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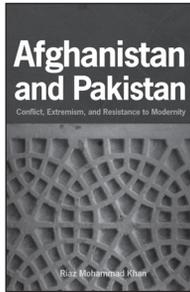
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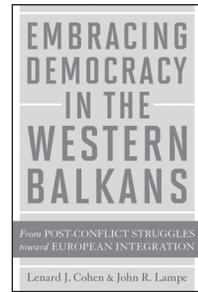
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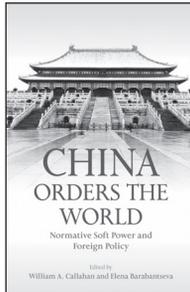


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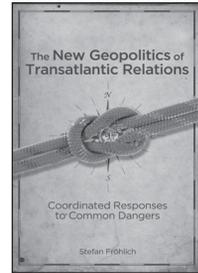
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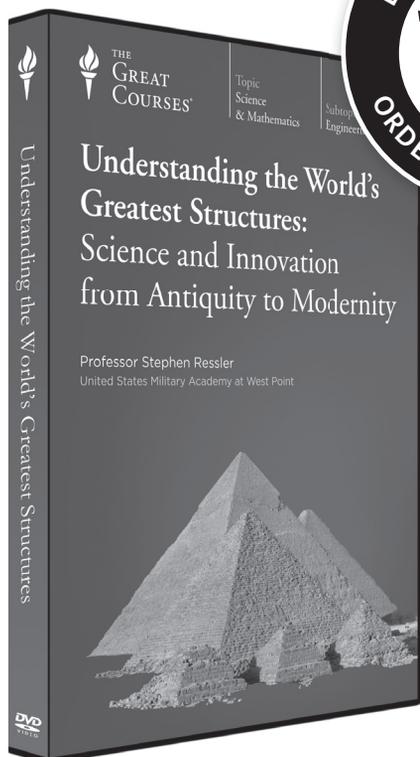
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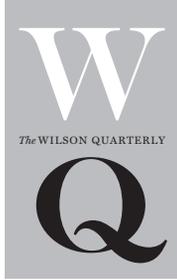
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ON THE COVER: A student in an English Language Learner class at Walnut Middle School in Grand Island, Nebraska, in 2007. Photograph by Nati Harnik/AP. **ABOVE:** Students fill a busy hallway at Southaven Middle School in Southaven, Missouri.

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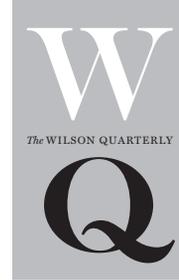
The Heart in Education

AFTER THREE DECADES OF NEARLY CONTINUOUS SCHOOL reform, it is remarkable how much we have learned about what makes schools tick—and how little progress we have made toward improving them. It is hard to imagine a field that has been more thoroughly researched than elementary and secondary education. We have long known how important it is to have good teachers, for example, but we now appreciate the crucial role of energetic, intelligent leadership by principals. We know, as Peter W. Cookson Jr. writes in our “cluster” on the schools, that smaller classroom sizes is a false panacea, and that while we need to invest more in decent school buildings and other essentials, education is a field where throwing money at problems really does not work.

The things we've learned have at least led us to understand what we do not yet know. In this edition of the *WQ*, we focus on four of the big issues: testing and accountability, authority within the school system, the ultimate goals of public education, and how best to employ education dollars. Of course there are other major questions, and I expect that readers will eagerly remind us of them in next issue's Letters section.

Knowing what works and how to implement it, however, will only get us so far. What has been striking to me in my reading about public education and my experience of it, both as a student and as the father of students, is the vital importance of heart. Whether it is through the impassioned work of a teacher or the stubborn, often-wearing commitment by parents to their children's learning, heart is the essential ingredient without which even the best-designed formulas will not work.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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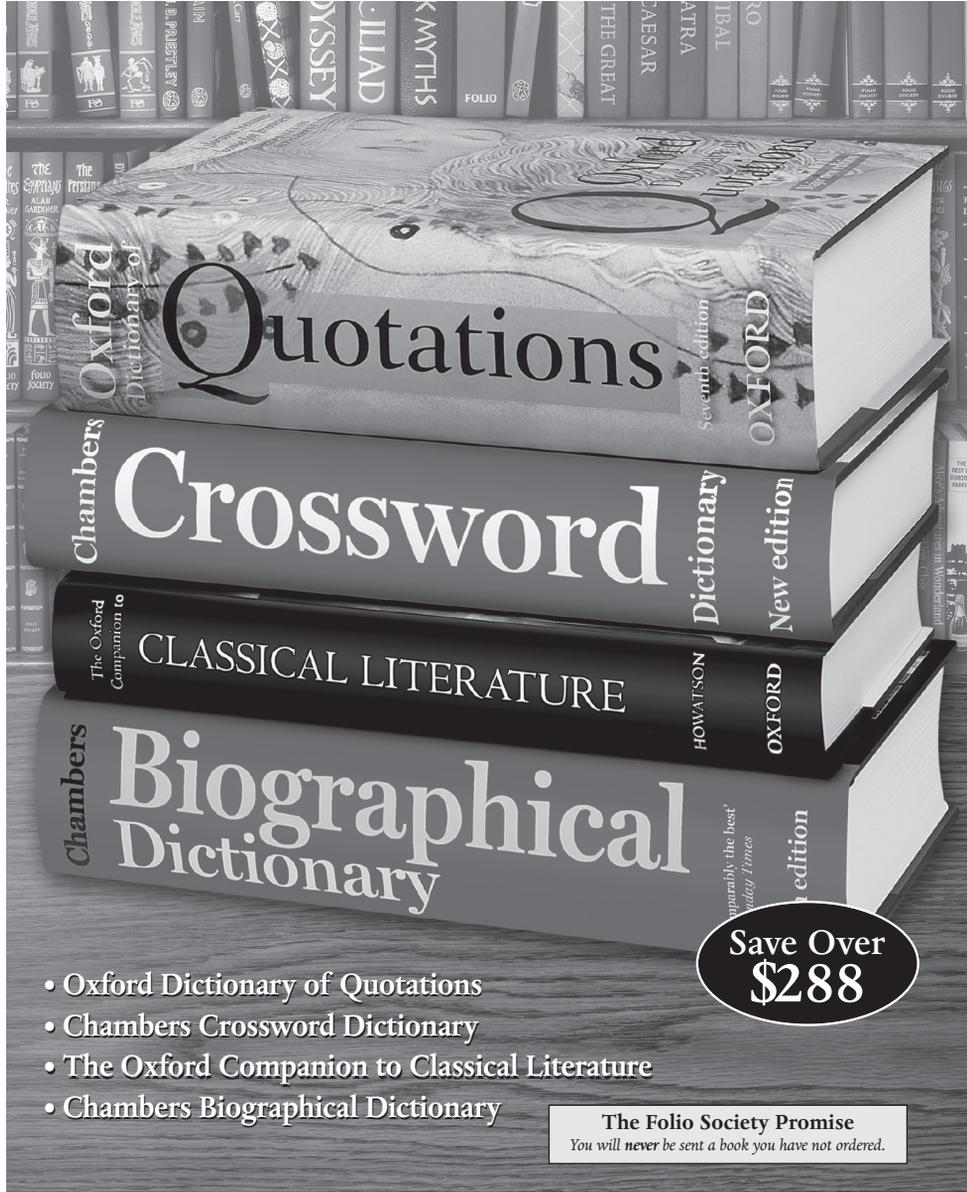
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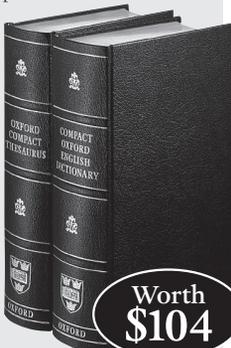
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LETTERS

AFTER THE REVOLTS

AMID THE CONFUSION AND uncertainty about the outcomes of the Arab revolts, there's a danger of a premature nostalgia for the age of authoritarianism in the Middle East. Aaron David Miller, a wise and seasoned scholar and diplomat, worries that the United States will suffer from the momentous changes and will struggle to pursue its national interests in a more open and democratic Middle East ["For America, an Arab Winter," Summer '11].

The authoritarians, however, were not such congenial partners for American diplomacy. To be sure, U.S. Central Command officers could go directly to the royal or "republican" palace for quick approval of overflight rights and did not need to wait for parliamentary approval or public opinion polls. Ease of military operations in the Middle East should not be conflated with paramount U.S. interests there, however. Frictions over virtually all American activities, from assistance programs to cultural exchanges—not to mention the existential Palestine question—hovered over U.S. relations with most states in the region.

Miller's stability-versus-democracy conundrum is not a hard choice for the Obama administration. Current policymakers have embraced the notion that the region is changing profoundly in ways that are consistent with the most enduring American values and interests. In the short to medium term, many awkward moments and policy disconnects will occur, but most policymakers will see the risks that Miller identifies as the cost of doing business in the region. They are not insurmountable obstacles to the pursuit of many of the fundamentals of U.S. engagement.

It is true that U.S. positions on Palestine will face frontal challenges from newly empowered Arab citizens and their governments. This may be a very good thing, given the entrenched and dysfunctional peace process. But the Palestine issue does not mean all trends favor Tehran and the radical camp. The degradation of Bashar al-Assad's control over Syria is already creating significant stresses in Iran's regional networks, and Arabs clearly do not view Iran as an appealing alternative political model.

The United States should look

upon the Arab revolts as an opportunity for Middle Eastern peoples and for regional peace and security. The gradual contraction of U.S. influence globally means that the new Middle East will likely develop diverse foreign partnerships, with less recourse to blaming the United States for every evil in the world. Is that such a bad thing?

Ellen Laipson

*President and CEO, The Stimson Center
Washington, D.C.*

RAMI G. KHOURI IS RIGHT TO remind us that the Arab Revolution was not a sudden, spontaneous eruption but, rather, the continuation of a long struggle for dignity and citizen rights in Arab countries ["The Long Revolt," Summer '11]. He is also right to remind us that the struggle had been building support and momentum over the last decade, and that it will likely take another decade or longer before we can judge its results. But I think he is too sanguine about the outcomes.

While democracy may be the goal everywhere, it is unlikely to succeed in all Arab nations within just a decade. Tribal conflicts, push-back from the monarchical regime in Saudi Arabia, and economic pitfalls make it probable that at least a few Arab states—Yemen and Libya, possibly Iraq, almost certainly

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Bahrain—will fall short of achieving a democratic outcome. Just as in the former Soviet Union, where the movement to democracy was reversed in Russia, stalled in Ukraine, stillborn in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, but very successful in the Baltics, we should expect a range of outcomes as well as a range of processes of rebellion.

Robin Wright's telling of Dalia Ziada's story makes the recent Arab revolts personal and shows how a lifetime of learning and searching for justice has propelled youthful new leaders forward ["The Pink Hijab," Summer '11]. I can confirm from my own visit to Cairo earlier this year that "veiling" is a much more varied practice than most Westerners realize; it can be expressive and individualistic rather than confining or depersonalizing. I saw Arab women in universities and in the streets wearing hijabs in jaunty patterns and colors, often pairing hijabs with bright, flowing clothing, or even with figure-hugging sequined jeans. In good Muslim fashion, they showed neither a wisp of hair nor an inch of skin beyond their face and hands; yet they were terrifically stylish and feminine.

Nonetheless, as in so many past revolutions, from the Russian to the Chinese to the Cuban, the leadership of courageous women, whether in Tahrir Square or in the labor and student movements, has not been rewarded with commensurate influence in the major political parties. Moreover, the women's rights issues that stirred Ziada's passions have been pushed aside by arguments over when to hold elections,

how to bring Mubarak and his cronies to justice, and whether the military or Islamists will triumph over secular democrats.

Leaders and supporters of the Arab revolts will have to work hard to keep issues of social justice front and center, for there is real danger that the promise of these stirring changes in the Arab world will be lost in old-fashioned factional struggles for power.

Jack A. Goldstone

Professor of Public Policy

George Mason University

Arlington, Va.

HAD I FINISHED MY BOOK *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, From the Middle East to America* just several months later—say, in March—instead of the previous September, I would certainly have had to write a postscript modifying one of my key conclusions. Feminism and the pursuit of women's rights were flourishing among the younger generations of American Muslims, I had argued, precisely because *they were American* and had grown up imbibing the values of democracy and equality alongside an Islamic emphasis on the importance of working for social justice. But as the Arab Spring made so clear, desires for democracy, equality, justice—and the courage to pursue these aspirations both relentlessly and peacefully—are as prevalent among Muslims living in the Middle East as they are in America.

The Egyptian women activists described in Robin Wright's insightful essay seem, in many ways, scarcely distinguishable in

their passions, words, and commitments from American Muslims. Wright notes that "for many young women, hijab is now about liberation, not confinement," words with which many American hijabis (women who wear hijab) would heartily agree.

For Dalia Ziada, a leading activist of the younger generation, Wright continues, hijab "provides protective cover . . . for campaigns she considers to be the essence of her faith—human rights and justice." Again, these are themes commonly emphasized by American Muslims, and perhaps especially by Muslim women who wear hijab.

Wright's depth of knowledge of the area, which she wears lightly, enables her to pick out just those details that are most revealing of the multiple and varied currents shaping Arab societies. Her account of Martin Luther King Jr.'s role as a source of inspiration for Ziada was particularly illuminating. As I followed the developments in Egypt, my native country, that led to Mubarak's downfall, I had quite often observed that there was something very American about the ideals and tactics (at least on the part of the revolutionaries) that were being played out in Tahrir Square, and at the very same moment that they were deeply Egyptian as well.

Ideas and ideals—along with everything else—evidently know no borders now, as our societies grow ever more inextricably enmeshed and interconnected.

Leila Ahmed

Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity

Harvard Divinity School

Cambridge, Mass.

DOES WIKILEAKS MATTER?

ALASDAIR ROBERTS'S CRITICAL assessment of WikiLeaks ["The WikiLeaks Illusion," Summer '11] provides a valuable corrective to the hyperbole, alarmism, and wishful thinking that have often surrounded the phenomenon.

Far from heralding "the end of secrecy," as WikiLeaks' sponsors promise and its supporters hope, the predictable consequence of massive disclosures has been a heightened level of security and new restrictions on the public accessibility of U.S. government information. In fact, as a result of such changes, it would now be impossible for anyone to reenact the scenario in which WikiLeaks' most important disclosures were acquired. Many of the documents made available through WikiLeaks are of interest and even of enduring value, but they have come at the price of increased secrecy, which will be paid by others.

Numerous imitators of and would-be competitors to WikiLeaks have arisen online to receive and publish leaked records. But none of them have generated any material of volume or significance comparable to WikiLeaks' so-called *Collateral Murder* video, the Iraq and Afghan "war diaries," and the State Department cables. Meanwhile, as Roberts notes, all of those celebrated WikiLeaks disclosures were allegedly derived from one individual, U.S. Army private Bradley Manning.

The obvious inference to be drawn is that what is really distinctive about WikiLeaks is not its infrastructure, its hardware, its soft-

ware, or its colorful proprietors—all of which can be replicated, more or less, by others. Rather, what has given WikiLeaks its edge is the extraordinary achievement, for good or ill, of what is believed to be a single source.

Yet that presumed source is now in military custody, and so far no one else has stepped forward to follow his uniquely prolific example. One may therefore doubt that WikiLeaks exemplifies either a real break with the past—which has always included leaks—or a shortcut to a more enlightened and transparent information policy.

Steven Aftergood

*Director, Project on Government Secrecy
Federation of American Scientists
Washington, D.C.*

WIKILEAKS IS NOT TRADITIONAL journalism and the leaks of 2010 did not mark the end of "old-fashioned secrecy." But the organization proved that freedom of information is the first casualty of war and that a new form of collaboration could exist in the name of the public good.

When WikiLeaks released the *Collateral Murder* video, Reuters had been requesting access to it under the Freedom of Information Act for years. Although two of its photographers were killed in the shooting, Reuters' attempts were in vain. No government should shroud cases involving the murder of innocent people in secrecy. The fact that the Obama administration simply selects which freedom of information requests it grants is appalling for a nation that touts itself as the world's leading democracy.

Last year's leaks also underscored the enduring indispensability of professional journalists in an era of "citizen reporting." As Roberts notes, there was no real surprise in these cables. So doesn't that indicate that journalists have been doing their job—that is, informing the public?

Roberts also observes that "when WikiLeaks released vast quantities of undigested information, the public could not absorb it." The news outlets can be credited with having rendered the cables readable and understandable for their audiences.

WikiLeaks is part of a journalistic process that has always relied on leaks. This is why Reporters Without Borders defends it. Our organization is outraged by the treatment Bradley Manning has been receiving. We believe sources should be protected in the name of freedom of information.

The Obama administration is now prosecuting five "leakers" because they talked to journalists. One *New York Times* reporter was even subpoenaed to publicly confirm one of his sources. Note, however, that the Obama administration has been smart to go after the sources. Trying to directly silence a reporter would be too noisy and lead to bad publicity.

Clothilde Le Coz

*Washington Director
Reporters Without Borders
Washington, D.C.*

ALASDAIR ROBERTS IS RIGHT to criticize WikiLeaks for its false premises and failures. If anything, he understates them. From the be-

ginning, WikiLeaks—staffed by a multinational cast of activists and headed by an Australian programmer—was conceived as a global initiative rather than an anti-U.S. crusade. WikiLeaks' activists hoped to inspire whistleblowers to join their efforts to fight government secrecy. That, in turn, would help to guarantee WikiLeaks a steady stream of top-secret documents gathered from all over the world.

The three biggest packages of documents released belong to the United States, and the largest of them, the diplomatic cables, mostly expose the U.S. State Department's misbehavior, not that of other governments. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's directive ordering American diplomats to spy on United Nations officials was the most sensitive cable release, but others were not of the same moment. The revelation that American diplomats in Moscow viewed Russian president Dmitry Medvedev as a mere Robin to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's Batman may say something about those diplomats, but it reveals little about Putin and Medvedev's real relationship.

So far, WikiLeaks has failed to win the support of whistleblowers based in other countries. The Web site's country-based sections are extremely modest, and the WikiLeaks team became so concerned that they turned to unusual methods to acquire documents from other countries.

In an article last year in *Ezhednevny Journal*, I wrote about the Web site Lubyanskayapravda.com, which published the first leak of documents from

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Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) to the Internet in 10 years. Dozens of top-secret reports, prepared for the leadership of the FSB and the head of state, dating from the mid-2000s, were viewable on the site, including some describing FSB secret operations in Ukraine and Turkmenistan. These documents not only explained what the FSB was doing in those countries, but even revealed conflicts among the Russian secret services. For instance, one report referred to a Ukrainian document that was forged by the FSB and then obtained by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service and reported to the Kremlin as genuine.

I wrote then that the FSB documents, although they appeared on the Internet, did not enter the public sphere. No Russian news media outlet republished them, and the site itself went offline just a couple of weeks after the publication.

Two weeks later, I was contacted by someone in the United Kingdom claiming to be a representative of WikiLeaks. Speaking on the phone, he asked me to forward documents from Lubyanskayapravda.com to WikiLeaks.

It was quite symbolic that WikiLeaks not only decided to rely on traditional media in disseminating documents, but tried to use journalists to get the very documents it sought to bring to light.

Andrei Soldatov

Coauthor, The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB (2010)
Editor, Agentura
Moscow, Russia

CIVIL WAR BOOKS

THE EDITION OF CURRENT Books devoted to the best Civil War books [Summer '11] is excellent (and I say this as a sometime Civil War reenactor, with more than a passing interest in the subject). However, I've come to rely on the *WQ* to keep me up to date on the latest books in different fields of study. I hope this kind of special section will be no more than a once-in-a-blue-moon occurrence.

Having said that, the *WQ* remains my favorite journal. Thanks for your good work!

George Foster

Huntington, Ind.

The editors reply: *We are glad you enjoyed the special section. And once in a blue moon it will be.*

HOW PRESIDENTS PERSUADE

IN HIS MASTERFUL ARTICLE "Beyond the Bully Pulpit" [Summer '11], David Greenberg says that Theodore Roosevelt was one of the first presidents who "grasped that effective presidential leadership required shaping public opinion." However, since almost all American presidents were experienced politicians, probably every one of them would have agreed with Lincoln that "public sentiment is everything" in the American political system.

Some of the earlier presidents did indeed seem to act as if influencing that sentiment was not within their constitutional job description. A number of others before Roosevelt, though, thought

differently. They wanted to influence public opinion, but they did not feel free to do it as publicly as TR (and, it should be noted, his immediate predecessor, William McKinley) did. Why? Their reticence can be explained by the tension that sprang up almost immediately in the new American republic, when political parties developed during the presidency of George Washington. Suddenly, there were two conceptions of the presidency. One, to which the Framers of the Constitution subscribed, conceived of presidents (and all elected officials) as being "above parties." The other, newer one conceived of presidents as being "in parties," often serving as party leaders.

Consequently, every president since Washington who might have contemplated acting like TR would have risked being accused of not behaving sufficiently "presidentially," in the old, original sense of being "above politics." So a number of them tried influencing opinion in publicly tempered ways or even behind the scenes. They mostly avoided lots of policy speechmaking (thus avoiding the rigors of travel then, too), wrote moderately worded public letters responding to "citizen groups," and, most significantly, used their own sponsored newspapers in Washington to let the public know what they were thinking. These newspapers were published by editors who were in the confidence of the president, and thus the commentaries they printed were widely understood to express the positions of the president and his administration. From 1800 to 1860, almost

every president had such a “presidential newspaper.”

Using polling data, presidential scholar George C. Edwards III has shown persuasively and provocatively that speechmaking by presidents rarely has much effect on public opinion. Since it doesn’t work, Edwards suggests that modern presidents consider other means of persuasion, such as educating the public on the factual aspects of an issue and framing perspectives in ways that encourage the public to view the issue as the president does. Ironically, when it comes to influencing public opinion, perhaps those bygone presidents who relied on journalistic mass media outlets to promote their positions in depth and over time had a keener understanding of the power to persuade than their modern speechmaking counterparts.

Mel Laracey

Author, Presidents and the People:

*The Partisan Story
of Going Public (2002)*

*Associate Professor, Department
of Political Science*

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TEACH THE TEACHERS

BEN WILDAVSKY’S REVIEW OF *Academically Adrift* [“Bad Educations,” Spring ’11] was an appropriate companion to Daniel Walker Howe’s essay in the same issue, “Classical Education in America.” Both expose the reasons for the frightening deterioration of American education.

I recently retired after 45 years of teaching high school English;

during 13 of the early years I also taught Latin. My preparation for the classroom was a liberal arts bachelor’s degree with a philosophy major followed by a handful of “teacher prep” courses. At that time, the humanities were the expected curriculum for those seeking to enter teaching. Unfortunately, that curriculum vanished in favor of excessive specialization, and colleges began mining prospective teachers for more revenues by requiring that they take more courses that did less to prepare them for teaching in their own classrooms. And as college professors were subjected to the rigors of “publish or perish” over the past few decades, as Wildavsky notes in his review, they increasingly relegated their classes to assistants who were insufficiently educated. For a generation, I watched novice teachers enter the profession with little comprehensive knowledge and no information about anything but their own narrow field of study.

In order to stop the downward spiral of the schools, the business world wrested control from educators and relied on the flawed logic of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, which based its prescriptions for the schools on the erroneous premise that students are inanimate and highly malleable things.

Colleges no longer produce well-educated graduates because the professors themselves are poorly taught. The students are not exposed to the elements of a comprehensive education, while their professors are busy publishing work on ever narrower slices of study. They turn out elementary and

high school teachers who lack any background in the humanities and continue the lackluster and superficial classroom presentations that are now scripted to yield higher test scores.

It’s no wonder that college and high school graduates know little about life. Nothing they have been taught has been aligned with a whole curriculum or with their lives. Nor is it astonishing that they have no thinking skills: They have been trained merely to regurgitate “important” facts.

For America to regain eminence as an educated country, our citizens must first be grounded in the humanities. Their teachers must receive an integrated education based in the liberal arts, the kind of all-but-vanished curriculum that Howe describes in his essay. All must realize that education is a lifelong pursuit, not something instantly gained or passively achieved merely by spending time at a desk or in front of a computer.

Don Braden

Barstow, Calif.

CORRECTIONS

When Little Rock Central High School was integrated in 1957, James M. McPherson was attending college, not high school, as was stated in “My Road to the Civil War” on p. 78 of the Summer ’11 issue.

Due to an editing error, the final line was dropped from “India’s Vulture Void” on p. 75 of the Summer ’11 In Essence section. The sentence, in its entirety, reads, “There are dogs on the ground, but the skies are empty.”

We regret the errors. ■

AT THE CENTER

A CALL FOR RESILIENCE

“THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL of dates each century that need no explanation and that define an era,” Woodrow Wilson Center president and CEO Jane Harman noted on September 12. “9/11 is one such date.” A U.S. representative at the time of the attacks, she recalled scrambling to the Capitol’s lawn with her colleagues, no evacuation plan in place.

In an effort to anticipate the dangers ahead, the Wilson Center devoted the third session in its new “National Conversation” series to the theme “9/11: The Next Ten Years.” A panel, moderated by *The Washington Post’s* David Ignatius, converged on two crucial issues: finding a narrative to counter that of the extremists, and building up citizen resilience in the probable event of another attack.

“We’ve got the narrative,” declared James Zogby, founder and president of the Arab American Institute. “It’s called America.” But the American value of integration has foundered. Zogby warned that anti-Muslim phobias alienate loyal Muslim Americans. The new Arab leaders rising to power may foster better relations, he said, but the United States must not inadvertently delegitimize allies by holding them too close.

Michael Leiter, the former director of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, agreed that a behind-the-scenes approach was best, adding that Al Qaeda

has been “poisoning its own message”—bombs detonated during weddings have repulsed more would-be supporters than any American propaganda could.

Indeed, radical Islam appears to be seeking direction after the killing of Osama bin Laden. Egyptian terrorist mastermind Ayman al-Zawahiri will don bin Laden’s mantle, Wilson Center senior scholar Bruce Hoffman predicted. But Zogby wasn’t sure how well Zawahiri will wear it. Bin Laden’s persona fit into “a Semitic tradition” that honors figures in the mold of “John the Baptist—the ascetic who goes into the desert and is purified and has this personality that transcends the mundane. Zawahiri doesn’t have that.”

How, Ignatius interposed, does the controversial use of drone weaponry by the United States in Afghanistan affect Arab perceptions of America? Leiter argued that drones have saved American lives; Representative Mike Rogers (R-Mich.) said the news media exaggerate the resulting civilian casualties. But for Zogby, drone use marks a law-of-the-jungle low.

Stanley McChrystal, Michael Leiter, and James Zogby at the Wilson Center



“It’s not who we are,” he said. “I find it offensive.”

Retired U.S. Army general Stanley McChrystal, who recently led American forces in Afghanistan, described the skepticism with which the country’s people view the American way of war. “If you go to a village in an armored vehicle, and you get out wearing body armor, and you wear a helmet and you’ve got safety glasses that they can’t see through,” he said, “on the one hand you’re a very intimidating person—or *thing*—but they’re warriors and they’re not wearing any of that. And they wonder why you’ve got to hide behind that.”

None of the panelists seemed to believe that terrorist activity, Arab Spring or no, would wither away anytime soon. Leiter noted that while a splintered terrorist network might be weaker, it is also harder to track. Referring to school and workplace shootings across the United States, he bluntly stated that a gunman identifying with Al Qaeda will likely conduct a similar attack. “We have to be a resilient political and public culture after the fact,” he concluded.

GAMING THE BUDGET CRISIS

AS THE DEBATE OVER AMERICA'S budget and debt boiled over this summer, the Woodrow Wilson Center rolled out a new tool designed to cool down the conflict: a computer game.

Budget Hero (www.budgethero.org) is no Angry Birds. It is one of a new breed of "serious games" designed to help people grapple directly with complex problems in public policy and other areas. "The point of the game is to educate and empower us, and I hope it is played in schools and right here at the Capitol," said Senator Mark Udall (D-Col.), one of several legislators who attended the Capitol Hill launch. The new and improved Budget Hero, developed by the Wilson Center's Science Innovation and Technology Program and the Public Insight Network at American Public Media, relies on updated data, models, and forecasts by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

Budget Hero players are presented with a landscape of brightly colored buildings that represent various categories of federal spending that can be cut or increased, ranging from infrastructure to Social Security. Another icon gives players the option to raise or lower taxes. Meters gauge each choice's impact on the magnitude of the deficit (or surplus), the size of government relative to the gross domestic product, and the debt-to-GDP ratio.

Before they start the game, players are invited to pick up to three badges that reflect their personal priorities. However, fulfilling the promises implied by the choice of badges may interfere with the aim of chipping away at the deficit.

Each policy option comes with pithy pro and con arguments along with a summary of likely financial impacts. Cutting the Pentagon's planned construction of stealth fighters would save \$25 billion over 10 years, for example, but it would also cause big job losses at U.S. companies, especially in Texas. Allowing oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would gain a player \$15 billion in revenues over the same period but potentially do great environmental damage and generate only enough energy to supply the nation for six months.

Some of the most popular spending reduction ideas include rapidly cutting troop numbers in Iraq and Afghanistan (picked by 63 percent of players) and reforming and simplifying the tax code (chosen by 61 percent).

Thousands of players have tried their hand at Budget Hero, leaving a trail of lively online comments and debates. Wrote one sly contestant in the comments section, "yes it did change my thinking, mr text box pop up."



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FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

I Contain Multitudes

A surfeit of Sybils

In the 1970s, a bestseller provoked a mental illness epidemic. *Sybil* (1973), by journalist Flora Rheta Schreiber, recounts the case history of Sybil Dorsett (a pseudonym). After Sybil is sexually abused by her mother, the girl's fragile psyche fractures into 16 different personalities. Then, after many years of intensive therapy, a psychiatrist named Cornelia Wilbur cures her.

Sybil tells only part of the story, according to *Sybil Exposed* (Free Press), by Debbie Nathan. Shirley Mason—the real Sybil—began seeing Dr. Wilbur in 1945 for anxiety, depression, and occasional blackouts. At one appointment, Mason claimed to be a girl named Peggy. Another time she said she was a 13-year-old named Vicky. The doctor injected Mason with barbiturates and asked her leading questions. Weak willed and enraptured by Wilbur, Mason responded with still more personalities, as well as accounts of nightmarish child abuse.

In a 1958 letter to Wilbur, Mason confessed that she had made up the different personalities and the child abuse. The psychiatrist replied that such “resistance” is

common in therapy. The treatment continued.

Five years later, Wilbur described the case to Schreiber, who agreed to write a book and share the royalties with doctor and patient. But the book would need a happy ending. Could Mason be cured by 1965? No problem, said Wilbur. In mid-1965, she forcefully told Mason that it was time to “integrate” her many personalities. A few weeks later, the surplus personas vanished, never to reappear.

And Mason's 1958 letter of recantation? When Schreiber came across it in her research, Wilbur said it was inconsequential and urged her not to mention it in the book. So she didn't.

Although Schreiber had trouble finding a publisher, *Sybil* ended up selling millions of copies. Sally Field and Joanne Woodward starred in a TV-movie adaptation. And over the next two decades, psychiatrists diagnosed thousands of cases of multiple personality disorder, a syndrome that, pre-*Sybil*, had been considered extremely rare. Even celebrities were



A scene from *Sybil*, based on the 1970s bestseller that led thousands to report having multiple personalities

afflicted. Actress Rosanne Barr announced that she was inhabited by 20 personalities, including ones named Piggy and Bambi.

But in 1994, the American Psychiatric Association cautioned that the syndrome was possibly being “overdiagnosed in individuals who are highly suggestible.” Today, cases of multiple personality disorder—now known as dissociative identity disorder—are much rarer. Though it's still in print, *Sybil* no longer seems to act as a contagion.

Lie Detectors

Lose the manual

To spot deception, watch for body language. Liars tend to act nervous. During interrogation, they often groom themselves and avoid eye contact. Truth tellers don't.

That's what some police manuals teach, and it's demonstrably wrong, according to a research review in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* (December 2010), by Aldert Vrij, Pär Anders Granhag, and Stephen Porter. Police interrogations make plenty of innocent people nervous, and studies have found that grooming and gaze aversion don't correlate with lying at all.

Research has also found that police officers tend to be confident they can catch liars. But they're actually no better at it than others. In fact, when laypeople are given lie detection tips taken from a leading police manual, they become *less* skilled at gauging deception than other civilians who don't get the tips.

To improve, the police should do less looking and more listen-

ing, Vrij and colleagues recommend. Instead of conducting accusatory interrogations, officers ought to seek as much information as possible and scour it for inconsistencies. They might ask unexpected questions, or have suspects repeat their accounts in reverse chronological order. What people say turns out to reveal a lot more than how they say it.

Nothing Helps

A placebo a day

When does a medical treatment qualify as a success? An article in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (July 14) suggests that the question may not be as straightforward as it seems.

Led by Michael E. Wechsler, researchers assembled four groups of asthma patients and gave them either albuterol inhalers, placebo inhalers, sham acupuncture, or nothing. (Sham acupuncture uses a trick needle, held in place with tape, that collapses and doesn't penetrate the skin.) When the researchers tested the patients' lung function, the albuterol—a stan-

dard treatment for asthma—was shown to have brought about a marked improvement, whereas the placebos and nonintervention had had no effect.

The patients themselves, however, told a different story. Half of those who used the albuterol reported feeling better. But so did nearly half of those who got the placebo inhaler or the sham acupuncture. By contrast, only a fifth of those who got no treatment said they felt better. Wechsler and colleagues conclude that doctors should discount asthma patients' self-reports and rely instead on tests.

Anthropologist Daniel E. Moerman isn't so sure. In an editorial in the same issue of the journal, he points out that placebos have been shown to alleviate scores of ailments. There's even a hierarchy of efficacy: "Two inert pills can work better than one, colorful inert pills can work better than plain ones, and injections can work better than pills."

