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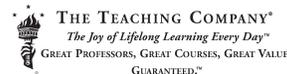
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Ronald Reagan famously remarked that the nine most terrifying words in the English language are, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help." Yet the disaster on Wall Street is a fresh reminder that there's often no substitute for effective government. Our four authors tote up the federal government's modern successes and failures and zero in on what it must do to adapt to the needs of the 21st century.

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The Expeditionary Imperative | *By John A. Nagl*

Teaching a Hippo to Dance | *By Amy Wilkinson*

Happy Together? | *By Donald R. Wolfensberger*

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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Thinking About Uncle

I recently read one of those forwarded joke messages—you have no choice when it's e-mailed by your father—and found myself chortling over its announcement of the discovery of Governmentium, a new chemical element with “one neutron, 12 assistant neutrons, 75 deputy neutrons, and 224 assistant deputy neutrons.” Governmentium is inert, the e-mail continued, and can be detected only because “it impedes every reaction with which it comes into contact. A minute amount of Governmentium causes one reaction to take over four days to complete when it would normally take less than a second.”

This turns out to be a polarizing joke. If you are the sort of person who thinks that the federal government does a lot of good and necessary things, you're not supposed to laugh at wisecracks about Governmentium. Uncle Sam, in this view, is a darling little boy who never makes mistakes, and if you laugh at him you only help the bullies who want to hurt him. On the other side are those who feel a proud thrill when Uncle goes marching off to war but think he's a useless, meddlesome creature when he's around the house.

This is a pretty silly dichotomy but, as I learned in assembling this issue's cluster on government, it's a fairly apt summary of the state of prevailing opinion. “Big government” is still nearly as polarizing an issue as abortion or gun control. Yet as a conservative president oversees the most significant federal intervention in the economy in decades and prepares to hand over power to a liberal successor who has tempered many hopes about what the federal government will seek to do, the time may be ripe to think seriously about Uncle Sam again.

Our cluster asks a trick question: Must government be incompetent? Either answer is correct. Of course it will sometimes blunder and fall. It will also do fine things. The really interesting question is how to alter the balance.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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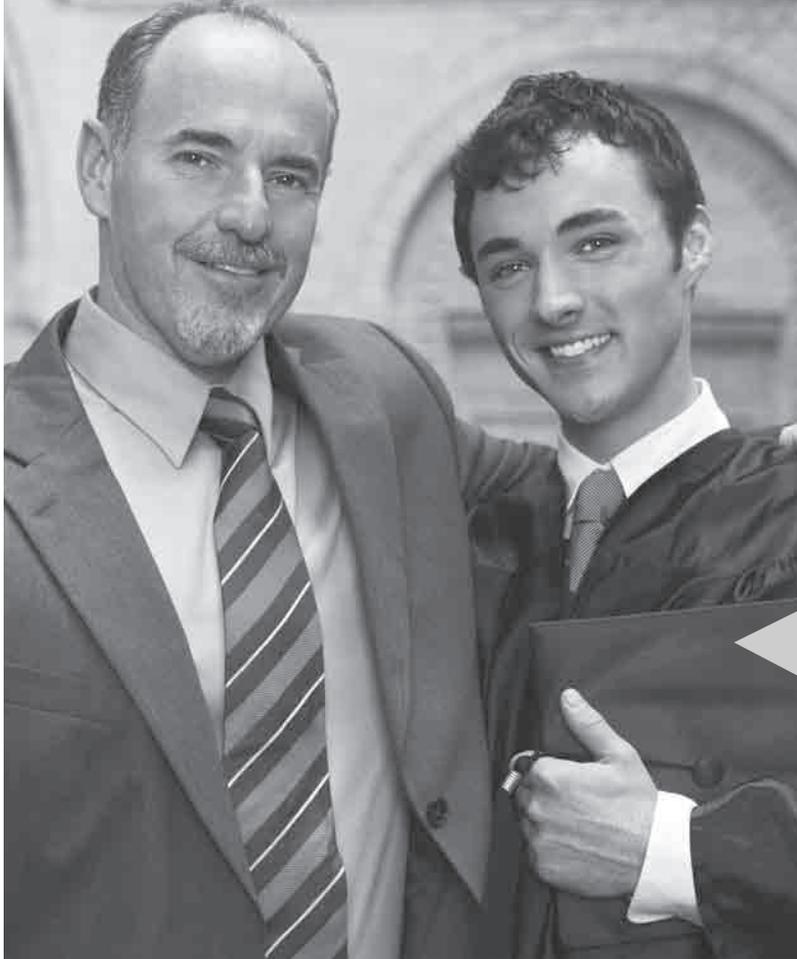
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LETTERS

VOTING FOR DUMMIES

LARRY M. BARTELS'S ARTICLE provides a timely, comprehensive, and surprisingly entertaining summary of the immense political science literature on voting behavior ["The Irrational Electorate," Autumn '08]. As Bartels explains, the average American voter isn't particularly well informed; this isn't necessarily a problem, but there are reasons for concern.

Now that the election is over, it's time to start thinking about governing. And while political science has developed an arsenal of excellent research on citizens as voters, research on interest groups and civic associations that give voice to motivated citizens beyond the voting booth has become stale. Arguably the most impressive aspect of the 2008 presidential election was not the final vote tally, but the 13 million citizens who signed up online to support Barack Obama's campaign. What's next for this audience, this potential community? Should we give everyday citizens greater opportunities for input than the biennial march to their polling places?

America has never had, and never will have, a perfectly informed electorate. But the same technologies that enabled Obama's breathtaking electoral mobilization can multiply the venues available for citizen input. In her 2003 book *Diminished Democ-*

racy, Theda Skocpol points out that today's Washington interest groups replaced the civic associations of old in response to a government that stopped seeking input from any save the professional class of lobbyists. New communications technologies can lower the costs of engagement and make the political elite into a more porous, responsive network. And while this may not improve voters' information, it could result in a better-informed dialogue between the government and its citizens.

Dave Karpf

Research Fellow

Miller Center for Public Affairs

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Va.

RICK SHENKMAN'S RECENT BOOK *Just How Stupid Are We?* reminds us how "grossly ignorant" voters are about many issues. Six in 10 young people are unable to find Iraq on a map, and people overestimate by a factor of 50 the percentage of the federal budget that is spent on foreign aid. According to Shenkman, politically involved Americans (for example, those who watch Bill O'Reilly or Jon Stewart, or listen to Rush Limbaugh) have more political knowledge than the average American, but still are more ignorant about many issues than we might hope.

This is all well known to political sci-

entists, and Shenkman does us all a service by presenting these findings so vividly to a broader audience.

But we have to be careful about studying trends in political knowledge without looking at broader trends in politics. In particular, the Democratic and Republican parties are further apart than they were 30 years ago on issues including abortion, the role of government in the economy, and war and peace. As Larry Bartels points out, partisanship is a shortcut that we use in our voting decisions, but many voters misperceive what the parties represent.

Voters, even if individually ignorant, can still vote somewhat coherently. People have clear enough ideologies that they will vote for the party that better represents their goals. Remember, we're voting for people to run the government and make these choices for us. All we need to do as voters is choose between candidates in the primary and general elections.

Bartels makes the case that it is reasonable for voters to make their decisions based on partial information, delegating the actual policy decisions to the politicians they elect. But at the same time, elections can be determined by short-term economic conditions, which influence the voters in the middle to go one way or another. In the end, it's not really clear in what ways outcomes would be better if voters were better informed. As many people have pointed out over the years, politicians are more politically informed than (most) voters, but they don't always make good

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decisions. Voting provides a feedback mechanism, but it's pretty crude.

Andrew Gelman

*Professor, Statistics and Political Science
Columbia University
New York, N.Y.*

PUNDITS COMPLAIN THAT VOTING behavior is "irrational," but it's possible that the decisions of voters simply don't conform to their critics' view of the world. In the 2004 election, exit pollsters handed voters a list of reasons for their votes and asked them to pick one. The fifth of the electorate who picked the vague reason "moral values" overwhelmingly supported Bush, a statistic later used by pundits to support their preconceived image of mindless religious believers doing what their churches tell them. The real reasons for their votes might not have been on that list and were therefore invisible to pollsters.

Charles Brown

Atlanta, Ga.

SURVEY SAYS . . .

SCOTT KEETER IS RIGHT TO DEFEND polling from its too numerous detractors ["Poll Power," Autumn '08]. New trends such as the refusal of some people to participate pose challenges to pollsters, but for the time being, polling provides a unique window into public opinion for political decision makers, who, despite their best efforts—and contrary to their own perceptions—are often insulated from the views of those they are elected to serve.

This lesson was seared into my consciousness years ago after I helped conduct the first political poll in a Latin American country that had recently emerged from decades of military rule. As part of the project, [Continued on page 9]



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AT THE CENTER

GETTING TO PEACE

FOR WEEKS AT A TIME, THE OFFICE DOWN THE hall from *The Wilson Quarterly* is quiet. Then Howard Wolpe returns, and suddenly the place is a hive of activity, with the staff of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Africa Program gathering to hear the stories of his latest trip to Burundi, the Congo, or Liberia, where Wolpe runs a program that trains civil society leaders from war-torn countries to mend their divisions.

The program grew out of Wolpe's frustration with the failed diplomacy he saw first as a congressman (1979–93) from Michigan and later as President Bill Clinton's special envoy to the Great Lakes region of Africa. Traditional diplomacy provided a recipe for rebuilding failed states: Mix two parts democratic institutions with one part rule of law and one part elections. What do you get? A whole lot of nothing, it seemed to Wolpe. Underneath the democratic apparatus, leaders were still mistrustful of one another and saw no benefits in cooperation.

After working in Burundi to develop accords that concluded four decades of violence and civil war, Wolpe conceived of a program that brings leaders from government, the military, civil society, and religious communities to workshops where they develop skills and rapport that help them rebuild their country. Often, these leaders have never met. The participants receive intensive training in a broad range of leadership skills including communications, negotiation, group problem-solving, and strategic planning. Former adversaries work together during role-playing exercises and simulations, beginning to build trust with each other while practicing the techniques they have learned.

To design the workshops, Wolpe drew from work he had done in racially divided communities in Michigan in the 1980s and from the research of Roger Fisher, founder of the Harvard Negotiation Project and coauthor of *Getting to Yes* (1981). Wolpe's mother, a clinical psychologist, also provided him with ideas about how to get people to move past an adversarial mindset.

The training program began in late 2002, with fund-

ing from the World Bank and U.S. Agency for International Development. Wolpe and a colleague, Steven McDonald, spent months identifying who needed to attend their first training session in northern Burundi if it was to be successful. Wolpe's years as a diplomat to the region meant that he already had relationships with many key players. The culmination of Wolpe and McDonald's intensive planning came in March 2003, when 34 Burundian leaders, including two officers of the Burundian National Army, representatives of six rebel groups, and a handful of parliamentarians and civil society leaders, met for a five-day workshop.

After that initial session, Burundians started reaching out for the program's help. All told, Wolpe and his colleagues have run some 30 sessions in the country. When fears grew that violence would erupt around the 2005 Burundian elections, the program joined with collaborators to mount a four-day session involving leaders of 31 rival political parties. For the first three days, no one discussed the upcoming elections. Wolpe says that when you take people out of their day-to-day roles, bring them together, and focus not on politics or justice but on leadership skills and dialogue, it typically takes three days for the most bitter enemies to see each other as individuals with legitimate concerns and grievances. On the fourth day, the leaders collaborated to create an election code of conduct, later adopted as law. The elections went off without a hitch.

The Africa Program's reach has expanded to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia. During the current violence in eastern Congo, alumni of the workshops are among the lead peacemakers, working across ethnic divisions in an attempt to stabilize the region. Wolpe says that grassroots reconciliation efforts are plentiful, but the Woodrow Wilson Center's program is unique because it targets those in power. In the long term, Wolpe hopes to create a class of leaders who can put themselves in the shoes of others. Without them, no peace agreement stands a chance.



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[Continued from page 7] we interviewed newly elected politicians and asked them what they thought voters regarded as the country's most important problems. Almost to a person, they identified the question of what to do with members of the military who had committed human rights violations under the junta, along with the issue of church-state relations, as the preeminent concerns of their constituents.

Our poll revealed that the politicians could not have been more wrong. Very few citizens were preoccupied with the issues elected officials had flagged. Rather, they were focused on health care and education—issues that barely registered on the politicians' radar. We did find, though, that the politicians' concerns reflected those of a very narrow segment of the public—college-educated, politically active individuals—precisely the people with whom politicians were most likely to interact.

Elected officials have always sought guidance about the contours of public opinion. Sometimes, as in my example, they confuse the views of their social circle with those of the "public." Sometimes, as during the Bill Clinton impeachment, they mistake the positions of newspaper editorialists for those of constituents. Sometimes they mistake the attitudes of those mobilized by lobbying firms for broad public opinion.

In a democracy, there ought to be some relationship between public opinion and public policy. Polling enables elected officials to understand the reality of public opinion, instead of forcing them to divine it indirectly and sometimes quite inaccurately.

Mark Mellman
President & CEO
The Mellman Group
Washington, D.C.

SCOTT KEETER ARGUES THAT polls enhance democracy by giving voice to all people and providing "equal representation of all citizens." But that assumes pollsters want to tell the whole truth about the public. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests they don't.

In order to make news stories more interesting, the major media pollsters typically manipulate their sample respondents to express opinions, even if they don't have a position on an issue. By asking "forced-choice" questions (those that do not provide an explicit "don't know" option), and by feeding respondents information when they don't know much about an issue, pollsters are able to extract opinions from virtually all respondents, and to report the results as "public opinion."

The problem is that once respondents have been fed biased information, they no longer represent the public at large. Different pollsters feed different kinds of information to their respondents, thus often resulting in wildly different results. That's how Pew Research, on September 23, 2008, could report that the public supported the bailout of Wall Street by a 27-point margin, and the next day *The Los Angeles Times*—polling the public over the exact same time period—could report the public opposed the bailout by a 24-point margin.

I agree with Keeter that polls could enhance democracy, but only if pollsters tell the truth about the public and the electorate.

David Moore
Senior Fellow
The Carsey Institute
University of New Hampshire
Durham, N.H.

MUDSLINGERS ANONYMOUS?

IT'S ALWAYS FASCINATING TO read criticisms of blogs as inaccurate that themselves reveal the slipshod nature of much conventional publishing. Gil Troy's "Bury the Hatchet" [Autumn '08], for example, alleges that blogging's "harsh, unfettered nature has coarsened politics," in part because "the fact that so many bloggers are essentially anonymous allows them to spew rancor, rumor, lies, and obscenities." Were I to write a blog post accusing *The Wilson Quarterly* of being filled with lies, I would follow the accusation up with an example of a lie. Troy, despite not being anonymous, feels no such obligation to back up his contentions.

Of course, it would not be difficult, were Troy to take the time, to find examples of inaccurate assertions in blog posts. But it wouldn't be difficult to find examples of inaccurate assertions in newspaper articles, on local television news broadcasts, or on 24-hour cable news networks either. I wouldn't be comfortable making an assertion about the relative accuracy of these different media without conducting some sort of research into the issue. Again, Troy, despite not being anonymous, feels no such obligation to support his charge.

It is of course true that many blogs are written anonymously, but the most influential political blogs are not. According to the political website Memeorandum's "leaderboard" of influential websites, the most important political blogs and bloggers, as of October 30, were *National Review's* The Corner, *Politico's* Ben Smith, The Huffington Post, *The Atlantic's* Marc Ambinder, The Center for American Progress's Think Progress, Josh Marshall's Talking Points Memo, *Politico's* Jonathan Mar-

tin, Michelle Malkin, *The Atlantic's* Andrew Sullivan, *The Washington Monthly's* Steve Benen, Nate Silver's fivethirtyeight.com, and my own blog on the Think Progress website. Indeed, not one of Memeorandum's top 100 most influential websites is anonymous.

Meanwhile, though these various unsupported and often inaccurate assertions about blogging are meant to contradict "false expectations" that the Internet would create a "new, more democratic, interactive politics," logically speaking they do no such thing. Engagement with politics via online communities *is* more interactive than engagement through the mass broadcast media, and the online media structure *is* more democratic than the late-20th-century media environment dominated by a handful of television networks and big-city newspaper monopolies. It may be the case that Troy doesn't like the form that this engagement takes (I myself at times wish it could be calmer and more policy oriented), but to deny its existence simply because one doesn't like it is the sort of sloppy, error-ridden journalism I've come to expect from print authors accustomed to immunity from audience feedback.

Matthew Yglesias

Think Progress

Center for American Progress Action Fund

Washington, D.C.

TEACHING TOTS

DOUGLAS J. BESHAROV AND Douglas M. Call's compelling analysis brings objectivity and common sense to bear on the politics and social implications of universal pre-K ["The New Kindergarten," Autumn '08]. The authors explain how the self-interested

claims of teachers' unions and the education establishment ignore the fact that the vast majority of three- and four-year-olds already spend time in some form of center-based child care or Head Start. If the public school system in the United States were doing a spectacular job of educating elementary and secondary students, one might feel a little less anxiety about entrusting all our four-year-olds to this establishment.

But even so, the benefits of educationally oriented out-of-home care for young children remain questionable. Ideological claims about the huge impact of pre-K simply do not comport with findings from almost 30 years of scientific research. A few of the most costly and well-executed programs have shown limited results for children from socially and economically disadvantaged families. But there is scant evidence that these programs benefit the daily experiences or enhance the cognitive capacities of most children. The universal pre-K movement encourages outsourcing of the parental functions of family life to public agencies. Indeed, as Besharov and Call point out, what parents do has a much greater impact than any early education program.

To what extent does substituting the pre-K classroom for parental care really benefit most young children? Besharov and Call sidestep this question, writing, "Let's pass on the worry that many experts have about the negative impact of starting formal education too soon." It's a worry they might have probed a little more deeply.

Neil Gilbert

Milton and Gertrude Chernin Professor of

Social Welfare and Social Services

University of California, Berkeley

Berkeley, Calif.

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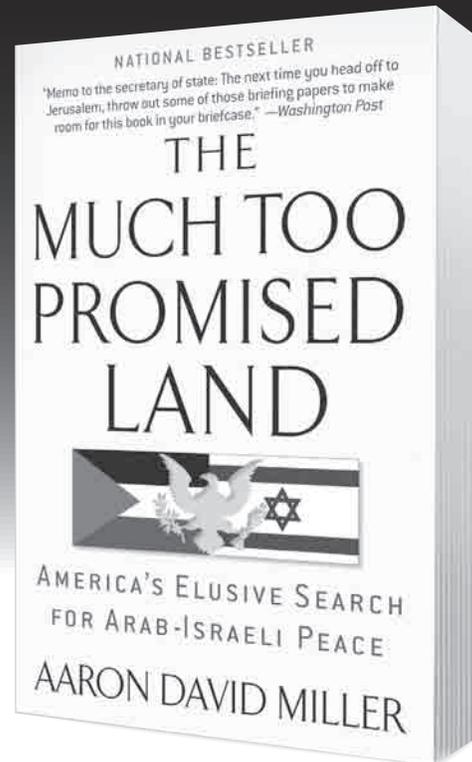


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BESHAROV AND CALL MAKE A compelling case for prioritizing disadvantaged youngsters for public early education investments. But their broader argument against expanding state pre-K programs rests on two fundamental errors.

First, the authors fail to recognize the value of pre-K because they ignore the issue of quality, conflating child care with pre-K. But child care is not pre-K. Quality pre-K programs support children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development to prepare them for school. Child-care programs merely provide custodial care so parents can work, which often does nothing to help (and may even harm) children's learning.

Second, the authors do not acknowledge the variety of ways in which states are building flexible, high-quality pre-K programs designed to meet the needs of low-income families. They persistently portray state pre-K as half-day, school-based programs. That's not the whole picture. States often braid pre-K and child-care funds; one-third of state pre-K slots are in community child-care centers.

The evidence is clear: Pre-K can improve outcomes for low-income students, but to do so it must be much more than typical child care. By setting quality standards for pre-K programs, helping existing child-care centers reach those standards, and braiding pre-K and child-care funding to offer flexible services, state initiatives can dramatically improve the quality of early education—and the chances of the very children Besharov and Call are most worried about.

Sara Mead

*Director, Early Education Initiative
New America Foundation
Washington, D.C.*

BESHAROV AND CALL SET UP A straw-man version of early education policy, and yet they still have trouble knocking it down. Yes, advocates for pre-K programs may overplay their hand (unlike those modest private-sector lobbyists). Yes, the state is substituting for the role once played by stay-at-home moms, but with median real hourly wages for males unchanged since the 1970s, most households need two incomes. Yes, public bureaucracies may be sclerotic, but private schools barely outperform public schools when we account for the composition of their selectively admitted student bodies. Yes, there are missing pieces in the case for early education, but no other education reform has remotely the same amount of supporting research from the fields of psychology, economics, and education.

Vouchers, the much-hyped reform from the Right, have almost no impact on achievement, and reducing class sizes, as favored by the unions, is effective but very expensive. Political support for early education may be hard to obtain, but nevertheless state spending on early education grew from \$2.8 billion to \$3.7 billion between 2004 and 2006, and Head Start's budget expanded from \$4 billion to nearly \$7 billion over the last decade. But keep these dollar figures in perspective: In a year when we have added more than \$500 billion to the national debt, just how adequately are we preparing American children to pay it back?

Clive Belfield

*Associate Professor
Economics Department
Queens College
City University of New York
Flushing, N.Y.*

DICTIONARY (N.)

I AM GRATEFUL TO CHARLOTTE Brewer for her article "Only Words," [Autumn '08] about the ongoing revision of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Only words! As she demonstrates, the *OED* has always been more than "only words." The backdrop of her article is a story in *The New York Times Magazine* in which it is implied that the book publication of the *OED* has run its course, and that in the future the dictionary will only be available online.

Perhaps I can add a word of clarification. The second edition of the *OED* has been in print continuously since it was first published in 1989. At present, we have completed and published (online, at oed.com) about a quarter of the third edition. Contrary to the implication of the *Times* article, the University Press at Oxford has not made a decision that the third edition will not be published in book form. It will certainly continue to be available online, but the time to decide on book publication will be when the current project to revise and update the dictionary ends and the continuing task of "maintaining" the dictionary with subsequent revisions and updates is about to start. At that point, we will need to establish whether there is still a market for the book version. If that time were today, I suspect there would be a good argument in its favor. But who knows what the situation will be in another decade or so?

So readers (or is it "users"?) of the *OED* can rest assured that the idea of traditional book publication has not been consigned to the scrapheap. Public demand is likely to be the principal factor in determining whether the dictionary continues to appear in printed form, or in any other medium.

In the meanwhile, I would encour-



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age readers and users to investigate the current major revision of the *OED* at oed.com, where the most recent text is available. They are also encouraged to continue sending their lexical discoveries to the dictionary's offices in Oxford, for the benefit of what is (in my opinion, at least) the greatest collaborative research program in the humanities.

John Simpson

Chief Editor

Oxford English Dictionary

Oxford, United Kingdom

I CERTAINLY CONCUR WITH Charlotte Brewer, who, in her delightful encomium to the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, writes that this new medium only increases the value of “the greatest dictionary ever written.” I would support Brewer’s

encouragement to “more fully and intensely . . . engage with its contents,” and go a step further: invite the readers who consult this work to question, as well as admire, the editors’ choices of citations and their interpretations of them in the definitions.

In suggesting that readers participate in improving the *OED*, I return to Brewer’s point that the dictionary had its start as a public-works project. On assuming its editorship, schoolteacher and amateur linguist James Murray invited readers to send in citations demonstrating how the language was used. The *OED* is decidedly not a work that just anyone can edit. Yet the *OED* has been, since its early days in the 19th century, a dictionary that anyone can submit a citation to, including those that challenge the existing entries.

The *OED* is indeed part of an earlier democratization of knowledge that digitization is making all the more widespread, much as online access is doing for a growing body of freely available research and scholarship. The British government is to be commended for ensuring that every public library patron in the country has access to the *OED* online. In fact, a national *OED* subscription for American libraries seems just the thing to commend to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which did so much to place computers in those libraries in the first place. Such a generous act would further extend the reach of this fascinating work.

John Willinsky

Khosla Family Professor of Education

Stanford University

Stanford, Calif.

FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

The Shelves Have Eyes

Elderly female in aisle three

When you study a supermarket display, is it studying you? Several companies have developed software that spots the face in a video image and determines sex and approximate age. Stores are using the software with hidden cameras to monitor the number and demographics of shoppers who pause to inspect displays or products.

Beyond sex and age, “there is absolutely no personal information about any individual—it does not even exist—nor is there any visual record kept,” says Hugh Phillips, a market researcher in Montreal who works with stores that use the software. Nonetheless, privacy concerns have slowed the spread of the technology in the United States.

With good reason, says Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Washington-based Electronic Privacy Information Center. “A few years ago it might have been the case that there was no interest in actual identity, but I would be more skeptical of that claim nowadays,” he says. “There is enormous incentive to match actual identity to get a better sense of the effectiveness of marketing practices and the responses

of particular consumers.” At a minimum, Rotenberg favors a law barring stores from using such technology to identify individuals without their consent. The better approach, he says, might be to prohibit stores from using cameras for any purpose other than security.

In the meantime, as the November issue of *Shopper Marketing* cautions, “The Shelf Is Watching You.”

Time Out

Long-lost leisure

In textile mills of the 19th century, workdays of 14 to 18

hours were common. But “it is important to recognize what a historically peculiar period that was,” Robert E. Goodin and three coauthors write in *Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press). For millennia, lots of people didn’t work all that hard.

“The best we can tell, people in hunter-and-gatherer societies typically spent moderately short amounts of time meeting their subsistence needs,” the authors say. In the Roman republic, one-third of the days on the calendar were holidays for professional men. People in urban areas of the 13th century might work a dozen



Life in the past could be poor, nasty, brutish, and short, but at least the 80-hour workweek was rare.

or more hours a day, but given the number of days off and the long lunch breaks, their work hours averaged out to roughly the same number per year as those of today's workers. High-ranking civil servants in Britain worked a 10-month year from 1800 until World War II. Your ancestors may have had it better than you do.

The Buzz on Z's

Enough, already

Thanks to today's "hurry and excitement," we're not getting enough sleep, warned the *British Medical Journal*—in 1894. In truth, sleep deprivation wasn't a significant problem then and it isn't one now, according to Jim Horne of the Sleep Research Center at Loughborough University in Leicestershire, England.

"Most adults get enough sleep," Horne writes in *New Scientist* (October 18, 2008), "and our collective sleep debt, if it exists at all, has not worsened in recent times." The oft-heard claim that people used to sleep nine hours a night comes from a 1913 study of eight-to-17-year-olds, who sleep more than adults.

Yes, we often sleep nine hours a night on weekends, but that doesn't prove a weekday deficit. "Why shouldn't we be able to sleep to excess, for indulgence? After all, we enthusiastically eat and drink well beyond our biological needs," Horne says. And yes, researchers find that people in cozy, darkened rooms often doze off, but such studies "are able to eke out the very last quantum of sleepiness, which, under everyday conditions, is largely unnoticeable."

If Horne's views get wide exposure, will midafternoon yawning become a thing of the past? Dream on.

Rampant Recess

Skippers

"Truancy is more pervasive than drug abuse and arguably has more dire social consequences," charges Harold O. Levy, former chancellor of New York City schools. It "may even be at the core of why our public schools are failing."

Many schools report average daily attendance rates of around 90 percent, Levy writes in *The Yale Review* (July 2008). "In any major company, that rate of employee absence would be considered a crisis." Anyway, the statistic is misleading. Elementary schools have "near-perfect attendance," whereas truancy runs rampant in higher grades. Further, the absences aren't evenly distributed. Chronic truants skew the numbers. In Hartford, Connecticut, during the 2006–07 school year, more than a quarter of ninth graders missed at least four weeks of school, and 14 percent missed at least eight weeks.

What is to be done? New York City has begun paying poor families to send their children to school. San Antonio is trying a different approach: GPS devices on ankle bracelets for chronic truants under court supervision. They can run, but they can't hide.

Nostalgia's Past

The Swiss disease

Feeling nostalgic about nostalgia? Constantine Sedikides

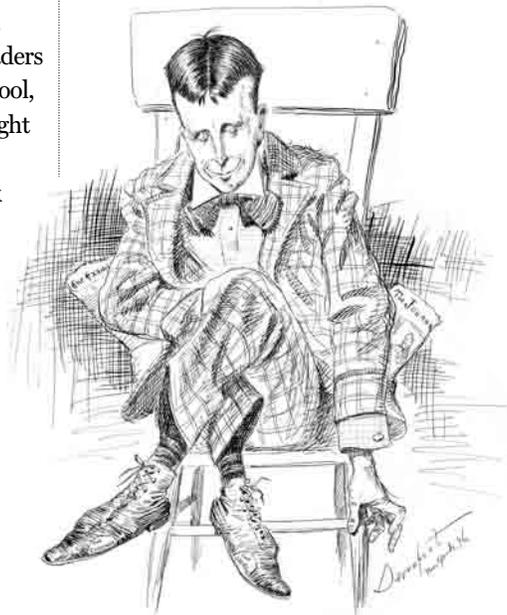
and three coauthors review its medical history in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (October 2008). Doctors first diagnosed nostalgia in Swiss mercenaries serving European monarchs in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Swiss alone were thought to be susceptible.

"Symptoms—including bouts of weeping, irregular heartbeat, and anorexia—were attributed variously to demons inhabiting the middle brain, sharp differentiation in atmospheric pressure wreaking havoc in the brain, or the unremitting clanging of cowbells in the Swiss Alps, which damaged the eardrum and brain cells."

Feet Street Publisher

Hearst's quirks

William Randolph Hearst had a few "odd habits," Kenneth Whyte writes in a new biography of the newspa-



Publisher William Hearst, resting his happy feet.

per publisher, *The Uncrowned King* (Counterpoint). At his *New York Journal*, Hearst would “appear at the door to an editor’s office, grab both sides of the door frame, and with solemn face perform a soft-shoe shuffle until he had sorted out what he wanted to say.” Hearst also liked to lay page proofs on the floor and study them while dancing and snapping his fingers. “It was his customary method of absorbing pictures and captions,” a secretary remembered. And he would sometimes spread a newspaper on the floor and use his toes to turn the pages. *Citizen Kane*, it seems, only scratched the surface of Hearst’s eccentricities.

Exit Strategy

In the unlikely event of a water landing

Those seat-pocket illustrations of serene passengers exiting a floating plane with their life jackets on are “pure fiction,” Michael Hanlon writes in *Standpoint* (October 2008). When big jets hit the water, they almost always cartwheel and break apart. Survivors, Hanlon says, are likely to be those who can get out of the wreckage fast, unburdened by life jackets or other “flotation devices.” So you can feel free to zone out for at least part of the flight attendant’s spiel.

The ASD Difference

Cool reason

If you have \$50, would you rather lose \$30 or keep \$20?

Studies find that how you’re asked makes a difference. Swayed by emotion, people will go to greater lengths to avoid “losing.”

Benedetto De Martino and four other researchers at University College London tried the experiment on subjects with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—that is, autism, Asperger’s, and related syndromes. Writing in *The Journal of Neuroscience* (October 15, 2008), De Martino and colleagues report that the ASD subjects were less influenced by how the possibility was framed. More than the control group, they seemed to recognize the “lose” and “keep” options as the same. Deficiencies in emotional processing apparently have an upside, safeguarding people with ASD from at least some forms of emotion-driven irrationality.

Capra Con

The ugly American

America’s standing in the world is deteriorating, and director Frank Capra is to blame. That’s what Joseph P. Kennedy, film mogul and U.S. ambassador to Britain, believed in 1939, according to Cari Beauchamp’s *Joseph P. Kennedy Presents: His Hollywood Years* (Knopf).

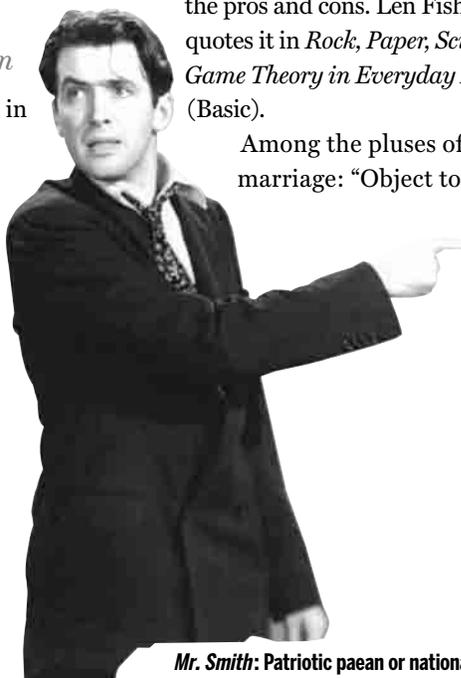
Kennedy’s target was Capra’s film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, with Claude Rains playing a crooked senator. “In foreign countries this film must inevitably strengthen the mistaken impression that the United States is full of graft, corruption, and lawlessness,” Kennedy told film censor Will Hays. It was “one of the most disgraceful things I have ever seen done to our country.” Even after columnist Louella Parsons called *Mr. Smith* “a smash patriotic hit” and the film received 11 Academy Award nominations, Kennedy continued grousing. He told one friend, “The danger doesn’t always come from Communists.”

Darwin’s Evolution

Betrothal balance sheet

Charles Darwin had some qualms about marriage, so he wrote a list of the pros and cons. Len Fisher quotes it in *Rock, Paper, Scissors: Game Theory in Everyday Life* (Basic).

Among the pluses of marriage: “Object to be



Mr. Smith: Patriotic paean or national disgrace?



As a young man, Darwin decided to marry after contemplating life as a “neuter bee, working, working.”

beloved and played with. Better than a dog anyhow; home, and someone to take care of house; charms of music and female chit-chat; and a nice soft wife on a sofa with good fire and books and music perhaps.”

As for unmarried life: “Conversation with clever men at clubs; not forced to visit relatives and bend in every trifle; [freedom from] anxiety and responsibility; and money for books.”

Proposing—to his cousin Emma Wedgwood—won out. “My God, it is intolerable to think of spending one’s whole life, like a neuter bee, working, working, and nothing after all—No, no, won’t do.”

“Marry, Marry, Marry Q.E.D.”

Wedding Bell Blues

Kennedy clincher

George Plimpton, author, bon vivant, and cofounder of *The Paris Review*, had nothing but qualms about marriage, according to *George, Being George* (Random House), an oral biography edited by Nelson W. Aldrich Jr.

In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy, newly announced candidate for president (and son of Joseph Kennedy), sat down with the 41-year-old Plimpton and his girlfriend, Freddy Espy. “You’re always going places together, staying in the same room, and you’re not married,” said Kennedy, a friend of Plimpton’s. He said that his wife, Ethel,

thought it set a poor example for the Kennedy children. “So I think you should get married.” Cornered, Plimpton agreed.

Plimpton and Espy went to get a marriage license in New York. “It was a pathetic scene, because you filled out papers at these little children’s desks,” Freddy Espy Plimpton recalled. “Imagine George in one of those—so cramped, so unhappy. He was kicking viciously at the desk in front of him, in a rage, in an absolute rage that he was down there—he, *George Plimpton*, in a marriage license bureau—he couldn’t get over it. He didn’t talk to me for a few days after we got our license. He couldn’t forgive me for having put him through that.”

Months passed, and then on the spur of the moment, Plimpton scheduled the wedding and invited several guests. The bride found out from one of the guests; the groom had neglected to tell her. She had three hours to get ready.

The morning after, Plimpton was scheduled to fly to Indiana to give a speech. He called his new wife at work and said, “I feel awful, just awful. I need your help. I can’t go alone.” She agreed to accompany him. “So, I’m on this airplane, sitting next to George, who has grabbed on to both of my hands and is shaking from head to toe,” she said. “Then I realize that he’s asked me to come along so I could commiserate with him over the fact that he’d married me.”

The marriage ended in divorce.

—*Stephen Bates*

Lincoln's Memo to Obama

A distinguished Lincoln biographer imagines what advice the 16th president would offer the 44th as he takes office.

BY RONALD C. WHITE JR.

