

Imitating Israel
ANDREW J. BACEVICH

The Rich Secede
MIKE LOFGREN

Conservative Kerouac
ROBERT DEAN LURIE

Elitism & Its Enemies
SAMUEL W. GOLDMAN

SEPTEMBER 2012

The American **Conservative**

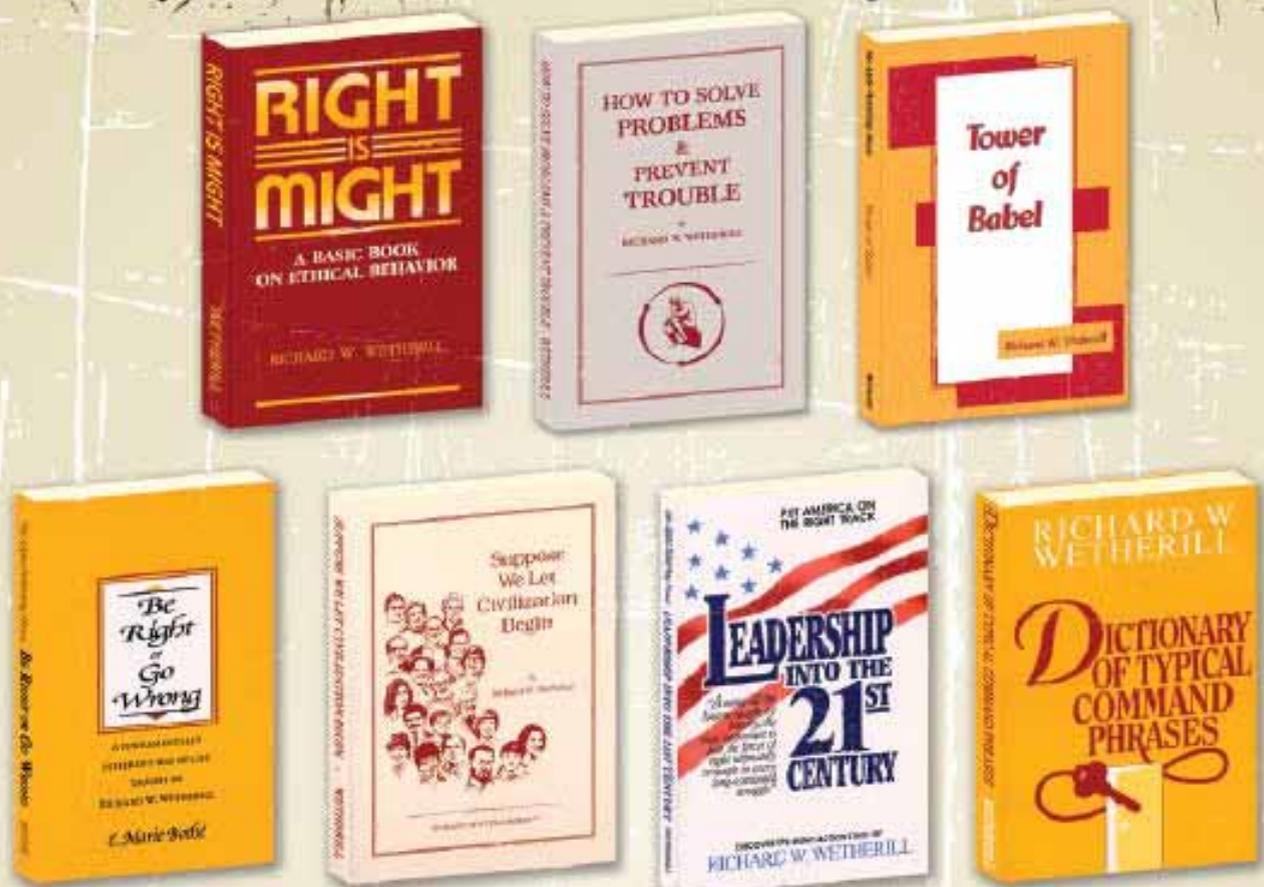
IDEAS OVER IDEOLOGY • PRINCIPLES OVER PARTY

What's Exceptional About America?

RICHARD GAMBLE



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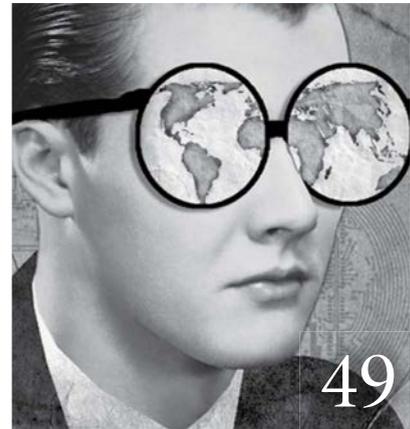
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This Month

VOL. 11, NO. 9, SEPTEMBER 2012



ARTICLES

- 16 **How We Became Israel**
Peace means conflict for Tel Aviv—and us.
ANDREW J. BACEVICH
- 19 **Revolt of the Rich**
The super-affluent secede from America
MIKE LOFGREN
- 24 **LePage Against the Machine**
Maine's Tea Party governor
MICHAEL BRENDAN DOUGHERTY
- 28 **Battle of Columbus**
“Fast and Furious” gets a sequel
ED WARNER
- 31 **The Right & the Drug War**
Will conservatives embrace legalization?
ANTHONY GREGORY
- 34 **Killer Culture**
We've been anesthetized to violence
R.J. STOVE
- 38 **The Conservative Kerouac**
An icon of rebellion who loved his Church
ROBERT DEAN LURIE

COVER STORY

- 12 **American Exceptionalisms**
Federalism, not empire, makes us unique
RICHARD GAMBLE

FRONT LINES

- 6 Dudes shirk parenthood
ROD DREHER
- 7 Syria's gang war
WILLIAM S. LIND
- 8 Alexander Cockburn, RIP
RON UNZ
- 9 Obama recruits for Republicans
JORDAN BLOOM

COMMENTARY

- 5 We are all isolationists now
- 11 Al-Qaeda's master plan
PATRICK J. BUCHANAN
- 18 Two new wars for us
PHILIP GIRALDI
- 27 Defense budget freeze
MICHAEL D. OSTROLENK
- 37 Mind your language
RICHARD M. WEAVER
- 41 Gore Vidal in letters
BILL KAUFFMAN
- 58 Olympic gold
TAKI

ARTS & LETTERS

- 42 *Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy* by Christopher Hayes
SAMUEL W. GOLDMAN
- 45 *The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton* by Michael Federici
GEORGE W. CAREY
- 47 *They Eat Puppies, Don't They?* by Christopher Buckley
SCOTT GALUPO
- 49 *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* by Robert D. Kaplan
WILLIAM ANTHONY HAY
- 51 *The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story of the Suspect Behind the Largest Security Breach in U.S. History* by Chase Madar
CHRIS BRAY
- 53 *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality* by Chris Mooney
HENRY CHAPPELL
- 55 “The Best Man” on Broadway
NOAH MILLMAN

Cover illustration: Michael Hogue

Letters

BUCKLEY AND RUSHER

Wick Allison's review of David Frisk's biography of William A. Rusher, *If Not Us, Who?* (July 2012), is (mostly) terrific. Allison, following Frisk, accords Bill Rusher his rightful place in the vanguard of the conservative movement, and he is deft and perceptive in his characterization of Rusher. Allison's review is also beautifully written, with some stunning metaphors.

It is all the more a pity, then, that Allison couldn't resist those three sentences concluding his account of the 1990 meeting at Bill Buckley's home in Connecticut at which he, Rusher, and John O'Sullivan argued against Buckley's intended sale of *National Review* to Rupert Murdoch. In those sentences Allison doesn't exactly say but more than implies that WFB's anger over their opposition was what led to the departure from *National Review* of Allison and O'Sullivan, and that it led also to a permanent rupture between WFB and WAR.

I have never known the full story of those departures, but it seems a bit unlikely that if Buckley were angry enough about his colleagues' disagreement to fire them, he would wait nearly a year in Allison's case and seven years in O'Sullivan's.

As for Bill Rusher, who had already retired, Allison writes, "I doubt that Rusher was ever invited back." Since such an estrangement would have been sad indeed, I'm very glad to be able—as the keeper of the Buckley calendar—to report that the two Bills next lunched together in May 1991, one of many meetings over the ensuing 17 years. In May 1992, WFB asked WAR to serve as moderator for three "Firing Line" shows he taped in Taipei.

Furthermore, Bill Rusher remained an active member of *National Review's* board of directors, faithfully attending the twice-yearly directors' meetings (followed, always, by dinner) at

the Buckley's Manhattan apartment. He continued doing so even when the directors' meetings became largely ceremonial after June 2004, when WFB transferred the *National Review* stock to a new entity, Constitutional Enterprises. Indeed, David Frisk, in the book under review, records WAR's attendance at the very last directors' dinner, in October 2007, and reports that "Rusher sadly confided that Buckley, Van Galbraith, and others of their generation seemed to have aged considerably."

LINDA BRIDGES

Editor-at-Large, *National Review*
New York, N.Y.

Wick Allison replies:

Thanks to Linda Bridges for her good words and for her corrections to the record. I was wrong to conflate the timing and therefore connect John O'Sullivan's departure to the Rupert Murdoch incident. Indeed, John was agnostic on the question. And, of course, I was plainly wrong about Buckley and Rusher's continuance of their long association, for which I apologize. Buckley and I had lunch once a year until his death, and it is no surprise that he and Rusher would meet as frequently as their travels permitted. Linda's correction reminds us of the generosity and loyalty that were the hallmarks of both of these great men.

YANKEE COME HOME

In "Neighborhood Watch" (July 2012), W.W. Chip claims Ron Paul is "naïve" and "simplistic" in calling for the removal of the American military from foreign soil. I can only ask: what is naïve and simplistic about this long overdue corrective to foolish American interventionism? There is no valid reason why U.S. troops are garrisoned all over this planet. Mr. Paul is right on target in proposing to bring our troops home.

TOM RAMSDELL

Oreland, Pa.

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No More Isolationists

Henry James was “cosmopolitan isolationist,” Henry Cabot Lodge an “isolationist imperialist.” Randolph Bourne was an isolationist who “espoused principles that we would today call internationalist,” while the ever bellicose Newt Gingrich is an isolationist because he favors “energy independence.” Such are the lessons of a new book—*Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a New Age* by Christopher McKnight Nichols—and a recent review of that book in *Dissent*.

Don't laugh. The smear “isolationist” has been used so often and in so many contexts that a case can be made for any of these figures fitting the bill. President Bush's critics on the left routinely counted him an isolationist, despite his invasion of Iraq, because he was a unilateralist. (Even that's not strictly true: the war did, after all, involve a certain “Coalition of the Willing.”) However inaccurate its use may have been, the term allowed progressives to believe they had been consistently fighting the same struggle from the 1930s to the 21st century—from Charles Lindbergh to Donald Rumsfeld.

Neoconservatives cherish the word for much the same reason: it allows them to say the enemy has always been on the side of fascism and appeasement. For them, not wanting to invest American blood and treasure in Iraq was tantamount—nay, identical—to ceding Europe to Adolf Hitler; thank you, Neville Chamberlain. No matter how much anti-war libertarians might favor free trade and open borders, no matter how European the outlook of traditional conservatives might be (and not just European, in the case of Irving Babbitt and others with keen Eastern interests), all deserve the isolationist tag. Because the only thing that isn't isolation, evidently, is war.

By either measure, then—that of the progressive left or the aggressive right—George Washington must have been an isolationist when he warned in his Farewell Address against “permanent, inveterate

antipathies against particular Nations, and passionate attachments for others” and advised us “to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” President Jefferson proved to be one as well, when he called for “Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations ... entangling alliances with none.” And John Quincy Adams, despite being author of the doctrine that carries President Monroe's name, sounded like the worst isolationist of all when he said America “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”

Each of these men fails the adventuresome ideologue's test, whether administered by the left or the right. The wars that followed the French Revolution, after all, were exactly the kinds of things neo-conservatives today would clamor to fight—though on which side is unclear. (Their ideological fury and aspirations to world-shaping power match the Girondists and Napoleon, but they make quite a show of their disdain for the French.) Progressives, meanwhile, would fault these fathers of the republic for their aversion to global-scale government.

Yet Washington, Jefferson, and the Adams family were not isolationists, any more than is anyone so labeled today. America in her infancy was surrounded by great powers: the British to the north and ocean east; Spain to the south in Florida; France in the lands Jefferson would purchase from Napoleon. What the statesmen of the early republic sought was to marshal the country's strength by avoiding unnecessary conflicts—wars of choice—and while they were not averse to deploying that strength in limited engagements when necessary, they envisioned no role as peacekeeper, let alone ruler, of the world. America would lead—but by example, not arms. And those who follow this counsel today are not isolationists; they are, with a small-r, republicans. ■

Front Lines

Four Men and No Babies

Is “Fortress Astoria” the end of the family?

by ROD DREHER

In a large Queens apartment its inhabitants have dubbed “Fortress Astoria,” four middle-aged bachelors are making a what-me-worry? last stand against marriage and the conventional trappings of manhood.

The men, all college buddies, all heterosexual, have been living together since their university days. According to a recent profile in *The New York Times*, they choose to live together be-

“I think the secret to our success is that we don’t think too much about the future,” says another. “We live together because we live together. That is all.”

It’s hard to get too upset about the Fortress Astorians. They all seem like nice guys who pay their bills with money earned from respectable jobs. Besides, not everybody is cut out for marriage and family life. If these fellows have found a way to support them-

selves and do happy, productive work, what’s the big deal? It’s not the end of the world, is it?

Well, it might be. The Fortress Astoria man-children, says the *Times*, are part of a growing trend in American life, in

which traditional family structures and patterns break down and are replaced by “fluid networks and bonds not dependent on blood ties.” In Fortress Astoria, the dudes have no sense of mission in life beyond making themselves happy in the moment, which requires keeping their options open—with jobs and with their girlfriends.

What becomes of a society that considers marriage and family to be only one choice among many, with no expectation that one ought to commit to one over another? Readers of the sociologist Carle C. Zimmerman know the answer: it may well disappear.

In his unjustly neglected 1947 work

of sociological history, *Family and Civilization*, republished by ISI Books in 2008, the late Harvard social scientist tracked developments in family formation in three great civilizations: ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and the modern West. It is always a mistake to blame a civilization’s decline on a single cause, but Zimmerman makes the case that the fall of both ancient civilizations had much to do with the long, slow collapse of family life—a collapse that was already well underway in the West at the time of Zimmerman’s writing.

It is impossible to do justice to Zimmerman’s argument here, but the gist of it is this: when a civilization quits believing in familism—the conviction that a key purpose of society is to support and advance the family—it falls apart. And when people think of marriage and family as a choice, not as an obligation or (less onerously) simply something one does, it becomes hard to stop the unraveling.

“Familism has to be motivated by the acceptance of ideals of behavior based upon a *way of life* and not upon the usual systems of rewards and punishment in nonfamily society,” Zimmerman writes (emphasis in the original).

It’s not hard to understand why. Marriage and family cost plenty, in terms of sacrifice of individual freedom and financial gain. Men and women alike have to subordinate their own desires for the sake of the family. This loss of autonomy can be frightening to the unmarried, but it’s common for young couples with children to speak of the surprising joys that come from this necessary sacrifice. In

When a civilization quits believing in familism—the conviction that a key purpose of society is to support and advance the family—it falls apart.

cause they enjoy each other’s company and because doing so makes it financially viable for each to pursue his artistic calling.

Now, as the “man-children” (as one calls himself and his housemates) approach 40, without wives and children, without a steady career path, and without savings in the bank, are they rethinking their choices? No.

“The freedom this has allowed me to have—to figure out my own quirks and foibles—has been much more important than investing in things that might have tied me down to something that would have kept me from figuring those other things out,” says one.

fact, Zimmerman contends that one can only understand the meaning of familism from experience.

When family formation is seen as culturally optional, and men can find sexual satisfaction without marital commitment or loss of social status, what pressure compels a man to trade in dudehood for manhood?

There are no conventional rewards and incentives that make the sacrifice of marriage and childbearing worthwhile, as national governments facing falling birthrates have learned to their dismay. Either people believe in familism as a matter of pre-rational conviction, often supported by religion, or they don't. Once that conviction is lost—especially, says Zimmerman, among the opinion-leading classes—it is all but impossible to stop civilizational demoralization, decay, and ultimately, dissolution.

That's a lot to put on the shoulders of four middle-aged guys in Queens who will likely get rich when Judd Apatow inevitably decides to make a film about their cutesy living arrangement. But no matter how many times we hear it, ideas really do have consequences. According to their own unembarrassed testimony, the men of Fortress Astoria only think of themselves and the present moment—two psychological characteristics of childhood, not adulthood. In that, they are a bourgeois-bohemian version of the social decomposition that has conquered black America and is rapidly overtaking the white working class, with the notable and happy exception that none of the Astorians are siring children outside of wedlock.

The irony is that among the educated classes, marriage is stable and getting stronger. The Fortress Astorians are exceptions to a trend within their own social class.

Or are they? Many educated people in media and academia—the values-forming class in this culture—prefer not to impose their own familistic beliefs on others, except to insist on gay marriage rights. They believe as

strongly as the bachelors from Queens that marriage and family are not institutions and practices to which one must conform but rather an expression of individual choice. This, not familism, is the way of life into which Americans today are acculturated.

Thus does Fortress Astoria, manned (if that is the word) by the Knights of Eternal Dudehood, stand as a crusader castle of the progressive creed amid

the conquered lands of familism. Enconced in its ramparts, they're not thinking too much about the future. It should come as no comfort to these man-children that the future—which history suggests belongs to the fecund and familial—is not thinking much about them, either. ■

Rod Dreher is a TAC senior editor. His blog is www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher.

Gangs of Aleppo

The Arab Spring succumbs to post-state violence

by WILLIAM S. LIND

In the view of our Laputan foreign-policy establishment, what is happening in Syria and elsewhere is a conflict between “democracy” and dictatorship. Valiant youths who fight for “freedom” are destined to triumph, bringing happiness and prosperity to their formerly oppressed lands. This is the Whig version of history—the progressive narrative. It bears little resemblance to reality.

A Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi came closer to truth. He was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that Syria faces “gang warfare.”

Gangs are one of the most basic, and most potent, building blocks of stateless Fourth Generation war. We commonly think of gangs in connection with crime. But through most of history, the line between crime and war was blurred, often to the point of vanishing. (See Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror: The calamitous Fourteenth Century*.)

It was the state that drew the line clearly, but today in much of the Middle East and elsewhere states and the state system are collapsing. What is succeeding the state looks much like the 14th century Europe Tuchman describes: people and regions are at the mercy of roving bands of armed men who hire themselves out as soldiers when they

can and otherwise take what they want from anyone too weak to resist them. Their only loyalty is to each other—to their gang.

One of the characteristics shared by most disintegrating states is a vast surplus of young men who have no access to jobs, money, or women. Gangs are a magnet for them. We see this in American contexts as well: in public schools, in ethnic neighborhoods, and in our prisons, most of which are controlled not by wardens but by racially defined gangs.

Young men are also drawn to fighting, which, conveniently, is something gangs do. Much of what we see in states struggling for their lives such as Syria is supply-side war. Fighting spreads not because of some “cause” like democracy but because idle young men see a fight and join in. Why not? They have nothing to do, nothing to lose, and thanks to their new gang and AK-47, lots to take: money, women, and fame. The *New York Times* reported from Aleppo:

Residents said there were not just clashes between the government and insurgents, but also rival militias from the countryside fighting for control of individual streets. ... In a central old quarter, one man said a friend had warned him not

to visit because young gunmen had established a checkpoint to rob car passengers.

Gangs fight not only the government but also each other, and their internecine wars further weaken the state. We need look no further than to our southern neighbor, Mexico, where the killing fields spread as drug gangs massacre one another and any civilians or agents of the state who get in their way. The state arose to bring order, and widening gang wars reveal the state's impotence. In the struggle for legitimacy that lies at the core of Fourth Generation war, a state that cannot control gangs becomes an object of contempt for friend and foe alike.

While gangs are not prominent on the radar screen in America at present, they have been in the past and will be again. The film *Gangs of New York*, set in the mid-19th century, was not fiction. *West Side Story* reflected a fear of gangs that was widespread in the 1950s. Crips and Bloods were big news a few years back.

The voices in Washington who call for us to suppress gangs in places halfway around the world underestimate the opponent. When the economic crisis really begins, it may take all the resources of the American state to control gangs here at home. They are no less a refuge for unemployed young men in Chicago or Atlanta or Tuscon than in Benghazi or Damascus.

Meanwhile, if you want to envision places such as Libya, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali—the list keeps growing—you could do worse than to think of spreading rumbles in the 'hood. That is a far more accurate picture than the two-sided “democracy vs. dictatorship” image purveyed by politically correct Polyannas. The bulletins of the Syrian Foreign Ministry, it seems, mislead less than those of the U.S. State Department. ■

William S. Lind is director of the American Conservative Center for Public Transportation.

Buckley's Unlikely Heir

Alexander Cockburn (1941–2012)

by RON UNZ

I first encountered the writing of Alexander Cockburn in the early 1990s on the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, where he served as a regular columnist. Given that Alex was one of the premier radical-left journalists of our era, this highlights the unique background of the man.

Being myself then a rather moderate and mainstream conservative, I don't recall reading any of his particular pieces or holding them in high regard. With the Berlin Wall having already fallen, the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe overthrown, and the Soviet Union itself undergoing dissolution, I had the sense that Cockburn was a bit dismayed by these revolutionary changes which were so welcomed by almost the entire thinking world. So I put him down as something of a stubborn left-contrarian and after glancing at his column usually shifted my attention to the endless discussions of tax policy and free trade that occupied the

entire remaining sheet of gray newspaper. Eventually, I noticed that his columns had stopped appearing, which didn't much surprise me.

His second act in reaching my awareness came just over a decade later, following the September 11 attacks. During the years of public build-up to our ill-fated Iraq War, which my old friend Lt. Gen. Bill Odom later described as “the greatest strategic disaster in United States history,” it was extremely rare to find an opinion in any mainstream media outlet not fatally contaminated with the sort of ignorance or cowardice that was leading America straight over the cliff.

In this parched desert of rational discussion, I somehow in 2002 or 2003 stumbled across a link to one of Alex's *Counterpunch* columns, which seemed to provide the sort of remarkably good sense almost totally absent from the pages of the major newspapers and opinion magazines. As I told a few friends at the

time, perhaps that Cockburn fellow really isn't the silly leftist I'd vaguely assumed him to be. And as I gradually began to spend some time reading the collection of well-written commentary he daily provided on his shoestring website operation, its perspective on reality came to seem more and more credible, while that of the *New York Times* op-ed page sank at an equal speed.

Given my own scientific background in theoretical physics, I tend to follow a simple rule in attempting to discover the reality of the world. When people say things widely denounced by all established opinion but that turn out to be correct, I grant them an extra point.



Alexander Cockburn in 1977

But when allegedly well-informed people backed by massive resources say things that seem absurd to me and these turn out to be totally false, they lose a point. By the time the massive hoax of the Saddam's WMD had exploded into international ridicule and national disaster, Alex's *Counterpunch* and the Sulzbergers' Gray Lady had largely switched their positions of credibility in my mind, at least across a broad range of issues. In the years that followed, there were many mornings when I would read endless amounts of absurd, dishonest nonsense in the news pages of the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, only to discover a far more plausible and accurate discussion of world events on *Counterpunch's* bright pages.

Meanwhile, my own intellectual horizons were steadily broadened by his stable of regular contributors, sometimes in unexpected ways. Alex was very decidedly a man of the left, indeed of the second generation, given that his father Claud had been one of the leading communist journalists of the 1930s. But the severe compression of the allowed ideological landscape in American journalism had established his website as a port in the storm for conservative voices as well.

It was at *Counterpunch* that I first encountered the pungent military analysis of William Lind. When I once showed one of Lind's articles to an acquaintance, he denounced Lind as an ignorant leftist, only to be shocked when I explained that Lind had had an illustrious career as a congressional staffer specializing in military reform and was also the longtime closest collaborator of Paul Weyrich, one of D.C.'s most prominent movement-conservative leaders.

I appreciated the thoughtful commentary on our Middle East policy by Kathleen and Bill Christison, former CIA analysts specializing in that region, and later discovered the same last name on articles of the same subject in back issues of *National Review* from

the mid-1980s. *NR's* loss was *Counterpunch's* gain.

Similarly, Paul Craig Roberts had for decades been one of the leading conservative intellectual figures at the intersection of academics and policy, playing a major role in crafting the economic policies of the Reagan administration and holding a variety of top-ranking appointments in the conservative firmament, while being one of the most widely distributed national columnists. But after he refused to toe the line following 9/11, he was ruthlessly purged, and his important voice might have been lost if *Counterpunch* and a few other websites had not provided him a venue.

Add the names Ray McGovern, Winslow Wheeler, Franklin Spinney, Pierre Sprey, and a few others to this list, and it sometimes seemed like half the *Counterpunch* articles I read were by authors with unassailable national-intelligence, military-affairs, or even movement-conservative credentials. Purged, blacklisted, or simply ignored by Conservatism, Inc., they often relied upon Alex's webzine as the primary distributor of their well-informed writings. Once or twice I joked with Alex that perhaps he was actually Bill Buckley's truest heir.

Credibility represents a valuable capital asset, one that may easily be invested for further gain or loss, and Alex always had the courage to risk his holdings boldly, including on those issues which greatly infuriated his usual allies on the left.

In the mid-2000s, I was quite surprised to read Alex's columns unmasking himself as a global-warming "denialist," making some pretty good arguments for his skepticism, and ridiculing the notorious group-think of America's lock-step—and scientifically illiterate—punditocracy. Not having investigated the subject myself, I don't really have a position, but I would say that Alex's sincere perspective counted more for me than that of a hundred dutiful oil-company hirelings writing for conservative think tanks and could go toe-to-toe with the absolutely universal views found among all their mainstream opponents.

Alex Cockburn was simply a remarkably courageous, honest, and free-thinking journalist, which in these dark days marked him as a very rare figure indeed. ■

Ron Unz is publisher of TAC and founder of Unz.org.

