

The background of the cover features silhouettes of several people with their arms raised, set against a bright, light-colored background. The silhouettes are dark, creating a strong contrast. The people appear to be in a crowd, possibly at a concert or a public event, with their hands raised in various positions, some open and some with fingers slightly curled.

WQ

THE WILSON QUARTERLY
SURVEYING THE WORLD OF IDEAS

THE AMERICAN QUEST FOR REDEMPTION

STAR WARS

THE ONLINE BATTLE OVER TASTE

BOOKS **THE SPOOK
IN SAIGON**

SPRING 2013

COVER STORY

THE AMERICAN QUEST FOR REDEMPTION

From the Oprah Winfrey Network to the White House, the ritual of forgiveness and starting afresh has a mesmerizing effect on Americans. This is the land of self-help and miraculous political rebirths—and the land where super-sizing a soft drink can take on the dimension of sin. Where does the redemptive urge come from? Where is it taking us?



1. STILL THE REDEEMER NATION

by WILFRED M. McCLAY

2. THE END OF SECOND ACTS?

by SHADD MARUNA and CHARLES BARBER

3. FEEL FREE TO HELP YOURSELF

by SARAH L. COURTEAU

FEATURES

STAR WARS

by TOM VANDERBILT

Online reviews can be useful when you're trying to pick a restaurant or movie at the last minute, but do those four stars really mean what you think they do?

EDITOR'S COMMENT

FINDINGS

IN ESSENCE

Our survey of notable articles from other journals and magazines

CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

ABOUT US

The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

ABOVE: *The Arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers* (c. 1864), by Antonio Gisbert
Photograph: Bonhams, London, UK

ON THE COVER: Seeking redemption
Photograph: Ocean / Corbis

EDITOR'S COMMENT

REDEEMING AN IDEA

American exceptionalism is the subject that won't go away. This once obscure academic concept became a political football in the last presidential election, used in so many ways and for so many purposes that it quickly lost much of its meaning. I didn't imagine that it would be our real subject when Shadd Maruna and Charles Barber proposed the article on criminal rehabilitation that appears in this issue. But after deploring our national policy of warehousing convicted criminals, Maruna and Barber show that convicts (and others) who embrace a "script" of personal redemption have a good chance of turning their lives around. That led us to think more broadly about the role of redemption in American life, our deeply rooted belief that we can, or must, take what is bad and remake it into something good.

The redemptive idea is constantly playing out in our lives, whether in the quasi-religion of self-help or in politics high and low. You can see it in the parade of political leaders, celebrities, and professional athletes treading the well-worn aisle to the podium and talk-show couch to confess their sins (even though



STEVE LAGERFELD

is the editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*. Before joining the magazine's staff in the 1980s, he worked at *The Public Interest* and the Institute for Educational Affairs. His articles and reviews have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The New Republic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other publications.

we've already heard too much) and plead for forgiveness and redemption.

Barber and Maruna point toward the origins of this strange ritual and other manifestations of the redemptive idea, but Wilfred McClay takes us there, to America's Puritan roots and the secular creed that emerged from them. What makes this idea of redemption so particularly American is the way in which we have infused it into our public life and linked it to individual freedom. America gives its citizens the liberty to create and re-create their lives—indeed, it almost demands they do so. And it holds up that redemptive promise as an ideal to the world.

That is the core of the exceptionalist idea—that America has a unique role in the world as a beacon of democracy and redeemer of the promise of human

freedom. That is also what makes this idea so controversial. In 2000, the *WQ* published a long article by Seymour Martin Lipset, one of the great social scientists of the 20th century, called “Still the Exceptional Nation?” Yes, was Lipset’s answer, though he rightly noted that there are many ways in which the United States falls short of its ideals. No other *WQ* article has elicited so many proposed rebuttals from academic writers, their level of venom showing how politically charged the subject had already become.

The idea of American exceptionalism has a long lineage, beginning as a concept

developed by European intellectuals trying to understand why the United States never developed a strong socialist movement and most recently being manifested, more or less as farce, as a campaign issue in the last presidential election, when Barack Obama felt compelled to insist that, yes, he really does believe in American exceptionalism. By then, it was impossible to know what anybody was really talking about. In this issue, our authors help to restore some meaning to the idea of American exceptionalism, and point us toward fulfilling some of its promise as well.

— STEVE LAGERFELD

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Time marches on the Third Reich

“We feel that Hitler is too important...



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The deserving poor

In 1926, less than a year after arriving in the United States from her native...



NEWS FOR NEWSREELS

Time marches on the Third Reich

“We feel that Hitler is too important a figure to be ignored,” Roy E. Larsen, vice president of Time Inc., said in 1935. The point would seem incontrovertible. By then, Hitler had flouted the Treaty of Versailles, pulled out of the League of Nations, and banned all political parties except the Nazis. American newspapers were chock-a-block with Nazi news. But

as Thomas Doherty explains in *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933–1939* (Columbia Univ. Press), newsreels were a different story.

To Hollywood executives, movies were all about escapism. Audiences wanted programs of lighthearted entertainment: perhaps a Mickey Mouse cartoon, a Clark Gable feature, and a newsreel about Canada’s Dionne quintuplets. (According to Doherty, a professor of American studies at Brandeis University, newsreels devoted more screen time to the adorable quints than to the Spanish



TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

The *March of Time* series “revolutionized” the newsreel when it debuted in 1935 but died 16 years later. The last newsreel companies folded in the 1960s.

Civil War.) The movie studios themselves put out the twice-weekly newsreels, which typically zipped through a clutch of upbeat stories in 10 minutes. Those stories might range from the inconsequential to the insipid, but producers didn't care. "The newsreel is not a purveyor of news," declared the trade journal *Motion Picture Herald*.

Newsreel items about Hitler evidently soured moviegoers' mood, sometimes to the point where they would breach the peace. When the Führer appeared on screen, Nazi sympathizers might cheer and yell "Heil!" Shouting matches and even fistfights broke out. To avoid strife, *Variety* reported in 1933, "newsreel editors are all dodging Hitler close-ups."

Then, in 1935, Time Inc. launched what it called "a new kind of pictorial journalism," a monthly newsreel called *The March of Time*. The company was wagering that the conventional wisdom was wrong: Moviegoers were eager to be informed as well as entertained. Exhibitors were skittish, but *The March of Time* won over audiences and critics. *Variety* praised "its outspokenness, its fearlessness, its production qualities, and its desire to remain impartial." (In truth, impartiality was a sometime thing.) The Time Inc. series received a special Oscar in 1937 "for having revolutionized one

of the most important branches of the industry—the newsreel."

Nazis might be verboten in other newsreels, but not in *The March of Time*. A 1935 segment titled "Berchtesgaden, Bavaria!" opens with a solitary Hitler, sitting and then pacing in near darkness, illuminated only by a modest fireplace. Narrator Westbrook Van Voorhis asserts that in just two years' time, this "lone, strange man . . . has lost for his country what Germany had nearly regained—the world's sympathy." The shadowy Führer was actually an American actor, in keeping with a common newsreel practice of reenacting or simply inventing scenes. Later shots show Nazi parades, munitions factories, and Hitler—this time the real one—flourishing before an enormous crowd.

In 1938, one edition of *The March of Time*, "Inside Nazi Germany," was devoted solely to the Nazi threat. In the 18-minute film, Van Voorhis declares that Hitler's "fanatic little propaganda minister," Joseph Goebbels, has created "a nation with one mind, one will, and one objective: expansion." The film talks bluntly of the Nazis' "persecution of the Jews," shows (and translates) "Jews Keep Out" signs, and reports that city parks have "special yellow benches . . . labeled 'For Jews.'"

“Inside Nazi Germany” also contends that Nazism represents a growing menace in the United States, showing footage of “Führer” Fritz Kuhn, leader of the pro-Nazi German-American Bund, “who claims to have enrolled 200,000 U.S. Germans under the swastika.” The film concludes on an ominous and prescient note. “Nazi Germany faces her destiny with one of the great war machines in history,” Van Voorhis warns. “And the inevitable destiny of the great war machines of the past has been to destroy the peace of the world, its people, and the governments of their time.”

Senators, Roosevelt administration officials, and critics praised “Inside Nazi Germany,” but Hollywood remained queasy. The newsreel would only “kindle the embers of violence,” the *Motion Picture Herald* predicted, adding that “theater patrons are supposed to be seated in comfortable opera chairs and not crouched behind barricades.”

Some theaters had police on hand at first, but they proved unnecessary. Americans lined up to see the film—at an all-newsreel theater in New York, even the midnight showing attracted a standing-room-only crowd—and, according to one report, audiences “nearly tore down the rafters with applause.” “Inside Nazi Germany” was a hit.

Competitors took note. “Newsreels never abandoned the fashion parades, dumb yuks, and sports highlights,” Doherty writes, “but the ratio of fluff to substance began to tilt toward weightier topics.”

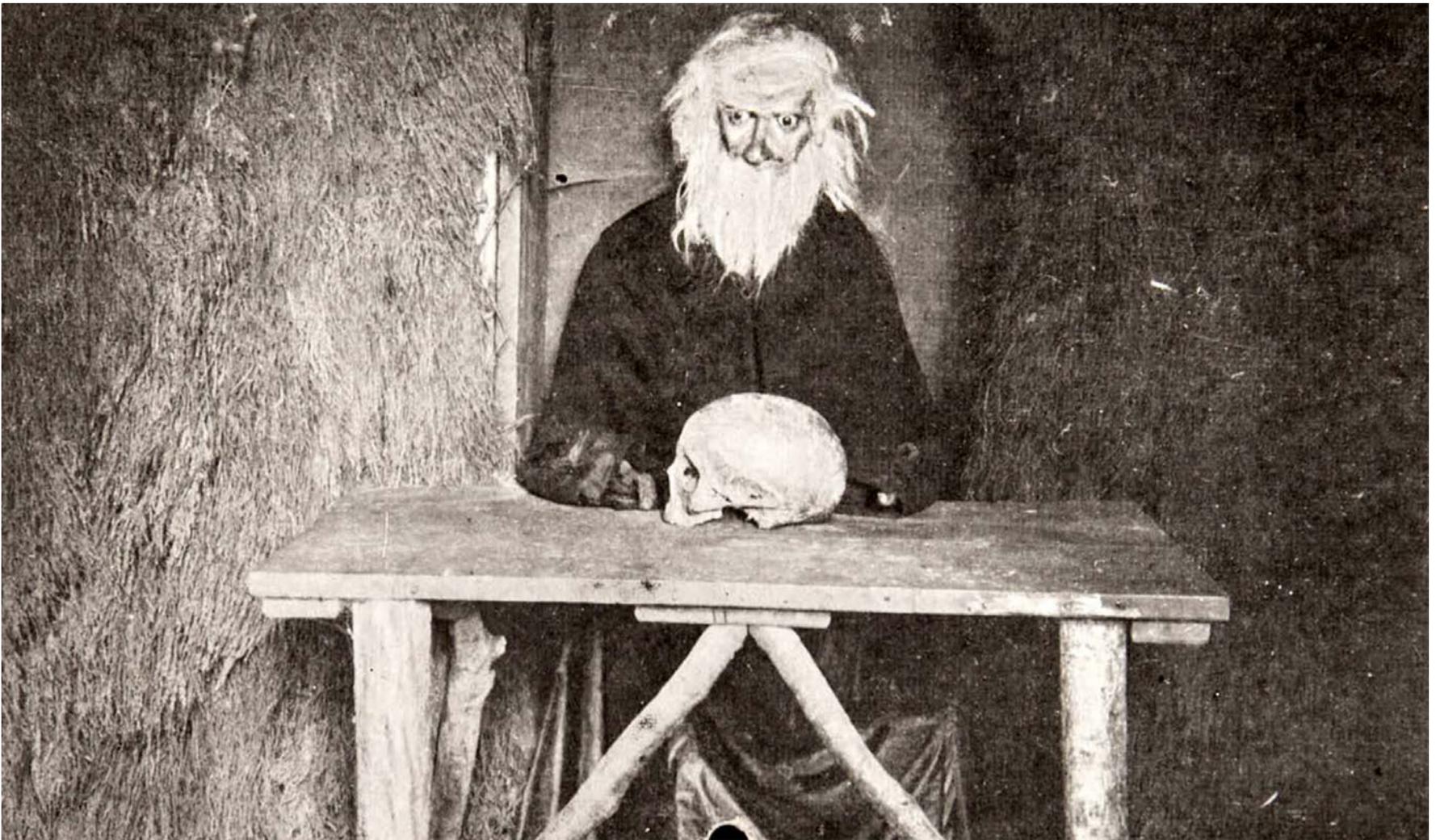
Perhaps *The March of Time* holds a lesson for the financially beleaguered press of today: If it’s well presented, serious news sells. Or, conversely, maybe contemporary editors should look elsewhere for guidance. As the film scholar Raymond Fielding points out, the newsreel may be the only medium of mass communication that, after its heyday had ended, simply vanished.

QUIET NICHE

Garden ornaments for hire

For upper-crust Britons of the 18th century, the garden was an especial point of pride. Amid the greenery, some landscape designers placed faux ruins of medieval structures. Others went in for more elaborate ornamentation: life-size rustic hermitages, inhabited by live, rustic hermits. Gordon Campbell, a professor of Renaissance studies at the University of Leicester, chronicles the fad in *The Hermit in the Garden* (Oxford Univ. Press).

A visitor strolling the grounds of Sir Richard Hill’s Hawkstone Park,



SHROPSHIRE ARCHIVES

Britain's Hawkstone Park, longtime home of Francis the hermit, still had one of his successors on the grounds in the early 20th century.

near Shrewsbury, would come upon a “well-designed little cottage,” according to a 1784 account. “You pull a bell and gain admittance. The hermit is generally in a sitting posture, with a table before him, on which is a skull, the emblem of mortality, an hourglass, a book and a pair of spectacles. The venerable bare-footed . . . Francis (if awake) always rises up at the approach of strangers. He seems about 90 years of age, yet has all his senses to admiration. He is tolerably conversant, and far from being unpolite.”

The professional hermit occupied, as Campbell puts it, “a specialist niche.” Some hermits offered their services to

estate owners by letter. Others placed newspaper ads, though as a character in Tom Stoppard’s 1993 play *Arcadia* points out, “Surely a hermit who takes a newspaper is not a hermit in whom one can have complete confidence.”

Terms of employment could be harsh. For his Painshill estate in Surrey, Charles Hamilton sought a hermit who would remain on the grounds at all times, refrain from cutting his beard and nails, and say nothing to the servant who brought his meals. If he heeded these rules for seven years, the hermit would be paid 700 guineas. Otherwise he would get nothing.

The hermit appealed to 18th-century Britons partly as a symbol, in Campbell's phrase, of the "pleasurable melancholy" brought on by contemplative solitude amid nature. Although attitudes had shifted by the early 19th century—critics likened hermitry to slavery—a few garden hermitages remained occupied. According to one account, the Hawkstone gardens still had a hermit living on the grounds in the early 1900s.

A century later, Calcutta-born performance artist Ansuman Biswas revived the lonely profession. For an art installation in 2002, Staffordshire County hired Biswas as its resident hermit. Diverging somewhat from tradition, Biswas stayed in a cave rather than a hermitage and remained there for just a weekend. (Safety regulations required him to leave at night, too.) Onlookers, the project manager said, would "explore and contest the dread and contempt society now displays for the once fashionable ideal of solitude," as well as enjoy "an antidote to . . . reality television."

Biswas landed another hermit gig in 2009, for a project sponsored by the museum of the University of Manchester. By spending 40 days in a Gothic tower, Biswas would "question the relationship of human beings to the natural world, hinting at the inevitable extinction of

the human race itself," the museum proclaimed beforehand. In the process, he would "become symbolically dead, renouncing his own liberty and cutting himself off from all physical contact."

No physical contact, however, didn't mean no contact. From his secluded cell, Biswas updated his blog and appeared on a webcam.

PROXY WAR ON TERROR

Fence sitters and peacemakers

Is Al Qaeda winning the online battle for hearts and minds? Jihadists promote their cause via YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, message boards, and, since 2010, a Web-based, English-language magazine called *Inspire*. In 2011, an American drone strike in Yemen killed *Inspire's* editor, but a new one took over and the magazine continues to appear. Though articles tend toward the turgid, the graphics are sometimes eye catching, and chillingly so. One issue includes a full-page photo of a man in a dark suit riding an escalator; behind him, a would-be assassin draws his gun. The photo bears a slogan repurposed from American politics: "YES WE CAN."

Inspire and its counterparts target

“partially radicalized ‘fence sitters’—those who are sympathetic to the extremist narrative and somewhat engaged in the online radical community, but not yet motivated to act in their own violent jihad,” according to a RAND Corporation report released in February. If the threat of terrorist attacks is to be reduced, the report says, the online advocacy of violence can’t go unanswered.

But in the high-stakes war on terror, RAND stresses, this is one battle American officialdom can’t lead. For one thing, terrorists often justify murder on religious grounds. Under the First Amendment, though, the U.S. govern-

ment can’t respond in kind. Doing so—say, by funding Muslim organizations to promulgate peaceable interpretations of the Quran—would violate the separation of church and state.

Even outside the realm of theology, RAND researchers Todd C. Helmus, Erin York, and Peter Chalk counsel a hands-off approach. They quote an Islamic scholar: “The American government is simply viewed as the kiss of death.” If a respected imam who preaches against violence is found to be on the U.S. payroll, this scholar said, “then the constituency you want to reach . . . will never, ever listen to that person again.”



JEAN-ERICK PASQUIER / GETTY IMAGES

Radical Islamists strive to recruit “fence sitters” over the Internet, and access to the Web is expanding rapidly in the Middle East.

The U.S. government may be able to act as “facilitator rather than orchestrator,” the RAND authors say—for instance, by bringing Muslim organizations together with private foundations interested in underwriting online projects. But even such baby steps may prove dicey, they note. Many high-profile Muslim leaders, including those who enjoy credibility with the disaffected fence sitters, oppose not just Islamic American officials will have to tolerate, even welcome, harsh criticism—it’s part of the price of peace.

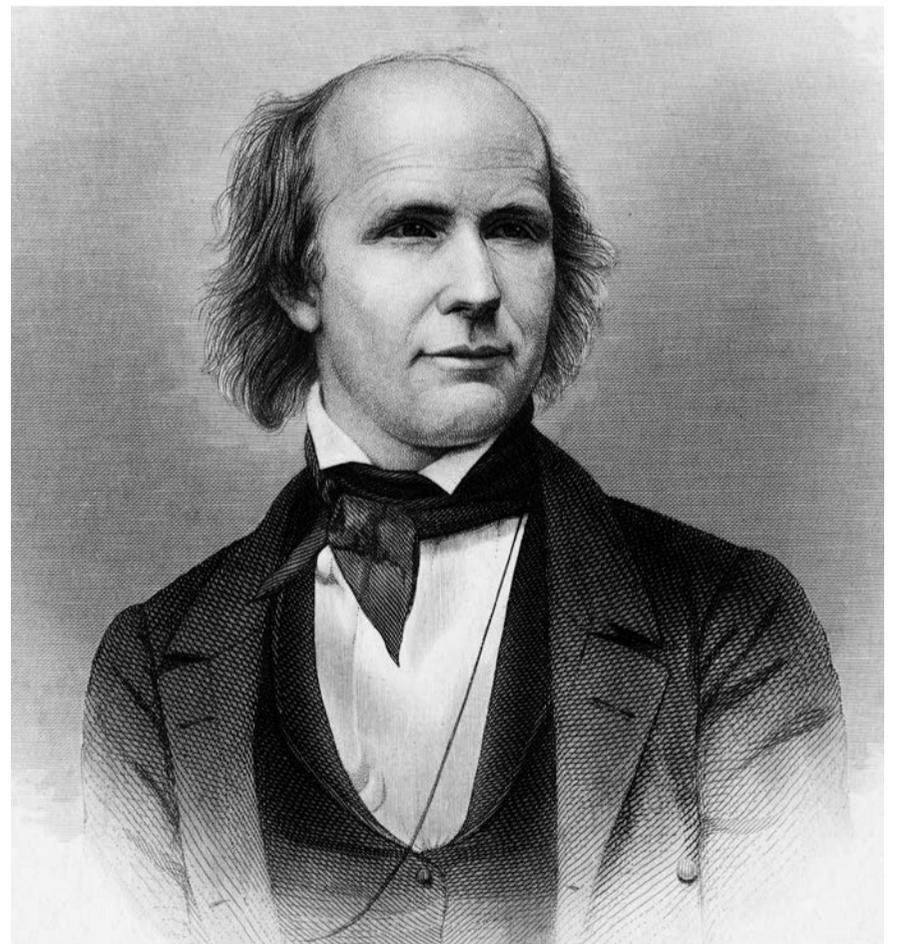
According to RAND, the bottom line is simple: For counterterrorism by

countermessaging to work, Washington can’t write the script.