ILLINOIS SENATOR EVERETT DIRKSEN OBSERVED 50 years ago, "The first task of every politician is to get right with Lincoln." As the inauguration of President Barack Obama converges with the beginning of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial, it is intriguing to think about what Lincoln might say across the years to the new president. In recent election campaigns many politicians, both Republicans and Democrats, have tried to associate themselves with Lincoln. President Obama has moved far beyond the invocation of Lincoln's words to patterning his political spirit after his 19th-century model. Again and again Obama has buttressed his vision for America by beginning, "As Lincoln said. . . ."

Nearly 150 years after his assassination Lincoln con-

RONALD C. WHITE JR. is the author of *A. Lincoln: A Biography*, published in January by Random House. His previous books include *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural* (2002), and *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words* (2005).



Abraham Lincoln, 1863

tinues to captivate us because he eludes our simple definitions and final judgments. Lincoln endured critics who libeled him as “the Black Republican,” “the original gorilla,” and “the dictator.” Obama is rapidly picking up his own libels—Rush Limbaugh has called him “The Messiah” and *National Review* labeled him “Our Memoirist in Chief.” Pundits always want to apply the conservative/liberal grid to politicians, but these political labels could not define Lincoln, nor can they confine Obama.

I believe Lincoln would begin by offering his own “Yes we can” to the election of America’s first African-American president. Lincoln, the homely westerner with less than one year of formal education, was surprised by his nomination and election as president in 1860. Four years later, when he had become convinced he could not be reelected, he told the men of the 168th Ohio Regiment, “I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House.” He said to the soldiers, “I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father’s child has.” How like Lincoln to speak of himself as “my father’s child.” How like Obama to say on the eve of his victory, “If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible . . . tonight is your answer.” In a world of “I,” both leaders pointed beyond themselves to the larger truth of the American “we.”

Lincoln would especially encourage Obama to use his public speeches as a key to his political leadership as president. Our most eloquent president would be distressed to hear the modern shibboleth, “It’s only words.” Lincoln, thinking of the role his speeches and public letters played in the Civil War, would counter that words are actions. He might advise Obama to nourish this gift by taking time for contemplation, not knowing how difficult space and time for thinking and reflection have become for modern presidents. In Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln escaped from the torrent of visitors to write the initial drafts of his inaugural address at an old merchant’s desk on the third floor of his brother-in-law’s office building. In the White House, quite accessible to visitors, he often found time to write very early in the morning in his office (what is now the Lincoln Bedroom). He would write either at the large walnut table

in the middle of the room where he convened cabinet meetings, or at an old mahogany writing desk with pigeonholes. Sometimes he would rise and ponder what to write as he gazed out the window at the unfinished Washington Monument.

The private Lincoln might offer some advice to the private Obama. Lincoln generated a running intellectual conversation with himself by developing the habit of writing down his ideas on little slips of paper or on the backs of envelopes. He stored these notes either in his tall silk hat or in the bottom drawer of his desk, ready to be retrieved to serve as the foundations of his finest speeches. Perhaps Obama already does something similar with his ever present Blackberry, and if, as reports suggest, he will have to give up this 21st-century technology in the White House, he could do worse than take up Lincoln’s old-fashioned pen and paper.

And what about speechwriters? Lincoln would not understand this modern phenomenon that probably began with FDR but has now become a full-time occupation, with a phalanx of writers backed up by even more researchers. Lincoln would advise Obama to write his own speeches, or at least the major ones.

Lincoln’s renown for compelling oratory has obscured the story of how much of his eloquence was the product of hard editing and rewriting. He might tell Obama the surprising story of his own first inaugural. As he worked on the speech, he showed it to a few Illinois friends who made but one significant suggestion. Arriving in Washington, he decided to give a copy to a new colleague who was not yet a friend: William Seward, the New York senator who had been his chief rival for the Republican nomination and would now be his secretary of state. Lincoln was surely surprised when Seward responded with six pages of suggestions. Seward, who fancied himself a great speaker, told Lincoln to throw out his last paragraph. He offered the president-elect two possible replacements. Lincoln demonstrated his brilliance by editing Seward’s words to make them his own. We know this memorable para-

graph by the words Lincoln revised to make it read like poetry:

Seward
I close.

We are not, we must not be,
aliens or enemies, but fellow-
countrymen and brethren.

Although passion has strained
our bonds of affection too
hardly, they must not, I am
sure they will not, be broken.
The mystic chords which,
proceeding from so many
battlefields and so many patriot
graves, pass through all the hearts
and all the hearths in this broad
continent of ours, will yet again
harmonize in their ancient music
when breathed upon by the
guardian angel of the nation.

Lincoln
I am loath to close.

We are not enemies, but friends.
We must not be enemies.

Though passion may have strained,
it must not break our bonds of
affection.

The mystic chords of memory,
stretching from every battlefield
and patriot grave, to every living
heart and hearth-stone, all over this
broad land, will yet swell the chorus
of the Union, when again touched,
as surely they will be, by the better
angels of our nature.

Lincoln might also offer his counsel to President Obama on integrity and ambition.

Lincoln's moral integrity was the strong trunk from which all the branches of his life grew. His integrity had many roots, including his intimate knowledge of the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. He may not have read Aristotle's *Treatise on Rhetoric*, but he embodied the ancient Greek philosopher's conviction that persuasive speech is rooted in ethos, or integrity. Lincoln would advise contemporary politicians that the American public knows when they are acting out a political role and when they are speaking with integrity, or what people now call authenticity.

Lincoln wrote candidly of his "peculiar ambition" in his first announcement for public office, in 1832. Barely 23, he offered a definition of ambition worth passing on: "that of being truly esteemed by my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem." Over the years, Lincoln learned to prune the strong branch of personal ambition so that it did not grow out of proportion to his service to others. The biting satire the young Lincoln occasionally dispensed gave way over time to the magnanimity he expressed in the closing benediction of his second inaugural

address: "With malice toward none, with charity for all."

The 16th president would counsel Obama to resist the growing demands to act quickly in response to the admittedly dire crises facing the nation in 2009. During the long interregnum between his election and his inauguration on March 4, 1861, Lincoln found himself under tremendous pressure to declare his policies on the growing Southern secession movement. The pressure only increased when he embarked on a 12-day train trip from Springfield to Washington in February 1861, which allowed him to speak to far more Americans than any previous president. And they expected to hear answers from him.

Lincoln would probably tell Obama that he too had been accused of being distant in the face of pressing political problems. As president, Lincoln emerged as a leader who kept his own counsel. Members of his own party accused him of neither convening nor consulting his cabinet enough.

I think Lincoln might offer a word of caution as President Obama puts in place several layers of economic and national security advisers in today's admittedly more complex administrative structure. On the one hand, Lincoln would applaud Obama for emulating what he did—

surround himself with strong leaders who would provide differing points of view. On the other hand, Lincoln might offer a gentle warning that Obama has appointed far more cooks than he did in the White House kitchen, which could end up spoiling his recipes for change.

With historical imagination, I can envision Lincoln putting his arm around Obama when offering this advice: Be comfortable with ambiguity. On a blue state/red state map, too often the question becomes, Are you for it or against it—gun control, abortion, immigration reform?

Ambiguity is too often seen as a weakness, an inability to decide. Not so for Lincoln. Ambiguity became for him the capacity to look at all sides of a problem. Ideologues are the persons who lack the capacity to see complexity in difficult issues.

Lincoln voiced this ambiguity in a private memo to himself that was found only after his death. As he pondered the meaning and action of God in the Civil War, he wrote, "I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet." At the very moment that Lincoln, in private, offered the affirmation that God willed this ongoing war, he did so by admitting the partiality of his vision—"almost" and "probably." Ambiguity is the mark of humility, not weakness. The question for the next four or eight years will be whether the American public can appreciate a president whose political autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope*, is filled with self-deprecating stories of his partial vision and even conflicting viewpoints.

Finally, Lincoln might have a heart-to-heart talk with Obama about the role of faith in politics.

Lincoln, who never wore his faith on his sleeve, who did not formally join a church, has left us in his second inaugural address the most profound speech combining politics and religion ever delivered to the American public. In only 701 words, the second shortest inaugural address (George Washington delivered a second inaugural of only 134 words), Lincoln mentions God 14 times, quotes the Bible four times, and invokes prayer three times. Today, what the public may remember most about

candidate Obama's religion is his painful distancing of himself from his former pastor and congregation during the 2008 campaign. What the American public needs to know is in his thoughtful discussion of faith in *The Audacity of Hope*. If the Bill of Rights codifies the separation of church and state, Obama affirms that Americans, "as a religious people," have never divided politics and religion. He couples the story of his own journey from skepticism to "embrace the Christian faith" with his admonition "to acknowledge the power of faith in the lives of the Ameri-

FOR MANY AMERICANS, Lincoln has at the outset of a new presidency moved from there and then to here and now.

can people." Obama says that part of the magnetism of the Christian faith that attracted him was the power of the African-American religious tradition to minister to the whole person and be an advocate for social justice.

Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, used inclusive language—"Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God"—to appeal to his entire audience, North and South. He would commend Obama's intention, in our increasingly multicultural and multireligious nation, to make his case for the religious and moral values that are the historical foundation of our society in order "to engage all persons of faith in the larger project of American renewal."

At the end of a compelling discussion of the Constitution in *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama exclaims, "I am left then with Lincoln." The remarkable tether between Lincoln and Obama, suddenly in such plain view in recent months, is not an end but a beginning. For many Americans, Lincoln, however appreciated before, has at the outset of a new presidency moved from there and then to here and now. He has become strangely contemporary. Obama, at the beginning of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial, reminds us that whenever contemporary Americans try to trace an idea or truth about our national identity, we will find Lincoln's initials—AL—carved on some tree, for he was there before us. ■

McCulture

Americans have developed an admirable fondness for books, food, and music that preprocess other cultures. But for all our enthusiasm, have we lost our taste for the truly foreign?

BY AVIYA KUSHNER

AS A CHILD, I LIVED IN A HOUSE WHERE WE spoke only Hebrew. I remember relatives from the American side of the family complaining about my parents' language policy when they visited our house in New York. "She'll suffer if she doesn't speak English at home," one worried. "She won't be able to write well enough to get into college." But something unexpected happened as my Israeli mother sang the Psalms to my siblings and me while we bathed: Empires fell. The Berlin Wall literally came down. Drove of immigrants and refugees—huddled masses who had long yearned to be free—changed London, Berlin, Tel Aviv, and New York. India rose, China skyrocketed, and four young Israelis invented instant messaging. Bilingual kids like me, toting odd foods at lunch and speaking with their mothers in something unintelligible, were suddenly not the problem, but the glittering future.

I did learn to write in English well enough to get into college. So did an entire generation of bilingual writers who discovered that another language rumbling in their ears was an advantage on the page, a double richness. For a third of the 21 writers on

AVIYA KUSHNER is the author of the forthcoming book *And There Was Evening, And There Was Morning*, about the experience of reading the Bible in English after a lifetime of reading it in Hebrew. She writes about literature for *The Jerusalem Post*, and her essays have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Poets & Writers*, and *Harvard Review*. The daughter of an Israeli mother and an American father, she teaches in the nonfiction writing program at Columbia College Chicago.

Granta's 2007 Best Young American Novelists list, English is a second language.

It's not just in the literary world where attitudes have changed. A name Americans have a hard time pronouncing, like Aviya, used to be a problem. I was urged to take a nickname to make things easier, by well-meaning dorm neighbors and even people I interviewed over the years, who asked if they could "call you something else." No one says that anymore. Instead, I get asked what *Aviya* means. With the election of a man named Barack Obama to the presidency, a man who introduced himself to the country at the 2004 Democratic convention with a speech about having an unusual name and a dual background, a new kind of translator is moving to the forefront of American culture. It is now cool to be half.

In areas ranging from politics to food to music to literature, suddenly we want to hear as much as possible from people who grew up in two worlds at once. The trend is especially noticeable in literature, where plenty of the best new writing in English seems to meld two languages and two ways of thought—the farther apart and more exotic, and the more seamlessly combined, the better. Obama himself has written a border-crossing memoir that leaps from Hawaii to Kenya to Chicago.

If a collection of stories about China written in English gains attention, or a memoir about growing up half-



Profil en Face, 1929, by Herbert Bayer

Kenyan, then you might think a translation of a work by a major Chinese writer or a leading Kenyan novelist would sell out. But the reverse seems to be true. Trans-

lations are rarely bestsellers; it can be hard to find a newly translated book at a megabookstore, even if that book was hugely important in its home country. Solid

numbers on translated books published in the United States are difficult to come by, but in a 2007 *New York Times* report on the international book market, writer Jascha Hoffman determined that less than three percent of all books published in the United States in 2004 were translated; 3.54 percent of new adult fiction published in the United States in 2005 was translated.

Others who track translations say that more recent

WE CONGRATULATE OURSELVES on our globalized worldview, but we read ethnic literature the way we down an ethnic meal: It's adjusted especially for our taste.

numbers are also embarrassingly low. Chad W. Post, who runs the Open Letter press at the University of Rochester, which publishes literature in translation, and Three Percent, a blog on international literature, estimates that 356 new translated fiction and poetry titles were published in the United States in 2008. He doesn't include retranslations—say, a new Jorge Luis Borges—in his count because he wants to know who the new voices are. “You could probably almost read all the translations that come out in a year,” he says.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world is reading outside the lines, as anyone who walks through a European airport bookstore can attest: Twenty-five percent of books published in Spain in 2004 were translations, according to Hoffman's study. In Italy the figure was 22 percent, and in South Korea 29 percent. Even China, with four percent, had a higher proportion of translations than the United States.

The world has noticed our resistance to translation. The head of the Swedish Academy, Horace Engdahl, caused a furor last fall when he dismissed American literature several days before the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to a Frenchman many Americans had never heard of. “The U.S. is too isolated, too insular,”

Engdahl told The Associated Press, explaining why he sees Europe, not the United States, as the center of the literary world. “They don't translate enough and don't really participate in the big dialogue of literature.” Engdahl stated the case too strongly, but I hear his worry—that the way Americans read is making us smaller.

It's not that Americans aren't interested in the world at all. It's just that we seem to want someone else to do

the heavy lifting required to make a cultural connection. As the Peruvian-born writer Daniel Alarcón observes, Americans would rather read stories by an American about Peru than a Peruvian writer translated into English. “There's a certain curiosity about the world that's not matched by a willingness

to do the work,” Alarcón said in a phone interview from his home in Oakland, California. “So what happens is that writers of foreign extraction end up writing about the world for Americans.”

Perhaps it's not laziness or insularity, but just being overwhelmed by a barrage of information. We are now expected to keep up with what's going on in China, Russia, and India, just to keep our jobs. The work of writers in smaller or low-profile countries, like most of Africa? Well, we just don't have the time to hear from them directly. And we'll survive—or so we think.

The writers' organization PEN has been working to identify important books that should be translated into English. Picks include *Selected Works*, by Suzan Samanci, a Turkish Kurd, and *Terra Sonâmbula*, by Mia Couto of Mozambique, which was on the 12-book short list of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century, a project of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. Works from minority communities, including the Kurds and the Roma, also stand little chance of reaching our bookshelves. Masterpieces of the widely exterminated, such as Yiddish short stories, can sit untranslated for decades. When *The Shadows of Berlin*, by Dovid Bergelson, made it to English in 2005, I was amazed that we had waited so long to have all these hilarious and haunting stories from prewar



Daniel Alarcón

Berlin, such as the one in which a woman falls in love with a murderous dog, and the dog with her.

The dog growled, the woman was delighted, and Bergelson saw the future.

But maybe we don't want a direct window into a culture in which canines eventually ruled people. Maybe we don't want to remember that Bergelson was killed in the last of Stalin's purges of Yiddish writers, in 1952, possibly because Stalin worried—correctly—that he had something dangerous, and essential, to say. We don't have much time, so we want a taste, some fast food to go. And so we read ethnic literature the way we down an ethnic meal. We can get a burrito almost anywhere, but it's often mildly spiced, adjusted just for us, and wrapped for those in a rush. So we're eating a translated burrito, and we're reading a world prepared especially for us. But we don't believe anything is missing. After all, we eat "ethnic" food, and often.

Sure, Ricky Martin topped the charts with a song built around a lone half-Spanish phrase, "livin' *la vida loca*." Despite that hit, all-Spanish songs are still segregated on their own radio station in most cities. This

trend of protecting Americans from any unnecessary non-English interference in their day even seeps into places where you might expect language skills to be valued. At the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, a screen on the back of every chair flashes English subtitles (originally introduced for those with disabilities). Now someone like me, with the tiniest bit of Italian but decent French, doesn't have to exert herself to muddle along, as I used to in high school.

It's easy to miss the subtitle factor as we congratulate ourselves on our globalized worldview, our ethnic restaurants in every downtown. Sure, we see some Spanish, on subway doors, and in political speeches when the candidate wants some Texas votes. But it's a bit like learning about the Middle East by listening to Shakira, a Colombian/Italian/Lebanese pop singer. You get a little bit of the rhythm, but not the whole thing.

For the past six years I have been intensively reading the King James Bible, to learn what the Bible in English looks and sounds like. I have been surprised and moved by the translation, sometimes baffled and sometimes angered. Adam, for example, the first man of all, comes from the word *adama*—earth—in Hebrew. In English, Adam's name is suddenly earth-less and, therefore, meaningless. Throughout the Bible, what is obvious in Hebrew, like man's roots in earth, is often not so in English translation, and vice versa. Something that English makes obvious—for example, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," followed by a period—is far more ambiguous in Hebrew, and therefore a matter of debate among the rabbis.

I often think about the men who perhaps struggled over what to name Adam in English. The lives and deaths of Biblical translators were awful; William Tyndale, the first to use Hebrew and Greek versions as he translated, and whose work eventually made its way into the 1611 King James, was tried for heresy, strangled, and burned at the stake in 1536. Previously there was John Wycliffe, who directed the translation of the Latin Vulgate—a fifth-century translation from the Hebrew by Jerome—into the English vernacular in the latter 1300s. Though he managed to die naturally, of a stroke, in 1384, his remains were exhumed in 1428, burned to ashes, and thrown into the River Swift. Sometimes,

reading peacefully in America, I think of how much translators suffered so English readers could hold this text in their hands.

For centuries, translating a text signified that it was essential, worthy of preservation and dissemination. The first translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, was commissioned for the Greek-speaking Jewish community of Alexandria, Egypt, who feared that Jews could no longer read Hebrew. To keep the Torah alive, they translated it. It was not an easy decision. The Talmud, in fact, recounts that the day the Torah was translated into Greek, “a darkness descended over the world.” Translation, then, has long been frowned upon, especially if it involves moving from a holy tongue.

My parents wanted me to speak Hebrew so I could read without a translator and understand my grandfather without an interpreter. They wanted me to see for myself that man and earth are intimately linked. They wanted me to understand the resonances of a Hebrew word like *kabed*, the imperative verb meaning “honor,” as in the Ten Commandments phrase “Honor thy father and thy mother.” Well, that “honor” is rooted in the Hebrew word for heaviness, and the word can also mean glory, or awe. And then, God himself is referred to as *melech ha’kavod*—the king of honor, maybe, but, more likely, the king of awe or glory. So many layers of man’s relationship to his parents, and also to God, are in that word.

What a foreign-born writer or a second-language writer does is pick one layer. Someone like me says, I will choose honor, or respect, or heft, or glory, but not all. I won’t—I can’t—explain all the references to that word in other contexts, because it’s too much information and will create an awkward reading experience. And if that word appears in a contemporary Israeli novel, the English reader of it in translation might never hear the echo of the Ten Commandments, or the whisper of a remembered psalm.

This is the gritty work of translation—to decide that

“glory” makes more sense and sounds better than “honor.” A translator might try to get “weighty” and “glorious” into the same word, and might succeed—or not. But as we reward such condensing of experience in our *original* literature, as opposed to our translated literature, we are creating a new kind of translator: a writer.

One being, not two, making all the calls.

“So many writers nowadays come from different cultures, and I wonder if that compensates for the lack of interest in other cultures,” says Moscow-born novelist Olga Grushin, author of *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*

(2006), who writes in English and now lives near Washington, D.C. “In a way, if Americans will not go to other cultures, then other cultures will have to come here and speak about themselves.”

But from the first translation of the Bible onward, what Grushin describes was always the translator’s role: to go to another culture and bring back what matters. It was sort of like immigration with a built-in return trip. A good translator must create and inhabit a place that does not fully exist—a land between languages—because it is impossible to reproduce another language exactly. A translator must bring over what is most important, as accurately as possible.

A bilingual writer, on the other hand, might omit the dirty laundry, inside jokes, or other intimate markers of a culture, such as a scandalous reference to a prime minister’s sexual harassment travails that matter only to the small number of residents of his country, or a joke on, say, Chairman Mao’s appearance. A novelist is more interested in story than in accuracy, but most translators think about exactness, and try to honor it, in their way.

Now, sadly, we have forgotten what it is to live between languages, to have translators who inhabit the space between tongues. We prefer to read of a Bosnian immigrant in New York instead of a Bosnian man in Sarajevo, written by a Bosnian. This way, at least we can recognize New York.



Jhumpa Lahiri

Immigration, from Bosnia or elsewhere, is not a new topic in American literature. In the 1950s, Bernard Malamud wrote of struggling grocers like his parents, who spoke Yiddish-thickened English, and a refugee from Hitler's Europe who accepts a paltry salary as a shoemaker's assistant, pounding leather in hopes that it will win him love. But now we have a new kind of immigrant hero, someone like the father described in Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Third and Final Continent," part of her Pulitzer Prize-winning story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999).

The father comes to America from India to get a Ph.D., not to escape the gas chambers. He finds himself boarding with a 103-year-old woman in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who is always talking about the amazing fact that a man has landed on the moon.

At the end of the story, he says: "I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I

have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination."

That Indian father is not unlike Obama's father: a man from a faraway land who came to America for an education. Both Obama and Lahiri are in that line of the new kind of translator Americans demand. Lahiri translates the immigrant experience for us, often lyrically; as the English-born child of immigrants, she can move smoothly between the two worlds, marveling and assuring us that, yes, it will be all right. Lahiri's immigrant characters can express sentiments like "it is beyond my imagination." In previous generations, such characters were working too hard to eat to have time to be amazed. And while a lot of accomplished fiction about immigrants was long ignored—Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934) was out of print for nearly 30 years, though to be fair, when it was first published some critics called it a masterpiece—Lahiri's work has had a different fate. It has struck a note with our a-little-ethnic-is-good culture, garnering prizes, a large readership, and numerous printings.

Throughout American history, certain books precipitated changes in the nation's thinking. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) energized the antislavery movement; Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) publicized food safety issues (though Sinclair wanted the focus to be on appalling labor conditions). Our reading can affect our voting, our eating, and our deepest beliefs. So we need to look hard at why we love bilingual or bicultural writers so much, and why we are still afraid of translation.

It is not that Americans lack curiosity of any kind—but that we seem to lack the right kind. Europe is overrun with young American tourists. Unfortunately, these college students tend to pack a dozen countries into a month or less. They often tote guides such as *Let's Go*, which highlight the greatest hits

OUR READING CAN affect our voting, our eating, and our deepest beliefs.

and cheapest places and are written by, you guessed it, other American college students. That's how we seem to read international literature as well. Let's go, we might say, but let's go easy. And cheap.

I remember taking the placement exam for foreign students at the Sorbonne in 1994. The registration desk was staffed by several well-coiffed Frenchwomen. The giant exam room was crammed with very thin European students: Italians, Swiss, Germans, some British, and only a handful of Americans. Yet plenty of American college students were studying in Paris. There were entire dormitories full of them. These students went to all-American programs, often run by prestigious universities. They went to French class, sure, but their classmates were American; they lived with other Americans, and so missed out on bathroom French, kitchen French, and get-out-of-my-way-I'm-getting-ready French, which I learned from my French roommate, Stéphanie, in an international dorm.

What is going on in our reading habits is that we want to know, but we want to go home at night to an Anglophone dorm, instead of negotiating with a French-speaking neighbor to stop cooking that awful-smelling thing at 3 AM. We want someone to address us directly, to write something just for us. Bilingual writers can slip in locales that speak to us, or brand names we recognize, or concerns that we have as Americans, such as whether sending an elderly parent to a nursing home is a reasonably compassionate choice. That's why they tend to fare better than writers whose work is translated, who focus on whether that new yurt was worth the cow-price. No matter that it's the same big issue: whether the cost is justified, whether the larger goal justifies the sacrifice. We want those concerns translated into familiar terms. We want to see our lives, our exact worries, already there on the page.

To be fair, it is not the worst of times for literary translation in America. Publishers of works in translation say that since 9/11, more Americans are worried about the cost of isolation, and it is easier to attract funding and media attention. The National Endowment for the Arts has expanded funding for translation fellowships, and more universities are offering translation courses. Publishing houses devoted to translation and new translation imprints are on the rise. In 2005, PEN launched its World Voices Festival, an annual affair in New York that showcases international writers, and independent booksellers began a project called Reading the World, committing to display 25 books of literature in translation during the month of June. The organization Words Without Borders, which translates, publishes, and promotes international literature through its online magazine and other channels, was established in 2003.

Still, the road ahead probably won't be easy, for translators or their publishers. As the demand for translations in the United States is still low, smaller publishers often struggle to break even. Typical sales of 2,000 to 3,000 copies simply don't cover the costs of securing rights, printing, salaries, translator fees, and overhead. Universities, foundations, and foreign governments often help to fund the publication of books in translation, in the absence of thousands of readers willing to pay \$15 to \$25 for a translated book. Trans-

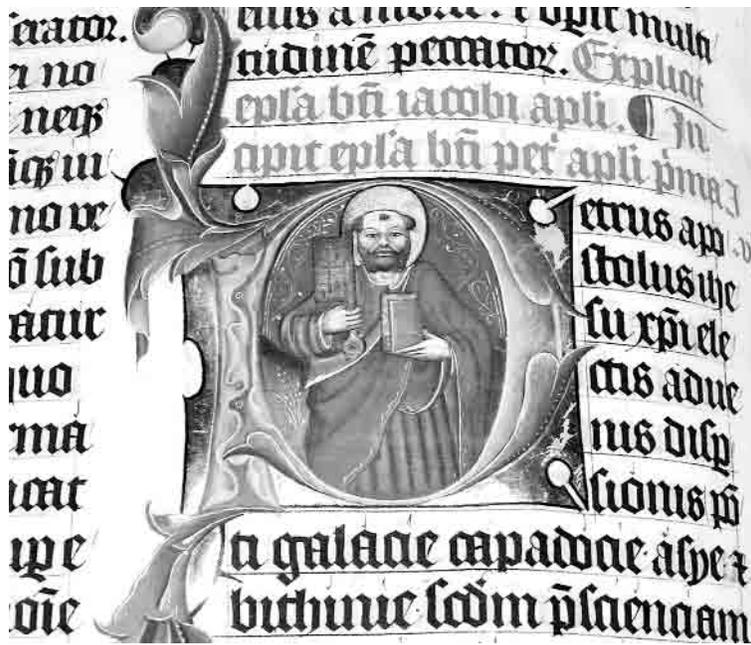
lators' fees remain paltry, and most American translators have a day job—professor, journalist, or even novelist. Saul Bellow, after all, translated the Isaac Bashevis Singer story “Gimpel the Fool” into English in 1953, lending Singer instant literary credibility in the English-reading world.

Lately, we've seen important new translations of classics: Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky published a new *War and Peace* in 2007; *Don Quixote*, translated by Edith Grossman, came out in 2003. Both translations received major attention. But those books fit the general pattern—well-known names such as Cervantes and Tolstoy, and languages we tend to translate more often, such as Spanish and Russian.

Occasionally, a writer in translation makes headlines or cracks the bestseller list. For some reason, it most often happens posthumously. *Suite Française*, by Irène Némirovsky, who perished at the hands of the Nazis, appeared in translation in the United States in 2006, and 900,000 English-language copies have since been sold here. I was thrilled to see stacks of *Suite Française* in an airport bookstore in Chicago. Then there is the Roberto Bolaño phenomenon. Since his death in 2003 at age 50, of liver failure, several of his books have appeared in translation, to wide acclaim; last year, his 900-page magnum opus, *2666*, which centers on unsolved sex crimes in Mexico, was published to laudatory reviews. Greatness is a huge factor in the success of these authors, of course, as is historical relevance, but it isn't always enough to attract Americans' attention, especially if that greatness isn't expressed in a language that plenty of English-language translators can handle.

Sadly, the Mongolian Tolstoy, if there is one, stands less of a chance. While studying at the University of Iowa a few years ago, I was lucky enough to read a short story translated by a classmate who had lived in Mongolia during a stint in the Peace Corps, in a translation workshop that paired a dozen student translators with visiting international writers. It was clear to me that the old man who sat next to my classmate was a major writer, who simply had never encountered an American reader who could write well enough to move his work to this world.

America, protected by water on two sides and friends on two borders, is at a crucial point in its history. We are at war in a part of the world that speaks Arabic, a lan-



The Latin Bible was sacrosanct to the medieval Catholic Church, and early English translators faced denunciation, even death. In this 1407 Latin text, “Petrus” (Peter) begins with an illuminated P.

guage woefully underrepresented in American schools and bookshelves. For the first time, an immigrant tongue—Spanish—is close to becoming a second language. From the beginning, America’s future has depended on deep curiosity, not just the look and sound of it. We have gone to the continent’s edge, we have gone to the moon, we have created forms of government that were previously just dreams. The pioneers knew it, the colonists knew it: There are certain things we must know personally if we want to create a dream of a future.

For years I struggled with the question, Should I write in Hebrew or English? For me it was as deep, as splitting, as life altering as the question of whether to write poetry or prose. Eventually I decided I did not have to choose: I could move what I loved of Hebrew to English, and I could move poetry to prose, and then I could move back and forth between the languages and the genres. I imagine that for every second-language writer there is a moment of choice, and then, after that, probably many additional moments of choosing.

A writer who chooses English today chooses to be

both read more and paid better. But though she may gain the world, she stands to lose the chance to speak directly to family and community in a home language, in my case the holy language of prayer and Torah and Isaiah’s screams. By encouraging a writer to move to a dominant tongue, we forgo the chance to listen in on intimate communication, with a home community.

There’s another risk, too. Trusting bicultural writers to be the sole transporters of the rest of the world also means that that we are losing different ways to conceive of story. International fiction doesn’t always follow the traditional American and British structure of beginning, struggle, climax, and ending, which also governs the average U.S. television sitcom and the standard Shakespearean play.

Latin American magical realism, for example, usually works differently. Borges would probably sneer at the idea of plot as a triangle, with action rising and then descending. Too simple, too angular, too Anglo, he might laugh. How we tell our stories matters almost as much as our stories themselves. Story structure affects how we see history, and, of course, ourselves.

This is not to discount the value of bilingual writers. There are bilingual writers who feel a special freedom in English: a rebirth, they say, without the weight of culture or history, the taste of prayer or the memory of genocide. Olga Grushin, at the end of our conversation, quoted Charlemagne, who said that to have a second language is to possess a second soul.

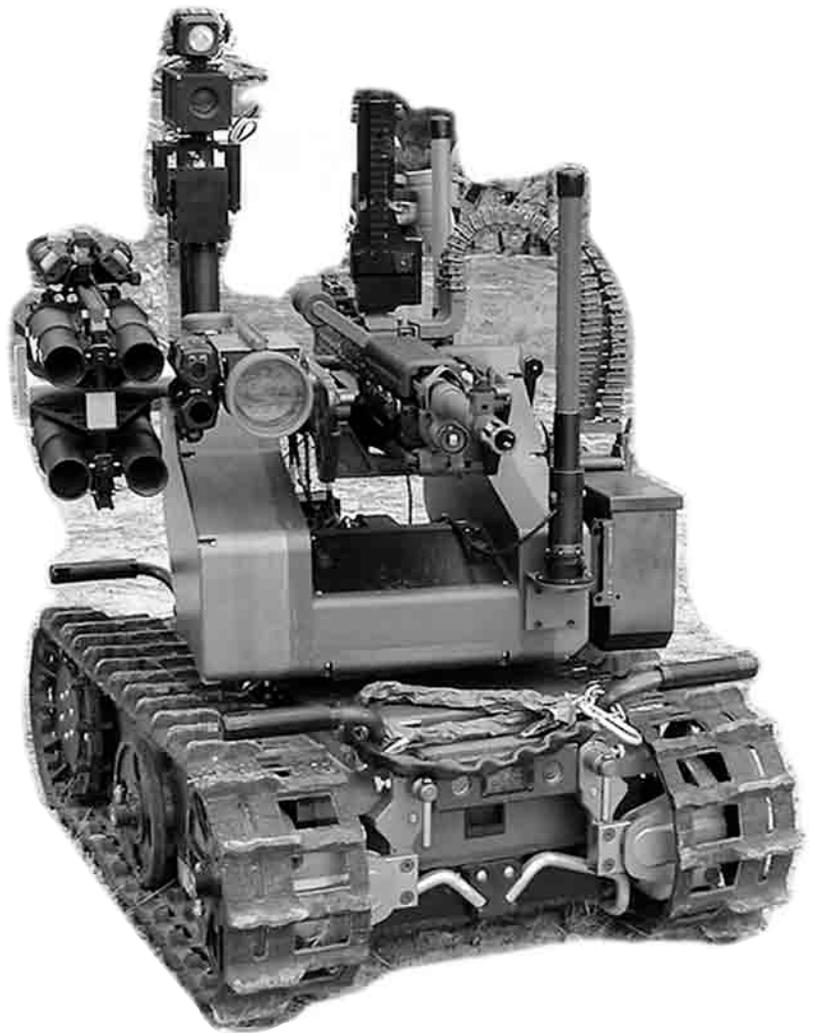
I was moved by the idea of another soul. But then I thought it over, as reader instead of writer. As praise is heaped on people who have mastered English, we are rewarding writers for selling their first soul. A culture with a healthier translation climate would create a space between languages, a space between souls. As readers, we’d win. We’d be able to hear the sound of all sorts of souls on the page—whether a first soul or, as Charlemagne claimed, a second soul, trying to speak, or perhaps, with luck, sing. ■

ROBOTS AT WAR

The New Battlefield

BY P. W. SINGER

It sounds like science fiction, but it is fact: On the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, robots are killing America's enemies and saving American lives. But today's PackBots, Predators, and Ravens are relatively primitive machines. The coming generation of "war-bots" will be immensely more sophisticated, and their development raises troubling new questions about how and when we wage war.



The 350-pound MAARS (Modular Advanced Armed Robotic System), a relative of the TALON, can be fitted with a machine gun, laser, and other weapons.

THERE WAS LITTLE TO WARN OF THE DANGER ahead. The Iraqi insurgent had laid his ambush with great cunning. Hidden along the side of the road, the bomb looked like any other piece of trash. American soldiers call these jury-rigged bombs IEDs, official shorthand for improvised explosive devices.

The unit hunting for the bomb was an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team, the sharp end of the spear in the effort to suppress roadside bombings. By 2006, about 2,500 of these attacks were occurring a month, and they were the leading cause of casualties among U.S. troops as well as Iraqi civilians. In a typical tour in Iraq, each EOD team would go on more than 600 calls, defusing or safely exploding about two devices a day. Perhaps the most telling sign of how critical the teams' work was to the American war effort is that insurgents began offering a rumored \$50,000 bounty for killing an EOD soldier.

Unfortunately, this particular IED call would not end well. By the time the soldier was close enough to see the telltale wires protruding from the bomb, it was too late. There was no time to defuse the bomb or to escape. The IED erupted in a wave of flame.

Depending on how much explosive has been packed into an IED, a soldier must be as far as 50 yards away to escape death and as far as a half-mile away to escape injury from bomb fragments. Even if a person is not hit, the pressure from the blast by itself can break bones. This soldier, though, had been right on top of the bomb. As the flames and debris cleared, the rest of the team advanced. They found little left of their teammate. Hearts in their throats, they loaded the remains onto a helicopter, which took them back to the team's base camp near Baghdad International Airport.

That night, the team's commander, a Navy chief petty officer, did his sad duty and wrote home about the incident. The effect of this explosion had been particularly tough on his unit. They had lost their most fearless and technically savvy soldier. More important, they had lost a valued member of the team, a soldier who had saved the others' lives many times over. The soldier had always taken the most dangerous roles, willing to go first to scout for IEDs and ambushes. Yet the other soldiers in the

unit had never once heard a complaint.

