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Q

A
Manifesto
at 50

Left,
Right, and
Science

The
Torture of
Solitary

Japan
Shrinks

THE AGE OF CONNECTION

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FEATURES



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Technology is making it as easy to keep in touch with someone on the other side of the world as it is with a next-door neighbor. Social networks bring news and tidbits from far and wide, sometimes with startling results. But is technology really increasing understanding between people? Between nations?

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ON THE COVER: Women at prayers in Jakarta, Indonesia, last year during the Festival of Sacrifice, a Muslim holiday celebrated worldwide. Photograph: Matt Brandon/Demotix/Corbis.

ABOVE: An ethnic Kazakh man texts on horseback during the 2011 Eagle Festival, a hunting related event in Mongolia.

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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Remote Possibilities

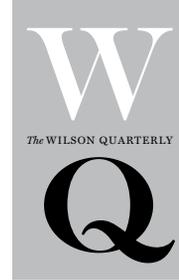
Is it possible anymore to speak of a person being in a “remote location”? A writer I know told me recently of editing an essay on her iPhone while camping in Alaska, and it’s almost commonplace to note that African farmers now check commodity prices on their mobile phones. We’re all familiar with the many everyday efficiencies and pleasures—and anxieties and irritations—that come from being constantly and ever more intricately connected, but what has been the result in the larger sense? Have we been brought any closer together as individuals, groups, or nations?

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, we shape our technologies and then they shape us. But it’s not at all clear *how much* they shape us, or how quickly. In his essay for this issue’s cover story, “The Age of Connection,” Ethan Zuckerman, a noted observer of the Internet, points out that the new technologies haven’t yet done much to nudge people from their comfortable information pathways. Yes, social media allow people to share great quantities of material, but unless they have unusually curious and wide-ranging friends, little of what is sent their way is likely to broaden their horizons. There still is not much of an audience for news from abroad—for instance, virtually no one in the United States paid attention to the early online posts about the Tunisian street vendor whose fiery protest suicide precipitated the Arab Spring.

Tom Vanderbilt’s essay on the impact of the telephone suggests another answer to the “how much, how fast” question: not as much or as fast as you might imagine. Yet Christine Rosen, in comparing the world of the handwritten letter with that of the e-mail, finds that, for better or worse, much has already changed.

“Already” is the operative term, because it suggests more to come. We are only at the beginning of what will be a long process. If we are wise, we will watch as our technologies shape us, and then reshape them according to the lessons we have learned.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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THE WILSON QUARTERLY (ISSN-0363-3276) is published in January (Winter), April (Spring), July (Summer), and October (Autumn) by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at One Woodrow Wilson Plaza, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004–3027. Complete article index available online at www.wilsonquarterly.com. Print subscriptions: one year, \$24; two years, \$43. Air mail outside U.S.: one year, \$39; two years, \$73. Digital subscriptions: \$15 per year. Single issues and selected back issues mailed upon request: \$9; outside U.S. and possessions, \$12. Periodical postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. All unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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POSTMASTER: Send all address changes to THE WILSON QUARTERLY, P.O. Box 16898, North Hollywood, CA 91615.

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LETTERS

PAKISTAN IN CONTEXT

I AGREE WITH MOST OF THE recommendations in Zahid Hussain's "Pakistan's Most Dangerous Place" [Winter '12]. In my chapter in the forthcoming volume *Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands*, I note that while Afghanistan and Pakistan have coexisted as neighbors since 1947 and share historical, cultural, and commercial ties, the two countries have failed to regard each other as fully legitimate states. Instead, they have set out to undermine each other, with Afghanistan targeting Pakistan's territorial integrity and Pakistan threatening Afghanistan's political independence. At the core of these policies lie the problem posed by the Durand Line and, by extension, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.

Like Hussain, I suggest that incorporating the tribal areas into Pakistan proper would be an initial step toward legitimizing the border between the two countries. This would halt Afghan claims that Pashtuns living in the tribal areas are not full Pakistani citizens, which fuel Kabul's long-standing

claim of stewardship of these people. Also, fully integrated tribal areas would make it more difficult for insurgents and terrorists to take root in the region.

However, I disagree somewhat with Hussain's assessment that the tribal areas' "long history of fierce independence and lawlessness" has been due to the zealous guardianship of independence by Pashtun tribes. I would submit that the region has been kept lawless and free of governance by those powers that have sought to use it as a buffer, e.g., the British Raj historically and, in part, Pakistan today, as we move toward a post-NATO Afghanistan. Additionally, Islamabad also helped the tribal areas to become an incubator of Islamist militancy, whose offspring were used to thwart any attempt in Afghanistan to re-energize its nationalistic claims over parts of Pakistan.

As the party disputing the legitimacy of the border between the two countries, Afghanistan ought to make a bold move to turn the page in its relationship with Pakistan and in its own policies. Kabul needs to remove any territorial ambitions on Pakistani territory and prohibit its

own territory from being used to foment anti-Pakistan elements.

Pakistan, in turn, would be expected to abandon its desire to overly influence the future makeup of the Afghan political system. Afghanistan should also expect to be given access to a Pakistani port on preferential terms.

Hussain's assertion that the tribal areas "have emerged as key to the future of both Pakistan and Afghanistan" is right on target. Whether Kabul and Islamabad and the international community at large have the patience and fortitude to give the people of the tribal areas a real chance of living normal lives remains to be seen. Sadly, they do not seem to be up to the task.

Amin Tarzi

*Director, Middle East Studies
Marine Corps University
Quantico, Va.*

(The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Marine Corps University or any other governmental agency.)

"MORE WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER" for Pakistan's tribal areas, argues Zahid Hussain. I couldn't agree more. We know this from Afghanistan. But what is the answer? To build roads, as he suggests? In Afghanistan, new roads often gave insurgencies their start; roads can

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be used for good or ill.

Authors are rarely to blame for the headlines above their articles. But “Pakistan’s Most Dangerous Place” raises questions. What about the border with India or Baluchistan?

Unfortunately, more of the same old clichés follow in the text itself, such as Sir Olaf Caroe’s semiracist characterizations of the Wazirs as “panthers” and the Mehsuds as “wolves.” This does not explain anything in today’s context. The Afghans are cast as the eternal gravediggers of empires, and as notorious xenophobes. This is incorrect. Over a good kebab and a decent conversation, Afghans can be extremely pleasant. They just dislike to be “tamed” by strangers who overstay their welcome, use their weapons against their hosts, and constantly tell them what to do. This is particularly true when the advice of outsiders leads the country deeper into crisis and not out of it, as has been the case in Afghanistan for more than a decade.

I am still waiting for someone to explain how exactly the “increasingly well-coordinated web including Al Qaeda and outlawed militant groups,” as Hussain writes, actually functions, in the tribal areas or elsewhere. Who meets whom, what is discussed, and how are decisions taken?

I often hear Afghan and foreign officials in Afghanistan putting everyone into the big Al Qaeda cauldron. In Kunduz Province, every fighter who is not local is “Al Qaeda.” But as any serious analyst knows, not every Pashtun insurgent is a member of the Taliban, and not every Arab ji-

hadist fights for Al Qaeda.

We should answer these questions, and not sell old myths as eternal explanations.

Thomas Ruttig

*Codirector, Afghanistan Analysts Network
Kabul, Afghanistan, and
Berlin, Germany*

RECESSION ODE

I THOUGHT THAT I WAS SUDDENLY reading *The Onion* when I read Robert J. Samuelson’s “Revisiting the Great Depression” [Winter ’12]. I imagine him writing a poem as follows:

I am a Republican
I care about me
And my friends in high finance
Who do as they please.

You, common Jane, common Joe,
Have brought the economy to its knees
You think that it’s security and care
As you age that you need.

So, for the good of my welfare
To keep my riches secure
You must die before sixty-two
For you there is no cure.

William R. Schuele

Muskego, Wis.

JUST EDUCATE

I WAS IMPRESSED BY THE FOUR analyses in “America’s Schools: Four Big Questions” [Autumn ’11]. But all the money, thought, and effort expended to improve the schools over the past 30 years have failed to address two systemic problems.

Our society demands that schools function as both educational institutions and social ser-

vice agencies. The needs addressed by the social service function invariably trump those of the education function whenever they compete for a school’s limited resources. The nation has paid dearly for forcing its schools to accept those conflicting mandates.

Society has also remained in thrall for decades to the childish notion that *all* teachers should be extraordinary, each one a Mr. or Ms. Chips, and the corresponding delusion that if only we had such teachers, *all* of our students would be above average—like the children of Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegon.

Most of my teachers in the 1950s and early ’60s were not extraordinary, only average when measured by the standards of our fantasies; yet every public school I attended during those years delivered an education ranging in quality from acceptable to outstanding. That’s because those teachers, and the society that produced them, understood that the proper mission of the public schools is not to mentor, reform, parent, baby-sit, love, or entertain, but solely to *educate*. Until society regains this understanding, our best efforts to save the schools—from improving test security to modernizing curricula, classrooms, and teaching methods—will continue to fail.

Louis Cox

Smyrna, Del.

YOUR STIMULATING ARTICLES on America’s schools raise important questions about the extent of education provided to the general public. Just as public education in

America once expanded from the primary level to include the secondary level, now it is time for the next step: to expand public education into the tertiary level.

These additional years of public education would not necessarily encompass the whole of what is now seen as a college education, but a program roughly equivalent to the first two years of college—a curriculum surveying what every American should know and know how to do in the 21st century. Historically, higher education has served three functions: imparting work skills, imparting shared culture, and identifying leaders and innovators. My suggestion would concentrate on the first of these functions during the years of extended public education. At the same time, college and graduate education as currently conceived should be reorganized to concentrate on the others (shared culture, leadership, and innovation) for those who go beyond the expanded publicly available education.

Mark F. Clark
Belmont, Mass.

PTSD RECONSIDERED

IN “THE PARADOX OF PTSD” [Autumn ’11], Katherine N. Boone argues that the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) fails to distinguish between normal and abnormal reactions to trauma. The implication is that many who are diagnosed with PTSD are actually experiencing normal distress. While not wanting to detract from the very real suffering experienced by such people, Boone argues for the need

to develop an understanding of normal reactions to trauma.

There is already research that helps us to do just this. The psychology of “posttraumatic growth” offers a paradigm shift for the field of traumatic stress studies by conceptualizing posttraumatic stress as a normal, albeit distressing, process that has the potential to act as a springboard to new meaning and purpose in life.

In this context, the term “posttraumatic stress,” as opposed to “PTSD,” refers to the spectrum of responses—ranging from low levels of intrusive thoughts and other signs of distress at one end of the spectrum to high levels at the other. Everyone exposed to traumatic stress experiences such symptoms to some degree. They are indicative of a need to cognitively process the trauma. Posttraumatic stress is a concept that is non-pathological; it recognizes both sides of trauma, that it can be both destructive and transformational.

The term “PTSD” must be reserved specifically for when these normal reactions tip over into an abnormal state characterized by dysfunction of some mental mechanism. If the PTSD label is to be prevented from losing its force as a diagnosis, the challenge for the next edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is to demonstrate when these normal processes of posttraumatic stress become disordered.

But for many people who experience trauma, their families, and those who treat them, an understanding of the psychology of posttraumatic growth can provide im-

portant balance to more strictly medical approaches.

Stephen Joseph

*Author, What Doesn't Kill Us:
The New Psychology of
Posttraumatic Growth (2011)
Professor of Psychology, Health,
and Social Care
University of Nottingham
Nottingham, England*

KATHERINE N. BOONE NOTES that after 9/11, “predictions that there would be an epidemic of PTSD among New Yorkers weren’t borne out,” but that “more than 10,000 firefighters, police officers, and civilians present at the site of the attack did at some point suffer from the disorder.”

This can be explained by cognitive science, which states that it is the individual’s interpretation of an event that determines whether or not he or she will experience symptoms of PTSD. It develops when one believes one could have done something to prevent trauma from happening to him- or herself or to someone else. That belief leads to guilt, which is associated with depression (demoralization) and anxiety (rumination, panic, flashbacks) about how one could have acted differently to prevent what happened. The guilt is tied to social expectations as well. From this perspective, it becomes easy to understand why New Yorkers did not develop PTSD after 9/11, but firefighters, police officers, and civilians involved did.

Vanessa Ann Vigilante

*Psychologist
Department of Pediatrics
Division of Behavioral Health
Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children
Wilmington, Del.*

AT THE CENTER

TOUGH TALK ON TEHRAN

Former Israeli deputy defense minister and legislator Ephraim Sneh pulled no punches in his discussion of Iran at the Woodrow Wilson Center's Middle East Forum in February. "The real problem is not the nuclear project," Sneh argued. "The problem is the regime."

But Sneh stopped short of calling for war against Tehran, and so did the session's other panelists. Sneh joined Aaron David Miller, distinguished scholar at the Wilson Center and panel moderator, and Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council and a former Center public policy scholar, in predicting that war with Iran over its nuclear program would not occur this year. Only Ghaith Al-Omari, executive director of the American Task Force on Palestine, foresaw a clash.

The agreement ended there. Sneh called for the removal of the regime in Tehran and advocated tougher sanctions against it. Parsi countered that the Iranian people—not the regime—end up bearing the brunt of trade restrictions. Sanctions, he added, don't bring about democracy.

Sneh gave no ground. "When there is a secular and democratic regime in Iran, let them have all the technologies they want," he said of Iran's nuclear program, which Tehran maintains is for peaceful purposes. Until then, all possible pressure should be applied.

Miller agreed, but said he

thought an Israeli attack unwise. "Covert war plus sanctions is a better option than the alternative, which is overt war."

Iran is already feeling the heat. Both Parsi and Al-Omari said the country's standing in the Middle East has slipped since the Arab Spring. Tehran's support of the embattled regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria is deeply unpopular in the Arab street. "Syria is what has made Iran the biggest loser in the Arab Spring," Al-Omari noted.

Israel, Sneh said, doesn't take the prospect of war lightly. "No one in Israel is trigger happy about Iran," he affirmed. "We all know the repercussions."

IMMIGRATION IMPASSE

Immigration reform has fallen on hard times. In 2007, Republicans and Democrats defeated President George W. Bush's efforts to overhaul the system. President Barack Obama has not pursued a major immigration initiative. The issue, discussed at the fifth of the Woodrow Wilson Center's National Con-

versations, remains contentious.

"How do you talk about the facts?" asked moderator Thomas "Mack" McLarty, former chief of staff to President Bill Clinton. "How do you do that in a safe, serious, constructive, civil manner?" In her introduction to the event, held at the University of Miami, Wilson Center CEO and president Jane Harman said that providing a "safe political space" for such discussion is precisely what the Wilson Center and its National Conversation program are designed to do.

"The reason we have an illegal immigration system is because our legal immigration system is almost impossible to abide by," argued Carlos Gutierrez, former secretary of commerce and a Wilson Center Board member. Immigrants—and American employers who seek to hire them—face a warren of costly delays and obstacles in the legal process. "If you have a farm in California," he said, "chances are you're looking at either trying to hire illegally or closing down and moving to Mexico."

Crediting ramped-up border

A Border Patrol agent strides past a new section of fence along the border in Nogales, Arizona. Illegal immigration has subsided but debate over the issue has not.



AP PHOTO/ROSS D. FRANKLIN



enforcement, former secretary of homeland security Michael Chertoff said illegal immigration had nonetheless slowed to a trickle. Since 2007, he observed, it “has decreased every single year, and it’s probably lower now than it’s been for the past 20 or 30 years.”

Antonia Hernández, president and CEO of California Community Foundation, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit, begged to differ: “The main reason that there has been a decrease in the flow of migration has been economics.”

Either way, said *Miami Herald* columnist Andrés Oppenheimer, an immigrant from Argentina, Americans need not worry about immigrants threatening the national fabric. “The second generation and the third generation, they assimilate,” he said. “The melting pot still works.”

RWANDA’S RURAL UPHEAVAL

“Rwanda is a country in a hurry,” Marc Sommers observed at the Wilson Center recently. The regime of President Paul Kagame boasts of enormous progress since genocidal ethnic Hutu extremists killed some 800,000 Tutsi and a small number of moderate Hutu in 1994. Kagame, a Tutsi who came to power after the genocide, points to declining AIDS rates, wider access to education, and solid economic growth. Boosters say tiny Rwanda—the most densely populated country on the continent—is on its way to becoming the “Singapore of Africa.”

Sommers, a fellow at the Center and a visiting researcher at Boston University, threw some cold water on that dream. In his new book, *Stuck: Rwandan Youth and the Struggle for Adulthood*, he argues that Kagame’s ambitious plan to corral rural Rwandans in tightly controlled villages in order to maximize land use and easily deliver social services is wreaking havoc, especially among the young. Rwandan men elbow for scarce housing plots in the new villages and struggle to build houses that meet the government’s stringent regulations. Without a home, their prospects for marriage—and respectable adulthood—are dim. “Virtually a whole generation of Rwandans are not going to get married,” Sommers said.

Young men who see no future in the villages are increasingly fleeing to the capital, Kigali, a city of one million in a country of about 11 million, where despair and fatalism rule. Rural women, meanwhile, search in vain for eligible husbands. Those who bear children out of wedlock often find themselves shunned.

Youth frustration could prove explosive. With three-quarters of its population under 30, Rwanda is one of the youngest societies in the world. While acknowledging progress in other areas of the country’s postgenocide development, Sommers said the evidence from the more than 300 young Rwandans he interviewed points to trouble ahead.

Jane Harman, *Director*

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FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

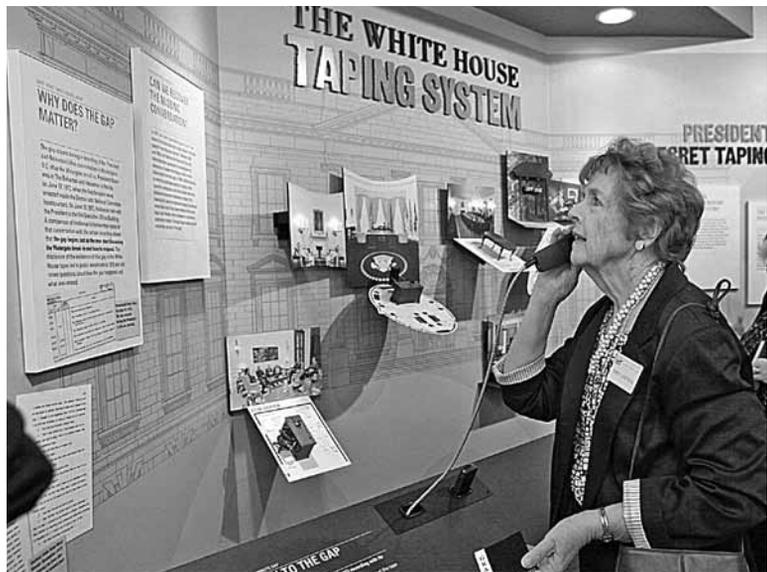
Noisy Library

Our long national nightmare still isn't over

When a presidency ends, the campaign for history's approbation begins. The battleground is often the president's official library, according to Benjamin Hufbauer, the author of *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory* (2005). In the library devoted to his life, Richard M. Nixon seems to be losing this final campaign. Forty years after the break-in, Watergate remains the decisive, divisive issue.

When it opened in 1990, the Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, California, was funded and operated by the private Richard Nixon Foundation. Bob Bostock, who helped Nixon research two of his post-presidency books, wrote the text of the original Watergate exhibit in the library, and the former president gave it his blessing: "Bob—A brilliant presentation." The exhibit was unapologetically partisan, declaring that "even complete disclosure would not be enough to satisfy those who wanted Nixon's head."

Then, in 2007, the National Archives took over the library. Bostock's handiwork was removed, and an extensive new exhibit opened in 2011. In *The*



The Nixon Library and Museum once belittled the Watergate scandal—but not anymore.

Journal of American History (December 2011), Hufbauer lauds it as "the most detailed account ever given of a scandal in a presidential museum," one that makes "a significant original contribution to scholarship."

To Bostock, the new exhibit is not only "very biased against President Nixon," but also contravenes the spirit of presidential libraries. "There are lots of sources people can consult for critical analysis of a presidency," he said in an interview. "The beauty of these libraries is that they give that president's perspective. Go to the FDR Library and see what they have on the internment of the

Japanese—not a lot. One might wonder whether interning tens of thousands of people without cause might be a greater constitutional violation than 17 wiretaps. . . . The Kennedy Library takes a very hagiographic approach. There's virtually nothing on the Bay of Pigs, nothing on his medical issues."

If Nixon is the only president excoriated by his own presidential library, there's a reason. Earlier presidents treated their records as personal property. They decided what to turn over to the National Archives, what to keep, and what to torch. Nixon figured he'd get the same opportunity. Instead, four months after his resignation

in 1974, Congress passed a law decreeing that his White House materials—42 million pages of documents and 880 recordings—were government property. Had Nixon held on to his records, it's a safe bet that the most damning items, such as the 1971 tapes in which he is heard ordering aides to find out how many Bureau of Labor Statistics officials are Jewish, would never have seen the light of day.

In another first, the 1974 law instructed the National Archives to reveal “the full truth . . . of the abuses of governmental power popularly identified under the generic term ‘Watergate.’” So the National Archives got a uniquely unvarnished documentary account of a presidency and a directive to focus on the worst of it—hence the Nixon Library’s current Watergate exhibit.

Even so, Bostock believes that the exhibit falls short: It lacks the context necessary for grasping “the full truth” about Watergate. “You’d think Nixon was the only guy who ever wiretapped, the only guy who ever thought about using the IRS [against adversaries], the only guy who ever thought about going after leaks,” he said. “These had been standard operating procedure under previous presidents. . . . Nixon himself had been the victim—his campaign plane was bugged in 1968. This is not to excuse it, but to understand Watergate, you’ve got to know all these other things.”

For altogether different reasons, some of Nixon’s long-standing critics also decry an overemphasis on Watergate. By e-mail,

linguist and leftist Noam Chomsky dismissed Watergate as “insignificant.” In his view, the break-in “probably became an issue because [Nixon] irritated people with power,” such as Establishment Democrats McGeorge Bundy, the national security adviser in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and Thomas Watson Jr., the head of IBM. “It’s okay to slaughter Cambodians . . . but not to call McGeorge Bundy, Thomas Watson, and other worthies bad names,” Chomsky wrote.

The unending feud over the import of Watergate reinforces an observation President Nixon made on August 7, 1974, the day before he announced his resignation. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had assured him, “History will treat you more kindly than your contemporaries.” Nixon responded, “It depends on who writes the history.”

Spreading the Word, Bit by Bit

Search engines of creation

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is burnishing its brand. Since 2010, the church has spent millions of dollars on cheery TV ads and billboards featuring diverse Americans—a surfer, a veteran of the Iraq war, a black woman who’s the mayor of a Utah town—with the tag line “I Am a Mormon.” Scott Swofford, one of the architects of the campaign, told *The Los Angeles Times* that the goal is to show that “Mormons are not that strange.”

With less fanfare, backers of



Through the More Good Foundation, missionaries with modems promote the Mormon faith.

the church are promoting it online, too. A prominent role is being played by the More Good Foundation, launched in 2005 by David Neeleman, founder of Jet-Blue Airways, and James Engbretsen, an associate dean at Brigham Young University.

One of the objectives of the foundation is to make it more likely that people looking for Mormon-related information via Google or another search engine will end up on church-friendly turf, rather than on hostile sites run by evangelical Christians, ex-Mormons, and others. Search engines evaluate a Web site’s importance based partly on how many other sites link to it, so the More Good Foundation creates networks of pro-Mormon sites.

As a consequence, the top-ranked results of Mormon-related searches increasingly reflect the church’s perspective, Chiung Hwang Chen writes in *The Journal of Media and Religion* (November 2011). She compares the top 20 results of various Google searches

elbow their way in front of voters for commercial purposes.”

Complementing McKinnon’s research, media scholar Jay Rosen and his students at New York University analyzed the questions journalists asked at debates. During the 20 debates between May 5, 2011, and mid-February 2012, the NYU team counted 46 questions about social issues (abortion and gay rights), four about the Arab Spring, two about climate change, one about small business—and 113 about campaign strategy and negative advertising.

Of the 12 questions categorized as fluff, seven came from John King of CNN, who said he wanted to illuminate the personal side of the candidates. Puzzlers from King included “Elvis or Johnny Cash?” (Michele Bachmann refused to commit), “Leno or Conan?” (Rick Santorum said he doesn’t watch either one), and “Spicy or mild?” (Mitt Romney declared, “Spicy. Absolutely.”).

Rosen believes that the debates are part of a larger problem: The presidential campaign doesn’t address voters’ true con-

cerns. Via polls, social media, and other tools, he and his students are learning what issues particularly animate the electorate this year. In turn, journalists from the London-based *Guardian* are using the NYU data to help direct campaign coverage for their American Web site. If Rosen and his team succeed, the *Guardian* will focus on issues that get slighted by more fluff-prone news outlets. More filling, less spicy.

The Periodical Table

Backing back issues

Ron Unz, Silicon Valley software entrepreneur, former candidate for governor of California, and publisher of *The American Conservative*, has started a new venture: a prodigious online library, featuring works by some 400,000 authors. Along with books and videos, unz.org has about 25,000 issues of 122 different periodicals. Some, such as *The American Spectator* and *The Washington Monthly*, still appear on newsstands. But most are no longer published, including *Saturday Review*, *Scribner’s*, *Collier’s*, *Encounter*, *The Reporter*, *I. F. Stone’s Weekly*, and H. L. Mencken’s *American Mercury*.

A browse through *The Bookman*, a New York-based journal published from 1895 to 1933, unearths some astringent literary pronouncements. Of the second installment of Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, published in French in 1919, the reviewer declared that he was “a little surprised to find any but the professional student of letters reach-

ing more than his first half-dozen pages.” In 1922, the novelist and critic Arnold Bennett said of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “As I finished it, I had the sensation of a general who has just put down an insurrection.”

Unz’s library has plenty of politics, too. Sounding like an Occupy Wall Street manifesto, an 1890 article in *The North American Review* refers to “gigantic corporations, whose greed and cupidity have extended all over the country, fleecing the poor of millions of dollars.” The author: William McKinley, Republican congressman and future president. If he were alive today, McKinley probably wouldn’t be writing for *The American Conservative*.

In *The Literary Digest*, you can find the infamous Poll (to use the magazine’s reverential capitalization) on the 1936 presidential election. The *Digest* distributed more than 10 million ballots by mail and received some 2.3 million responses, on the basis of which it predicted that Alf Landon would trounce President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

“Will we be right in the current Poll?” the *Digest* asked on Halloween 1936. “That, as Mrs. Roosevelt said concerning the President’s reelection, is in the ‘lap of the gods.’” The gods favored FDR.

The following year *The Literary Digest* inaugurated “For the Record,” a new department. “Magazines, newspapers, and writers make strange errors,” the *Digest* said, inviting readers to “send in those you run across in any publication—even in this magazine.”

—Stephen Bates



Left, Right, and Science

Liberals and conservatives alike wrap groupthink in the cloak of science whenever convenient. The results are seldom good.

BY CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

WHEN BARACK OBAMA PROMISED IN HIS 2009 inaugural address that “we will restore science to its rightful place,” he invoked not so much a debate as a set of widely shared assumptions. According to conventional wisdom, liberals and Democrats are the party of reason and science; conservatives and Republicans are the party of religion and patriotic symbols. As Drew Westen, a psychotherapist, recently expressed it in a *New York Times* op-ed, “Whereas Democrats have carried forward the belief in the role of science and knowledge in improving our lives, Republicans have moved in increasingly anti-intellectual directions.” This way of stating the division, needless to say, is itself liberal and Democratic. While many conservatives (with notable exceptions) agree that religion is an important source of beliefs and public policies, probably few consider themselves anti-intellectual. Yet the impression that the physical and social sciences are to liberalism what religion is to conservatism goes mostly unquestioned on either side. Conservatives complain about a liberal war on Christian values and faith in general, Democrats about a Republican war on science.

Whether or not science inherently conduces toward liberalism, there is little question that American scientists tend to be liberals. In 2009 the Pew Research Center, in collaboration with the American

Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), released an exhaustive survey of attitudes toward science among scientists and the general public. About half the scientists were in biology or medicine; the rest were divided among other “hard” sciences. Fifty-five percent of the scientists identified themselves as Democrats, a level 20 points above that of the nonscientists. (When “leaners” are included, 81 percent of the scientists fall into the Democratic camp.) More than half of the scientists described themselves as liberals, while only a fifth of the general public did. Only nine percent of the scientists said they were conservatives, while 37 percent of the public did. Do scientific habits of evaluating evidence and looking at the world lead their practitioners to become liberals, or are scientists simply following the dominant influences in environments such as universities? After all, professors of English are also leftward in their political sympathies, though hardly anyone would claim that the study of language and literature is responsible.

If God is not a Republican, however, as a familiar bumper sticker proclaims, neither is nature a Democrat. Consider evolution. One of the anomalies of contemporary thought is that acceptance of Darwin’s theory, which posits a brutally competitive, amoral, and goalless process of natural selection, has come to be identified with liberal political beliefs, while traditional Christianity, with its New Testament teachings about brotherhood, serving the poor, and turning

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN, the author of *Faded Mosaic: The Emergence of Post-Cultural America* (2000) and other books, writes frequently on American culture and society. His last article for the *WQ* was “America’s Changeable Civil War” (Spring 2010).



Evangelical preacher T.T. Martin opened this storefront near the site of the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. A national figure, Martin argued that the teaching of evolution in public schools would deprive children of their faith, thus violating their religious liberty.

the other cheek, is equated with conservatism. The emphasis on cooperative elements in social development by many evolutionary biologists today is partly an attempt to make the theory more compatible with aspirations to a more harmonious world. When William Jennings Bryan helped prosecute John Scopes in the famous 1925 Tennessee case that defined the battle lines between fundamentalists and evolutionists, part of his motivation was a concern about the brutalizing effects of Darwinian thinking on social theory. Bryan, who was the Democratic candidate for president in 1896, 1900, and 1908, had been perhaps the farthest-left presidential nominee in U.S. history at a time when social Darwinism—the application of an exaggerated version of natural selection to economic and social relations—was an influential force in American life and right-wing thought. If the South had not been simultaneously more religious and more conservative (for unrelated reasons) than the rest of the country when these controversies came to a head, Christian belief might easily have been more often identified with liberal politics and evolution with the Right.

Social Darwinism was not the only politically charged outgrowth of evolutionary theory. There was

also eugenics, the movement to breed a healthier, more genetically fit population, which Bryan found particularly odious. Because of its later identification with Nazi racial theories, the eugenics movement has come to be thought of as right-wing, but early in the 20th century it was championed by progressive thinkers and political figures. The Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw made it the theme of *Man and Superman* (1903), one of his most popular plays. In the United States, Margaret Sanger, the leading early advocate of birth control and founder of what later became Planned Parenthood, was a close ally of the eugenics movement on some issues (though not all).

By the mid-1930s, 35 states had enacted laws “to compel the sexual segregation and sterilization of certain persons viewed as eugenically unfit, particularly the mentally ill and retarded, habitual criminals, and epileptics,” Edward J. Larson writes in *Summer for the Gods* (1998), a history of the Scopes trial. “Typically,” he says, they justified their actions “on the basis of evolutionary biology and genetics.” In the celebrated 1927 case *Buck v. Bell*, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of such laws, with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes writing a majority opinion that

culminated in the lapidary announcement: “Three generations of imbeciles are enough.” The only justice who dissented, Pierce Butler, was a politically conservative Roman Catholic whom Holmes criticized for letting religious dogma get in the way of scientific and legal judgment.

Though long since established as the bedrock of modern biology, evolution remains controversial in American popular opinion, especially in public education. Many efforts to reconcile Christianity and Darwin have been made since the 19th century, but the results are inevitably decaffeinated versions of both that many Christians and most scientists find unsatisfactory, whatever Spencer Tracy may have thought in *Inherit the Wind*. In the Pew survey, only 33 percent of the more than 2,500 AAAS members polled stated that they believed in God, as against 83 percent of the general public in the same survey. (Oddly enough, the younger the scientist, the more likely he or she was to acknowledge a belief in God. This result could herald a change in attitudes or might simply indicate that, in common with recent popular usage, young scientists attach a vaguer meaning to the word than their elders do.)

Since the founding of the American Association of University Professors in 1915, the doctrine of academic freedom as generally understood has held that properly certified teachers should be free to speak and write according to their convictions. The Scopes trial began as a contest not just over the rights or wrongs of Darwinism but whether majority rule should determine what a public school teacher might or might not teach on a sensitive subject. According to Scopes’s liberal defenders, by banning evolution from the classroom the state of Tennessee had put itself in the position of the Catholic Church with Galileo. More than that, it was practicing thought control by overriding individual conscience, the very organ that both Protestantism and the First Amendment to the Constitution supposedly held sacred. The American Civil Liberties Union, which had recruited Scopes to test the Tennessee law, lost the battle, but in time won the war absolutely. In *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968), the Supreme Court threw out the last state laws banning the teaching of human evolution, on the grounds that such requirements, however framed, expressed an

unconstitutional religious purpose.

Today the shoe is on the other foot. Following *Epperson*, some states enacted laws mandating equal time for creationism whenever evolution was taught. The Supreme Court struck these laws down as well in *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987). Public school teachers are now forbidden to discuss “creation science,” “intelligent design,” or related doctrines as alternatives to Darwin’s theory. How many of Scopes’s supporters in 1925 would be happy with this outcome is impossible to say. The justification usually given by scientists and others who defend what looks like a double standard is that creationism in whatever guise is religion, not science. No question, but the corollary that all mention of such a widely shared view should therefore be excluded is less obvious. It can hardly be considered either socially marginal or irrelevant to the subject of human origins. According to the findings of a 2010 Gallup poll, about 40 percent of Americans believe in “strict creationism”—that God created humans in their present form—with another 38 percent accepting evolution with divine guidance. Only 16 percent accept evolution with no divine participation. These numbers have changed only slightly since Gallup began asking about the subject in 1982.

Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection, as modified by later discoveries in genetics, is one of the greatest intellectual achievements of all time. None of its competitors has anything like its sophistication or credibility. Why go to so much trouble to forbid any mention of them? Doing so has apparently not made them less popular. The principle that everyone is entitled to his or her say on disputed subjects is so deeply ingrained in the American psyche that advocates of banning religious points of view wherever possible are at a crippling disadvantage with public opinion—perhaps one more reason scientists often feel beleaguered despite their prestige and perquisites.

Today, political controversies involving science are aggravated by the discipline’s tendency, as it became an important element in popular culture, to accrete moralistic elements that are not really scientific at all. A venerable example that predates Darwin is the common belief that evolution means progress from “lower” to “higher” forms of life, probably with supernatural guidance, rather than simply an unending process of

adaptation to changing environments that could lead in many different directions. Another moral concept that crept into supposedly scientific discussions of ecology is the notion of a correct balance of nature that human action is capable of disrupting. Although it has been critiqued by ecologist Daniel Botkin and other scientists, this imaginary construct has become one of the fundamental, if not always conscious, premises of environmentalism, a movement with elements of both science and religion. On the antiabortion right, activists in a number of states have introduced contentious legislation to recognize that human life or personhood begins at conception, and therefore that even early-term abortion is murder. (A referendum on this issue failed in Mississippi last November.) While the assertion is often stated in quasi-scientific terms, neither it nor the counterclaim that life begins at birth has anything to do with science. Nobody disputes that both sperm and ovum are as alive and human as their hosts. The moral question of the stage at which a fetus becomes entitled to the legal protections accorded human beings has no possible scientific answer.

These examples betray a common instinct to use science as an assault weapon in political combat even when it really has little or nothing to say. In the fever swamps of the academic Left, some postmodernists attack science as just one more expression of power, but the Pew survey confirms that most Americans of all political ideologies respect and admire its accomplishments. Science in the abstract has become so powerful that conservatives as well as liberals claim its authority when it seems to support their positions, as in the case of social science research showing the benefits to children of living with two married parents. Conservatives also tend to be more comfortable than liberals with modern genetic science when its findings bear upon such matters as social behavior, abilities, and differences between the sexes.

More often, though, liberals are the ones who cite “the science” about a particular subject as indisputable support for policy decisions, treating Big Science (the interlocking apparatus of national academies, commissions, foundations, universities, and professional societies) as the ultimate referee rather than as a team of specialized players. When the Obama administration followed the U.S. Institute of Medicine’s

recommendation that all health insurance plans be required to cover birth control without charge, defenders hailed the decision as a victory for science over politics. “They asked for the guidance on what the evidence and science say,” declared an institute spokeswoman, “so that’s what we’ve given.” A few months later, a recommendation by the California Medical Association that marijuana be legalized was greeted by longtime supporters of pot as a scientific refutation of the status quo.

What is the actual role of science in policy disagreements such as these? In the birth control case, the recommendations were intended to reduce unwanted pregnancies and, by mandating screening as well, certain forms of disease. Few people would doubt the new policy’s potential effectiveness in achieving at least some of these goals. But the controversy over birth control in health insurance has little to do with scientific questions. It involves differing convictions about religious freedom, sexual behavior, and government control over personal or medical decisions. Similarly, when Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius overruled a Food and Drug Administration recommendation last December that the “morning-after” pill be made available without prescription to girls younger than 17, both she and the FDA couched their disagreement in scientific terms, though the issues were really moral and political. Scientists are no more qualified to pronounce on these matters than anyone else, and to believe otherwise is to confuse different realms of thought.

The marijuana issue is likewise much more about values than about facts that science can determine. In a 2010 referendum, California voters defeated a proposal to legalize marijuana in the state. (If it had gone the other way, its validity would have been at best debatable, since drug policy falls under federal jurisdiction.) Less than a year later, the California Medical Association urged that the drug be legalized and regulated in unspecified ways. Once again, defenders claimed to be representing science against superstition. “This was a carefully considered, deliberative decision made exclusively on medical and scientific grounds,” Dr. James T. Hay, president-elect of the group, announced. “Drug use is a health issue, and for too long we have let law enforcement and

federal bureaucrats decide policy,” added Bill Piper of the Drug Policy Alliance, an advocacy organization. “CMA is saying let’s treat medical marijuana as a health issue.” Legalizing marijuana, however, would affect far more users than the patients who constitute a sympathetic but minute proportion of those who consume the drug.

The point is not that science is irrelevant to questions of public policy. Where a consensus exists about ends such as eradicating polio or putting a man on the moon, scientific findings are indispensable for reaching them. Properly designed studies can produce valuable information about the physical and mental effects of marijuana on users, or the likelihood that free screening for cervical cancer would significantly reduce its prevalence. But not everyone thinks this kind of information should settle these issues, any more than the scientific fact that men commit many more crimes of violence than women should automatically lead to a policy of preventive detention for aggressive young males. Debates over ethical questions will not disappear simply because one side denounces the other as backward, ignorant, or motivated by religion.

In 1968, Paul Ehrlich, a biologist at Stanford University, published a scary book titled *The Population Bomb*. Backed by the imprimatur of the Sierra Club and armed to the teeth with what seemed to be up-to-date science, the book, which went on to become a bestseller, built on contemporary fears of a global population explosion (a term that first appeared in the 1940s) and carried them a big step further. It opened with these ominous words: “The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now.” While it was already too late to prevent mass deaths, population control could help minimize the slaughter, provided governments acted decisively: “Our position requires that we take immediate action at home and promote effective action worldwide. We must have population control at home, hopefully through a system of incentives and penalties, but by compulsion if voluntary methods fail.”

Not surprisingly, Ehrlich relentlessly attacked the Catholic Church and complained indignantly that in

what were then called underdeveloped countries “people *want* large families” and would continue “multiplying like rabbits” unless their governments imposed draconian controls. He was far from optimistic that catastrophe could be avoided—“the chances of success are small,” he conceded. Still, it was possible to look on the bright side. “Suppose we do not prevent massive famines. Suppose there are widespread plagues. Suppose a billion people perish. At least if we have called enough attention to the problem, we may be able to keep the whole mess from recycling.” The book concluded with a series of steps readers could take to demand action on the part of the federal government.

Almost half a century later Ehrlich remains a hero to some environmentalists, but none of his apocalyptic predictions have come true. Although overpopulation is still a threat in some parts of the world, birth-rates have declined dramatically and resources have proved to be far less fixed than alarmists feared. The hysterical tone of *The Population Bomb* now seems as dated as its authoritarian solutions. The book and its reception came to represent a much-cited demonstration that while science as an ideal is detached and self-correcting, actual scientists can be as fallible and ideological as anyone else.

Today, most of the passions and anxieties the population explosion once aroused are centered on global warming, more elegantly known as anthropogenic climate change. Again, one side claims to be motivated purely by science, while the other argues that the science is questionable. In contrast with the debates over abortion and embryonic stem cells, there is no overt moral or religious disagreement. The dispute in this case, at least on the surface, is solely about facts: Is the atmosphere as a whole getting steadily warmer, and if so, are human-produced greenhouse gases the main reason?

Beyond the immensely complicated evidence and computer models that predict the future climate of the entire world, however, lie familiar political factors, such as a vast increase in government power over the economy and everyday life that advocates say is immediately necessary to avert calamity. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain why activists resort to such overheated language in dismissing skeptics, sometimes going so far as to claim (in the words of econo-



Contending principles were back at war this year when the Obama administration required religious institutions to include contraception in employee health insurance plans.

mist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman) that anyone who denies global warming is guilty of “treason against the planet”—while most conservatives remain skeptical.

When those who question the validity of a relatively new scientific theory are accused of mythical crimes by its supporters, and conversely skeptics attack believers for trying to impose a dictatorship, something other than science is at stake. According to the Pew survey, “The strongest correlate of opinion on climate change is partisan affiliation.” Even more striking, a 2007 Pew poll found that among Democrats, having a college education correlated with an increased likelihood that one believed in global warming, while among Republicans and independents the opposite was true. Probably only nature has the power to resolve this impasse by unambiguously confirming the views of one side or the other. Because such strong claims of a scientific consensus have been accompanied by so much invective against skeptics, the potential damage to the reputation and future credibility of institutional science if catastrophic warming fails to occur is enormous. In the meantime, most Americans rank global warming near the bottom of the list of pressing national issues.

Since the Progressive movement a century ago, the

dream of settling contested questions of governance by empowering scientific experts—of making policy follow pronouncement with no struggle—has appealed to many intellectuals disillusioned with raucous, often ill-informed political processes. To most members of the public who heard President Obama’s inaugural address or took part in the Pew survey, “science” should be a supremely nonpolitical activity, impartial and guided by evidence rather than interest, the opposite of partisan bickering. Partisan bickering, however, is one of the many names for democracy. An extreme but logical consequence of the desire that science and evidence (invariably equated with one’s own convictions) should prevail without

political struggle is the belief in an updated version of the benevolent despot of 18th-century fantasy who can build bullet trains or establish a green economy at a stroke.

The United States is not the only country where claims made in the name of science sometimes clash with the popular will. In Europe, genetically modified crops, which create hardly a ripple here, are an object of heated opposition, while militant hostility to nuclear power coexists uneasily with strident demands for an end to fossil fuels. We may, however, be the only country in which the relation of science to power is itself such a powerful issue. A few enthusiasts, such as Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times*, have wished in print that the United States could have, at least temporarily, a system of government more like China’s that could ignore opposition and do whatever it wanted, or, rather, what the enthusiast wanted. Why not, when those desires are equated with the dictates of science and what any dispassionate expert would recommend? The only thing that stands in their way in a society like ours is politics. Such wishes actually prove the opposite of what their proponents intend: that when it becomes embroiled in controversies over government policy, science is anything but above the battle. ■

The Torture of Solitary

Solitary confinement, once regarded as a humane method of rehabilitation, unravels the mind. Yet today, more than 25,000 U.S. prisoners languish in isolated cells.

BY STEPHANIE ELIZONDO GRIEST

HERE IS WHAT I KNEW ABOUT JOE LOYA BEFORE stepping into his car: During a 14-month stretch in the late 1980s, he stole a quarter-million dollars from 30 Southern California banks by donning a tailored suit and, occasionally, a fedora, striding up to bank tellers, and, in a low and smoky voice, demanding all their money. His panache earned him the nickname “The Beirut Bandit” because, he said, “no one could believe a Mexican from East L.A. could be so smooth.” He was finally bum-rushed by undercover agents while reading the newspaper at a UCLA campus café. (His girlfriend had tipped them off.) As he served out a seven-year prison sentence, he grew increasingly violent, once chopping a chunk off the ear of an inmate who had snaked his copy of *Playboy*. When his former cellmate was slaughtered in their old cell, Loya was pegged as a primary suspect and consigned to Security Housing Unit—otherwise known as solitary confinement—for two years, until cleared of the charges. He was released in 1996, at age 35.

All of this I could handle. But when he started careening 77 miles per hour down a Northern Californian freeway, slicing in and out of traffic, I began to worry. Tall and husky with mocha-colored skin, Loya was wearing Ray-Bans and a pinstriped shirt untucked

STEPHANIE ELIZONDO GRIEST is the author of *Mexican Enough: My Life Between the Borderlines* (2008) and *Around the Bloc: My Life in Moscow, Beijing, and Havana* (2004). She splits her time between Corpus Christi, Texas, and Iowa City, Iowa.

over jeans. His temples were flecked with gray.

“There is something seductive about solitary confinement,” he mused. “It is the myth of the American male: I walk alone. There is a sense that solitary is a kind of adventure, and men love adventure.”

We narrowly avoided sideswiping an SUV, which blared its horn.

“It sounds like you already had a lot of adventure,” I offered.

Maybe too much. Loya’s mother died of cancer when he was nine, leaving him with a little brother and a Bible-thumping father for emotional support. He sought comfort in an older female neighbor, who repeatedly molested him. Meanwhile, his father tried to beat the demons out of him. After an especially brutal pummeling at age 16, Loya plunged a steak knife into his father’s neck. The old man survived, but Loya landed in county custody, embarking from there on a decade-long crime spree that included auto theft, larceny, fraud, and, finally, the bank robberies that landed him in prison.

“No adventure is like solitary,” he said, gliding into another lane. “It’s almost erotic, like—like masturbation. You don’t rely on anyone else to pleasure you. You just do it yourself. Solitary is just you creating your own universe with you at the center of it, to sleep, to read, to jack off, to think, to be with yourself.”

He glanced at me and grinned. “When you come

An unrestored isolation cell in
Eastern State Penitentiary.



out of solitary, you know that you've taken stock of yourself. You know who you are."

In his case, that meant discovering a knack for the pen. Halfway through his prison sentence, Loya struck up a correspondence with the writer Richard Rodriguez, who emboldened him to pursue his literary tendencies. Six years after his release, Loya starred in a one-man show he'd written about his past called *The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell*, which HarperCollins later published as a memoir.

The exit for San Leandro loomed ahead. Loya zipped across three lanes, pivoted east, then dog-legged through an upscale neighborhood. "Pretentious bullshit," he muttered at a sign featuring the word "estates" in floral script. We pulled up to a cream-colored house with rust-brown trim. Inside, the living room radiated newness. Black-and-white photographs of sidewalk cafés in foreign lands were propped against the walls, waiting to be hung. Teddy bears, blankets, and teething toys were scattered on the floor. Just a few months earlier, Loya and his wife had been nesting in East Oakland, but they decamped after five shootings occurred within a few blocks of their home. The safety of their 16-month-old daughter trumped their desire to help "foster community."

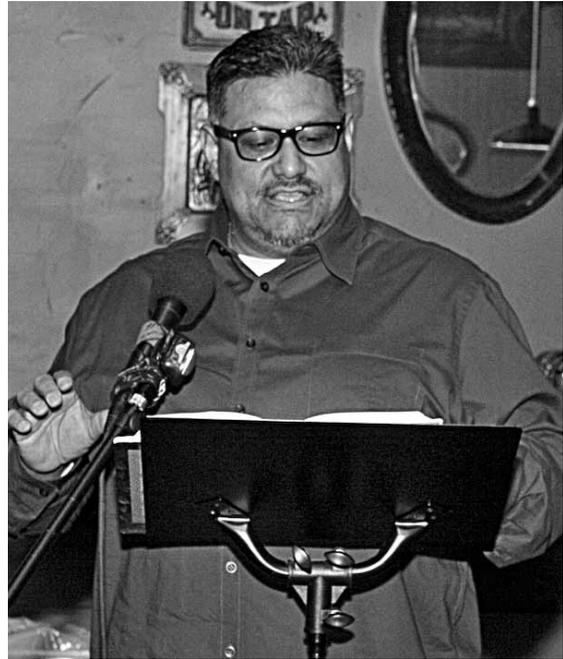
Loya motioned for me to sit. We stared at each other for a long moment.

"So, solitary," I said.

"So, solitary," he repeated, combing his fingers through his gel-spiked hair. "Rule number one is, you make your bunk in the morning and you don't lie on it again. Not until lunch, and even then, just for a nap. Your bunk is like quicksand. Spend too much time on it, and your mind will grow sloppy. You have to be vigilant. You have to take control of your thoughts before they grip hold of you. Mind games help, because they keep you sharp.

"First, you sit on the edge of your bunk. Don't lie on it. SIT. Find a spot on the wall. OK, now—stare. That's it. Stare. Don't look away. Just keep staring at it, staring at it, at that same little spot, for a whole entire minute. Once you got that, stare at it for five minutes. Then 10. Then 20.

"That's when things start to happen. Things like light. Panels of light will slowly open as your peripheral vision recedes into darkness. And then that spot on



Joe Loya began writing while in solitary confinement. After being released, he turned the skill into a profession.

the wall, it will dance. It will become a dog or a horse, and after a while it will become a man, and that man, he will start to walk. If you concentrate hard enough, deep enough, long enough, a little movie will flicker.

"Eventually, this will happen without you even trying. Faces will appear, but without you concentrating. You just open your eyes, and a scene appears right in front of you. But then those faces, they start to morph, like in that Michael Jackson video. Only, they morph into people you don't want to see. People you f****d over. People suffering. People in pain.

"And then you start hearing things."

When Philadelphia Quakers conceived of solitary confinement in the late 18th century, the punishment was regarded as humanitarian. At the time, convicts were typically hanged, flogged, or tossed into wretchedly overcrowded dungeons. What these prisoners needed, Quakers argued, was a spiritual renovation. Give a man ample time and quiet space to reflect upon his misdeeds, and he will recover his bond with God. He will grieve. He will repent. He will walk away a rehabilitated man.

And so, after conducting a few test runs at local

jailhouses, Philadelphia, a city infused with the theology of the Quakers who had helped to found it, sank a record \$800,000 into building a prison on an elevated piece of farmland just north of the city limits (known today as the Fairmount District). The structure consisted entirely of isolation cellblocks. In 1829, Eastern State Penitentiary opened its iron-studded doors. Its high stone walls and castellated towers suggested a fortress, yet its Gothic façade was redolent of a monastery. For 142 years, it tried to be both.

“If reform is possible, it will happen here,” proclaimed a sign in the modern-day visitor’s center. When I visited a few years ago, I walked down a corridor draped with cobwebs, gripping a map. Every few feet, I passed another cell. Some were whitewashed and barren; others were refurbished with rusty cots and wobbly workbenches. Entering a cell required ducking your head, an act of supplication. The room measured eight feet by 12 feet, with a barrel ceiling that reached 10 feet at the crown. A tiny round skylight—known as “the Eye of God”—cast a circle of sunshine on the floor. I stepped inside it as legions of inmates had done before me, following the light as it slowly revolved around the cell, the sole indicator of time’s passage. As the soft glow warmed my face, I imagined the horrors that had once transpired here.

First, you were hooded. A black woolen sheath covered your head, clung to your shoulders, clouded your vision. Supposedly, this kept you from discerning the prison’s layout (and thus concocting an escape), but it also disabled you. Guards shoved you forward, warning when to duck, when to turn.

Next, you were assigned a number corresponding to your spot in the admissions log. For the duration of your sentence, you’d be known only by this number. It was written above your cell door, stitched on your shirt, shouted when you were needed.

In quick succession, you were examined by a physician, shorn by a barber, and shown to a shower. By the time you emerged, dripping wet, your belongings had been confiscated: your socks, your shirt, your un-

derwear, the contents of your pockets. In exchange, you received woolen trousers, a close-fitting jacket, a shirt, two handkerchiefs, two pairs of stockings, and coarse leather shoes—all of which itched.

Then you were led (or, if you resisted, dragged or carried) to your cell. At last, you could pull off the mask. Aside from a cot, a stool, and a whale-oil lamp, the cell was empty. No paper, no ink, no reading material. Nothing whatsoever to occupy your time, at least those first weeks. (Eventually, you’d be permitted to cobble shoes or roll cigars for the prison’s profit.) A side door led to a small yard where—if you behaved—you’d be allowed to exercise for an hour a day. Baths were offered every two to three weeks. Aside from that, you’d spend your entire sentence between those white walls, visited only by the warden, a clergyman, and your own mounting regret.

All seven cellblocks connected to a central surveillance hub, like the spokes of a wheel. The walls were 18 inches thick. But architecture wasn’t the only cause

AFTER THE 1890s, solitary confinement largely fell out of practice for decades except as a short-term punishment for bad behavior.

of the silence that engulfed the place. In the early days, the guards pulled woolen stockings over their boots to muffle their footsteps and wrapped the wheels of the food cart in leather to quiet its creaking. Yet the inmates were inventive with their noisemaking. They shouted down the toilet every time they flushed it. They banged on the water pipes, each clang corresponding to a different letter of the alphabet. The guards retaliated by covering the skylights, eclipsing the prisoners even from God. If the noise persisted, they stormed the cells. In wintertime, they stripped the offending inmates, chained them to the wall, and tossed buckets of cold water on them until icicles hung from their limbs. In summertime, they strapped inmates into chairs for days at a stretch, until their legs ballooned. If the inmates *still* kept talking, the guards put them in the “iron gag,” a five-inch metal brace that was clamped over their

tongues and attached by chains to their wrists, which were handcuffed behind their backs.

Yet the physical pain of these tortures—common in many prisons at the time—paled beside the mental anguish of solitude. Charles Dickens spent an afternoon visiting Eastern State inmates in 1842, and wrote an account of the experience in his travelogue *American Notes*: “On the haggard face of every man among these prisoners, the same expression sat. I know not what to liken it to. It had something of that strained attention which we see upon the faces of the blind and deaf, mingled with a kind of horror, as though they had all been secretly terrified.” At another point in the book, Dickens wrote:

I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body: and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye and sense of touch as scars upon the flesh; because its wounds are not upon the surface, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay.

The prison’s annual reports listed scores of suicides, and while loneliness was never cited as a factor, a certain side effect was. One report described a “white male, aged 17” who died of “debility. . . . Persistent masturbation was the sole cause of his death.” Another mentioned a prisoner who set his cell ablaze and snuffed up all the smoke. Cause of death: “excessive masturbation.” In fact, the 1838 report ascribed 12 cases of insanity to this “solitary vice.”

Eastern State gradually abandoned the practice of solitary confinement. There were simply too many bodies—with too few minds—to keep. As early as 1841, the warden was doubling up the inmates, and by the turn of the century, cells bunked as many as four apiece. Solitary confinement also grew costly. Whereas inmates at other penitentiaries could toil together in chain gangs, quarrying marble or tending crops, Eastern State inmates could only labor within the confines of their cells, and the piecemeal tasks they performed didn’t turn enough profit. The “crucible of good intentions,” as the authors of a history of Eastern State call it,

finally shuttered in 1971, reopening a quarter-century later as a museum and, during the Halloween season, as “the scariest haunted house in America!” (according to television talk-show host Rachael Ray).

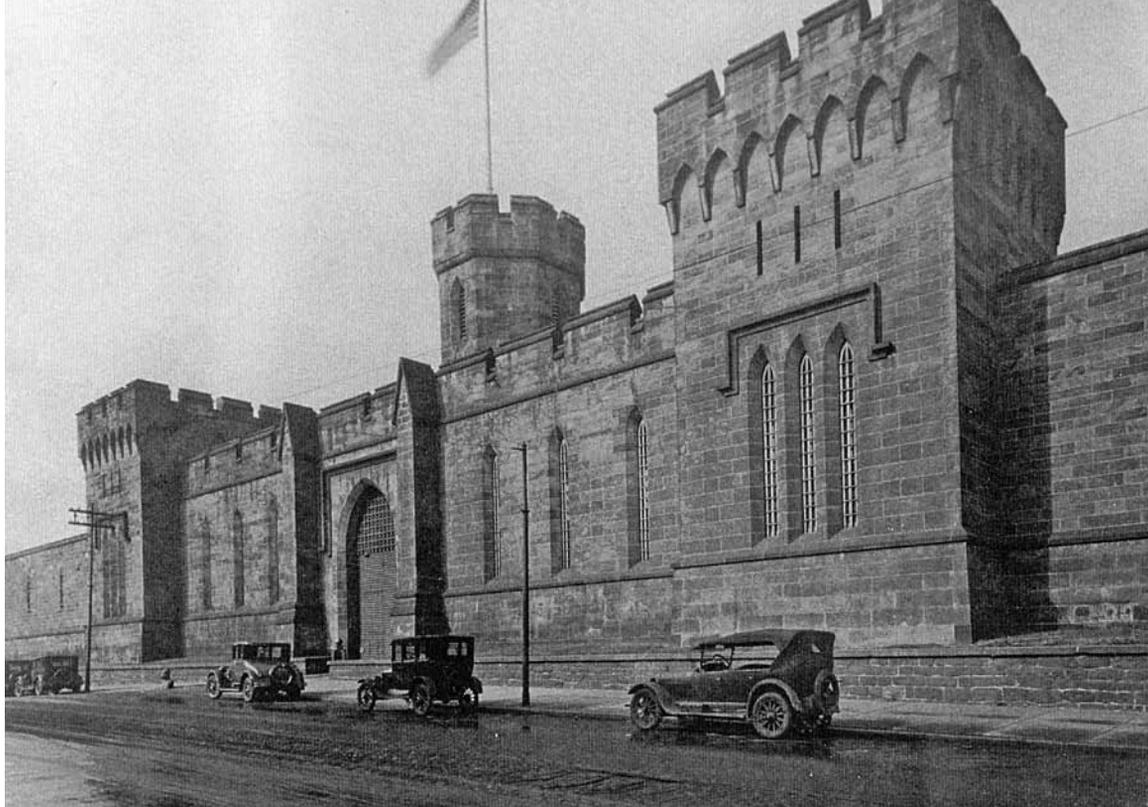
Eastern State Penitentiary was widely considered a failure, but that didn’t stop other prisons from implementing its “separate system”—with equally disastrous results. In the second half of the 19th century, German researchers published 37 studies documenting the psychotic illnesses suffered by their country’s isolated inmates, including hallucinations, delusions, and “psychomotor excitation.” In England, guards at Pentonville Prison had to cart so many inmates off to the insane asylum each year that the warden finally ruled that no one be isolated longer than 12 months.

In 1890, the U.S. Supreme Court nearly declared the punishment unconstitutional. Writing for the majority, Justice Samuel Miller argued,

A considerable number of the prisoners fell, after even a short confinement, into a semi-fatuous condition, from which it was next to impossible to arouse them, and others became violently insane; others, still, committed suicide; while those who stood the ordeal better were not generally reformed, and in most cases did not recover sufficient mental activity to be of any subsequent service to the community.

Solitary confinement largely fell out of practice in the century that followed, save as a short-term punishment for exceedingly bad behavior.

Fast-forward to the 1970s. Increased penalties for drug crimes swelled the nation’s prison population. Ronald Reagan’s “war on drugs” sent the number yet higher. Meanwhile, lawmakers wishing to seem tough on crime dissolved the bulk of prison educational and occupational programs, leaving inmates with an infinity of hours and no way to fill them. When two correctional officers were shanked to death in a single day at Marion Federal Prison in Illinois in 1983, the warden ordered the entire facility put on “permanent lockdown,” forbidding inmates to leave their cells to work, take classes, eat in the cafeteria, or do anything but shower. Heralded as a success, the Marion lock-



down spawned a new breed of prison called the “Supermax,” which cooped all inmates in solitary cells for no less than 23 hours a day. More than 60 such prisons have sprung up across the nation, housing up to 25,000 inmates. Tens of thousands of other men and women—nobody knows the exact number—are languishing in what are essentially concrete cages at other facilities. And they aren’t all just staying for days or weeks or months or even years. Some Americans are enduring solitary confinement for decades.

Robert Hillary King is a star in certain circles. He is the subject of a British documentary narrated by Samuel L. Jackson, and has published an autobiography and touted it to hundreds of groups around the world. He has mingled with members of Congress, gabbed with historian Howard Zinn, and befriended the cofounders of the Body Shop. The cause behind his célèbre isn’t so glittering: He survived one of the longest known stints in solitary confinement. For 29 years, King passed all but perhaps an hour a day inside a six-by-nine-foot concrete cell at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Since his release in 2001, he has launched a one-man campaign to end this form of punishment.

“I saw men so desperate, they ripped prison doors apart,” King told me in a slow Cajun drawl when we



Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary combined the elements of a fortress and a monastery. All seven isolation cellblocks connected to a central surveillance hub.

met at a café in Austin. “They starved themselves. They cut themselves. My soul still mourns for them.”

King, in his late sixties, walks with a noble gait. That day in Austin, he was wearing sunglasses, a black ankh necklace, and an ivy cap turned backward. Tattoos of daggers and spiders covered his arms, and his face was pockmarked, yet he exuded yogic tranquility. The tops of his knuckles were tattooed with the word L-O-V-E, while the bottoms read H-A-T-E.

King was born in 1942 to a mother who drank and a father who split. Although his grandmother was still rearing some of her own nine children, she added him to her brood. One of his earliest memories is of watching an uncle strangle a rat and stew it for the family’s

supper. After living in a smattering of Louisiana towns, including New Orleans, King ditched home at 15 to ride the rails with a couple of hoboes. A brief stint in reform school followed, and at 18 he received the first of several prison sentences for armed robberies he claims not to have committed (though he acknowledges other crimes), landing at Angola, known as the nation's bloodiest prison. A former plantation so massive that the entire island of Manhattan could fit on its grounds, Angola was named after the African nation where the bulk of its slaves originated.

The first thing King noticed upon his arrival was that the majority of the inmates were black and the guards were uniformly white. Known as "Freemen," the guards lived with their families on the prison grounds, served by inmates called "houseboys." Before the light of dawn, the Freemen marched the inmates down to the fields and watched on horseback as they cut, bladed, ditched, and quarter-drained sugarcane in a work line for up to 16 hours a day. In 1951 more than 30 inmates slashed their own Achilles tendons with razorblades to protest these working conditions. The Freemen called them the "Heel String Gang" after that.

King thus spent the 1960s in a time warp. While serving out his sentences at Angola, he was trapped in the pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. During his intermittent stretches of freedom, however, he lived in the spirit of the nation's flourishing civil rights movement. "By 1969, everybody who was black, even those with just a trace of black blood, wanted to be Black and Proud. It was a time of consciousness. I loved it," he said.

He didn't have long to revel in it: By 1970 he had racked up yet another conviction, for robbery, which carried a 35-year sentence. While awaiting transfer to Angola, he shared a cell with some Black Panthers who had just been arrested in a police shootout. Their ideology enthralled him. "Through our discussions, I grasped the historical plight of blacks and other poor people in America. I saw that, for these people, America is one great big prison, a perpetuation and continuation of slavery."

Back in Angola, he befriended two inmates also serving time for robbery, Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox. They had recently founded the nation's first prison chapter of the Black Panther Party, and invited him to join. Under their tutelage, King started crack-

ing books—the Bible, philosophy, and especially law—and leading political discussions and hunger strikes.

Angola was a war zone in the 1970s. Roving gangs raped vulnerable inmates and forced them into prostitution. Stabbings occurred on an almost daily basis. When a young white Freeman joined the list of fatalities, after being knifed 32 times, Wallace and Woodfox were pinned with the blame—despite dubious testimony from a witness who was legally blind, another who was on antipsychotic medication, and a third whom the warden had bribed with a carton of cigarettes a week for life. Wallace and Woodfox were exiled to Closed Cell Restriction, Angola's isolated chamber. King soon shared their fate, after he was falsely accused of murdering a fellow inmate. In time, these Panthers would be christened "the Angola Three" by activists and championed by human rights groups such as Amnesty International. Back then, however, they felt as though they'd just been sucked down a hellhole, never to resurface.

The first years of solitary were the hardest. Denied even exercise privileges, King did crunches, jumping jacks, and pushups in the skinny plot between his toilet and cot. He read. He wrote. He paced. Most of his family had either died or wandered away, so letters were scant and visitors nonexistent. Other inmates lived on his cellblock, but he could only communicate with them by passing notes or shouting—and if caught, he'd be thrown in the "dungeon," a darkened room without a mattress or even a blanket, for weeks at a time. Black Pantherism became King's touchstone. He meditated on its tenets like a lotused monk.

A sweet tooth inspired a risky hobby: candy making. Having learned a few culinary tricks from Angola's chief cook years earlier, King fashioned a stove out of scraps of metal and wire, transformed Coke cans into a pot, and, using toilet paper for fuel, started cooking confections atop his toilet seat (so he could quickly conceal the contraption inside the bowl to avoid detection, if need be). Before long, inmates were sneaking him pats of butter and packets of sugar stashed at breakfast, while Freemen smuggled in bags of pecans. King's pralines grew famous; requests streamed in all the way from Angola's death row.

The bulk of King's time, however, was devoted to a thick stack of law books, in hopes that the contents

might free him. Eventually, in 1975, he was able to win a retrial for the murder. Another man testified to doing the killing solo, but an all-white jury convicted King again anyway. Back in solitary, King wrote a flurry of letters—signed “the Angola 3”—that landed in capable hands. Human rights groups began to champion the trio’s cause, while top lawyers adopted their cases pro bono. After a great deal of legal wrangling, in 2001 King’s advocates won him a reprieve of sorts: He could walk if he promised not to sue for wrongful conviction. He agreed—though as he stalked out the gate, he paused to shout, “I may be free of Angola, but Angola will never be free of me!”

The cases of Wallace and Woodfox have proven more difficult. Angola’s warden has repeatedly accused the two of “still trying to practice Black Pantherism,” which he has likened to the doctrines of the Ku Klux Klan. The men briefly rejoined the general prison population after a 2008 visit from Representative John Conyers (D-Mich.), but have since been returned to isolation. Wallace and Woodfox have now endured more time in solitary confinement than anyone in U.S. penal history: 40 years each, as of April.

Angola Three lead counsel George Kendall and his team are currently pursuing two legal cases in the Louisiana courts, one of which argues that indefinite solitary confinement violates the constitutional guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment. His clients hope to live to see the outcome, but the odds are formidable: Approximately 85 percent of Angola’s inmates die in captivity. Wallace turned 70 in October. Woodfox has blood pressure so high that once a nurse who was administering a medical exam checked her machine to make sure it wasn’t broken. But according to Kendall, the two men are still mentally sharp. “I really braced myself for our first meeting,” he admitted to me in an interview. “I thought that after so many years in solitary, they’d be lying on the floor sucking their thumbs. But no: You are still able to have a con-



Robert Hillary King, accused of murdering a fellow inmate, spent 29 years in solitary, one of the longest known stints.

versation with them about what is happening in the Middle East. By sheer determination, they have not let this confinement crush them.”

After he was released with nothing but a one-way bus ticket and a few crumpled bills in his pocket, King moved to New Orleans to forge a new life—only to lose everything he’d cobbled together in the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina. “I cried more during those first two weeks after Katrina than I did the whole time I was in Angola,” he said, shaking his head.

Texan friends rescued him in a boat and helped him relocate to Austin. He travels at least two weeks a month campaigning for the release of Woodfox and Wallace. Speaking engagements cover

most of his bills, as do profits from the pralines he perfected in prison and now sells over the Internet. They arrive in a package stamped with a sleek black panther and labeled “King’s Freelines.”

