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What Is Writer's Block?

NATIONAL REVIEW

The Kids Aren't Alright

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Abby M. McCloskey on paid maternity leave p. 18

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Fiercely Frail Millennials

It's a popular sport to scorn entitled Millennials—I'm guilty of it myself—but when people live as Millennials were raised to live, where does the lion's share of the blame lie? Parents and children enriched each other's lives as parents fed off the joy they provided their kids. Life as an adult is not a problem so easily solved. *David French*



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The Apartment of Labor

Scott Lincicome's comprehensive and illuminating article "The Truth about Trade" (April 11) describes several government policies that have acted to exacerbate current labor-market inefficiencies. One could speculate on the role of an additional government policy in the genesis of the problem—its aggressive promotion of home ownership. Unable to deal politically with middle-class wage stagnation, the government for decades sought to prop up middle- and lower-class living standards by pushing subprime-mortgage availability through the banking system. (It worked pretty well until 2008.) The anchoring effect of home ownership could well act as an additional deterrent to work-force mobility.

J. A. Frascino
Upper Saddle River, N.J.

Crows and Crockery!

In the "The Week" (April 11), the editors referred to Donald Trump's supporters, contemptuously, as "Trumpkins." Thimbles and thunderstorms! Is that any way to use the name of an honorable Dwarf, a loyal servant of King Caspian X, and (at the end of his life) a Lord Regent of Narnia? I do hope that an apology to Trumpkin will be forthcoming in your next issue.

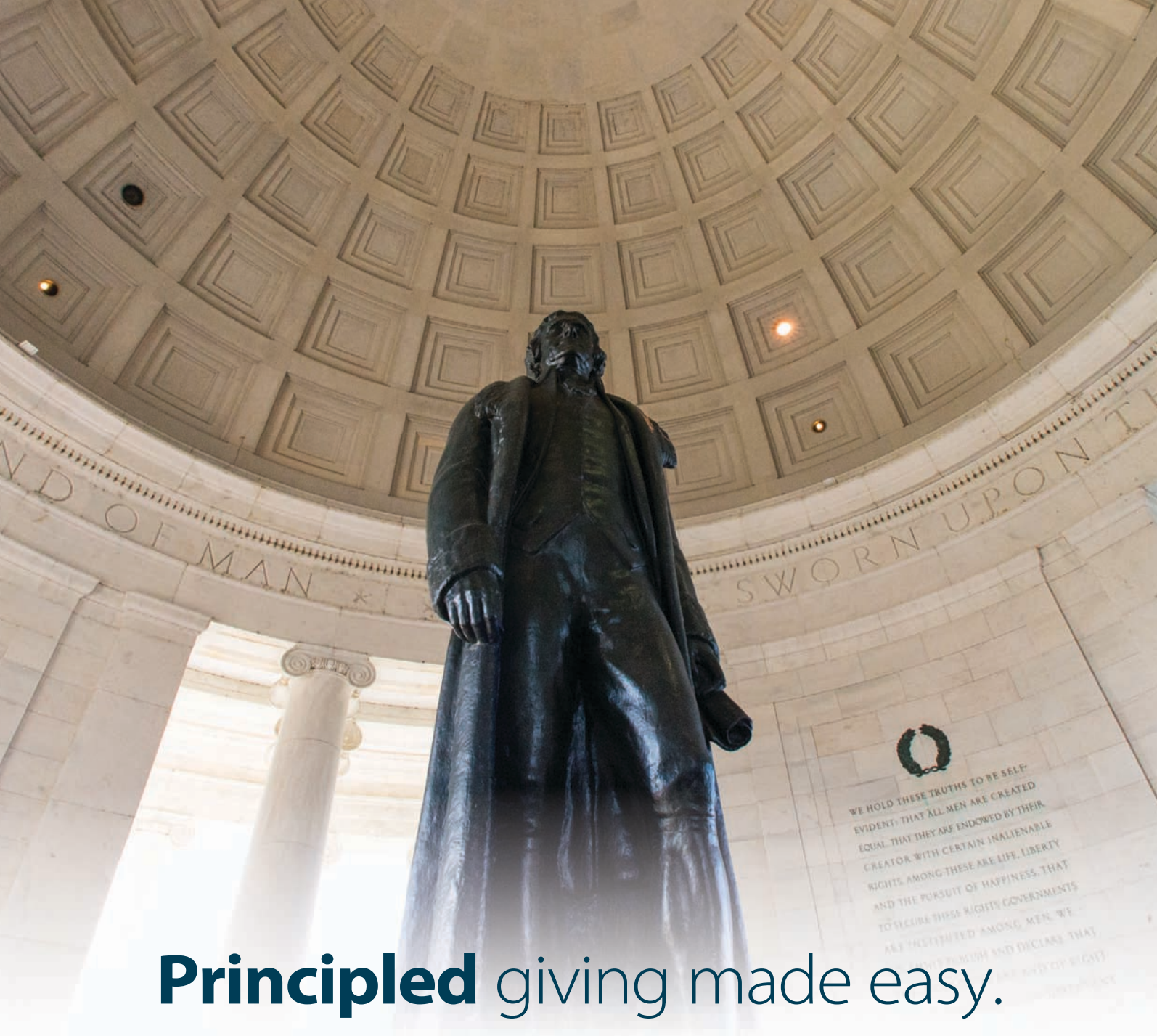
Nicholas Arkison
Via e-mail

Tiresome Fleshpots

I appreciated Ross Douthat's review of the underappreciated Terrence Malick movie *Knight of Cups* ("Angelic Fleshpots," April 25). In one respect my reaction differed from his, however. I don't think Malick needed and failed to portray how "the appeal of a life lived in the moment, and more specifically the appeal of a purely physical attitude toward sex," managed to keep the main character from hearkening to the call of redemption. I don't think the allegory was supposed to be that heavy. Bunyan is thematically relevant, but so is the Zen-master character who asserts the completeness and perfection of the present moment, a character whom I see as an exponent of something useful rather than as an adversary. The main character, being aware and perceptive and reflective, discovers within the present moment, which after all includes his own state of mind and his ability to think about it, the unsatisfactoriness of his romantic involvements. Less than wicked, they turn out to be subtly empty. Malick dramatizes that in a convincing way, although perhaps at a cost in drama.

David Rawlston
Via e-mail

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The Week

■ As Abraham Lincoln said, “You’re fired.”

■ Protesters, many of them riotous, dogged Donald Trump in southern California. In Costa Mesa, they blocked an interstate, threw debris at passing cars, and attacked police cars, all the while waving Mexican flags. In Burlingame, Trump had to enter the hall via a back door. Such disorder is a boon to Trump: He joked that his improvised entry was like “crossing the border.” Uproar and hooliganism has long been a feature of American democratic politics; spectacle is a staple of American popular culture. These stubborn facts do not relieve us of the burdens of arguing, listening, and thinking—which Americans have also, at times, memorably done.

■ Donald Trump gave a major foreign-policy address at the Mayflower Hotel, an element of a long-discussed pivot toward being “presidential.” Stylistically, he kept to this goal: He read a text displayed on two teleprompters and did not ask anyone in the audience to punch someone. Substantively, he sought to invoke the tradition of nationalist realism, even echoing John Quincy Adams (“We do not go abroad in search of enemies”). He called for a more prosperous America, spending more on a military that would be used less. He promised a more consistent policy that would earn the respect of rivals and the trust of friends. All worthy sentiments. Yet he breezed over contradictions: He pledged to destroy ISIS, which will require hard work on the ground with Middle Eastern allies—the very kind of entanglement that he says he disdains. He pursued his bromance with Vladimir Putin: “Some say the Russians won’t be reasonable. I intend to find out.” And, like many businessmen, he put his faith in “talented experts with approaches and practical ideas”—new experts, of course, not the old ones, whom he will brush aside. A Trump foreign policy would be like giving a teenager the keys to his first superpower.

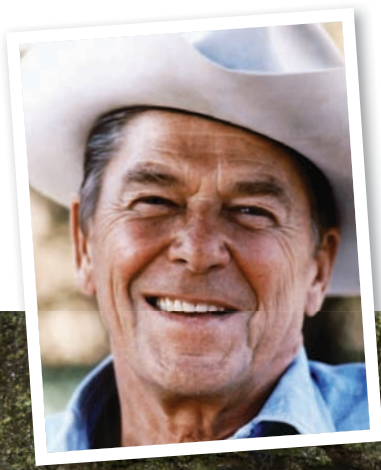
■ In the days before Trump clinched the nomination, John Boehner thought it important to register how much he dislikes Ted Cruz. In a witless cheap shot, the former speaker called him “Lucifer in the flesh” while speaking at Stanford University. This attitude is widespread among Republican insiders, who foolishly allowed personal ill will to cloud their reasoned judgment about who, among the candidates in the GOP race, was the best representative of conservative principles and policies, and about who would be the best candidate in the upcoming general election. On both counts, Cruz was the obvious choice. This is why prominent conservatives who might not be counted among his friends—Lindsey Graham and Jeb Bush come to mind—urged the party to rally around Cruz. They were right to do so, and not to give in to Boehner’s petty grudge-holding. If Republicans lose control of Congress as they lose the presidential election, Boehner and his kind will be part of the reason.



■ A more-than-random number of Trump supporters and watchers see him as a father figure: *Breitbart*’s Milo Yiannopoulos calls him “Daddy,” *Dilbert* cartoonist Scott Adams tags him as the dad who fixes things. What can that possibly mean in a country that declared that all men are created equal? More than you might think. Any executive, royal or elective, wears a trace of paternal authority (queens—and Margaret Thatcher—vary the pattern without breaking it). Great men in times of crisis wear it more openly—George Washington was known as the father of his country, Abraham Lincoln as Father Abraham. There are, naturally, bad father/rulers, just as there are bad fathers (e.g., Papa Doc Duvalier). It is the task of the republican father to inspire the people he leads to be responsible. Donald Trump grasps something about wearing the pants on a debate stage. About mature citizenship, less.

■ For *GQ*, Julia Ioffe wrote a profile of Melania Trump. The Trump camp did not like it. Ioffe was then the target of a wave of anti-Semitic attacks. Tweeters tweeted ovens and the like. She would pick up the phone and hear recordings of Hitler speeches. She received death threats sent in abhorrently creative ways. Ioffe was born in Moscow. And here is a tweet of her own: “For those among you who appreciate irony: my family arrived in the U.S. (legally) 26 years ago today. We were fleeing anti-Semitism.”

■ A lengthy attack on liberal smugness appeared in, of all places, *Vox*. Emmett Rensin argues that liberal condescension has alienated white, working-class voters, making liberalism



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both less able to win the “class struggle” and less interested in trying. He even sticks up for Kim Davis, Kentucky’s most famous county clerk, suggesting that liberals should have opposed her without celebrating her imprisonment or attacking her personally. Class struggle aside, Rensin is clearly on to something. What he does not consider is that the attitude he decries follows naturally from progressives’ long-standing conviction that neither tradition nor markets channel any wisdom. Condescension is indeed a vice, but it is only a tributary of the deeper sin of pride.

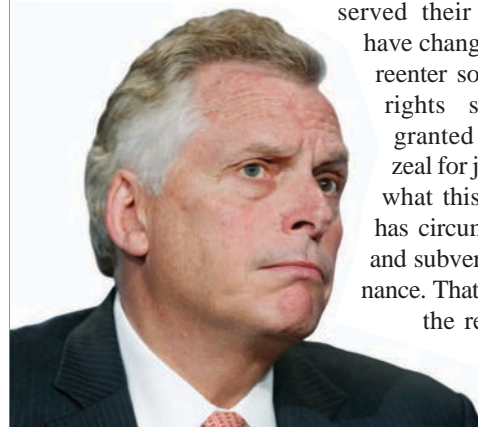
■ There really is nothing that the Obama administration will not yoke to identity politics. To the position of librarian of Congress, vacant since the retirement of Reagan appointee James H. Billington last fall, Obama has appointed Carla D. Hayden, who, if confirmed, “would be the first woman and the first African American to hold the position,” the president noted in his nomination statement, “both of which are long overdue.” Hayden, CEO of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Md., and president of the American Library Association from 2003 to 2004, is not obviously the best candidate for the job. The Library of Congress is, first and foremost, the go-to research center for the 535 members of the federal legislature. But over more than two centuries, it has also become the de facto repository of the intellectual artifacts of American civilization—the storehouse of much of our knowledge and culture, and thus of much of the world’s. That has made it a destination for researchers from across the globe. For that reason, recent appointees have not been librarians—the library’s 3,000-person staff already has plenty of those—but noted scholars (Billington, for example, and his predecessor, Daniel J. Boorstin). Hayden is not a professional scholar. She is also an activist. “We are fighters for freedom,” she told *Ms.* magazine in 2003, waxing grandiose about “the social work aspect of librarianship.” *The Nation* recently called her a “radical librarian.” The Library of Congress should not be a place for ideological agenda-pushing.

■ Kamala Harris, the California attorney general running for a Senate seat, attempted to do with her office what Lois Lerner did with the IRS: weaponize it for politics. In this case, that meant changing California practice with regard to nonprofits, demanding that they hand over IRS documents identifying contributors. The IRS itself has a history of abusing these documents—it was obliged to pay the National Organization for Marriage a settlement after illegally leaking donor information for political purposes—and there is no reason to believe that Kamala Harris would behave any more responsibly, especially given that her demand for the documentation is nakedly political in the first place. Democrats at the IRS used selective investigation of conservative groups to harass them before the 2012 election, and used illegal leaks to enable campaigns of retribution and intimidation against conservative donors; Democrats in prosecutors’ offices around the country routinely misuse their powers in political crusades (the Texas cases alone—Tom DeLay, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Rick Perry—are enough to give pause to all but the most reflexive liberal partisans); and Harris is an active part of a multi-jurisdiction conspiracy (she is joined by the AGs of New York and the U.S. Virgin Islands, among others) to use prosecutorial powers

against critics of the global-warming policies favored by Democrats. This is undiluted, unapologetic political persecution and abuse of police powers. The Americans for Prosperity Foundation, one of the conservative groups Harris targeted, sued and has, for the moment, prevailed in federal court. But the fight is far from over.

■ Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe (D.) has signed an executive action returning the franchise to more than 200,000 convicted felons, on the grounds that disfranchisement “disproportionately affects racial minorities and economically disadvantaged Virginians” and that “all individuals who have served the terms of their incarceration and any periods of supervised release deserve to re-enter society on fair and just terms.” Neither rationale is compelling. The former contention ignores the question of discriminatory intent, which the Supreme Court rightly says must be proved to make a disfranchisement provision unconstitutional. And as for the latter, federal and state laws place a long roster of “civil disabilities” on felons who have completed their terms, including prohibitions against owning a firearm. Why, by McAuliffe’s logic, should the privilege of voting be restored, but the constitutional right to keep a firearm not be? Under the Virginia constitution, the governor can restore certain civil rights on a case-by-case basis: a power that recognizes that some felons genuinely turn over a new leaf. But McAuliffe has obliterated that individualized process under the dubious legal rationale that the constitution gives him the power to grant the vote to felons as a class, a claim with which the last two governors of the state—one a Republican, one a Democrat—disagreed. Restoring voting and other civil rights can be an element

in helping criminals who have served their time and who have changed their ways to reenter society. But those rights should not be granted lightly. In his zeal for justice—if that is what this is—McAuliffe has circumvented the law and subverted good governance. That’s an injustice to the rest of Virginia’s voters.



■ Bill de Blasio gave the teachers’ union the keys to his educational policy, he enraged the police by siding with black protesters, and he picked fights with the governor, a member of his own party, for not being left-wing enough. All par for the course in the world of Gotham liberalism. Is the mayor also a crook? Two aides (Emma Wolfe and Ross Offinger) and one polling firm founded by an adviser (Jonathan Rosen) have been subpoenaed as part of an investigation into straw donations to upstate Democratic-party organizations, intended to bypass spending limits on campaigns for the state senate

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(where Republicans hold a working majority). The violations, said a spokesman for the state’s Board of Elections, “can only be described as willful and flagrant.” New York City had a two-party system under mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, though those days are done. De Blasio’s replacement will likely be another left-wing nullity, hopefully honest, though don’t count on it.

■ The British Labour party has presented its Marxist leader Jeremy Corbyn with an explosive issue. The chairman of its Oxford branch resigned because his members had views about Jews that he found racist. Naseem Shah, Labour M.P. for a constituency in Bradford, a city with a large Muslim population, wrote that Israelis should all be transported to the United States in a “solution” that gives the land to Palestinians. She

The CBO’s Clouded Crystal Ball

As the 2016 presidential-election cycle kicks into gear, economic-policy discussion has been virtually off the table. Yet whoever wins will inherit a stagnant economy and a policy trajectory that changes course with the suddenness of the *Queen Mary*. One can be sure that our next president will try to do something to improve economic growth, and that at a crucial moment, the proposed legislation’s passage will hang by a thin thread spun by the Congressional Budget Office. A smile from the CBO and policy will be easier to change. A frown from the CBO could prove deadly.

And when the next president leaves office, we will look back on that period’s policy and economy and wonder what effect the president truly had. In that process, too, the CBO will play an outsized role. It offers forecasts of taxes, spending, and deficits before the new president does anything and then revisits its analysis of the president’s policies when she or he leaves office. The history of how key variables unfolded relative to the CBO’s expectations of them, then, offers a perspective on the marginal impact of each president.

The next president’s agenda will depend most crucially on the deficit estimates, so let’s look at those. The chart shows how federal budget deficits unfolded relative to the CBO forecasts generated when a president took office. For each, we use the January CBO forecast in the inaugural year. The dotted lines are the CBO forecasts; the solid lines, the actual experience. For the first part of the sample, the starting forecast windows were five years, but by the end, they were ten.

The chart shows that the CBO has tended to be too optimistic. As one can see, the deficit exceeded the CBO forecast for every modern president besides Bill Clinton, who was committed to the deficit-hawk policies prescribed by Robert Rubin and benefited from the dot-com boom.

In the case of George H. W. Bush, it would be difficult for any deficit-reducing policies to overshadow in the public mind the famous “Read my lips: No new taxes” pledge that he violated. To his credit, however, he also attempted to restore a measure of responsibility to federal spending. But, as Arthur Laffer predicted, the deficit increased relative to expectation after the tax hike.

George W. Bush started with a surplus stretching as far as the eye could see but squandered much of it on “compassionate” tax cuts, such as the child credit, that have little

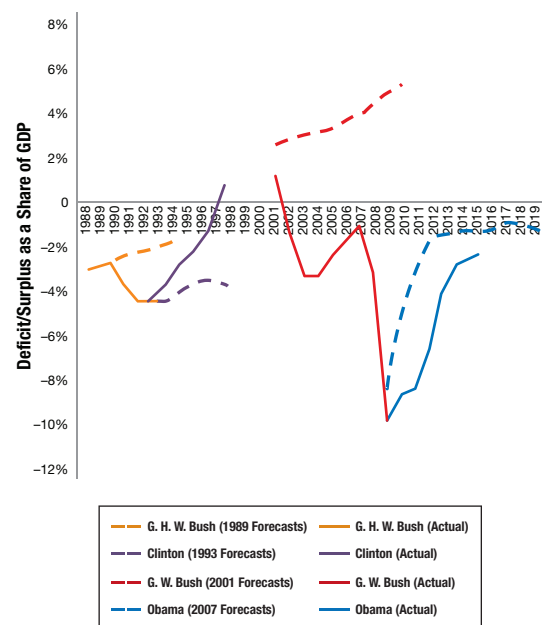
impact on economic growth. Meanwhile, the bursting of the dot-com bubble and 9/11 dampened economic activity early on, and the financial crisis blew the lid off the deficit stew by the end. All told, the deficit was about 15 percent of GDP higher than expected when he left office.

In the early Obama years, deficits continued to swell far more than the CBO had forecast. As with Clinton before him, however, Obama’s fiscal policies moved in a responsible direction once Republicans controlled Congress.

Perhaps the biggest lesson in the chart is how awe-inspiring the scale of the misses can be. Sometimes it’s because of policy changes, sometimes it’s because the economy changes, and sometimes it’s because both things happen. The next president will inherit a deficit path that is fairly favorable. Whether it stays that way is anyone’s guess. If history is any guide, however, you would do well to be skeptical of even the informed guess of the CBO.