The Party Left Him

Obama helped make former Rep. Artur Davis a Republican

by JORDAN BLOOM

Artur Davis, a former Democratic congressman from Alabama, was the first House member outside Illinois to endorse Barack Obama's presidential bid. Yet over the next several years he bucked his party on a number of high-profile votes and became the sole member of the Congressional Black Caucus to oppose the president's healthcare reform law in 2010. After losing a primary bid for governor in his home state, Davis

reemerged in 2012 as a Virginia Republican, floating tantalizing though decidedly noncommittal hints that he might run for office again. *TAC* recently spoke to him:

TAC: The Republican Party's platform hasn't changed much since the Bush years, except with a bit more fiscal stringency thanks to the Tea Party. So did your views change, or did the Democratic Party simply become inhospitable?



Rep. Artur Davis

Artur Davis: The Democratic Party became more insular, and I finally decided over the course of the last year and a half that the things the Democrats were saying weren't resonating with me and that the things that the Republicans were saying did. I'm certainly one of many Americans disappointed with the Obama presidency, one of many Americans who voted for promises that haven't been delivered on. So my switching parties may be of interest to people because I used to be an elected official, but it's frankly a fairly broad trend in parts of the country. And you'll definitely see that in Virginia. Barack Obama got about 53 percent of the vote in Virginia. Barack Obama is running about 46 right now. There are a lot of people who left the Democratic Party.

TAC: To what do you attribute the Democratic Party's failure to advance any credible plan for entitlement reform?

AD: The Medicare program constructed in 1965 was for a different country and a different population than the

one it serves today, but essentially it's financed in the same manner. That's not sustainable. We can't sustain a system where Medicare is a universal program that is a God-given American right if you're a senior with a certain income level. If we want to preserve the safety net aspects of Medicare, which we absolutely need to, we're going to have to make changes to the program. We are going to have to give people a viable option out of Medicare, particularly when they're affluent and when they can afford it.

Social Security will not exist like it does today for people under 30. It absolutely won't. And if we don't make smart, prudent changes in the system, we will end up with a system that can't even meet basic safety net goals. And I think that's the risk the Democrats are incurring now—that by their loyalty to the present system for financing and sustaining Social Security and Medicare, they are contributing to an insolvency that will eventually undercut the safety net goals that were a core part of these programs.

TAC: You've been a critic of both a laissez-faire approach to Wall Street and the new regulatory regime embodied in the Dodd-Frank Act. Are there regulatory solutions to the financial system without breaking up the big banks?

AD: I'm a Republican that believes that we do need regulatory reform in the next couple years. And I'm a Republican who does worry that some of the large banks continue to take on risk that is at an unacceptable level. I worry that the rules are entirely too hazy. I worry that the lines of what is permissible behavior and what's not permissible behavior are more opaque than ever in the aftermath of Dodd-Frank.

I'm torn about the too-big-to-fail question. When I hear legitimate conservatives like Stephen Moore [of the *Wall Street Journal*], whose credentials are indisputable, say for the first time that they think there is something to the idea of preventing large investment banks from occupying such a large space of this economy, I have to take that seriously.

TAC: Who are some of your intellectual influences writing today?

AD: Reihan Salam and Ross Douthat, who wrote a very constructive book several years ago about Republicans re-fashioning themselves to be a middle-class friendly party, as conservatism was in the Reagan era. David Brooks is sometimes a mile wide and an inch deep, but at his best he makes sound observations about the challenges in the American economy and the limits of an untethered free-market approach to the capital markets. And he has made some sound observations about the need for conservatives to constructively address gaps in this society. We do have a gap in this country between rich and poor. We do have a gap between people whose livelihood is in the manufacturing sector and people whose livelihood is in the high-tech sector. They exist and it's not wrong for conservatives to think constructively about how markets and public policy can meet those gaps.

Conservatism offers to the public a sense of responsibility, fiscally speaking. A sense of personal responsibility in terms of the obligations individuals have towards themselves as opposed to obligations government has towards them. And conservatism does contribute a sense of limits. I think conservatives ought to be pushing to inject that perspective into the questions of how we address the gaps in our society instead of acting as if they are somehow things we shouldn't be bothered with. ■

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Al-Qaeda's Map

“A part from political maps of mankind, there are natural maps of mankind. ... One of the first laws of political stability is to draw your political boundaries along the lines of the natural map of mankind.”

So wrote H.G. Wells in *What Is Coming: A Forecast of Things to Come After the War* in the year of Verdun and the Somme Offensive. In redrawing the map of Europe, however, the statesmen of Versailles ignored Wells and parceled out Austrians, Hungarians, Germans, and other nationalities to alien lands to divide, punish, and weaken the defeated peoples. So doing, they set the table for a second world war.

The Middle East was sliced up along lines set down in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement. But with the Islamic awakening and Arab Spring toppling regimes, the natural map of the Middle East seems now to be asserting itself. Sunni and Shia align with Sunni and Shia, as Protestants and Catholics did in 17th-century Europe. Ethiopia and Sudan split. Mali and Nigeria may be next. While world attention is focused on Aleppo and when Bashar Assad might fall, Syria itself may be about to disintegrate.

In Syria's northeast, a Kurdish minority of two to three million with ethnic ties to Iraqi Kurdistan and 15 million Kurds in Turkey seems to be dissolving its ties to Damascus. A Kurdish nation carved out of Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran would appear to be a *casus belli* for all four nations. Yet in any natural map of the world, there would be a Kurdistan.

The Sunni four-fifths of the Syrian

population seems fated to rise and the Muslim Brotherhood to rule, as happened in Egypt. The fall of Assad and his Shia Alawite minority would be celebrated by the Sunni across the border in Iraq's Anbar province, who would then have a powerful new ally in any campaign to recapture Sunni lands lost to Iraqi Shia. With its recent murderous attacks inside Iraq, al-Qaeda seems to be instigating a new Sunni-Shia war to tear Iraq apart. The fall of the Alawites in Damascus would end the dream of a Shia crescent—Iraq, Syria, and Hezbollah—leave Hezbollah isolated, and conceivably lead to a renewal of Lebanon's sectarian and civil war.

The losers in all this? Certainly Iran, which seems fated to lose its only Arab ally, Syria, and its land link to Hezbollah. That would make Israel a winner. But Israel's situation appears more perilous than it was a decade ago.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has replaced Hosni Mubarak, who kept the peace in Sinai and the lid on Hamas. Recently, new Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi met with Hamas's Khaled Meshaal at the presidential palace in Cairo. The Sinai is becoming a no man's land where terrorists plot and Africans cross to Israel.

To Israel's east, there is no true peace with the Palestinians, and the Jordanian throne has rarely been shakier. On the Golan Heights, quiet for decades, the future may see Syrian troops loyal to a militant Sunni regime in Damascus. Hezbollah sits on Israel's northern border. Beyond is a Turkey no longer friendly.

Israel is blaming the atrocity in Bulgaria, in which Israeli tourists were

massacred, on Iran. But neither the Bulgarians nor the Americans appear to know who did it. And why would the Iranians—who following the slaughter publicly denounced such atrocities against civilians—do it?

Were an Iranian hand to be found in this act of barbarism, it would give Israel justification for an attack, igniting a war in which America could be dragged in. Why would Iran want a war with the United States when that would mean destruction of its air force, navy, missile force, and nuclear program, a crippling blockade, and perhaps destruction of its vital oil facilities on Kharg Island?

Whoever was behind the attack on the Israeli tourists seems to want a war between the Jewish state of Israel and the Shia state of Iran. Who would benefit from such a war?

Answer: Al-Qaeda, which, during the Iraq War, urged the United States to bomb Iran back to the Stone Age. An al-Qaeda affiliate has also attacked Israeli vacationers before, at Egyptian resorts on the Gulf of Aqaba.

“There is an international plot against Gulf states in particular and Arab countries in general ... to take over our fortunes,” says Dubai's chief of police. “I had no idea that there is this large number of Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf States.”

What is al-Qaeda's goal? Ignite Sunni-Shia wars and Muslim-Christian clashes in Arab states. Draw in the Americans to smash Iran. And when the Sunni are ascendant, expel the Americans and Christians, isolate Israel, and set about creating the caliphate of Osama bin Laden's dream. ■

American Exceptionalisms

The old kept us out of conflict; the new leads to empire.

by RICHARD GAMBLE

In 1765, John Adams unwittingly penned one of the proof texts of American exceptionalism. “I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder,” the young lawyer wrote in his diary, “as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.”

This one sentence sums up what we have come to assume is America’s calling: to be a beacon to the world and a liberator on a mission of universal redemption. This was heady stuff for 18th-century colonists with the chutzpah to resist the British Empire. Perhaps such a powerful meta-narrative helped them triumph over impossible odds.

But the simple story of the American identity gets complicated when we discover that Adams edited out these musings when he extended his thoughts a short time later for publication as his *Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law*. When his son John Quincy came upon the excised words, he regretted the omission and exclaimed, “Who does not now see that the accomplishment of this great object is already placed beyond all possibility of failure?” Charles Francis Adams in 1851 called his grandfather’s sentiments “the most deserving of any to be remembered.” If John Adams had reservations about American exceptionalism—and he did—later generations got over them.

Today, the United States owes more to the hubristic exceptionalism of Adams’s descendants than to anything bequeathed to us by the Founders of the republic. Hardly a trace of humility survives among the boasts of collective excellence we encounter with

numbing predictability from neoconservatives and their allies. Dissidents find themselves in the cross-hairs as apostates from the American civil religion.

The speed with which this neo-orthodoxy has been fastened onto the popular mind is astonishing. In *America by Heart*, Sarah Palin’s 2010 “reflections on family, faith, and flag” (as the subtitle promises), the former Republican vice presidential candidate used the word “exceptional” 20 times, the word “exceptionalism” 14 times, and devoted all of chapter three to “America the Exceptional.” Palin’s preoccupation with this idea is remarkable in contrast to her 2009 memoir, *Going Rogue*. There she—or ghostwriter Lynn Vincent—didn’t use the word once. In the year between these books, “exceptionalism” became central to the GOP’s marketing campaign. “There is a depressing predictability to conversations about America these days,” Palin complained. Indeed there is.

In Palin’s chapter on “America the Exceptional,” she quoted Barack Obama’s now-infamous answer to a question posed by *Financial Times* reporter Ed Luce at a televised press conference in Strasbourg held in conjunction with the 2009 NATO summit. The former Alaska governor complained that the president said “that he believes in American exceptionalism in the same way ‘the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.’”

Obama’s artful equivocation struck Palin as saying that no one is special if everyone is special. By relativizing America’s sense of itself, she charged, the

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president stood apart from an enduring tradition that united patriotic Democrats and Republicans into a single vision of the Redeemer Nation. But context matters. Here is the rest of what Obama told reporters in Strasbourg:

I'm enormously proud of my country and its role and history in the world. If you think about the site of this summit and what it means, I don't think America should be embarrassed to see evidence of the sacrifices of our troops, the enormous amount of resources that were put into Europe postwar, and our leadership in crafting an Alliance that ultimately led to the unification of Europe. We should take great pride in that.

At one level, Obama endorsed American exceptionalism. At another, he finessed exceptionalism with a post-modern flair that rendered his words anything but an affirmation of America's uniqueness. And the backstory of his comments reveals the charade going on at the nexus between the media, presidential rhetoric, and America's increasingly politicized image.

In an online post on April 4, 2009, *Time* White House correspondent Michael Scherer wrote that "[Obama's] answer was fascinating to me." He detected a telling contrast between the new president and his predecessors in the Oval Office. "While in the past the idea that America was exceptional, the shining city on a hill, was evoked as an objective description, a fact, a prediction and a course by which the ship of state could be sailed, Obama used the phrase, by contrast, in a more subjective, self-aware way, acknowledging that the fact that he held this belief was not so, well, exceptional."

Yet it turns out that Scherer was the one who wrote the question in the first place and fed it Luce, who admitted this in a tweet on June 14, 2012. The C-SPAN video of the news conference clearly shows the president working from a prepared list of questioners. The pretense here is breathtaking. A reporter writes a question, gives it to a colleague, who is then chosen to ask the question, and does so, after which the first reporter writes a glowing editorial praising the cleverness of the answer. One can't help wondering if the president saw the question ahead of time and if the answer was scripted.



This staged contrast in 2009 between Obama and his recent predecessors masks a deeper division in American history between two incompatible exceptionalisms, what we might call the "old" exceptionalism and the "new." On this view, Obama and Mitt Romney do not speak from separate traditions but from within the same ideological construction of the purpose-driven nation. Both speak for the new exceptionalism and sound like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. But we need not remain trapped in Alice's looking glass. The necessary resources are still there in our history for conservatives to articulate a compelling alternative. We might forego the word "exceptionalism" as damaged beyond repair by ideologues, but we need not reject all notions of America's differences. There is a reason why ordinary Americans respond to these ideas.

One place to turn is the work of William Graham Sumner. More than a hundred years ago the Yale sociologist noticed the damage being done to the old exceptionalism. His classic 1899 speech "The Conquest of the United States by Spain" affirms the

old exceptionalism in a way that might prove useful in combatting the new exceptionalism that bolsters nationalism and imperialism while undermining what's left of federalism.

Sumner deftly captured his thesis in his title. America had militarily defeated Spain on land and sea. But with that victory the United States had been conquered by the old European lust for empire. By its adventures in the Pacific and the Caribbean in the Spanish-American War, the U.S. was not venturing on something new but on something very old and even un-American. The old imperialism gave birth to the new exceptionalism.

"The point which I have tried to make in this lecture," Sumner emphasized, "is that expansion and imperialism are at war with the best traditions, principles and interests of the American people, and they will plunge us into a network of difficult problems and political perils, which we might have avoided, while they offer us no corresponding advantage in return."

There is much in Sumner's long speech of contemporary relevance. His indictment of President William McKinley could apply as easily to Bush or Obama. "A statesman," he said, "could not be expected to know in advance that we should come out of the war with the Philippines on our hands, but it belongs to his education to warn him that a policy of adventure and of gratuitous enterprise would be sure to entail embarrassments of some kind."

Sumner believed that the plunge into war and territorial expansion pointed first and foremost to a failure of statesmanship, the craven use of foreign policy to wage domestic party warfare, the "truckling to popularity" at the expense of "moral courage." But he knew that we cannot simply blame our leaders. A dangerous public appetite for spectacle and pomp made cynical political exploitation of imperialism possible.

"The thirst for glory," he said, "is an epidemic which robs a people of their judgment, seduces their vanity, cheats them of their interests, and corrupts their conscience." (Sumner was no "national greatness" conservative.) "My patriotism is of the kind which is outraged by the notion that the United States never was a great nation until in a petty three months campaign it knocked to pieces a poor, decrepit bankrupt old state like Spain."

When Sumner came to the question of what set America apart from other nations, he debunked the most popular and superficial conception of exceptionalism and looked at history to ground America's identity in something more substantial. Sumner first noted

the irony that by claiming it had a unique civilizing mission to perform, America sounded just like every other major power at the end of the 19th century.

"There is not a civilized nation which does not talk about its civilizing mission just as grandly as we do," he remarked. The English, French, Germans, Russians, Ottoman Turks, and Spanish said the same. "Now each nation laughs at all the others when it observes these manifestations of national vanity. You may rely upon it that they are all ridiculous by virtue of these pretensions, including ourselves." America's divine mission was emphatically not what set it apart in history. This kind of exceptionalism placed the U.S. on a crowded stage.

Sumner also feared that the new exceptionalism—the belief that Americans were somehow secure from changing circumstances, immune to limits on power and resources, and exempt from the impact of war and empire on free institutions—had seduced the public into believing that their prosperity, liberty, and security were inevitable blessings accruing to a special people, rather than the fragile products of abundant land, a small population, and benign neighbors. Once these circumstances changed, Americans would discover that "liberty and democracy" required hard work to sustain.

"People say that this country is like no other; that its prosperity proves its exceptionality, and so on," he cautioned. "These are popular errors which in time will meet with harsh correction."

Sumner's realism enabled him to put aside messianic and chosen-nation delusions and ground America's uniqueness in something far more valuable for a free and self-governing people—the historically rare creation of a federal republic. In an 1896 essay, "The Fallacy of Territorial Extension," he had already addressed this point. Americans in the late 18th century had seized the opportunity handed to them by history and geography to build a system that escaped Europe's errors: "This confederated state of ours," Sumner claimed,

was never planned for indefinite expansion or for an imperial policy. ... The fathers of the republic planned a confederation of free and peaceful industrial commonwealths, shielded by their geographical position from the jealousies, rivalries, and traditional policies of the Old World and bringing all the resources of civilization to bear for the domestic happiness of the population only. They meant to have no grand state-craft or 'high politics,' no 'balance of power' or 'reasons of state,' which have cost the human race so much.

This claim takes on even more significance when we recall that America had been through a bloody war of national unification in the 1860s, yet Sumner was still able to say that the United States was not a unitary nation-state on the model of the Old World, but rather “a confederated state of a very peculiar and artificial form. It is not a state like the states of Europe, with the exception of Switzerland.”

In the speech’s closing section, Sumner repeatedly used the words “no,” “not,” and “never.” This makes sense if authentic exceptionalism is more about what America doesn’t do than what it does, more about national self-restraint than national self-assertion. The early republic dreamed of a land, he said, with

no manors, no barons, no ranks, no prelates, no idle classes, no paupers, no disinherited ones except the vicious. There would be no armies except a militia, which would have no functions but those of police. They would have no court and no pomp; no orders, or ribbons, or decorations or titles. They would have no public debt. They repudiated with scorn the notion that a public debt is a public blessing. If debt was incurred in war it was to be paid in peace and not entailed on posterity. There was to be no grand diplomacy, because they intended to mind their own business, and not be involved in any of the intrigues to which European statesmen were accustomed.

Sumner did not offer nostalgia, and no statesman should do so today. What had been possible at the Founding may no longer be possible: “We know that, as time has gone on, and we have grown numerous and rich, some of these things have proved impossible ideals, incompatible with a large and flourishing society, but it is by virtue of this conception of a commonwealth that the United States has stood for something grand in the history of mankind, and that its people have been happy.”

The shift from the old exceptionalism to the new did not happen all at once. The examples of John Quincy Adams and his son Charles show that the old and the new have existed for a long time, perhaps since our beginning as a people. There were new exceptionalists among the old and there remain old exceptionalists among the new. But where the old once predominated in how Americans thought about where they came from, who they are, and how they ought to relate to the rest of the world, now the new does. William Graham Sumner believed he witnessed the tipping point in 1898, when, to use Walter

McDougall’s image, the U.S. turned from Promised Land to Crusader State.

The old exceptionalism was consistent with the ethos of American constitutional democracy; the new is not. The old was an expression of and a means to sustain the habits of a self-governing people; the new is an expression of and a means to sustain a nationalist and imperialist people. The old exceptionalism suited a limited foreign policy; the new suits a messianic adventurism out to remake the world.

The task is not to recapture a Golden Age of American exceptionalism from a distant epoch when we got it all exactly right. The challenge is to articulate a healthy exceptionalism that is true to our history, traditions, principles, and institutions, that helps sustain a constitutional republic of limited powers.

With apologies to C.S. Lewis, we might call the old exceptionalism our republic’s “discarded image.” That picture of American exceptionalism showed that empires were incompatible with republics; that wars and colonies were expensive indulgences that led to high taxes, excessive borrowing, and perilous debt; that empire did something to the soul of a virtuous people and not just to its pocketbook; that statesmanship required self-restraint and placing the good of one’s people above personal and party ambition; that one should demand of one’s nation what one demanded of one’s own character and no less—namely, that a nation ought to cultivate a reputation for integrity, frugality, keeping its word, fair-dealing, and courage.

In 1814, half a century after the publication of his *Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law*, John Adams wrote to his Southern adversary John Taylor of Caroline. In the course of defending his constitutional principles, Adams issued a warning that the new exceptionalists will never quote, let alone heed: “We may boast that *we* are the chosen people; we may even thank God that we are not like other men; but, after all, it will be but flattery, and the delusion, the self-deceit of the Pharisee.”

A people, as surely as an individual, cannot stand in the presence of the world and congratulate itself on its unassailable virtue without leading itself into moral blindness and earning the contempt of others. Nothing about the American achievement is “placed beyond all possibility of failure,” as John Quincy Adams boasted. It would be fatal for a republic to entertain such presumption. There is nothing inevitable about our future, and no facile talk about exceptionalism will make it so. A history and a tradition—an authentic, fully American history and tradition—is available to us, but only if we turn away from the myths of the new exceptionalism. ■

How We Became Israel

Peace means dominion for Tel Aviv—and now for us.

by ANDREW J. BACEVICH

Peace means different things to different governments and different countries. To some it suggests harmony based on tolerance and mutual respect. To others it serves as a euphemism for dominance, peace defining the relationship between the strong and the supine.

In the absence of actually existing peace, a nation's reigning *definition* of peace shapes its proclivity to use force. A nation committed to peace-as-harmony will tend to employ force as a last resort. The United States once subscribed to this view. Or beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere, it at least pretended to do so.

A nation seeking peace-as-dominion will use force more freely. This has long been an Israeli predilection. Since the end of the Cold War and especially since 9/11, however, it has become America's as well. As a consequence, U.S. national-security policy increasingly conforms to patterns of behavior pioneered by the Jewish state. This "Israelification" of U.S. policy may prove beneficial for Israel. Based on the available evidence, it's not likely to be good for the United States.

Here is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu describing what he calls his "vision of peace" in June 2009: "If we get a guarantee of demilitarization . . . we are ready to agree to a real peace agreement, a demilitarized Palestinian state side by side with the Jewish state." The inhabitants of Gaza and the West Bank, if armed and sufficiently angry, can certainly annoy Israel. But they cannot destroy it or do it serious harm. By any measure, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) wield vastly greater power than the Palestinians can possibly muster. Still, from Netanyahu's perspective, "real peace" becomes possible only if Palestinians guarantee that their putative state will forego even the most meager military capabilities. Your side disarms, our side stays armed to the teeth: that's Netanyahu's vision of peace in a nutshell.

Netanyahu asks a lot of Palestinians. Yet however baldly stated, his demands reflect longstanding Israeli thinking. For Israel, peace derives from security, which must be absolute and assured. Security thus

defined requires not simply military advantage but *military supremacy*.

From Israel's perspective, threats to supremacy require *anticipatory action*, the earlier the better. The IDF attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 provides one especially instructive example. Israel's destruction of a suspected Syrian nuclear facility in 2007 provides a second.

Yet alongside perceived threat, perceived opportunity can provide sufficient motive for anticipatory action. In 1956 and again in 1967, Israel attacked Egypt not because the blustering Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser possessed the capability (even if he proclaimed the intention) of destroying the hated Zionists, but because preventive war seemingly promised a big Israeli payoff. In the first instance, the Israelis came away empty-handed. In the second, they hit the jackpot operationally, albeit with problematic strategic consequences.

For decades, Israel relied on a powerful combination of tanks and fighter-bombers as its preferred instrument of preemption. In more recent times, however, it has deemphasized its swift sword in favor of the shiv between the ribs. Why deploy lumbering armored columns when a missile launched from an Apache attack helicopter or a bomb fixed to an Iranian scientist's car can do the job more cheaply and with less risk? Thus has *targeted assassination* eclipsed conventional military methods as the hallmark of the Israeli way of war.

Whether using tanks to conquer or assassins to liquidate, adherence to this knee-to-the-groin paradigm has won Israel few friends in the region and few admirers around the world (Americans notably excepted). The likelihood of this approach eliminating or even diminishing Arab or Iranian hostility toward Israel appears less than promising. That said, the approach has thus far succeeded in preserving and even expanding the Jewish state: more than 60 years after its founding, Is-

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rael persists and even prospers. By this rough but not inconsequential measure, the Israeli security concept has succeeded. Okay, it's nasty: but so far at least, it's worked.

What's hard to figure out is why the United States would choose to follow Israel's path. Yet over the course of the Bush/Clinton/Bush/Obama quarter-century, that's precisely what we've done. The pursuit of global military dominance, a proclivity for preemption, a growing taste for assassination—all justified as essential to self-defense. That pretty much describes our present-day MO.

Israel is a small country with a small population and no shortage of hostile neighbors. Ours is a huge country with an enormous population and no enemy, unless you count the Cuban-Venezuelan Axis of Ailing Dictators, within several thousand miles. We have choices that Israel does not. Yet in disregarding those choices the United States has stumbled willy-nilly into an Israeli-like condition of perpetual war, with peace increasingly tied to unrealistic expectations of adversaries and would-be adversaries acquiescing in Washington's will.

Israelification got its kick-start with George H.W. Bush's Operation Desert Storm, a triumphal Hundred-Hour War likened at the time to Israel's triumphal Six-Day War. Victory over the "fourth largest army in the world" fostered illusions of the United States exercising perpetually and on a global scale military primacy akin to what Israel has exercised regionally. Soon thereafter, the Pentagon announced that henceforth it would settle for nothing less than "Full Spectrum Dominance."

Bill Clinton's contribution to the process was to normalize the use of force. During the several decades of the Cold War, the U.S. had resorted to overt armed intervention only occasionally. Although difficult today to recall, back then whole years might pass without U.S. troops being sent into harm's way. Over the course of Clinton's two terms in office, however, intervention became commonplace.

The average Israeli had long since become inured to reports of IDF incursions into southern Lebanon or Gaza. Now the average American has become accustomed to reports of U.S. troops battling Somali warlords, supervising regime change in Haiti, or occupying the Balkans. Yet the real signature of the Clinton years came in the form of airstrikes. Blasting targets in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Serbia, and Sudan, but above all in Iraq, became the functional equivalent of Israel's reliance on airpower to punish "terrorists" from standoff ranges.

In the wake of 9/11, George W. Bush, a true believ-

er in Full Spectrum Dominance, set out to liberate or pacify (take your pick) the Islamic world. The United States followed Israel in assigning itself the prerogative of waging preventive war. Although it depicted Saddam Hussein as an existential threat, the Bush administration also viewed Iraq as an opportunity: here the United States would signal to other recalcitrants the fate awaiting them should they mess with Uncle Sam.