A patient may talk a doctor into writing a prescription for "the latest Internet fad" to manage pain or other symptoms, Moerman says in an interview. Scientifically, it can't possibly help—but the patient nonetheless gets better. "It's like putting Earl Grey tea in the gas tank and, damn it, the car drives to California."

Although the American Medical Association generally advises doctors not to administer placebos, Moerman thinks that's shortsighted. "The placebo is more than just a little inert tablet. Each time you take it, it represents the

Body language often lies—detectives in this 1952 film noir nabbed the wrong guy.



whole process by which you got that drug. . . . There are people in white coats listening to you, lots of degrees hanging on the wall, equipment that can look into you in ways you could never look into yourself. All of this is very powerful. The placebo is inert, but it's rich in meaning."

Bad Breakfast

Gowrongly

Breakfast at Tiffany's was nominated for five Oscars, including one for best adapted screenplay. But one of the 1961 film's fiercest critics was Truman Capote, the author of the novella on which the script was based.

Capote considered his story, published in 1958, "rather bitter," whereas the movie was a "mawkish Valentine" that, he said, "made me want to throw up." Marilyn Monroe would have been "perfect" to play protagonist Holly Golightly, Capote said, "but Paramount double-crossed me and gave the part to Audrey Hepburn." The result was "the most miscast film I've ever seen."

Capote's disappointment was keen because he took great pride in Holly Golightly. He wasn't alone in admiring his creation. After the novella was published, one woman after another claimed to be the model for Holly, including Oona O'Neill, Gloria Vanderbilt, and



Truman Capote thought *Breakfast at Tiffany's* with Marilyn Monroe in the lead role would have been bitter—and better.

"virtually any partially or entirely upper-crust party girl who did her own thing and never looked back," writes Capote scholar William Todd Schultz in *Tiny Terror* (Oxford University Press), his biography of the puckish writer.

Perhaps they didn't read Capote's work all that closely. In Schultz's assessment, Holly Golightly is vacuous, oblivious, erratic, and famous without having accomplished anything—in sum, "yesterday's Paris Hilton."

Who's Slighting Whom?

The bias pivot

Almost everyone agrees that racial discrimination in the United States has changed drastically since the 1950s. But African

Americans and white Americans disagree on the extent and the nature of that change, Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers write in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (May).

The researchers asked some 400 Americans, half of them white and half black, how much discrimination existed in each decade from the 1950s to the present. Using a one-to-10 scale, both groups agreed that discrimination against African Americans was brutal in the 1950s—between nine and 10 on the scale—and that it has diminished since then. But white respondents gauged the improvement as significantly greater than black respondents did.

As for discrimination against whites, both groups agreed that it was virtually nonexistent in the 1950s. In the eyes of black respondents, it has remained minimal. White respondents, by contrast, reported that antiwhite discrimination has increased over time, and that they now consider it more widespread than antiblack discrimination.

For many white Americans, racial bias seems to be a zero-sum game: African Americans' gains have been their losses.

Chump Chimps

The price of popularity

Chimpanzees may lead the revolution in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, but offscreen they're not doing so well. Chimps are an endangered species in their native habitat of equatorial Africa, and some conservationists fear that they'll

be extinct within a few decades.

But surveys find that that message hasn't reached the public. To find out why, Stephen R. Ross, Vivian M. Vreeman, and Elizabeth V. Lonsdorf, all researchers at Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo, distributed photographs to more than 1,200 Americans. Half of them got a photo of a chimp standing alone; the other half got a photo in which a picture of a smiling man was digitally inserted next to the chimp.

Compared to those who saw the solitary simian, those who saw the photo with the man were more likely to believe that chimpanzee populations are thriving. Apparently, when seen alongside humans, chimps don't seem imperiled. The researchers suggest that such images may convey the implicit message that humans routinely encounter chimps, so they must be plentiful.

In the online science journal *PLoS ONE* (July), Ross and colleagues blame the media for frequently depicting chimpanzees with people. Gorillas and orangutans, which are also endangered, don't get the same screen time, perhaps because they're less human looking than chimps. So when the final credits assure you that no animals were harmed in the making of a movie, a dash of skepticism may be in order.

Debatable

On and off limits

As moderator of one of the 1988 presidential debates, Bernard Shaw of CNN got to ask a single question of each candidate. For Democrat Michael Dukakis, he chose a provocative one.

"Governor," he said, "if Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?"

"No, I don't, Bernard," Dukakis answered, "and I think you know that I've opposed the death penalty during all of my life. I don't see any evidence that it's a deterrent, and I think there are better and more effective ways to deal with violent crime. We've done so in my own state, and it's one of the reasons why we have had the biggest drop in crime of any industrial state in America, why we have the lowest murder rate of

any industrial state in America."

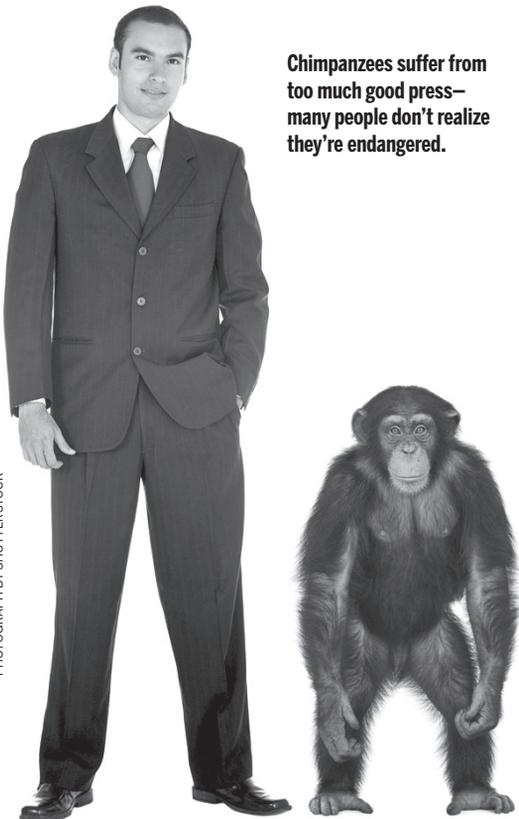
Commentators faulted Dukakis for giving a wonkish answer to an emotionally explosive question—but some also faulted Shaw for framing the question in such personal terms. Shaw's critics included the three other journalists who questioned the candidates that night: Andrea Mitchell of NBC, Ann Compton of ABC, and Margaret Warner of *Newsweek*.

Before the debate, PBS journalist Jim Lehrer writes in *Tension City: Inside the Presidential Debates, From Kennedy-Nixon to McCain-Obama* (Random House), the four reporters met to make sure that their questions didn't overlap. When the others heard what Shaw intended to ask Dukakis, they tried to dissuade him. "It was the women against Bernie," Mitchell told Lehrer. One of the women suggested omitting the name of Dukakis's wife and asking about the rape and murder of an acquaintance instead, but Shaw refused. He was, he recalled, "outraged . . . that a journalist would try to talk a fellow journalist out of asking a question." In an interview with Lehrer more than two decades after the debate, Shaw continued to defend the query as perfectly legitimate.

Michael Dukakis also considered it a reasonable question. He's inclined to think his answer was reasonable, too. "I've listened and watched myself respond to that," he told Lehrer, "but I have to tell you—and maybe I'm just still missing it or something. I didn't think it was that bad."

—Stephen Bates

Chimpanzees suffer from too much good press—many people don't realize they're endangered.



The Paradox of PTSD

Thousands of soldiers are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with deep psychological scars. Posttraumatic stress disorder is a common diagnosis—but is it the right one?

BY KATHERINE N. BOONE

WHEN STAFF SERGEANT KYLE JEWART RETURNED to his hometown of Savannah, Georgia, from Iraq in 2008, he had trouble sleeping. During his 15-month tour with the U.S. Army's Sixty-Fourth Armor Regiment, six men in his company were killed in combat, and many more were wounded. He thought about those guys a lot. As a part of the Army's civilian reintegration process, he filled out a standard questionnaire: Did you kill anyone? Did you lose anyone close to you? Do you feel tense? Do you think about harming yourself?

"There must have been something in my answers," Jewart says, "because they told me I had PTSD." The Army offered him counseling, the military's most common treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but after a session or two, Jewart stopped going. "I guess according to the definition I had PTSD, but I just didn't feel like I did."

Jewart neither was having flashbacks nor was seriously impaired by his symptoms. He wasn't suicidal. To keep his mind occupied, he went back to school to finish his bachelor's degree, and he sought support from his friends, family, and fiancée. Over time, he began to feel better and to sleep more easily. Today, he says he's doing fine. So had Jewart really suffered from PTSD? Any medical diagnosis, of course, must

be made by a licensed clinician, but Jewart's story raises a larger question: How is a person *supposed* to react to trauma?

For the past decade, legions of soldiers have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq bearing wounds both physical and psychological. As a country, the United States is struggling to understand, support, and treat these veterans. But for all its advances in finding ways to repair their bodies, the medical establishment is still grappling with how to treat their minds.

How many soldiers suffer from PTSD? There is no clear answer. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) says that more than 177,000 Iraq and Afghan war veterans have received a provisional diagnosis of PTSD, though this number does not take into account soldiers who are still serving or veterans who seek care outside of the VA system. What's more certain is that the VA has struggled with the diagnosis and treatment of those affected. In May, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit declared that the VA's "unchecked incompetence" in meeting the psychological needs of soldiers violated their constitutional right to due process, and mandated that the department completely overhaul its mental health care system. Indeed, bureaucratic delays, case backlogs, a shortage of qualified medical personnel, and stringent documentation

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Showing the strains of the fighting in Afghanistan's bitterly contested Korengal Valley in 2007, a U.S. infantryman takes refuge near a bunker.

requirements delay or block disability compensation and treatment in many instances—and what sufferers do receive is often inadequate. Treatments vary widely, from medication to intensive one-on-one therapy, and depend on whether the servicemember is still on active duty—the VA's treatment is often different from the Army's.

Perhaps one of the reasons the system has become so complex and dysfunctional is that the conceptual foundation on which it is based is fundamentally unstable. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), the bible of the psychiatric profession, Staff Sergeant Jewart should indeed have been afflicted by PTSD. The DSM's definition of the disorder is somewhat mechanistic: Input a sufficient degree of stress, and you get disorder. And therein lies the illness's paradox: If you

react normally to trauma, you have a disorder; if you react abnormally, you don't. As Nancy Andreasen, a neuroscientist and psychiatrist at the University of Iowa, aptly observed in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1995, PTSD is the only disorder that patients want to have; unlike all other psychiatric conditions, which imply defects of some kind, a diagnosis of PTSD confirms the patient's normality.

The creation of PTSD as a diagnostic category emerged as much from politics as from medicine. The disorder was first included in the DSM's third edition, published in 1980, in large part because activists, many of them Vietnam War veterans, had lobbied for a formal diagnosis that not only validated the experience of delayed and prolonged psychic pain but also relieved sufferers of the shame and stigma associated with mental illness. At the same time, clinicians who

studied other traumatic events as varied as rape and the Holocaust supported the idea that symptoms could appear months or even years after exposure to the stressor—one of the criteria the DSM incorporated.

The recognition of PTSD was not the first time the military had grappled with war's psychological effects on combatants. During World War I, psychiatrists thought that the spate of unusual psychological symptoms afflicting soldiers was the result of concussions caused by the new high explosives used in battle—hence the term “shell shock.” Though the theory was quickly discredited, the term lingers. The problem was put into bold relief when, in 1943, the Veterans Administration calculated that the government had spent over a billion dollars on the long-term care of World War I psychiatric casualties, who constituted more than half of the Veterans Administration's patients. In the early years of World War II, psychiatric casualties were diagnosed with “war neurosis,” a condition already existent in the individual because of inherent weakness or defective parenting and ag-

DURING WORLD WAR I, doctors believed soldiers' psychological ills were caused by the concussions of high explosives—shell shock.

gravated by armed conflict. The U.S. military, unable to provide the months, if not years, of psychotherapy that war neurosis required, discharged soldiers displaying psychiatric distress of any kind.

Midway through the war, a manpower crisis forced the military to re-evaluate its policy of summary dismissal. Escalating casualties and a dwindling pool from which to draft meant that the armed services could no longer afford to discharge men who were physically fit, if psychically shattered. In response to the problem, a group of Army psychiatrists in North Africa developed the theory of “combat fatigue,” also known as “combat stress” or, simply, “exhaustion.” If the “war neurosis” label implied a deep-seated pathology, combat fatigue suggested exactly the opposite. Ac-

ording to this new theory, it was not a latent neurosis that caused psychiatric symptoms among soldiers but natural emotional and physical fatigue that was highly treatable. Because the condition was not pathological, Army psychiatrists theorized that rest, emotional support, and encouragement not to think of themselves as sick or abnormal could re-fortify most men, who consequently would not need to be automatically discharged. Much to the military's relief, many of them could return to duty—often quickly.

By making psychiatric symptoms normal, the combat fatigue diagnosis freed soldiers from the stigma of neurosis. The flip side of this reclassification, however, was that it risked minimizing soldiers' very real psychic pain. Whatever its strengths and flaws, combat fatigue was the dominant paradigm in 20th-century military psychiatry until the advent of PTSD.

Though the diagnosis of combat fatigue was commonly used by military psychiatrists, it had no widely accepted analogue in civilian psychiatry. Thus, when the first DSM was published in 1952, the category

of “gross stress reaction” was included to formally acknowledge reactions to traumatic stress in civilian life. That diagnosis was eliminated, however, from the second edition, published in 1968. The absence of gross stress reaction left psychiatrists

without a concept for understanding and treating those exposed to extreme stress. A new diagnosis was thus necessary both to capture the new understanding of how stress worked and to accord victims the treatment they needed. The 1980 edition made clear that PTSD was precipitated by a single external event and not anything in the victim's nature. Thus, while all other psychiatric diagnoses eschew assigning causes, which are invariably manifold, the definition of PTSD requires a specific etiologic event: exposure to an identifiable traumatic stressor. Without such exposure, known in the DSM as “Criterion A,” a patient cannot be diagnosed with the disorder, no matter how closely his or her other symptoms seem to fit. But Criterion A has undergone major alterations in all subsequent



The Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs have come under fire for mishandling PTSD cases such as that of Private Jason Scheuerman, whose parents mourn his 2006 suicide.

revisions of the DSM precisely because it has been so difficult to specify what constitutes traumatic stress.

The 1980 edition of the manual defined traumatic stress as “a recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone;” qualifying events fell “generally outside the range of usual human experience.” In PTSD’s original configuration, the only reaction for almost everyone—i.e., normal people—to sufficiently abnormal events was to develop PTSD. Inherent in this wording were assumptions about what a normal person is and does and what events constitute a normal life—assumptions that proved somewhat simplistic and shallow. After all,

sticky question of what the usual human experience is and how normal people ought to react to it.

Nevertheless, the concept of normality originally so necessary to the project is still implicit in the construct of PTSD. The symptoms of the disorder include flashbacks, avoidance, numbing, and the state of heightened tension known as hyper-arousal. However, Harvard psychiatrist J. Alexander Bodkin has found that people experience these symptoms after events that fail to reach the threshold of Criterion A, such as divorce, the collapse of adoption arrangements, and financial insolvency. Similarly, a study by psychologists at Temple University found that when a set of

people survive—and even find meaning in—suffering, and the definition of normal life as being free of traumatic events obscures the difficult and often tragic aspects of human experience.

The definition had technical problems as well. As it was written, Criterion A failed to distinguish the types of traumatic stressors it intended—such as combat, rape, and natural disasters—from “everyday” stressors, such as divorce or the death of a loved one. Moreover, other PTSD-precipitating events—car accidents and assaults, for example—are an unfortunate but hardly unusual part of everyday life.

In response to such criticisms, in the DSM’s 1994 revision the language defining Criterion A was changed to read that “the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.” In excising all language of normalcy, psychiatrists hoped to disentangle PTSD from the

otherwise normal undergraduates were asked to think about the most troubling aspect of their lives, they reported PTSD symptoms at equal and sometimes higher rates than did students who had been exposed to Criterion A stressors.

If a normal event can precipitate the symptoms of PTSD in normal people, it would seem that the description of the clinical syndrome in the DSM fails to distinguish between normal and abnormal reactions. It's a catch-22: The only way not to be called crazy is not to be bothered by trauma, but in some ways you'd have to be crazy *not* to be. As Bodkin and others have argued, the problem with the DSM's symptoms is that they are broad phenomena—sleep disruption, anxiety, depression—that are common to many forms of psychic distress, and that those criteria lack adequate means of distinguishing symptoms of genuine disorder from their normal analogues. As many critics have pointed out, the confusion of ordinary unhappiness with actual illness troubles all fields of psychiatry. The profound, implacable suffering of those with true PTSD ought not to be cheapened by being conflated with everyday distress.

Compare how we think about trauma to how we think about bereavement. Grief is understood as a normal, painful part of life through which a person eventually passes, thanks to a combination of time, soul-searching, and the compassion of others. It is normal human pain. The DSM reflects the commonality of this process with an official diagnosis for normal grief, indicating that there exists a non-pathological condition for which a person might seek professional help. Diagnoses of clinical depression, a recognized pathology, apply only to those whose sadness becomes chronic. Yet there is no designation for a normal reaction to traumatic events.

In recent years, we've learned that not everyone exposed to a traumatic stressor gets PTSD. In the wake of 9/11, predictions that there would be an epidemic of PTSD among New Yorkers weren't borne out (though more than 10,000 firefighters, police officers, and civilians present at the site of the attack did at some point suffer from the disorder.) Important research on risk factors, vulnerability, resilience, and even "posttraumatic growth" both complicates and illuminates the relationship between PTSD and nor-

mality without reverting to the pre-PTSD tendency to blame the victims for their condition. Much has been written on the factors that might predispose any given individual to PTSD: race, gender, ethnicity, coping mechanisms, support networks, and education level, to name several.

According to the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, approximately eight percent of American adults will experience PTSD in their lifetimes; the VA estimates that among the more than two million soldiers who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan, the proportion will be between 11 and 20 percent. Other researchers, looking just at Iraq vets, project rates of up to 35 percent. To be sure, a much greater proportion of both soldiers and civilians have been exposed to a traumatic stressor as defined by the manual than suffer from the syndrome. Still, little is known about why some people exposed to extreme stressors experience PTSD while others don't. The next version of the DSM, to be published in 2013, provides an opportunity to modify the definition and criteria to reflect new research.

A number of psychiatrists, among them Robert L. Spitzer, who coauthored the original PTSD diagnosis in 1980, have been vociferous in their criticism of the current definition of the disorder, and many are skeptical that whatever changes are implemented in the next DSM will resolve the conceptual problems. While Spitzer and others have advocated a tightening of the diagnosis, there is concern that the definition might even be broadened, which would further blur the line between normality and disorder. Besides diminishing the significance of the disorder for both the sufferer and society at large, this "conceptual bracket creep," as Harvard psychologist Richard J. McNally has called it, would have real consequences for the military. Treating soldiers such as Staff Sergeant Jewart strains already-scarce resources and diverts them from the ones who need more intensive care. As Jewart says, "We were shot at and we were hit with IEDs throughout the whole deployment. I guess I really should have gotten PTSD. Everybody in my platoon *should* have." A one-size-fits-all diagnosis begs for a one-size-fits-all treatment, but treating those with milder symptoms the same way as those who are incapacitated does justice to none. ■

The World Trade Revolution

To see how the world will eventually right today's massive trade imbalances, look to the Atlantic, not the Pacific.

BY MARTIN WALKER

LAST YEAR, TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL CORPORATIONS in the United States reversed a decades-long trend of sending money and jobs to low-wage factories overseas and announced that they would be investing up to \$10 billion in manufacturing goods at home.

Two-thirds of that investment is to be made by Intel Corporation, which will be upgrading its existing plants and building a new chip fabrication facility in Oregon. That might have been expected. While Intel makes more than 70 percent of its sales overseas, it has traditionally kept three-quarters of its manufacturing in the United States. But the other announcement, by General Electric, was a surprise. Its investments, more than \$400 million on top of some \$600 million made during the past two years, will go toward building new manufacturing plants for household appliances such as refrigerators, freezers, and washing machines. These are traditionally the kinds of mass-market, low-technology products that can be produced more cheaply in China and imported back into the United States.

The advantages of lean manufacturing and ad-

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vanced design are among the reasons GE gave for its decision, along with innovative wage agreements with its unions. Rising fuel—and thus transport—costs may have also played a part, along with a thoughtful assessment of the marketing value of a label saying “Made in USA” at a time of high unemployment. And China is less and less a low-wage economy. The well-publicized strikes at Honda's plants in China last year led to 24 percent wage increases. In Guangdong, the legal minimum wage in export industries has been increased twice, by 20 percent and then by 19 percent, in the last 18 months.

In August, China's state-owned shipping giant COSCO stunned the international maritime trade community by saying it would no longer honor the contracts it had signed three years ago to pay \$50,000 to \$80,000 a day to charter the category of huge merchant ships known as “capesize” (because they are too big for either the Panama or Suez Canals and must round Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope). With the going charter rate for such ships at around \$22,000 a day, COSCO reckoned it was losing money. After aggrieved charter firms took legal action to impound some of the ships they had leased to COSCO, the company resumed some payments, but the threat not to

pay illustrated that something fundamental seems to be shifting in world trade. The assumption of permanent, inevitable growth is crumbling.

For the past 60 years, the value of world trade has been the lifeblood of globalization, consistently growing much faster than world economic output—sometimes twice as fast. Over the past two decades, while global economic output has increased by an average of around three percent annually, the value of world trade has grown by more than five percent annually. But this trend may be drawing to an end.

This may sound counterintuitive, with unprecedented tonnage of new shipping on the stocks or being launched. Moreover, the emerging markets of Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East are gearing up for a massive expansion of trade among themselves as the developed economies of the G-7 countries falter.

But when we look at the main components of world trade by volume, rather than by value, doubts begin to creep in. Economists look at the value of trade, but the shipping companies that carry the goods have to think in terms of volume, which means how much shipping capacity they will need. They then have to balance the price they pay for the ships and crews against the fees their customers will pay to charter the ships.

Between 1970 and 2010, the volume of world seaborne trade more than tripled, from 11 trillion ton-miles a year to 34 trillion. Last year, half of this volume was composed of crude oil, oil products, and coal. Another quarter of it was iron ore and grain. The rest consisted of other merchandise, mostly carried in containers.

So the critical question for future trade volumes is what will happen to seaborne oil and coal, iron ore, and grain. Looking beyond the coming decade, oil and coal seem likely to start losing their dominance as sources of energy. The European Union is aiming to obtain 20 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020 (Germany is almost there already), and China looks set to beat its own target of 15 percent.

This is not to say that the world will not need supertankers for oil and huge LNG (liquefied natural gas) tankers for many years to come. As millions of

newly middle-class Chinese and Indian consumers start to buy cars, global demand will continue. But that demand may be fed more by pipelines than by tankers. And an increasing percentage of those new vehicles are likely to be powered by hybrid or all-electric motors, while cars of the future that run on gasoline will be getting much higher mileage than today's models.

Tomorrow's cars will also have plenty of ethanol for their tanks. The production of ethanol from wood cellulose, including wood chips and various grasses, is finally looking promising. U.S. energy secretary Steven Chu announced in August that researchers at the U.S. Department of Energy-funded BioEnergy Science Center have identified the single gene that controls ethanol production capacity in the microorganism *Clostridium thermocellum*. And scientists are now experimenting with genetic alterations in biomass plants that may allow enhanced processes such as those coming from the BioEnergy discovery to yield even greater concentrations of ethanol.

All of these developments mean that the power train revolution for the automobile is under way, and oil imported by tankers is starting to see the erosion of its century-long dominance of the trade routes.

Two other trends seem likely to reduce the world's appetite for seaborne oil. The first is the preference for pipelines where possible, and for a variety of reasons. China, for example, is building pipelines from Central Asia because of the strategic risks of depending on oil tankers from the Persian Gulf that can be interdicted by U.S. or Indian naval power. Europe will receive increased quantities of imported oil and gas via pipeline from Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and North Africa. The Medgaz pipeline, which conveys natural gas from Algeria to Spain, was officially inaugurated in March. The \$7 billion Greenstream pipeline from Libya to Italy, which began shipping 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually when it opened six years ago, is expected to resume operations before the end of this year, after service was interrupted by the Libyan revolution.

The second important trend is the dramatic expansion in the availability of natural gas, a far cleaner

energy source than coal or oil, and a resource that the United States and China have in abundance, thanks to the new technology of hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.” With increasing amounts of domestic natural gas coming online, the U.S. appetite for imported energy is shrinking dramatically. A Department of Energy advisory panel recently reported, “As late as 2007, before the impact of the shale gas revolution, it was assumed that the United States would be importing large amounts of liquefied natural gas from the Middle East and other areas. Today, the United States is essentially self-sufficient in natural gas, with the only notable imports being from Canada, and is expected to remain so for many decades.” Natural gas currently supplies nearly a quarter of U.S. energy needs. Over time, the panel added, domestic shale gas could reduce America’s dependence on imported oil.

Then consider the seaborne trade in iron ore. China

accounts for half of this, much more than the combined imports of Japan, Germany, and South Korea, the next-biggest importers. This is not simply because of China’s great steel output but because the other advanced economies get a growing share of their steel from recycling. No less than two thirds of the steel produced in the United States is created from recycled materials. As the stock of steel products accumulates in China, it too will start to replace imports with recycled materials.

In the longer term, the amount of grain being shipped, now roughly three trillion ton-miles a year is also likely to decline. This is not because the world will stop being hungry; far from it. But shipping grain is a highly inefficient way of distributing food. Because of the large amounts of water used in the production of grain, shipping it is, in effect, like shipping water, and water is becoming an increasingly valuable com-

Iron ore is unloaded from a massive cargo ship, or “bulker,” in the major Chinese port city of Qingdao.



PHOTOGRAPH BY YAN JUN/IMAGINECHINA

modity that most countries will seek to preserve.

Advances in genetic modification and food technology suggest that by the next decade the shipment of grain by boat could start giving way to the shipment of smart seeds by air. New seeds that are drought resistant or salt-water tolerant are already entering widespread use. Seedlings grown from the S1, a genetically modified seed developed by researchers in the Philippines, can survive more than 10 days' immersion in saltwater, an

attribute that could save many, many lives in flood-prone areas such as Bangladesh and the Mekong Delta. It would mean that people could still eat when the floods subside. Smart seeds can already be custom designed for the soil, climate, and environmental conditions of a particular region, or even a particular field. They look like the future of food trade.

So the global trade in oil, coal, iron ore, and grain, which together account for more than two-thirds of shipping volumes, looks likely to slow in the future, and even to shrink. But trade is not going to disappear. Trade in container-shipped manufactured goods will continue, and airfreight looks likely to thrive. In their own studies, Boeing and Airbus see airfreight growing at around six percent annually for the next two decades, and they are planning and building the aircraft to carry it. Thanks to computer chips and motherboards, smartphones and tablets and liquid-crystal displays, electronics account for 40 percent of the value of all airfreight. It is a lucrative business; air carries about one-third of international trade by value, but only about six percent by volume.

Trade in manufactured goods has a big question mark hanging over it. World trade is out of balance. The United States is running a trade deficit of nearly \$600 billion a year, half of it accounted for by one country—China. Protectionist pressures are building. It may only be a matter of time before China learns



The \$12 billion Nord Stream pipeline began delivering Russian natural gas to Germany this year.

to do what Japanese and German auto manufacturers did when faced with protectionist threats in the 1980s. They built plants in the United States. As China follows, world trade volumes are likely to shrink yet further.

Perhaps the best way to understand the shift that is taking place in the nature of world trade is to compare the values of the world's two great trading routes, the one across the Atlantic between Europe and the United States, and the one across the Pacific. On the face of it, in terms of raw trade volumes and prices, the Pacific trade appears to dwarf that across the Atlantic. Last year, the United States imported \$335 billion in goods from Europe but \$599 billion from the top five Asian economies (China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Taiwan). In the same period, the United States exported \$235 billion in goods to Europe and \$230 billion worth to the five Asian countries. Include Asian countries with smaller economies such as Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Pakistan, and the Pacific trade was worth almost \$1 trillion last year, while the Atlantic trade was worth only \$367 billion.

But that is to measure trade as it used to be. These days, trade in goods is just one part of a much broader and more sophisticated set of commercial relation-

ships. The Atlantic nations ship fewer goods because they conduct their trade in different ways. The Atlantic trade in services, which includes insurance and financial services, data management, advertising and entertainment, and royalties and license fees, was worth more than \$300 billion last year, and the United States enjoyed a surplus of nearly \$7 billion from it.

Trade in services is only a fraction of the overall Atlantic economic relationship. Rather than transport goods to one another in ships, the Atlantic economies instead send investment, executives, product designs, and marketing strategies so that they can manufacture goods in one another's markets. The transatlantic economy generates \$5 trillion in total commercial sales a year and employs up to 15 million workers in mutually "onshored" jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

Total U.S. investment in the EU countries is three times higher than American investment in all of Asia. And European investment in the United States is around eight times the amount of EU investment in India and China together. The total U.S. investment stock in Europe, as measured by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, is worth more than \$1 trillion. The total European investment in the United States is very nearly as great.

The United States and Europe are also each other's "most important commercial partners when it comes to services trade and investment," argue Daniel Hamilton and Joseph Quinlan in the latest edition of their annual survey, *The Transatlantic Economy 2011*, from which many of the statistics in this section are drawn. Hamilton is director of the Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, and Quinlan is a fellow there. "The economies of the United States and Europe have never been as intertwined as they are today in financial services, telecommunications, utilities, insurance, advertising, computer services, and other related activities."

Europeans and Americans build plants and employ workers in one another's countries. Last year, Europe-based affiliates of U.S. companies earned record profits of \$196 billion, equal to more than half of all foreign output by U.S. affiliates. They accounted to the same share even in the recession year of 2009. The sales of U.S. affiliates in Europe last year were roughly double

those in the Asia-Pacific region. And European affiliates accounted for two-thirds of the \$670 billion in total 2008 foreign affiliate production in the United States. Indeed, American-owned affiliate companies sell as much in the United Kingdom alone as they do in all of Asia.

The transatlantic economy remains by far the largest, most integrated, and wealthiest market in the world, with 54 percent of global GDP. Even after the financial crisis, American and EU financial markets continue to account for well over two-thirds of global banking assets, three-quarters of global financial services, more than 70 percent of all private and public debt securities, almost 75 percent of all new international debt securities, and 70 percent of all foreign-exchange derivatives transactions. Of all the world's foreign exchange holdings, 94 percent are in dollars (62 percent), euros (27 percent), or sterling (four percent).

In short, world trade in the future is likely to look much more like the Atlantic trade of today than like the Pacific trade. Most trade is mutually beneficial, but the Atlantic exchange is visibly beneficial to voters and politicians in that it employs local people. This is a major advantage at a time when high unemployment builds political resistance to imports from China and other low-wage competitors. It is even more of an advantage when the greatest volume of U.S. exports to China, filling those otherwise empty containers, consists of wastepaper and scrap metal.

Herbert Stein, who was chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford, coined a saying that has become known as Stein's law: "When something can't go on forever, it will stop." This almost certainly applies to the current massive imbalances in U.S.-China trade, in which the U.S. deficit is running at more than \$20 billion a month, a pattern symbolized by all that wastepaper and scrap metal Americans ship to China. The Atlantic trade points to the more balanced and politically acceptable way this trade is likely to develop, within the concept of the slow revolution in the nature and components of world trade now under way. ■

In the Footsteps of Giants

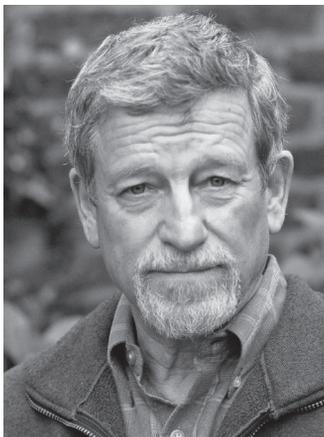
An Interview With Michael Scammell

BIOGRAPHER MICHAEL SCAMMELL has devoted much of his long career to writing about two of the 20th century's foremost intellectuals, whose impassioned writings defined in human and moral terms the stakes in the struggle against communism. Scammell's book about the Nobel Prize-winning dissident Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography*, published in 1984, was the first major biography to shed light on this towering yet secretive figure. *Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic*, which came out last

year to much acclaim, revived the reputation of the protean Hungarian writer Arthur Koestler, best known for his 1940 anti-totalitarian novel *Darkness at Noon*.

Scammell was born in 1935 and grew up in a working-class family near Southampton, England. Attracted to writing from an early age, he landed a job as a messenger for a local newspaper at 16. Two years later, he was drafted into the army and, as luck would have it, was sent to school to learn Russian. At the conclusion of his military service, Scammell

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Michael Scammell has written epic biographies of two of the 20th century's most enigmatic writers.

studied Russian at Nottingham University and then at Columbia University, where he earned a PhD (and currently teaches translation and writing). He took up translating, and his first effort, the experimental novel *Cities and Years*, by Konstantin Fedin, caught the eye of Vladimir Nabokov, who asked Scammell to help translate two of his early Russian-language novels, *The Gift* and *The Defense*, into English. Eventually, Scammell would translate many other books from Russian into English, including works by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy.

In the early 1970s Scammell helped found *Index on Censorship*, a magazine that continues to defend writers against state persecution and bring their censored texts to the attention of the public. He served as the magazine's editor for nearly a decade, published Solzhenitsyn's work, and started on the path to becoming one of today's most widely admired biographers. In 1985 he was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where he studied the emigration of artists who left the Soviet Union to work in the West.

Writer and translator Michael McDonald interviews Scammell about his life and work.



Soviet dissident writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, but international acclaim didn't save him from deportation after his scathing book *The Gulag Archipelago* was published. Here he peers at reporters gathered outside his house in Zurich in 1974.

MICHAEL McDONALD: How did you become a biographer?