—KEVIN A. HASSETT

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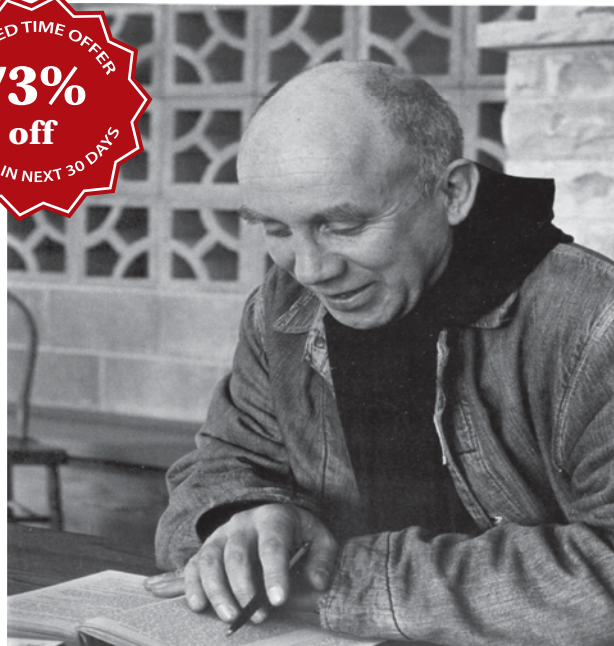
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apologized before the House of Commons. Ken Livingstone, a Labour grandee even more hard-line than Corbyn, said there was no need to apologize, Zionists were in the wrong, and Hitler himself had been a Zionist “before he went mad.” On the grounds of anti-Semitism, the Labour party has suspended the repentant Naseem Shah, the infuriated Livingstone, three local councilors who are all Muslims, and about 50 members. An apparently unfazed Corbyn says that the number who have misspoken is small, and he celebrated May Day alongside Communists bearing portraits of their hero Stalin—who was also no friend of the Jews.



Nicolás Maduro

■ When Venezuela’s caudillo, Hugo Chávez, died in 2013, his successor, Nicolás Maduro, vowed to continue Chávez’s policies. Unfortunately, this is a promise that he has kept. Since Maduro took office, Venezuela has passed rapidly through the stages of imploding socialism: price controls, unemployment, riots, violent repression, hyperinflation, blaming the U.S., and, finally, a spate of stories in the yanqui media about stores’ running out of toilet paper. Venezuela’s government is now so poor that it doesn’t have enough money to pay for printing as

much money as it wants. The billions in banknotes it can print should all have Chávez’s face on them. It would remind long-suffering Venezuelans who is responsible for their current mess, and if continuing hyperinflation renders the currency even more worthless, they will get a grim satisfaction from repurposing the bills to replace what the stores can’t supply.

■ This time, Alexander Hamilton dodged the bullet. The Treasury Department has decided that its first secretary, currently experiencing a historical renaissance, will remain on the front of the \$10 bill, while Harriet Tubman will replace Andrew Jackson on the front of the \$20 bill. Tubman is an admirable choice. Not only was she a courageous chaperone along the Underground Railroad, responsible for escorting more than 300 slaves to freedom; she was also a scout and spy for the Union Army, the first woman in American history to lead a military raid (against Combahee Ferry, in South Carolina, where she helped liberate more than 700 slaves), a Republican, a devout Christian, and a staunch defender of the right to bear arms. Still, this contretemps over the countenances on our currency highlights the way in which the histories of particular groups and interests are now often preferred to a larger, unifying American history, and it’s hard to see how future administrations will be able to resist the temptation to further turn our money into a Who’s Who of Americans from designated interest groups. The administration’s other proposed changes, which will accompany the Tubman redesign—refashioning the back of the \$10 bill to highlight portraits of leaders of the women’s-suffrage movement, and the back of the \$5 bill to include images of Martin Luther

King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, and opera singer-cum-civil-rights activist Marian Anderson—are exactly this sort of overindulgence. The currency of political symbolism rapidly devalues.

■ “We see this trend of political intolerance across the country . . . even on college campuses, where students and faculty have attempted to censor political opponents,” said Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York City, in his commencement address at the University of Michigan on April 30. Then he mentioned the case of one student whose travails were described in this space in 2014. “I know that one of today’s graduates, Omar Mahmood, has faced threats and intimidation because he dared to write political satire about being left-handed.” Mahmood’s satire appeared in the pages of the *Michigan Review*, a conservative student newspaper, and it cost him his job at the *Michigan Daily*, where he wrote a column. “He refused to apologize for it,” continued Bloomberg. “Omar, wherever you are out there, I’m glad you stood your ground.” And we’re glad that Bloomberg stood up for him, in such a high-profile forum. If only more professors and administrators would do the same.

■ Melissa Click, the scholar of Lady Gaga studies dismissed from her professorship in the University of Missouri’s department of communication for assaulting a student journalist, has a new complaint: Her actions during the Black Lives Matter protests got her fired because she’s white. “I’m a white lady,” she said. “That makes me an easy target.” She is white, to be sure, but a lady? She physically struck a student journalist attempting to commit an act of journalism on campus and then called for “some muscle” to eject the student from the scene of the protest. She also attempted to use her position as a professor to intimidate the student journalist and keep him from doing his job—while also enjoying the benefits of an appointment in the Mizzou journalism department, no less. Ladies and gentlemen do not behave that way. And though it takes a great deal to rouse a university administration against a misbehaving professor, assaulting a student (Click was obliged to reach a non-prosecution agreement with police) is enough, apparently, for the University of Missouri.

■ Yale University has decided to keep one of its residential colleges named after John C. Calhoun (class of 1804). The name, bestowed in the 1930s, commemorates a titan of the Senate and passionate political theorist. Unfortunately Calhoun’s theories laid the groundwork for secession and upheld slavery as a positive good. The best argument against retiring his name is that it would whitewash history. But names are also honors: Should New Haven, Conn., put up a statue to local merchant Benedict Arnold? Yale also decided no longer to call the heads of its colleges “master,” on the grounds that it sounds like a plantation title. This is ahistorical—masters ran colleges at Oxford and Cambridge in the Middle Ages, when all serfs were white. Finally, Yale stole a base, naming a new residential college after Benjamin Franklin, on the grounds that it gave him an honorary degree in 1753. Really now—leave Ben to Penn (which he founded), or better yet, the College of Life (where he studied). Curriculum: experience. Degrees offered: success, wisdom. Can Yale brush up on the last?

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■ Curt Schilling has a famously big and colorful mouth, which is why ESPN hired the former major-league pitcher and World Series champ as an analyst for its baseball programming. Now ESPN has fired Schilling for his famously big and colorful mouth. Schilling had shared on his Facebook page a crude meme that commented on the recent transgender-bathroom imbroglio and added: “A man is a man no matter what they call themselves. I don’t care what they are, who they sleep with, men’s room was designed for the penis, women’s not so much. Now you need laws telling us differently? Pathetic.” ESPN, a basic-cable

sports channel with pretensions of grandeur, declared itself “an inclusive company” and announced that “Schilling has been advised that his conduct was unacceptable and his employment with ESPN has been terminated.” ESPN is a private company: It can associate with and employ whomever it wants. But it should drop the fiction that it’s “inclusive” of anyone who disagrees with the politically correct company line.

■ Meghann Foye, a *New York* magazine editor who “got to work on big stories, attend cool events, and meet famous celebs all the time,” nonetheless felt unfulfilled and directionless after she hit 30, and envied her peers who could take maternity leave. So she came up with the idea of “meternity leave”—a mid-career period of rest, growth, and reflection for professionals who are childless and thus have the time to feel alienated. Meternity leave is just like maternity leave, except that in one of them you cater to the whims of a self-centered, needy tyrant who spends lots of time sleeping and crying, while in the other you look after a baby. Today we laugh, and tomorrow a mandate for it will be in the Democratic platform.

■ At the University of North Georgia in April, a student group dedicated to promoting “secular tolerance and skeptical thought” held a pro-abortion event. They had a table featuring cookies shaped like babies. Some of the baby-cookies had their heads or limbs torn off and were displayed around sheets of paper on which students were invited to complete the sentence: “Abortion should remain legal because . . .” One student wrote, “a woman controls her own body.” Another, “my vagina is too pretty to let a fetus crawl out.” Some pro-life students took photos of the display, which were posted online to widespread shock and disgust. The secular-tolerance group issued a defensive statement: “We determined the fetus shaped cookies used in the event to be the least graphic way to display a divisive topic.” They may be callous, but at least they’re candid.

■ California’s state legislature has voted against designating May 26 “John Wayne Day” after some in the state general assembly objected to remarks the actor made in a 1971 interview with *Playboy* magazine. Wayne’s remarks—that he believed in a policy of “white supremacy” until such a point as African Americans were educated to the point of civic responsibility—were indeed ugly. (And, we should note, not wildly dissimilar from opinions expressed in these pages in the 1950s.) Setting aside the question

of why we should designate a day to honor an actor who played American heroes (and Genghis Khan) in the movies rather than, say, one of the heroes he played, we question the value of looking for unpretty sentiments and outdated language in interviews given decades ago. But if we’re going to engage in this business, then the attitudes of the current secretary of state toward, say, Daniel Ortega, or those of any number of active political figures toward Hugo Chávez, are of much greater public importance than those of a long-dead movie star. Whatever his defects, John Wayne was a picture of enlightenment compared with Robert Byrd or William Fulbright, who were actors in public affairs rather than in the movies. One supporter of the Wayne holiday complained that opposition was like “opposing apple pie, fireworks, baseball, the free-enterprise system, and the Fourth of July.” We wonder whether he has met his Democratic colleagues.

■ Prince Rogers Nelson, better known by his first name, as an unpronounceable doodle, as an artist formerly known by his first name, and finally again by his first name, had many qualities that were admirable or that at least showed cultivated talent and independence of mind. A workaholic, he was never without a new album. He wrote his own songs and reportedly played nearly all the instruments on his recordings (onstage he had to share the work and the limelight). He was loyal to his hometown, Minneapolis, and though reports of his Republicanism seem to be exaggerated, he had flashes of demureness (no cursing) grounded in his faith (raised Seventh-day Adventist, converted to Jehovah’s Witness). Some even see in his absorption with eros a defiance of both casual pick-up culture and identity pigeonholing. But why oh why was he, like so many rock musicians, apparently crazy? Celebrities must think they have everything, including constant adulation, when they are in fact some of the loneliest people on earth. Dead at 57. R.I.P.



■ Harry Wu was a symbol of the struggle against Chinese tyranny and for Chinese democracy. But, more than a symbol, he was a man. He was born in 1937. He was arrested in 1960, when he was 23. His mother then killed herself. Wu spent 19 years in *laogai*, “reform through labor,” the Chinese gulag. He was subjected to the usual abuses but survived. He came to the United States to dedicate the rest of his life to spreading the truth about the Chinese Communist Party and its crimes. He thought the word *laogai* should be as well known as “Gulag” (which Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn did much to make known). He established the Laogai Museum in Washington, D.C. He wrote for *NATIONAL REVIEW*, and his longtime administrator, Ann Noonan, is a sister of our publisher, Jack Fowler. Harry Wu suffered terribly and then did all he could to see that others did not have to. What a heroic life. Dead at 79. R.I.P.

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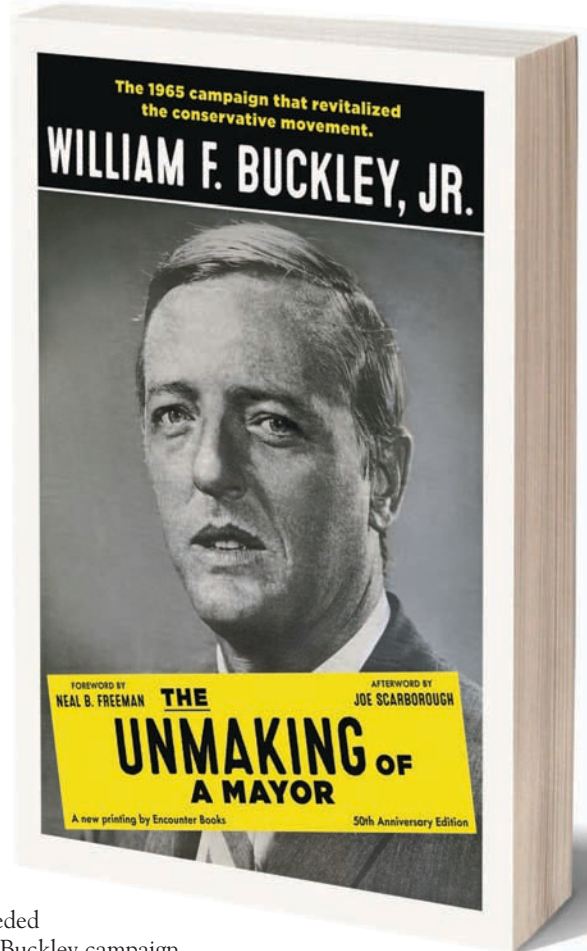
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■ “Modernism in the streets,” Lionel Trilling called it. Student anarchists ran amok in New York and Paris. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April; Robert F. Kennedy in June. In the spirit of the season, spring 1968, Daniel Berrigan joined eight other Catholic activists in raiding a Selective Service office in Maryland. They burned draft records in the parking lot, posing for a UPI photographer. Berrigan became famous overnight. A Jesuit priest and a pacifist, he often trespassed and vandalized to dramatize his cause over the next three decades, and he spent time in prisons. He applied similar tactics on the matter of abortion, which he condemned. In 1991, he was arrested for blocking the entrance to a Planned Parenthood clinic in Rochester, N.Y. In sum, he broke things, including the law, to promote his broad view of the sanctity of human life. In midlife he taught at several universities. A prolific author and award-winning poet who off the page as well as on it expressed his bold vision with panache, Father Berrigan was by turns thoughtful and rash, filled with the virtue of courage but not that of prudence. Dead at 94. *Requiescat in pace.*

■ Before TV commercials sounded like nursing-home residents discussing their symptoms, before they became minute-long suspense playlets to keep you from clicking away, before they were the subject of academic papers and TV shows of their own, commercials were *commercial*. Insomniacs in dark, silent houses let their minds wander from a 17th viewing of the *Honeymooners* golf episode to think deep thoughts, such as: “You know, I really ought to try that Veg-O-Matic. I could make my own French fries and save enough to buy a new TV set.” No one understood late-night selling better than Phil Kives, founder of K-Tel. A rapid-fire series of miraculous demonstrations made the Miracle Brush or Pocket Fisherman seem criminally underpriced at \$4.99, even before the inevitable “But wait, there’s more!” and the closing “Order before midnight tonight!” (an injunction that left most potential purchasers with about 23 hours to decide). Later he branched out into pop-music greatest-hits collections: “*Souled Out!*—20 ORIGINAL HITS by 20 ORIGINAL STARS—available on LP, cassette, and 8-track tape!” Kives, a Canadian, outlived all those technologies and almost did the same with broadcast television; for his achievements in horse racing he was enshrined in the highly exclusive Manitoba Jewish Athletes Wall of Honour. Dead at 87. R.I.P.

2016

Trump, Alack

FOR months, Donald Trump has complained that he should not have to win a majority of delegates to the Republican convention to be the party’s nominee. We were among those who insisted to the contrary—that he had to win a majority and otherwise abide by the procedures the party had set forth in advance of the nomination contest. Now that he has won the Indiana primary and Senator Cruz and Governor Kasich have dropped out of the race, he is guaranteed to do that: to win fair and square, without the threat of violence in Cleveland that he had previously and shamefully raised.

His victory demonstrated some real strengths that it would be foolish to deny. His mastery of the media was one, and we do not



Donald Trump speaks in Carmel, Ind., May 2, 2016.

make that observation backhandedly: Would that a conservative of good character had displayed such an ability to use the networks to convey his messages. Trump had a better sense of where Republican voters are on immigration than most of the other candidates (even if he has taken no interest in the crucial details). His campaign has also shown boldness and imagination. Who else would have tried to win while spending almost no money? Who else would have ignored the strategists and consultants and just winged it, day after day, and successfully too?

There ends our praise. We regret that Trump will be the Republican nominee and think Senator Cruz, our preferred candidate, would have been vastly better. Trump has done little to demonstrate any commitment to, or even understanding of, conservative principles; his instinct seems to be to use government power to silence his critics; he has no experience in government, a lack that we persist in seeing as a bad thing; his ethical record is disturbing; he will simply make things up when it suits his purposes; he traffics in conspiracy theories about everything from Iraq to the JFK assassination; he exhibits little self-control. We assume that in coming days we will hear even more discussion than previously of a new, more “presidential” Trump in the offing. We’ll believe it when we see it sustained.

Trump has won more primary votes than any nominee before him; but it is also true that no nominee has seen more primary votes cast for his opponents. He eked out a bare majority in Indiana at a time when past nominees were winning supermajorities. Any other nominee in this weak position would now turn to unifying his party. But Trump has in recent days said that he can win without doing that. If he finds a way to win the general election without nearly uniform support from Republicans, he will again have broken the mold of modern politics. He enters the race as an underdog against Hillary Clinton, who is, thanks entirely to him and notwithstanding her own primary defeat in the state, the other great victor in Indiana.

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

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Who Caused Trump?

There's blame enough to go around

BY RAMESH PONNURU

RECRIMINATIONS are beginning unusually early for Republicans this year. Usually political parties wait until they have lost general elections before their members start blaming one another for the defeats. Sometimes the finger-pointing begins a few weeks ahead of schedule, as the polls foretell doom. This year, the polls have been foretelling Republican doom with six months to go before the election—foretelling it, that is, conditional on Donald Trump's locking up the nomination, which he appears now to have done.

Trump's supporters have generally said that the polls should not be believed or denied the polls' predictive power. A few of them have, however, already devised a preemptive explanation for why neither Trump nor his supporters in the primary will be responsible if he should lose in November. According to this theory, it will be anti-Trump Republicans who have caused a Trump defeat. They will be to blame for not voting for him, or for validating some of Hillary Clinton's criticisms of him,

or for refusing to give him their wholehearted backing.

This theory may turn out to be right—if Clinton defeats Trump narrowly, and especially if a third-party campaign by anti-Trump conservatives exceeds the margin between them. If, on the other hand, Clinton beats Trump by a mile, as the polls suggest she will, then the theory will not explain the result. It will instead be clear, at least for those with eyes to see, that Trump supporters gave an extremely weak general-election candidate the nomination.

How that happened is the subject of another category of precriminations, this time dividing his opponents. The question these precriminations seek to answer is who, besides Trump himself and his supporters, paved the way for his nomination. Four groups are in the dock: Trump's primary rivals, Republican officials, the media, and conservatives.

Trump's primary rivals are all at fault, in a sense, for not winning more votes than he did. But Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich have attracted

particular blame for supposedly staying in the race after it became clear they could not win. Bush should probably have never entered in the first place. For all the talk about 2016 "not being his year" because of the Republican electorate's sour mood, it is hard to picture a candidate so diffident and cold winning in any year.

But the dynamics of the campaign were too unpredictable to make these indictments stick. If Bush had dropped out after coming in fourth in New Hampshire, Rubio might have won South Carolina and altered the course of the race. But then again, he might not have: Adding all of Bush's votes to his would have gotten him to second place. And it was hard to make the case that the fourth-place finisher in New Hampshire should step aside for the guy who took fifth.

Some of Kasich's behavior, on the other hand, is harder to explain, let alone defend. Ted Cruz offered to debate Kasich even if Trump refused to participate, allowing the two to make a point of the front-runner's cowardice. In declining this, Kasich also turned down an opportunity to make himself and his views better known nationally.

The other Republican candidates collectively refused to take on Trump—and devote ad money to attacking him—in the early stages of the race. Early ads would have had to persuade Republican voters not to choose Trump. They might not have worked; but later ads had the harder task of persuading Republicans to stop someone already on the path to the nomination.

Elected Republicans, meanwhile, mostly decided not to get involved in the presidential race. A very few of them, generally the most opportunistic, endorsed Trump. But few of them were moved by Trump's character, or his principles, or even his poll numbers, to endorse someone else. Kasich won the support of one senator, Trump of one, and Cruz of five (counting himself): Most Senate Republicans have stayed neutral. If Governor Doug Ducey of Arizona, or Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, or most of their colleagues, are alarmed by the prospect of Trump as the Republican nominee, you wouldn't know it from anything they did.

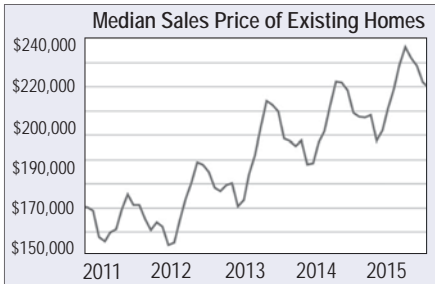
Along with the party's donors, most Republican officials moved in the blink of an eye from thinking that it was un-

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necessary to act against Trump because it was too early in the primaries to thinking it was futile to act against him because it was too late. A lot of anti-Trump commentary at the start of the race proceeded from the assumption that such an obviously flawed nominee would be unacceptable to the party. But the party's leaders gave its voters no signal that Trump was unacceptable.