More subtly, in going after Saddam, Bush was tacitly embracing a longstanding Israeli conception of deterrence. During the Cold War, deterrence had meant conveying a credible threat to dissuade your opponent from hostile action. Israel had never subscribed to that view. Influencing the behavior of potential adversaries required more than signaling what Israel *might* do if sufficiently aggravated; influence was exerted by punitive action, ideally delivered on a disproportionate scale. Hit the other guy first, if possible; failing that, whack him several times harder than he hit you: not the biblical injunction of an eye for an eye, but both eyes, an ear, and several teeth, with a kick in the nuts thrown in for good measure. The aim was to send a message: screw with us and this will happen to you. This is the message Bush intended to convey when he ordered the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Unfortunately, Operation Iraqi Freedom, launched with all the confidence that had informed Operation Peace for Galilee, Israel's equally ill-advised 1982 incursion into Lebanon, landed the United States in an equivalent mess. Or perhaps a different comparison applies: the U.S. occupation of Iraq triggered violent resistance akin to what the IDF faced as a consequence of Israel occupying the West Bank. Two successive Intifadas had given the Israeli army fits. The insurgency in Iraq (along with its Afghan sibling) gave the American army fits. Neither the Israeli nor the American reputation for martial invincibility survived the encounter.

By the time Barack Obama succeeded Bush in 2009, most Americans—like most Israelis—had lost their appetite for invading and occupying countries. Obama's response? Hew ever more closely to the evolving Israeli way of doing things. "Obama wants to be known for winding down long wars," writes Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post*. "But he has shown no hesitance when it comes to shorter, Israel-style operations. He is a special ops hawk, a drone militarist."

Just so: with his affinity for missile-firing drones, Obama has established targeted assassination as the very centerpiece of U.S. national-security policy. With his affinity for commandos, he has expanded the size and mandate of U.S. Special Operations Command, which now maintains an active presence in more than

Strategy

70 countries. In Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, and the frontier regions of Pakistan—and who knows how many other far-flung places—Obama seemingly shares Prime Minister Netanyahu's expectations: keep whacking and a positive outcome will eventually ensue.

The government of Israel, along with ardently pro-Israel Americans like Michael Gerson, may view the convergence of U.S. and Israeli national-security practices with some satisfaction. The prevailing U.S. definition of self-defense—a self-assigned mandate to target anyone anywhere thought to endanger U.S. security—is exceedingly elastic. As such, it provides a certain cover for equivalent Israeli inclinations. And to the extent that our roster of enemies overlaps with theirs—did someone say Iran?—military action ordered by Washington just might shorten Jerusalem's "to do" list.

Yet where does this all lead? "We don't have enough

drones," writes the columnist David Ignatius, "to kill all the enemies we will make if we turn the world into a free-fire zone." And if Delta Force, the Green Berets, army rangers, Navy SEALs, and the like constitute (in the words of one SEAL) "the dark matter ... the force that orders the universe but can't be seen," we probably don't have enough of them either. Unfortunately, the Obama administration seems willing to test both propositions.

The process of aligning U.S. national-security practice with Israeli precedents is now essentially complete. Their habits are ours. Reversing that process would require stores of courage and imagination that may no longer exist in Washington. Given the reigning domestic political climate, those holding or seeking positions of power find it easier—and less risky—to stay the course, vainly nursing the hope that by killing enough "terrorists" peace on terms of our choosing will result. Here too the United States has succumbed to Israeli illusions. ■

DEEPBACKGROUND

by PHILIP GIRALDI

Normally Washington bureaucracies shut down in August, but this year the intelligence community was working flat out to develop information on two crises in the Middle East. One official describes a deep sense of foreboding, recalling NSC Counter Terrorism Security Group chairman Richard Clarke's description of walking around the West Wing in August 2001 with his "hair on fire."

Syria is on the frontburner as a shooting war in which the U.S. is already clandestinely involved. The attempt to come up with a consensus National Intelligence Estimate on the crisis has been put on hold, both because the situation is too volatile and because new intelligence paints an increasingly dark picture of the insurgency. A number of atrocities against civilians previously attributed to the Assad government are now known to be the work of the rebels, who are becoming less reticent about their plans to eliminate all regime supporters, which would include most Alawites as well as many in the Christian community. U.S. intelligence has also come to the conclusion that rebel militias are heavily infiltrated and frequently commanded by jihadis linked to al-Qaeda. Attempts by CIA officers to discuss the issue with the rebels' political representatives in Lebanon and Turkey have been blown off or deferred, suggesting that the movement's leadership might be fully complicit. There is also increasing concern about a domino effect spreading

unrest to Lebanon. Even the Turks are backing away from more direct involvement, worried that major refugee and Kurdish-based terrorism problems are developing.

The Iran crisis is more troublesome because the possible consequences are graver. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta traveled to Israel at the end of July to get a commitment from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to attack Iran before America's elections. A commitment was not forthcoming, with Netanyahu demanding as quid pro quo that Washington publicly break off negotiations with Iran. Intelligence analysts in Washington are split 50-50 over whether Netanyahu is bluffing. Some analysts are convinced that an attack will come in October when the weather is still good in the region and at a point when President Obama will have no choice politically but to support the Israelis. There has been some intelligence suggesting that Israel has already made the decision, fearing that Obama will ratchet down his tolerance for a military option whether he wins or loses. Reports suggest that Israeli leaders privately view Mitt Romney as useful but cautious, even timid, and do not trust his overblown and politically motivated assurances of support if war were to break out. ■

Philip Girdali, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest.

Revolt of the Rich

Our financial elites are the new secessionists.

by MIKE LOFGREN

It was 1993, during congressional debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement. I was having lunch with a staffer for one of the rare Republican congressmen who opposed the policy of so-called free trade. To this day, I remember something my colleague said: “The rich elites of this country have far more in common with their counterparts in London, Paris, and Tokyo than with their fellow American citizens.”

That was only the beginning of the period when the realities of outsourced manufacturing, financialization of the economy, and growing income disparity started to seep into the public consciousness, so at the time it seemed like a striking and novel statement.

At the end of the Cold War many writers predicted the decline of the traditional nation-state. Some looked at the demise of the Soviet Union and foresaw the territorial state breaking up into statelets of different ethnic, religious, or economic compositions. This happened in the Balkans, the former Czechoslovakia, and Sudan. Others predicted a weakening of the state due to the rise of Fourth Generation warfare and the inability of national armies to adapt to it. The quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan lend credence to that theory. There have been numerous books about globalization and how it would eliminate borders. But I am unaware of a well-developed theory from that time about how the super-rich and the corporations they run would secede from the nation state.

I do not mean secession by physical withdrawal from the territory of the state, although that happens from time to time—for example, Erik Prince, who was born into a fortune, is related to the even bigger Amway fortune, and made yet another fortune as CEO of the mercenary-for-hire firm Blackwater, moved his company (renamed Xe) to the United Arab Emirates in 2011. What I mean by secession is a withdrawal into enclaves, an internal immigration, whereby the rich disconnect themselves from the civic life of the

nation and from any concern about its well being except as a place to extract loot.

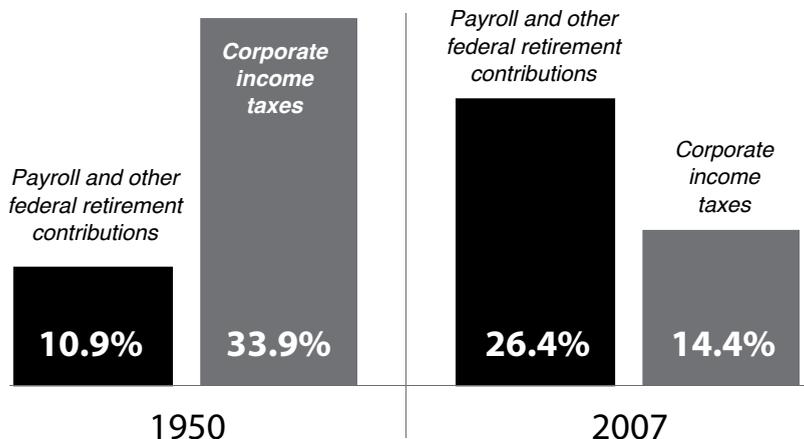
Our plutocracy now lives like the British in colonial India: in the place and ruling it, but not of it. If one can afford private security, public safety is of no concern; if one owns a Gulfstream jet, crumbling bridges cause less apprehension—and viable public transportation doesn't even show up on the radar screen. With private doctors on call and a chartered plane to get to the Mayo Clinic, why worry about Medicare?

Being in the country but not of it is what gives the contemporary American super-rich their quality of being abstracted and clueless. Perhaps that explains why Mitt Romney's regular-guy anecdotes always seem a bit strained. I discussed this with a radio host who recounted a story about Robert Rubin, former secretary of the Treasury as well as an executive at Goldman Sachs and CitiGroup. Rubin was being chauffeured through Manhattan to reach some event whose attendees consisted of the Great and the Good such as himself. Along the way he encountered a traffic jam, and on arriving to his event—late—he complained to a city functionary with the power to look into it. “Where was the jam?” asked the functionary. Rubin, who had lived most of his life in Manhattan, a place of east-west numbered streets and north-south avenues, couldn't tell him. The super-rich who determine our political arrangements apparently inhabit another, more refined dimension.

To some degree the rich have always secluded themselves from the gaze of the common herd; their habit for centuries has been to send their offspring to private schools. But now this habit is exacerbated by the plutocracy's palpable animosity towards public

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Taxes as a share of share of federal revenues



10.9 percent of all federal revenues. By 2007, the last “normal” economic year before federal revenues began falling, they made up 33.9 percent. By contrast, corporate income taxes were 26.4 percent of federal revenues in 1950. By 2007 they had fallen to 14.4 percent. So who has skin in the game?

While there is plenty to criticize the incumbent president for, notably his broadening and deepening of President George W. Bush’s extra-constitutional surveillance state, under President Obama the overall federal tax

education and public educators, as Michael Bloomberg has demonstrated. To the extent public education “reform” is popular among billionaires and their tax-exempt foundations, one suspects it is as a lever to divert the more than \$500 billion dollars in annual federal, state, and local education funding into private hands—meaning themselves and their friends. What Halliburton did for U.S. Army logistics, school privatizers will do for public education. A century ago, at least we got some attractive public libraries out of Andrew Carnegie. *Noblesse oblige* like Carnegie’s is presently lacking among our seceding plutocracy.

In both world wars, even a Harvard man or a New York socialite might know the weight of an army pack. Now the military is for suckers from the laboring classes whose subprime mortgages you just sliced into CDOs and sold to gullible investors in order to buy your second Bentley or rustle up the cash to get Rod Stewart to perform at your birthday party. The sentiment among the super-rich towards the rest of America is often one of contempt rather than *noblesse*.

Stephen Schwarzman, the hedge fund billionaire CEO of the Blackstone Group who hired Rod Stewart for his \$5-million birthday party, believes it is the rabble who are socially irresponsible. Speaking about low-income citizens who pay no income tax, he says: “You have to have skin in the game. I’m not saying how much people should do. But we should all be part of the system.”

But millions of Americans who do not pay federal income taxes do pay federal payroll taxes. These taxes are regressive, and the dirty little secret is that over the last several decades they have made up a greater and greater share of federal revenues. In 1950, payroll and other federal retirement contributions constituted

burden has not been raised, it has been lowered. Approximately half the deficit impact of the stimulus bill was the result of tax-cut provisions. The temporary payroll-tax cut and other miscellaneous tax-cut provisions make up the rest of the cuts we have seen in the last three and a half years. Yet for the president’s heresy of advocating that billionaires who receive the bulk of their income from capital gains should pay taxes at the same rate as the rest of us, Schwarzman said this about Obama: “It’s a war. It’s like when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939.” For a hedge-fund billionaire to defend his extraordinary tax privileges vis-à-vis the rest of the citizenry in such a manner shows an extraordinary capacity to be out-of-touch. He lives in a world apart, psychologically as well as in the flesh.

Schwarzman benefits from the so-called “carried interest rule” loophole: financial sharks typically take their compensation in the form of capital gains rather than salaries, thus knocking down their income-tax rate from 35 percent to 15 percent. But that’s not the only way Mr. Skin-in-the-Game benefits: the 6.2 percent Social Security tax and the 1.45 percent Medicare tax apply only to wages and salaries, not capital gains distributions. Accordingly, Schwarzman is stiffing the system in two ways: not only is his income-tax rate less than half the top marginal rate, he is shorting the Social Security system that others of his billionaire colleagues like Pete Peterson say is unsustainable and needs to be cut.

This lack of skin in the game may explain why Romney has been so coy about releasing his income-tax returns. It would make sense for someone with \$264 million in net worth to joke that he is “unemployed”—as if he were some jobless sheet metal worker in Youngstown—if he were really saying in code

that his income stream is not a salary subject to payroll deduction. His effective rate for federal taxes, at 14 percent, is lower than that of many a wage slave.

After the biggest financial meltdown in 80 years and a consequent long, steep drop in the American standard of living, who is the nominee for one of the only two parties allowed to be competitive in American politics? None other than Mitt Romney, the man who says corporations are people. Opposing him will be the incumbent president, who will raise up to a billion dollars to compete. Much of that loot will come from the same corporations, hedge-fund managers, merger-and-acquisition specialists, and leveraged-buyout artists the president will denounce in *pro forma* fashion.

The super-rich have seceded from America even as their grip on its control mechanisms has tightened. But how did this evolve historically, what does it mean for the rest of us, and where is it likely to be going?

That wealth-worship—and a consequent special status for the wealthy as a kind of clerisy—should have arisen in the United States is hardly surprising, given the peculiar sort of Protestantism that was planted here from the British Isles. Starting with the Puritanism of New England, there has been a long and intimate connection between the sanctification of wealth and America's economic and social relationships. The rich are a class apart because they are the elect.

Most present-day Americans, if they think about the historical roots of our wealth-worship at all, will say something about free markets, rugged individualism, and the Horatio Alger myth—all in a purely secular context. But perhaps the most notable 19th-century exponent of wealth as virtue and poverty as the mark of Cain was Russell Herman Conwell, a canny Baptist minister, founder of perhaps the first tabernacle large enough that it could later be called a megachurch, and author of the immensely famous “Acres of Diamonds” speech of 1890 that would make him a rich man. This is what he said:

I say that you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich. ... The men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community. Let me say here clearly ... ninety-eight out of one hundred of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they are trusted with money. ... I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be sympathized with is very small. To sympathize with a

man whom God has punished for his sins ... is to do wrong ... let us remember there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings.

Evidently Conwell was made of sterner stuff than the sob-sister moralizing in the Sermon on the Mount. Somewhat discordantly, though, Conwell had been drummed out of the military during the Civil War for deserting his post. For Conwell, as for the modern tax-avoiding expat billionaire, the dollar sign tends to trump Old Glory.

The conjoining of wealth, Christian morality, and the American way of life reached an apotheosis in Bruce Barton's 1925 book *The Man Nobody Knows*. The son of a Congregationalist minister, Barton, who was an advertising executive, depicted Jesus as a successful salesman, publicist, and the very role model of the modern businessman.

But this peculiarly American creed took a severe hit after the crash of 1929, and wealth ceased to be equated with godliness. While the number of Wall Street suicides has been exaggerated in national memory, Jesse Livermore, perhaps the most famous of the Wall Street speculators, shot himself, and so did several others of his profession. There was then still a lingering old-fashioned sense of shame now generally absent from the über-rich. While many of

The super-rich have seceded from America even as their grip on its control mechanisms has tightened.

the elites hated Franklin Roosevelt—consider the famous New Yorker cartoon wherein the rich socialite tells her companions, “Come along. We're going to the Trans-Lux to hiss Roosevelt”—most had the wit to make a calculated bet that they would have to give a little of their wealth, power, and prestige to retain the rest, particularly with the collapsing parliamentary systems of contemporary Europe in mind. Even a bootlegging brigand like Joe Kennedy Sr. reconciled himself to the New Deal.

And so it lasted for a generation: the wealthy could get more wealth—fabulous fortunes were made in World War II; think of Henry J. Kaiser—but they were subject to a windfall-profits tax. And tycoons like Kaiser constructed the Hoover Dam and liberty ships rather than the synthetic CDOs that precipitated the

latest economic collapse. In the 1950s, many Republicans pressed Eisenhower to lower the prevailing 91 percent top marginal income tax rate, but citing his concerns about the deficit, he refused. In view of our present \$15 trillion gross national debt, Ike was right.

Characteristic of the era was the widely misquoted and misunderstood statement of General Motors CEO and Secretary of Defense Charles E. “Engine Charlie” Wilson, who said he believed “what was good for the country was good for General Motors, and vice versa.” He expressed, however clumsily, the view that the fates of corporations and the citizenry were conjoined. It is a view a world away from the present regime of downsizing, offshoring, profits without production, and financialization. The now-prevailing Milton Friedmanite economic dogma holds that a corporation that acts responsibly to the community is irresponsible. Yet somehow in the 1950s the country eked out higher average GDP growth rates than those we have experienced in the last dozen years.

After the 2008 collapse, the worst since the Great Depression, the rich, rather than having the modesty to temper their demands, this time have made the calculated bet that they are politically invulnerable—Wall Street moguls angrily and successfully rejected executive-compensation limits even for banks that had been bailed out by taxpayer funds. And what I saw in Congress after the 2008 crash confirms what economist Simon Johnson has said: that Wall Street, and behind it the commanding heights of power that control Wall Street, has seized the policy-making apparatus in Washington. Both parties are in thrall to what our great-grandparents would have called the Money Power. One party is furtive and hypocritical in its money chase; the other enthusiastically embraces it as the embodiment of the American Way. The Citizens United Supreme Court decision of two years ago would certainly elicit a response from the 19th-century populists similar to their 1892 Omaha platform. It called out the highest court, along with the rest of the political apparatus, as rotted by money.

We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the Legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized. ... The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection, imported

pauperized labor beats down their wages. ... The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind, and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the Republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.

It is no coincidence that as the Supreme Court has been removing the last constraints on the legalized corruption of politicians, the American standard of living has been falling at the fastest rate in decades. According to the Federal Reserve Board’s report of June 2012, the median net worth of families plummeted almost 40 percent between 2007 and 2010. This is not only a decline when measured against our own past economic performance; it also represents a decline relative to other countries, a far cry from the post-World War II era, when the United States had by any measure the highest living standard in the world. A study by the Bertelsmann Foundation concluded that in measures of economic equality, social mobility, and poverty prevention, the United States ranks 27th out of the 31 advanced industrial nations belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Thank God we are still ahead of Turkey, Chile, and Mexico!

This raises disturbing questions for those who call themselves conservatives. Almost all conservatives who care to vote congregate in the Republican Party. But Republican ideology celebrates outsourcing, globalization, and takeovers as the glorious fruits of capitalism’s “creative destruction.” As a former Republican congressional staff member, I saw for myself how GOP proponents of globalized vulture capitalism, such as Grover Norquist, Dick Armey, Phil Gramm, and Lawrence Kudlow, extolled the offshoring and financialization process as an unalloyed benefit. They were quick to denounce as socialism any attempt to mitigate its impact on society. Yet their ideology is nothing more than an upside-down utopianism, an absolutist twin of Marxism. If millions of people’s interests get damaged in the process of implementing their ideology, it is a necessary outcome of scientific laws of economics that must never be tampered with, just as Lenin believed that his version of materialist laws were final and inexorable.

If a morally acceptable American conservatism is ever to extricate itself from a pseudo-scientific inverted Marxist economic theory, it must grasp that order, tradition, and stability are not coterminous with an uncritical worship of the Almighty Dollar, nor with



obedience to the demands of the wealthy. Conservatives need to think about the world they want: do they really desire a social Darwinist dystopia?

The objective of the predatory super-rich and their political handmaidens is to discredit and destroy the traditional nation state and auction its resources to themselves. Those super-rich, in turn, aim to create a “tollbooth” economy, whereby more and more of our highways, bridges, libraries, parks, and beaches are possessed by private oligarchs who will extract a toll from the rest of us. Was this the vision of the Founders? Was this why they believed governments were instituted among men—that the very sinews of the state should be possessed by the wealthy in the same manner that kingdoms of the Old World were the personal property of the monarch?

Since the first ziggurats rose in ancient Babylonia, the so-called forces of order, stability, and tradition have feared a revolt from below. Beginning with Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre after the French Revolution, a whole genre of political writings—some classical liberal, some conservative, some

reactionary—has propounded this theme. The title of Ortega y Gasset’s most famous work, *The Revolt of the Masses*, tells us something about the mental atmosphere of this literature.

But in globalized postmodern America, what if this whole vision about where order, stability, and a tolerable framework for governance come from, and who threatens those values, is inverted? What if Christopher Lasch came closer to the truth in *The Revolt of the Elites*, wherein he wrote, “In our time, the chief threat seems to come from those at the top of the social hierarchy, not the masses”? Lasch held that the elites—by which he meant not just the super-wealthy but also their managerial coat holders and professional apologists—were undermining the country’s promise as a constitutional republic with their prehensile greed, their asocial cultural values, and their absence of civic responsibility.

Lasch wrote that in 1995. Now, almost two decades later, the super-rich have achieved escape velocity from the gravitational pull of the very society they rule over. They have seceded from America. ■

LePage Against the Machine

This street-tough governor is a new kind of Maine Republican.

by MICHAEL BRENDAN DOUGHERTY

Until 2010 the state of Maine produced the most exquisitely moderate Republicans. Whenever Democrats needed a vote for gun control, a tax hike, or bipartisan cover for a social issue, they could dial a Maine area code and make a date with one of the ever-temperates of the Pine Tree State.

But in that year an avenging populism swept through the state. The Republican Party that used to elect Olympia Snowe and William Cohen practically burned its old platform and replaced it with another that calls for the abolition of the Department of Education and the Federal Reserve System, adhering to the principles of Austrian economics, and, rather darkly, the prosecution of those perpetrating “the global warming myth.”

At the head of this revolution is a new governor who has compared the IRS to the Gestapo, said that Obama could go to hell, and pointed to the press box during his inaugural address warning, “You’re on notice.” Paul LePage is one of the most intriguing and infuriating men in American politics. Bumptious, dogged, quick to anger, openly resentful of Maine’s political class, and witty in a down-home way, he is an authentic specimen of the movement. And his governorship is turning into a fascinating test case, revealing the limits and the possibilities of the Tea Party populism he champions.

But how did Maine get here, and how did a man like LePage get to the Blaine House?

One of LePage’s first public appearances as governor gives some clue. Shortly after taking office LePage returned to the town where he was born, Lewiston, to speak at the Franco-American Heritage center. The building used to be his childhood parish, St. Mary’s Church, a gothic fortress where the millworkers of “Little Canada” worshipped. Its interior is now converted into a museum and concert space, with the maniples encased in glass and the confes-

sional transformed into an office.

“I have to make one confession that I never made in that old confessional,” said LePage. “Halloween was really big in Little Canada because we had these apartment buildings; candy was aplenty. When I was 12 I got lazy, so I used to hide right here down the street in the little alleys between buildings here. We used to hide there and when little kids came by we used to steal their candy.”

The crowd responded with a big disapproving “aww” and laughed.

“Isn’t that awful?” LePage said, as the laughter grew and a naughty smile crossed his face. “And now I’m governor of Maine. What do you think of that?”

Someone shouted. “Don’t steal our candy!”

“Well, I’ll tell you, now that I am governor of Maine, there is nothing left to steal,” he said.

By 2010 Maine was facing a post-crash shortfall in revenues, yawning deficits, and daunting unfunded liabilities. Long-term it faced a brain drain of its brightest young people: depopulation and decline. Amid this, LePage’s bootstrapping biography and outsized personality allowed him to win two 38 percent pluralities. The first came against seven Republican primary opponents, the next against three general-election rivals—an assortment of life-time politicians and bland moderates all around. It was as if this plurality of Mainers saw their desperate situation reflected in LePage’s early life and hoped that if he could turn his own fate around, he could do the same for Maine.

And what a life: it began in the apartment blocks of Lincoln Street in Lewiston. He was the first son of the 18 children born to his Francophone parents. The apartments his family lived in were practically in the shadows of the Bates textile mill, the state’s largest employer until the 1960s, with St. Mary’s parish

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at the end of the same block.

LePage's mother, Theresa, was a devout woman who led her many children through the rosary on her knees. His father, Gerard, was a drunkard given to insane, violent fits. LePage's brother Moe has said that as a child he refused to go to sleep before Gerard did because the old man would occasionally stuff a slipper with newspapers, douse it in kerosene, and put it under the television before lighting it on fire and quietly slipping out of the house.

Gerard broke Paul's nose in one conflict when the future governor was just 11 years old. Paul left and never returned: he remained homeless for the next few years, spending nights with friends, in horse stables, even at a strip club, the Hotel Holly. He would work as a shoeshine boy, dishwasher, short-order cook, and bartender.

LePage credits Peter Snowe for the big turnaround in his life. He was Senator Olympia Snowe's first husband. It was he who suggested that Paul be allowed to take the verbal portion of the SAT in his mother tongue, French. That was the difference between going to Husson College and staying in odd jobs. "If it wasn't for Peter Snowe, seriously, I would still be in generational poverty. I would still be on the streets and I would be on welfare," LePage told a Tea Party rally during his gubernatorial campaign.

Paul improved his English, edited the school newspaper, eventually pursued an MBA. He formed a consulting firm that carried out significant business turnarounds, and worked at Marden's, a major Maine retailer. He joined the city council of Waterville and eventually became mayor.

By 2010, LePage was a man meeting his party and the political climate of his state at the right time. GOP House Speaker Bob Nutting also attributes the sudden success of Maine Republicans to national dynamics. "It was probably an overreach on the part of the president's administration. We also had an active conservative Tea Party group in the state, and a better than normal candidate recruitment."