In his condolences, the chief noted the soldier's bravery and sacrifice. He apologized for his inability to change what had happened. But he also expressed his thanks and talked up the silver lining he took away from the loss. At least, he wrote, "when a robot dies, you don't have to write a letter to its mother."

The "soldier" in this case was a 42-pound robot called a PackBot. About the size of a lawn mower, the PackBot mounts all sorts of cameras and sensors, as well as a nimble arm with four joints. It moves using four "flippers." These are tiny treads that can also rotate on an axis, allowing the robot not only to roll forward and backward using the treads as a tank would, but also to flip its tracks up and down (almost like a seal moving) to climb stairs, rumble over rocks, squeeze down twisting tunnels, and even swim underwater. The cost to the United States of this "death" was \$150,000.

The destination of the chief's letter was not some farmhouse in Iowa, as is always the case in the old war movies. Instead, it arrived at a two-story concrete office building across from a Macaroni Grill restaurant and a Men's Wearhouse clothing store in a drab office park outside Boston. On the corner is a sign for a company called iRobot, the maker of the PackBot. The name was inspired by Isaac Asimov's 1950 science-fiction classic *I, Robot*, in which robots of the future not only carry out mundane chores but make life-and-death decisions. It is at places like this office park that the future of war is being written.

The PackBot is only one of the many new unmanned systems operating in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan today. When U.S. forces went into Iraq in 2003, they had zero robotic units on the ground. By the end of 2004, the number was up

P. W. SINGER is director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at the Brookings Institution and the author of *Children at War* (2005) and *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (2003). This article is adapted from *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*, reprinted by arrangement with The Penguin Press, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. © 2009 by P. W. Singer.

to 150. By the end of 2005 it was 2,400, and it more than doubled the next year. By the end of 2008, it was projected to reach as high as 12,000. And these weapons are just the first generation. Already in the prototype stage are varieties of unmanned weapons and exotic technologies, from automated machine guns and robotic stretcher bearers to tiny but lethal robots the size of insects, which look like they are straight out of the wildest science fiction. Pentagon planners are having to figure out not only how to use machines such as the PackBot in the wars of today, but also how they should plan for battlefields in the near future that will be, as one officer put it, “largely robotic.”

The most apt historical parallel to the current period in the development of robotics may well turn out to be World War I. Back then, strange, exciting new technologies that had been the stuff of science fiction just years earlier were introduced and used in increasing numbers on the battlefield. Indeed, it was H. G. Wells’s 1903 short story “Land Ironclads” that inspired Winston Churchill to champion the development of the tank. Another story, by A. A. Milne, creator of the beloved *Winnie the Pooh* series, was among the first to raise the prospect of using airplanes in war, while Arthur Conan Doyle (in “Danger”) and Jules Verne (in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*) pioneered the notion of using submarines in war. These new technologies didn’t really change the fundamentals of war. But even the earliest models quickly proved useful enough to make it clear that they weren’t going to be relegated to the realm of fiction again anytime soon. More important, they raised questions not only about how best to use them in battle, but also about an array of new political, moral, and legal issues. For instance, the United States’ and Germany’s differing interpretations of how submarine warfare should be conducted helped draw America into a world war. Similarly, airplanes proved useful for spotting and attacking troops at greater distances, but also allowed for strategic bombing of cities and other sites, which extended the battlefield to the home front.

Much the same sort of recalibration of thinking about war is starting to happen as a result of robotics today. On the civilian side, experts such as

Microsoft’s Bill Gates describe robotics as being close to where computers were in the early 1980s—still rare, but poised for a breakout. On the military side, unmanned systems are rapidly coming into use in almost every realm of war, moving more and more soldiers out of danger, and allowing their enemies to be targeted with increasing precision.

And they are changing the experience of war itself.

This is leading some of the first generation of soldiers working with robots to worry that war waged by remote control will come to seem too easy, too tempting. More than a century ago, General Robert E. Lee famously observed, “It is good that we find war so horrible, or else we would become fond of it.” He didn’t contemplate a time when a pilot could “go to war” by commuting to work each morning in his Toyota to a cubicle where he could shoot missiles at an enemy thousands of miles away and then make it home in time for his kid’s soccer practice.

As our weapons are designed to have ever more autonomy, deeper questions arise. Can the new armaments reliably separate friend from foe? What laws and ethical codes apply? What are we saying when we send out unmanned machines to fight for us? What is the “message” that those on the other side receive? Ultimately, how will humans remain mas-

In Baqubah, Iraq, soldiers prepare a MARCBOT to scout the road ahead for improvised explosive devices.



ters of weapons that are immeasurably faster and more “intelligent” than they are?

The unmanned systems that have already been deployed to Iraq come in many shapes and sizes. All told, some 22 different robot systems are now operating on the ground. One retired Army officer

speaks of these new forces as “the Army of the Grand Robotic.”

One of the PackBot’s fellow robo-soldiers in Iraq is the TALON, made by Foster-Miller Inc., whose offices are a few miles from iRobot’s. Foster-Miller builds an EOD version of the TALON, but it has also remodeled the machine into a “killer app,” the Special Weapons Observation Reconnaissance Detection System, or



SWORDS. The new design allows users to mount different weapons on the robot—including an M-16 rifle, a machine gun, and a grenade or rocket launcher—and easily swap them out. Another robo-soldier is the MARCBOT (Multi-Function Agile Remote-Controlled Robot). One of the smallest but most commonly used robots in Iraq, the MARCBOT looks like a toy truck with a video camera mounted on a tiny, antenna-like mast. Costing only \$5,000, this miniscule bot is used to scout for enemies and to search under cars for hidden explosives. The MARCBOT isn't just notable for its small size; it was the first ground robot to draw blood in Iraq. One unit of U.S. soldiers jury-rigged their MARCBOTs to carry Claymore anti-personnel mines. If they thought an insurgent was hiding in an alley, they would send a

see Americans killed in front of your eyes and then have to go to a PTA meeting." Says another, "You are going to war for 12 hours, shooting weapons at targets, directing kills on enemy combatants, and then you get in the car, drive home, and within 20 minutes you are sitting at the dinner table talking to your kids about their homework."

Each Predator costs just under \$4.5 million, which sounds like a lot until you compare it to the costs of other military aircraft. Indeed, for the price of one new F-35, the Pentagon's next-generation manned fighter jet (which hasn't even taken flight yet), you can buy 30 Predators. More important, the low price and lack of a human pilot mean that the Predator can be used for mis-

sions in which there is a high risk of being shot down, such as traveling low and slow over enemy territory. Predators originally were designed for reconnaissance and surveillance, but now some are armed with laser-guided Hellfire missiles. In addition to its deployments in Iraq

**IN THE WORDS OF ONE Predator pilot,
"You see Americans killed in front of your
eyes and then have to go to a PTA meeting."**

MARCBOT down first and, if they found someone waiting in ambush, take him out with the Claymore. Of course, each insurgent killed in this fashion has meant \$5,000 worth of blown-up robot parts, but so far the Army hasn't billed the soldiers.

The world of unmanned systems at war isn't confined to the ground. One of the most familiar unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) is the Predator. At 27 feet in length, the propeller-powered drone is just a bit smaller than a Cessna plane. Perhaps its most useful feature is that it can spend up to 24 hours in the air, at heights up to 26,000 feet. Predators are flown by what are called "reach-back" or "remote-split" operations. While the drone flies out of bases in the war zone, the human pilot and sensor operator are 7,500 miles away, flying the planes via satellite from a set of converted single-wide trailers located mostly at Nellis and Creech Air Force bases in Nevada. Such operations have created the novel situation of pilots experiencing the psychological disconnect of being "at war" while still dealing with the pressures of home. In the words of one Predator pilot, "You

and Afghanistan, the Predator, along with its larger, more heavily armed sibling, the Reaper, has been used with increasing frequency to attack suspected terrorists in Pakistan. According to news media reports, the drones are carrying out cross-border strikes at the rate of one every other day, operations that the Pakistani prime minister describes as the biggest point of contention between his country and the United States.

In addition to the Predator and Reaper, a veritable menagerie of drones now circle in the skies over war zones. Small UAVs such as the Raven, which is just over three feet long, or the even smaller Wasp (which carries a camera the size of a peanut) are tossed into the air by individual soldiers and fly just above the rooftops, transmitting video images of what's down the street or on the other side of the hill. Medium-sized drones such as the Shadow circle over entire neighborhoods, at heights above 1,500 feet, to monitor for anything suspicious. The larger Predators and Reapers roam over entire cities at 5,000 to 15,000 feet, hunting for targets to strike. Finally, sight unseen, 44-foot-long jet-powered Global



The eerie Global Hawk surveillance drone, only 44 feet long, can travel thousands of miles at altitudes of up to 12 miles virtually without human control.

Hawks zoom across much larger landscapes at 60,000 feet, monitoring electronic signals and capturing reams of detailed imagery for intelligence teams to sift through. Each Global Hawk can stay in the air as long as 35 hours. In other words, a Global Hawk could fly from San Francisco, spend a day hunting for terrorists throughout the

entire state of Maine, then fly back to the West Coast.

A massive change has thus occurred in the airspace above wars. Only a handful of drones were used in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, with just one supporting all of V Corps, the primary U.S. Army combat force. Today there are more than 5,300 drones in the U.S. military's total

inventory, and not a mission happens without them. One Air Force lieutenant general forecasts that “given the growth trends, it is not unreasonable to postulate future conflicts involving tens of thousands.”

Between 2002 and 2008, the U.S. defense budget rose by 74 percent to \$515 billion, not including the several hundred billions more spent on operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. With the defense budget at its highest level in real terms since 1946 (though it is still far lower as a percentage of gross domestic product), spending on military robotics research and development and subsequent procurement has boomed. The amount spent on ground robots, for example, has roughly doubled each year since 2001. “Make ’em as fast as you can” is what one robotics executive says he was told by his Pentagon buyers after 9/11.

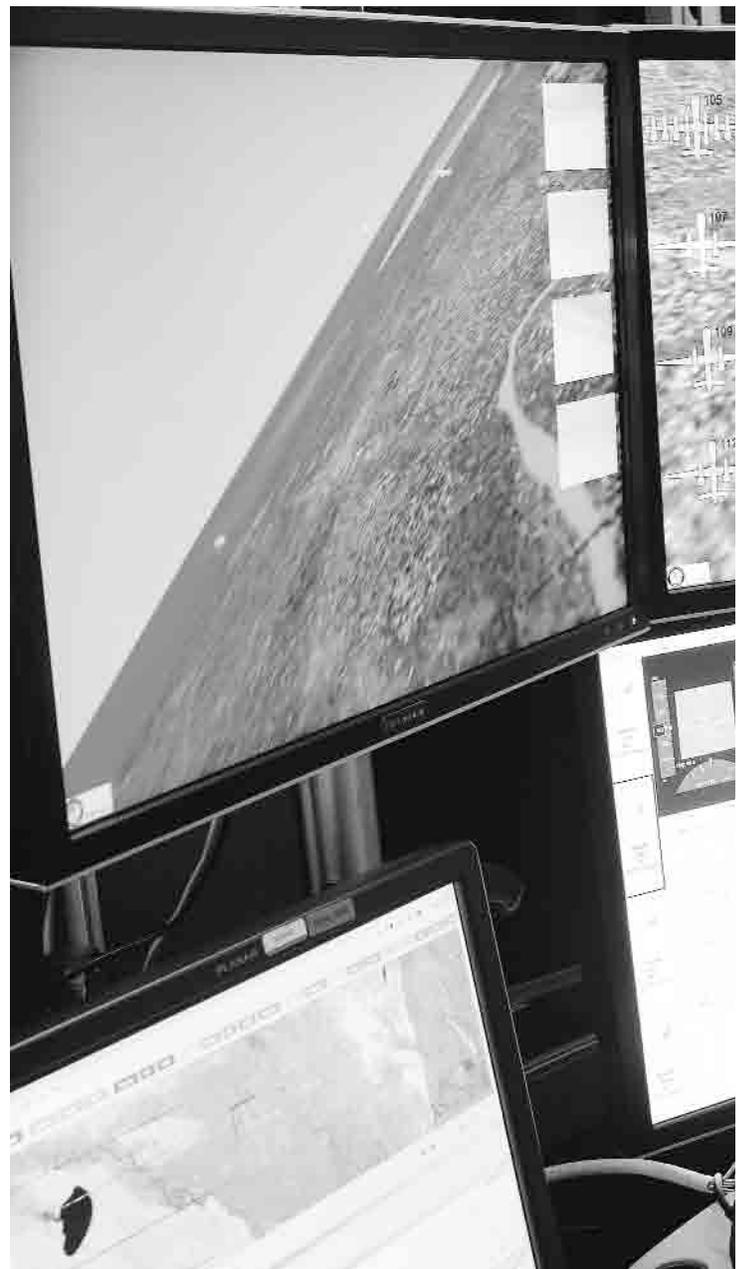
The result is that a significant military robotics industry is beginning to emerge. The World War I parallel is again instructive. As a report by the Pentagon’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) noted, only 239 Ford Model T cars were sold in 1908. Ten years later, more than a million were.

It’s not hard to see the appeal of robots to the Pentagon. Above all, they save lives. But they also don’t come with some of our human frailties and foibles. “They don’t get hungry,” says Gordon Johnson of the Pentagon’s Joint Forces Command. “They’re not afraid. They don’t forget their orders. They don’t care if the guy next to them has just been shot. Will they do a better job than humans? Yes.”

Robots are particularly attractive for roles dealing with what people in the field call the “Three D’s”—tasks that are dull, dirty, or dangerous. Many military missions can be incredibly boring as well as physically taxing. Humans doing work that requires intense concentration need to take frequent breaks, for example, but robots do not. Using the same mine detection gear as a human, today’s robots can do the same task in about a fifth the time and with greater accuracy.

This Universal Control System for the military borrows “the best-of-breed technologies from the gaming industry,” according to a Raytheon executive.

Unmanned systems can also operate in “dirty” environments, such as battle zones beset by bad weather or filled with biological or chemical weapons. In the past, humans and machines often had comparable limits. When the early fighter planes made high-speed turns or accelerations, for example, the same gravitational pressures (g-forces) that knocked out the human pilot would also tear the plane apart. But



now, as one study said of the F-16 fighter jet, the machines are pushing far ahead: “The airplane was too good. In fact, it was better than its pilots in one crucial way: It could maneuver so fast and hard that its pilots blacked out.” As a result of the new technologies, an official at DARPA observed, “the human is becoming the weakest link in defense systems.”

With continuing advances in artificial intelligence,

machines may soon overcome humans’ main comparative advantage today, the mushy gray blob inside our skull. This is not just a matter of raw computing power. A soldier who learns French or marksmanship cannot easily pass that knowledge on to other soldiers. Computers have faster learning curves. They not only speak the same language but can be connected directly to one another via a wire or network,



which means they have shareable intelligence.

The ability to compute and then act at digital speed is another robotic advantage. Humans, for example, can only react to incoming artillery fire by taking cover at the last second. But the Counter Rocket Artillery Mortar (CRAM) system uses radar to detect incoming rockets and mortar rounds and automatically direct the rapid fire of its Phalanx 20 mm Gatling guns against them, achieving a 70 percent shoot-down capability. More than 20 CRAMs—

of software code for a computer network that will link them all together. The Army believes that by 2015 it will be in a position to reorganize many of its units into new FCS brigades. The brigades will present a revolutionary new model of how military units are staffed and organized. Each is expected to have more unmanned vehicles than manned ones (a ratio of 330 to 300) and will come with its own automated air force, with more than 100 drones controlled by the brigade's soldiers. The aircraft will range in size from

**A soldier launches a Raven, a four-pound
spycraft that flies low over nearby terrain.**

known affectionately as R2-D2s, after the little robot in *Star Wars* they resemble—are now in service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some think that the speed of such weapons means they are only the start. One Army colonel says, “The trend towards the future will be robots reacting to robot attack, especially when operating at technologic speed. . . . As the loop gets shorter and shorter, there won't be any time in it for humans.”

Each branch of America's armed services has ambitious plans for robotic technologies. On the ground, the various Army robotics programs are supposed to come together in the \$230 billion Future Combat Systems (FCS) program, which military robots expert Robert Finkelstein describes as “the largest weapons procurement in history . . . at least in this part of the galaxy.” FCS involves everything from replacing tens of thousands of armored vehicles with a new generation of manned and unmanned vehicles to writing some 34 million lines

a small unit that will fit in soldiers' backpacks to a 23-foot-long robotic helicopter.

At sea, the Navy is introducing or developing various exotic technologies, including new “unmanned underwater vehicles” that search for mines or function as mini-submarines, launched from manned submarines in order to hunt down an enemy. The Navy has tested machine gun-wielding robotic speedboats that can patrol harbors or chase down pirates (one has been used on missions in the Persian Gulf, spooking local fisherman), as well as various robotic planes and helicopters designed to take off from surface ships or launch underwater from submarines.

In the air, the next generation of unmanned vehicles will likewise be a mix of upgraded current systems, convertible manned vehicles, and brand-new designs. “Unmanned combat aerial systems,” such as the Boeing X-45 and the Northrop Grumman X-47,

are the centerpiece of U.S. military plans for drones. Described as looking most like “a set piece from the television program *Battlestar Galactica*,” this type of drone is designed to take over the ultimate human pilot role, fighter jock. Especially stealthy and thus suitable for the most dangerous roles, the unmanned fighter plane prototypes have already shown some impressive capabilities. They have launched precision guided missiles, been “passed off” between different remote human operators 900 miles apart, and, in one war game, autonomously detected unexpected threats (missiles that “popped up” seemingly out of nowhere), engaged and destroyed them, then did their own battle damage assessment. The Navy plans to test its drone on aircraft carriers within the next three years, while the Air Force has taken its program into the “black” world of top-secret development.

As new prototypes of aerial drones hit the battlefield, the trend will be for the size extremes to be pushed in two directions. Some drone prototypes have wings the length of football fields. Powered by solar energy and hydrogen, they are designed to stay in the air for days and even weeks, acting as mobile spy satellites or aerial gas stations. At the other size extreme are what technology journalist Noah Shachtman describes as “itty-bitty, teeny-weeny UAVs.” The military’s estimation of what is possible with micro air vehicles is illustrated by a contract let by DARPA in 2006. It sought an insect-sized drone that weighed under 10 grams (roughly a third of an ounce), was less than 7.5 centimeters long, had a speed of 10 meters per second and a range of 1,000 meters, and could hover in place for at least a minute.

As our machines get smaller, they will move into the nanotechnology realm, once only theoretical. A major advance in the field occurred in 2007, when David Leigh, a researcher at the University of Edinburgh, revealed that he had built a “nanomachine” whose parts consisted of single molecules. When asked to describe the significance of his discovery to a normal person, Leigh said it would be difficult to predict. “It

is a bit like when stone-age man made his wheel, asking him to predict the motorway,” he said.

Despite all the enthusiasm in military circles for the next generation of unmanned vehicles, ships, and planes, there is one question that people are generally reluctant to talk about. It is the equivalent of Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter*; The Issue That Must Not Be Discussed. What happens to the human role in war as we arm ever more intelligent, more capable, and more autonomous robots?

When this issue comes up, both specialists and military folks tend to change the subject or speak in absolutes. “People will always want humans in the loop,” says Eliot Cohen, a noted military expert at Johns Hopkins who served in the State Department under President George W. Bush. An Air Force captain similarly writes in his service’s professional journal, “In some cases, the potential exists to remove the man from harm’s way. Does this mean there will no longer be a man in the loop? No. Does this mean that brave men and women will no longer face death in combat? No. There will always be a need for the intrepid souls to fling their bodies across the sky.”

All the rhetoric ignores the reality that humans started moving out of “the loop” a long time before robots made their way onto battlefields. As far back as World War II, the Norden bombsight made calculations of height, speed, and trajectory too complex for a human alone when it came to deciding when to drop a bomb. By the Persian Gulf War, Captain Doug Fries, a radar navigator, could write this description of what it was like to bomb Iraq from his B-52: “The navigation computer opened the bomb bay doors and dropped the weapons into the dark.”

In the Navy, the trend toward computer autonomy has been in place since the Aegis computer system was introduced in the 1980s. Designed to defend Navy ships against missile and plane attacks, the system operates in four modes, from “semi-automatic,” in which humans work with the system to judge when and at what to shoot, to “casualty,” in which the system operates as if all the humans are dead and does what it calculates is best to keep the ship from being hit. Humans can override the Aegis system in any of its modes, but experience shows that this capability is often beside the point, since people hesitate to use this power. Sometimes the consequences are tragic.



The Navy's unmanned X-45, an attack and surveillance drone shown here in prototype, may spell obsolescence for fighter pilots one day.

The most dramatic instance of a failure to override occurred in the Persian Gulf on July 3, 1988, during a patrol mission of the U.S.S. *Vincennes*. The ship had been nicknamed "Robo-cruiser," both because of the new Aegis radar system it was carrying and because its captain had a reputation for being overly aggressive. That day, the *Vincennes's* radars spotted Iran Air Flight 655, an Airbus passenger jet. The jet was on a consistent course and speed and was broadcasting a radar and radio signal that showed it to be civilian. The automated Aegis system, though, had been designed for managing battles against attacking Soviet bombers in the open North Atlantic, not for dealing with skies crowded with civilian aircraft like those over the gulf. The computer system registered the plane with an icon on the screen that made it appear to be an Iranian F-14 fighter (a plane half the size), and hence an "assumed enemy."

Though the hard data were telling the human crew that the plane wasn't a fighter jet, they trusted the computer more. Aegis was in semi-automatic mode, giving it the least amount of autonomy, but not one of the 18 sailors and officers in the command crew challenged the computer's wis-

dom. They authorized it to fire. (That they even had the authority to do so without seeking permission from more senior officers in the fleet, as their counterparts on any other ship would have had to do, was itself a product of the fact that the Navy had greater confidence in Aegis than in a human-crewed ship without it.) Only after the fact did the crew members realize that they had accidentally shot down an airliner, killing all 290 passengers and crew, including 66 children.

The tragedy of Flight 655 was no isolated incident. Indeed, much the same scenario was repeated a few years ago, when U.S. Patriot missile batteries accidentally shot down two allied planes during the Iraq invasion of 2003. The Patriot systems classified the craft as Iraqi rockets. There were only a few seconds to make a decision. So machine judgment trumped any human decisions. In both of these cases, the human power "in the loop" was actually only veto power, and even that was a power that military personnel were unwilling to use against the quicker (and what they viewed as superior) judgment of a computer.

The point is not that the machines are taking over,

Matrix-style, but that what it means to have humans “in the loop” of decision making in war is being redefined, with the authority and autonomy of machines expanding. There are myriad pressures to give war-bots greater and greater autonomy. The first is simply the push to make more capable and more intelligent robots. But as psychologist and artificial intelligence expert Robert Epstein notes, this comes with a built-in paradox. “The irony is that the military will want [a robot] to be able to learn, react, etc., in order for it to do its mission well. But they won’t want it to be too creative, just like with soldiers. But once you reach a space where it is really capable, how do you limit them? To be honest, I don’t think we can.”

Simple military expediency also widens the loop. To achieve any sort of personnel savings from using unmanned systems, one human operator has to be able to “supervise” (as opposed to control) a larger number of robots. For example, the Army’s long-term Future Combat Systems plan calls for two humans to sit at identical consoles and jointly supervise a team of 10 land robots. In this scenario, the humans delegate tasks to increasingly autonomous robots, but the robots still need human permission to fire weapons. There are many reasons, however, to believe that this arrangement will not prove workable.

Researchers are finding that humans have a hard time controlling multiple units at once (imagine playing five different video games simultaneously). Even having human operators control two UAVs at a time rather than one reduces performance levels by an average of 50 percent. As a NATO study concluded, the goal of having one operator control multiple vehicles is “currently, at best, very ambitious, and, at worst, improbable to achieve.” And this is with systems that aren’t shooting or being shot at. As one Pentagon-funded report noted, “Even if the tactical commander is aware of the location of all his units, the combat is so fluid and fast paced that it is very difficult to control them.” So a push is made to give more autonomy to the machine.

And then there is the fact that an enemy is involved. If the robots aren’t going to fire unless a remote operator authorizes them to, then a foe need only disrupt that communication. Military officers counter that, while they don’t

like the idea of taking humans out of the loop, there has to be an exception, a backup plan for when communications are cut and the robot is “fighting blind.” So another exception is made.

Even if the communications link is not broken, there are combat situations in which there is not enough time for the human operator to react, even if the enemy is not functioning at digital speed. For instance, a number of robot makers have added “countersniper” capabilities to their machines, enabling them to automatically track down and

MILITARY PERSONNEL HAVE proved reluctant to second-guess the judgments of a computer.

target with a laser beam any enemy that shoots. But those precious seconds while the human decides whether to fire back could let the enemy get away. As one U.S. military officer observes, there is nothing technical to prevent one from rigging the machine to shoot something more lethal than light. “If you can automatically hit it with a laser range finder, you can hit it with a bullet.”

This creates a powerful argument for another exception to the rule that humans must always be “in the loop,” that is, giving robots the ability to fire back on their own. This kind of autonomy is generally seen as more palatable than other types. “People tend to feel a little bit differently about the counterpunch than the punch,” Noah Shachtman notes. As Gordon Johnson of the Army’s Joint Forces Command explains, such autonomy soon comes to be viewed as not only logical but quite attractive. “Anyone who would shoot at our forces would die. Before he can drop that weapon and run, he’s probably already dead. Well now, these cowards in Baghdad would have to pay with blood and guts every time they shot at one of our folks. The costs of poker went up significantly. The enemy, are they going to give up blood and guts to kill machines? I’m guessing not.”

Each exception, however, pushes one further and further from the absolute of “never” and instead down a slippery slope. And at each step, once robots “establish a track record of reliability in finding the right targets and employing

weapons properly,” says John Tirpak, executive editor of *Air Force Magazine*, the “machines will be trusted.”

The reality is that the human location “in the loop” is already becoming, as retired Army colonel Thomas Adams notes, that of “a supervisor who serves in a fail-safe capacity in the event of a system malfunction.” Even then, he thinks that the speed, confusion, and information overload of modern-day war will soon move the whole process outside “human space.” He describes how the coming weapons “will be too fast, too small, too numerous, and will create an environment too complex for humans to direct.” As Adams concludes, the new technologies “are rapidly taking us to a place where we may not want to go, but probably are unable to avoid.”

The irony is that for all the claims by military, political, and scientific leaders that “humans will always be in the loop,” as far back as 2004 the U.S. Army was carrying out research that demonstrated the merits of armed ground robots equipped with a “quick-draw response.” Similarly, a 2006 study by the Defense Safety Working Group, in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, discussed how the concerns over potential killer robots could be allayed by giving “armed autonomous systems” permission to “shoot to destroy hostile weapons systems but not suspected combatants.” That is, they could shoot at tanks and jeeps, just not the people in them. Perhaps most telling is a report that the Joint Forces Command drew up in 2005, which suggested that autonomous robots on the battlefield would be the norm within 20 years. Its title is somewhat amusing, given the official line one usually hears: *Unmanned Effects: Taking the Human Out of the Loop*.

So, despite what one article called “all the lip service paid to keeping a human in the loop,” autonomous armed robots are coming to war. They simply make too much sense to the people who matter.

With robots taking on more and more roles, and humans ever further out of the loop, some wonder whether human warriors will eventually be rendered obsolete. Describing a visit he had with the 2007 graduating class at the Air Force Academy, a retired Air Force officer says, “There is a lot of fear that they will never be able to fly in combat.”

The most controversial role for robots in the future would be as replacements for the human grunt in the



Researchers are working on ways to add robotic enhancements to human soldiers, as in this Future Warrior Concept. One exotic possibility: super-strong “nano-muscle” fibers sewn into suits, boosting soldiers’ strength.

field. In 2004, DARPA researchers surveyed a group of U.S. military officers and robotics scientists about the roles they thought robots would take over in the near future. The officers predicted that counterintelligence operations would go first, followed by reconnaissance, forward observation, logistics, then infantry. Oddly, among the last roles they named were air defense, driving or piloting vehicles, and food service—each of which has already seen automation. Special Forces roles were felt, on average, to be least likely ever to be delegated to robots.

The average year the soldiers predicted that humanoid robots would start to be used in infantry combat roles was 2025.

Their answer wasn't much different from that of the scientists, who gave 2020 as their prediction. To be clear, these numbers only reflect the opinions of those in the survey, and could prove to be way off. Robert Finkelstein, a veteran engineer who now heads Robotic Technologies Inc. and who helped conduct the survey, thinks these projections are highly optimistic and that it won't be until "2035 [that] we will have robots as fully capable as human soldiers on the battlefield." But the broader point is that many specialists are starting to contemplate a world in which robots will replace the grunt in the field well before many of us pay off our mortgages.

However, as H. R. "Bart" Everett, a Navy robotics pioneer, explains, the full-scale replacement of humans in battle is not likely to occur anytime soon. Instead, the human use of robots in war will evolve "to more of a team approach." His program, the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center, has joined with the Office of Naval Research to support the activation of a "warfighters' associate" concept within the next 10 to 20 years. Humans and robots would be integrated into a team that shares information and coordinates action toward a common goal. Says Everett, "I firmly believe the intelligent mobile robot will ultimately achieve sufficient capability to be accepted by the warfighter as an equal partner in a human-robot team, much along the lines of a police dog and its handler."

A 2006 solicitation by the Pentagon to the robotics

industry captures the vision: "The challenge is to create a system demonstrating the use of multiple robots with one or more humans on a highly constrained tactical maneuver. . . . One example of such a maneuver is the through-the-door procedure often used by police and soldiers to enter an urban dwelling . . . [in which] one kicks in the door then pulls back so another can enter low and move left, followed by another who enters high and

**TOMORROW'S WEAPONS may be
"too fast, too small, too numerous" for
humans to direct.**

moves right, etc. In this project the teams will consist of robot platforms working with one or more human teammates as a cohesive unit."

Another U.S. military-funded project envisions the creation of "playbooks" for tactical operations by a robot-human team. Much like a football quarterback, the human soldier would call the "play" for robots to carry out, but like the players on the field, the robots would have the latitude to change what they did if the situation shifted.

The military, then, doesn't expect to replace all its soldiers with robots anytime soon, but rather sees a process of integration into a force that will become, as the Joint Forces Command projected in its 2025 plans, "largely robotic." The individual robots will "have some level of autonomy—adjustable autonomy or supervised autonomy or full autonomy within mission bounds," but it is important to note that the autonomy of any human soldiers in these units will also be circumscribed by their orders and rules.

If the future is one of robot squad mates and robot wingmen, many scientists think it puts a premium on two things, both very human in nature. The first is good communication. In 2004, Lockheed tested an unmanned jet that responded to simple vocal commands. A pilot flying in another plane would give the drone some broad mission, such as to go to a certain area and photograph a specific building, and the plane would carry it out. As one report

explains, “The next war could be fought partly by unmanned aircraft that respond to spoken commands in plain English and then figure out on their own how to get the job done.” The robot’s responses may even sound human. WT-6 is a robot in Japan that has a human-sounding vocal system, produced from an artificial tongue, lips, teeth, vocal cords, lungs, and soft palate made from polymers.

To work well together, robots and human soldiers will need to have confidence in each other. It sounds funny to say that about the relationship between a bucket of bolts and a

understand these wars. In 2007, I asked him what he thought was the most important overlooked issue in Washington defense circles. He answered, “Robotics and all this unmanned stuff. What are the effects? Will it make war more likely?”

Korb is a great supporter of unmanned systems for a simple reason: “They save lives.” But he worries about their effect on the perceptions and psychologies of war, not merely among foreign publics and media, but also at home. As more and more unmanned systems are used, he sees change

occurring in two ways, both of which he fears will make war more likely. Robotics “will further disconnect the military from society. People are more likely to support the use of force as long as they view it as costless.” Even more worrisome, a new kind of voyeurism enabled by the

TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS unmanned systems can be seductive, feeding overconfidence that can lead nations into war.

human, but David Bruemmer, a scientist at the Idaho National Laboratory, actually specializes in how humans and robots work together. “Trust,” he says, without any irony, “is a huge issue for robot performance.”

Trust is having a proper sense of what the other is capable of, as well as being correct in your expectations of what the other will do. One of Bruemmer’s more interesting findings is that novices tend to make the best use of robotic systems. They “trust” robot autonomy the most and “let [the robot] do its job.” Over time, Bruemmer predicts, robots will likely have “dynamic autonomy” built in, with the amount of “leash” they are given determined less by any principle of keeping humans “in the loop” than by their human teammates’ experience and trust level.

Lawrence J. Korb is one of the deans of Washington’s defense policy establishment. A former Navy flight officer, he served as assistant secretary of defense during the Reagan administration. Now he is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, a left-leaning think tank. Korb has seen presidential administrations, and their wars, come and go. And, as the author of 20 books and more than 100 articles, and a veteran of more than a thousand TV news-show appearances, he has also helped shape how the American news media and public

emerging technologies will make the public more susceptible to attempts to sell the ease of a potential war. “There will be more marketing of wars. More ‘shock and awe’ talk to defray discussion of the costs.”

Korb is equally troubled by the effect that such technologies will have on how political leaders look at war and its costs. “It will make people think, ‘Gee, warfare is easy.’ Remember all the claims of a ‘cakewalk’ in Iraq and how the Afghan model would apply? The whole idea that all it took to win a war was ‘three men and a satellite phone’? Well, their thinking is that if they can get the Army to be as technologically dominant as the other services, we’ll solve these problems.”

Korb believes that political Washington has been “chastened by Iraq.” But he worries about the next generation of policymakers. Technologies such as unmanned systems can be seductive, feeding overconfidence that can lead nations into wars for which they aren’t ready. “Leaders without experience tend to forget about the other side, that it can adapt. They tend to think of the other side as static and fall into a technology trap.”

“We’ll have more Kosovos and less Iraqs,” is how Korb sums up where he thinks we are headed. That is, he predicts more punitive interventions such as the Kosovo strikes of 1999, launched without ground troops, and fewer operations like the invasion of Iraq. As

unmanned systems become more prevalent, we'll become more likely to use force, but also see the bar raised on anything that exposes human troops to danger. Korb envisions a future in which the United States is willing to fight, but only from afar, in which it is more willing to punish by means of war but less willing to face the costs of war.

Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795) first expressed the idea that democracies are superior to all other forms of government because they are inherently more peaceful and less aggressive. This "democratic peace" argument (cited by presidents across the partisan spectrum from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush) is founded on the belief that democracies have a built-in connection between their foreign policy and domestic politics that other systems of government lack. When the people share a voice in any decision, including whether to go to war, they are supposed to choose more wisely than an unchecked king or potentate.

Colonel R. D. Hooker Jr. is an Iraq veteran and the commander of an Army airborne brigade. As he explains, the people and their military in the field should be linked in two ways. The first is the direct stake the public has in the government's policies. "War is much more than strategy and policy because it is visceral and personal. . . . Its victories and defeats, joys and sorrows, highs and depressions, are expressed fundamentally through a collective sense of exhilaration or despair. For the combatants, war means the prospect of death or wounds and a loss of friends and comrades that is scarcely less tragic." Because it is their blood that will be personally invested, citizen-soldiers, as well as their fathers, mothers, uncles, and cousins who vote, combine to dissuade leaders from foreign misadventures and ill-planned aggression.

The second link is supposed to come indirectly, through a democracy's free media, which widen the impact of those investments of blood to the public at large. "Society is an intimate participant [in war] too, through the bulletins and statements of political leaders, through the lens of an omnipresent media, and in the homes of the families and the communities where they live. Here, the safe return or death in action of a loved one, magnified thousands of times, resonates powerfully and far afield," Hooker says.

The news media's role in a free system, then, is not merely to report on a war's outcome, as if reporting on a

sporting event. The public's perceptions of events on distant battlefields create pressures on elected leaders. Too much pressure can lead an elected leader to try to interfere in ongoing operations, as bad an idea in war as it would be in sports for the fans to call in the plays for their favorite team. But, as Korb and Hooker explain, too little public pressure may be worse. It's the equivalent of no one even caring about the game or its outcome. War becomes the WNBA.

Many worry that this democratic ideal is already under siege. The American military has been at war for the past eight years in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, but other than suffering the indignity of smaller bottles of shampoo in its carry-on luggage, the American nation has not. Since the end of the draft, most Americans no longer have to think about whether their husband, wife, son, or daughter would be at risk if the military were sent to war. During World War II, by comparison, more than 16 million men and women, about 11 percent of the American populace, served in the military—the equivalent of more than 30 million today.