Some of them did worse. Anti-Trump conservatives are angry right now at Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus for saying that Republicans should support the nominee, whoever he is. But that's the chairman's job; if he can't say that in good conscience, he should resign. What he

he is not someone who tries to keep his audience informed, he is certainly right.

Many commentators have suggested that Trump's rise is evidence of a deep pathology among movement conservatives. The critique comes in several versions. An implausible version faults conservatives for having been too hostile to President Obama and his agenda. Obstructionism led to nihilism and then to Trump. The defects of this theory are that Senator Cruz is a much more convincing obstructionist than Trump, who boasts regularly of his willingness to cut deals with Democrats and has donated to many of them; and that Trump has done worse with the very conservative voters who have been most hostile

We have come to reward the expression of **resentment and anger** more than the mastery of public policy.

didn't have to do was get all the presidential candidates to take a pledge to support the nominee. That pledge was not intended to help Trump, but rather to make it harder for him to run as a third-party candidate if he lost. Its effect was to handicap Trump's rivals, since the strongest arguments against him concern his unfitness for office. The RNC also did what it could to make the primaries more friendly to front-runners; these efforts, too, ended up helping a candidate it didn't expect.

The media, from the start of the campaign, gave Trump far more coverage than any of the other candidates. (Actually, the media did that from before the start, since they had already made him a celebrity.) He has been good for ratings. But it's the conservative end of the media, from Fox News to many radio talk-show hosts, that really helped him. They did more than give him a hearing: They made endless excuses for him, and they ignored stories that might hurt him.

You could watch many Sean Hannity interviews with Trump (and there have been many) without learning that Trump is an extremely unpopular figure. Nor would you have any sense of the fraud controversies surrounding his "university." Hannity protests that he is not a journalist—and if by that he means that

to deal-cutting than he has with more moderate voters.

A related argument comes from conservative and libertarian supporters of relatively open immigration policies. They say that restrictionists created Trump by getting conservative voters worked up about immigration. But a better case can be made that the immigration liberalizers tried to create a consensus in the party that was a poor fit for its voters. That attempt succeeded for a while—before Trump, it appeared that almost all the presidential candidates would favor increased immigration and the granting of legal status to illegal immigrants—but eventually backfired by giving Trump an opening.

Some of the connections between organized conservatism and the Trump phenomenon are, however, real. We have come to reward the expression of resentment and anger more than the mastery of public policy. Our attacks on the "political class" have gotten less discriminating over time. Skepticism of the press and of technocratic experts has made conservatives more prone to falling for lies when they're told by people who are, or claim to be, on our side. It has made us more credulous rather than less.

If the polls are roughly right, we conservatives will all have a lot of time out of power to think about these matters. **NR**

A Plan for Parental Leave

The Right should not ignore this issue

BY ABBY M. McCLOSKEY

WITH Hillary Clinton as the likely Democratic nominee and potentially the first female president, paid maternity leave will be a big issue in the general election and beyond. Republicans have a choice to make: They can either stand on the sidelines shouting "No" and be passed by, as they were in the Obamacare debate, or they can be the architects of a thoughtful maternity-leave policy that works for new mothers, employers, the federal budget, and the economy.

The United States is the only country in the developed world without a national paid-maternity-leave program. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 mandates that employers offer twelve weeks of job-protected leave to workers for family-related issues. But 40 percent of working women are ineligible, owing to the act's various restrictions. Moreover, because it is unpaid, many mothers cannot afford to take this leave even if they are eligible to do so.

Many companies in the United States offer paid-leave benefits, sometimes on incredibly generous terms, especially in the tech world. But only 12 percent of private-sector workers are granted paid leave by their employers, according to a recent Department of Labor study. This drops to 5 percent for employees in the bottom income quartile.

As a result, many working mothers cobble together vacation days, sick leave, and disability when they need to recover from childbirth. And even then, a significant gap remains: In the 2006–08 period, approximately half of first-time mothers gave birth without

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any form of paid leave from their employer for any duration of time, and only 10 percent claimed disability insurance, according to the Census Bureau.

Lack of paid leave is a problem especially for low-income mothers, who often don't have the savings needed to carry them through months in which they earn nothing; for single mothers, who have no family income other than their own to rely on; and for the four in ten American mothers who are their household's main breadwinner, according to Pew Research Center.

The lack of paid maternity leave appears to be more of a bug than a thought-out feature of America's safety net. The government provides benefits for workers temporarily out of work because of a disability or unemployment, but not for those out of work because of childbirth. It makes little sense that a woman who is laid off from her job can receive unemployment-insurance payments for 26 weeks, or that a woman who reports back pain can receive disability payments indefinitely, but that a new mother in her early weeks of recovery receives no benefits.

Democrats have tried to close the paid-leave gap in two main ways. First, they have tried to mandate that companies provide it—President Obama's preferred method for everything. In 2015, Obama signed a memorandum ordering

agencies to give federal workers six weeks of paid leave to care for a new child or take care of ill family members.

Second, Democrats have tried to create new paid-leave programs. Three states—California, Rhode Island, and New Jersey—have implemented such programs, funded by higher payroll taxes, and New York recently passed a law establishing one. And on the federal level, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (N.Y.) and Representative Rosa DeLauro (Conn.) have proposed the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (Family Act), which would provide up to twelve weeks of paid family leave (which covers any family-related caretaking situations), also funded by payroll taxes. The president has also called on Congress to pass a federal law guaranteeing up to seven days of paid sick leave, including leave for family care.

But both of these methods could hurt working women more than help them. Government mandates increase employers' costs, which have to be made up somewhere. This is why mandating benefits or requiring a certain level of wages typically is accompanied by lower wages and less hiring, especially among low-skilled workers (who tend to be women). And there is substantial research showing that higher taxes on work tend to reduce women's labor-force participation disproportionately.

At a time when women's work-force participation has plateaued, raising taxes should be approached with extreme caution.

While proponents of paid-leave policies often argue that the payroll-tax hikes involved would be minimal (for example, an increase of 0.4 percentage points under the Family Act), there's reason to be suspicious. When the American Action Forum analyzed the Family Act, it found that, annually, the proposed payroll tax would raise only \$30.6 billion while costing anywhere from \$159.6 billion to \$997.4 billion. In other words, taxes would need to increase by a lot more than estimated, which would be bad news for working women.

It's time for a conservative approach. After all, conservatives are generally pro-life and pro-family, and research shows that paid leave results in better maternal healing and improved child health. Conservatives also generally support economic opportunity and self-sufficiency.

To that last point, studies have found that paid leave increases work-force participation for new mothers. Economists Christopher Ruhm and Jacqueline Teague found that moderate paid-leave periods are associated with higher labor-force-participation rates for women than is unpaid leave. Evidence from California's paid-leave program suggests that the weekly work hours and wages of new mothers rose by 10 to 17 percent, probably because more women kept their jobs rather than quitting them and seeking new ones once they were ready to go back to work.

To the extent that more work-force participation leads to higher earnings—especially for low-skilled workers—it could reduce recourse to public assistance in the long run. There's growing evidence to support this possibility. A 2012 study by Rutgers, "Pay Matters," found that—holding income, job quality, age, education, and other factors constant—paid leave reduces a woman's likelihood of using food stamps by 40 percent in the year following her child's birth.

Recently, Republicans have tried to tackle paid leave through the tax code. In 2015, Marco Rubio became the first GOP presidential candidate to put forward a paid-leave plan, providing a 25 percent tax credit to encourage companies

to offer paid leave of up to twelve weeks or \$4,000. This proposal was modeled on the Strong Families Act, coauthored by Senators Deb Fischer (R., Neb.) and Angus King (I., Maine). And the Independent Women's Forum, a right-leaning women's group, recently called for the creation of pregnancy savings accounts akin to health savings accounts (funds into which workers can currently contribute \$30,000 tax-free over their lifetimes).

To be sure, either of these programs would be an improvement over the status quo. But there are two potential problems with attempting to solve the paid-leave problem through the tax code only. First, tax credits or tax shelters are a form of government spending; it's just hidden spending. Second, it's possible that this spending would be unnecessary. It's possible, for example, that those who would contribute to pregnancy savings accounts are saving already, or that companies that would receive the tax credits already offer paid leave. Some type of restrictions would have to accompany these reforms to ensure that they're not duplicative. Moreover, because low-income households typically don't have to pay income taxes, the pregnancy savings accounts would probably be more of a middle-class benefit than something truly aimed at helping the poor, unless the government contributed to the accounts.

There is another way: The government could provide a universal maternity-leave benefit, which would be of help mainly to new mothers whose employers do not offer paid leave. But instead of paying for it through higher taxes or more federal debt, we could raise the money from reforming our existing social safety net.

If structured properly, a government-provided maternity-leave benefit need not be very costly. By my calculations, if the government provided six weeks of paid maternity leave (the duration provided to workers in Obama's White House) to working mothers without paid leave from their employer, this would cost approximately \$2.5 billion, assuming that each mother received \$300 weekly, the average value of an unemployment check. (For perspective, consider that this is 1 percent of what was spent on disability insurance and the

associated medical benefits in 2012, and just over 2 percent of what was spent on unemployment benefits in that year.)

The amount of the benefits should be set low enough, and the duration made short enough, that they function as a true safety net for working mothers without other options. Otherwise, it might become attractive for employers to drop their existing paid-leave policies, and extended periods of paid leave might reduce a mother's future earnings potential (although this typically tends to occur only with a year or more of leave).

There is understandable pushback from fiscal conservatives when any new government program, even a small one, is proposed at a time of historic levels of government spending. But this cannot be a reason to block all new programs regardless of their merits. And the proposal outlined here compares favorably with liberal alternatives, which do not countenance any reduction in spending on existing programs to pay for maternity leave.

The paid-leave debate should be the impetus for a review of our entire safety net (including entitlements), with a view to modernizing it. The U.S. has been accumulating benefits programs for the past 80 years, without any comprehensive overhaul—save for the 1996 welfare reform—despite dramatic changes in family structures and the economy. The result is a chaos of programs that are failing America's poorest families, are increasingly directing benefits toward the middle class, and are fiscally unsustainable.

Conservatives should take the lead in prioritizing deserving programs and cutting ineffective ones. There's a strong case to be made that providing a minimum level of support for new mothers who are unable to work in the early weeks of recovery should qualify as a basic element of the safety net, while tripling the disability rolls or providing Social Security benefits to millionaires might not.

A majority of Republican voters (55 percent) support paid leave for new parents, as do two-thirds of the American public, according to a recent AP-GfK poll. Instead of shying away from paid leave, conservatives should articulate the shortcomings of the Democratic approach and present America with a better alternative. **NR**

Entitlement Reform after Trump

The need of it will remain no matter who becomes president

BY ANDREW G. BIGGS

DONALD TRUMP has betrayed conservative principles in ways large and small. But perhaps his biggest betrayal is his rejection of the decades-long movement to limit the growth of entitlements, particularly Social Security. Without a meaningful entitlement-reform agenda, larger government, slower economic growth, and greater government dependency are inevitable.

Social Security is the largest federal spending program, bigger than Medicare, Medicaid, or the Pentagon. As a share of income, Social Security's payroll tax is the largest tax paid by most workers (who split its 12.4 percent evenly with their employers). And both the spending and the tax burden are slated to grow as 10,000 Baby Boomers retire daily, swelling the benefit rolls and increasing costs. Over the next 75 years, Social Security faces funding shortfalls of \$10 to \$15 trillion. To address these deficits would require an immediate and permanent payroll-tax increase of 4.4 percentage points, according to the Congressional Budget Office, or an at least 20 percent across-the-board benefit reduction. Trump's stance on Social Security, which combines a willful ignorance of the facts with a seductive claim that everyone deserves everything he has been promised by Social Security, threatens to swell unnecessarily the size of a program that penalizes work, undermines saving, and increases dependency among middle- and upper-income households that could easily afford to save more for retirement on their own.

To the degree that Trump has a plan for Social Security, it borders on magical

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thinking: He promises that higher economic growth spurred by his other policies would bring new revenues into the system. Perhaps it would. But Social Security's trustees already project that future growth of wages and salaries—the key economic variable affecting the program's finances—will be higher than in the past, averaging 1.17 percent above inflation versus an average of 1.09 percent since 1950 and 0.59 percent since 1970. And even higher economic growth would make little difference, since both taxes and benefits would increase. We could literally double the rate of economic growth, and Social Security would still be insolvent.

But Trump has gone beyond ignorance of how Social Security is financed. He contends that in an election in which both of the remaining Democrats are proposing to raise Social Security benefits, “you’re going to lose the election” by talking about cuts. That claim may or may not be true, given that Hillary Clinton’s and Bernie Sanders’s plans to boost Social Security benefits won’t pay for themselves. Both candidates propose massive Social Security–tax increases that would push America’s top tax rates to Scandinavian levels.

But Trump, like former Arkansas governor and presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, opposes reform not simply on political grounds: “More importantly, in a sense, I want to keep it. These people have been making their payments for their whole lives. I want to keep Social Security intact.” As Trump tells the story, we have a moral obligation not to reduce benefits.

In part, this belief stems from how conservatives have sold Social Security reform in the past. The push for Social Security personal accounts, which culminated in George W. Bush’s failed 2005 reform drive, often framed choices in these terms: To fix Social Security, we need to raise taxes, cut benefits, or earn a higher rate of return through personal accounts. In that context, personal accounts had an obvious appeal. But crunching the actuarial numbers revealed a problem. Allowing workers to divert part of their Social Security taxes to personal accounts would create a funding gap that required tax increases or benefit cuts on top of those needed to restore solvency. And while personal accounts offered the possibility of higher returns, they came

with greater risk. It was never mentioned that if workers wanted to take more investment risk in search of higher returns, they could do so simply by shifting their 401(k) savings toward stocks. In other words, conservative voters weren’t given an informative picture of the difficult choices they faced.

A more forthright discussion of the choices available to fix Social Security might help dismantle the moral case that Trump builds against entitlement reform. The simple point is that Social Security has promised more in benefits than it will collect in taxes. Politicians have known that fact since the late 1980s and have failed to act. It is true, as Trump points out, that Americans have paid into Social Security all their lives. But they simply haven’t paid enough to cover what they expect to receive back in retirement benefits. That doesn’t mean we should pull the rug out from under retirees who have few options available to them. Trump is right that someone who has paid into the system for his entire life should not suddenly face large benefit cuts. But younger workers haven’t paid in all their lives, and they have the option to save more or delay retirement. They should do so. The only other realistic option is for those same workers to pay higher Social Security taxes. Compassionate-sounding arguments don’t make difficult choices go away.

In the 1990s, the media reported extensively on how population aging and falling ratios of workers to retirees were pushing Social Security toward insolvency. Ohio governor John Kasich, who was chairman of the House Budget Committee during that time, hopes to restart that conversation. He would, he says, “lead a bipartisan effort to assemble the best ideas from the various reform plans that have been proposed to preserve [Social Security’s] solvency.” But even in yesteryear’s favorable environment, with support from Democratic heavyweights such as New York senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Congress never came close to approving Social Security–reform legislation. And since that time, the politics of Social Security reform have shifted well to the left. The “green eyeshades” reform strategy of a retirement-age increase here and a cost-of-living reduction there won’t pass Congress. And even if it did, it would leave Americans with Social Security

and retirement programs that are, in many ways, substandard.

What was lacking in the 1990s and is still lacking today is a personal perspective. Social Security is a massive budgetary problem, but it is not only a budgetary problem: Its insolvency is a threat to the retirement security of millions of Americans. The typical American has no idea how his Social Security benefits are calculated or how the program is financed. What the typical household cares about is being able to put together enough money for a secure retirement, at a time when both progressives and the financial industry are stating that Americans are trillions of dollars short of what they need. The typical American’s retirement goal is both understandable and achievable. If Social Security and retirement reform are framed in personal terms, with dollars measured in hundreds and thousands rather than billions or trillions, a conservative reform agenda may have a chance. To date, however, none of the Republican presidential candidates has even talked about a retirement agenda.

Such an agenda must not only address Social Security’s finances, but also offer better ways for Americans to save for retirement on their own. Americans don’t trust Social Security. They want to, but they have seen the system’s problems go ignored for decades. Only 35 percent of working-age Americans are “very” or “somewhat confident” in receiving benefits at least equal to what today’s retirees receive. Sixty-five percent are either “not very” or “not at all” confident. This doesn’t mean Americans don’t value Social Security. But they will be reluctant to pay more into a system when they feel unsure they will get that money back.

By contrast, Americans are confident in their own savings: 81 percent of 401(k) or IRA participants are “somewhat” or “very confident” that these retirement plans can help them meet their goals. This doesn’t mean such options are perfect: 401(k)s, in particular, have had problems with low participation, confusing investments, and high administrative costs. But compared with the risk of giving additional taxes to Congress today in hopes of receiving them back decades in the future, personal savings look like the better bet.

And the main problems with 401(k)s are being addressed. For instance, automatic enrollment of employees has

become far more widespread, helping increase retirement participation rates to record levels. Most 401(k)s today also offer simple “target date” funds, which automatically shift from stocks to bonds as workers near retirement, thus allowing workers to access the higher returns from stocks when they are young but shifting to a more stable portfolio as they approach retirement age.

The overall purpose should be to help Americans who can save more for retirement do so while strengthening the Social Security safety net for those who need it most. One simple step would be to make automatic enrollment in 401(k) plans universal. The Employee Benefit Research Institute found that such a policy would more than triple a young worker’s account balances by the time he reached retirement age.

Social Security reform should guarantee that no one will retire into poverty. That’s an affordable promise, since the system already pays out more than enough to provide everyone a poverty-level benefit. But to keep this promise over the long term, we must prioritize those who need Social Security most. Already, nearly one-third of retirees receive a sub-poverty-level Social Security benefit. Unless we want to increase taxes substantially, benefits for middle- and upper-income households will need to be scaled back, and not just by a nip and a tuck. Americans may be willing to live with not receiving Social Security benefits they never thought they would receive in the first place, but only if they have adequate opportunities to save for retirement on their own and are confident that Social Security remains available as a safety net.

Social Security reform also needs to encourage longer careers. A higher retirement age could be part of that. But carrots are just as important as sticks. Eliminating the burdensome Social Security payroll tax for those who work beyond age 62 would give an immediate boost to older workers and encourage more people to delay retirement.

Donald Trump’s economic bluster may have ruined the possibility of a meaningful entitlement-reform agenda in this election cycle. But Social Security isn’t going to fix itself. No matter who wins the presidential election, conservatives need to enter 2017 with a clear strategy on entitlement reform.

Wordsmiths Without Words

Examining the nature of writer’s block

BY JOHN J. MILLER

‘T HE first point about *writer’s block* is that relatively little has been written about it.”

That’s the second sentence of the introduction to a 1991 book by Zachary Leader called—wait for it—“Writer’s Block.” The claim makes sense: The writers who might say the most about block are the ones who have the hardest time saying anything at all. They’re like singers without voices. The rest of us have no idea what we’re missing in the silence.

I became interested in writer’s block last fall—not because it had afflicted me (knock on wood), but because I had decided to reread the work of a fiction author who seems not to have written much of anything since he was in his late thirties, back when Ronald Reagan was president. Curious about his lack of productivity, I found myself on his Wikipedia page. It mentioned writer’s block.

Yet the details were scant. So I decided to track him down and ask what had happened. I also began to investigate the phenomenon of writer’s block.

I approached the topic with skepticism. As a writer, I’ve had good days and bad days—but I’ve never struggled with the sheer inability to write. Many people have a starry-eyed, artsy view of what writers do. Not me. I see writing as work, and agree with Samuel Johnson (via Boswell): “A man may write anytime if he will set himself *doggedly* to it.” Do ditchdiggers ever acquire ditchdigger’s block? They may suffer sore backs, but they also do their jobs. Why should writers be different?

Yet I’d also heard of stage fright, and I began to wonder if it might have a corollary among ink-stained wretches. So I e-mailed a bunch of friends who write for a living, asking whether they’d ever suffered from block or knew anybody who had. The first reply came quickly. It also startled me, with its note of superstitious dread. “I refuse to discuss the subject, the way some people won’t talk about cancer,” it said. “Sorry not to be of more help. Now never mention this to me again!”