Republican Party Chairman Charlie Webster has for years been working to box in liberals as the party of Portland elites and the public sector. He has been passing out bumper stickers and plastering up billboards with the message, "Working people vote Republican" and has taken to recruiting bartenders and hairdressers as candidates. When, before the election, the legislature proposed a tax reform that

would lower some tax rates but institute a new sales taxes on most services, Webster and others saw their opportunity. Anger over the tax was the impetus behind successful petition and voter-registration drives that laid the ground for the state's Republican revolution.

LePage was a natural candidate for this backlash from Maine's rural and lower-middle-income voters. His populist edge has always been evident in the way he governs. As mayor of Waterville he kept open hours on Saturdays to let residents complain to him, a practice he has brought to the governorship. Though he doesn't support Ron Paul, he has insisted that the national Republican Party seat Maine's unanimously Ron Paul-supporting delegates, who, through an organizational coup, took over the state party convention. LePage occasionally let his positions become known by giving people he chatted

Paul LePage is one of the most intriguing and infuriating men in American politics.

with on Facebook permission to publicize their conversations. LePage and most of his fans acknowledge cheerfully that he is "not politically correct" and "not a normal politician."

In many ways, LePage is what you would expect if your voluble Tea Partying-uncle went almost directly from railing at cable news to the governor's mansion. Since taking office he's hired his daughter as an assistant to his chief of staff. He's removed a mural depicting the history of the labor movement from a state building, under the not-exactly-credible pretense that certain (unnamed) business owners viewed it as unwelcoming. He routinely blasts the performance of most of Maine's public agencies. And he's implied that Maine schools are so bad, its students so "looked down upon," that Virginia's College of William and Mary makes Maine students take a special test for admission. That isn't true.

Politicians in Maine often complain about LePage's suspicion of expertise. "He runs things on anecdotes and doesn't tell you the source. He just takes one datapoint out of the whole if it furthers his ideological agenda," says Justin Alford, a Democratic state senator. Maine's political and media class had a freak-out when *Forbes* ranked the state dead last for

its business climate two years straight. In response to the latest 50th-in-the-nation placing, LePage gave an address in which he recounted what editors at *Forbes* had told him the state needed to tackle: “they said, ‘Unless you get your fiscal house in order, and you address energy, you address work force development, and you get yourself [so] that you spend within your means, you’re in the cellar.’ This mission here this year, you’re going to hear an awful lot of education, energy and the economy. Unfortunately, we’re starting out with welfare, because we’re going broke,” he told his audience.

Forbes promptly reported that LePage’s account of their conversation was entirely inaccurate. “Sorry Governor, but I didn’t say any of those things,” editor Kurt Bandenhause wrote. “Welfare? Not even a part of the rankings. Getting your ‘fiscal house in order’ is sound government, but once again has nothing to do with our ranking of business climates.”

LePage’s populist anger isn’t just boob-baiting—it is distressingly authentic.

After Democratic state senator John Patrick sent out an e-letter to constituents criticizing the governor for cutting government spending and threatening to delay bonds, LePage sent him a note on the governor’s stationary, in large and angry handwriting:

You are a bald-faced liar and cheat! Character eludes you. It is up to the Governor’s discretion when bonds are sold, he has five years. Paul.

To another senator he wrote:

Senator Alford,

It must be election time! ... As for my plan for Millinocket I am reluctant to divulge it to you as I believe you will do anything to defeat [sic]. We have attempted to implement “best practices” for two sessions but you sat on your hands criticizing everything we do and vote against everything with my name on it. Hypocit [sic] comes to mind.

Although many who have worked with him testify to a personal sweetness outside of politics, LePage wears his vengeful reputation proudly. He once took a Democratic campaign flyer picturing him under the word’s “Augusta’s Biggest Bully” and displayed it in his office tucked into the frame of a Ronald Reagan portrait.

But underneath all of the hostility to his colleagues,

expert opinion, and the press, LePage has some serious accomplishments to his name. In his first year as governor LePage passed a two-year budget—with supermajorities in both chambers—that included the state’s largest ever tax cut and a lowering of the top income tax rate from 8.5 to 7.95 percent. Changes were made to Maine’s generous welfare system to bring it in line with other states, including a 5-year limit on benefits and mandatory drug tests for recipients who have been convicted of drug crimes. The budget also eliminated the provision of Maine’s state financed healthcare to non-citizens. Overnight Maine became more competitive with neighboring New Hampshire.

For decades the state had been building a massive unfunded liability with its generous public pensions. In the 1990s, new groups of public employees were added to the pension plans without funding. The state also borrowed from the pension fund and postponed its debt payments. The stock market crash of 2008 wiped out another \$2.1 billion. But the budget under LePage closed this unfunded liability by half, a full 16 years ahead of the date by which the state has determined it must take its unfunded liabilities down to zero. And the changes, though painful in some respects, were not nearly the shock to the system that has been delivered to states like Wisconsin and Ohio under other Republican governors. LePage can’t take all the credit; both houses of the citizen legislature play a large role. But as he did during his days as Waterville’s, he set down ambitious goals and drew deep, almost non-negotiable lines.

In a characteristically inside-out compliment, J. Scott Moody of the right-leaning Maine Heritage Policy Center called the above reforms “not at all modest” and attributed them to LePage’s will and a political climate that overnight “pitted one interest group, public workers, against everyone else.” But Speaker Nutting emphasizes the bipartisan nature of the reforms, which has tamped down opposition and given them a more durable character.

It is hard to argue that the electoral shock of LePage and the 2010 Republicans, even with its bombast and nastygrams, is not getting something worthwhile done in Maine. The Blaine House that had for years been the home of a self-assured liberalism and a genteelly moderate Republican party was suddenly invaded by the hairdressers, bartenders and shit-kickers of the Tea Party. The result is a state house that is a lot more paranoid and populist, more unmannerly and ugly. But, at last and at least, a little more frugal. ■

How to Freeze the Pentagon

by MICHAEL D. OSTROLENK

In July, freshman congressman Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.), along with Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), introduced an amendment to the House's 2013 defense appropriations bill freezing defense spending at 2012 levels. Though it merely eliminates a proposed \$1.1 billion increase in defense spending, the Mulvaney-Frank amendment was an acknowledgment that the endless military-spending hikes since 9/11 cannot continue. The legislation passed the House 247-167, with 88 Republicans in support, and the Senate will take up the bill this September.

American Conservative contributor Michael Ostrolenk, co-founder and national director of the Liberty Coalition, caught up with Congressman Mulvaney before the August recess to discuss conservative support for a more fiscally sound national defense.

TAC: Why is this an important issue for you?

Mick Mulvaney: I think it is important that conservatives show a willingness to look at all spending with the same level of critical analysis. To think that the Defense Department is somehow immune from the same tendencies toward inefficiency and waste as we know all other areas of government to possess, is just absurd. More importantly, perhaps, showing that willingness builds our credibility when it comes to reducing spending elsewhere. Put another way: if we show a willingness to at the very least freeze defense spending, it may well send the message

that we are deadly serious about our spending problems, and not just using the deficit as a convenient excuse to cut spending on programs that we generally just don't like.

TAC: What pushback did you receive and how will you overcome it in the future?

MM: The conversations with my colleagues were fairly simple and focused mostly on educating folks on what the amendment was, and was not. For example, many initially thought that this was somehow related to the sequester; it wasn't. And others thought it represented a cut; it was actually just a freeze. Once we were able to get down to the facts of the matter, the amendment was an easy sell to many conservatives. The push back was mostly from the appropriators, who believed that the bill was fine as it was. They also attempted, for a short time at least, to argue that we had "already cut defense substantially" or that we were somehow "gutting" the defense budget. Again, the best tools here working in our favor were the facts: the cuts mentioned were to the War Budget and not the base budget; the "gutting" was only 0.17 percent of the total defense budget; etc. It is somewhat encouraging that, at the end of the day, the facts won out.

TAC: With military operations finished in Iraq, the conventional war in Afghanistan winding down and the fact that the U.S. is \$16 trillion dollars in debt, is it a good time to not only freeze Pentagon budgets but to look at seriously cutting

pork programs at DOD?

MM: Clearly. But to do so will take a much larger commitment from Republicans in general and conservatives in particular. Too many Members of Congress are still afraid to cut even a penny from the defense budget out of fear of looking "weak on defense." We need to change the culture that exists now that equates dollars spent with commitment to national defense. Certainly, there is a link between the two at some point, but wanting to be smart with taxpayer dollars and defending the nation are far from mutually exclusive.

TAC: Many Republicans are warning that possible future cuts to the Pentagon will lead to job loss and economic impacts. That sounds a lot like military Keynesianism. How do you respond to such warnings?

MM: Republicans are just as guilty of flawed Keynesian thinking when it comes to defense spending as Democrats are on social spending. Indeed, that flaw weakens our correct argument we make against social spending, as it allows the opposition to easily—and accurately—cast us as hypocrites. Government spending is government spending, and it does not magically have different impacts on aggregate demand just because it is spent on guns instead of delivering the mail. We have to be courageous in our convictions that government spending does not create net new jobs. Period. We need to divorce the jobs discussion from the military spending/national security discussion. ■

Battle of Columbus

Obama's Fast and Furious scandal gets a sequel in New Mexico.

by ED WARNER

“**W**here are my guns?” demanded Pancho Villa, flamboyant bandit-warrior of the Mexican revolution. Though he had paid for them, the store across the U.S. border in the town of Columbus, New Mexico hadn't delivered. He had other grievances as well. So in the early morning of March 9, 1916, Villa led some 500 troops in an attack on Columbus that lasted until dawn, without doing too much damage. Next day, General John J. Pershing, of World War I fame, accompanied by George Patton, hero of World War II, arrived to drive out the Villistas and pursue their leader into Mexico. They didn't catch him. He was eventually assassinated by other Mexicans in some kind of political intrigue.

Until now this was Columbus's main claim to fame. Today, it's been overtaken by another gun sale. In March last year federal agents drove into Columbus and arrested virtually all its top officials, including the mayor and police chief, for selling weapons to the Mexican cartels, who thereafter used them to kill other Mexicans, which is their habit. The arrests were no real surprise to Columbus citizens, who wondered why Mayor Eddie Espinoza had been driving a \$50,000 car on a \$700-a-month salary. Police Chief Angelo Vega already had a criminal record. In this town, says Addison Bachman, who runs a website reporting on local events in Columbus, “You get a job with a rap sheet, not a resume.”

The dozen offenders have all pleaded guilty. The mayor has received 51 months in prison, and two others have also been sentenced. The rest await their punishment, which seems slow in coming—and in the meantime, one has escaped. Yet another, police officer Ian Garland, claims agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives encouraged him to sell the weapons to the cartels.

What's that? Shades of “Fast and Furious,” the Arizona operation that delivered some 2,500 U.S. guns

to the cartels, with no explanation yet forthcoming. It has led to a D.C. tussle with the Republican House citing U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder in contempt of Congress and the Democrats crying “witch hunt.” Lost in the tumult is the heart of the matter: what were U.S. agents doing with those guns?

The White House says the goal was to track the guns to the cartel leaders. What then? Drop a drone on them, only to have them replaced by any of dozens of other eager mobsters lusting for the job. “You cut off one head and [another] hydra head emerges,” says James Phelps, assistant professor of border and homeland security at San Angelo University in Texas.

But there are no signs that agents were doing any tracking. A different explanation is gaining ground: that the feds were helping to arm one cartel, Sinaloa, against more sinister ones like Los Zetas, whose trademark is a severed head on a pike. Many of the latter's members have had military training in Mexico, some in the United States. They are well equipped for violence and have inflicted some of it in this country. Better to have a comparatively benign cartel facing us.

Dealing with any cartel has its risks. Guns from Fast and Furious have been used to kill U.S. Border Patrol agent Brian Terry and who knows how many Mexicans. Meanwhile, Los Zetas is still going strong. A trial of the Columbus gang could reveal what operations like Fast and Furious are all about. But then, there will be no trial since the prisoners have pleaded guilty, no doubt in exchange for appropriate bargains from prosecutors. The cover-up continues.

In a borderless war, it's hard to know what's what or who's who. “Nothing is black and white,” says Raymond Cobos, sheriff of Luna County, which includes Columbus. With little available work on the border that pays more than a pittance, crooked money is too tempting, says former Border Patrolman David Ham:

Ed Warner is a former editor-reporter for the Voice of America.

“Wherever there’s a connection to the border, look for trouble.” But be careful not to talk about it, cautions Columbus activist Karen Lee. “There’s no freedom of speech on the border. To survive is to say nothing.”

“We are a microcosm,” says Addison Bachman, who in addition to running his website is minister of the Promised Land Community Church in Columbus. Small as it is, Columbus is ground zero for the drug runners. Robert Plumlee, a former contract pilot for the CIA, notes that Los Zetas has acquired property in the Columbus area, where it stores arms and drugs destined for anywhere in the United States. Little stands in its way, certainly not media coverage.

We read continually of arrests of small-timers with pockets of marijuana. But the big guys? Not much. A notable exception is a recent *New York Times* article revealing that Los Zetas used drug money to buy a large ranch in Oklahoma with 300 quarter horses for which they paid a million dollars a month. One of them recently won a major race in New Mexico. This enterprise was broken up by the U.S. Justice Department. Michael Vigil, a former top DEA official, tells the *Times*, “The Zetas are particularly adroit at spreading their tentacles across borders.”

The cartels’ vast network reaches into the United States, concentrating in hundreds of larger cities but increasingly in smaller towns as well. They prefer areas with a Mexican population where they can blend in. Federal lawmen estimate there are more people working for the cartels in the United States than in Mexico, and they are busier than ever. While the number of illegal immigrants has dropped dramatically, far more drugs are arriving, and with them the cartel bosses, among the most vicious people on earth.

They don’t always look the part, say those who get to see them. They may be smooth, suave, just the gentleman next door who donates generously to churches and charities. Let the thuggish underlings handle the rough stuff. But these bosses should not be underrated or misunderstood. They are not here just to make money. They also seek power. “Money is a manifestation of power,” says Robert Odom, recently retired deputy sheriff of Columbus. Since they have taken over much of Mexico, why not a much larger prize to the north? There’s a challenge.

Money more than weapons paves the way—just another interest group buying up politicians and other worthies on the path to a narco-state. While wars in the Middle East and South Asia bear scant relevance to the national interest, this is the real war within that can

be truly destructive to the country. But we’re not really fighting it. Most Americans are not even aware of it.

The citizens of Columbus, however, have been left bankrupt by the cartels, with some in danger of their lives. Ordinarily the drug lords don’t like to harm Americans. It’s bad publicity. But they make an exception for lawmen they can’t corrupt and who continue to fight them. Before they were arrested, crooked town officials threatened to kill Deputy Odom. Twice police chief Vega tried to run him off the road at night. They are gone now and unlikely to return from prison: since they’ve been talking to the feds, the car-

Federal lawmen estimate there are more people working for the cartels in the United States than in Mexico, and they are busier than ever.

tels would make short work of them. But their families remain with the prospect of the cartels’ revenge no doubt in mind.

“The raid has swept out some of the dark corners,” says Odom, but more light is needed. He adds that the cartels are not operating openly in Columbus. They’re discreet and quiet at the moment. But crossing the border is hazardous for a lawman whose face is known. It could mean courting death or worse. The cartels are skilled at torture, like dismembering a victim while he is still alive. “You’ve got to understand the new reality,” says Odom.

Corruption on the U.S. side of the border now rivals that in Mexico, thanks in part to the rapid hiring of anti-terrorist personnel after 9/11 without sufficient background check. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that in the last eight years 130 U.S. Border Patrol agents have been arrested and 600 more are under investigation. “We take this kind of thing for granted in Mexico,” says Odom. “That’s history. We’re immune from history, right?”

Sheriff Cobos, now in charge of the Columbus police, is a Mexican American of staunch visage and candid speech—not to be easily crossed. His grandfather joined Pancho Villa’s invasion, though unlike his chief he decided to stay in America and make his way. Sheriff Cobos says he was so strictly brought up—“I was told if I looked at a girl the wrong way she would get pregnant”—that he was invited to teach anti-crime, anti-drug classes at a Mormon settlement in Mexico.

He wonders why we can’t secure the border. Other nations with fewer resources have managed this. It

Corruption

would cost a fraction of the war in Afghanistan. He's dubious of federal law enforcement and suggests a better acronym for the DEA; "Don't Expect Anything." Why did the feds wait so long to arrest the town fathers, he asks, when they had ample evidence in front of them? A federal agent informed Deputy Odom: "We don't necessarily trust local law enforcement." Replied Odom: "I'm not offended because I don't trust you, either."

Sometimes it's not altogether clear who the enemy is. We had a drug-running, gun-running operation that didn't seem to interest authorities, says Bachman. Are they pursuing some other plan we don't know about? "We're kept in suspense."

Today law enforcement in Columbus seems to be in good hands, and life is more or less back to normal in a town where most amenities are in easy walking distance. A library is especially well supplied. There's a Pancho Villa state park that people enjoy, except perhaps for the name. No sign of rudeness or anxiety amid a friendly population of only 2,000. House and car doors are left unlocked. There's no street crime. More than that, people are loyal to their town. Because of its empty treasury (a million dollars was lost to the gun-runners), many town employees are working for no pay until the not-too-sympathetic county offers some money or takes over the municipality.

That includes the firemen who double as ambulance drivers. They are required to pick up anyone who has a medical emergency on the border. Many pregnant Mexican women show up so they can bear their children in the United States, where they automatically become citizens. Columbus's new mayor, Nicole Lawson, sidelines as an ambulance assistant and has helped deliver 24 newborn Americans. "Our town spirit has been crushed by the arrests," she says, but apparently not hers.

Three miles down the road is the Mexican border town of Palomas, somewhat larger and livelier than Columbus, but not as lively as it used to be. A few years back there was considerable violence that ended when one cartel managed to oust its rivals and restored the peace in its own way, a sort of Pax Narcotica. Today tourists still shy away because of past troubles, but a number of Americans come for inexpensive dentistry and glasses. "How do you like these teeth?", an American asked, pointing to some replacements. Like new, I said. Amid the many shops, in deference to the past, there's a statue of Pancho Villa charging on horseback. Never say die.

People go back and forth across the border. Some 300 students, most of whom are U.S. citizens, cross

each day to go to school in Columbus or 30 miles further north in Deming. This presents a problem. Some inevitably are given drugs to carry. At no age do you refuse a cartel request, and not everyone can be searched. And cartel cash is addictive. "Once you've started taking money, there's no way to stop taking it," says Deputy Odom. Don't want to cooperate? Well, we know when your kid leaves school and ... you get the point. A school bus driver was arrested for transporting drugs along with children. With that human cargo, it was easy for him to get through checkpoints. Sheriff Cobos never ceases to marvel at the tactics of the cartels. "If only they could put all that energy and ingenuity into something useful like curing cancer."

Those who closely follow the drug war are increasingly dismayed by the way it's fought. Guns don't stop drugs. Eliminate the narcotics in one place, they move to another. Money determines. Don Wirth, a former senior special agent with the Department of Interior, told the *Tucson Weekly* in May that the war is a "tremendous waste of the country's resources. We've spent billions fighting that stuff and haven't made a dent. And the violence escalates. This is unusual for somebody in law enforcement to say, but we're never going to win the drug war. We need other approaches."

The best approach, some say, is to legalize drugs, at least marijuana, which comprises anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of cartel earnings. That would free lawmen to concentrate on the harder but smaller drugs and human smuggling (often for prostitution). In an interview with *Truthout*, Ethan Nadelman, executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, says, "a law enforcement strategy cannot defeat a dynamic global commodities market. So as long as there is demand, there will be supply. Attempts at interdiction just move the drug trafficking around, wreaking havoc in its wake."

Border towns have to live with that havoc, facing incursions of a kind far more dangerous than Pancho Villa's. What does the future hold for Columbus? Addison Bachman suggests making something of the past—and what a past it is: a town that repelled a very rare invasion of America, launched by one of its most colorful enemies. Maybe statues to Pershing and Patton could be erected to accompany Villa's. But yesterday's enemies are now friends in a closely integrated society: for all intents, Palomas and Columbus are one. This is an invisible gem that needs the right kind of exposure, says Bachman.

So Americans, come on down and enjoy yourselves. But please, no drugs or guns. ■

The Right & the Drug War

Conservatives are the last prohibitionists, but that's changing.

by ANTHONY GREGORY

Pat Robertson began publicly criticizing the drug war in December 2010, and he has become more vocal since. Unlike the vague critiques often heard from prominent figures—even Barack Obama has called the drug war a failure—Robertson's insights have been precise, and consistent, and deeply-rooted. "We here in America make up 5 percent of the world's population, but we make up 25 percent of jailed prisoners," he noted in March, appearing genuinely moved by the issue. "I really believe we should treat marijuana the way we treat ... alcohol," he told the *New York Times*. Beyond the practical argument, Robertson sees the moral dimension: "I believe in working with the hearts of people, and not locking them up."

In light of his key role in the religious right, Robertson's comments take on special significance. The man speaks to a particular strain of social conservatives, not straying from their rhetorical comfort zone even as he champions drug legalization for principled reasons. He even blames the left for a burgeoning police state: "Every time the liberals pass a bill—I don't care what it involves—they stick criminal sanctions on it."

Should "theocons" adopt a more tolerant view on drugs, it would shake the entire right-wing on the issue. They would be the last prominent faction to demonstrate skepticism. The American right has long had its share of drug-war critics. William F. Buckley articulately defended legalization on a half-hour PBS special in 1996. George Will has often explained the unintended consequences of prohibition, although he still falls short of calling for decriminalization. Barry Goldwater expressed skepticism toward the criminal-justice approach.

Neocons have either not cared much about drugs and other domestic matters or have sometimes embraced drug decriminalization as a nod to their social liberal side. Fusionist and libertarian-leaning

conservatives have tended toward decriminalization. Right-wing talk radio, the information source for millions, has also featured many voices skeptical of drug laws, from the sensationalist Michael Savage to Jeffersonians like Mike Church. The common-sense center-right has often decried the futility of marijuana prohibition in particular.

Missing in the conservative approach to the issue has been an understanding of the grave threats prohibition poses to the social institutions that cultural conservatives, including the Christian right, hold dear. If Robertson foreshadows a coming shift in the Silent Majority's sentiments, this void will finally be filled. Despite the prominent critics among their ranks, everyday conservatives have consistently revealed themselves in polls as more hostile to decriminalization than liberals and moderates. A socially conservative turnaround on the issue would change everything. Just as many moralists who championed temperance turned against alcohol prohibition after seeing the social destruction it unleashed in the 1920s, today's social conservatives could play a defining role in ending drug prohibition.

The drug war embodies secular leviathan like few other government efforts. The federal anti-drug crusade began with Woodrow Wilson's signing of the Harrison Narcotics Act in 1914, escalated with Franklin Roosevelt's signing of the Marijuana Tax Act in 1937, and tyrannically expanded to cover previously legal psychedelics and other substances during Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Bill Clinton increased marijuana arrests and drug task force spending, greatly accelerating the Reagan-Bush drug war. Under Obama, the policies have once again enjoyed a boost: his 2009 stimulus bill included major hikes in drug enforcement spending that had dwindled under George W. Bush.

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Liberties

If alcohol prohibition qualified as the progressives' greatest domestic triumph in the early 20th century, drug prohibition has achieved even more as a usurpation of traditional morality and the social order. Constitutionalism, states' rights, subsidiarity, community norms, traditional medicine, family authority, and the role of the church have all been violently pushed aside to wage an impossibly ambitious national project to control people in the most intimate of ways. For years, the federal DARE program encouraged children to rat out their parents for minor drug offenses, an intrusion into family life all too reminiscent of Soviet Russia.

Prohibition-fueled gang warfare has not only inflicted violence upon the social fabric; the crime wave has also served as a rationale to weaken the very civil liberties that conservatives most cherish—particularly Second Amendment rights. Bloodshed on city streets attributed to the 1920s liquor trade spawned the National Firearms Act of 1934. Congress specifically targeted drug users in its Gun Control Act of 1968. The 1990 Crime Control Act focused on creating drug-free school zones, but semi-automatic rifles also came under its ambit. Even the 1993 Waco standoff, rationalized by the Clinton Justice Department as an anti-assault-weapon operation, started with search warrants dubiously directed at finding a meth lab. In the 1980s drugs had served as the excuse to carve out exceptions to the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act forbidding military involvement in domestic law enforcement. The radicalized grassroots patriots in the post-Cold War 1990s who saw national police power as a threat to their liberty, their guns, and their families should have recognized America's drug laws as a principal culprit.

Today drug money finances not just domestic gangs but foreign thugs as well. In the last decade many reporters have commented on how opium profits have enriched the Taliban—a nearly unavoidable result of America's drug policies, which keep narcotics highly profitable. But today the most conspicuous violent foreign threat comes from Mexico. The cartels, whose

killing spree has taken tens of thousands of lives in just the last couple years, have shattered the peace on the border and become the subject of the Obama administration's most notorious scandal. Some conservatives have wondered aloud whether the "Fast and Furious" program of arming Mexican drug gangs was intended to create an excuse to crack down on American gun ownership. Regardless of the ATF's intentions, the drug violence has indeed served as a

rationale to restrict American liberties, including the right to bear arms. But very little of this would be possible if these cartels could not fund themselves with the amplified profits that drug prohibition produces. (No wonder all of the conservative movement's heroes of economic science—Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, and Milton Friedman—were unambiguous in opposing the drug war, on practical as well as moral grounds.)

Recent polls indicate that a slight majority of Americans is now open to legalizing marijuana. Somewhat surprisingly, residents of liberal California are less likely than the nation at large to support the idea, according to a USC Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* poll,

although Democrats and voters in the lefty Bay Area favor decriminalization in far higher numbers than Republicans and the rest of the state. Conservatives are still the main ideological barrier to drug liberalization.

But the tide may be turning. At a Republican primary debate in South Carolina last May, Ron Paul likened the freedom to use drugs to the freedom to worship according to one's faith, a radical insight about the liberty of conscience usually heard mainly from proud proponents of psycho-pharmacological experimentation. Moderator Chris Wallace asked the Texas congressman whether using heroin was simply an "an exercise of liberty." Paul responded with a rhetorical question: "How many people here would use heroin if it were legal?" He mocked the very idea of paternalistic prohibition: "Oh yeah, I need the government to take care of me. I don't want



to use heroin, so I need these laws.”