MICHAEL SCAMMELL: A big question. Until I was in my early twenties, all I wanted to do was write fiction. I tried many times, but came to the conclusion that I didn't have the stamina for it, so I turned to translation, putting the words of foreign writers into English—which is a kind of creativity: creativity with language but not with thought. I also wrote a large number of reviews of other people's books, but it was only in the period right before the *Index on Censorship* came along that the idea of writing a biography about Solzhenitsyn first occurred to me.

McDONALD: And so what did you do?

SCAMMELL: Well, I was a freelancer—a polite term for unemployed—at the time, so I extorted a tiny advance

and went off to collect everything I could find out about Solzhenitsyn's life. Looking back, it's curious that I had the biographical itch from the beginning, because I could have written about many things, I suppose, and it didn't necessarily need to be a biography, but that was the way I thought about it. However, Solzhenitsyn was so successful at covering his tracks that I couldn't find out nearly enough to satisfy me, and I simply gave up.

McDONALD: But the seed had been planted.

SCAMMELL: Yes. And as I moved from freelancing to editing the *Index on Censorship* full-time, I got to publish a lot of dissident literature from the Soviet Union—Solzhenitsyn obviously being the most stellar dissident writer of them all. In time, I ferreted out some early poetry by Solzhenitsyn that I'd found in samizdat, and out of the blue I was contacted by Dr. Fritz Heeb, a lawyer in Zurich—the German writer

Heinrich Böll had found him for Solzhenitsyn—who asked me to stop. Solzhenitsyn suspected the poems had come from the KGB, but when he learned about the samizdat source, he relented and agreed to the publication.

I got drawn in deeper when Heeb later contacted me to ask if I could manage the translation and publication of Solzhenitsyn's heartfelt plea for democratic reforms in the Soviet Union, *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*. This was in 1974, after the KGB's discovery of the manuscript of *The Gulag Archipelago* and literally days before Solzhenitsyn's arrest. We worked round the clock at *Index* to get the *Letter* out in the form of a slim book, and got caught up in the whole drama of Solzhenitsyn's arrest and deportation. And always at the back of my mind was this idea that I should one day write Solzhenitsyn's biography.

MCDONALD: But you must also have been attracted in some way to Solzhenitsyn. Why else devote so many years of your life to writing about his?

SCAMMELL: Well, at that point I had no idea how many years it would take. The main thing was that for me, Solzhenitsyn was an iconic figure, a larger-than-life hero like no other I had come close to. First of all there was his titanic struggle with the censorship that was the main subject of my magazine, making him the greatest exemplar of freedom of expression of our times. In thinking about his life and his work and publishing work by him, I was advancing my own ideas of freedom of expression and my ideas about the nature of a regime—the Soviet regime—that totally suppressed it. In writing the life of Solzhenitsyn, I would be promoting ideas and values that were dear to me, and, in my commentary, bringing my own views to bear.

MCDONALD: Was there a similar fascination with Koestler?

SCAMMELL: Not at first. The early part of my professional life overlapped with the latter part of Koestler's writing life. In fact, I had met him once and was fully aware of who he was. By that time he was writing about science and even parascience, and the notion

of writing his life never occurred to me. But the urge to write a biography comes about in a variety of ways. In this instance, I was approached by Koestler's last editor and literary executor, Harold Harris, who had admired the Solzhenitsyn book and thought I might be right for Koestler. There was one existing biography, written during Koestler's lifetime, which was woefully inadequate and was disowned by Koestler—rightly, I think. So I sat down and read a lot of his work, reacquainted myself with *Darkness at Noon* and his autobiographies, read some secondary material, and then decided I had plenty to write about.

MCDONALD: Koestler is quite different from Solzhenitsyn, isn't he?

SCAMMELL: Yes and no. He's an interesting counterpart and an interesting contrast to Solzhenitsyn. Unlike Solzhenitsyn, he wasn't born into and didn't grow up in a tumultuous, revolutionary society, though he did have one experience of revolution in his teens. But in an odd way, Koestler's progress mimics Solzhenitsyn's. He was born 13 years earlier than Solzhenitsyn, in 1905, before World War I, in Hungary. He had a perfectly straightforward bourgeois upbringing, and was a Zionist for a while, before discovering and embracing communism. It's often forgotten that Solzhenitsyn, too, was a believing communist as a young man, until he turned against it. Long before Solzhenitsyn, however, Koestler became one of the 20th century's most powerful critics of communist mythology and behavior. He was a cosmopolitan, free to travel the world in a way forbidden to Solzhenitsyn, and he was broader in his interests than Solzhenitsyn, but I don't think he was deeper. If anything, Solzhenitsyn was the deeper writer.

MCDONALD: Solzhenitsyn the hedgehog versus Koestler the fox?

SCAMMELL: Yes, Koestler was very much a fox. He had a million different interests, and, by the way, knew and clashed intellectually with the popularizer of that metaphor, Isaiah Berlin.

MCDONALD: Was that part of what attracted you to him?

SCAMMELL: What Koestler embodied was something else that represents an important side of my own character. He was fascinated by the idea of utopia, by the ideal of human happiness. He was desperate to find a way to build a perfect society—or, if you like, a less imperfect society than the one we have now—and spent most of his life beating his brains out in search of a solution. I eventually concluded he was innately a mystic, though he rejected religion out of hand, even when he was a Zionist. Lacking the religious option, he was left with varieties of politics—and later science and social science—as prospective means of improving society.

MCDONALD: Who, if anyone, did you take as your model in writing your lives of Solzhenitsyn and Koestler?

SCAMMELL: There's no doubt in my mind that James Boswell is the greatest biographer of all time, and the one against whom I measure my own accomplishments, such as they are.

MCDONALD: Boswell, the greatest biographer of all time—or simply in the English language?

SCAMMELL: No, of all time. Don't forget, biography has been much more fully developed—and for a much longer time—in the English language and in English literature than in others. If you look at French literature, Russian literature—the two others I know best—or even German literature, you won't find a strong biographical tradition, and their contemporary biographies ape English and American models. You have to go back to classical times to discover a well-developed school of biography: Plutarch with his Greek and Roman lives, and so forth. Imitations of his biographical works followed in all European languages in succeeding centuries, but it took Dr. Johnson, who had one foot firmly planted in the ancient classical tradition, to challenge the reigning conventions. He was the one who first opened up English literature to biography as an art. In one of his books, *The Life of Mr. Richard Savage*, he came close to producing a biography with the vividness and modernism that characterized Boswell's. Boswell, building on Johnson's experiments, created the art of biography in the modern sense of the word.

MCDONALD: What makes Boswell the best?

SCAMMELL: Well, one astonishing aspect of his work is that Boswell didn't spend all that much time with Johnson and didn't know him half as well as he pretended. If you go through his book and add up how often Boswell saw Johnson, and for how long, it amounts to a period of only 15 years, out of Johnson's more than 70. But Boswell's genius lies in the vividness with which he brings his encounters with Johnson to life. It's Boswell's scene painting that made such a big impression on me, as well as the way in which he organizes his material around those scenes and the interviews he contrived to have with Johnson. At the end of your reading, you feel you've been living with Dr. Johnson for a very long time and have really come to know him.

MCDONALD: No one more recent?

SCAMMELL: A modern example of a well-done Boswellian biography that I greatly admire is Gerald Clarke's life of Truman Capote, which appeared in 1988. Clarke, like Boswell, knew and admired his subject personally for many years. Quite early on, he and Capote agreed that he would write Capote's biography, so Capote, as it were, "sat" for his portrait over many years. Like Boswell, Clarke crams his book with vivid scenes and drama, in many cases relying on things that he saw or heard himself. But that's rare. I also admire Richard Ellmann's biographies of James Joyce and Oscar Wilde, which strike me as the acme of academic literary biography. Ellmann wears his learning lightly, and succeeds in making serious subjects entertaining. He also excels at marshaling and wielding his sources by organizing his material to maximum literary effect.

MCDONALD: What about the Bloomsbury writer Lytton Strachey and the new form of psychological biography he pioneered in the post-World War I era?

SCAMMELL: I've read Strachey very carefully, but he's no model for me. The biographies in *Eminent Victorians* are mostly very short and written in a satirical vein as part of a wide-ranging polemic against the hypocrisy and moral turpitude of Victorian England. His skill is immense, but he turns the exhortation



Arthur Koestler is best known for his anti-Stalinist novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940), which reflected his own disillusionment with communism.

of Ecclesiasticus, “Let us now praise famous men,” completely on its head.

MCDONALD: It used to be said that the biographer who’s done his work well vanishes into the shadow of his creative achievement. But then you have books—most famously, perhaps, Edmund Morris’s life of Ronald Reagan, *Dutch*—in which the biographer has a walk-on role or may even take center stage. What do you think of this development?

SCAMMELL: I think it arises out of jealousy and a sort of mild desperation. It’s very tempting to wonder, “Why should I give up so much of my life to writing about another person?” And sometimes the biographer may get fed up and say, “Well, actually, I want to be here, too. I’m important.” We biographers are generally self-effacing, but there comes a point where we don’t want to efface ourselves anymore, or at least not so completely.

Another influence is the modern sense of the narrator as performer. Janet Malcolm is very good at this sort of thing, though her books aren’t biographies in the usual sense. But she writes about biographical matters, and this conceit enables her—and the rest of us—to step forward in our own person and give our views about people we meet and the issues raised by our work and our writing. When I began work on the Koestler biography, I tried that approach, too.

MCDONALD: What happened?

SCAMMELL: I wrote a draft of the first few pages in the present tense—the present tense works particularly well when you are striving for immediacy—and I described making my way through the old city of Buda, crossing one of its famous bridges to get to the more modern part of the city known as Pest (hence Budapest), and walking up the main avenue to where Koestler was

born. Then I stood in front of his parents' apartment building and began to narrate the story of Koestler's birth and his family history, and so on and so forth.

MCDONALD: What stopped you from continuing on in that way?

SCAMMELL: I found it uncomfortably self-serving. If I wanted to write about my own life and travels, I should simply do that, I thought. It also wasn't functional. If I could have said that my approach illuminated important matters that I couldn't do so well otherwise, it would have been legitimate—and I'm not saying it can't be done. But in my case, it was a distraction. Thirdly, there was the sheer volume and weight of fact and information I had to deal with, so that introducing a personal story line would have enlarged it without adding much of value. The conventions are there for a reason. So I maintained the goal of presenting Koestler's life in as lively a manner as possible—with lots of "show" as well as "tell"—but in the usual third-person style. Of course, I also tried to avoid the opposite temptation, which is to overload the narrative with facts and data simply because you have them. To earn their place, they have to pass a certain test.

MCDONALD: Namely?

SCAMMELL: The test Horace set out for writers so many centuries ago: Not merely to instruct, by piling fact upon fact, but to delight, to entertain. Fact is fundamental, but the biographer has a duty to be selective. A great deal of what you gather and what you know—and this is true of even a large biography like mine of Koestler—remains underwater, and what the reader sees is only the tip of the iceberg.

MCDONALD: How do you view the essential difference between being a novelist and a biographer?

SCAMMELL: To paraphrase the British literary critic Desmond MacCarthy, the biographer is the novelist on oath. He captured both parts of what's important. Where he was very astute was in recognizing that the biographer is using the same arsenal of devices as the novelist; that is to say, the biographer is us-

ing characterization. It's not simply enough to take the sum total of people's impressions of someone, to collect them and put them all down on the page; a biographer has to select, too. One has to be able to set a scene in such a way that the reader is drawn in and convinced by what one has written, and that too is a novelistic gift.

MCDONALD: Facts alone don't convince?

SCAMMELL: It depends on the genre, but facts alone can never convince the reader. At the very least, there has to be an argument. In a biography, if the facts aren't artfully presented, you end up with a flattened portrait. Let me put it this way: Quite a bit has been written about the suspension of disbelief in fiction. My wife, who reads more novels than I do, has a habit of picking up a novel, starting it, and then all of a sudden she'll throw it on the table or chair. I say, "What's wrong?" She'll respond, "I don't believe in this anymore." And the biographer has the exact same problem. It's two-fold: One, does the reader believe what the biographer is saying to him about the subject of the biography? And, two, does the reader believe that the biographer has found the best way to say it? Of course, biographers also rely heavily on the intrinsic interest of their subjects, often too heavily, in my opinion, but credibility is even more important in biography than in fiction, because fiction is made up.

This touches on the other aspect of MacCarthy's dictum: the oath. As a biographer, you must write only what you know (or think you know), what is genuinely fact based. You can't make up a whole new character for your subject. You cannot—and here is where I think Edmund Morris went wrong in his biography of Reagan—imagine scenes and say, "This is what he would have been doing or thinking. I know it, because I know the rest of his life." You can put down only what you have sources for—preferably more than one source. What you do, if you can, is get as many different accounts of your subject's character and behavior as possible, and, in effect, you triangulate.

MCDONALD: How so?

SCAMMELL: One of my favorite scenes in the Koestler

biography is when Koestler, Simone de Beauvoir, Camus, and Sartre were all at a party at the home of [the French novelist and musician] Boris Vian. They each reported different things about that party, but none of them knew what any of the others had written. I found their accounts, and I was able to show it in 3-D, as it were, melding the different versions and revealing several layers of meaning. The oath is against invention; if you're not sure of something, you don't put it in. But when you have a variety of sources, you can put them together for the reader in such a way that the reader is also convinced and nods his head and says, "Ah yes, I see. I now know what Koestler didn't know at the time, or Camus, or Sartre, or Simone de Beauvoir, for that matter, and I understand." You need a novelist's skill in timing and setting a scene, but also a biographer's honesty in sticking to the known facts.

MCDONALD: But isn't the besetting biographical temptation, at least when the facts are either murky or missing, to fill in the blanks by seeking patterns in the subject's life?

SCAMMELL: Yes, the temptation to find patterns is very seductive, and I wouldn't say I always resisted it. You do tend to put two and two together and have a hypothesis about how something's going to turn out. But this is where the oath comes in. If you can't find the smoking gun, you can't convict, but you still have two options. You don't necessarily omit the possible—or probable—existence of a gun, but you have to be frank with the reader. You have to confess and say, "This is what I think may have occurred, but I can't prove it." And that way you have your cake and eat it, too. The thought and the image are planted in the reader's mind, but you don't claim more for it than you can back up with evidence. It's also true that one is always looking for the subject to behave as you would have predicted he would. On the other hand, it's very valuable when you come across something that contradicts the pattern, and better still, the reader's expectations,

because the reader suddenly realizes your subject is an autonomous human being and unpredictable and liable to do and say surprising things—even perhaps surprising himself.

MCDONALD: How do you begin writing a biography? Do you read everything first?

SCAMMELL: I began in different places. In the case of Solzhenitsyn, the book grew out of my interest in Russian literature and in Soviet dissident writers. It sort of grew on me, to the point where I was able to filter my concerns through the personality of Solzhenitsyn, and then translate my fascination with his personality

TO EARN THEIR PLACE, facts have to pass the test Horace set out for writers so many centuries ago: Not merely to instruct, but to entertain.

into a project to write his life. In the case of Koestler, it was a question of feeling an affinity not so much with his personality as with his profile as a writer and with the subjects of his writing—a kind of sociopolitical affinity, if you will. With Solzhenitsyn, the book came more naturally, because I had known my subject over a long period of time. With Koestler, I sat down and read a lot of his work in one gulp before deciding to write about him.

MCDONALD: How much time did that take? Koestler's body of writing is enormous.

SCAMMELL: I was teaching full-time, so I had to work on the book in the summer and winter vacations and during what spare time I could muster. The big initial read probably happened during a summer vacation, when I read *Darkness at Noon*, *Arrival and Departure* (his third novel), his autobiographies, and some of the essays in *The Yogi and the Commissar*. My imagination was fired both by what I read that summer and by some commentaries on his work. As with Solzhenitsyn,

I formed an image of him in my mind. I think this aspect of the work is underemphasized in the art of biography, which brings us back to the comparison between novels and biographies: One forms an image in one's mind pretty early on about who this person is, and then it becomes a question of testing it and adjusting it on the basis of what one finds out as one goes along. Sometimes you have to make huge revisions to the image, sometimes smaller revisions, but as a biographer, you need that kind of shining light up ahead of you—the image that draws you on. Then it's a matter of putting flesh on it and making it three-dimensional.

MCDONALD: And as you put more flesh on your subject's image, your view of it changes, right?

SCAMMELL: Of course. For instance, Solzhenitsyn up close turned out to be a far less saintly figure than he had seemed from afar, which was all to the good from the biographical point of view, because it makes him more human. Koestler, on the other hand, who has always had a bad reputation for his character, grew in my estimation. Of course, I never thought of him as a saint, but I did become more aware of the forces and obsessions that contributed to his frailties and that in many ways he was helpless to oppose. So my admiration for him, which would certainly strike many reviewers as odd, grew, and I became more sympathetic to him as my work progressed.

MCDONALD: Given the oppressive weight of modern archives, how do you know that you've read enough?

SCAMMELL: It's a combination of things. Let's just take a prosaic and yet important practical consideration. Biography is rife with examples of people who don't finish for 20 or 25 years—or perhaps ever—and this is often a result of reluctance to stop researching. There's always more to find out. But after a certain point in time, even they feel the pressure. Others around you (your agent, your publisher, your spouse) are pressing you to finish, and you begin to feel ridiculous. Another unheroic explanation is sheer exhaustion. You may feel there's important information still out there, but you don't have the strength or time or inclination to go further. But it's more complicated than that, because research

and writing aren't completely separated from one another, and it's not as if you come to the complete end of one before starting the other. There does, however, come that moment when you begin to grapple with the writing in a serious way. You grow impatient with the collection of material; you can't wait to explore your notes and get your cherished insights down on paper. At the back of your mind is the fear of losing your freshness and growing stale. At last, you feel you've covered all the main bases, you've gathered up all the relevant material, and whatever else you collect is not going to change the picture you've built up in any significant way.

MCDONALD: What's the most significant thing that reviewers of biographies tend to miss?

SCAMMELL: It mainly comes down to a disregard for craft. I'm aware that space allotted for book reviews is usually short and that most attention should rightfully be directed toward the subject, but the one or two token sentences of praise or dispraise you get in the average review are disappointing, especially when you've put so much effort into the composition and literary effects of your work. This is another area in which biographies are taken less seriously than novels, and that's frustrating for a biographer.

MCDONALD: Is there a code of ethics for a biographer?

SCAMMELL: It's very simple: Don't lie. Of course, when you break that commandment down and start to analyze it, you realize it's not that simple after all. You can, after all, without technically lying, create a false picture. Or you can try to force the reader to conclusions that are not truly justified by the evidence. I think that voice also plays a role here. Can you trust that person who's telling you all these things and setting out the evidence for them, or is there something shady and evasive about it? The judgment is quite subjective, of course, and readers don't always agree, but I have faith in the ability of most intelligent readers to spot the difference.

MCDONALD: Does the public have a right to know everything about a writer? W. H. Auden, for one, thought that a writer's personal sins, sufferings, and weaknesses are of absolutely no interest.

SCAMMELL: He wasn't the only one. Thomas Hardy ordered all his letters and diaries burnt after his death, and virtually dictated a biography of the early part of his life to his much younger wife and secretary. James Joyce referred to biographers as "biografiends," and then you have the famous Oscar Wilde quote about each great man having his disciples and how it's the Judas among them who ends up writing his biography. There's a long tradition of that, I think, and to a certain extent they're right, for biographers do in a sense exploit their subjects for their own ends.

MCDONALD: Some say biographies deflate the novelist's work—that they rob the work of its autonomy.

SCAMMELL: Do they? In my experience, they almost always turn readers' attention back to the work, not away from it, and I can't really think of any great or good novel, poem, or play that I've read—knowing much more about the background of the work—that's been diminished by a biography.

MCDONALD: Auden disagreed; but then he himself was a voracious reader of biography.

SCAMMELL: "Do as I say, not as I do" is the motto there, I think. I found that in the cases of Solzhenitsyn and Koestler there came a point at which they became—subconsciously, and then consciously—aware of the figure they were cutting in the world, of the impression they wanted to make, and deliberately worked on it. And perhaps it's this self-created image some are afraid of losing.

Whatever the case, the biographer has to contend with the image his subject has built up for the public. I find it interesting to go behind the image and compare it with the known facts and with how writers were seen by contemporaries who knew them well. It enriches one's perspective. In the case of Koestler, it was extremely interesting to compose the biography of someone who'd written two extensive autobiographies, *Arrow in the Blue* and *The Invisible Writing*, along with such autobiographical works as *Dialogue With Death*, *Scum of the Earth*, and the lead essay in *The God That Failed*. In a way, I was in competition with those works—except I could never imitate

Koestler's style or write as vividly as he did. But I was able to approach his life with a different aim and to illuminate the same events from a different point of view, and this only increased my admiration for him. The more I researched the facts and the more I became acquainted with the sources, the more I discovered how truthful Koestler was about his past. Like any writer, he embroidered a bit, and there were omissions, of course. But very, very rarely did I find something that was patently untrue, and that he knew to be untrue.

MCDONALD: What do you think of writing a biography in order to get behind the myth a writer has constructed about himself or herself?

SCAMMELL: If you mean negatively behind the myth, I don't have much sympathy with it. I think it's a modern trend that probably takes its cue from Strachey, whose goal was to debunk his subjects. But they were political actors, not writers, and that sort of thing belongs to a different genre. Why write a biography? Why not simply write an essay to demonstrate that someone's reputation is overblown, that they are untalented or immoral or whatever it is you want to say? But to write a whole biography to demonstrate that the idol has clay feet doesn't appeal to me.

MCDONALD: How would you react if you learned you were the subject of a biographer?

SCAMMELL: That's a wonderful question. I've never thought about it before. I would be very uneasy, I think. I would immediately recall all of the sins, ungracious acts, lies—white and not so white—I've been guilty of at different times in my life. I would be fearful of the weaknesses—my own and those of others—that would inevitably come out in the open. And I would argue that whoever is writing the biography should wait until I'm dead.

MCDONALD: But if you knew someone was on the trail of *your* life, would you cooperate?

SCAMMELL: I'm not sure. I'd probably say what Solzhenitsyn first said to me: "I won't stop you." ■



America's Schools: 4 BIG QUESTIONS

Nearly 30 years after a presidential commission warned of a “rising tide of mediocrity” in America’s public schools, the waters have yet to recede. Decades of effort have yielded only spotty progress, but also much valuable knowledge about what works, what doesn’t, and which questions remain.

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Teach to the Test?

Most of the problems with testing have one surprising source: cheating by school administrators and teachers.

BY RICHARD P. PHELPS

EVERY YEAR, THE EDUCATION MAGAZINE PHI DELTA *Kappan* hires the Gallup Organization to survey American opinion on the public schools. Though Gallup conducts the poll, education grandees selected by the editors of the *Kappan* write the questions. In 2007 the poll asked, “Will the current emphasis on standardized tests encourage teachers to ‘teach to the tests,’ that is, concentrate on teaching their students to pass the tests rather than teaching the subject, or don’t you think it will have this effect?”

The key to the question, of course, is the “rather than”—the assumption by many critics that test preparation and good teaching are mutually exclusive. In their hands, “teach to the test” has become an epithet. The very existence of content standards linked to standardized tests, in this view, narrows the curriculum and restricts the creativity of teachers—which of course it does, in the sense that teachers in standards-based systems cannot organize their instructional time in any fashion they prefer.

A more subtle critique is that teaching to the test can be good or bad. If curricula are carefully developed by educators and the test is written with curricula in mind, then teaching to the test means teaching students the knowledge and skills we agree they ought

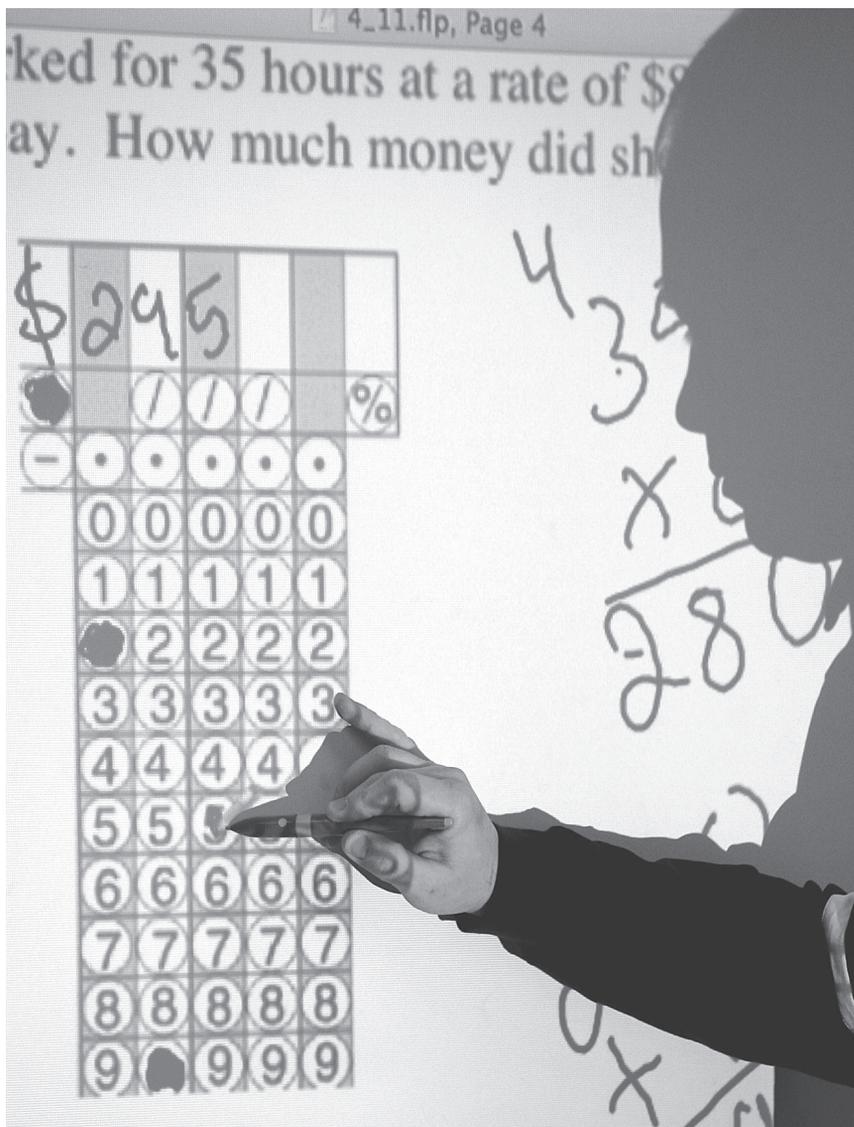
to learn—exactly what our teachers are legally and ethically obligated to do.

Yet there are two senses in which teaching to the test can indeed be harmful: excessive preparation that focuses more on the format of the test and test-taking techniques than on the subject matter, and the reallocation of classroom time from subjects on which students are not tested (often art and physical education) to those on which they are (often reading and mathematics).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, for example, implicitly encourages educators to reallocate classroom time, because it requires testing in only reading and math (in seven grades) and science (in three). Researchers have yet to determine exactly what the effects have been in schools, but NCLB has created a clear incentive for educators who are worried about their schools’ performance to cut back on art, music, and history classes while devoting more time to reading, math, and science. (Since science results are not included in the school accountability calculations under NCLB, however, that subject may also get short shrift.)

What about all the time spent on schooling students in the techniques of test taking—how to fill in answer sheet bubbles, whether to guess or not, what to do when time runs short, and so on? This kind of instruction has been known to eat up weeks, even months, of class time during which students study old examinations or practice test-taking skills. It should

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Many teachers drill students extensively in test-taking techniques, but scores don't rise.

occupy less than a day. The firms that write today's standardized tests, such as the Educational Testing Service and CTB/McGraw-Hill, strongly discourage this kind of preparation, correctly arguing that teachers who spend more than a little time familiarizing students with test formats can hurt learning and test performance by neglecting to cover the subject matter itself. (As for the amount of time spent administering the tests, another source of complaints, it is insignificant. The tests required by NCLB, for example, are given once a year and take about an hour each.)

and far more troubling reason why this kind of teaching to the test persists: It sometimes works. And it does so for a very bad reason: Repeated drilling on test questions only works when the items match those on the upcoming test. But if those questions are available to teachers, that means test security has been breached. Someone is cheating.

Test security includes measures ranging from taking effective precautions against divulging any but the broadest foreknowledge of the test's contents to educators and students to guarding against old-fashioned

The evidence from commercial firms that offer preparation for college and graduate school entrance tests such as the SAT and GRE is clear on this point. Most companies, including industry behemoth Kaplan Inc., focus on subject-matter review. However, one firm, The Princeton Review, distinguished itself for years by arguing stridently that students need not master such material to do well. For a fee of several hundred dollars, it would teach test-taking techniques that it promised would increase scores. But dozens of academic studies failed to confirm these claims, and after sustained pressure from better-business groups, The Princeton Review agreed last year to pull the ads in which these assertions were made.

Why do so many teachers persist in extensive test preparation? Partly because they have been misled. But there is a deeper

cheating when students take tests. It requires diligence both in proctoring test administration and in maintaining the “integrity” of test materials. For example, for a paper-and-pencil test, materials must be sealed until the moment test taking begins and students—and no one else—open their test booklets. Students should be the ones to close those booklets, too, with the completed answer sheets inside. Recent cheating scandals around the country, however, indicate how easily and frequently integrity is violated.

Unlike in most other industrialized countries, security for many of our state and local tests is loose. We have teachers administering tests in their own classrooms to their own students, principals distributing and collecting test forms in their own schools. Security may be high outside the schoolhouse door, but inside, too much is left to chance. And, as it turns out, educators are as human as the rest of us; some cheat, and not all manage to keep test materials secure, even when they are not intentionally cheating.

Lax test security has plagued American education for at least a quarter-century. The people in the best position to fix the problem, though, are the same ones who direct our attention instead to the evils of “teaching to the test.” But teaching to the test is not the main problem; it is the main diversion.

It was not always so. In the late 1970s, a group of 10 African-American students who were denied high school diplomas after failing three times to pass Florida’s graduation test sued the state superintendent of education. The plaintiffs claimed that they had had neither adequate nor equal opportunity to master the curriculum on which the test was based. Ultimately, four different courtrooms would host various phases of the trial of *Debra P. v. Turlington* between 1979 and 1984.

“Debra P.” won the case after a study revealed a wide disparity between what was taught in classrooms to meet state curricular standards and the curriculum embedded in the test questions. A federal court ordered the state to stop denying diplomas for at least four years while a new cohort of students worked its way through the revised curriculum at Florida high schools and was tested.

Before *Debra P.*, Florida and most other states that gave graduation tests purchased the exams “off the

shelf” from commercial publishers while leaving responsibility for curricular standards management in the hands of school districts. Given that each state’s standards differed, when they existed at all, commercial tests were based either on an amalgam or, except in Iowa and California, another state’s standards.

Florida’s schools had been teaching state standards, but the standards underlying the graduation test were from somewhere else. *Debra P.* revealed a conundrum: In learning the Florida standards, students were not prepared for the graduation test, but if their teachers taught to the test, students would not learn the official Florida curriculum. The court declared it unfair to deny students a diploma based on their performance on test content they had had no opportunity to master.

Debra P.’s legacy continues to prescribe how high-stakes tests are made. The development of standards-based tests is time consuming and expensive. And the process starts only after the content standards have been set. Today, the standards dog wags the test tail.

Even so, some education insiders rue the effect on instruction. Complete alignment matches the content of the curricular standards, the test, and instruction as well, which means that every teacher in the state must teach the same content in a given grade level and subject area. That notion is anathema to many education professors and others who take the romantic view that each and every teacher is a skilled and creative craftsperson who designs unique instructional plans for unique classrooms. In this view, standardizing instruction “de-skills” teachers. Therefore, teaching to a test must always be wrong.

About the time *Debra P. v. Turlington* was decided, John J. Cannell, a medical resident working in rural Flat Top, West Virginia, read about the claims of local school officials that their children scored above the national average on standardized tests. Skeptical, he investigated further and ultimately discovered that every state that administered nationally normed tests made the same claim, a statistical impossibility. Cannell documented the phenomenon—later called the “Lake Wobegon Effect,” an allusion to radio humorist Garrison Keillor’s fictional hometown where “all the children are above average”—in two lengthy self-published reports.

As often happens after school scandals make the news, policymakers and pundits expressed dismay, wrote opinion pieces, formed committees, and, in due course, forgot about it. Deeper investigations into the issue were left to professional education researchers, the vast majority of whom work as faculty in the nation's colleges of education, where they share a vested interest in defending the status quo.

Cannell correctly identified educators' dishonesty and lax security as the culprits behind the Lake Wobegon Effect. At the time, it was common for states and school districts to purchase standardized tests off the shelf and administer the exams themselves. To reduce costs, schools commonly reused tests year after year. Even if educators did not intentionally cheat, over time

view's now-retracted advertising. Seldom do such critics mention their other reasons for criticizing high-stakes tests: These exams are often externally administered and thus beyond educators' direct control, and the results can be used to judge educators' performance.

Consider two particularly high-stakes tests, the SAT and ACT. A student's score on these tests plays a large role in determining which college he or she attends. But these tests exhibit no score inflation. Indeed, the SAT was re-calibrated in the 1990s because of score *deflation*. The most high-stakes tests of all—occupational licensure tests—likewise show no evidence of score inflation. All of these tests are administered under tight security, and test forms and items are frequently replaced.

THIS YEAR ALONE, educators in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania have been caught up in test cheating scandals.

The harmful teaching to the test that Cannell uncovered was, unambiguously, cheating. Is it still practiced today? Probably not widely, but yes. This year, cheating scandals were uncovered in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. The

they became familiar with the test forms and questions and could easily prepare their students for them. When test scores rose over time, administrators and elected officials could claim credit for increased learning.

These were not the high-stakes graduation tests of *Debra P.* Test security was very lax because the tests were given only for diagnostic and monitoring purposes. They “didn’t count”—only one of the dozens of state tests Cannell examined carried direct consequences for educators or students. Nevertheless, prominent education researchers, most notably those associated with the federally funded National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), at the University of California, Los Angeles, blamed “high stakes” for the test score inflation.