Several respondents shared my doubts: “I think it’s a condition that was invented as an excuse.” Another: “Can you imagine a healthy bird worried that it might not be able to fly? A shark worried that it might not be able to swim? Writers can write.” A few, however, pointed to known



cases of accomplished writers who went through fallow periods or stopped writing altogether.

In 1950, Edmund Bergler published *The Writer and Psychoanalysis*. It describes the writing troubles of several patients upon whom Bergler inflicted his Freudianism. One of them, he claimed, had fallen victim to “a pseudo-aggressive covering cloak for his deep masochistic elaboration of his pre-oedipal conflict.” So it’s that kind of book. Despite the jargon, Bergler made a lasting contribution to semantics: He invented the term “writer’s block.” People have used it ever since.

A handful of great writers appear to have suffered the symptoms before Bergler named the condition. “So completely has a whole year passed,” complained Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1804; “I have done nothing!” Herman Melville quit writing novels a few years after he finished *Moby-Dick*, spending much of the rest of his life as a customs inspector. More recent examples include Dashiell Hammett, Ralph Ellison, and Harper Lee. They wrote celebrated novels early in life—*The Maltese Falcon*, *Invisible Man*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*—and then more or less stopped. Tom Wolfe felt something akin to writer’s block when he switched from nonfiction to fiction and began to compose *The Bonfire of the Vanities*: “I sat in front of my typewriter . . . in a catatonic state, unable to write a thing for several months,” he once explained. For him, at least, the condition was temporary.

Blocked writers don’t claim that they can’t write anything at all. The difficulty is not that their hands cramp when they try to scribble notes. Think of Jack Torrance, the character Jack Nicholson played in *The Shining*, the movie based on the book by Stephen King. He’s a professional writer, unable to create anything good but also prolific. Over and over, he types the same line: “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” That’s a worst-case scenario of blockage.

Coleridge, for his part, wrote lots of letters and essays. Yet he saw poetry as his calling and failed to produce it to his satisfaction. For Coleridge and many other blocked writers, the problem seems to be that they succumb to a kind of performance anxiety. When they write, they fall short of their own great expectations. So they quit. Or they don’t

start. Or they stare at blank screens, feeling helpless.

They may be letting the perfect become the enemy of the good—or even worse, as my old boss Fred Barnes once put it, they’re letting the pretty good become the enemy of the good enough. That’s the shoptalk of a deadline-driven journalist, but there’s wisdom in it. “I write when I’m inspired,” quipped Peter De Vries, “and I see to it that I’m inspired at nine o’clock every morning.” Joseph Epstein, another unblocked essayist who has written on block, suggests a solution: “Demystify writing as completely as possible,” he advises in his collection *In a Cardboard Belt*. “Keep the pretension level as low as possible.”

Norman Podhoretz, the longtime editor of *Commentary*, wrestled with writer’s block early in his career. He described his trial in *Making It*, a 1967 memoir. “Blocks are to the professional writer what jails are to the professional burglar: a ‘normal’ occupational hazard,” he wrote. He blamed his own episode on ambition and the desire to write a consequential book. The cure came in the form of a steady gig that involved writing for money rather than fame, which took “writing out of the realm of ‘psychology’ and deposited it so beautifully into the world of real work,” with its obligations to editors and the need to support a family. (More Johnson: “No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.”)

In 1974, Dennis Upper, a young psychologist, sent a paper to the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. He called it “The Unsuccessful Self-Treatment of a Case of ‘Writer’s Block,’” and its contents included the title followed by several blank pages. An amused editor published it. “I submitted it as a practical joke,” says Upper, who now runs a private practice in Massachusetts. “Over the years, though, I’ve treated cases of writer’s block. Everybody who does creative work goes through unproductive periods.” For those who seek help but not from a shrink, he recommends reading Julia Cameron’s book *The Artist’s Way*.

Her book caters to frustrated writers, and so does a cottage industry of coaches and cons. Soon after starting my online research, the social-media advertisements erupted onto my Facebook feed: “Writer’s block? Get your creative juices flowing with 31 writing prompts to inspire you through the month.” It led to

a website that demanded my e-mail address and promised to turn my “writing talents” into “a high-paying career.”

No single solution works for every blocked writer. Anxiety, for instance, may hurt creativity in some and spur achievement in others. “If there were a one-size-fits-all cure, I’d sell it on the Home Shopping Network,” says Alice W. Flaherty, a Harvard psychiatrist and the author of *The Midnight Disease*, a 2004 book on block. Even so, science offers a few insights. Medicines such as antidepressants and beta blockers can influence creativity both favorably and unfavorably. (Consult your doctor!) Alcohol tends to have a negative effect: Some writers may believe that booze relaxes, granting them a magical way with words, but it more likely turns them into lousy judges of their own work. They think they’re writing well when in fact they’ve just lowered their standards. Physical exercise helps bookworms more than they may realize. “The data on exercise and creativity are strong,” says Flaherty. “Here’s an idea: Writers should invest in treadmill desks.” She’s only half joking.

Perhaps more than anybody else, writers should recognize that writer’s block is a metaphor that suggests an obstacle, such as a dam on a river. Yet rivers have sources, and behind the conundrum of writer’s block resides the mystery of creativity. Where do ideas come from? Writers often hear this question. The smartest neurologists don’t really know much about “eureka” moments. Homer liked to invoke the muses. Others pray for inspiration. Sometimes it’s just a matter of willful receptivity: The idea for this article sprang into my head last Thanksgiving, as I enjoyed an old paperback.

What about the author of that paperback book, the writer who set me on this quest? I managed to find him. We had a cordial exchange. He’s even a reader of *NATIONAL REVIEW*, which was a pleasant surprise. Yet he didn’t want to talk about my subject. He still aspires to write, he said, and refuses to think of himself as blocked. He added that he feels embarrassed by it—and so I’m withholding his name.

I’m also cheering for him to conquer whatever dark gods haunt his imagination. He recently retired from a workaday job and now he has time to finish a new project. I hope it’s a genuine blockbuster. **NR**



Student protesters outside a meeting of the board of trustees of Santa Monica College

Fiercely Frail Millennials

They're delicate as snowflakes but not so harmless

BY DAVID FRENCH

It's hard to doubt that legendarily entitled Millennial social-justice warriors will finally go too far, and not even *The Onion* will be able to sufficiently parody their aggressive fragility. In a campus culture saturated with controversy over trigger warnings and so-called micro-aggressions, my favorite story comes from Brown University.

Even some of Brown's coddling administrators had to shake their heads at the student response to a debate between leftist feminist Jessica Valenti and libertarian Wendy McElroy. A campus debate is usually a tame-enough event, but this debate would deal with the alleged campus-rape crisis, and McElroy was expected to depart from college orthodoxy and dissent from the myth that women at American universities are uniquely in danger of being raped.

To help students "recuperate" from the debate, student activists set up a "safe space" that featured coloring books, cookies, Play-Doh, and videos of puppies. Yes, adult students at one of the world's most prestigious universities intentionally re-created a day-care center for one another.

Conservatives often alternate between laughing at Millennials' fragility and expressing alarm at its long-term consequences.

Viral videos show the campus meltdowns in living color and students so eager to demonstrate their tolerance that they can't bring themselves (in one famous example) to say a five-foot-nine white man is "wrong" to self-identify as a six-foot-five Chinese woman.

Yet in attacking Millennial activists and their administrative enablers, we not only mislabel their malady—they're not nearly as fragile as they claim—we also fail to identify the real culprits. Snowflakes aren't spontaneously generated. They're made, formed largely by parents who've loved their children into the messes they've become.

THE upper-middle-class American style of parenting is creating a generation of children who are trained from birth to believe three things: first, that the central goals of life are success and emotional well-being; second, that the child's definitions of success and emotional well-being are authoritative; and third, that parents and other authority figures exist to facilitate the child's desires. If the child is the star of his own life's story, then parents and

teachers act as agents, lawyers, and life coaches. They are the child's chief enablers.

Parents, for their part, didn't set out to raise fragile children. Instead, they desperately desired that their kids first be safe and happy. Then—later—safe, happy, and successful. Faced with kids they loved and perhaps still reeling from their own childhood problems, including growing up during the first massive wave of divorce and in an era of increasing crime, Millennials' parents (younger Boomers and older members of Generation X) decided that they were going to get parenting right.

The superficial displays of their parental care and caution are there for all to see. Out of exaggerated fear for their children's physical safety, upper-middle-class mothers and fathers devote themselves to "helicopter parenting," hovering and doing all they can to smooth the bumps of life, well into their offspring's young-adult years.

New York University social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has dubbed this phenomenon the "flight to safety" and sees its manifestations in parents who "pulled in the reins" to keep their children from roaming as freely as kids in generations past. Playgrounds were redesigned. Schools put in place "zero tolerance" policies to squelch even the hint of violence. The message

challenging. On the playgrounds, they face their first bully or their first physical conflict. And at each stage, they do what kids do: They tell their parents.

When I went to my parents with these dilemmas, the response was often some form of "Suck it up." I once told my dad that my coach threw a basketball at a kid's head when he was talking during practice. My dad laughed. When I broke my right arm in fifth grade, I asked if I could get a break on homework while I learned to write with my left. My dad told me the struggle would teach me how to work hard. If parents ever intervened in playground conflicts, the shame was deep and enduring.

These are small but telling examples from life's little challenges. My parents' priority was building character, not maintaining my happiness. They wanted to raise a child who would love God and live by the Golden Rule. So I had to learn that I wasn't the center of the universe. I had to learn that I was often wrong. And I had to learn the daily courage necessary to confront and overcome problems on my own, without constantly appealing to a higher earthly authority for aid and comfort.

Presently, however, many parents view their child's pain, anger, or inconvenience less as an opportunity to teach the child a lesson about character and perseverance than as an imperative

If the choice is between confront and consent, parents consent again and again, each time vowing to themselves that they'll **stand up to their child** if the issue is 'truly' big.

was simple: Even in a time of declining crime and exploding prosperity (especially for upper-income families), the world was dangerous and full of terrors.

But why are such fragile, fearful children simultaneously so aggressive? Isn't such strident activism inconsistent with the fear hypothesis? Haidt ascribes much of their ideological aggression to having grown up in an age of increasing polarization. Simply put, Republicans and Democrats hate one another more than ever. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Haidt and Foundation for Individual Rights in Education president Greg Lukianoff note that "implicit or unconscious biases are now at least as strong across political parties as they are across races." Thus, "it's not hard to imagine why students arriving on campus today might be more desirous of protection and more hostile toward ideological opponents than in generations past."

This analysis rings true but seems incomplete. In addition, a lifetime of experience has told student activists that complaints to parents and teachers get results. Thus, the paradox of the modern Millennial snowflake. In the name of their own alleged vulnerability and fragility, they engage in dramatic protest, seek conflict, and relentlessly attack opponents. These snowflakes are dangerous.

How does this happen? Think of the dilemmas that parents face because of their children. Their children participate in sports and run into a coach who is perceived as too angry or who doesn't give the child a fair chance. They go to school and inevitably encounter teachers who don't teach well or who teach subjects they find irritating or

to come to the child's rescue. Thus, parents themselves confront the angry coach, find all the help the child needs to succeed academically (including sometimes even doing homework *for* the child), talk to the principal about playground conflict, and negotiate with teachers to optimize the child's classroom experience.

The parent emerges first as savior, then as friend. All decent parents covet a relationship with their child, but there are countless times when parent and child naturally clash, and—especially as those children get older—the clashes can strain or fracture the relationship. Parents preserve friendships with their kids in countless small ways: extending curfews on request, purchasing items that strain the family budget, excusing minor infractions of family rules. If the choice is between confront and consent, parents consent again and again, each time vowing to themselves that they'll stand up to their child if the issue is "truly" big.

Not long ago, I was speaking to the headmaster of a large Christian school who was lamenting the extraordinary power children exercised in the parent-child relationship. In the aftermath of the *Obergefell* decision, the school was considering changing its policy handbook to clearly state that the school teaches that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. The headmaster said that he'd already received pushback from parents, not because the parents had any real conviction on the issue (and those who did were generally quite conservative) but because *their children* demanded the parents take a stand. The definition of marriage had become a strain in the parent-child relationship, and parents deferred to their children to remain "friends."

Stories like this are legion. Impose virtually any limit on a child's desires and there is sure to be a parental revolt that

begins with the phrase, “My child wants . . .” The rest of the argument flows entirely from the child’s desire, which overrules all other reasoning.

We mislabel them as fragile because their unhappiness comes so easily and their tolerance for adversity is so low. But they are not weak. They’re instead doing exactly what they’ve been taught to do since that first bad soccer practice or kindergarten conflict. They scream as loudly as they can for Mom and Dad—for the teacher or the principal, acting in loco parentis—and the authority figure duly obeys. And why not? When happiness and friendship are the goals, when comfort is the highest calling, the response will be immediate. If it’s not, then kids will find new friends.

GRADUATION season is upon us. At countless dinners, emotional parents and children will reflect on their journey, and two sentences will be uttered time and again: “Mom, you weren’t just my mother. You were also my best friend.” Those words, tearfully delivered and gladly received, are the reason that the present cultural trend is likely to endure, at least for the foreseeable future. Parents are raising exactly the children they want to raise.

But it cannot last. Life is too hard, and authority figures are ultimately too weak to guarantee enduring joy and success. So the aggressively fragile generation will face a choice: either greater anger and aggression as they desperately flail for the utopia that can never come, or a rediscovery of the virtues that enable perseverance.

In the Bernie Sanders phenomenon, we see the flailing. Out from under their parents’ roof, out from under the watchful eye of sympathetic administrators, who’s the parent now? Who has the authority to address their grievances and ease their fears? Responding to the fear and uncertainty, a geriatric socialist (a fatherly sort of fellow) steps in with his call for free health care and education (neither in fact free), and protection from the rough-and-tumble world of liberty and markets. In other words, Sanders wants to make the entire country a “safe space.”

College campuses are centers of Sanders support in large part because they represent small examples of the world he wants to build. Tuition represents an extreme form of progressive taxation as rich families fund generous breaks for the poor, and everyone enjoys the same, often luxurious facilities. Each student has access to an immense social-welfare infrastructure, complete with diversity offices for every ethnicity and easy access to doctors and counselors. College is the ultimate nanny, and many former students miss her warm embrace.

It’s a popular sport to scorn entitled Millennials—I’m guilty of it myself—but when people live as Millennials were raised to live, where does the lion’s share of the blame lie? Parents placed their child’s joy first in large part because it made them happy. It seemed win-win. Parents and children enriched each other’s lives as parents fed off the joy they provided their kids. Life as an adult is not a problem so easily solved.

Eventually children leave home (and Brown and Yale), and when they do, they find that temper tantrums are not so well received, authority figures don’t prioritize their joy, and the hard work of building character must be started now, years late. Even Bernie Sanders cannot heal the hurt to come. **NR**

The Sanders Youth

What do they understand by ‘socialism’?

BY EMILY EKINS

FOR decades, politicians and the media, especially on the right, have used the term “socialist” as an epithet to vilify political opponents. Yet somehow Bernie Sanders has managed to bring socialism back into style. The quirky 74-year-old senator from Vermont explains that he’s not a regular socialist but rather a new, improved “Democratic socialist.”

Sanders’s railing against wealth inequality and his calls for dramatically expanding government provision of services seems to be working for him among America’s rising generation. Sanders has won more than 70 percent of the under-30 vote in twelve of the first 25 primaries for which we have exit-polling data. And it’s not just young Democrats; regardless of party affiliation, most Americans under 30 have a positive impression of Sanders, according to a recent poll by Harvard’s Institute of Politics (IOP).

For many young people, socialism is not a label representing a bad history. A *Reason-Rupe* poll found Millennials were the only age cohort of which a majority (53 percent) had a favorable view of socialism, compared with only a third of Americans over 30.

A possible explanation of this difference is that younger Americans don’t know what socialism is. A CBS/*New York Times* survey found that only 16 percent of Americans 18 to 29 years old could define socialism accurately in their own words. While two out of three Americans over 30 couldn’t define it either, three out of four of them oppose it nonetheless. Their reaction to it is visceral.

Older Americans remember the Cold War, during which the concept of socialism merged with their fear of the Soviet Union. Americans could see that the USSR had long bread lines, poor-quality consumer goods, little innovation, and low productivity. All that reduced its standard of living. The USSR also had forced-labor camps, campaigns against religion, and myriad forms of political repression. Americans came to see its ideology—that everyone should be rewarded equally regardless of achievement—as a demoralizing force that undermined individuals’ self-efficacy by reducing the incentive to work hard, excel, and innovate.

In part because they did not live through the Cold War, Millennials find the “socialism” label less alarming. “Socialism” to the Millennial mind doesn’t mean the Soviet Union; it means Scandinavia, a place far gentler.

Scandinavia, however, isn’t socialist so much as socialistic, in that its governments provide generous social services, impose value-added taxes, or VATs, and collect high income taxes. What Millennials like is the large social-welfare state that provides for people’s needs.

Emily Ekins is a research fellow and the director of polling at the Cato Institute.



A Bernie Sanders supporter displays a sign.

Young Americans support this Scandinavian version of “socialism” for several reasons. First, Scandinavia shows them that large social-welfare states need not be politically repressive. Second, the Great Recession, not the Cold War, has defined their youth. Financial insecurity may incline them to see value in activist government. Finally, over the past year Sanders has told us repeatedly that we ought to be more like Sweden, which people naturally associate with his “Democratic socialism.”

Sanders’s use of the label has helped legitimize socialism and the Scandinavian model specifically. Political scientists have found that, rather than choose a candidate whose views match their own, voters often change their views to align with the candidates they’ve chosen. A recent Harvard IOP poll shows that over the past year Millennials have moved slightly but significantly toward the left on welfare spending and government guarantees of health insurance. Sanders may have contributed to that movement.

But it’s not just Sanders. Many young people are predisposed to find his message compelling because of certain conventions in the culture they were raised in. Take sports. *Reason-Rupe* finds college-age Millennials to be the only cohort with a majority (51 percent) supporting participation trophies, with most older Americans saying that trophies should be reserved for those who win their events.

Many on the right have bemoaned Millennials’ ostensible embrace of a failed economic and political philosophy. Others hope Millennials will begin to reject socialism when they get jobs, pay taxes, and assume adult responsibilities, as some evidence suggests they will. But advocates of limited government should not be complacent. Most Americans think our economy is still in recession, and young people may take longer to find their footing in a good career with higher pay. Moreover, not all of them will eventually pay high taxes, and those who will not may need to hear stronger arguments before they reject socialistic policies.

The time has come to start explaining to the next generation how socialistic economic planning hurts people.

But first we must correct the perception, promoted by Sanders, that Scandinavia is socialist. It’s not. Although Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have social-welfare states, they outrank the United States on a variety of other economic-freedom indices calculated by the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute; they have, for example, less business regulation, lower corporate

tax rates, and more trade freedom. Their liberal markets are what enable them to accommodate massive social-welfare spending. If Sanders says that America should be more like Sweden, he should acknowledge what it takes to be more like Sweden: freer markets, not more government control.

While the Scandinavian countries are not socialist, they are socialistic in that their governments exercise a high degree of control over the provision of health care, higher education, and other services. *Reason-Rupe* has found that, the label “socialism” aside, Millennials prefer, by a ratio of two to one, a “free-market economy” over a “government-managed economy.” If they chafe at the idea of government’s running businesses, they may be open to arguments that government guarantees of health care and college necessarily lead to government control in those sectors and to the inefficiency and rigidities that come with it. The key is to highlight that government control often leads to insufficient supply, rationing, and reductions in innovation and in quality of services.

We see this in the health-care systems of Scandinavian countries. The United States far outranks them in health-care innovation and in wait times for surgery and to see specialists. In recent decades, U.S. companies have developed about half of the major new medicines introduced worldwide. Americans have better access to medical technology and to new versions of pharmaceuticals with fewer side effects. By some measures, survival rates in the U.S. are higher for breast cancer and heart attacks after hospital admittance.

The social-welfare state also comes with costs to productivity, economic growth, and, ultimately, standards of living. While the welfare state may offer certain benefits, we must acknowledge its costs. And even if we did decide to steer our economy in that direction, the lesson of Scandinavia is that we need to further liberalize our market economy, not bring it under more-centralized, bureaucratic control.

In research we are conducting at the Cato Institute, we are finding that people change their minds when presented with fact-based, reasoned arguments. The expression “If you’re explaining, you’re losing” is not only tired, it’s wrong. By explaining, we can correct people’s misunderstanding of how best to improve access, innovation, and quality in health care and education. And that way forward is not through increased government management of the economy but through the free-market model, which most Millennials recognize as the better system.