The audience erupted in laughter and enthusiastic applause. Many of Paul’s supporters sat in the crowd, but more important was the lack of booing from the more conventionally conservative attendees. In this Republican audience in a right-leaning state, some of the most radical arguments for heroin legalization fared surprisingly well. Even if today’s conservatives do not buy into all the reasons to end prohibition, they no longer find them as dangerous or worthy of ridicule as in years past.

Also in May, a survey conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research found that 67 percent of Republicans wanted to see an end to federal medical-marijuana raids. President Obama’s policies are not only out of touch with his liberal base, they are far more draconian than what most conservatives want. On the issue of national power, this is not a completely new development on the right. Citing states’ rights, George W. Bush suggested he would put a stop to the raids in 1999. After becoming president, he stepped them up instead, but not nearly as much as Obama has done. According to Americans for Safe Access, the Obama Justice Department conducted 170 SWAT-style raids of medical-marijuana dispensaries between October 2009 and Spring 2012. Given his campaign promises to the contrary, Obama has “gone from first to worst,” according to Marijuana Policy Project Executive Director Rob Kampia. “There’s no question that Obama is the worst president on medical marijuana.”

The federalism argument against the raids has always seemed more appealing to conservatives than liberals. In 2005, the Supreme Court upheld the marijuana raids in *Gonzales v. Raich* in the name of preserving an expansive federal commerce power. Antonin Scalia joined the majority, but Clarence Thomas, Sandra Day O’Connor, and William Rehnquist dissented. Justice Thomas, the court’s most conservative member, issued the most stirring rebuke, which he grounded in a restrictive reading of Commerce Clause power: “If the Federal Government can regulate growing a half-dozen cannabis plants for personal consumption (not because it is interstate commerce, but because it is inextricably bound up with interstate commerce), then Congress’ Article I powers—as expanded by the Necessary and Proper Clause—have no meaningful limits.”

Tellingly, the Supreme Court’s opinion upholding Obamacare this summer cited the precedents of

Raich many times. Dissenting conservatives on the court attempted to find a distinction between the two rulings, but many commentators noted the corner into which Scalia in particular had painted himself, viewing federal power as nearly unlimited concerning medical marijuana but restrained on health insurance. Thomas was right in *Raich* that a federal police power that can supersede state marijuana laws, bust down someone’s door, and jail him for growing a plant for personal use, faces no effective limits and is the very face of tyranny. The liberals who endorsed unmitigated federal power on Obamacare as well as on medical marijuana were being completely consistent. The logic of the drug war is the logic of the New Deal, national supremacy, and everything conservatives profess to hate about Obama-style governance.

President Obama’s policies are not only out of touch with his liberal base, they are far more draconian than what most conservatives want.

Drug laws expose the tension within the conservative movement: devoted to localism and nationalism, freedom and law and order, today’s conservatives, if they are to mount a meaningful resistance to the unrestrained bureaucracy in Washington, D.C., must choose between their conflicting values. Many on the Tea Party right have come to regard the Bush-created Transportation Security Administration (TSA) as clumsy and despotic. They cling proudly to their guns and religion. They worry about their privacy in the face of a relentlessly growing central state. But it was the drug war that first shredded the Bill of Rights in modern times.

Public opinion has gradually been turning against the militarized Just Say No approach. Meanwhile, special interests like the tobacco and law-enforcement lobbies continue to put pressure on politicians to maintain the status quo. Democrats do not have the political will or capital to push for major changes. Perhaps Republican leaders—unafraid of accusations of being soft on crime, emboldened by a conservative movement increasingly skeptical of unlimited police power—are the ones most likely to lead the charge toward liberalization. This prospect leaves much to be desired, but for the first time in many years perhaps there is some hope on the horizon, and from an unexpected direction. ■

Killer Culture

Have we lost the meaning of iniquity?

by R.J. STOVE

*“A rain of blood has blinded my eyes ...
We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean,
United to supernatural vermin.”*

—T.S. Eliot, “Murder in the Cathedral”

“Art is what you can get away with.”

—Andy Warhol

Who currently reads Pamela Hansford Johnson, or even recognizes her name? Yet once she ranked among Britain’s 10 favorite living novelists. Born in 1912, she produced between 1935 and 1963 bestseller after bestseller, including *The Unspeakable Skipton*; *This Bed Thy Center*; *Too Dear For My Possessing*; and *Night and Silence, Who Is Here?* (Clearly she had a knack for memorable titles.) Broadly speaking, she appealed to that audience which also gravitated toward authors better remembered these days: Anthony Powell, Nancy Mitford, Barbara Pym, and C.P. Snow—who became her second husband and, eventually, Lord Snow. All were grunge-free zones; all purveyed not-quite-satirical but sharp-witted narratives of genteel malice. Then, after 1967, the progress of Miss Johnson’s career went somehow, as billiards players would say, out-of-true.

In that year she issued a monograph called *On Iniquity*. There she did something almost too frightful, too dishonorable, and too loathsome for words. She postulated—and this amid Swinging London, forsooth—three unfashionable theses. First, that a nation’s entire mass culture could become morally toxic without any blackshirts or commissars smashing skulls, without even Madison Avenue washing brains. Second, that the British mass culture of 1967 bore unarguable signs of such toxicity. Third, and most appalling of all: she dared imply that in

extreme circumstances a case conceivably existed for censorship, whether applied to the pornography of libidinous appetite, or to the more menacing pornography of violence.

Hers was not a Dwight Macdonald-style philippic against dumbing-down. There is almost no doctrine in her book at all. No party-political program is advocated (albeit Lord Snow served in Harold Wilson’s first cabinet). Nor does *On Iniquity* invoke any religion, other than rare and mildly approving references to the Christian creed, and an implied endorsement of Orwell’s maxim that “bourgeois morality” means no more than “common decency.” Johnson gave her readers a sequence of *pensées*, in which the flow remains logical but unpredictable.

Desensitization: that is her specific nightmare, on every page. She probably never encountered Saint-Saëns’s warning: “Why cannot we understand that in art, there are some things to which we *must not* accustom ourselves?” But repeatedly she asks, in different language, Saint-Saëns’s question. A few excerpts might convey the volume’s flavor.

At one point, she quotes a young Englishman whose employment had forced on him frequent visits to Hitler’s Nuremberg before Kristallnacht—in other words, when Jews were being spat on, derided, dismissed from workplaces, and thrashed, but seldom actually killed. This is what the youth told her:

The first time [when he saw thugs tormenting Jews] it was such a shock, I felt so sick, that I simply took to my heels. ... The second occasion I felt it was my duty to see just what was going on, so I stopped just for a minute. I felt as sick as ever, and did so the third time I tried to watch.

On the fourth I stood in that jeering crowd

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for quite a while. It seemed awful, but not quite so awful as before, almost as if it were a play. ... I was in serious danger of becoming acclimatized, to feel all this was a part of life, the way things happened. And then I took to my heels for the second time, and I went back to England as soon as I could get my bags packed.

Johnson's gloss on the above: "For the second time he took to his heels. For many of us, there might be no second chance to run. I wish I had not forgotten his name, because I shall never forget what he said."

Earlier comes Johnson on *Crime and Punishment's* Raskolnikov:

Novelists are conceited people; they tend to believe there is no mind into which they cannot imagine themselves ... [Dostoyevsky] has such demonic projective force that we tend to swallow whatever he tells us. He believes in the ultimate triumph of repentance in the murderer, that he must come to hate what he has done. ... [Yet] I believe very few of the guards in the concentration camps were true sadists: what had disappeared in them was the capacity to think of those they tortured as human beings at all. The prisoners were animals; they didn't have the same feelings as ourselves. There have been far more horrors committed in our time by the affectless than by the pathologically cruel.

Near the end occurs a discourse on what the progressive will usually die rather than admit: the sheer financial greed of so many voyeurs and their pimps, for all their squeals about "liberation," Getting In Touch With My Feelings, and so forth. "One of the oddities of the entire situation," she avers, "is that, in becoming so un-prudish about sex, we have suddenly become extravagantly prudish about money." (Katherine Anne Porter, in an overdue Damascene conversion to taste, admitted in 1960 that she and her fellow anti-censorship lobbyists had "championed recklessly the most awful wormy little books we none of us would have given shelf room ... [to gratify] a low cynic cashing in.")

But it might be asked: why should Johnson's thoughts have been pointed on such lines in the first place? Because of what she says at the outset: "I was asked by the *Sunday Telegraph* to spend a day or so at the Moors Trial and write of my impressions."

To anybody within the former British Empire—as well as in Britain itself—who remembers the mid-1960s, the words "Moors Murders," "Myra Hindley," and "Ian Brady" have not forfeited one iota of their power to induce revulsion. The cause for this revulsion may be tersely, and in bowdlerized manner, recounted.

Hindley and Brady, well before they took to slaying youngsters, were already whining, rutting, race-baiting, animal-slaughtering trailer-trash. Brady possessed highbrow pretensions of an incoherently National Socialist kind. In their *folie à deux* they kidnapped and killed five persons—the eldest 17 years old, the youngest 10—with numerous refinements of erotic cruelty. Arrested and tried in 1966 for only three murders (the relevant victims' names were Lesley-Ann Downey, Edward Evans, and John Kilbride), the pair took till 1985 to admit to the other two. In the dock, they waged demarcation disputes over who did what, but they never simulated either lunacy or guiltlessness. A few years beforehand, the scaffold would have awaited them, but in 1965 Harold Wilson's government jettisoned capital punishment. So the judge handed down life sentences. Then the fun really started.

Hindley got religion. You might think that a quintuple infanticide who insists that the Holy Spirit de-

Hindley and Brady, well before they took to slaying youngsters, were already whining, rutting, race-baiting, animal-slaughtering trailer-trash.

scended on her in Her Majesty's Prison, Holloway, and converted her to the Catholic faith would have been unable to convince a bong-toting kindergartner. Sadly, you would be wrong. Not one but two adult media panjandrum frantically backed her cause. These men were no Émile Zolas passionately committed to proving Captain Dreyfus's innocence. They knew Hindley had done everything for which she had been convicted. And still they wanted her released.

Panjandrum #1 was Lord Longford, the airheaded spouse of brilliant historian Elizabeth Longford. Few associated this egotistic earl, pre-Hindley, with anything much except his heavy-breathing reverence toward JFK and an unexpected distaste for homosexuals. For Longford, the "save Myra Hindley" crusade just lay waiting. There are Longfords in every neighborhood: when they do not gush over

peroxide-haired child-killers, they solemnly announce that the moon landings and 9/11 were faked, that the pope sends them secret messages through their dental fillings, and that the European Union is controlled by giant subterranean lizards. Today they proclaim these dogmas in upper-case emails to absolute strangers and are usually thwarted by the anti-spam button.

Panjandrum #2 was wholly different: Bernard Levin, a bellicose columnist with considerable anti-Soviet courage, with adolescent glee in others' sufferings, with a reputed tendency to lionize Wagner even when under general anesthetic, and with the

When capital-punishment abolitionists get their way, the very nature of bloodbaths, not merely the rate of them, changes.

most boorish prose idiom since Theodore Dreiser last vomited alphabet soup.

In 1977 Levin needed a new heroine and found one: Hindley. He accused those who decried a possible Hindley pardon of being actuated purely by vengeance: "The inevitable fury," Levin complained, "is, of course, based on the theory of punishment that is supposed to have no place in our system, to wit the retributive. Myra Hindley did terrible things to children; therefore, runs the instant but unreasoning answer, she must rot in jail for the rest of her life."

Clive James, with children of his own—Levin had no offspring, though two long-term concubines—responded:

The whole article takes the same high tone of judicial detachment. He sounds like Solomon, Cato the Elder and Oliver Wendell Holmes all rolled into one. Levin likes nothing better than to hand down a ruling. But although it is probably true that the majority of the public would be furious if Myra Hindley were released, it is unlikely that their desire to keep her locked up has anything to do with revenge. They just don't want her to do it again. ... This might seem an elementary point to make, but when you are dealing with Levin's high-and-mighty treatment of world politics you are forced to make elementary points all the time.

Successive British governments—Old Labour,

New Labour, or notionally Conservative—sided against Levin and with James. Levin's beatific vision of England's green and pleasant land rendered even more pleasant by a liberated Hindley's mischievous frolicking remained at the utopia stage.

Canada scrapped the death penalty in 1976, Australia in 1984. No Scandinavian realm has carried the penalty out since Denmark shot its last war criminals in 1950. The results, not least on the characteristic televised British crime bulletin, confirm Lord Melbourne's lament: "What all the wise men promised has not happened, and what all the damned fools said would happen has come to pass." When capital-punishment abolitionists get their way, the very nature of bloodbaths, not merely the rate of them, changes.

Number of rampages in Britain, Canada, Australia, and Norway when executioners still had jobs and almost every household still had firearms: zilch. Rampages in these lands after abolition: here we go.

Fifteen people murdered within minutes at Hungerford, Berkshire, in August 1987 by a gunman whose victims included his own mother. Fourteen female students murdered on a Montreal campus in December 1989. Sixteen children butchered at Dunblane, Scotland, in March 1996 by a pedophile. Thirty-five tourists eliminated at Port Arthur, Tasmania, in April 1996. Twelve wiped out in a brief killing spree at Cumbria, England, in June 2010. (Um, about those post-Dunblane gun-confiscation laws...) And latterly, of course, Anders Breivik's spree in July 2011, leaving 77 corpses. The only reason Oslo lawyers disseminate the consummate lie of Breivik's psychosis is the pitiable hope that a certified maniac might endure slightly more inconvenience than the 21 years' taxpayer-funded lodging which forms the maximum possible chastisement for Norway's sane.

The rest is almost silence. Hindley died, still a prisoner, in 2002. Twenty morticians refused to cremate her before the 21st consented. Brady survives to this hour, having improbably found—to quote Hannah Arendt on Eichmann—some members of the human race willing to share the earth with him. Longford passed away in 2001. Three years later Levin succumbed to Alzheimer's. Any syllable of Hindley-related remorse that either Longford or Levin voiced has not been documented.

Of the foregoing horrors Pamela Hansford Johnson

knew, thankfully, zero. Her death in 1981 occurred at a time when British public culture retained a certain civility. David Cameron's England—that militaristic porno-despotism tempered by Sharia, where Fourth Estate "freedom" amounts in practice to the choice between Julius Streicher and Jacques Hébert—remained, in 1981, unsuspected. Yet *On Iniquity* hints that Johnson might have guessed, in some cloudy witching-hour, at what her grandchildren would experience.

One more incident must yet be mentioned. The Brady-Hindley courtroom heard something that scorched the most blasé correspondents' souls. What was that something? A reel-to-reel tape (inately exotic: few Britons in 1966 owned tape-recorders at all, and cassettes constituted a still more

bizarre novelty) on which the Moors Murderers had recorded Lesley-Ann Downey's screams and sobs for help while they tortured her to death. Their tape lasted 13 minutes.

The other day, a middle-aged author abruptly recollected, from his distant boyhood in rural New South Wales—and despite vigilant parental censorship—a tabloid announcement of that tape. On the very same day there came to him the news that Batman's Joker had arrived at a cinema in Colorado. Which even now (blessed be the name of the Lord) consoles its bereaved by sanctioning, for the Joker, lethal injection.

And suddenly, ashamedly, that author could no longer staunch his tears. He wrote, for better or for worse, the essay you have just read. ■

OLD and RIGHT

We live in an age that is frightened by the very idea of certitude, and one of its really disturbing outgrowths is the easy divorce between words and the conceptual realities which our right minds know they must stand for. This takes the form especially of looseness and exaggeration. Now exaggeration, it should be realized, is essentially a form of ignorance, one that allows and seems to justify distortion. And the psychopathic mind of war has greatly increased our addiction to this vice; indeed, during the struggle distortion became virtually the technique of reporting.

A course of action, when taken by our side, was "courageous"; when taken by the enemy, "desperate"; a policy instituted by our command was "stern," or in a delectable euphemism which became popular, "rugged"; the same thing instituted by the enemy was "brutal." Seizure by military might when committed by the enemy was "conquest"; but, if committed by our side, it was "occupation" or even "liberation," so transposed did the poles become. Unity of spirit among our people was a sign of virtue; among the enemy it was proof of incorrigible devotion to crime. The list could be prolonged indefinitely. And such always happens when men surrender to irrationality. It fell upon the Hellenic cities during the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides tells us in a vivid sentence that "the ordinary acceptance of words in their relation to things was changed as men thought fit."

Our situation would be sufficiently deplorable if such deterioration were confined to times of military conflict; but evidence piles up that fundamental intellectual integrity, once compromised, is slow and

difficult of restoration. If one examines the strikingly different significations given to "democracy" and "freedom," he is forced to realize how far we are from that basis of understanding which is prerequisite to the healing of the world. To one group "democracy" means access to the franchise; to another it means economic equality administered under a dictatorship. Or consider the number of contradictory things which have been denominated Fascist. What has happened to the one world of meaning? It has been lost for want of definers. Teachers of the present order have not enough courage to be definers; lawmakers have not enough insight.

The truth is that our surrender to irrationality has been in progress for a long time, and we witness today a breakdown of communication not only between nations and groups within nations but also between successive generations. Sir Richard Livingstone has pointed out that the people of the Western world "do not know the meaning of certain words, which had been assumed to belong to the permanent vocabulary of mankind, certain ideals which, if ignored in practice under pressure, were accepted in theory. The least important of these is Freedom. The most important are Justice, Mercy, and Truth. In the past we have slurred this revolution over as a difference in 'ideology.' In fact it is the greatest transformation that the world has undergone, since, in Palestine or Greece, these ideals came into being or at least were recognized as principles of conduct."

—Richard M. Weaver,
Ideas Have Consequences, 1948

The Conservative Kerouac

Beat novelist, Catholic, Republican—do you know Jack?

by ROBERT DEAN LURIE

*Someone's gonna give you wings
You'll think it's what you need
You'll fly, man, you'll be so high
But your history acts as your gravity*

—Joseph Arthur

For someone who documented just about every moment of his life in torrents of breathless, “spontaneous” prose, Jack Kerouac—the late author of *On the Road*, *Big Sur*, and other stream-of-consciousness, hyper-autobiographical novels—remains surprisingly up for grabs ideologically. The hippies claim him as an inspiration, as do many western Buddhists; a biography called *Subterranean Kerouac* attempts to out him as a homosexual; a new film adaptation of *On The Road* starring Kristen Stewart opens the door for the *Twilight* generation; and I wouldn't be surprised if there aren't more than a few Occupy Wall Street protestors hunkering down in their tents with battered copies of Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* stuffed in their jacket pockets.

Each of these groups is absolutely sincere in its self-identification with Kerouac. Each sees its concerns and agendas reflected in his roiling ocean of language. Yet this bopping, scatting, mystical jazz poet who almost singlehandedly willed the 1960s counterculture into being was himself a political conservative and a Catholic.

How can this be?

The key to understanding Kerouac lies in a close examination of his roots, for it was in the small French Canadian community of Lowell, Massachusetts that the future author was inculcated with the values that would carry him through his life. He did indeed go on to lead a wild existence filled with alcohol, drugs, and perpetual shiftlessness; he fled from monogamy as from leprosy. Yet one cannot grasp the soul of Kerouac unless one understands his fundamentally traditional core. He never wished to foment a revolution.

He did not desire to change America; he intended to document, celebrate, and, in the end, eulogize it.

Jean-Louis (“Jack”) Kerouac was born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1922, the son of French Canadian immigrants. His father Leo, like so many immigrants, fiercely loved his adopted country. This belief in the land of opportunity remained with him even after his Catholicism lapsed in the wake of devastating business failures. Jack's conservatism, like his father's, was the conservatism of the old ways: of hard work and even harder drink, of big blue-collar families passing down oral traditions. Above all, it was a conservatism of the natural world: of the large, solid, protective trees, of the perpetually roaring Merrimack and Concord Rivers—all combining to cast that crucial illusion of unchangingness that, in the best of circumstances, cradles and fortifies a soul for its journey beyond childhood. Late in life Kerouac would tell William F. Buckley Jr., “My father and my mother and my sister and I have always voted Republican, *always*.” This had nothing to do with party planks and everything to do with family identity, with holding onto *something*, no matter how arbitrary, in an otherwise disorienting world. *We're Kerouacs and this is what we do*.

Hand in hand with the politics was the pre-Vatican II Catholicism that saturated Lowell's tight-knit French Canadian community. Gabrielle Kerouac—Jack's mother—matched Leo's civic pride with a fervent religious faith, which if anything intensified after the death of Jack's older brother Gerard, whom Jack would later eulogize as an unheralded saint in the novel *Visions of Gerard*. This was that majestic, fearsome Catholicism that now exists purely in the realm of imagination for most modern practitioners: the Catholicism of the Latin mass, of all-powerful priests, of God as the unknowable, awe-inspiring *other*. To

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New England's mostly impoverished French Canadians, the Catholic Church served as de facto government, educator, extended family, and cultural arbitrator. Perhaps as a result of this spiritual immersion, both Gabrielle and Jack saw signs of God and angels everywhere.

"The Catholic Church is a weird church," Jack later wrote to his friend and muse Neal Cassady. "Much mysticism is sown broadspread from its ritual mysteries till it extends into the very lives of its constituents and parishoners." It is impossible to overstate the influence of Catholicism on all of Kerouac's work, save perhaps those books written during his Buddhist period in the mid-to-late 1950s. The influence is so obvious and so pervasive, in fact, that Kerouac became justifiably incensed when Ted Berrigan of the *Paris Review* asked during a 1968 interview, "How come you never write about Jesus?" Kerouac's reply: "I've never written about Jesus? ... You're an insane phony ... *All I write about is Jesus.*"

Berrigan ought to have known better. But casual readers can be forgiven for failing to grasp the religiosity in Kerouac's writing. After all, his version of Christianity esteemed visions and personal experience over doctrine and dogma. He felt a special affinity for such offbeat souls as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Therese of Liseux ("The Little Flower"), and Thomas Merton, all of whom to some extent de-emphasized legalism in favor of a direct union with God. Beyond the confines of the Catholic Church, the influence of the painter and ecstatic poet William Blake loomed just as large and perhaps fueled Kerouac's disregard for what he perceived to be restrictive sexual mores.

Of course, Kerouac is best known not for his lovely Lowell-centered books but for *On the Road*, a breathless jazz-inflected torrent of words initially typed out onto a "scroll"—actually hundreds of pages of tracing paper taped together and fed continuously through his typewriter—during one epic coffee-fueled writing session in 1951 and ultimately published in 1957. The book, now considered an American classic, documents the author's real-life adventures traipsing around the country in his mid-20s with friends Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Neal Cassady who, together with Kerouac, would comprise the core



of "The Beat Generation," the last great American literary movement. Much drinking, drugging, and fornicating ensues over the course of *Road's* 320 pages. Not surprisingly, these prurient elements did not endear Kerouac to the mainstream right of his time, which irked the young author, as he felt no affinity for the left.

He never saw the impartial documenting of his own reckless youth as license for others to drop out of society. If anything, the downbeat ending of *Road*, in which Kerouac predicts the frantic, kicks-obsessed "Dean Moriarty's" (Neal Cassady's) eventual slide into oblivion, as well as his unflinching depiction of his own nervous breakdown from alcoholic excess in the follow-up novel *Big Sur*, make quite clear the inevitable outcome of a "life on the road." But Kerouac should not have been surprised by the right's reaction; this was, after all, not conservative writing. The books did not follow the established standards of the novel and, in reality, were not novels at all but something else entirely: "confessional picaresque memoirs" (a phrase coined by Beat scholar Ann Charters), with the names of the participants changed to avoid accusations of libel. The conservative critics, missing the deeper themes of loneliness and the yearning for God,

lambasted Kerouac for encouraging delinquency, while critics of all stripes complained about his sloppiness and occasional incoherence.

These commentators had a point: as novels, the books could be frustratingly uneven. Readers often found themselves bewildered by the sheer number of characters drifting in and out of the pages, unable to keep track of all the “mad ones” that Kerouac strained to include in his storylines. Why, the critics wondered, couldn’t Kerouac simply create a few composite characters embodying his friends’ most noteworthy traits? By any standard such an authorial modification would have vastly improved the readability of the books.

But that was not Kerouac’s aim. He wished to capture the truth, his truth, as best and as purely as he could. And he wanted to do this spontaneously, like a jazz musician wailing on his horn during an onstage improvisation. Revision, in Kerouac’s eyes, would only dilute the purity of the original performance. Furthermore, since he viewed his writing vocation as rooted in the Sacrament of Reconciliation: revision was tantamount to lying in the confessional. It might have resulted in better novels, but they would no longer have been “spontaneous” and “true” novels. And it is the spontaneity and the emotional truth of these books, more than anything else, that continue to speak to readers.

It’s easy to approach *On the Road* with cynicism: an almost rapturous naïveté, or idiocy, permeates throughout. Yet this wide-eyed quality is actually one of the book’s great strengths; it evokes the exhilaration of being young, of leaving home for the first time and venturing out into the wider world with an open heart and credulous mind. Kerouac had the beguiling ability to find the admirable and holy in every soul he encountered on his travels, just as he had seen angels and the Holy Mother emerging from every corner in Lowell. And who has not experienced the sweet rush of moral transgression or the anguish of having to accept the consequences of such behavior? *On the Road* captures those emotions expertly.

Kerouac’s self-destructive nature, which led to his premature death from alcohol-induced hemorrhaging, is perhaps the most curious aspect of his life story. Why would a man who worked so relentlessly at his craft, who endured 15 years of obscurity and rejection before his triumphant breakthrough, and who seemed to derive blissed-out enjoyment from even the most mundane aspects of life methodically destroy everything he had worked so hard to attain?

The answer may lie in a combination of near-crippling shyness and the very emotional openness that gave his writing such warmth. A fundamentally quiet,

sensitive soul, Kerouac was woefully ill-equipped for the spotlight and had very little tolerance for criticism. Alcohol bolstered his confidence to speak in public and partially anaesthetized the sting of the many bad reviews his books received. Yet it was not enough. His friends watched helplessly as he barreled onward to his demise, spurred ever faster by the hostile media.