PASS THE TEA AND CHIVALRY

Intimacy unripened

Born in 1810, the pioneering feminist Margaret Fuller broke one glass ceiling after another. In 1837, she was the first woman admitted to the circle of the New England Transcendentalists, which included Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In 1840, she was the first woman to edit a highbrow American journal, *The Dial*. In 1843, she



LEFT: BETTMANN / CORBIS; RIGHT: KEAN COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

Horace Greeley helped Margaret Fuller open professional doors but wouldn’t hold a real one for her. She is shown in an undated daguerreotype, he in an 1850 engraving.

was the first woman granted permission to use the Harvard College library. And in 1844, she was the first woman to join the newsroom of *The New-York Tribune*.

“Not one man, in the million, shall I say? no, not in the hundred million, can rise above the belief that Woman was made *for Man*,” Fuller wrote in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). But her new employer was one of those rare men. *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley “felt no challenge to his own authority from Margaret’s strong will,” the historian Megan Marshall writes in *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). “Instead, he admired her for it.”

Emerson thought Fuller was slumming by writing for the masses. She disagreed. After having spent years in “*the depths*” of literature, she wrote, “an abode of some length in *the shallows* may do me no harm.” Emerson also looked down his nose at Greeley, “no scholar” but a mere “mother of men.” Fuller, though, respected her boss for his “go-ahead, fearless adroitness.”

For his part, Greeley highly regarded Fuller’s intellect, her prose, and her courage—she wrote without regard to “what odium it might draw down on her own head,” he said. Nonetheless, he characterized their relationship as one of

“friendly antagonism,” especially during her first months in New York, when she lived with him and his family. Fuller claimed that she could write only when inspired, a notion Greeley dismissed as “absurd.” He disapproved of her diet, too. When Fuller complained of a headache, he said it was no doubt brought on by her addiction to strong tea. She replied that she would prefer not to be lectured at the breakfast table.

More substantively, the two disagreed about the implications of equal rights for women. Greeley wrote that he “heartily acceded” to Fuller’s demand that all professions be open to both sexes. He also believed that men and women should be social equals: “So long as a lady shall deem herself in need of some gentleman’s arm to conduct her properly out of a dining or ballroom . . . I cannot see how the ‘Woman’s Rights’ theory is ever to be anything more than a logically defensible abstraction.” Fuller, however, expected precisely such chivalry. When she would wait for him to offer an arm or open a door, Greeley would recite a passage from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*: “Let them be sea-captains if they will!” The practice, Greeley acknowledged, “did not tend to ripen our intimacy.”

In 1846, Fuller left New York to travel through Europe. For a time, she continued

to write for the *Tribune*—the first female foreign correspondent for a major American newspaper. On her voyage back to the United States in 1850, her ship ran aground in a storm off New York’s Fire Island. The captain and some crewmembers and passengers struggled through heavy surf and reached the shore, but Fuller didn’t know how to swim. In the days that followed, Greeley, Thoreau, and others searched for her body and, equally important, her newly completed book manuscript. A week after the accident, partial and mangled human remains washed ashore; they may or may not have been Fuller’s. The manuscript was never found.

In the *Tribune*, Greeley published a tribute untainted by antagonism, friendly or otherwise. “A great soul has passed from this mortal stage of being,” he wrote, and added, “America has produced no woman who in mental endowments and acquirements has surpassed Margaret Fuller.”

SUPREME DISCOMFORT

Robed road show

In the early years of the Republic, few officials logged as many miles as Supreme

Court justices. Federal law required justices to spend much of their time presiding over trials in different regions of the country, called “circuits.” Many of them considered “riding circuit” the worst part of the job, as retired justice Sandra Day O’Connor writes in *Out of Order: Stories From the History of the Supreme Court* (Random House).

In letters to his wife in the 1790s, Justice James Iredell recited a litany of discomforts and mishaps he suffered while traveling to trials in Georgia and the Carolinas. He was obliged to stay in a “very rascally house,” where “worthless young fellows [were] sitting up drinking gaming & cursing and swearing all night.” After that, he was robbed by a “Scoundrel.” Later, Iredell reported that he was in “much pain” after his horse threw him and his carriage ran over his leg.

Circuit riding proved too much for some justices. Six months after George Washington appointed him to the Supreme Court, Justice Thomas Johnson resigned. He would not, he told President Washington in 1793, spend half of each year away from his family, “on Roads at Taverns chiefly and often in Situations where the most moderate Desires are disappointed.”

Congress relieved justices of their

circuit-riding duties in 1801 but reinstated them a year later. In the decades that followed, lawmakers repeatedly considered bills to abolish circuit riding once and for all, but none of them passed. Defenders of the status quo raised a host of arguments. To Representative James Bowlin of Missouri, circuit riding helped protect federalism: “Consolidate the Court in the metropolis, and the day is not far distant when the sovereign rights of the free States . . . will be swallowed up in this mighty vortex of power.” Senator George Badger of North Carolina suggested that the justices’ visibility helped legitimize their rulings: Citizens might disobey “unseen, final arbiters of justice, issuing their decrees as it were from a secret chamber.” Senator Abner Lacock of Pennsylvania predicted that through constant contact, shrewd Washington lawyers would learn to manipulate the men on the Court, who were “*vain* and *susceptible to flattery*.”

But as the Supreme Court’s docket grew, circuit riding became increasingly untenable. By the 1880s, the justices had more than a thousand cases pending, some of them three years old. In 1891, Congress created federal appellate courts. The justices could finally unpack their robes.

FOUNTAINHEAD OF NEED

The deserving poor

In 1926, less than a year after arriving in the United States from her native Russia, 21-year-old Ayn Rand did what many young Americans longed to do: She headed for Hollywood. She appeared as an extra in Cecil B. De Mille’s *King of Kings*, landed a job as a junior



AYN RAND INSTITUTE

Ayn Rand at the Studio Club, whose “great work” she admired because it aided “the able, the fit, the talented” rather than “disabled unfortunates” and other “sub-normal” people.

screenwriter for silent films, and took a \$10-a-week room at the Hollywood Studio Club. For the two and a half years she lived at the Studio Club, the woman who would later write *The Virtue of Selfishness* was an object of charity.

As film historian Anthony Slide recounts in *Hollywood Unknowns* (University Press of Mississippi), the Studio Club provided subsidized lodging for some 80 women, all under 30, who were struggling to get by. Donors included such Hollywood luminaries as Harold Lloyd, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks. After Rand lost her job in 1927, she found only intermittent, low-paying work. She fell behind on her rent, according to biographer Jennifer Burns. When the Studio Club received a \$50 donation to be given to its neediest resident, director Marjorie Williams picked Rand.

Rand didn't forget the generosity. In 1936, she sent Williams a copy of her newly published first novel, *We the Living*, along with a letter expressing her gratitude. When Williams asked permission to show the letter to prospective donors, Rand responded with lengthier and more effusive praise, which Williams quoted in fundraising materials.

"The Studio Club," Rand wrote, "is the only organization I know of personally that carries on, quietly and modestly, this great work which is needed so badly—help for young talent. It not only provides human, decent living accommodations which a poor beginner could not afford elsewhere, but it provides that other great necessity of life: Understanding."

A paean to altruism? Not exactly. In the letter, Rand also declared that it was time to stop favoring "crippled children, old people, blind people and all kinds of disabled unfortunates" over "the able, the fit, the talented." She continued, "Who is more worthy of help—the sub-normal or the above normal? Who is more valuable to humanity?" Aiding "the disabled" was fine, she said, but nurturing "potential talent" represented "a much higher type of charity."

The Studio Club archives at Smith College don't include any fundraising documents. Still, it's a safe bet that when Williams composed this appeal to potential donors, Rand's priorities for Hollywood almsgivers didn't make the final cut.

—*Stephen Bates*



HENGLEIN AND STEETS / GETTY IMAGES

STAR WARS

Online review culture is dotted with black holes of bad taste.

BY **TOM VANDERBILT**

By TOM VANDERBILT

IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE INTERNET, eating at an unknown restaurant meant relying on a clutch of quick and dirty heuristics. The presence of many truck drivers or cops at a lonely diner supposedly vouchsafed its quality (though it may simply have been the only option around). For “ethnic” food, there was the classic benchmark: “We were the only non-[insert ethnicity] people in there.” Or you could spend anxious minutes on the sidewalk, under the watchful gaze of the host, reading curling, yellowed reviews, wondering if what held in 1987 was still true today. In an information-poor environment, you sometimes simply went with your gut (and left clutching it).

Today, via Yelp (or TripAdvisor or Amazon, or any Web site teeming with “user-generated content”), you are often troubled by the reverse problem: too much information. As I navigate a Yelp entry to simply determine whether a place is worth my money, I find myself battered between polar extremes of experience: One meal was “to die for,” another “pretty lame.” Drifting into narrow currents of individual proclivity (writing about a curry joint where I had recently lunched, one reviewer noted

that “the place had really good energy, very Spiritual [sic], which is very important to me”), I eventually capsize in a sea of confusion. I either quit the place altogether or, by the time I arrive, am weighed down by a certain exhaustion of expectation, as if I had already consumed the experience and was now simply going through the motions.

What I find most striking is that, having begun the process of looking for reviews of the restaurant, I find myself reviewing the reviewers. The use of the word “awesome”—a term whose original connotation is so denuded that I suspect it will ultimately come to exclusively signify its ironic, air-quote-marked opposite—is a red flag. So are the words “anniversary” or “honeymoon,” often written by people with inflated expectations for their special night; their complaint with any perceived failure on the part of the restaurant or hotel to rise to this momentous occasion is not necessarily mine. I reflexively downgrade reviewers writing in the sort of syrupy dross picked up from hotel brochures (“it was a vision of perfection”).

In one respect, there is nothing new in reviewing the reviewer; our choices in pre-Internet days were informed either by friends we trusted or critics whose voices



SARAH BETH GLICKSTEEN / THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR / GETTY IMAGES

Yelp's Monocle, an app for smartphones, extends the reach of mass opinion by using the device's camera, compass, and GPS capabilities to find reviewed businesses near the user.

seemed to carry authority. But suddenly, the door has been opened to a multitude of voices, each bearing no preexisting authority or social trust. It is no longer merely enough to read that someone thought the vegetarian food was bad (you need to know if she is a vegetarian), or the hotel in Iowa City was the best they have ever seen (just how many hotels have they seen?), or a foreign film

was terrible (wait, they admit they don't like subtitles?). Critics have always had to be interrogated this way (what dendritic history of logrolling lay behind the rave about that book?), but with the Web, a thousand critics have bloomed. The messy, complicated, often hidden dynamics of taste and preference, and the battles over it, are suddenly laid out right in front of us.

IN *THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY*, KARL MARX famously ruminated on the predicted collapse of the division of labor in a communist society, where he would be free to “do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.” It may not be communism, but the Internet has enabled the fruition of at least one of these activities: criticizing after dinner—particularly if the object of criticism is dinner itself.

Ruth Reichl, the former editor of *Gourmet*, recently harrumphed that “anybody who believes Yelp is an idiot. Most people on Yelp have no idea what they’re talking about.”

The rise of this crowd-sourced aggregate of amateur reviewers, a reserve army of critical labor, is generally seen as an egalitarian blossoming, freeing consumers from the tyranny of individual

mandarins, each harboring his or her own agendas and tastes. “The excising of the expert reviewer is happening right across the board,” writes Suzanne Moore in *The Guardian*. “Who needs expertise when every Tom, Dick, and Harriet reviews everything for free anyway. Isn’t this truly democratic? The nature of criticism is changing, so this hierarchy of expertise is crumbling.”

One can almost hear the anticipatory echoes of something like Yelp in the context of José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930). The multitude, he wrote, once “scattered about the world in small groups,” now appears “as an agglomeration.” It has “suddenly become visible, installing itself in the preferential positions in society. Before, if it existed, it passed unnoticed, occupying the background of the social stage; now it has advanced to the footlights and is the principal character.” The disgruntled diner, now able to make or break a restaurant through sheer collective will. Against this leveling of critical power, the old guard fulminates. Ruth Reichl, the former editor of *Gourmet*, recently harrumphed that “anybody who believes Yelp is an idiot. Most people on Yelp have no idea what they’re talking about.”

If the God Criticism—in the sense of experts telling the anxious middle what



COURTESY BOLT BARBERS

Yelp hoped businesses would display its badge of honor, “People Love Us on Yelp,” on storefronts, thereby promoting the online review site. Stung by negative reviews, however, some enterprises have sardonically fought back.

to read, what to see, and how to be—now lays on its side, an Enver Hoxha statue in a Tirana back alley, what’s left? A new utopia of fisherman-critics who are free to make up their own minds and influence others? A glorious world of transparency and objectivity? A radical rewriting of the canon?

Perhaps. But there are complications with this idea that the Internet has obviated the need for experts and for critical authority. One question is what is happening to criticism itself when the evaluative architecture on a site such as Amazon is the same for leaf blowers as it is literature, when everything seems to be quantifying one’s hedonic response to a consumption activity; when we are forced into a ruthless dyad of thumbing up or thumbing down, or channeled into expressing a simple “liking” for something when the actual response may be more complex.

If the Internet was supposed to wrest criticism from elites, a good deal of the reviewing energy on Yelp (and other sites) is precisely an effort to establish one’s bona fides. In the re-

views for a new seafood restaurant in my neighborhood, a number of the writers tout themselves as “New Englanders,” thus implying that they implicitly know of what they speak. A reviewer for an Indian restaurant in midtown Manhattan lays down a sort of tripartite claim on authority: “I am a foodie and my love

for Indian food (as an Indian) is tough to match. I eat at this restaurant at least once a week. Really innovative mix of ingredients, and yet extremely authentic.” Not only is he a foodie, he is an Indian foodie who, like all true food critics, has eaten here more than once—thus no need to unpack that thorny word “authentic.”

Yelp is filled with this sort of signaling, as economists call it—making discreet references affirming one’s authority in an effort to rise above the masses of similar reviewers (“I knew the chef from his previous stint at . . .”; “of all the Henan cuisine places I’ve eaten, this is one of the . . .”). And even as it aggregates its democratic horde—after filtering out reviews for various reasons, including those suspected of being fraudulent—Yelp itself strives to reintroduce hierarchy, by designating a class of “elite” reviewers (identified by special badges), picked by a team known as The Council. “We don’t share how it’s done,” a Yelp spokesperson said, as if describing the shadowy process by which Michelin inspectors are hired.

What further complicates this picture of the masses liberating the objects of criticism from the tyranny of critics is that so many reviewers seem to turn toward petty despotism. Reading Yelp reviews, particularly of the one-star variety, one quickly senses the particular ax

being ground—the hostess who shot the “wrong” look at the “girls’ night” group; a greeting that is too effusive, or insufficiently so; the waiter deemed “too uneasy with being a waiter”; or any number of episodes (each example has been taken from Yelp) that have little to do with food.

As Paul Myerscough, an editor at *The London Review of Books*, has written of the “affective labor” that is now such a prominent feature of the service economy (and is drilled into workers at chains such as Pret A Manger through quasi-Stakhanovite uplift campaigns), “Work increasingly isn’t, or isn’t only, a matter of producing things, but of supplying your energies, physical and emotional, in the service of others.” For consumers-turned-overseers who feel they did not receive the right kind of emotional energy, Yelp becomes a place to catalog these litanies of complaint.

Reading Yelp reviews, particularly of the one-star variety, one quickly senses the particular ax being ground—the hostess who shot the “wrong” look at the “girls’ night” group.

WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE, AROUND the time critical theory was in full bloom on the American campus, a favorite professor of mine kicked off a seminar by saying we were to going to do criticism. “I’m not talking about the sort of gonadal, ‘thumbs up/thumbs down’ kind of criticism,” he said. Rather, we would analyze texts, films—any kind of cultural product—assisted by an array of high-powered lenses: deconstructionism, semiotics, structuralism, reader-response, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes. (My writing career may actually have launched with a *Mythologies*-style analysis of the “Not Your Father’s Oldsmobile” ad campaign.) Whether we liked something or not was irrelevant; our job was to think about what the work said, what the work did, and what we brought to it.

There may be no field besides criticism more open, or indeed appropriate, to perpetual, almost Maoist self-examination; I do not imagine that accountants

or podiatrists much concern themselves with impassioned forums in which the “role of the accountant” or the “future of podiatry” is debated. Criticism itself is meant to be criticized—an idea nicely captured in the title of an H. L. Mencken essay, “Criticism of Criticism of Criticism.” Wrote Mencken of the critic: “He makes the work of art live for the spectator; he makes the spectator live



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H. L. Mencken, shown here in 1927 in his Baltimore home, championed the role of elite arts critics. “Nine-tenths of the grown-up sophomores who carry on the business of criticism in America,” he wrote, “lack the intellectual resilience necessary for taking in ideas, and particularly new ideas.”

for the work of art. Out of the process comes understanding, appreciation, intelligent enjoyment.” Nearly a century later, despite all the hand-wringing, some version of this definition is extant. In his critics’ “manifesto,” Daniel Mendelsohn, author of the recent *Waiting for the Barbarians*, argues that the “critic is someone who, when his knowledge, operated on by his taste in the presence of some new example of the genre he’s interested in—a new TV series, a movie, an opera or ballet or book—hungers to make sense of that new thing, to analyze it, interpret it, make it mean something.”

Most online reviewing, Mendelsohn notes, “isn’t criticism proper”—it’s full of heat, yes, but lacks light. And before you cry elitism, he notes that academics and other “expert” reviewers often fall prey to the reverse condition. For a comparison of criticism and online reviewing, let us first turn to Mendelsohn himself, writing about *Mad Men*, the cable television series chronicling mid-20th-century social upheaval:

Worst of all—in a drama with aspirations to treating social and historical “issues”—the show is melodramatic rather than dramatic. By this I mean that it proceeds, for the most part, like a soap opera, serially (and often unbelievably) generating, and

then resolving, successive personal crises (adulteries, abortions, premarital pregnancies, interracial affairs, alcoholism and drug addiction, etc.), rather than exploring, by means of believable conflicts between personality and situation, the contemporary social and cultural phenomena it regards with such fascination: sexism, misogyny, social hypocrisy, racism, the counterculture, and so forth.

This is a critic at the top of his game, a few deft strokes forcing you to reassess your own judgment—and not in a purely “like” or “dislike” sense—of a show, one that comes bedecked with awards and other tokens of critics’ adoration.

And now let us turn to Netflix. Here is the review of *Mad Men* deemed “most helpful” (whatever that means) by an impressive 393 out of 394 viewers, as of the time of writing:

I am in the middle of Season 3 and I cannot stop watching, this show is incredible! If my math is correct Sally Drapper [sic] was born in 54. In 1962 she is 8. I was born in 1954. I had an Aunt, Cousin, and family friend that were ‘working girls’ in the 60s and for me the show depicts this world perfectly.

It goes on, in a similar vein. Netflix formerly featured quotes from working critics on the title pages of films and shows, but as a Netflix employee who counts himself a committed cineaste explained to me with a certain chagrin, by his reckoning, only 15 percent or so of Netflix users were interested in professional critics' opinions.

Yet freed from the yoke of expert opinion, what are we left with? Hundreds of individual reviews, each written by people who, like critics, come bearing their own agendas and biases. You may not "like" A. O. Scott's taste, but at least you know who he is and what he stands for. And so we look for new forms of authority and trust, new ways to filter. We ourselves are invited to review the reviewers (if only in that "gonadal" good/bad sort of way) by "liking" their comments or rating their helpfulness. Data points pile upon data points.

IT IS PRECISELY IN THIS VAST RANGE OF online activity where the value and interest lie for researchers investigating what is not actually known as "criticism" but, rather, "electronic word of mouth." The trove of data generated from online reviews, the thinking goes, may offer quantitative insight into a perpetually elusive dynamic: the formation of judg-

ments, the expression of preferences, the mechanics of taste. The results, filled with subtle biases and conformity effects, are not always pretty.

While any one review is essentially useless—the low transaction cost, as the Columbia Business School's Ray Fisman has noted, tags it with the "cheap talk" problem—the aggregate level is where, through sheer numbers, the noise can be filtered, the outliers marginalized, and statistical consensus achieved.