By the start of the 21st century, even the financial costs on the home front had been displaced. After September 11, industry didn't need to retool its factories, and families didn't need to ration fuel or food, or even show their faith in the war effort by purchasing bonds. (Instead, a tax cut lightened the burden on Americans, especially the affluent.) When asked what citizens could do to share in the risks and sacrifices of soldiers in the field, the response from the commander in chief was, "Go shopping." The result is an American public that is less invested in and linked to its foreign policy than ever before in a democracy.

With this trend already in place, some worry that robot technologies will snip the last remaining threads of connection. Unmanned systems represent the ultimate break between the public and its military. With no draft, no need for congressional approval (the last formal declaration of war was in 1941), no tax or war bonds, and now the knowledge that the Americans at risk are mainly just American machines, the already falling bars to war may well hit the ground. A leader won't need to do the kind of consensus building that is normally required before a war, and won't even need to unite the country behind the effort. In turn, the public truly will become the equivalent of sports fans watch-



At Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, maintenance personnel work on a Predator. Within the military, unmanned systems are altering command structures and human-machine relations. Some ground troops have even complained that Nevada-based Predator pilots value the machines' safety over soldiers' lives.

ing war, rather than citizens sharing in its importance.

But our new technologies don't merely remove human risk, they also record all they experience, and in so doing reshape the public's link to war. The Iraq war is literally the first conflict in which you can download video of combat from the Web. By the middle of 2007, there were more than 7,000 video clips of combat footage from Iraq on YouTube alone. Much of this footage was captured by drones and unmanned sensors and then posted online.

The trend toward video war could build connections between the war front and home front, allowing the public to see what is happening in battle as never before. But inevitably, the ability to download the latest snippets of

robotic combat footage to home computers and iPhones turns war into a sort of entertainment. Soldiers call these clips "war porn." Particularly interesting or gruesome combat footage, such as video of an insurgent being blown up by a UAV, is posted on blogs and forwarded to friends, family, and colleagues with subject lines like "Watch this!" much as an amusing clip of a nerdy kid dancing around in his basement might be e-mailed around. A typical clip that has been making the rounds shows people's bodies being blown into the air by a Predator strike, set to the tune of Sugar Ray's snappy pop song "I Just Want to Fly."

From this perspective, war becomes, as one security analyst put it, "a global spectator sport for those not involved

in it.” More broadly, while video images engage the public in a whole new way, they can fool many viewers into thinking they now have a true sense of what is happening in the conflict. The ability to watch more but experience less has a paradoxical effect. It widens the gap between our perceptions and war’s realities. To make another sports parallel, it’s the difference between watching an NBA game on television, with the tiny figures on the screen, and knowing what it feels like to have a screaming Kevin Garnett knock you down and dunk over your head. Even worse, the video segments that civilians see don’t show the whole gamut of war, but are merely the bastardized ESPN *SportsCenter* version. The context, the strategy, the training, the tactics—they all just become slam dunks and smart bombs.

War porn tends to hide other hard realities of battle. Most viewers have an instinctive aversion to watching a clip in which the target might be someone they know or a fellow American; such clips are usually banned from U.S.-hosted websites. But many people are perfectly happy to watch video of a drone ending the life of some anonymous enemy, even if it is just to see if the machines fighting in Iraq are as “sick” as those in the *Transformers* movie, the motive one student gave me for why he downloaded the clips. To a public with so much less at risk, wars take on what analyst Christopher Coker called “the pleasure of a spectacle with the added thrill that it is real for someone, but not the spectator.”

Such changed connections don’t just make a public less likely to wield its veto power over its elected leaders. As Lawrence Korb observed, they also alter the calculations of the leaders themselves.

Nations often go to war because of overconfidence. This makes perfect sense; few leaders choose to start a conflict thinking they will lose. Historians have found that technology can play a big role in feeding overconfidence: New weapons and capabilities breed new perceptions, as well as misperceptions, about what might be possible in a war. Today’s new technologies are particu-

larly likely to feed overconfidence. They are perceived to help the offensive side in a war more than the defense, plus, they are improving at an exponential pace. The difference of just a few years of research and development can create vast differences in weapons’ capabilities. But this can generate a sort of “use it or lose it” mentality, as even the best of technological advantages can prove fleeting (and the United States has reasons for concern, as 42 countries are now working on military robotics, from Iran and China to Belarus and Pakistan). Finally, as one roboticist explains, a vicious circle is generated.

THE ABILITY TO DOWNLOAD the latest snippets of robotic combat footage turns war into a sort of entertainment. Soldiers call these clips “war porn.”

Scientists and companies often overstate the value of new technologies in order to get governments to buy them, but if leaders believe the hype, they may be more likely to feel adventurous.

James Der Derian is an expert at Brown University on new modes of war. He believes that the combination of these factors means that robotics will “lower the threshold for violence.” The result is a dangerous mixture: leaders unchecked by a public veto now gone missing, combined with technologies that seem to offer spectacular results with few lives lost. It’s a brew that could prove very seductive to decision makers. “If one can argue that such new technologies will offer less harm to us and them, then it is more likely that we’ll reach for them early, rather than spending weeks and months slogging at diplomacy.”

When faced with a dispute or crisis, policymakers have typically regarded the use of force as the “option of last resort.” Unmanned systems might now help that option move up the list, with each upward step making war more likely. That returns us to Korb’s scenario of “more Kosovos, less Iraqs.”

While avoiding the mistakes of Iraq certainly sounds like a positive result, the other side of the tradeoff would not be

without problems. The 1990s were not the halcyon days some recall. Lowering the bar to allow for more unmanned strikes from afar would lead to an approach resembling the “cruise missile diplomacy” of that period. Such a strategy may leave fewer troops stuck on the ground, but, as shown by the strikes against Al Qaeda camps in Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998, the Kosovo war in 1999, and perhaps now the drone strikes in Pakistan, it produces military action without any true sense of a commitment, lash-outs that yield incomplete victories at best. As one U.S. Army report notes, such operations “feel good for a time, but accomplish little.” They involve the country in a problem, but do not resolve it.

Even worse, Korb may be wrong, and the dynamic may yield not fewer Iraqs but more of them. It was the lure of an easy preemptive action that helped get the United States into such trouble in Iraq in the first place. As one robotics scientist says of the new technology he is building, “The military thinks that it will allow them to nip things in the bud, deal with the bad guys earlier and easier, rather than having to get into a big-ass war. But the most likely thing that will happen is that we’ll be throwing a bunch of high tech against the usual urban guerillas. . . . It will stem the tide [of U.S. casualties], but it won’t give us some asymmetric advantage.”

Thus, robots may entail a dark irony. By appearing to lower the human costs of war, they may seduce us into more wars.

Whether it’s watching wars from afar or sending robots instead of fellow citizens into harm’s way, robotics offers the public and its leaders the lure of riskless warfare. All the potential gains of war would come without the costs, and even be mildly entertaining.

It’s a heady enticement, and not just for evil warmongers. The world watched the horrors of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Congo but did little, chiefly because the public didn’t know or care enough and the perceived costs of doing something truly effective seemed too high. Substitute unmanned systems for troops, and the calculus might be changed. Indeed, imagine all the genocides and crimes against humanity that could be ended if only the human barriers to war were lowered. Getting tired of some dictator massacring his people? Send in your superior technology and watch on

YouTube as his troops are taken down.

Yet wars never turn out to be that simple. They are complex, messy, and unpredictable. And this will remain the case even as unmanned systems increasingly substitute for humans.

But let’s imagine that such fantasies of cheap and costless unmanned wars were to come true, that we could use robots to stop bad things being done by bad people, with no blowback, no muss, and no fuss. Even that prospect should give us pause. By cutting the already tenuous link between the public and its nation’s foreign policy, pain-free war would pervert the whole idea of the democratic process and citizenship as they relate to war. When a citizenry has no sense of sacrifice or even the prospect of sacrifice, the decision to go to war becomes just like any other policy decision, weighed by the same calculus used to determine whether to raise bridge tolls. Instead of widespread engagement and debate over the most important decision a government can make, you get popular indifference. When technology turns war into something merely to be watched, and not weighed with great seriousness, the checks and balances that undergird democracy go by the wayside. This could well mean the end of any idea of democratic peace that supposedly sets our foreign-policy decision making apart.

Such wars without costs could even undermine the morality of “good” wars. When a nation decides to go to war, it is not just deciding to break stuff in some foreign land. As one philosopher put it, the very decision is “a reflection of the moral character of the community who decides.” Without public debate and support and without risking troops, the decision to go to war becomes the act of a nation that doesn’t give a damn.

Even if the nation sending in its robots acts in a just cause, such as stopping a genocide, war without risk or sacrifice becomes merely an act of somewhat selfish charity. One side has the wealth to afford high technologies, and the other does not. The only message of “moral character” a nation transmits is that it alone gets the right to stop bad things, but only at the time and place of its choosing, and most important, only if the costs are low enough. With robots, the human costs weighed against those lives that might be saved become zero. It doesn’t mean the nation shouldn’t act. But when it does, it must realize that even the just wars become exercises in playing God from afar, with unmanned weapons substituting for thunderbolts. ■

Must Government Be Incompetent?



MANY AMERICANS ARE CHEERING AS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT rides to the nation's economic rescue. But the public's decades-old sense that their government does not work will not change overnight. What will happen when the inevitable blunders and disappointments occur? Here are four ideas about what more will be needed.

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The Right Bite

There are five maxims the federal government can follow to regain the public confidence it has lost over the past four decades.

BY WILLIAM A. GALSTON

ONE OF THE PUZZLES OF OUR AGE IS WHY AMERICANS distrust their own government so deeply. Against the inescapable and well-publicized cases of failure by the federal government must be weighed a remarkable half-century record of accomplishment. The federal government has cleaned up our air and water, improved safety in the workplace, spurred immense amounts of scientific and medical research, and underwritten technological innovations, such as the computer and the Internet, that have transformed our society. It has dramatically reduced poverty among the elderly while ensuring their access to medical care. It has expanded both individual freedom and social inclusion—for women, racial and ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, among others. The list goes on. Yet despite this record, trust in the federal government now stands at the lowest level ever recorded. That is not merely a riddle for academicians. Without the public's confidence it becomes ever more difficult for government to do its job effectively.

We might be tempted to seek an explanation in recent failures, such as an unpopular war, economic crisis, and the monumentally botched response to

Hurricane Katrina. But the decline began long ago. As recently as the mid-1960s, about 70 percent of Americans reported that they trusted the federal government. That number then dropped steadily, with only modest interruptions, before bottoming out at 21 percent in the early 1990s. The peace and prosperity of the Clinton years brought it back up, but only to about 40 percent—little more than half its post-World War II peak. After another rise early in George W. Bush's first term, it has steadily declined and now stands at 17 percent. We are mired, it seems, in a long cycle of diminished trust, decoupled—at least in part—from government's performance. The question is why.

One possibility is that the two decades after World War II are a misleading baseline. Compared with those of other advanced societies, America's public culture is basically antistatist, skeptical at best about concentrated public power. Government's successful response to the Great Depression and the fascist threat shifted the mainstream, this argument goes, but only temporarily. As memories of crisis faded and a generation reached maturity, public sentiment would inevitably have reverted to its deeply rooted default setting, a process accelerated by the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the "Great Inflation" of the 1970s. As Hugh Heclo, a leading scholar of political institutions, puts it, "We are disposed to distrust institutions. That is the basic

WILLIAM A. GALSTON is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, where he holds the Ezra Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies. A former deputy assistant for domestic policy to President Bill Clinton, he is the author most recently of *Public Matters: Politics, Policy, and Religion in the 21st Century* (2005).



The federal government has been blamed for some high-profile bumbles, but to those on a sinking ship no sight is more welcome than the U.S. Coast Guard.

fact of life we share as modern people. . . . We are compelled to live in a thick tangle of institutions while believing that they do not have our best interests at heart.”

While we cannot dismiss this hypothesis out of hand, we must consider that trust in state and local government remained relatively stable even as trust in the federal government plunged. We cannot explain this divergence as a response to the sheer growth of federal activities: By many measures, state and local governments have expanded at least as fast. Nor can it be said that state and local governments are more honest, less self-dealing, or less corrupt. Hecló himself notes that the most logical consequence of America’s quasi-libertarian tradition is skepticism about the federal government, not the cynicism that prevails today. It is the move from skepticism to outright cynicism that needs explaining.

One possibility is that the news media’s turn from supportive to adversarial during the 1970s exacerbated mistrust by bringing to light mistakes and misdeeds in Washington that would have remained hidden in earlier times. There’s something to this, but the withdrawal of public trust was under way well before Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate story and made investigative journalism fashionable. The public’s response to events—real or perceived—changed the tone of public life and created an opportunity that journalists alertly filled.

The remaining possibility is that something about the qualitative expansion of federal power—about the additional responsibilities the federal government has taken on and the way in which it discharges them—is the reason for its diminished standing. Here there is much to say.

Since the New Deal, Americans have held the fed-

eral government accountable for the performance of the economy. In the quarter-century after World War II, this expanded responsibility seemed unproblematic: The economy grew steadily, with low inflation, and Americans at every income level experienced rising living standards. Among officials and citizens alike, confidence grew that Keynesian economics offered the tools needed to mute the inevitable downturns and spur non-inflationary growth whose fruits would be widely shared. But at the moment that complacency peaked (Richard M. Nixon famously declared that “we are all Keynesians now”), new developments—slower growth, higher inflation, increasing inequality, and threats to U.S. manufacturing supremacy—challenged government competence and eroded public confidence.

At roughly the same time, the elite consensus on fundamentals was breaking down. Liberals and conservatives parted ways on economics and foreign policy, and the duopoly that had kept most racial and cultural issues off the federal government’s agenda gave way to national action and contestation. When combined with government’s expanded reach, rancorous and prolonged disputes among elites further weakened public confidence.

Some have argued that starting with the civil rights and voting rights legislation of the mid-1960s, the federal government’s efforts to advance racial equality led to a withdrawal of trust among white Americans. The facts do not support this view. Whites and blacks expressed trust in the federal government at equal (and high) rates until 1968, after which trust declined more rapidly among blacks than among whites for a number of years before measures for the two groups converged again in the late 1970s. It may well be the case, however, that public controversy over government’s role in race relations exacerbated the decline across the board.

In civil rights and many other areas, expanding government bypassed the tiered constraints of the federal system and established direct links between Washington and localities, or with the people themselves. The federal government not only created new conflicts with mayors and governors but also assumed responsibilities that

often exceeded its ability to act effectively. Although the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 aimed to reduce inequalities between rich and poor districts, the federal government provided less than 10 percent of total funding for the nation’s public schools and had limited authority, at most, to alter local school practices. A gap between promise and performance was inevitable. All too often, the federal government used legislative authorizations to proclaim expansive good intentions while proving unable or unwilling to back up those intentions with commensurate resources.

During the New Deal, a new kind of governance had arisen, as Congress increasingly set only general goals in legislation, leaving it to government agencies to give form and substance to national policies through regulations and other administrative tools. The presidencies of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon expanded this strategy into a host of new areas, from workplace safety and racial equity to environmental regulation. While yielding some real accomplishments, the new “administrative state,” as political scientists called it, produced unintended harmful consequences. As former Harvard president Derek Bok has argued, federal agencies tended to develop regulations without adequately consulting the people they affected, generating charges that elites and “faceless bureaucrats” were running roughshod over democracy. Litigation surged, slowing the translation of purposes into policy. As agencies with overlapping jurisdictions issued conflicting directives, compliance costs rose. And many citizens experienced regulations—for example, limiting construction on their property to preserve wetlands—as invasions of what they had long considered their personal rights and liberties.

This was but one instance of a more general problem: As government activities ramified through society, interactions between citizens and the federal government multiplied. All too often, in areas ranging from drivers’ licenses and home improvement permits to voter registration, government was slow moving, unresponsive, and maddeningly hard to navigate. Interaction often bred dissatisfaction. As the private sector deployed new technologies to improve customer service, government suffered by comparison.

Even at its best, however, government could not

hope to be as flexible as the private sector at its best can be. In the first place, the exercise of public power requires public authorization, direct or indirect, a process that is bound to be more cumbersome than everyday corporate decision-making. Second, government is committed to norms of procedural fairness that tug against efficiency. This fact reflects Americans' historic aversion to concentrated power as well as a more recent mistrust of unchecked administrative discretion. Public infrastructure projects, for example, now must run a gauntlet of public meetings, environmental impact statements, and multilayered policy reviews that can last for a decade—longer than the entire New Deal era. Unless citizens are prepared to relax their guard, they will have to accept a government that moves more slowly than the private sector in making decisions; implementing, reviewing, and adjusting those decisions; and firing incompetent or redundant employees.

Many of the federal government's new responsibilities strained against the limits of its effectiveness. The key issue, however, turned out to be qualitative, not quantitative. For example, though large and increasingly costly, Social Security proved relatively straightforward to administer: Government collected payroll taxes at a flat rate, kept records of contributions, and made payments to retirees based on a clear formula that left little room for bureaucratic discretion. Every month, the Social Security Administration, with only 62,000 employees, efficiently dispenses billions of dollars in benefits to 55 million Americans. To the extent that it involved more than writing checks, winning the Johnson-era "war on poverty" turned out to be far more difficult. And it proved impossible to honor the new commitment to eliminate racial segregation in public education; residential mobility defeated efforts of bureaucrats and courts to establish and maintain racially balanced jurisdictions.

Citizens' enlarged expectations make matters worse. Government is now called upon to exercise a degree of

foresight—about the performance of the economy, the future costs of present commitments, the behavior of adversaries, and much else—that exceeds its competence (indeed, anyone's competence). Contingency and risk are built into social life. Beyond a certain point, the effort to increase security becomes futile, even self-defeating.

**GOVERNMENT IS NOW CALLED upon
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Nor is it possible wholly to avoid administrative error, a fact that legislators and the news media often overlook. When officials fear that they will be pilloried for isolated mistakes, they will manage defensively, impairing government innovation and effectiveness. Although the cost of excessive caution is harder to measure than that of recklessness, it is no less real. After a period in which home loan standards were relaxed to an absurd degree, we are in danger of lurching to the other extreme, making mortgages inaccessible to all but gold-plated borrowers. We would do well to remember the old maxim that a loan officer who never makes a bad loan is a bad loan officer, and adapt it to government: An administrator who never makes a mistake is probably too cautious.

So what is to be done? There is no manual for improving government's performance, let alone the public's assessment of it. But heeding a few simple (at least simple to state) maxims would make matters better over time.

The first is to focus on the basics. The people expect the national government to keep the economy on an even keel, exercise a measure of foresight, win the wars it decides to wage, and deal effectively with disasters. In recent years, government has done poorly in all these areas. The new administration and Congress must do better.

Second, federal officials in every branch of government must be more conscious of the need to align their promises with the limits of feasible performance. While we can reasonably hope to move our transportation system away from fossil fuels during the next generation, “energy independence” is beyond reach. The constant use of that phrase does nothing to reduce public cynicism.

POLICYMAKERS MUST STOP the vicious circle in which mistrust breeds inaction and thus exacerbates mistrust. We need to set in motion a virtuous circle of reform.

Third, leaders must be more honest about the costs as well as benefits of the measures they support. In the debate over how to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, for example, many elected officials prefer a “cap-and-trade” strategy rather than a carbon tax because they think the public would rebel against a new tax. But most specialists agree that a cap-and-trade system would drive up consumers’ costs just as much as the tax, albeit indirectly, and might also invite corruption in the distribution of pollution quotas. The deliberate attempt to obscure the link between a policy decision and its consequences will exacerbate mistrust without improving performance.

Fourth, pay attention to institutional design. After the end of the Cold War, Washington reduced the effectiveness of our public diplomacy by abolishing the independent U.S. Information Agency and folding its functions into the State Department, where its old mission of promoting American ideas and values conflicted with Foggy Bottom’s culture of conflict avoidance and diplomacy. Incorporating the Federal Emergency Management Agency into the new, behemoth Department of Homeland Security contributed to the federal government’s disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina. Conversely, as the United States imports increasing quantities of food from countries around the world, the failure

to establish a single, unified agency to oversee food safety has been steadily increasing risks, some of which are already becoming realities. High-profile consternation over the adulteration of Chinese-manufactured powdered milk is a warning sign that we should not ignore.

Fifth, as Elaine Kamarck, the director of the National Performance Review during the Clinton administration, has argued, policies should be designed with effective implementation firmly in mind: Pick the right means to each end. For any particular initiative, policymakers can choose to use reformed bureaucracies, networks, or market mechanisms to accomplish their goals. For some purposes, moving

away from public institutions to contracts with the private sector or nonprofit institutions may work best. (This is one of the principal arguments in favor of President George W. Bush’s faith-based initiative, which President Barack Obama has pledged to continue.) For others—environmental regulation and health insurance are frequently cited examples—it may make sense to use public power to create market mechanisms. In every case, however, employing public power and resources requires effective mechanisms of oversight and accountability. “Contracting out” will not achieve its intended purpose if contract recipients misappropriate funds or do shoddy work, and public confidence will be further weakened.

Public policies cannot succeed in democracies without sustainable public support. In order to restore public confidence in government, policymakers must stop the vicious circle in which mistrust breeds inaction and thus exacerbates mistrust. We need to set in motion a virtuous circle of reform. That means adopting measures that make people’s lives better, step by step, without violating their intuitive sense of how much government should try to do and how it should go about doing it. ■

The Expeditionary Imperative

America's national security structure is designed to confront the challenges of the last century rather than our own.

BY JOHN A. NAGL

GEORGES CLEMENCEAU, FRANCE'S INDOMITABLE prime minister during World War I, famously remarked that "war is too serious a matter to entrust to military men." He had reason to know: The fighting on the western front cost the lives of more than two million of his soldiers, exhausting the French nation for generations and ending in a peace that turned out to be only the prelude to an even more costly war.

If Clemenceau's words were true a century ago, they are even more applicable today. Wars of this century are not fought by masses of people but, in British general Rupert Smith's phrase, "among the peoples." The counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are battles for the allegiance of local populations, without whose support or at least compliance insurgents cannot survive. In our contemporary struggles, ideas and economic development are as important as heavy artillery was in Clemenceau's time.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, demonstrated the enormous power our own technology could have when directed against us by a small group of people driven by a single powerful idea. Unfortunately, our response to that attack has focused disproportionately on military means, and these have not been able to affect the underlying dynamics of this new and most serious kind of war. The rapid defeat of Sad-

dam Hussein's regime turned to ashes when misguided policy decisions threw gasoline on the embers of a nascent Sunni insurgency. America's counterattack in Afghanistan, with its memorable images of bearded U.S. Special Forces soldiers on horseback calling in precision air strikes against the Taliban, seemed to show that our military could adapt to new realities. But while the Taliban quickly fell, Osama bin Laden escaped an undermanned Army cordon in the mountains of Afghanistan, and a stubborn and strengthening insurgency there now stymies the best efforts of our national security establishment, which is in the midst of conducting at least three separate full-scale policy reviews to find a way out of another seemingly endless war.

We can and must do better. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has noted, the national security community continues to devote the vast majority of its resources to preparing for conventional state-on-state conflicts, but "the most likely catastrophic threats to our homeland—for example, an American city poisoned or reduced to rubble by a terrorist attack—are more likely to emanate from failing states than from aggressor states." For that reason, Gates has been a vocal advocate of increasing the resources devoted to accomplishing U.S. objectives abroad without relying on military power. In what he describes as a "man bites dog" moment in political Washington, he has argued outspokenly for reinforcements for his comrades in arms in other departments, including Justice, Agriculture, and Commerce.

JOHN A. NAGL is a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security. A retired Army officer who helped write *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, he recently returned from visits to Iraq and Afghanistan sponsored by the commands there.

Gates has been instrumental in leading the Department of Defense to adapt to a world in which the most serious threats to America and the international system come not from states that are too strong, as was the case in the 20th century, but from those that are too weak to control what happens inside their borders. The 9/11 attacks, plotted from within a failed Afghanistan that provided a safe harbor for Al Qaeda, are only the most vivid illustration of this principle. The terror attacks in Pakistan and India, along with the hijackings by pirates who operate with apparent impunity off the coast of Somalia, show that challenges to state authority will remain a prominent and threatening fact of the 21st century. In a globalized world, these threats are too serious to be left to the generals; they demand a different U.S. government from the one we have today.

Our overly militarized response to Al Qaeda's attacks, the global war on terror, could be more sensibly recast as a global counterinsurgency campaign. Insurgency is an attempt to overthrow a government or change its policies through the illegal use of force; Al Qaeda's stated objective—to expel the West from the Islamic world and reestablish the Caliphate—can be usefully conceived of as a global insurgency. It would then take a global counterinsurgency campaign to confront this challenge. Counterinsurgency—a coordinated use of all elements of national power to defeat an insurgency—is a slow and difficult process, often requiring years, but it can succeed when well resourced and executed. David Galula, the great French counterinsurgency theorist and veteran of the Algerian War, estimates that a successful counterinsurgency strategy is 80 percent nonmilitary and only 20 percent military—requiring not just armed forces but assistance to the afflicted government in the areas of politics, economic development, information operations, and governance. An ability to deliver such a coordinated response would be useful not just in the campaign against Al Qaeda, but also to confront emerging threats ranging from terrorists in Pakistan to 21st-century pirates.

Unfortunately, more than seven years into a global counterinsurgency campaign, the United States still lacks many of the nonmilitary capabilities required to secure, assist, and reconstruct societies afflicted by insurgency and terrorism. Prevailing in today's conflicts will require more than just a few additional resources. It will require an expanded and better-coordinated expeditionary advisory effort involving all agencies of the executive branch, and it must include a re-created

U.S. Information Agency to make the American case in the global war of ideas.

Defeating an insurgency requires winning the support of the population away from the insurgents, and unlikely as it seems, the “hierarchy of needs” propounded decades ago by humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow is never more applicable than in a combat zone. After obtaining basic security, people want to live and work under the rule of law, with a chance for economic progress. Many of the insurgents I fought as the operations officer of a tank battalion task force in Iraq in 2004 were not motivated by Islamic extremism but by hunger or at worst greed. At the time, Anbar Province was suffering from 70 percent unemployment, and the leaders of the insurgency were offering \$100 to anyone who would fire a rocket-propelled grenade at one of my tanks. They would pay a \$100 performance bonus if we were forced to call in a medical evacuation helicopter as a result. In this kind of conflict, development and reconstruction aid are perhaps our most valuable weapons. As the new *U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (which I helped to develop) puts it, “Dollars are bullets.”

Unfortunately, many of the people who are firing America's dollar bullets today are untrained in that task. Because of a shortage of U.S. diplomats and U.S. Agency for International Development officers willing and able to deploy to combat zones, American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan are making daily decisions about the comparative economic benefits of giving microloans to small businesses and investing in water treatment plants. The military trained me well in how to coordinate close air support, artillery strikes, and tank and machine-gun fire, but I was left on my own in determining how to coordinate economic development in Anbar. Since my corner of Iraq included critical enemy support zones between the provincial capital of Ramadi and Fallujah, epicenter of the Sunni insurgency, my mistakes had strategic consequences.

In partial recognition of how badly my well-meaning but poorly informed peers and I were conducting this critical aspect of counterinsurgency, the State Department developed provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), first in Afghanistan in 2003 and two years later in Iraq. There are currently 26 PRTs in Afghanistan, each led by a lieutenant colonel (or Navy commander) and composed of 60 to 100 personnel.

More than 30 teams now operate in Iraq. They focus on governance, reconstruction and development, and promoting the rule of law. In Afghanistan, several other nations in the International Security Assistance Force, including Britain and Germany, now contribute PRTs of their own.

Although the creation of PRTs was an important step in the direction of building the government we need to win the wars of this century, they lack sufficient resources. The team I visited in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in November was composed almost exclusively of U.S. Air Force personnel, with a sprinkling of civilian experts. In Iraq, the absence of civilian specialists is also a chronic problem.

The State Department is in the midst of further efforts to establish effective civilian control of the political, economic, and social dimensions of nation-building operations. In 2004, it created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization to oversee these efforts, but this office remains a poorly staffed and funded institution with fewer than 100 people assigned to accomplish its tasks of predicting, planning for, and mitigating the effects of state fail-

ure around the globe. To provide more muscle behind this new office, the Bush administration proposed a \$250 million Civilian Response Corps, with 250 development and reconstruction experts from different parts of the government ready to deploy to a crisis within 48 hours and many more in reserve.

These are noble efforts, but they lack the required scale. Today, there are more musicians assigned to military bands than there are Foreign Service officers in the State Department. While a rousing rendition of John Philip Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever" always did wonders for my morale in a combat zone, having the economic and political expertise to persuade the people of Anbar not to shoot at me would have been even better. The State Department has finally requested the money to hire 1,100 new Foreign Service officers—the biggest increase since Vietnam—but there is no guarantee that it will be approved by Congress, and no understanding that this 15 percent increase must be only a down payment. At a recent conference on building capacity to win the wars of the 21st century, a four-star Army general



Lt. Colonel Dave Adams, head of a U.S. provincial reconstruction team, helps Afghan dignitaries inaugurate a high school for girls his team built in Khost.

exploded, “Eleven hundred! I need another 11,000, and I need them now!”

The general knows exactly what he wants to do with this additional personnel, and it isn't to staff the embassies in Europe. More Foreign Service officers would allow the government to fully staff PRTs so that they would not have to make do with military personnel better trained in close air support than in political negotiations and economic development. Every Army and Marine battalion commander in Iraq and Afghanistan would pay a king's ransom to have his own political adviser, a privilege now reserved for two-star generals who command divisions. However, as the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* notes, “many important decisions are not made by generals” in this kind of war; the colonels on the ground deserve the political and economic advice they need to make better decisions than I did.

And Foreign Service officers are far from the entire answer. The most effective tools of U.S. policy in Afghanistan today are the agricultural development teams composed of Army National Guard personnel drawn from places such as my home state of Nebraska. Wise in the ways of irrigation and bioengineered seed stock, they make a huge difference in that impoverished and overwhelmingly agricultural country. A bigger Department of Agriculture, with an expeditionary culture like the one that is beginning to grow in State, could deploy more experts to contribute to the future of Afghanistan—and allow the Nebraska soldiers to go back to waging the war they were trained to fight.

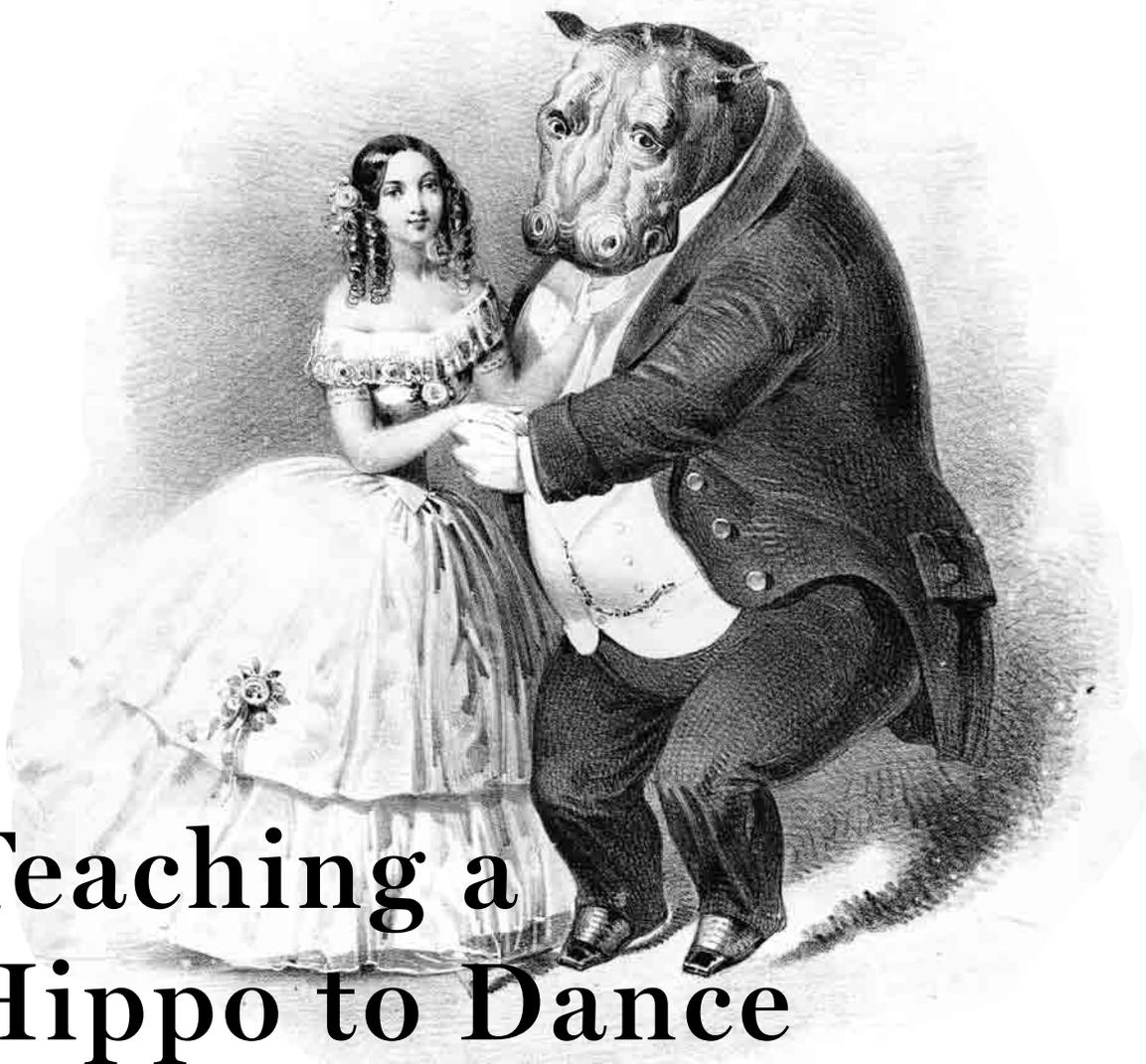
Important as governance and economic development are, the single most pressing need is the ability to fight more effectively in the global war of ideas. During the Cold War, which was primarily an economic fight, secondarily a military one, and only third an ideological struggle, the U.S. Information Agency still did yeoman's work publicizing the objectives of American policy and pointing out the contradictions inherent in the Soviet Union's. From 1953 through 1999, USIA did everything from promote jazz and American libraries abroad to broadcast the Voice of America and Radio Martí. But with incredible shortsightedness, the government allowed USIA to become a victim of its own success. As a cost-saving measure in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, it was disbanded, and many of its most strategic functions were shifted to the State Department.

That shift encapsulated two critical errors. The already underfunded State Department was in no position to devote money to the information fight, and the department's culture

of reporting on foreign countries' policies is in direct opposition to the very idea of public diplomacy, which focuses on changing, rather than merely talking about, the actions of foreign governments. As a result of these misguided organizational decisions, American efforts to fight the global war of ideas are badly coordinated and often contradictory. How many of our friends and allies abroad, or even our own citizens, realize that the extremists we are fighting in Afghanistan's eastern provinces have thrown acid in the faces of girls who dare to attend school? While the insurgents regularly present exaggerated claims of American “atrocities,” we consistently fail to “be first with the truth” in explaining our efforts to help the local populations and how those efforts contrast with the horrific brutality of our enemies. On a broader scale, there has been no attempt to capitalize on the still-potent attractiveness of American culture and freedom through expanded exchange programs for artists, authors, and academics, as occurred during the Cold War. The United States must rebuild its ability to project its image abroad, and it can start by relaunching USIA.

There is no shortage of messages that a reborn USIA could send to our friends around the globe—and our enemies and their supporters—but the single most important message would be to acknowledge with the act of reviving the USIA that the United States has fundamentally misconceived the nature of the conflict. The struggle against radical Islamists is not primarily a military fight. The Department of Defense will continue to have a critical role to play, but we cannot kill or capture our way out of this problem. Victory in this long struggle requires changes in the governments and educational systems of dozens of countries around the globe. This is the task of a new generation of information warriors, development experts, and diplomats; it is every bit as important as the fight being waged by our men and women in uniform, but nowhere near as well recognized or funded.