As the apolitical Beat Generation metastasized into the heavily politicized hippie movement, Kerouac’s despondency and sense of alienation deepened. “I made myself famous by writing ‘songs’ and lyrics about the beauty of the things I did and ugliness too,” he said in a heated exchange with political activist Ed Sanders on Buckley’s “Firing Line.” “*You* made yourself famous by saying, ‘Down with this, down with that, throw eggs at this, throw eggs at that!’ Take it with you. I cannot use your refuse; you may have it back.”

He allowed political differences to play a part in the demise of one of his greatest friendships. “I don’t even particularly want to see [Allen Ginsberg],” he wrote his friend John Clellon Holmes in 1963, “what with his pro-Castro bullshit and his long white robe Messiah shot. ... He and all those bohemian beatniks round him have nothing NEW to tell me.” This was a one-sided breakup. Ginsberg, by then a famous poet, remained intensely loyal to Kerouac even after Kerouac started publicly denouncing his old friend and hurling anti-Semitic insults in his direction. Ginsberg was wise enough, and big-hearted enough, to understand that Kerouac’s flailing out at him was a symptom of larger issues.

Kerouac’s sad final years were spent in an increasingly frantic quest to find a true home for himself and his mother. On an almost yearly basis he oscillated between Florida and New England, always following the same cycle: purchase a home, move in, grow restless, sell it; purchase another one, move in, sell it; and so on. Tragically, even when he returned to Lowell for a brief time, he found that the nurturing community he had written about so fondly for so many years now existed only in his books. He yearned, as the fictional Odysseus had during his wanderings, for the familiar, for something real and stable in his life. His mistake lay in looking for these things outside of him. Nevertheless, that desire is a good, true, worthy desire, and it permeates all of Jack Kerouac’s writing. It is the reason why the Beat movement could not last. Allen Ginsberg, the poet visionary, pined for utopia and spiritual revolution. William S. Burroughs, the outlaw libertarian, pined for anarchy and gay liberation. Neal Cassady, the exiled cowboy, pined for girls and cars. Jack Kerouac, the mystic, pined for God and home. ■



My Pen Pal Gore Vidal

Now he belongs to the Ages... Well, why not? Edwin Stanton's grandiloquent sendoff for the martyred Lincoln applies to Gore Vidal, author of the best fictive treatment our 16th president is ever likely to get. Plus it would have appealed to Gore's fair vanity.

Gore Vidal's favorite subject was his country. From Aaron Burr and Daniel Shays to Eugene V. Debs, America and its protagonists were his. This land was made for you and me? Of course it was.

So many healthy springs once fed our politics: they were rural, populist, patrician, pacifist, libertarian, anti-monopolist, prairie socialist, Main Street isolationist. Gore Vidal was explicator, dramatist, and even avatar of these American currents—which have no place in the dreary humorless social-democratic textbook history that bores our children and suffocates our discourse.

On a Sunday afternoon of torrential rains and crashing thunder (sound effects supplied by the Almighty in winking tribute to the anti-theist Vidal), I sat down and read through the sheaf of letters constituting our long epistolary friendship.

Each missive arrived in a pale blue envelope bearing the return address "La Rondinaia/Ravello (Salerno)/Italy." His tone was often light self-mockery, unless the subject was, say, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Amused by Schlesinger's surprisingly evenhanded review of one of my books, Vidal wrote, "As no bandwagon is complete without 'there is this pendulum' clinging to its buckboard, you seem to have launched a juggernaut out of Batavia." Not exactly.

Gore's "favorite US pol (in my lifetime, that is)" was Huey Long, who had

promised to make General Smedley "War is a Racket" Butler his Secretary of (Anti?) War. Cue the assassin's bullet.

Vidal was an aristocratic populist. It was as if Henry Adams had fallen for William Jennings Bryan.

"As always, the unconsulted people are cowardly isolationists," mused Gore as yet another of our endless wars began. Left-right rumblings against the empire heartened him: "They are terrified that anti-imperials will get together and revive America First, no bad rallying cry."

I tried to get him to run in the 1992 Democratic presidential primaries, but he demurred: "If I had the energy, I'd make Huey Long seem like Robt Alphonso Taft—But too much sand's slipped through the hourglass."

While he saw the value of devolving power from the capital to the provinces, Vidal maintained an independent liberal's skepticism of my decentralism, asserting that "if a state, exercising its rights, should wish to execute all spinsters over 40 (my father's dream!), then a Power Higher"—presumably a Bill of Rights-enforcing federal government—"must protect the minority from the majority."

He enjoyed the sound of my hometown, and so his letters are filled with exhortations to "Preserve Batavia" and "Hail Batavia." A decade ago he told me he was preparing to write a "counterbook" to my *Dispatches from the Muckdog Gazette*, but when one hits one's octage, energy flags.

Vidal's sense of place encompassed not only Ravello but his native Hudson Valley, especially his place of birth, West Point, of which he wrote: "what I find intolerable is the presence of women. Boys don't like girls around

when they do boy things. Fortunately, we'll never again win or, perhaps, fight a war based on the bonded squad. Girls with lasers in outer space will prevail."

He rather liked the current laser-pointing schoolmarm, Hillary Clinton. When she visited him in Italy, he found her "unexpectedly droll and (expectedly) quick." Curiously, the late Carl Oglesby, who headed SDS when it was healthily rebellious—before the Weathermen blew it apart—also insisted to me that Hillary, who had admired Carl in her Goldwater-girl-goes-left phase, was sharp. In public, at least, she hides her little light well.

Another name from the '90s, Newt Gingrich, has praised Vidal's *Lincoln*, and Vidal had a soft spot for Newt, too. In early 1995 he predicted that "Newt will self-destruct but he's the blueprint for the 1st (post-Lincoln) dictator—New Age, spacey, Fun." Beats Dick Cheney.

Gore's last line in his last letter to me, after predicting that "the approaching economic collapse" will "stop the wars," was "I'm always an optimist!"

Maybe not, but he was always a patriot. With slashing wit and Adamsian erudition, Gore Vidal, in his essays and historical novels, lit roads not taken, the America we might have had. Not a bloated bullying arrogant superpower but a modest republic whose citizens—not subjects—cultivate their own gardens.

That's what Gore Vidal wanted. That's why the empire-lovers hated him. Yet a century hence, Americans will still read, with pleasure and profit, for laughs and for edification, *Burr* and *Lincoln* and *Screening History* and those magisterial essays.

So long, Gore. I'll be reading you in all the old familiar places. ■

Arts&Letters

Tyranny of Merit

by SAMUEL W. GOLDMAN

Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy, Christopher Hayes, Crown Publishers, 292 pages

“Elite” wasn’t always a dirty word. Before the 19th century, the term described someone chosen for office. Because this typically occurred in the church, the word possessed distinctly ecclesiastical connotations. The pre-Victorians transformed a word imputing religious status to individual persons into a collective noun with class implications. By the 1830s, “elite” referred to

Equality of opportunity tends to be subverted by the inequality of outcome that meritocracy legitimizes.

the highest ranks of the nobility.

Those meanings are no longer primary. As invoked by followers of the Tea Party movement, for example, “elite” means essentially a snob. Not, however, a snob of the old, aristocratic breed. In this context, “elite” means men and women who think degrees from famous universities mean they know better than their fellow citizens.

Elites like these don’t just look down on regular folks from provincial perches in Boston or Palo Alto. According to stump speeches, blogs, and TV

commentators, They’ve been getting their way on Wall Street and in Washington for years, with disastrous results for the country.

MSNBC host Chris Hayes is no conservative. But he agrees that America is governed by a ruling class that has proved unworthy of its power. According to Hayes, the failures of the last decade created a deep crisis of authority. We counted on elites to do the right thing on our behalf. The Iraq War, steroid scandal in baseball, abuse cover-up in the Catholic Church, incompetent response to Hurricane Katrina, and, above all, financial crisis showed that they didn’t know enough or care enough to do so.

Twilight of the Elites advances two explanations for these failures. The first emphasizes elite ignorance. People with a great deal of money or power aren’t like the rest of us. Their schedules, pastimes, and even transportation are different to those of ordinary people. This isn’t always because their tastes are distinctive, at least initially. It’s often a job requirement.

In addition to their unusual lifestyles, elite types don’t spend much time with averages Joes. At work, they’re surrounded by subordinates. At home, they live in literally or metaphorically gated communities and socialize with people similar to themselves. Again, there’s nothing sinister about this. Because of their distance from the rest of the population, however, members of

the elite often have little idea what’s going on in less rarefied settings.

One consequence, Hayes argues, is that elites have trouble making good decisions. Ignorant of the challenges that the poor and middle-class face and separated from the consequences of their actions, elites are susceptible to making policies that seem reasonable, but which on-the-ground experience would expose as ineffectual. Take the evacuation of New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina. It didn’t succeed because many New Orleanians had nowhere to go, no money to get there, and no cars in which to escape—facts the mayor and governor should have known.

The distance of elites can also have moral consequences. When policies fail, isolated elites are more likely to blame their subjects than themselves. Politicians blamed poor New Orleanians for being too lazy to evacuate. Similarly, the sellers of toxic securities blamed their customers for being too stupid to appreciate the risks that they were accepting. In an especially revolting example, members of the national-security establishment blamed Iraqis for failing to appreciate invasion and occupation. For elites like these, it’s always someone else’s fault.

All elites risk falling out of touch, and always have. As Hayes notes, the Declaration of Independence argues that effective authority must be accountable authority. The other aspect of Hayes’s theory of elite failure is more contemporary, though. The problem of ignorance, he argues, is exacerbated by the principle of selection used by our

most influential institutions. According to Hayes, modern American elites are distinctive because they acquire status by means of ostensibly objective criteria. As a result, they think they deserve their wealth and power.

The ideal of meritocracy has deep roots in this country. Jefferson dreamed of a “natural aristocracy.” But the modern meritocracy dates only to the 1930s, when Harvard President James Bryant Conant directed his admissions staff to find a measure of ability to supplement the old boys’ network. They settled on the exam we know as the SAT.

In the decades following World War II, standardized testing replaced the gentleman’s agreements that had governed the Ivy League. First Harvard, then Yale and the rest filled with the sons and eventually daughters of Jews, blue-collar workers, and other groups whose numbers had previously been limited.

After graduation, these newly pedigreed men and women flocked to New York and Washington. There, they took jobs once filled by products of New England boarding schools. One example is Lloyd Blankfein, the Bronx-born son of a Jewish postal clerk, who followed Harvard College and Harvard Law School with a job at a white-shoe law firm, which he left to join Goldman Sachs.

Hayes applauds the replacement of the WASP ascendancy with a more diverse cohort. The core of his book, however, argues that the principle on which they rose inevitably undermines itself.

The argument begins with the observation that meritocracy does not oppose unequal social and economic outcomes. Rather, it tries to justify inequality by offering greater rewards to the talented and hardworking.

The problem is that the effort presumes that everyone has the same chance to compete under the same rules. That may be true at the outset. But equality of opportunity tends to be subverted by the inequality of outcome that meritocracy legitimizes. In



short, according to Hayes, “those who are able to climb up the ladder will find ways to pull it up after them, or to selectively lower it down to allow their friends, allies and kin to scramble up. In other words: ‘whoever says meritocracy says oligarchy.’”

With a nod to the early 20th-century German sociologist Robert Michels, Hayes calls this paradox the “Iron Law of Meritocracy.”

In the most personal section of the book, he describes the way the Iron Law of Meritocracy operates at his *alma mater*, Hunter College High

School in New York City. Admission to Hunter is based on the results of a single test offered to 6th graders who did well on statewide tests in 5th grade. Because there are no preferences for legacies, donors, members of minority groups, or athletes, admission to Hunter seems like a pure application of the meritocratic principle.

It doesn’t work that way. Although its student body once reflected the racial and economic proportions of the city, Hunter has grown increasingly wealthy and white. Why? In Hayes’s view, rich parents have discovered strategies to

game the system. By buying cognitive enhancements like foreign travel, music lessons, tutoring in difficult subjects, and outright test prep, these parents give their kids a substantial leg up.

These children are better prepared than rivals from poor or negligent families. But it's hard to conclude that they've earned their advantage. They're clearly bright and hardworking. Yet they've also been fortunate to have parents who know what it takes to climb the ladder and can pay for those advantages. The ideal of meritocracy obscures the accidents of birth. From Hunter to Harvard to Goldman Sachs, the meritocrats proceed through life convinced that they owe their rise exclusively to their own efforts.

This sense of entitlement is one reason meritocratic elites are particularly susceptible to pathologies of distance. They don't only have distinctive lifestyles. They're convinced that they really deserve their privileges.

Could a radicalized upper-middle class turn from the bulwark of meritocracy into its opponent?

Of course, most elites have fancied themselves a superior breed. The way meritocracy obscures the role of chance, however, encourages the modern elite to think of themselves as unusually deserving individuals rather than members of a ruling class with responsibilities to the rest of society.

Finally, Hayes argues, the selection of the elite for academic accomplishment leads to a cult of intelligence that discounts the practical wisdom necessary for good decision-making. Remember Enron? They were the smartest guys in the room.

Hayes oversells his argument as a unified explanation of the "fail decade." Although it elucidates some aspects of the Iraq War, Katrina debacle, and financial crisis, these disasters had other

causes. Nevertheless, the Iron Law of Meritocracy elucidates why our elites take the form they do and how they fell so out touch with reality. In Hayes's account, the modern elite is caught in a feedback loop that makes it less and less open and more and more isolated from the rest of the country.

What's to be done? One answer is to rescue meritocracy by providing the poor and middle class with the resources to compete. A popular strategy focuses on education reform. If schools were better, the argument goes, poor kids could compete on an equal footing for entry into the elite. The attempt to rescue meritocracy by fixing education has become a bipartisan consensus, reflected in Bush's "No Child Left Behind" and Obama's "Race to the Top."

Hayes rejects this option. The defect of meritocracy, in his view, is not the inequality of opportunity that it conceals, but the inequality of outcome that it celebrates. In other words, the problem is not that the son of a postal clerk has less chance to become a Wall Street titan than he used to. It's that the rewards of a career on Wall Street have become so disproportionate to the rewards of the traditional professions, let alone those available to a humble civil servant.

Hayes's prescription, then, is simple: we should raise taxes on the rich and increase redistributive payments to the poor and middle class.

Raising taxes is surprisingly popular, at least in principle. According to one poll Hayes cites, 81 percent of Americans favor a surtax on incomes over \$1 million a year. Nevertheless, these seem unlikely to be enacted. Among other reasons, the legislators who would have to approve them are either drawn from or depend on the same class that the taxes target.

Yet Hayes is optimistic about the prospects for egalitarian reform. He places his hopes on a radicalized up-

per-middle class. As recently as a decade ago, people with graduate degrees and six-figure incomes could think of themselves as prospective members of the elite. While the income and influence of the very rich has zoomed ahead, however, the stagnation of the economy has left the moderately well-off at risk of proletarianization.

Despite their ideological differences, both the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street draw support from this class. It's just that the Tea Party appeals to the parents, while Occupy mobilizes the kids.

Could a radicalized upper-middle class turn from the bulwark of meritocracy into its opponent? That seems unlikely for three reasons.

First, the polls Hayes mentions do not document popular support for redistribution. They indicate that Americans want to tax the rich to cover the deficit. Americans like their current entitlements and want to keep them. But there's no evidence that they endorse the egalitarian agenda Hayes has in mind.

Second, there's a tension between this agenda and the social liberalism to which Hayes is committed. Social scientists have found that we're willing to share resources with others like ourselves. We're reluctant, however, to make sacrifices for people we consider different or objectionable.

In a section on the "two eras of equality," Hayes urges us to adopt the solidaristic norms that characterize relatively homogeneous societies, including the United States circa 1960. At the same time, he praises the diversity and freedom of contemporary America. These things don't go together, in practice if not in principle.

The tax regime of 50 years ago was legitimized by a broad consensus about the proper uses of shared prosperity. The more libertarian views dominant today are also relatively consistent across economic and social realms. Hayes thinks that we can combine the economic virtues of the for-

mer era with the social virtues of latter. That's wishful thinking.

I mentioned at the beginning of this review that Hayes is not a conservative. That's no defect in itself. But this book would have been improved, in the end, by engaging with the conservative tradition.

The central insight of this tradition is that there is no society without a governing class. Whether they're selected by birth, intelligence, or some other factor, some people inevitably exercise power over others. Hayes mounts a powerful critique of the meritocratic elite that has overseen one of the most disastrous periods of recent history. He lapses into utopianism, however, when he suggests that we can do without elites altogether. Like the poor, elites will always be with us. As the word's original meaning suggests, the question is how they ought to be chosen. ■

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Hamilton Was Right

by GEORGE W. CAREY

The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton, Michael P. Federici, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 291 pages

Toward the end of his work, Michael Federici writes, "It is rare to find books or articles on Hamilton that do not in some way make comparisons between him and Thomas Jefferson." This is understandable given that their differences, far from being just theoretical or temporal, have played and continue to play a role in determining the direction of our economic and political development. What is somewhat remarkable, however, is that Hamilton usually does not fare very well in

these comparisons.

The contrasts drawn between the two are all too familiar: Jefferson articulated the American creed in the Declaration, he was a real republican who reposed faith in the people, whereas Hamilton, out of step with the temper of the times and ever fearful of the masses, favored a strong central government with an aristocratic, if not monarchical, character. Even many conservatives, especially those with libertarian leanings, find Jefferson to their liking because they associate him with unalienable individual rights, a federal government with limited powers, and a decentralized political system. From their vantage point, Hamilton fares very poorly.

The significance of Federici's work, in my estimation, can best be understood in this context because it presents persuasive evidence that Hamilton may well deserve a place in the pantheon of conservative statesmen, while it simultaneously undermines Jefferson's credentials for any such status. This is not to say that these are Federici's conclusions, although he unquestionably believes that a major reappraisal of Hamilton's legacy is in order. Rather, they are warranted simply in light of the totality of Hamilton's political thought that he surveys.

As Federici acknowledges at various points, Hamilton was not a systemic and comprehensive political theorist. Such is true of virtually all the Founding Fathers, though to a greater extent with Hamilton than, say, John Adams or James Wilson. This means, as Federici puts it, that often "his political ideas have to be teased out his writings and one has to be aware that Hamilton was often writing not to explicate philosophical truth but to accomplish a political objective." Therefore, the range of Hamilton's

theoretical concerns was largely confined to the concrete issues within his immediate political universe. Given this orientation, he did not embrace or espouse any ideology, nor was he wont to engage in abstract political thought. And, although he was influenced by various political theorists, Hume and Montesquieu being among the most notable, Federici concludes that he does not fit comfortably into any school of political thought.

The character and foundations of

Hamilton did not embrace or espouse any ideology, nor was he wont to engage in abstract political thought.

Hamilton's political thought are apparent, however, from Federici's revealing treatment of Hamilton's imagination, in which Federici employs Irving Babbitt's distinction between the "idyllic imagination," evidenced in the thought and approaches of both Rousseau and Bacon, and the "moral imagination" that fashioned Burke's thinking. Federici offers compelling reasons to believe that Hamilton's imagination was akin to Burke's.

Hamilton, for instance, rejected "the idea that human nature is malleable," which, in turn, contributed mightily to his realism "about the possibilities of politics." He "was not enamored with the wisdom of the people or with plebiscitary forms of democracy" and, along with Marshall and Washington, he saw an imperative need for "constitutional checks and restraints" in order to control the "will to power."

Yet his "moral and political realism ... the product of an imagination imbued with Christian and Classical realism regarding the human condition" clearly did not prevent him from

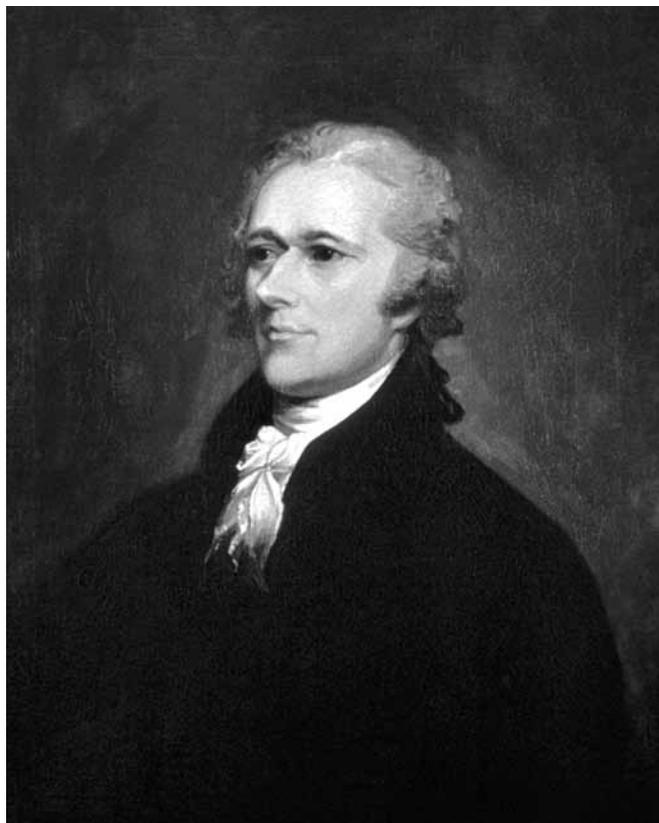
advocating change. Indeed, Federici remarks, “few Americans did more than Hamilton to change the nation’s political and economic institutions.” But lasting and beneficial change or reform for Hamilton, as for Burke, could only take place “within the parameters of a structure of reality ... defined by historical experience.”

As Federici shows, these views and assumptions, among others, serve to highlight the basic differences between Hamilton’s views and those of Jefferson (the latter deriving from Jefferson’s “idyllic imagination”). These differences, not surprisingly, manifest themselves in their respective attitudes toward the Jacobins and the French Revolution. Federici points out that Jefferson, even after the culmination of the French Revolution, could write, “The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the context, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood?” Hamilton, on the other hand, condemned the revolution along the same lines as Burke and concluded that for “a deluded, an abused, a plundered, a scourged and oppressed people,” the Revolution has left “not even the shadow of liberty.”

Federici’s concerns go well beyond comparing the political thought of Hamilton and Jefferson. A chapter is devoted to Hamilton’s positions on various and wide-ranging foreign-policy issues, including Washington’s neutrality proclamation, which prompted the Hamilton’s “Pacificus” essays and Madison’s response as “Helvidius”—an exchange that raised fundamental issues over the direction and control of foreign policy that are

still very much with us today. Also included is analysis of Hamilton’s “Camillus” essays defending the controversial and unpopular Jay Treaty that failed to secure any substantial concessions from Great Britain over its longstanding violations of the Paris Treaty.

Still another chapter centers on those economic and finance policies that constitute Hamilton’s most en-



Alexander Hamilton

during legacy: his “Report on Manufactures,” his success in pushing for the national assumption of state war debts, and, among others, the creation of a national bank. In both the economic and foreign-policy fields, his policies were designed with an eye to the security and independence of the new nation: on the foreign-policy side this amounted to “protecting the ship of state from ideological and imperial powers”; on the domestic, “building a

diverse and productive economy that could serve the nation’s economic and military needs.”

In many ways, Federici’s discussion of Hamilton’s theory of constitutionalism and his commentary on the Constitution, gleaned primarily from the *Federalist* essays, is the most interesting. Hamilton believed that civic virtue—i.e., subordinating personal self-interest for the common good—

was essential for a just and enduring constitutional republic. At the same time, given his views on human motivation, he was convinced that this virtue could never prevail in the political arena for any length of time without the benefits of a natural aristocracy. Consequently, with Madison he perceived the need for “fit characters” in representative institutions; characters who, always mindful of justice and the common good, would “refine and enlarge the public views.” He also shared with Madison the belief that provision for delay and deliberation was essential to allow for passions to cool and, as he put it, provide “time for more cool and sedate reflection.”

Federici makes clear, however, that in important ways, Hamilton’s positions on restraining either oppressive majorities or government are at odds with

views that seemingly prevail today. In *The Federalist*, for example, he argues against a bill of rights on various tenable grounds that belie the charge that he was opponent of self-government. The “primary signification” of rights, he observes, has been the grant of rights by kings to the people. As such, he concludes, they have no place in the proposed Constitution because the “people surrender nothing ... and

... retain everything.” He emphasizes the Preamble’s “We the people” by way of affirming that the Constitution’s consensual foundation “is a better recognition of rights” than the “aphorisms” found in the various states’ bills of right.

In discussing the push to elevate “liberty of the press” to the status of a constitutional right, Hamilton points to other considerations, namely, the difficulties in clearly defining it and its potential conflict with the legitimate powers of government such as taxation. Significantly, he adds, the observance of any such right depends, in the last analysis, on “public opinion ... the general spirit of the people and of the government.” (The validity of this proposition is evident in today’s America.)

Finally, he maintains, stipulating “things shall not be done, which there is no power to do” offers “a colourable pretext” for contending that the national government possesses plenary, not simply delegated, powers. Nor, as increasingly seems to be the case today, did Hamilton look upon the Supreme Court as the last resort in blocking oppressive measures, correcting for political failures, or addressing minority concerns. He is adamant that the Court should exercise only “judgment” and not “will,” the prerogative of the legislature. Beyond this, he holds that only in the event of an “irreconcilable difference” between a law and the Constitution can the Court legitimately nullify the law; a test so stringent that the Court would have occasion perhaps once or twice in a century to invalidate laws. In sum, as Federici rightly comments, Hamilton’s thoughts on judicial power bear scarcely any relationship to modern theories of judicial review.

Suffice it to say that Federici deals with virtually every aspect of Hamilton’s political thought—his penchant for order, the grounds of his loose construction of the Constitution, his

reactions to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and, *inter alia*, the character of his nationalism. He was not, Federici notes, entirely consistent in his treatment of issues, tending, for example, “to overestimate the possibilities of politics when power rested in his hands.” But for Federici, Hamilton’s “central weakness” is his failure to recognize “what Tocqueville and others would later identify as the rich American tradition of state and local communities, including the place of sectional and private groups and associations in the affairs of the country.” For this reason, he continues, “Hamilton overestimated the extent to which government can control or manage the lives of people and communities it governs.”

