In a 2011 survey, one in three women claimed they had been raped in the past year. South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, was accused of raping an HIV-positive woman, but replied that he took a shower afterwards to "minimize the risk of contracting the disease." This is one of the more rational self-administered treatments. It is widely believed among Mr. Zuma's compatriots that sex with a virgin will cure you of AIDS, which, virgins being somewhat thin on the ground, has led to an epidemic of child rape, including victims as young as eight months old.

Not all of this, or even very much of it, can be laid at Mandela's door. In that sense, his leadership is more of a lesson in the limitations of the great-man theory of history. His predecessor, F. W. de Klerk, South Africa's last white leader, was also a great and generous man, who understood that the regime he had served all his life could not be preserved. Yet, as the years go by, it seems to me that the comradely de Klerk and Mandela are less symbolic of the new South Africa than were their wives. Marike de Klerk wound up getting murdered; Winnie Mandela was a murderer—or, at any rate, found by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to have been personally responsible for multiple murders. Either role would be unusual for an American first lady, as it would have been for a prime-ministerial consort in Smuts's day. Mrs. de Klerk was stabbed and strangled in 2001 by a domestic servant—just another of those 50 murders a day; no motive, nothing was taken; she was killed because that's just the way it is.

Upon her death, Winnie Mandela said, "As a woman I can identify with the exhaustion of her emotional resources in shaping her former husband's career." That's one way of putting it. Mrs. Mandela coped with her own emotional exhaustion by having her security detail kidnap 14-year-old Stompie Moeketsi on suspicion of being an informer, slit his throat, and dump his body in a field. Her most famous contribution to the dictionary of quotations was a celebration of the aforementioned practice of black-on-black "necklacing": "With our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country."

In the end, she never got the chance. The Cold War ended, which meant that Moscow was too internally distracted to subvert South Africa the way it had the rest of the continent. So Mandela was gracious and dignified, and content to cut himself and the ANC in on the crony capitalism of the old National Party. Even so, South Africa has been living off the capital of its racist past these last two decades, even as all its social indicators head remorselessly south and a fifth of the white population has fled.

Jan Smuts and Nelson Mandela met just the once, when the general came to Mandela's college to talk up Britain's cause in the war against Germany. It would amaze Smuts, who had fought in the Boer War against Britain and whose comrades had clung fiercely to their identity during the enforced Britishization that followed, to see how swiftly even the most tenacious culture can be swept away. Yet Mandela's benign rule in the 1990s was likewise only an interlude. South Africa is disintegrating, and what's left is headed nowhere good. **NR**

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