Freed from the yoke of expert opinion, what are we left with? Hundreds of individual reviews, each written by people who, like critics, come bearing their own agendas and biases.

For example, Yelp compiles key lines that more or less repeat in reviews ("the homemade whipped cream on the side hit the spot") and posts these "highlights" near the top of the page. The shift to smartphones and smaller screens has made the idea of reading through dozens of reviews even less palatable, encouraging

greater compression by opinion-mining projects such as the University of Washington's RevMiner. It rates descriptive words by their "strength"; for example, "exquisite" is stronger than "good." A person searching for something like "good dim sum," the researchers note, does not really mean good dim sum, but "dim sum that others have described as 'great' or 'amazing.'" Good is no longer good enough. You need to be awesome.

Customers deem this feedback desirable, and it can move cultural markets. The Harvard Business School's Michael Luca has found, for example, that a one-star uptick in a Yelp review can lead to a nine percent improvement in revenues for independently owned restaurants. Other studies have shown a similar impact for independent hotels—and for books.

Good is no longer good enough. You need to be awesome.

In a discussion on the future of literary criticism, Jen Doll noted in *The Atlantic Wire* that "book reviews are not science." And yet, on Amazon they approach it. One can discover that the

average rating for goods sold on the site is approximately 4.3 stars out of 5, as it is elsewhere on the Internet. Why so high? There is, undoubtedly, a raft of selection biases going on—an author's fans are more likely to weigh in positively; an existing review's rating wields an influence on later reviewers; the mere fact of having purchased something may make someone less likely to issue a negative review. But curiously, as more ratings trickle in, a study by business professors David Godes and Jose Silva has found, the average rating begins to decline. "The more reviews there are," Godes and Silva suggest, "the lower the quality of the information available"; later reviewers tend to be either less serious or less disposed to like the book, or to respond to other reviewers rather than to the book itself. While one might think a five-star review would summon more passion than a four-star review, one study found that four-star reviews were, on average, longer.

What consumers make of reviewers is also a fertile field of study. A team of Cornell University and Google researchers, for example, found that a review's "helpfulness" rating falls as the review's star rating deviates from that of the average review—as if it were being punished for

straying. As the team noted, defining “helpfulness” is itself tricky: Did the review help people make a purchase, or were they rewarding it for conforming with what others were saying? There are a number of feedback effects: Early reviews tend to draw more helpfulness votes, simply because they’ve appeared online longer. The more votes a review has, the more its “default authority,” and the more votes it tends to attract.

One thing the Internet reviewing culture makes clear is that, at least with “experience goods”—things such as books or music—we often seem to react more strongly to someone else’s opinion than to the work itself. As Temple University’s Susan Mudambi and David Schuff found, people tend to rate longer reviews for “search goods”—such as cameras or printers—more positively than those for “experience goods.” A strong negative review for a camera might reflect some discrete product failure (pictures were blurry), but a strong negative review for a book might simply be another person’s taste getting in the way.

Indeed, one might protest that reviewing restaurants at Yelp and books at Amazon and films at Netflix are all different enterprises, but I would argue that there is a sort of metalogic to online reviewing that subsumes all categories.

**One occasionally spies a flummoxed “review” of a simple product such as paper clips: “What can I say? They’re paper clips!”
Four stars!**

What people are doing, after all, is generally not situating a work in its historical context—or performing some other kind of critical heavy lifting—but reflecting upon their own consumption experience. This logic has become so ingrained, so expected, that one occasionally spies a flummoxed “review” of a simple product such as paper clips: “What can I say? They’re paper clips!”
Four stars!

That a site such as Amazon sells virtually everything under the sun offers a chance for these varying groupings of products—“search goods,” “experience goods”—to blur and flatten, as do the lines of authority; what does the competent paper clip critic have to say about French symbolist poetry?

Trawling through the reviews of a book I recently purchased, *The Old Ways*, an elegy to life on foot by the travel writer

Robert Macfarlane, I was struck by the sole one-star review: “I too use walking as a way of thinking. But without maps of his walks this book is seriously incomplete. I wonder why there are no maps.” One might argue that this is to have missed much of the point of Macfarlane’s work. But the ground on which this person was engaging the book—a narrow quibble over a functional attribute of the book itself having nothing to do with the writing—was not unlike the assessment of any other consumer good on Amazon, such as a conferral of one star on the iPad for not having a USB port.

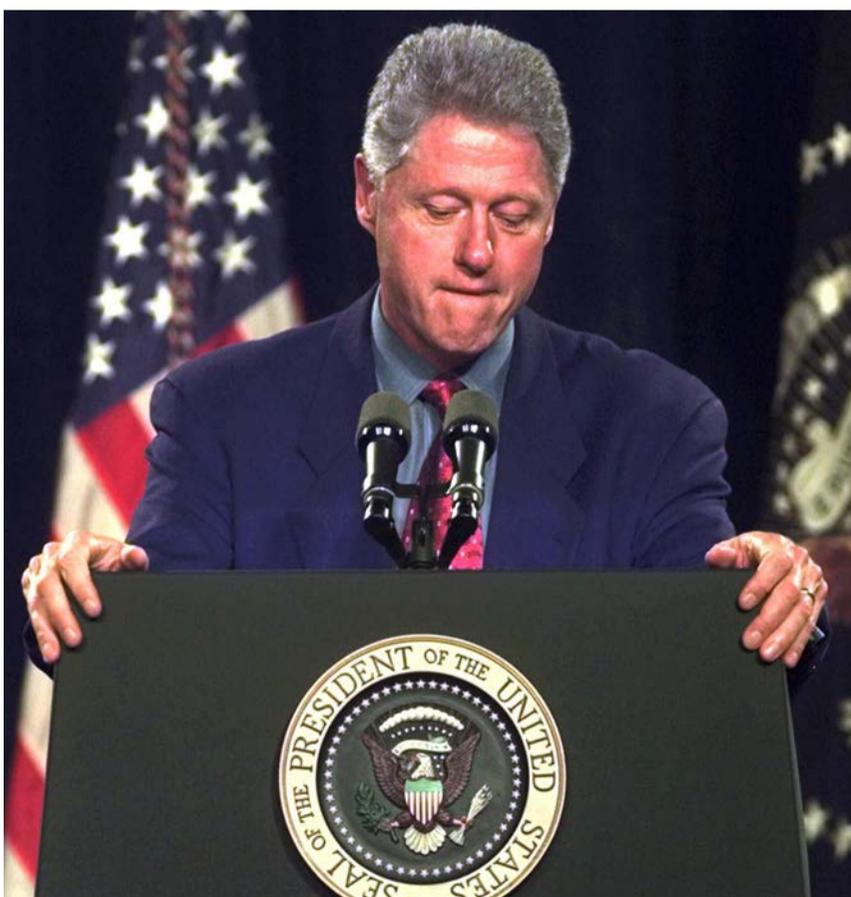
Yet all may not be lost. That one-star review of *The Old Ways* has received not a single “helpful” vote. What’s more, two readers felt compelled to weigh in on the

review itself. “It appears you had one criterion, and only one, for your rating of this book,” wrote one. “Did anything make you think this book would include maps?” asked another. The rise of online reviewing may be toppling the singular critical voice from its pedestal, and with its fall, taste has shattered into a thousand fragments. We are every day sifting through those shards, trying to make meaning of everyone else’s attempt to say what something meant to them. ■

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The AMERICAN QUEST FOR REDEMPTION

In a nation born with a sense that it had a redemptive mission in the world, the urge to take what is bad and turn it into something good often turns obsessively inward. The results can be surprising.



WILFRED M. McCLAY
on the politics of redemption

**SHADD MARUNA AND
CHARLES BARBER**
on new paths of atonement
for convicts

SARAH L. COURTEAU
on self-help and its gurus



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE / AP / CORBIS

The master: After the Starr Report was released in September 1998, President Bill Clinton issued several public apologies for his involvement with intern Monica Lewinsky, including this one in Miami: “I also let you down, and I let my family down, and I let this country down. But I’m trying to make it right. And I’m determined never to let anything like that happen again. And I’m determined to redeem the trust. So I ask you for your understanding, for your forgiveness on this journey we’re on. I hope this will be a time of reconciliation and healing.”

STILL THE REDEEMER NATION

The ceaseless quest for redemption in politics and culture is one of the chronic infirmities of American national life. But God forbid we should ever give it up.

BY **WILFRED M. McCLAY**

THE WILSON QUARTERLY SPRING 2013

By WILFRED M. McCLAY

THIS PAST FEBRUARY, AS THE MAMMOTH snowstorm dubbed “Winter Storm Nemo” bore down on the northeastern United States, all eyes turned to the elected officials in the region. Many of them had done a poor job of handling the effects of such storms in the past, with unhappy political consequences, and even after the expensive and highly publicized relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, many New York and New Jersey households remained in severe distress. New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg was laboring under an especially large cloud of distrust, thanks to his fumbling performance during the blizzard of December 2010, when snow removal was ineffective, ambulances and fire trucks got stuck in the uncleared streets, and there was a backlog of 1,400 emergency calls. So a lot was at stake this time. As Nemo approached, the local CBS affiliate proclaimed, “For Bloomberg, Getting Response to This Storm Right Would Be Redemption.”

Ah yes, *redemption*. Meaning deliverance from sin, atonement, expiation, absolution, regeneration, the debt forgiven, release from stigmatization, the

ransom paid, the captive set free—a new beginning, a fresh start, a transformation, a liberation from guilt, a new lease on life, even if not an entirely clean slate. It may take more than a snowstorm to penetrate the awareness of the famously self-righteous Bloomberg, the scourge of smokers and soda drinkers and trans fat consumers and other enemies of humanity. It might not yet have occurred to him that he too stood in need of redemption. But most of us understand the need for it, both for ourselves and others. Politicians, as cynosures of the national psyche, may need it rather more than most, or at least the convincing appearance of it, particularly when it is dispensed by the likes of CBS News. Figures as different

Most of us understand the need for redemption, and politicians, as cynosures of the national psyche, may need it rather more than most, or at least the convincing appearance of it.



BETTMANN / CORBIS

Richard Nixon with Checkers, the spaniel he made famous in an unprecedented national television broadcast to defend himself against charges of campaign finance irregularities. Nixon, then Dwight Eisenhower's running mate in the 1952 presidential campaign, called upon viewers to redeem his reputation and career by writing to the Republican National Committee. As for Checkers—a gift, he conceded, from a political supporter—“regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it.”

as Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, two men who rode the roller coaster of fall-and-redemption all their careers, could attest to its value, and each was, in his own way, a master of its giddy heights and harrowing depths. Indeed, their tarrings and their laurels are impossible to separate.

But the phenomenon seems to go beyond particular personalities, and touches upon one of the deepest moral and emotional foundations of American life. In his classic 1968 book *Redeemer Nation*, the Berkeley scholar Ernest Tuveson identified one of the most

enduring strains in American life as a belief in the nation's divinely ordained redemptive role in the world, a belief for which he found seeds in America's origins, and which flowered in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly with regard to the nation's external relations and foreign policy. Yet Tuveson's insights can surely be turned inward as well, since the externally aimed logic of redemption is just as applicable, if not more so, to individuals as well as nations. In fact, as the external has become less plausible, the internal has taken on greater and greater importance.

The algebra of fall-and-redemption, always a part of American culture, seems to have become an ever more integral part of the psychological drama of American politics. Leaders are more likely to be embraced fully and heartily when they have first been shown to stumble badly, to be flawed and human and vulnerable, and then allowed to rise again, scarred to be sure, but also contrite and humbled and seasoned. William Dean Howells famously observed that “what the American public wants in the theater is a tragedy with a happy ending”; the same is true in the theater of public life.

THE REQUIREMENT THAT POLITICIANS be flawed bears some resemblance to the equally imperative rule that presidents demonstrate something we call “a sense of humor.” The historian Daniel Wickberg has written a brilliant study (*The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America*) showing how the very idea of a sense of humor is modern, and reflects a softening and socializing of the individualistic ideal. For politicians today, having a sense of humor clearly means demonstrating the willingness and ability to mock or make light of themselves and allow their spouses to complain in public about their

To be anointed as an “uncommon common man,” a democratic politician must first provide a believable demonstration of his all-too-commonness, of the common human need to be redeemed of something.

foibles. It is a strange requirement. Why should we want to elect as president a man who wants to convince us that he does not take himself too seriously? That his self-abasement is almost certain to be, well, somewhat confected, indeed, entirely phony, seems not to matter. A sense of humor is taken seriously, and to lack it, as a “wooden” Al Gore Jr. was said to lack it in the 2000 election, can be fatal.

The democratic leader is supposed to be “the uncommon common man.” But to be anointed as such, one must first provide a believable demonstration of one’s all-too-commonness, of the common human need to be redeemed of *something*. The story is told that when Elliot

Richardson, the quintessential Boston Brahmin and the man with the perfect resumé, perfect breeding, and perfect appearance, ran for the U.S. Senate in Massachusetts in 1984, he was mocked by William “Billy” Bulger, then president of the Massachusetts State Senate and a quintessential Irish pol, who held up a fake newspaper with a headline reading “Vote Elliot, He’s Better Than You!” It was a brilliant stroke. Needless to say, Richardson lost. He didn’t even survive the Republican primary.

Some of this posturing is, of course,

traceable to one of the fundamental requirements of democratic politics—the need to affirm equality in all ways at all times, and find ways to discreetly conceal the many and inevitable divergences from that ideal. Politicians are often accused of hypocrisy in such matters, but the charge is self-serving; the rest of us are guiltier than they are, precisely because we insist that they dissemble to us. On the face of the matter, would it not make sense to entrust the nuclear football to someone who is demonstrably better than oneself? Yes, but it would be



DAVID HUME KENNERLY / GETTY IMAGES

President George W. Bush’s gathering of presidents past and future, convened shortly before Barack Obama’s inauguration in 2009, served to dramatize the fact that almost every modern presidency yields at least one redemption saga.

a fatal mistake for that better someone to betray even a hint of awareness of his superiority. Much smarter to divert attention from himself by attacking the privileged status of an opponent, as Bulger did. One can at least hope that such cunning has its essential political uses, and that the most cunning politicians will be, if not the best, at least not the worst.

It would not be cynical to say that many Americans felt comfortable voting for Bill Clinton eight years after Richardson's defeat precisely because they felt confident he was *not* better than them. But there was, and is, something more in play in Clinton's case than the dynamics of democratic egalitarianism. Even after the disgraces of Monicagate and impeachment, and the pardons and disquieting scandals attending Clinton's departure from the White House, and dozens of other embarrassments, his stock remains high. It is not only that he is a quintessential democratic figure. He also has a near-endless native capacity for evoking and receiving the public's redemptive generosity. People tend to forgive him his faults, even if they smile and snicker as they do it.

Few others can get away with this on such a monumental scale, and sometimes a politician's bid for redemption is a bit

more than the market will bear. Consider the case of philandering former South Carolina governor Mark Sanford, who in 2009 was impeached, censured, and nearly removed from office in disgrace, who had a very public split from his wife, Jenny, and now, logically enough, is running for the U.S. House of Representatives. "I'm a sinner and I'm a flawed man but I think God can use flawed men or women, and I hope that the voters in this case will choose to use a flawed man," he told ABC radio affiliate WTMA in an interview. It is patently a play for redemption. Sanford is refusing otherwise to talk about his personal life, and yet his flawedness seems to be his principal asset. This gambit makes the logic of redemption seem a bit too pat, as if it could be reduced to a calculated form of leading with one's jaw; but there is no doubt that redemption-through-reelection is what is on Sanford's mind. And who knows? He just might get it.

Similarly, redemption clearly has been on the mind of ex-president Jimmy Carter for the past 33 years. Carter has never gotten over the stern rebuke administered by voters in 1980, and the harsh judgment of many observers that his was a failed administration. In his case, a craving for redemption has animated an energetic, sometimes

admirable, but often clumsy and self-seeking post-presidential career. In group photographs of president-elect Barack Obama and his four living predecessors at the White House, it was noticeable that Carter stood apart from the others, seemingly weighed down by a lingering sense of failure. One might think that his Christian beliefs would make him more at peace about how he is regarded in this world, given the priority his faith accords to the next one. But very few of us, and least of all the kind of man who wants to be president, can be genuinely indifferent to how we are regarded by others, and by history. And Carter is a proud man, in all the best and worst senses of that word. Redemption in the here and now, in the eyes of others, would be too sweet a vindication for

For an allegedly secular society, the United States seems to be remarkably in thrall to ideas, gestures, emotional patterns, nervous tics, and deep premises that belong to the supposedly banished world of religion.

him not to seek it; but it will likely elude him, because of the conspicuous pride that has motivated his quest for it. Who would be exalted must first be humbled.

WHAT WOULD AMERICAN POLITICAL culture look like without its pervasive moral dramas of sin and redemption, sometimes expressed in forms lofty and noble, but at other times resembling nothing so much as the smarminess and vulgarity of soap opera? One thing can be said for certain: We are not only intensely fascinated by these episodes of political theater, but fully in the grip of them, as far more than mere on-lookers. For an allegedly secular society, the United States seems to be curiously in thrall to ideas, gestures, emotional patterns, nervous tics, and deep premises that belong to the supposedly banished world of religion. These habits of heart and mind are evident everywhere we look, and they possess a compulsive and unquestioned power in contemporary American life. It is as if the disappearance of religion's metaphysical dimension has occasioned a tightening hold of certain of its moral dimensions, particularly so far as these relate to guilt and absolution.

Consider the range of manifestations: The feeding frenzies over malfeasances by public officials, real or imagined,

eventuating in obligatory rituals of public confession and abasement before the altar of Oprah Winfrey or some other secular priest or priestess invested with the power to give or withhold absolution. The obsession with our environmental sins, both as an overconsuming society and as individuals leaving carbon footprints, giving rise to such phenomena as “carbon offsets,” schemes that have been decried by skeptics as little more than “green indulgences,” transparent sops to voracious (and credulous) consciences. The almost bottomless reservoirs of racial guilt and recrimination, most recently illustrated by the embarrassingly abject apology proffered by James Wagner, the president of Emory University, for the sin of mentioning in an essay the formulation of the three-fifths rule in the U.S. Constitution as an example of political compromise, instead of condemning the rule with thundering, absolute, and final moral certainty, as so many on his faculty demanded he do, no doubt in the spirit of academic freedom. The similar and related tendency to shout down all unwelcome speech as being a form of bigotry and therefore morally unacceptable: anti-Semitic, racist, sexist, homophobic, un-American, and so on. On many college campuses, the inhibiting fear of saying the wrong thing at

the wrong time in the wrong way to the wrong person has all but rendered vigorous debate impossible. Whatever else one might say of these manifestations, they do not reflect a culture in which easygoing relativism, tolerance, skepticism, and laissez-faire permissiveness reign. It is instead a culture clenched taut with every imaginable form of moral anxiety, seemingly convinced despite its own secular professions that we inhabit a universe that has an inherent and unforgiving moral structure.

Hence, the yearning for redemption is not likely to go away, since the need for a certification of one’s blamelessness is so strong. And it must be said that, despite all the pathologies I have named, there are many reasons why we should not want it to go away, even if we could somehow miraculously banish it. For we all have serious faults, often grievous ones, and the yearning for redemption is the rightful call of our consciences and the proper object of our hopes, the very thing for which hope is forever hoping, especially in dark or troubled times. Howells’s conjecture that Americans want “a tragedy with a happy ending” is another way of saying not only that we want things to turn out happily, but that we want them to turn out in a way that redeems all our suffering in the end—we

want our world to prove to be purposeful and orderly, the kind of world in which nothing is wasted and the animating virtue of hope is not futile. The pathologies stem, in part, from the fact that we want redemption more than ever, applied to a wider range of things.

Americans' feelings of guilt over their country's failures and malfeasances are merely the flip side of the continuing belief in America's redemptive responsibility to the rest of the world.

Howells's dictum echoes the core Christian meaning of redemption as Saint Paul understood it, that there is a way of taking what was bad, even what was meant for bad, and turning it for good. (The classic exposition can be found in chapter 8 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.) It was not for nothing that the New England Puritans spoke of their "plantation" as a New Zion, a utopian restoration of a godly commonwealth, whose ultimate aim was to provide an example for the

redemption of the world.