In this line of argument, high stakes drive teachers to teach (successfully) to the test, which results in artificial test score increases. CRESST researchers and others simply ignored the abundant evidence to the contrary—that too much time studying a test format harms students—and, in effect, echoed the claims of The Princeton Re-

800-page Investigation Report on the Atlanta Public Schools named 178 school-based principals, teachers, and other staff who either pressured others to cheat or felt pressured themselves in a “culture of fear, intimidation, and retaliation.” The most common illicit activity investigators uncovered was painfully straightforward: Teachers and administrators erased students' incorrect answers and replaced them with correct ones.

In Washington, D.C., school administrators practiced a more elaborate form of score manipulation: the blueprint scam. During a test's development, a contractor typically produces a “blueprint”—a document that matches education standards to the test items written for them. Blueprints show that the draft test items cover all the standards, and in acceptable and consistent proportions. Often they are kept secret along with other test materials until the tests are completed. But some states make their blueprints public, indicating that some standards are meant to be emphasized more than others.

Washington's school authorities go a step further. Each year, they publicly identify a large number of

standards—as many as half the total in some cases—that will not be represented by any test item. Teachers then face a moral dilemma. They are ethically and legally obligated to teach all the standards for their grade level and subject. But the students of their colleagues who do not do so—who teach only the standards they know will be tested—may well perform better on the year-end test. The official record will show the thorough, responsible teacher to be inferior to colleagues who take instructional shortcuts. And in Washington, teachers can be rewarded with pay bonuses or subjected to dismissal on the basis, in large part, of their students' test performance.

Much harmful teaching to the test would be easy to fix: by tightening security, rotating test items and test forms frequently, and squashing sleazy deceits such as Washington's blueprint scam. Test security is more likely to be tight when tests are externally administered, either by computer or by proctors unaffiliated with the schools. If neither approach is possible, test booklets should be made tamper proof, teachers who administer a test should do so in a classroom other than their own, school administrators who handle test materials should do so in a school other than their own, and the materials should arrive just before test time. Neither teachers nor principals can coach students on specific test items in advance if they don't have them in advance. And educators can't change students' wrong answers if they never touch the answer sheets.

The problem is easy to fix, however, only if educators genuinely desire to stop the cheating. Although the fixes are simple and obvious, test security is effectively no better today than it was in Cannell's time. The tests are better, but test security often is not.

The current flawed testing regime puts teachers in a classic “damned if you do, damned if you don't” bind. The only way out, according to many educators, is to eliminate testing, or at least the stakes attached to it. But without standardized tests, there would be no means for members of the public to reliably gauge learning in their schools. We would be totally dependent on what education insiders chose to tell us. Given that most testing critics are education insiders, that may be the point.

The furor over the recent cheating scandals could

lead to real progress on test security reform, but the vested education interests are still trying to deflect attention elsewhere. Earlier this year, the National Research Council released a report that again asserts a causal relationship between high stakes and score inflation and ignores test security's role. The report's proposed solution is to administer new no-stakes “audit tests.” Under the dubious assumption that such no-stakes tests are inherently trustworthy and incorruptible, the resulting score trends would be used to shadow and allegedly verify (or not) the trends in the high-stakes tests. Thus, resources that could be used to bolster the security of the test that counts would be diverted instead toward the development and administration of a test that didn't. Who would administer the new tests? Almost certainly it would be school officials themselves.

A more fundamental worry is that education researchers are now attempting to compromise the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, a set of guidelines developed by three national professional organizations for developing and administering tests that the courts use as a semiofficial code of conduct. The education insiders have incorporated their ideas into the draft revision of the standards. In its more than 300 pages, the draft says next to nothing about test security.

We have an opportunity to set things right with an agreement by more than 40 states to embrace the new Common Core State Standards Initiative for kindergarten through grade 12, beginning in 2014. The Common Core is sponsored by the National Governors Association; participation is voluntary. Standards for reading and math have already been agreed upon, and committees are drafting those for science and social studies. The design and administration of the relevant tests are being discussed now. Already, the liveliest debate concerns the lower grades, where many standards—such as those that require students to speak, draw, dance, and build—can be tested only through expensive procedures. If they wish to head off harmful reallocations of classroom time and ensure that “what gets tested is what gets taught,” policymakers will need to spend the extra money. That decision is itself a test of our determination to assure tight security in the new system, and a superior education for American children. ■

Who Rules?

The national drive for education reform has touched off many power struggles, but one has emerged as fundamental.

BY THOMAS TOCH

EDUCATION REFORM HAS TAKEN ON THE DIMENSIONS of an epic over the past 30 years. Americans are collectively writing the script, and its high drama is the struggle for authority. Schools have fought to preserve their independence amid ever-louder demands for accountability. Teacher unions have struggled to solidify and then sustain their primacy over their profession. Charter school advocates have battled entrenched education bureaucracies, and reformers have grappled with establishment academics for intellectual dominance. The fundamental conflict, however, has been all but subterranean, though now it is emerging into the open. It pits local school boards against the national drive for modernization.

America's modern school reform saga began in 1983, with a loud warning shot fired by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today," the federally funded commission declared, "we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

At the time, public education was the province of some 16,000 local school boards. The states were minimally involved in school policies. The U.S. Department of Education had been created only three years earlier, during the Carter administration, and until the com-

mission's battle-stations warning transformed school reform into a winning political issue, Ronald Reagan had spent more than two years in the White House urging that the new department be abolished.

The release of the commission's 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, marked high tide for local public school boards. Ever since, their dominance of American education has been under attack on many fronts, and their grip has been loosening. They no longer seem to be the icon of American democracy they once were. The commission did not want simply to patch up the nation's schools. Public education's tradition of stressing low-level academics and vocational training for many students, it said, was no longer sufficient. Together with other champions of reform, the commissioners pressed a far tougher assignment on America's school systems: Deliver a much more demanding academic curriculum to a much wider range of students. The rise of the postindustrial economy—with its requirement for brains over brawn—and the nation's recently forged commitment to racial equality required that the kind of rigorous academic curriculum traditionally reserved for the few now be taught to the many.

Entrusting that work to local school boards, it became clear by the late 1980s, was not going to yield the results the nation needed. Since then, national and state leaders have increasingly imposed the new expectations directly, holding schools responsible for

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their students' performance, introducing national standards, and devising uniform tests—each step further distancing the country from its long tradition of local control. In 2008, commentator Matt Miller aptly characterized the idea of relying on local school boards to meet today's educational challenges: "It's as if after Pearl Harbor, FDR had suggested we prepare for war through the uncoordinated efforts of thousands of small factories." With the nation's pursuit of equality of educational opportunity far from fulfilled and with workers increasingly competing for jobs with their counterparts around the world, a compelling case can be made for defining public education's aspirations nationally rather than locally.

American public education traces its origins to 1647, Gene Maeroff of Teachers College, Columbia University, writes in *School Boards in America* (2010). That year, the Massachusetts Bay Colony mandated that every town within its jurisdiction establish a public school. Committees sprang up to run the institutions. In the 1820s, the state of Massachusetts made the committees independent of local governments, establishing the model for the autonomous school districts that exist throughout the country today.

The U.S. Constitution left authority over education in the hands of the states under the Tenth Amendment, which reserved to them all powers not explicitly given to the federal government, and the states passed that authority on to local school boards, reflecting both the localistic tenor of American life and the nation's skepticism of centralized authority. For more than a century, local boards were solely responsible for public education's funding, standards, instruction, and results. At their height in the 1930s, during the heyday of small-town America, there were as many as 127,500 boards. Some sparsely populated states had more school board members than teachers.

For much of their history, the boards presided

over school systems serving agrarian and industrial economies that required most workers to use their hands more than their heads. Schools were mostly concerned with teaching basic literacy and numeracy, and for most Americans education ended after the eighth grade. At the turn of the 20th century, only six percent of young people earned high school diplomas. It was not until the 1920s that attending high school became the norm, and as late as 1950 only half of white students and a quarter of African-American students completed 12 years of schooling.

Only with the passage of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, a weapon in the War on Poverty and the first major federal foray into public education, did federal and state authorities begin to impinge on the influence of local school boards, and then only modestly. The 1965 law, for example, required studies of the impact of the federal money that began flowing in small amounts to local communities. A federally funded snapshot of student performance debuted in 1969.

State governments, meanwhile, began requiring tests to ensure that students were achieving "minimum competency" in core subjects. Michigan launched the first statewide standardized testing program in 1969. But there were no state achievement standards, and no

AS LATE AS 1950, only half of white students and a quarter of African-American students completed 12 years of schooling.

explicit consequences for educators if their students performed poorly.

Not surprisingly, local boards did not respond well when the reformers of the 1980s proposed a new, far more academically ambitious role for public education. Many local leaders rejected the notion that large numbers of students could or should be taught a demanding academic curriculum through high school. When states began setting more rigorous graduation requirements, many school districts subverted them



Chicago students are welcomed back after winter break by the then mayor Richard Daley, who won direct authority over schools during his tenure.

by creating a myriad of watered-down courses to fulfill them, such as “Fundamentals of General Science” and “Informal Geometry.” In many school systems, students could complete a four-year curriculum in “Fundamentals of Math” without ever studying anything but arithmetic—and consequently missing algebra, geometry, and other essential elements of a meaningful mathematics curriculum. Often students could fulfill their science requirement by taking classes in subjects such as commercial food preparation and auto body repair.

By the end of the 1980s, with large percentages of students continuing to perform at low levels, state and federal policymakers, including President George H. W. Bush (and later President Bill Clinton), began putting pressure on public school systems. State education standards and national goals were followed by requirements for more student testing

and efforts to hold individual schools and school systems responsible for the results. This accountability campaign culminated in President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, passed with bipartisan support.

Now state and federal officials are pushing further. With the strong support of the Obama administration, the National Governors Association, along with the Council of Chief State School Officers, is developing a program called the Common Core State Standards Initiative, with comprehensive curricula for all grade levels that the vast majority of states have pledged to begin implementing in the next few years. States are also working, with the support of federal money, to develop a set of standardized tests that states may voluntarily adopt. It would have been hard to predict back when *A Nation at Risk* raised its alarm that in less than three decades every student

in many states would be taking what are in effect national examinations.

Not by accident, the emergence of common standards and tests, along with other centralizing forces, is making America's public education system more like those of Singapore, Japan, and other countries that post superior results on international tests of academic achievement. American policymakers have looked to those nations with a combination of admiration and envy.

The record of the past three decades does not inspire great confidence in the capacity of school boards to lead public education. The number of boards has declined to about 13,600 through consolidations, but there are still 6,300 of them that serve fewer than 1,000 students. Districts of that size rarely operate efficiently and almost always lack sufficient resources to help educators improve teaching and learning.

Amid the challenges of the 21st century, the local school board looks

less like a democratic utopia and more like a bastion of leadership dyspepsia. In many districts, constant infighting slows reforms and contributes to the notoriously rapid turnover among the school superintendents who must lead the way toward change. More than 95 percent of the nation's school board members are elected to office, but balloting rarely draws more than 20 percent of eligible voters, leaving the elections vulnerable to single-issue candidates and special interests. While school board seats once attracted civic leaders, today more than one in six school board members are past or present teacher union members. Others are single-minded advocates of pet causes, from varsity sports to creationism. Conflicts of interest are also a problem. Maeroff reports that a number of the jobs in a New Jersey school system on whose board he served were occupied by the spouses and children of other board members.

Less than three-quarters of school board members

have bachelor's degrees. Maeroff writes that many school board members have scant grounding in effective board practices, much less the complexities of education policy. Many just don't buy the idea of pushing students academically. Only eight percent told researchers commissioned by the National School Boards Association last year that public education's first priority should be to prepare students for college. Four times as many indicated that they believed it was most important merely to "help students fulfill their potential."

Nor are local school districts the economic engines of public education they once were. Until the late 1970s, most public school dollars came from local property taxes. Today, states pay the largest share—48 percent—of the more than \$600 billion cost of educating the nation's 49 million public school students.

ONLY EIGHT PERCENT of school board members think that preparing students for college should be the schools' top priority.

Local revenues cover 44 percent, and Washington contributes the rest.

What is to be the future of school boards? Reducing the number of boards and consolidating school systems, some have argued, would streamline leadership and eliminate redundancy. But it would not necessarily produce better students. Florida and New York State educate about the same number of students, for example, but even though New York has 10 times as many school systems (697 versus 67), Florida's test scores are no higher than New York's. Some states have resorted to taking direct control of schools in districts with consistently bad records, mostly in poor urban neighborhoods, but the results, Maeroff reports, have been mixed.

In the nation's big cities, another trend has gained momentum, as mayors have been granted direct authority over public schools, displacing school boards. This strategy has shown more promise, with mayors

moving faster and with greater enthusiasm for reform. Kenneth Wong, chairman of the Department of Education at Brown University and coauthor of *The Education Mayor* (2007), studied 104 cities and found that in those where mayors governed education, good things happened. School superintendents pursued longer-term reform agendas that produced higher test scores, more funding flowed to public schools, and public confidence in school systems increased. Chicago, Boston, New York City, and Washington, D.C., are among the big cities whose school systems have moved to mayoral control in recent years.

The charter school movement, meanwhile, has made it possible for some 5,000 (out of 99,000) publicly funded schools to govern themselves, outside the authority of school boards. (Charter schools must still meet state standards and administer statewide standardized tests.) Some charter schools have used this independence to build tight-knit school communities and shake things up in the classroom. But they have not had a free pass from governance challenges. Under state laws, they must have nonprofit boards of directors. And though the directors are appointed rather than elected, many of the schools have struggled because of the uneven quality of their boards—the same problem plaguing traditional school systems.

Some of the most successful charter school networks, such as Achievement First, headquartered in New Haven, Connecticut, and Philadelphia-based Mastery Charter Schools, have responded by going beyond local governance. They have sought to have boards govern multiple schools, and have imposed uniformity of standards, curriculum materials, and instructional strategies throughout their networks.

But the shift away from local control of public education is under attack from many quarters. Though it was a Republican president, George W. Bush, who launched a nationwide school accountability system by signing No Child Left Behind into law, and prominent conservatives such as William Bennett have endorsed national achievement standards, Republican presidential candidates Michele

Bachmann and Rick Perry have attacked the Bush-era reforms. Early in her political career, Bachmann ran unsuccessfully for a Minnesota school board seat, campaigning against state achievement standards. Under Governor Perry, Texas has been one of only a handful of states that haven't joined the Common Core State Standards Initiative, even though it is being led by the National Governors Association rather than the federal government.

The Left is as unhappy as the Right. This summer, leading liberal education activists including Jonathan Kozol and Diane Ravitch (who was once a prominent supporter of national education standards) spent three days in Washington rallying against accountability, No Child Left Behind, testing, and other elements of what they derided as “corporate reform,” concluding their activities with a march on the White House.

The states themselves have begun aggressively pushing back against No Child Left Behind, the primary vehicle for holding local schools and school systems accountable for their performance. This year, several states declared that they will stop raising minimum test score requirements as the law demands. (The law unrealistically requires that the vast majority of students be “proficient” by 2014, and large numbers of schools have failed to meet the states’ generally modest standards, exposing them to penalties that critics view as unfair and sending state policymakers scrambling to distance themselves from the embarrassing performances.)

The backlash offers another reason to wonder how vigorously states will implement the new common core curriculum in the next several years. Both the standards and the examinations linked to them are expected to be more demanding than those that most states are using today.

Schools are complex social enterprises. They can be only as good as the people in them and the culture in which those people work. Improvement, therefore, cannot merely be imposed from the outside. Ultimately, reform has to come from the inside. But the next necessary step toward change is to establish a new governance structure—one that acknowledges roles for players and policy at every level of government—that is capable of supporting our national needs and aspirations. ■

College for All?

The college-educated share of America's population has barely increased in years. The key to reviving mass higher education may be to rethink the divide between high school and college.

BY KEVIN CAREY

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN UNDERSTANDABLE IF PRESIDENT Barack Obama had ignored education in his first speech to Congress. There were other things to worry about in February 2009: an economy in free fall, health care costs threatening to bankrupt the federal government, a nation bleeding in two protracted foreign wars. Obama had said little about education on the campaign trail. Yet when he took the podium, he made a bold declaration: By 2020, America would regain its historical international lead in college attainment.

Months earlier, Bill Gates had announced a similar priority for his charitable foundation, the richest on the planet. After years of focusing on improving education for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, the Microsoft billionaire had set his sights on college. As would Obama, he called for a major increase in the number of adults with college degrees. Together, the most powerful man in the world and one of the richest created a rare moment of purpose and clarity in American education policy.

But effecting a major increase in college attainment is a daunting task. The percentage of American working-age adults who have graduated from college has hovered around 40 percent for years, with roughly 30 percent holding four-year degrees and another 10

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percent associate's degrees. Obama and Gates were calling for a rise in the college attainment rate to nearly 60 percent in less than a generation, even though many public colleges and universities were already bursting at the seams, and cash-strapped state legislatures were handing down further punishing budget cuts.

Moreover, to succeed in college, students need to get a decent high school education. Many don't. Drop-out rates in urban high schools are catastrophic. And while 70 percent of the nation's 3.3 million high school graduates go directly to two- or four-year colleges every year, and still more enroll by their mid-twenties, less than half of all students are exposed to a legitimate college preparatory curriculum in high school.

Such harsh realities have led a growing number

Doubts about the value of a college education are growing. Among those recent graduates lucky enough to find a job, about half have taken positions that do not require a college degree.

of critics to question the realism and wisdom of the new college attainment agenda. Some don't believe that the economy can absorb a huge influx of degree holders. That argument has been heard before. In the 1970s, Harvard economist Richard Freeman, author of *The Overeducated American* (1976), landed in *People* magazine and on the front page of *The New York Times* with his prediction that a glut of degree-bearing workers would lead to falling wages for college graduates.

Instead, wages of college-educated workers rose dramatically relative to those of less educated Americans over the following decade. In the mid-1970s, graduates earned about 40 percent more than people with high school diplomas. The gap has relentlessly widened since then and stands near 100 percent today. In fact, college graduates are the only category of workers whose real pay has increased since 1979.

A more controversial argument against wider higher education comes from Charles Murray, coauthor of the controversial *Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994). Murray, who believes that intelligence is strongly determined by genes, contends that "no more than 20 percent" of the population, and probably closer to 10 percent, has sufficient intelligence to earn a legitimate four-year college degree. Internet billionaire Peter Thiel, meanwhile, not only warns of a dangerous higher education "bubble" but is paying a bounty to a select group of talented young people who have agreed to drop out of college to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.

Yet there is strong evidence that America needs more people to earn college degrees, not fewer. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce has projected that if current trends continue, the nation will produce three million fewer college graduates by 2018 than the labor market will require. That's because the economy continues to reorganize itself in ways that favor people with the knowledge and skills that college degrees represent. As economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz have argued, America's economic dominance during the 20th century stemmed in significant part from educational investments that began in the 19th century. "The nation that invested the most in education," they wrote, "was the nation that had the highest level of per capita income."

Other nations have noticed. Data from the Orga-

PHOTOGRAPH BY BUTCH DILL/AP



nization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that highly industrialized competitor nations have increased college attainment faster than the United States in recent decades. A few nations, including South Korea, have even surpassed us in the proportion of the national population from ages 25 to 34 that holds a bachelor's degree. When associate's degrees are included, we fall to ninth place in college attainment. Meanwhile, America's population is becoming increasingly diverse, with the greatest growth occurring among Hispanic citizens who have below-average college attainment rates. Helping new generations of Americans graduate from college will be crucial to the nation's future prosperity.

There are opportunities to improve college preparation at all levels, beginning with early childhood education. But high schools have a special place in the process. For far too many students, high school is where college aspirations effectively come to an end.

This observation is not new. Sputnik-era reforms sought to improve high school mathematics and science education, and the landmark 1983 federal report *A Nation at Risk* focused primarily on the shocking lack of academic rigor in secondary education. More recently, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan singled out for reform the so-called dropout factories, a group of approximately 1,750 high schools that have graduation rates of 60 percent or less and produce a disproportionate share of the nation's dropouts. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, high school math and reading scores have been flat for decades.

One reason for this poor performance is that there has never been a serious effort to establish consistent high standards in America's secondary schools and to hold schools accountable for achieving them. The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its antecedents focused primarily on elementary and middle school, requiring only one round of tests in high school. Typically, students are given three subject-area tests (in reading, math, and science) in the 10th grade that require little more than eighth-grade skills to pass. From that point on, high schools in many states are subject to only minimal external accountability for

how much students learn. For many students, the consequences of this neglect come quickly. One-third of students attending four-year colleges and nearly two-thirds of those attending two-year colleges are required to take remedial courses.

In recent years, a group of governors and nonprofit organizations has been developing the Common Core State Standards, essentially a shared curriculum tied to college and career readiness, which all but a few of the states have pledged to adopt. The federal government has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to developing high-quality assessments of student learning tied to the standards. If these efforts are implemented with fidelity, the great majority of American high school students will for the first time take well-designed tests that were specifically crafted to measure readiness for college and careers—whether those students plan to apply to college or not. High schools will still need talented teachers and other resources to help students meet the standards. But at least the schools will have a common foundation to build on.

Another reform proposal comes from Robert Schwartz and two colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In *Pathways to Prosperity*, a report published earlier this year, they argue that many students are ill served by a unitary “college for all” strategy, and that America should look to the European system of high school and college vocational training as a model. They favor an expansion of “work-linked learning,” bringing employers and others into schools to help create new occupation-based education opportunities for some students.

However, the contention that high schools are too focused on the traditional route through college is something of a straw man. It may be the case that certain upper-income suburban enclaves are gripped by the “college for all” fever. But most students don't live in places like that. Indeed, the percentage of students who enroll in four-year colleges without adequate curricular preparation suggests that too *few* students are being prepared to earn a bachelor's degree. The European system, moreover, is nested in a larger environment of private-sector unionization and government-supported occupational training that is scarcely imaginable in the United States. At the same time, the risk is greater in more heteroge-

neous America that disproportionate numbers of low-income, minority, and immigrant students would be channeled into working-class tracks.

The *Pathways* authors are right to insist that our education system must do a better job of serving students who are unlikely to obtain a four-year college degree. Even if we meet the Obama-Gates college attainment goals, millions of people will be left without college credentials in an economy that pays good wages for little else. The key to helping those students—and all students—is to erase the arbitrary and damaging dividing line between high school and college.

The nature of public education changes profoundly at the point when young people reach the end of high school. Yet in intellectual terms, the freshman year of college is little more than grade 13. Starting around grade 10 and continuing through roughly the first two years of college, students make the transition from acquiring foundational skills to applying them in pursuit of broader knowledge in math, language, the humanities, and the physical and social sciences. The vast majority of students progressing through these grades take the same small group of courses: precalculus, biology, psychology, English composition and literature, American and world history, and so on.

The years between grades 10 and 14 are also the leakiest segment of the education pipeline, a time when students drop out of high school, fail to enroll in college, and drop out of college by the hundreds of thousands every year. Many colleges could also be characterized as “dropout factories.” Among students who enroll as first-time full-time freshmen in four-year universities, less than two-thirds graduate within six years. Among all new college students, the on-time graduation rate is less than 50 percent. In 2009, more than 350 four-year colleges and universities reported a six-year graduation rate of 30 percent or less.

A logical way to get more students through this education choke point is to eliminate some of its artificial barriers. We could begin by extending the public subsidy for education all the way through grade 14. In our system of public education, all students are fully subsidized to take courses such as precalculus at age 17, and must be taught by a licensed teacher. At age 19 or older, students wanting to learn exactly the same

thing get a partial subsidy from a wholly separate set of state and federal sources and receive instruction under a completely different regime of curricular standards and professional norms. This makes little sense. As initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards are implemented, it should become possible to require colleges and universities to grant credits for all the basic courses of grades 10 through 14, even if students happen to take some of them in high school. This will help students move more quickly through the system, and thus cut the expense of acquiring a degree. But more changes will be needed.

While American higher education is diverse in many ways, encompassing a variety of missions and constituencies, it is remarkably *undiverse* when it comes to awarding degrees. Every institution grants the same two- or four-year credentials that signify little more than how many hours the bearer sat in classrooms. Newer institutions such as Western Governors University (WGU) are turning that equation upside down, awarding degrees when students demonstrate defined competencies, regardless of how long it took to achieve them.

WGU is a fully accredited nonprofit institution founded in the 1990s by the governors of 19 western states that now enrolls 25,000 mostly adult students online. It currently focuses on occupation-specific fields such as education, business, and health care. But efforts are afoot to expand the model into more traditional academic fields.

The WGU experiment points to a future public education system in which public subsidies are tied to commonly understood goals for learning, not how old the student happens to be or where he or she happens to live. In increasingly digital learning environments, it will be possible to track, store, and summarize evidence of learning in ways that render traditional time-based credentials obsolete. The federal and state governments should help people learn what’s worth knowing, and when they learn it, government should make sure they have evidence of their knowledge and skills that can be used in their pursuit of employment and further education. A system rebuilt on such principles would look much different and better than what many students suffer through today. ■

Is \$600 Billion Enough?

Today's new austerity may have an upside if it prods schools to embrace new technologies that cut costs and improve learning.

BY PETER W. COOKSON JR.

IT IS CRUNCH TIME FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION. Several storms are converging to create a hurricane of educational instability: sharply declining revenues, intense international competition, outdated approaches to teaching and learning, and a significant achievement gap between white students and their African-American and Hispanic peers. Seemingly unable to get to the root causes of what is plaguing the schools, we keep spinning our policy wheels while also spending a great deal of money—\$600 billion a year.

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that the nation's per pupil expenditures have doubled in inflation-adjusted terms since 1970, while scores on standardized assessments of student achievement have remained essentially flat. In 1971 the average reading score for nine-year-olds on the National Assessment of Educational Progress was 208 (on a scale of 0 to 500); in 2009 it was 221, an improvement, yes, but still mediocre at best. Moreover, it appears that the longer students stay in school, the smaller the learning gains. Seventeen-year-olds averaged a score of 285 on the NAEP reading test in 1971; nearly 40 years later, they scored only three points better.

Today, the average yearly cost of educating a public

school student is more than \$10,000. Topping the expenditure scale is New York State, at \$17,000, and at the bottom is Utah, at \$6,000. Yet on average, Utah students do as well as their New York counterparts on standardized tests. To be sure, interstate and intradistrict funding inequities are sometimes glaring and very likely contribute to achievement gaps between whites and blacks and between other groups. Few policymakers advocate abandoning the goal of finance equity. But on the whole, simply spending more money is not likely to produce greater student learning.

In any case, money is going to be increasingly hard to come by. Nearly every state and school district is grappling with budget shortfalls, and there is little reason to expect much relief in the foreseeable future. Financial constraints have caused states and districts to experiment with a variety of cost-cutting strategies, including bigger classes, shorter school days, fewer school days per year, and reduced extracurricular and afterschool programs. We don't know yet how these measures will affect student learning, but we can be certain of one thing: They are not going to usher in the era of breakthrough achievement we desperately need.

Today's climate of austerity is forcing us to grapple with the reality that a good deal of our current education spending is ill directed. We keep investing in 19th-century classrooms even though today's students are 21st-century learners. One promising alternative

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to business as usual is the creation of cost-effective 21st-century classrooms in which new communication technologies are blended with traditional face-to-face instruction. Teachers will always be the key to unlocking students' imaginations, but standing in front of a 21st-century class and lecturing is neither pedagogically sound nor economically efficient.

Integrating technology into the classroom does not mean putting kids in front of computers all day or turning schools into academic call centers where

students have different learning styles, skills, abilities, and dispositions, and that they progress and mature at different rates. Common sense and research tell us that if we can customize students' educational experiences, achievement will increase. Truly individualized instruction is the age-old dream of education; technology puts it within our grasp.

In the current industrial-era model of education, all students are exposed to the same (or nearly the same) educational treatment, as if they were identical units



A School of One program in New York City is one of many efforts to find effective ways to bring technology into the classroom.

teachers are technicians and students are “end users.” Technology can be a trap. In the 1990s, media scholar Neil Postman of New York University warned against “technopoly,” a state of mind that “consists in the deification of technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology.” But if we treat technology as a partner, it can facilitate individualized learning and thus stimulate intellectual curiosity and academic ambition. We know that

moving along an assembly line. At the end of the treatment, they are tested competitively in a yearly exercise of what passes for quality control. This is the system that is failing us, as well as the young people it is supposed to prepare for productive and meaningful lives.

Imagine a middle school student named Alicia. She is about to enter the eighth grade and encounter algebra for the first time. Algebra is not just another subject in Alicia's academic career; it is a gatekeeper course. Failure to master the subject means exclusion from advanced mathematics courses and reduces her chances of admission to a selective college.

Let's assume that Alicia is an average math student. In most situations, she would have only two possible pathways: placement in a "real" algebra class with other mathematically competent students or in a general math class, a kind of "algebra for dummies." Tests largely determine which path Alicia will find herself on. If she is placed in the "real" class, she has a good shot at succeeding in high school; if she is placed in the general class, there is a high probability that her academic career will go nowhere. And students placed in lower academic tracks can see the writing on the wall. That is one reason why nearly 50 percent of teenagers in urban areas leave school before graduation, choosing, however unwisely, to look for work rather than see their rather empty education through.

So the stakes are high for Alicia and for us, because in the era of global competition the wasting of talent is not only a personal tragedy, it is a national security issue. We cannot expect to successfully compete internationally if many of our students fail to complete high school while others fail to achieve their full potential even as they hang on to earn a diploma.

What if we had a different approach? It might look like this: When Alicia is about to enter eighth grade, she is given a battery of diagnostic tests to assess her preparedness for the conceptual thinking required by algebra. The results are not used to slot Alicia into column A or column B. Rather, a computer program is able to integrate data about her aptitudes and abilities to create a unique learning profile. Teachers, with the assistance of intelligent software, are then able to create a customized, individualized algebra curriculum for Alicia by drawing on a wide variety of digitized resources, some from online education companies, universities, and other outside sources, and some developed by teachers at her school.

Alicia's individualized algebra course is dynamic; after she completes her assignments every day she takes a short quiz, perhaps in the form of a game, which gauges her level of comprehension. This allows her teacher to adjust Alicia's next lesson in order to address those areas where she needs more work or a different approach. Her teacher has a large library

of digitized alternatives from which to choose, and Alicia's program allows her to make certain choices herself. She is participating in the creation of her own education.

Unlike weekly tests that have little diagnostic utility, Alicia's daily quizzes and games are adaptive; that is, they adjust themselves to her strengths and weaknesses and prescribe a course of study to address her specific learning needs. None of this means that students like Alicia are no longer part of a classroom community or that their only learning comes through a computer. Teachers in "blended" classrooms such as these, like police officers using modern community policing methods, do spend more time than their counterparts of old managing and analyzing data, focusing on problem areas, and carefully charting progress. This is what enables them to use their time more effectively on the "street," talking and listening to flesh-and-blood students and guiding them in their education.

Recently I visited Intermediate School 228 in Brooklyn, New York, where an experimental blended math program called the School of One is being implemented. Just outside the big white doors that lead to the School of One wing, an old-fashioned classroom with battered chairs and heavy desks has been preserved as a kind of case study of what the School of One is not. It is a bit unsettling, since such traditional classrooms served generations of earlier students well, and indeed some of their principles still animate places like the School of One.

Beyond the white doors, however, is a classroom that would have been unrecognizable to a teacher or student of 50 years ago. I.S. 228 students come to this classroom only for their math classes. Kids move around, talk, listen to teachers, occasionally talk back to teachers, and, yes, even hack around a little in the open and airy space. Gone are the rows of desks facing the teacher and blackboard. Movable bookshelves create flexible spaces where students can work together or with instructors in groups of various sizes. Some students collaborate, others work alone on computers. A teacher circulates, spending a few minutes with one student, perhaps a larger block of time instructing a group.

Journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote about his visit to a School of One campus in the Bronx in *The Atlantic* last year, remembering his own experience as

a young man who had struggled mightily in school. “By the time I was in high school, we were using the computer lab once a week for math. But we were using it the same way we used pen and paper—a teacher at the front of the class and all of us following along. The computer lab bored me as much as the chalkboard. . . . I thought I was lazy (and maybe I was) and lacking the will to learn. But as I watched the kids at I.S. 339 working at their own pace and in their own way, I wondered if all I had ever really needed was the equivalent of a warm hug from a cold algorithm.”

One of the notable experiments in blended learning is Rocketship Education, a nonprofit charter school network that opened its first school in San Jose, California, in 2007. The five Rocketship elementary schools were designed from the ground up to support customized learning. They are hardly enclaves of privilege. Ninety percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, and 75 percent speak English as a second language. With an explicit mission of closing the achievement gap, Rocketship has already seen two of its sites ranked among the 15 top-performing schools serving high-poverty areas in California.

Experiments in blended learning have caught the eye of policymakers and private-sector innovators. President Barack Obama paid a highly publicized visit earlier this year to TechBoston Academy, a blended curriculum public school for grades 6–12 in Boston. The U.S. Department of Education’s 2010 National Education Technology Plan calls for bringing “state-of-the-art technology into learning to enable, motivate, and inspire all students.” Education entrepreneur Chris Whittle and his partners are planning to open the first in a planned international network of private schools using a blended curriculum in 2012.

Integrating technology into classrooms will be no easier than it has been in offices and factories. Finding the right ways to shape human-computer interactions is a delicate task, especially when the humans are children. Different approaches will be needed for children of different ages. There will be—and already have been—disappointments and mistakes.

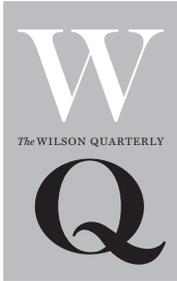
No comprehensive research exists on the impact of computers on education, and those studies that have been conducted yielded conflicting results. That is no surprise. We are only in the early stages of learning

how to create effective blended classrooms, and there are many pitfalls—from techno-utopianism and our weakness for thinking that complex problems can be solved with easy technological fixes, to the challenge of identifying the useful technologies amid the mountains of ill-conceived and simply shoddy software and edu-gadgets being peddled by eager companies.