Four years have passed since my car ride with Joe Loya. Curious how he was faring, I called him in January. His daughter is a vivacious kindergartener now; he has been happily married for 13 years. Several of his television and movie scripts are being shopped around Hollywood.

Yet Loya still feels solitary’s grip now and then. In 2003, hallucinations so haunted him that he checked into a hospital for eight days. He has developed a case of tinnitus and sometimes hears sounds like the rumbling of a crowd, a reminder of those long days in solitary he had recalled the day he drove me through Oakland.

“At first, you think it is only blood rushing in your head, but then the silence just gets sucked out your ear. Literally. There is a suction sound. Eventually, you start hearing radio static, and it grows louder and louder. Before long, you can’t eat. You can’t sleep. You’re f***ing drowning in sound. After a few months of that, you realize there’s no such thing as silence anymore.” ■

Japan Shrinks

Many nations have aging populations, but none can quite match Japan. Its experience holds lessons for other countries as well as insights into the distinctiveness of Japanese society.

BY NICHOLAS EBERSTADT

IN 2006, JAPAN REACHED A DEMOGRAPHIC AND social turning point. According to Tokyo's official statistics, deaths that year very slightly outnumbered births. Nothing like this had been recorded since 1945, the year of Japan's catastrophic defeat in World War II. But 2006 was not a curious perturbation. Rather, it was the harbinger of a new national norm.

Japan is now a "net mortality society." Death rates today are routinely higher than birthrates, and the imbalance is growing. The nation is set to commence a prolonged period of depopulation. Within just a few decades, the number of people living in Japan will likely decline 20 percent. The Germans, who saw their numbers drop by an estimated 700,000 in just the years from 2002 to 2009, have a term for this new phenomenon: *schrumpfende Gesellschaft*, or "shrinking society." Implicit in the phrase is the understanding that a progressive peacetime depopulation will entail much more than a lowered head count. It will inescapably mean a transformation of family life, social relationships, hopes and expectations—and much more.

But Japan is on the cusp of an even more radical demographic makeover than the one now under way in Germany and other countries that are in a similar

situation, including Italy, Hungary, and Croatia. (The United States is also aging, but its population is still growing.) Within barely a generation, demographic trends promise to turn Japan into a dramatically—in some ways almost unimaginably—different place from the country we know today. If we go by U.S. Census Bureau projections for Japan, for example, there will be so many people over 100 years of age in 2040, and so few babies, that there could almost be one centenarian on hand to welcome each Japanese newborn.

Population decline and extreme population aging will profoundly alter the realm of the possible for Japan—and will have major reverberations for the nation's social life, economic performance, and foreign relations. Gradually but relentlessly, Japan is evolving into a type of society whose contours and workings have only been contemplated in science fiction. It is not clear that Japan's path will be a harbinger of what lies ahead in other aging societies. Over the past century, modernization has markedly increased the economic, educational, technological, and social similarities between Japan and other affluent countries. However, Japan has remained distinctive in important respects—and in the years ahead it may become increasingly *unlike* other rich countries, as population change accentuates some of its all-but-unique attitudes and proclivities.

Japan's future population profile has already very

NICHOLAS EBERSTADT holds the Henry Wendt Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute and is a senior adviser to the National Bureau of Asian Research.

largely been set. Well over 75 percent of the people who will inhabit the Japan of 2040 are already alive, living there today. The country's population trajectory will be driven by three fundamental and distinctively Japanese trends: (1) extremely favorable general health conditions—the Japanese now enjoy the world's greatest longevity, and the outlook is for further improvements; (2) an unusually strong aversion to immigration; and (3) the most pronounced and prolonged period of sub-replacement fertility of any nation in the modern world.

Japan's total fertility rate first dipped temporarily below replacement level in the 1950s, a time when the rest of the world was just beginning to grow alarmed by the possibility of a "population explosion." It has

remained below replacement level (around 2.1 births per woman) since the early 1970s. The total fertility rate—a measure of births per woman per lifetime—while up slightly from its low (to date) of 1.26 in 2005, was a mere 1.37 in 2009, only two-thirds of the level required for long-term population stability. (Japan's population continued to grow into the 21st century because the pool of women of childbearing age kept growing until about 1990, while tremendous improvements in health among seniors postponed the intersection of death and birth totals.)

Japan's postwar fertility plunge has been so steep that it can be described as a virtual collapse. In 2008, barely 40 percent as many Japanese babies were born as in 1948. [See chart, page 32.] In fact, the country's



"Stop the birthrate decline!" was the theme behind a line of lingerie launched in 2006 by a Japanese firm. The children embroidered on the bras are supporting elderly women and Japan itself, while the line's signature phrase was emblazoned on other items in the line.

annual birth totals are lower today than they were a century ago—and if current projections come to pass, Japan will not have many more newborns in 2050 than it did in the 1870s.

We can get a sense of the shape of things to come by comparing Japan's current population profile with an estimate for 2040. [See chart, page 33.] Not even 30 years from now, more than a third of Japanese will be 65 or older. Japan is already the world's grayest society, with a median age of almost 45 years. By 2040 its median age, to go by U.S. Census Bureau projections, will rise to an almost inconceivable 55. (By way of comparison, the median age in the retirement haven of Palm Springs, California, is currently under 52 years.)

This aging society, of course, will also be shrinking. By Tokyo's projections, Japan's population will decline from about 127 million today—the 10th largest in the world—to about 106 million in 2040. The working-age population (ages 15–64) will plunge 30 percent, from 81 million to 57 million. In 2040, by these projections, the total population will be declining by about one percent annually (roughly one million people per year), and the working-age population by almost two percent annually.

But there is more. Japan's historically robust (if perhaps at times stifling) family relations, a pillar of society in all earlier generations, stand to be severely and perhaps decisively eroded in the coming decades. Traditional "Asian family values"—the ideals of uni-

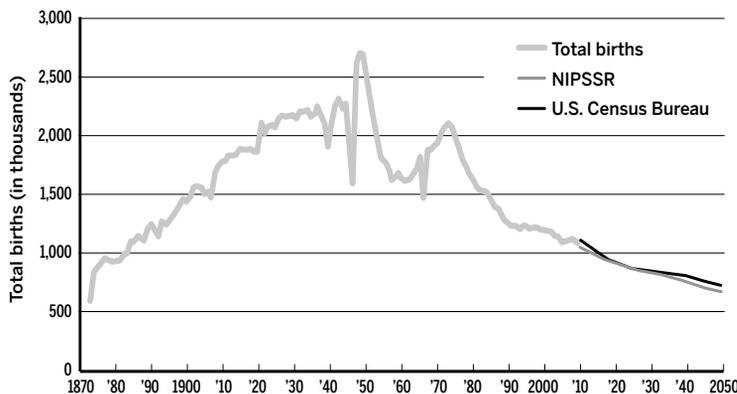
versal marriage and parenthood—are already largely a curiosity of the past in Japan. Their decay has set in motion a variety of powerful trends which virtually ensure that the Japan of 2040 will be a country with far greater numbers of aged isolates, divorced individuals, and adults whose family lines come to an end with them.

At its heart, marriage in traditional Japan was a matter of duty, not just love. Well within living memory, arranged marriages (*miai*) predominated, while "love matches" (*renai kekkon*) were anomalies. Love matches did not exceed arranged pairings until 1970—yet by 2005, only six percent of all new marriages fit the traditional mold. The collapse of arranged marriage seems to have taken something with it. Remarkably enough, there is a near perfect correlation between the demise of arranged marriage in Japan and the decline in postwar Japanese fertility.

Unshackled from the obligations of the old family order, Japan's young men and women have plunged into a previously unknown territory of interpersonal options. One consequence has been a headlong "flight from marriage," as Australian demographer Gavin Jones describes it. Increasingly, men and women in modern Japan have been postponing marriage—or avoiding it altogether. Between 1965 and 2005, for example, the proportion of never-married women in their late thirties shot up from six percent to 18 percent. Among men, the proportion rose even more steeply, from four percent to 30 percent. Many of these single adults still have not left home, creating a new breed of *parasaito shinguru*, or "parasite singles."

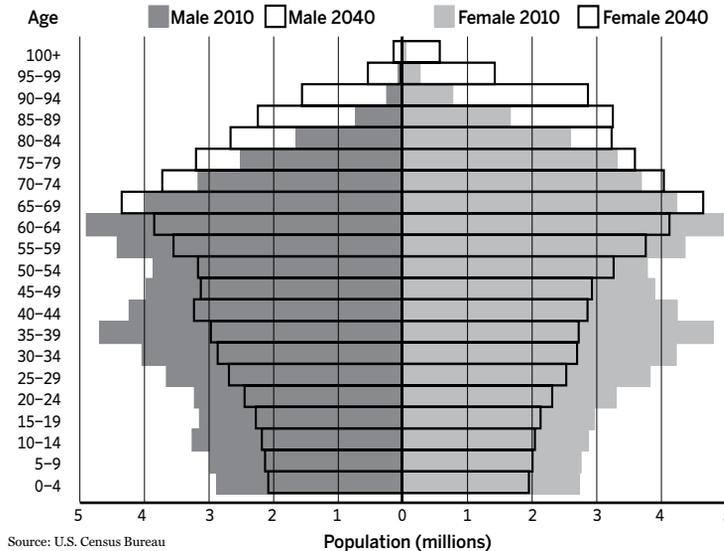
Even as young Japanese increasingly avoid marriage, divorce is further undermining the country's family structure. Just as being unmarried at prime child-rearing age is no longer a situation requiring explanation, divorce now bears no stigma. Between 1970 and 2009, the annual tally of divorces nearly tripled. The number of new marriages, meanwhile, slumped by nearly a third. According to one study, a married woman's probability

Births in Japan, 1872-2050



Sources: Japanese Statistical Yearbook. Estimates from National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (Japan) and U.S. Census Bureau.

Japan's Population, 2010 v 2040



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

of eventual divorce in Japan has leapt from under 10 percent in 1965 to about 30 percent today—higher than in such “postmodern” Scandinavian societies as Norway and Finland.

As the flight from marriage and the normalization of divorce has recast living arrangements in Japan, the cohort of married fertile adults has plummeted in size. Although the number of men and women between the ages of 20 and 50 was roughly the same in 2010 and 1970, about 10 million fewer were married in 2010. Nowadays, the odds of being married are barely even within this key demographic group. And marriage is the only real path to parenthood. Unwed motherhood remains, so to speak, inconceivable because of the enduring disgrace conferred by out-of-wedlock births.

TWPHOTO/CORBIS

In effect, the Japanese have embraced voluntary mass childlessness.

Rates of childlessness have been generally rising throughout the industrialized world since 1945, but Japan's levels were high to begin with. About 18 percent of Japanese women born in 1950 ended up having no children—a larger percentage than among their famously childless West German contemporaries. Among Japanese women born 15 years later, the odds of being childless are roughly one in four. But this may be only a foretaste of what lies in store.

Projections by Japan's official National Institute of Population and Social Security offer a stunning picture of the possible future for today's young Japanese. Consider, for example, a woman born in 1990, now 22 years old. Given current trends, the institute estimates her life expectancy to be around 90, maybe higher. But children—and family, at least in the current understanding of the term—may very



An age wave is descending on Japan, promising to make what is already the world's “grayest” society into one with a median age close to that of retirement havens such as Palm Springs, California.

well not be part of her life experience. The projections give her slightly less than even odds of getting married, and staying married to age 50. Her chances of never marrying at all are nearly one in four. Further, these projections suggest she has nearly a two-fifths (38 percent) chance of ending up childless. Even more astonishing: She has a better-than-even chance of completing life with no biological grandchildren.

Though it can be represented in cold statistics, the human flavor of Japan's new demographic order may be better captured in anecdote:

- Rental “relatives” are now readily available throughout the country for celebrations when a groom or bride lacks requisite kin.
- “Babyloids”—small, furry, robotic dolls that can mimic some of the sounds and gestures of real babies—are being marketed to help older Japanese cope with loneliness and depression.
- Robot pets and rental pets are also available for those who seek the affection of an animal but cannot cope with having one to look after.
- In a recent government survey, one-third of boys ages 16 to 19 described themselves as uninterested in or positively averse to sexual intimacy.
- Young Japanese men are, however, clearly very interested in video games and the Internet: In 2009, a 27-year-old Japanese man made history by “marrying” a female video game character’s avatar while thousands watched online.
- Japanese researchers are pioneering the development of attractive, lifelike androids. Earlier this year, a persuasively realistic humanoid called Geminoid F was displayed in a department store window, appearing to wait for a friend.

These random facts may not reflect the full spectrum of everyday life in modern Japan, but like anecdotes about any country, they reveal things that are genuine, distinctive, and arguably meaningful about

it today—and perhaps tomorrow as well.

What will all of these unfolding demographic and familial changes mean for the Japan of 2040? A few of the most likely implications can be briefly itemized:

A looming old-age burden: Despite salutary trends in “healthy aging,” Japan’s extraordinary demographics can only mean that a rapidly growing share of the country’s population will be frail in the years ahead—and that public pension allowances, health and medical services, and long-term care will be ever more pressing priorities for Japanese society. Not the least of the problems may concern Alzheimer’s disease. A study commissioned by Alzheimer’s Disease International suggests that, on current track, the prevalence of dementia in the Japanese population could rise to five percent by 2050—one person in 20. The caregiving implications of such an outcome are staggering—and given the coming erosion of the Japanese family, a steadily decreasing proportion of senior citizens will have children to turn to for

WHEN A GROOM OR BRIDE lacks the requisite kin for a celebration, rental “relatives” are now readily available throughout the country.

support. Under such circumstances, an increase in long-term institutionalization among the elderly seems inescapable.

A new kind of childhood: In the recent past, children in Japan were plentiful, while elders (who could expect a measure of veneration) were scarce. But by most projections there will be three senior citizens in 2040 for every child under 15—an almost exact inversion of the ratio that existed as recently as 1975.

It is easy to imagine a Japan in which children—the country’s link with its future—will become increasingly prized. It is also possible to envision a future in which Japanese boys and girls develop a pronounced sense of entitlement, much as China’s rising generation of “little emperor” only-children have today, and regard their obligations and duties



Young women celebrate “Coming of Age Day” in a Tokyo amusement park. The January holiday for those who turned 20 in the previous year has seen declining participation as perceptions of adulthood change.

to their elders as increasingly onerous and optional. The hopes and expectations falling on this dwindling cadre of youth would be truly enormous—and for some fraction of the rising generation could amount to an unbearable pressure.

Japan is already witness to a worrisome rise in the number of what social scientists call NEET youth (not in education, employment, or training)—women and, more commonly, men who are, in effect, opting out of existing Japanese social arrangements. The pathological extreme of this phenomenon is the *hikikomori*—young adults who shut themselves off almost entirely by retreating into a friendless life of video games, the Internet, and *manga* (comics) in their parents’ home. Hard data on the *hikikomori* are scarce, but Japanese experts guess that there are hundreds of thousands of them. Suffice it to say that childhood and young adulthood in the Japan of the future will be different—and in some ways, perhaps more difficult than ever before.

A struggle to maintain economic growth: In the aftermath of two “lost decades” of meager growth, a world economic crisis, and a devastating tsunami, the

Japanese economy faces a future in which simply sustaining growth will be an increasing challenge. The working-age population is set to shrink by 30 percent over the next three decades, and even if older Japanese take up some of the slack, the country’s work force will almost surely be much smaller than it is today. Extreme population aging, for its part, stands to place mounting downward pressure on the nation’s savings rate—and thus, other things being equal, on investment.

Ballooning debt obligations will compound the demographic pres-

ures on economic performance. Thanks in part to its approach to financing programs for the aged, Japan already has the highest ratio of gross public debt to gross domestic product (well over 200 percent) of the developed nations. Projections by researchers at the Bank for International Settlements imply that this ratio could rise to a mind-boggling 600 percent by 2040. (Greece’s public debt, by contrast, amounted to about 130 percent of its GDP at the start of its current default drama.) While Japan might well be able to service such a mountain of debt without risk of sovereign default (assuming the country’s low-interest-rate environment continues to hold), it is hard to see how a recipe for rapid or even moderate economic growth could be cooked up with these ingredients.

Even so, from a purely arithmetic standpoint, a country with a shrinking population—and even a shrinking GDP—could theoretically enjoy steady improvements in personal income and living standards. Japan does possess a number of options for enhancing economic growth. Significantly, it has built a generally strong educational system, and efforts to increase

attainment (including implementation of a genuine lifelong approach to education and training) could tangibly increase labor productivity. Japan is also a world leader in research, development, and “knowledge production.” Strengthening these capacities and applying technological advances and breakthroughs throughout the national economy could stimulate growth. And as the healthiest people on the planet, the Japanese have untapped possibilities for augmenting their future labor force by extending working life. Finally, far-reaching structural reform of the economy—long hobbled by a dysfunctional financial and banking sector and other ills—could significantly brighten the prospects for long-term growth. Seizing these opportunities, however, will require widespread determination to chart a sharp change of economic course on the part of Japan’s political leadership and an aging electorate that may be increasingly risk-averse.

A less crowded, “greener” Japan: Japan’s impending depopulation may have its upsides. With the emptying of the countryside, for example, the nation will have more living space and arable land per person than it does today. Given the country’s ongoing improvements in energy efficiency and environmental technologies, depopulation could coincide with an improvement in natural amenities and (by at least some criteria) quality of life. Further, thanks to environment-friendly technological advances and, however unintended, slow economic growth, Japan may emerge as a world leader in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Diminishing international influence: Demographic trends have created powerful pressures for a smaller Japanese role in world affairs in coming decades. The country’s share of world economic output—and its international economic influence—should be expected to decline, perhaps considerably. Prospective trends in military-age manpower tell a similar story. Thirty years ago, Japan was the world’s seventh most populous country. Thirty years hence it likely

will be down to number 15, surpassed by Egypt and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among others.

It is true that Japan’s biggest neighbors, China and Russia, have demographic clouds on their horizons as well. And Japan’s potential for self-defense is far greater than its current capacities (many of them shaped by self-imposed restrictions) suggest. Even if it becomes more assertive of its national interests, however, this maritime power, like others before it, may continue

IN 2009, JAPAN NATURALIZED barely a third as many new citizens as Switzerland, whose total population is a small fraction of Japan’s.

to rely heavily on international alliances to protect its national security. Japan may need international friends and allies in the years ahead even more than it does now. Japanese policymakers will be well advised to think about what their aging, depopulating nation can offer such prospective partners.

A potentially pivotal role for migration: Migration is something of a wild card in the country’s future. In light of Japan’s long-standing sensitivity to the “otherness” of *gaijin* (non-Japanese), immigration to Japan has been strikingly limited, assimilation of newcomers even more so. (To put the situation in perspective: In 2009 Japan naturalized barely a third as many new citizens as Switzerland, a country with a population only six percent the size of Japan’s and a reputation of its own for standoffishness.) All the same, Japan is an increasingly cosmopolitan country, and the Japanese are enthusiastic tourists and international travelers. It is not impossible that attitudes toward the importation of foreign labor could change in the face of demographic pressures.

No less intriguing, however, is the proposition that Japan might turn out to be a major supplier of *emigrants* to the rest of the world. Given the cost and care outlook for their aging population, the Japanese might, for example, establish health care “colonies” in places such as India or the Philippines, spots where

large populations of elderly Japanese could enjoy a good quality of life or receive necessary treatment and support at a fraction of what they would cost at home. Younger Japanese, for their part, might find it increasingly attractive to venture overseas in search of opportunity if the alternative were perceived to be a limited future in a shrinking, dying Japan. More than one million Japanese were already estimated to reside abroad as of 2009.

Population projections are just that, estimates based on assumptions made today. Is a significant turnaround in Japan's population outlook possible over the next several decades? That cannot be ruled out entirely, but we must recognize the narrow limits of the possible. Only a catastrophe of truly biblical proportions, such as a disastrous die-off among today's middle-aged and elderly Japanese, could prevent Japan's unprecedented aging. Migration, at least for now, looks unlikely to increase much, and an increase in emigration could accelerate the trends that darken Japan's future. Nor is there much hope that pro-natalist policies, such as "baby bonuses," would make a significant long-term difference. They have had at best limited success in other affluent societ-

ies. Singapore has aggressively promoted a variety of pro-natalist policies for more than two decades, yet its total fertility rate in 2011 was even lower than Japan's. Decades of worldwide evidence suggest that birth levels depend critically on desired family size rather than "birth bribes." To the degree that values and norms frame individuals' views about family size, it is possible that some great change in public attitudes—an ideological or religious movement, a "national awakening," or the like—could sweep Japan and increase the desire to bear children. But nothing like this has ever occurred in an affluent open society with fertility levels as low as Japan's.

For better or worse, depopulation and pervasive graying look to be Japan's lot for as far as our imaginations can stretch. In one sense, this may simply make the Japanese a "pioneer people": Many other nations and populations may likewise eventually find themselves to be shrinking societies, too. Japan's efforts to cope with the problems posed (and also to capitalize on the opportunities presented) by a prosperous and orderly depopulation may prove exemplary for the rest of the world. On the other hand, as Japanese themselves are so often the first to point out, their own *minzoku*—

An ever more precious commodity, Japanese children are under enormous pressure to succeed. As Japan comes to rely on a shrinking number of children, those pressures may grow—with unpredictable results.

an emotive and heavily freighted term meaning "tribe," "race," or "nationality"—is in important ways unique. "Depopulation with Japanese characteristics" may therefore turn out to look different from prospective depopulations elsewhere—and Japan may face special, self-imposed constraints in dealing with its impending appointment with this demographic future. In either case, making the most of the new demographic realities that lie in store in the decades ahead could be one of this great nation's very greatest trials. ■

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A Manifesto at 50

The Port Huron Statement launched America's New Left in 1962. Today it seems naive and in some ways misguided—yet it raised questions that still agitate Americans today.

BY DANIEL AKST

“WE ARE PEOPLE OF THIS GENERATION, BRED IN at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.”

So begins the audacious manifesto known as the Port Huron Statement, the product of 60 idealistic young Americans who traveled in June 1962 to a retreat at the base of Lake Huron to hash out their beliefs about social change. The conferees were serious sorts, conventionally dressed middle-class overachievers from good colleges, mostly, meeting at the height of the optimism prevailing during the Kennedy years.

But the young people gathered in Port Huron, Michigan, weren't buying the era's hopefulness; on the contrary, they were members of a two-year-old group called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) that was in the process of inventing the New Left. And these students were uncomfortable about plenty: the Cold War, the plight of “Negroes,” the power of corporations, the danger of nuclear Armageddon. The idea in Port Huron was to clarify and proclaim the new organization's values and agenda. The meetings, some of which lasted through the night, were full of utopian fervor and shared passion. The resulting document—based on a draft written largely by Tom Hayden, a young radical who later became a California state senator,

DANIEL AKST, a *Wilson Quarterly* contributing editor and former Wilson Center public policy scholar, is a member of the editorial board at *Newsday*. He is the author most recently of *We Have Met the Enemy: Self-Control in an Age of Excess* (2011).

not to mention Jane Fonda's second husband—might well be said to have launched the 1960s.

All these years later, everything about the Port Huron Statement remains youthful, including the tender mix of insight and naiveté throughout. But lo and behold, the 50th birthday of that fateful document is fast approaching. Its leftist masterminds—or at least, those who haven't moved on to some great protest rally in the sky—are on Social Security. Yet judging from the continuing timeliness and insight of what they produced, they might as easily have met last week.

The Port Huron kids were concerned about economic inequality, which, measured by the distribution of income, is greater today than it was then. Their emphasis on the unchecked power of corporations echoes down to us in the controversial size and power of big banks. They were concerned about militarism, even though Vietnam wasn't even on their radar, and their opposition to U.S. war making has been vindicated time and again in the half-century since, from Southeast Asia to Iraq. Nuclear annihilation was a bigger issue for them than proliferation, but certainly nuclear weapons remain firmly on the foreign-policy agenda and in the news.

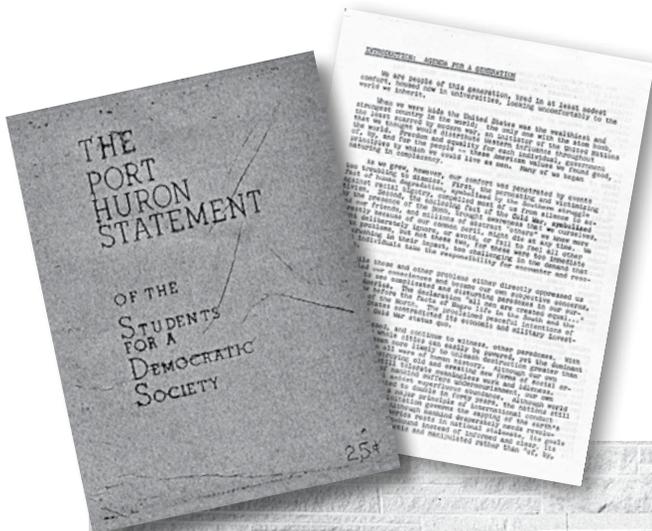
The Huronites, if we may call them such, were frustrated that there was no truly progressive mainstream political party, a frustration that will resonate with many today who lament the shifting of the national

policy conversation to the right. Partly to blame, in their view, was the parties' lack of ideological purity—each contained liberals and conservatives. They saw this “party overlap” as a “structural antagonist of democracy,” complaining that it led to “organized political stalemate.” They had just the remedy, too: Drive most southern Democrats, who so often lined up with Republicans, out of the Democratic Party. If only one could shout back across time about the importance of being careful what you wish for. As it turns out, the southerners left the party after it enacted the great civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Now we have more ideologically consistent parties—along with more stalemate, not less.

That’s an especially bitter irony given Port Huron’s focus on broadening democracy. Above all else, the Huronites were determined that Americans should gain control of their own destiny through a democratic process that would supersede the power of government bureaucrats and corporations alike. Their own fervent deliberations embodied the group’s obsession with participatory democracy, which was inspired by the philosopher Arnold Kaufman, a teacher of Hayden’s at the University of Michigan.

In keeping with their faith in what might be called radical democracy, the young SDS members believed the very best about people—“we regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love”—and were desperate to turn back the tide of alienation they felt was engulfing Americans. “Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. These dominant tendencies cannot be overcome by better personnel management, nor by improved gadgets, but only when a love of man overcomes the idolatrous worship of things by man.”

Leaders of the Students for a Democratic Society gathered in Bloomington, Indiana, a year after issuing the Port Huron Statement. Tom Hayden (left), the document’s chief author, later became a well-known California activist and politician.



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Those same words might have been written yesterday, and not just by some young radicals. On the contrary, they could as easily have come from evangelical Christians, academic communitarians, secular social critics (such as Jaron Lanier, author of the 2010 manifesto *You Are Not a Gadget*), or almost anyone recoiling from the radical individualism that many people feel has beset our vast and fast-moving society. Pretty much the only ones who couldn't have penned those words, if you'll forgive an anachronistic metaphor, are modern feminists, who would bristle at the use of "man" to stand in for the half of us who are female. In fact, for all its prescience and progressiveness, the single most striking thing about the Port Huron statement from today's perspective is that it's oblivious to women's issues, even though some of the conferees were women.

The Port Huron Statement otherwise is a thoroughgoing expression of a certain worldview—an outlook present on one side in the political and culture wars that have sharply divided the country in recent years and brought Washington practically to a standstill. What most people don't realize is that there was another important statement crafted by a conference of young idealists back in those days, one that encapsulates a very different worldview just as effectively as Port Huron embodies the progressive one. And while the founding document of the SDS is the far more famous of the two, the other is surely as significant. Each of these sharply contrasting texts can shed useful light on the other, and read together, they provide a crisply binocular view of the American body politic today.

Idealistic manifestoes and declarations, it should be noted, have always been important in American history. The Mayflower Compact proclaimed our specialness, and our special obligation to God. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution launched a new country based on a set of bold principles. In the post-World War II era, Barry Goldwater's passionate acceptance of the GOP presidential nomination in 1964 ("extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice"), John F. Kennedy's stirring inaugural vow to "pay any price, bear any burden," and Martin Luther King Jr.'s inspiring "I have a dream" speech all galvanized the nation and changed the course of its history.

While the counterculture, the civil rights movement, opposition to the Vietnam War, and student

radicalism define the 1960s for many Americans, in recent years scholars have demonstrated that there was more to the era's politics than leftist agitation. "The untold story of the 1960s is about the New Right," sociologist Rebecca E. Klatch insists in *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (1999), a book that depicts the decade "as a time of ferment for the Right as well as the Left. Idealistic youth from one end of the political spectrum to the other formed movements to reshape American politics."

In September 1960, just a few months after the very first meeting of SDS and nearly two years before the Port Huron conference, more than 100 young conservatives from 44 colleges and universities descended on the estate of conservative author and editor William F. Buckley Jr., in Sharon, Connecticut. The meeting was inspired by a suggestion from Senator Barry Goldwater, the up-and-coming Arizona Republican who was helping transform the GOP, that America's youthful conservatives set up a national organization. Goldwater, don't forget, was a ruggedly handsome and outdoorsy former fighter pilot who, for a while at least, was a magnet for young activists—including Joan Didion and Hillary Rodham.

The Sharon conference was almost a mirror image of the one that would come later at Port Huron. At both events, excitement was in the air. Idealistic young Americans gathered to reshape the future and reveled in being among like-minded people. While the SDS folks would retreat to a United Auto Workers camp to formulate their manifesto, the conservatives in Sharon brought forth not just a statement, but an organization—Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)—at Great Elm, the Buckley family's 47-acre country seat, where parts of the vast main house dated back to 1763.

The Sharon Statement, at least at first glance, seems to be everything its counterpart on the left was not. Drafted by M. Stanton Evans, a young Indianapolis newspaperman, the one-page document is a model of brevity and coherence, especially compared with the rambling 64-page Port Huron Statement. That length wasn't just a matter of leftist logorrhea; Hayden, who reportedly had read the Sharon Statement, was himself a newspaperman of sorts, serving as editor of the University of Michigan's student daily. The great economy of the Sharon Statement simply reflected its



In 1970, William F. Buckley (with clipboard) celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Sharon Statement at his Connecticut estate.

much clearer message: the less government, the better. The basic idea was to let people take care of themselves, a viewpoint not very difficult to elaborate then or now.

The Port Huron Statement is so much longer because its many earnest drafters had a much heavier lift. They were determined not only to perfect relations among “men” but to safeguard against the undue power government and business tend to arrogate to themselves—even as they demanded that the same inept and militaristic state they reviled somehow manage housing, capital allocation, and other things by now demonstrably beyond its competence. Since they shared with their Sharon counterparts a profound distrust of government, it’s fair to ask how they can have hoped to harness the unruly leviathan on behalf of the public good and the popular will. The answer? “By steadfast opposition to bureaucratic coagulation, and to definitions of human needs according to problems easiest for computers to solve. Second, the bureaucratic pileups must be at least minimized by local, regional, and national economic planning—responding to the interconnection of public problems by comprehensive programs of solution. Third, and most important, by experiments in decentralization.”

The Port Huron conferees, with their starry-eyed

view of human nature and their desire to transform the entire world by simultaneously enlisting government while protecting people from it, produced a wildly utopian manifesto whose length speaks volumes about its contradictions and overreach. Yet on closer inspection, the Sharon Statement was perhaps no less utopian. Its tightly ordered vision of free people and free markets, with the role of government limited to protecting individual freedom “through the preservation of internal order, the provision of national defense, and the administration of justice,” narrows the public sphere almost to the vanishing point. Taxes, to the Sharon conferees, sounded not just like theft, but poison, at least when used for anything other than personal and national security: When government “takes from one man to bestow on another, it diminishes the incentive of the first, the integrity of the second, and the moral autonomy of both.” In the Sharon worldview, this made sense, for “when government interferes with the work of the market economy, it tends to reduce the moral and physical strength of the nation.”

Even liberals will acknowledge that government meddling in commerce—Fannie Mae, anyone?—can make a mess of things, and the clarity of the Sharon vision is seductive. Yet surely schools play some role in the moral and physical strength of the nation, to say nothing of decently supported retirees or decently paved roads.

The differences between the Sharon and Port Huron manifestoes seem stark. The Sharon drafters might be said, in Isaiah Berlin’s famous formulation of 1958, to be concerned with negative freedom, or protecting the rights of individuals from external constraint, while the students at Port Huron focused more on positive freedom, or the ability to meet one’s needs and achieve one’s potential. Freedom to go to the supermarket counts for little, after all, if one lacks the money to buy food. The SDS adherents, perceptively, also saw freedom as embedded in community, recognizing that a society of self-interested pinballs bouncing off one another and their surroundings probably isn’t sustainable.

Similarly, the Sharonites seemed not to worry at all about the accumulation of private power, focusing instead on the threat from government, while the Huronites were somehow both fearful of government

and in love with the potential of collective action. At the same time, they were all too conscious of the great weight of private (read: corporate) power. I say “too conscious” because they were sorely handicapped by the Left’s traditional fear, loathing, and sheer misunderstanding of the private sector, which—let’s face it—is the source of most of the wealth and innovation that make improvement in the world possible.

Yet the two statements—and many of their middle-class drafters—had a great deal in common, including a deep faith in the American people and their ability to govern themselves. At the same time, the drafters and their manifestoes were disillusioned with the cautiously liberal consensus that had prevailed during their young lives, and impatient with the pragmatism and compromise embodied by the Kennedy administration. They believed in pushing governance further down the democratic pyramid, and were suspicious of far-off technocrats and others who might exercise power over people. If the two statements were cast as a Venn diagram, their considerable overlap could be labeled libertarianism. Implicit in both is a kind of nostalgia: for a smaller, simpler polity than the United States had become, and for direct relations among people rather than between individuals and huge centers of undemocratic power. Most of all, the framers of both statements believed in political action as a way to advance what was essentially a moral agenda.