But redemption is not merely a restoration of a *status quo ante*. More fundamentally, it is a form of alchemy, a making of something fine and noble and new out of what once was ordinary, commonplace, even debased, and severely confined by its limitations. Such transformative alchemy has long been at work in the American experience, and is indeed at the very heart of it. After all, America, and more specifically the United States, began life thinking of itself as a kind of second chance or new beginning for the world. Americans still retain much of this belief, and their feelings of guilt over American failures and malfeasances are the flip side of that continuing belief in America's redemptive responsibility to the rest of the world. It's a more ambitious guilt, actually, one that reflects expectations that are less and less susceptible of being easily met.

Such guilty feelings are often sources of social and political division. But Americans remain as one in ardently resisting the idea that the conditions of our birth should place automatic limits on who we are, or what we can become. Our natal identity itself, while always viewed as something to be affirmed, is not to be regarded as final, but instead as something to be redeemed and

transformed. That is why Americans have always valued education as a ladder of personal and social mobility. And it is also why America has always been such a magnet for immigrants—men and women who were, and are, eager to cast aside the heavy lumber of their Old World in order to have the opportunity to make a new beginning for themselves.

SO THE MYTH OF REDEMPTION—myth not in the sense of a falsehood, but in the sense of an overarching story about the larger meanings of our lives that we cannot otherwise know—is as powerful as ever as an organizing and regulative force in American culture. It surely played a role in the 2008 election of Barack Obama. He made “hope” and “change” the mantras of his campaign because he grasped some deep need in the American people to which no other political figure on the scene had spoken. It was a need for *their* redemption.

In 2008, rather than the *subject* in need of redemption, Obama promised



NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION / ART RESOURCE, NY

Campaigning for the presidency in 2008, Barack Obama offered what many Americans saw as national redemption.

to be the *agent* of national redemption, a restorer of national innocence in matters of race, foreign relations, and environmental policy, among other areas. In a June 2008 speech celebrating the Minnesota primary victory that guaranteed him the Democratic nomination, a speech given in, yes, the city of Saint Paul, he referred to his nomination as

a “defining moment for our nation,” declaring that he was “absolutely certain that generations from now . . . we will be able to look back and tell our children” that “this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal,” the moment when we “restored our image as the last, best hope on Earth.” With such grandly redemptive rhetoric in play, small wonder that the 2008 campaign sometimes took on the atmosphere of a national psychodrama.

Small wonder, too, that the result would soon be disappointment. There was never the slightest possibility that Obama, or any other mortal politician, could deliver the things his more impassioned voters sought from him. However the second-term Obama evolves, things will never again be as they were in 2008. Democratic regulars will support him, Republicans will oppose him, but the redemptive myth has gone into hibernation, and the true believers have nearly all gone home.

One should not draw the wrong lesson from this. The desire for redemp-

tion, even if it sleeps from time to time, is real, powerful, and insistent. It will not sleep forever, just as it is unlikely to be satisfied by any conceivable political expedient or program or person. One could be forgiven for thinking that it should therefore be ignored, even disdained, as the kind of irrational human weakness to which practical people should give no quarter. Yet the politician who ignores it, who thinks that politics in America can ever be strictly a matter of sinks and sewers, of calm and passionless administration (or self-interested distribution of party booty), of calculated instrumental reasoning about the management of practical objectives either by accredited experts or cunning pols, is going to lose eventually.

Even if he is better than we are. ■

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IKON IMAGES / CORBIS

THE END OF SECOND ACTS?

The mass warehousing of convicts is a sign of America's faltering belief in second chances. Considering how individuals atone for their crimes can help us restore rehabilitation as an ideal.

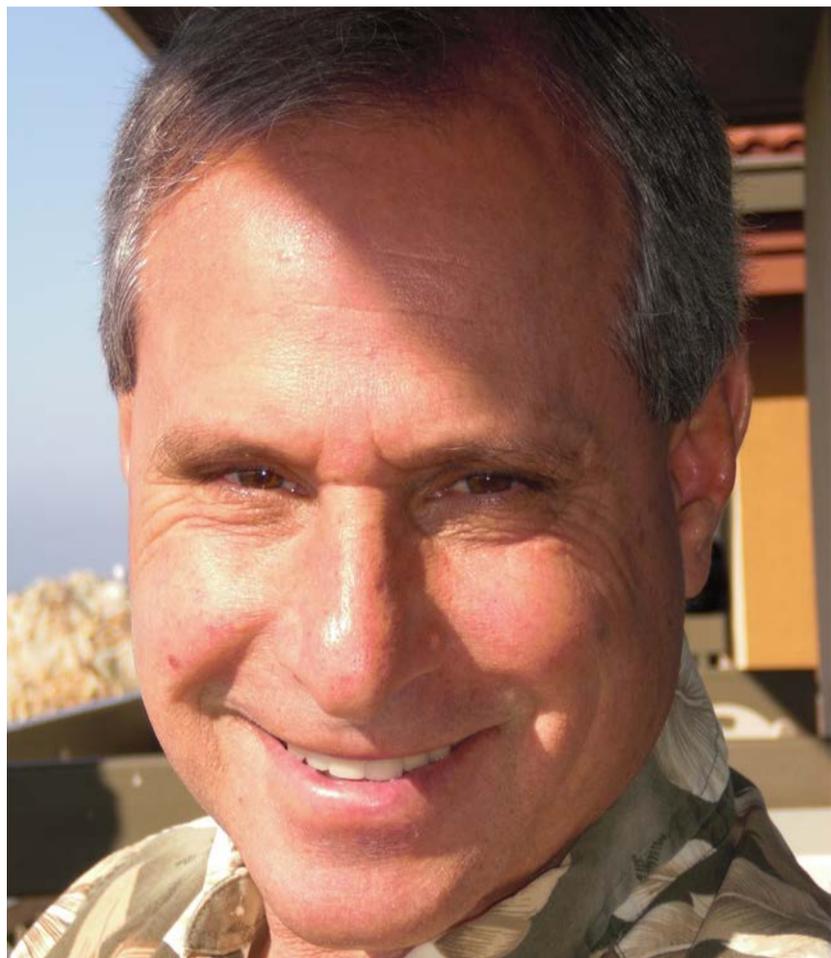
BY SHADD MARUNA AND CHARLES BARBER

THE WILSON QUARTERLY SPRING 2013

By SHADD MARUNA and CHARLES BARBER

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, DAVID DEUTSCH was arrested in Salinas, California, while making his regular drug trafficking run from Los Angeles to San Francisco. When his car was pulled over, he was under the influence of marijuana; police found large amounts of cocaine and marijuana in the vehicle, as well as \$715,000 in cash. Although he had been using and dealing drugs most of his adult life, Deutsch had never previously been caught, so he received a rather lenient sentence (by California standards) of six years in San Quentin State Prison.

The day of his arrest was the last time Deutsch used drugs. Early in his prison term, he says, he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to helping others with drug problems. At San Quentin he volunteered to run a peer tutoring program, joined Narcotics Anonymous, and became a chapel clerk. He published an article on prison education in *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*—unlike most inmates, he held a college degree. After his release, he became a certified addiction counselor and earned a master's degree in social work, with a 4.0 grade point average. Despite all that, he needed no less than 58 letters of recommendation to get his license as an associate



COURTESY DAVID DEUTSCH

David Deutsch

social worker. Once equipped with those testimonials, Deutsch received a formal Certificate of Rehabilitation—declaring him to be officially reformed—from the state of California in 2011. His drive to inspire others to turn their lives around has an almost physical intensity. He currently works as a clinical director for one of the country's largest mental health agencies, where he runs a program for former prisoners who are mentally ill.

Deutsch's story is both extraordinary and highly ordinary. Extraordinary because more than half of all released prisoners are returned to prison for new crimes or parole violations within three

years of their release. Ordinary because most ex-offenders do, eventually, manage to overcome the substantial hurdles they face and “go straight.” After all, crime is a young person’s game. Research on the life paths of prisoners over long stretches of time suggests that around 85 percent of them grow out of criminal behavior by the time they turn 28.

F SCOTT FITZGERALD FAMOUSLY WROTE, in his personal essay of doom, *The Crack-Up* (1936), that there are “no second acts in American lives.” Yet most Americans firmly believe that there are. President George W. Bush, who had his own second chance after years of alcohol abuse, made this case in introducing new prisoner rehabilitation legislation in his 2004 State of the Union speech. “America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of prison open, the path should lead to a better life,” he declared. Dan McAdams, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University and author of *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (2006), has spent a lifetime studying the stories that Americans, to borrow a phrase from Joan Didion, tell themselves in order to live. McAdams argues that there is in the American psyche a deeply ingrained belief in a special destiny and self-reinvention that dates

The saga of redemption and reinvention—the creation of our own individually unique second acts—is arguably *the American story.*

from the Massachusetts Bay Puritans and has continued through Benjamin Franklin and Horatio Alger on to the present-day reign of Oprah and 12-step therapy. Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting from France in the 1830s, wrote that Americans “have an immensely high opinion of themselves and are not far from believing that they form a species apart from the rest of the human race.”

Redemption is a centerpiece of nearly every religion and culture, but in none does it loom larger than the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly the American variant. The redemption narrative sustains Hollywood’s happy endings and Madison Avenue’s mantra of endless self-improvement. As book critic Michiko Kakutani wrote a decade ago in *The New York Times*, “There is no public narrative more potent today—or throughout American history—than the one about redemption.” The saga of redemption and reinvention—the creation



GEORGE BURNS / OPRAH WINFREY NETWORK VIA GETTY IMAGES

When disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong took the tried-and-true route of seeking public redemption in a January interview with Oprah Winfrey, viewers were largely unmoved.

of our own individually unique second acts—is arguably *the* American story.

Yet there are signs that our faith in this narrative is slipping. Champion cyclist Lance Armstrong is the latest in a string of fallen celebrities and politicians—from actor Mel Gibson and former New York governor Eliot Spitzer to retired baseball superstars Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds, both emphatically denied spots in the Hall of Fame in the last balloting—who have found that the old rituals of repentance and redemption are not as effective as they used to be.

A more serious early symptom of our declining faith came several decades ago with the loss of belief within the criminal justice system in the possibilities of criminal rehabilitation. Beginning in the 1970s, states gave up this ideal, and began warehousing prisoners in ever

greater numbers. The United States now incarcerates a larger percentage of its citizens than any other country, with about one in 100 adults currently behind bars. About a quarter of the world's prisoners are confined in U.S. prisons and jails. President Bush's Second Chance Act, which funded community and mentoring programs for prisoners after their release, was inadequate when he announced it nine years ago, and the programs have seen their combined budgets shrink from \$100 million in 2010 to \$63 million last year. With nearly 700,000 former prisoners hitting the streets annually across the United States, such sums are little more than token gestures. Far more is spent simply to put people behind bars and keep them there. California alone has a corrections budget of \$9 billion.

Americans still love a good redemption story, at least in movies and other imagined worlds. (The middling *Shawshank Redemption* is consistently ranked online as one of the country's greatest films, and *Les Misérables* has been one of the longest-running shows on Broadway.) But they are often less convinced about such accounts in reality. Many would regard a story such as David Deutsch's with either skepticism (interpreting his change as a con game) or hostility (asking why he should be allowed to be so successful after what he has done). Indeed Deutsch says that he met resistance early in his journey. His parole officer took a wait-and-see attitude, while the criminal justice system as a whole operated on a simpler assumption: once a criminal, always a criminal.

THE SKEPTICISM ABOUT SECOND ACTS is no longer confined to corrections systems. Once universally known as the land of irrepressible optimism, America seems to have entered a sustained period of doubt, a kind of antiswagger. A series of national and international cataclysms have shaken Americans' traditional confidence. A recession that never seems to end has left many resigned to just hanging on. Upward mobility, the traditional elixir

of American society, seems increasingly out of reach. Almost half of American boys reared in households in the bottom quintile of income stay there as adults, according to a recent study, and only eight percent rise to the highest quintile. In Britain, young men who start out in the bottom quintile have a 50 percent better chance of rising to the top than their counterparts in the United States. Higher education, the most reliable avenue of upward mobility, is significantly less attainable than it used to be. Family income has been largely stagnant, while the cost of attending a public university has risen 60 percent in the last 20 years.

Americans still love a good redemption story, at least in movies and other imagined worlds. They are often less convinced about them in reality.

A less obvious factor in the waning of the redemption script is the rise of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which, with their obsessive focus on the chronicling of personal micro-events, have drawn many users away from the

larger narratives and collective themes that provide hope and inspiration. Only other people can provide redemption, yet social media are a boon to narcissism, calling for us to publish and advertise our every move, no matter how incidental. As Daniel Boorstin wrote, with remarkable prescience, a half-century ago in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, “We have fallen in love with our own image, with images of our making, which turn out to be images of ourselves.”

The victim—or perhaps “survivor”—has become one of our reigning cultural figures.

Each generation tends to have its characteristic or favored mood or diagnosis. During the Cold War we had the Age of Anxiety; in the late 1970s it was “malaise.” In the Prozac-fueled 1990s the diagnosis was depression, followed soon after by attention deficit disorder, often treated with Adderall. The signature diagnosis of the last decade may be PTSD: posttraumatic stress disorder. Legions of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have received that di-

agnosis, and enormous resources have gone into its treatment. But trauma of all sorts—from 9/11 to Hurricane Katrina to Newtown—now feels like a constant on the American scene. Memoirs of suffering such as James Frey’s best-selling *A Million Little Pieces* (2003)—later caught up in scandal when it emerged that Frey had embellished his hardships as a recovering drug and alcohol addict—have burgeoned into a new genre of “misery lit,” a far cry from the long line of self-improvement tales descended from the Horatio Alger stories. The victim—or perhaps “survivor”—has become one of our reigning cultural figures.

Highly publicized tragedies such as the December massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, that left 26 children and adults dead pose the greatest threat to our belief in the redeemability of the most marginalized among us. (And when such events occur, as Newtown did, in the kind of tranquil, upper-middle-class community to which many Americans aspire, they subtract all the more from our hopes.) Take, for example, the story of Sister Karen Klimczak, a Catholic nun who was murdered in Buffalo, New York, on Good Friday in 2006. Two decades earlier she had opened HOPE House (the acronym stands for



DON HEUPEL / AP IMAGES

Sister Karen Klimczak started distributing “I leave peaceprints” signs before she was murdered in 2006. Bishop Edward Kmicc of Buffalo, New York, was given one of them after the memorial service for Klimczak, and they are still seen in the city today.

Home of Positive Experience), a Buffalo-based residential treatment center for ex-offenders, where she also lived. She was known as a whirlwind of grace and positive energy, described locally as “Mother Teresa in fast-forward.” Klimczak was murdered in her room by new resident Craig Lynch nine days after his release from prison, where he had served time for car theft. She walked in as he was stealing her cell phone, and

he strangled her in an attempt to keep her from screaming. Hours before she was murdered, Klimczak had said about the man who would kill her, “I think Craig’s doing well. I think he’s going to be all right.” Her funeral is believed to have been the largest in Buffalo history. After killing Klimczak, Lynch traded in the cell phone for a rock of crack. When he tried to smoke it, it wouldn’t light. The rock was fake.

There was a horrible forerunner to Klimczak's murder. Several years earlier, she had moved her halfway house to a former rectory and renamed it Bissonette House in honor of a Catholic priest who had once lived there. The Reverend Joseph Bissonette was killed in the building in 1987, at the height of the crack era, by two teens who had sought him out for help. In the spirit of forgiveness, Sister Karen had made it a point to lead prayers every morning in the ground-floor room where Bissonette was killed.

If, as a result of tragedies such as those in Buffalo and Newtown, Americans have become more cynical about hope and second chances, who can blame them? Perhaps F. Scott Fitzgerald was right about second acts. Certainly for Fitzgerald, who wrote so much about the promise of youth yet died an alcoholic at 44 without ever equaling the dazzling success of his 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*, there was no second act. Maybe America is finally facing an uncomfortable reality.

DAN McADAMS ARGUES THAT THE American redemption script has two key components. The first is the belief that we, as individuals and as a people, are fortunate, blessed, or "chosen for a special, manifest destiny" to do

In the spirit of forgiveness, Sister Karen Klimczak had led prayers every morning in the ground-floor room of her halfway house where teens once murdered a priest.

great things in the world. The second is the conviction that by responding successfully to hardships and tribulations, we will only grow stronger and better. We will take bad things and create good things out of them. Both beliefs are under threat. Americans have probably never been as special and blessed as they believed themselves to be, but they are particularly less special today. In many areas, from educational achievement to average life span to rates of violent death and infant mortality, measurable evidence shows that we are special only by virtue of our poor standing compared with other countries. And as for our capacity to overcome adversity, it may be limited in the future by increased global competition and environmental challenges.

There may be something to be gained by loosening our grip on the

redemption narrative. It has promoted a belief in American exceptionalism that, while serving America and the world well during the world wars and at other times, has often bred national arrogance and self-righteousness. George W. Bush, who so embodied the second act, also embraced American exceptionalism in foreign policy, with far-reaching and destructive results.

There is a counternarrative to the redemption script. Its sources of inspiration include Shakespeare, the Greek dramatists, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In the tragic narrative, the hero suffers a plight that he is not responsible for and cannot overcome. Many non-American cultures are rooted in this more tragic, perhaps more realistic view of the world. Such a narrative would allow for a more balanced approach, a realistic appraisal of the challenges and rewards of living. Tragedy, McAdams writes, “teaches us . . . lessons that serve as psychologically useful counterpoints to the redemptive self. Tragedy calls into question the belief that any particular individual is blessed and destined to achieve good things. It looks with skepticism upon the kind of ideological certitude celebrated in the redemptive self.”

Most important, McAdams says, tragedy brings people together. “People often

identify moments of greatest intimacy in their lives as those times when they shared with others deep sadness and pain.” As veterans of any war know, tragedy creates bonds that those who haven’t shared it can never fully understand.

Perhaps a greater acceptance of suffering would relieve Americans of a pressure to pursue happiness in a world that quite often doesn’t make it possible. As a Swedish woman once said to us at a reading, “In America, everybody says ‘Have a nice day’ and everybody is supposed to be happy. You ask people how they are doing, and they say, ‘Great!’ In Sweden, you ask people how they are doing, and they say, ‘Terrible!’ But you get to know them, and they are doing fine, while the Americans, once you get to know them, are all on Prozac and miserable.”

Yet the American redemption script has many virtues. Researchers have consistently found that adults who hold such beliefs are far more likely to be successful than others in areas such as parenting, social support, and religious and civic involvement. Our own research on the reintegration of ex-prisoners suggests that developing a personal redemption script may be essential for them to overcome the many obstacles they face. We have studied the life histories

of hundreds of men and women with long records of drug and property offenses, some of whom desist from crime and others who carry on undeterred by any punishment. Both groups face the same obstacles (poverty, childhood abuse, addiction, poor education, the stigma of a criminal record) and have similar personality traits. What appear to distinguish them from each other are their subjective orientations, or understandings of the world. They live by very different stories. Persistent offenders often told us they were tired of living in a cycle of crime and imprisonment, but they portrayed themselves as being doomed to their path by circumstances beyond their control. They saw their lives in terms of what we call “condemnation scripts,” as a kind of lottery they have lost. By contrast, ex-prisoners who succeed in putting crime behind them seek to transform their tragic pasts into resources for the future, remaking, as criminologist (and former prisoner) Charles Terry writes, “a seemingly intractable pattern of deviance into a life of benevolence and social contribution.”

The desistance process involves getting in touch with a real or core self that was fundamentally good and making explicit efforts to “make good” and give back to others, particularly young people

vulnerable to going down the wrong path. The redemption script appears, in other words, to be self-fulfilling.

Our research also shows how redemption occurs in a practical sense, and how we might maximize “redemption opportunities” for people who have been on the wrong side of the law. Successful reintegration appears to require not only that a person stop bad behaviors but actively make amends and reparations to prove his reform to family members and the wider community. So it would be wise to incorporate into the criminal justice system more ways for people to make good, such as opportunities to do volunteer work.

The criminal justice system is rife with ceremonies of stigmatization. Why can't we do more to celebrate those who have changed their lives?

The kind of counseling Deutsch does—delivered by peers who have “been there and done that”—holds special credibility among offenders. Studies show that it is both effective

and cost efficient. After all, redemption is clearly a two-way street: It requires not only behavioral change by the individual, but ratification of that change by others. People say, “I redeemed myself *in the eyes* of my family,” or that the White Sox have “redeemed themselves *in the eyes* of their fans.” It is the “eyes” that matter, whether they belong to one’s god or to community members or to the state. In Deutsch’s case, the official Certificate of Rehabilitation he received was enormously important. Validation of his success by an external source such as the state (the very entity that had sentenced him) served to make his internal journey incontrovertibly real. The criminal justice system is rife with ceremonies of stigmatization. When people have served their time and made behavioral progress, why can’t we do more to ratify and even celebrate their effort?