Can we afford such experiments in a time of increasing austerity? Up-front investments will be needed. But over the longer term, blended schools can produce considerable economies. Textbooks are an obvious place to begin. They cost billions of dollars every year—Texas alone budgeted more than \$800 million for textbooks in 2010. Information technology, meanwhile, gets radically cheaper every year. Additional savings can be realized through the use of open-source curricula, shared lesson plans, online tutoring, and other measures. In time, fewer teachers will be required as large, unmanageable, industrially organized classrooms disappear. Even in today’s classrooms, research shows that teachers with the right training and support can lead quite large classrooms without diminishing student achievement. (Reducing class size, a perennial favorite reform in public opinion surveys, does not automatically improve student performance. The only consistent evidence of a positive effect indicates that kindergarten and primary-level students do better in classrooms that do not exceed 15 students.)

Exploring how blended classrooms can individualize teaching and learning while saving money is a reform strategy that has several virtues. New technologies coupled with new thinking about education can expand students’ opportunities to learn, enable implementation of new forms of teaching more in keeping with the learning styles of today’s students, and squeeze much better results from our education funds. Six hundred billion dollars is a lot of money; cutting back spending on nonessentials and investing in innovative teaching and learning may be one way to reduce costs and boost achievement at the same time. Perhaps we can turn the energy of the hurricane that is engulfing public education to positive ends by redirecting that energy toward the future. ■

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IN ESSENCE

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FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Calming the IED Storm

THE SOURCE: “The Secret History of Iraq’s Invisible War” by Noah Shachtman, at Wired.com, June 14, 2011.

A MAN PUNCHES A FEW BUTTONS on his cell phone. Hundreds of yards away a hidden bomb detonates, unleashing a brain-rattling blast wave and propelling scorching bits of shrapnel in every direction. For U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, this scene has played out thousands of times, but *Wired* contributing editor Noah Shachtman reports it is becoming rarer. The United States has made big steps in defusing the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

It’s been a long and ugly journey. When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, all that American troops had to protect themselves from IEDs were a few short-range radio frequency jammers. By late 2002, the Navy had developed a more sophisticated jammer called the Acorn, which blanketed a set of radio

frequencies with competing signals, preventing an IED’s trigger signal from reaching its bomb. But bombers soon learned to switch frequencies.

The Army began to adapt a technology used to protect troops from artillery and mortar fire to thwart IEDs. This tool, the War-

lock Green, was able to zero in on an IED’s triggering frequency and explode the bomb prematurely.

The Warlock Green was a welcome breakthrough, but before long militants found a way to defeat it. “Every time we put a countermeasure in the field—especially with the Warlock—they were able to outstrip it,” a defense executive told Shachtman. By May 2004, well into the Warlock Green era, some 2,000 American troops had been wounded by IEDs in Iraq alone. “IEDs are my



An Afghan soldier inspects the devastation wrought by an improvised explosive device.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP CHEUNG/CORBIS

number one threat in Iraq. I want a full-court press on IEDs,” the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, General John Abizaid, declared.

The defense industry obeyed. But each countermeasure had its flaws, and with all the devices in the field, some even jammed others. As of May 2005, IEDs had caused more than 7,700 American casualties. By the end of 2006, that number had roughly doubled.

The military pressed on. The Joint IED Defeat Commission was given a budget of \$3.6 billion. Then the Warlock Duke—a successor to the Warlock Green that was able to detect and jam IED signals with unprecedented specificity—was brought to the field, soon to be followed by numerous countermeasures of equal or greater sophistication. By the summer of 2007, Shachtman reports, “IEDs had become relics in broad swaths of” Iraq.

But what worked in Iraq hasn’t worked in Afghanistan. “No-tech” bombs of wood and fertilizer that explode when stepped on or driven over remain the weapon of choice there. The number of IEDs is growing, though it is still smaller than what U.S. troops faced at the height of IED use in Iraq. Shachtman notes that 378 U.S. troops were injured by IEDs in Afghanistan in July 2010—a number “about 15 times higher than the casualty count from two years before.” Anti-IED efforts there involve enhanced surveillance and intelligence.

Having come to regard IEDs as a permanent threat in warfare, the Pentagon is no longer set-

ting for stopgap measures. The so-called JCREW, now under development, is a highly advanced, networked jammer that will be used not just against IEDs but drones, satellite signals, and other high-tech threats. Field tests began in July.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Rumble Over the South China Sea

THE SOURCES: “Countering Beijing in the South China Sea” by Dana Dillon, in *Policy Review*, June–July 2011; “The South China Sea Is the Future of Conflict” by Robert D. Kaplan, in *Foreign Policy*, Sept.–Oct. 2011; “Deep Danger: Competing Claims in the South China Sea” by Marvin C. Ott, in *Current History*, Sept. 2011.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA IS ONE of the most valuable pieces of marine real estate in the world. A third of global maritime traffic passes through its sea-lanes, and its depths contain significant stores of oil and natural gas. Six of the nine countries with coastline bordering its 1.35 million square nautical miles (China and Taiwan, as well as Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia) have lodged competing claims to the sea or its manifold atolls, reefs, and small islands. The stage is set for struggle.

For much of history, the South China Sea was an “obscure afterthought,” writes Marvin C. Ott, a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center. That changed in 1995, when Filipi-

no officials learned that China had built an outpost on the aptly named Mischief Reef, 120 nautical miles from Filipino territory but 600 from the closest Chinese island chain. The startling discovery came even as China was launching a wave of diplomatic efforts to demonstrate to the world that it was undertaking a “peaceful rise.” In 2002, China signed a declaration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) pledging that all parties would act in good faith until competing claims to the sea were resolved.

Tension eased, but then Chinese patrol craft began seizing Vietnamese fishing boats and harassing U.S. naval surveillance ships operating in the contested waters. China also continued to develop its military capacities on Mischief Reef. Last year, to the relief of many ASEAN countries, U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton pointedly criticized Beijing’s policy, stating that the United States favored “freedom of navigation, open access to Asia’s maritime commons, and respect for international law.” A Chinese Ministry of Defense spokesman retorted that “China has indisputable sovereignty” over the sea. As if to underscore the point, a Chinese submarine descended to the sea’s deepest part and planted a Chinese flag in the seabed.

China’s actions are “beyond serious,” Ott contends. China is in violation of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Seas, which holds that nation-states cannot

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

What 9/11 Did Not Change

THE SOURCE: "9/11 in Retrospect" by Melvyn P. Leffler, in *Foreign Affairs*, Sept.–Oct. 2011.

LOOKING BACK, IT'S EASY TO think of September 11 and its immediate aftermath as a time when U.S. officials made strategic choices that fundamentally changed the nation's course. Melvyn P. Leffler, a historian at the University of Virginia, takes a different view. The 9/11 attacks were terrible, but "they did not change the world or transform the long-term trajectory of U.S. grand strategy," Leffler writes.

Rewind to late August 2001. President George W. Bush had been in office about eight months, and his foreign-policy team was busy with an array of familiar is-

ssues, from free trade to China. Then the attacks happened. Suddenly—necessarily—the Bush administration had a new focus. In the months that followed, the administration launched the "global war on terror."

While Leffler believes that the Bush administration failed to meet the aims of its foreign policy—and often brought about the opposite of what it intended—it did not fail because its approach was radical. Many of the choices the administration made—engaging in preventive war, and promoting defense, open trade, and democratization—were straight out of the U.S. foreign-policy playbook.

Preemption, the most controversial of these moves, has a long history in U.S. foreign policy. President John F. Kennedy, for example, imposed a unilateral blockade on Cuba in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Indeed, in 2002, when Vice President Jo-

assert sovereignty over international waters. The conflict has the "clear potential to spark armed conflict between the United States and China," he adds.

There's no saying where China's territorial ambitions will stop, warns Dana Dillon, author of *The China Challenge* (2007). In his view, China's foreign policy is centered on a "Chinese world order . . . where China is the central power and Beijing is the global political pole." Dillon thinks the conflict's resolution rests in the hands of ASEAN. "Ironclad security treaties and the presence of American warships are not enough to protect Southeast Asian countries if they are not willing to defend themselves," he writes.

Robert D. Kaplan, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and a member of the U.S. Defense Department's Defense Policy Board, is more sanguine. He foresees a "naval century" for the region, in which cool assessments of interest prevail over ideology and crucial decisions are largely the domain of non-ideological defense experts. Kaplan believes that the United States should maintain its presence in the South China Sea while also accommodating China's inevitable naval expansion, seeking "balance not dominance." China may well be content to extend its power without meddling in the affairs of the ASEAN countries, leaving them free to enjoy the security the United States offers as well as the fruits of China's investment dollars.

EXCERPT

Libyan Exceptionalism

What gives me cause for optimism about the future of Libyan women is something very subjective: the way that Libyans remind me of Americans. . . . Libyans share with us a proud carelessness, an impatience, a wildness and a willfulness, that I don't find in the British or the New Zealanders or the continental Europeans. It isn't all good; both cultures have a propensity to aggression. . . . Maybe some of it comes from being a rich country, some from a low population density, some from the similarities between Bedouin primitive democracy and Anglo-Saxon traditions. . . . This is going to be a very, very interesting country to watch.

—ANN MARLOWE, a visiting fellow at the Hudson Institute, in *World Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 2011)

seph Biden was still a U.S. senator, he declared, “One way or another, Saddam has got to go, and it is likely to be required to have U.S. forces to have him go, and the question is how to do it, in my view, not if to do it.”

President Bush is commonly castigated for his ideological rhetoric, but all U.S. presidents have extolled the country’s ideals in powerful language. Think of President Jimmy Carter on human rights. “The affirmation of demo-

cratic values is hardly new,” Leffler observes. Bush’s promotion of free markets and democratization, derided in some circles, is a staple of presidential rhetoric and policy.

Leffler takes no comfort in what he sees as the continuities of U.S. foreign policy. Noting that Bush’s mistakes were no anomaly, he observes that Americans’ experience should promote “sorrowful reflection about how fear, guilt, hubris, and power can do so much harm in the quest to do good.”

vices: In 2008, at the height of the panic over the financial system, personal spending on education and health care continued to rise.

Kling and Schulz note that it is also hard “to squeeze labor costs out of” these industries. Teachers and medical professionals need to have good judgment and problem-solving skills, and are virtually impossible to replace with machines. Just compare the idea of “increasing the number of operations per surgeon, or the number of essays graded per teacher,” with increasing the speed of a production line. And while the market generally offers people in such low-productivity occupations lower wages, the indispensability of teachers, doctors, and the like means their wages will climb to remain competitive with those in professions in which output is more readily manipulated.

Another notable characteristic of the education and health care industries is that they’re dominated by government. Kling and Schulz argue that as these two areas’ shares of the economy continue to grow—they totaled 26 percent of U.S. GDP in 2010—they will increasingly exert a negative influence. The public sector is largely exempt from imperatives that are routine in the private sector, such as “economic value, efficiency, productivity, and consumer preferences.” If so much of the U.S. labor market comes within the purview of the state, the values of the private sector may lose their salience. Kling and Schulz predict that “the struggle for power over these sectors will be the focal point of American domestic politics in the 21st century.”

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Budget’s Next Battlefield

THE SOURCE: “The New Commanding Heights” by Arnold Kling and Nick Schulz, in *National Affairs*, Summer 2011.

THE DEBT CEILING FRACAS THAT consumed Washington this summer made it seem as if restoring economic health was only a matter of finding a new balance of taxes and spending. But Arnold Kling of the Cato Institute and Nick Schulz of the American Enterprise Institute argue that policymakers are neglecting a transformational development on the horizon: Health care and education are on track to become “the heart of the economy.” That is, or should be, the central issue, they argue.

Unlike many fields, health care and education will enjoy sol-

id demand and wage growth for the foreseeable future. They’ve already accounted for the vast majority of job gains in recent memory: Employment in health care, education, and other parts of the public sector increased by 16 percent over the past 10 years, while employment in all other sectors fell by eight percent. And the trend will only continue. The way the modern economy has evolved means that Americans use a smaller percentage of their income for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, freeing up money for secondary but still integral services such as education and health care. What’s more, even in hard times, people refrain from tightening their belts when it comes to these secondary ser-

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Capitol Hill's Heroines

THE SOURCE: "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" by Sarah F. Anzia and Christopher R. Berry, in *American Journal of Political Science*, July 2011.

WOMEN MAY BE UNDERREPRESENTED in Congress, but those who get elected to office are no shrinking violets. Research by political scientists Sarah F. Anzia of Stanford University and Christopher R. Berry of the University of Chicago shows that congresswomen are more effective on Capitol Hill than their male counterparts. Female legislators secure nine percent more federal discretionary spending for their districts than congressmen do—on average, a difference of \$49 million per district annually. They also sponsor about three more bills per Congress than their male peers (the average per member is 18), and cosponsor roughly 26 more bills.

Would Congress be more effective if more women were elected? (They've held an average of just 17 percent of the seats in recent years.) It's not likely, Anzia and Berry say. Congresswomen aren't overachievers because women are intrinsically better legislators, the authors argue, but because the barriers to entry for women in congressional politics are so high that those who succeed simply have more talent and put in more effort than the average man who wins at the polls.

If those barriers were to fall, so would the performance level of most female legislators.

The authors attribute women's superior performance in Congress to what they call the "Jill Robinson effect." Like the famed African-American baseball player Jackie Robinson, whose combination of great athletic talent and outstanding character persuaded the major leagues to desegregate, congresswomen have to prove their mettle and then some before they can win entry to the fortress that is Capitol Hill. The persistence of discrimination against female politicians, even in the wake of the 2008 presidential campaign, in which Hillary Clinton finished a close second for the Democratic nomination, is indicated by a recent survey that found 23 percent of American adults believed men to be more emotionally suited for politics than

women. In another survey, 11 percent said that they wouldn't vote for a woman for president even if she were qualified for the job.

Women are conscious of the bias, and it discourages all but the most competitive would-be female congressional candidates from entering the electoral fray, Anzia and Berry argue. One study found that 90 percent of women with a suitable profile for political office reported believing that there would be prejudice against them in political contests because of their gender.

Female candidates running in conservative districts have to be especially tenacious. Yet there is a considerable payoff that comes with electing a woman in these locales, Anzia and Berry find. Conservative congresswomen bring home even more federal dollars than their female colleagues from liberal districts.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Grim Dawn of the Republic

THE SOURCE: "America's Revolution: Economic Disaster, Development, and Equality" by Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, in *Vox EU* (voxeu.org), July 15, 2011.

BY 1840, THE UNITED STATES was a member of the club of prosperous nations, enjoying strong growth rates that outshone even Great Britain's. But the country's phenomenal per-

formance masked an economic calamity that had shaken it only a few decades earlier, a period that may have been one of America's darkest financial hours. From 1774 to 1800, say economists Peter H. Lindert of the University of California, Davis, and Jeffrey G. Williamson of Harvard, the United States experienced "a decline almost as steep as during



Americans may have been victorious in the Revolution but they paid a high price: The war pitched the U.S. economy into what historically may have been its steepest decline.

the Great Depression . . . and certainly longer.”

The colonists were already better off than the British in many ways before the Revolution, and Lindert and Williamson’s analysis shows that they were even wealthier than previously thought. The society the British seeded had turned out to be strikingly egalitarian, and, apart from the top two percent of income earners, colonists earned more than their British counterparts. The South was especially flush, with per capita income double that of New England, even when slaves were counted as part of the population.

During the Revolutionary War, combat and the British occupation of key cities destroyed industries and infrastructure, while inflation wreaked havoc on the weak financial system. Overseas trade was disrupted, and Americans were shut

out of lucrative British markets. Well-educated Loyalists decamped for the mother country or for Canada, taking their skills with them.

White-collar workers made up 13 percent of the American labor force before the Revolution, but only eight percent in 1800. The South suffered a particularly harsh reversal of fortune. The war reduced the upper South’s exports of rice, tobacco, and other commodities by 39 percent and the lower South’s by 50 percent.

All told, American incomes dropped by 22 to 28 percent between 1774 and 1800, Lindert and Williamson estimate. When the decline ended is not entirely clear; some economists believe that incomes began to grow again in the 1790s. If that is the case, say Lindert and Williamson, the period immediately following the Revolution may have seen a fall

even more rapid than their calculations show, constituting “America’s greatest income slump ever.”

The North rebounded from the catastrophe quickly, posting 2.1 percent annual growth in per capita income between 1800 and 1840, largely on the strength of its industrial output. The South took much longer to recover; by 1840, the region’s personal income per capita still had not reached prewar levels. The country’s overall growth rate of 1.26 percent during that period put it solidly in the camp of modern economies, defined as those growing by at least one percent annually. “Without the 1774–90 economic disaster,” Lindert and Williamson write, “it appears that America might well have recorded a modern economic growth performance even earlier, [becoming] perhaps the first [country] on the planet to do so.”

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Back to Basics for Economics

THE SOURCE: “Economics in Crisis” by J. Bradford DeLong, in *The Economists’ Voice*, May 2011.

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS LAID waste to many things—the housing market, the banking system, individual 401(k)s. A less noticed but still significant casualty was the confidence of many of the nation’s leading economists, among them J. Bradford DeLong of the University of California, Berkeley.

A confounded economist asks: How did he and his colleagues fail to predict the gravity of the Great Recession?

How, he asks, could he and his fellow economists have failed to anticipate the gravity of the most significant American economic downturn since the Great Depression?

DeLong, who was deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury for economic policy from 1993 to 1995, is still “astonished” by the scale of the panic that “relatively small” losses in subprime mortgages caused. But he’s even more astonished by the failure of university economics departments to learn from their mistakes. While economists strove to perfect theoretical models of how markets function, they neglected the human, historical, and political forces that shape economies. Consequently, they missed many of the factors that turned the crisis into a disaster, from the theory-

defying failure of banks to protect themselves against excessive risks to consumers’ potential to react to adversity in irrational ways.

A few contemporary economists, including Robert Shiller of Yale and Barry Eichengreen of Berkeley, had relevant insights to offer before the crisis. But it’s striking that many of the most illuminating thinkers—such as Charles Kindleberger, author of *Manias, Panics, and Crashes* (1978), and Walter Bagehot, the editor of *The Economist* in the mid-19th century—are “dead men.”

DeLong argues that economics departments need more people who study subjects such as cognitive biases and microstructure, the nuts and bolts of how particular markets function. “We need fewer equilibrium business-cycle theorists and more old-fashioned Keynesians and monetarists. We need more monetary historians and historians of economic thought and fewer model builders,” he says. If the field of economics fails to change, it risks becoming “a rump discipline that merely teaches the theory of logical choice,” he

adds, while political scientists, business professors, and others take on the job of explaining how the economy actually works.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Career, Interrupted

THE SOURCE: “Why the Gender Gap Won’t Go Away, Ever.” by Kay S. Hymowitz, in *City Journal*, Summer 2011.

ALMOST 50 YEARS AFTER THE publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, studies show that women still earn between 75 and 81 cents for every dollar men earn. It’s wrong simply to attribute this discrepancy to the straw man of gender discrimination, argues Kay S. Hymowitz, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a New York City think tank. Lots of other factors are at play, such as women’s preference for the kinds of careers that naturally bring in less cash.

Preferences aside, Hymowitz believes that the architecture of studies assessing the wage gap

EXCERPT

A Kind Word for Theory

There is a proper division of labor between those who develop theories and those who meet day to day challenges. It is progress, not regress, that today we have physicists who conceive theories and do experiments and civil engineers who build bridges. This work was done by the same people centuries ago. In the same way, it repre-

sents progress through the division of labor that it is no longer true that academics are the people best informed about the evolution of next quarter’s GDP, as was the case even in the 1960s. While there are exceptions, much of the progress in modern medicine comes from scientific research done by people who do not on a regular basis see patients. Watson and Crick would have been slowed down, not helped, if they had spent time with MDs.

—LAWRENCE H. SUMMERS, economist and former director of the National Economic Council, at Reuters.com (July 26, 2011)

contains significant flaws. Researchers who compare the full-time earnings of women and men ignore the fact that many women work fewer hours in their full-time positions than men do. Twenty-seven percent of men with full-time jobs worked beyond the average 40-hour work week in 2007, while only 15 percent of women with full-time jobs did.

Moreover, because the available data are limited, researchers can only compare broad career categories. “The Labor Department’s occupational categories can be so large that a woman could drive a truck through them,” Hymowitz says. One oft-cited statistic is that among workers in one category, “physicians and surgeons,” women take home only about 64 percent of the pay men do. But if one considers the fact that men are more likely to go into the medical specialties that require years of additional training—only 16 percent of surgeons are female—then the lag makes a lot more sense. “When you control for such factors as education and hours worked, there’s actually just a five percent pay gap,” Hymowitz reports. If the earnings of men and women who have no children are compared, there’s virtually no difference.

Women with kids are hardly all banging on the doors of the office, begging to be let inside: In a 2007 Pew Research survey, 60 percent of women with children called a part-time job ideal, with the remaining 40 percent divided between those who dreamed of returning to work full-time and

those who wanted to throw in the towel altogether. It’s not just American women who are reluctant to return to the grind. “Even the determined Swedes haven’t been able to get women to stick around the office,” Hymowitz observes. In Iceland, a country revered for its public child care and family-friendly parental leave policies, women also work fewer

hours and earn less than men.

The playing field is far from level, Hymowitz concedes, and gender discrimination hasn’t disappeared. But it’s important to be realistic about how much change is actually possible. “Less time at work, whether in the form of part-time jobs or fewer full-time hours, is what many women want and what those who can afford it tend to choose.”

SOCIETY

Stigma Instead of Safety

THE SOURCE: “Sex Offender Registries: Fear Without Function?” by Amanda Y. Agan, in *Journal of Law and Economics*, Feb. 2011.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HAS IT that sex offender registries keep the public safe. With the addresses of people who have been convicted publicly available (and, in most cases, searchable online), police and local residents can monitor offenders and guard against further crimes. Registries have become so accepted that, today, every state maintains a publicly accessible database for at least some category of sex offender. Amanda Y. Agan, a PhD candi-

Sex offender registries are very popular but they have virtually no effect on how many sex crimes are committed.

date in economics at the University of Chicago, argues that many of these efforts are for naught.

Agan analyzed the registries several different ways. First she looked at the incidence of rape and other sex offenses before and after the implementation of registries in all 50 states. She found that registries produced “no real change” in the number of arrests. In a second analysis, Agan studied the arrest records of roughly 9,600 convicted sex offenders following their release from prison in the mid-1990s. About half of the offenders lived in states that required them to register, and half in states that did not. Three years after the offenders’ release from prison, the two groups’ recidivism rates turned out to be virtually the same. In fact, those required to register were convicted of sex crimes at slightly higher rates.

Agan put one of the central premises behind registries—that

SOCIETY

The Mighty Spud

THE SOURCE: “The Potato’s Contribution to Population and Urbanization: Evidence From a Historical Experiment” by Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian, in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, May 2011.

knowing where sex offenders live predicts where sex offenses will occur—to a third test. Examining the correlation between the two factors in Washington, D.C. (and controlling for other variables known to influence crime), she found that the areas of residence of sex offenders played no role in the geographical distribution of sex crimes. Essentially, “there is little information we can infer from knowing that a sex offender lives on our block,” Agan observes.

If registries are ineffective at curbing recidivism among sex offenders, Agan contends, then they shouldn’t be adopted for people convicted of other crimes, such as methamphetamine use, a policy in force in a handful of states. And states, which employ a hodgepodge of registry strategies, should not impose stricter registration requirements, such as forcing offenders to wear GPS monitoring devices, until they’ve taken a hard look at registries themselves.

CONSIDER THE POTATO: IT’S dull in color, bland in taste, and prone to rot. Europeans initially suspected the spud of being poisonous because it bore a resemblance to the skin of leprosy victims. But the humble tuber has spurred great things, according to economists Nathan Nunn of Harvard and Nancy Qian of Yale. The significant increase in population and urbanization in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries owed a good deal to the incorporation of the spud into regional diets.

The potato’s unappealing exterior masks an abundance of virtues. “Because potatoes contain nearly all important vitamins and



nutrients, they support life better than any other crop,” Nunn and Qian report. Add milk, with its stores of vitamins A and D, and you’ve got a diet that humans can live on. Potatoes are also packed with energy. An acre of spuds yields about three times more calories than an acre of wheat, barley, or oats. Plus, potatoes are easy to grow in tandem with other crops, and they make great fodder for cattle and other livestock.

The potato is native to South America, and was brought to the Eastern Hemisphere by Spanish explorers in the 16th century. Most of the countries of Europe were lucky enough to have the kind of rocky, fertile soil suitable for growing this modest-seeming wonder food. They began to cultivate the potato in earnest in the early 18th century.

EXCERPT

Tolerating Indifference

Today, most politically correct people celebrate the fact of racial, ethnic, or religious differences, but we do not believe in them as our Humanist ancestors did. We focus on toleration, particularly on the rights of people who differ from us, but toleration can be itself a form of mutual indifference, leaving one another alone, each in his or her own sphere, as a version of getting along together.

—RICHARD SENNETT, sociologist and author, most recently, of *The Craftsman* (2008), in *The Hedgehog Review* (Summer 2011)

Living standards and life expectancies in potato-friendly areas soon improved, pushing up fertility rates. The average height of males grew half an inch. After controlling for a variety of factors known to influence population growth such as religion and trade relations, Nunn and Qian credit the introduction of the spud for about 26 percent of the population growth in Europe between 1700 and 1900—a time when its population exploded from 120 million to 390 million people.

The potato also influenced

Europe's population sprouted in large part thanks to the nutritional value and hardiness of the potato.

where Europe's growing population lived. The profusion of potatoes pushed down their market price, sending farm folk into cities to look for work—a trend that is plainly seen in city population numbers 50 years after the introduction of the potato. Nunn and Qian found that 27 to 34 percent of the increase in the rate of urbanization in potato-suitable areas could be traced to the spud.

Western Europe enjoyed a series of advances during the 18th and 19th centuries that made it the richest, most developed region of the period. While there are many reasons for Europe's success, the potato seldom gets the credit it deserves.

SOCIETY

Polluting Young Minds

THE SOURCE: "Air Pollution Around Schools Is Linked to Poorer Student Health and Academic Performance" by Paul Mohai, Byoung-Suk Kweon, Sangyun Lee, and Kerry Ard, in *Health Affairs*, May 2011.

AIR POLLUTION IS NOT GOOD for anybody, but it's particularly harmful to children. With their high respiration rates, kids take in more polluted air relative to their body weight than adults do. And because their bodies are still developing, they are especially vulnerable to pollution's effects. Lead and manganese, for example, have a direct impact on children's brains. "Children exposed to air pollution perform worse on cognitive functioning tests and have impaired neurological function and lower IQ scores compared with other children," report Paul Mohai, who teaches environmental policy at the University of Michigan, and three colleagues. In light of this evidence, say the authors, it's bad news that many schools are located very close to significant sources of air pollution.

In a study of Michigan's 3,660 public schools, Mohai and colleagues found that almost half were in the most polluted parts of the state. Two-thirds of students were attending schools sited in the bottom fifth of geographic tracts in terms of air pollution. (Each tract is one square kilometer.) Moreover, within individual school districts, most schools

were located in the worst-polluted neighborhoods. The authors also uncovered stark racial disparities: While 44 percent of white students were attending schools in the worst-polluted tenth of geographic tracts, 82 percent of their black peers and 62 percent of their Latino peers were enrolled in such schools.

Mohai and colleagues found that the levels of air pollution surrounding schools are "statistically significant predictors" of academic outcomes, even when the data are adjusted to account for rural-urban disparities and other factors. The 40 percent of schools exposed to the highest level of air pollution had significantly worse attendance rates and academic performance than other schools.

Schools wind up in bad spots chiefly because the land there is cheaper. Only seven states prohibit school construction near sources of industrial pollution: California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Utah, and West Virginia. Indiana is the only state that sets a minimum distance (500 feet). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released a set of school siting guidelines last year, but they are voluntary.

Tougher rules are long overdue, Mohai and his colleagues contend. More can be done both to prevent air pollution from infiltrating schools and to minimize indoor sources—by using paint with nonvolatile organic compounds, for example. Even measures as obvious as preventing buses from idling near schools would help.

PRESS & MEDIA

Hoover's Hidden Wordsmiths

THE SOURCE: "Friends of the Bureau: Personal Correspondence and the Cultivation of Journalist-Adjuncts by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI" by Matthew Cecil, in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Summer 2011.

AS THE FIRST DIRECTOR OF THE Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover faced a public-relations problem. Amid the centralization of government under FDR's New Deal, some Americans worried that a federal law enforce-

ment agency would develop into a secret police force. To head off such fears, the FBI under Hoover began what became a decades-long effort to court allies in the press.

One of the more unusual aspects of this campaign was the creation of a five-agent ghostwriting division that cultivated journalists with ostensibly personal letters from Hoover. The correspondence unit, housed in the FBI's crime records division, churned out thousands of

these missives during Hoover's 48-year tenure at the helm of the FBI and its predecessor, the Bureau of Investigation, writes Matthew Cecil, a journalism and communications scholar at South Dakota State University.

The correspondence unit took the lead in recruiting new "journalist-adjuncts" to the FBI's side by engaging potentially friendly reporters in a wide-ranging correspondence. As letters were exchanged, Hoover might offer condolences at the loss of a family member or inquire about his correspondent's wife—on occasion even maintain a separate correspondence with her—all through the pen of a ghost. Hoover met in person with some of his supposed pen pals, but more often



J. Edgar Hoover was a polarizing figure, but thanks in part to the fawning coverage of the FBI's "journalist-adjuncts," he had plenty of admirers.

than not letters and information leaks sufficed to give the quarry the impression that he was a member of Hoover's inner circle. Grateful reporters offered up tips and glowing press mentions of the FBI. "Thank God that a man like J. Edgar Hoover is the head of the FBI," read one ringing endorsement in *The American Magazine* in 1955. "He is the greatest bulwark against the insidious Communist menace that is casting a shadow over this great land of ours."

The unit sometimes suggested particular articles for "special correspondents" to write. In 1950, after the publication of a book criticizing the FBI's spying and other activities, Hoover's letter writers convinced Morris Ernst, the general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union, to publish a defense of the bureau in *Readers' Digest*. "The article's publication provided Hoover with cover from the Left that the bureau cited for decades thereafter as evidence of its restraint in civil liberties matters," Cecil notes. Some journalists writing about the FBI even submitted their work to Hoover for his review prior to publication.

Those who believed themselves to be part of Hoover's inner circle took their relationship with one of Washington's most powerful men seriously. Writer Courtney Ryley Cooper collaborated with Hoover on articles, books, and film scripts over seven years, and was the frequent recipient of letters ghostwritten by the correspondence unit. But when an article he wrote under Hoover's name about the surfeit of criminal activ-

ity in car-friendly campgrounds was loudly criticized by defenders of the tourism industry, the unit cut Cooper off. He committed suicide within a year, and his wife alleged that he did so because of the depression he experienced after Hoover snubbed him.

Hoover has gone down in history as a master manipulator, but the story of this unit went largely untold. The group, said one disgruntled former FBI administrator, was the "greatest letter-writing bureau in the history of the United States."

PRESS & MEDIA

How the Fire Starts

THE SOURCE: "All the News You Want to Hear: The Impact of Partisan News Exposure on Political Participation" by Susanna Dilliplane, in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer 2011.

THE CHARGED RHETORIC OF conservative Bill O'Reilly and liberal Rachel Maddow have won their television news shows sizable audiences. Do their fighting words actually inspire fans to put down their remotes and become politically active? According to Susanna Dilliplane, a PhD candidate in communications at the University of Pennsylvania, the answer is yes. The wrinkle is that it matters a great deal what else the viewers watch.

Dilliplane studied the television news viewing habits of more than 10,000 Americans who identified as Republican or Democratic during the 2008 presiden-

tial election campaign. They all watched shows that reflected their views with about the same frequency. But when they switched to other offerings, Republicans were more likely to view programs headlined by partisans of the opposing stripe, while Democrats were more likely to tune in to neutral shows, such as PBS's *News-Hour With Jim Lehrer*.

Partisans of both parties who frequently watched like-minded shows became politically active earlier in the campaign cycle than others, Dilliplane found. But partisans who watched any conflicting news sources—taking in both conservative firebrand Glenn Beck and liberal flame-thrower Keith Olbermann, for instance—were much slower to volunteer to hand out campaign buttons, post signs on their front lawns, or donate money to candidates. Even those who viewed neutral programs on top of their partisan fare were quicker to jump into the political fray.

Differing tastes in partisan news shows didn't have much to do with who showed up at the polls, however. Survey respondents voted at about the same rate, regardless of political orientation. The biggest impact of partisan news, Dilliplane concludes, may be that it sparks the people who are least likely to be familiar with the other side's case to get involved in political campaigns early. That may be good news for candidates eager for zealous volunteers, she says, but it's hardly ideal for citizens looking for a more nuanced political culture.

HISTORY

Afghanistan's Fateful Border

THE SOURCE: "The Man Who Drew the Fatal Durand Line" by David Rose, in *Standpoint*, March 2011.

WHEN SIR HENRY MORTIMER Durand left Kabul in the autumn of 1893, his fellow Britons showered him with hosannas. Durand, then serving as foreign secretary of Britain's Indian colony, had succeeded in negotiating the first "scientific frontier" between what are now Pakistan and Afghanistan, a crucial victory in British efforts to contain Russian expansionism. Queen Victoria herself telegraphed congratulations.