Yet it must be said that Hamilton, having experienced first hand the mismanagement and failures of government during and after the Revolutionary War, and whose historical knowledge of the ancient confederacies gave him reason to fear that the states might undermine the Union, had good reason for advocating a strong national government. As well, we should not forget that Hamilton never espoused the kind of extensive, intrusive governmental powers that most of the American people today, including many “conservatives,” have willingly accepted.

Above all, our estimate of Hamilton must also take in account the role he played in our Founding. In Federici’s estimation, “No American did more to bring it [the Constitution] into existence, ensure its ratification, and nurture in its infancy.” This estimate may be generous, but if it is, not by much.

We owe thanks, then, to Federici for this comprehensive and very thoughtful work that should go a long way toward restoring Hamilton to his rightful place among our Founding Fathers. ■

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Baiting the Dragon

by SCOTT GALUPO

They Eat Puppies, Don't They?,
Christopher Buckley, *Twelve*, 335 pages

With war in Iraq officially ended and the one in Afghanistan slowly and painfully winding down, lonely eyes are turning toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. But if the neocon-truckling Mitt Romney campaign is any indication, there’s an audience for some old-fashioned saber-rattling at big second-world countries like Russia and China.

The comic novelist Christopher Buckley, presciently as ever, is here, cackling wickedly, to greet that audience before it even realizes its lamentable existence.

They Eat Puppies, Don't They? imagines a fantastical military-industrial plot to foment tensions with China and thereby induce Congress to fund a fancy new toy for the Pentagon. The principals of the plot are Walter “Bird” McIntyre, Beltway lobbyist for a big aerospace defense contractor, and Angel Templeton, the sultry “directrix” of an “Oreo-Con” think tank called the Institute for Continuing Conflict. What, you ask, is an Oreo-Con? It is, Buckley writes, a conservative who is “hard on the outside, soft on the inside.” It’s a wry code for neoconservative, with softness understood as the casual disregard for the expanding scope of domestic policy under the George W. Bush administration: “Oreo-Cons didn’t really care what presidents and the Congress did so long as they kept the Pentagon and the armed forces well funded and engaged abroad, preferably in hand-to-hand combat.”

Bird McIntyre should be familiar to fans of Buckley. Think of him as another likeable antihero who could have fit nicely into the author’s 1994 novel *Thank You For Smoking*, in which lobbyists for the alcohol, tobacco, and firearms industries gathered for a weekly

“Merchants of Death” luncheon. Bird is the MOD nonpareil. There may be more annual deaths attributable to booze, cigarettes, and guns, but those products lack the panache of “Dumbo”: a “predator drone,” as one war-weary senator describes it, “the size of a commercial airliner.”

As *Puppies* commences, Project Dumbo has been shot down by congressional appropriators. (The novel, incidentally, was written before Buckley could have known about the current budget sequestration panic in Washington.) Buckley’s narrator is suitably cynical about Congress’s cozy relationship with defense contractors. “In happier times,” he reflects, “getting approval for a Dumbo-type program

Rather than thunder impotently at this heightened reality, a satirist like Buckley has another, better option: laugh at it.

would have consisted of a couple meetings, a few pro forma committee hearings, handshakes all around, and off to an early lunch. Now? Sisyphus had it easier.”

Consequently, Bird and his CEO, Chick Devlin, concoct a devious ... what’s the advocacy industry jargon? ... conflict-expansion strategy. Their goal is to sell a tight-fisted Congress on a mysterious new project code-named “Taurus.” It has something—Chick is not at liberty to say what—to do with China. The problem is, American lawmakers are loath to confront their creditor-in-chief. As Bird notes, “China is more or less financing our economy.”

“We’ll set up some foundation,” Chick informs Bird. “That way you’ll be technically working for it. Instead of the old military-industrial complex, God bless it.” This foundation will purportedly focus on “national security and Far Eastern issues.” But

its true purpose is to conjure a new Red Scare that’s scary enough to justify Taurus.

Which is where Angel Templeton comes in.

Angel should be familiar not just to Buckley fans but to any consumer of political news. She—at least a good portion of her—is Ann Coulter. Behold the pinup Buckley paints: “Tall, blond, buff, leggy, miniskirted.” Actually, “Leggy” isn’t even the half of it. Angel’s legs, it is observed later, “seemed as long as the Washington Monument.”

As for Angel’s mouth, it sounds a lot like Coulter’s, too. Echoing Coulter’s smearing of 9/11 widows and antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan, Angel calls a woman whose son was killed in action a “headline-hungry harridan,” an “opportunist” who had the invective coming because “she’s undermining the war effort.”

There is slightly more to Angel than mere Coulterian performance art. She has something that passes for an inner life. She’s a single, Type A soccer mom to son Barry (middle name: Goldwater). She interrupts a work-related cellphone conversation thusly: “Barry, sweetie! Stay with the ball! Stay with the ball! The ball! Kick it! Kick the ball! Barry! Kick THE BALL!” She has a complicated, mildly sympathetic sexual history with powerful men who promise and then fail to divorce their wives on Angel’s behalf, leaving her with the nickname “Silo.” Bird—married himself to a hell-on-wheels aspiring equestrienne named Myndi—is instantly attracted to, and utterly intimidated by, her. Bird concludes he is “no match for Angel Templeton. She made the man-eating lions of Tsavo look like hamsters. She’d chew him up and spit him out in little balls of gristle.”

Initially, at least, this only-in-the-Beltway duo is all business. Its first break in fomenting an anti-China

arms race is a news report that the Dalai Lama collapsed during a meeting with Prince Charles. Thanks to their efforts, a story is soon planted in the pliant bottom-feeding New Delhi-based Internet media to the effect that the ChiComs had attempted to assassinate the spiritual leader of its wannabe-breakaway Tibetan province. Buckley has great fun with how this story—“developing,” as we’re accustomed to reading on the Drudge Report—plays out in the media. “Hardball” host Chris Matthews appears as himself in several scenes in which the plight of the pitiable Tibetans is debated. A certain Sarah Palin-like former governor named Penelope Kent also figures briefly in the media firestorm. “I can’t believe she was actually governor of a state,” Bird remarks of Kent. “This country. It’s going to hell.”

There’s some well-researched substance here about the labyrinthine world of domestic Chinese politics, too. Buckley sets a good chunk of the book in Beijing, where the (relatively) reform-minded President Fa Megnyao must fend off hardliners in the Communist Party leadership. Fa is tormented by nightmares of his deceased father and struggles with nicotine addiction (thank him for smoking!). Bird and Angel’s machinations have made his precarious position at the top of the party leadership that much harder to maintain.

In Buckley’s geopolitical story world, there are reasonable grownups, people who want to make the thing work, on both sides of the Sino-American divide. And then there are the nitwits, with their mutually emboldening acts of aggression, who profit financially or professionally from making the thing not work. Rather than thunder impotently at this heightened reality, a satirist like Buckley has another, better option: laugh at it.

Buckley laughs with a human touch, however. There isn’t a hint of malice in Bird. He does not deceive himself about the nature of his business; rather

adorably, he deceives himself that the Tom Clancy-style techno-thrillers he earnestly pecks away at nightly have literary merit. He supports a live-in mother suffering from Alzheimer's and a brother, Bewks, who spends his days in the "living history" business reenacting the Civil War. He's responsible for the care and feeding of his wife's horses, whose bloodlines would impress Ann Romney. All this, plus an apartment near the Pentagon—the "military-industrial duplex"—and a money pit of an antebellum estate in Northern Virginia horse country.

Buckley's performance throughout the book is razor-sharp. Each chapter is a crystalline dialogue-driven episode in its own right. Eventually, as these episodes hurtle along, a Taiwanese shrimp boat is sunk by the Chinese. The U.S. responds by selling F-22 fighter jets and Aegis-equipped destroyers to the Taiwanese. And the Central Bank of China begins "making noises about sitting out the next auction of U.S. Treasury bills."

Quelle horreur:

The stock market was doing quadruple-front-flip triple gainers off the high board, gas prices were spiking at the pump, people were being laid off everywhere. But there was some good news, at least: Gold was at an all-time high! Yay! So if things got really bad, people could buy groceries with twenty-dollar gold pieces or coupons from their gold stock certificates.

Such is this American life, "in hock," as Buckley writes, "up to [our] eyeballs to the Chinese." There have been jeremiads written about this state of affairs. No doubt more will be written. Christopher Buckley has given us something else: a sprightly cocktail of satire that nonetheless delivers sobering truths. ■

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The Map to Power

by WILLIAM ANTHONY HAY

The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate, Robert D. Kaplan, Random House, 432 pages

Winston Churchill noted the symbiotic relationship between space and human action with the remark that "we shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."

On a much greater scale, consider how the physical world and its contours shape human development, just as humanity adapts the environment to its needs. The obvious faded from view in recent decades, however: globalization set the tone for the post-Cold War idea that old limits mattered little in a very new world. Grand, transformative projects sought to recast societies and institutions. Disappointment ensued with the failure of nation-building in the Middle East and the collapse of economic prosperity throughout the developed world.

In *The Revenge of Geography*, Robert Kaplan draws upon many thinkers, some unjustly neglected, to sketch a guide through the wreckage of these lost hopes. Far from creating the flat world Thomas Friedman described in his eponymous (and ephemeral) bestseller, globalization brings distant threats closer to home and draws differences into sharper relief. The future requires a new map.

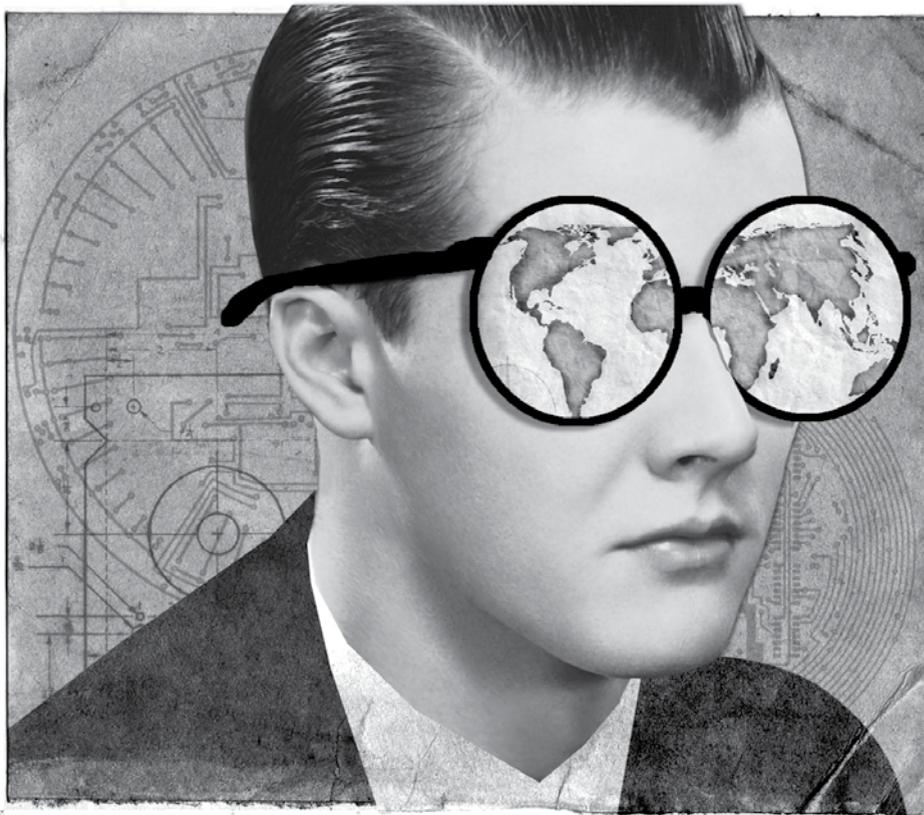
Constructing the map to encompass geography in its fullest sense—embodying demographics, climate, and resources along with topography—highlights the factors that drive world trends. History and anthropology take the analysis further by providing context and showing how trends work over time. Geography, Kaplan argues persuasively, sets the framework within which contingency operates. International politics makes little

sense without it.

Kaplan brings a reputation along with his point of view. His reporting from benighted regions during the 1990s drew criticism from liberal internationalists who objected to his pessimistic tone and caution about democracy-promotion. Deploying what John Ruskin called the innocent eye—an observer's ability to see what lies before him rather than what he expects to see—Kaplan ignored the triumphalism of democratic capitalism to sketch a more complex and often bleak vista. Disdain for frivolous preoccupations among civilian elites drew Kaplan closer to the U.S. military, whose Spartan, practical ethos won his respect.

Experience—including with the Hobbesian nightmares of Afghanistan and Somalia, along with Saddam Hussein's totalitarian experiment in Iraq—led Kaplan to back nation-building after 9/11. He joined the consensus behind the Iraq War and spent periods embedded with U.S. troops. While some commentators praised Kaplan as a latter-day Rudyard Kipling, others attacked him as a cheerleader for American empire. Kaplan himself admitted to having come too close to his subject and fallen prey to excessive zeal, even though he never took up the polarizing rhetoric of the Bush era. *The Revenge of Geography* marks a search for new perspective.

The way in which geographers, historians, and strategists traced their maps frames Kaplan's discussion of geopolitics. He takes their ideas—particularly where diverging opinions raise conflicts—to pose questions rather than providing answers. Herodotus, whose account of the wars between the Greeks and Persia balanced geographic determinism with the decisions of men, represents the sensibility Kaplan seeks to recover. Environment sets a context, not least by shaping culture and custom, for decisions often made in the grip of



Michael Hogue

passion. Dynamics shaping politics in the fifth century B.C. still operate today. Indeed, the region Herodotus describes between the eastern Mediterranean and the Iranian-Afghan plateau remains a critical area of conflict.

William McNeill, author of the 1963 landmark *The Rise of the West*, also looked to that area linking three continents for insight into the interaction between civilizations. Isolation along a fertile river surrounded by desert shaped Egypt by keeping outsiders at bay, while Mesopotamia remained vulnerable to predation. Both developed authoritarian, bureaucratic regimes, but Iraq had a more brutal political culture forged by insecurity. McNeil describes Greece, India, and China—all three developed unique civilizations, but distance kept China on a separate path while the ebb and flow of frontiers between Hellenistic, Middle Eastern, and Indian civilizations made for a delicate cultural balance in Greece, India, and the lands

between. McNeill's focus on interaction challenged the view of civilizations as developing separately, familiar from Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Arnold Toynbee's more optimistic account. McNeill's idea of history as a study in fluidity gives Kaplan a starting point to consider geography's impact upon social and political development in Eurasia.

The fact that Nazi Germany turned geopolitics to the service of conquest tainted the reputation of the field's founding father, Halford Mackinder, but the continuing relevance of his ideas is undeniable. Geography, Mackinder argued, operates as the pivot of history by setting the context in which men and societies act. It forms barriers of desert, mountain, and tundra along with pathways of river valley and steppe. The seas acted as both, alternately providing a sheltering impasse and a highway transit.

Far from being an environmental determinist, however, Mackinder

thought that understanding geographical limits pointed to ways of overcoming them. Indeed, Kaplan argues that his vision of geography's role had a dynamic quality exactly opposed to the static assumptions of determinism. Technology, a form of human initiative, modified environments. Railways had a decisive impact by opening land to inexpensive transport of bulk goods. What began as a feeder to ocean or river transport eventually became a means of connecting Eurasia. Controlling its heartland would confer a decisive strategic advantage. Mackinder sought to chart trends rather than strategize conquest, but his analysis had an obvious appeal to the evil empires of Hitler's Germany and Soviet Russia.

Where Mackinder and Nazi theorists like Karl Haushofer focused on the Eurasian heartland, the Dutch-born American Nicholas Spykman argued that projecting maritime power from the rimland built on advantages geography provided the United States. The combination of temperate climate and rich resources with effective hegemony over the Western Hemisphere gave the U.S. power to spare for adjusting the balance of power in the Eastern Hemisphere. The United States' location provides access to Europe that South America lacks, while the Amazon and Arctic create secure buffers. Kaplan cites Spykman's analysis as a way to see past the immediate press of events and discern basic geostrategic truths. His approach matters more than his conclusions themselves.

Earlier, Alfred Thayer Mahan offered in 1890 an historical account of sea power that still resonates among Chinese and Indian strategists. It influenced Spykman, along with Theodore Roosevelt and Germany's Wilhelm II. Britain's ability to control the seas by defeating enemy fleets during the 18th-century wars Mahan narrates ensured that maritime commerce would operate on British terms and rendered France vulnerable to coastal attack.

Mahan's contemporary Julian Corbett refined the analysis by arguing that a weaker fleet could effectively contest a numerically stronger foe by attacking bases and controlling vital choke points. Such leverage suited powers, like early 20th-century Britain, forced to meet widespread commitments with limited means. Maritime coalition building—and a presence in littoral spaces to affect land operations—offers an alternative to matching high seas fleets.

What do these ideas mean for understanding present discontents? Kaplan applies insights from these thinkers to sketch possibilities in key regions. Spykman warned that a united Europe would be a staunch competitor to the United States and perhaps the dominant outside power in equidistant parts of South America. Geography, however, has divided Europe to facilitate a balance of power since Roman times, as Edward Gibbon pointed out. Kaplan notes the appeal Mitteleuropa holds as a tolerant cultural zone dating from the Habsburg Empire, which joined pluralism with the impartial rule of law. The geographic space Central Europe occupies, however, serves as a crush zone between maritime and continental Europe. Peace might allow it to flourish, especially with Germany's turn from war and Russia's relative weakness.

Indeed, the search for peace has driven Europe's efforts to rearrange itself since the 1950s. European integration, particularly in its post-Cold War phase, aims to transcend limits of history and geography to end conflict. Defying those limits, however, made the single currency a transmission mechanism for fiscal strain rather than a unifying force. Greece, as the weakest link in the project, offers a guide to the health of European integration. Its weakness derives from a history torn between Europe and the Middle East that left it politically and economically underdeveloped.

Gravity in the Middle East seems

likely to shift toward Turkey and Iran, with Ankara providing a check on its rival. History and geography give logical frontiers to both, along with avenues of influence throughout the region. Other states lack such clear borders, making civil disorder in Syria a danger to Iraq and Jordan.

Geography also sets the terms for the problem China's rise presents. A continental power like Russia, China also holds a large oceanic frontage onto the Pacific with good harbors. The combination provides strategic reach enhanced by decades of economic growth. Kaplan deftly notes the interaction between human initiative and geography over China's history and how those factors shape its current ambitions.

But geographic factors also mitigate its advantages. Vietnam and Japan look to the United States for help in balancing China, while Korea's unstable division presents a problem on its doorstep. The weakness of neighboring powers can trouble China no less than their strength. Sea power allows the United States to balance China without forcing a confrontation. Kaplan suggests that a struggle between them will be more stable than the Cold War rivalry with Russia was. Geopolitics shapes a subtle dynamic to influence other states while avoiding war.

Sketching geostrategic possibilities is a more useful exercise than making predictions. Kaplan articulates a realism focused on consequences that marks a welcome change from the fads and theories of the past 20-odd years. Instead of narrowing vision through a theoretical lens that hides facts out of line with theory, he draws upon those facts to press questions, and he thereby offers a more nuanced view. Seeing the world as it is, rather than as we might wish it to be, helps navigate the rapids of the turbulent era in which we live. ■

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In Defense of Bradley Manning

by CHRIS BRAY

The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story of the Suspect Behind the Largest Security Breach in U.S. History, Chase Madar, OR Books, 167 pages

In a short new book about Bradley Manning, journalist and civil rights lawyer Chase Madar necessarily and appropriately looks beyond the figure of Manning himself to ask how we understand information, how we perceive our relationship to state authority, and how people who serve the armed power of the state see their own place in its project. Writing from what often seems to be a leftist perspective, Madar nevertheless builds on a deeply conservative explanatory foundation in which political illnesses have cultural causes.

"The United States is an increasingly depoliticized society," he writes, "and we struggle to comprehend the very concept of the political." Our most urgent problem lies not in the nature of government but in the failures of civil society. The pathologies of empire and the national-security state grow from our own pathologies of thought and speech. This approach is familiar: it's a republic if *you* can keep it, and we apparently can't.

Madar is most successful at two points. First, he places Manning's attempt to explain himself against the explicatory efforts of an exhaustingly banal news media. In chat sessions with a stranger on the Internet who (shockingly enough) turned out to be an FBI snitch, Manning is said to have written that he wanted to share "the non-PR versions of world events and crises" with his fellow citizens. Information, he wrote, "should be a public good," allowing people to assess state action with something more than the information the state chooses

to provide. Like Madar, Manning appears to have blended the premises of the left and the right, promising to reveal “how the first world exploits the third” in very nearly the same breath with which he compared his own alleged leaks to the release of the Climategate emails. However it varies in theme and perspective, though, Manning’s discussion focuses on state power and public engagement: what is government doing, and what do we know about it?

“The intel analyst’s intent is conscious, coherent, historically informed and above all it is *political*,” Madar concludes. Manning is alleged to have leaked to an organization that “quotes Madison and the *Federalist Papers*” in its mission statement. The people behind Wikileaks, Madar writes, “are, essentially, eighteenth-century liberals who are good with computers.”

A government that increasingly targets leakers from its lower and middle ranks is the same government that leaks constantly from the top.

Pulling at the masks that cover neo-conservative and neoliberal foreign policy, Manning seems to have been engaged in a small-r republican project, looking for ways to give informed citizens the knowledge to restrain state power.

News coverage of Manning’s alleged leaks, on the other hand, shoved aside politics to focus on the young soldier’s homosexuality and the fact that he had sought gender-identity counseling. The explanation for Manning’s actions was steered into a few permissible channels: sexual, emotional, psychiatric, pharmacological. This guy leaked information that brings the projects of state power into question—what caused him to go crazy

like that? Was it a boyfriend thing?

Second, Madar cogently examines the culture of unchecked government secrecy. There’s something vaguely Soviet about the American security state these days, a familiar sense that the surreptitious and the pathetic are one in the same. In 1991, Madar writes, the federal government classified six million documents; in 2010, it classified 77 million. The rapid growth of secrecy matches the rapid growth in bad ideas and administrative incompetence, as overclassification protects “the delicate ego of the foreign policy elite, whose performance in the past decade has been so lethally sub-par.”

The phrase at the end of that sentence is my favorite moment in the book. Nor is it only in foreign policy that our political elites are implicated in this lethal mediocrity. The worse they get, the more they hide.

Examining at some length the material Manning is alleged to have leaked, Madar compares the claimed harm and the known harm from several leading examples. A classified list of “vital strategic interests” compiled by the State Department reveals such sensitive information as the fact that the Strait of Gibraltar is “a vital shipping lane” and that the Congo is “rich in mineral wealth.” Secrets like these, he writes, may as well have been “tabulated by a reasonably capable undergraduate intern” but their release prompted agonized howling from government spokesmen. “Have we in America become so infantilized that tidbits of basic geography must now be state secrets?” Madar asks. “Maybe better to leave that question unanswered.”

The secrecy isn’t exactly *secrecy*, though. A government that increasingly targets leakers and whistleblowers from its lower and middle ranks is the same government that leaks constantly from the top. But

the difference is in the use of those leaks, as senior officials shape political perception by the process of control. Leaks are okay, as long as they serve the interests of power; “when official Washington decides to leak, the law fades away.” Again, the taste is faintly Soviet, and Madar correctly describes the effect of metastasizing classification in a government that also freely hands out secret information when it serves state purposes. “If a rule is selectively only enforced it ceases to be a rule and becomes something else—an arbitrary instrument of authority, a weapon of the powerful—but not a rule.” If anything, Madar is being too polite on this point.

Covering a series of topics—a brief history of whistleblowing, secrecy, and the rule of law; Manning’s personal background; the scope and nature of the leaked information—Madar falls significantly short in only one area of analysis. Discussing Manning’s pre-trial detention, many months of which took place in absurdly punitive solitary confinement, Madar allows that “after a decade, the ‘excesses’ of the War on Terror may have seeped into our domestic justice systems.” But he quickly pronounces this understanding of Manning’s treatment to be “incomplete,” moving on to a chapter that looks at the record of solitary confinement and disciplinary brutality in domestic prisons. “On the whole,” he concludes, “the GWOT has been all-American.” Military prisons at Guantanamo Bay and Bagram Air Field are just Pelican Bay and the federal “super-max” cellblock picked up and planted overseas, and Manning was caught in that same model of incarceration. Prisoners at San Quentin would recognize Abu Ghraib; our domestic model of prison brutality is our model of prison brutality abroad.

But it seems to me that the premises of war and threatened security lie deeply at the roots of that model, as increasingly harsh domestic confinement has grown up alongside the

rapidly expanding national-security state. War is the health of the state, but that increasingly vigorous state doesn't fall asleep at the edge of the battlefield. The legal historian Nasser Hussain has usefully described the "jurisprudence of emergency" in the British empire (and in the postcolonial states it left behind). Closer to home, Alfred McCoy has described American counterinsurgency in the Philippines as a site of origin for the 20th-century American surveillance state. At the very least, each feeds the other; domestic power and foreign aggression blend together, sharing sources and outcomes.

But Madar is finally successful at opening a discussion that needs to be opened. The war over government secrecy is fully joined. Darrell Issa is living on leaks from the Justice Department in the "Fast and Furious" scandal, for which Border Patrol agent Brian Terry's family must feel nothing but gratitude. The Food and Drug Administration has been spying on its own scientists in an effort to catch and punish internal critics. And the Obama administration, that great fountain of transparency and good government, is pursuing criminal charges against more whistleblowers than every previous administration combined. As government tries to pull itself down the rabbit hole, its success is unlikely to be prevented by a supine press, especially if Obama is re-elected. Whatever victories we may have against a political elite that wishes to free itself from the restraint of the society it seeks to control will come from a culture of shared republican values. And they will come from a genuine freedom of information.