NR

Ideas Have Consequences?

Not in short-term politics

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

“IDEAS have consequences” is a phrase conservatives of a certain age may associate with Rush Limbaugh. Before that, it was associated with the philosopher Richard M. Weaver, who published a famous book by that title in 1948, arguing that the Western world was in decline because William of Ockham convinced Europeans that there is no such thing as absolute truth, hence Buchenwald, Communism, and the oeuvre of Jackson Pollock.

(I may be simplifying Weaver’s thesis a little bit here.)

The belief that ideas have consequences is implicit in advocacy journalism; indeed, one obituary of NATIONAL REVIEW’s founder and guiding spirit, William F. Buckley Jr., was headlined “Ideas Have Consequences.” Dinesh D’Souza’s obituary of Buckley insists: “Buckley’s life proves that ideas have consequences.” The mission statement of the William F. Buckley Jr. Program at Yale affirms: “We believe that ideas have consequences.” Geoffrey Kabaservice, reviewing Carl T. Bogus’s biography of Bill Buckley in the *New York Times*, added a qualification: “Ideas have consequences, but they don’t make political realities by themselves.”

The political realities are, at the moment, a source of despair for conservatives. Regardless of what in the end becomes of the presidential ambitions of game-show host Donald Trump, his Godzilla stomp across the ideological landscape of organized conservatism in pursuit of whatever it is he is in fact pursuing has left this bedrock principle of the Right—that ideas matter—cracked. The Trump partisans do not believe that ideas, and the related enterprises of persuasion, matter very much at all. Andrea Tantaros, occasional Fox News personality and vocal Trump enthusiast, demanded to know: “What has ‘conservatism’ done in 15 years?”

That short historical timeline—15 years—is telling. Given a historical perspective that is more statesmanlike and less talking-heady, the question of what the conservative movement has done is easier to answer.

OF course ideas have consequences. The political consensus of the immediate post-war period would be unrecognizable to a 21st-century American, and a very large share of the reform that has been achieved since then has been in a conservative direction. When this magazine was founded in 1955, the top federal income-tax rate—meditate on the figure for a moment—91 percent. That figure was not about collecting adequate revenue for a massive federal apparatus: Total federal tax collections were slightly (not radically) lower as a share of GDP during the Eisenhower years than they

are today. Rather, that high rate was purely redistributive, an exercise in social engineering left over from the war years. The conservative critique of high marginal tax rates (the oversimplified version of which is expressed by the Laffer curve) was that these rates discouraged marginal work and investment, distorted economic activity, encouraged tax avoidance ranging from the creative to the criminal, and were unnecessary to the collection of sufficient revenue. Conservatives made the case to intellectuals and politicians of both parties (John F. Kennedy’s views on taxation would fit in well with those of contemporary Republicans), and the rates eased down, a bit. But Americans in the 1970s, when the top rate was still 70 percent, might have asked: “What has ‘conservatism’ done for us lately?” Fifteen years isn’t that long in history, though it may seem like a long time in politics: It is approximately the period that elapsed between the defeat of Barry Goldwater and the victory of Ronald Reagan, or, if you prefer, between “Tear down this wall!” and 9/11.

The alienness of the political consensus of the 1950s isn’t best expressed by a figure on an IRS form, though. Convincing people that they’d rather pay 28 percent in taxes than 91 percent in taxes doesn’t take much of a philosophical breakthrough. What has changed most dramatically is the baseline assumption about what government can and should do.

The mobilization of the Arsenal of Democracy during the war years was, in retrospect, something to behold. Even accounting for all the usual shenanigans, errors, waste, fraud, and self-service inevitably associated with dramatic political intervention in the economy (much of our wartime production was comically mismanaged), what happened was without precedent. The United States had gone from the depths of the Great Depression to saving the world to being the greatest peacetime economic power in human history over the course of approximately 15 years.

The cultural ramifications were extraordinary. Classical liberalism and the traditional Jeffersonian skepticism toward central government were dramatically attenuated. The federal government, government in general, and central planning were in the 1950s at the height of their prestige. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *The Organization Man*, published practically back to back, were perfectly matched fictional and nonfictional indictments of the post-war culture of bureaucracy, collectivism, central planning, the corporate aesthetic and ethic, and the diminishing value perceived in what Americans had called, without blushing, “rugged individualism.” But, in reality, the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit and his fellow Organization Men in the private and public sectors had never enjoyed better reputations or more popular deference. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the words “government scientists” were practically an incantation, and the capital-P Progressive assumption—that political discipline would empower expertise in every field to assuage every felt social problem, one at a time—was so pervasive as to be hardly remarked upon outside of intellectual circles.

When conservatives decided in the middle 1950s that they would undo this state of affairs, people thought they were mad. Even Ronald Reagan, the great conservative champion, considered himself a New Deal Democrat who had been abandoned by his radicalized party rather than the other way around. The only respectable conservatism of the era was that of President

Eisenhower, who accepted the New Deal and social insurance but pledged to police their excesses and to manage them with prudence. Given the cultural consensus of the era, Lionel Trilling and the rest were absolutely correct to sneer at the nascent conservative movement as nothing but an “irritable mental gesture.”

UNDER the influence of a million books, lectures, seminars, and articles in *NATIONAL REVIEW*, *Commentary*, the *Orange County Register*, etc., that political consensus changed, and changed radically.

Until the advent of talk radio and cable-news opinion programming, conservatives mainly followed a Hayekian model of social change, partly out of prudence and partly because we had no other real choice. F. A. Hayek argued that the people he would have called “liberals” and we would call “conservatives” or “libertarians” did not have much hope of changing the political consensus through reaching out to mass audiences, because our ideas require a little bit of homework (at least some elementary economics) and a certain emotional discipline (e.g., elevating the rule of law over our own desires, or, more generally, valuing process over outcomes in legal questions) that ill suit them for mass consumption.

There is no such thing as a conservative agenda that can win, because **agendas do not win**, and they do not lose.

On the other end of the spectrum, trying to persuade the genuine geniuses of our time, the truly original thinkers, is largely pointless as well, inasmuch as such minds are unique, unpredictable, and not generally open to persuasion through ordinary means.

So, Hayek argued, we should concentrate on the “second-hand dealers in ideas.” Don’t bother trying to convince Stephen Hawking that fracking is, in the long run, preferable to the alternatives, but convincing Neil deGrasse Tyson or Bill Nye would be very valuable indeed. Professors, business executives, entrepreneurs, city councilmen, newspaper editors, public intellectuals of various kinds—these were to be the targets of our efforts.

Conservatives have been remarkably successful in making that case. But if you think that’s what elected Ronald Reagan—or what will elect the next important conservative—then you don’t understand how elections work.

Senator Barry Goldwater got massacred in the 1964 presidential election, but it wasn’t because he opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, or because of the “Daisy Girl” ad, or because Lyndon Johnson was such a gifted and ruthless politician (though he certainly was). And it certainly was not Senator Goldwater’s deeply felt libertarian conservatism that cost him the election. Goldwater lost practically the entire country in November 1964 because John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in November 1963. No Republican was going to win in that year.

And though the country’s intellectual consensus did move to the right over the next 15 years, it wasn’t a sudden new and deep commitment to limited government, free enterprise, and anti-Communism that put Ronald Reagan in the White House in 1981.

It was gas lines and the Iranian hostage crisis. Jimmy Carter did not play the hand that was dealt him especially well, to be sure, but there was no great ideological realignment in 1979: There was a gasoline shortage, largely caused by events outside any ideological considerations of the Carter administration.

Indeed, if the Arabs had only known what a great Israel-hater President Carter would come to be, they probably would have kept us up to our necks in oil, and Ronald Reagan would be remembered as a kind of aberration, a Hollywood activist on the right, whose political career had coincided with the high-water mark of Orange County-style conservatism.

SCHOLARS of voter behavior have long known that ideas, ideology, and issues play only a very small role in the outcomes of elections. In my report in our last issue on the state of the Hillary Rodham Clinton campaign (“The Empty Pantsuit,” May 9), I made reference to a new survey and synthesis of the scholarship on the issue, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*, a very digestible book by Princeton’s Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels. Much of what the authors document will come as little surprise to those familiar with the depressing realities of American political discourse.

For example, voters who believe that they are choosing a candidate based on an issue or a set of issues reliably do not know what their candidate’s actual position is on those issues and instead have projected their own preferences onto a candidate they pre-selected for other reasons. Effectively none of the electorate is equipped to judge the effects of economic policy on the country in the near term, but to the extent that voters do consider economic developments, they tend to take into account only the state of the economy in the few months prior to the election, and they are unable to distinguish the results of economic policy from those of exogenous factors: A tax hike, a new regulation, and a hurricane all are received in roughly the same way. The end of the presidency of George H. W. Bush coincided with a mild recession, which had ended before the election; in fact, real economic growth in 1992 was 3.6 percent, considerably higher than during any year of Barack Obama’s presidency and higher than the historic median annual rate of real growth. Bill Clinton inherited a growing economy from one Bush and left a contracting one to the next Bush, but the public’s estimate of the Clinton years does not reflect that.

Voters, as Achen and Bartels document, are moved mainly by two things: The first is social loyalties, generally acquired during youth in the home. The second is recent events, though, as noted, voters do not distinguish between events that are the results of political decisions and those, such as natural disasters, that are not. This sheds some light on questions that often perplex conservatives.

For example, in spite of the offensive and counterproductive “plantation” rhetoric that is unfortunately an article of

Title IX in The Restroom

*Transgender activism has produced
a legal absurdity*

BY EDWARD WHELAN

faith among many on the right, the reason black voters vote Democratic is not that they are generally poorer than whites and more likely to benefit from the welfare programs that are Democrats' stock in trade. In fact, black voters' identification with the Democratic party intensifies slightly as their incomes go up: Rich black voters who are never going to benefit from welfare programs, and who are going to be taxed like hell to pay for them, are slightly more likely to support those programs than are the poor black voters benefiting from them. Likewise, the attitudes of white voters toward those same programs, and toward the politicians associated with them, are not much affected by their own economic status, or even by their own participation in those programs.

In fact, the "Self-Interested Voter Hypothesis" has been studied at great length, and evidence for the proposition that voters make choices based on the pursuit of particular economic or political outcomes is scarce. For example, race, sex, and family affiliations far outweigh factors such as income when it comes to choosing a party or a candidate. Why do black women vote so overwhelmingly Democratic? The nearest answer scholarship can provide is: Because they are black women.

THE talk-radio and cable-news arms of the conservative movement, which aren't especially conservative these days, do not take a Hayekian approach to social change. In broadcast, you need a large audience, not an audience that has read *Individualism and Economic Order*. That they have rallied in no small part to the banner of Donald Trump isn't surprising: He is the most popular political figure at the moment, and popularity is their business. Like many of their programs, he is conservative in form (an "R" next to his name, for the moment) but not in content.

The usual challenge levied at the egghead types who do things such as work at think tanks and write articles for NATIONAL REVIEW is: "Give us a conservative agenda that can win." It is a demand that misunderstands the nature of mass democracy. There is no such thing as a conservative agenda that can win, because agendas do not win, and they do not lose. In the wake of Newt Gingrich's great victory in 1994 with his "Contract with America," probably not one Republican voter in 50 could have identified what actually was in that contract. Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, Obama . . . Cruz/Sanders/Clinton/Trump: Does that look like a rational progression to you? Bill Clinton ran for office promising a confrontation with China, and George W. Bush as a soft anti-interventionist who was deeply skeptical about nation-building abroad and wanted to focus on school reform at home. Barack Obama wasn't elected because he wanted to bankrupt the coal industry, but because the country felt the need to punish Republicans in 2008 and wasn't in the mood for a Mormon private-equity investor in 2012. No Republican platform in either year, no speech delivered by John McCain or Mitt Romney, was going to change that.

That isn't how elections work. Ideas matter in the long term, but operational politics is conducted in the short term. The question for 2016 is how much short-term damage this country can withstand. **NR**

IN a 2–1 panel ruling in mid April, a federal appellate court decided (or at least seemed to think that it decided) that G.G., a girl who identifies herself as male, has a legal right to use the boys' restrooms at her high school in rural Gloucester County, Va. In so doing, the panel's majority, consisting of two appointees of President Obama, kowtowed to the Obama administration's radical claim that federal law requires any college or school that receives federal funding to make its single-sex restrooms, locker rooms, showers, housing, and sports teams available to "transgender students consistent with their gender identity."

Seldom has a more brazen and aggressive bureaucratic misreading of federal law encountered a more craven and confused judicial reception.

In 1972, Congress enacted the federal law known as Title IX. Title IX provides generally that no school that receives federal funding—a category that includes public grade schools and high schools as well as nearly all colleges, public or private—may "discriminat[e]" "on the basis of sex." Everyone understood from the beginning, and the Obama administration still agrees, that Title IX allows schools to have single-sex restrooms, locker rooms, and showers. A regulation dating from 1975 says exactly that—a school "may provide separate toilet, locker room, and shower facilities on the basis of sex"—and goes on to specify only that "such facilities provided for students of *one sex* shall be comparable to such facilities provided for students of *the other sex*" (emphasis added).

Pushing the transgender agenda through the entire alphabet of the federal bureaucracy has been a high priority for the administration in President Obama's second term. So it was that in January 2015 an obscure functionary named James A. Ferg-Cadima, in his temporary capacity as acting deputy assistant secretary at the Department of Education, signed his name to a letter and sent that letter to G.G. (and to various transgender activists). In his letter, Ferg-Cadima made two cursory legal claims on behalf of the department. First, he declared that Title IX's ban on discrimination on the basis of sex includes a ban on discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Second, he asserted that schools that provide "sex-segregated restrooms, locker rooms, shower facilities, housing, athletic teams, and single-sex classes" must "treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity."

Mr. Whelan, the president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, is a regular contributor to NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE's Bench Memos blog.

Ponder for a moment some examples of what Ferg-Cadima's second claim means for schools that receive federal funding. A young man who says his gender identity is female must be offered a college dormitory room with roommates who are women (irrespective of the wishes of those roommates). An athlete who is biologically male in all respects must be allowed to compete for a position on a women's sports team if he identifies himself as female. A first-grade girl who thinks she's a boy can use the boys' bathroom. And, yes, high-school boys who say they're transgender girls may use the girls' locker rooms and showers on the same terms, and at the same time, as the girls do—and vice versa, of course, for girls who say they're transgender boys.

Not surprisingly, this insanity has no plausible basis in Title IX. Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that Ferg-Cadima is right in his first claim: that Title IX actually forbids discrimination on the basis of gender identity. On any coherent account of what discrimination is, that assumption thoroughly defeats, rather than supports, Ferg-Cadima's claim that "transgender students" must be treated "consistent with their gender identity."

A person discriminates on the basis of a trait when he takes that trait into account in making a decision (at least when there is no compelling or inherent justification for doing so), and he doesn't discriminate when he disregards the trait. Similarly, a policy dis-

criminate on the basis of a trait when it makes that trait relevant to how a person is treated, and it doesn't discriminate when it treats the trait as irrelevant. So, for example, a person discriminates on the basis of race when he factors a job applicant's race into his hiring decision, and he doesn't discriminate on the basis of race when he disregards the applicant's race in making his hiring decision. Likewise, a person discriminates on the basis of gender identity when he factors a job applicant's gender identity into his hiring decision—when, for example, he refuses to hire a woman because she says she identifies as male—and he doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender identity when he disregards her gender identity in deciding whether to hire her.

But in the context of single-sex bathrooms, locker rooms, and showers, the concept of discrimination on the basis of gender identity plays out very differently from what the transgender ideologues contend. In this context, a school *complies* with the (hypothetical) norm of nondiscrimination on the basis of gender identity when it *disregards* a student's gender identity and instead assigns the student to the facilities that correspond with his biological sex.

In other words, it is the advocates of transgender access to bathrooms and showers who, under the guise of their nondiscrimination rhetoric, are in fact seeking to discriminate on the basis of—in favor of—gender identity. That's exactly what a policy of making gender identity override biological sex entails: It makes gender identity determine which restrooms and showers a person is allowed to use, just as a policy of race-segregated restrooms and showers makes race determine

which facilities a person is allowed to use. (I am of course not asserting that racial discrimination and discrimination in favor of gender identity are moral equivalents.)

The unsound proposition that separate facilities assigned by biological sex involves discrimination on the basis of gender identity collapses into incoherence. If a boy who identifies as female has a right under Title IX to use the girls' restrooms and showers, then it would clearly be discrimination on the basis of gender identity to bar a boy who identifies as male from also using them. After all, the difference between these two biological males is that they have different gender identities. How could one of the males be allowed to use the girls' facilities and the other be barred from doing so if Title IX bars discrimination on the basis of gender identity? In short, contrary to everyone's understanding of Title IX, the transgender illogic would disallow *any* system of single-sex facilities to survive.

LET'S now look at G.G.'s case. G.G. is a girl in all biological respects who identifies herself as male and is trying to live her life as a boy. After she told school officials that she was a transgender boy, her high school barred her from using the boys' restroom and instead built three single-stall restrooms that were available for her (and other students of

It is the advocates of transgender access to bathrooms and showers who are in fact **seeking to discriminate** on the basis of—in favor of—gender identity.

either sex) to use. Dissatisfied with this accommodation, G.G. sued the school board under Title IX.

The federal district court ruled that the 1975 regulation barred G.G.'s claim because the school's separate restrooms for boys and girls fell squarely within its terms. The school board having won on this question, the district court had no need to address additional alternative grounds to decide for the school board.

On appeal, the Fourth Circuit majority stated at the outset of its opinion that "the heart of this appeal is whether Title IX requires schools to provide transgender students access to restrooms congruent with their gender identity." But its own torrent of confusion sidetracked it from ever reaching that fundamental question. The Education Department's primary argument was that the school's restroom policy violated Title IX. In a secondary argument, it contested the district court's holding that the school board could win under the 1975 regulation alone. The department agreed that the 1975 regulation was valid and operative, but it claimed that the regulation was silent and ambiguous on what the terms "sex," "students of one sex," and "students of the other sex" meant. It had discretion, it claimed, to construe the regulation to mean that students who identify as transgender have the "sex" that is the same as their gender identity—the opposite, in other words, of their biological sex. (The only source the department cited, Ferg-Cadima's letter, didn't even mention or refer to the 1975 regulation, much less interpret it in this way.) Under this reading, a school's single-sex restrooms would fall within the protection of the 1975 regulation only if boys

who identify as girls are allowed to use the girls' restrooms (and vice versa).

According great deference to the department's interpretation of its own regulation, the majority held that even though "sex" in the 1975 regulation was best interpreted as biological sex, the department's alternative interpretation wasn't foreclosed.

There is no point in contesting the majority's implausible holding on this matter, for, as the department's brief recognized, that holding, if correct, would establish only that the 1975 regulation didn't deliver a victory to the school board. So it was then incumbent on the majority to address the fundamental question: whether the school's bathroom policy did in fact violate Title IX—whether, in short, Ferg-Cadima was right to claim that Title IX requires that schools make single-sex restrooms (and other facilities) available to "transgender students consistent with their gender identity."

But in an astounding botch (or was it a deliberate blunder?), the majority failed to answer that central question. Had the court done so, it would have had to decide whether Ferg-Cadima's claim about Title IX's meaning provided the *best reading* of that law. On that question of statutory meaning, the court, under well-established precedents, would not have been able to accord *any* deference to an administrative interpretation as informal as Ferg-Cadima's letter.

The school board merited an easy victory on the question of Title IX's meaning. There is nothing in Title IX that can remotely be read to require schools to allow boys who identify as female to use the girls' facilities, or to allow girls who identify as male to use the boys' facilities. Again, even if we assume that Title IX bars discrimination on the basis of gender identity, a school's practice of reserving single-sex bathrooms, locker rooms, and shower facilities to those of the corresponding biological sex does not involve any discrimination on the basis of gender identity. On the contrary, Ferg-Cadima's proposition that schools must "treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity" discriminates on the basis of gender identity.

The appellate court ordered the case sent back to the district court, which might still determine that the constitutional privacy interests of other students override G.G.'s right to use the boys' restrooms. Or it might even determine that the appellate court's failure to address the Title IX question leaves that matter for it to decide afresh.