In its new doctrine, the Army correctly recognizes that we now live in an era of “persistent irregular combat.” It is adapting to meet the demands of that kind of war—fitfully and often haltingly, it is true, and not without protests from those who “didn't sign up for this,” but it is learning. Now it is time for the civilian agencies of the U.S. government similarly to steel themselves for a long struggle against a twilight enemy, and for the American people to commit to support those who fight on their behalf with words and dollars—the bullets of modern warfare. The stakes are too high to leave the whole fight to the military. ■



Teaching a Hippo to Dance

The most brilliant policies will fail if government does not attract talented people and free them to do their best work.

BY AMY WILKINSON

FOUR YEARS AGO, I LEFT SILICON VALLEY TO accept a presidential appointment as a White House fellow. After undergoing months of interviews and obtaining a top-secret security clearance, I moved to

AMY WILKINSON, a public-policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, is writing a book about the next generation of leadership.

Washington, D.C., to join a class of 12 nonpartisan White House fellows and to work in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. After my fellowship ended I stayed on, caught up in the challenging work of improving the nation's trade policies. My old business-school friends and my colleagues at the consulting firm McKinsey &

Company were perplexed. Why would anyone want to serve in the federal government, the epitome of everything that is slow, bureaucratic, and opaque?

There, in a nutshell, is a major problem confronting American government in the 21st century: how to attract talented young people—not just to the prestigious jobs that bring you face to face with a cabinet secretary or the president but to the line jobs that exist across the civil service. It is not just a recruiting challenge. Government will only attract the people it needs when it refashions itself so that public servants can serve the public effectively.

The federal government deserves more credit than it gets, but it is still a slow-moving behemoth. To reinvig-

THE ANTIQUATED CONDITION of our national government today would have troubled the Founding Fathers.

orate our federal system and attract fresh talent, we must transform our aged, hierarchical institutions into modern networks of scale and impact. In effect, we must teach a hippopotamus to dance.

Like government, hippos are enormous, weighed down by a heavy mid section and designed with disproportionately big mouth and teeth. Stubby legs, a natural system of checks and balances, support their tremendous bulk. They are powerful, yet slow to change. When perturbed, hippos can move quickly—as the federal government did in passing the \$700 billion bailout in just two weeks. Yet usually they plod along, preferring to slumber in murky waters.

In today's networked world, our hippo must dance in sync with private-sector and nonprofit partners. Keeping pace will require a more engaged federal workforce, realignment of out-of-date incentives, and an ability to meet the expectations of modern workers. To succeed, government must get the people piece right.

There are some bright lights in government leadership, and some of the brightest are at the local level. In San Francisco, Mayor Gavin Newsom, a former wine and restaurant entrepreneur, has forged alliances with busi-

nesses in housing and other fields, established a 24-hour hotline to promote accountability in city services, and pushed forward on such controversial initiatives as universal health care. In Newark, New Jersey, Mayor Cory Booker has partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other foundations to jump-start the city's dysfunctional public school system with a \$19 million charter school initiative. He has embraced new technologies such as ShotSpotter, an acoustic surveillance system that detects gunshots in seconds, to control crime. "I always say that the biggest problem in America is not a problem of material poverty," Booker said in an interview. "It's a poverty of imagination. It's a poverty of innovation. It's a poverty of action."

Often, what many regard as the very nature of government—its notoriously multilayered bureaucracy—stifles needed innovation and initiative. The average memo originating in a State Depart-

ment bureau requires between two and 10 sign-offs and five to eight approvals through the chain of command before it reaches the secretary. Beyond whatever sense of public mission individuals bring to their work, there is often little incentive to excel. As one Foreign Service officer I spoke to joked, "At the end of the year I go to the GS schedule, reference my rank and years of service, and poof, there's my promotion cycle and salary."

The high-caliber employees that government does manage to attract are often driven out of public service. Many of the strongest junior people leave government frustrated by midlevel management that is ineffective but will never be fired. Retaining star talent requires replacing our current seniority-based system with merit-based promotions. A close colleague, who distinguished himself while working with Colin Powell, recently left the Foreign Service, discouraged by the bureaucratic mindset. When he was nominated for a fast-track promotion, human resources denied the advancement, stating that there were "already qualified people at that grade level." He is now a partner in an advisory firm.

Today's young professionals expect adaptable work schedules, state-of-the-art technology, and a measure of

autonomy. Most of all, we are looking for work that allows us to have an impact. Speed and flexibility define our lives. If we have a question, we Google it. We Skype friends in Poland and instant-message colleagues in Shanghai. These changes have their parallels in organizational life. In the private sector, “flash teams” assemble to tackle specific challenges, disband, and reconfigure as situations evolve. Large companies such as Best Buy allow people at all levels throughout the company to participate electronically and in person in efforts to solve problems. The symbolic apex of this new world may be the professional temp agencies that attract large numbers of workers in high-skills fields, from accounting to graphic design, because these people prefer short assignments and constant change.

In the search for people with talent and ideas, the new field of social entrepreneurship provides stiff competition for government. Rather than work their way up in government or large corporations, many civic-minded leaders in their twenties and thirties now launch nonprofit or business ventures to address social injustices, using business partnerships, grants, and donations.

“Our generation is saying we need private innovation and private initiative to solve big, public problems,” Jacqueline Novogratz explained when we met in her New York office. She is the founder and CEO of Acumen Fund, a nonprofit equivalent of a venture capital firm that backs private-sector and nonprofit enterprises that help the poor. “I think that it’s a parallel with when John F. Kennedy said we want the best and brightest in government. Today, we want the best and brightest in this field of social enterprise.” Bill Drayton, father of the social entrepreneurship movement and founder of a similar organization called Ashoka, told me, “We’re in the business of ‘everyone a change maker.’” Ashoka has supported some 2,000 social entrepreneurs around the world in launching social start-ups to address ills ranging from domestic violence to water pollution. Half of them, Drayton says, are able to bring about changes in national policy within five years.

The United States is the world’s most innovative nation, yet our government is out of sync with today’s realities. With more than 2.6 million employees, the federal government is the nation’s largest employer. As I can attest after seven years in the corporate world, business does not always escape the problems of bureaucracy. Just ask General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. But big corporations learn to

be nimble in order to compete against agile, new entrants. Government is what is called, in the business world, an incumbent player; it is blind to competition. Change must come from within, beginning at the top. As New York mayor Michael Bloomberg explained, “Part of the government’s problem is that it never delegates. In the White House, for example, they control everything.”

The antiquated condition of our national government would have troubled the Founding Fathers, who were political entrepreneurs and the creators of revolutionary new public institutions. It is true that they did not design American government to be fast. Our system of checks and balances, along with the diffusion of power among local, state, and federal authorities, is designed to inhibit rapid change. Yet if the Founders were wary of overweening government, they hardly favored *ineffective* government.

Technology offers one route to breaking down barriers and improving productivity. Before the development of Web 2.0 technologies, for example, it would have taken many months to gather information across stovepiped government agencies. Last year, when the Office of Management and Budget needed to compile a database of congressional budgetary earmarks, government personnel were able to bypass normal bureaucratic channels by using a wiki that allowed people from all over the government to report directly on a shared website. They did the job in just 10 weeks, turning up 13,496 earmarks.

Government is clearly in need of such new ideas, but the culture of public institutions is risk averse. Gilman Louie, former CEO of In-Q-Tel, a nonprofit corporation created by the Central Intelligence Agency to promote defense technologies, put the problem in graphic terms when I interviewed him: “The most surprising thing was that if terrorists rolled a hand grenade down the middle of a room, all our CIA employees would jump out of their seats and throw their bodies on it to protect everyone else. They would all give up their lives for one another and their country. However, if someone ran into the room and said, ‘I need someone to make a decision, but if it’s the wrong one it will be the end of your career, but I need an answer now,’ all of them would run toward the door.” The problem with public institutions is that the consequence of failure means that there is no reward for risk taking and thus no innovation. Government agencies must change to say that it is all right to fail, just not

catastrophically. To do this, they need to evaluate employees not on the success or failure of any particular decision, but on the overall outcome of their performance.

United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions, commonly known as the “Plum Book,” lists more than 7,000 available jobs in the new administration. Many of these positions are reserved for cabinet secretaries and other officials to hire their own personal staffs. Barack Obama will award about 3,000 positions, from White House chief of staff to principal deputy under secretary of defense for policy.

There is no shortage of job seekers, but the cumbersome appointment process deters many talented people, and the incoming administration has set up even more hurdles. Prospective Obama appointees are presented with a seven-page questionnaire about their personal and professional lives. They must append copies of all resumé and biographical statements from the past 10 years, list gifts worth more than \$50 that they and their spouse have received from anyone other than close friends or relatives, and divulge their and immediate family members’ affiliations with Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, or any other institution receiving government bailout funds. Applicants are also expected to disclose their “Internet presence,” including e-mails, Facebook pages, blog posts, and aliases used to communicate online.

Once past the screening, these prospective federal appointees enter a labyrinth of forms, investigations, and intrusive personal and financial disclosures. The process is embarrassing and confusing, and often requires that they seek outside expert advice to process forms and financial information—which applicants pay for out of their own pockets. Senate confirmation proceedings for cabinet secretaries start in January, but subcabinet and Schedule C appointees, the folks who do the nuts-and-bolts work, can wait many months. Only 30 percent of George W. Bush’s national security appointees were in place on 9/11, eight months after he took office.

The career civil service faces an even greater challenge. Last year, the Partnership for Public Service estimated that nearly 530,000 personnel—a third of the federal government’s workforce—will retire by 2012. “Help wanted” should become Washington’s byword if these jobs—many of them critical senior posi-

tions—are to be filled by first-rate people. Yet Donna Shalala, the former secretary of health and human services and current president of the University of Miami, said recently at the Woodrow Wilson Center that government recruiters don’t even come to her campus: “Kids in Miami are interested in government but have no information about how to apply.”

Indeed, a recent Gallup poll found that 60 percent of those under age 30 have never been asked to consider a job in government. Thirty-three percent would give such a request a great deal of consideration if asked by their parents, and 29 percent if asked by the newly elected president. The first challenge government must overcome is ignorance about government opportunities. The nonprofit Teach for America, by contrast, is beating out consulting firms and banks to recruit college graduates. Last year, 25,000 individuals applied to Teach for America and more than 3,700 started teaching in the nation’s toughest inner-city schools.

Government must get into the headhunting business. At business schools the pitch could be, *You want to manage complexity and lead a team? Great. We’ve got big budgets and complex problems. Which would you like to tackle first, health care or Social Security reform?* At law schools, recruiters could ask, *Are you good at negotiating contentious issues and analyzing contradictory information? Perfect. When can you start?* Let’s offer undergraduates career tracks that let them quickly rotate through assignments at State, Energy, Defense, and other agencies.

During the recent election campaign, President Obama vowed to “transform Washington” and “make government cool again.” And why not? Why shouldn’t public service be highly esteemed? Americans rally to support exceptional athletes who compete in the Olympic Games. We applaud extraordinary scientists who work to cure cancer and superior military forces that defend our homeland. We want the best Hollywood talent to entertain us and super computer geeks to invent the next Google. But when it comes to government service we set our sights low.

Last year’s election turned ordinary citizens into activists who not only donated money and canvassed door to door in unprecedented numbers but used new media to blog, organize campaign events, and form networks. The question now is how our 44th president will harness civic engagement to govern more effectively. Millions of Americans are waiting by their BlackBerries, iPhones, and laptops to find out. ■

Happy Together?

Americans love to complain about gridlock in Washington and partisan warfare between presidents and Congress. Yet the record suggests that unified party government is no panacea.

BY DONALD R. WOLFENBERGER

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL, BARACK OBAMA PROMISED to bring change to Washington and a post-partisan, non-ideological approach to governing. In his first post-election press conference on November 7, he reiterated this hope: “I know we will succeed if we put aside partisanship and politics and work together as one nation.”

These snowflakes of soothing rhetoric drift slowly down on a Capitol Hill power plant fueled by partisanship and politics. What will happen when the snow hits the furnace—where majority Democrats and their allied interest groups have long been denied their wishes by Republican presidents and Congresses? The question is not whether President Obama can forge an extrapolitical national consensus to solve problems, but how effectively he will be able to govern with his own party in the majority in Congress.

One should not assume that Obama will get everything he wants from congressional Democrats any more than they will succeed in getting him to sign off on all their pent-up demands. Not only does the spike in

deficits from the financial bailout and economic recession impose severe constraints, but the history of unified party government suggests that it is no more a guarantor of success than divided government is of failure. Indeed, American chief executives from Harry S. Truman to Ronald Reagan enjoyed some of their greatest successes in periods of divided government. In the end, what the people want and are willing to speak up for usually matters more than all the frantic maneuvering in Washington.

One of the features of the American system that most baffles visitors from parliamentary democracies is the paradox that it can create unified party government without total party unity. They find it hard to believe that our system was intentionally designed with internal checks and balances precisely in order to prevent hasty action and the concentration of too much power in any one place. As James Madison put it, “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.” And the Pennsylvania Avenue axis of power between the White House and the Capitol is aswirl with ambition. Even when politicians belong to the same party, they represent different geographic and demographic constituencies that often put them at

DONALD R. WOLFENBERGER is director of the Congress Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center and author of *Congress and the People: Deliberative Democracy on Trial* (2000). His 28-year career as a staff member in the U.S. House of Representatives culminated in his position as chief of staff of the House Rules Committee.

odds with one another and their own party's president. The system was not designed for action. It typically reacts only when required by events, public opinion, and presidential prodding.

That is why the young scholar Woodrow Wilson dismissed the Madisonian system as outmoded. "As at present constituted," he wrote in his 1885 doctoral dissertation, *Congressional Government*, "the federal government lacks strength because its powers are divided, lacks promptness because its authorities are multiplied, lacks wieldiness because its processes are roundabout, lacks efficiency because its responsibility is indistinct and its action without competent direction."

As president, Wilson would reconcile himself to Madison's Constitution as a "living" and "evolving" document. Building on his admiration for the British system of responsible party government, Wilson gave us the first "legislative presidency" as he moved his New Freedom agenda through a Democratic Congress in his first two years. He did so by addressing joint sessions of Congress (a record 22 appearances over eight years); traveling frequently to Capitol Hill to meet with Democratic leaders and their committee lieutenants; holding informal press conferences; and even scheduling forums in the White House on whether he should sign legislation sent to him by Congress.

But the Capitol Hill experiences of the Obama administration are not likely to resemble those of Wilson, nor of the other great examples of "unified" party government, which gave us Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society.

FDR's presidency occurred under very unusual circumstances (notwithstanding some parallels to today's economic troubles). President Johnson's Great Society successes were made possible in part by the emotional backwash from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and in part by LBJ's unique mastery of congressional procedures and personalities.

Moreover, Congress as an institution has changed considerably since those periods of presidential dominance. Compared with earlier times, when powerful, autonomy-minded committee chairmen ruled the Hill, the political parties and their leaders in Congress play a much greater role today in directing legislative policy-

making. Congress entered this new age in the early 1970s as a result of congressional reforms that produced a resurgence of internal party cohesion and activity to levels not witnessed since the turn of the 20th century. Inspired in part by opposition to the Nixon administration, the Democratically controlled Congress and its members became more assertive, entrepreneurial, and independent of the executive branch.

The more relevant examples of unified party government are the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush—all of whom came to the White House from the governorships of southern states, and all of whom promised to change the way Washington worked. All three experiences provide highly cautionary lessons.

Carter was elected in 1976 after the contentious Nixon years. Although he had a firm working majority of Democrats in both houses—292–143 in the House and 61–38 in the Senate—he never had a firm working partnership with Democrats on the Hill. His arrogant and dismissive attitude toward the Capital establishment offended his own party's leaders in Congress, as did his appointment of Washington neophytes to key staff positions in the White House. (After being refused a common courtesy by the White House, Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neill [D.-Mass.] derisively referred to Carter aide Hamilton Jordan as "Hannibal Jerkin.") And Carter's attempt to eliminate pork barrel projects did not endear him to those members of Congress with a taste for that "other white meat."

Carter had a tendency to overload Congress's circuits by submitting many legislative proposals simultaneously, generating sparks and committee power outages. He sent his welfare reform proposal to the Hill, for instance, when the House Ways and Means Committee was already bogged down with his energy and tax reform initiatives. His attempt to enact a comprehensive energy plan faltered in Congress as special interests picked it apart, and it emerged much diminished. Four years of unified party government ended with the economy in dreadful condition and a hostage crisis in Iran (which was beyond Carter's control). The Democrats lost the White House and the Senate.

Bill Clinton took office in 1993 determined not to repeat Carter's mistakes. He made a point to meet with Democratic leaders in Congress prior to his inauguration



No precedent: Unusual circumstances helped President Lyndon Johnson, shown signing a bill in 1965, push many groundbreaking bills through Congress.

to map out legislative priorities. He was persuaded to delay his campaign pledge to “eliminate welfare as we know it,” and reluctant congressional Democrats agreed to move forward on a deficit reduction package to reassure financial markets in return for his backing of an economic stimulus package.

Clinton eked out narrow victories in both houses on his deficit package after being forced to abandon a hefty BTU energy tax proposal and settle instead for a 4.3-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax increase. His \$16 billion economic stimulus club was whittled down in the Senate to a scrawny \$840 million twig. The first lady’s secret health-care task force produced a bulky plan that couldn’t get off the ground in either house as key congressional committee chairmen who had been shut out of the plan’s development were unable to reach consensus.

The Clinton-era experiment with unified government ended ignominiously in 1994 with a Republican electoral sweep of both houses of Congress—which included the first GOP majority in the lower house in 40 years. Some of Clinton’s signal achievements, however,

were still to come. Even before the GOP takeover, his victory in passing the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 depended heavily on Republican support to offset large Democratic defections. Once Republicans took control of Congress, Clinton built on this tactic of “triangulating” between the two caucuses to enact welfare reform and balanced budget legislation.

George W. Bush came to office in 2001 after losing the popular vote and narrowly winning the Electoral College bowl in a sudden-death overtime refereed by the Supreme Court. Notwithstanding widespread press assertions that he had no mandate, he proceeded as if he did, assiduously courting members of both parties to pave the way for his priorities. Even though the Senate flipped to Democratic control in mid-2001 with the defection of Vermont Republican James Jeffords, the GOP still controlled the House. By the end of the year Bush managed to enact his No Child Left Behind education

reform with bipartisan support, and his tax cuts with only minimal Democratic support.

Bush failed to achieve two other priorities of his administration, Social Security reform and immigration reform, but it was less party rivalry in Congress than a lack of firm support in the country that did them in. Democrats artfully played his proposal for

however, it is suddenly able to juggle numerous high-level investigative oversight hearings into executive branch activities simultaneously.

Where might an Obama presidency fit in this historical mosaic of unified party governments? Unlike four of the last five presidents, who were governors, Obama is not a stranger to Washington's ways. His

four years in the Senate count for something (though he spent most of the last two years running for president). His early picks of experienced hands to run his White House, cabinet departments, and legislative affairs office bode well for his success. But it will not be enough to have the

THE AMERICAN SYSTEM is capable of monumental accomplishments in times of crisis regardless of which party is in control of what lever of government.

best people giving the best advice in the White House and cabinet. It will ultimately depend on the president himself to show he can work with an independent, coequal branch made up of diverse personalities, interests, and ideologies—a branch that enjoys bipartisan unanimity on at least one principle: It is not about to abandon politics. Politics, after all, is simply a process of working through problems to build a consensus around mutually agreeable solutions—sometimes known as deliberative democracy.

private accounts in Social Security as an attempt to “privatize” the system, frightening seniors and forcing even Republicans to abandon it. Immigration reform was shot down by members of Bush’s own party in Congress, aided by radio and cable shock jocks who claimed he was giving “amnesty” to “illegals.”

The Bush presidency was at its apex in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when a divided Congress worked together to produce a blizzard of legislation in response. The president’s job approval rating shot up to 90 percent, and even Congress briefly enjoyed an unprecedented 84 percent approval rating (more than double its customary level). Five years later, however, in the 2006 elections, Democrats retook control of both houses of Congress as public opinion turned against the Iraq war.

Within Congress itself, unified party government has generally had two less than salutary characteristics. The legislative branch tends to spend more money than it does under divided party government. It is generally more demanding, and presidents more giving (an arrangement that provides new meaning to the term normally used to describe the final review of legislative text before passage—“bill markup”). At the same time, Congress tends to slack off on its oversight responsibilities when its majorities share the president’s party label. Under divided party government,

If there is any conclusion to be drawn from recent history on the relative benefits of unified versus divided party government in the United States, it is this: The American system is capable of monumental accomplishments in times of crisis regardless of which party is in control of what lever of government, but the system can be just as incapable of doing anything when the people are not behind it—even with unified party control.

President Abraham Lincoln said as much when he observed, “With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed.” The success or failure of the Obama presidency will ultimately depend on the extent to which the people rally behind the plans and programs the new president and Congress are able to develop together as they work to address some of the most difficult problems this country has ever faced. ■

In ESSENCE

REVIEWS OF ARTICLES FROM PERIODICALS AND SPECIALIZED JOURNALS HERE AND ABROAD

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FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Undersea Terrorism

THE SOURCE: "A New Underwater Threat" by Wade F. Wilkenson, in *Proceedings*, Oct. 2008.

IN THE WESTERN LOWLANDS OF Colombia, where a labyrinth of rivers flow through rainforests and mangrove marshes teeming with exotic wildlife, drug smugglers are secretly constructing the next generation of naval craft—self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) vessels with a range of 1,500 miles and space for up to 15 metric tons of cargo. The SPSS is the new vessel of choice for drug traf-

fickers, says Captain Wade F. Wilkenson, a special assistant to the commander of the U.S. Southern Command, but more ominously, it poses a new danger to American national security.

Generally built of wood and fiberglass, the primitive submarines have a small conning tower with a wave-top view for steering. They ride low in the water, usually about four to six inches above the waves, almost totally submerged. Piping directs the diesel engine exhaust back toward the vessel's wake to

dilute its infrared signature. Global positioning systems allow crews to navigate without external communications, to avoid signal detection. Powerful diesel engines can maintain cruising speeds of more than eight knots, but the boats tend to move slowly to avoid leaving an easily discernible wake.

Constructed and manned at a cost of \$1 million to \$2 million each, five boats, fully loaded, can double the drug traffickers' return on investment in all five if just one of them makes it through, Wilkenson writes. A kilo of cocaine costs about \$1,800 in Colombia but fetches at least \$20,000 wholesale along the U.S. coast, where the drug runners usually rendezvous with dealers offshore. A four- or five-man crew—on board chiefly to offload



Nine out of 10 self-propelled semi-submersible vessels (shown above) escape detection as they ferry cocaine to American dealers.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

A Second Surge?

THE SOURCES: "How Should the U.S. Execute a Surge in Afghanistan?" by Robert A. Downey, Lee K. Grubbs, Brian J. Malloy, and Craig R. Wonson, in *Small Wars Journal*, Nov. 15, 2008, and "After Action Report: The Surge From General Petraeus's Perspective" by Dennis Steele, in *Army*, Dec. 2008.

A SURGE OF ABOUT 30,000 extra troops in 2007 finally allowed the United States to wrest the initiative from the enemy in Iraq after nearly four years of war. So what's the holdup in Afghanistan?

A shortage of troops and a vast porous border, write Lieutenant Colonel Robert A. Downey of the Air Force and Lee K. Grubbs of the Army,

A shortage of troops and a vast open border make Afghanistan a much more challenging theater than Iraq.

Commander Brian J. Malloy of the Navy, and Lieutenant Colonel Craig R. Wonson of the Marine Corps. Afghanistan is a "much more challenging" theater than Iraq. It is bigger, more populous, heavily rural, strongly tribal, and historically ungoverned from the center. It also has a 3,400-mile border across which insurgents slip like minnows through a wide mesh net.

About 42 million Pashtuns live in the broader Afghanistan-Pakistan region, some 14 million of them in Afghanistan. The Afghan Pashtuns act as the sea that buoys 10,000 to 15,000 insurgents of the Taliban, according to the authors. The Taliban

when they reach their destination—gets fresh air through snorkel tubes. There are bunks, but no sanitary facilities. The vessels are typically used for one-way missions, and can be almost instantly scuttled if a law enforcement vessel is spotted.

SPSS vessels accounted for only one percent of the maritime cocaine flow from South America to the United States in 2006, but were responsible for 16 percent a year later, and were on track to carry more than 30 percent in 2008. Only 10 percent of known or suspected SPSS shipments have been intercepted. The underwater detection systems that flagged Soviet submarines when they left their home ports during the Cold War have no counterpart off the coast of Colombia. And sonobuoys work at a distance of two to three miles, and only under very good conditions, Wilkenson says.

The current rate at which the vessels are intercepted is inadequate, he writes. Developing perfect intelligence on every shipment or complete imperviousness in the six-million-square-mile transit zone seems unlikely. But, coordinated with the Colombian navy and marines, interdiction efforts can focus on the 1,800 miles of territorial waters along the Colombian coast.

With November attacks on tourist hotels in Mumbai by seaborne killers raising new concerns about terrorist attacks by sea, the fight against the SPSS vessels off Colombia could have implications for America's security. Nobody expects a Colombian drug lord to launch an attack with weapons of mass destruction, but the SPSS technology might be used by enemies who would.

focuses on coercing or influencing the Pashtun population in the rural districts. In July it operated in 130 of Afghanistan's roughly 400 districts, and from June to August temporarily overran 41 of them, moving back and forth across the ambiguous and unsecured Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Army counterinsurgency doctrine calls for an "optimal density ratio" of about 20 troops to every 1,000 people, an impossible figure to achieve given Afghanistan's scattered population of about 32 million, even with augmented NATO and Afghan National Security Forces, Downey and colleagues acknowledge. What *would* be possible is a surge of eight brigades (to Iraq's five), adding 25,000 to 40,000 personnel. Three brigades would move into villages to clear them of Taliban and take up residence, using the same "clear-hold-build" strategy that has been employed in Iraq. Three brigades would operate along the border, and two would train Afghan security forces. Most of the surge forces would be shifted from Iraq.

Without a surge, the authors conclude, security will continue to deteriorate, the Taliban will assume control over much of the country, and political instability will reign.

In a speech in Washington after stepping down as commander of the Multi-National Force-Iraq, General David H. Petraeus said that the United States faces a "thinking, adapting, and diabolically brutal enemy" in both Iraq and Afghanistan that requires constant learning on U.S. forces' part. "By the way," he added, so fast and changeable is the enemy that "what worked in Iraq may not work in Afghanistan."

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Clueless Voter

THE SOURCE: “Does Compulsory Voting Lead to More Informed and Engaged Citizens? An Experimental Test” by Peter John Loewen, Henry Milner, and Bruce M. Hicks, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Sept. 2008.

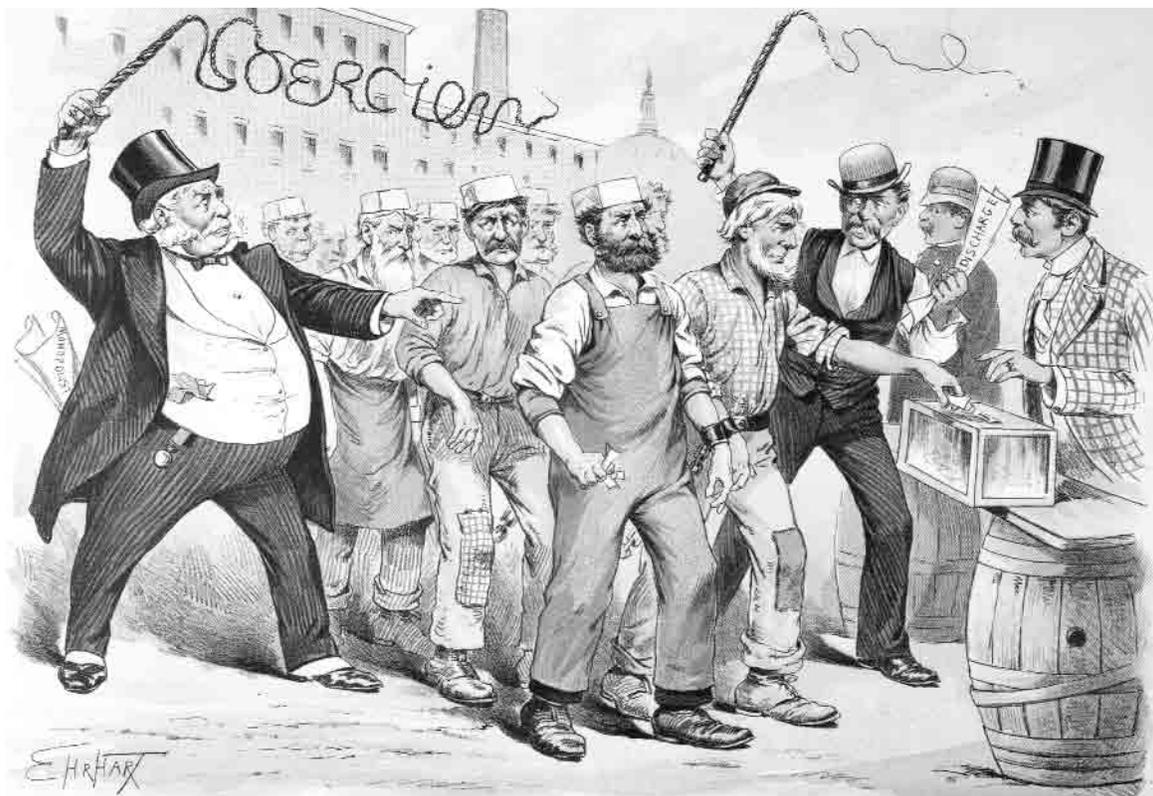
IF VOTING WERE MANDATORY, would voters get smarter? Three Canadian political scientists conducted an experiment. They recruited a group of newly eligible voters for a study of “youth attitudes” and divided the sample

randomly. They promised about half of the student subjects \$25 to take two exams on civic affairs; the rest were offered the same \$25 to take the tests and vote in the upcoming provincial election. Would the students required to vote become more knowledgeable than the others?

The participants in the study were not necessarily Canada’s future Nobel laureates. They were picked from pre-university classes and courses with minimal admission

requirements. Peter John Loewen, Henry Milner, and Bruce M. Hicks of the University of Montreal administered tests one month before the election and again after. Questions included such head scratchers as which party was in power when the election was called, which party wanted to maintain a freeze on tuition, and which party leader had been criticized for using the term “slanted eyes.”

Both groups essentially got about 28 percent of the political knowledge questions right on the first round and 43 percent on the second round. There was no statistical difference between those paid to vote and those not. The researchers found no evidence that either group



Today’s reformers have loftier motives than the fat cats in this 1888 cartoon, but their efforts to induce voting could yield just as many uninformed votes.

discussed politics more frequently, and only slight evidence that the group that was required to vote in order to collect its \$25 paid more attention to radio, television, or newspapers during the campaign.

Political scientists who have called for compulsory voting to motivate more citizens to participate in the electoral process should go back to the drawing board, the authors say. Evidently, even financial incentives are not sufficient to make the nonvoter learn more about politics.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Spoon-Fed Ideology

THE SOURCE: "Indoctrination U.? Faculty Ideology and Changes in Student Political Orientation" by Mack D. Mariani and Gordon J. Hewitt, in *Political Science and Politics*, Oct. 2008.

ARE LIBERAL COLLEGE PROFESSORS indoctrinating a generation of innocent college students? The perceived left-wing bias of the professoriate has inspired a push in state legislatures to enact an "Academic Bill of Rights" to protect students from being propagandized. Turns out, according to Mack D. Mariani and Gordon J. Hewitt, that students all along haven't been buying it.

There is little question, write Mariani, a political scientist at Xavier University in Cincinnati, and Hewitt, assistant dean at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, that college faculties tilt liberal. In a survey by the Higher Education Research Institute, about 53 percent of professors identified themselves

as liberal or far left, while only 16 percent said they are conservative or far right. By contrast, 25 percent of Americans surveyed in the 2004 American National Election Study said they were left of center, and 41 percent said they were to the right.

Mariani and Hewitt studied the responses of 6,807 students to questions about political orientation when they entered college as freshmen and three years later, when they were seniors. The researchers took the ideological temperature of faculties at different institutions using a similar political orientation question included in the Higher Education Research Institute survey. They reasoned that if the indoctrination problem were real, students at the institutions with the most liberal faculties would be more likely to switch their political allegiance from right to left. They saw "little evidence that this is the case."

Overall, Mariani and Hewitt found that 57 percent of students didn't budge in their political orientation during their four years. About 27 percent moved to the left and 16 percent to the right. That was a net swing of about 10 percent to the left, but the authors say this merely moved the students closer to the normal spectrum of views among 18-to-24-year-olds. They found that women were more likely to move left than men, but this too brought them in line with the national averages. Students from well-off families were more likely to move rightward.

The bottom line shouldn't come as a surprise: Professors' political notions don't make a big impression on their students.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Local Government Colossus

THE SOURCE: "Attempted Merger" by Josh Goodman, in *Governing*, Nov. 2008.

NEW YORK CITY HAS 1.1 million pupils in a single school jurisdiction. The entire state of Maine has only 200,000 students in 290 districts. Last year, Democratic governor John Baldacci and the Maine legislature required that school boards consolidate. The goal was to reduce their number to 80. It's been a tough sell.

Maine is only one of a number of demographically challenged states to promote consolidations among its school districts, townships, counties, villages, cities, and library boards. Indiana governor Mitch Daniels, a Republican, has proposed doing away with township government, slashing the number of library districts, and forcing school district consolidations. New Jersey governor Jon Corzine, a Democrat, has proposed eliminating state aid for towns with fewer than 5,000 residents. New York and Ohio are looking at similar proposals. Iowa tried to push consolidation but failed. Nebraska and Arkansas merged school districts, but only after years of fighting.

From the vantage point of the state capitals, the hundreds of small governmental units scattered across the land are inefficient, unwieldy, and confusing. State officials in Maine believe that school consolidation alone could save \$36 million as

larger districts more efficiently employ a single superintendent, special education coordinator, or even art teacher or computer lab. But at the local level, the benefits seem abstract and largely unproven, the drawbacks, real and personal. Indiana's effort to eliminate townships, for example, would retire more than 5,000 officials, all popular enough to get elected, often over and over again.

A tense debate is under way

between states and localities, writes Josh Goodman, a staff writer for *Governing*, over what local government should look like. The local pride that comes from having your own school district or township isn't worth the higher taxes that result from inefficient or duplicative services, say many state officials. But any possible savings from consolidation aren't worth the cost of losing control of your own school, tax assessor, or emergency rescue unit, say many residents.

Given fierce opposition to mergers, almost all states have offered both carrots and sticks. Maine extends logistical assistance to school districts to work out consolidations. Indiana wants to create a state office to provide technical assistance to local governments. In the push for marriages of convenience between governments, most localities need prenuptial counseling to make them work—and a few financial handouts don't hurt either.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Price of Salvation

THE SOURCE: "Changing the Rules: State Mortgage Foreclosure Moratoria During the Great Depression" by David C. Wheelock, in Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis *Review*, Nov.–Dec. 2008.

THE MORTGAGE BANKERS Association announced some bad news in December: Seven in every 100 homeowners had fallen behind in their house payments, and another three were in foreclosure. It was a modern record, but hardly in the same league as rates during the Great Depression. On New Year's Day 1934, about half of all urban home mortgages were delinquent. And during the previous 12 months, nearly four percent of farm owners had lost their land to foreclosure.

The 1930s farm crisis, etched in memory by photographs of crowded foreclosure auctions with a faded barn in the background, seemed to have a particularly strong effect. During an 18-month period starting in

1933, writes David C. Wheelock, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 27 states limited or halted foreclosures. Pressure for moratoria was strongest in the Midwest and other regions with large rural populations.

The laws ranged from temporary prohibitions on foreclosures to bans on "deficiency judgments," which were rulings that enabled a lender to require mortgage holders to pay the difference between their debt and the price their devalued land fetched at auction. Some states gave former landowners up to two years to

Mortgage delinquency rates are bad, but not nearly as bad (yet) as they were during the Great Depression.

redeem farms lost to foreclosure, and others allowed some families to stay on their former property as renters.