It’s not difficult to see the roots of our current impasse in these two ambitious documents. The emphasis on individual rights (Sharon) or participatory democracy (Port Huron), carried to extremes, leads to the kind of paralysis the commentator Jonathan Rauch has termed “demosclerosis,” in which it’s all too easy for determined stakeholders to protect special privileges or block needed public improvements, such as a subway extension or overhaul of the power grid, at great cost to everyone else. The emphasis on rights over responsibilities in both statements—how different from President Kennedy’s demand back then to “ask not what your country can do for you”!—may have helped justify the selfishness and narcissism of succeeding decades. And the uncompromising idealism of both statements probably contributed to the later breakdown of cooperation across the aisle in Washington. SDS grew increasingly radical as the

1960s wore on, and in 1969 its most revolutionary elements broke away, some of them eventually helping to form the violent Weather Underground, whose bombings and anti-Americanism helped alienate the very working-class voters the Weathermen’s erstwhile associates had hoped to enlist in combating capitalism. While SDS was defunct by the mid-1970s, YAF persists to this day, and the conservative movement it continues to support has scooped up those same alienated white working-class voters. Those are the voters who propelled Ronald Reagan into the White House, and whose defection has made life so difficult for the Democratic Party ever since.

Now that even the most basic government initiatives are contested, the top marginal tax rate has been slashed, and unions in the private sector have all but vanished, it’s easy to dismiss the Port Huron Statement as idealistic raving. The Sharon Statement, it would seem, has won the day. But assuming so would be a big mistake. All the important progressive changes of the last couple of centuries—abolitionism, women’s suffrage, civil rights for blacks and, later, gays—have bubbled up through social movements like those framed by the words written in Michigan 50 years ago. The massive antiwar campaign SDS would soon enough help foment was a prime example.

The historical fact is that half a century after Port Huron, hardly any advanced societies in the world look anything like the one idealized by the young conservatives who met in Sharon. What’s nearly universal instead is a never-ending effort to balance the rights of individuals with the needs that, in the modern world, it seems only government can meet. If the Port Huron Statement was absurd to suppose that collective action can solve all the world’s problems, surely it was just as silly for the Sharon Statement to suggest that collective action can’t solve any of them, even the ones right here under our collective noses. The challenge for us today, 50 years after Port Huron, is to embrace what was best about the SDS statement—its warnings against militarism, its emphasis on citizen involvement, and its insistence on equality—while bearing in mind that other statement, so that we can come to some agreement on the proper role of government in a bigger, more complex, and more interconnected world than the framers of either document ever imagined. ■

THE AGE OF CONNECTION



Tweets from a protest in China race instantly around the world, while New York bankers exchange texts and a teenager in Denver shares a video with hundreds of “friends.” The world is increasingly connected, but the effects are unclear. Technology has changed everything—how much has it changed us?

In Benghazi, Libya, a reveler shared the city's celebration with the world after the new transitional government announced the country's liberation from the regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi.

Ethan Zuckerman on the dream of a smaller planet | p. 44

Christine Rosen on electronic intimacy | p. 48

Tom Vanderbilt on the telephone's lessons for today | p. 52

A Small World After All?

The Internet has changed many things, but not the insular habits of mind that keep the world from becoming truly connected.

BY ETHAN ZUCKERMAN

WHEN THE COLD WAR ENDED, THE WORK OF America's intelligence analysts suddenly became vastly more difficult. In the past, they had known who the nation's main adversaries were and what bits of information they needed to acquire about them: the number of SS-9 missiles Moscow could deploy, for example, or the number of warheads each missile could carry. The U.S. intelligence community had been in search of secrets—facts that exist but are hidden by one government from another. After the Soviet Union's collapse, as Bruce Berkowitz and Allan Goodman observe in *Best Truth: Intelligence in the Information Age* (2002), it found a new role thrust upon it: the untangling of mysteries.

Computer security expert Susan Landau identifies the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran as one of the first indicators that the intelligence community needed to shift its focus from secrets to mysteries. On its surface, Iran was a strong, stable ally of the United States, an "island of stability" in the region, according to President Jimmy Carter. The rapid ouster of the shah and a referendum that turned a monarchy into a theocracy led by a formerly exiled religious scholar left governments around the world shocked and baffled.

The Islamic Revolution was a surprise because it had taken root in mosques and homes, not palaces or

ETHAN ZUCKERMAN is director of the Center for Civic Media at MIT. He and Rebecca MacKinnon are cofounders of the international blogging community Global Voices (globalvoicesonline.org), which showcases news and opinion from citizen media in more than 150 nations. His book *Rewire: Rethinking Globalization in an Age of Connection* will be published by W. W. Norton early next year.

barracks. The calls to resist the shah weren't broadcast on state media but transmitted via handmade leaflets and audiocassettes of speeches by Ayatollah Khomeini. In their book analyzing the events of 1979, *Small Media, Big Revolution* (1994), Annabelle Sreberny and Ali Mohammad, who both participated in the Iranian revolution, emphasize the role of two types of technology: tools that let people obtain access to information from outside Iran, and tools that let people spread and share that information on a local scale. Connections to the outside world (direct-dial long-distance phone lines, cassettes of sermons sent through the mail, broadcasts on the BBC World Service) and tools that amplified those connections (home cassette recorders, photocopying machines) helped build a movement more potent than governments and armies had anticipated.

As we enter an age of increased global connection, we are also entering an age of increasing participation. The billions of people worldwide who access the Internet via computers and mobile phones have access to information far beyond their borders, and the opportunity to contribute their own insights and opinions. It should be no surprise that we are experiencing a concomitant rise in mystery that parallels the increases in connection.

The mysteries brought to the fore in a connected age extend well beyond the realm of political power. Bad subprime loans in the United States lead to the failure of an investment bank; this, in turn, depresses interbank



It wasn't secrecy that kept the world from anticipating the revolution that was brewing in Tunisia in 2009 but a failure to see the pieces of the puzzle for what they were. A year later, protestors defied a curfew in Tunis to remember those killed in their country's struggle for freedom.

lending, pushing Iceland's heavily leveraged economy into collapse and consequently leaving British consumers infuriated at the disappearance of their deposits from Icelandic banks that had offered high interest rates on savings accounts. An American businessman on a flight to Singapore takes ill, and epidemiologists find themselves tracing the SARS epidemic in cities from Toronto to Manila, eventually discovering a disease that originated with civet cats and was passed to humans because civets are sold as food in southern China. Not all mysteries are tragedies—the path of a musical style from Miami clubs through dance parties in the favelas of Rio to the hit singles of British-Sri Lankan singer M.I.A. is at least as unexpected and convoluted.

Uncovering secrets might require counting missile silos in satellite images or debriefing double agents. To understand our connected world, we need different skills. Landau suggests that “solving mysteries requires deep, often unconventional thinking, and a full picture of the world around the mystery.”

The unexpected outbreak of the Arab Spring, a mys-

tery that's still unfolding, suggests that we may not be getting this full picture, or the deep, unconventional thinking we need. Had you asked an expert on the Middle East what changes were likely to take place in 2011, almost none would have predicted the Arab Spring, and none would have chosen Tunisia as the flashpoint for the movement. Zine el Abidine Ben Ali had ruled the North African nation virtually unchallenged since 1987, and had co-opted, jailed, or exiled anyone likely to challenge his authority. When vegetable seller Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire, there was no reason to expect his family's protests against government corruption to spread beyond the village of Sidi Bouzid. After all, the combination of military cordons, violence against protesters, a sycophantic domestic press, and a ban on international news media had, in the past, ensured that dissent remained local.

Not this time. Video of protests in Sidi Bouzid, shot on mobile phones and uploaded to Facebook, reached Tunisian dissidents in Europe. They indexed and translated the footage and packaged it for distribution

on sympathetic networks such as al-Jazeera. Widely watched in Tunisia, al-Jazeera alerted citizens in Tunis and Sfax to protests taking place in another corner of their country, which in effect served as an invitation to participate. As Ben Ali's regime trembled and fell, images of the protests spread throughout the region, inspiring similar outpourings in more than a dozen countries and the overthrow of two additional regimes.

While the impact of Tunisia's revolution is now appreciated, the protests that led to Ben Ali's ouster were invisible in much of the world. *The New York Times* first mentioned Mohamed Bouazizi and Sidi Bouzid in print on January 15, 2011, the day after Ben Ali fled. The U.S. intelligence apparatus was no more prescient. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D.-Calif.), who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, wondered to reporters, "Was someone looking at what was going on the Internet?"

A central paradox of this connected age is that while it's easier than ever to share information and perspectives from different parts of the world, we may be encountering a narrower picture of the world than we did in less connected days. During the Vietnam War, television reporting from the frontlines involved transporting exposed film from Southeast Asia by air, then developing and editing it in the United States before broadcasting it days later. Now, an unfolding crisis such as the Japanese tsunami or Haitian earthquake can be reported in real time via satellite. Despite these lowered barriers, today's American television news features less than half as many international stories as were broadcast in the 1970s.

The pace of print media reporting has accelerated sharply, with newspapers moving to a "digital first" strategy, publishing fresh information online as news breaks. While papers publish many more stories than they did 40 years ago (online and offline), Britain's four major dailies publish on average 45 percent fewer international stories than they did in 1979.

Why worry about what's covered in newspapers and television when it's possible to read firsthand accounts

from Syria or Sierra Leone? Research suggests that we rarely read such accounts. My studies of online news consumption show that 95 percent of the news consumed by American Internet users is published in the United States. By this metric, the United States is less parochial than many other nations, which consume even less news published in other countries. This locality effect crosses into social media as well. A recent study of Twitter, a tool used by 400 million people around the world, showed that we're far more likely to follow people who are physically close to us than to follow someone outside our home country's borders, or even a few states or provinces away. Thirty-nine percent of the relationships on Twitter involve someone following the tweets of a person in the same metropolitan area. In the Twitter

AS WE START TO UNDERSTAND how people actually use the Internet, the cyberutopian hopes of a borderless, postnational planet can look naive.

hotbed of São Paulo, Brazil, more than 78 percent of the relationships are local. So much for the death of distance.

As we start to understand how people actually use the Internet, the cyberutopian hopes of a borderless, postnational planet can look as naive as most past predictions that new technologies would transform societies. In 1912, radio pioneer Guglielmo Marconi declared, "The coming of the wireless era will make war impossible, because it will make war ridiculous." Two years later a ridiculous war began, ultimately killing nine million Europeans.

While it's easy to be dismissive of today's Marconis—the pundits, experts, and enthusiasts who saw a rise in Internet connection leading to a rise in international understanding—that's too simple and too cynical a response. Increased digital connection does not automatically lead to increased understanding. At the same time, there's never been a tool as powerful as the Internet for building new ties (and maintaining existing ones) across distant borders.

The challenge for anyone who wants to decipher

the mysteries of a connected age is to understand how the Internet does, and does not, connect us. Only then can we find ways to make online connection more common and more powerful.

There are at least three ways we discover new information online. Each of these methods has shortcomings in terms of giving us a broad, global picture of the world. Search engines, while incredibly powerful, are only as good as the queries we put to them. They are designed for information retrieval, not for discovery. If you had been able to ask Google in 1979 how many SS-9 missiles the Soviets possessed, you might have received a plausible answer, but you wouldn't have been told you should be asking about cassette recorders in Iran instead. Search engines tell us what we want to know, but they can't tell us what we might need to know.

Social media such as Facebook or Twitter might tell you to pay attention to cassette recordings in Iran, but only if your friends include Iranians. Social media are a powerful discovery engine, but what you're discovering is what your friends know. If you're lucky enough to have a diverse, knowledgeable set of friends online, they may lead you in unexpected directions. But birds of a feather flock together, both online and offline, and your friends are more likely to help you discover the unexpected in your hometown than in another land.

The most powerful discovery engines online may be curated publications such as *The New York Times* or *The Guardian*. Editors of these publications are driven by a mission to provide their audiences with the broad picture of the world they need in order to be effective citizens, consumers, and businesspeople. But professional curators have their inevitable biases and blind spots. Much as we know to search for the news we think will affect our lives, editors deploy reporting resources toward parts of the world with strategic and economic significance. When mysteries unfold in corners of the world we're used to ignoring, such as Tunisia, curators are often left struggling to catch up.

The limits of online information sources are a challenge both for us and for the people building the next generation of online tools. If we rigorously examine the media we're encountering online, looking for topics and places we hear little about, we may be able to change our behavior, adding different and dissenting views to our social networks, seeking out new sources

of news. But this task would be vastly easier if the architects of Internet tools took up the cause of helping to broaden worldviews. Facebook already notices that you've failed to "friend" a high school classmate and tries to connect you. It could look for strangers in Africa or India who share your interests and broker an introduction. Google tracks every search you undertake so it can more effectively target ads to you. It could also use that information to help you discover compelling content about topics you've never explored, adding a serendipity engine to its formidable search function.

Why aren't engineers racing to build the new tools that will help unravel the mysteries of a connected world? They may be waiting for indicators that we want them and are ready to use them.

In 2004, journalist Rebecca MacKinnon and I founded Global Voices, an international news network designed to amplify and spread ideas and perspectives published online in the developing world. Our 800 correspondents translate and summarize content from the blogs of Russian activists protesting election fraud and Nigerian Facebook users discussing the latest hot Nollywood film. The project has won awards and recognition, but it's had only modest success building an audience. When a news story receives global attention, as Iran's Green Movement protests did in 2009, readership spikes. But our in-depth coverage of the protests in Sidi Bouzid went largely unnoticed until Ben Ali's government fell. We continue to report on coups in Madagascar and culture in Malaysia regardless of the audience these stories generate. But to convince Facebook to broker global connections or encourage *The Huffington Post* to cover global stories, people need to demand a broader view.

As Pankaj Ghemawat of Barcelona's IESE Business School reminds us in *World 3.0* (2011), we're not at the endpoint of globalization, but somewhere near the starting line. The age of connection is just beginning. Many people still view the world as dominated by secrets: How close is Iran to building a nuclear bomb? How can Western companies crack the Chinese market? Where are undiscovered reserves of oil? It's at least as possible that the questions that will dominate the next century are the ones we don't yet know to ask. Those who will thrive in a connected world are those who learn to see broadly and to solve the mysteries that emerge. ■

Electronic Intimacy

Friendships that were once maintained with the rudimentary technology of pen and paper are now reinforced 24/7 with the stroke of a few keys. A longtime letter writer reflects on what has been gained . . . and lost.

BY CHRISTINE ROSEN

WE MET AT MUSIC SCHOOL IN VERMONT IN THE 1980s. He was the golden boy, popular and cocksure. I wore thick glasses and played the bassoon. Somehow we formed a friendship, much to the annoyance of his string of romantic conquests and my friends, who disliked him. When August came we parted ways, close but not entirely connected. Two weeks later, I received my first letter from him. It was still broiling hot in Florida as I stood by the mailbox and tore open the envelope. My friend had gone to the trouble to find my address, and, by including his own on the back of the envelope, signaled his expectation that I should write back.

During the next few years we wrote regularly about all kinds of things—the music we were listening to, our parents' willful misunderstanding of our monumental teenage torments. A "pen pal" is what everyone called him. But that childish phrase always bothered me. It sounded too limited and casual, nothing like an expression of the way our letter writing felt. I went through the day filing away little experiences to replay later in a letter to him, and eagerly awaited his responses. Once he wrote "It's here! It's here!" on the back of an envelope containing a letter that was tardier

than usual. He understood perfectly my anticipation of his letters because he shared it.

Years passed, and our friendship deepened. We spoke on the telephone occasionally and reunited during one more summer at camp, but most of our communication occurred through letters. After hundreds of small revelations, we made large ones to each other—but only to each other. Our letters were always handwritten. Private. Mediated only by the technology of pen and paper and the postal service.

I don't recount this long-ago exchange to lament the lost era of letter writing. These days, I rarely put pen to paper. Instead, like most of us, I rely on e-mails or text messages, which I simultaneously embrace for their brilliant efficiency and loathe for the conformity they impose.

But I wonder how humans' chosen forms of communication alter our emotional experience of connection. Our feelings for each other haven't changed. We continue to seek validation and happiness and contact with others. We still flush with pleasure when we spy a particular person's e-mail in our in-box. But does the way we communicate with each other alter that experience significantly?

In preparing to write to someone, we prime the emotional pump. We think about how we feel; ideally,

CHRISTINE ROSEN is senior editor of *The New Atlantis*. Her book *The Extinction of Experience*, which explores how our lives are increasingly mediated by technology, will be published next year.

we reflect for a moment. The medium of pen and paper encourages this. E-mail and texting and interactions on Facebook encourage more efficient and instantaneous affirmation or rejection of our feelings. They also introduce something new—a form of social anxiety caused by the public nature of so many of our communications. A study published earlier this year in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* found that the more time and more “friends” people had on Facebook, the more likely they were to agree with the statement that others had better, happier lives than they did, and the less likely they were to believe that life is fair. Researchers have confirmed what many of us already know: Using social networking sites is pleasurable. But the pleasure of publicizing our connections on social networking sites is inextricably linked to the anxiety we experience about the meaning of those connections and what they reveal about the value of our offline lives.

We are living in an age of electronic intimacy. Its hallmark is instantaneous global communication inseparable from an ambient awareness that we are or should be connected to others. Scientists have documented that we experience a dopamine rush when we receive a new e-mail in our in-boxes. The flip side of

that rush is the vague social anxiety we feel when we see that we have no new messages. This is new emotional terrain.

Smartphones are the Geiger counters of this electronic intimacy. They are supremely efficient at delivering information, allowing us constantly to measure the levels of connection radiating throughout our social network. Such connection is a genuine pleasure. But is more of it better?

Surely, some of the disquiet about the revolution we are experiencing stems from the fact that a world that supports the marvel of instantaneous communication is also one in which we must decide who is and is not worthy of our communications—the average Facebook user has 130 “friends,” after all. The possibilities are endless—we can talk one on one, broadcast our feelings to a small group of friends, or weigh in as an anonymous Internet commentator and be heard by millions of strangers. Yet most of us have also suffered decision fatigue when faced with this proliferation of choices. Why this particular person, why now? We have always had to answer these questions, but never this often or on this scale.

Our new communications technologies have ful-



filled their promise to help us find people with whom we might form intimate relationships. But they have done so by giving us an overwhelming amount of choice and a copious amount of false hope. A recent meta-analysis of online dating published in the journal *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* found that people “become cognitively overwhelmed” when they search through hundreds of dating profiles. To cope, they must “objectify” the people they are sizing up for some sort of emotional connection. And despite the many claims online dating sites make about their “scientific” matching systems, the study found that none of the systems devised to predetermine compatibility reliably predicted the long-term success of relationships. Algorithms that purport to match the athletic cat lover with the poetry-reading outdoorsman might lead to a first date, but they are no better than blind luck at ensuring lasting love.

Even when we already have a thriving social network, it can be a challenge to keep up with everyone in it. In social networking’s most extreme form, we end up engaging in a kind of intimacy porn as we keep tabs on hundreds of our Facebook “friends,” follow the Twitter feeds of others, and respond to a daily deluge of e-mail. All the while, we are expected to keep our own electronic presence up to date. The extent of this transformation is evident in the marketing slogans of telecommunications companies. In the late 20th century, the Bell System urged customers to “reach out and touch someone.” The company’s advertisements assumed that we would prefer to see our loved ones face to face. If we couldn’t, the ads suggested, a conversation on the telephone was the next-best thing.

Contemporary telecommunications companies emphasize something fundamentally different: individual control over a communications empire premised on speed and efficiency. Sprint calls itself “The NOW Network” and promises that you can do business, talk to friends, and travel the globe, all “without limits”; AT&T urges us to “Rethink Possible.” In one recent advertisement, two men sit together in a coffee

shop conducting a business meeting by sending e-mails back and forth to each other instead of speaking.

Perhaps the current state of affairs explains our spasms of nostalgia for the days of written correspondence. Peruse the cards and paper for sale on Web sites such as Etsy, an online marketplace of handmade goods, and you could be forgiven for thinking that Brooklyn’s economy is built almost entirely on cheeky letterpress stationery produced out of people’s basements. The literary magazine *The Rumpus* has launched a service called Letters in the Mail; for \$5, subscribers are mailed an honest-to-god letter from a writer such as Dave Eggers, Stephen Elliott, or Elissa Schappel. “Think of it as

THE MORE “FRIENDS” people have on Facebook, a study found, the likelier they are to believe others have better, happier lives than they do.

the letters you used to get from your creative friends, before this whole Internet/e-mail thing,” the Web site urges. But since this is a simulacrum of a pen pal relationship, a helpful caveat is included: Return addresses are appended “at the author’s discretion.”

As much as I rely on modern forms of communication today, I don’t think I would have become friends with that boy at summer camp if we had used them. The pace of an e-mail or text exchange would have been too quick, and our weird bond would not have had time to emerge amid such public and impatient forms of communication as Facebook or Twitter. For both of us, there would have been too much risk involved in publicly acknowledging our affinity for each other. Once our friendship cohered, the last thing I wanted to do was “share” it by displaying it to the rest of the world.

But our new world of electronic intimacy paradoxically demands that we share those intimacies early and often. It turns the private bonds of friendship and connection into a mass spectator sport, a game in which we are all simultaneously players and viewers (and one in which Facebook and other companies profit richly from our participation). I wonder about the nearly eight

million American children age 12 and younger who are currently registered on Facebook (having easily evaded restrictions created in response to federal laws prohibiting data collection on children under 13). By the time they are 15, they will have cultivated dozens of online friends. How many of those connections will become what sociologists are starting to call “migratory friendships”—relationships that form online but eventually move to the physical world and face-to-face interaction?

I hope a great many will, even though moving beyond the efficiency and convenience of online friendship to real-world connection isn’t always easy. Of course, future generations will have the benefit of new communications technologies offering solutions to our problems connecting with each other. Flirting apps such as IFlirt4U and Axe Auto Romeo promise to outsource the awkwardness of first encounters to your smartphone. (The Axe app even lets you set the flirt level to “warm,” “hot,” or “steamy.”) And a recent patent application filed by Apple hints that the company is developing a program that would function as a form of iDating, scanning the data on your smartphone to locate like-minded people in your immediate area and suggesting ways to initiate conversations with them.

But these technologies seem aimed less at encouraging intimacy than manufacturing serendipity—an oxymoronic notion that has gained surprising traction in Silicon Valley. “You never know when you might come across a little planned serendipity,” the mobile geotagging company Foursquare says on its Web site. In an interview he gave in 2010 while he was still CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt claimed that serendipity “can be calculated now. We can actually produce it electronically.”

Manufactured serendipity suggests that Google’s algorithms and your smartphone’s sophisticated data collection systems are better life guides than your own intuition. Certainly they have their uses, but our reliance on them to map our emotional lives poses dangers, too. As psychologist Julia Frankenstein of the University of Freiburg has found, the use of global positioning system devices significantly erodes our capacity to create “mental maps,” a skill that brings with it countless cognitive benefits. Might texting and e-mailing and tweeting eventually have the same deleterious effect on, for instance, our ability to experience

longing? In a world of electronic intimacy, we elevate immediacy and availability, from which we glean a great deal of pleasure. But it is a pleasure tinged with pleonexia—we always want more.

Then again, longing is so last century. It doesn’t seem to suit an age of enhanced reality, when our devices cater to our need for immediate gratification and we describe ourselves—rather than our appliances—as “plugged in.” Nor does it suit a culture in the grips of what sociologists call “time famine.” No wonder we turn to time management gurus for advice on how to extract the most out of every minute of the day, and rely on social networking sites to keep our far-flung friends and family informed about our lives. Longing suggests languid hours for contemplation—a luxury for most people today. But perhaps we should see it instead as a necessity, an antidote to the excesses of a hectic, wired world. During the economic downturn, retailers revived their layaway policies; couldn’t we practice a kind of emotional layaway program? Like instant credit, instant friendship in the Facebook mold yields immediate rewards. But it also has hidden costs—costs that tend to accrue long after the pleasures of that first connection have faded.

We will adapt, as we always have done. But perhaps we should permit ourselves a small lament, after all, for what we are leaving behind. As Charles Swann observes in Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, “Even when one is no longer attached to things, it’s still something to have been attached to them.”

During college, my correspondence with my friend was sporadic. We visited each other a few times, and even made a hilariously doomed attempt at a romantic relationship from which we emerged even more grateful for each other’s friendship. We never made the transition to e-mail. Eventually we lost touch altogether.

That’s life—or at least that is what the life of a friendship used to be. A closed door usually stayed closed forever. No longer. Last year my sister tracked down my summer camp friend on Facebook. From what I could gather from his profile, he is a married schoolteacher who enjoys bass fishing in his spare time. This is the moment when I should recount how we reconnected on Facebook and reminisced about the old days. But we didn’t. I never contacted him. His Facebook profile assures me that he has lots of friends. He looks happy, as far as I can tell. I barely recognized him. ■

The Call of the Future

Today we worry about the social effects of the Internet. A century ago, it was the telephone that threatened to reinvent society.

BY TOM VANDERBILT

IN 2009, THE UNITED STATES CROSSED A DIGITAL Rubicon: For the first time, the amount of data sent with mobile devices exceeded the sum of transmitted voice data. The shift was heralded in tech circles with prophetic fury: “The phone call is dead,” pronounced a blogger at the Web site TechCrunch. Writing in *Wired*, journalist Clive Thompson observed, “This generation doesn’t make phone calls, because everyone is in constant, lightweight contact in so many other ways: texting, chatting, and social network messaging.” And the online news network True/Slant declared a paradox: “We’re well on our way to becoming an incredibly disconnected connected society.”

Where the world’s wires once hummed with the electrical impulses of people talking, that conversation, in the digital age, has been subsumed by all the other information we are exchanging. “At this point, voice isn’t even a rounding error in network operators’ calculations,” Stephan Beckert, an analyst with TeleGeography, a telecom research company, recently told me. To underscore the point, he sent me a chart showing “switched voice” as a thin wedge, gradually squeezed to a nearly invisible nothing by the oceanic thrust of “Internet” (and a smaller stratolayer of “private networks”). It looks as if the world has gone quiet.

There is one significant caveat here: Placing a voice

call, compared to streaming *The Hangover 2* on Netflix or uploading a video clip of your friend’s latest freestyle BMX trick to YouTube, consumes virtually *no* bandwidth.

And so the phone call is hardly dead. While it is true that land lines are in sharp decline in every advanced industrial country—the most recent and, presumably, final time land lines saw an increase in use was, ironically, during the adoption of dial-up Internet in the 1990s—in many of those countries the decline has been more than offset by an increase in minute-per-month levels on mobile phones. Even on Skype, the explosively expanding Internet phone and video chat service, some 85 percent of calls still go to the “PSTN” (the public switched telephone network, composed of the infrastructure for land lines and cell phones).

Still, there are signs of an ongoing cultural shift. Even as the number of wireless connections increased from 286 million in 2009 to 303 million in 2010, voice usage on those phones decreased. And our calls are getting shorter. While in 2003 the average local mobile phone call lasted a leisurely three minutes, by 2010 it had been trimmed to a terse one minute and 47 seconds.

What’s going on? Disentangling our communication preferences and habits can be hard, bound tightly as they are, like fiber-optic cable, with myriad strands. Simple economics may be one significant factor; in many European countries, texting is cheaper than making a call. Personal inclination, rooted in psychology, may be

TOM VANDERBILT is the author of the 2008 book *Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (and What It Says About Us)*. He is currently at work on *You May Also Like*, a book about the mysteries of human preferences.



another; researcher Ruth Rettie, of Kingston University, in London, has found that British mobile phone users often fall into “talker” and “texter” camps, the latter (the “phone averse”) leaving, rather uneconomically, huge numbers of unused voice minutes on their phone plans each month. (Their average mobile call is under 30 seconds.)

Or it may be merely a matter of logistics and convenience. In an increasingly data-rich, time-starved environment, the phone call can seem less a welcome invitation to connect than a disruptive, troublingly analog experience. As Judith Martin, who doles out etiquette advice as “Miss Manners,” told *The New York Times* last year in an article on the disappearing telephone call, “I’ve been hammering away at this for decades. The telephone has a very rude propensity to interrupt people.”

Before probing into the future of voice telephony, and the idea that we find it ever easier to do without it, we need to ask a simpler question, one that turns out to be curiously relevant to current discussions of the impact and role of a communication technology such as the Internet in our lives: What *was* the telephone call?

When it is introduced, a new technology typically sets in motion a now familiar script. At first, the technology is deemed to have little import or to fulfill only

very specific, limited uses. Consider, for example, this casual dismissal by *The New York Times* in 1939: “The problem with television is that people must sit and keep their eyes glued on a screen; the average American family hasn’t time for it.”

Next, as the technology’s true uses come into view, but before it is widely adopted, come the grandiose pronouncements, both pro and con, on how it will reshape society. In *The Last Lone Inventor* (2002), Evan Schwartz noted that television inventor Philo T. Farnsworth thought television would engender world peace: “If we were able to see people in other countries and learn about our differences, why would there be any misunderstandings? War would be a thing of the past.”

And then, as prices come down and the technology continues to improve, people simply buy the thing (which, it turns out, has fulfilled neither the utopian nor apocalyptic scenarios ascribed to it), and like a persistent rainfall refilling a dry desert lakebed, over time it so thoroughly permeates everyday life that we no longer pause to think about its presence, or indeed what might have once lain beneath the shimmering surface.

The telephone fits comfortably into this schema. It arrived on the historical stage in 1876 without invitation or clear mass desire. Yet there it was, a device harboring a radical change: For the first time, people could converse in real time at a distance.

But what to do with it? As sociologist Claude Fischer observed in *America Calling* (1992), businessmen, who relied on letters and the telegraph to transmit important and often complex information, were initially skeptical of the telephone. “For them,” Fischer wrote, “voice transmission, scratchy and often indistinct, could be an adjunct at best.” (Inventor Elisha Gray gave up pursuing the telephone, which he called the “talking telegraph,” to focus on improving telegraphy.) Economics also played a role. William Preece, chief engineer of the British postal service, said America—not Britain—had use for the telephone. “Here we have a superabundance of messengers, errand boys, and things of that kind.”

Then, as Fischer described, the uses took hold, cycling through new audiences and wider purposes, thanks in large part to a vigorous marketing push by the Bell System. (The company boasted in a 1909 ad that it had “from the start *created the need of the telephone and then supplied it.*”) First the phone was used for commercial business, then for household business, then, gradually, for social purposes: visiting with relatives, “fond intimate talks,” getting “in touch.” “Friendship’s path,” a 1937 AT&T ad declared, “often follows the trail of the telephone wire.”

While this progression seems obvious in retrospect, the brief period when the function of the phone was in play should not be overlooked. There was, for example, the “Telephone Herald” (which was launched in Budapest but eventually came to the United States in various forms), described in a 1903 article in *Chambers’s Journal* as a “telephone-receiver” installed in the home that would alert the subscriber to the “sending of news” by an alarm (“a sort of trumpet”). An editor would read bulletins to the service’s subscribers. “The apparatus is so arranged,” explained the *Journal*, “that the subscriber can lie down or follow some other occupation while he hears the news. Should the information not prove delectable to the auditor, he simply places the trumpet upon the hooks fitted to the receiver.”

The telephone as a broadcast medium, a kind of protoradio, is a historical curiosity, but the article included one other observation that still resonates. While the larger press may have seen in the Telephone Herald a threat to printed newspapers, the *Journal* saw quite the opposite: “People cannot afford to spend the whole of the day with their ear at a telephone-receiver or perusing a newspaper from morning till

night. What is the result? The telephone delivers in a terse, incisive manner any special item of news; and, if the subscriber’s curiosity be aroused therein, he promptly seeks the next day’s newspapers for a full report.” Today, we sift through any number of information streams—flagging that tweet so we can later read the full article it links to on the Instapaper app installed on our iPad—and debate questions such as whether the Internet will kill television.

As the phone began to find users and uses, on came the claims for what it was doing to American society. For some, telephones were an “antidote to provincialism,” while others argued that the devices augured the “destruction of community because they encourage far-flung operations and far-flung relationships.” The phone tore down the walls of privacy even as it helped create a “general withdrawal into self-pursuit and privatism.” It brought people together in cities as it scattered them in far suburbs. (The idea that the phone allows us to live at great distance from one another persists today, even though, as MIT architect and engineer Carlo Ratti and a team of other researchers have found, the more people telecommunicate, the more they collocate.)

The sociologist Sidney Aronson, noting in the early 1970s the phone’s capacity to improve the coordination of business activities, observed that the “years from 1875 to 1914, during which telephone use spread rapidly, witnessed the growth of giant corporations and the formation of trusts, despite the passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1890.” In the early 1900s, an AT&T engineer argued that without the telephone, the skyscraper would have been impossible: “Suppose there was no telephone and every message had to be carried by a personal messenger. How much room do you think the necessary elevators would leave for offices?”

In fact, the skyscraper owes its existence not to Alexander Graham Bell but to Elisha Otis, inventor of the safety elevator. That the claim on behalf of the telephone “has been repeated for over 80 years without serious examination,” Fischer argued, hints at how little we know about this instrument’s actual effects. As telephones became ubiquitous in America—their number grew from 1.3 million in 1900 to 43 million at the end of the 1950s—they nearly disappeared from the realm of scholarly inquiry. Perhaps, as political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool noted in the introduction

to a 1977 book, *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, “the telephone’s inherently dual effects are one reason for the paucity of literature on its social impact. Its impacts are puzzling, evasive, and hard to pin down.”

But so too are the impacts of, say, the computer. Witness the intense debate occasioned by the publication a couple of years ago of *The Shallows*, in which technology journalist Nicholas Carr examined whether the Internet was changing the way we think. Yet while there are entire academic journals (e.g., *Computers in Human Behavior*) that parse the social impact of computers, not a single scholarly publication is devoted to the telephone. Even the mobile phone, arguably, is more scrutinized for its computer-like texting functions than its influence on our vocal communication.

Indeed, it is striking how many phenomena attributed to the Internet age have their historical echo in the telephone. Identity theft and Internet predators? The early years of the telephone brought concerns over the unwanted entry—via telephone line—of unsavory characters into the home, and some people called for laws to regulate criminal use of the phone. Or consider the contemporary argument that automated high-frequency Internet trading increases the volatility of financial markets. As Aronson noted, “The widespread use of the telephone probably added to the short-run instability of such markets.” Before unwanted spam e-mails there were unwanted sales calls. The phrase “information superhighway” was preceded by a century in an AT&T ad announcing “a highway of communication.” Computer hacking grew out of the culture of “phone phreaks”—those early-1970s technological obsessives (Steve Jobs among them) who figured out how to manipulate the phone system to place free phone calls. The list of parallels goes on.