SIX YEARS AFTER HE LEFT SAN QUENTIN, David Deutsch is thriving. He remarried several years ago and is advancing in his field, becoming, as he puts it, a “poster boy” for the promise of redeeming lives seemingly lost to crime. He is routinely asked to share his story with prisoners and with young people, showing them the living, breathing

example of his personal redemption. Even more remarkably, Sister Karen Klimczak’s supporters in Buffalo and around the world appear more inspired than ever to carry on her message of hope. Bissonette House continues its work today with new volunteers and donations.

America’s belief in redemption has been tested and stretched in recent decades. We have become sadder but wiser as a nation, less hopeful, more realistic. Yet this core aspect of our culture’s narrative remains surprisingly intact. Without it, it seems, we might not be American. ■

SHADD MARUNA is director of the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Queen’s University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. His book *Making Good: How Ex-Offenders Reform Their Lives* was named the “Outstanding Contribution to Criminology” by the American Society of Criminology in 2001. As part of a Soros Justice Fellowship, he is writing a new book on redemption beliefs in contemporary society.

CHARLES BARBER is a lecturer in psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine and the author of two books on mental health and psychiatry. He directs the Connection Institute, which is conducting a study of the life stories of residents of a New Haven, Connecticut, halfway house. He is completing a novel about a depressed detective who redeems himself by solving a crime.



STEVE HIX / SOMOS IMAGES / CORBIS

Who drew up *this* blueprint? Women make up 70 percent of self-help gurus' clientele—here's hoping the happiness architects know what they're doing.

FEEL FREE TO HELP YOURSELF

There is a booming market for self-improvement guides among Americans eager to redeem themselves from the sins of sloth, gluttony, or general discontent. But what qualifies one person to tell another how best to live?

BY SARAH L. COURTEAU

By SARAH L. COURTEAU

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I WAS LIVING in Washington with one of my brothers, who had come to stay with me while he pulled himself out of a rough patch. Eventually, he got a gig selling memberships at a gym, part of a well-known national franchise. No one in our family is a natural salesperson, but it was a job, and at least the gym is one place where my brother is in his element.

He had the closing shift, and he'd get home in his regulation polo shirt and raid the fridge just as I was going to bed. Pulling in a paycheck straightened his shoulders, as it does for anyone. Some of his wry humor returned, and so it was that one night he came in and, standing at the kitchen counter, recited "The Affirmation," the creed that new gym employees had to learn by heart:

I will win. Why? I'll tell you why—because I have faith, courage, and enthusiasm!

Today, I'll meet the right people in the right place at the right time for the betterment of all.

I see opportunity in every challenge.

I am terrific at remembering names.

When I fail, I look at what I did right, not what I did wrong.

I have clearly defined goals.

I never take advice from anyone more messed up than I am.

I never let a negative thought enter my head.

I am a winner, a contributor, an achiever. I believe in me.

We laughed until there were tears on our cheeks, in part because of the mock enthusiasm with which my brother belted out that last line, but mostly at the idea that such earnest propaganda could ever be received—much less adopted—with a straight face. What kind of chump did these corporate types think he was?

But really, what was so ludicrous about a company that makes its money bur-nishing the temple of the body applying that same approach to the mind? Sure, it isn't exactly a tune you can dance to. Still, "The Affirmation," crude as it is, echoes some of the time-tested ideas of the self-improvement canon, old and new. Back in 1936, in *How to Win*

Friends and Influence People, a folksy businessman's bible that is really just a useful guide to not being a jerk, Dale Carnegie admonished his readers to "remember that a man's name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language." And in the 2006 blockbuster *The Secret*, various "experts" unrelentingly advocate using positive thinking to mobilize the "law of attraction" in your favor. "Your life is a mirror of the dominant thoughts you think," but the law of attraction doesn't register "words of negation," says one of these authorities. (In other words, if you're thinking "I don't want the restaurant to give away our table," what the universe hears is "I want restaurants to give away our tables.") *The Secret* reminds me of another megaseller, *The Da Vinci Code*, with its pseudo-historical references and simplistic explanations peddled as deep insights. The law of attraction is bunk. But there really are some benefits to thinking positively.

The truth is, my brother could have done worse than take "The Affirmation" to heart. And at that point in my life, dating a string of men whom Dale Carnegie would have kicked to the curb, I could have, too. The main trouble with "The Affirmation" was the source—a company that wanted its workers to bristle with

enthusiasm so they'd sell more memberships. That didn't invalidate the message.

We openly admire gym rats and envy their fit bodies. But anyone who dabbles in the improvement of the mind invites a raised eyebrow.

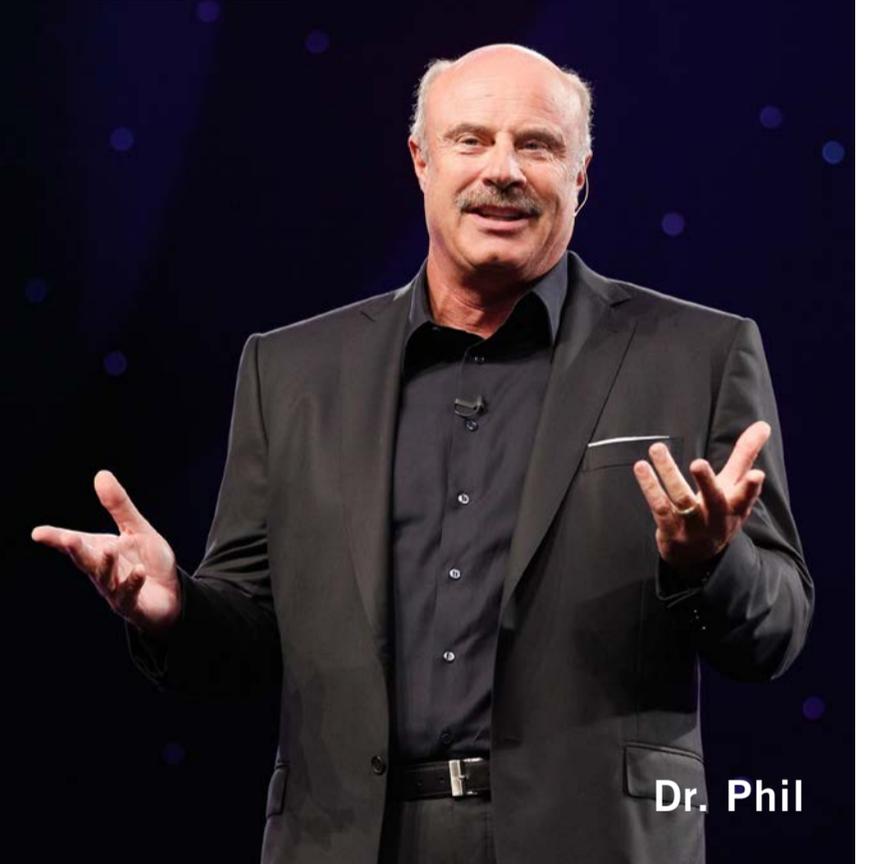
There's a fundamental contradiction in our attitudes about self-help—a term that describes the broad category of products and ideas that are supposed to make us thinner, happier, smarter, and more efficient. We Americans accept protein powders, extreme diets, personal trainers, expensive gym memberships, and the Rube Goldberg exercise contraptions that litter our basements and garages as the necessary paraphernalia for the pursuit of physical perfection. We openly admire gym rats and envy their fit bodies. But anyone who dabbles in the improvement of the mind—even taking yoga that hasn't had its spiritual roots bleached out completely—invites a raised eyebrow among those of us who consider ourselves serious people. *We* are above such lockstep platitudes, empty positivity, and pop psychology.



Suze Orman



Sheryl Sandberg



Dr. Phil

TOP: BEN ROSE / WIREIMAGE / GETTY IMAGES; LOWER LEFT: NADINE RUPP / GETTY IMAGES; LOWER RIGHT: BEN ROSE / WIREIMAGE / GETTY IMAGES

AS I READ THROUGH A STACK OF self-help books in preparation for this essay, I started with what I hoped was an anthropologist's distance. It diminished pretty much immediately. I found myself mulling insights from Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness*

Project (2009) and *Happier at Home* (2012). In both books, she records her attempts to take domestic bliss to the next level and offers tips on how the rest of us can, too. "Acknowledge the reality of other people's feelings," a chestnut that's at the heart of Dale Carnegie's

win-people-over philosophy but is easy to lose sight of, did wonders for Rubin when she was faced with a kid's tantrum. I could see plenty of applications in my relationships with adults.

We assume self-help is the opiate of the intellectual underclasses. And that's where we're wrong.

In conversations, I took to reciting various *bons mots* from Augusten Burroughs's *This Is How* (2012), which distills his life wisdom into a charming do-as-I-say-not-as-I-did primer. Burroughs made his literary mark—and a fortune—with books including *Running With Scissors* (2002), about growing up in two dysfunctional families, and the rehab memoir *Dry* (2003). When he warns, “The past does not haunt us. We haunt the past,” he knows whereof he speaks. He seemed to be specifically describing my own tendency to endlessly rehash family history with certain others of my flesh and blood, sort of like saying a rosary together, rather than look at what we can do about the here and now.

With each mention of the current self-help book I was reading, I'd include

a “research” disclaimer, afraid to risk the judgment or, worse, pity of those who'd now lump me with weak-minded housewives who fall prey to TV pitches for kitchen gadgets that can Do All This and More! for \$29.95. That fear is another reason self-help provokes such profound unease in us. We assume it's the opiate of the intellectual underclasses—the people who don't know any better than to go in for that sort of thing. And that's where we're wrong.

The ethos of self-help is woven into American culture. It's the literature of aspiration. The pursuit of happiness is embedded right there in the document that launched the American experiment. For centuries, religion has offered a strong tonic for those in need of backbone, upper-lip stiffening, moral guidance, or practical advice. The cultivation of good human relationships and moderation in both food and drink—two central preoccupations of the self-help industry—are touchstones of the Christian faith.

It's hardly a coincidence that self-help is booming at a time when America is less religious than ever before. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life finds that nearly one in five of us claims no religious affiliation at all. But we're still in need of guideposts—a Good

Book or a guru—when our appetites, our relationships, our finances, or the general busyness of life get the best of us. Marketdata, a Florida research firm that tracks the U.S. self-improvement industry, puts the price tag for our collective appetite for self-help books and seminars and those ubiquitous infomercials for diets, speed-reading, and killer abs at \$10 billion a year.

Somebody is buying all that stuff. Men are a distinct minority of the self-help clientele—only about 30 percent, according to Marketdata. They tend to consult books about how to dominate in the boardroom or be a savvier investor. The typical consumer is a woman who is middle aged and affluent. (By and large, self-help is neither marketed to nor used by the young, who are busy out there making the mistakes they'll be looking to fix in a few years' time.) She's someone who wants to maximize, and she has the luxury of a little money—and perhaps time—to worry about how to take off a few pounds, put her best foot forward at work, improve her relationship or her dating life, get her schedule or her closets more organized, or become a better mother. She is representative of a generation that has made enormous strides, yet she feels dissatisfied with where she is.

It's easy for women to believe they need all the help they can get. We're raised on

Cosmo and *Seventeen*, both of which are chock-full of tips on how to pluck our eyebrows, choose a lipstick, or have better sex. We graduate to *Real Simple* and *O: The Oprah Magazine* when we have households of our own. The line between fighting for equal footing—that elusive sense of “empowerment” that we're forever supposed to be grasping for—and the conviction that we could *always* be doing more is fine, if it exists at all. No surprise that self-help marketers know that their target audience consists of people who have already shelled out money for a self-improvement product within the last several months.

AS MUCH AS I ENJOYED MY FORAY into self-help—a bit *too* much, in the opinion of some near and dear to me—I grew increasingly uneasy about it. No matter how “authentic,” “down to earth,” or “real” this advice is supposed to be (and marketers, if not the authors

There's much we don't know about self-help gurus. But what we do know should be enough to give us pause.

and seminar leaders themselves, tout these qualities at every opportunity), the creators of these self-help products are not people like us. There's much we don't know about them—whether they stiff their waiters, snap at their spouses, or kick the dog when they come home. But what we do know should be enough to give us pause. Self-help, along with the rest of the culture, has undergone a pronoun shift, from “you” to “I.” In Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* or, to go back to the beginning of the genre, Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859), the inspirational anecdotes are about others. Today, the focus is relentlessly on the *I* who is delivering whatever advice is on offer. It's their lives that serve as the platform, and if they've overcome hardship, so much the better.

Increasingly, that *I* is a woman. In the self-help industry, male gurus have traditionally dominated, but today there are more women at the top. I'm looking at you, Oprah Winfrey, Suze Orman, and, most recently, Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg. For women like me, looking for a way to balance the stresses and pressures of trying to do it all, these women's success is actually a problem. We might not seek to emulate Tony Robbins's home life or look to

Dr. Phil as a role model. But female self-help authors are a different story.

Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty, but it's been many years since she looked into a bare fridge.

I have to keep reminding myself that Sandberg, who just published *Lean In*, in which she argues that women need to become more forceful advocates for themselves in the workplace, has a battery of nannies and household staff and a net worth of several hundred million. Yes, Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty, but it's been many, many years since she looked into a bare fridge. Financial doyenne Suze Orman takes every opportunity to remind us that at age 29 she was still a diner waitress. In 2011, she brought in \$15 million. Even the domestically minded Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, isn't a simple housewife: It's all well and good to create scrapbooks to preserve family memories and take the time to plan a thoughtful birthday party for your mother-in-law. It helps if you're a mom living on the Upper East Side who has a babysitter, a housecleaner, and a

husband who's a private equities trader—facts Rubin carefully dances around in her books.

There's a large dollop of self-congratulation in these gurus' advice. To offer a blueprint for success is to produce evidence that one's own good fortune was achieved through deliberate planning, hard work, and good character alone. While all these ingredients are a part of these women's great American success stories, a large element of luck, and, in some cases, privilege, was involved. To insist that anyone can do it is the bedrock of the American dream, and the answer to everyone who falls short. The flip side of the empowerment doctrine that self-help offers—that the potential to change your life lies entirely within you—is that the potential to fail does, too. At least when God was part of the

plan, His hand shared some of the blame.

Self-help is ultimately a lonely enterprise. Whatever kernels of useful wisdom we Hoover up from the books and DVDs and infomercials coming at us, it's worth remembering that the gurus du jour aren't self-made at all. We've put them where they are today, buying their books, attending their seminars, purchasing their products, and watching them on TV. We've contributed to their success, and now see it as a reason to listen to them. They may offer a useful tip or two, but they can't offer us a one-size-fits-all key to a better life. It's up to us to remember that, because they have worked very hard to forget it. ■

SARAH L. COURTEAU is literary editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*.

IN ESSENCE

OUR SURVEY OF NOTABLE ARTICLES FROM OTHER JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES



POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

STIMULUS OR WISH LIST?

From *Political Science Quarterly*

PARTY FATIGUE

From *The American Interest*

REMEMBRANCE OF POWERS LOST

From *The National Interest*

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

THE REWARDS OF BEING WRONG

From *American Historical Review*

AMERICA THE STRONG

From *International Security*

LEAVE NO MAN BEHIND

From *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

PATENTLY USELESS

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SOCIETY

WHY IS JOHNNY HAVING SO MUCH FUN?

From *American Sociological Review*

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PREVENTING POVERTY

From *Current History*

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

THE JEWISH HEAD START

From *Reform Judaism*

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BURNING THE *BRITANNICA*

From *Aeon Magazine*

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DARK GREEN

From *Orion*

RUMBLE OVER PRIMING

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ECSTASY DOT COM

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OTHER NATIONS

TURKEY'S SOUL FOOD

From *Gastronomica*

THE COMING MELTDOWN IN KABUL

From *Harper's*

UP IN THE DUMPS

From *The Journal of Positive Psychology*

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

STIMULUS OR WISH LIST?

THE SOURCE: “Geographic Distribution of the Federal Stimulus of 2009” by James G. Gimpel, Frances E. Lee, and Rebecca U. Thorpe, in *Political Science Quarterly*, Winter 2012–13.

DURING THE BLEAKEST DAYS OF THE RE-cession, in February 2009, President Barack Obama signed the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into law. Congress and the president promised relief for the unem-

ployed and other down-on-their-luck Americans.

But according to political scientists James G. Gimpel and Frances E. Lee of the University of Maryland, College Park, and Rebecca U. Thorpe, of the University of Washington, the areas of the country hit hardest by the downturn actually got a smaller share of the discretionary portion of the federal goodies than more fortunate regions.

Most of the stimulus money wasn't geographically targeted, going for food stamps, tax cuts, and other general



CARLOS OSORIO / AP IMAGES

The stimulus paves the way: The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act generously funded road repairs in Moran, Wyoming, near Grand Teton National Park, and other sparsely populated areas. Parts of the country where the recession did greater damage saw fewer federal dollars per person.

purposes. The authors focused on the remaining \$308 billion. That works out to \$917 per capita for the average county. But some of the worst-hit regions fared poorly. In Florida, which was wracked by home foreclosures and unemployment, all but three counties received less than the average amount of stimulus money per capita. The Midwest, where industry struggled to stay afloat during the recession, also largely missed out.

All the talk about targeting the hardest-hit parts of the country was misleading.

What was at work? Despite Republican charges of pork barrel politics—conservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh dubbed the bill a “porkulus” measure—the authors found little evidence to support this characterization. Democratic legislators on powerful committees didn’t succeed in bringing home undue quantities of the bacon, though overall there was “a distinct tilt toward counties that were stronger for the Democratic Party in 2008.” The bluest-hued counties received about \$35 more per person in funding than counties that had gone heavily Republican.

The broader reason why spending went haywire, the authors believe, is because Democrats used it to fund their pet policy initiatives. Ordinarily, progress on fronts such as infrastructure repair and scientific and medical research is painfully slow. ARRA offered an all-too-tempting “policy window” to change that.

Democrats showered the National Institutes of Health with \$10 billion of new funding and the National Science Foundation with \$3 billion. They created more than 30 new federal programs, leapfrogging the normal congressional authorization process. President Obama homed in on highways. “Because of this investment, nearly 400,000 men and women will go to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, repairing our faulty dams and levees,” he declared when he signed the stimulus into law.

Not surprisingly, Gimpel, Lee, and Thorpe found that counties that already had lots of roads and other public installations profited handsomely, harvesting an average of \$50 more per capita than less endowed counties. “Prioritizing infrastructure favored areas with access to interstate highways, bodies of water, and national parks, regardless of local economic circumstances.”

Counties with large numbers of people with PhDs raked in a \$40 bonus per person. Hubs of clean energy development and medical research were also cash magnets. The irony, the authors point out, is that “science and technology sectors were more resilient to the economic downturn than was the rest of the private sector.”

Geographically, the infrastructure and research windfall fell most heavily in the Mountain West and the Plains states, often in areas largely spared by the recession.

There’s no doubt that ARRA stimulated the national economy. But all the talk about targeting the hardest-hit parts of the country was misleading. The stimulus, the authors conclude, “brightly illuminates the politics of taking advantage of crisis.” ■

PARTY FATIGUE

THE SOURCE: “America’s Missing Moderates” by Morris P. Fiorina, in *The American Interest*, March/April 2013.

PITY THE STATE OF AMERICAN POLITICS. HALF the voters pull the country in one direction, and the other half stubbornly yank it the opposite way. Everybody seems to be screaming, not so much at each other as past each other. The United States is divided down the middle, the pundits say.

It isn’t. In terms of party affiliation, ideology, and even positions on particular hot-button issues, the American electorate has hardly changed at all in a generation. Today, about a quarter of Americans say they are Republicans; a similar proportion said the same 30 years ago. Some 35 percent of Americans identify as Democrats, the same as before. Nearly 40 percent of Americans don’t even identify with a political party, writes Morris P. Fiorina, a political scientist at Stanford and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Can the United States afford 20 years of political chaos?

What has changed is the political class—party activists, donors, and convention delegates. The rise of partisan media and the proliferation of ideological interest groups have also turned up the temperature.

Meanwhile, demographic and political sorting has left the parties “more homogenous than they were a generation ago,” Fiorina says. Liberals, for example, were once found in both parties. Now virtually all are Democrats, while conservatives have moved to the GOP.