In the short run the foreclosure legislation redistributed wealth, favoring borrowers over lenders. It saved some farmers from failure, and it gave the economy time to recover while the federal government initiated programs to refinance delinquent mortgages. It prevented wholesale evictions that "might have seriously endangered basic interests of society," according to a government report at the time.

In the longer run, however, the legislation did "impose costs on future borrowers," Wheelock writes. Previous economic studies have found that private lenders made "significantly fewer loans in states that imposed moratoria and tended to charge higher rates on the loans they did make." During the Great Depression, about half the states decided that the immediate cost to society of widespread foreclosures was greater than the danger of costs later on. Nonetheless, he concludes, the relief legislation transferred at least some of the pain to future borrowers.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Home Field Advantage

THE SOURCE: “The Influence of Social Forces: Evidence from the Behavior of Football Referees” by Thomas J. Dohmen, in *Economic Inquiry*, July 2008.

FANS HAVE LONG SUSPECTED it, but now comes ammunition for that next barroom argument: Referees really *do* favor the home team. Thomas J. Dohmen examined a decades’ worth of statistics from the Bundesliga, Germany’s 18-team premier soccer league—more than 3,500 matches—and found that there was a measurable bias toward the home team when it came to decisions on stoppage time (time added at the end of regulation play for minutes lost through substitutions, players’ injuries, etc.), penalty kicks, and goals. The phenomenon became more pronounced when home-team fans outnumbered those rooting for the visitors, when the home team was only a goal behind, and, revealingly, in stadiums without a running track between the stands and the field.

Were there raised eyebrows at Maastricht University in the Netherlands when Dohmen, a professor there, proposed looking at soccer games for deep insights into human behavior? Perhaps, but the Bundesliga offered him a unique opportunity to assess the referees’ decisions since each game is also scrutinized by an “official observer of the DFB,” the governing body of the league.



There is a home field advantage, shown here in a 2007 soccer game in Bremen. It’s probably in the air.

Even though referees risk losing pay if they make biased rulings, Dohmen found subtle, though measurable, evidence that they favor the home team. He was unable to pinpoint the exact cause. The most likely explanation is “that social pressure from the crowd directly affects the referee,” a conclusion buoyed by the higher incidence of favoritism in track-less stadiums (where the partisan crowd is closer to the action). It could be that referees respond subconsciously to the fervor generated by a close game; the crowd wants the suspenseful match to continue and the referee accedes to this desire by rewarding additional game minutes. Or, in the most indirect hypothesis, home-team players may be spurred by rabid fans to complain more vociferously about the officiating, badgering the referee into making calls in their favor. Dohmen finds this idea the least plausible, but it, too, fits “the social pressure hypothesis.”

Dohmen cites a corroborating study in which professional soccer referees were shown videotapes of tackles in the English Premier League. One group watched with the sound off and called 15.5 percent fewer fouls against the home team than those listening to the crowd noise. Clearly, Dohmen says, “referees’ objective judgment capabilities are impaired by the emotional atmosphere in the stadium.” Coming soon to a stadium near you: overhanging stands with crowd noise amped *really* loud.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Diet or Else

THE SOURCE: “Have Yourself Committed” by Daniel Akst, in *The American*, Oct. 9, 2008.

THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of Americans who vow fruitlessly to lose weight demonstrate the power of the principle called “hyperbolic discounting”: Most mortals choose

small short-term rewards (dessert) over bigger long-term gains (longevity). People have tried to thwart this tendency since at least Odysseus's voyage past the Sirens, whose beautiful singing lured men to their deaths. The Greek hero had his men stop their ears and tie him to the mast of their ship so that he would not be able to yield to temptation. Now some people are suggesting that individuals and businesses should adopt a modern equivalent—"precommitment."

Most people already do some of

this, writes journalist and novelist Daniel Akst. They skip buying the jar of peanuts to prevent themselves from wolfing down the whole thing or sign up for an automatic savings plan to avoid spending their entire monthly paycheck. Three economists several years ago founded a "precommitment store" on the Internet called www.stickK.com (the extra "K" stands for contract), which offers those with frail willpower a binding contract to meet laudable goals or else have some up-front money funneled to a charity. Choices include quitting smoking,

losing weight, or an individualized goal, such as "stop calling my ex." One or two slip-ups, according to the terms of the contract, and off the money goes.

There's a renewed trend in America toward paternalism by government and others, Akst writes. But skeptics wonder whether politicians or other well-meaning folks ought to be telling the public how to behave. The beauty of precommitment mechanisms such as stickK.com is that they amount to do-it-yourself paternalism.

SOCIETY

Contagious Crime

THE SOURCE: "The Spreading of Disorder" by Kees Keizer, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg, in *Scienceexpress*, Nov. 20, 2008.

ONE OF THE GREAT STRENGTHS of the "broken windows theory" of crime control is its appeal to so many lawn-mowing, graffiti-scrubbing, litter-bin-using Americans. They believe that order and cleanliness are cornerstones of urban safety and that promptly fixing small things such as broken windows sends a social signal and prevents bigger problems such as break-ins and thefts. Sociologists have cast serious doubt on some of the most extravagant claims for this crime-fighting technique, for instance, that it is responsible for the dramatic reduction in New York City's crime rate in the mid-1990s. But criticism has slid off

the theory like water off an unbroken windowpane. Now researchers in the Netherlands have put the theory to some ingenious tests.

Kees Keizer, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg of the social science faculty at the University of Groningen attached annoying "Happy Holidays" flyers to the handlebars of bicycles parked in an alley with a big "No Littering" sign on the wall. No trash can was provided. When the alley walls were pristine, 67 percent of the

People are twice as likely to steal from a graffiti-covered mailbox as from one that's pristine.

bicyclists took the flyer with them to dispose of properly. When the same area was scribbled with graffiti, only 31 percent did.

The researchers conducted an experiment with an envelope, allowing it to protrude out of a mailbox with a five-euro bill visible through the clear window showing the address. When the mailbox was free of graffiti, 13 percent of passersby pocketed the money. When it was covered with graffiti, 27 percent did so. In another experiment, the researchers partially blocked the entrance to a parking lot with a temporary fence. Customers were ordered by the parking lot's owner not to lock their bikes to the fence and to walk about 220 yards to an alternate entrance. When four nearby bikes were clearly *not* locked to the fence, 73 percent of the people walked the extra distance; when the bikes were locked to the fence, in violation of the posted order, only 18 percent did.

The researchers found that the

more Groningen residents saw examples of illegal or improper behavior, the more they violated other rules. Signs of previous “inappropriate behavior” such as graffiti or broken windows led to other such acts, including littering or stealing, the authors write. Each new example of antisocial activity undermined the general goal of doing the right thing.

SOCIETY

Training Mere Mortal Teachers

THE SOURCE: “Charter Schools and the Limits of Human Capital” by Steven F. Wilson, in *The Education Gadfly*, Nov. 6, 2008.

CHARTER SCHOOLS HAVE GENERALLY failed to find a Petraeus-style solution to the urban school crisis. A surge of troops may have reduced sectarian violence in Iraq, but a surge of private innovation has produced only isolated successes in a sea of low test scores. Only 200 or so of the nation’s roughly 4,500 charter schools stand out as shining lights in the classroom firmament. Inevitably, writes Steven F. Wilson, the president of a charter school management company and senior fellow of an education think tank in Washington, the question turns to scale. Can rare exceptions be turned into everyday reality?

In a detailed examination of seven successful charter schools in Boston, Wilson found that all but one hewed to what is called the “no excuses” model: the phi-

losophy that every child can succeed and neither family dysfunction nor poor preparation is sufficient reason for failure. A rigorous academic program was established to prepare every child for college. The key to schools’ success was the hiring of driven and highly educated teachers who made “nearly heroic” efforts to overcome years of accumulated learning deficits in the students. More than half of these schools’ staff members had attended elite undergraduate institutions, and 82 percent had attended at least a “very competitive” college.

Each year, about 142,000 students graduate from these highly selective colleges, so even if one of every 10 of their graduates went into charter school teaching for the usual two years, this cohort would provide only six percent of the educators employed in the nation’s large urban school districts. And even if many non-elite teachers were highly capable, the gap would remain great. Success in school reform will always depend on tens of thousands of “mere mortals” who mostly aren’t interested in working more than the standard 40-hour week.

The keys to success, Wilson says, are vision and good management. That means precise adherence to an effective instructional system with tools for “school culture-building,” placement tests, a content-rich curriculum, frequent assessments, and other detailed help. Legislatures should raise the pay of starting teachers, and drop the certification requirements that bar many worthy

recruits. Teachers should be rewarded for performance in the classroom and not for seniority or degrees.

The entire social system does not need to be reformed before inner-city students can succeed. If shortages of qualified workers can be overcome in order to staff entire governments in developing countries, surely enough great teachers can be found to educate America’s most disadvantaged children.

SOCIETY

Mission Being Accomplished!

THE SOURCE: “Are We Finally Winning the War on Cancer?” by David M. Cutler, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Fall 2008.

AMERICA’S OFFICIAL 38-YEAR war on cancer has reduced deaths from the disease dramatically. But most of its success has not come from bravura breakthroughs in treatment. More lives have been saved by relatively humdrum screening tests.

In the first two decades after President Richard M. Nixon launched the war on cancer in 1971, cancer mortality rates rose twice as fast as before. By 1986, *The New England Journal of Medicine* was pronouncing the effort a “qualified failure.” But starting in 1990, cancer deaths for each 100,000 people of the same age began to decrease. By 2004, the cancer mortality rate was down 13 percent from its peak, writes David M. Cutler, an economist at Harvard University.

The four leading killers among all

types of cancer are lung, colorectal, breast, and prostate. The lung cancer rate was down eight percent by 2004, mostly because so many people quit smoking. The colorectal cancer rate declined 26 percent between 1990 and 2004, largely because of better screening techniques. The breast cancer mortality rate fell 28 percent, generally because of mammography. And the death rate from prostate cancer plunged 31 percent because of early detection, hormone

therapy, and surgery.

America may finally be winning the war on cancer, Cutler says, but at heavy cost: \$15 billion in anti-cancer spending in 1972 became \$74 billion in 2005. Improved screening was the single most important change and one of the biggest bargains. Treatments, particularly new drugs, have also improved, but some of the new wonder pharmaceuticals sell for \$4,000 to \$100,000 per year. They

can extend the life of a cancer patient, but typically only for a few months, Cutler writes. Insurance generally covers efficacious drug therapies in the United States, regardless of cost, but in other countries cost sometimes trumps treatment. The United Kingdom's arbiters, for example, turned thumbs down on two \$50,000-to-\$100,000-a-year medications for colon cancer, simply ruling them "not cost-effective."

PRESS & MEDIA

Pressroom of Babel

THE SOURCE: "Memorandum to the President-Elect" by Mike McCurry, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Dec. 2008.

RICHARD M. NIXON WAS PRESIDENT when the White House Press Office was last revamped, and it is now suffering from hardening of the arteries. More Americans are interested in politics than ever, but an office that had specialized in communicating the president's daily message to major newspapers, magazines, and television networks must now deal with cable, websites, YouTube, comedy shows, and those 21st-century pamphleteers, the bloggers. The White House press

secretary needs a makeover, writes Mike McCurry, who held the job from 1995 to 1998 under President Bill Clinton. "But one person cannot adequately speak on behalf of the institutional

presidency."

Blow up the 35-year-old model of having one overexposed spokesperson be ground zero for every question, he says. Put articulate representatives from various parts of the government, from the new technology czar to the national security adviser, on camera to explain their own initiatives, straight. The recent press secretary arguably considered the

best of the lot—Marlin Fitzwater, who held the job under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush—honed his skills as an apolitical information officer in the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Treasury Department before moving to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Forget the single "line of the day," McCurry urges. It should give way to multiple information

EXCERPT

Enough, Already

The blogosphere, once a freshwater oasis of folksy self-expression and clever thought, has been flooded by a tsunami of paid bilge. Cut-rate journalists and underground marketing campaigns now drown out the authentic voices of amateur wordsmiths. It is almost impossible to get noticed, except by hecklers.

—PAUL BOUTIN, former *Wired* senior editor and correspondent for the Silicon Valley site *Valleywag*, in *Wired* (Nov. 2008)

streams of specialized news delivered clearly and factually. Move parts of the White House press operation into regional and local offices, even overseas. Hold presidential news conferences online, or in front of student newspaper editors, or even members of Congress. To prevent a disaggregated communications operation from sending out mixed messages, the president himself should use his position as communicator in chief to pull together themes and explain ideas as he attempts to bring the political change he promised.

Offer multiple televised messages to minimize the importance

of a daily briefing that has become a “silly theater of the absurd with all sides posturing for the cameras and the editors and employers watching.” Consider filming cabinet meetings or even some National Security Council sessions. “The more everything at the White House is televised, the less that any one thing becomes a focus for disproportionate coverage,” he says. The more Americans see of serious policy-making, the greater their respect for it will be. Trust the generation facile in Facebook and ubiquitous on YouTube, McCurry counsels, and run a spin-free exercise devoted to getting the public the information it needs.

PRESS & MEDIA

Congenitally Digital?

THE SOURCE: “Generational Myth” by Siva Vaidhyathan, in *The Chronicle Review*, Sept. 19, 2008.

IN THE WAKE OF THE GREATEST, the beat, the baby boom, and the millennial generations comes the “digital generation,” another empty formulation describing an amorphous group with a trait of the moment. Siva Vaidhyathan, a professor of media studies and law at the University of Virginia, says that a generation of “digital

EXCERPT

Stand Up for Integration

The Carolina Israelite was a remarkable solo act, a bold effort to liberate its southern white readers from the inertia of tradition, defying the odds that anyone producing a one-man newspaper in the mid-20th century was very likely to be a crank. . . .

The Vertical Negro Plan, which made [editor Harry] Golden's reputation, . . . was simple. Blacks and whites standing together—in grocery store lines, at bank tellers' windows, at drugstore counters—appeared to pose little challenge to regional mores. Only when blacks sat down—on buses, at dining counters, in theaters—did they seem not to know their place. So why not provide “only desks in all the public schools of our state—[and] no seats.” He commented that since pupils “are not learning to read, sitting down, anyway, perhaps standing up will help.”

—STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD, professor at Brandeis University, in *Southern Cultures* (Fall 2008)



The Carolina Israelite, written and edited by Harry Golden (right), influenced readers such as poet Carl Sandburg, author of “Chicago.”

Archive password: JUPITER

natives” doesn’t exist.

“I am in the constant company of 18-to-23-year-olds. I have taught at both public and private universities, and I have to report that the levels of comfort with, understanding of, and dexterity with digital technologies vary greatly within every class.” Overall, Vaidhyanathan finds, students’ level of computer savvy hasn’t budged in a decade.

“Every class has a handful of people with amazing skills and a large number who can’t deal with computers at all,” he says. Although studies show that three out of four children had access to a computer at home as long ago as

2003, many used it for playing games rather than connecting to the Internet and taking advantage of its scholastic potential. Even at elite universities, many students are not affluent enough to have had extensive digital experience, Vaidhyanathan writes. Painting an entire generation as innately digital discounts the experience of immigrants and those who don’t speak English. “Mystical talk about a generational shift and all the claims that kids won’t read books are just not true. . . . They all (I mean all) tell me that they prefer the technology of the bound book to the PDF or webpage.”

What is a generation, anyway?

The Vietnam War affected most men who were 18 to 25 at the time, but they are hardly a “Vietnam generation” with common experiences. College students are more complicated than any “imaginary generations” can portray. Lack of Web-savviness correlates with “identity traits” among young people, according to new research being conducted by Eszter Hargittai, a sociologist at Northwestern University. Who are these less Web-proficient undergraduates? Women, Hispanics, African Americans, and students whose parents have lower levels of education. Sounds as if a lot of young people missed out on digital DNA.

HISTORY

Fallout From the Ice Age

THE SOURCE: “Crisis and Catastrophe: The Global Crisis of the 17th Century Reconsidered” by Geoffrey Parker, and “Crisis, Chronology, and the Shape of European Social History” by Jonathan Dewald, in *American Historical Review*, Oct. 2008.

HISTORY BURSTS WITH WRITERS who believed they lived in the worst of times, but scholars think they know who’s right. People who lived in the mid-17th century faced “adversity on a scale unparalleled in modern times,” writes Geoffrey Parker, a historian at Ohio State University. What is dubbed “the General Crisis” affected the entire globe. More wars took place than in any era until the 1940s. The Ming dynasty in China, the world’s most populous

country, collapsed; England’s king was beheaded; Ottoman sultan Ibrahim was strangled; and the richest state on earth, the Mughal Empire, jailed its ruler. Popular revolts swept across some 50 regions.

For most of the 20th century, these upheavals were explained in the English-speaking world as fall-

Scholars have begun to confirm what Voltaire told his mistress: *le climat* was partly to blame for the great upheavals of the 17th century.

out from the shift from feudalism to capitalism, writes Jonathan Dewald, a historian at the State University of New York at Buffalo. In France, they were seen as evidence of the “limits of pre-industrial society.” But new researchers, chronicling disasters from Mombasa to Peru, began to question how such unrelated events could have a single cause.

Parker advances an old theory with a strikingly contemporary ring: The climate did it. Vast new data archives of climate and other information have begun to confirm what Voltaire explained to his mistress, Mme. du Châtelet, in the 1740s. The “period of usurpations almost from one end of the world to the other,” he wrote, were the result of government, religion, and “*le climat*.”

The Little Ice Age, which had been building for centuries, brought fierce weather globally. In Virginia, Chesapeake Bay “was much of it

frozen,” along with the rivers that fed it, wrote Massachusetts governor John Winthrop. In Egypt, people began to wear furs. Previously warm and humid Fujian Province in southeastern China got snow. In the Alps, whole villages disappeared under the advance of glaciers.

The horrible weather triggered both drought and flooding. The Philippines got no rain for eight months. Northern China experienced its driest year in five centuries. In Mecca, where little rain normally falls, floods destroyed two walls of the sacred Kaaba. The Tigris and Euphrates rose from their banks to cover the entire Baghdad plateau.

But how could weather cause kings to be beheaded and wars to be fought? Parker says that climate change killed crops, caused famine, and raised prices in locations as divergent as Osaka and Catalonia. Unprecedented urban rioting occurred in 1642 when bad weather conditions caused rice to run short in Japan. Much of southern Portugal rose up against local rulers when drought forced the price of bread to unprecedented heights. Climate change caused hardship, and hardship triggered political revolt.

Parker acknowledges that the coincidence of climate change and political upheaval doesn't mean that the former caused the latter: “We must not paint bull's eyes around bullet holes.” Still, he says, with scientists predicting catastrophic global warming, it's worth rewinding the tape of history to see how governments dealt with the only previous global cataclysm that left enough records for historical study—the General Crisis.

HISTORY

Spice and Status

THE SOURCE: “The Medieval Taste for Spices” by Paul Freedman, in *Historically Speaking*, Sept.–Oct. 2008.

THE CUISINE OF THE MIDDLE Ages, with its tincture of ambergris and malaguetta, may not inspire many start-up restaurants, but the long-held explanation for the powerful flavors of the age turns out to be a historical myth. Meat during the period was not so rancid that its taste had to be masked with spices, writes Paul Freedman, a Yale historian. Any medieval lord rich enough to afford spices could

easily have bought fresh meat.

Spices were both the status symbols and high-yield investments of their day. Expensive and coveted, they were the mark of a wealthy household. Outrageously profitable, spices drove Europeans to their first overseas adventures. Pepper purchased in India for three Venetian ducats could fetch 80 ducats in Europe. Christopher Columbus was on the trail not only of gold and silk but also spices when he set off for what became America. The purpose of procuring spices, however, was not to mask the taste of bad meat, but rather to infuse good meat with the sweet-sour flavor that was the epitome of the fashionable cooking of the era.



Harvesting nutmeg is somewhat fancifully depicted in a 15th-century German wellness handbook.

Cinnamon, nutmeg, and sugar, now most commonly used in desserts, seasoned the main courses at medieval banquets. They were paired with a selection of peppers, including African malaguetta, Indian long pepper, and galangal—the strong spice now known mainly through Thai cooking, to flavor thin sauces often based on almond milk. Fashionable food was prepared with an eye toward achieving a pleasant color as well as taste. Rich hues could be achieved with such spices as cinnamon and saffron. Contrary to the conceit of movies set in medieval times, meat was not served in large haunches on racks, but was ground up and cooked, often several times, so coloring was useful.

Rarity bred prestige. When pepper became so common in the early 14th century that it was used in meals

served to peasants working in the fields, it began to disappear from recipes for fine cooking. Still, cooks used spices frugally. They were occasionally used to flavor wine, then

reused in sauces.

By the 17th century, European cooks had moved away from heavily spiced sauces to more intense preparations based on butter, herbs, and meat reductions. Traffic in slaves, sugar, and tobacco would eventually outstrip the spice-carrying business. Ambergris, a substance created by digestion in the hindgut of the sperm whale and considered the height of exotic taste in the 14th century, slowly fell out of favor. But spices remained important. New Amsterdam, eventually to become New York, was relinquished by the Dutch to the English in return for

Run, the most remote of the Molucca islands. No wonder the Dutch wanted Run instead of Manhattan: The tiny spice island was the original home of nutmeg.

EXCERPT

On the Dime

In 1946, the Mercury [dime] was replaced. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died the previous year, took his place on the head of the dime that's still in circulation today. The congressional decision to memorialize the creator of the New Deal in this manner was a testament to his search for a cure for polio (resulting in the charity March of Dimes) and carried an implicit reference to "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"—the song of the Great Depression that he had helped resolve. The dime, as luck would have it, was also the only denomination not "taken" by another president. For FDR, it was right on the money.

—PHIL PATTON, author of *Dreamland: Travels Inside the Secret World of Roswell and Area 51* (1998), in *AIGA* (Oct. 29, 2008)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

What's the Buzz?

THE SOURCE: "Religion, 'Westernization,' and Youth in the 'Closed City' of Soviet Ukraine, 1964–84" by Sergei I. Zhuk, in *The Russian Review*, Oct. 2008.

HIP-HOP HAS BEEN HOT IN THE Hezbollah-run suburbs of Beirut, and rock remains popular in Rio, but as scholars sift through the history of the Soviet Union, one of the

unexpected cultural influences to emerge from diaries and police and customs records is the popular force of a Christian rock opera. During the 1970s, young people in the nation's secret rocket-making capital were captivated by *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970).

Dnepropetrovsk, a vast industrial

metropolis in eastern Ukraine, was off limits to outsiders. But its residents were occasionally able to travel to "free" cities such as Lviv in western Ukraine, where they could meet tourists from Poland and Yugoslavia hawking tapes and records of Western music. *Jesus Christ Superstar*, shocking in conservative communities in the United States and banned in South Africa as irreligious, was appealing to Dnepropetrovsk residents, not only for its music but also for its religious content. In the 1970s, the rock opera topped the list of pop-

ular consumption items among Soviet rock fans across the country, writes Sergei I. Zhuk, a historian at Ball State University in Indiana.

The Biblical story behind the opera triggered interest in the history of Christianity, and, while the Bible was officially banned from Soviet libraries, books debunking the stories of the Gospels suddenly became best-sellers and were put on waiting lists. Attendance at Orthodox Church services in Dnepropetrovsk increased, especially at Easter. In 1973, police had to chase crowds of devotees of the opera from the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.

Oversized metal crosses began dangling from young necks. The KGB reported an upsurge in the smuggling of religious items. More than 60 percent of all residents accused of smuggling silver crosses, Bibles, and icons into Dnepropetrovsk mentioned *Jesus Christ Superstar* as the inspiration for their interest in religion. In the 1970s, a quarter of evangelicals in the region were under 25 years old.

An upsurge in the performance of indigenous music in the West was matched in Dnepropetrovsk by a passion for Ukrainian folk music. This was a welcome development for Soviet officials, but the KGB soon accused local bands of seizing on religious compositions, choosing “Ukrainian nationalistic songs of a Christian character.”

Despite the KGB’s best efforts, Jesus mania survived. The interest in popular religiosity and Western mass culture in Dnepropetrovsk, Zhuk says, highlights the failure of the Soviet system to protect the youth of even an isolated and heavily policed city from “ideological pollution.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Forgive Me Not

THE SOURCE: “Pinning Your Own Tail on Someone Else’s Donkey” by Wilfred M. McClay, in *In Character*, Fall 2008.

ANOTHER POLITICIAN SWEEPED up in a tawdry sex scandal, another celebrity nabbed for driving drunk—then cue the ritual of redemption: the mea culpa media confession, the promise to repent or check into rehab, the teary plea for forgiveness. “Even when we cannot ourselves forgive a transgressor,” Wilfred M. McClay writes, “we usually credit the generosity of those who can.” Indeed, forgiveness is being touted in self-help books for its therapeutic effects: “It makes us, the forgivers, *feel better*.” Forgiveness, McClay contends, is in danger of “being debased into a kind of cheap grace,” a state in which it will have “lost its luster as well as its meaning.”

To McClay, “forgiveness can’t be understood apart from the assumption that we inhabit a moral universe in which moral responsibility matters, moral choices have real consequences, and justice and guilt have a salient role.” It is—or ought to be—a serious business. In ancient Jewish society, transgressors performed sacrificial acts to wipe away their sins, and “in the Christian context, forgiveness of sin was specifically related to Jesus Christ’s substitutionary atonement.” In our time we retain “Judeo-Christian moral reflexes without Judeo-Christian metaphysics,” and discharging the weight of sin becomes more problematic and confusing, especially when the process is complicated by the guilt

many feel about not being able to “diminish my carbon footprint enough, or give to the poor enough, or otherwise do the things that would render me morally blameless.”

Our awareness of our own moral shortcomings, says McClay, a historian at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, makes us all too prone to forgive the failings of others, and also explains today’s odd spate of popular “phony memoirs” such as *Love and Consequences*. “The putative autobiography of a young mixed-race woman raised by a black foster mother in gang-infested Los Angeles,” it was actually written by Margaret Seltzer, a white 33-year-old raised in a prosperous suburb. What Seltzer and other writers of forged memoirs are marketing, McClay writes, is “stolen suffering, and the identification they are pursuing is an identification with certifiable victims.” In a world without a religious route to the absolution of sin, making such an identification “offers itself as a substitute means by which the moral burden of sin can be shifted, and one’s innocence affirmed.”

McClay points to other areas in which moral sensibilities have careened out of control: the public apologies for the institution of slavery, such as one by the U.S. Senate, for instance, or the “faculty and administrator watchdogs” in academia who pounce on even the slightest slips by those who fail to “observe the regnant pieties regarding race, class, or gender in their public statements.” Attacking someone who falls short of perfection, he says, allows the condemners to “displace their guilt onto him, and prove to all the world

their own innocence.”

Is there a way out of this confusion? McClay thinks we may have to “concede that forgiveness is an example of a virtue that may not be extensible beyond its religious war-

rant.” Maybe we need another name for our therapeutic absolutions. In any event, it seems we need our foundational moral understandings more than ever. Recalling the true meanings of guilt and forgiveness, McClay

believes, may help us remember that they are concerned with “the soul of the transgressor and the well-being of society, and not merely with the forgiver’s good health and his sweet psychological revenge.”

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Research Boomerang

THE SOURCE: “Be Careful What You Wish For: A Cautionary Tale About Budget Doubling” by Richard B. Freeman and John Van Reenen, in *Issues in Science and Technology*, Fall 2008.

BETWEEN 1998 AND 2003 THE Clinton administration started and the Bush administration finished doubling the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the primary source of governmental funding for biomedical research. The result of this historically abrupt largesse, according to one of the affected researchers, has been a “completely new category of nightmare.”

Instead of producing twice as many jaw-dropping breakthroughs as before, the suddenly enlarged research corps plodded ahead at the same steady pace. And the rapid buildup from

\$14 billion in 1998 to \$27 billion in 2003 seemed to suck dry the government’s enthusiasm for science—resulting in a near freeze of the NIH budget. As a result, the NIH is on track to spend 13.4 percent *less* on

biomedical research in 2009 than it did five years earlier. Young researchers who hurriedly ramped up their labs to handle new grants have been pressured to cut staff as they face longer and longer odds of having the grants renewed. “Young people who build their skills as graduate students or postdocs during the acceleration phase of spending bear much of the cost of the deceleration,” write economists

Richard B. Freeman of Harvard and John Van Reenen of the London School of Economics. A glut of newly trained graduate students is competing for a shrinking number of jobs.

During the doubling, the NIH increased both the value and the number of grants. When the available funds shrank because the annual appropriation failed to keep up with inflation, the number of grants had to be cut by a fifth. With poorer odds of getting funded, researchers submitted many more applications, making competition fiercer. The cuts may also have led to “conservative science, as researchers shy away from

EXCERPT

Naps for Invention

[Thomas Edison] solved many problems by going to sleep and letting an otherwise inaccessible part of his mind work on the challenge. He would lie down on his couch in his laboratory and place a steel ball firmly in his right hand. At the start of his nap his right hand would grip that steel ball, with his arm extended out, over the floor on the right side of his couch. After he went to sleep his hand would gradually relax. The fingers would open, and at some point the ball would fall to the floor, making a sound that would awaken him. Sometimes, he said, the answer to what he was working on would be right there in his mind.

—JAMES OPIE, a writer and businessman in Portland, Ore., in *Parabola* (Winter 2008)

the big research questions in favor of manageable topics that fit with prevailing fashions,” Freeman and Reenen say.

The squeeze has struck hardest at scientists just starting their careers. Postdoctoral researchers labor indefinitely in the labs of senior scientists who continue to win follow-up grants while new grantees are turned down. The average age of new grantees rose from 35.2 in 1970 to 42.9 in 2005, the last year for which numbers are available. Twenty-two percent of grants went to scientists 35 and younger in 1980, but in 2005 only three percent did.

In a choice between equally competent young and older researchers, the economists

argue, the government should tilt toward youth. Youthful applicants will have more years to use the new knowledge and it will have a higher payoff.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Just Another Prescription

THE SOURCE: “Ten Years of ‘Death with Dignity’” by Courtney S. Campbell, in *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2008.

UNLESS YOU LIVE IN THE Pacific Northwest, you may not know that the voters in the state of Washington passed a “death with dignity” initiative on November 4 by a 16-percentage-point margin. In 1997, a ferocious battle

preceded the narrow approval of an Oregon law allowing doctors to write lethal prescriptions for dying patients. In 2006, the law survived a Supreme Court challenge brought by two attorneys general. Now, in contrast to the earlier drama, the extension of the so-called right to die to a second state in November was almost ho-hum news.

Part of the reason is that in 10 years of experience with Oregon’s law, only 541 patients in a state of 3.7 million acquired prescriptions for lethal drugs. Of those, only 341 used them. None of the fears surrounding the new law have proved justified. No public outcry has arisen over pressuring dad to die so junior can sell the business. No flood of

EXCERPT

Everyman’s Qibla

The black granite Kaaba, the cubical structure that stands as the holiest center of Islam, features at its eastern vertex a small black stone about the size of a grapefruit, the al-hajar al-aswad, which may or may not have fallen to earth in the time of Adam and Eve. Supported in a silver frame, this obsidian-like cipher structures space for some billion Muslims, standing as it does at the culminating point known as the qibla—the direction to which devout followers of Muhammad address their five daily obeisances. Tradition has it that the rock was once snowy white, and has darkened over time through exposure to human sin.

A snowy-white stone that gives shape to the universe: As it happens, we all carry within our skulls the vestige of such a thing, a kind of existentially reversed qibla (this one

perspectival, the other metaphysical) that gives us our sense of being at the center of things, the sense that we are upright at the origin point of a three-dimensional space. The “otolithic organs,” as they are known, are a pair of sensors, the utricle and the saccule, nestled in the labyrinthine architecture of the inner ear. . . . The saccule is roughly vertical in our heads, and the utricle more or less horizontal. Together they orient us in the world, since they work as tiny inertial references: Raise your head suddenly (or get a jerky elevator), and the pebbles of the saccule get momentarily left behind as your skull starts upward; this bends down the hairs against which those pebbles lay, and the sensitive hairs function like switches, sending signals to your brain that you register as a feeling of ascent. The utricle does the same work for motion from side to side, and between them these tiny organs generate the neurological data that give us our normal sense of being in the world.

—D. GRAHAM BURNETT, a historian of science at Princeton, author of four books, and an editor of *Cabinet* (Fall 2008)

lawsuits has been filed over the legislation.

What has happened, writes Courtney S. Campbell, a religion and philosophy professor at Oregon State University, is that doctors have almost certainly changed the way they practice medicine. One of the law's major selling points was that it would lead to the alleviation of unbearable pain among the dying. The public response to the issue caused doctors, hospitals, and hospices to pay more attention to pain. Laws and licensure requirements were altered so that doctors no longer faced investi-

A decade-old Washington state law allowing doctors to write lethal prescriptions for dying patients has led to improved care at the end of life.

gation if they boosted dosages of medication to potentially dangerous levels for terminally ill people. Today, the issue of pain has become secondary. More than 80 percent of the patients request-

ing lethal drugs cite a "loss of autonomy" as justification. Pain is sixth on the list.

The expressed purpose of the Oregon law, like that of the Washington initiative, is to allow residents to choose death with dignity. Drugs are not a precondition for such a death, Campbell says, nor does the "possession of a right [entail] its subsequent use."

It may be, writes Campbell, who considers the law a "moral mistake," that the mere possibility of legalizing physician-assisted death serves as sufficient impetus to find alternatives for improving care at the end of life.

ARTS & LETTERS

Gray Listeners

THE SOURCE: "The Ageless Audience" by Diane Haithman, in *Latimes.com*, Oct. 5, 2008.

AUDIENCES FOR CLASSICAL music aren't getting gray, observes Diane Haithman, a writer

for *The Los Angeles Times*. They always *were* gray.

Actually, they're somewhat older than they used to be, but not by as much as first appears. The median age of the typical classical music patron in 2002 was 49, compared

with 40 in 1982. But the median age of the general population increased at the same time, from 40 to 45. So the run-of-the-mill concertgoer grew nine years older between 1982 and 2002—but only four years older than the median American.

The same sort of arithmetic works for patrons of the theater, ballet, and jazz. It is too early to write the obituary for live performing arts, Haithman says.

EXCERPT

The Man Who Knew Too Much

One of the cruel ironies of any literary endeavor is that the filmmaker—or the playwright, or poet, or novelist—can never truly experience the work the way the audience

does. I, who had worked for six years on this movie [Field of Dreams], will never know what it's like to see it. To enter the theater without knowing what will unfold and give myself over to the story. I knew too much, and if I had the ability, I would invent a machine that would selectively wipe our memory, so we too could enjoy our creations without pre-knowledge of their secrets.

—PHIL ALDEN ROBINSON, writer/director of *Field of Dreams*, in *The Hopkins Review* (Fall 2008)

Symphony concert attendance is up. Journalists who lament the aging of concert audiences may be forming their opinions by looking around from the most expensive seats—the ones the young concertgoers can't afford. Up in the nosebleed section, wrinkles may be scarce.

Classical concert tickets simply price out many young people. Tickets are like wine. Buyers start out with Two Buck Chuck, move on to a Yellow Tail, and eventually feel flush enough to indulge in a fine Burgundy. Looked at another way, the life cycle of concertgoers might once have been graphed in three quantum leaps: Twentysomethings went to clubs on weekends; couples in their thirties stayed home raising children; and people in their forties began to subscribe to more highbrow entertainment, such as concerts. One theater director notes that the 21st-century version of the graph would be elongated: Parents with young children at home were once aged

Classical concerts have to give their audience something more than just a great CD sound with visuals.

20 to 40; now they're 30 to 50.

Demographic and economic explanations aside, the appreciation of classical music requires early exposure, something less common in schools than in the past. And selling high culture is no longer a matter of posting a repertoire and expecting the audiences to come. Competition for the time, attention, and money of the "new gray" performance-goer is fierce. Symphonies, operas, and even musicals will have to work for their patronage. A concert has to be more than a great CD sound with visuals. Audiences want to be touched by the experience, Haithman concludes. They seek not only to be entertained, but moved.

ARTS & LETTERS

Chagall's Curious Legacy

THE SOURCE: "Whatever Happened to Marc Chagall?" by Michael J. Lewis, in *Commentary*, Oct. 2008.