Perhaps the telephone, despite its seemingly transformative nature—the annihilation of time and space—didn’t change us much after all. Fischer, in *America Calling*, refuting the technological determinists who see the telephone altering the way we think and behave, quoted historian George Daniels: “Habits seem to grow out of other habits far more directly than they do out of gadgets.” Social historian Daniel Boorstin similarly observed that “the telephone was only a convenience, permitting Americans to do more casually and with less effort what they had already

been doing before.” A good place to examine how much the telephone changed society is the phone call itself.

“This is going to make you self-conscious,” Emanuel Schegloff tells me from the other end of the line in California, “but there will be a point in this conversation when one of us will say ‘so’—or something like that—which will be a signal that I want to close this off. But you don’t have to play along. Maybe you’ll say, ‘There’s something else I want to ask you.’ You have to work up to goodbye.”

There is something deeply metaphysical about conducting a telephone conversation with a linguist who has studied, perhaps more than anyone, how we talk on the telephone. Yet even Schegloff, an emeritus professor at UCLA, is hesitant to assert that there are any vast differences between how we talk on the phone and how we talk face to face. “It is an adaptation to the absence of visual access to one another, but it’s pretty much the same sorts of action in the same sorts of order.”

What made telephone conversation so interesting to one of the main progenitors of “conversational analysis”—a discipline that looks for the deep structures in our everyday talk—was not that it represented some bold break from traditional human communication, but that it is, in essence, *pure* talk, not contaminated by the suggestive glance, the gesture of a hand, a person’s body torque. Sifting through hundreds of hours of actual recorded calls from an array of sources, Schegloff rigorously dissected the dynamics in play when two people who cannot see each other talk: the turn taking, the “forced position repair” (that moment in a conversation when one realizes there has been a misunderstanding—“I thought you meant . . .”—and the participants must go backward in time to “fix” the conversational thread).

Consider, for example, the “conversational beginning.” A “multiplicity of jobs” are done in those first moments, Schegloff says. There’s simple identification—though not often so simple. The answerer speaks first. “Hello?” “It’s me,” says the other. And there it is: The presumption of intimacy, the expectation (or desire) that one will be recognized. Haven’t we all, when playfully (or aggressively) opening a call with the words “It’s me,” felt the sting of being asked, “Who’s me?” That’s hardly the end of the work. There’s the “reconstitution of the relationship” (“It’s been ages since we talked”), as well as

the articulation of the specific reason for the call, which Schegloff says often will be preceded by an utterance such as “um” once the initial pleasantries have been dispensed with. The caller, he says, often will try to ease into this purpose without drawing undue attention to it.

While there are certainly differences between phone conversations and face-to-face communication—on the phone, silences tend to be shorter, and “overlaps” can be more frequent because we can’t see that the other person is preparing to speak—what is most striking is how much of the spirit and function of social interaction survives on the phone, even stripped of humans’ powerful nonverbal cues.

In an early teleconferencing exercise in 1963—set up with the idea of providing a video hot line between the White House and the Kremlin—the Institute for Defense Analyses found that individuals preferred talking on the phone to video interaction. Further studies revealed little difference between the telephone and face-to-face contact in accomplishing a variety of tasks, ranging from comprehension to problem solving. Linguist John Baugh and other researchers have shown that subjects on a phone call generally can determine the other speaker’s race. In short, while we might regard the phone as an impoverished form of communication, it more or less gets the job done.

But the call itself has not been immune to the evolution of technology. The introduction of caller ID dispensed with the recognition problem (though I am still sometimes startled to hear the phone answered with “Hey, Tom”), while mobile phones introduced an entirely new function for openings: establishing location (hence the grating procession of “We just landed” or “I’m in line at the bank”). The advent of e-mail and text messages—one-way, contained, their purpose generally spelled out in advance, presumably less intrusive (save for the ping of the BlackBerry)—made the phone call seem more formal, with yet another function thrown into the opening. As Clive Thompson noted in his *Wired* article: “If I suddenly decide I want to dial you up, I have no way of knowing whether you’re busy, and you have no idea why I’m calling. We have to open Schrödinger’s box every time, having a conversation to figure out whether it’s OK to have a conversation.”

Indeed, there is a sense that young people today, with so many other ways to stay in touch, find the very

structure of the phone call oppressive. “You’ve got to get the whole chit-chat in there,” one texter told Ruth Rettie in the course of her research on mobile phone users. Noting texters’ disaffection with calls, Rettie wrote, “There was a need for small talk, silences were unacceptable, and finishing a call could be difficult. . . . Silences and hesitations are interpreted as meaningful, so that there is little time for the interactants to deliberate.” The structure of the call loomed so large that while there is “no technical reason why phone calls could not be used for minimal messages such as ‘goodnight,’ ” this was deemed roundly unacceptable. It’s as if texters were dodging the telephonic version of what television comedian and writer Larry David calls “the stop and chat,” that encounter on the street where you’d prefer to just say “hello” and keep walking.

Now that telephones are virtually everywhere, observed *The New York Times*, “telephone manners are, quite naturally, becoming equally complicated.” The year was 1986 (when a few people had car phones but the mobile phone was not yet widely distributed). Strikingly, it could have been last week—or it could have been around 1900, when, the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin noted, the phone arrived in his Berlin household, with an “alarm signal that menaced not only my parents’ midday nap but the historical era that underwrote and enveloped this siesta.”

In 1986, the latest shift was “call waiting,” which Judith Martin compared to “standing at a cocktail party and not paying attention to the person you’re with, waiting for a more important person.” Now, of course, as we stand at that same cocktail party, fidgeting with our smartphones—which, despite rarely looking like something designed for speaking into, we not only talk on, but to (summoning the iPhone’s electronic concierge, Siri, for directions or the weather)—the interruptions that once occurred on the telephone line now occur in real time and space.

We have been fretting about the phone for years, even as it has moved closer and closer to us—once relegated to the back hallway, “between the dirty linen hamper and the gasometer,” as in Benjamin’s day, now in our back pocket. But it is difficult to say, as it seems to be morphing once more as a cultural form, whether the telephone has profoundly changed us in any way. ■

IN ESSENCE

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Blowin' in the Wind

THE SOURCE: "The Future of History" by Francis Fukuyama, in *Foreign Affairs*, Jan.–Feb. 2012.

IN *THE END OF HISTORY* (1992), Francis Fukuyama famously argued that the collapse of Soviet communism marked the end of human ideological evolution. Liberal democracy had triumphed and would face no further significant challengers. He still thinks that's true, but now he detects a different kind of challenge to liberal democracy: its own failure to respond to a changing world.

Technology and globalization are undermining the middle class, which is the foundation of liberal democracy, Fukuyama warns. While Americans enjoy the use of cell phones and other technological innovations, the financial rewards of economic change have accrued "disproportionately to the most talented and well-educated members of society." Globalization



The only dynamic response to globalized capitalism in the United States has come from the Tea Party, says Francis Fukuyama. The Left still needs a "plausible progressive counternarrative."

is increasing economic inequality.

The only dynamic political response has come from the Tea Party, whose members, despite their antielitist rhetoric, "vote for conservative politicians who serve the interests of precisely those financiers and corporate elites they claim to despise." Fukuyama, a fellow at Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law (and a one-

time leading neoconservative thinker who broke ranks with the movement several years ago), contends that what America needs more than anything is "serious intellectual debate" over how to respond to the new globalized capitalism. Yet despite the momentary success of Occupy Wall Street, the Left has failed to create "a plausible progressive counternarrative."

In the universities, leftist

Technology and globalization are undermining the middle class—and thus liberal democracy itself.

thinkers have embraced postmodernism, feminism, and other culturally oriented intellectual trends that simply can't mobilize popular majorities. A bigger problem is the Left's "lack of credibility" in the political realm. It mainly defends a social-democratic agenda of "social services, such as pensions, health care, and education," that are no longer affordable at current levels, and is unable to offer much that is new.

The Left needs to articulate an "ideology of the future" that can compete with the Right's libertarian populism, Fukuyama contends. That ideology should "reassert the supremacy of democratic politics over economics and legitimate anew government as an expression of the public interest." But simply defending the welfare state won't do. "The ideology would need to somehow redesign the public sector, freeing it from its dependence on existing stakeholders and using new, technology-empowered approaches to delivering services."

Nothing will be possible, however, unless the Left develops a strong critique of neoclassical economics, which provides the theoretical underpinning for today's reigning ideology. Among other things, the new ideolo-

gy must show that "people's incomes do not necessarily represent their true contributions to society" and that the existing distribution of incomes is not necessarily the fairest.

Many of the elements of a new way of thinking about society are out there. Until they are assembled, Fukuyama concludes, the middle class will continue to believe that "their interests will be best served by ever-freer markets and smaller states."

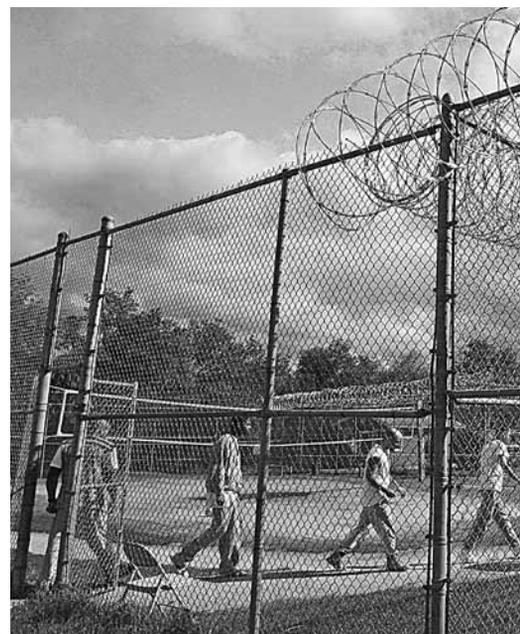
POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Packing Prisoners

THE SOURCE: "The Strategic Use of Prisons in Partisan Gerrymandering" by Jason P. Kelly, in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Feb. 2012.

OTHER THAN ELECTIONS, NO battles are more bitterly fought in American politics than the redistricting fights that occur after each decennial U.S. Census. Many officials are willing to resort to any trick in the book to gain an advantage for their party. Jason P. Kelly, a postdoctoral research associate at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, has uncovered a new gimmick: prisoner swaps.

In most states, prisoners are barred from voting. But the Census still counts them (almost always at their prison location, not their last home address), and they are included in the head counts of electoral districts. A shrewd gerrymanderer would put prisons



in electorally safe districts, freeing up some of his party's supporters in those districts to be drawn into competitive areas where their votes could help tip the balance.

That's exactly what officials do, Kelly found. He studied the movement of prison populations among state senate districts in 46 states following the 2000 Census. (The impact of prison populations on House of Representatives districts is minimal because the districts are too large to be affected by a few hundred votes, Kelly says.) In states where the redistricting authority shifted to Republicans after 2000, the aver-

Prisoners have become the latest pawn of state gerrymanderers looking to win districts for their party.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

From Think Tank to Do Tank

THE SOURCE: “Devaluing the Think Tank” by Tevi Troy, in *National Affairs*, Winter 2012.

THINK TANKS ONCE HAD SUCH studious, genteel atmospheres that they were known as “universities without students.” That era is long over, writes Tevi Troy, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, itself one of the older think tanks around. Many of these institutions now serve an array of functions, and an ability to wage partisan warfare is chief among them.

The nation’s oldest and most august think tanks, such as the Brookings Institution, established in 1916 in Washington, D.C., were founded out of a Progressive-era faith in the ability of experts to formulate superior public policies. As the federal government grew in the aftermath of the New Deal, think tanks proliferated, becoming critical sources of guidance for officials contending with an increasingly complex policy-making process.

Though some institutions had partisan tints, all were united in their remove from the messy business of politicking. Frustration with “this studied aloofness” led a band of right-leaning politicians to form the Heritage Foundation in 1973. Interested in determining the Republican agenda as much as informing it, Heritage saw more than 60 percent of its 2,000 policy recommendations adopted by the Reagan ad-

ministration. The 1980s were boom times for conservative policy more broadly, as right-leaning academics gravitated toward the friendly atmosphere inside the Capital Beltway.

“Lose an election, gain a think tank” has since become an adage as each departing administration creates a new crop of think tank derivatives, pushing up the number of think tanks and increasing their attention to “the formulation and advancement of political arguments.” There are now about 1,800 such institutions nationwide, in comparison to around 45 during World War II. Often they focus on single topics, such as Middle East policy or urban affairs. Some still produce rigorous research consumed at the top levels of government. But others also pump out rapid partisan responses to political events, provide safe harbor for former government officials when the political climate is unfavorable, and train like-minded activists in the arts of partisan warfare. The new priorities of the think tanks are reflected in their staffing: Among representative think tanks founded before 1960, 53 percent of scholars hold PhDs; among those founded after 1980, only 13 percent do, one study found.

Troy doesn’t fault think tanks for their activist ways. Messaging has become integral to success in Washington. The real danger is that think tanks could shed their policy orientation completely, becoming nothing more than “part of the intellectual echo chamber of our politics.”



Inmates at Marble Valley Correctional Facility in Vermont, one of the few states in which virtually all prisoners have the right to vote.

age number of prisoners in safe Republican districts swelled by about 300. Where Democrats took power, they added about 400 prisoners per safe Democratic district. A party that gains control of the redistricting process in a state shifts a total of about 5,000 prisoners, on average. In some states, such as Texas and Florida, the prison strategy is pursued particularly aggressively.

Maryland now requires prisoners to be counted at their last home address rather than their prison location, and New York and Delaware have similar legislation in the works. But Kelly believes that prisoners may not be the only “phantom constituents” manipulated by gerrymandering officials: Children and noncitizens also get counted but lack the right to vote.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

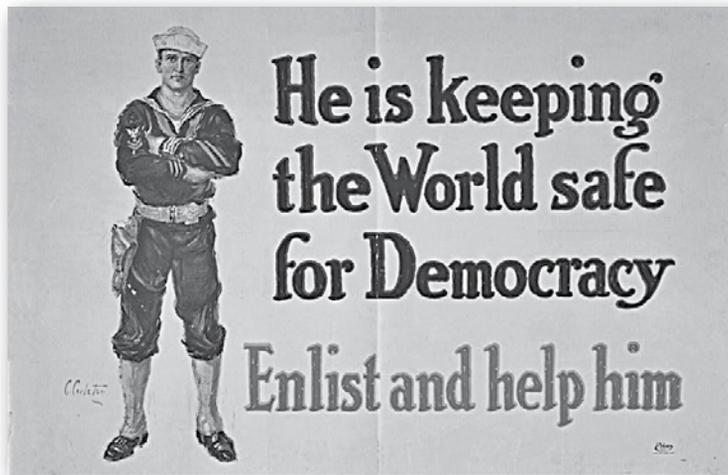
Unanchoring the Navy

THE SOURCE: “Sea Change” by Ronald Spector, in *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Winter 2012.

IN ITS UNIFORMS, RANKS, AND lexicon, the U.S. Navy retains the trappings of an earlier era. One could be forgiven for thinking of it as a “traditional, even reactionary” organization, writes Ronald Spector, a historian at George Washington University. That would be mistaken. Over the last century, the Navy engaged in a “seemingly endless process of re-invention” in response to changes in technology and warfare. Dreadnoughts, airplanes, and nuclear submarines all brought disruptive change. But thanks to titanic efforts of will—and encouragement from unique figures—the Navy switched course successfully.

The early-20th-century steel-hulled dreadnought, propelled by a steam turbine and better armed than its wind-powered predecessors, presented the first modern challenge. Dreadnoughts required a larger and better-trained maritime force. President Woodrow Wilson’s secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, wanted the new American sailor to be “a sort of well-traveled, high-tech Boy Scout,” Spector writes. In 1916, Daniels—a Progressive newspaperman with no military background—ordered that

all sailors receive two hours of daily instruction. He also improved shipboard life with perks such as laundry service and ice cream. Some officers balked, but Daniels was vindicated. The number and quality of men in the Navy rose. Their image as “rakish adventurers” went the way of the sail.



In World War I, the Navy worked hard to upgrade the skills and education of its recruits.

Aviation, which began to have a place in the naval mission after World War I, introduced new problems. The Navy vastly expanded its airpower, but soon faced a shortage of pilots. It responded by enabling civilians to become commissioned Navy Reserve pilots after just a year of training. The program played a crucial role in World War II; most of the Navy pilots who fought the Axis were not lifers. “For the first time in 20th-century naval history,” Spector says, “a

major, potentially decisive mode of warfare had been largely entrusted to a body of noncareer, short-service officers.”

After the war, nuclear technology stirred the pot again. In 1954, the Navy launched the *Nautilus*, its first nuclear submarine. Like dreadnoughts, these pioneering subs required a new sort of sailor. Admiral Hyman Rickover oversaw the creation of the nuclear service, which became an influential “navy within the navy.” Rickover’s intensity and eye for detail were legendary.

He personally interrogated every prospective “nucs” officer. Those who passed muster faced intensive schooling and a tour of training at a nuclear reactor in Idaho. Old-timers grumbled, but the “nucs” thrived. By the 1970s, they accounted for a major part of the admiralty.

Spector says naval reinvention will continue. In 2010, the Navy launched its Fleet Cyber Command—designed to wage war over the Web as well as the waves.

“This is only the latest in a series of radical transformations,” Specter writes, “that have reshaped the American sailor’s trade over the last hundred years.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Still Standing

THE SOURCE: “Not Fade Away” by Robert Kagan, in *The New Republic*, Feb. 2, 2012.

A GLANCE AT THE CURRENT AFFAIRS titles at any bookstore would suggest that the United States is on the verge of an irreversible decline. Not only are commentators exaggerating our current struggles, but they’re also romanticizing our recent past, argues Robert Kagan, a senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution and the author of the new book *The World America Made*.

Pessimists liken the United States today to the British Empire around the time its influence began to wane, in the late 19th century. That decline was reflected in the “clear-cut, measurable, and steady” deterioration over half a century of “two of the most important measures of power”: the size of the empire’s economy and the power of its military.

America’s performance in these areas is still strong, Kagan contends. The U.S. share of global economic output has held steady at 25 percent since the 1970s, even with the burgeoning prosperity of emerging economies such as Brazil and India. The growth of these countries has taken a bite out of Europe and Japan’s share

of global wealth, not the United States’. Furthermore, these rising powers are not nemeses reminiscent of the Cold War, but strategic partners eager to cooperate with America. The U.S. military, after all, remains far and away the most powerful in the world.

China presents a real challenge, Kagan admits. But even if it does eclipse the United States as the world’s largest economy, Chinese world dominance will not automatically follow. China boasted the world’s biggest economy in the 19th century, yet it was still a “prostrate victim” of smaller European powers. GDP per capita and military capability are also important indicators of a country’s strength, Kagan argues, and China has a very long way to go to compete with the United States in these categories.

Commentators also blunder

when they assess America’s power by measuring it against past glories, Kagan notes. “For every great achievement in the early Cold War, there was at least one equally monumental setback.” The losses were significant: The Soviet Union developed an atomic bomb; the United States launched a costly intervention on the Korean Peninsula. Allies ignored the wishes of Washington on issues ranging from diplomatic recognition of Communist China to the invasion of Egypt over control of the Suez Canal. Nor was the embrace of American soft power uncritical: Young people around the world gravitated toward jeans and rock music, but they and their elders were put off by American domestic politics, consumerism, and foreign policy.

The Great Recession has unduly darkened the outlooks of

EXCERPT

Simmering Soldiers

I felt I was watching some of the men unravel toward serious crimes, if, in fact, they had not already committed them elsewhere in Afghanistan or Iraq. Evil or atrocity often explodes from a furnace built by the steady accretion of small, unchallenged wrongs. Some men in Destroyer platoon had been drifting that way for a long time.

Of course, we require our fighters to be ready hurricanes, on-call combat machines. We want them held easily in check, and we expect light-switch control over their aggression. . . . We vaguely hope their anger does not spill over, or come home. It is not simple. My own reaction to the men of Destroyer is difficult. I liked them. I still want to believe they were merely full of bravado.

—NEIL SHEA, a journalist who has covered the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 2012)

some pundits, Kagan adds. In 2004, commentator Fareed Zakaria proclaimed that the United States was experiencing a moment of “comprehensive unipolarity”; just four years later, he was churning out pieces about the “post-American world.”

The United States has experienced difficult times before (see the 1970s), only to see its fortunes revive in a few years. Yes, the

challenges facing the country are daunting. But decline “is a choice,” Kagan asserts, echoing columnist Charles Krauthammer. If the United States wants to maintain its stature, it can start by ensuring the health of its top-notch military and thus the present world order, which, “with its widespread freedoms, its general prosperity, and its absence of great-power conflict, is as fragile as it is unique.”

Sloan School of Management, studied four highly successful retail businesses: Costco, the retail giant; the specialty grocery chain Trader Joe’s; the convenience store line QuikTrip; and Mercadona, the Spanish supermarket chain.

Common to all is what Ton calls a “virtuous cycle” of success, which begins when a store opens with adequate numbers of decently paid staff. Starting wages at Trader Joe’s amount to \$40,000 a year, and Costco pays about 40 percent more than its leading rival, Sam’s Club. Mercadona hires all staff on a permanent basis. Coupled with generous pay are training and promotion opportunities that give employees a way to see a future for themselves. Not surprisingly, these chains’ stores boast some of the lowest turnover rates in the industry. “Investment in employees allows for excellent operational execution, which boosts sales and profits, which allows for a larger labor budget, which results in even more investment in store employees,” Ton explains.

But it’s not so simple as “happy employees equals happy customers.” These retailers have worked hard to reduce costs in areas other than labor, such as inventory. Trader Joe’s only stocks 4,000 items, far fewer than the average supermarket’s 30,000. As does Costco, it buys many items directly from manufacturers, sidestepping fees to middlemen. A smaller inventory reduces overhead and the number of supply-and-demand mismatches. Plus, because

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Ringling Up Better Pay

THE SOURCE: “Why ‘Good Jobs’ Are Good for Retailers” by Zeynep Ton, in *Harvard Business Review*, Jan.–Feb. 2012.

CASHIERS HAVE TO BE SKILLED at counting nickels and dimes for more than one reason: They brought home less than \$20,000 in pay on average in 2010—if they were lucky enough to work 40 hours a week. Cutting hours and

workers is one of the first steps many retailers take when sales slow.

Some retailers have bucked this trend, however, while still managing to offer low prices, good customer service, and impressive financial returns. What’s their secret?

Zeynep Ton, an operations management specialist at MIT’s



Retail stores like QuikTrip don’t just make customers happy; employees are smiling, too.

employees get to know their wares better, they are better able to tout them to customers.

The companies also take efficiency seriously. Trader Joe's sells many of its perishable items pre-packaged so cashiers don't need to count them individually. Quik-Trip and Mercadona have robust training programs that prepare employees to perform a variety of tasks, from operating cash registers to ordering inventory, so they can work where they are needed. In addition, fewer workers have to rearrange their schedules at the last minute to work "on call" shifts, improving morale.

It's a winning formula, Ton says, and it's not just applicable to retail. Hospitals, restaurants, and banks could all benefit from a similar approach. "Bad jobs are not a cost-driven necessity but a choice," she writes.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

No Help for Displaced Workers

THE SOURCE: "Does Trade Adjustment Assistance Make a Difference?" by Kara M. Reynolds and John S. Palatucci, in *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Jan. 2012.

AS GLOBALIZATION PULLS JOBS from American factories, the federal government has created programs to help displaced workers find positions with pay comparable to the ones lost. These initiatives make for reassuring political speeches, but do they actually achieve their objective?

In the case of the four-decade-



In Detroit, a huge complex once occupied by the Packard Motor Company was slated for demolition earlier this year. Efforts to help displaced workers have been costly and often ineffective.

old U.S. Trade Adjustment Assistance Program (TAA), which helps workers whose jobs were axed because of increased imports, the answer is no, write associate professor Kara M. Reynolds and student John S. Palatucci, both of American University's Department of Economics.

Reynolds and Palatucci compared the employment and salary trajectories of TAA beneficiaries with those of workers laid off in similar circumstances who weren't eligible for the program. In 2007, approximately 150,000 Americans received a total of \$850 million of TAA aid in the form of income support, health insurance, job search assistance, relocation compensation, and retraining. The 2009 stimulus expanded the program's roster and benefits.

After controlling for geog-

Federal programs for workers displaced by increased imports don't improve their employment prospects much.

raphy and other factors, the authors found that TAA beneficiaries fared no better at getting new jobs than those who didn't participate in the program. Furthermore, the TAA beneficiaries who did find jobs earned roughly 30 percent less than they did in their previous positions, while the other workers typically earned 18 percent less. (This disparity owes much to the fact that the TAA program targets workers who are most in need of help.)

There is a silver lining: Workers who participated in the voluntary training component of the program increased their likelihood of finding a job by 10 to 12 percentage points over those who did not. Their wages were also higher than those of beneficiaries who didn't undergo training. Even these brighter numbers, however, did not make the TAA cohort more successful than the other group.

The authors suggest that mandatory training could make the TAA program more effective. But even with such a change, the need would persist for a better way to soften the ups and downs of free markets.

EXCERPT

Is Our Money Lying?

Friedrich Hayek, the godfather of neoliberalism, had little interest in the efficiency of markets, but was fervently convinced of their honesty. Because prices reflect all available information about a good, they are the most accurate symbol of its true worth. The current crisis is not simply a "market failure," in which prices are not functioning properly, but a profound loss of faith in money's capacity to tell the truth.

—WILLIAM DAVIES, academic director of Oxford University's Center for Mutual and Employee-Owned Business, in *The New Statesman* (Nov. 16, 2011)

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Don't Blame Bonuses

THE SOURCE: "Bankers' Bonuses and the Financial Crisis" by Ian Tonks, in *Vox EU*, Jan. 8, 2012.

EVERYONE HAS A THEORY ABOUT what caused the 2008 financial crisis. One idea that's made the rounds is that the money flashed at bank executives in the form of salaries and bonuses encouraged them to take big risks that maximized short-term profits at the expense of long-term viability. The U.S. Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission asserted as much when it connected the crucial 2008 failure of the investment bank Lehman Brothers in part to an executive compensation scheme "that was based predominantly on short-term profits." In the United Kingdom, the chairman of the Financial Services Authority linked "inappropriate incentive structures" with

risk-taking and the financial turmoil of 2007–09.

The finger-pointing may be unwarranted, says University of Bath finance professor Ian Tonks. The financial sector differs from other corporate sectors "not so much in its reward for taking risks, but in its reward for expansion," he writes, summarizing research he did with several colleagues.

The group compared the sal-

aries and bonuses of executives across all British industries from 1994 to 2006, just before the financial crisis hit. Not surprisingly, the financial sector boasted some of the highest pay rates for executives and board members. Yet the relationship between firms' performance and executive pay was not much different from that in other industries. A 10 percent increase in company stock price was associated with a measly 0.68 percent increase in executive compensation. "In other words, executives were paid irrespective of performance," Tonks writes.

The researchers found a stronger correlation between executive pay and firm size in the financial sector: When a firm's assets increased by 10 percent, executive pay rose by two percent. If regulators want to protect against another financial crisis, it seems they'd be better off trying to decouple executive pay from the expansion of financial empires.

SOCIETY

School's Out Forever

THE SOURCE: "Unschooling" by Astra Taylor, in *n+1*, Winter 2012.

IMAGINE BEING A KID AND HAVING no school bus to wait for, no quizzes to fret over, no curriculum to slog through. Imagine that the only thing guiding your education is your own curiosity, with

the occasional assist from Mom and Dad. That was the experience of Astra Taylor, a writer and documentary filmmaker who was raised in the radical pedagogical tradition known as unschooling.

The unschooling movement got its start amid the idealism of the 1960s and '70s. Iconoclasts

such as Paul Goodman and John Holt argued that children should be trusted to create their own educational goals. At the heart of the unschooling ethos, Holt wrote, was the idea that “the human animal is a learning animal.”

For Taylor and her three siblings, unschooling worked pretty well. They created their “own standards of excellence,” she recalls, “which were often impossible to meet. Yet failure in intellectual and creative pursuits felt honorable as opposed to humiliating.” The children were free to engage with subjects that captivated them; Taylor’s younger sister “fell in love with painting when she was 12 years old and devoted year after year to mastering her craft, an investment of time denied most artists until they enter graduate school.” Now she’s a well-known artist. A newsletter on environmentalism and animal rights that Taylor published for three years “prepared me for my adult work better than almost anything else I’ve done.” (She concedes that she and her siblings also watched countless episodes of *The Simpsons*, and “when we weren’t inspired—which was often—we simply did nothing at all.”)

Are there any gaping holes in her knowledge? Not that she can tell. Taylor says she and her siblings “are all literate, can count well enough to balance a checkbook, and have had, or will have, the opportunity to pursue higher education.”

She did worry about her lack of credentials, and enrolled in

a public high school in Georgia, where her family lived, then briefly studied at Brown University. After years of marching to her own drummer, however, she found the education on offer lacking. By far the worst part was the boredom, “the obligatory raising of hands and answering of questions, the trying to look busy when you’re about to doze off, the wish to be anywhere in the world beyond the window.”

Is it utopian to imagine unschooling for all? Taylor recognizes her advantages, including a stay-at-home mother and a father who was a university professor. A few schools, such as the Albany Free School in New York State, try to make a similar experience possible for children of all socioeconomic backgrounds. But the Albany school depends on fundraising and extensive volunteer labor (including the uncompensated work of teachers, who receive only an \$11,000 annual stipend)—clearly, an unscalable model.

But the unschooling of every American child is not Taylor’s goal. Instead, she writes in a follow-up published on the *n+1* Web site, “Taking a closer look at the radical margins may help us ask better questions about what we really want from our educational system.”

SOCIETY

Wonder Bread

THE SOURCE: “Atomic Bread Baking at Home” by Aaron Bobrow-Strain, in *The Believer*, Feb. 2012.

YOUR AVERAGE LOAF OF SLICED white bread may not inspire much wonder, but its unassuming character masks an intriguing provenance. According to political scientist Aaron Bobrow-Strain of Whitman College, industrially produced white bread emerged from a confluence of political and social needs unique to the mid-20th century.

At the beginning of the 1900s, an unprecedented surge of immigrants was landing on American shores. Industrial food products, with their predictable shapes, standardized ingredients, and hygienic assurances, enjoyed rising



To appeal to hygiene-conscious consumers, early 20th century bakeries broadcast the “sanitary” quality of their goods.

sales, thanks in part to Americans' desire to avoid what was then perceived as racial contamination. As World War II approached, the federal government scrambled to think of ways to fortify a populace weakened by the skimpy diets of the Great Depression. Of the first million men screened by draft boards in 1940, at least 13 percent were rejected for reasons relating to malnutrition. It dawned on the government to spike the most ubiquitous items in American pantries with vitamins. Thiamin, niacin, iron, and eventually riboflavin became banner ingredients of enriched bread.

But how to ensure that the public would appreciate this new nutritional jewel? Bread had to be perfected for the American palate. In 1952, the U.S. Department of Agriculture joined forces with baking industry scientists to inaugurate the "Manhattan Project of bread," as Bobrow-Strain calls it. Its objectives were not only to ascertain Americans' ideal of white bread but also to establish a process by which large volumes could be produced quickly. Beginning in 1954, researchers scrutinized the bread-eating habits of 600 American families in Rockford, Illinois, and subjected these consumers to countless taste tests. (The subjects, it turned out, favored extremely fluffy bread, perhaps because fluffiness had once been a signal of freshness. Arguably less surprising is that their preference was 250 percent sweeter than the then-average loaf.)

On the production side, chemists developed a way for yeast to ferment independently of the baking

process, whittling down the time bakers needed to wait for the bread to rise. Scientists also perfected a formula to toughen gluten strands to "stand up to the traumas" of modern processing. "Four years and almost one hundred thousand slices of bread" later, the prototypical loaf of enriched white bread was born.

The project certainly achieved its goal. By the early 1960s, each American was eating an average of a pound and a half of white bread per week and getting 25 to 30 percent of his or her necessary calories from it. Consumption may not be as great today, but bread remains a fundamental conduit of governmentally mandated nutrients—and a staple of American diets.

SOCIETY

Big Medicine

THE SOURCE: "The New Goliaths" by Margot Sanger-Katz, in *National Journal*, Feb. 18, 2012.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA'S Affordable Care Act was enacted in 2010 with the promise of bringing down the cost of health care, which currently consumes more than 17 percent of U.S. gross domestic product. But unintended consequences of the law—partic-

Unintended consequences of the new federal health care law may drive the cost of insurance even higher.

ularly more rapid hospital consolidation—are likely to drive costs even higher, writes Margot Sanger-Katz, a correspondent for *National Journal*.

The law includes scores of provisions designed to make the nation's sclerotic health care system more effective. Hospitals accepting Medicare will be required to use electronic medical record systems by 2014 and to participate in efforts to track care quality. But such systems are costly—"up to \$50 million for a mid-size facility," Sanger-Katz says.

To meet the costs of the new law, hospitals and doctors are banding together. One study reported that the number of hospital mergers and acquisitions has increased 50 percent since 2010. The Medical Group Management Association found that the number of physician practices owned by hospitals grew 35 percent from 2010 to 2011. Medical practice mergers are on the rise, too.

Consolidation is a problem because bigger hospital organizations and practices have much stronger leverage when negotiating with insurance companies, especially as the number of competitors shrinks. In 2008, *The Boston Globe* reported that the medical system Partners HealthCare, which includes Massachusetts General Hospital and Brigham and Women's Hospital, received 15 to 60 percent more than its competitors for various services. These costs eventually are felt in the average Jane's pocketbook in the form of higher insurance premiums.

The 2010 law also aims to cut costs by reducing Medicare reim-

bursement rates to doctors and hospitals. The federal program already pays substantially less than private insurers do, and health care providers (who usually lose money on Medicare patients, according to Sanger-Katz) respond by charging private insurers more. Such “cost shifting” is likely to increase.