NOTWITHSTANDING how feeble its misreading of Title IX is, the department is using its power over federal funding to bully vulnerable school districts around the country into revising their policies and practices on restrooms, locker rooms, and showers to comport with the transgender agenda. Intimidated by the threatened loss of funds and wary of the costs of litigation, many of those school districts are meekly surrendering and are in turn bullying parents and students who dare to raise concerns about the new regime. You can be sure that if the Fourth Circuit's woefully defective ruling is permitted to stand, the department will use it to club more victims into submission.

The Education Department seems to be picking its fights and leaving the administration's friends alone. Under its misreading of Title IX, secular women's colleges that don't admit men who identify as women, or that do admit or retain women who identify as men, are evidently in violation of federal law and ought



to face the threat of having their federal funding terminated. It's also curious that liberal Montgomery County, Md., a powerhouse suburb of D.C., seems to be facing no reprisals for its go-slow practices, even as an LGBT-activist member of the school board in nearby Fairfax County, Va., successfully enlisted the department to intimidate his board into submission. Might the administration be giving more weight to the privacy and safety interests of the children of the influential than to those of everyday people?

The problems faced by those fraught souls who identify as transgender deserve our sympathy, and a compassionate response may well include efforts at accommodation such as the single-stall restrooms that G.G. was allowed to use. But the Obama administration and transgender activists have shown no interest in sensible compromises that give any weight to the privacy or safety interests of others. Never mind that the transgender policy on restrooms and showers makes it much easier for any man or boy with nefarious or mischievous purposes to gain access to the girls' facilities.

The foundational premise of the transgender agenda is that the *objective* fact of biological sex is some sort of arbitrary fiction "assigned at birth" and that the *subjective* conception of gender identity is the genuine reality that demands recognition and respect—including the use of wrong pronouns, thus yielding such absurdities as, from *The New Republic*, "She . . . tried to castrate herself by tying off her testicles." That premise, with its disjunction between reality and perception, is a stark illustration of what everyone used to recognize as lunacy. But the Obama administration now claims that federal statutes adopted decades ago embrace and compel that lunacy.

Under any theory of political accountability, it is appalling that the Obama administration would seek to impose its radical rewriting of Title IX through a bureaucratic diktat. And it is all the more appalling that any judges would be so confused or compliant as to acquiesce in this. But it's no surprise that for those for whom the concepts of male and female have no core meaning, legal texts don't either.

NR



The Long View BY ROB LONG

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

Special Republican Convention Edition™

Welcome, delegates! We're pleased to see you and hope you're all settled into your hotels here in Cleveland! By now you've received your official delegate packet, which includes a welcome note from the mayor of Cleveland and photographs of your children and maps of their daily routines from the Trump campaign.

We're in for an exciting week! (Or two, or three. Please see below, "Motion to Suspend Indefinitely.")

Before we get started, however, we'd like to refresh your memory about some of the key provisions in Robert's Rules of Order, which as you may or may not know are the guiding rules for our time together. Despite what you may have read during the run-up to the convention, "Robert" of Robert's Rules is *not* a RINO GOPe establishment hack, but U.S. Army Major Henry Martyn Robert, who codified these rules in 1876.

General Guidelines:

The following are general procedures to keep in mind as we begin the nominating process:

Obtaining the Floor:

The best way to obtain the floor is by asking the chair to recognize you from the podium. This is usually accomplished by raising your hand or making a short, loud call to the podium. Until the third ballot, it is *not* acceptable to set another delegate on fire and use the smoke as an attention-getting device.

Ending Debate:

Ending the debate is a complicated process that often entails several rounds of additions, amendments, and debating the "question" of whether to end debate at all. This is exactly the

kind of thing that separates us from the animals, which is why the chair will entertain these motions *only* from delegates who have maintained an assault- and/or battery-incident-free span greater than one (1) day, a "day" being defined as four hours.

Addressing Remarks:

Robert's Rules states that all remarks should be addressed to the chair and that persons speaking must refrain from personal, ad hominem, threatening, or otherwise hostile language.

This rule will be suspended for the duration of the Republican National Convention.

Acceptable Floor Motions & Responses:

The following are acceptable motions and calls from the floor, with appropriate responses:

Point of Privilege:

Any delegate may, at any time, raise a point of privilege. In general, these points are given immediate attention from the chair. A point of privilege relates to safety, comfort, or the ability to physically participate in the proceedings. If you find yourself under the boot of a fellow delegate, or if you cannot hear the speakers due to a swelling in your face and/or head, this would be an appropriate time to raise a point of privilege.

Question of Hand Size:

At any time, any qualified delegate may ask that the speaker's hands be measured against a uniform hand-size standard. Does not require a vote. For informational purposes only.

Motion to Summon Lucifer:

During the floor debate on the nominee question, the speaker who is recognized by the chair may, if he or she wishes, introduce a motion to summon Lucifer in the flesh to stand alongside any candidate for nomination in order for the assembly to ascertain which potential nominee more closely resembles the Dark Lord of the Underworld. Does not require a vote. For informational purposes only.

Point of Order:

At any time during the proceedings, any delegate may call to the chair with a point of order. A point of order is appropriate only if a qualified delegate believes that the rules of order have been broken or misapplied.

During the 2016 Republican National Convention, points of order will be ignored by the chair.

Motion to Suspend Indefinitely:

Robert's Rules allow for any qualified delegate to introduce a motion to suspend the proceedings. These motions require a second, and a voice vote. The chair may also introduce a motion to suspend if he or she believes the proceedings are in disarray, because of either a series of small fires that have broken out on the floor or perhaps the arrival of emergency medical crew to collect and remove the injured.

Once the motion to suspend has been seconded and affirmed by vote, only the chair may reopen the proceedings from the secure "panic room" of the Quicken Loans Arena.

Motion to Disband:

From the floor, any qualified delegate may make a motion to disband the Republican party by simply raising both hands, bowing his or her head, and weeping silently (see also: "Motion to Capitulate").

Point of Hairstyle:

At any time, any qualified delegate may ask that the speaker's hairstyle be "unrolled" or "unwrapped" to provide a clear idea of its structure and physical makeup.

Motion to Capitulate:

The assembly may, if it chooses, introduce a Sense of the Convention Statement endorsing Hillary Rodham Clinton for president of the United States, thereby saving itself a lot of time and heartache.

These motions may be introduced at any time from the floor, but the sooner the better.

‘At This Point Who Cares?’

THE tweets of Trump enthusiasts have three styles. There are the dark, muttered threats to settle scores when it’s all done, as if inauguration will blend into a festival of retribution, a Benghazi on K Street. Some sunny acolytes bray about the manifest brilliance of their guy, untroubled by his actual utterance. Sometimes Doubters of Donald will get an ALL CAPS exhortation to find a seat on the #TrumpTrain. Is that like Amtrak? Government subsidized, with eminent domain used to raze an old lady’s house for a new station? The mood darkens: On it or under it, pal.

Not all resort to threats about how you’ll get yours when the New Era dawns with a faint orange glow in the east. But there’s a constant theme. From the talk-radio hosts with slopping pails of throne polish to the earnest voter who’s just tired of the GOP, there’s an awestruck, unshakeable faith. As one fan began a recent call to the Michael Medved show: “Donald Trump is right about everything.”

Ta-da! It makes life so much easier. Rally speech: YOU KNOW, YOU KNOW, THEY SAID PLUTO ISN’T REALLY A PLANET. I KNOW PLANETS. I OWN A LOT OF REAL ESTATE ON ONE. A LOT. LET ME TELL YOU, PLUTO IS A PLANET. Yay! Finally someone’s standing up to the establishment octoplanetarians! PLUTO IS ALSO MADE OF STICKY PUTTY. I SAID THAT BACK IN 2003, AND THEY SAID, NO, YOU CAN’T SAY THAT. NOW THEY SAY, I WAS RIGHT. IT’S PUTTY. SOME KIND OF SPACKLE. (Crowd roars.)

Ask anyone after the rally whether he thinks Pluto is made of bathroom caulk and you’ll get a pitying look: *What kind of gotcha question is this? When Pluto was a planet America was respected around the world.* Yes, but it’s not putty. *Why does that matter? Don’t you see the situation we’re in?*

Which brings us to this liberating Trump remark: “I’m a conservative but at this point who cares? We’ve got to straighten out the country.” Enough of measuring one’s actions against one’s principles! It’s time for action. As one person tweeted in response to Trump’s call for ideological ecumenicalism:

“Conservatism is what? like the mystical holy grail. I don’t give a hoot. I want my neighbors and children to have jobs.”

Okay. So let’s nationalize the cable industry and pay the jobless to drive to customer’s houses and offer new batteries for the remote. Free of charge. Unemployment? So over. Not conservative, but it works! Or we could nationalize the banks and forgive all mortgage debt. Even the least-skilled person would be guaranteed a job feeding paperwork into the shredders, to say nothing of the armies of shredder repairmen we’d hire because people forgot to take out the staples. Banks would have no money, but that’s cool because we hate banks. They take our money and give it to

someone else and keep the profit for themselves—how was that insider racket ever legal?

Eventually, Venezuela. Eventually, Cuba. Eventually, less of everything, including such “conservative” things as “freedom,” but hey, that’s just another of your mystical holy grails.

Sorry; that’s unfair. You don’t have to go full Bernie to try something outside of the conservative toolkit. Granted. So let’s consider what might work, because Working is Winning and Winning is Awesome.

Fixing the debt: The standard conservative position would be entitlement reform, smaller government expenditures, and tax and regulatory policies that encourage growth and thus boost revenue. Which of these should be tossed out like the anchor baby with the bathwater? Trump does not want to touch entitlements, because we don’t need to. We’re going to get so much tax revenue when Apple is forced by the Domestic Industrial Repatriation Act of 2017 to build smartphones in rural Idaho that there will be enough money for socialized health care. You can say that’ll work, but if you are a conservative who wants a command economy and state control of health care, one has to wonder what drew you to the party in the first place. Was it a pancake breakfast?

If these people are so eager to shed the itchy church pants of conservatism for the supple raiment of the progressive elect, what were they? Pro-America, pro-military, inclined to side with the baker instead of the gay-wedding client, sorta pro-life (that first trimester’s a head-scratcher, when you get down to it), and doubtful we must reduce the economy to pre-industrial levels to keep the sea from eating a yard of Miami Beach. The party of the Right was where they felt they belonged, because it wasn’t full of snotty academics who look at an artwork that consists of 50 pounds of liposuctioned fat and call it quantitatively transgressive. It was full of regular folk.

But if those guys in Washington haven’t figured out a way to stop Obama from doing stuff, well, what’s the point of a party? Understandable. But somehow this morphed into a simultaneous rejection of the ideals behind the party and embrace of the agent of rejection as the true embodiment of those ideals. This attitude condemns the “establishment” for its pliable spine and salutes a man whose ideological flexibility makes a Cirque du Soleil acrobat look like someone in a full-body cast.

The novel *1984* would have wrapped up much quicker if Winston Smith had been one of these folk. O’Brien tells him that the State wants him to believe “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ”; Smith says sure, why not? What matters is getting to five. And if you count one, two, three, four, that’s like two plus two, and what comes next? Five! Besides, Marco Rubio wanted to open the borders to people who say “*Dos plus dos equallo cinco.*” So, #TrumpTrain! Whether it’s private or state-run, who cares? As long as it runs on time.

NR

Books, Arts & Manners

The Way Of Rome

MICHAEL AUSLIN



SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome,
by Mary Beard (Liveright, 608 pp., \$35)

Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the House of Caesar,
by Tom Holland (Doubleday, 512 pp., \$30)

THE insatiable appetite of broadcast media for compelling images has elevated Americans' brawling at political rallies to a central place in the 2016 campaign. Whenever adjudication of political differences happens in the streets—instead of inside the voting booth—or with fists (or appears likely to do so), democracy is imperiled. If elections are swayed by those who feel entitled to riot, or to threaten or silence their political opponents, as do some Black Lives Matter protesters and some Donald Trump supporters alike, then we might indeed be embarking on a path that will result in traumatic changes to the American political system.

Degradation of republican institutions is not a new phenomenon. A mirror to the coalescing upheavals in America today is provided by that all-too-familiar doppelgänger, Rome. Last decade, anguish over the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq spawned shelves of books and reams

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of articles on how America had become a new Rome, risking overstretch and blow-back. This decade, it might well be the image of a crumbling republic that invites the most comparison with events of two millennia ago. Perhaps it is precisely because of the timeless fascination of decline and fall that Rome remains a topic of endless discussion after more than 20 centuries.

Two new scholarly, yet popular, treatments of Rome may resonate particularly in America's current time of troubles. The Cambridge don and public intellectual Mary Beard, in her sweeping *SPQR*, and the classicist Tom Holland, in his highly dramatic *Dynasty*, delve into the wicked doings and unending drama of a civilization almost unsettlingly modern. Complementing other recent Roman histories, such as Adrian Goldsworthy's *Augustus* (2014) and Barry Strauss's *The Death of Caesar* (2015), they explore the crucial moments of transformation and reconstruction in the Roman sociopolitical sphere. What each reveals, in the reading that we should care most about in light of our looming election, is the eternal, yet banal, lesson that national elites can ignore deep social divisions while steadily rigging the system in their favor for only so long before the plebeians catch on. Once that happens, only the most ruthless, cunning, and daring will emerge when the dust settles.

Idiosyncratically, Beard begins her history with the conspiracy of Catiline in 63 B.C., the event that marked the high point of the orator Marcus Tullius Cicero's career. If she were going to flout standard chronology, one might have expected her to begin in 44 B.C., with Julius Caesar's assassination, or possibly with the murders of the people's champions, the Gracchus brothers, in 133 and 121 B.C. But Beard's work is not intended as a straightforward chronicle; it is, rather, a triumph of interpretation. More than with any treatment since, perhaps, Edith Hamilton's classic *The Roman Way* (1932), Beard's readers will *understand* Rome, but how much they will *know* about Rome is another question.

But first, back to Catiline. Beard is careful to note that we might not be able to learn much *directly* from Rome's tra-

vails, but our engagement with them can nonetheless teach us a great deal. Thus, the Catilinarian conspiracy is a good fit for our current national mood, as it reflected the desperation of many ordinary citizens during yet another financial crisis in Rome and their apparent willingness to support the violent schemes of a flamboyant (though bankrupt) member of the Roman elite. Anger at the vast fortunes amassed by the top slice of society, and a lack of faith in the political system, spurred on Catiline and his supporters. Yet just as important as the political programs of both Catiline the rebel and Cicero the defender was the way in which the public debates were dominated by the idea of what Rome was supposed to be. It was both to Jupiter and to Rome's mythical founder Romulus that Cicero appealed in his peroration against Catiline. This appeal to ideals and origins also drives much of America's current political contest.

The continuing power of foundational images is striking in both the Roman and the American case. Few Britons refer today to King Arthur when arguing over Brexit, nor do Japanese often invoke the sun goddess Amaterasu when debating fiscal policy. Yet the appeal to the *idea* of Rome as defined by its origins recurred at moments of great national drama, as the similar idea of America still does in U.S. politics. In each, the founding myth (or calling) is based on a perilous journey and the dangers faced in establishing a divinely inspired land.

Consider, for example, the opening lines of the *Aeneid* (in Robert Fagles's magnificent translation):

Wars and a man I sing—an exile
driven on by Fate,

...
before he could found a city,
bring his gods to Latium, source of the
Latin race,
the Alban lords and the high walls of
Rome.

Compare Virgil's paean to the Augustan Roman spirit with the Puritan John Winthrop's famous 1630 sermon, "A Modell of Christian Charity," which he delivered onboard his ship crossing

the Atlantic to what would become Massachusetts Bay:

Wee must Consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a byword through the world.

The divine strain is strong in both—the presumption that it is the gods who will bless or curse the endeavor and thus the responsibility of the citizen to shoulder the unending burden.

That's not the only way the two foundation stories rhyme: Beard reminds us that Rome was, from its start, a city of immigrants, invited by the mythical

ish strongmen and the violent outbursts of citizens who no longer believed that the republican system looked out for their interests will resonate painfully with today's readers. Roman politics throughout the first century B.C. descended into a battle among self-interested groups that were made cohesive by clan and patronage loyalty. It was only when the ideal of the republic had been fatally undermined by the clash of private armies led by Julius Caesar and Pompey, and when Rome was terrorized by politically active gangs of thugs, that all pretense could be dropped. Caesar, and even more so his successor Octavian (Augustus), gained popular support not only because of their military victories but also because they offered a new idea of Rome that was becoming apparent below the veneer of tradition.

political role at best, instead gorging on salacious stories and gossip about those who held absolute power and being entertained with the now proverbial bread and circuses. The enervation of the Roman spirit of liberty was complete by the time the Julio-Claudian dynasty died with the assassination of the abominable Nero in A.D. 68.

It is too easy to read into the past the roadmap of our future, and it would be unreasonable to contend that American politics is moving in the direction of imperial rule. No president yet has dared suggest he won't pack up his suitcases at the end of his term. Yet an American public ignorant of public policy and how government works, following merely the most artfully packaged disinformation from leaders of both parties and a partisan press while more

In both Virgil and John Winthrop, we find the presumption that it is the gods who will **bless or curse** the endeavor and thus the responsibility of the citizen to shoulder the unending burden.

founder Romulus. She ends her story just as idiosyncratically as she began it: in A.D. 212, when the emperor Caracalla bestowed citizenship on every free male of the Roman Empire. In Rome's granting of citizenship and its responsibilities to ever wider groups of foreigners, and in the attendant battles over the definition of just what it meant to be a Roman, a modern American will see more than a distant echo of his own country's path to greatness, as well as of its current political disputes.

Beard does her best to bring to life the often invisible plebeians, women, and slaves of the empire. But the reader will come away with only a basic knowledge of how the Roman army evolved, though historians from H. H. Scullard to Adrian Goldsworthy have identified the military as perhaps the main element of Rome's sociopolitical system. The centuries-long development of Rome's distinctive political mechanisms is deftly sketched but not explored in detail. At the end, a sympathetic reader may well feel what it was like to be Roman but he will have little understanding of how it all came to be.

The focus of both Beard and Holland on how a city-state empire at its height succumbed to the machinations of self-

In contrast to Beard's impressionistic approach, Holland paints like a Dutch Master, meticulously detailing how one family monopolized power in the greatest empire in history and then precipitously lost it. The author of *Rubicon*, a fine popular work on the fall of the Roman republic, Holland here shows a family drama as a cautionary tale of what happens when personality takes over politics. As Rome suffered through a century of civil unrest and war, the new autocracy instituted by Augustus necessarily depended increasingly on the character of individual emperors. Such was the price paid by the former republic for stability after a century of increasing upheaval.

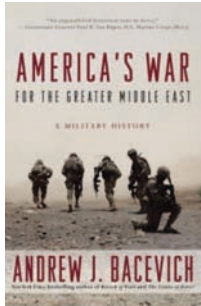
As Holland demonstrates in exquisite detail, while it took decades of civil war to destroy the republic, the intrusion of the image of the emperor into nearly every facet of daily life, from coinage to public statues, occurred in almost no time at all. The decisions that ruled the lives of the empire's subjects were increasingly hidden from view, moved from the Forum to the imperial precincts on the Palatine Hill. A people that had prided itself for centuries on the public settlement of all questions affecting the republic quickly satisfied itself with a fictive

interested in sports and entertainment, is complicit in the attenuation of its freedom. At the same time, there are indeed worrying signs about the public veneration of our leaders: The beatification of Barack Obama severed popular opinion about a political leader from reality for perhaps the first time in American history (except, maybe, for JFK). The aggrandizement of the presidency has been occurring for decades, and this distorting trend is steadily chipping away at the Constitution.

The phenomenon of Trumpism is another step in the process of the triumph of personality over ability and experience, and the gutter battles now being fought over the candidates' families is a sign of depravity among political "professionals" that the Romans would have known all too well. Should this not prove a temporary aberration in U.S. politics, a tale like Holland's—of sanguinary plotting, brutal capriciousness, and the constant risk of upheaval—might gradually come to dominate the American political imagination. That alone would mark a tragic loss of the balance so carefully created by the Founding Fathers, a balance, ironically, based on the unwritten constitution of the Roman republic. **NR**

The Costs Of Retreat

DAVID FRENCH



America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History, by Andrew J. Bacevich
(Random House, 480 pp., \$30)

AMERICA'S very long war in the Middle East has been an expensive, bloody mess; on that point, virtually all can agree. But has it been a failure? Has it been a waste? And what are the credible alternatives?

Andrew Bacevich's ambitious new book attempts to answer these questions by examining the intentions and outcomes of every significant American military conflict in the Muslim world—he defines the “Greater Middle East” as stretching from Afghanistan to North Africa, and even into Bosnia and Kosovo—beginning with the failed attempt to rescue American hostages in 1980 and stretching into the present conflict against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and beyond.