THINK OF MARC CHAGALL (1887–1985), and what immediately comes to mind is a large, colorful canvas filled with whimsical symbols from his Jewish childhood in the Russian city of Vitebsk—a fiddler or a pair of lovers or a cow (sometimes all at once) cavorting on the roof of a rough-hewn peasant house or, just as likely, floating through the air in a dreamy dance. When Chagall died, at 97, he was acclaimed as the last survivor of the pioneering Modernists and the world's preeminent Jewish artist. But Michael J. Lewis says that Chagall was a "straggler in the march of Modernism," whose best work was already behind him by the end of World War I.

EXCERPT

America's Greatest Reader

By the end of his life—hell, by the middle of his life, Edmund Wilson was a fat, ferocious man: petty, pretentious, and petulant, a failure at many of the most ordinary tasks of life. But, man, could he dance: through a poem, through a book, through a library. He was the Nijinsky, the Nureyev, at what he did—a genius, really: probably the greatest reader America has ever known. . . .

If he seems lost to us now, that's not just because we have no similar genius to occupy the space that he filled. It's also because that space has nearly disappeared. The magisterial critic has no role left in America, really. We appreciate, we enjoy, we peruse, we watch. But we don't define ourselves by reading anymore. The novel, the premier art form of Western civilization over the last 200 years, has ceased to be the mark of civilization. And so what need have we of Edmund Wilson—that fat, ferocious man, so nimble on his feet?

—JOSEPH BOTTUM, editor of *First Things*, in *Humanities* (Nov.–Dec. 2008)

Born Movsha Shagal into a Hasidic Jewish community that did not value visual art, the artist was raised in modest circumstances; his “remote, pious father toiled in a herring warehouse, and his mother ran a small grocery business from their home,” relates Lewis, a Williams College art historian, drawing on a new biography by Jackie Wullschlager, the art critic at *Financial Times*. Early on, Chagall studied with Yehuda Pen, a “realist who painted plein-air scenes of Jewish life,” and later in St. Petersburg with Léon Batsk, a ballet set designer. Though the

young Chagall resisted his tutors’ attempts to rein in his artistic style, Batsk left an impression on the painter, “who learned to place his figures on the canvas as if they were stenciled cutouts, their eloquence made up almost entirely of their expressively straggling silhouettes.”

By 1911, Chagall had charmed several benefactors into financing a move to Paris. There he was dazzled by the chromatic intensity championed by artists such as Henri Matisse and Odilon Redon. “Many of Chagall’s Paris works were updated versions of paintings he had

made in Russia, transposed into Fauvist or Cubist keys,” Lewis says. Indeed, “recycling earlier compositions and themes would become a lifelong habit, and is one of the great peculiarities of his career.” Still, Chagall’s “uncanny gift for coining fresh and haunting symbols, with the rubbery logic of dreams,” impressed the avant-garde crowd that surrounded him in Paris. The poet Apollinaire proclaimed his canvasses “*surréal*” (a term that found its way into the Surrealist Manifesto of 1924), but Chagall resisted inclusion in that club. According to Lewis, he “did



Birthday (L'Anniversaire) by Marc Chagall, 1915

not like their exaltation of the arbitrary and the random, feeling that his own personal language of symbols was meaningful and thoroughly sincere.”

Following the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks sought to make use of Chagall’s growing international fame. He declined a position as Soviet commissar of visual arts, but agreed to take a similar local position in his native Vitebsk, where he spoke out, somewhat naively, in support of personal expression. In 1922 Chagall decamped from Russia, eventually

winding up in France, where he began “very assiduously to market himself,” Lewis says, publishing his autobiography at age 36. Chagall worked in a cocoon, protected and sometimes directed by his wife, Bella, and the women who succeeded her after her death in 1944. While commissions kept coming—“stained glass for the cathedrals of Rheims and Metz, a Dag Hammarskjöld memorial at the United Nations, the great ceiling mural in the Paris Opera”—Chagall’s painted work, Lewis contends, remained limited by the same characteristics

that define all folk art, “the filling-in of blank spaces with auxiliary figures, the strange shifts in scale that show hierarchical importance rather than recession in depth.”

But if Chagall’s “gifts were limited, he exploited them intensely and with unusual urgency of feeling.” Lewis believes that the early works mark Chagall as “a minor master on the order of a William Blake or an El Greco,” and that he “has earned a permanent place in the pantheon of artists who have spoken deeply about the secrets of the human heart.”

OTHER NATIONS

A Sickening State

THE SOURCE: “The Health Crisis in Russia’s Ranks” by Murray Feshbach, in *Current History*, Oct. 2008.

RUSSIA’S ARMY AND NAVY, bristling with nuclear weapons, rocketry, and 1.2 million conscripts and volunteers, is a ripe-looking fruit with a diseased core. Its military capabilities are undermined by the nation’s low birthrate and poor health.

Murray Feshbach, a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, writes that Russia’s armed forces lack the skilled and healthy workers to back up its saber rattling and international ambitions. As the military deploys ever more technologically sophisticated weaponry, it relies on ever less educated troops to operate it. Military records show

that only 43 percent of new naval conscripts in 2004 had finished high school. Some had less than four years of schooling, and the percentage of draftees who had completed higher education fell from 17 to 13 percent in a six-month period.

The cause of much of Russia’s problem is demographics. Births fell by 50 percent between 1987 and 1999, and Feshbach predicts that this decline will produce an “echo” in a depressed birthrate starting in 2012 and continuing for decades to come. The most optimistic national estimates show Russia’s population falling to 136 million in 2020, down from 141 million today. Life expectancy in Russia is among the lowest in the developed world: for



Russian honor guard soldiers stand at attention in front of posters touting some of the threatened elements of post-Soviet life: (clockwise from top left) life, health, happiness, family, and comfort.

OTHER NATIONS

Illusory Reform

THE SOURCES: "Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy: The Latin American Experience" by Francis Fukuyama, in *Journal of Democracy*, Oct. 2008, and "Freed From Illiteracy? A Closer Look at Venezuela's *Misión Robinson* Literacy Campaign" by Daniel Ortega and Francisco Rodríguez, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Oct. 2008.

NO BIGGER QUESTION OCCUPIES development economists than the lagging performance of Latin America, which has embraced economic and democratic reforms only to watch defiantly antireformist nations in other parts of the world race past. Chile alone stands in the regional economic winner's circle. Not only has its economy been growing robustly, it has also achieved substantial reductions in poverty, writes Francis Fukuyama, the noted political economist and a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

But what one economist has called the "birth defect" of inequality stubbornly characterizes most neighboring countries. These states generally started as colonies with economies built on the exploitation of natural resources that excluded large parts of their populations from economic gains and political power. This inequality was reproduced over hundreds of years as if it were imprinted on the regional DNA. Inequality delegitimizes the political system and triggers crises as groups fight for power and wealth, Fukuyama says. And when the poor begin to assume greater roles in politics, weak public institutions—courts, police, schools, hospitals—prove

men, officially 61 years; for women, between 72 and 73 years. In the Netherlands, by contrast, men and women typically live to be 77 and 82, respectively.

"Drugs and alcohol use, crime, illiteracy, and health problems—including HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C, psychological disturbances, and ailments related to muscular-skeletal structures and central nervous systems—are increasing markedly," Feshbach reports.

An unusual child health census in 2002 showed that prenatal problems were rampant within the generation now approaching the prime conscript ages of 18 to 27. Only 30 percent of children are born healthy, Russian statistics show, with half lacking sufficient iodine or calcium during gestation—deficiencies that can lead to mental retardation and weak bones. Tuberculosis nearly quadrupled in the 15-to-17-year-old age group between 1989 and 2002. Mental disorders almost doubled in the decade before 2002 among the same cohort, and alcoholism went up by nearly a third in two years. Even cases of cancer and cerebral palsy increased dramatically.

Life expectancy, birth and death rates, labor productivity, and reproductive and child health reflect the health status of the population, and that status is not good. For some groups within Russia, it is distinctly worsening, a situation the government was late to recognize. Russia, Feshbach concludes, has "a huge military arsenal and major ambitions—but very low human potential to realize these ambitions."

inadequate, fueling cynicism.

Policies to level the playing field such as investments in universal education and health care have barely mitigated economic disparities in many parts of Latin America.

The difficulties in improving education illuminate the challenges facing the region, according to Fukuyama. Increasingly unable to compete against Asia in low-skilled manufacturing, the Latin American nations need to produce highly educated workers who can succeed in the globalized economy. Many governments in the region have poured money into education, but without achieving the commensurate societal gains that have occurred in places such as South Korea and Taiwan.

Even small pockets of success in Latin America can turn out to be illusions.

Even what seem to be small pockets of success in Latin America can turn out to be illusions. Venezuela recently won international acclaim for a massive effort to teach hundreds of thousands of illiterate adults to read and write. In 2005, Venezuela announced it had become an "illiteracy-free territory," write economists Daniel Ortega (no relation to the Nicaraguan politician of the same name), of the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración in Caracas, and Francisco Rodríguez, of Wesleyan University. Such an achievement would be revolutionary because big adult literacy programs rarely work.

But Ortega and Rodríguez

analyzed the official Venezuelan Household Survey, which asks representative households whether each member knows how to read and write. This self-reported data showed that between 2003, before the program began, and 2005, after it ended, the illiteracy rate indeed dropped, but only from 6.5 percent to 5.6 percent, leaving more than a million Venezuelans still illiterate.

The drop was in line with a long-run increase in literacy in Venezuela. The effect of the much touted literacy campaign, the two economists say, essentially amounted to “precisely estimated zeroes.”

OTHER NATIONS

Headscarf Politics

THE SOURCE: “Secularism, State Policies, and Muslims in Europe: Analyzing French Exceptionalism” by Ahmet T. Kuru, in *Comparative Politics*, Oct. 2008.

ALONE OF THE MAJOR COUNTRIES in Europe, France has passed legislation prohibiting students from wearing headscarves in school. The ban, which affects fewer than 1,500 students, has cost the French government time, money, and international credibility, writes Ahmet T. Kuru, a political scientist at San Diego State University. Why would France waste resources on such an economically and politically marginal issue?

The answer, he submits, goes back to the French Revolution of 1789 and the long period thereafter when the nation veered between secular republicanism and Catholic monarchy. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, tens of thousands of clerics fled the country or were imprisoned. Church lands were expropriated, and

about 3,000 priests were guillotined. Later, education became the battleground in what was called the “war of two Frances.” About 15,000 Catholic schools were closed, and tens of thousands of clerical teachers lost their jobs. As the 20th century began, three factors helped the secularists: the disorganization of Catholics, republican electoral gains, and the Dreyfus scandal (1894–1906), in which a young Jewish military officer was wrongly convicted of treason with the help of a forged document as army leaders sought to preserve the traditional social order. In 1905, the Catholic Church was legally severed from the French state.

The long battle to dislodge religion from its official role forged a “combative secularism” that continues today. In 2004, combative secularists in the National Assembly and Senate, who are generally leftists, joined with right-leaning opponents of immigration to pass a headscarf ban by a vote of 770 to 56. The “pluralistic secularist” opposition was routed.

France has more Muslim immigrants than other European countries: about 4.5 million, compared with about 3.3 million in Germany. But Muslims are no more religiously observant than other French people. About five percent attend mosque weekly, and 10 to 12 percent consider themselves observant. About 10 percent of French Christians attend church weekly, according to Kuru. Muslims are virtually powerless in the French parliament, holding only two of 908 seats in the Senate and Assembly. Islamic immigrants were divided on the headscarf issue, and opposition to the ban was led by a small band of non-Muslims.

Anti-immigrant and anti-headscarf sentiment flourishes in many countries in Europe, but the closest that any country has come to the French path is a prohibition on headscarves for teachers in six of the 16 German states. France succeeded in its strict policy because new anti-Muslim sentiment was able to piggyback on an ancient French tradition of militant anti-clericalism.



Lady Liberté, the symbol of the French Revolution, is depicted as blind to the freedom of Muslim women.

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Ayesha Siddiqi on
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Allison Herling
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Ruth Levy Guyer
on the history of
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CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

True North

Reviewed by David J. Garrow

MOST HISTORIES OF THE AMERICAN black freedom struggle focus, unsurprisingly, on the events of the 1950s and '60s that ended legally authorized racial segregation across the South. But overt racial discrimination—and, indeed, some forms of out-and-out segregation—also existed in the North, where African Americans resisted second-class treatment long before *Brown v. Board of Education* sounded legal segregation's death knell in 1954.

Sweet Land of Liberty is an intentionally ironic title for a political history that surveys efforts to improve black northerners' lives from the 1930s through the '90s. Thomas J. Sugrue, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania, apologizes in an endnote for "the enormous geographic and chronological scope of this book," but his rich and sprawling treatment often reads like a tale of just two cities—Detroit and Philadelphia—which he repeatedly places at the center of a complex story that ranges from the upper Midwest to New England.

Sugrue builds the first half of his history, covering the period before 1960, around what he sees as an ideological shift in the mid-1940s. Before the end of World War II,

he argues, most northern civil rights proponents—many of whom, black and white, came from the political Left—believed that African-American inequality was fundamentally an issue of economic power, "that class and race were intertwined, that jobs were necessary for freedom, that unionism was a prerequisite to civil rights." During World War II, those activists succeeded in significantly raising popular consciousness of racial discrimination as a political issue, largely because their efforts "coincided with the American battle against fascism abroad." Between 1940 and 1946, membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the premier civil rights group, rose from 50,000 to almost 450,000. Meanwhile, wartime industrial employment needs and the availability of good jobs stimulated black migration to the North. Between 1940 and 1945, Detroit's auto industry workforce shifted from three percent black to 15 percent, and by 1946 more than one-third of Detroit municipal workers were black.

**SWEET LAND OF
LIBERTY:**
The Forgotten
Struggle for Civil
Rights in the North.

By Thomas J. Sugrue.
Random House.
688 pp. \$35

In 1944, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal published his hugely influential study *An American Dilemma*, in which he argued that racism so contradicted the nation's basic creed as to leave whites highly susceptible to moral suasion that racist practices were downright un-American. Sugrue says that Myrdal's analysis "would wholly reshape the postwar struggle for racial equality in the North" because of its argument that "individual psychological or emotional deficiencies" were

Open housing succeeded only in allowing a handful of blacks to move into white suburbs. It did not break down the inner-city ghettos.

the crux of the problem, and because it indicated a clear optimism that equality could be attained through widespread personal transformations.

To the lawyers who litigated *Brown* and to the Supreme Court justices who cited Myrdal to support their ruling against racial segregation, *An American Dilemma* was a landmark in the national struggle for black equality. But Sugrue believes that changing the focus from black economic advancement to whites' "hearts and minds" actually harmed African Americans' real interests, especially when schools and housing—the North's epicenters of racial inequality—took center stage in the early 1960s.

What Sugrue terms "the poisonous link between housing segregation and school segregation" furnishes a central thread for his post-1960 story. In major metropolitan areas, "northern public schools were nearly as segregated as those in the South," notwithstanding the absence of written laws or racially explicit policies. In 1961 the NAACP proclaimed that "schools segregated in fact are as harmful to our youth as are schools segregated by law," but in the North the roots of the problem lay in "the ostensibly race-neutral concept of neighborhood schools" and the extent to which housing practices concentrated citizens in racially homogenous neighborhoods.

None of *Brown*'s participants had considered how the case would affect northern schools. The

large-scale postwar development of suburbia moved millions of whites beyond big-city boundaries, and while that migration opened older neighborhoods to new black residents, efforts to improve inferior, all-black schools quickly demonstrated that "what constituted a neighborhood was ultimately a matter of politics" rather than of demarcations such as topography: Administrators quietly "gerrymandered" school attendance zones to preserve segregation.

Sugrue writes that "the battle against housing discrimination . . . was perhaps the most consequential of the entire northern freedom struggle," and indeed "would ultimately be one for the hearts and minds of white Americans." But he uses Myrdal's formulation only to assert its failure, for in his eyes the efforts to open white suburbs to black families "proved to be one of the great failures of postwar racial liberalism." Open housing succeeded only in allowing "a handful of middle-class and wealthy blacks" to move into white suburbs; it did not break down the inner-city ghettos in which many lower-income black families remained trapped. "Choice was a white freedom," Sugrue incisively observes. "In 1970, northern cities remained nearly as segregated by race as they had been in 1940." In the roughly two decades following, "rates of housing segregation rose in most of the North."

Sugrue acknowledges that as early as 1963, polling data showed that "white racial attitudes had improved to an extent that seemed to bear out Gunnar Myrdal's optimistic predictions," but he forcefully insists that the change in attitudes "was not accompanied by a shift in behavior," an assertion supported by the demographic data of the time. With federal courts, and eventually the Supreme Court in 1974, holding that school district boundaries could not be swept aside to integrate students, absent evidence that those boundaries had been adopted with segregative intent, suburban whites were exempted from any responsibility to personally assist black advancement.

Sugrue uses this material to state his underlying



Before the civil rights era, segregation wasn't confined to the South: In a 1944 NAACP parade, Detroit marchers make a dramatic statement.

ing argument in its bluntest form: “The problem of housing segregation was one of political and economic power, of coercion, not choice, personal attitudes, or individual morality.” As most readers will recognize, that conclusion does not necessarily follow from the history Sugrue accurately recites, a tension that is most obvious when he rightly and repeatedly highlights how crucial the racist behavior of many white real estate agents and mortgage bankers is today in denying African Americans free and equal access to homes in predominantly white neighborhoods.

The emergence of “black power” rhetoric and black separatist ideologies in the mid- and late 1960s aided black America no more than Myrdal’s moral suasion analysis had, Sugrue argues. “A staggering array of new organizations” appeared on the northern urban scene during these years, but almost without exception they

were “intensely local” in focus, and “even at their peak of influence, they did not constitute anything resembling a coherent movement.” Such groups, Sugrue asserts, were just “a series of impulses” stemming from a desire to repudiate liberal integrationism.

One grassroots organization that did attain widespread visibility in many urban areas by the end of the 1960s was the now little-remembered welfare rights movement, whose advocates—mostly black women—sought to preserve and expand assistance targeted to the poor, primarily through the Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Sugrue frankly confesses his uncertainty over how to evaluate the movement’s impact, though he notes that black poverty rates in the North fell sharply during the 1960s as welfare rolls expanded. Poverty rates held firm in the three decades after 1970, while

welfare benefits cumulatively declined: Adjusting for inflation, “median AFDC payments in 1992 were 43 percent lower than they were in 1970,” as interest in the war on poverty evaporated from the public agenda.

Sweet Land of Liberty deals with black employment far more sure-handedly. Between the late 1940s and the late '60s, cities such as Detroit and New York lost hundreds of thousands of blue-collar manufacturing jobs, and “over the course of the 1960s, government became the single most important employer of African Americans in northern cities.” Thus, “government became the most important vehicle for the expansion of the black middle class,” and by 1995 “more than half of all black professionals worked in the public sector.”

Blacks' concentration in the public sector

may be a more mixed state of affairs than Sugrue acknowledges, but he rightly emphasizes that in the North, as in the South, “the growth of the black middle class is the most obvious result of the civil rights movement.” Sugrue gives significantly less attention to the rise of black electoral politics in the North than many other historians do, and that too may be the result of his overarching belief that economic power is more important than moral claims, cultural innovations, or election results. *Sweet Land of Liberty* is a richly detailed tome, but many readers may wish Thomas Sugrue had drawn a clearer road map through his own urban sprawl.

DAVID J. GARROW, a senior fellow at Homerton College, University of Cambridge, is the author of *Bearing the Cross* (1987), a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King Jr.

First Man of Letters

Reviewed by Brooke Allen

FOR ELEGANCE, INVENTION, AND MELIFLUENCE, the English language is usually considered to have reached its apogee during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. But there is a case to be made for the 18th-century Augustan age, with the great critic, poet, philologist, and journalist Samuel Johnson as its brightest star. Observing Johnson in conversation with Edmund Burke, the young novelist Fanny Burney opined that for sheer brilliance Burke was “the second man in this Kingdom,” but that Johnson was “the first of every kingdom.” Praise indeed, for along with Burke, the most dazzling politician of the age, Johnson’s close social circle included Edward Gibbon (whose *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* achieved a sustained perfection in prose that has perhaps never been matched), Oliver Goldsmith, Adam Smith, Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the great naturalist Joseph Banks, the portraitist Sir

Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick (the Olivier of his day), and the irrepressibly naughty and amusing young James Boswell, who would one day write *The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.*

In retrospect, it is easy to see Johnson standing as a sort of dividing line between the distant past and our own era.

While he identified himself as a Tory and saw himself as a conservative and upholder of tradition, this was true only in the most limited sense. He was passionately anti-militarist and anti-imperialist, and (unusually, for his time) deplored his country’s foreign adventures and the oppression of native peoples throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas. He was just as passionate in opposing slavery. He spoke out loudly

SAMUEL JOHNSON: A Biography.

By Peter Martin.
Belknap/Harvard Univ.
Press. 608 pp. \$35

SAMUEL JOHNSON: The Struggle.

By Jeffrey Meyers.
Basic. 528 pp. \$35

against the political suppression of Catholics in the British Isles. His essay advocating the humane treatment of prisoners of war during the wars against the French was so powerful that the International Red Cross saw fit to reprint it in the mid-20th century. He protested against vivisection of animals for scientific research, which he considered as immoral as the torture of human beings. Most significantly, he commiserated deeply with the poor, whose unhappy lives he ascribed to social conditions rather than their own vices. "A decent provision for the poor," he wrote, "is the true test of civilization."

Intellectually, too, Johnson pointed toward a new sensibility. His *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) marked a revolution in English letters by being descriptive rather than prescriptive: In other words, he gave up on the project of creating a dictionary that would purify the unruly language by fixing meanings and pronunciations (as the Académie Française had recently attempted across the Channel) in favor of simply describing the state of English as it was spoken at that time and had been in the past. His philosophy and achievement cleared the path for the *Oxford English Dictionary* begun a century later. "Language," Johnson wrote, "is the work of man, of a being from whom permanence and stability cannot be derived." Of words, he said that "like their author, when they are not gaining strength, they are generally losing it. Though art may sometimes prolong their duration, it will rarely give them perpetuity."

Boswell's *Life of Johnson* appeared in 1791, six years after the great man's death. Being one of the most enchanting writers who ever lived, Boswell succeeded in creating an image of Johnson that has so far proved impossible to dislodge from the public imagination, that of the clubman, the wit, the doughty champion of tradition, the truculent, bullying conversationalist who "tossed and gored" his interlocutors with impunity. All these aspects of Johnson are real enough, but they are only part of the picture, and probably not the largest part. In any case, Boswell's account is heavily weighted toward the

last 20 years of his subject's life—the years, in other words, of the two men's friendship. Only one-fifth of the text is devoted to Johnson's first 55 years. These defects have now been compensated for in two new biographies, written in time to celebrate the tricentennial of Johnson's birth: an English one by Peter Martin, and an American one by Jeffrey Meyers.

As far as quality and depth go, there is not any real competition between the two. Martin has spent a lifetime steeped in Johnson's world, having written definitive biographies of Boswell and of Edmond Malone, the Irish Shakespearean scholar without whose help the unstable Boswell might never have finished his massive biography. Meyers is a prolific and facile writer who has produced a range of biographies so large and varied—works on Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, F. Scott Fitzgerald, George Orwell, Amedeo Modigliani, W. Somerset Maugham, Errol Flynn, Gary Cooper, Humphrey Bogart, Edgar Allan Poe, Edmund Wilson, and many more—as to preclude a deep knowledge of any one area of study. If it were necessary to choose between the two, Martin's would be the book to read. Nevertheless, they are both interesting, and both succeed in filling in the very substantial gaps in Boswell's account.

As Martin points out, the *Life of Johnson* "presents a man essentially at peace in his own mind. Boswell did not want his portrait to be of a man wracked with self-doubt, guilt, fear, and depression. He rarely cited from Johnson's writings, did not make sensational use of Johnson's diary extracts to which he had access, and was not privy to his friend's deepest secrets and worries." The diaries (or at least what remained of them after Johnson made a huge bonfire of his private papers shortly before his death) and his surviving prayers and meditations portray a man "poised dangerously between control and madness, between doubt, fear, and faith, tormented by the dread of loneliness and death and lacerated by physical as well as mental sickness." A severe depressive, Johnson occasionally toyed with the idea of writing an account of his "melan-

cholia." It's a pity he did not, for then we might have had an addition to the literature on the subject as valuable as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) or William Styron's *Darkness Visible* (1990).

A depressed Johnson was not the father figure that Boswell, himself prey to crippling bouts of melancholia and insecurity, wanted to celebrate. Another side of Johnson he chose to suppress was his sexuality, a subject explored by Martin and especially by the more prurient Meyers. Everyone knows Johnson's much-quoted line about his idea of contentment being to "spend my life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman," but few will know the answer he gave to Garrick (here provided by Meyers) when asked what activity gave the greatest pleasure in life. The first pleasure, he said, was "fucking & the second was drinking. And therefore he wondered why there were not more drunkards, for all could drink tho' all could not fuck."

Meyers devotes considerable space to evidence for what he calls Johnson's "secret life": a sexual desire to be locked up and physically disciplined, activities that Meyers, on the basis of scholarship by Katharine Balderston and others, believes Johnson and his friend Mrs. Hester Thrale engaged in. Martin pooh-poohs the notion, but the citations Meyers provides from Johnson's correspondence with Mrs. Thrale do seem too suggestive for mere coincidence. And in any case, why shouldn't Johnson have his sexual peculiarities just like anyone else? The real question is just what, if anything, this knowledge adds to our understanding of the man and his work. Meyers claims that "Johnson's secret life adds to rather than detracts from his greatness. It makes his character more complex and tormented, his struggle more extreme, his achievement more impressive."

There is a certain truth in this, however self-justifying it might seem coming from Meyers. Johnson was on record as believing that "to strive with difficulties and to conquer them, is the high-

est human felicity." If this is true, then Johnson more than earned whatever felicity he attained, for the difficulties he encountered on his upward path were considerable. He was poor, obscure, and largely self-educated. Struck by scrofula shortly after his birth in 1709, he lost much of his eyesight and went through life half-blind, having to read by pressing his face to the page. He suffered from violent physical tics that have been posthumously attributed to Tourette syndrome.

Though highly sexed, he was not attractive to women. His 17-year marriage, to a woman two decades his senior, was not a passionate one, and many women found his appearance quite grotesque. Fanny Burney wrote, "his mouth is continually opening and shutting, as if he were chewing something; he has a singular method of twirling his fingers, and twisting his hands: his vast body is in constant agitation, seesawing backwards and forwards: his feet are never a moment quiet; and his whole great person looked often as if it were going to roll itself, quite voluntarily, from his chair to the floor." "When he walked," Boswell observed with his usual genius for the apt image, "it was like the struggling gait of one in fetters."

Johnson was not only the first English literary celebrity, in the modern sense of the word, but one of the first professional men of letters. Lord Chesterfield had originally proposed to stand patron to the *Dictionary*; in the event, he contributed a mere £10 to the effort as against Johnson's seven years of unremitting labor and poverty, then tried to claim some credit for the final product. Johnson's famous snubbing letter to Chesterfield, which Boswell published in 1790 for all the world to read, was described by one critic as "the Magna Carta of the modern author, the public announcement that the days of courtly letters were at last ended." "Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help?" Johnson asked pointedly. ". . . I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligation where no

benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.”

As a character, Johnson turns out to be not only funny and wildly eccentric—as we always knew he was—but deeply poignant. I was moved to tears by Martin’s biography, as I also was by his beautiful life of Boswell. But neither Martin’s book nor Meyers’s answers the fundamental question of just how important Johnson’s writing (as opposed to his famous witty remarks) will continue to be to 21st-century readers. Johnson’s edition of Shakespeare and its introduction, as well as his *Lives of the Poets*, were turning points in literary criticism, vastly important to scholars but not much read nowadays, and the same applies even to the great *Dictionary*. His poems *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* live on under almost purely academic auspices.

His essays, however, particularly those he wrote under the alias of “The Rambler,” in a pamphlet series of the same name he published twice a week from 1750 to 1752, deserve to be brought back into the literary mainstream. Meyers is correct to emphasize the influence Johnson exerted

on Jane Austen, two generations younger than he. Like countless readers of the 18th and 19th centuries, Austen was steeped in Johnsonian principles imbibed through his essays, and each of her novels can be seen as a working out, in imaginative terms, of themes explored in *The Rambler*. Sometimes it is nearly impossible to differentiate one author from the other, as in this excerpt from *Rambler* 172: “It is certain that success naturally confirms us in a favorable opinion of our own abilities. Scarce any man is willing to allot to accident, friendship, and a thousand causes which concur in every event without human contrivance or interposition, the part which they may justly claim in his advancement. We rate ourselves by our fortune rather than our virtues, and exorbitant claims are quickly produced by imaginary merit.” As guides to the kind of questions that were troubling thoughtful men and women then—and now—Johnson’s reflections can hardly be equaled.

BROOKE ALLEN’s most recent book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (2006). Her work appears in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New Criterion*, and *The Nation*, among other publications, and she was named a finalist for the 2007 Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing from the National Book Critics Circle.

Captain America

Reviewed by Max Byrd

THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT HERMAN Melville modeled his Captain Ahab after the perpetually furious, sublimely obsessive seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson.

It is an easy association to make—Ahab, the man of “fixed purpose” and an “iron soul,” Jackson the “Iron President,” as his contemporaries called him, not only for his triumph over physical infirmities (he was probably the only president to endorse a patent medicine), but also for what one eulogist described, without irony, as his “amazing inflexibility of will.”

Ahab was stark, staring mad, of course, hurling defiance at the Almighty and the Whale, imagining the day his own head would turn slowly to solid metal, a “steel skull . . . that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight.” In Jackson’s case, though plenty of his enemies thought him crazed and even insane, those closer to him suspected that underneath his ferocious glare and temper Old Hickory was a calculating politician, fully rational and in control.

AMERICAN LION:
Andrew Jackson in
the White House.

By Jon Meacham.
Random House.
483 pp. \$30



Andrew Jackson, ca. 1845

Jon Meacham is something of a connoisseur of contradictions. A native of Tennessee who resides in New York City, a working journalist with a scholarly bent, he has written extensively in *Newsweek*—where he is the editor—on the tension between faith and reason in American life. He is also the author of an elegant and sensitive study of the friendship between the cool, secretive Franklin Roosevelt and his mighty opposite, the warm, transparent Winston Churchill.

It is no surprise, then, that his book about Andrew Jackson's years in the White House should stress the antithetical quality of Jackson's personality. "Commanding, shrewd, intuitive yet not especially articulate, alternately bad-tempered

and well-mannered," Meacham writes in his prologue, Jackson "could seem savage, yet he moved in sophisticated circles with skill and grace." More than one of his contemporaries had an experience like that of the New Orleans hostess who dreaded inviting the "wild man of the woods" for dinner, yet afterward found her guests breathless with admiration: "Is this your backwoodsman? He is a prince!"

He is a prince, Meacham makes clear, who began as a pauper. The first chapter of *American Lion* provides a concise account of Jackson's wretched early life in the Carolinas after his birth in 1767, beginning with the deaths of his parents and his two brothers and his cruel boyhood service against the British in the Revolution. A few more pages take up his move to Tennessee, his fiery courtship of Rachel Donelson (separated but not yet divorced from her first husband), his duels, his Indian wars, his glorious victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.

But Meacham is eager to get to the presidency and what he sees as Jackson's permanent transformation of that office. After a journalist's appreciative glance at the so-called Corrupt Bargain of the 1824 election, when John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay apparently collaborated in secret to defeat the Tennessean, he begins his narrative proper with Jackson's revenge on Adams and his triumphant election in 1828.

If, as is sometimes said, Thomas Jefferson was the great theoretician of democracy, envisioning a smiling republic of sober, learned farmers like himself, Andrew Jackson, storming like a comet out of the west, was the great coarse, brawling, unlettered reality. Even as Adams's carriage was rolling sullenly north toward Boston, Jackson's rampageous followers, in what Meacham calls a "legendary scene in American history," were crowding by the hundreds into the president's mansion for a chaotic victory celebration, quite literally trashing the White House. The "*Majesty of the People*," wrote the horrified Jeffersonian Margaret Bayard Smith, "had disappeared, and a rabble, a mob of boys, negroes, women, children,

scrambling, fighting, romping” had taken its place.

Meacham is clearly fascinated and moved by what the French call the grand lines of history—here the violent, torrential expansion of democracy in the early 19th century, the nearly apocalyptic clash of vision and social classes that would soon bring the Union to the brink of permanent dissolution. He has a gift for clarity and the telling quotation, and he does a wonderful job of breathing life into his long-silent actors. But first he must rehearse, like all students of Jackson’s administrations, that most curious of presidential scandals, the Eaton Affair.

Rachel Jackson died shortly before Jackson took office, driven to her grave, so he believed, by slander and gossip about her first marriage and divorce. When his secretary of war, John Eaton, married the former barmaid Margaret O’Neale, many in Washington, including Jackson’s own niece and nephew, thought that in the past Margaret had been (in the curious Victorian phrase) no better than she should be, and they treated her with a disruptive coolness. Jackson, however, saw only another slandered woman (“She is as chaste as a virgin!”), and official Washington quickly divided into Puritans and Cavaliers. Then, for more than two years the wheels of government rocked back and forth, so mired in rumor and ill will that some cabinet members and their wives refused to speak to each other. Hard as it is to picture now, social and political gatherings at the White House were conducted—or dissolved—in an atmosphere of paralyzing rectitude and disdain. In April 1831 all but one of Jackson’s cabinet resigned in frustration, and suddenly, as Martin Van Buren put it, “the Eaton malaria” was past.

From this point on, Meacham’s narrative builds in tension and speed. He is particularly good on the ominous battle between South and North over tariffs, a prelude to civil war marked by South Carolina’s shrill and repeated threats of secession. (South Carolina, the anti-secessionist lawyer James Petigru once mused, was “too small for a republic, and too large for a lunatic asylum.”) He lays out with saintly clarity the intricacies of Jackson’s long populist struggle to reduce the

power of the United States Bank and its president, Nicholas Biddle. And he writes with compassion and anger—and a baffled sense of paradox—about Jackson’s decision to forcibly remove Cherokees and other Indians from their homes in the South to reservations west of the Mississippi, which resulted in the infamous “Trail of Tears”: Jackson “could be both unspeakably violent toward Indians and decidedly generous.” But Meacham comes very late to a discussion of Jackson’s chilling view of slavery, noting perhaps too judiciously that the president was “blinded by the prejudices of his age” (there was no shortage of abolitionist voices in Jackson’s America). In 1837, at age 69, unapologetic and as combative as ever, Jackson left the White House, to be succeeded by Van Buren.

Biographer Jon Meacham sums up Andrew Jackson’s antithetical personality: “commanding, shrewd, intuitive yet not especially articulate, alternately bad-tempered and well-mannered.”

As a running counterpoint to politics, Meacham draws an intimate picture of the ever-shifting, ever-dramatic Jackson household, both in Washington and back in Tennessee. In particular, Jackson’s niece Emily Donelson, official hostess for many of his White House years, emerges as an utterly charming if ultimately tragic figure. A foreign diplomat compliments her dancing with undiplomatic condescension: “I can hardly realize you were educated in Tennessee.” To which, according to the story, Emily smoothly replies: “Count, you forget that grace is a cosmopolite, and like a wild flower is much oftener found in the woods than in the streets of a city.” She died of tuberculosis in Nashville in 1836 at the age of 29, with neither her husband nor her uncle present.

Few readers will disagree with Meacham’s central premise, familiar to scholars, that Jackson “expanded the powers of the presidency in ways that none of his six predecessors had.” He is thinking of Jackson’s bold use of the veto and his

unblinking assertion that the president was elected by all the people, not just the states, and therefore had priority over Congress—a clear reversal of the Founders' ideas. He is also thinking of Jackson's direct appeals to the people through newspapers (the "media" of 1828), his extensive and private circle of advisers known as the "Kitchen Cabinet," his melodramatic and compelling personality.

A surprising number of Jacksonian issues are with us today—the recklessness and arrogance of bankers, the rise of the evangelical Right—but none more central and important than the expansion of presidential power year after year, and the parallel dwindling away of Congress to a series of transoms through which lobbyists submit their bids. Jackson's expansion of executive power was much admired by later presidents, particularly the two Roosevelts and Truman, and Meacham is surely right that most of it is irreversible. But though he tries to view this development calmly, even philosophically, the distance between iron will and tyranny is not easy to measure. "The Bank . . . is trying to kill me," Jackson once cried out in rage, "but I will kill it."