What’s to be done? The Federal Trade Commission has begun challenging hospital mergers that it views as a threat to competition. Some specialists believe that “accountable care” organizations that bring all services under one hospital roof will ultimately yield economies. So may experimental payment systems that pay flat rates for bundles of services rather than individual ones. And health care optimists opine that prices can’t keep rising forever. But Sanger-Katz is skeptical, saying that none of this will help much if the law keeps encouraging consolidation.

SOCIETY

Middle School Munching

THE SOURCE: “Competitive Food Sales in Schools and Childhood Obesity: A Longitudinal Study” by Jennifer Van Hook and Claire E. Altman, in *Sociology of Education*, Jan. 2012.

MORE THAN A THIRD OF AMERICAN six-to-11-year-olds are overweight or obese. That’s one of the alarming facts that have critics calling for a ban on vending machines and a purge of unhealthy cafeteria offerings in American schools. But a new study suggests that these



Vending machines’ fattening fare may not be the main cause of obesity among young people.

temptations don’t necessarily put extra pounds on kids. In combating childhood obesity, a child’s home environment may be the more pivotal battleground, say Pennsylvania State University sociologists and demographers Jennifer Van Hook and Claire E. Altman.

Van Hook and Altman analyzed a nationwide study that tracked almost 20,000 children, homing in on the period between 2003 and 2007, when the kids passed from fifth grade to eighth. As they climbed the academic ladder, they were confronted with more vending machines and unhealthy snack bars. When the children were in the fifth grade, 59 percent of them attended schools with such temptations; by eighth grade, the exposure rate had risen to 86 percent. But the prevalence of unhealthy body weight did not increase. In fact, the percentage of students who were overweight or obese dropped slightly, from 39 to 35 percent.

One reason things don’t get

worse may be that students simply don’t have much time to eat. Middle schoolers are herded from class to class, with few opportunities to pick up a sugary energy drink. It is also possible that students’ diets are already set by the time they enter middle school. Kids with unhealthy dietary habits will make poor food choices whether they are at home, in the classroom, or at the mall.

The authors caution that high school students, who were not included in their study, may be more susceptible to the siren song of the vending machine than middle school kids. High schoolers have more money, and more freedom to spend it.

Schools certainly have a role in promoting healthy eating and physical activity—it just may not translate into slimmer waistlines for kids, Van Hook and Altman conclude. The contents of a child’s household refrigerator seem a more promising target.

SOCIETY

The Meritocracy Machine Hiccups

THE SOURCE: "Is a College Degree Still the Great Equalizer? Intergenerational Mobility Across Levels of Schooling in the United States" by Florencia Torche, in *American Journal of Sociology*, Nov. 2011.

BY LEVELING THE PLAYING field, a college degree does something magical. A new study, however, concludes that the process runs in reverse once students reach graduate school.

In a study of several large databases, Florencia Torche, a sociologist at New York University, confirmed previous findings about the socioeconomic benefits of a college degree. Yes, children of the affluent have a better chance of getting into prestigious undergraduate institutions. But where your alma mater stands in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings is not the only determinant of how you will fare in your professional life. The major you choose, what line of work you enter, and how well you are paid relative to others in your field also matter. In the end, Torche reports, things even out. Once people get college degrees, the power of their socioeconomic background to predict their future status and income is "virtually zero."

All that changes, however, among those who take the step up to graduate school. The advantages that come with a relatively well-to-do background reassert themselves, especially for men. Among

male recipients of graduate degrees, those from families in the bottom third of the income distribution may earn as little as 60 percent as much as their peers from families in the top third.

The field of graduate study men choose may be a particularly important factor in this finding. About 58 percent of men from the top third of the income tier who obtain advanced degrees get them in high-paying professional fields such as business, law, and

College graduates enjoy a level playing field, but inequality returns among students who get advanced degrees.

medicine, while only 44 percent of those from the bottom tier do so.

Torche found significant pay differentials within professional fields as well. Among men with advanced degrees in computer sciences, engineering, and math, for example, those from the lower tier earned only two-thirds as much as those from the upper tier.

What's most alarming about graduate education's tendency to reinforce economic inequality is the fact that advanced degrees are increasingly a key to getting ahead. In 1970, only five percent of men and one percent of women held a graduate degree; by 2005 the numbers were 11 and 10 percent, respectively. If Torche's findings are correct, America's meritocracy machine is not running smoothly.

PRESS & MEDIA

Hashtag Heroics

THE SOURCE: "Social and News Media Enable Estimation of Epidemiological Patterns Early in the 2010 Haitian Cholera Outbreak" by Rumi Chunara, Jason R. Andrews, and John S. Brownstein, in *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, Jan. 2012.

NINE MONTHS AFTER THE HORRIFIC 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a cholera outbreak erupted. Almost half a million Haitians were stricken, and more than 6,500 died. A study by Harvard Medical School biomedical engineer Rumi Chunara and epidemiologists Jason R. Andrews and John

S. Brownstein suggests that an unlikely set of media tools including Twitter can help public health workers anticipate and respond to disease outbreaks more effectively, particularly in countries with weak infrastructure such as Haiti.

The authors compared reports of cholera during the first 100 days of the Haitian outbreak from the Haitian Ministry of Health, Twitter, and healthmap.org, an online disease aggregator that draws from reports from

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The First Jews for Jesus

Twitter is a time-killing medium for millions but for some people in poor, disease-prone areas, it may prove a lifesaver.

news media and individuals. Even though Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world, a significant portion of its people own cell phones, and thus have access to Twitter. During the 100 days the authors studied, more than 188,000 tweets with the word or tag “cholera” were sent. (Said one: “Sitting with a father who just lost his 7-year-old to cholera. Reality still has not hit.”) Healthmap.org registered almost 5,000 alerts about the Haitian cholera crisis.

In reviewing what happened, the authors found that the volume of mentions involving Haiti and cholera on Twitter and healthmap.org correlated well with the severity of the epidemic as it progressed. An increase in mentions corresponded with a spike in cases. But new media data were available much more quickly than the Haitian Ministry of Health’s numbers, which usually sat for two weeks before they were released to the public.

Chunara and colleagues conclude that new media tools can give public health workers an earlier start on predicting the size and spread of possible outbreaks, enabling them to respond more effectively. What is a time-killing medium for millions of people could be a lifesaver for many others.

THE SOURCE: “Jews, Christians, and Judaeo-Christians” by Geza Vermes, in *Standpoint*, Dec. 2011.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY TOOK A while to gain a critical mass. Proclaiming the miracle of Jesus’s death and resurrection didn’t make Christ’s early followers Christians on the spot. These early converts were Jews, and into the second century AD some of them maintained a hybrid identity, obeying the laws of Moses but professing faith in Jesus.

What distinguished Jewish Christians from their Jewish counterparts? Few things on the

surface, observes Geza Vermes, a professor emeritus of Jewish studies at Oxford University. They followed Jewish laws and customs and worshiped at temple. They even called themselves Jews.

But they departed from traditional Jewish practices in some telling ways. They followed Jesus in the “breaking of the bread,” a sacred meal intended to unite participants with Jesus, God, and one another. Jewish Christians also relinquished their belongings and property, living a communal lifestyle that was distinct from Jewish custom.

Keeping one foot in the Jewish

tradition and one in a burgeoning religious movement proved difficult for Jewish Christians, especially when Gentiles (former pagans) began to convert to Christianity in droves around 40 AD. While early Jewish and Gentile branches of Christianity shared a number of beliefs, such as the eventual second coming of Christ, resurrection of the dead, and establishment of the Kingdom of God, they disagreed on many issues, including the importance



An early Epistle attributed to Barnabas (above) called for a clear divide between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

of Jewish law and the authority and message of Jesus.

The conflict produced some revealing documents. One major Jewish Christian text from the first century, the *Didache* (also known as the Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles), treats Jesus as little more than a “charismatic prophet,” Vermes writes. In contrast, an important Gentile Christian work, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, written in the 120s AD, portrays Jesus as “a quasi-divine character” who has “existed since all eternity and was active before the creation of the world.”

In the first century, a council of apostles convened in Jerusalem to attempt to resolve the tensions between the branches. The council ruled that Gentiles would only have to obey select Jewish laws, such as those that prohibited offerings to idols, and could disregard others, such as the circumcision requirement. But Gentile Christians weren’t cowed. Buoyed by their growing numbers, they began to remake some aspects of the Jewish Christian experience to suit their preferences. The breaking of the bread became “a sacramental reiteration of the Last Supper,” now known to many Christians as Communion.

During the second century, the unique early brand of Jewish Christianity began to wane. Vermes writes that as Christianity spread across the Gentile Roman Empire and Jews were taxed in the Jewish-Roman wars, Jewish Christians “vanished, either rejoining the Jewish fold or being absorbed in the Gentile church.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Disaggregating the Bible

THE SOURCE: “Christianity and the Future of the Book” by Alan Jacobs, in *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2011.

THE KORAN CALLS CHRISTIANS “People of the Book.” It’s an apt description. “There is an intimate connection between the Christian message, the Christian scriptures, and the codex,” argues Alan Jacobs, an English professor at Wheaton College. The codex—a bound, portable successor to the unwieldy scrolls on which Scripture was preserved for earlier Christians—spread a unified and organized version of the Word across the world. But what happens to Christianity if the book goes the way of the scroll?

It depends, says Jacobs. As a technology, the bound book has served Christians well. Early adherents were eager to convey that



Behold, the iBible.

“the Church does not possess a series of little books,” but, rather, one big book that encompasses both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. From the Christian perspective, Jesus’s life is foretold in the former and chronicled in the latter. “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is also the God of Jesus Christ,” Jacobs writes of the Bible’s message. Whether one is browsing Scripture on an iPad or thumbing through it the

EXCERPT

Philosophy With Floorboards

In her Sovereignty of Good, [novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch] wrote that any moral philosophy must be inhabited. What counts is not so much whether it passes an exam, as what kinds of occupancy it can support. Is anyone at home in this philosophy? Does it have flesh and bones, or rather joints and floorboards? If you knock, does anyone come to the door?

—SARAH BAKEWELL, author of *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (2011), in *The Philosophers’ Magazine* (First Quarter 2012)

old-fashioned way, that message of unity endures. “Electronic reading devices like the Kindle, and even tablets like the iPad, preserve many of the essential features of the codex,” Jacobs says.

Not so projector screens and PowerPoints, which are rapidly becoming the preferred means of presenting Scripture in church services around the world. Screen projection, prevalent in developing-world congregations too strapped to purchase Bibles, “severs its chosen verse or two from its textual surroundings” and “occludes any sense of sequence within the whole of the Bible.” (Jacobs isn’t the first to fret about

fragmentation. Biblical scholars have claimed for years that verse and chapter divisions—not finalized until the 1500s—are artificial distractions.)

Popular Web sites also encourage selective reading. Search boxes in online Bibles feature more prominently than “browse” buttons, Jacobs reports.

Will these technologies lead Christians to miss the forest for the trees? It’s possible. “If Christians forget, or forget more completely than they already have,” Jacobs writes, “the integrity and necessary sequentiality of their holy Book, and of the story it tells, that would be a catastrophe for Christianity.”

Arts in Beijing. What one critic has called the “frenzy” for music training in China, writes Hao Huang, a professor of music at Scripps College, has an unexpected history.

Western classical music wasn’t introduced to the Chinese public until Christian missionaries came in the 19th century, but it quickly gained popularity and prestige as a symbol of the Western “culture of scientific progress and modernization.” The rigors of classical training fit the Confucian value of self-cultivation through self-discipline. Confucius believed that the study of music was “an indispensable way to train the mind,” Huang notes, and considered it more important than mathematics and writing. The great sage said that “one is roused by Songs [poetry], established by ritual, and perfected by Music.”

Confucianism and classical music both came under severe attack during Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The communist government portrayed European music as a bourgeois invention used for counterrevolutionary ends. By the 1980s, however, the Chinese Communist Party was beginning to re-embrace Confucius, and classical music came back into favor as well.

Li Delun, one of the Chinese musicians trained in the West whose career survived the Cultural Revolution, helped lead the revival with a new ideological line, declaring, “People need this product of the West to liberate their cultural thinking from 2,000 years of feudalism.” By the early 1990s,

ARTS & LETTERS

From Confucius to Chopin

THE SOURCE: “Why Chinese People Play Western Classical Music: Transcultural Roots of Music Philosophy” by Hao Huang, in *International Journal of Music Education*, Oct. 11, 2011 (online).

THERE MAY BE NO PLACE IN THE world where the great works of the Western classical music tradition are so widely admired as in China. Some 36 million Chinese children are studying the piano, six times the number of American children. Government has poured money into majestic new music halls such as the Shanghai Opera House and the National Center for the Performing



In Beijing, renowned Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim instructs young musicians.

the Chinese government was deliberately encouraging the study of music through its education policy. Students and their parents were keenly aware that musical training could be an advantage in China's brutal competition for slots at top universities. Knowledge of Beethoven was something to show off, and President Jiang Zemin (in office 1993–2003) enjoyed doing just that, taking the baton to conduct orchestras at state banquets and playing the piano for Western leaders.

There is a deeper irony in China's renewed enthusiasm for Mozart and Mahler, Huang says. The future of Western classical music as a "living art form" may be in the hands (and fingers) of the East's rising musicians rather than those of the West, where classical music is "marginalized by the contemporary entertainment industry as an esoteric genre for a privileged few."

ARTS & LETTERS

Tortured Muser

THE SOURCE: "I Thought You Were a Poet" by Joshua Mehigan, in *Poetry*, July–Aug. 2011.

PITY THE PLACID BARD. "READERS are disappointed by poets who aren't at least a little mad, which is to say visionary, melancholic, tormented, debauched, or somehow awry," writes Joshua Mehigan, himself a poet. But is poetry really the domain of the disturbed?

It's true that poets and madness have always seemed to share close quarters. Addiction, mood disorders, and extreme eccentricity also crop up frequently. Think of Ezra Pound, whose anti-Semitic ravings during World War II landed him in a Washington mental hospital, or Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide at age 30 after years of depression.

Madness became part of the

theater of poetry long ago. The English poet Lord Byron (1788–1824) once caused a stir by declining every course at a dinner party, requesting instead "hard biscuits and soda water." (Neither being available, he consented to potatoes and vinegar.) When an onlooker asked a friend of the poet how long Byron would abide by the curious diet, the friend answered, "Just as long as you continue to notice it."

Mehigan doesn't deny that "some deep connection exists between 'madness' and the compressed thought and emotion typical of memorable art." Invoking Wallace Stevens, he observes that "extremity, natural and artificial, often helps poets wrest something sublime from the 'dividing and indifferent blue.'" And presumably sane poets such as John Ashbery and Jorie Graham "have forged styles that echo the dislocations of madness: fragmented language, surreal imagery, oblique thought, shifting points of view, violent emotion."

While most people associate madness with psychosis, "only a small number of poets actually spend much time psychotic," Mehigan notes. Psychic extremes aren't conducive to good writing. "Madness is precisely the *absence of the work of art*," the French thinker Michel Foucault observed. Mood disorders and addiction are more common, but disabling in their own ways. Mehigan has had his own mental troubles, including alcoholism and bipolar disorder. While his addiction made certain emotional and social experiences

EXCERPT

Music With a Pulse

Until well into the last century, the only way you could hear music was to either make it yourself or be in a room with someone making it. The sound of music was inseparable from the presence of a living being; without physical breath and beating pulse, music did not exist. The only music was live music. What I do today at the piano does not differ in its essentials from what was done by pianists 100 years ago. . . . And yet, how different it must have been to walk on stage and play for an audience that did not know when, or if, they would ever again hear the musical works performed.

—SARAH ROTHENBERG, a pianist, in *The Threepenny Review* (Fall 2011)

accessible to him, “I never wrote drunk, and I don’t see how anyone can,” he says. For him, poetry serves as “a set of tactics for offering my Best Self to the world”—the thoughtful and deliberative self he struggles to present in real life. In other words, writing poetry is the opposite of inebriation.

For many poets, the form does allow for an indulgence of sorts. It takes at least “a touch of egotism” to unveil one’s soul, Mehigan writes. Yet plenty of poets have “reached through self-regard to give the bitter world a little beauty and insight.”

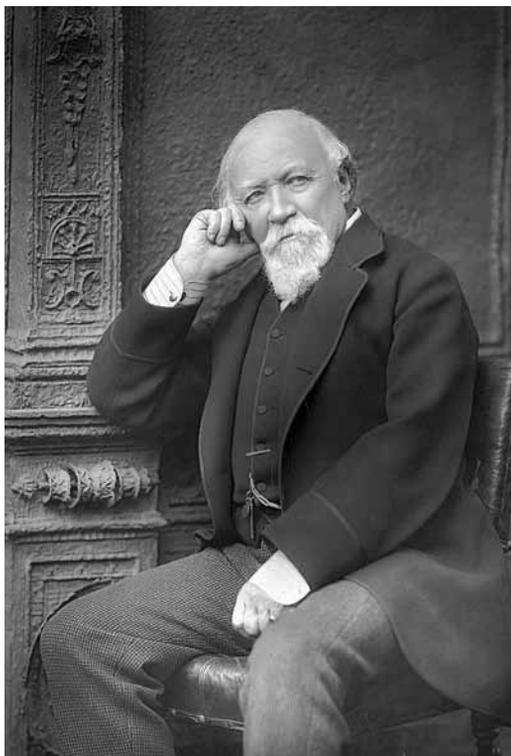
ARTS & LETTERS

The Birth of English 101

THE SOURCE: “Browning in Hackney” by Alexandra Lawrie, in *Times Literary Supplement*, Jan. 20, 2012.

FOR ALL ITS DUBIOUS PRACTICALITY, English is still one of the most popular college majors around. But the discipline is relatively new to academia, even in the homeland of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Until the late 19th century, classics monopolized literary studies. The authorities at England’s preeminent universities, Oxford and Cambridge, “refused to accept English as a serious, scholarly discipline, deeming it too vague and ill defined to be taught and examined in a systematic manner,” writes Alexandra Lawrie, a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh.

Banned from Oxbridge’s hal-



Robert Browning belonged to the elite, but his poetry found its first academic home in extension schools for the masses.

lowed lecture halls, the discipline instead incubated a stone’s throw away, in university extension programs designed to bring higher education to the masses. Civic-minded British scholars developed such programs in the 1870s, providing working- and middle-class adults the opportunity to attend lectures by university faculty for greatly reduced fees and eventually earn diplomas.

Extension lecturers such as

In the 19th century, Oxbridge authorities refused to accept English as “a serious, scholarly discipline.”

John Churton Collins used the system to demonstrate “a workable scheme providing students with a literary education that was both broad and thorough.” Because critics saw English as a “soft” discipline that could be used to play up English pride, instructors emphasized “critical analyses of individual texts, rather than superlative examples of English conduct or moral fiber.” An extension course on the poet Robert Browning, for instance, included lec-

tures on the author’s biography; his command of literary devices, psychology, and theology; and his translations of Greek poetry.

By the early 20th century, skeptics “could no longer remain impervious to the sheer volume of letters and articles on [English literature], or to the number of adults signing up for English lectures,” Lawrie writes. Extension instructors such as R. G. Moulton would go on to be the first university professors of English. And if Collins needed absolute proof that English had arrived, his seminal work, *The Study of English Literature* (1891), was adopted “practically verbatim” as a curriculum guide by Cambridge University when it finally established an English course of study in 1917.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Move Over, Einstein

THE SOURCE: “The Accidental Universe: Science’s Crisis of Faith” by Alan Lightman, in *Harper’s*, Dec. 2011.

THEORETICAL PHYSICISTS USED to dream of producing a “theory of everything” that would relate the two principal breakthroughs of 20th-century physics: quantum mechanics and Einstein’s general theory of relativity. They hoped such a vision would show that the workings of the universe can be explained by a few fundamental parameters and laws of nature.

That goal is increasingly thought to be chimerical, observes Alan Lightman, a physicist at MIT. Advances in new areas of investigation have cast doubt on a linchpin for a “theory of everything”: the assumption that our universe is the only one out there. More and more physicists are open to the idea that we may be part of a “multiverse” that contains “many *different* self-consistent universes, with many different properties,” he writes.

One of the new areas of investigation, string theory, holds that the smallest units of energy are “extremely tiny one-dimensional ‘strings’” that operate in extra dimensions. Adherents now believe that the “string landscape” predicts a practically infinite number of possible universes, each with different sets

of properties. Good luck coming up with a theory that unites all of them. Physicists who study eternal inflation—one of the possible consequences of the big bang—have come to think that the “original, rapidly expanding universe spawns a multitude of new universes, in a never-ending process,” Lightman says.

Mind bending as it is, the multiverse theory clears up some confusion. It provides physicists with a plausible answer to a conundrum that has always vexed the field: how our universe, with

its precise conditions for supporting life, came into existence without the guiding hand of an intelligent designer. If, however, there is an abundance of universes, as the multiverse theory holds, it is more probable that one (or even more than one) could possess the conditions necessary to foster life.

The multiverse theory hasn’t won over all physicists, but it is the theory of choice for some of the field’s leading thinkers. If the idea wins more adherents, the mandate of theoretical physics may have to be substantially revised, Lightman says. Consensus on the multiverse would suggest that the highly sought “theory of everything” is “futile, a beautiful philosophical dream that simply isn’t true.”

EXCERPT

The Sack of the West

Two millennia later, many ancient Roman aqueducts remain serviceable (after some retrofitting). Operating with no external energy requirements, these brilliantly engineered channels functioned for centuries; in most cases they were vulnerable only to seismic activity—and eventually, of course, to conquest. But despite modern materials and engineering methods, the water delivery system of the American West is comparatively ephemeral—for the sole reason that it depends so heavily on energy. We have built major cities in response to the engineered availability of water, and we did so in an era when energy was cheap and apparently plentiful. But ultimately the price of energy might be as destructive to our public water supplies as invading barbarians were to Rome’s.

—AUSTIN TROY, associate professor at the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont and author of *The Very Hungry City* (2011), in *Design Observer* (Jan. 23, 2012)

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Limits of Knowledge

THE SOURCE: "Trials and Errors" by Jonah Lehrer, in *Wired*, Jan.-Feb. 2012.

THE 18TH-CENTURY SCOTTISH philosopher David Hume was famously skeptical of human perceptions of the relationship between cause and effect. Causes, in Hume's estimation, were tales "we tell ourselves to make sense of events and observations," not necessarily a complete picture of what really triggered an event, writes Jonah Lehrer, a science journalist and the author of the new book *Imagine: How Creativity Works*. The disconnect Hume intuited is becoming more apparent in modern science, especially in medicine, Lehrer writes.

Plenty of cause-and-effect discoveries, such as smoking's impact on mortality, are perfectly valid. But most clear-cut relationships have been uncovered. As medical researchers move into ever knottier territory, parsing the threads that make up biological systems is becoming more difficult. Scientists are prone to perceptual shortcuts, misapprehensions, or oversimplifications. Because we rely so heavily on our vision to construct and interact with reality, for example, we're particularly susceptible to believing that what we see is the whole picture, even when it's not.

Take chronic back pain. The common treatment used to be to do nothing, a slow but effective palliative. Then magnetic res-



Too much knowledge? Using MRIs to diagnose back pain often yields less clarity than confusion, and can lead to misdiagnoses.

onance imaging (MRI) revealed that many sufferers had severely degenerated spinal discs, and patients underwent surgery to have them removed. Researchers later discovered that the seemingly obvious causal relationship did

We like to think we understand "how all those shards of fact fit together," says Jonah Lehrer. "But we don't."

not hold up: Some people with injured disks never experienced back pain. Now doctors are advised to skip performing MRIs on patients with the complaint; the additional information confuses more than it clarifies.

Cases such as these have multiplied across the medical world. Yes, there are checks in place to stop scientists from premature-

ly believing they've discovered a causal relationship. The principle of statistical significance is one such check; it specifies that an experiment's results can't be considered valid if its outcome can be produced by chance more than five percent of the time. But such protocols are weak in the face of science's deep conviction that "the so-called problem of causation can be cured by more information, by our ceaseless accumulation of facts," Lehrer writes. He refers to a 2011 study of scholarly articles in which causal relationships had been reported between certain molecules and illness. Of the 400 articles that were scrutinized, all of them published in highly influential journals, 83 percent had been subsequently retracted or revised to tone down the finding.

Searching for correlations is a poor way to go about understanding the complex systems that scientists now seek to demystify. "While correlations help us track the relationship between independent measurements, . . . they are much less effective at making sense of systems in which the variables cannot be isolated," Lehrer says. Scientists need to be more mindful of how the system they're evaluating interacts with other systems. A drug that lowers cholesterol, for instance, may also raise blood pressure, wrecking a patient's overall cardiovascular health. In the end, Lehrer writes, "the details always change, but the story remains the same: We think we understand how something works, how all those shards of fact fit together. But we don't."

OTHER NATIONS

India's Unique Path

THE SOURCE: "Economic Liberalization and Indian Economic Growth: What's the Evidence?" by Ashok Kotwal, Bharat Ramaswami, and Wilima Wadhwa, in *Journal of Economic Literature*, Dec. 2011.

ONCE ONE OF THE WORLD'S most heavily regulated and protectionist economies, India underwent an economic transformation in 1991 under the careful watch of finance minister Manmohan Singh, now the prime minister. It lifted tariff and nontariff barriers on trade, abolished restrictions on foreign investment, gave up price controls and industry licensing requirements, and reprivatized state banks. Its gross domestic product has seen the benefits of liberalization, growing at an annual rate of as much as nine percent in recent years.

Yet to say that the progress has not been enjoyed by all is an understatement. While a portion of Indians are educated and able to capitalize on globalization, there is still a "huge mass of undereducated people who are making a living in low-productivity jobs in the informal sector," write University of British Columbia economist Ashok Kotwal and his coauthors.

Manufacturing, which has created plentiful jobs for low-skilled workers in China and other fast-growing Asian countries, has not been the primary economic driver

in India. Employment in manufacturing grew from 32 million in 1983 to 42 million in 2004–05—not much in a land of more than one billion people. And the vast majority of factory workers are employed in small family enterprises with 10 or fewer staff. Their small size, along with persistent corruption, poor infrastructure, and a lack of credit, has made it difficult for these businesses to

India's software and services exports grew from \$745 million to \$24 billion in the 10 years after 1995.

But the majority of Indians—59 percent—still toil on farms. They're moving to higher wage-endavors slowly. While the number of workers employed in agriculture sank by 22 percentage points in China and Thailand from 1980 to 2000, it only dropped nine points in India.

The segment of the population living in poverty also remains large. More than 80 percent of India's population lives on \$2.16 a day or even less—about the same proportion as in 1983. (The official poverty rate is \$1.08 per day.)



Agriculture still dominates India's economy. Above, workers harvest barley in Rajasthan.

take advantage of India's new opportunities.

Instead, the service sector has been the economic hot spot. India's large pool of English-fluent university graduates and the advent of the digital revolution have combined to make the country an attractive outsourcing location for American and European companies, particularly in the high-tech arena. Annual revenue from In-

Outside elite circles, levels of literacy and educational achievement are unimpressive: Only in 2004 did India meet or surpass benchmarks that China reached nearly 25 years earlier.

India will not be able to follow the standard Asian development model, the authors argue. To improve the lives of its people, the country must make its farms more productive. To do so,

it needs to cultivate institutions that can boost technical skills, agricultural innovation, and access to credit. It is woefully deficient in roads and other basic infrastructure. “India’s future will depend a great deal on how these institutional improvements shape up,” the authors conclude.

OTHER NATIONS

Tehran’s Iraq Headache

THE SOURCE: “Iran’s Declining Influence in Iraq” by Babak Rahimi, in *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2012.

FROM SADDAM HUSSEIN’S FALL in 2003 until 2009, Iran rapidly increased its influence in Iraq. Tehran quietly supported various Shiite militias, some of which attacked American troops, and flooded the country with intelligence operatives. To the great alarm of the United States, relations between hard-liners in Tehran and their coreligionists in the Shia-dominated regime in Baghdad warmed. State visits and trade deals followed.

Those good feelings are largely gone, writes Babak Rahimi, a specialist on Islam and Iran at the University of California, San Diego. Iranian influence in Iraq is in decline. “For Tehran, Iraq’s internal politics and regional policy have proven to be a headache,” Rahimi argues, “as it can no longer exercise the same power over Iraq’s once fragile political system as it did.”

Things used to be different.



Iranians and many Iraqis share religious bonds. Here, Iranian pilgrims visit the Imam Abas shrine, a Shia holy site in southern Iraq.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s 2005 election in Iran empowered a “neoconservative faction” in Tehran bent on making the most of the turmoil in Baghdad. Its goal: “to eclipse U.S. power in the region.” Iran sought—and won—friends across the Iraqi political landscape and insinuated itself into the economic fabric of the country.

What went wrong? In June 2009, furious street protests erupted in Iran after Ahmadinejad claimed a lopsided reelection victory in a vote that many Iranians considered fraudulent. Operatives hurried home from Iraq to quell the unrest. Ahmadinejad’s supporters splintered under the pressure, leaving Tehran’s Iraq strategy “in disarray.”

Events in Iraq also changed the equation. Iraqi nationalism flared in 2008, fueled by fears of Iranian economic domination and the declining popularity of Shiite militias such as Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army. Iraqi Shia blamed the militias, in part, for the country’s alarming descent into sectarian violence.

Iraq’s Shiite prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, led a military rout of the Mahdi Army, and tout-

ed the victory as proof that he would defend all Iraqis, regardless of sect. He fashioned his political alliances accordingly. Maliki has since openly defied some of Tehran’s wishes by, among other things, calling for reform in neighboring Syria, where Iranian ally Bashar al-Assad has murderously repressed a popular revolt.

Iran has done itself no favors in the court of Iraqi public opinion. Tehran has periodically cut off fuel and electricity to eastern Iraq and has built dams that divert Iraqi water to its own uses. Bitter memories of the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War persist. Now that Iraq is on a firmer footing, the two countries are in no danger of becoming bosom buddies anytime soon, Rahimi assures Washington.

OTHER NATIONS

Africa: Storms Ahead

THE SOURCE: "Climate Change, Rainfall, and Social Conflict in Africa" by Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan, in *Journal of Peace Research*, Jan. 2012.

MANY RESEARCHERS HAVE LONG believed that climate conditions can be tied to the civil wars that break out so often in Africa. The continent is largely dependent on agriculture, and a fluctuation in rainfall, for example, can make a huge difference in the lives of millions of people. Now the question is whether climate may affect the frequency of less severe forms of sociopolitical conflict, such as rioting and demonstrations.

Cullen S. Hendrix, an assistant professor of government at the College of William and Mary, and political scientist Idean Salehyan, of the University of North Texas, have found empirical support for this climate-turmoil relationship. Using a new database of conflicts that included riots, strikes, coups, episodes of government repression, and occurrences of insurgent violence, they compared rainfall patterns and the incidence of conflict in 47 African countries.

Hendrix and Salehyan found that abnormal rainfall levels had a statistically significant impact on domestic instability. An increase of one standard deviation (a statistic that indicates how far a quantity deviates from the mean) over normal rainfall averages was associated with a 45 percent greater likelihood of conflict.

A two-standard deviation increase boosted the chance of conflict by 116 percent. Drier periods had their perils, too: A decline in rainfall averages by one and two standard deviations saw the likelihood of conflict grow by 30 and 50 percent, respectively.

Violent events were more likely to occur when rainfall was excessive, while nonviolent events, such as protests and strikes, occurred

more frequently when rainfall didn't meet expectations. The authors speculate that drier periods may see less violence because of the difficulty of sustaining combat operations when water is scarce.

Scientists predict that climate change will turn some parts of Africa drier and other parts wetter. The findings of Hendrix and Salehyan suggest that such areas may well turn more contentious, too.



EXCERPT

Communism's Iron Horse

Tractor—the word itself, iron cast and earth encrusted, conjures up the vast steppes of the Soviet Union. It was British and American inventors and investors who put the first tractors into production—massive 30,000-pound steam monsters in the late 19th century followed by much leaner models with internal combustion in the early 20th—but it was the Soviets who made the tractor truly famous. Wherever you look in the history and culture of the USSR, there it is—the iron horse of Communism, the icon and fetish of the proletarian empire. Neither balalaikas nor Sputnik capture the genius of the place as perfectly as the tractor.

—DIMITER KENAROV, contributing editor,
in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Fall 2011)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Bharati Mukherjee on slum savvy

Jag Bhalla on hunter-gatherer etiquette

Joel Garreau on where to live

Laura Claridge on the first Girl Scout

Leslie Lenkowsky and *Suzanne Garment* on philanthropy

Marie-Therese Connolly on elder care

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Nathalie Lagerfeld on speaking in tongues

Megan Buskey on Marilynne Robinson

Colin Fleming on Woody Guthrie

Phil Patton on the cars we've loved

Wendy Call on Saint Death

CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

One Nation Under God

Reviewed by Charles Hill

THE MODERN ERA HAS DEFINED ITSELF against religion. At worst, religion is reviled; at best, it is regarded as a subject not to be mentioned in the corridors of power. It wasn't always so. In the premodern world, religion was pervasive, respected, and powerful. The turning point came with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War, a horrendous, religiously motivated scouring of much of Europe. From then on, the states of the international system were expected to keep their holy scriptures off the diplomatic negotiating table.

But America has always been saturated in religion. As I made my way with increasing fascination through the pages of Cambridge University historian Andrew Preston's monumental study *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, I recalled my long-ago work as a member of a team preparing a proposal to reconstitute the old Patent Office building in Washington, D.C., as the National Portrait Gallery. In deciding the criteria by which to select portraits of the most influential Americans, we could pick those whom we regarded as major figures in the present, or those who had been most influential in their own

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, SHIELD OF FAITH:

Religion in American War and Diplomacy.

By Andrew Preston.
Knopf. 815 pp. \$37.50

time. If we chose the latter course, we suddenly realized, most of the portraits would be of clergymen.