Fears of Russian encroachment into Afghanistan had sparked two wars with the Afghans, in 1839–42 and 1878–80, and the British believed that drawing a well-defined frontier and befriending Afghanistan's "Iron Amir," Abdur Rehman Khan (with the help of plenty of cash), would make the country an effective buffer between Russia and British India. A deeper motive was also at work. The British were haunted by the bloody Indian Mutiny of 1857—Durand himself had lost his mother in the conflict—and were convinced that taking decisive steps against the Russians would disabuse the Indians of any notions of British weak-



Sir Henry Mortimer Durand cut a fine figure, but he made a mess of cutting a border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

ness. Durand's biographer wrote in 1926 that "generations yet unborn will benefit from the Durand Line that he negotiated."

Of course, it didn't turn out that way. "If Durand had not produced his frontier," writes journalist David Rose, "the conflicts that have plagued the region since the Soviet invasion of 1979 might never have occurred."

Dubbed "the strongest man

in the Empire" by London's *Spectator*, the extravagantly mustachioed Durand was typical of imperial Britons in his slight regard for the people under his sway. In drawing a line through 1,200 miles of some of the world's most rugged terrain, "it simply did not occur to Durand that the [native] Pashtuns would object," Rose says. When Abdur Rehman complained during the 1893 negotiations about losing the Waziristan region, for example, Durand gave him half of it—noting breezily in his journal, "he will have a bit of Wazir country."

The Pashtun ties of clan, tribe, and faith were far denser than the British understood. Barely more than three years after Durand's triumphant departure from Kabul, Abdur Rehman convened a meeting of Pashtun mullahs who subsequently crossed back into British India with Afghan arms and launched the violent jihad of 1897, convulsing most of the northwest frontier. It was only the beginning.

In addition to igniting pro-"Pashtunist" feeling, the Durand Line contributed to the radicalization of Pashtun Islam. With the jihad of 1897, Rose says, the teachings of Pashtun scholar-priests "decisively changed direction," away from their traditional Sufi-inspired emphasis on "the individual's contemplative relationship with God, and toward one emphasizing strict observance and obedience." Increasingly, militant Islam "provided tribal leaders with their vocabulary and their ideological rallying point."

The British compounded their mistake after the 1897 jihad by granting the rebellious tribes in the region between the Durand Line and the rest of British India semi-autonomous status. These areas promptly became jihadist breeding grounds and to-

day, as largely ungovernable parts of Pakistan, serve as safe havens for Afghan insurgents and Pakistani Taliban. One of the Afghan Taliban's deadliest elements, the Haqqani network, makes its home in the bit of Waziristan that Durand kept for Britain.

ture of free will. Ask a dozen philosophers why slavery is wrong, and you'll get 12 different explanations. Philosophy "morphs and transforms to stay current," Dietrich says, but the underlying questions are pretty much the same.

Why can't philosophy give definitive answers? Dietrich believes that the multiple viewpoints humans can adopt are the essential reason. One "No-Progress" philosopher, Thomas Nagel of New York University, sees the problem as arising from the contradiction between objective and subjective points of view. Based on their own experience, lots of people strongly believe that humans possess free will. Taking a longer view of history, however, may lead one to doubt that conclusion.

University of Miami philosophy professor Colin McGinn has argued that philosophical problems are solvable in principle—just not by us. In McGinn's eyes, humans are comparable to dogs when it comes to their grasp of the world around them, philosophically speaking: We understand a little bit of what's going on, but the real language used to articulate what's happening is beyond us.

There's some consolation, then, in Dietrich's assertion that his field has accomplished virtually nothing since its inception: It simply couldn't be any other way. "In philosophy, clashing points of view are ineluctable, and their existence is the only truth."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy's Inertia

THE SOURCE: "There Is No Progress in Philosophy" by Eric Dietrich, in *Essays in Philosophy*, July 2011.

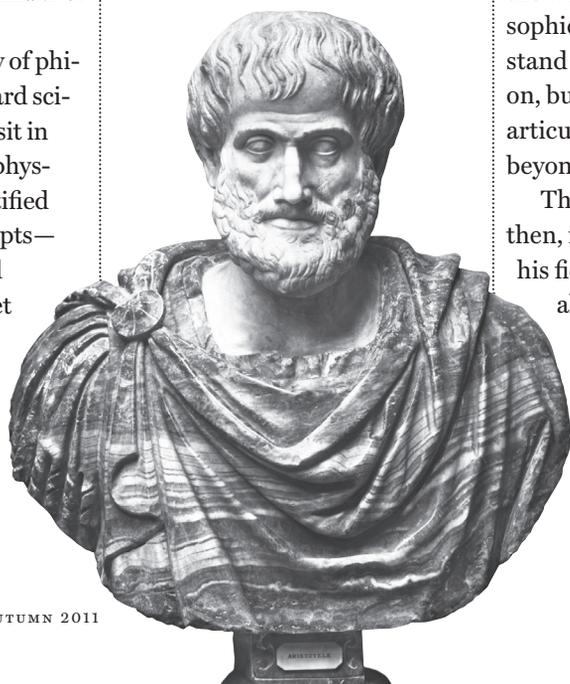
WESTERN PHILOSOPHY SEEMS to have had a pretty clear evolution: from Plato to Descartes to Kant to Wittgenstein. Eric Dietrich, a philosophy professor at the State University of New York, Binghamton, begs to differ. "Philosophy is, except for some modernizing, exactly the same now as it has ever been. It has not progressed one iota," he argues. And he's no renegade—a number of his peers agree.

Compare the trajectory of philosophy with that of the hard sciences. If Aristotle were to sit in on an elementary college physics class, he would be mystified by some of the basic concepts—equations, gravity—tossed around by the students. Yet he would feel very much at home in an introductory philosophy class, where his works continue to command a spot on the syllabus. People

are still grappling to understand some of the phenomena Aristotle wrestled with 2,400 years ago.

Of course, a few philosophical advances have gained traction since the agora's heyday, such as modal logic, which formalizes considerations of necessity and probability. But there is no "deep and widespread agreement" on—much less answers to—the essential questions the discipline faces, such as the na-

Philosophy has been set in stone since the days of Aristotle, argues one scholar.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Against Biologism

THE SOURCE: "Neurotrash" by Raymond Tallis, in *Prospect*, June 2011.

IF YOU SUBSCRIBE TO THE WILSON *Quarterly*, you are probably fond of reading. Where do you think that predilection comes from? A neural circuitry over which you have little control, or an amalgam of factors, including education and parental encouragement?

If you're in the latter camp, you have an ally in Raymond Tallis, a retired physician and clinical scientist in the United Kingdom who staunchly opposes biological determinism, or biologism. Biologism's governing idea is that humans are "organisms rather than people," acting only out of innate drives. Adherents hold that human experience "is identical with activity in the brain." All of this is hogwash, Tallis says. It's true that some experiences roughly correlate with activity in certain parts of the brain. But there's no saying that this is the *only* mechanism at play in human experience. Memory, for instance, has no specific way of being represented by brain activity. And biologism cannot account for what philosophers call "intentionality"—an awareness unique to humans of the otherness of the world around them. Human consciousness is so rich and multi-

faceted that it's "a much tougher nut to crack than the mystery of the Trinity," Tallis argues.

That's not the only complaint he has with those who think that human experience can be wholly explained by the brain's electrical impulses. They also strive too hard to see human behavior through an evolutionary lens, grasping for Darwinian explanations of artistic, religious, and ethical practices, he believes. Some speak of "memes"—cultural analogues to genes—that spread throughout society, rising and falling on their evolutionary usefulness. But humans are not just "pieces of living matter subject to the laws of the biosphere," Tallis protests. Our cousins in the animal kingdom might be governed by unconscious biological imperatives, but people lead lives, "regulating them by shared and individual narratives."

People who look exclusively to the brain for answers to life's great mysteries are barking up the wrong tree, Tallis concludes.

Humans are not organisms simply acting out innate drives. Capabilities such as memory and intention make us an animal apart.

"Our bodies are generated by natural processes, and . . . eventually the natural world closes over us. But between birth and death we inhabit a community of minds, a human world that goes beyond nature," he writes.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

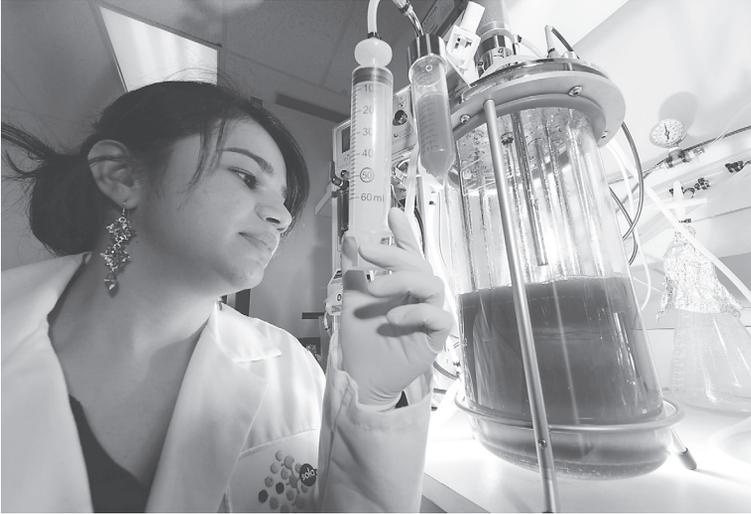
Energy From Algae?

THE SOURCE: "The Scum Solution" by Neil Savage, in *Nature*, June 23, 2011.

THE ENDLESS QUEST FOR AN alternative to petroleum has dipped a toe in a rather slimy source: pond scum, reports science journalist Neil Savage.

There's plenty to like about the green- and red-colored organisms as a possible fuel source. Unlike many biofuel sources, such as corn and sugar cane, which require land that could be used to grow food, algae can easily grow in areas not suitable for farming as long as water is supplied. Algae even do well in polluted water. They are also incredibly productive: Researchers estimate that algae could produce 61,000 liters (around 16,110 gallons) of biofuel per hectare; by comparison, soybeans only yield 200 to 450 liters.

Lots of problems must be resolved before algae-based biofuels become more than a novelty. For one thing, because algae need sunlight, the surface area required to cultivate meaningful amounts is tremendous. Europe



Sizing up scum: Researchers are experimenting with new technologies to harvest biofuel from algae.

would need an algae farm the size of Portugal to produce enough fuel to fully supply just its transportation systems. And the water requirements of algae farms are immense, dwarfing those of more traditional forms of agriculture. Combined with a slow and delicate harvesting process, in which algae cells are broken apart to extract oil that can be turned into

fuel, these factors make current algae biofuels too financially and environmentally expensive to compete.

Some scientists say that the algae cultivation process can be tweaked to overcome current production difficulties. One renewable energy company in San Francisco has engineered a way to overcome the inefficiencies of

photosynthesis that hamper algae's production of fuel-packed oil. Another company believes that the future lies with blue-green algae (which are actually photosynthetic bacteria) that naturally secrete oil and thus don't need to be destroyed in the harvesting process.

Proponents of algae biofuels insist that algae's depths have yet to be plumbed. Photosynthesis converts barely more than one percent of the sunlight reaching the Earth into chemical energy that humans can use, but a share closer to 10 percent is possible.

Both the government and the private sector are listening: The U.S. Department of Energy recently granted a research consortium \$44 million to develop algae energy technology, and companies such as ExxonMobil and Boeing have devoted funds to similar research. Algae may be mucky, but they have the potential to be as good as gold.

EXCERPT

Burning Brightly

After the energy shocks of the 1970s, high-pressure sodium lights gradually took over the night. Following the economic imperative to use the most cost-effective lighting—high-pressure sodium lights consume half as much energy as mercury-vapor lamps and can last up to 16,000 hours longer—transportation departments and cities embraced sodium light. It was as though someone said Fiat lux sulfurea—“Let there be light from hell.” The relentless spread of sodium streetlights is documented in NASA night photographs from space: New York City

and Los Angeles are circuit boards of glowing orange, and Long Beach [California], one of the world's busiest ports, is a flare of tarnished gold. . . .

The color of night is changing again. In the next decade, a large percentage of America's 37 million streetlights will be equipped with light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, and other kinds of solid-state lighting. Once again, energy saving is the driving force. . . . Unlike sodium lights, LEDs and other next-generation lights can be tuned to various colors, easily dimmed, arranged into luminous surfaces and shapes, and turned on and off instantly. . . . Perhaps we can now learn, in the words of the lighting designer Rogier van der Heide, “why light needs darkness.”

—**HAL ESPEN**, a writer in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in *The Atlantic* (July–Aug. 2011)

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Married to Google

THE SOURCE: "Google Effects on Memory: Cognitive Consequences of Having Information at Our Fingertips" by Betsy Sparrow, Jenny Liu, and Daniel M. Wegner, in *Scienceexpress*, July 14, 2011.

IN AN AGE WHEN MOST INFORMATION is just a few keystrokes away, it's natural to wonder: Is Google weakening our powers of memory? According to psychologists Betsy Sparrow of Columbia University, Jenny Liu of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Daniel M. Wegner of Harvard, the Internet has not so much diminished intelligent recall as tweaked it.

The trio's research shows what most computer users can tell you anecdotally: When you know you have the Internet at hand, your memory relaxes. In one of their experiments, 46 Harvard undergraduates were asked to answer 32 trivia questions on computers. After each one, they took a quick Stroop test, in which they were shown words printed in different colors and then asked to name the color of each word. They took more time to name the colors of Internet-related words, such as *modem* and *browser*. According to Stroop test conventions, this is because the words were related to something else that they were already thinking about—yes, they wanted to fire up Google to answer those tricky trivia questions.

In another experiment, the authors uncovered evidence sug-

gesting that access to computers plays a fundamental role in what people choose to commit to their God-given hard drive. Subjects were instructed to type 40 trivia-like statements into a dialog box. Half were told that the computer would erase the information and half that it would be saved. Afterward, when asked to recall the statements, the students who were told their typing would be erased remembered much more. Lacking a computer backup, they apparently committed more to memory.

In another version of this experiment, the participants were informed that the statements they had keyed in were saved in various folders with forgettable names such as "facts," "points," and "items." Still, they did a bet-

ter job of remembering the folders than they did retaining the information itself. The researchers say this shows that people are better at remembering *where* information is to be found.

There's nothing alarming about any of this, Sparrow and colleagues insist. What some psychologists call "transactive memory" is a familiar feature of the human mind. Married couples often divide memories—the wife may remember the Social Security numbers of everyone in the family, while the husband might remember when the cars need an oil change. Each knows to ask the other when the need arises. Perhaps one way of looking at the Internet age is that we haven't lost our memories but have gained a new spouse, and its name is Google.

OTHER NATIONS

India's Sensual Past

THE SOURCE: "From Kama to Karma: The Resurgence of Puritanism in Contemporary India" by Wendy Doniger, in *Social Research*, Spring 2011.

ATTACKS ON STORES AND RESTAURANTS that celebrate Valentine's Day. Protests against artists and writers who link Hindu gods with sexuality. The arrest of couples who put their arms around each in public. These incidents in India today aren't isolated, argues the Indologist Wendy Doniger of the University of Chicago. Throughout much of the country, Hindu fundamen-

talists are engaged in "pervasive and often violent moral policing." Many of them blame the West for tainting India with lasciviousness, but they're pointing a finger in the wrong direction, Doniger writes.

India has a rich tradition of eroticism, and a tradition, just as old, of what Doniger calls "Hindu Puritanism." The *Rig Veda*, India's earliest Hindu sacred text, written around 1500 BC, "reveals in the language of both pleasure and fertility." Various other texts, including the Upanishads and the



The buttoned-up Brits who colonized India minimized the amatory side of Hindu gods such as Krishna (left).

Tantras, which appeared in subsequent centuries, refer to ritual sex. But sexual acts coexisted with the path of meditation and asceticism—some interpreted the acts as intended to occur only on a symbolic level—and so a kind of religious doublethink arose that fostered tolerance.

The more secular *Kamasutra*, a book that today is referred to much more often than it is read, appeared in the third century AD. Some of the views that the author, Vatsyayana, expressed about women and homosexuality are liberal even by today's standards in India. Yet "the *Kamasutra* plays almost no role at all in the sexual consciousness of contemporary Indians," in part because it is large-

ly known through the ham-handed translation by Sir Richard Francis Burton (and various others who generally aren't credited) published in 1883. In any case, Burton and other Britons who celebrated India's erotic traditions were outnumbered by Protestant British colonizers and missionaries who were put off by Hinduism's "amatory excesses," exemplified by gods such as Krishna—"all those arms, all those heads, all those wives."

Many elite Hindus admired the British colonizers and adopted their views of Hinduism.

"The fraction of Hinduism that appealed to Protestant, evangelical tastes at all was firmly grounded in . . . the philosophical, renunciatory path," Doniger writes. Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), one of several religious leaders who toned down Hinduism's sexy side, developed a strain of religion that combined monistic Hindu beliefs with elements of Islam, Unitarianism, and even the ideas of the Freemasons.

Nineteenth- and 20th-century liberal Indian intellectuals tended to explain the shift from appreciation of to embarrassment about Hinduism's erotic past by blaming marauding Mughals and British Victorians. While there are elements of truth in these general-

izations, they ignore the Mughals and the Britons who celebrated the Hindu erotic arts, while downplaying India's own history of "Hindu antieroticism."

What India *has* picked up from the West is the bad habit of censorship. The erotic and the ascetic have a long history of coexistence in India that is endangered today, but the ancient "erotic path" won't be easily eradicated, Doniger suggests, in a country where two-thirds of young adults say they would have casual sex before an arranged marriage.

OTHER NATIONS

The Islamist Bogeyman

THE SOURCE: "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East" by Ellen Lust, in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, June 2011.

ARGENTINA, PORTUGAL, THE SOVIET UNION: All turned democratic during what the political scientist Samuel Huntington famously called the "Third Wave" of democratization, a phenomenon of the 1970s, '80s, and early '90s. The authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa, however, were curiously resistant, and scholars have long tried to figure out why.

One group blames the region's oil riches, noting the negative correlation between resource wealth and democracy. Another says that the absence of civic life and the strength of tribal and family-based networks make the region

more disposed toward authoritarianism. For still others, the culprit is Islam, with its mixing of religion and governance.

Ellen Lust, a political scientist at Yale, is not completely persuaded by any of these explanations. An important factor is being overlooked, she insists: the ability of incumbent regimes to exploit the presence of Islamist movements. By portraying Islamists as a greater threat to society than the status quo, authoritarian regimes dampened the ambitions of democratically oriented opposition groups across the region, particularly in the 1980s.

Take Tunisia. The secularist regime of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, who took power in a bloodless coup in 1987, excluded Islamists from the political sphere. The fear of Islamism was high, particularly because of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. This anxiety was compounded in the early 1990s by a civil war in Algeria that was sparked when the state canceled parliamentary elections to head off a likely Islamist victory. Rather than risk having Islamists come to power during a push for reform in its own country, the Tunisian opposition swallowed its ambitions and accepted the state's repressive policies.

Ironically, countries where Islamist voices were incorporated into government experienced more liberalization than other states in the region. A prime example is Jordan, where King Hussein allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to be a part of the political fold for most of his reign from

1935 to 1999. "Secularists in such regimes were more likely to believe that they had little to lose if Islamists came to power," Lust explains, "and thus, they were more likely to demand reform."

The Arab Spring erupted in part, she believes, because dissatisfaction with the status quo grew so great that it trumped the long-standing fear of Islamist power. But it was also aided by the gradual accommodation of Islamist movements since the 1980s. (The Muslim Brotherhood cooperated with pro-democracy groups to overthrow Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, for instance.) Whether Islamist and pro-democracy secularist groups can continue to find common ground will be a big factor in determining if the Third Wave can finally make it ashore in North Africa and the Middle East.

OTHER NATIONS

In Need of a Vodka Tonic

THE SOURCE: "Drinking Games: Can Russia Admit It Has a Problem?" by Heidi Brown, in *World Policy Journal*, Summer 2011.

FEW CULTURES ARE STRANGERS to the perils of the bottle. However, "there is a specific eeriness about the problem in Russia," writes Heidi Brown, who formerly reported on the country for *Forbes*. There, alcoholism is "widespread, it is socially accepted, and it has transcend-

ed regimes—from the tsars, to the communists, to today's hybrid mix of democracy and authoritarianism." The life expectancy of a Russian male born this year is just 60 years, nearly 20 years less than that of his Italian and French counterparts, and his death may well come from alcohol poisoning or a drink-related accident, suicide, or heart attack. Overall, alcohol contributes to 500,000 Russian deaths a year. Fetal alcohol syndrome, which causes marked physical and neurological impairments, is epidemic; a 2006 Tufts University study found that more than half of the children in one Russian city's orphanages suffered from the disorder.

The government's response has been weak—raising the tax on liquor and restricting advertising—for a reason, Brown argues. Traditionally, the Russian state has nursed its own booze addiction. In tsarist times, levies on spirits accounted for nearly half of the government's tax revenues, and during the Soviet era, 30 percent.

Vodka, a liquor distilled from rye, wheat, or other plant pulp high in starch or sugar, has been winter-chilled Russians' nip of choice for the past thousand years; unlike beer or wine, it won't freeze. If it has raked in state revenue, it has also been a handy tool for bringing the populace to heel. In the 18th century, Peter the Great encouraged drinking, then allowed indebted boozers to avoid prison by serving in the military—for enlistments of 25 years. Landowners paid their serfs in the clear spirit,

and “during World War II, Stalin ordered his generals to give their soldiers a daily portion of vodka . . . ‘100 grams for courage,’” Brown notes. “This helped numb the malnourished, underequipped, and terrified young men.”

A few leaders, including Vladimir Lenin and Mikhail Gorbachev, have tried to curb alcoholism, but coercive approaches that don’t focus on treatment haven’t done much good, or haven’t stuck. Raising the liquor tax means that destitute alcoholics will turn to moonshine (often made from sawdust), even antifreeze, for a fix. The standard Russian treatment, based on “narcology,” is not effective, either. It relies on “harsh medicines and temporary palliatives,” as well as hypnosis, and the state-appointed chief narcologist of Russia seems to have a shaky grasp of alcoholism’s menace, advising drinkers to “get up, walk around, and open windows to keep from getting too inebriated”—hardly a proven method of conquering addiction.

The biggest problem with narcology is that, like the authoritarian state, it puts power into the hands of a few—in this case, doctors. Programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, in which patients take charge of their own recovery, are rare. With an estimated 25 percent success rate for those two years out of treatment, however, AA is making inroads in the land of vodka, where roughly 7,000 Russian members are struggling to stay on the wagon whether or not their government follows.

ARTS & LETTERS

Pop Fiction

THE SOURCE: “Readers of the Pack: American Best-Selling” by Ruth Franklin, in *Bookforum*, Summer 2011.

IN 1895, A TRADE MAGAZINE published a list of books “in order of demand.” Since then, *Publishers Weekly*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Amazon.com, and IndieBound (an association of independent booksellers), among others, have compiled their own bestseller lists. But while the term *bestseller* sounds authoritative, it has no consistent meaning. Each publisher gleans its numbers from different sources; the *Times*, for instance, relies on reports from a changing cast of 4,000 booksellers, IndieBound only on those from independent bookstores. “A writer with a carefully timed marketing blitz,” writes *New Republic* senior editor Ruth Franklin, can elbow onto a list for a day—long enough to claim permanent status as a best-selling author.

The lists’ meaning is inconsistent in another way: Over the years, works by Edith Wharton,

Think the bestseller you bought is a sure winner? Think again—the term has no consistent meaning.

Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, and other literary greats have ascended the lists, but so have Christian morality tales, Danielle Steel romances, and horror stories. Novelist Zane Grey lassoed top spots with his dime store westerns. Franklin surveyed the 1,150 top 10 fiction titles that have appeared on the *Publishers Weekly* list since its inception, hoping to learn what bestsellers do have in common. Her finding? Not much.

Her sampling of bestsellers reveals even some of the campiest to be what George Orwell, quoting G. K. Chesterton, called “good bad books,” enjoyable to read however much “one’s intellect simply refuses to take [them] seriously.” But if the majority of titles have been forgotten, Franklin writes, “it is the outliers—the one-hit wonders, the dynamos that suddenly shot to the top of the list while the mainstays languished in the lower digits—that remain most readable and relevant, both for the skill of their storytelling and for their surprising revelations about social mores.” Literary works enjoyed a heyday in the 1960s and ’70s, when graphic sexuality in novels such as Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* (1961) and Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969) helped them attract readers.

With the rise of chain bookstores and huge publishing hous-

es headed by executives who appreciate commercial over literary heft, bestseller lists have become homogenized. Indeed, a recent *Times* list was chock-a-block with crime thrillers and romances. Now, often only movie deals (for Umberto Eco's 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose*, for instance) or, in the case of Salman Rushdie, widely publicized death threats can vault artistically ambitious works to the top.

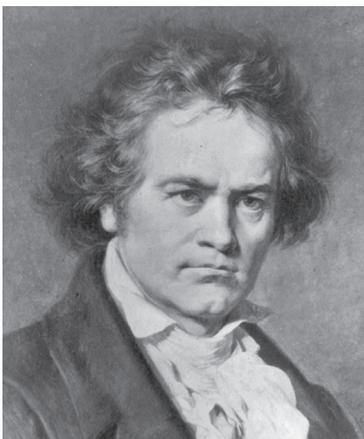
What's the worry? After all, a book's "popularity can be understood as both proof and negation of its value," Franklin says. Authors anxious to be taken seriously might cringe to see their stories sitting next to, say, *Jaws* (1974) on a shelf of bestsellers. But when that shelf becomes filled with a uniform bunch of mainstays, the public loses. Outliers, coupled with the influence that comes with top-selling status, can provoke the conversations that initiate change: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was, Franklin notes, a "good bad book"—and a bestseller.

ARTS & LETTERS

Beethoven's Secret

THE SOURCE: "Why Beethoven?" by Leon Botstein, in *The Musical Quarterly*, Fall–Winter 2010.

THE ENDURING APPEAL OF Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) is something of a mystery. Unlike Mozart and Wagner, Beethoven didn't produce much music for the



The Master Maestro: Ludwig van Beethoven

stage, which offers narrative and direction that keep music scholars busy and provide enjoyable distractions for unpracticed audiences. He wrote only one opera, while Wagner composed 13. In fact, much of Beethoven's canon is labeled as "absolute" music, possessing no narrative or extramusical intent.

To Leon Botstein, a music historian and the president of Bard College, this characterization of Beethoven's oeuvre is not entirely convincing. One of the reasons Beethoven's work remains so popular, Botstein says, is that the German composer "defied the later reductive separation of program music"—work intended to produce a set of feelings or complement a story—"from absolute music." Some of Beethoven's pieces do contain hints of narrative, ideas, and emotions, even while they lack text. After Beethoven died, his simply titled Piano Sonata no. 14 became informally known as "Moonlight Sonata" for a reason, Botstein points out.

Even though Wagner and others are better known for the prac-

tice, Beethoven also used standard musical techniques to give his work emotional depth; for example, he conveyed intensity by alternating between fast and slow tempos in the opening movement of the Fifth Symphony. In his melancholy piano sonatas he used slow tempos to set the mood. These pieces allow even the novice listener to feel that the music is "about something," that it can be construed to "tell a compelling story and make some sort of argument."

The works Beethoven composed at the end of his life, such as the Ninth Symphony, are more abstract, Botstein concedes. But they earned him a starring role in the evolution of music. Those compositions served as a touchstone for later composers and musicologists, including Theodor Adorno and the members of the influential Second Viennese School of the early 20th century. These modernist pioneers prized the "audible transparency, spirituality, and formal inventiveness" of Beethoven's late work, seeing in it an alternative to the Romanticism that dominated the 19th century. "Late Beethoven became an icon of the power of music to be philosophically and spiritually profound," Botstein says.

Interest in Beethoven continues exactly because his music "conveys meaning to a wide range of listeners"—from the first-time concertgoer to professional music theorists. Even when everything seems to have been said, Beethoven's music will speak to a listener anew.

ARTS & LETTERS

The Demise of Don Juan

THE SOURCE: "A Splendid Wickedness" by David Bentley Hart, in *First Things*, Aug.–Sept. 2011.

THE MYTHICAL STORY OF THE energetic seducer Don Juan fascinated Europe for three centuries, stirring thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus to pen reflections on his character. But today the Don Juan myth is all but dead. How did one of literature's most potent figures become what David Bentley Hart calls an "imaginative impossibility"?

The early Don Juan offered commentators the opportunity to weigh in on society's morals, argues Hart, a *First Things* contributing editor. A longtime folk legend, the infamous sensualist made his first notable literary appearance in the 17th-century play

The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest, by the Spanish writer Tirso de Molina. The early Juan had all of the legend's trademark rakishness but was more dissolute than the one of later centuries. Writing during the Renaissance, when morality plays prevailed, Molina wanted the great seducer to stand as "a cautionary example of the vicious and debased state to which unrestrained appetite reduces a soul," Hart writes.

Writers of the Romantic period, such as Lord Byron, added a more positive and philosophical dimension to Don Juan's lustiness, transforming him from a figure of "unreflective sybaritism" into an idealist who pursued his desires in "Promethean defiance of the gods." Romantics portrayed Don Juan's bed-hopping as a hopeless quest for the perfect woman. He was "a tragic lover whose soul was worth contending for."

The 20th century did not look upon the roué so kindly. The

works in which Don Juan took a leading role, such as George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1903), were largely satires. In a culture increasingly defined by "glandular liberation and relaxed consciences," Juan's earnest yearnings had little resonance.

There's more to Don Juan's faded glory, Hart argues. Earlier incarnations of Juan, which had the seducer rejecting the reigning moral framework for one of his own devising, demonstrated "the godlike power of the soul." The notion of a great if misdirected soul is all but lost in an age in which will is commonly thought of as a "random confluence of mindless physical forces and organic mechanisms." The demise of traditional morality took a crucial frisson out of Juan's story. "His proper element was that long cultural gloaming in which the old moral metaphysics retained its formal authority, but not its credibility." ■

EXCERPT

Modest Pursuits

Many of my writers have extremely handsome educational histories and broad experiences of the world. And many don't. . . . [But] they are all equally persuaded that they are culturally or intellectually disadvantaged, relative to writers of other times and places. That is, they feel that culture and circumstance have relegated them to lesser levels of attainment. Big thought is not a thing they ought to attempt.

On one hand, modesty about one's education is wise and appropriate. At best it is an outline, an agenda, a

curriculum for the decades of learning that should follow—and which, by the way, this big, buzzing civilization of ours has done an extraordinary amount to accommodate. And on the other hand, a modesty that disqualifies anyone from making a real, full test of his or her ability simply impoverishes the world. The attempt to take on ideas is full of perils, of course. Many people fear embarrassment. There are those who will not give words to a thought, in all silence and privacy, with a delete key at their fingertips, because they fear embarrassment. . . . Modesty is a fine thing under all circumstances, except those in which it becomes disabling.

—MARILYNNE ROBINSON, novelist and University of Iowa creative writing professor, in a commencement address at Holy Cross College (May 27, 2011)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Vaughan Bell on human violence

Charles Barber on leadership and madness

Emily Bernard on blacks and marriage

Michael O'Donnell on Christopher Hitchens

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Ginger Strand on back-to-the-landers

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Daniel Akst on bad decisions

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Aaron Mesh on Roger Ebert

Kevin M. Schultz on evangelical intellectuals

CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

China's Great Leader

Reviewed by J. Stapleton Roy

MORE THAN ANY OTHER INDIVIDUAL, Deng Xiaoping made China's modern rise possible. History is replete with examples of great leaders who made their mark through force and conquest. Far rarer, at least in the public mind, are those leaders who earned their reputations not through feats of arms but through their positive transformative actions while in power. Deng Xiaoping, whose life spanned most of the 20th century, was such a leader.

Deng spent much of his career in the shadow of Mao Zedong, the revolutionary leader who was the driving force in bringing the Chinese Communist Party to power in 1949 but then proved to be a disaster as a national leader, repeatedly plunging his country into chaos through his quixotic policies, his erratic vision, and his cavalier disregard for the welfare of the common people. Purged for the third time in 1976, as Mao approached death, Deng emerged from the convulsions of the Cultural Revolution to become China's supreme leader in fact if not in name. In the space of less than 15 years, from 1978 to 1992, Deng set China on the course that has regained for it the wealth and power it enjoyed through much of the last two millennia. This course, if

DENG XIAOPING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHINA.

By Ezra F. Vogel.
Belknap/Harvard.
876 pp. \$39.95

sustained, could position China to challenge the economic and military position of the United States as the world's leading superpower.

Quite a few highly competent biographies of Deng have been written over the years. Many were published during the 1990s, when the full impact of his openness and reform policies was becoming dramatically evident. To one degree or another, all of these works have suffered from the limitations of the source material: abundant official documents, but almost no personal papers. (Deng relied on his excellent memory, and left no paper trail.) More often than not, these biographies necessarily focused on particular aspects of Deng's long career, adding useful insights but falling short of a well-rounded portrait of the man.

In an authoritative biography of Deng, Harvard sociologist Ezra F. Vogel, a renowned specialist on China and Japan who rose to international prominence in 1979 with the publication of *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, has attempted the difficult task of providing a

comprehensive look at the experiences and influences that shaped this remarkable individual. He has succeeded superbly. To compensate for the dearth of personal written material, Vogel drew on extensive interviews he conducted over several years with Deng family members, former associates, officials, scholars, former ambassadors, and Chinese and foreign political leaders to add texture to his assessment of Deng's career.

Regrettably, there is still a paucity of information about Deng's formative years. Born in 1904 to a family in a rural village, Deng apparently excelled in school. In the 1920s he lived for about five years in France as a destitute student, during which time he joined the Chinese

Communist Party.

After he left France in 1926, he spent a year studying in the Soviet Union.

Upon his return to China, the party sent Deng in 1929 to lead an effort to establish a Communist base in

Guangxi Province, where his initial small successes were negated when the local warlord used his superior forces to overrun Deng's cohort. Deng submitted a self-criticism of his failures, which was used against him decades later during the Cultural Revolution. He was then dispatched to join the Soviet base area carved out by Mao Zedong's military forces in the southeastern province of Jiangxi. While there, Deng developed a strong admiration for Mao. In an episode that gave him valuable protection in later years, he was punished by the party's central leadership for, among other offenses, allegedly heading a "Mao faction." This was the first of the three purges he suffered during his career. We know too little about these episodes, as well as Deng's performance during the Long March (1934–35), the war of resistance against Japan (1937–45), and the first two turbulent decades of the

People's Republic of China, which was formally established on October 1, 1949.