Though Bacevich's book is full of potshots against Charles Krauthammer, Max Boot, and other conservative writers and politicians, I found myself nodding along with his analysis time and again. While the sheer number of conflicts covered means that he can't do an in-depth analysis of any single war, he does an effective job of comparing expressed goals with chosen tactics and real-world outcomes. Moreover, unlike many critics on the left, Bacevich knows and understands the American military, its culture, and its capabilities. He's a graduate of West Point and a retired colonel—and a man who lost his only son in the Iraq War. He's

given far, far more than most to the country he loves.

The book reveals a number of critical truths, exposing deep flaws that have persisted for decades in American strategic thinking—flaws that have led successive American presidents to ask the American military to accomplish the impossible, often while barely providing it with the resources to accomplish even the most modest of goals.

The first truth is that American leaders have committed American forces to the Middle East while barely understanding the history, culture, and faith of the region. It is simply remarkable to contemplate the extent of American naïveté. American leaders have been unwilling to confront or seriously grapple with the full implications of the reality that the Middle East is a maelstrom of conflicting tribes, conflicting strains of the Islamic faith (some apocalyptic and jihadist), and brutal strongmen. The desire for freedom does not, in fact, beat

in the heart of the Middle East—or, at least, that desire takes a back seat to the quest for vengeance or domination.

Because we fail to understand the cultural forces in play, we've obsessed over leaders—believing that a succession of bad men are primarily responsible for the region's ills. Remove Saddam Hussein, and Iraq can flourish. Remove Osama bin Laden, and al-Qaeda will wither. Remove Moammar Qaddafi, and Libya will revive. But as Bacevich notes, these men are products of history, culture, and faith. They do not spring up *sui generis*, and they are easily replaced. (The obsessive focus on the “bad guy” isn't just an American political and strategic failing, it's a media failing as well. Barrels of ink have been spilled tracing the particular rise of Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, or Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. American forces keep cutting off the “head of the snake,” but the snake stays alive.)

THE SS *NORMANDIE*

Confiscated from Vichy France, she sat
In the Hudson for months until the fire.
The smoke was so thick over midtown, rumors
Spread the Japanese had attacked New York.
The old transatlantic style fulfilled itself
In her Art Deco and Streamline Moderne.
She looked like a giant clipper, narrow
As a blade in Cassandre's poster, black hull,
White decks, red belts at waterline and bow.
France herself seemed docked off 42nd Street,
A windy boulevard of flags, a hall
Of mirrors larger than Versailles filled
With families, couples, aloof aristocrats,
Loners in tuxedos staring at the waves,
Card players in capes and gowns, a score of chefs,
Waiters staggering across the Atlantic,
Bound west for Manhattan one more voyage,
A wine cellar the size of the Morgan
Library, an orchestra floating beside
Confounded seabirds strutting on lifeboats
Seating eighty.

The Francophiles are gone,
Belloc, Repplier, Wallace Stevens, who loved
France forever, until death, loved her
For what she had been, not what she'd become.
The old Thomists are gone, Maritain, Gilson,
Marcel, who left Vichy on the *Normandie*
And watched her towed for scrap down the Hudson.

—LAWRENCE DUGAN

The failure to understand the local culture, like the belief that killing leaders can destroy popular movements, leads to persistently under-resourced military efforts. Bacevich is effective in laying out how, time and again, American forces have been given sweeping goals but provided with limited resources. A striking number of times, American forces have found themselves outnumbered, and occasionally they have even found themselves outgunned, in battles with Somalis, Afghans, and Iraqis. Even the most ambitious military efforts—including the invasion of Iraq—were under-resourced. America has proved unwilling either to leave the Middle East alone or to commit the overwhelming resources that would at least have given American forces a fighting chance to accomplish our somewhat grandiose goals.

ties, and now a safe haven for the world's worst terrorists.

Bacevich looks at this reality and rightly asks Americans to reexamine their priorities, to ask whether the Middle East's natural resources or even the prevention of mass slaughter are worth the price we've paid or worth the mistakes we've made. It is here where I begin to part company with him. Despite his call for Americans to better understand the region—including its potent religious influences—I fear that he underestimates the consequences of withdrawal.

The region's ills long predate American involvement, and American intervention has had only a marginal effect on Middle Eastern culture. If the Greater Middle East were little more than an oil-soaked zone of competing strongmen, it would present a challenge to

to confront the bloody reality that there are no permanent answers; there is, however, permanent self-defense. Americans look at the challenge of the Middle East and seek to remake the region, believing that the right combination of diplomacy, military effort, and cultural engagement can create a new version of Western Europe or Japan—enemies-turned-friends in an interconnected world. Wise Israelis look at the Middle East and see something else entirely—a region populated by millions of people committed by faith and tradition to jihad. Thus the need for eternal vigilance and a permanent posture of self-defense.

This vision is a hard sell for idealistic Americans. We want solutions. We want answers. I'm frequently asked, "How do we defeat ISIS?" By that, the person means, "How do we solve the

The Middle East's ills long predate American involvement, and American intervention has had only a marginal effect on Middle Eastern culture.

Indeed, with the partial exception of the Gulf War—in which the U.S. committed overwhelming resources but stopped short of achieving decisive victory—the recent American interventions represent one long story of war on the cheap. Not even after 9/11 were Americans truly mobilized for war. In the run-up to the Iraq invasion, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pressed commanders to present him with options for an ever-smaller invasion force. Ultimately, American forces charged to Baghdad with less than half the forces initially recommended.

Finally, with the exceptions of the "Carter Doctrine"—which declared that protecting the Persian Gulf from Russian and Iranian aggression was in the national interest of the United States—and George W. Bush's strategic effort to remake the Middle East through the Iraq invasion, America has too often pursued military conflict with no real strategy beyond ameliorating the crisis at hand. The military action against Libya is a textbook example—a bloodless (for Americans) air war helped depose Qaddafi but led to chaos on the ground, subsequent American casual-

American interests (the global economy is key to American prosperity, even if our nation depends little on Middle Eastern oil), but it would not truly endanger our way of life. But the region is home to a militaristic, expansionist, and apocalyptic strain of Islam—the same strain that has empowered jihad for over a thousand years—and it is that challenge that commands our attention.

Jihadist Islam sweeps away national boundaries, raises the specter of genocide, and creates refugee crises that destabilize our allies. Jihadist Islam seeks to develop and use weapons of mass destruction in the heart of America. America did not create the threat of jihadist Islam, and American retreat will not eliminate the threat. Violent expansionism has been a central fact of Islamic existence, and the Ottoman Empire's fall after World War I did not result in a change in Islamic theology so much as a call among Islamists for Islam to return to its jihadist roots—to reclaim what it had lost and resume its (allegedly rightful) march to world domination.

Israel has faced jihad from the first moments of its founding, and it has had

problem of jihad?" The first answer is relatively easy. ISIS—to the extent that it exists as a battlefield power—can be crushed with a fraction of American military might. But jihad—as an idea—is deeply embedded within the Islamic world and will continue to exist independent of any American military effort.

Consequently, we will continue to fight. We will have no choice. Wars do not end simply because we want them to end. But we should fight with cold-eyed clarity—aware that one act of self-defense will spawn a fresh round of grievances that will necessitate the next military response. The effective use of military force can suppress jihad, sometimes for years, but it cannot end jihad. Nor can American retreat and withdrawal. As Samuel Huntington noted, "Islam has bloody borders"; and in an interconnected world, those borders now stretch into the heart of the West.

Read Bacevich—not for the solutions he proposes but to be sobered by the challenge. Our long war is just beginning. The least we can do is learn from our mistakes. **NR**

DAY #4 ON THE NR 2016 CARIBBEAN POST-ELECTION CRUISE



After 3 nights on the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, you wouldn't have known Larry and I once thought we "weren't cruisers." Good thing Kim and Jerry convinced us to really check out those NR magazine ads we'd looked at for years. NR cruises sounded like fun, and since we wanted a special 30th Anniversary trip, we figured, let's do it. Did we ever make the right decision?! This voyage is a **BLAST**—everything our friends said it would be, and more. The ship and our cabin are beautiful, the food delicious. Make new friends? We've made a bunch, including some NR speakers. Find quiet places? There are plenty, so you can read, write, nap ... draw! When we embarked Larry handed me pencils and this notebook and gave me that "go ahead" look. From our balcony

I spied this lonely palm, and began drawing for the first time in years. (It felt wonderful: the old art major has still got it!)



JANE—WE ARE SITTING WITH VDH TONIGHT AT DINNER! CAN'T BELIEVE IT! I KNOW I PACKED 30 OF HIS BOOKS TO SIGN, WHERE DID YOU CUT THEM? ~~ALSO~~ ... BING WEST

AND ALLEN WEST SAID LET'S ALL OF US HAVE LUNCH FRIDAY AFTER THE SEMINAR WOW!! ~~ALSO~~ ... KIM! JERRY AND THE LOBES ARE ALSO ON THE TULUM TOUR! ~~ALSO~~ ... THE NR SWOOPER IS TOMORROW!!! (I CAN'T SPELL!)

MORNING SESSION

Today was kicked off with a fascinating one-on-one interview where Jay Nordlinger quizzed David French about the Left's assaults on religious business owners and the First Amendment. It was an education. Then there followed an hour-plus panel with Allen West, Bing West, and Andy McCarthy—yep, all of them—moderated by John Hillen, on the situation facing America's military in Iran and Afghanistan. Bing had several eyewitness stories about just how tough our troops are. Too bad their Commander in Chief is ... Anyway, we watched it sitting next to Neal Freeman and his wife (we chatted afterwards about his close relationship with Bill Buckley and launching *Firing Line*, and before you knew it, we were making lunch plans with our new pals, "Neal" and "Jane").

PORT TIME We pulled into Georgetown, Grand Cayman just before lunch, and ... I never saw a sky so blue. So we grabbed our things and we headed in to sightsee (and

draw!) and to have a bite. We picked a spot right on the water, and yep: Larry had the turtleburger! While we were enjoying the scene along came some NR folks with James Lileks and Charlie Cooke and Rob Long—they sat with us and gosh we talked about everything from North Dakota to Charlie's music career to Hollywood. We

left them in mid-laugh for marketing, and on the walk over Larry mentioned—you see the ads, and you wonder (because we sure did) are these speakers really going to be on the cruise? Are Rich and Ramesh and Nah (he signed my copy of Liberalism the first night!) and Eliana and the rest going to be on the ship? Well, they are! And they're accessible, inviting, fun, friendly.

AFTERNOON SESSION What a panel: VDH, John Yoo, Steve Hayward, and John Miller (talk about an all-sar lineup) made us cringe with their tales about the academy. Then Kat Timpf (oh my is she ever funny!) did a one-on-two with John Podhoretz and Heather Higgins about New York, and how the Big Apple is turning sour again. It was a humorous but troubling talk about what happens (and fast!) when Lefties and "progressives" get their mitts on a municipality. That was just one of eight NR sessions happening this week. When it ended I turned to Larry and said: "I am so glad we did this." He replied: "You just read my mind." Then he grabbed my hand and we were off to the Spa!



COCKTAIL PARTY Oh my what a fun time! Out by the Lido pool hundreds of NR guests enjoying each others' company. We met up with Kim and Jerry, and Al and Marta Lobe (new friends!) and then several people just like us (Red State vote, Blue State address) joined in, and before you knew it a dozen of us were deep in talk about the direction the conservative movement is taking. And then KLO and Jonah joined us. We must have taken a dozen pictures with them. That was cool. But then the whole week has been!

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GUEST #1: Name as listed on Passport (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE)		Date of Birth
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[]		[]
GUEST #2: Name as listed on Passport (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE)		Date of Birth
[]	[]	[]
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PASSPORT INFORMATION This cruise requires a valid passport. Passports should expire after 5/21/17. Failure to provide this form of documentation will result in denied boarding of the *Nieuw Amsterdam*. For more information visit www.travel.state.gov.

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All rates are per person, double occupancy, and include all port charges and taxes, all gratuities, meals, entertainment, and *National Review* activities. Failure to appear for embarkation for any reason constitutes a cancellation subject to full penalties. Personal items not included. **PLEASE CHECK ALL APPLICABLE BOXES!**

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Every Night 3-4 times 2 times Once

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: I understand and accept the terms and conditions of booking this cruise package and acknowledge responsibility for myself and those sharing my accommodations (signed)

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Your legal first and last name are required for travel documentation. If you have an informal name you would like reflected on your name badge, please indicate it here:

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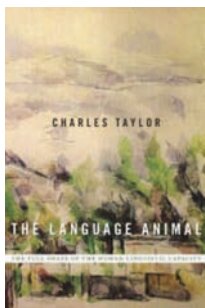
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SIGNATURE OF GUEST #1 _____

DATE _____

I Speak, Therefore I Am

EDWARD FESER



The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity, by Charles Taylor (Belknap, 368 pp., \$35)

NEWSPeAK is the artificial, regimented, highly condensed language of the totalitarian society of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. So reduced is its expressive power that certain ideas easily conveyable in (say) ordinary English become, for the Newspeak, unsayable, and ultimately unthinkable. That is, of course, exactly what its creators intend.

Philosopher Charles Taylor does not mention Newspeak in *The Language Animal*, which is odd, because it is an apt and obvious analogy for the highly influential but deeply flawed conception of language he devotes the book to criticizing. Perhaps he is being politic; certainly the target of his attack has had some eminent defenders. Taylor labels it the “designative” or “enframing” conception of language and traces it to thinkers including Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac (after whom he also dubs it the “HLC” approach to language). Its modern representatives include (among others) the logical-positivist philosophers of the Vienna Circle. Taylor thinks its deepest assumptions are taken for granted even by many contemporary theorists of language who are otherwise critical of this tradition.

Mr. Feser's most recent book is Neo-Scholastic Essays.

Those assumptions are as follows. First, language essentially functions to describe and convey information about objects that exist independently of language and that come to our attention before we name them. Second, metaphorical language adds nothing to the description of objective reality but merely conveys our subjective reactions to it. Third, the objects about which language conveys information should be understood in a metaphysically restrictive way—for example, as being reducible to what is physical, or to what is empirically detectable. Fourth, correct descriptions of reality can be given only from the third-person perspective, rather than from the first-person point of view of the human observer.

Taylor does not deny that language conceived of in this HLC manner has its place. It is obviously appropriate to scientific modes of description. But it does not do justice to moral, aesthetic, religious, political, literary, and cultural discourse. Notoriously, logical positivism dismissed theological and ethical language as strictly meaningless or devoid of cognitive content. Most thinkers in the HLC tradition would not go that far, but they nevertheless inevitably fail fully to capture the aspects of reality conveyed in these non-scientific modes of discourse. In particular, the HLC account of language fails, ironically, to capture the full reality of language users *themselves*—the flesh-and-blood human beings who are not only scientists but also moral agents, appreciators of beauty, political actors, cultural innovators, and so on.

In opposition to the HLC tradition stands an alternative approach that emphasizes what Taylor calls the “constitutive” and “figuring” aspects of language. It traces historically back to thinkers including Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt (after whom Taylor labels it the “HHH” conception of language), and its modern representatives include (among others) Heidegger, the later Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty. This rival tradition is the one Taylor champions.

The HHH tradition emphasizes, first of all, that language users are not disembodied minds that merely passively take in information about pre-

existing objects and then apply labels to them. Rather, they are essentially *embodied*, and their grasp of the meanings of terms involves various kinds of behavior, including active interaction with the things the terms refer to. We grasp the meanings of words such as “run,” “hammer,” and “apple” in part by virtue of running, using hammers, and eating apples. The use of linguistic expressions is also continuous with gestures, body language, habits, and other seemingly non-linguistic bodily phenomena.

Furthermore, the introduction and use of linguistic expressions sometimes plays a role in actively *creating* or *constituting* the phenomena to which the expressions refer. For example, notions such as that of living a “meaningless” life, or of being “cool,” or of being a “dandy,” came into being in part by virtue of the very introduction of these terms into our language. The terms do not describe some reality that entirely preexisted these expressions’ having “caught on” within the community of language users. Certain individual speech acts can also bring into being the realities they describe. For example, someone with the authority to do so can, by uttering the words “I now pronounce you man and wife” under the right circumstances, bring a marriage into existence.

The HHH tradition also emphasizes the irreducible role that metaphor plays in capturing certain features of reality. For example, we often speak of one class of things (dogs, say) falling *within* a larger class (pets), or of being *in* love, or of trying to get *out of* a bad situation. In all of these cases we are applying a “container” metaphor, and it is hard to see how we could convey the ideas in question without it.

From the HHH point of view, the HLC tradition’s empiricist or physicalist metaphysical restrictions, and its insistence that reality can be described only from the third-person perspective, are simply dogmatic and not true to the facts. Actual human life—including the practice of scientists themselves—cannot be understood except in a “hermeneutical” way, one that traces out the interconnected meanings that we grasp only from the first-person point of view. Taylor notes that the HLC tradition has been hypnotized by

the successes of post-Galilean science, which deliberately excludes from its picture of nature Aristotle's notion of final cause or inherent purpose. *Human* purposes and meanings have tended to go out the window with it, so that the HLC approach to language has seemed, to those beholden to scientism, to be unavoidable. But this fallaciously supposes that, because the scientific mode of description has tremendous utility in understanding *some* aspects of reality, it must suffice for *all* aspects.

Taylor ends by calling for a return to Aristotle's conception of man as a rational animal, emphasizing that what he calls "the full shape of the human linguistic capacity," rather than

in the meal there is something that is *analogous* to the goodness of a book, *analogous* to the goodness of a person, and so forth.

Like metaphor, analogy greatly expands the expressive power of language, but unlike metaphor, it is literal rather than figurative. Accordingly, recourse to the Thomistic account of analogy can help rescue Taylor, and the HHH approach in general, from the charge of obscurantism, which the HLC tradition is bound to fling at it.

Another problem is that Taylor does not challenge (and indeed at one point even seems to concede) the assumption that post-Galilean science gives us an exhaustive account of the natural

Taylor purports only to be making a first step in the recovery of the full range of **our linguistic capacity**.

the truncated HLC account, must inform our understanding of what rationality involves.

Taylor's argument is salutary and powerful. His erudition is impressive, and the rich diet of examples he assembles poses a serious challenge to facile reductionist accounts of language and of human nature. On the downside, he can be somewhat prolix, and his arguments are sometimes too sketchy, set out in a manner that is highly suggestive but that more-stubborn opponents are unlikely to find compelling.

There are also some surprising gaps in Taylor's argument. Amazingly (especially given Taylor's Catholicism), he says nothing about the theory of the *analogical* use of language famously associated with Thomas Aquinas and developed by later Thomists. Think of the way we use the word "good" to describe a meal, a book, and a human being. The term does not mean exactly the same thing in each case—the goodness of a meal is very different from that of a book, and both are very different from the goodness of a morally virtuous person. But that doesn't mean we are speaking metaphorically or non-literally when we use the same word in these cases. Rather, we are speaking *analogically*, in Aquinas's sense. We are saying that

world. Thomists and other Aristotelians would deny this and maintain that, while the description of nature that physical science affords is correct as far as it goes, it is nevertheless incomplete and needs supplementation by metaphysics. Despite his expressed sympathy for the classical Platonist and Aristotelian traditions in philosophy, Taylor stops short of endorsing, much less defending, any such metaphysics.

This threatens to open him up once again to the charge of obscurantism. If (as he at least implicitly seems to concede) the physical world in general really is entirely devoid of any purposes or meanings whatsoever, then how could genuine, irreducible purposes and meanings ever come to arise in this one tiny pocket of nature that we call the human world? To concede that nature in general is devoid of purposes and meanings makes it very difficult to resist the conclusion that the human purposes and meanings Taylor wants to affirm are illusory.

But then, Taylor purports only to be making a first step in the recovery of the full range of our linguistic capacity, and he promises a follow-up volume. Judging from his first word, we are well advised to keep our ears attuned to his last word. **NR**

Falstaff In Muti's Hands

JAY NORDLINGER

Chicago

FOR the past many summers, I've hosted a public-interview series at the Salzburg Festival. Last summer, one of our guests was Gianandrea Noseda, an Italian conductor. He was conducting Verdi's opera *Il trovatore* at the festival. We talked about that opera, of course, and others by Verdi.

Because I thought it would be interesting to Noseda, and to the audience, I made a confession: Though I acknowledged Verdi's last opera, *Falstaff*, as a masterpiece—and something unique in the world—I had never been able to warm up to it. Could he help me?