Apart from some material on the Donelson family, little here is new, but everything is so carefully and brilliantly set out for the general reader that Meacham's book should now become the biography of choice. He concludes with Jackson's retirement to Nashville and his late conversion to church membership just before his death in 1845. An epilogue on the famous equestrian statue of Jackson across from the White House offers a warm and reassuring image of the old hero as a strong-willed but loving father to his people.

Some readers will see the image differently, however. It is also possible to imagine from the evidence that Jackson's character was less benign, founded on a dangerous core of anger that never went out and fueled by an inexhaustible ambition to dominate and control. If he was often compared by his contemporaries to Napoleon, it was not solely because of military ability. If he was like Ahab in his astonishing, mesmerizing energy and force of will, it is well to recall that in the end Ahab's ship and all its men, save Ishmael, perished.

MAX BYRD is the author of the historical novels *Jackson* (1997), *Jefferson* (1993), *Grant* (2000), and *Shooting the Sun* (2004).

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

Marching Orders

Reviewed by Ayesha Siddiqi

IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON terror, no country looms larger than Pakistan, and in Pakistan, no institution looms larger than the army. The dominant force in Pakistan's political life, it also has a profound regional influence through its never-ending confrontation with India and its tangled relationships with the Islamist militants it is pledged to oppose both at home and in Afghanistan and India.

Books on Pakistan's politics and military gener-

CROSSED SWORDS:

Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within.

By Shuja Nawaz.
Oxford Univ. Press.
655 pp. \$34.95

ally do one of three things: (a) justify the military's presence at the helm of the country's affairs, (b) hold the military responsible for manipulating the state, or (c) link military intervention with structural flaws in the nation's political system. Shuja Nawaz, a journalist and political consultant who has followed the country's military for the past three decades, has written a book in the first category. In *Crossed Swords*, he uses historical evidence and rich details, some not available before—including information about the ethnic backgrounds of the officer cadre and kickbacks military officials have siphoned to various politicians—to explain the armed forces' consistent intervention in affairs of state.

Writing primarily for a Western audience, Nawaz presents Pakistan's army as a secular and

professional institution that has been in power, either directly or indirectly, for half of the country's 61 years of existence. Even when the military does not hold the reins, it plays a major role in power politics. The threat from India—Pakistan's paramount concern since the violent division of the subcontinent into these two states in 1947—and the weakness of Pakistan's civil and political institutions allowed the army to dominate national resources and create a role for itself as a guardian of the state and its ideology.

Nawaz applauds Pakistan's first military dictator, Ayub Khan (1958–69), for developing the country politically and economically. And he praises the regime of his own brother, Asif Nawaz (1991–93)—who died in office under what the general's family charges were mysterious circumstances—along with that of Pervez Musharraf, who handed over power to a civilian last year after seven years in office. Nawaz appears critical of only two military regimes: Yahya Khan's (1969–71), which imposed authoritarian policies that led to civil war in 1971, and Ziaul Haq's (1977–88), which he criticizes for encouraging religiously conservative or extremist values in the military and the country at large.

While the incompetence of Pakistan's civilian politicians is incontrovertible, Nawaz's characterization of the army as a professional and secular organization is questionable. Can we describe a military engaged in a variety of political and economic roles as professional according to Western liberal democratic standards? Even its competence as a fighting force is debatable. Because of shoddy generalship, the military hasn't won a single war, and it has been guilty of adventurism, most recently in 1999, when General Musharraf sent militants and light infantry to occupy territory in the disputed Kargil region of Kashmir. The operation took place around the time of Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan, and reaction from Delhi was strong. Its military response, along with international pressure, forced Pakistan's army to withdraw. Musharraf still lauds the operation as a tactical success.

As early as the 1947–48 war with India over



Pakistani prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani awards officers and aviation cadets at a graduation ceremony in November.

Kashmir, when the military joined forces with tribal warriors, Pakistan's generals have used nonstate actors to achieve their goals. They conscripted jihadists to fight against Soviet troops in the U.S.-backed war in Afghanistan that began in 1979, and in the late 1980s they pursued their own ambitions in Afghanistan, which resulted in the creation of the Taliban. The Pakistani army maintains alliances with some of these militant elements to fight what it considers Indian-sponsored militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan's northwestern tribal areas. The Islamabad government is still upset by what it sees as a strong Indian influence in Kabul.

Like previous writers about the Pakistani army's links to militants (with the exception of Ambassador Husain Haqqani, in *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*), Nawaz fails to recognize that the centrality of jihadists to the Pakistani army's pragmatic strategy obliterates the distinctions between the thinking of secular generals and of those who are religiously motivated. Nawaz's book will prove helpful for scholars of Pakistan and its military, but it must be read with caution, for he does not grapple with the problems the military has created for itself and for the country.

AYESHA SIDDIQA was the Pakistan Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center during 2004–05. Her most recent book is *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (2007).

Deadly Networks

Reviewed by Allison Herling Ruark
and Daniel Halperin

IN *UNIMAGINED COMMUNITIES*, anthropologist Robert Thornton seeks to explain the sharply divergent trajectories of HIV infection in two African countries: Uganda, where new HIV infections plummeted in the late 1980s and 1990s, and South Africa, where they skyrocketed during the same period. Rather than approach this complex question in the usual epidemiological manner, Thornton argues that the structure of the epidemic has to do primarily with social meaning and culture. Sexual relationships, he says, place people within an invisible “unimagined community.” Because a sexual network links people not only to their own sexual partners but also to their partners’ partners, such networks can become what noted AIDS writer Helen Epstein has referred to as a “super-highway” for the spread of HIV.

Uganda has experienced the most dramatic decrease in HIV infection of any nation in the world. In the early 1990s, approximately 15 percent of the adult population was infected; today, that figure is only about six percent. Thornton argues, as have many others, that the nation’s political leadership and the openness and collective action of Ugandans themselves were important factors in the decline of this deadly epidemic. Ugandans treated HIV as a “normal illness,” established a “native category” for it (naming it “slim”), and used existing cultural structures such as religious institutions and traditional healers to respond to the threat. Uganda’s now famous “zero grazing” slogan was an unmistakable message to keep sex within the home, and helped reduce the extramarital sexual partnerships that had pushed infection to very high levels.

In contrast, South Africa’s response to its AIDS crisis is widely recognized as disastrous. At least one in six of all HIV-positive people in the world

UNIMAGINED COMMUNITIES.

By Robert Thornton.
Univ. of California
Press. 304 pp.
\$60, \$24.95 paper

live in this country of some 48 million. Many South Africans saw AIDS as an invention of the racist West and responded to it with stigma, denial, and obfuscation. Instead of treating AIDS as a communicable disease (and providing treatment), the South African government typically labeled it a social problem, the product of poverty and disenfranchisement. This attitude inhibited frank discussion of the sexual behaviors that spread the disease. While South Africa is awash in information about HIV, this knowledge has done little to transform sexual behaviors in ways that would slow the spread of the virus.

Thornton is most persuasive when describing how these two very different sociocultural environments determined the spread of HIV in Uganda and South Africa. While the role of sexual networks in spreading HIV is well understood, the public-health community often gives insufficient attention to the cultural meanings and motivations behind sexual behaviors. Thornton situates his discussions of the HIV epidemic within sexual culture, political climates, land rights, kinship and marriage customs, patterns of travel and migration, and the epistemology and meaning of sex and disease. For example, he argues that in Uganda kin groups have significant power to control sexual behavior and sexual access (such as through marriage) among their members, who depend for their livelihood on land controlled by the kin group. In contrast, most South Africans live in urban areas, few own or inherit land, and kin groups are weak and exert little influence.

Yet Thornton is clearly out of his depth when he attempts to describe the epidemiology of sexual networks, a subject on which sophisticated modeling and research are being brought to bear, and his rejection of seminal studies on the decline of HIV in Uganda is puzzling and misguided. He fails to emphasize the well-established fact that sexual behaviors *did* change significantly in Uganda, and have *not* in South Africa.

In addition to numerous publications that have documented sexual behavior changes in Uganda, as early as 2003 a study for the U.S.

Agency for International Development, coauthored by one of the writers of this review (Halperin), emphasized the role that reductions in the number of sexual partners had in the decline in Uganda's HIV infection rate. (Oddly, Thornton describes the impetus for this report as a "hidden agenda" to push abstinence.) In contrast, recent national surveys suggest an increase in the proportion of South African men having multiple partners. Thornton's assertion that "sexual behavior has changed by similar amounts in both countries" is bizarrely incorrect.

Certainly, sexual behaviors are rooted in complex relationships, motives, and forces that extend beyond the individual. Yet the prescription for reducing the sexual transmission of HIV in these epidemics is clear: Sexual networks must be broken up, primarily through reductions in number of sexual partners. The declines in HIV infection not only in Uganda but also more recently in countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Malawi suggest that it is possible to promote such changes successfully. In fact, when Thornton proposes a "new approach to prevention" in the final pages of the book, he stresses the need to reduce the number of sexual partners. While hardly novel, this recommendation may be the most valuable message of his book.

ALLISON HERLING RUARK is a research fellow at the AIDS Prevention Research Project at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies. DANIEL HALPERIN is a lecturer on global health and a senior research scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health, and has written on HIV/AIDS and other global health issues for peer-reviewed journals including *The Lancet*, *AIDS*, and *Science*.

HISTORY

Why the Sun Finally Set

Reviewed by William Anthony Hay

ROME CAST A LONG SHADOW over the Western imagination. The British in particular saw themselves as Rome's spiritual heirs and named the cultural flourishing of the early 18th

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, 1781–1997.

By Piers Brendon.
Knopf, 786 pp. \$37.50

century an Augustan age, after the emperor who found Rome built in brick and left it in marble. Conflicts within the English-speaking Atlantic world that formed the basis of Britain's first empire climaxed in the American Revolution, prompting darker reflections. Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) both express anxieties about the evanescence of power. Smith believed history proved that the costs of holding Britain's empire in America outweighed the benefits. Neither man anticipated the second British empire across Asia, Africa, and the Pacific that Piers Brendon chronicles. Gibbon's famous work offers a model for this account, and Brendon underlines the parallel between ancient and modern empires by stressing how British elites steeped in the classics looked to Rome for guidance.

The 1780s might seem an inauspicious moment from which to chart the revival of Britain's empire. British historian and parliamentarian Horace Walpole predicted that the next Augustan age would occur across the Atlantic, and European rulers saw a Britain shorn of its colonies as a second- or third-rate power. But Britain held Ireland, the Caribbean, and Canada, and its public finances proved far more resilient than those of its French rival. Brendon argues persuasively that the "pugnacious nationalism" sparked by the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France from 1793 to 1815 raised the British Empire to new heights. Control of sea-lanes and commerce secured by strategic chokepoints from Gibraltar to Cape Town and Singapore created parameters for a revived empire in the early 19th century.

As "an English barrack in the Oriental seas," India played a central part in consolidating British power in Asia in the 1790s. It served as a secure base and a source of manpower, and provided tax revenues and a captive market for

The wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France from 1793 to 1815 raised the British Empire to new heights.

British exports that more than made up for losing America. Britain's imposition of order and progress, which often meant Westernization, touched off a bloody uprising in 1857. Afterward, direct rule and paternalistic accommodation of native customs stabilized India. But Edmund Burke's earlier insistence that colonial government was a trust exercised for the governed became what Brendon calls an "ideological bacillus" that would prove fatal to empire once colonies educated to venerate British liberties grasped for their own independence.

The question of how a society committed to liberty could sustain an empire became inescapable, and Rome offered little guidance. Liberty as the ultimate solvent of empire gives Brendon a running theme. Policy toward settlement colonies focused on avoiding mistakes made earlier in America: Britain granted responsible government as soon as colonies proved themselves able to exercise it; its leaders now preferred trade over the burdens of governing distant territories and their turbulent populations. Guiding colonies to self-government worked in Australia and Canada, where emigrants filled largely empty lands, and even in New Zealand, where colonists, restrained by administrators, reached a *modus vivendi* with indigenous peoples.

Elsewhere, particularly in Africa, empire took a different turn as the old preference for trade gave way to opening territory for exploitation, and natives faced displacement or subjection. Rudyard Kipling ominously remarked of the Sudanese, to whom he believed British colonizers had brought "civilization," that "if you give any man anything that he has not painfully earned for himself, you infallibly make him or his descendants your devoted enemies."

Even before imperial sentiment peaked following Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897, Indian nationalism was rising and the Irish were agitating for home rule. Britain's empire reached its widest extent as a superpower between the world wars, but its weakness was apparent even before decolonization after World

War II through the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

Brendon dwells on the petty injustices of empire that alienated subject peoples, and his account emphasizes the decadence and inequality inherent to imperialism. One need not lapse into nostalgia to discern a more complex story. Harvard historian Niall Ferguson, among others, has noted that Britain brought peace, investment, and development, along with the suppression of horrific tyranny and injustice, to the lands it colonized. In many places, decolonization has produced failed states, low-level anarchy, and a wistfulness for imperial rule. Britain itself did not have to choose between empire and irrelevance, as Brendon suggests. Revival based upon a dynamic commercial economy, rather than decline, has been the British story of recent years. So Adam Smith may have been right about the burdens of empire after all.

WILLIAM ANTHONY HAY is an assistant professor of history at Mississippi State University and a senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia. He is the author of *The Whig Revival, 1808–1830* (2005).

Animal Power

Reviewed by Dick Courteau

HORSES AT WORK IS A sprawling account of two species sharing a common destiny. Expect no tight thesis, but it's the story that counts. Ann Norton Greene leads us on a

grand tour through the streets and roads, the railroads and waterways, the farms and factories, and the grisly battlefields of the 19th century. The core of her argument is that while steam engines were the backbone of the Industrial Revolution, they required, because of their limited mobility, millions of horses as a complementary power supply. Around this idea she weaves other strands: that energy use shapes landscapes—material, cultural, political, social—and that our energy sources and technologies are determined not just by inexorable material progress but by

HORSES AT WORK:
Harnessing Power in
Industrial America.

By Ann Norton Greene.
Harvard Univ. Press.
322 pp. \$29.95

our culture, our minds, as well.

About 1800, with industry rising, Americans were seeking a mobile power supply. The ox was popular, but America chose the horse, mainly for its speed and consequent versatility. Greene launches her narrative with a discussion of physiology and anatomy, and the physics of harnessing, which gets too technical for her purpose and contains puzzling and misleading explanations. Carry on, reader! She recovers, and conducts us through the landscape taking shape along the many arteries of the newly developing transportation system.

The bustle and hum must have been exciting: freight wagons pulled by teams of six or eight horses, traveling in groups of up to 30; eight thousand horses pulling passengers and freight along the 363-mile Erie Canal; a thousand weekly arrivals and departures by stagecoach in Philadelphia. In 1860, travelers going from

Washington, D.C., to New York City began by horse-drawn vehicle, transferred to a train, to a horse-drawn streetcar, to another train, to a horse-drawn vehicle again, to the ferry boat—and that only got them as far as the Susquehanna River!

The Civil War, “the first war of industrialized animal power,” brought a colossal need for horses. In 1861 alone, the Quartermaster Department purchased 194,000 horses and mules. Keeping the Union army supplied with equines, and hundreds of thousands of tons of forage and grain, and millions of iron horseshoes, fell to highly efficient Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs, a desk-bound soldier who lectured General William Rosecrans on the care and judicious use of horses and demonstrated to a complaining George McClellan, always tricky with the numbers, that he had received 10 times as many horses as he was reporting. The war



A team pulls a streetcar on a winter day in Harlem in 1892. In 1900, an average of nearly 500 horses powered each square mile of New York City.

ground up horses as it ground up men. One officer folded horses and men into the same casualty report.

Industry and industrialized agriculture could be hard on horses too. Especially grueling were the stationary units whose tramping horses turned the gears of power machines to do almost anything. “On the treadmill” was not a metaphor. Cities ran on horse power. In 1872, an epidemic of equine influenza brought Philadelphia to a standstill. They couldn’t even get beer to the saloons!

New York and Chicago each averaged nearly 500 horses *per square mile* by 1900; Milwaukee had 709, Richmond 615. Then the numbers began to collapse, quickly in the cities, much more slowly on the farms. As the millions of acres that once produced horse feed began producing surpluses, effects of the resulting depressed prices rippled through the economy. In 1933, the Census Bureau suggested the transition to automotive power as a main cause of the Great Depression.

Greene maintains that the abandonment of horses wasn’t inevitable. Objections to the ubiquitous manure, the greater privacy and independence provided by the automobile, humane considerations—these all played a part, but “the overriding objection [to horses] came from the discomfort of the visible, physical work of power production.” If the explanation for this most fundamental revolution in daily life can be reduced to so few words, then let me reduce it to fewer: man’s fatal attraction to the Machine.

Greene’s account is as much about the 19th-century cultural landscape as about horses. “Progress,” “civilization,” “prosperity,” become almost a chant, first linked to horses, then turning against them. Especially revealing is her discussion of animal breeding. Americans, in their ebullient new faith in controlling nature, were intent upon molding new horses for new purposes, but myth and prejudice pervaded all. Mules, for example, a hybrid between horses and donkeys that “straddled the border between what in the popular mind were two separate species,” were often discussed in “explicitly racial” terms. Americans “transformed horses,” Greene states,

hinting at radical genetic engineering, but ultimately all we know is that a few new specialized breeds emerged, and that horses got *much* bigger, the result of European imports.

As a lifelong horseman and teamster myself, I cannot but wish that Greene had avoided the technics, where she illuminates little, but this is a very small part of a vast scholarly work. As a historian, Greene has limited herself to the descriptive, but in her epilogue, falling out of—or perhaps into—character, she hesitantly suggests a future mixed-energy scene that might include horses. Why so timid?

DICK COURTEAU has been a teamster and horse trainer for more than half a century. His essay on horse power appeared in *Orion* in 2007. He lives in the Ozark Mountains of northwest Arkansas.

ARTS & LETTERS

Canon Fodder

Reviewed by Eric Liebetrau

SINCE AMERICA’S BIRTH, ITS writers have attempted to capture the essence of the American dream. Jay Parini, a prolific poet and novelist and one of the nation’s foremost literary scholars,

taps into that common project in *Promised Land*. Putting a welcome twist on the concept of the best-of list, he searches the landscape of American literature for works that “played a role in shaping the nation’s idea of itself.” Parini is quick to note that his choices aren’t necessarily the “greatest” books, but rather a handful of “nodal points, places where vast areas of thought and feeling gathered and dispersed, creating a nation as various and vibrant as the United States.”

Inspired by British journalist Melvyn Bragg’s 2006 lecture “Twelve Books That Changed the World”—all of them, ahem, English—Parini settled on a baker’s dozen of works (a nod to the original 13 colonies) that he believes “helped to create the intellectual and emotional contours of this country.” The choices cover a wide swath of literary traditions, ranging from a 17th-century journal to 20th-

PROMISED LAND:
Thirteen Books That
Changed America.

By Jay Parini.
Doubleday.
385 pp. \$24.95

century self-help volumes. (Perhaps anticipating the arguments sure to result from his choices, Parini includes a helpful appendix, “One Hundred More Books That Changed America.”)

He proceeds chronologically, and each book receives the same treatment: a short introduction and author biography, a close reading, and analysis of the work’s legacy. The approach is by nature formulaic, but it is also effective, and Parini’s erudition allows him to deftly maneuver among these classic works to highlight major themes of American life: immigration and assimilation; the struggle for religious and civic freedom; the capacity for self-transformation and personal betterment; the desire to “light out for the Territory,” as Huck Finn put it so well.”

Certain works also cluster together in their similarities. *Of Plymouth Plantation* (published in 1856), William Bradford’s chronicle of colonial life and possibly “America’s first immigration narrative,” is echoed in the Old Country/New Country dichotomies of Jewish émigré Mary Antin’s memoir *Promised Land* (1912). The tradition of nature and travel writing initiated by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in their *Journals* (1814) comes to bear on the meticulous detailing of wilderness living in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), as well as the acute observations of Mark Twain’s legendary narrator in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). The latter two works certainly had some effect on the unabashed celebration of freedom that is Jack Kerouac’s propulsive novel *On the Road* (1957).

A concern with freedom, in nearly every sense of the word, is the hallmark of all the authors Parini examines: Benjamin Franklin, whose emphasis on self-reliance in his *Autobiography* (1793) reflected a desire for autonomy and personal independence; Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, who in *The Federalist* (1787–88) sought to defend and explain the Constitution, the very embodiment of free democracy; and Harriet Beecher Stowe, creator of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), and W. E. B. Du Bois, the revolutionary author of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), who both wrote of the struggle to win freedom from slavery

and racism; Twain and Jack Kerouac, endlessly curious explorers on the road toward adventure; or Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and ambassador for second-wave feminism’s struggle to get women out of the house.

Though two of Parini’s picks—Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) and Benjamin Spock’s *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946)—may not excite students of literature, their practical, quotidian nature is not out of keeping with the other texts, all of which illuminate “a climate of opinion, consolidating a tradition or marking a fresh turn in a long and winding road.”

Parini’s professorial tendencies show only in the occasional passage of academic-speak. He describes *The Federalist*, for example, as “clear and crisp, yet highly nuanced, with extraordinary flexibility and a mature sense of subordination—a far cry from the monosyllabic, flat style (with a fear of subordinate clauses) so popular today, post-Hemingway.” Such circumlocutions may deter some readers, but *Promised Land* reminds us of the diversity and potency of American literature and its profound connection to the country’s history.

ERIC LIEBETRAU is the managing editor and nonfiction editor of *Kirkus Reviews*. His reviews have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, *Mother Jones*, and elsewhere.

Image Conscious

Reviewed by Grant Alden

IF YOU OWN A COMPUTER, YOU are—by default—a graphic designer. At your fingertips is software that makes it possible to design newsletters and invoices and bake sale posters, no formal training or special gifts required. Just as the do-it-yourself ethos of punk music taught many of us who keep a guitar in the closet that we *could* be in bands, it also revealed the importance of actually having something to say, and the skill to say it in a compelling fashion. The democratization of com-

GRAPHIC! DESIGN HISTORY.

By Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish.
Pearson/Prentice Hall.
386 pp. \$135



George Lois's famous mid-1960s cover for *Esquire* magazine featured Italian actress Virna Lisi playing around with gender roles.

puter-assisted design has illuminated a similar schism, evident whenever we walk past a wall of amateur wheat-pasted posters. Only a very small number of designers become superstars and change, however briefly, the shared language of our culture.

That shared visual language is one reason design matters, and why the study of its history is relevant beyond Madison Avenue. Johanna Drucker, a professor of media studies and English at the University of Virginia, and Emily McVarish, an assistant professor of graphic design at California College of the Arts, have written and curated a history of commercial visual discourse that runs from 35,000 BC, when people drew on cave walls, to the present. Or almost to the present—the authors hardly mention Web design.

Graphic design has long been pulled between two impulses: purely decorative (it looks pretty and pleases the client) and context driven (it looks pretty, pleases the client, and echoes some relevant visual from the past to convey its message). Unlike most design books, this volume focuses not on large, pretty pictures (which designers page

through looking for solutions to problems), but on the history and context of those images, addressing the social and artistic implications of changing technologies and the major design schools and movements that grew around them. (Design is typically viewed as the bastard child of fine art, as something an artist does to eat. That design is even being taught in the academy is progress.)

Though *Graphic! Design History* is fundamentally and structurally a textbook, it omits footnotes and includes only a modest bibliography. Most of the printed pieces that are highlighted are reproduced as thumbnails, too small to be of great use to designers or to justify displaying the book on one's coffee table. The authors' 20th-century examples will seem fairly obvious to those in the field, particularly when compared to the striking ephemera assembled from earlier periods—the handmade grandeur of a 13th-century illuminated manuscript, the formal elegance of a 17th-century sailing notice. Veteran designers will recognize, for example, the Stenberg brothers' influential 1928 constructivist poster in which a collage is worked into a worker's eyeglasses, George Lois's 1965 *Esquire* cover, or Jamie Reid's ransom-note typography on the cover of the Sex Pistols' 1977 album *Never Mind the Bollocks*.

Graphic! Design History is not a critical consideration of the field; there is simply too much ground to cover to do much more than name names. Drucker and McVarish's selections suggest an underlying interest in creating or reinforcing a canon that focuses on the best and the best known. This is, after all, an introduction. What is left out, though, is sometimes curious. With the exception of the Russian constructivists, this history is limited, once we reach the 19th century, to Western European and U.S. traditions, leaving out the influential designs of Asia, except as they were interpreted in the West, and presuming that nothing of interest happened in Africa or South America, or even Australia or Mexico. Another glaring omission is the ordinary work of ordinary designers (the cover bands of advertising, if you will); there is no discussion of signage or sign painting, and hardly a mention of billboards.

All that said, textbooks offer entry points to broader and deeper discussions. Generations of guitarists heard first the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, then worked backward to Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson, discovering the sources of what they initially admired. Today we are overwhelmed with carefully crafted visuals, on PDAs and computer screens and newsstands. This volume helps us to understand what they mean and where they came from.

GRANT ALDEN was the founding coeditor and the art director of *No Depression* magazine. He lives in Morehead, Kentucky.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Broomsticks and Politics

Reviewed by A. J. Loftin

IF WITCHES EXISTED, JOHN Demos would have found them.

He has been hunting them for the better part of five decades, first as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Harvard in the 1960s, then as a professor of early American history at Yale. In 1982 Demos published a long scholarly book, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*, intended to be his last word on the subject. Yet he could hardly refuse the talk-show invitations that came every Halloween, nor those 3 AM calls from people fearing demonic possession. So when editors at Viking asked him to write another book on witch-hunting, this time aimed at a general readership, Demos took the bait.

The result is a text of admirable if breakneck concision, slowed only by the gratuitous insertion of italics in certain sections (as if to warn: *scholarly analysis ahead*) and clunky headings such as “*Mentality*. How did witchcraft reflect, and contribute to, the prevailing worldview of its time?” Demos briefly considers the early Christian martyrs, tortured and killed by their countrymen, then races through the next 1,500 years of witch-hunting in Europe, only slowing down when he revisits his

THE ENEMY WITHIN:
2,000 Years of
Witch-Hunting in
the Western World.

By John Demos. Viking.
318 pp. \$25.95

area of expertise, colonial America. He reviews the last three decades of Salem witch trials scholarship, which has tried to explain the bizarre behaviors of accused and accuser by looking to science and medicine: Poisoning by ergot (a fungus hosted by cereal grains) could have caused hallucinations in the accused; epidemic encephalitis might have caused convulsions and other symptoms in the “victims.” But mostly such theories have failed the test of time, Demos says. He speculates instead that economic and religious challenges to the Puritan way of life, combined with the constant threat of Indian warfare, created “an overwhelming and highly toxic climate of fear.”

At last Demos ventures somewhat timidly into more recent centuries, to discuss the Chicago union-organized Haymarket riots of 1886, the “Red Scare”—era of Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, and the daycare “abuse” cases of the last 30 years. He zooms in on the sensational Fells Acres Day School case of the mid-1980s, in which child-care providers in Malden, Massachusetts, were accused and ultimately convicted of sexually abusing their young charges, though many believed they were innocent. “Malden to Salem is barely a dozen miles,” Demos observes, as he considers the characteristics common to both witch hunts: “A panic atmosphere builds. . . . A sense of the demonic . . . serves as the animating core. The judicial system is immediately and fully engaged. . . . Intense, prolonged interrogation assumes central importance. . . . Legal and moral precedents are tossed aside. . . . Children are centrally positioned [to] play a role that has, in effect, been assigned them by their elders.” He concludes: “And now I believe that I truly *have* said my last word on witchcraft history.”

Certainly Demos is entitled to stop writing about witchcraft. But this book, far from putting the matter to rest, simply invites more speculation. In treating modern instances, Demos repeatedly asks, “Was it a witch-hunt?” bringing the intellectual scruples and caution of a scholar to bear on his answer. But a general reader doesn’t need to be convinced. Hell, yeah—close enough. What we want to know is why we are still hunting for witches, whether at daycare centers or union meet-

ings or mosques. Why, given all our liberal education and supposed psychological literacy, do we continue to project our fears onto other people? If we can't help ourselves, can't some safeguards be put into place to protect society's scapegoats? Or does society need the ritual—the threat, the war on terror, the bloody retribution and fleeting absolution?

A much scarier book could have been written—a book only a witch might enjoy.

A. J. LOFTIN is a writer and editor living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Showdown at Dry Gulch

Reviewed by Geoff Manaugh

ANY BOOK ABOUT DAMS AND water politics in the American West risks comparison to a daunting predecessor: Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (1986), the standard reference for an unusually complex field. Indeed, the breadth and moral conviction of Reisner's argument against the irrational excesses of western water use has yet to be matched. Nonetheless, in *Dead Pool*, James Lawrence Powell achieves something that Reisner did not: force of concentration.

Powell, executive director of the National Physical Science Consortium, focuses on just one dam: northern Arizona's Glen Canyon Dam, constructed starting in 1956 on a remote stretch of the Colorado River. *Dead Pool* zeroes in on the astonishing complication of factors—legislative, topographic, and meteorological—that shaped the dam's creation. While the bulk of the book describes the rapid growth of the Bureau of Reclamation, a branch of the U.S. Department of the Interior founded in 1902 to help irrigate the desert West, it also reminds us of the strangeness of the water-world in which the western states now thrive.

DEAD POOL:

Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West.

By James Lawrence Powell. Univ. of California Press. 283 pp. \$27.50

In the 1950s, the Colorado River, flowing from the Rockies to the Gulf of California, presented an irresistible target for industry lobbyists, politicians, and federal hydrologists inspired as much by the experience of the Dust Bowl as by the electrical and agricultural needs of a westward-moving population. Hoover Dam, née Boulder Dam, had proved, upon completion in 1935, that the canyons of the West could be dammed; the Grand Canyon itself, incredibly, had only barely missed being flooded in the early 1950s.

The upper basin states—Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming—needed their own reservoir to help protect against the future thirst of California, and the federal government responded by building Glen Canyon Dam. Behind it is Lake Powell, an artificial sea capable of storing 27 million acre-feet of water and, after spinning through the dam's eight 155,000-horsepower turbines, generating more than four billion kilowatt-hours of electricity a year.

The construction of Glen Canyon Dam was not an act of collaborative hydrology. The Colorado River states are, in fact, in stiff competition with one another, and Powell forecasts dire consequences for their inability to agree on future water rights. "As the hydrologic system falters," he suggests, outlining a scenario in which long-term severe drought returns to the West, "how might the legal system respond?" His short answer: It won't. A regulatory labyrinth of unbelievable proportions has emerged, functioning, like all true bureaucracies, at the precise intersection of illogic and inertia, and helping to produce absurd irrigation schemes worthy of a Monty Python sketch. (As Powell understatedly points out, "Reclaimed lands had often proved to be worth less than the money it took to irrigate them.")

While *Dead Pool's* environmental politics are relatively easy to parse, it's unclear what Powell advocates. Radical conservation of local water resources? Wholesale abandonment of the West? Central—that is, federal—control over the rivers of the western states? Or a states-based approach to water management? These are fundamental questions involving water rights, taxation, agricultural

productivity, endangered species displaced by flooding, summer lakeside recreation, and electrical power for tens of millions of voting Americans.

It is precisely the lack of easy answers that leads Powell, late in the book, to break away from history altogether and write what could be called speculative nonfiction, predicting the future of Glen Canyon Dam—and of the American West in general. We go 10, 20, 50 years into the future, and watch climate change and drought afflict the region, dams fill with silt, and whole cities go thirsty, their lights fading into darkness. At times, the book verges on the apocalyptic: “One day every trace of the dams and their reservoirs will be gone, a few exotic grains of concrete the only evidence of their one-time existence.”

While Powell’s vision of the future is not always convincing, *Dead Pool* ends as a historically important, well-timed, and memorable addition to the growing library of books about water and the West.

Geoff Manaugh is senior editor of *Dwell* magazine; his blog, BLDGBLOG, can be found at bldgblog.blogspot.com. *The BLDGBLOG Book* is forthcoming this spring.

Something for the Pain

Reviewed by Ruth Levy Guyer

BEFORE THE ERA OF ANESTHETICS, walking to the operating room resembled “going to a hanging,” in the words of one surgeon. So imagine what surgery was like for the hapless patient.

The changes that accompanied the advent of anesthetics in the 1840s—particularly in Britain and the United States—are the focus of Stephanie Snow’s *Blessed Days of Anaesthesia*. Anesthetics affected the practice and evolution of general surgery, dentistry, and military medicine, and altered childbirth. They also brought about social changes, as people came to understand that experiencing physical pain was not crucial to a moral life; indeed, sometimes a pain was just a pain.

The earliest anesthetics—ether, chloroform, laughing gas—had distinctive strengths, weak-

nesses, and uses. Dentists favored laughing gas—a short-acting agent—for their quick procedures. Ether required careful titration by a specialist. Chloroform was the easiest to use but also the most commonly associated with overdosing, addiction, and death.

Over many decades, the merits of anesthetics on the battlefield remained controversial. Were they too flammable for use near gunfire? Might their depressant effects hamper recovery in the severely traumatized? “The smart of the knife is a powerful stimulant and it is much better to hear a man bawl lustily than to see him sink silently into the grave,” wrote the British chief medical officer of the Crimean War in 1854, but others believed there were limits to how much trauma one shocked soldier could endure.

In the United States during the Civil War, anesthetics had a second use. Soldiers suspected of malingering were lightly anesthetized and then assigned tasks. Those who performed successfully were dispatched back into battle. Not until the 1880s, Snow notes, did the “concept of traumatic or post-traumatic neurosis become established as a medical category of disease,” accounting for soldiers who were physically able but psychologically scarred.

The elite revered anesthetics. Charles Darwin self-experimented with chloroform and in 1850 gave it to his wife, Emma, during labor, writing that he “kept her in a state of insensibility of 1 & 1/2 hours & she knew nothing from first pain till she heard that the child was born.” Physician John Snow, a central figure in the book and a distant relative of the author, administered chloroform to Queen Victoria during the births of her eighth and ninth children in the 1850s, giving rise to debate in *The Lancet* and other publications between those who found the use of anesthetics for normal birth dangerous and irresponsible and those who embraced the practice.

Anesthetic compounds were initially easy to purchase. Asthma and toothache sufferers self-administered them. Muggers and robbers used them to stun their victims. Individuals caught in

BLESSED DAYS OF ANAESTHESIA:
How Anaesthetics Changed the World.

By Stephanie J. Snow.
Oxford Univ. Press.
226 pp. \$34.95



First Operation Under Ether, by Robert C. Hinckley, 1881–94

compromising situations claimed to have been etherized to “account for being in disreputable places and company.”

In the 20th century, “the needle . . . replaced the mask,” Snow writes, and researchers developed many new compounds with single effects—analgesia, amnesia, muscle relaxation, sedation—and fine-tuned their uses, making surgeries and dentistry safer.

The story of anesthesia is fascinating, a mix of surprising social consequences, engaging philosophical debates, curious personalities, experiments gone right and wrong. But Snow, a researcher at the Center for the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine at the University of Manchester, is too often a stiff stylist, and frequent insider asides and digressions detract from many of

the interesting tales she tells.

Today anesthesia is integral to Western medicine, though some—myself included—elect to forgo it when we can (in the dentist’s chair; during childbirth), realizing that every drug has unpredictable side effects. Others, of course, take anesthetics *for* the side effects. The 19th-century transcendentalists, for example, saw self-experimentation as a path to spiritual enlightenment. “You expand like a seed . . .” wrote Henry David Thoreau. “You exist . . . like a tree in the winter. If you have an inclination to travel, take the ether; you go beyond the furthest star.”

RUTH LEVY GUYER teaches bioethics at Haverford College and writing at Johns Hopkins University, in the arts and sciences graduate program. She is a regular commentator on NPR’s *Weekend All Things Considered*, and is the author of *Baby at Risk: The Uncertain Legacies of Medical Miracles for Babies, Families, and Society* (2006).

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PORTRAIT



Step Right Up! Clowns, acrobats, and elephants—the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus had it all. Edward Kely snapped this shot of the Greatest Show on Earth in Brooklyn in 1931. It appears in *The Circus: 1870–1950*, edited by Noel Daniel and published by Taschen in July.