In a book of more than 800 pages, only 30 are devoted to Deng's life from his birth until 1969, when, amid the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, he was banished after two years of house arrest to work as a machinist in a tractor repair station in Jiangxi. (Though Deng and his family suffered abuse and indignities during this purge and again in 1976, Mao protected Deng from efforts by radicals to expel him from the Chinese Communist Party. "Mao twice purged Deng, but he never destroyed him," Vogel writes. "He set him aside for possible later use.")

The skimpy treatment of Deng's early history is no fault of the author, who diligently mined previous biographies, archives, and interviews for what little material was available. But Vogel's research does provide a wealth of detail about the most important period of Deng's career, from 1969 to 1992, after which ill health and physical frailty forced him into the background. He died in 1997.

By the time Deng emerged as China's most influential leader, in the late 1970s—at over 70, he had reached an age when most Western politicians would have withdrawn into retirement—he became the first Chinese leader in more than 150 years to combine the necessary power, experience, and vision to thrust China onto a successful modernization trajectory. Vogel's book provides extensive insights into how Deng was able to use his experience, his network of associations among China's aging revolutionaries, and the force of his personality to direct China's course, all while allowing others to hold the top government and party titles.

What are the traits of this unusual man who succeeded where so many before him had failed? Whereas Mao, like Lenin, was a pamphleteer and prolific writer, churning out lengthy tracts setting out his vision, Deng's strength lay in organization and implementation. He shared Mao's revolutionary credentials, but not his economic vision for Chi-

When Deng Xiaoping rose to power in the 1970s, he was of an age when many Western politicians would have withdrawn into retirement.



Tourists pause below an image of Deng Xiaoping in Shenzhen. The planned industrial city, which today boasts a population of several million, was built on top of farming villages in the late 1970s as part of Deng's effort to spur China's economic growth.

na's future. He saw in Marxism-Leninism an ideology that combined organizational discipline, military forces under tight party control, and a practical commitment to bettering the lives of the working class. The victory of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 provided practical confirmation that a small, tightly organized party could be the motive force for overcoming insuperable odds to seize the reins of power. Deng's belief never wavered that unchallenged rule by the Chinese Communist Party was the only method that could provide the stability necessary for China to grow and prosper.

Deng's pragmatism is well known. For those of us who witnessed the ideological excesses of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), including the glorification of the "little red book" filled with excerpts from Mao's articles and speeches, and the narrowing of China's cultural expression to a few red operas and revolutionary songs, Deng's no-nonsense practicality was a refreshing change. Yet it also

represented a weakness in his understanding of human nature. Once Deng was clear in his own mind about what needed to be done to accomplish important goals, he was impatient to the point of intolerance with those who saw things differently or had other priorities.

In the lead-up to the Tiananmen Square protests, Deng was contemptuous of the respected astrophysicist Fang Lizhi, who advocated greater freedom of expression and a more open political system, because in Deng's mind loosened strictures would undermine China's ability to sustain its rapid economic growth. Two of Deng's handpicked and highly competent choices to become general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang (1980–87) and Zhao Ziyang (1987–89), lost his confidence because he regarded them as lax in enforcing domestic stability.

Deng's backing for the suppression of the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 (which were precipitated by Hu's death after his forced resignation two years earli-

er) was predictable. He had no use for people he saw as impractical visionaries with no idea how to translate their high-minded ideals into the policies and actions that could overcome China's backwardness and poverty. He was unapologetic about quashing what had developed into a high-profile challenge to the authority of the Chinese Communist Party. Once stability was restored, he lent his personal authority to the effort to overcome the resistance to his economic policies exerted by conservative ideologues who had become entrenched in influential positions in the party after the Tiananmen events. This was his last hurrah.

Diminutive in stature and unassuming in his personal style, Deng was a study in contrasts. He possessed neither photogenic good looks nor charisma, and he showed no taste for playing the role of an inspirational national leader, preferring to exercise his influence from behind the scenes. He never sought or held China's topmost party and government positions, his highest titles being chairman of the Central Military Commission and vice premier. Yet on his visit to the United States in 1979 he displayed a flair for public relations, wearing a cowboy hat without embarrassment and acting with assurance in his public appearances.

What he lacked in looks and charm, Deng made up for in self-confidence and decisiveness. In my capacity as the deputy to Ambassador Leonard Woodcock in the U.S. Liaison Office and later the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, I was present on two occasions when Deng resolved disputed issues of great consequence. The first was his decision in December 1978 to proceed with establishing diplomatic relations with the United States even though the Americans had confirmed explicitly that the U.S. government intended to continue arms sales to Taiwan. After the establishment of U.S.-China diplomatic relations in 1979, this issue quickly resurfaced as a core problem in the relationship, prompting the negotiation of the third U.S.-China

Joint Communiqué, issued on August 17, 1982. This communiqué contained the issue for a decade, but U.S. arms sales to Taiwan re-emerged as a particularly vexing sticking point in the 1990s and remain one today.

The second instance of Deng's decisiveness was his approval in May 1979 of an agreement settling the private claims of American citizens against China for property confiscated following the Chinese Communist Party's assumption of power, under terms that were vigorously opposed by elements within the Chinese government. In giving his assent, Deng overrode a cabinet-level official who had argued against the terms in a key meeting. After the meeting, a foreign ministry official rushed up to me urging that we quickly get the agreement signed because of the danger the decision would be reversed.

In both instances, Deng subordinated short-term considerations to longer-term strategic goals. He recognized that there was no prospect for a quick resolution of the Taiwan arms sale issue. As Vogel plausibly speculates in his biography, Deng probably recognized that the implementation of China's new economic reform policies would labor under a significant handicap without access to U.S. knowledge, capital, and technology, especially in the initial stages. In all likelihood, an additional motivation was Deng's concern about Soviet inroads in Vietnam; in a brief, bloody invasion in February 1979, Deng had attempted to teach the Vietnamese a military "lesson." He may well have felt that the new diplomatic relationship with the United States would deter Soviet retaliation on behalf of Moscow's Southeast Asian client.

In the case of the claims settlement, the \$81 million China paid to the U.S. government for distribution to American claimants was trivial compared to the benefits provided by the 1979 trade agreement, for which the claims settlement was a precondition. The trade agreement granted most-favored-nation treatment to Chinese imports to the

United States and greatly facilitated the rapid expansion of bilateral trade.

For those of us who as U.S. government officials participated in or monitored many of the developments in China and in the bilateral relationship Vogel describes, he has illuminated events in ways that would have been invaluable to us had we had such a clear picture at the time. The transformation of China that Deng set in motion is likely to confront the

United States with its most significant foreign-policy challenge over the next several decades. We are fortunate indeed that Vogel has written this timely and highly informative biography of Deng Xiaoping, which provides a wealth of insights into one of history's great leaders.

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Peace on Earth

Reviewed by Vaughan Bell

I RECENTLY VISITED CAQUETÁ, ONE OF THE southernmost regions of Colombia, noted for its beautiful Amazonian landscape and its bitter armed conflict. For almost five decades, it has been the epicenter of violent confrontations between a long list of regular and irregular armed groups, with a frighteningly high murder rate and periodic civilian massacres the result. As a health worker in the region who deals with the consequences of violent conflict, I could not help feeling a touch of irony as I read Steven Pinker's new book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, which examines how "the decline of violence may be the most significant and least appreciated development in the history of our species."

Pinker, a psychologist and linguist at Harvard, is best known for his books about cognitive science, but in *The Better Angels of Our Nature* he has produced an excellent exploration of how and why violence, aggression, and war have declined markedly, to the point where we live in humanity's most peaceful age. This news is likely to come as a surprise to many, who are perhaps more familiar with the specters of industrial warfare, nuclear Armageddon, and nightly televised atrocities, but Pinker musters an impressive array of evidence—his book contains more than a

THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE: Why Violence Has Declined.

By Steven Pinker.
Viking, 802 pp. \$40

hundred maps and graphs, including data illustrating the falling homicide rates in Western Europe over the past several centuries and a chart showing the dramatic increase in the number of apologies by political and religious leaders in the last few decades—to demonstrate that, since early history, violence has become less and less a fact of everyday life.

The Greek epics and the Old and New Testaments are full of accounts of horrific personal and mass violence—gruesome battles, genocides, stonings, crucifixions. During the Middle Ages, knights vied for power by fighting for control of land and the human property that lived on it. Mutilation and torture were not just the standard punishments for an array of minor crimes, actual or imagined, but also a major source of public entertainment that was as inventive as it was vile. Intercommunity and interpersonal violence was a primary cause of death, while physical abuse of women and children was not only accepted but expected.

Since those dark times, history has seen a steady decline in death and brutality. Even taking into account the extremity of the 20th century's world wars, genocides (including

the Holocaust), ethnic cleansing campaigns, and war-related diseases and famines, which marked a genuine uptick in the otherwise downward historical trend in the rate of violent death, a conservative estimate puts deaths from these human causes at just three percent of the deaths in the 20th century. In prehistoric hunter-gather societies, Pinker observes, roughly 15 percent of people came to violent ends. Several conflicts of the distant past took a proportionately greater toll on the global population than the world wars, including the Mongol conquests of the 13th century and the An Lushan Revolt in the eighth century during China's Tang dynasty, in which 36 million people (two-thirds of the Chinese Empire's population) died. Pinker notes that the decline in violence is evident not only in wars but in almost every sphere of unpleasantness—slavery, inhumane treatment of criminals, hate crimes, homicide, sexual abuse, even the treatment of animals.

Sociologist Norbert Elias called this movement toward restraint the civilizing process. (Pinker is clearly a fan of Elias's work.) *The Better Angels of Our Nature* identifies several historical trends that have helped humanity reach its state of relative modern peace. The growth of the state, with its monopoly on violence and its ability to curb vengeance through the administration of justice that is disinterested in personal feuds, correlates with a reduction in murder rates wherever national boundaries have appeared. Commerce has huge potential to provide benefits to both parties in an economic exchange and promotes mutual cooperation even when differences emerge. The idea that personal well-being and freedom from suffering are important social values in themselves became a major influence in the Enlightenment and remains a cultural cornerstone to the present day. It lives on in the modern concept of human rights. Less recognized but accorded equal value in Pinker's book is the process of feminization, whereby the acceptance

of female-friendly values (including ready access to birth control and "the deflation of manly honor," which has a tendency to start fights) reliably leads to less violent societies.

Perhaps less convincing is Pinker's discussion of how our minds and brains have adapted to reduce the psychological payoffs for violence. We really know very little about the psychology and neuroscience of personal violence, not least because getting people to batter each other in the lab has never been popular with academics, while few potential killers are interested in doing a short test involving attention and problem solving before they take up arms. More seriously, violence is predicated on the intent to do harm and injury, yet ethical research demands that harm and injury be avoided, and so studies of violence tend to follow subjects who are naturally aggressive or else use watered-down games in the lab in which participants can do no more than express their hostility through mild punishments.

One of the best-known researchers on the neuroscience of aggression is Estonian-born psychologist and neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp, who has identified several primary emotion circuits in small mammals such as mice and cats, including one he calls the "Rage circuit," which, when stimulated, produces an immediate aggressive response. Although a little too Freudian for some, Panksepp has made a massive contribution to our understanding of emotion; still, his concept of a specific rage circuit is not widely accepted by either animal or human neuroscientists. You wouldn't know that, however, from reading Pinker's book.

This overreliance on Panksepp's work makes for a great narrative but only a partial view of how the brain generates hostile impulses, and Pinker is left making sweeping generalizations. For instance, he writes that "all the parts of the rat brain have been carried over to the human brain, including the organs that house the circuits for rage, fear, and dominance," then launches into a discussion of the



Human violence has a long and glorious history. The Bible itself is full of episodes of brutality, such as the stoning of the Christian martyr Stephen described in Acts.

science of the human brain as if nothing out of the ordinary has just been proposed. The current understanding of how the limbic system and other deep brain structures (which are by no means dedicated to hostility) are involved in the motivation to attack and how these motivations are kept in check by brain networks in the frontal lobes (which Pinker does address well) is no less interesting than the limited version presented in the book.

I suspect that Pinker's preference for the "we have inherited it from rats" explanation of aggressive urges may have been encouraged by his well-known objection to "blank slateism" (the subject of one of his earlier books), a theory popular among many intellectuals in which genetic influences are played down to the point of assuming that all of our thoughts and behavior result purely from our experiences during life. Although the genetic data is not always cut and dried, Pinker has done an admirable job of alerting us to how the effect of the

environment is often vastly exaggerated, but occasionally his evangelical spirit itself leads to exaggeration. In one section, he writes that "by the late 20th century, the idea that parents can harm their children by abusing and neglecting them (which is true) grew into the idea that parents can mold their children's intelligence, personalities, social skills, and mental disorders (which is not)." While the inclusion of each of these categories is controversial, the appearance of mental disorders on this list

only makes sense if you throw out years of research on how childhood treatment can alter the risk of mental illness, along with, as it happens, adult aggression and violence.

I found equally unconvincing Pinker's argument about how violence declines as IQ levels rise and how this reflects the moderating effect of reason on aggression. Intelligence can equally be applied to justifying nonsense as to debunking it, and problem solving is not the same as evidence-based skepticism, but there is not a hint of dishonesty in the book. Pinker dismisses as many attractive theories as he accepts. For example, the appealing idea that violent people are more likely to have a specific version of the gene for monoamine oxidase, an enzyme that breaks down neurotransmitters such as serotonin in the brain, is rightly given short shrift despite the fact that it is a pop-science favorite.

For a book championing humanity's unrecognized triumph over violence, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* also includes some interesting

reflections on whether the culture of nonviolence has gone too far in some respects, to the point where children are being prevented from playing sports such as dodge ball due to these games' aggressive nature. This trend can also be seen in how the concept of violence is used to stigmatize other unwanted behaviors—for example, what was traditionally called “verbal abuse” is now being increasingly categorized and condemned as a form of “psychological violence.”

This is not to say that our work is done and we can rest on our peaceful laurels. Brutality is still endemic throughout the world, but the fact that we have gotten to the stage where violence is considered abnormal and unnecessary is, historically, an astounding transformation. One of Pinker's more subtle observations about how this peaceful revolution is reflected in society is that war memorials have changed in the last hundred years from being celebrations of glory and triumph to laments for lost lives.

Despite my concerns about how Pinker portrays individual psychology and neuroscience, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* is so comprehensive that these faults represent

only a fraction of the book. Taken as a whole, it is powerful, mind changing, and important. Pinker does not shy away from the gritty detail and is not to be taken lightly—quite literally in fact, as at more than 800 pages his book could easily be used as a weapon if you remained unpersuaded by its arguments. But this avalanche of information serves to demonstrate convincingly and counterintuitively that violence is on the decline.

In many ways, violence is a disease of the emotions. While we should never ignore the victims, it can be managed and curbed so it affects as few people as possible and remains minimally contagious. Many illnesses that once felled multitudes are now largely vanquished through greater knowledge and simple preventive measures; a similar process has made us all less likely to be targets, and perpetrators, of brutality. As Pinker argues, this is an achievement we should take pride in.

VAUGHAN BELL is currently working for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) as mental health coordinator for Colombia. He is an honorary research fellow at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, and is writing a book, *The Enchanted Window: How Hallucinations Reveal the Hidden Workings of the Mind and Brain*.

The Lunacy to Lead

Reviewed by Charles Barber

IN SEPTEMBER 2001, I WAS WORKING IN Manhattan as an assistant director of a homeless shelter in which lived 200 men. Each had a psychotic illness. For two days after the 9/11 attacks I was unable to get into Manhattan, but I made it to work on Thursday, September 13, taking the bus over the George Washington Bridge. The city felt like a war zone. The acrid smell of smoke suffused the air; sirens and alarms sounded constantly; armed soldiers or police officers stood on every corner. I steeled myself, expecting the shelter to be, well, more insane than usual.

I was astonished to find everything at the shelter as it always was—if anything, a lit-

A FIRST-RATE MADNESS:

Uncovering the Links Between Leadership and Mental Illness.

By Nassir Ghaemi.
Penguin. 340 pp. \$27.95

tle calmer. When I asked the residents if they had any concerns, someone pointed out that the hot water was not working very well. No one mentioned the fact that a large portion of lower Manhattan was no longer there.

At last I felt compelled to bring up the attacks. The men said they felt bad for those who had suffered, but all of that had happened a couple of days ago. At first I was indignant at their seeming apathy, but over time I realized that 9/11 was for many of them the day the level of

crisis in the world met their own. Functioning in a crisis mode was something they knew how to do very well.

This phenomenon is more or less what Nassir Ghaemi adroitly explores in *A First-Rate Madness*. The book, though psychologically nuanced, has a simple thesis: Leaders who have mental illness or have experienced periods of mental abnormality are often better able to handle crises than their mentally healthy peers. When it comes to wars and depressions, it's better to have someone at the helm who has suffered than someone who has not. In Ghaemi's formulation, George W. Bush, a fairly untroubled soul once he got past his substance abuse, was ill equipped to handle 9/11. In his response to the tragedy, he was rigid, insufficiently empathic, and overly optimistic. Abraham Lincoln, depressed and tortured, would have done a lot better.

Ghaemi, a psychiatrist at Tufts University School of Medicine and author of a number of distinguished books on psychiatry, sees four potential derivatives of mental suffering: creativity, realism, empathy, and resilience. Mania, for example, is strongly associated with torrents of new ideas. People who have suffered from depression often see the world in more realistic and pragmatic terms than "normal" people, who have been shown in studies to be overly sanguine about the world and their place in it. Those who have suffered any illness tend to be more empathic, understanding that life is fragile and difficult. And those who can survive mental illness (and there's the rub) learn skills of resilience that are applicable to any of life's hardships.

Through a series of deft and highly perceptive case histories, Ghaemi explores how figures including Lincoln, Civil War general William Tecumseh Sherman, media mogul Ted Turner, British prime minister Winston Churchill, father of Indian independence Mahatma Gandhi, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., and Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, all of whom either suffered from mental illness or sus-

tained periods of mental abnormality, brought special attributes to the crises of their times and ultimately became great leaders and innovators. (The pool of female political leaders from which to draw is admittedly small, but the fact that Ghaemi's sample does not include a woman is a shortcoming.)

Ghaemi's thesis is a provocative one, and like a lot of ideas that push our cultural narrative forward, it simultaneously holds water and does not. *A First-Rate Madness* is at its most convincing in its analyses of individuals whose depression (Lincoln, Churchill) or bipolar disorder (Sherman, Turner) was either self-admitted or, based on the historical record and personal diaries, indisputable. While Lincoln and Churchill lived in a largely preclinical age, one cannot read their writings about the depths of their periodic suicidal states and not be absolutely convinced that they suffered from major depression for most of their lives. These were men who stared into the abyss early and often, and thus were able to take wars and secessions in stride. For these great figures, as for my men in the shelter, crisis was normal, and they were able to retain the ability to function.

The novelist Walker Percy, a major depressive himself, wrote of the phenomenon of the ex-suicide: the person who almost kills himself but chooses not to. Take a man waiting for the bus on a March day in the rain, Percy said. Life is dull, annoying, and vaguely painful. Take that same man waiting for the bus, having just escaped his own suicide: Life is an unexpected gift, profound and joyous. Everything is gravy—he had not expected to be alive. Lincoln and Churchill were ex-suicides many times over. "I don't like standing near the edge of a platform when an express train is passing through," Churchill told his doctor. "A second's action would end everything." Having survived chronic inner anguish, Lincoln and Churchill found the battles at Gettysburg and on the Normandy beaches relatively manageable.

The chapters on Kennedy and Roosevelt are less persuasive. Ghaemi argues that FDR and JFK were mentally abnormal—that at the very least, they suffered from hypomania (a mood state characterized by loquacity, an excess of energy, an inordinate need for sex, and general recklessness). Though Kennedy’s sexual voracity was indeed abnormal, it seems to me that both his and Roosevelt’s abnormalities were more physical (Roosevelt’s polio, Kennedy’s severe Addison’s disease) than mental. Roosevelt’s struggle with the physical impairments of polio led him to become more empathic and less of a rich, arrogant dandy. Kennedy’s enormous resilience seems more a reflection of his personality and his unbridled ambition than a product of his mental state.

Nonetheless, *A First-Rate Madness* has important implications for public policy and how we view the stigma of mental illness. Perhaps we should be more tolerant of our leaders’ foibles, indiscretions, weaknesses, diagnoses, and, yes, psychiatric histories. In Bush and Barack Obama, we’ve had stable, “mentally healthy” presidents who arguably have not been particularly adept at managing crises. I have no doubt that someone who had faced the abyss would have done a better job of lead-

ing the country as it faced a decade of abysses.

Ghaemi makes clear from the outset that his troubled but great leaders are best for times of *crisis*, not tranquility. When peace and prosperity reign, he writes, “mental health is useful. One meets the expectations of one’s community, and one is rewarded for doing so.” Yet in reading *A First-Rate Madness* I kept thinking of Dwight Eisenhower, a figure absent from its pages. As a military commander Eisenhower functioned on the brink in World War II and on D-Day, and as president he led the country during the relatively placid 1950s. He had his flaws, and he may not have been flashily creative or intellectual. But as a victorious general he was humane, he was profoundly realistic (warning us of the dangers of the evolving military-industrial complex), and he was enormously resilient. Yet Eisenhower, I submit, was about as sane as any man who ever lived, or at least as sane as anybody who ever wished to be president. Perhaps the true value of Ghaemi’s book is that it shows how diverse the wellsprings of leadership are, from the fervor of madness to staid and prosaic sanity.

CHARLES BARBER, a lecturer in psychiatry at Yale Medical School, is the author of *Comfortably Numb: How Psychiatry Is Medicating a Nation* (2008). He is currently writing a novel about a depressed detective.

The Marriage Gap

Reviewed by Emily Bernard

RALPH RICHARD BANKS BORROWS THE PROVOCATIVE title of his book from an anecdote relayed by an African-American journalist who taught a class to a roomful of black sixth graders in Washington, D.C., a few years ago. When the journalist offered to invite married couples to speak to the students about raising children, one boy sneered, “Marriage is for white people.”

The black family has long been a topic of public discussion. In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in what became known as the

IS MARRIAGE FOR WHITE PEOPLE?

How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone.

By Ralph Richard Banks. Dutton. 289 pp. \$25.95

Moynihan Report, famously described single-parent (and overwhelmingly female-headed) black families as a “tangle of pathology.” Today, black women are peculiarly unpartnered—as many as three out of 10 may never marry. With movies such as *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005) and *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007), black film-

maker Tyler Perry has built a fortune on the subject of black female loneliness and the precarious nature of relationships between black women and black men.

The decline in the marriage rate among poor African Americans has gained most of the attention, given that it's especially pronounced, but the scarcity of married couples is increasingly apparent among affluent blacks as well. In this accessible and comprehensive study, Banks focuses on the plight of middle-class black women, who marry at higher rates than poor black women but are still twice as likely as white women never to wed.

An implicit theme of Banks's book is the universality of black experience. He suggests, as others have, that perhaps the institution no longer suits the needs of men and women today, who don't feel compelled to marry in order to gain economic or romantic partners. And divorce and single-parent child rearing have become both more socially acceptable and financially feasible. Today, 40 to 50 percent of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. While the marriage rates of blacks have dropped off more steeply than those of whites, Banks notes that in regard to marriage and child-rearing trends, "white follows black." The proportion of white children born to single mothers is now equal to the percentage of black children born to single mothers 50 years ago.

Banks proposes that both blacks and whites have set such high standards for mates and for marriage itself that they cannot possibly be met. Still, African Americans, as Banks observes, "are the most unmarried people in the nation." And divorce rates among blacks are double those of whites. Why?

Is it because blacks have yet to overcome the effects of slavery, which made lasting unions impossible? (This proposal is partially undermined by the fact that the marriage gap developed a century after abolition.) Is it because, by some estimates, more than a quarter of all black men in the United States will spend time behind bars during their lives?

Is it because more than one out of five black men marry outside the race—a fact that black women deeply resent? Is it because black women greatly outdistance black men in the educational and professional realms and can't find a partner whom they regard as a peer? Or is it because black men have so many options in the romance "market" that they resist being forced to commit to one?

Banks concedes that his research provides only partial answers, and that his findings are not drawn from firsthand experience. In his acknowledgments, he indicates that he is happily married. He confesses that he found this book difficult to write for the same reason that—I must confess—I found it difficult to review: It exposes "some uncomfortable truths about relationships between black men and women."

Despite its disheartening revelations, *Is Marriage for White People?* is compelling reading. The book is not the standard academic

text that Banks, a Stanford law professor, set out to write. His arguments are buttressed by sound reasoning and incontestable statistics, but the book is not overrun with numbers. As Banks conducted interviews to supplement his research, the project grew into an effort to illuminate the experiences of the black middle class, which have long been obscured as attention "oscillates from the black poor to everyone else." His selection of interviewees consists mainly of black women within his peer group: lawyers with Ivy League degrees.

However limited his pool of participants, the stories these women entrusted to Banks put human faces on the distressing conundrums he explores. For example, he opens the book with a portrait of Audrey Jones, a 39-year-old multilingual business consultant who has been ex-

American filmmaker Tyler Perry has built a fortune on the subject of black female loneliness and the precarious nature of relationships between black women and black men.

ceptionally successful. She is also unmarried, though she doesn't want to be. A woman with boundless professional opportunities who is also a "good catch," in Banks's estimation, is facing a lifetime of loneliness, according to statistics. "This may not be the life that I had hoped for," Jones says, "but this is the life I have to live."

What to do about the black family is a dilemma that has preoccupied sociologists, psychologists, journalists, screenwriters, novelists, and ordinary people for decades. Few have unreservedly advocated the refreshing solution Banks offers: interracial marriage. While black men have long felt free to choose white mates, he notes, black women are "more segregated in the intimate marketplace than any group in American society." They view interracial relationships as too complicated and see partnering with black men as an expression of a larger commitment to the race itself; often, black women aren't as attracted to men of other races as they are to black men. But Banks urges them to overcome these reservations.

He ends his book with an uplifting story about Joe, who is white, and Teresa, who is black. They are complete opposites in personality and background, but have a joyful and mutually supportive relationship. Banks uses their story to illustrate the core of his argument, which is that unions between black women and white men actually benefit interracial relationships, because such relationships shift the "power, ever so slightly, in favor of black women" as the gender imbalance among single blacks becomes less severe. "If more black women married nonblack men," Banks muses, "more black men and women might marry each other." His controversial conclusion may rankle, amuse, or vindicate, but it provides a new chapter to an old story about the distressing state of black marriage.

EMILY BERNARD is an associate professor in the Department of English and the ALANA (African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American) U.S. Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Vermont. She is the editor of *Some of My Best Friends: Writers on Interracial Friendships* (2004). Her book *A Portrait in Black and White: Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance* will be published next year.

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

A Singular Voice

Reviewed by Michael O'Donnell

FOR YEARS, IT HAS BEEN easy to take Christopher Hitchens for granted, and now we are losing him. The incomparable British polemicist, contrarian, essayist, bon vivant, and bullhorn of the anti-totalitarian left has advanced throat cancer, and may have won his last motion in the debating hall and blown his last smoke cloud into the face of tyranny. Fortunately for his readers, Hitchens's voice is not yet silenced. *Arguably* is a massive, engrossing collection of essays produced over the past 10 years. Like his brilliant memoir of 2010, *Hitch-22*, it reminds us of all we stand to lose.

Hitchens made himself somewhat tedious

ARGUABLY:

Essays by Christopher Hitchens.

Twelve. 788 pp. \$30

from about 2003 to 2007 with his relentless defense of the Iraq war and his apparently spiteful flirtation with conservatism. *Arguably* covers other ground. Those familiar with Hitchens only from his pugnacious television appearances and his Fighting Words column in *Slate* magazine will benefit from exposure to his literary side, especially his splendid review essays in *The Atlantic*. For those who like a little splatter, he can be just as brutal panning a book as attacking an apologist for fascism. He writes that, in composing the 2006 novel *Terrorist*, John Updike gives "the impression of someone who has been keeping up with the 'Inside Radical Islam' features in something like *Newsweek*," producing "one of the worst pieces of writing from any grownup source since the events" of 9/11.

The essays on literature and literary biography are erudite and often very funny. Here is a précis of the poet Philip Larkin's libido: "Lar-



For decades, writer Christopher Hitchens has delighted and provoked readers. Recently diagnosed with esophageal cancer, he posed earlier this year in his Washington, D.C., home.

kin may not have been highly sexed in the conventional sense, but he was a heroic consumer of pornography and amateur composer of sadomasochistic reveries, which he often shared with his worldly friends Robert Conquest and Kingsley Amis.” Perhaps nothing recommends Hitchens more than his taste in literature. He returns again and again to W. H. Auden, Evelyn Waugh, Vladimir Nabokov, and Saul Bellow. If only more of our political writers read such fine stuff between columns.

A master of circumlocution, Hitchens writes with a spontaneous, understated, digressive style, orbiting a target with asides and allusions until it is all but lost from sight. Then, like Muhammad Ali, he suddenly stops dancing and punches with his whole arm. Two pieces in *Arguably* exemplify this pattern: one on Gore Vidal (of the far left) and one on Patrick Buchanan (of the far right). At times all the ironical, wordy sentences and name-dropping can feel like obfuscation, as when Hitchens smirkingly floats this judgment of Hungarian-born writer Arthur Koestler: “It has been plausibly alleged that in his compulsive seductions—of Simone de Beauvoir, for one—he did not always stop quite short of

physical coercion.” Well, did he commit rape or not? But more often, Hitchens’s luminous style and his development of an argument thrill. In an age of sound bites delivered to yawning members of mostly empty chambers, he actually persuades his listeners to change their minds.

This is particularly the case at the intersection of literature and politics, Hitchens’s natural

home. Two themes preoccupy him: solidarity and totalitarianism. The former he prizes from his early years on the Trotskyite left; it manifests itself in an honor-bound and borderline-violent refusal to unlink arms with old comrades in places such as Kurdistan, Iran, and Cyprus. The loathing of totalitarianism in all forms comes from the right half of the Left—the territory of George Orwell, Hitchens’s well-chosen hero. (Few could have predicted that a writer as verbose as Hitchens would champion the master of the 12-word, comma-less sentence.)

No one writing today beats Hitchens in crushing an argument of moral equivalency between Nazi Germany and Allied Britain, say, or between terrorists who kill as many innocents as possible and American troops who try to avoid civilian casualties. In this regard it must be said that even though his Saddam-loathing case for war in Iraq was not quite persuasive, it was by far the most persuasive case on offer. He waited a lifetime for his Iraq—a chance, as the Spanish Civil War was for Orwell, to stand firmly against the forces of totalitarianism, alone if necessary. Reading Hitchens today, one clearly sees that he would do it

the same way again.

At one point he quotes a novelist's description of a newspaper hack who "possessed that opportune facility for turning out several thousand words on any subject whatever at the shortest possible notice." Although Hitchens does not generally shy away from boasting, he is too polite to claim this mantle for himself. It is his. Reading him is like riding in a luxurious sedan upholstered in leather and cornering sharply: It does not really matter where we go because we will get there in style. And of course, we'll let down the window for our host's cigarette.

MICHAEL O'DONNELL'S essays and reviews have appeared in *The Nation*, *The Washington Monthly*, and *The Los Angeles Times*.

HISTORY

Water Over the Bridge

Reviewed by Edward Tenner

ALMOST 75 YEARS AGO, THE city fathers of Portsmouth, Ohio, ordered the sewers opened so that high water from the Ohio River would inundate the town gradually rather than violently. As a journalist of the time commented, "The people knew better than to argue with the river." Triggered by days of torrential rainstorms that astounded even many veterans of earlier floods, the waters in January 1937 would eventually crest 15 feet above flood stage and earn the engineering designation of "thousand-year flood," one statistically expected to occur once in a millennium.

Farming tracts and urban neighborhoods long classified as safe havens were inundated. Railroad and highway traffic was interrupted and power stations stopped working as waters spread where planners had never imagined they could. (In this respect, the Ohio-Mississippi Flood of 1937 resembles the tsunami in Japan earlier this year as much as it

does the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.) All told, financial losses were estimated at a billion dollars (roughly \$15 billion today). A million people fled their homes. Hundreds died, mostly from pneumonia and other flood-related illnesses.

Yet today few remember the 1937 flood, though it was more severe than the famous Mississippi River flood of a decade earlier, remarks David Welky, an associate professor of history at the University of Central Arkansas. National media, which were concentrated in the Northeast, Chicago, and California, gave the flood short shrift. But, as Welky suggests, the crisis has also been forgotten because the Flood Control Act of 1938 changed the perception of the Ohio (and other rivers) from "disaster waiting to happen" to "pleasant view."

The flood has three interwoven stories. One is geographic. Land hunger had encouraged the construction of homes and businesses in areas known to be flood prone. The relatively steep slopes of the Ohio River make it potentially more volatile than the Mississippi—which, for all its power, overflows gradually during heavy rains. The physical conformation of the Ohio valley inhibits control of the river by dams, but also increases its scenic allure, drawing people to settle on its treacherous banks. Even after railroads and highways reduced the need for commercial ports on rivers, river towns concentrated essential facilities in known danger zones.

The second narrative is technical. In the 19th century, two influential civil engineers offered rival visions for managing the Ohio. The self-taught Charles Ellet advocated building reservoirs that would intercept floodwaters from the rivers feeding the Ohio while providing drinking water and power for industry. Ellet's nemesis, the workaholic Andrew Atkinson Humphreys of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, published an exhaustive treatise in 1861 on the Mississippi and its management that attacked Ellet's views on reservoirs in favor of levees located on riverbanks. Through

THE THOUSAND-YEAR FLOOD:

The Ohio-Mississippi Disaster of 1937.