Nonetheless, there's still some diversity within the parties. For example, nearly 40 percent of "strong Republicans" polled in a 2008 survey wavered from a strictly pro-life stance. And more than a third of "strong Democrats" took views on abortion close to those associated with the Grand Old Party. Polls find similar results when it comes to gun control and other issues.

The problem is that "the most active and involved members come from the most extreme reaches of each party." During last year's presidential primaries, for example, the conservative former senator Rick Santorum emerged for a time as a top Republican contender after victories in Minnesota, Colorado, and Missouri. The turnout in those contests, however, averaged less than four percent.

Our era of what Fiorina calls "almost unprecedented electoral instability" is evidence that "the middle of the American electorate . . . no longer has a home in either party." In 2004, Americans reelected a Republican president and solidified GOP control of both chambers of Congress. In 2006, they gave the Senate and House back to Democrats. In 2008, Barack Obama roared into the White House and commanded control of Congress. But in 2010, voters handed Democrats catastrophic losses, costing them control of the House.

The last time party control seesawed so consistently was during the Gilded Age, over five elections from 1886 to 1894. Fiorina says the similarities between the two eras are striking. In the late 19th century, partisan rancor prevailed, and the parties themselves were neatly sorted ideologically. Americans worried about the yawning gap between robber barons and tenement dwellers—much as they fret today about disparities between "one percenters" and the rest of the country. Then, the economy was transitioning from agriculture to industry; today it's in flux again.

The political turmoil of the Gilded Age ended with the formation of lasting new electoral coalitions. But Fiorina says that these "are arguably more dangerous times," shadowed by the specters of terrorism, rising debt, and looming inflation. "The United States could afford 20 years of political chaos in the late 19th century before a new majority emerged," Fiorina concludes. "It remains to be seen whether we can do the same today." ■

REMEMBRANCE OF POWERS LOST

THE SOURCE: "Congressional Abdication" by Jim Webb, in *The National Interest*, March/April 2013.

BEHOLD THE CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF the legislative branch in the realm of

foreign affairs: to declare war, to raise an army and maintain a navy, to ratify treaties.

The Founding Fathers weren't as generous with the president: He is commander in chief, but in deciding matters of war and peace, lawmakers are to keep the chief executive on a short leash, lest he resemble a monarch.

Congress has shirked those weighty constitutional responsibilities, contends Jim Webb, a recently retired Democratic senator from Virginia. On an alarming number of occasions since 9/11, George W. Bush and Barack Obama have thumbed their noses at Capitol Hill. Cowed by political pressure or suffering from collective amnesia, Congress hardly whimpered.

In 2008, President Bush signed a wide-ranging Strategic Framework Agreement with Iraq. The Bush administration deftly avoided labeling the agreement a "treaty," so the document didn't require Senate ratification. "But neither was it a typical executive-branch negotiation designed to implement current policy and law," writes Webb, a Marine Corps veteran, novelist, and onetime Republican who served as secretary of the Navy under Ronald Reagan. After the investment of hundreds of billions of dollars and the loss of thousands of American lives, the "framework" determined the

course of substantial U.S. assistance to the fledgling regime in Baghdad for years to come.

Webb, who served one term in the Senate (2007–13), says Bush should have consulted Congress about something so consequential. Instead, the administration kept the agreement under wraps until the eleventh hour. Just before it was signed, Webb requested access to the document. Other lawmakers weren't so diligent: "It appears that I was the only member of the Senate who at least at that point had actually read it." The Iraqi parliament, meanwhile, voted on the pact two times.

In May 2012, President Obama pulled a similar stunt. After more than a year of negotiations with Afghanistan, he skirted congressional oversight by signing "a legally binding executive agreement," as the White House termed it. Obama labeled Afghanistan a "Major Non-NATO Ally" and pledged long-term economic and military aid to Hamid Karzai's regime in Kabul—all without consulting Congress.

It wasn't Obama's first executive end-around. In 2011, he hastily ordered the U.S. military into action to protect Libyan civilians from forces loyal to Muammar al-Qaddafi. The commander in chief of the armed forces can authorize such

Lawmakers blanch at the thought of questioning the president's national security prerogatives.

strikes without congressional approval if time is short and the threat is grave. But in this case, there was no direct threat to the United States. Even when the intervention dragged on for months—and the financial costs mounted—the president refused to loop in Capitol Hill. Congressional leaders didn't even schedule a debate on the matter. "President Obama has arguably established the authority of the president to intervene militarily virtually anywhere without consent or the approval of Congress," Webb marvels, "at his own discretion and for as long as he wishes." The precedent "has the potential to haunt us for decades."

The worst of it, according to Webb, is that Congress doesn't howl in protest. In

the post-9/11 world, lawmakers blanch at the thought of questioning the president's national security prerogatives. Few have sought formal debates over these issues; in the Senate, leaders barred all Libya-related legislation.

Negligence and dereliction plague Capitol Hill, Webb argues. "As in so many other areas where powers disappear through erosion rather than revolution, many members of Congress do not appreciate the power that they actually hold."

What's more, in today's world of drones and special operations forces, the president can order actions that fly under the radar of the American public. Congressional oversight is needed now more than ever.

Webb says his former colleagues should dust off their copies of the Constitution and remember their duties. "One hopes Congress—both Republicans and Democrats—can regain the wisdom to reassert the authority that was so wisely given to it so many years ago." ■

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

THE REWARDS OF BEING WRONG

THE SOURCE: “General, I Have Fought Just as Many Nuclear Wars as You Have” by Matthew Connelly, Matt Fay, Giulia Ferrini, Micki Kaufman, Will Leonard, Harrison Monsky, Ryan Musto, Taunton Paine, Nicholas Standish, and Lydia Walker, in *American Historical Review*, Dec. 2012.

AMERICA’S INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS AND futurists were dead wrong about many of

the big questions during the Cold War. At the outset, they badly underestimated how quickly the Soviet Union would be able to build its first atomic bomb, and they topped off their poor record decades later by failing even to imagine the Cold War’s end. Yet their work was invaluable, argue Matthew Connelly, a Columbia University historian, and his student coauthors.

More than any other conflict, the



BETTMANN / CORBIS

Deep underground in Omaha, Nebraska, the Strategic Air Command’s command center was built to survive a nuclear blast. But the more U.S. strategists planned for nuclear war, the more they realized it was unthinkable.

Cold War put a premium on “prevision.” Nobody had ever fought a nuclear war before, so history provided little useful guidance, and if war broke out, events were expected to unfold so quickly and with such unprecedented violence that there would be little time to think. Ultimately, previsioning taught what history could not: Nuclear war was unthinkable.

After the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb in 1949, U.S. intelligence turned its attention to determining the “moment of maximum danger”—the point when an aggressive Soviet Union would calculate that it had sufficient strength to launch a surprise attack on the United States. Many American strategists believed that communist ideology made such an attack nearly inevitable. After the Central Intelligence Agency was blindsided by the North Korean army’s surge across the 38th parallel in June of 1950 and again when Chinese and Soviet forces joined the fray the following November, alarmed U.S. officials moved the moment much closer. Air Force chief of staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg put it just eight months in the future. He and others talked of launching a preemptive nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. Instead, the United States launched a massive military buildup that altered the perceived balance of power.

The stunning intelligence failures sparked harder thinking about a future nuclear war. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower launched the Solarium Project, naming three teams of experts to lay out competing long-term strategies. Eisenhower listened to the results in an all-day meeting and largely concluded that the preventive war favored by many strategists was out of the question. What would the world do if a vast part of it were left in ruins? “The only thing worse than losing a global war [is] winning one,” he declared.

Previsioning taught what history could not: Nuclear war was unthinkable.

America was learning to live with the Bomb—the emphasis would gradually shift from confrontation toward building a survivable nuclear deterrent force.

War planning nevertheless continued, with rounds of sophisticated computer simulations and, during the Kennedy administration, war games pitting U.S. officials against one another in role-playing exercises. After one such contest involving a hypothetical crisis over Berlin, the Americans

realized that they would not be willing to go to war over the divided city because of the damage the Soviets could inflict. “It’s very hard to get a war started,” one wrote.

It wasn’t just the possibility of war that made thinking about the future a high-stakes enterprise. Envisioning future threats also translated directly into appropriations for weapons, fostering a new kind of futurist gamesmanship. Most early war games, for example, suggested that America’s strategic bombers would be destroyed on the ground by Soviet missiles. So in 1960 the Strategic Air Command successfully maneuvered to win responsibility for the nation’s nuclear war-fighting plan, the Single Integrated Operational Plan. Lo and behold, SAC’s computer simulations discovered new vulnerabilities in the Navy’s aircraft carriers and ballistic missile submarines, building the case for more B-52 and B-58 bombers. (In the 1970s, Andrew Marshall, head of the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment, reckoning that Soviet bureaucracies were just as flawed as American ones, cleverly baited Moscow into launching a needless and costly biological weapons effort.)

Previsioning had many ill effects, Connelly and his team concede. The United States built a huge nuclear arse-

nal, poised at hair-trigger levels, even though, as scholars learned after the Soviet archives were opened, there never were any plans for a surprise attack on the United States. Like their American counterparts, the Soviets had assumed that the enemy would be the aggressor. But the various forms of previsioning “helped regulate the relationship between the superpowers. Anticipating the future, perhaps even more than learning from the past, is what kept the Cold War cold.” ■

AMERICA THE STRONG

THE SOURCE: “Don’t Come Home, America” by Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, in *International Security*, Winter 2012–13.

IT’S RARE TO FIND AGREEMENT IN ACADEMIA, but when it comes to the grand strategy of the United States, there is near unanimity among security scholars: America is too dominant and too domineering for its own good. The cash-strapped and war-weary United States ought to cut its bloated defense budget and pull back from its “globe-girdling” foreign policy, a chorus of scholars implores.

Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, government professors at Dartmouth, and G. John Ikenberry,

a political scientist at Princeton, say their colleagues are all wet: The United States mustn't retreat. The nation is at its safest, richest, and most influential when it flexes its muscles far beyond North America.

Pulling back from America's global commitments would amount to a "massive experiment."

"Deep engagement," as Brooks and colleagues call U.S. strategy today, gets a bad rap, they say, from scholars who overlook its benefits. America's vast network of military bases and alliances in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East prevents a foreign power from dominating all of Eurasia (and therefore menacing the United States). The strategy ensures American economic well-being by guarding global stability and keeping shipping lanes open. And deep engagement greases the squeaky wheels of diplomacy. When the United States wants to ink a free-trade deal or isolate a rogue state, its allies cooperate, lest they lose the perks of American friendship, such as American-made weaponry or U.S. security guarantees.

America plays nice with other countries in forums such as the United Nations, magnifying the benefits of deep engagement. It does not always get what it wants, but its combination of hard and soft power "results in more cooperation on matters of importance than would occur if the United States disengaged."

Critics rebut all this. They contend that Eurasia isn't a legitimate American concern. Or they claim that stability would endure there in the absence of a U.S. presence. Besides, they say, America can't afford the financial and human costs of policing the world anymore.

Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth shudder at the thought of leaving so much to chance. Pulling back from America's commitments—whether entirely, as some advocate, or only "over the horizon" to a maritime stance—would amount to what the authors call a "massive experiment." The question: "How would the world work without an engaged, liberal leading power?"

It would be no peaceful idyll. Among other "nasty security consequences," U.S. allies in the Middle East, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, might acquire nuclear weapons. An American withdrawal from Asia would ratchet up tension by removing a check on China's appetite for regional dominance.

The authors aren't convinced that a pullback would save much money, either. If the United States opted for "offshore balancing," as some scholars advocate, the price tag would still be high. Stationing troops aboard ships is costly. Pulling U.S. forces back home comes with its own problems, and, as Brooks and colleagues remind us, American allies "generally cover many infrastructure costs of U.S. forces and bases" overseas.

Pullback advocates also argue that deploying American GIs in so many places pulls the United States into unwise wars or tempts American leaders into rash interventions. They cite Iraq as the prime example.

Iraq was a major exception to what has been a sound grand strategy for some 60 years, the authors respond. Deep engagement hardly means that the United States is destined to repeat such mistakes.

Grand strategies must evolve, Brooks and his coauthors allow. The United States is right to "pivot" to Asia in anticipation of China's rise. The Pentagon's budget can afford to shrink somewhat. But abandoning deep engagement would tempt fate. "A world with a disengaged United States," they write, "is the devil we don't know." ■

LEAVE NO MAN BEHIND

THE SOURCE: "Rest in Peace?" by Drew Lindsay, in *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Winter 2013.

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, ARMIES AFFORDED few dignities to those who fell on the battlefield. The lowly fighting man "was cast into a hastily dug trench or pit, awarded not even his own grave," writes Drew Lindsay, executive editor of *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*.

It wasn't until the Civil War that the U.S. military embraced the notion that a dignified burial in a proper national cemetery was every soldier's sacred right. But if it weren't for a popular outcry after World War I, the practice might have been abandoned.

During the Civil War, the United States confronted unprecedented carnage: 750,000 men died, their bodies blanketing battlefields at Shiloh, Antietam, and elsewhere. The conflict was different in another way: Unlike most wars of the past, this one was fought, for the most part, by citizens motivated by deeply held beliefs; few of the soldiers were professionals. Citizen-soldiers seemed to deserve more than a rude battlefield grave.

Whether fighting for North or South, young soldiers saw their fallen comrades'

bodies left to the elements, “without a kind hand to hide one’s remains from the eye of the world or the gnawing of animals or buzzards,” one wrote in horror. Compounding their revulsion were new, more sentimental ideas about death that had become influential in a midcentury American culture increasingly taken with romanticism. American Protestants, in particular, embraced the ideal of the “Good Death,” characterized by “dignity and grace.” The modern battlefield hardly offered that.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln gave in to popular pressure and authorized the construction of national cemeteries for Union fighting men. After the war, Montgomery C. Meigs, the U.S. quartermaster general, sent troops fanning out to battlefields throughout the country to uncover forgotten gravesites. They persisted for five years, recovering the remains of 316,000 of the 342,000 men who had sacrificed their lives for the Union. The dead were reburied at 74 national cemeteries, including—thanks to the wily Meigs—one on the site of Confederate general Robert E. Lee’s estate in Virginia, which became Arlington National Cemetery. (There was no systematic effort to recover Confederate soldiers’ remains.)

A Civil War soldier recoiled at seeing his fallen comrades’ bodies left to the elements, “without a kind hand to hide one’s remains from the eye of the world or the gnawing of animals or buzzards.”

Three decades later, at the end of the Spanish-American War, President William McKinley, who had been deeply affected by his own experience as a young soldier at Antietam, swiftly ordered the dead brought home from foreign battlefields. *The New York Times* called McKinley’s mandate an “innovation in the world’s history of warfare.”

But World War I was different. By the war’s end, in 1918, the United States had lost more than 70,000 men on a foreign continent. They lay in hastily prepared graves. Families had clamored from the outset for the return of those killed. General John “Black Jack” Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force in Europe, said that was impractical, adding that family members should be spared from seeing the horrific

wounds inflicted by modern warfare. After the armistice, America's European allies vociferously opposed the idea of exhuming the bodies. French leaders wanted to get on with reconstruction without being distracted by having to run "ghoulish trains packed with bodies" across the country. The British government worried that an American effort would fuel public pressure at home for a costly effort to repatriate the British dead—the bodies of a staggering 700,000 men.

Some Americans found the battlefield graves fitting. American pilot Quentin Roosevelt, former president Theodore Roosevelt's son, had died in 1918 after being shot down over France. Theodore and Edith Roosevelt said their son should remain where he fell: "To us it is painful and harrowing long after death to move the poor body from which the soul has fled." But most grieving American families demanded otherwise. "My son sacrificed his life to America's call, and now you *must* as a duty of yours bring my son back to me," a New York mother wrote, addressing the government.

The War Department relented in October 1919, almost a year after the end of the war. The families of every fallen soldier would be given two choices: proper burial of their loved one in new American military cemeteries in Europe, or the return of remains to America's shores. The families of some 30,000 fallen soldiers opted for European burial, while another 46,000 of the dead were brought home.

Some Americans found the whole business gruesome. And foreigners scoffed at the U.S. effort. "America feels that she is morally superior to Europe," British writer Stephen Graham declared after viewing stacks of caskets bound for the United States. "American soil is God's own country and the rest is comparatively unhallowed."

"But a sacred tradition had been born," Lindsay writes, and other countries have followed the American example, including Britain, which brought home its dead after the Falklands War with Argentina in 1982. ■

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

PATENTLY USELESS

THE SOURCE: “The Case Against Patents” by Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter 2013.

PATENTS ARE THE GOLD STANDARD OF NATIONAL competitiveness. The more we have, Americans often think, the more innovative our economy is.



ANN E. YOW-DYSON / GETTY IMAGES

In 1991, Bill Gates, shown here at a computer conference, railed against the ability of the established tech giants of the day to use the patent system to slow upstart firms like Microsoft. “A future start-up with no patents of its own will be forced to pay whatever price the giants choose to impose,” he wrote in an internal corporate memo. Today, Microsoft swears by the patent system, using it to fend off younger competitors such as Google.

That’s a big mistake, according to Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine. Patents don’t often encourage innovation—they stifle it. Companies use the system to freeze out competition and leech off the commercial successes of others. The authors, both economists at Washington University in St. Louis, argue that the patent system should be abolished.

The real engine of innovation and economic growth is competition. Companies and individuals profit handsomely when they beat competitors to a new idea. After the iPhone’s debut in 2007, Apple sold more than five million of its game-changing devices before rivals could muster a challenge. Even then, the iPhone’s peerless design—not patent protections—allowed the company to reap lavish profits.

In theory, a perfectly designed, rationally administered patent system would work well. But in the real world, maturing industries flex their political muscles to game the system and protect themselves from competition.

Compounding the problem is the fact that today's products often contain so many patentable components. In 1983, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office granted about 60,000 patents. By 2010, the annual number—which by then included software innovations, as a result of a 1994 court case—had quadrupled, to some 244,000.

The real engine of innovation and economic growth is competition—not the patent system.

The patent glut accomplished little. “Academic studies have . . . typically failed to find much of a connection between patents and innovation,” Boldrin and Levine write. Instead, it has created a Scylla-and-Charybdis world in which innovators must navigate between infringing on countless patents and paying multitudes of stiff licensing fees. When Google made a foray into the mobile phone market, for example, Apple and Microsoft used patent suits to slow the creative newcomer.

To avoid such headaches, Google forked out \$12.5 billion in 2012 to

purchase Motorola Mobility, Motorola's smartphone arm. With the acquisition came a trove of Motorola patents. “Google's purpose in obtaining this patent portfolio is purely defensive,” the authors write. “It can be used to countersue Apple and Microsoft.” Google is not alone in using this strategy. Companies spend vast sums every year to buy intellectual property of dubious real value.

Legal battles waste more time and money. One study found that during the 1990s companies spent an amount equivalent to 14 percent of their research and development budgets on patent litigation.

Big pharmaceutical companies are among the staunchest defenders of patents. Without patent protection, they contend, drugs developed at enormous cost would be swiftly copied, making it hard to recover expenses and discouraging future innovation. But Boldrin and Levine say it takes a long time for competitors to reverse-engineer path-breaking drugs. The authors also point out that some 80 percent of the \$1 billion it typically takes to develop a new drug is consumed by the final phase of clinical tests required by law. There are much cheaper ways to help manufacturers recoup that expense—including

government subsidies—than granting them monopolies that cost consumers dearly.

Other patent champions insist that patents foster collaboration and transparency. Not true: Today's patent applications are carefully designed to be incomprehensible to anyone but a patent attorney.

Not coincidentally, attorneys lobby hard to defeat reform. So do so-called patent trolls, companies that amass patents merely for the purpose of suing alleged infringers. In 2006, a company called NTP Inc. claimed that the maker of the BlackBerry mobile phone, Research in Motion, was infringing on one of NTP's patents. Research in Motion paid NTP a \$613 million licensing fee. A court subsequently invalidated NTP's patent, but the company kept the fee anyway.

Boldrin and Levine would prefer to scrap patents entirely. If that's too radical a solution, they suggest limiting their number and duration, a reform that would free competitors from today's morass. "The patent system arose as a way to limit the power of royalty to award monopolies to favored individuals," the authors observe. "But now," they conclude, "its primary effect is to encourage large but stagnant incumbent firms to block innovation and inhibit competition." ■

DOUBLE HELIX DESTINY

THE SOURCE: "The 'Out of Africa' Hypothesis, Human Genetic Diversity, and Comparative Economic Development" by Quamrul Ashraf and Oded Galor, in *American Economic Review*, Feb. 2013.