"If we hope to know what our government is so busily doing all over the world, massive leaks from insider whistleblowers are, like it or not, the only recourse," Madar concludes. We need Bradley Manning. ■

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Are Conservatives Irrational?

by HENRY CHAPPELL

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The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality, Chris Mooney, Wiley, 327 pages

Chris Mooney believes conservatives are wrong about many more important issues than are liberals. Like any principled science writer, he's also certain he could be wrong. Had Mooney chosen a less insulting title, he might have convinced a few conservatives to consider his positions on climate change, evolution, and President Obama's healthcare program.

Of course, he'd also sell fewer books. He and his publisher know their audience, just as Ann Coulter and Jonah Goldberg know theirs. Mooney admits that he has little hope of changing conservative minds through education. His 2005 attempt at an edifying overture, *The Republican War on Science*, failed entirely.

Despite a religious temperament and natural respect for tradition, an unsettling, empirical bent forces me into agreement with Mooney and his fellow liberals on the issues of climate change and evolution. Darwin got it right. There is no scientifically credible challenge to the general theory of evolution. Likewise, the scientific consensus on climate change—that it's real, anthropogenic, and poses a grave threat—is as solid as consensus on anything beyond first principles is likely to ever be.

Mooney's guiding light is the Marquis de Condorcet, the French Enlightenment philosopher and mathematician, whom he correctly distances from Jacobin excesses during the French Revolution. Alas, that Mooney dedicates *The Republican Brain* to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with no caveat, supports his assertion that conservatives

and liberals are truly different people. Mooney quotes Thomas Carlyle on Rousseau: "He could be cooped into garrets, laughed at as a maniac, left to starve like a wild beast in his cage; but he could not be hindered from setting the world on fire."

Keep that cheery image in mind.

According to Mooney, conservatives' personality traits, resulting from both genetic and environmental factors, predispose them to resist data that conflict with strongly held beliefs. Referring to research by Yale Law professor Dan Kahan, Mooney writes, "deep-seated views about morality, and about the way society should be ordered, strongly predict who [individuals] consider to be a legitimate scientific expert in the first place—and where they consider 'scientific consensus' to lie in the contested issues."

To his credit, Mooney admits that liberals aren't immune to irrationality and "motivated reasoning." He points out the equalitarian left's attacks on sociobiologist E.O. Wilson and the reflexive liberal antipathy toward nuclear power and hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." But Mooney asserts that the trait is far more pronounced in conservatives.

He presents Kahan's model, a Cartesian coordinate system with one axis running from very hierarchical to very egalitarian, the other axis running from individualist (or libertarian) to very communitarian. All of us would fit into one of the four ideological quadrants, though we might move depending on the issue. According to Mooney, the *hierarchical-individual* quadrant corresponds to American conservatives while liberals fall into the *egalitarian-communitarian* quadrant.

In one of Kahan's studies, participants were asked to imagine that a friend had told them that she is considering her position on highly charged issues, including whether global warming is caused by humans and the safety of nuclear waste disposal. The imaginary friend is planning to read a book

on the subject but would like opinions on whether the author is a legitimate authority. The study subjects were then shown alleged book excerpts by fake experts as well as phony pictures and resumes. Here's Mooney's interpretation: "The results were stark: When the fake scientist's position stated that global warming is real and caused by humans, only 23 percent of hierarchical-individualists agreed the person was a 'trustworthy and knowledgeable expert.' Yet 88 percent of the egalitarian-communitarians accepted the same scientist's alleged expertise."

Mooney describes other research that suggests conservatives are prone to "backfire effect," the tendency to affirm strongly-held beliefs even more tenaciously after being shown contradictory evidence. Furthermore, Mooney says, the more educated the conservative, the more sophisticated the argument—thus the "smart idiots" effect. "The 'smart idiots' effect generates endless frustration for many scientists—and indeed, for many well-educated, *reasonable* people." (Emphasis mine.)

Could it be that the reality of anthropogenic climate change and the culpability of corporate capitalism simply rests easier with liberals than with conservatives? Does Mooney believe the average liberal earnestly studies the latest climate data? What if the study questions addressed the responsibility of the poor for their own condition or evidence that scientific genius is more common among men? Might there be some liberal backfire effect?

Mooney quotes Kahan: in some conservative communities "people who say, 'I think there's something to climate change,' that's going to mark them out as a certain kind of person, and their life is going to go less well." What would Daniel Patrick Moynihan say about the consequences of breaking with liberal orthodoxy? Lawrence Summers?

Mooney builds much of his argument on the work of New York University's Jon Jost and others who've studied

the psychological basis of political orientation. The results have been fiercely attacked by Republican politicians and opinion-makers. Yet the studies appear broad and painstaking, and many of the findings ring true. Researchers have found that conservatism emphasizes resistance to change and the acceptance or rationalization of inequality. No surprises there. Or, as a conservative might say, short of equalitarian despotism, inequality is unavoidable. Mooney admits that the conservative need for order and management of uncertainty and the accompanying virtues of patriotism, decisiveness, and loyalty to friends are assets in a time of crisis.

Another trait researchers found prevalent among conservatives and surprisingly common in the United States is "authoritarianism," which has been intractably linked to fascism thanks to largely discredited work by Theodore Adorno. Mooney doesn't mention Adorno's F-scale, nor does he distance himself from it.

"Authoritarians are also increasingly strong in today's Republican Party—and especially in its most extreme ideological arm. ... Authoritarians are very intolerant of ambiguity, and are very inclined toward group-think and distrustful of outsiders (often including racial outsiders)."

Racial outsiders like Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Thomas Sowell, and Walter Williams, say?

Liberals are "pretty much universal agents of change," characterized by curiosity and openness to new experience, more tolerant of disorder, less tolerant of economic inequality. According to Jost and Mooney, liberals also tend toward greater "integrative complexity," or IC. "And not only do liberals tend to have much less need for closure than conservatives. At the same time, liberals often have more need for cognition. They like to think, in an effortful and challenging way, and take pride in doing a good job of it. They enjoy complex problems and trying to solve them."

The relationship between IC and

sound thinking remains unclear. Mooney points to studies that show that Neville Chamberlain demonstrated greater IC than Winston Churchill and that abolitionists were just as low in IC as apologists for slavery. Mooney associates IC and the liberal temperament with creativity. To which I respond: T.S. Eliot, Flannery O'Connor, Evelyn Waugh, Walker Percy, Wilhelm Röpke, Robert Nisbet, Christopher Lasch, Richard Weaver, Eric Voeglin, and of course Edmund Burke, reduced by Mooney to an "honest status-quo conservative."

The Abrahamic faiths are inherently authoritarian, yet more than any institution built on abstract Enlightenment notions of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, they recognize human dignity and worth. Could there have been a pre-Christian Kant? If we rightly blame distorted religion for the Crusades, Galileo's arrest, and the Inquisition, we should credit religious longing in its highest forms with the Sistine Chapel and Alhambra.

Certainly, Enlightenment reason freed minds from superstition and opened countless avenues of investigation. Yet other than a single mention of "murderous Jacobins," Mooney glosses over the historical lesson that rationalism and egalitarianism, in the extreme, lead to gallows and gulag.

At the managerial level, hyper-rationalism is necessarily utilitarian. But in a multicultural society—a liberal project—there can be no agreement on what constitutes common good. Despotism is the only recourse. Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer have suggestions.

The liberal mind, in all its purported subtlety, can be disastrously, murderously wrong. Long after evidence of unprecedented atrocity trickled out of the Soviet Union, the intellectual left in the United States continued its infatuation with totalitarian communism, seeing in Stalinism the realization of the aims of the French Revolution.

The eugenics movement of the early

20th century was a progressive project as grounded in racism and nasty paternalism as it was in good intentions. Today, the left's doctrinaire support for programs that incentivize young women to have children out of wedlock virtually ensures increasing poverty, dependence, and resentment—problems that could prove as disastrous as climate change.

Mooney, in his reverence for science, seems oblivious to potential threats to human dignity posed by certain kinds of genetic, neurological, and psychological investigations. "The thrill is to be part of a dramatic merger of science, psychology, and biology that ultimately promises to uncover a 'science of human nature.' ... Any guesses about what personality types will want to be working in this area, or how they're likely to vote?"

No doubt, researchers will vote for the party "brimming with intellectuals and Ph.Ds." Then egalitarianism won't be demolished by authoritarians, but by liberal scientists. If, as Mooney asserts and some studies suggest, white Christian men are especially recalcitrant in their denial of climate change and their personalities can be partially attributed to genes, then surely planners and "experts" will need to know the strengths and weaknesses of other groups so as to ensure Progress.

It doesn't seem to occur to Mooney that dogged resistance to climate science might have something to do with loyalty and priority. If you look at an image of a 10-week-old fetus and see "human," instead of a lump of insentient human tissue, then climate change is not humanity's most pressing issue.

Early in the book, Mooney promises not to engage in "what is often called *reductionism*," reducing conservatives to their psychology. For the most part, he keeps his promise. Yet he can't help but resort to reductionism when he describes responses of various regions of the brain to laboratory stimuli. Thus deep affection for one's own people

and place is reduced to simple fear of change and can be readily interpreted as racism. Do liberals see no threats other than Christians and shagbark reactionaries?

And this: "Conservatives—especially religious ones—are also in denial about the single most important thing that we human beings know about ourselves: Namely, that our species evolved by natural selection and therefore shares a common ancestor with every other living thing on earth."

That we evolved by natural selection tells us more about ourselves than all of the recorded wisdom of the ancients? More than the works of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky? More than the Delta blues?

If this is where Enlightenment reason takes us, Chris Mooney can have it. Count me on the side of superstition. ■

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Vidal's Machiavelli

by NOAH MILLMAN

"The Best Man," by Gore Vidal, Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, dir. Michael Wilson

Four years after "The Audacity of Hope" and "Change We Can Believe In," Americans are enduring a presidential campaign of relentless negativity, one side claiming the president needs to "learn how to be an American," the other all but accusing the challenger of killing a woman with cancer. It's enough to make one long for the good old days, when politics was a decorous contest between principled opponents.

Anyone interested in a trip down this particular lane of memory would do well to take a detour to the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre on Broadway,

where a revival of Gore Vidal's political drama "The Best Man" runs through September 9. The play, first produced in 1960—there's also a film version from 1964, starring Henry Fonda and Cliff Robertson—allows us to participate vicariously in an epic contest between a high-minded liberal mandarin and a ruthlessly ambitious arriviste. Will the "best man" win?

The setting is the Democratic nominating convention of 1960. (There's a pretense that the convention could be for either party, but Vidal isn't fooling anyone.) William Russell, former secretary of state, arrives in Philadelphia to claim the nomination, but a rival, Senator Joseph Cantwell, is coming on fast in the polls—grubby measures of popularity that Russell doesn't have much use for. To close the deal, Russell needs to do two things: convince his estranged wife, Alice, to play the doting part expected of her, and convince former president Artie Hockstadter to endorse him.

The first of these tasks is unfortunately accomplished within a half-hour. Russell agrees to remain faithful for the duration of the campaign; his wife agrees to put on a good show and not expect more from him than friendship. This easy resolution is regrettable because it eliminates one potential axis of drama—the marriage and its future—for the remainder of the play. This structural problem is exacerbated by one of the few weak performances in the production. While Russell is played with fine, understated irritation by John Larroquette—in his domestic scenes, the viewer believes his weariness with Alice but also his lingering affection for her—Cybill Shepherd, as Alice, seemed barely to be in the room with him. Perhaps she was also aiming for understatement, but what she achieved was opacity.

Russell's second labor—winning the Hockstadter endorsement—is tougher and drives two of the play's strongest scenes. James Earl Jones plays the former president, and though there are many fine performances in this production,

Joan Marcus



Cybill Shepherd and John Larroquette in "The Best Man"

Jones is in a class by himself. He plays Hockstadter as a cross between Harry Truman and Teddy Roosevelt: TR's girth and glasses, his mustache and explosive laugh, but Truman's class and regional background and position within his party. Hockstadter knows that he could determine who the next president might be. And he's determined to pick the "best man" of the title.

But what makes a man "best" for exalted office? Russell thinks he knows the answer: the president ought to be a man with integrity, who is true to himself and what he thinks is right, who neither cares about being popular nor debases politics with smear tactics. When he suspects Hockstadter is going to endorse Cantwell, Russell focuses all of his rhetorical power into an attack on the unscrupulous senator, letting Hockstadter know just what a threat to the republic he considers this upstart scoundrel to be.

The speech falls on deaf ears. Hockstadter doesn't really care about Cantwell's dirty campaign tricks. If you need to use them, you need to

use them—and when you need to, you'd better know how. He doesn't like Cantwell, but as a professional politician, he rather admires him.

Until he meets him. Cantwell, as played by John Stamos, is a restlessly strutting rooster, apparent confidence layered over some deep vulnerability. This is a man who isn't content to win the game; he has to win every point. Hockstadter comes to give him some free advice and get the obeisance due to elder statesman of the party, as a prelude to making his endorsement. But Cantwell can't read the situation. Since Hockstadter comes bearing criticisms, he sees him as an enemy and unloads on him, revealing the secret weapon he's been husbanding. Russell had a nervous breakdown some years before. Saw a shrink. The medical records that use words like "suicidal tendencies." If Russell doesn't withdraw, Cantwell will distribute these records to the delegates and Russell's political career will be ruined.

Hockstadter tries to dissuade Cantwell from using such tactics,

which would only hurt the party, but Cantwell won't budge. So Hockstadter leaves vowing to fight him tooth and nail—and reveals, as he leaves, that he had planned to endorse him.

Just because Cantwell failed his test of character, though, doesn't mean Hockstadter is sold on Russell. He still worries whether Russell can shed his Hamlet-like indecisiveness and prove tough enough to be president. And so Vidal provides Russell with a test of character of his own. Cantwell, who appears to be without personal blemish—doesn't drink, doesn't fool around, has a beautiful, loving wife (played as a shallow sex-kitten by Kristin Davis)—has a skeleton in his closet after all. And it's a doozie: back in 1944, an officer he served with was court-martialed for homosexuality. The accused was part of a "ring" of so-called degenerates, and he named dozens of names. One of them was Cantwell.

Is the accusation true? The play doesn't say, but based on the far-away look Stamos gets when he learns that Russell has made contact with his old army buddy who knew about the court martial, I'm inclined to think that, in this production anyway, he is—and this is a crucial moment, subtle and well-acted, the only one where Stamos lets us see what's inside Cantwell's hard shell. But true or not, the test for Russell is: will he use this dirt? His long-suffering campaign manager, Dick Jensen (Mark Blum), would. Alice Russell would. Hockstadter practically begs him to. But Russell? He struggles mightily with his own decency, but every time he finally convinces himself to use the potent weapon he has at his disposal, he flinches. And thus begins over an hour of dithering.

This is a dramatic problem. Not because of the dithering as such—Hamlet dithers for nearly four hours, and if it's played well it's riveting. But Hamlet is ahead of everyone else in the play. In "The Best Man," it's President Hockstadter who's ahead of every-

one, and since the audience has heard Hockstadter explain his reasoning for choosing and then rejecting Cantwell, it's very difficult to take Russell's scruples seriously.

If I stoop to Cantwell's level, Russell asks, where does it end? But Hockstadter has an answer to that: there are no ends, only means. This line is deployed earlier against Cantwell, when he says the ends justify the means in his opinion (and hence it's okay to smear Russell to win). There are no ends—there's no destination but the grave. On the way, all that matters is how you treat people and why you treat them that way. Russell doesn't deserve the treatment Cantwell is about to dish out, in part because it's totally unnecessary. But Cantwell *does* deserve what Russell could give him. The means are appropriate to the situation.

(Speaking of the grave: two of the finest moments in the play are when Hockstadter reveals, first to Russell, then to Cantwell, that he is dying. Hockstadter admits that he doesn't believe in God, and that's why he's so terrified of death. Russell suggests that perhaps he can derive some consolation from the quasi-immortality achieved through the mark he's left on others. To which an incredulous Hockstadter retorts: I suggest you give yourself that little speech when you face the prospect of annihilation. Cantwell, meanwhile, avouches himself a religious man, but completely ignores Hockstadter's revelation, returning immediately to business. Later, when Hockstadter has died off-stage, Cantwell shrugs it off as for the best; his time had passed already. It's a perfect capsule of their respective failings as humans and politicians. Russell takes a real, human situation in front of him—a dying man—and retreats from it into an abstract principle. Cantwell only cares about that situation inasmuch as it affects him. Neither relates to the human being and his condition.)

"The Best Man" contains a number

of well-drawn political portraits, and enough humor to keep the audience engaged through the slow second half, most memorably provided by the southern-fried performances of Elizabeth Ashley and Dakin Matthews as, respectively, the chatterbox Sue-Ellen Gamadge, chairman of the Women's Division, and anxious Russell-supporter Senator Clyde Carlin. But the question of whether Russell will learn to use the shiv or not is too light to bear the weight of tragedy. Vidal came up with an ending that cleverly evades the question of whether Russell of Cantwell is the "best man"—Russell withdraws and throws his weight behind a third candidate of whom we know nothing. But that gets less and less satisfying the more you think about it. If the "best man" is a non-entity, then the whole premise that there is a "best man" to find, or that we need to find him, is questionable. In which case it never really mattered whether Russell or Cantwell won. So what have we been watching?

What we've been watching is a civics lesson, but not the kind we expected. The play has been described as a contest between ambition and principle, but it's really about the falseness of this dichotomy. Artie Hockstadter's situational ethics are a folksy marriage of Aristotle and Machiavelli, his notion of "character" being about neither fidelity to principle (Russell's version) nor smirchless personal righteousness (Cantwell's), but practical wisdom, the judgment to know what means are appropriate to particular situations. His death, and the failure of either of his potential political heirs to understand what he was trying to tell them, suggests that with the passing of the "last of the old-time hicks," as he calls himself, that kind of practical wisdom has gone out of the political world.

How does the drama play in 2012?

On the one hand, the political types are eternal, and the specificity of Vidal's prescience is striking. The charges against Russell foreshadowed the travails of Thomas Eagleton in 1972, whose vice presidential nomination was derailed by revelations that he had undergone electroshock treatment, and accusations of homosexuality continue to dog a variety of crusading moral conservatives. In other ways, the play feels like a period piece—conventions, after all, are no longer scenes of drama of any kind. And the produc-

"The Best Man" has been described as a contest between ambition and principle, but it's really about the falseness of this dichotomy.

tion plays up this dated quality, decorating the entire theatre as a mid-century conventional hall.

The problem for us in approaching this play today is that 1960 feels like the lost golden age, so it is easy to assume Vidal took the side of Russell's stand on principle. This screen of nostalgia prevents us from seeing the drama for what it is, and the relevance it actually has for our day. Negative campaigning and dirty tricks, after all, have always been with us. Practical wisdom, though, is not exactly the watchword of our democracy today.

Or perhaps we can't see our own forest for our rotten trees. Vidal, in 1960, depicted his day as an age when practical wisdom passed from the scene, but we look back on that time as a golden age. Perhaps half a century from now, Americans will look back on our political world as we look back on 1960 and say: back then, there were statesmen; now, in our fallen day, the best lack all conviction, while the worst are filled with passionate intensity. ■

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Taki

No Gold for Sportsmanship

So the miracle has happened. A generation has been inspired and millions of children have been driven away from their hand-held devices and have gone out on the track, running, jumping, throwing. For once the Brits got it right and proved the gloom gluttons wrong with the London Olympics. The rains did not come, just a few sprinkles. Yes, Uncle Sam came first in the medal count, and no, the Chinese were not caught doping because they used clones rather than real people. (At least they acted like genetically engineered humans, or perhaps it's just me.)

But let's be serious for a moment. Doping is the large elephant in the Olympic living room that somehow is totally ignored by the professional cheerleaders who report the games. In Barcelona in 1992 we were astonished at the swimming performance of the Chinese women. Their coach had performed similar miracles while in charge of the East German swimmers during the previous decade. Many Chinese were caught and their medals taken away. Twenty years on, a 16-year old, Ye Shiwen, beats the time of the male world-record holder and passes the urine test immediately following. Is it a miracle or is it that the masking agents the Chinese use are far superior to the detection methods of the IOC? I am of the latter opinion.

Sportsmanship has suffered in other ways, too. My uncle, a hurdler, ran in the Los Angeles 1932 Olympics

and carried the flag into the Berlin stadium in 1936. My father was on the Greek relay team. They both said that the nerve-wracking part was the entrance—we always go in first, as well we should, having invented the games back in 700 B.C.—as all athletes back then were required to march like soldiers, in step and looking sharp. Watching the motley way athletes marched in on the opening night parade this year had me reaching for the sick bag. Mind you, it's a sign of the times. Lack of respect, clowning around, using the f-word, as Katerina Thanou, a Greek gold medal winner in the 100-meter dash in Sydney, did once as she stood at the podium. (She was expelled for drug use in 2004 in the Athens games.)

Compare that with the dignity of a Jesse Owens winning four golds in Berlin, forcing even Hitler to go onto the track and shake his hand. The press had Adolf leaving the stadium in a rage, a total invention. He spoke to Owens and congratulated him, and Jesse tried to set the record straight upon his return, but back home he had to sit in the back of a bus, so no one took his protests seriously.

This year in London, the Kenyan world-record breaker and gold-medal winner in the 800 meters, David Rudisha, reminded me of many gold medalists of yore. His quiet dignity and soft manner stood out among the show-offs and the braggarts. Usain Bolt declared himself a legend, although his actions before and after a race are hardly legendary. And if he's

a legend, what about Jim Hines, Bob Hayes, or Carl Lewis? They were running 9.90 seconds on high-school surfaces 30 years ago, and in the 200 meters Tommy Smith ran 19.8 in 1968. Today he'd be doing 19.5, faster than Bolt.

In 1960 in Rome, I watched my friend Tony Madigan fighting for Australia in the boxing semifinals against an American with the charming name of Cassius Clay. After three furious rounds, we thought Tony had it. "It's going our way," said his trainer, "at least a split decision."

It was a split decision all right, but it went Clay's way. Madigan never complained, just shook hands with Clay and told me afterwards "that's how sport goes." Clay knocked out his opponent in the final.

You know the rest.

I thought of Tony Madigan and what a gentleman he was and is—we still correspond—when the chairman of the IOC, the aptly named Jacques Rogge, pronounced "rogue," said in his opening speech that athletes should not take drugs and should always respect their opponents. The camera then closed in on Muhammad Ali, now in bad shape, bloated and trembling. If ever there was an athlete who did not respect his opponents, it was Ali. He humiliated them, insulted them, and turned boxing into a circus.

Someone should have warned the rogue to stay away from things like respect and dignity. Only a few athletes still know what they're about. ■

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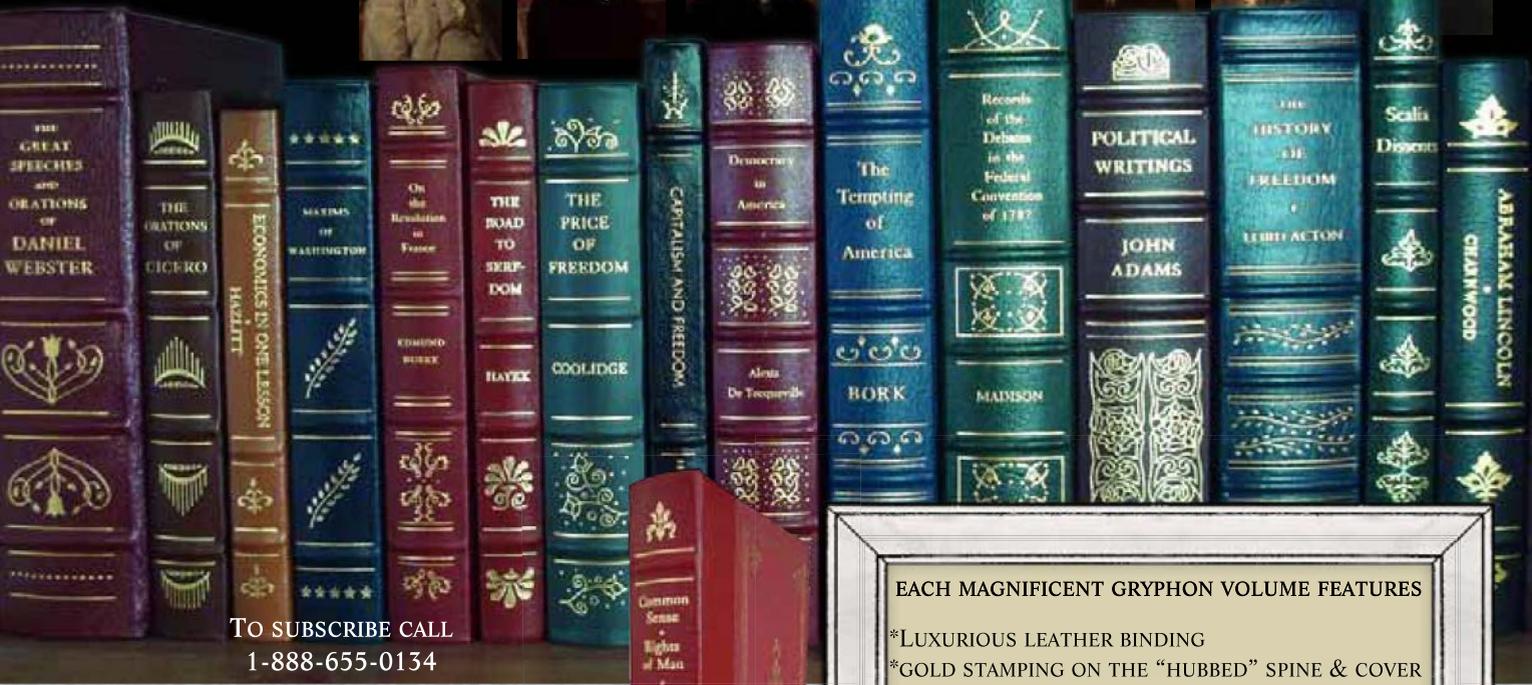
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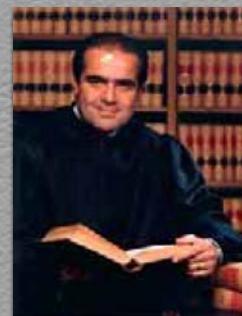
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