Noseda spoke very interestingly on the subject, which led me to bring up *Così fan tutte*, the Mozart opera. That's another one I have sometimes balked at. And *Così* and *Falstaff* are related, in several ways. Moreover, they happen to be the favorite operas of Riccardo Muti, the famed Italian conductor, now the music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

At the end of the summer, I wrote a little journal about the festival, including my conversation with Noseda. By e-mail, I got a note from Maestro Muti's chief of staff, Emily Master, explaining that the CSO would perform *Falstaff* the next April, as part of a Shakespeare celebration. The world would be marking the 400th anniversary of the writer's death. Would I care to come to Chicago, to observe Muti in rehearsal, and talk with him, and maybe warm up to *Falstaff*?

Sure. Here I am.

"Allora," says Muti, beginning his final rehearsal of the opera. ("So.") The conductor's famous head of hair shows some gray now, but he looks essentially as he did when I first saw him, in about 1980. He tells the orchestra that the opening measures



Riccardo Muti

must be “like a spring,” bubbling forth—and that’s how they come out. Muti does not say much to the orchestra or the singers in this final rehearsal. But what he does say tends to emphasize liveliness and character. Every note and word must be invested with life and meaning.

He sings a bit on this afternoon, and sings well. He is renowned as a solfèger—a user of the do-re-mi system—and it’s clear why.

Out in the seats, there is a guest far more important than any visiting critic: Pau Gasol, the Spanish-born star of the Chicago Bulls. He is a gracious guest, all 7 feet of him. At breaks, he poses for pictures with his fans in the orchestra, and in the cast. He is a fan of theirs, too.

Verdi began work on *Falstaff* in 1889, when he was 75. His librettist was Arrigo Boito, whom we also know as a composer—of *Mefistofele*, the only opera he finished. *Falstaff* is based on the three plays in which Shakespeare placed that “fat knight”: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*, both parts. Sir John Falstaff is a buffoon, of course. Or is he?

Verdi took his time on the opera, much to the consternation of Boito, who kept asking where it was. Maybe Verdi would die before completing it? Verdi mentioned this possibility himself. He did not seem overly concerned, either, about whether *Falstaff* would see the light of day. It did—having its premiere at La Scala, Milan, in early 1893. Verdi would soon turn 80.

The audience liked *Falstaff*, sort of, but it liked Verdi a lot more, roaring for this lion. The opera, frankly, confused them. It was unlike the 27 other operas that had come from this composer’s pen. To begin with, it had no overture. And it proved to be through-composed, pretty much—an opera without arias, duets, and other such pieces to applaud. The characters just sang—more like talked—straight through.

Also, there was the texture of the opera: light, intricate, effervescent, *grazioso*. There was almost none of the grandeur of, say, *Aida*, with its elephants. *Falstaff* was fat, but fleet.

Falstaff was not a hit with the public, but it was a hit with Arturo Toscanini. In the first half of the 20th century, this conductor would champi-

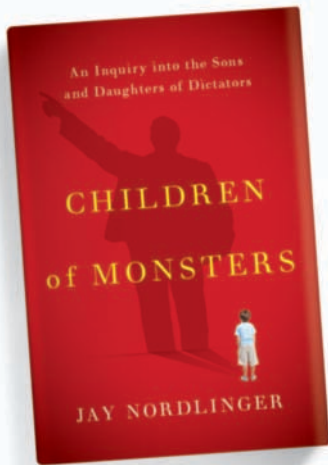
on the work, loving it deeply and understanding it thoroughly. (The two amount to the same thing, I think.) Other conductors have been similarly devoted to *Falstaff*: Herbert von Karajan, for one. James Levine, for another. And, of course, the starry, superb maestro sitting next to me at breakfast here in Chicago.

Muti recounts how he learned *Falstaff*—from his teacher, Antonino Votto. The veteran maestro knew the work cold. He could have written it down from first page to last, if called on to do so. Young Muti asked him, “Maestro, how is it possible that you know this opera so well?” Votto answered, “You would too, if you had worked with *him*.” The *him* in question was Toscanini. Votto was his assistant during the 1920s.

Toscanini charged him with teaching the title role to Mariano Stabile, who would become the outstanding Falstaff in history. Votto worked with him for six months. Then they went to Toscanini’s home, to audition. Toscanini said, “Fine, you are right for the part. Now go work on it for another six months. Then come back.”

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That was a different era, as Muti notes. Today, a leading singer may waltz in for the final rehearsal. "That's the reason we have so many problems with superficial performances, and performances that are not really accurate. The conductors have lost authority."

Falstaff relates to Verdi's life, says Muti. It's an extremely personal work. For 50 years, Verdi had written operas for the public—on commission, on deadline, etc. This one was for him, for his own purposes. He was feeling morose at this stage of life. He had had his glory, but he had also faced much criticism. Wagner had captured the fancy of the so-called intellectuals in Italy; they regarded Verdi as provincial and passé. Who was *he*, who could write only simple melodies with an oom-pah-pah accompaniment?

He answered his critics in *Falstaff*, which brims with compositional sophistication. It both borrows from the past and points toward the future.

These days, says Muti, we speak the name "Verdi" with reverence. He is perpetually on a pedestal. But, in his autumn years, he feared that he had wasted his life, writing operas that had no value. He was born a peasant, he said, and he would die one, out in the country, where he lived (though in an elegant villa). At the end of *Falstaff*, we get an ensemble that declares, "Tutto nel mondo è burla," i.e., "Everything in the world is a joke, a trick, a big fat farce. Nothing matters, and you can't trust anyone." *Falstaff* is regarded as a comedy, which it surely is. But it's also laced with pain—and Muti sees the opera as more sad than happy.

"Guilty, rotten world!" says Falstaff, when the "merry wives" have dumped him into the Thames. "There is no longer virtue. Everything declines. Go, old John. Be on your way. Keep walking till you die." That is Verdi, says Muti: That is how Verdi felt. "I insist, because I have dedicated my life to this composer, that Falstaff is Verdi, in all aspects."

The opera is not without loveliness, as Muti says. Take the love music between Anne and Fenton: young, innocent, fresh. Verdi could write music expressing all sorts of love, as

Muti details (and sings!). The erotic, as in *Un ballo in maschera*. The jealous, as in *Otello*. In *Falstaff*, when he is nearing 80, Verdi looks back to a kind of first love.

When you dig into it, this opera offers complexity upon complexity, says Muti.

Does conducting it give him pleasure? "Sì, molto," he says. It gives him a lot. But only if you have singers and an orchestra that can handle the opera. "At La Scala, I could do *Falstaff* without moving my fingers." Muti was capo of that company. "They had worked with me for so many years, through so many rehearsals." But when the Vienna State Opera asked him to come and conduct *Falstaff* there—as it did several times—Muti said no. Because there would not be enough time to get it right.

And with his Chicagoans, he has had enough time, after six years of his music directorship, which has included plenty of Verdi.

In *Falstaff*, we have the real McCoy, says Muti: the real Verdi. His genuine self comes through. And "*Falstaff* is very much like Mozart," adds Muti. When Verdi was writing *Falstaff*, he had at his bedside three sets of scores: the quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Mozart's critics said that he lacked the skill to write a fugue (if you can imagine). And what do we find at the end of the last movement of the symphony that turned out to be his last? A grand fugue. And what do we find at the end of Verdi's last opera? "Tutto nel mondo è burla," a fugue.

Near the end of our breakfast, I ask Muti, "Is *Falstaff* a perfect opera, in your opinion? Is there anything wrong with it?" He answers, "I'm nobody to make such a judgment, but, for me, it's perfect." I then tell him I want to ask a heretical question. It's about his other favorite opera, *Così fan tutte*. "Is Act II too long?" "Sì," says Muti, immediately. "The first act is *perfect*. The second act is beautiful, but at a certain point it does not find a way to end."

I should have a showdown with *Così*, someday, but it will have to wait. For now, I can't stop listening to, and thinking about, and loving, *Falstaff*. **NR**

Film
Golden Days

ROSS DOUTHAT

THINK about a stereotypical college or high-school comedy. Then think about its villains. You can picture them, can't you—smug, dumb jocks, striding the football field or hanging around their frat house like lords of the earth, treating women like objects and lesser men like serfs, just begging for the comeuppance that only a serf-turned-screenwriter can give them?

But have you ever wondered what the world looks like from their point of view? Hath not a jock eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? If you prick them, do they not bleed?

This is the conceit behind Richard Linklater's *Everybody Wants Some!!* (yes, two exclamation points, as in the Van Halen source text), his first movie since the critically beloved *Boyhood* and another return to the Texas landscape that he's painted so affectionately throughout his career. Here the setting is a Texas campus in the year of Ronald Reagan's victory over Jimmy Carter, and our characters are a group of baseball players, just arrived on campus and settling into their autumn routine—meaning a round of practice, partying, and chasing the prettiest coeds they can find.

Everybody Wants Some!! is being billed as a kind of spiritual sequel to Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* (1993), an early-career peak in which his camera followed a motley group of Texas teenagers around on the last day of high school in 1976. There are similarities: It has the same relaxed, deliberately underplotted vibe, the same rambling bull-session dialogue, the same skillful use of era-appropriate music. But *Dazed* was a panorama of a high school's social world, while this is a zooming close-up of the jocks; even when they tour the wider college world, it's all seen through their eyes. And while *Dazed* was spiked with angst and fear and bursts of violence, *Everybody Wants Some!!* is a story



Glen Powell, Wyatt Russell, Blake Jenner, J. Quinton Johnson, and Temple Baker in *Everybody Wants Some!!*

in which almost all the characters get something that they want.

Our way in to this sunshine semester is through a freshman pitcher, Jake Bradford (Blake Jenner), who enters the baseball house and finds a band of brothers waiting for him: the charming chatterbox Finnegan (Glen Powell), the scowling senior slugger Glenn (Tyler Hoechlin), the lively black infielder Dale (J. Quinton Johnson), the country bumpkin Billy Autrey (Will Brittain), the bearded stoner-philosopher Willoughby (Wyatt Russell), and a few more comrades. The movie then unspools over the course of a long weekend before classes begin, following the players from party to party, scene to scene, onto the baseball field and then back into the social whirl.

The through line, such as it is, consists of Jake's pursuit of a girl named Beverly (Zoey Deutch), who flirts with him early on after rejecting his older teammates' advances, and who turns out to be a theater major, which leads the baseball boys (who have already hit up disco, country-western, and mosh-pit scenes on their peregrinations) to a strange costume party in the movie's final act.

But really *Everybody Wants Some!!* is less a story than an appreciation—of youth, athleticism (the actors can really play baseball, happily), long lazy hours, and music and the fairer sex. There are few real shadows and there is little conflict; the only intimation that this Eden is impermanent comes late in the film, when it turns out that one of the players has faked his age, that he's a serial impostor trying to hang on to college ball and the college life. (This bit is also the clearest call-out

to *Dazed and Confused*, whose most famous line was delivered by Matthew McConaughey's twentysomething former high-school stud: "High-school girls: I get older, they stay the same age.")

But even this surprise is more an amusement, ruefully accepted between games of ping-pong and attempts to bisect a slow-pitched baseball with an axe, than a real cloud across these young men's Texas sun. Other sources of tension are entirely invisible: Race and class seem to matter not at all, the punk kids and theater geeks welcome the jocks, the girls are game and hard-drinking and nobody's talking about "affirmative consent," the hayseed's fears that his girlfriend might be pregnant are waved away and proven groundless, and—as this is 1980 and not 1990—absolutely nobody's worried about AIDS.

Nor are they really worried about philosophical matters, the deep questions of life, which, as in Linklater's other films, get batted around casually during the endless breeze-shooting, but not (despite what some of the movie's critical admirers have suggested) with any memorable weight or wit or insight. But then, on the evidence of Linklater's story, these men don't need deep insights to get along in this phase of their life. All they need is what they have—the body's grace and the guilelessness of campus godhood.

It's a strange movie, all in all. Relaxed as always with Linklater, charming in its way, eminently watchable, but mostly dedicated to a proposition that every teenage dork and geek and loser knew already all too well: It's good to be the king. **NR**

Trumpkins Having a Ball

JUST two months after moving to D.C., I observed one of the best moments I'll see in my life. It was at the "Hinckley" Hilton in Dupont Circle—the hotel where Reagan got shot—on the night of the White House Correspondents' Dinner. I had joined colleagues for the pre-dinner drinks that different media outlets host. There's an escalator in the hotel that guests cram onto, and a staffer stood at the top telling women, quite sternly, to take care that their gowns didn't get stuck in the escalator tines.

I found this kind of hilarious—a full-time employee whose only responsibility for the night was to keep people's clothes from getting stuck in heavy equipment? Do people in this odd city really not know how to wear clothes and ride escalators at the same time? What is up with these people? Do they need help?

A few moments later, though, the gravity of the situation became crystal clear: A woman got her gown snagged in the perilous escalator, and she didn't realize this till it was stuck at the bottom of the long, people-packed moving staircase and at least two dozen blissfully unaware, mildly tipsy White House Correspondents' Dinner-goers were flooding down toward her, and a bloody catastrophe seemed all but guaranteed—all but guaranteed, that is, until a quick-witted security guard leapt across the room, grabbed the woman's arm, and yanked her out of the escalator with such force as to nearly throw her across the room. She stuck the landing, though, brushed her hair off her face, and headed on to the next happy hour.

I report this to highlight an eternal truth: that the White House Correspondents' Dinner, every year, brings together hundreds of glamorous, wealthy, serious adults who seem incapable of performing basic human tasks. It's a four-day celebration of everything absurd and trivial and ridiculous about D.C. It brings out lots of feelings, and it's sort of a Rorschach test for how you feel about American politics. Thus this year's dinner highlights just how little a President Trump would change D.C. culture.

If the idea of an overdressed lobbyist's getting her dress stuck in an escalator and almost causing a multi-dozen-person pile-up in the hotel where just 32 years earlier Ronald Reagan got SHOT doesn't sound to you like the most Trumpian thing that has ever happened, you clearly don't watch much cable news. The Trumpishness of the White House Correspondents' Dinner has nothing to do with ideals or public policy, of course. In fact, the event's ideological promiscuity is a major indicator of just how Trumpy it is. In the same way that ideologies and values are blissfully absent from Trump's campaign, they're total non-issues over the course of the long weekend. The one shared passion, it seems, is for getting extremely wasted in front of people you need to impress.

Betsy Woodruff is a politics reporter at the Daily Beast.

A wonderful correspondents'-dinner paradox is that it's both very exclusive and very (very) easy to get into—at least, it's very easy to get into the fun parts. Invites to the dinner itself are tough to come by unless you're an advertiser for a media company or a B-list celebrity promoting a direct-to-TV movie. But let's be real: The dinner isn't exactly the hottest ticket; stars of shows that air on the CW get crammed into a ballroom, mashed against talk-radio producers and RV-industry lobbyists and U.S. senators, eating less-than-extraordinary cuisine and listening to a speech that they could also watch on TV. Before enjoying these earthly delights, though, they mob through a metal detector, which dramatically protracts the seating process. I've been to Trump rallies with better crowd control. Perhaps the event planners should compare notes.

But while the dinner itself is invitationally and logistically challenging, getting into the building is pretty much a piece of cake. The pre-parties held adjacent to the ballroom that holds the dinner itself are mostly RSVP-only, but e-mail invites spread like herpes. Not that I would ever do this kind of unethical and problematic thing, but if your friend from out of town lets you know the day before the dinner that she's visiting for the weekend, you could—theoretically! only theoretically!—get her into enough parties to have a perfectly decent time. In the same way that getting a seat inside the Trump press fence is a big pain but getting into a Trump rally takes the mental capacity of a goldfish, getting into WHCD parties is only slightly more difficult than getting into a D.C. Walmart. It feels like a big deal. And it isn't.

That isn't to say it's guaranteed. A fellow reporter—who didn't want me to name her for fear she would "sound bitchy"—said she saw an adult woman weeping openly at being turned away from the Funny or Die party. Tears.

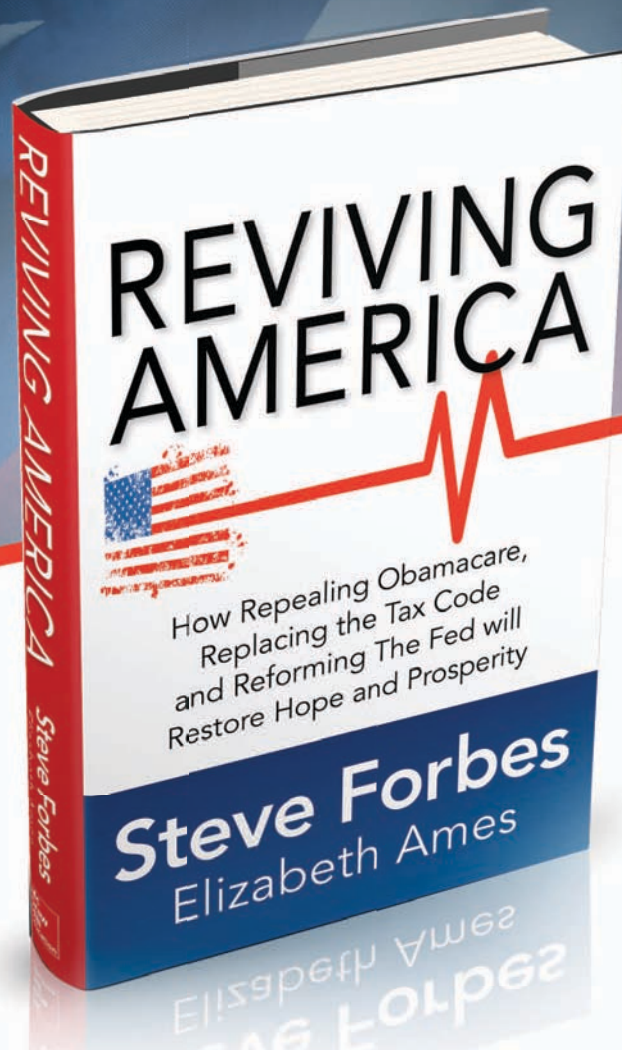
The Washingtonians who waited in a line wrapped down the block around the Newseum to get into *The Onion's* Joe Biden-themed party have nothing but similarities with Trump supporters. The devotion is the same. The love is pure.

The similarities aren't just aesthetic; who can forget the spat heard round the world between the *Huffington Post's* Ryan Grim and Fox News's Jesse Watters, ably refereed by RNC communications director Sean Spicer? If this sounds like the kind of thing that would happen at a Trump rally, that's because it is. If you think Trump supporters are hooligans, wait till you meet D.C. journalists.

So the similarities between Trump culture and White House Correspondents' Dinner culture may be greater than the differences. America may not be ready for Trump. Western Civilization may not be ready for Trump. Leaders of small Eastern European and Central Asian nations that rely on American foreign aid for their defense sure as hell may not be ready for Trump. But D.C.? Beyond ready—been practicing for years.

NR

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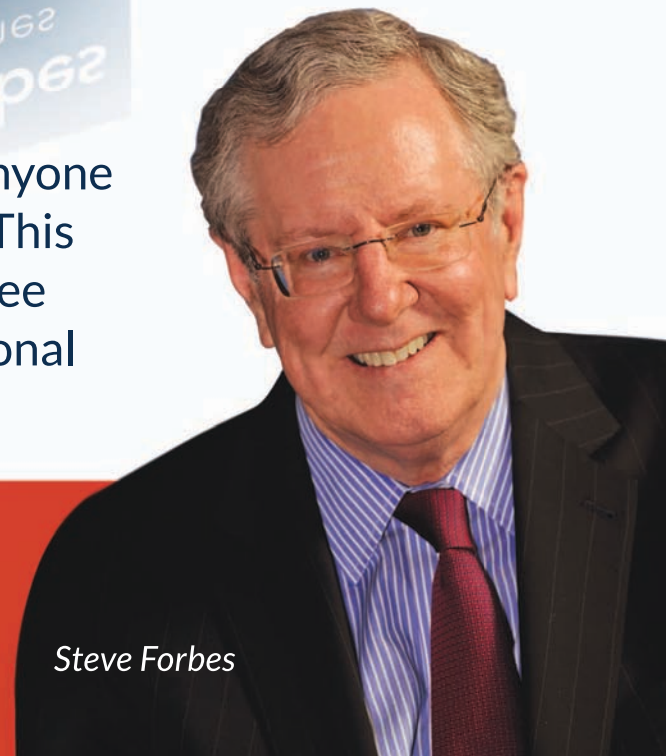
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