This book solidifies Preston's reputation as one of the foremost

younger scholars working in the great tradition of historical interpretation of war, diplomacy, and peace. Over nearly 800 pages (disclosure: I am mentioned in the acknowledgments), Preston describes how America's religion has been far more intimately intertwined with its statecraft and foreign policy than is generally understood.

His achievement is to provide a convincing explanation of why the rest of the world finds the United States so weird and perplexing. Political scientist Samuel Huntington, in his 1968 book *Political Order in Changing Societies*, argued that the United States is a premodern polity that formed just before Hobbes's theory of the social contract centralized modern European state power in a secular form that would be carried to every other region of the world. Preston deepens and elaborates upon the

difference. This is not *the* new master narrative of America, but it is close enough.

America's sense of security, protected as the nation was by two oceans, allowed freely chosen morality to influence policy. The American conception that liberty's task was to oppose concentrated power produced a sense that the country had a mission to reshape the world in a form much like its own, and enlarged a conviction that America was God's country, with an exceptional and newly chosen people. The American civil religion that emerged was presided over by presidents who aimed to carry out reformation on a grand scale.

Preston's American Revolution sits atop nearly a hundred pages of analysis of colonial creedal struggles that transferred Puritan ideas into politics. We see the French and Indian War of 1754–63 in a religious dimension animated by fervor against Catholics and their demonical Indian adjuncts, as vividly depicted in James Fenimore Cooper's classic 1826 novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. Preston calls the American Revolution an "American Revelation," a label that helps to explain the wild rhetoric of the upheaval, stimulated by the colonists' fear of domination by the Church of England. George Washington restored confidence and calm. The real meaning of his Farewell Address was that a free republic could spin out of control unless its citizenry was virtuous—and the surest source of virtue was religion.

John Quincy Adams's sense of imperial destiny, as Preston tells the story, exemplifies Alexis de Tocqueville's perception that in America, uniquely, religion and liberty were compatible. Adams prefigured Tocqueville in the conviction that "democracy flowed from religion, just as religious liberty was made possible by democratic freedoms."

Preston sees the War of 1812 as a turning point: Religion was used both for and against the war as the first pacifist antiwar movement emerged; no longer could the federal government claim a monopoly on righteousness. At this point, *Sword of the Spirit* begins to evolve

into something of a religious epic, with two sides locked in a contest for supremacy: those professing faith, hope, and charity as they turn the other cheek, versus those in the tradition of Augustine's "Christian Prince" who must make hard decisions about the management of this fallen world. The outcome of the War of 1812 strengthened the latter camp's vision of the United States as divinely destined for greatness.

Manifest Destiny would spread both faith and commerce across the North American continent, while missionaries dispatched abroad became "accidental imperialists." The Civil War turned the American Religion's moral vision on itself. Abraham Lincoln, not really religious at the outset, became a spiritual leader; his second inaugural address served as an American "Sermon on the Mount." The war was contained within the nation's borders, but it profoundly affected Americans' mission to the world, as the duty to bring freedom to the South was transposed into "a redemptive platform for America to save the world."

Somewhat problematically, Preston depicts the United States as subsequently launching a sporadic series of "crusades," an overworked, never quite apt term. The first was the Spanish-American War of 1898, as shaped by Secretary of War Elihu Root, bred in New York State's feverishly devout "burned-over district," by naval historian and theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan—for whom religion was indispensable—and by the "muscular Christianity" of Theodore Roosevelt, who declared that "we stand at Armageddon." The war was a "humanitarian intervention" to halt the "cruel, barbarous, and uncivilized" practices of Cuba's Spanish colonial rulers.

The second crusade was Woodrow Wilson's. The 1917 declaration that signaled the United States' entry into World War I was at odds with the sentiments of key American religious leaders, but out of it came an "idealistic synthesis," a grouping identifiable as "America's first-ever liberal internationalists." Al-



In *American Progress* (1872), John Gast depicted America's westward expansion as a sacred duty to spread Christianity and progress across the continent. Historically, a religiously based sense of mission has often inspired U.S. foreign policy.

though Wilson, a son of the manse, did not take the United States into war for a specifically religious reason, it was “a war for the good of the world to ensure perpetual peace.” The idealistic war aims he announced in his Fourteen Points speech were founded on the golden rule, and “Wilsonianism was essentially an expression of Christian reformism.” It was not by chance, Preston observes, that Wilson insisted on calling the League of Nations a covenant, nor that the organization was headquartered in Geneva, “the birthplace of Calvinism.”

The third American crusade emerged from the “simple faith” of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was the very embodiment of the country's civic religion and the first president to give faith itself first place as the essence of democracy. While FDR “tolerated all faiths, he could not tolerate a lack of faith,” Preston writes, explaining how World War II can be seen as a struggle for religious liberty.

The name of Reinhold Niebuhr appears frequently in Preston's account. For two decades after Wilson, Christian pacifism had been ascending. Now an exciting new religious thinker took an oppositional stance, declaring with authoritative irony that the only Christian doctrine that had been empirically proved was original sin. From the halls of Union Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School came “a theology and a morality for military intervention.”

World War II, Preston shows, was not the “good war” of nostalgists. On the one hand, it spawned such sentiments as “Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition” and “God is my copilot.” On the other hand, mainstream religious liberals had a hard time overcoming their World War I revulsion toward ultra-patriotism and were deeply troubled by the draft, the demand for unconditional surrender, the internment of Japanese Americans, and strate-

gic—and ultimately atomic—bombing. A new antiwar wave of liberal resistance was formed.

The Cold War can be recognized as a fourth crusade. Harry Truman's Baptist faith encouraged him to see it in religious terms. Even the Presbyterian anticrusader George F. Kennan was shaped by the duality of his beliefs—in pessimistic original sin and optimistic providence—to struggle with the paradoxes of his containment doctrine. NSC-68, the founding document of America's Cold War that spelled out that doctrine, derived phrasing and meaning from the reformed Protestant tradition, declaring the Soviet Union a spiritual as well as political and military threat, "animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own." The 1950s thus produced another "Great Awakening" of religiosity. During these years the markers of the Cold War were steeped in religion, including the recognition of the State of Israel, the insertion of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the assumption of a leading role by Dwight D. Eisenhower and presidents since in the National Prayer Breakfast.

Once again, Preston astutely demonstrates that retrospective consensus is a myth; the country was divided along a "Great Schism," with one side represented by Billy Graham's unflinching support for every president, and the other by pastors and priests who favored dialogue, disarmament, development, the United Nations, and recognition of communist China, and were increasingly sharp in their critique of segregation and capitalism. Mainline Protestantism was on the way out. Black Power and liberation theology marched hand in hand. The anti-Vietnam War movement was only one of several cultural revolutions that swept America in the 1960s and '70s. New Age beliefs and strange foreign religions appeared; Hare Krishnas danced in airports.

Neither Richard Nixon's Quaker background nor Henry Kissinger's Jewish upbringing approached anything like the faith of Lincoln, Wilson, FDR, or Truman. The exception

was Nixon's insistence, in the depth of their travails in 1974, that he and Kissinger fall on their knees to pray. Though both men were profoundly patriotic, they nonetheless conducted an almost Metternichian foreign policy, centered on détente and the adroit shifting of great-power relationships. But in the eyes of those on the religious right, détente was defeatist, the opening to Mao's China a betrayal. Nixon and Kissinger found themselves surrounded by a resurgence of traditional Christian religion and morality, fiery in its opposition to the 1970s leftist world agenda.

Christian Zionism, inflamed by the 1975 UN General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism, re-emerged as well. Nixon and then Gerald Ford were surprised by opposition from what they had assumed was their side. Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, Democrat of Washington, took up the cause of Soviet Jewry's right to emigrate. Kissinger, Preston writes, was slow to appreciate the muscle behind this drive, "and in the end it cost him détente."

Today, after all the studies and biographical analyses of Ronald Reagan, he remains, his biographer Edmund Morris concluded, impossible to fathom. But not for Preston, who locates President Reagan's Cold War successes almost entirely in his religious beliefs and his adept handling of religion's symbolic power. Reagan had that sixth sense, and "reconfigured the Judeo-Christian civil religion from what it had been since the 1930s—a way to foster inclusiveness—into a rhetorical device to attack liberalism and secularism."

Reagan was engrossed by the Book of Revelation and the idea of Armageddon, but that fascination didn't color his outlook with nihilism; instead, he used it to snatch U.S.-Soviet relations back from the brink. Suppression of religion, Reagan believed, was the linchpin of atheistic communism; remove that, and the Soviet Union would change. Reagan focused on a group of radically religious Siberian Pentecostals who had taken refuge in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during the Carter administration. If

the Soviets let the Pentecostals leave the country, Reagan promised he wouldn't crow about it. He kept his word, establishing a new basis for trust between the two superpowers.

President George H. W. Bush claimed born-again status, and evangelicals composed much of his electoral base, but once in office he prioritized order over justice and stability over human rights. President Bill Clinton, religious enough, appeared to have no larger vision for the world beyond the news cycle. President George W. Bush, who expressed his personal faith more openly than any previous chief executive, sought after 9/11 to return to the tradition of using religion to frame foreign policy. But Bush's sense of global mission was challenged by an array of religious Americans. Preston summarizes all the evidence for President

Barack Obama's Christianity, from the influence of Martin Luther King Jr. to Obama's erstwhile place in the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's congregation, but this has not translated into a religion-based vision for the world.

If *Sword of the Spirit* is an epic in which the story of Christianity is recapitulated through American foreign policy, the last couple of decades in Washington seem to have caught up with the metahistory of the ages, as religion, in the United States and, indeed, the world, struggles to come to terms with a newly secular global age. At the end, this engrossing book makes its point about religion indisputably: "Those who conduct U.S. foreign policy ignore it at their peril."

CHARLES HILL is Brady-Johnson Distinguished Fellow at Yale University and a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

India's Underbelly

Reviewed by Bharati Mukherjee

IN *BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS*, A portrait of a slum in Mumbai, India, Katherine Boo sketches characters with Dickensian vividness against the black machinations of communal enmities, caste and ethnic politics, class prejudice, sexism, and corruption. Boo, whose long-form journalism on the American poor has earned her a Pulitzer Prize, a MacArthur Fellowship, and other awards, set herself a difficult task with this, her first book: to dramatize the effects of poverty and corruption on everything they touch. The poverty in Mumbai—indeed, in all the developing world's megacities—can reinforce ties among neighbors; more often, it breeds suspicion, gangs, and lethal jealousies.

To illustrate her global concerns, Boo ratchets them down to events in a single community. It is 2008 in Annawadi, a Mumbai squatter settlement of 335 huts built next to an international airport. Palm trees, razor-wire fences,

BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS:

Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity.

By Katherine Boo.
Random House.
256 pp. \$27

and glass towers of luxury hotels ring the slum. In a hut, a teenager named Abdul Husain is putting up a shelf on which his mother, Zehrumsa, can store her cooking supplies. On the other side of the wall where the shelf is to be mounted lives Fatima, or "One Leg," a Hindu woman named for a congenital deformity that forced her into marriage with a sickly, elderly Muslim. Now she is a luridly made-up, indiscriminately promiscuous madwoman on crutches, with an irrational hatred of the more successful Husain family. Abdul's taps against the wall send brick dust drifting into a pot of rice on Fatima's stove, triggering a chain of events that will bring death to Fatima and economic ruin to the Husain family.

In the eyes of their city, all Annawadians are criminals, squatters on airport property, so

they cannot open businesses. Most are trash sorters, selling metals and plastic they gather from random sources or buy from children who risk their lives nightly to pluck bits of the recyclables from a roadway. Some of the garbage, however, is obtained by trespassing on hotel grounds, or is stolen from construction sites. Whenever a family purchases a television set, improves its property, or sends a child



Children in the slums on the outskirts of an ascendant Mumbai play in an alley. A faith in the future prevails, but many will fall victim to disease, violence, or drugs.

to school, a policeman's first suspicion is that the money must have come from some sort of illegality. The only way to avoid jail is to pay off the police, who share their take with judges and lawyers. It is a sordid game, its rules understood and played by all.

Of the slum's 3,000 inhabitants, only six have full-time jobs, yet by government standards Annawadi does not fall below the poverty level. Most of the men and boys, including Abdul, his tubercular father, and Fatima's TB-ridden husband, are model entrepreneurs, recyclers with an eye to the burgeoning Chinese metals market on the eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. It has been a memorable year for Indian trash sorters such as Abdul, leading, in his case, to new tiles on the floor and the in-

stallation of the fatal cooking shelf. His father is too sick to work much, so Abdul is single-handedly supporting his family on the equivalent of about \$11 a day.

On the July day when brick dust ruins her rice, Fatima decides to trap the Husains by drawing them into a public brawl. An outdoor shouting match ensues, witnessed by all the neighbors. Zehrunisa calls Fatima a prostitute; Abdul, ever the conciliator, pulls them apart, and Fatima then takes a rickshaw directly to the police station, where she reports that the other woman has assaulted her. Within a few minutes, Zehrunisa arrives to contradict Fatima's story, but too late. Fatima is sent home, her complaint largely ignored, but Zehrunisa is forced to stay, and the extortion process begins. The shakedown starts modestly at 1,000 rupees (about \$20), to be given to Fatima—and shared, of course, with the policemen.

As Zehrunisa languishes in the police station, the Husains' oldest daughter, Kehkashan, charges Fatima with the lies that landed her mother in custody, while hundreds of neighbors look on. Mr. Husain, who was out trying to buy floor tiles and missed the original encounter, now threatens to give Fatima a real beating.

I must intervene here, to point out one of many background details that leap off the page. Kehkashan has recently left her husband—a cousin whom her family arranged for her to marry when the two were toddlers—because she found pictures of another woman on his cell phone. The young, urban Indian underclass is not inexperienced in the ways of modern technology. Its members play video games and watch movies, but, like their peers in other megacities, they are not really part of the larger metropolis. Only arrests and detentions, albeit frequent, tend to take them out of Annawadi and its immediate environs. Still, all of them dream of leaving, and believe they will.

Back at her hut, Fatima plots her next move: She will set herself on fire, then quickly douse the flames with water and blame the Husains

for trying to burn her. Once the plan is set in motion, though, she doesn't extinguish the flames quickly enough. Carried to a hospital, she dies of an infection three days later. But a small, cruel, incomprehensible revolution has been launched. No one in authority believes that the Husains murdered Fatima, whose own young daughter witnessed the burning incident and told what she saw. Even so, without bribes or the intervention of higher-ranking authorities, corrupted justice marches on. The rest of the book traces its expanding implications.

Boo never underestimates the force of class jealousy. Arrests and jailings, especially of the relatively successful, are first-rate entertainment for the neighbors. Early on, Boo summarizes the view of Asha, a would-be slumlord and local power player who lives near the Husains: "She had by now seen past the obvious truth—that Mumbai was a hive of hope and ambition—to a profitable corollary. Mumbai was a place of festering grievance and ambient envy. Was there a soul in this enriching, unequal city who didn't blame his dissatisfaction on someone else? . . . Everyone, everywhere, complained about their neighbors." Asha understands the link between envy and corruption. It can be used. Others' yearnings, exploited smartly, are openings to wealth and power. Asha's perfect daughter, Manju, might—with luck—become Annawadi's first college graduate.

If there's hope, it lies with the children. Many are orphans, or effectively so, given the ravages of drink and tuberculosis, but they retain many of the charms of childhood: enthusiasm, knacks for mimicry and tale telling, and a readiness to act the daredevil. Many will fall to drug abuse, road accidents, and suicide. Arranged marriages, gang violence, preventable diseases, and incarceration will claim even the most hopeful. But they are true believers in the rising economic tide. Boo muses, "Annawadians now spoke of better lives casually, as if fortune were a cousin arriving on Sunday, as if the future would look nothing like the past."

For opportunists such as Asha, Boo writes,

that fortune can arrive in many forms. "In the West, and among some in the Indian elite, this word, *corruption*, had purely negative connotations; it was seen as blocking India's modern, global ambitions. But for the poor of a country where corruption thieved a great deal of opportunity, corruption was one of the genuine opportunities that remained."

In other words, everyone on top is out to squeeze you. Not destroy you—they need their share of your services, often sexual, and great chunks of your income. With corruption the one constant underneath the narrative of a progressive

and prosperous India, there's no reason you can't profit, as Asha does, from dalliances with police inspectors and politicians.

Everyone below you will scheme and lie, and, yes, try to destroy you, because the surest mark of success in Annawadi is to witness, or cause, a neighbor's fall. Schadenfreude could have been an Annawadian invention. And the competition is not simply economic: If your children are in school and doing well, aspersions will be cast—who are you sleeping with? If you manage to fix up your hut, install a shelf, tile the floor, or buy a television set, you'll attract the scorn of your neighbors—what did you steal? Conspicuous success will eventually earn police attention.

This has been an uncomfortable book to read, more so because I trust the reporting. Boo, whose husband is Indian, lived for several months in Annawadi over a three-year period. She does not speak the languages (Hindi, Urdu, and Marathi), but relied on translators and multiple interviews. The dynamics all ring true. An uncle of mine used to say, of the joint family, in which many generations of an Indian family live communally, "In times of stress, a fortress. Otherwise, a madhouse." Those

The competition is not simply economic: If your children are in doing well in school, aspersions will be cast—who are you sleeping with?

words convey the atmosphere of Annawadi, where the smallest incident can incite a riot, and an act of generosity can mend a rift.

Boo's take on India and the people she obviously loves (in an exasperated way) shows that the country's ancient social structures run more like the joint family than a class system. The great terror is not incarceration but exclusion, or, finally, banishment. The old caste-and-class conflicts are weakening—especially in the cities, where India's future is being written—but they still trump the call to collective

revolt against corrupt and arrogant overlords.

The future in Annawadi, even for the more privileged, is still unreadable. Boo's last words in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* are cautionary and apply universally: "If the house is crooked and crumbling, and the land on which it sits uneven, is it possible to make anything lie straight?"

BHARATI MUKHERJEE is the prize-winning author of eight novels, most recently *Miss New India* (2011), and two story collections. She and her husband, Clark Blaise, have collaborated on two India-based nonfiction studies, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* and *The Sorrow and the Terror*. Mukherjee is a professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley.

Noble Savages

Reviewed by Jag Bhalla

THE STORIES WE'VE BEEN told about the role of competition in our evolution have been unnaturally selective. Sound-bite pop science, of the "red in tooth and claw" and "selfish gene" variety, has left out much that is essential

to human nature. Anthropologist Christopher Boehm aims to resurrect some of those missing elements in *Moral Origins*. In his view, cooperation, along with the traits and rules needed to make it work, was as essential to our survival as large brains.

Boehm has spent 40 years studying hunter-gatherers and the behavior of our primate cousins. His book's explanatory quest started with a 10-year review of all 339 hunter-gatherer cultures ethnographers have described, 150 of which were deemed representative of our ancestors. Fifty of these have so far been coded into a detailed database. Boehm says this deep data set shows that we have been "vigilantly egalitarian for tens of thousands of years."

The dominant view of human evolution against which Boehm deploys his arguments and data is well summarized in evolutionary

MORAL ORIGINS:

The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame.

By Christopher Boehm.
Basic Books.
418 pp. \$28.99

biologist Richard Dawkins's hugely influential 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins famously warned that "if you wish . . . to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature." In nature, he declared, there is "no welfare state." Indeed, he wrote, "any altruistic system is inherently unstable, because it is open to abuse by selfish individuals, ready to exploit it." These ideas, aided by others' similar claims, became barrier beliefs, preventing further analysis for decades.

Boehm's story begins when the survival of our ancestors became a team sport. About 250,000 years ago, collaborative hunting of big game became more successful than solo hunting. Teams that chased the game toward hunters could be much more productive—but only if the profits were sustainably shared. A further complication arose in harsh environments where success depended on luck as well as skill. Both problems were solved, then as now, by the logic of shared profits and risks. Even the best hunters, when unlucky, benefited from rules that required meat sharing. Solving this collective carnivores' dilemma



Bushmen gather firewood near South Africa's Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. Studies of hunter-gatherers past and present show that cooperation is crucial to human survival; the mandate to share has been strictly enforced.

radically changed the rules of our evolutionary game. Those who were skilled at cooperating fared better, as did those with the fittest sharing rules. Our ancestors, Boehm writes, went through a “major political transition,” developing from “a species that lived hierarchically” into one that was “devoutly egalitarian.”

Dawkins argued that the benefits enjoyed by selfish exploiters, or free riders, are a key constraint on the viability of generous cooperation. Though he was right about that, he was deeply wrong in being so pessimistic about evolution's ability to overcome such hurdles. Boehm marshals extensive evidence showing how hunter-gatherers use rigidly enforced social rules to suppress free riding today, providing a model for how our ancestors could have cooperated in a natural “welfare state” that was crucial to their survival.

A key new insight Boehm provides is that humans are both able and inclined to “punish resented alpha-male behavior”—for example, when powerful individuals hog more than their fair share of meat. He illustrates this phenomenon with examples from present-day hunter-gatherer societies, in which social rules are used to prevent excessive egoism, nepotism, and cronyism. For example, meat is nev-

er distributed by the hunter who made the kill, but by another stakeholder. Rules of this kind are socially enforced by means of “counter-dominant coalitions” and techniques such as ridicule, shaming, shunning, ostracism, and, ultimately, the death penalty. (Typically, the task of execution is delegated to a kinsman of the condemned to prevent escalating revenge by other relatives.) The result is a sort of inverted eugenics: the elimination of the strongest, if they abuse their power. Astonishingly, such solutions aren't rare; rather, they're nearly universal. Our ancestors likely unburdened themselves of the “Darwinian” overhead costs of Hobbes's “war of all against all.” Lincoln's principle of government “of the people, by the people, for the people” ran deeper than he knew.

Socially enforced rules create powerful new environmental pressures. The lowest-cost strategy to avoid social penalties becomes preemptive self-control. Many evolutionary psychologists commit a grave error when they assume, for example, that our epidemic of obesity is a result of our evolved preference for fatty meat, which is irresistible in an environment of excess. Impulse control has likely long been adaptive, especially in regard to social rules.

This premium on self-control nurtured a capacity to internalize behavioral rules—to feel instinctively that some behaviors are definitively right or wrong. These rules tended to balance immediate selfish gain with longer-term or group interests. The enlightening moral emotions, such as shame and guilt, that implement these constraints created a means to administer a social contract without “policemen, judges, and juries.”

At some point we transitioned from an “ape-like ‘might is right,’ fear-based social order to one also based on internalizing rules and worrying about personal reputations.” And conscious, reputation-based social selection for collaborative activities became dominant. If you were known not to cooperate generously, you were less likely to reap group benefits, and less likely to be selected for the massively resource-intensive collaborative venture of raising human offspring. Those who played by the moral rules tended to breed with others who did the same. Boehm describes these directed selection processes as “auto-domestication.”

When one is thinking about human evolution, a common error—which Boehm tends to repeat—is to fixate on genetically influenced behaviors. Much of what humans do is nowhere in our genes. For example, neither you nor I have genes coded specifically for what we are each doing at this precise moment. Writing and reading are marvels of our educability, learned at large cost—unlike spoken language, which is innate and emerges effortlessly.

Boehm’s book contains many important ideas, but its flaws risk reducing their impact. His fresh thinking is mired in a musty, baggage-laden vocabulary. For example, a less loaded term for “morals” would be “social coordination rules.” A better term for “conscience” might simply be “social rule processor,” very similar to our “language rule processor.” We easily absorb and use the rules of both. Because Boehm aims at two not easily compatible audiences, the general reader and the student-practitioner, he goes into

too much detail in some places, and in others he assumes too much knowledge on the part of the reader. But those who persevere will be well compensated.

Boehm estimates that our dependence on social rules evolved some 250,000 years ago. That’s 10,000 generations. In comparison, only 15 generations have elapsed since Enlightenment thinkers began promoting the idea that self-interested social coordination rules were politically and economically viable. And it’s been perhaps two generations since those ideas began to prevail over the theory that unfettered egoistic competition is good and natural. Boehm shows that whatever the intellectual fashions are, our nature has long included adaptive constraints to counter the costs of unproductive competition. Models of our nature and social organization that lack these balancing forces ignore inalienable traits that have long served us well.

Scientific descriptions of human nature are particularly susceptible to Rorschach readings. Victorian capitalists and imperialists aggressively promoted the “survival of the fittest” strain in Darwin. (English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, a key popularizer of Darwin, went so far as to describe the merciless natural world a “holocaust . . . in every hedge.”) These ideas came to define what “Darwinian” meant, to the point where Darwin’s less convenient ideas were ignored. But that bitterly pessimistic view has too long held sway. As Charles Darwin himself wrote in *The Descent of Man* (1871), “Social instincts, which no doubt were acquired by man, as by the lower animals . . . will from the first have given to him some wish to aid his fellows.” Indeed, Darwin goes on to call any man who does not harbor such instincts an “unnatural monster.” Boehm helps us see again that we need not be so monstrously at odds with our social natures.

JAG BHALLA is a writer and entrepreneur living in Washington, D.C. He is the author of *I’m Not Hanging Noodles on Your Ears* (2009), on amusing idioms of various cultures, and is currently at work on *Errors We Live By*, a book about fallacies in the ideas that run our world.

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

The Urban Future

Reviewed by Joel Garreau

IS GENTRIFICATION THE “fifth great migration,” that will fill old downtowns with upper-middle-class white folks, while the tract mansions of the outer ring become slums for immigrants? So suggests Alan Ehrenhalt, the former executive editor of *Governing* magazine. In *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City*, he proposes that a demographic shift is under way that is reversing generations of suburbanization and white flight.

This book will gain Ehrenhalt nothing but friends, admirers, and speaking engagements among the New Urbanist set, just as Richard Florida, perhaps today’s best-known urban theorist, has made a good living with his work. Ehrenhalt believes that “the massive outward migration of the affluent that characterized the second half of the 20th century is coming to an end.” Soon, he predicts, scarcely anyone “will be buying large, detached single-family houses 30 miles from the city limits.” And, more specifically, “Chicago in 2030 will look more like the Paris of 1910 than like the Detroit of 1970.”

As corroboration of this vision of the future, he notes the undeniable fact that the ‘burbs have not been lily white for decades. Their good jobs, good schools, property values, and low crime rates continue to attract great numbers of hard-working, middle-class African Americans and immigrants. Meanwhile, as some inner-city neighborhoods become safer, they are drawing the market segment that developers refer to as “the risk

**THE GREAT
INVERSION
AND THE
FUTURE OF THE
AMERICAN CITY.**

By Alan Ehrenhalt.
Knopf. 276 pp. \$26.95

oblivious.” Often, these are intrepid young white people without school-age children who recognize that it was always nuts to ignore the marvelous real estate near the old downtowns. Frequently, they are followed by the somewhat less adventurous and more affluent.

For those of us who have long admired Ehrenhalt’s astuteness, however, this book’s theme is undercut by some real head scratchers: His “great inversion” thesis isn’t supported by the 2010 Census data, the location of high-paying white-collar jobs, or the rise of the Internet as a social and economic force.

As demographer Wendell Cox and others have noted, suburbs are capturing a growing share of the population increase in the nation’s major metropolitan areas. “Historical core municipalities accounted for nine percent of metropolitan area growth between 2000 and 2010,” Cox writes, “compared to 15 percent in the 1990–2000 period. Overall, suburban areas captured 91 percent of metropolitan area population growth between 2000 and 2010, compared to 85 percent between 1990 and 2000.”

The old real estate mantra “location, location, location” applies to American jobs,



Wave of the future? Santa Fe, New Mexico, attracts hip professionals who want to live near like-minded people but far from major metropolises.

too. If you imagined the map of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area as a waiter's tray, with each white-collar job assigned the same weight, you'd discover that the balance point was just east of the "edge city" of Tysons Corner in Fairfax County, Virginia. New residential areas such as wealthy Loudoun County, Virginia, are booming because of their proximity to concentrations of high-paying jobs around Dulles International Airport, Reston, Fair Oaks, and Tysons. People living in these areas can go years without visiting the District of Columbia, much less commuting to it.

Because the Internet is, in effect, a transportation device, it is transforming the built environment. There are nearly 100 classes of real estate—including grocery stores, warehouses, and offices—from which cities are built, noted the late urban theorist William J. Mitchell of MIT. All are being transfigured more swiftly and dramatically than they were by the rise of the automobile.

In addition, the Internet is, counterintuitively, putting a new value on face-to-face contact. This has led to the rise of village-like places where people can easily meet. Some are embedded in old downtowns—the sort of places Ehrenhalt cites, such as Chicago's University Village. Some are part of what traditionally have been regarded as suburbs. But the fastest-growing segment consists of places such as Santa Fe, New Mexico. Home to a world-renowned opera, charming architecture, distinguished restaurants, quirky bookstores, sensational desert and mountain vistas, and a great deal of diversity, Santa Fe, with a population of 68,000, is also little more than a village, far from the nearest metropolis. It represents aggregation and dispersal.

If and when real estate begins to increase in value, it may be instructive to look at the metropolitan areas that were appreciating fastest before the recent crash. Number one was Wenatchee, Washington. On the dry, east side of the Cascade Range, it has lots of sunshine, great skiing, and beautiful views, and thus at-

tracted a lot of hip people who brought with them the arts, cafés and restaurants, and increased educational opportunities. Then came the Seattle-area software people, who extended their outdoorsy weekends using cell phones and laptops to stay in touch with the office, eventually moving there and starting their own businesses. Almost the entire top-20 list of fast-appreciating metro areas similarly became urbane without really becoming urban.

Ehrenhalt is absolutely correct that "we are moving toward a society in which millions of people with substantial earning power or ample savings will have the option of living wherever they want." Whether that choice will amount to a great inversion, in which the roles of cities and suburbs "will very nearly reverse themselves," remains to be seen.

JOEL GARREAU's books include *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991) and *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies—and What It Means to Be Human* (2005). He is the Lincoln Professor of Law, Culture, and Values at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University and a Future Tense Fellow at the New America Foundation.

HISTORY

Leader of the Pack

Reviewed by Laura Claridge

MILLIONS OF AMERICAN women have worn a Girl Scout uniform, including Hillary and Chelsea Clinton, Lucille Ball, Mariah Carey, and Sandra Day O'Connor.

Aside from those ubiquitous boxes of thin mint cookies, the organization, which today claims more than three million members, is synonymous with the best values of American culture, including devotion to public service and chipper self-sufficiency. It owes its existence to the vision of a vibrant if eccentric promoter of opportunities for girls, as historian Stacy A. Cordery recounts in *Juliette Gordon Low: The Remarkable Founder of the Girl Scouts*.

JULIETTE GORDON LOW:
The Remarkable
Founder of the
Girl Scouts.

By Stacy A. Cordery.
Viking. 382 pp. \$28.95



Girl Scouts founder Juliette Gordon Low poses with two scouts in the early years of the movement that promoted inclusion and public service.

Low, known all her life as Daisy, was born in Savannah in 1860, on the brink of the Civil War, to a Confederate captain and his Yankee wife. As a young woman, she grew smitten with William Mackay Low, a rich squire with a likewise geographically divided pedigree: His mother was a local belle and his father was British. After months of Southern romance, “Willy” left for Oxford, where he was too busy carousing with other women to answer Daisy’s letters, though he spent every summer with her. Once he decided to settle down, however, the two became engaged—Daisy evidenced the fine breeding he required in a bride, and she was attracted to his wild streak.

Already having lost most hearing in one ear because of an improperly treated infection, Daisy suffered a freak accident at their wedding in 1886 when a grain of rice thrown by a celebrant lodged in the same ear and led to complications in both ears that left Daisy al-

most entirely deaf. Seeking treatment for the disability, as well as for tubo-ovarian abscesses that left her childless, preoccupied Daisy as Willy returned to his libertine ways.

Living most of each year in London, and manipulating their life until he was Daisy’s only priority, Willy became “everything to her and simultaneously despised her for it,” Cordery writes. Unfortunately, she fails to provide much insight into the personalities of Willy and Daisy, whetting our interest without giving satisfaction. The book, though gracefully written, lacks the bite of Cordery’s biography of Alice Roosevelt Longworth—probably because Daisy was a nicer person and because her life produced a comparative dearth of primary sources.

In 1905, just after Daisy had accepted the inevitability of divorce, her husband died suddenly. With the help of her family, she fought successfully to claim the inheritance Willy had left

to his lovers and friends instead of to his wife.

By 1908 Low was accompanying relatives and friends to Pompeii, Egypt, Africa, and India.

But once back in her London home, she would complain of boredom and loneliness. Yet when she filled her house

with guests, she would disappear until the frantic servants found her upstairs. (One wishes Cordery had plumbed such eccentricity—or buried hostility—more deeply.)

Low’s life changed in 1911, when, at the age of 51, she met General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, a Renaissance man who had recently founded the Boy Scouts in England. Having long felt that women were treated as second-class citizens (especially when, as in Low’s

In 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. lauded the Girl Scouts as “a force for desegregation”: Troops were frequently integrated by then. Today, Low’s ethos of acceptance endures.

case, the member of the “weaker sex” had a physical disability), Baden-Powell convinced her that she could achieve for girls what he had for boys. Low headed home to Georgia, where she telephoned a friend to say, “Come right over. . . I’ve got something for the girls of Savannah and all America.”

Low organized the first troop meeting of 18 girls in her hometown on March 12, 1912. When the United States declared war on Germany five years later, she and her troops registered voters, rolled bandages, planted victory gardens, learned Morse code, and made vast numbers of “smokeless trench candles” with which soldiers could warm their rations. At last, Juliette Gordon Low had found herself useful.

The organization grew quickly; within eight years, it numbered over 67,000 members. Low remained at the helm until shortly before her death from cancer in 1927. As a leader, she was far from perfect. She was frequently bossy and unwilling to share authority with others. Her eccentricity coupled with her deafness could make her whimsy appear more imperious than charming. But her belief that women could overcome any adversity convinced her that public service was a perfect fit for typically underoccupied girls and women.

Initially unsure about the wisdom of racially integrating the Girl Scouts at the troop level, Low formed the first all-black troop in 1917. Other racially and culturally defined troops soon followed. In 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. lauded the Girl Scouts as “a force for desegregation”: Troops were frequently integrated by then. Today, Low’s ethos of acceptance endures. This past October, a Denver Girl Scout troop told seven-year-old transgender Bobby Montoya that he could not join. But a national spokesperson for the organization later said the decision had been a mistake: “If a child is living life as a girl . . . we welcome her. We do not require proof of gender.”