By David Welky. Univ. of Chicago Press. 355 pp. \$27.50



Works Progress Administration workers aid evacuees in Newport, Kentucky, during the disastrous Ohio-Mississippi flood in 1937.

his influence in staffing the corps as much as through his theories, Humphreys established a de facto national pro-levee policy that endured into the 20th century.

The most important story is political. President Franklin Roosevelt, influenced by theorists such as George Soule, saw the flood as an opportunity to establish a powerful, centralized expert body, based on the scientific regional planning embodied in the Tennessee Valley Authority (established in 1933), to manage the valleys of the Ohio, the Mississippi, and other rivers. He didn't get his wish, but the Flood Control Act did create recreational and wildlife areas and hydroelectric power stations that helped to transform the Ohio valley, making the river for the first time "a friend, an ally, a boon, rather than an enemy."

These efforts, however, also revealed the New Deal's limits. Communities in the region were often highly stratified, divided into elite whites, "white trash," and African Americans, and many—even forward-thinking cities such as Louisville, Kentucky—maintained these divisions when they rebuilt.

We are left with a paradox of memory. A

highly successful response to disaster created a solution so lasting that the public has forgotten its origins. For 75 years, the measures introduced by the Flood Control Act of 1938—which called for the construction of flood walls to protect cities in flood zones, the installation of pumping stations, and the creation of scores of man-made lakes that largely vindicated Ellet's emphasis on flood control reservoirs—have brought security to river communities, though Welky warns that new development on floodplains and overreliance on levees may yet spell disaster in extreme conditions. Vividly written and carefully documented, *The Thousand-Year Flood*

masterfully brings a turning point in American history back to life.

EDWARD TENNER, a contributing editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*, is the author of *Why Things Bite Back: Technology and the Revenge of Unintended Consequences* (1996) and *Our Own Devices: How Technology Remakes Humanity* (2003). He is currently at work on a book about positive unintended consequences.

Land Trust

Reviewed by Ginger Strand

LOCAVORES, URBAN FARMS, BACKYARD chickens. The periodic urge to embrace bucolic self-sufficiency—or at least to dream of doing so—is upon us once more. Is it an outburst of environmental anxiety triggered by the much-bemoaned End of Nature? Maybe. But Dona Brown's *Back to the Land* is a useful

BACK TO THE LAND:
The Enduring Dream of Self-Sufficiency in Modern America.

By Dona Brown.
Univ. of Wisconsin Press. 290 pp. \$24.95

corrective to the idea that the country living movement is strictly an effort to get right with Mother Earth. Tracing the history of the back-to-the-land movement across the 20th century, Brown argues that the waxing and waning impulse to return to



A woman tends a garden at a federally sponsored subsistence homestead community outside Los Angeles in 1936.

rural life tracks economic anxiety more than ecological awareness.

Back-to-the-land movements are often assumed to have taken root with Henry David Thoreau or ideas about nature embodied in Romanticism, but Brown launches her story later, in the early 20th century, when financial instability amplified a growing unease with urbanization. She argues convincingly that proponents of the movement wanted farms of their own as guarantees of financial security—particularly in the face of retirement—rather than as idyllic rural retreats. Not that their motives lacked any kind of ideology, but that too was economic: First-wave back-to-the-landers were intent on becoming self-sufficient producers instead of parasitic consumers. In fact, anti-consumerism is one theme linking the historical iterations of the country life movement.

In the first two decades of the century, however, the nature of that critique of the economic system changed. The back-to-the-land movement began to jettison many of its associations with reform and radicalism. In a surprising chapter, Brown shows how the movement became bound up with real estate

development, irrigation, and the growth of a car-dependent culture. Colonies including William Ellsworth Smythe's Little Lands, founded in San Ysidro, California, in 1908, subscribed to the same ideal—a house with some greenery around it—promoted in protosuburbs such as architect Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City.

There was, Brown writes, “an increasingly intimate interplay between back-to-the-land rhetoric and the emerging Southern California suburban ‘lifestyle.’” In other words, a split was looming between those who wanted actual rural life and those who wanted a sanitized suburban semblance of it. Later, when the suburban lifestyle swept the mainstream, drawing fire as soulless and unsustainable, the split became a chasm.

The country life movement faded in the prosperous, urbane 1920s, then surged back during the Great Depression, due partly to renewed frustration with the economic system. President Franklin Roosevelt added something new: federal sponsorship. He wanted to promote self-sufficiency—but he had to tread carefully in order to appease the farm

lobby, which feared competition from the little guy. Rather than advocate a wide-scale return to small farms, the New Deal promoted “subsistence homesteads” and “greenbelt towns,” where residents could grow fruits and vegetables for themselves, but not for the market. The New Deal thus struck a blow for the suburban version of country life in deference to the farm lobby. The transition from family farms to industrial agribusiness is a lurking subtext in this book, though Brown shies away from discussing it in detail.

The New Deal era, Brown declares, was the last time liberals would advocate government programs to help citizens produce for themselves. After World War II, the country life movement gave birth to a new wing: “decentralists” opposed to bigness, whether of corporations or of governments. They were, not surprisingly, often based in Vermont, one of the few states that sustain a separatist movement. (The author is an associate professor of history at the University of Vermont.)

The most famous of these Vermont back-to-the-landers, Helen and Scott Nearing, were not strictly decentralists, but staunch socialists. Nonetheless, their book *Living the Good Life* (1954) would be the bible for back-to-the-land’s next flowering. In the 1970s, the movement came to represent a countercultural lifestyle and a rejection of the “rat race.” Brown argues that even this iteration was more a reaction to economic instability—triggered by inflation and the oil crisis—than the outburst of hippie nature-worship many people see it for.

Brown’s enthusiasm for sharing the fruits of archival research means that her narrative often gets bogged down, but the book’s main insight is clear. Today’s surge in the popularity of gardening is frequently said to reflect economic insecurity. Brown unearths an alternative history in which going back to the land has always been more about greenbacks than green.

GINGER STRAND is the author of *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies* (2008). Her book about highway murderers, *Killer on the Road: Violence and the American Highway*, will be published in March.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Animals Are Us

Reviewed by Emily Anthes

FOR HUMANS, NATURE HAS never been less threatening. We have conquered many of the diseases that felled our ancestors when they were half as old as the average person lives to be now, and few people die anymore in the jaws of predators. Antibiotics keep bacteria at bay, and the spread of cities and towns has pushed lions and tigers and bears away from our doors. We call this progress. Who would want to go back to, say, a time before penicillin?

But driving other species out of our lives has had some unintended consequences, argues biologist Rob Dunn in his provocative book *The Wild Life of Our Bodies*. For most of human history, we lived in proximity to countless other species. We evolved in concert with these life forms; everything from the tiniest microbes to the most fearsome predators shaped the bodies and brains we’re walking around with today. “What happens,” Dunn asks, “when humans leave behind the species their bodies evolved to interact with, whether they be cheetahs, diseases, honeybees, or giant sucking worms?”

The answers Dunn provides aren’t pretty. Without these other life forms, he argues, many features of our own bodies have “become anachronistic or worse.” The unlikely Exhibit A: Crohn’s disease, a chronic inflammation of the bowel that is on the rise in developed nations. Crohn’s and other autoimmune disorders are most common in exactly those places where public health seems to be most advanced—where, for instance, the intestinal parasites that plagued humans for much of history, such as hookworms and tapeworms, have become staggeringly rare.

THE WILD LIFE OF OUR BODIES:

Predators, Parasites, and Partners That Shape Who We Are Today.

By Rob Dunn. Harper. 290 pp. \$26.99

What if, scientists wondered, the absence of these parasites was somehow leaving us more vulnerable to various maladies of the immune system?

The idea sounds crazy—and the experiments conducted to test it even crazier. In 1999, one scientist enlisted 29 patients with intractable Crohn's and asked them to infect themselves with parasites. Each swallowed a glass of whipworm eggs. Six months later, after the worms had had a chance to take up residence in these patients' guts, 21 of the volunteers were symptom free.

Soon, other researchers were linking most or all autoimmune diseases to our missing parasites—as well as many allergy and asthma cases. Reintroducing intestinal worms has been shown to alleviate the symptoms of inflammatory bowel syndrome, diabetes, heart disease, and multiple sclerosis. Whatever the exact mechanism—scientists are still working it out—intestinal parasites appear to help train the immune system to work properly.



A schoolboy is treated for hookworm in Coffee County, Alabama, in 1939. Many parasites that once plagued humans have been virtually eradicated in the Western world.

(Perhaps, without parasites, the immune system looks for something else to attack—such as the body itself.) But prescribing parasites is still a counterintuitive and controversial idea that doctors and patients find hard to swallow.

The disappearance of our intestinal parasites is but one stop on Dunn's breathtakingly broad look at the other species that have shaped human evolution. He moves seamlessly from the physiology of the digestive system to the circuitry of the brain. He explains, for instance, how the disappearance of most of the animals that preyed on humans has left us with outdated fear circuitry. (Primed to detect threats that no longer exist, some brains remain on hyperalert, giving their owners chronic stress and anxiety disorders.)

Dunn does this all in prose that not only evokes the wonder of scientific discovery but illuminates the human struggles behind it. Though the picture he paints is sometimes bleak, he leaves the reader with a bit of hope. We needn't restore our environments to their original wild state, Dunn says, and it's a good thing, since that would be nearly impossible. Instead, we could embark upon some targeted rewilding, reintroducing specific parasites to our guts or chugging down cocktails of beneficial bacteria. It wouldn't hurt to curb our use of antibacterial soaps, as well as antibiotics and other medicines, since they destroy bacteria indiscriminately, without consideration of whether some of the bugs might do us good.

And we could create natural oases, such as urban farms, which could bring certain plants and animals back into our lives. "Given the choice of which and how many species to live around (a choice we still have, though not forever), why not consciously garden a greater diversity of life around us?" he writes. It's a tall order, but Dunn makes a compelling case that our health and happiness may depend upon it.

EMILY ANTHERS is a science writer who lives in Brooklyn. She is working on a book about biotechnology and the future of animals.

Rushing to Judgment

Reviewed by Daniel Akst

BODY AND SOUL, REASON and passion, yin and yang—expressions of twoness pervade the world's cultures, perhaps because duality comes naturally to creatures divided into males and females and destined to live through daily cycles of light and dark.

Dualism is the organizing principle of Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, a genial survey of human irrationality that serves as an admirable summa of the author's extraordinary life's work. His pioneering research mapping the vast territory of human irrationality, much of it done with the late Stanford psychologist Amos Tversky, helped Kahneman win the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics—even though he's a psychologist.

Since then, irrationality has become a growth industry, both for scholars such as Duke psychologist Dan Ariely and popular science writers including Jonah Lehrer, but few authors have thought as long or as deeply about the subject as Kahneman. The central message of this accessible book is that most of us simply have no idea how illogical, impressionable, and downright inept we are when it comes to making judgments.

Imagine, for instance, a man described as meek, shy, tidy, and helpful. Is he more likely to be a librarian or a farmer? Most of us will answer librarian, thereby falling for what Kahneman calls the representativeness heuristic. It may be true that librarians tend to fit the description, but there are 20 times as many male farmers as male librarians in this country. So it's much likelier that the man described grows food for eating rather than catalogues food for thought.

Our divided nature is partly to blame for our bad judgment. Broadly speaking, humans have a hasty and appetitive instinctual side, and a more patient, forward-looking reason-

THINKING, FAST AND SLOW.

By Daniel Kahneman.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
499 pp. \$30

ing side that supposedly provides some sort of supervision. Kahneman describes them as System 1 and System 2, respectively. The former provides most of the processing that gets us through our days. System 1's snap judgments are often correct, but on more complex matters it can too easily victimize us. It can be "primed" through the power of suggestion, for example. And it's susceptible to mere repetition, which it credulously mistakes for veracity. System 2 is our conscious, more rational self, and ought to ask, for instance, whether we are sure there are very many male librarians. But it's lazy and easily tired, often bestirring itself just enough to certify that System 1 was right after all.

A second dualism in Kahneman's book is the one between what behavioral economist Richard Thaler dubbed the Econs, the imaginary species whose members, found only in textbooks, act in rigid conformity to the models of economists, and the Humans, who instead act like real people, illogical though they may be. This distinction pervades the book, just as it pervades the author's work. (It's the reason a psychologist was awarded a Nobel in economics.) Finally, there is the division between the experiencing self and the remembering self, a dualism that is the basis for a fascinating meditation on how we make judgments about whether we are happy, which of these "selves" we choose to serve when we plan a vacation, and why we discount years of happy marriage or productive work if they end in a divorce or layoff (because endings loom disproportionately large in human memory).

Kahneman's work should be of profound interest to policymakers, whose job, after all, is making difficult choices for society. He cautions against the human tendency to vastly overweight unlikely events, for example, as well as the tendency to answer an easy question (do I like this person?) when we can't answer the hard one at hand (how good a surgeon is this?). Overconfidence and delusional optimism are rampant, so we should rely

whenever possible on simple formulas and checklists that measure things strongly associated with a desired outcome. Dumb luck explains a lot more of life than most of us realize, so we must beware of our tendency to create narratives that conjure causality. Kahneman even dispenses advice on how to improve your

meetings: “Before an issue is discussed, all members of the committee should be asked to write a very brief summary of their position”; otherwise, whoever talks first and most will likely sway the others.

Most of us simply have no idea how illogical, impressionable, and downright inept we are when it comes to making judgments.

Kahneman observes that we are often disastrously content with the inadequate information before us, but he doesn’t address how we are to know when we have enough data to make a good enough choice. Humans must constantly assess whether the cost of searching—for new information or additional options—has become too high. Working at a newspaper, according to an old saying, involves making judgments about the world with too little time and too little information. The problem, unfortunately, is even worse in life.

DANIEL AKST, a contributing editor to *The Wilson Quarterly*, is the author most recently of *We Have Met the Enemy: Self-Control in an Age of Excess*, published earlier this year.

ARTS & LETTERS

Heroic Reader

Reviewed by Gerald Russello

TWENTY YEARS AGO, ASKING why Lionel Trilling mattered would not have seemed necessary. Trilling (1905–75) was a professor at Columbia University for four decades, author of *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) and other essential works of 20th-century criti-

cism, and an editor—along with poet W. H. Auden and historian and critic Jacques Barzun—of the popular Reader’s Subscription Book Club series in the 1950s. His influence was palpable. Although he left no disciples behind, critics such as Cynthia Ozick and neo-conservatives including Irving Kristol show his influence.

Yet, as Adam Kirsch notes in this concise study, Trilling is in danger of being dismissed or, worse, mocked. His emphasis on the canonical texts of English literature doesn’t jibe with our multicultural sentiments, and his conviction about the autonomy and privileged place of literature (specifically, the long-form novel) has struck many contemporary critics as schoolmarmish and passé. Books are dead; who needs literary critics, especially those who (in the view of Trilling critic Louis Menand) “worried too much about culture” and were raised in an environment permeated by Modernism and Marxism, neither of which has the cultural weight it once did?

To Kirsch, a well-known poet and essayist and an accomplished critic in his own right, these indictments oversimplify Trilling’s work. He places Trilling alongside figures such as Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt as representing a liberalism committed to pluralism and difference. Unlike those two, Kirsch argues, Trilling advanced this liberal vision by engaging with literature rather than political philosophy or history.

Writing as a young man in the 1920s and ’30s, Trilling mouthed some of the anti-middle-class platitudes of the Left, and thought literature should be subservient to communist ideology. As he matured, however, he staked out the opposite positions in books such as *The Liberal Imagination* and, later, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972). Like his models E. M. Forster and Matthew Arnold, Trilling “tried to vindicate literature as a social good, while preserving its imaginative independence from utilitarian pressures,” Kirsch says.

Kirsch deftly untangles this intellectu-

WHY TRILLING MATTERS.

By Adam Kirsch.
Yale Univ. Press.
185 pp. \$24

al journey, freeing Trilling from the collective opinions of a generation. For example, contrary to the general view that *The Liberal Imagination* is a political book, Trilling explicitly made the liberalism alluded to in his title at once “an emotional tendency, a literary value, an intellectual tradition, and a way of being in the world,” Kirsch observes. Indeed, he makes a compelling case that the book reflects Trilling’s rejection of a simplistic equation of literature with ideology in favor of a nuanced liberal imagination suffused with “complexity and difficulty,” which the reader must confront in the great works of modern literature. Trilling’s liberalism, therefore, was an interior conversation—reader to author.

For most of his book, Kirsch makes a case for Trilling as an important historical figure, if not a figure of current importance. The Modernists who held the attention of Trilling’s contemporaries are largely without an audience today, and the agonized arguments over Modernism and communism among *Partisan Review* writers will fail to move a new generation to pick up Trilling’s books. But in the last chapter, which he titles “The Reader as Hero,” Kirsch cleverly pits Trilling against the still-influential critic Susan Sontag.

In the 1960s, Sontag opposed many of Trilling’s literary values in favor of an “erotics of art” that offered no standards with which to discriminate among artistic experiences; the emerging “one culture” she championed would be dedicated to “seriousness” as well as “fun and wit and nostalgia.” What Sontag did not anticipate was that this culture, in breaking down the boundaries between popular art and high culture, would transform art from something experienced internally to something to be consumed. Kirsch finds Sontag’s legacy in brand loyalties and commercial purchases: art as reflecting whom we want to be perceived as by others, rather than whom we are trying to become. Trilling’s unique encounter with the work of Henry James is superseded by Andy Warhol’s endlessly replicable soup cans.

Trilling long argued that the individual reader’s struggle with great literature formed character, and that the 1960s counterculture and the global capitalism it colonized replaced this struggle with a quest for external status markers. He regarded with alarm the same cultural shifts Sontag celebrated—until she eventually grew chastened at their destructive possibilities. Trilling’s enduring value, Kirsch concludes, is that despite the rise of a consumerist sensibility to replace the liberal self, his brand of “readerly heroism is always a possibility for those who believe in it.”

GERALD J. RUSSELLO is the editor of *The University Bookman*.

Where the Writers Live

Reviewed by Leonard Benardo

THE NEW YORK CITY BOROUGH of Brooklyn is one of the most ethnically diverse places on earth. Drenched in working-class iconography, from baseball’s fabled Dodgers to the 1970s television series *Welcome Back, Kotter*, it has

long been home to immigrants and the many other New Yorkers who can’t afford to live in Manhattan. It has scarcely been perceived as a hotspot for the cultural set. Yet over the past decade, much ink has been spilled charting the migration of writers to New York City’s suddenly fashionable destination. Some, such as the inimitable British novelist Martin Amis, have even come from across the pond. Few cultural critics have attempted, however, to put this development in historical perspective, a glaring omission given the rich diversity of Brooklyn’s literary tradition.

Blending literary and urban history, Brooklyn-based writer Evan Hughes assays these *longue durée* connections. Commencing with that rugged, empathic democrat, Walt Whitman, and following with a score of other character studies, including considerations of poets Hart Crane and Marianne Moore,

LITERARY BROOKLYN:

The Writers of Brooklyn and the Story of American City Life.

By Evan Hughes. Holt. 337 pp. \$17



Before his death in 2007, Norman Mailer was among the most notable of the literary luminaries who live in Brooklyn.

Native Son author Richard Wright, and contemporary novelist Paul Auster, Hughes writes capably about the vast terrain Brooklyn writers have traversed. While most of this biographical material is culled from secondary sources, Hughes deftly weaves rich, allusive links between writers—whether Crane’s channeling of Whitman’s democratic ethos; the street-fighting, bravura prose styles of novelists Norman Mailer and Henry Miller; or the shared aspiration of literary critic Alfred Kazin and novelist Bernard Malamud to cross the East River.

Literary Brooklyn’s main contribution may lie in its subtle interweaving of history and literature. Hughes vividly evokes the dystopian currents of the Boerum Hill neighborhood in the 1970s, as reflected in the fiction of then-residents L. J. Davis and Jonathan Lethem. The suggestion that Boerum Hill would soon be populated by brownstone-buying gentrifiers

would have produced nothing short of guffaws in what was at the time a broken-windowed enclave. And Hughes’s complex sociological portrait of Wright’s world in the 1930s and ‘40s sheds light on the racial and class dimensions of elegant Fort Greene, showing how the demographic makeup of this once lily-white neighborhood and of Brooklyn as a whole changed as African Americans flooded into the borough during the Great Migration.

It is no fault of Hughes that the question of what constitutes a “Brooklyn writer” remains unresolved. He says at the outset that “there is no ‘Brooklyn school,’” and that “we shouldn’t mistake a massive place for an aesthetic camp.” He remains careful not to overreach. Writing of Moore, Hughes concedes that she “likely would have honed her unique voice . . . even if she had never moved to Brooklyn.” These are honest caveats. Without them, one wonders what William Styron

or Thomas Wolfe, who spent only short spans of their careers in Brooklyn, would be doing in this lot. Or what Norman Mailer's literary preoccupations—including executed murderer Gary Gilmore and the CIA—have to do with the borough of his youth.

Hughes's urban history occasionally veers toward the inductive when gratuitous facts—repetitious rehearsals of who lived down the street from whom—interrupt the narrative flow. Photos would have helped, too. And the final chapter seems the product of an editor's ukase to trumpet the present Brooklyn renaissance. Here Hughes departs from the introspection of the rest of the book, leaving us with a laundry list of current literati.

Quibbles aside, unpacking the historical relationship between a city and its literary culture is no easy feat. Kings County deserves more than puff pieces on the “New Brooklyn.” Hughes has written a sensitive literary history on an underexplored theme. And as he makes abundantly clear, Brooklyn not only has a literary tradition; its past is also consonant with the social currents coursing through American urban history.

LEONARD BENARDO is associate director of the Open Society Foundations and the coauthor, with Jennifer Weiss, of *Brooklyn by Name: How the Neighborhoods, Streets, Parks, Bridges, and More Got Their Names* (2006).

The Natural

Reviewed by Aaron Mesh

BEFORE I LOVED THE MOVIES, I loved Roger Ebert. As a teenager, I spent hours lying on my bed, engrossed in a fat purple volume of his *Home Movie Companion*, with its summaries of “grownup” films I had never dared to see: *Leaving Las Vegas*, *Flirting*, *Natural Born Killers*. Later, I would understand how much more grownup Ebert's reviews were than many of the movies themselves, but at the time, I just knew he was genuine. His informal prose, often suggesting a chat between

LIFE ITSELF: A Memoir.

By Roger Ebert. *Grand Central*. 435 pp. \$27.99

intimate friends, radiated a nearly aching romance with cinema. He retold other people's stories, and sometimes I recognized my own.

My reading was a solitary pleasure, though hardly a unique one. Just about everybody loves Roger Ebert. Instantly recognizable from his long-running television shows *Sneak Previews* and *At the Movies*, he didn't so much teach us to take movies seriously—at a time when critics such as Pauline Kael were enshrining films as high art—as make criticism seem like a universal pastime. His naysayers, who are not without their ammunition, charge that he never became much of a student of cinema, and deride his plainspoken, democratic style as artless. But for more than 40 years, he has celebrated the joy of moviegoing and given his readers confidence in their ability to read a film intelligently without being snooty about it.

Since 2006, when thyroid cancer and complications of surgery deprived him of his jaw, his ability to eat and drink, and his speech—his communication is now limited to the written word and the thumb that for years warred with that of the late Gene Siskel on television—Ebert has been granted the chance, like his boyhood hero Huckleberry Finn, to sit in the back of the church for his own eulogies. Even as the tributes pile up, Ebert, now 69, keeps expanding his following. Pundits wondered if there could be an Ebert in the Internet age; it turned out that that new-media critic was—Ebert. His Web site, rogerebert.com, attracts more than 100 million visitors a year. Ebert is one of the few movie critics working today who is comfortable engaging his readers as equals in online comment threads. With this new audience, he has also broached a new subject: himself.

From the personal blog posts that mingle with his reflections on movies have emerged *Life Itself*, a discursive, companionable memoir that foremost confirms what fans have long known: Ebert is a natural born writer. But the book also makes clear how little we have

known of a person who seems to have lived so much of his life in public. For all the years wags spent ridiculing the once rotund Ebert's fondness for food, we never knew that his real, dangerous weakness was booze. The book's most compelling essays are sober considerations of alcohol. Ebert celebrates a rollicking Chicago journalists' dive called O'Rourke's, then makes an impassioned case for the honest self-appraisal offered by Alcoholics Anonymous. (Of the barroom he remarks, "We knew who we said we were, who we wanted to appear to be, and who O'Rourke's thought we were, and that was knowing each other well enough.") He also celebrates his history of interracial romances—his wife, Chaz, is African-American, and he once tried, unsuccessfully, to date Oprah Winfrey.

Though Ebert never cites it explicitly, the book that *Life Itself* most closely mirrors is *A Child of the Century*, the 1954 autobiography of the fluent Hollywood screenwriter Ben Hecht, a former reporter who wrote *His Girl Friday*. Like Hecht, Ebert spends more time chronicling Windy City newsroom capers and childhood idylls than he does contemplating the pictures he liked or didn't. And the two men, each a writer working at the edges of a temporal art, give special place to the enduring quandaries: God and girls. For Ebert, these two are inextricably linked: His mother wanted him to be a priest, and he resisted, keeping "as much of my life as possible a secret from her" as she slipped into angry alcoholism. He remains anguished about the relationships he let slip away, sheltered in movie theaters watching other lives.

It is perhaps with these losses in mind that he offers his ultimate philosophy. "To make others less happy is a crime," he writes. "To make ourselves unhappy is where all crime starts." This book will bring others happiness, because the author so deeply feels pleasure and so honestly acknowledges its obstacles.

AARON MESH is a movie critic and reporter for *Willamette Week*, an alternative weekly newspaper in Portland, Oregon.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

God's Experts

Reviewed by Kevin M. Schultz

TO THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE, America's evangelical community might look like an uneducated mass of people who subscribe to beliefs that defy common sense. And we know very little about who has done the spadework for these ideas—including the notion that America has a Christian mission to fulfill and the belief that the Earth was created in six days.

In *The Anointed*, Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson, professors at evangelical Eastern Nazarene College near Boston, draw a fascinating group portrait of today's most popular intellectual leaders among evangelicals and attempt to explain why so many of the faithful buy their arguments. While it is clear that the authors are baffled and even frustrated by many of their cobelievers, they strive to be dispassionate and fair. Most of the time they succeed.

Texan David Barton is perhaps the most visible of these leaders. He heads a media empire that reaches millions of radio listeners and was a regular guest on Glenn Beck's television talk show until it went off the air earlier this year. Barton, who has the ears of a number of conservative politicians, interprets American history to comport with the idea that the United States is a "Christian nation." The Founders never intended to erect a high wall between church and state, according to Barton, and secular historians have sought to obscure the evidence of God's role in American affairs throughout history.

Then there's Ken Ham, an Australian émigré and former high school science teacher who has had a large hand in promoting creationism. Ham delivers dozens of lectures a year in which he amplifies on this concept, offering such pseudoscientific details as an explanation

THE ANOINDED:
Evangelical Truth in
a Secular Age.

By Randall J. Stephens
and Karl W. Giberson.
Belknap/Harvard.
356 pp. \$29.95

of how Noah's flood jumbled the fossil record so that it's impossible to know which animals lived on earth when. His books feature prominently in homeschooling curricula, and, at his Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, thousands of visitors each month view displays of young children playing with dinosaurs.

The authors also profile Christian psychologist James Dobson, founder of the vast organization Focus on the Family, and the late televangelist Jerry Falwell. Both have advocated child-rearing principles from the Bible—including the famous dictate that to “spare the rod” is to “spoil the child,” based on several verses in Proverbs—and have suggested that wives should submit to their husbands on the model of biblical patriarchy.

For the most part, these leaders have dubious credentials. Though Barton is often referred to as “Dr.,” for instance, his only advanced degree is an honorary doctorate from Pensacola Christian College. Dobson has a PhD in child development from the University of Southern California—but he hasn't published in a mainstream professional journal since the mid-1960s.

The question that animates *The Anointed* is why so many people believe these guys (they're all men) when there are highly credentialed evangelicals competing to be heard. The authors cite with admiration Mark Noll, an evangelical historian at the University of Notre Dame who, in 1994, wrote a book decrying evangelical anti-intellectualism, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. And why give credence to Ham's theories about how life started when you could listen to evangelical Christian Francis Collins, the former head of the Human Genome Project and the current director of the National Institutes of Health?

Men such as Ham and Barton have been “anointed,” in part, because they offer easy-to-grasp answers delivered with conviction. More important, they employ us-versus-them rhetoric, castigating those who disagree with them as mortal enemies trying to ensnare the righteous.



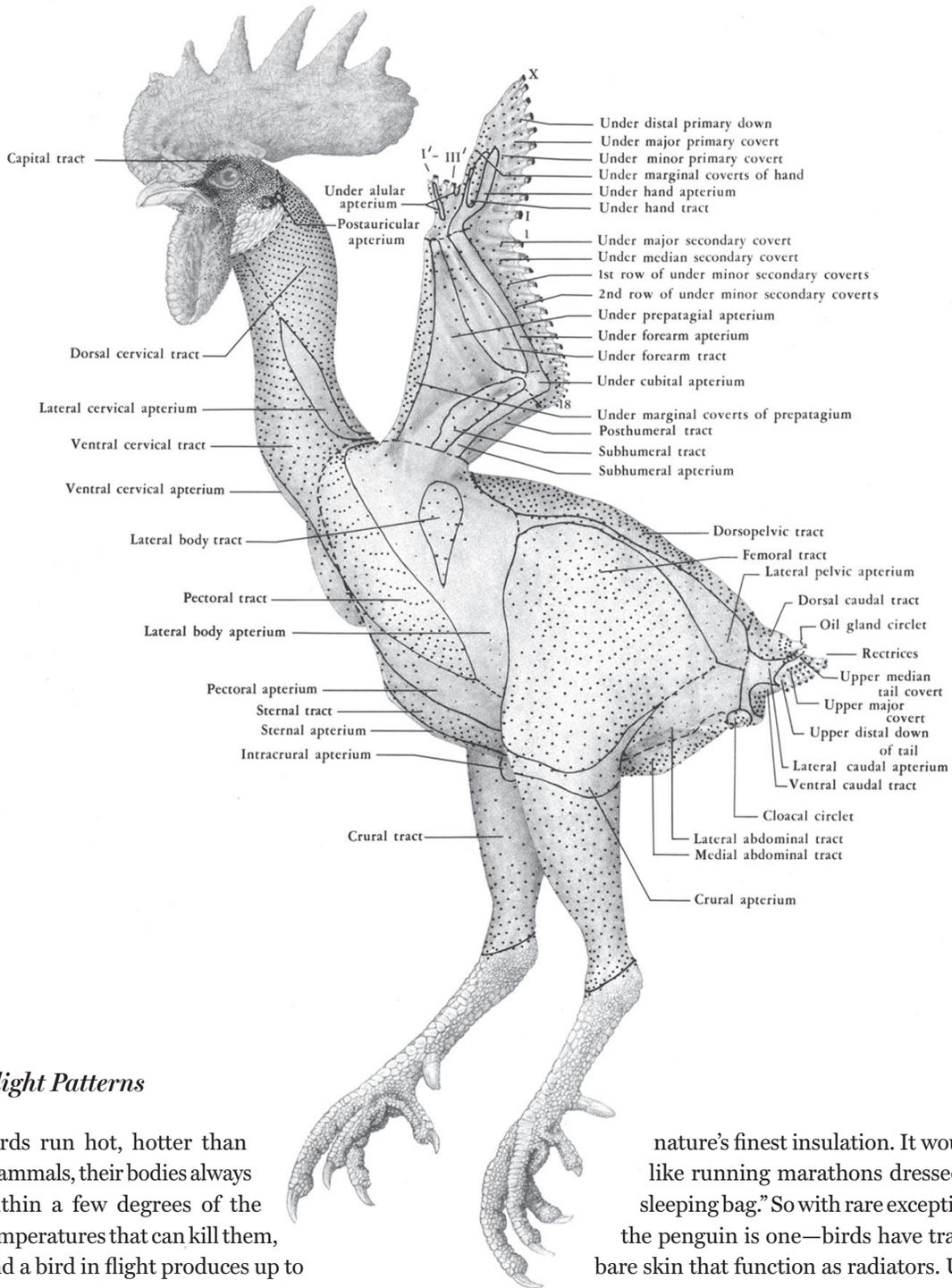
All eyes are on evangelist David Barton at a prayer event sponsored by presidential candidate Rick Perry earlier this year.

But the real key to their success, Stephens and Giberson suggest, may be the nearly airtight “parallel culture” that evangelicals have created in America. They have their own curricula, publishing houses, music industry, and social spaces, such as Christian bookstores. Outsiders are hardly heard, and those within who disagree with cherished narratives are looked on with suspicion. NIH director Collins may be an evangelical, but in advocating evolution he suffers from a bad case of secular-itis.

The authors present the story of one young evangelical who felt constrained by this parallel culture until he transferred from a fundamentalist college to Gordon College, a liberal Christian institution in Massachusetts where his questions were welcomed, not quashed. One of the principal virtues of *The Anointed* is that it represents an effort to demonstrate that the evangelical community is not a monolith of the unthinking. Yet if that were as true as the authors hope, they probably would have felt less pressed to write this book.

KEVIN M. SCHULTZ, an assistant professor of history and Catholic studies at the University of Illinois, Chicago, is the author of *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*, published earlier this year.

PORTRAIT



Flight Patterns

Birds run hot, hotter than mammals, their bodies always within a few degrees of the temperatures that can kill them, and a bird in flight produces up to 20 times its body heat at rest. “What’s more,” biologist Thor Hanson writes in his new book *Feathers: The Evolution of a Natural Miracle*, “they manage to do it while fully encased in feathers,

nature’s finest insulation. It would be like running marathons dressed in a sleeping bag.” So with rare exceptions—the penguin is one—birds have tracts of bare skin that function as radiators. Under the wings are the largest of these patches, called apteria, which cool birds in flight. Chances are that the rooster you see flapping his wings isn’t showing off—he’s cooling off. ■

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