WHAT GIVES RICH SOCIETIES THEIR MOJO? Scholars who look for the roots of economic development offer an array of answers: Culture, history, or geography push a country toward prosperity, they claim.

Quamrul Ashraf and Oded Galor, economists at Williams College and Brown University, respectively, propose an entirely different explanation: genetic diversity. They say the range of a given population's genes—determined 70,000 to 90,000 years ago when humans first journeyed out of East Africa—played a decisive role in determining which lands would hit the economic jackpot.

In a process known as the serial founder effect, populations closer (via land migration routes) to modern-day Ethiopia, where the earliest evidence of *Homo sapiens* has been found, had higher levels of genetic diversity than groups that settled farther away. The nearer societies had more "founders"—or early settlers—and therefore more genetic variation. When smaller groups peeled off and ventured into Europe and Asia, they carried a smaller gene pool with them. It shrank further

when humans trekked to the Americas.

This made all the difference. Societies flourish when their populations have just enough genetic diversity, but not too much. (Geneticists gauge genetic diversity with “expected heterozygosity,” which measures the likelihood that two people within a group will have, say, a difference in eye color or some other heritable trait.) Genetically diverse societies are more likely to cook up new technologies; people with varying traits develop different specialties and work in complementary ways.

Societies flourish when their populations have just enough genetic diversity but not too much.

But heterozygosity comes with tradeoffs. Kin selection theory suggests that the more closely related people are genetically, the more likely they are to cooperate with one another. More diversity equals less cooperation. While spurring innovation and production, genetic diversity simultaneously “raises the likelihood of disarray and mistrust, reducing cooperation and disrupting the socioeconomic order.” On the other end

of the spectrum, low genetic diversity promotes high levels of public trust and economic efficiency. Yet the gene pool does not vary enough to kick development into high gear.

Thanks to the path taken by the earliest humans out of Africa, Asian and European populations that developed at least 3,000 miles from humanity’s birthplace hit the diversity sweet spot. In contrast, “the low degree of diversity among Native American populations and the high degree of diversity among African populations have been detrimental forces in the development of these regions,” Ashraf and Galor write.

The authors tested their theory by comparing genetic diversity in select countries with these countries’ level of economic development in 1500, before the influence of colonialism and industrialization was felt, and again in 2000. They used population density as a proxy for wealth in 1500, surveying 21 countries. For 2000, they expanded the sample to include 145 countries and gauged wealth on the basis of income per capita.

When they graphed the data on wealth against genetic diversity, they found what they expected. In 1500, the regions at an intermediate distance from East Africa—Europe and Asia—enjoyed the highest rates of development.

African and American populations lagged behind the boom areas. The pattern persisted in the comparison of per capita incomes of 145 countries in 2000, with countries consisting of large immigrant populations, such as the United States and Canada, joining the advantaged group.

Ashraf and Galor aren't the first to connect modern wealth disparities to long-ago events. In his 1997 bestseller *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond argued that ancient societies blessed by geographic good fortune had a decisive leg up on competitors; they adopted domestic agriculture earlier, cementing dominance that has persisted into contemporary times. Ashraf and Galor accounted for the timing of agricultural adoption in their calculations and found support for Diamond's idea.

But the correlation between development and genetic diversity is much stronger. Of the 145 nations considered in the 2000 comparison, Bolivia, one of the world's poorer countries, was the most genetically homogenous. The authors calculated that if Bolivia's level of genetic diversity were just one percentage point higher, its current per capita income would be 41 percent greater.

Ethiopia, where the first modern humans emerged 150,000 years ago, lies at the other end of the spectrum. There, extreme genetic diversity has led to crippling poverty. A drop in heterozygosity of just one percentage point would result in a 21 percent bump in contemporary income per capita, the authors found.

In Ethiopia, extreme genetic diversity has led to crippling poverty.

Ashraf and Galor also calculated a theoretical "optimum" level of genetic diversity at which a country would be most likely to thrive. The optimum level was markedly higher in 2000 than it was in 1500. After the Industrial Revolution, the authors hypothesize, "the beneficial forces associated with greater diversity became intensified in an environment characterized by more rapid technological progress."

The nation that came closest to the ideal level of post-industrial genetic diversity? According to Ashraf and Galor's calculations, it was the United States. ■

SOCIETY

WHY IS JOHNNY HAVING SO MUCH FUN?

THE SOURCE: “More Is More or More Is Less? Parental Financial Investments During College” by Laura T. Hamilton, in *American Sociological Review*, Jan. 3, 2013.

MOST MIDDLE-CLASS AMERICANS WANT their kids to attend college. Parents set aside what money they can to pay fat tuition bills when the time comes. The

hope is that youngsters will repay their parents with hard work on campus and a degree that puts them in good stead in the working world.

There’s one problem: Kids don’t fulfill the whole bargain. In fact, undergraduates with financial support from mom and dad are more likely than others to let their grades slip, according to Laura T. Hamilton, a sociologist at the University of California, Merced.



IMAGE SOURCE / CORBIS

Did you guys study for the chemistry final? Me neither.

Drawing on a 1993 survey of college seniors, she found that a \$16,000 parental subsidy every year pushed the average student's grade point average (GPA) below 3.0—the B considered the bare minimum by many graduate schools and employers.

The impact of financial help varied by family income level. Children of affluent families earned higher grades to begin with but exhibited the sharpest downward response to subsidies. A \$2,000 subsidy by a low-income family had virtually no impact on grades. But one pattern remained clear throughout: The more money students received from their parents, the further their grades slipped. About 43 percent of the students received no financial help from their folks.

The more money students received from their parents, the further their grades slipped.

Students who take out loans also find their grades heading south. Like financial help from parents, loans seem to come with no strings attached. The day of repayment looms far in the

future—and mom and dad might cover it anyway.

Do grades always sag when someone else foots the bill? Hamilton notes that GPAs actually edge higher when students are on scholarship or rely on grants, probably because these forms of assistance come with performance requirements. Work-study programs don't have an impact on grades, she found.

Parents recoup their investment in one crucial respect. The more they pay, the less likely their children are to drop out. Hamilton cites a survey of 3,810 students who attended college between 1990 and 1994, in which it was found that undergraduates who received no help from their parents had a 56 percent chance of graduating. That probability jumped to 62 percent if parents provided a \$4,000 yearly subsidy and began to plateau at 65 percent in cases in which they wrote a \$12,000 check.

Why these contradictory trends in grades and graduation? When they have less skin in the game, students engage in what Hamilton calls “satisficing”: Rather than maximize the odds of an outstanding GPA by hitting the books, average students dedicate more time to social activities, lest they miss out on

what they're told are "the best years of your life." Little wonder that American college students dedicate a paltry 28 hours a week to class and studying—fewer hours than high school students do—while spending 41 hours a week chatting on the quad and hanging out with friends.

In the past, students and their families might pay for college with the help of a grant from the federal government. Now that aid is more likely to come in the form of a federal loan. State and local subsidies to universities are also drying up, and tuition keeps rising.

Families of modest means can't pick up the slack, which leads to bigger problems. "Disparities in the ability to fund a young-adult life stage may be one of the central mechanisms through which class inequalities are reproduced," Hamilton writes.

Whether college education is being financed by student loans or money from mom and dad, parents need to keep an eye on their kids when they're off at school. "Students with parental support are best described as staying out of serious academic trouble but dialing down their academic efforts," Hamilton observes. ■

ESCAPING THE GHETTO

THE SOURCE: "Neighborhood Effects on the Long-Term Well-Being of Low-Income Adults" by Jens Ludwig, Greg J. Duncan, Lisa A. Gennetian, Lawrence F. Katz, Ronald C. Kessler, Jeffrey R. Kling, and Lisa Sanbonmatsu, in *Science*, Sept. 21, 2012.

WHAT IF THE PEOPLE LIVING IN AMERICA'S most impoverished ghettos could be moved en masse to better neighborhoods? Would a more favorable environment improve their lives? A new study suggests some surprising answers.

During the 1990s, a federal program called Moving to Opportunity offered housing vouchers to some 4,600 households in high-poverty city neighborhoods that allowed them to find apartments in better areas. More than 10 years later, Jens Ludwig, a professor of law and policy at the University of Chicago, went back with six colleagues to find out how the program participants had fared.

Moving to Opportunity didn't have the effects its creators had hoped. Ludwig and his colleagues found that the participants—about half of whom actually took advantage of the vouchers—enjoyed no increase in "economic self-sufficiency" compared with a control group. There was some improvement in a "broad index of physical health measures," but not enough to be statistically

Moving to a better neighborhood didn't make poor people much healthier or wealthier, but it did make them happier.

significant. There was a “marginally significant” increase in mental health.

By one measure, however, moving out and up made a world of difference: happiness. The “subjective well-being” of those who used the vouchers, measured by a survey the researchers carried out, soared after they moved. This was true even if they went to neighborhoods only somewhat better off than the ones they left behind (in which half the residents were poor). Those who got out of their old neighborhoods had annual incomes averaging only \$20,000, but they reported levels of happiness on a par with those of people with incomes of about \$33,000. It's not hard to see why: Many of the people who signed up for Moving to Opportunity said that an important reason was their desire to escape gang violence and drugs.

That's not all the authors found. While racial segregation is declining in America, income segregation is on the rise, with poor people increasingly concentrated in

certain areas. And Ludwig and his colleagues discovered that it is income segregation that accounts for the lower levels of subjective well-being among the poor. The Moving to Opportunity beneficiaries who made their way to less racially segregated but otherwise similar neighborhoods reported no rise in their level of happiness; all the benefits went to those who moved where poverty was less prevalent.

Is increasing people's happiness a legitimate goal of government policy? Ludwig and his colleagues recast the issue this way: “Policies that seek to ameliorate the adverse effects of dangerous, distressed neighborhoods on poor families are worthy of careful consideration.” ■

PREVENTING POVERTY

THE SOURCE: “The Mixed News on Poverty” by Anirudh Krishna, in *Current History*, Jan. 2013.

“SPECTACULAR” IS NOT TOO STRONG A WORD to describe the reduction in poverty around the world during the past quarter-century. Between 1981 and 2005, world gross domestic product quadrupled. The percentage of the global population living on less than \$1.25 fell by half.

That reduction resulted mostly from people being lifted out of poverty, and in the popular mind, that's where the story ends. But it doesn't. One-third of the

world's poor were not born in poverty. They fell into it.

New policies need to be preventive—focused on stemming the flow of people into the ranks of the newly poor, argues Anirudh Krishna, a public policy professor at Duke. He and several colleagues surveyed more than 35,000 households in Uganda, Kenya, Peru, India, and the United States over a nine-year period (2001–10). Poverty, they found, is sticky. Sixty percent of those who had fallen into poverty 15 or more years before they were surveyed were still poor.

Krishna and his colleagues isolated one reason: the cost of medical care. In the Indian state of Gujarat, 88 percent of the households that slipped into poverty attributed their plight to health care costs. A Peruvian man told of losing his wife to uterine cancer: “I was obliged to sell my animals, cows, oxen, and donkeys, and I also went into debt in order to care for her, and later, to bury her.” It’s not just the developing world: Medical expenses are to blame for more than half of all personal bankruptcies in the United States.

Those who have made only “marginal escapes” from poverty are especially worth targeting. The near poor—maids and pushcart vendors, for example—may have a steady income, but it depends on showing up to work every day. Up to

One-third of the world's poor were not born in poverty. They fell into it.

one-fifth of family income can be lost during a major illness. Living on \$1.27 a day suddenly becomes living on barely more than a dollar a day.

Affordable and accessible health care is key to future poverty reduction, Krishna argues. Japan, an early postwar adopter of universal health care, has just a two percent poverty rate. Sweden and other robust welfare states yield similar lessons.

By comparison, more than 30 percent of the population of Gujarat lives in poverty. Medical care is more expensive and less efficient there than in poorer parts of India. At the same time, the state’s booming economic growth has undermined the traditional social safety nets of family and community. When people get sick and fall into poverty, there is no one there to catch them.

Rapid economic growth is essential to the reduction of poverty, as are improvements in education and other targeted efforts to promote upward mobility, Krishna concludes, adding that poverty prevention should be the next big issue taken up by the world’s policymakers. ■

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

THE JEWISH HEAD START

THE SOURCE: "Were the Jews Moneylenders Out of Necessity?" by Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, in *Reform Judaism*, Spring 2013.

WHEN ROMAN SOLDIERS DESTROYED JERUSALEM'S Second Temple in AD 70, they

unknowingly planted the seeds of centuries of Jewish flourishing. The temple's destruction shifted power within Judaism from the high priests who had governed temple life to the widely scattered rabbis and religious scholars devoted to studying the Torah. Henceforth, every upstanding Jewish man would learn to read the Torah, the scholarly authorities



THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NYC

In this 15th-century German print, rabbis read from the Haggadah, the tale of the Exodus that Jews consult at the beginning of Passover. Thanks to an early theological shift that required all Jewish males to study the central texts called the Torah, literacy spread among Jews long before it did among Christians and Muslims.

ruled, and Jewish families would send their sons to school.

By learning to read and write, Jews transformed themselves into marketable assets in a largely illiterate world. Maristella Botticini, an economist at Università Bocconi in Milan, and Zvi Eckstein, an economist at Tel Aviv University, say that these skills led the Jews to carve out a lasting niche in finance, trade, and business that brought them wealth and carried them to the ends of the earth.

Judaism's new requirements cost it dearly at first. Jewish farmers in the Near East had neither the money to learn to read nor much use for the skill. After the destruction of the Second Temple, some converted to Christianity and other faiths that imposed no reading requirement, helping to reduce the Jewish population between the third and sixth centuries AD.

But the literate Jews who endured soon prospered. After the birth of Islam in the seventh century, the Muslim caliphs built a vast empire, boosting urbanization, manufactures, and trade. Botticini and Eckstein note that “almost all the Jews in Mesopotamia and Persia—nearly 75 percent of world Jewry—left agriculture and moved to the cities and towns of the newly established Abbasid

Empire to engage in myriad skilled occupations.” There, they manufactured and traded wares, changed and lent money, and worked as physicians. Opportunity took them to Africa, Asia, and especially to Europe, where trade and commerce began to revive in the 10th century.

Making literacy a religious norm in the first millennium led to centuries of Jewish economic success and intellectual prominence.

Wherever the Jews went, they had a leg up on competitors. “They could read and write contracts, business letters, and account books using a common alphabet (Hebrew) while learning the local languages of the different places in which they dwelled.” And they could broker deals with more than just a handshake. Jews made agreements with coreligionists based on Jewish law codified in the Talmud.

Conventional wisdom holds that Jews' prominent role in moneylending resulted from the Christian church's prohibition on lending money at interest and Jews' exclusion from other fields

by guilds. But Botticini and Eckstein say Jewish involvement predated both the enforcement of the ban and the rise of the guilds by a century or more. Jews simply enjoyed a competitive advantage in the field.

But Jewish livelihoods were fragile. In 1258, Mongol invaders sacked the capital of the Abbasid Empire, Baghdad; subsequently, much of the empire gradually reverted to subsistence agriculture. Some Jews who fell on hard times

converted to Islam and others left, and again Jewish numbers were depleted in the region. In Europe, two centuries of intermittent pogroms beginning in 1290 sent Jews fleeing from England, France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Yet they survived and prospered in other lands. “An apparently odd choice of religious norm in the first millennium . . . turned out to be the lever of the Jewish economic success and intellectual prominence to come.” ■

ARTS & LETTERS

BLUE HAWAII

THE SOURCE: “Steelin’ the Slide: Hawai’i and the Birth of the Blues Guitar” by John W. Troutman, in *Southern Cultures*, Spring 2013.

BLUES PROPHET ROBERT JOHNSON (1911–38) and other early blues guitarists captivated listeners with a new way of playing their instrument. Sliding a steel bar or other hard object over the strings to change the guitar’s pitch, they created a sound eerily like that of a weeping or singing human voice. Later blues and rock musicians such as Muddy Waters (1915–83) and Bonnie Raitt (b. 1949) would further improvise on the sound.

Scholars have mostly agreed that the slide style was directly influenced by the “diddley bow” or “jitter-bug,” a single-stringed instrument they say was carried to America by West African slaves. The more likely story, John W. Troutman argues, is that the musical technique popularized in the Missis-

sippi Delta came from traveling Native Hawaiian musicians. Tracing the proliferation of their playing style, writes Troutman, a historian at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and weekend steel guitarist, once again underlines just how many ethnic and racial groups have shaped southern culture.

In the 19th century, the American South was just one of a number of



COURTESY OF REDPATH CHAUTAUQUA COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

Lei and steel: The Hamakua Singers and Players, above, and other touring Hawaiian acts captivated American audiences—and musicians—in the 1910s and '20s. Part of their appeal was the riveting new sound guitarists produced by laying the instrument flat on their laps and sliding a steel over the frets, a technique that evolved into the blues’ distinctive slide guitar.

regions around the world experiencing an influx of newcomers. Half a world away, Honolulu harbor received a steady stream of “sailors, whalers, merchants, missionaries, entrepreneurs, and laborers from distant lands such as the United States, Portugal, Mexico, and Japan,” as well as cowboys from Latin America brought in to wrangle cattle. With all these foreigners also arrived—in the early 1800s, and likely via Mexico—the Spanish guitar, which quickly caught on as an accompaniment to the local hula song and dance.

The Hawaiian guitar “sonically revolutionized every musical tradition it touched.”

A few decades after the first guitar appeared in the islands, Joseph Kekuku (1874–1932), a Native Hawaiian youngster, flipped his own instrument to lie flat on his lap and played it with a piece of metal he slid across the strings. Over the next seven years he honed the lap-steel style and hacked his guitar to accommodate it, raising the strings from the fretboard. “The

effect, as described by all who first heard it, was transcendent,” Troutman says. It “sonically revolutionized every musical tradition it touched. . . . Vaulted in status from serving as a typically rhythmic, accompanying instrument to that of a much more dynamic and melodic, or lead, instrument, the guitar would never be the same.”

Kekuku taught other islanders to play as he did, and then left to perform elsewhere, touring North America and Europe for an eventual three decades. He was one of many Native Hawaiians who left their homeland after 1893—the year U.S. Marines overthrew the government and ended Hawaiian self-rule—more than a few of them carrying guitars and igniting a steel-slide craze wherever they went. In American sales of recorded music in 1916, Hawaiian guitar tunes topped all other genres.

Oral testimony, newspaper clippings, and other evidence show that Hawaiian musicians frequented southern cities from Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Memphis, to New Orleans, “working every small town, nook, and holler along the way.” They sometimes collaborated with black musicians. Walter “Fats” Pichon (1906?–67), a New Orleans jazz singer and pianist, hired Hawaiian guitarist

“King” Bennie Nawahi (1899–1985) to accompany him, for instance. Louis Armstrong featured Hawaiian guitar on a 1930 track. Racial segregation in the South likely increased the islanders’ contact with black Americans, since they would have shared boarding houses and restaurants with other nonwhite traveling entertainers.

“Most of the earliest documented African-American slide guitarists, and certainly the most significant, understood their style as that of playing ‘Hawaiian guitar,’” Troutman notes, even as they perfected their own techniques. References to Hawaii showed up in song titles (“Blue Hawaii,” “Hawaiian Harmony Blues”), and some blues musicians, such as Huddie Ledbetter (1888–1949), better known as Lead Belly, played Native Hawaiian ditties. Talking shop with an interviewer, Tampa Red, a popular blues guitarist of the 1920s and ’30s, recalled achieving a “Hawaiian effect” while using a bottleneck as a slide. In another interview, blues legend Eddie “Son” House (1902?–88) remembered first learning to play Hawaiian guitar, not the diddley bow—indicating that American pop culture rather than ancient African roots had the greater say in his musical development. ■

BURNING THE BRITANNICA

THE SOURCE: “Bibliocide” by Julian Baggini, in *Aeon Magazine*, March 6, 2013.

WHAT IS AN ENCYCLOPEDIA WORTH? IN ITS heyday, advertisers insisted that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* was invaluable, especially for young minds. “You should give your child as many tools for success as possible,” a *Britannica* advertisement in a British newspaper advised in 1983. “*Especially a fine encyclopedia.*”

And what a fine one it is: 44 million words, 30,000 pages, all the world’s knowledge on topics from the aardvark to Zoroastrianism. Julian Baggini, founding editor of *The Philosopher’s Magazine*, was lucky enough to own all 32 volumes. Then he resolved to burn them.