Laura Claridge is the author of *Emily Post: Daughter of the Gilded Age, Mistress of American Manners* (2008). She is currently working on a biography of Blanche Knopf.

United States of Givers

Reviewed by Suzanne Garment and Leslie Lenkowsky

DESPITE THE SLUGGISH economy, Americans gave a staggering \$290 billion to charity in 2010. There is no shortage of causes clamoring for our attention—and our dollars. Philanthropic

drives and organizations are woven into the fabric of American life. In *Philanthropy in America*, Olivier Zunz, a historian at the University of Virginia, has written a lucid and engaging story of how this came to be. He focuses on the 20th century, when Americans transformed their prolific, but mostly localized, efforts to form groups for addressing all manner of problems into philanthropy on a much larger scale, measured not only in the amount of money and numbers of people involved, but also in the scope of what such enterprises tried to achieve. American democracy has been “enlarged,” Zunz writes, by this “convergence of big-money philanthropy and mass giving.” The question is whether 21st-century philanthropy can withstand the growing chorus of criticism that has resulted.

One factor in this transformation was the rise of large American foundations in the early 20th century. Rich funders, such as John D. Rockefeller, and social reformers, such as education activist Abraham Flexner, formed alliances to address the root causes of impoverishment rather than give alms directly to the poor. The new allies gradually dismantled common-law doctrines that had limited donors to making gifts for narrow purposes, and during the Progressive Era, the great foundations—Rockefeller, Carnegie, Russell Sage—embarked on large-scale programs in fields ranging from scientific research to the rebuilding of the South.

At the same time, Americans’ old-fashioned idea of charity as alms for the poor evolved into the concept of philanthropy as a “search for the

**PHILANTHROPY
IN AMERICA:
A History.**

By Olivier Zunz.
Princeton Univ. Press.
381 pp. \$29.95



Liberal George Soros (left) and conservative brothers Charles (middle) and David Koch add a political edge to philanthropy.

common good.” Zunz lays out the markers of this trend: the founding of community chests such as the United Way, the rise of professional fundraising, and the beginning of nationwide campaigns to amass money for the eradication of diseases such as tuberculosis.

Hovering over the great convergence was the question of the role government should play when donors claimed that they too could legitimately address public interests. As Zunz sees it, the presidency of Herbert Hoover gave one answer, when he asked private philanthropy to deliver social services to the unemployed during the deepening Depression, without much assistance from government. The New Deal offered another: Harry Hopkins, as head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, decided that if funds gathered through taxation were to be distributed to American citizens, government would do the job. In 1934, Congress seemed to decide the question of what relationship private philanthropy should have with government when it revised the federal tax code to stipulate that nonprofit organizations could “educate” but not “advocate.”

During the 1960s, some organizations, chiefly the Ford Foundation, found ways to circumvent what Zunz considers this unsatisfactory division of nonprofit activities, as well as to exert significant influence over urban and welfare policies. Their circumventions became national policy with the introduction of Lyn-

don B. Johnson’s Great Society: Government would now fund the provision of social services by private nonprofit organizations. Philanthropy was back in the public arena, “not as a subordinate but as an ally,” Zunz writes.

True, this was not the end of philanthropy’s troubles with government. It had to contend with both the growth of politically conservative groups, which insisted on an end to the alliance, and the increasing weight of government, whose influence was so pervasive that it threatened to overwhelm the philanthropic sector.

Out of this conflict, Zunz argues, a new synthesis has emerged. In Washington, conservative administrations’ support for financial aid for faith-based initiatives allowed religion, that quintessentially private force, back into the public arena, while legitimizing the idea of partnerships between private philanthropies and government. A series of Supreme Court decisions, meanwhile, has made it easier for nonprofits to venture into the realm of advocacy and exert influence on government. Today, Zunz says, the “only serious limitation that remains” on political activity by nonprofits is “their being barred from entering electoral contests,” and the *Citizens*

A series of Supreme Court decisions has made it easier for nonprofits to venture from education into the realm of advocacy and exert influence on government.

United case of 2010, which removed limits on corporate spending to fund issue-oriented groups, may breach even that barrier.

But the synthesis Zunz describes is already showing cracks. The nonprofits that have allied themselves with government must now cope with the fact that the states are increasingly unable to pay their bills. As wealthy people and well-funded organizations increasingly dominate the private side of American philanthropy, critics on both right and left have decried its democratic pretensions and called for tighter controls. It may have looked for a time as if American philanthropy could combine its divergent traditions and coexist successfully with government, but it seems ever more likely that the moment has passed.

SUZANNE GARMENT is a visiting scholar at Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy. LESLIE LENKOWSKY is a professor of public affairs and philanthropic studies at Indiana University. They are coauthoring a book on philanthropy and public policy.

An Economy of Regard

Reviewed by Marie-Therese Connolly

THE STORY BEHIND HENDRIK Hartog's important new book sounds almost like the setup to a joke: What does a Princeton legal historian do when he visits his 91-year-old mother for a month? Spend alternating days shuttling between Mom, who lives in a retirement community in San Mateo, California, and the *New Jersey Miscellany*, an "obscure and unofficial series of New Jersey case volumes" unearthed in the law library at the University of California, Berkeley.

Hartog discovered a cluster of New Jersey cases spanning the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, chronicling disputes that arose when older people used promises of inheritance to cajole younger ones, usually their adult children, into caring for them. The resulting book, *Someday All This Will Be Yours*, explores arrangements that preceded the multibillion-

dollar enterprise we now call family caregiving.

Family members have cared for one another in old age for millennia. But in the 19th century, families were becoming smaller, and with economic opportunities expanding, "no one had to stay home and provide care." How, then, to assure it? With *promises* of inheritance, but without creating what Hartog calls the "King Lear problem"—"giving up control and power and property too early." Once the inheritance changed hands, the parent lost leverage. In the words of Shakespeare's aging king, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

Promised inheritances thus became, in effect, collateral for homegrown long-term care insurance policies. Family members, adopted children, and others provided years and sometimes decades of hard labor, housekeeping, and nursing. Disputes arose when the deceased's will didn't provide the expected remuneration, siblings staked competing claims, or creditors objected. Litigants sued under various legal theories, including—in the archaic language of law—*quantum meruit*, or as much as one deserves. The resulting cases reflect the evolving roles and entitlements of women and men, parents and children, family and help.

Hartog's book doesn't yield neat lessons, but it does reveal trends. The earliest cases he found revolved around the question of whether adult children remained subject to the "empire of the father." That debate gave way to judicial attempts to find clarity by focusing on definitions of "family." In *Disbrow v. Durand* (1892), a New Jersey court analyzed the claim of Sarah Disbrow "not in terms of patriarchal authority but of the expectations of 'members of a family, living as one household.'" Disbrow had provided live-in help to her unmarried brother, keeping house, cooking for him and his hired men, and nursing him in his last illness. The court denied her claim to compensation, finding her labor to have been borne of the types of "reciprocal acts of kindness and goodwill, which tend

SOMEDAY ALL THIS WILL BE YOURS:

A History of Inheritance and Old Age.

By Hendrik Hartog.
Harvard Univ. Press.
353 pp. \$29.95

to mutual comfort and convenience”—in other words, familial labors rather than the fruit of a contractual agreement.

At the turn of the 20th century, courts tried to distinguish between “normal work” (cooking, cleaning, companionship) and “exceptional work.” In 1893, for example, after Asher Woolverton broke his hip, he relied on his stepson-in-law, David Lawshe, to frequently help him with various bowel problems. Litigants such as Lawshe enumerated in graphic detail the indignities that attend the mutinies of flesh and mind to persuade courts that the care provided was not of the normal sort, but was undertaken with an expectation of compensation.

Women were denied recompense more often than men, on the assumption that they had more of a duty and paid a smaller price than their male counterparts, a perspective that raised enduring questions about “women’s work”: Do we demean caregivers (chiefly women) by not paying them for the care they provide children and elders? Do we pervert the meaning of family by assigning a dollar value to care offered out of love?

By the mid-20th century, Hartog’s narrow swath of cases disappears (though the disputes likely morphed into other sorts of legal claims). But even as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, pensions, and private insurance ushered in a “commoditized universe of pay for services,” family caregiving continued to grow.

The issues underlying Hartog’s cases are hardly obsolete. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, 43 million people (more than live in California) provide unpaid care, broadly defined, for someone 50 or older, often at substantial personal cost. The cumulative price tag for such care is estimated at \$450 billion a year in supplies, lost wages, transportation expenses, and other costs. These numbers will grow as the nation’s 77 million baby boomers age.

It’s not clear who’s going to provide or pay for all the care that will be needed. Hartog’s subjects had assets to fight over. Those with-

out means relied on family and the poorhouse, just as today they mostly rely on family and Medicaid. Medicare doesn’t reimburse most long-term care costs, and few people can afford long-term care insurance. The fact is that, as a matter of policy, economic necessity, and personal preference, millions will continue to rely on care provided at home by kin.

Though the focus of Hartog’s fascinating book is narrow, the questions it raises about conceptions of family, gender roles, work, aging, disability, duty, love, and the (fair) wages of caregiving are abundantly contemporary.

MARIE-THERESE CONNOLLY is a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, director of the nonprofit Life Long Justice initiative, and a 2011 MacArthur Foundation fellow.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Human Circuit Board

Reviewed by Eric Hand

WHO ARE YOU? ONCE, THAT question was answered by philosophers. Today, it’s often the province of geneticists who parse our DNA for clues to our identity. In *Connectome*, Sebastian Seung, a neuroscientist at MIT, proposes

a different source. The essence of personhood, he says, lies not so much in our genetic code as in the way the 100 billion neurons in each of our brains are wired to one another.

“Genes alone cannot explain how your brain got to be the way it is,” Seung writes. “As you lay nestled in your mother’s womb, you already possessed your genome but not yet the memory of your first kiss.” Forging memories, imagining the future, acquiring a skill—these acts all require changes in the brain that cannot have been preordained by your DNA. Key to Seung’s view is the way that structures in your brain—and the behavior of your person—evolve over your lifetime, in contrast to your genome, whose content is fixed. Neurons

CONNECTOME:
How the Brain’s
Wiring Makes Us
Who We Are.

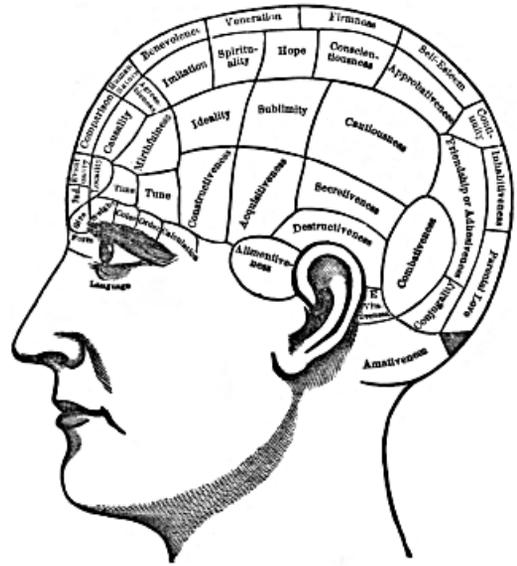
By Sebastian Seung.
Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt. 359 pp. \$27

are plastic, constantly creating and destroying connections with one another. Moreover, the electrical sparks that course through them can spike with varying degrees of strength.

Though Seung adopts the tone of the genial professor in his lessons on neural circuitry, his aim is quite earnest: to sound a rallying call to map uncharted territories. He wants nothing less than a complete snapshot of every neural connection in the human brain: a *connectome*. The task will be immense. In 1986, neuroscientists published the first and only definitive connectome—for the nervous system of *Caenorhabditis elegans*, a lowly roundworm one millimeter long. After images were taken of several thousand worm slices, the 7,000 connections made by the worm's 302 neurons were traced by hand, a project that took more than 12 years. If one were to apply the same manual approach to the far denser circuitry of the human cortex, Seung tells us, it would take a million person-years just to map a cubic millimeter.

Seung describes some of the advances that have put a human connectome in view, if not in reach. Diamond-tipped knives can slice brain matter into wafers less than 50 nanometers thick. (It takes a billion nanometers to make a meter.) These wafers are slapped onto a conveyor belt that brings each slice under an electron microscope for imaging. The limiting factor is not the gathering of these images but the identification of the neurons within them, and the sequential tracing of these neurons through the slices. Seung's lab at MIT is developing software that could automate the identification of the pathways.

Critics of the connectionist view say that a complete map of the pathways still doesn't constitute a comprehensive understanding of the brain. The shifting chemical bath in which neurons sit is also important. And the neurons themselves cannot be modeled as simple transistors, governed by binary rules. There are hundreds of types of neurons, each with different behaviors. The brain, Seung suggests, is not so much a tangled forest as it is a tropical



The phrenologists of the 19th century got one thing right: The cerebral cortex is where much of the action is.

jungle, rich in biodiversity.

But there is no denying that a map would be a major first step toward a completely mechanistic understanding of the brain. In the last two chapters of *Connectome*, Seung proposes some logical, if speculative, ends. If an aging brain is just a machine—an old car in need of new parts—why accept death? For \$200,000, Alcor, a cryonics company, will freeze clients in liquid nitrogen and promises to thaw them when scientists can repair and revive their neural pathways. (Storage of just one's sawed-off head is a better deal, at \$80,000.) Even stranger are the dreams of transhumanists who see the connectome as the key not just to outlasting the body but transcending it. If the circuits can be perfectly known, why not upload that information onto a computer and live happily ever after as a simulation?

It's hard to tell how seriously Seung takes these dreams of an afterlife. He is far more optimistic that a connectome can help in the here and now, in the development of therapies for connection disorders such as autism and schizophrenia. A connectome would mark a turning point in human history, he says. In sev-

eral million years of evolution, humans have used their brains to create technologies. In the age of the connectome, we would be creating technologies to change the very brains by which these technologies were conceived.

ERIC HAND reports on astrophysics for *Nature*.

A Genius for Languages

Reviewed by Nathalie Lagerfeld

A WELTER OF TONGUES erupted from the assembled crowd, in speech so rapid that individual phrases could barely be made out. Pope Gregory XVI had gathered a crew of international students to test the skills of Giuseppe Mezzofanti, a 19th-century Italian cardinal who supposedly spoke as many as 60 languages, including Turkish, Hebrew, French, and Chinese. According to historical accounts, Mezzofanti switched swiftly between dozens of dialects to answer the students' questions one by one, thereby passing the pope's test. His performance qualifies him as one of history's first recorded hyperpolyglots—defined as people who speak at least 11 languages.

In *Babel No More*, a study of so-called language superlearners, journalist Michael Erard argues that examining the cognitive gifts of people like Mezzofanti may help uncover “the upper limits of our ability to learn, remember, and speak languages.” Mezzofanti's capacity to switch between languages, for instance, is evidence of an extremely well-developed executive function—the set of cognitive skills that help people or-

19th-century Italian cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti spoke as many as 60 tongues, but even the linguistic genius had to study flash cards.

BABEL NO MORE:
The Search for
the World's Most
Extraordinary
Language Learners.

By Michael Erard.
Free Press.
306 pp. \$25.99



ganize and manage multiple tasks.

Erard writes that he “set out to write *Babel No More* along the lines of a book about, say, some fabled creature like the Loch Ness monster,” in which the author “returns from his wanderings enlightened, engaged. But not with the creature in a cage.” Then, on an online message board, he stumbled upon Alexander Arguelles. By working on languages for as many as 12 hours a day while teaching at a university in South Korea, Arguelles had built a repertoire of dozens of tongues, from Sanskrit to Old Norse. Erard soon encountered other hyperpolyglots, including a World Bank official with an arsenal of 19 languages, and a man in the Shetland Islands whose competence in 22 languages had won him the “Polyglot of Europe” contest in 1990, at age 68.

Eventually, Erard heard from nearly 400 polyglots who served as a sample for a Web survey he devised. It turned out that most of them didn't maintain maximum fluency in all their languages all of the time. Rather, they let some lapse in order to pick up new ones, brushing up on their former proficiencies as needed. Most hyperpolyglots seem to max out at between five and seven “active” languages, roughly the same number as average language learners who are raised in extremely multilingual environ-

ments. (Globalization, Erard observes, has brought a proliferation of such environments, so that even monolinguals such as himself must increasingly learn to “live and act multilingually.”)

The fleeting nature of their fluency didn't seem to bother the hyperpolyglots that Erard met, who had mostly given up “speaking like a native” as the standard for proficiency. Instead, they tended to fashion their own multilingual worlds. Besides, hyperpoly-

glots often make clever use of bits and pieces of a language to sound more fluent than they are. This talent allows them to complete complicated tasks with only a limited vocabulary—for instance, as a priest, Mezzofanti could quickly assimilate the standard phrases and responses needed to hear confession in a new language, even if he would be lost, say, discussing politics in it. Another case reported by Erard is that of an MIT linguistics professor who, according to his colleagues, was able to wander into an aboriginal village with a previously unknown language at 10 a.m. and begin conducting interviews for his field work by noon.

Although *Babel No More* is dense with this kind of well-observed detail, Erard flounders when he attempts to locate the physical basis of hyperpolyglots' abilities in the brain. Only a few hyperpolyglot cerebrums have ever been analyzed by scientists, so Erard must rely on individual case studies to prove the neurological exceptionalism of his captured creatures. The results are necessarily haphazard. For instance, Erard tells us that the brain of a German diplomat who knew 60-odd languages had a high density of neurons in a language-related sector of the frontal lobe known as Broca's area. But without examining other hyperpolyglot brains, scientists can't determine if this is an inborn trait or one that anyone could acquire after years of studying Mandarin Chinese.

Whether or not hyperpolyglots' brains are unique, their language-learning experiences still have enough in common with ours to yield useful insights. In *Babel No More's* final chapter, Erard compiles a helpful list of suggestions for aspiring language learners that holds out the tantalizing prospect that average people can tap into linguistic magic. Even Mezzofanti, it turns out, couldn't entirely skip the tedious process of rote language learning. A search of his library uncovered a trove of handwritten flash cards in tongues including Tagalog, Algonquin, and Persian.

NATHALIE LAGERFELD is a writer who lives in Chicago.

ARTS & LETTERS

A Wealth of Insight

Reviewed by Megan Buskey

MARILYNNE ROBINSON IS one of America's most important novelists. What often gets lost in the swooning over her fiction is that she is also one of the country's most accomplished essayists.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD I READ BOOKS.

By Marilynne Robinson.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
206 pp. \$24

Robinson stepped into the literary limelight in 1980 with the novel *Housekeeping*, an eerie story of two sisters trying to survive off the geographic and social grid. *Gilead* (2004), which won the Pulitzer Prize, and *Home* (2008) provided a fine-grained rendering of the moral and spiritual ruminations of the inhabitants of a fictional Iowa town.

But these works display only a portion of her talents. Robinson has a critical, rigorous mind. She earned a PhD in English from the University of Washington before turning to fiction and eventually taking up a teaching post at the University of Iowa. A dedicated student of ancient religion and literature, she is able to spar with translations from multiple languages. One chapter in her latest collection of erudite, searching essays, *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, takes contemporary Old Testament scholars to task for their arcane language, superficial analysis, and weakness for the reductive and clever.

While her novels have a timeless quality, Robinson's nonfiction is pointed and contemporary. This volume, titled after the first sentence of the only memoir-like essay in the collection, provides a brilliant and stirring account of the challenges and gifts of the present moment. In the course of the 10 essays, some of which have previously appeared in literary magazines such as *Brick* and *Salmagundi*, she laments the alarmism in American politics and suggests that rhetoric about the U.S. education system's need to produce workers "is so

common among us now that an extraterrestrial might think we had actually *lost* the Cold War.”

But Robinson is not your standard declinist; gratitude animates her prose. “Considering the overwhelming odds against anyone’s existence, the word ‘miraculous’ is an appropriate superlative,” she writes. How refreshing this perspective is at a time of unchecked gloom. Cast in a political light, her gratitude becomes a kind of patriotism, fueling evenhanded and learned accounts of American achievements in education, politics, and social reform.

This book sheds welcome light on the origins of Robinson’s brand of conviction. For her, 16th-century Christian theologian John Calvin, with his ethic of humility and “nonjudgmental, nonexclusive generosity,” is a guiding star. She argues that the “radical openhandedness” he embraced rooted itself early in American culture, strongly influencing colonial Puritan leaders such as Jonathan Edwards.

Today, Robinson says, American culture and politics conspire with the contemporary economics of self-interest to encourage the public to give first priority to individual needs. The notion of the common good has dissipated, as has an intrinsic respect for fellow citizens. Fiscal challenges have led many Americans to embrace austerity as both a “practical necessity and moral ideal.” Fear, cynicism, and misanthropy are around every turn.

“When we accept dismissive judgments for our community we stop having hopes for it,” Robinson writes. She credits her childhood in the West—she was born in Idaho in 1943—with her appreciation for the “radical singularity” of every human life. In the West, she explains, “lonesome is a word with strongly positive connotations.” It allows a person to appreciate the value of the individual. “When I see a man or woman alone, he or she looks mysterious to me,” she writes, “which is only to say that for a moment I see another human being clearly.”

One comes away from Robinson’s work with the sense that the life of the mind involves empathy and compassion as much as intellect.

“When we act consistently with a sense of the character of people in general which demeans them, we impoverish them *and* ourselves,” she observes. We “preclude our having a part in the creation of the highest wealth, the testimony to the mysterious beauty of life we all value in psalms, tragedies, epics, meditations, short stories, novels.” This sentiment could be improved only by adding to her list the kinds of essays she delivers with this book.

MEGAN BUSKEY is associate editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*.

Sweet Possessives

Reviewed by Colin Fleming

IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN popular songwriting, few composers have better blended hope and scorn than Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Guthrie (1912–67), an artist who seemed to believe that you couldn’t have the one without the other.

His acolyte, Bob Dylan, certainly has a way with a vituperative turn of phrase, but anger never sounded so righteous nor so proudly

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND:
Woody Guthrie and the Journey of an American Folk Song.

By Robert Santelli.
Running Press.
256 pp. \$24

Is this land still your land? Guthrie’s famed ballad took on a life of its own—but the original tune was defiant.



optimistic as when Guthrie sang “This Land Is Your Land,” a folk song that is both a paean to the country he loved and a critical broadside launched on behalf of all those—dreamers, migrant workers, poets, or anyone else—who ever felt that their vision of America had been compromised.

We encounter “This Land Is Your Land” so often in its myriad forms—as a jokey aside in a *Simpsons* episode, or as a grammar school memory, or as a sonic backdrop to the latest political rally—that sometimes Guthrie’s defiance gets lost. Most of us remember those bright opening lines:

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California, to the New York Island
From the redwood forest, to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me

But the end of Guthrie’s original version is surprisingly dark:

In the squares of the city—In the shadow of the steeple
Near the relief office—I see my people
And some are grumblin’ and some are wonderin’
If this land’s still made for you and me.

Fortunately, Robert Santelli, director of the Grammy Museum, has written a biopic of the song that—like the perpetually rambling Guthrie—covers a lot of ground. We begin with songwriter Irving Berlin, whose “God Bless America” (which he wrote in 1918 and revised in 1938) enjoyed its own kind of ubiquity in the Great Depression, thanks to singer Kate Smith. Guthrie, the hardened, hard-traveling everyman who knew the people of this country in a way few have, wasn’t in the mood for jingoism.

“Though Berlin had clearly said he wrote the song to ‘wake up America,’ the way Guthrie heard it, ‘God Bless America’ had become a sonic elixir, a numbing narcotic,” Santelli writes. Early in 1940, Guthrie made his way across the country at the height of the Berlin/

Smith phenomenon. He arrived in New York City in mid-February, with Smith’s voice, no doubt, in his head. It was riposte time, and out came a song called “God Blessed America,” with a melody sourced from a Carter Family number. Two years later, Guthrie revisited the song, replacing the line “God blessed America for me” with “This land was made for you and me,” and everything clicked into place.

Santelli dutifully covers the song’s gestation and dissects the various versions before, in essence, following it out into the world. The tireless musical anthropologist Alan Lomax played a central role in the song’s dissemination. He was close friends with Pete Seeger, who in turn became tight with Guthrie. The two musicians were practically foils for each other: “While Woody perfectly represented the look of the wandering musician with rumpled clothes and hair and guitar in tow,” Santelli writes, “Pete portrayed a picture of poise and intellect.” Seeger was also a passionate “This Land” fan, and did perhaps as much as anyone to popularize it, performing innumerable concert versions.

Once he had composed “This Land,” Guthrie himself didn’t have a lot to do with where the song went, what it did, and with whom it traveled. It was there to be used by people who had use for it, and, as such, was a song forever in demand: an exemplar of faith, candor, wit, duty, and that particularly American virtue of saying “Enough. You will push me no further.” That the song was co-opted by groups, companies, and movements that would have sickened Guthrie (the Ku Klux Klan foremost among them) speaks more to its intent than its deficiencies. “This Land Is Your Land” is nothing if not inclusive. But it’s a rare song that manages to be so welcoming—downright communal, even—while railing at those who created a world of exclusion versus inclusion in the first place.

COLIN FLEMING’S writing has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*. His first book, *Between Cloud and Horizon: A Relationship Casebook in Stories*, is forthcoming.

Rollin' Through the Years

Reviewed by Phil Patton

“THE SUN IS MIRRORED even in a coffee spoon,” declared Siegfried Giedion, the great historian of technology and champion of modernism. He believed that studying the artifacts of ordinary life could reveal at least as much about the past as the analysis of kings and wars. This school of history has given us such diverting books as *A History of the World in Six Glasses* (2005), in which journalist Tom Standage considers the cultural importance of beer and wine, and British Museum director Neil MacGregor’s *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2011).

Now Paul Ingrassia finds the sun shining in hubcaps. In *Engines of Change: A History of the American Dream in Fifteen Cars*, he examines “the automobiles that have influenced how we live and think as Americans.”

A former *Wall Street Journal* reporter and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Detroit’s auto industry, Ingrassia is also the author of *Crash Course: The American Auto-*

ENGINES OF CHANGE:

A History of the American Dream in Fifteen Cars.

By Paul Ingrassia.
Simon & Schuster.
416 pp. \$30

mobile Industry’s Road to Bankruptcy and Bailout—and Beyond (2010). That book plays out as the nightmare to the dream of his new one, which is nostalgic and frankly romantic. It is also entertaining and enlightening.

Making lists of best cars is a favorite activity of car buffs, so it is testimony to the cleverness of Ingrassia’s picks that few critics could point to glaring omissions. But Ingrassia plays some tricks in compiling his list. He goes for an offbeat choice, the Cadillac LaSalle, as a way to talk about Harley Earl, the inventor of American car design, who in the late 1920s figured out how to borrow some of the style of Spain’s aristocratic Hispano-Suiza cars to market Detroit’s newest models.

Ingrassia notes the importance of the Honda Accord, which began rolling off the line in Ohio in 1982 as the first of the so-called Japanese transplants that still regularly top the lists of best-selling models in the United States. And he reaches forward to the American debut in 2000 of the Toyota Prius hybrid, the first car that let drivers wear their green on their sleeves without fear of compromise in road performance. He cheats a bit by pivoting from his unimpeachable inclusion of the iconic military jeep to the Jeep Grand Cherokee—and a discussion of the sport-utility craze—

In its Corvette, Detroit aimed to marry European agility with power suited to straight U.S. highways. Here, the 1960 model.



sneaking two vehicles into one parking slot.

Cultural critic Jacques Barzun famously told Europeans they could not understand America without understanding baseball. He could have added the pickup truck. Together, the vehicles Ingrassia describes come close to constituting a condensed history of the car industry and car culture in America. While setting cars in the context of their times, he avoids the all-too-common practice of reducing each decade to a sort of newsreel-montage cartoon.

Along the way, Ingrassia recounts some of the familiar chest-thumping tales of motor Americana: the development of the Chevrolet Corvette, say, at the intersection of the 1950s hot rod boom and Hollywood's fascination with the European sports car. But he also provides details as bright and gleaming as a chrome hood ornament and characters as sharp and overstated as tailfins.

There is Ford designer George Walker, hailed by *Time* magazine in 1957, the year he turned out

the Edsel, as "The Celini of Chrome." Walker owned 40 pairs of shoes and 70 suits and moved in a great cloud of Fabergé cologne. And there's John DeLorean, who in the 1960s turned a modest compact, the Pontiac

Tempest, into the fiery GTO, the first muscle car, before going off to found his own doomed car company.

Ingrassia has spent his life covering the auto industry, and he takes the central cultural function of the car as a given. But his book arrives just as the automobile's role as an American cultural indicator may be passing. This year General Motors will sell more cars in China than in the United States. Recently, automotive executives were jolted by surveys showing the declining importance of driving a car as a rite of passage; one poll found that in 1983 nearly 70 percent of 17-year-olds had driver's licenses, but

in 2008 only 50 percent did. Today's teenagers are more likely to dream about their next mobile phone than their first set of wheels.

PHIL PATTON, the author of numerous books, writes about automobiles and design for *The New York Times* and teaches in the design criticism program at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Mexico's Gruesome Icon

Reviewed by Wendy Call

IN 1998, ON A STATICKY television in a small Oaxaca town, I watched Mexico's most famous newscaster interview one of the country's most famous criminals. Daniel Arizmendi López, known as El Mochaorejas—the "ear chopper"—had granted an interview to Televisa after his arrest. The bland discussion of his gruesome crimes repelled me, yet I could not turn away from Arizmendi's flat stare. He had kidnapped dozens of people. Occasionally, he murdered them. More often, he severed a victim's ear with poultry scissors and mailed it to the family. The practice had earned him millions in ransom payments, but finally it earned him a 50-year prison sentence. During a long surge in violent crime triggered by Mexico's 1994 economic crisis, Arizmendi's arrest came as a national relief, symbolizing some small degree of official control amid spiraling insecurity.

Now Mexico is entering the sixth year of an ever bloodier drug war. The country's attorney general recently estimated that 48,000 people have been killed in drug-related violence since President Felipe Calderón declared war on the cartels in 2006. In this grisly maelstrom, growing devotion to Santa Muerte, Mexico's folk saint of death, is understandable. A wide range of remedies are attributed to her intercession: vengeance, restored health, the acquisition of wealth, and healing for broken hearts.

DEVOTED TO DEATH:

Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint.

By R. Andrew Chesnut.
Oxford Univ. Press.
221 pp. \$24.95

Cultural critic Jacques Barzun famously told Europeans they could not understand America without understanding baseball. He could have added the pickup truck.

When I watched Daniel Arizmendi shrug off his crimes in 1998, I had never heard of Saint Death. Much later, even after living in Mexico for several years, I still conflated Santa Muerte and La Calavera Catrina, the comical, proper-lady skeleton made famous a century ago by artist José Guadalupe Posada. Though “Saint Death” has been venerated at least as far back as colonial times, she’s far less public than most of Mexico’s pantheon of both church-sanctioned and folk saints.

An early public devotee of Santa Muerte, Arizmendi earns multiple mentions in R. Andrew Chesnut’s *Devoted to Death*. Ever since Arizmendi’s high-profile arrest, Chesnut notes, journalists have focused on Saint Death’s vogue among drug traffickers and other criminals, while missing the larger story of a female folk saint (rejected by the Catholic Church) who has become nearly as popular as Mexico’s patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The first book about Santa Muerte published in the United States, *Devoted to Death* offers readers a tour of Saint Death’s varied roles in Mexican pop culture and quotidian life. Chesnut traces her history to 18th-century colonial records, exploring her possible origins in the Grim Reaper of medieval Europe and the Aztec death goddess Mictecacihuatl. He describes briefly how the cult of Saint Death exemplifies the quintessentially Mexican syncretism of Catholicism, native cosmology, Old and New World pagan rituals, and Afro-Cuban Santería. Perhaps most compelling are his reviews of her colorful appearances in Mexican songs, films, television shows, and novels, and even the U.S. television drama series *Breaking Bad* and *Dexter*.

Chesnut, a scholar of Catholic and religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, provides fascinating glimpses into Saint Death devotional practices on both sides of the border. One Santa Muerte devotee Chesnut interviewed tells of hiding her “Bony Lady” statuettes in her purse and taking them to Mass, so that the priest might unknowingly bless them. Chesnut men-

tions that the leader of a temple in Los Angeles weds men to Saint Death for a six-month period of sexual abstinence and devotion, but does not describe the practice nor speak to anyone who has taken the vow. He does, however, document the deeply gendered dynamics of specific petitions made to Saint Death: Women frequently ask her to bring back wayward lovers or cure husbands of alcoholism, while men more often request protection from the authorities.

Though most of the critical attention given to Chesnut’s book has come from the Catholic press, it deserves wider readership among



A figure of the popular Santa Muerte receives offerings of marijuana and U.S. dollars at a Mexico City shrine.

Mexico watchers of all religious persuasions. Santa Muerte’s popularity speaks volumes about contemporary life in Mexico amid the drug war’s unprecedented violence. Chesnut’s book is readable and accessible, if at times his tone is rather too casual. Like one of the Santa Muerte-inspired films the author describes—indeed, like the kidnapper and murderer who first brought Saint Death into the public eye—*Devoted to Death* “is engrossing in a pulp fiction kind of way.” ■

WENDY CALL is the author of *No Word for Welcome: The Mexican Village Faces the Global Economy* (2011) and is currently a distinguished visiting writer at Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa.

PORTRAIT



Expressly Forbidden

Folks rely on the U.S. Postal Service to deliver goods that are scarce in rural areas, and at least four thrifty families used it to mail children. In 1913, an Ohio couple posted their infant son a mile down the road, the 15-cent cost a bargain for freight they insured for \$50. The next year, a five-year-old girl rode the rails between two Idaho towns, accompanied by her cousin, a postal clerk, with a 53-cent stamp affixed to her coat. Both children were delivered to their grandmothers. Shortly thereafter, the mailing of such “parcels” was forbidden. ■