Baggini acted partly out of necessity. He could find no room for the hulking volumes, which weighed four pounds each. Libraries, schools, and secondhand booksellers evinced no interest in them. Eventually the books were relegated to plastic storage boxes kept outside, where they attracted mold and muck. Baggini decided that only a bonfire could end the books’ waterlogged suffering, “both a funeral pyre to mourn the positive ideals they represented, and a celebration of

the good things that superseded them.”

How far the *Britannica* has fallen. In the 20th century, British families frequently broke the bank to own copies. Using funds normally earmarked for a telly or a sofa set, working-class households paid door-to-door salesmen on installment—known in English slang as the “never-never.”

Decades ago the books were sold as a tool to enlarge young minds, but modern *Britannica* admen convinced buyers that owning an encyclopedia would ensure worldly success for their children. The spin doctors called it “the Britannica Advantage.”

In reality, kids seldom consulted the imposing volumes. Parents “would have been better off spending half that money or less on books with beginnings, middles, and ends that children might actually read.”

Print encyclopedias themselves had undeniable flaws. A fair portion of their contents was instantly obsolete, and they were products of an era in which a select few served as the gatekeepers

Print encyclopedias were products of an era in which a select few served as the gatekeepers and guardians of knowledge.

and guardians of knowledge.

It’s different these days. Even *Britannica* offers vast bodies of information at a fire-sale price: Monthly access to a constantly updated Web corpus starts at \$1.99. In 2012, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. announced that the print encyclopedia would be phased out.

The 32-volume print version did have a major advantage: It set a solid standard of legitimate knowledge, however rigid and ossified. “It’s hard to say which is worse,” Baggini writes, “an excessive deference to a small cultural elite or a hubbub of cyberchatter in which everyone feels not only entitled to an opinion but to a grateful audience for it.” ■

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

DARK GREEN

THE SOURCE: “Dark Ecology” by Paul Kingsnorth, in *Orion*, Jan.–Feb. 2013.

THE ENVIRONMENTALIST MOVEMENT, WRITES journalist and poet Paul Kingsnorth, is in crisis: “Assailed by a rising movement of ‘skeptics’ and by public boredom with being hectored about carbon and consumption, colonized by a new breed of

corporate spivs for whom ‘sustainability’ is just another opportunity for selling things, the greens are seeing a nasty realization dawn: Despite all their work, their passion, their commitment, and the fact that most of what they have been saying has been broadly right—they are losing.”

Kingsnorth identifies with the early green movement, which held that wild nature was intrinsically valuable and worthy of conservation. Early greens air-quoted



STUART WESTMORLAND / SCIENCE FACTION / CORBIS

Worth preserving: While some modern environmentalists preach the gospel of “managing” nature and using it for human betterment, committed greens champion conservation of wild nature for its own sake. The horned frog of the Amazon jungle has value all its own, they say.

the word “progress,” believing that many advanced technologies threatened “human-scale, vernacular ways of life.”

Neo-environmentalists reject the idea that wild nature is intrinsically valuable and worthy of conservation.

Kingsnorth considers the scythe, a simple, ancient instrument he uses to mow the grass on his property in England. “It’s what the green thinkers of the 1970s used to call an ‘appropriate technology’—a phrase that I would love to see resurrected—and what the unjustly neglected philosopher Ivan Illich called a ‘tool for conviviality.’” Illich (1926–2002), Kingsnorth notes, contrasted such tools with technologies that “created dependency; they took tools and processes out of the hands of individuals and put them into the metaphorical hands of organizations. The result was often ‘modernized poverty,’ in which human individuals became the equivalent of parts in a machine rather than the owners and users of a tool. In exchange for flashing lights and throbbing

engines, they lost the things that should be most valuable to a human individual: Autonomy. Freedom. Control.”

It is just this kind of exchange that neo-environmentalists, as Kingsnorth calls them, have embraced. Peter Kareiva, chief scientist of the Nature Conservancy, embodies the new breed of environmentalists who “emphasize scientific measurement and economic analysis over other ways of seeing and measuring.” Kareiva believes that development, even that which levels Amazonian rainforests, is inevitable, and that nature can and will adapt. The natural world must be managed.

Mainstream greens dismiss limiting consumption and its machinery; more technological fixes (nuclear energy, biotechnology, geoengineering, etc.), the thinking goes, will cure any ills previous technologies have wrought. Neo-environmentalists charge Greenpeace types with trying to—here Kingsnorth quotes the PR blurb for a pop conservationist’s book—“preserve nature in its pristine, prehuman state.” But that’s a straw man, he says. Intelligent environmentalists have always seen humans as part of most ecosystems. Their point has been that humans should not dominate and control the realms they inhabit.

Attempts to do so, Kingsnorth predicts,

will be severely checked. Early hunter-gatherers enjoyed markedly better health and longer lives than later agriculturalists; humans only turned to farming once their hunting technology became too advanced, and the animals on which they fed were hunted to extinction. “So much for progress.” Now that the growing world population threatens to outstrip its food supply, the latest fix, genetically modified foods, will, in Kingsnorth’s view, bring a host of new problems.

Kingsnorth uneasily discovers the writings of “Unabomber” Theodore Kaczynski, Harvard mathematician turned society dropout turned ecoterrorist, to be eerily prescient. Kaczynski’s arguments were premised on four points:

1. Technological progress is carrying us to inevitable disaster.
2. Only the collapse of modern technological civilization can avert disaster.
3. The political Left is technological society’s first line of defense against revolution.
4. What is needed is a new revolutionary movement, dedicated to the elimination of technological society.

Kingsnorth does not condone violent revolution. He has, however, developed

what he calls a “personal philosophy for a dark time: a dark ecology.” Its practices include a “very ancient practical and spiritual tradition: withdrawing from the fray” and into meditation and reexamination. He recommends “insisting that nature has a value beyond utility,” and preserving plant and animal life, albeit in small ways, such as allowing a garden to run wild. Engaging in physical labor will help us relearn vernacular, convivial skills. “Can you think, or act, like the librarian of a monastery through the Dark Ages,” he asks, “guarding the old books as empires rise and fall outside?” ■

RUMBLE OVER PRIMING

THE SOURCE: “Power of Suggestion” by Tom Bartlett, in *The Chronicle Review*, Jan. 30, 2013.

IMAGINE THE LIFE OF A COLLEGE PROFESSOR—a home filled with books, days filled with erudite conversation. Now answer this: “What is the capital of Bangladesh?”

You’ve just experienced the “professor prime.” It’s an example of a phenomenon that social psychologists call behavioral priming, in which subtle cues—pictures, ideas, words—subconsciously affect behavior. If you’re “primed” to think about a professor, then you become smarter—

and more likely to dredge up the fact that Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh. Contemplating the life of a soccer hooligan, on the other hand, makes you denser.

In the 1990s and 2000s, priming was all the rage, explains Tom Bartlett, a senior writer at *The Chronicle*. It captured headlines, as well as the imaginations of superstar science writers such as Malcolm Gladwell.

But there's a problem. Skeptics have been trying to reproduce the priming findings. The "replicators," as Bartlett calls them, haven't had any luck. Are the findings bogus?

The granddaddy of priming research was the famed "slow walker" study, published in 1996 by John Bargh, a psychologist at Yale. Bargh asked undergraduates at New York University to form sentences out of a group of words. It appeared that the words were random. In reality, one group of subjects considered words evoking lonely old age, such as "bitter," "wrinkles," "Florida," "alone," and "bingo." Another group rearranged words that had no theme. When the experiment seemed to end, the subjects were directed to leave down a hallway. Researchers with hidden stopwatches timed how long it took them to walk the distance. The result: The geriatric words rubbed off. On aver-

age, the group that had rearranged those words walked more slowly than the other group. "Words on a page made them act old," Bartlett explains.

Does hearing words such as "wrinkles," "Florida," and "alone" make subjects walk like old people?

It was smashing stuff. Bargh became a rock star in social psychology. Sensational priming studies by other psychologists followed. "The American flag makes you vote Republican," Bartlett recounts. "Fast-food logos make you impatient."

But now Bargh is a pariah. His reputation took a huge hit last year when scientists replaced stopwatches with infrared sensors and redid his experiment. The researchers found that subjects who rearranged the words associated with old age didn't walk any more slowly than the control group. (Previous attempts by other researchers also failed to replicate Bargh's results.) But then the scientists reverted to Bargh's method, using stopwatches operated by researchers—and thus opening the door to potential bias. This time the slow walker phenomenon returned.

The “professor prime” hasn’t fared well, either. David Shanks, a psychology professor at University College London, attempted to reproduce the original experiment, whose results were published in 1998 by Dutch professor Ap Dijksterhuis. Shanks tried the experiment nine times and found no correlation between thinking about professors and subjects’ performance on trivia tests. So much for knowing the capital of Bangladesh.

Bargh fired back at the naysayers. In blog posts, which he later removed, he blasted the “incompetent or ill-informed researchers” behind the infrared sensor study. They conducted the experiment a second time. “It still didn’t work,” Bartlett reports.

Princeton’s Daniel Kahneman, a winner of the Nobel Prize and an *éminence grise* of academic psychology, watched all this unfold and decided to intervene. In a stern e-mail to the priming big shots, including Bargh, he wrote of a “train wreck looming” in social psychology. “I believe that you should collectively do something about this mess,” he warned, beseeching the advocates of priming to engage with the replicators. (In his best-selling book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman writes flatteringly of Bargh’s research.)

The e-mail didn’t accomplish much.

Bargh and his allies, a minority camp, insist that the replicators are either conducting their experiments with insufficient care or don’t know the priming literature. The replicators throw up their hands and ask, What more can we do?

Gary Latham, a University of Toronto organizational psychologist, fully expected to join the doubter camp. He and a research assistant performed a series of experiments testing people’s subconscious reactions to pictures. Lo and behold, he found strong evidence of priming. “I’ve got two more [sets of experiments] that are just mind-blowing,” Latham gushed to Bartlett.

Latham’s research may be arriving too late to resurrect priming—or Bargh. Shanks, the London professor, says an “avalanche of failed replications” is on the way. But Bargh remains defiant, and Latham now understands why. “I’m like a converted Christian,” he told Bartlett. “I started out as a devout atheist, and now I’m a believer.” ■

ECSTASY DOT COM

THE SOURCE: “I’m Waiting for My UPS Man” by Ned Beauman, in *n+1*, Feb. 18, 2013.

LET’S SAY YOU WAKE UP TOMORROW MORNING with a hankering for heroin. Don’t hit the streets. Stay at home and log on to

Silk Road, one of a handful of Web sites that sell a wide variety of drugs, most of them imported from China.

Check the customer reviews. Carefully compare prices, often given in Bitcoin, an online currency that leaves no digital trail. Just don't expect to know exactly what you're ordering.

In online drug bazaars, you can buy almost anything but have no idea what it is.

The Internet plays host to a zany drug bazaar that extends far beyond Silk Road, explains Ned Beaman, a British author of novels and nonfiction. But the hawkers wouldn't last long if they peddled their goods in plain sight. The sites appear to vend pool cleaners, plant food, or bath salts. And the drugs, most of them experimental and therefore legal, go by opaque labels: ethylphenidate, methoxetamine, pentadrone.

Trying the stuff amounts to a massive gamble. "In the old days, you knew what you wanted but didn't know where to get it," Beaman explains. "In 2013, you can get almost anything but have no idea what it is."

Still have that heroin hankering? For the intrepid—or desperate—drug user, Internet message boards populated by walking drug encyclopedias can guide you through the process. Some of the users "are evidently trained chemists, while the rest are enthusiastic autodidacts," Beaman reports, "so there is much talk of moieties, isomers, and chiral centers, as well as debate about the best cheap microgram scales."

Forum denizens never waver from the mission: to exchange lots of information in pursuit of drug-induced pleasure. "These forums do what no government antidrug campaign has ever been able to accomplish: They make hard drugs seem boring."

The shadowy network of Chinese producers that supply the retail sites play a pharmacological cat-and-mouse game with law enforcement. In 2009, the makers introduced mephedrone, a substitute for the hallucinogen Ecstasy. After mephedrone caused several deaths, authorities outlawed the drug. Manufacturers have responded by tweaking their recipes, throwing in a pinch of this or that ingredient to create something new. In the case of mephedrone, Beaman says "dozens of its relatives still count as legal highs."

Such mystery mixtures are doubly bad for customers. The drug sites boast smooth user interfaces and provide

speedy service, but many Westerners report that the Chinese knockoffs are just plain bad. The high is no good. The side effects are terrible. And debilitating addictions can ensue. That would explain why the Web sites always seem to be slashing prices.

Beauman recounts an incident in 2009 in which a 22-year-old Internet forum user in Denmark known as Minimal died after ingesting 18 milligrams of an online mystery drug. Minimal had resold some of his stash to other online customers. The forum lit up with urgent posts. “If you have

ordered 2C-B-fly from Haupt-RC,” a Web administrator warned, “then your life may be in danger.” A man in California also died from the drug. Lab tests revealed it to be “a mislabeled hallucinogen . . . mixed with various lethal impurities.”

The wonder is that anybody would even try an online mystery drug. “The merchants can give you the best customer service in the world, but the one thing they can’t do is explain the effect of these drugs and how much you might want to swallow, because, remember, they’re only selling plant food.” ■

OTHER NATIONS

TURKEY'S SOUL FOOD

THE SOURCE: "Simit: Turkey's National Bread" by Alisa Roth, in *Gastronomica*, Winter 2012.

WHETHER THEY ENJOY IT AT BREAKFAST, lunch, dinner, or snack time, Turks have a weakness for the *simit*. At all hours of the day, Istanbul residents can buy the bagel-shaped bread, served with a slather of mild cheese, from vendors with street carts, tray-toting men on foot, even Starbucks baristas. The state-mandated price: one Turkish lira (roughly 55 cents).

But these days Turks hunger for more than their daily bread, says Alisa Roth, a writer based in New York City. The Turkish economy is off and running, foreign companies have arrived with exotic new foods, and Turkey dreams of recapturing the greatness of the Ottoman Empire. The country's traditional simit sellers (*simitçi*) and simit makers (*simit-ustasi*) are left to fret: Will all the progress spoil Turks' appetite for an old staple?

Though the simit's geographic origins are unclear—possible birthplaces include Central Asia and Armenia—Turks have enjoyed the national bread



NEIL FARRIN / JAI / CORBIS

Mom-and-pop bakeries used to have a corner on the market for Turkey's national food, the *simit*. But now many Turks prefer Big Macs or buy the bagel-like pastries at Simit Palace, Turkey's answer to Dunkin' Donuts.

for hundreds of years. Ottoman royals developed a taste for it in the 16th or 18th century. It subsequently conquered the empire, possibly reaching as far as Eastern Europe, where some say the simit gave birth to the bagel.

Every morning at Turkish mom-and-pop bakeries, bakers knead four simple ingredients into dough: yeast, water, salt, and flour. They work the dough into thin ropes, tie them into rings, and dip them in a mulberry syrup called *dut pekmez*, which is what gives simits their savory flavor. The bakers roll them through sesame seeds, shape them into circles, and bake them in huge brick ovens. Then they're shipped off to cafés, hotels, and countless street vendors. "Simit is the meat of the poor," an Istanbul restaurant owner named Musa Dağdeviren explained to Roth. It's a point not lost on Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In his 2002 election campaign, he burnished his image as a man of the people by recalling his boyhood experiences selling simits in Istanbul's streets.

But the traditional simit is increasingly under attack. Motivated in part by its desire to join the European Union, the government has decreed that all food sold on the street must be vended from carts with closed glass cases. That would

deprive the simits of the crispiness that is essential to their appeal. Fortunately, enforcement has been lax.

The bigger threat may be competition. Turkish palates are being seduced by newcomers such as pizza and Big Macs. And then there is Simit Sarayı (Simit Palace). Founded in 2002 by Haluk Okutur, a Turkish tycoon, the chain has rapidly become the Turkish version of Dunkin' Donuts, with simits—80 million a year—as their centerpiece. Okutur has opened more than 200 stores, including branches in Germany and Saudi Arabia.

Turkish palates are being seduced by newcomers such as pizza and Big Macs.

Okutur claims that he rescued simits from oblivion. "We have revived a traditional food which was disappearing," he told Roth. "Simit sales were going down, more hygienic production was needed."

Traditional simit baking is hard, low-prestige work that is losing its appeal as Turkey modernizes. Nearly all of Istanbul's bakers are migrants from Tokat, a provincial city to the east. Aydın Eryılmaz, a second-generation baker

who runs Tophane Simitçisi with his brother, wants his two daughters to “get educated so they can do something else.”

Prosperity has also yielded artisanal bakers. Mehmet Özdemir sells his simits to artists and others who appreciate “organic” ingredients. “These businessmen who entered the simit business said, ‘Oh, I can make simit a brand,’” he told Roth. “[But] it’s not business, it’s culture.”

Roth doesn’t venture any predictions about the simit’s struggle at home, but she sees a wealth of possibilities abroad. “Turkey has been trying to reclaim its Ottoman role as a global political and economic leader,” she concludes. “Maybe the simit will be the ambassador it needs.” ■

THE COMING MELTDOWN IN KABUL

THE SOURCE: “Kabubble” by Matthieu Aikins, in *Harper’s*, Feb. 2013.

IN THE PAST DOZEN YEARS, FOREIGN AID has transformed Afghan cities into boomtowns. Kabul alone has seen its population double, swelling to about four million as rural migrants and returning refugees of previous wars stream in. Construction is everywhere. But Kabul-based writer Matthieu Aikins

warns that the bustling metropolis, as well as other urban centers, is headed for economic collapse. “The aid boom of the past decade has fueled wild and haphazard growth without providing the infrastructure needed for it to last. In 2010, total aid spending was \$15.7 billion—equivalent in size to the entire Afghan GDP,” he writes.

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, many of the wealthy and powerful, among them U.S.-backed warlords, swooped into Kabul to grab choice lots. An estimated 70 percent of the city’s residents have not been so fortunate, living in illegally constructed dwellings. Sewage flows in open gutters, water is scarce and polluted, and “the smoke from burning scrap tires, wood, coal, and plastic garbage fills the air,” along with automotive exhaust. Youth unemployment is at 40 percent.

Some foreign aid has lifted families from nomadism and poverty. Aikins cites the example of a computer technician and his wife, a schoolteacher: They went from begging for stale bread to owning a home after he secured a job with the British Council, the United Kingdom’s agency for international cultural relations. But above struggling middle-class families and even the foreign-educated elite are “the businessmen, contractors,

and warlords who have made millions off the torrent of money flowing into the country. . . . They've stashed most of their gains abroad: Mind-boggling quantities of U.S. currency are exported from the country in hand-couriered packets and on shrink-wrapped pallets. Afghanistan's central bank estimated that \$4.6 billion in cash left the country legally through Kabul International Airport in 2011 alone." The dollars, tens of billions in total, end up in places such as Dubai, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Switzerland.

Mind-boggling quantities of U.S. currency are exported from the country in hand-couriered packets and on shrink-wrapped pallets.

The nouveaux riches do spend lavishly in the capital, but even that money dribbles out of the country. Aikins notes the city's many gaudy wedding halls, where a family can plunk down \$100,000 for an event. One boasts 62 food service workers, generators, wells, and a greenhouse for growing flowers. But the trappings, from food ingredients to décor, come from nearby Pakistan, Iran, and China.

Local manufacturers can't compete, Aikins says: The flood of foreign cash has "driven up the costs of skilled labor, land, raw materials, and other inputs," inflating the local currency even as "the free-trade, open-border policies pushed by the U.S. government and Afghan technocrats" make producers vulnerable to an influx of cheap goods from neighboring countries.

Before the aid dries up (foreign countries have made no commitments past 2015), Afghanistan will have to develop an economic policy tailored to maximizing its strengths. Aikins cites the work of economist William Byrd, a longtime student of the country, who recommends encouraging "high-value, labor-intensive farming, such as drying the country's grapes into exportable raisins, or cultivating saffron." The country is believed to harbor large reserves of minerals and precious stones, and Chinese and Indian companies have invested billions to mine them. Resource-rich but poor countries such as Afghanistan seldom retain the profits of such operations, however.

Foreign and domestic agencies have come up with a plan that would greatly expand overcrowded Kabul, and would install a hydroelectric dam in nearby mountains,

providing water and electricity. The project would cost \$34 billion, a fraction of \$592 billion the United States has already spent on the war in Afghanistan. At present, plans for the so-called New Kabul remain nothing more than an engineer's tabletop model. ■

UP IN THE DUMPS

THE SOURCE: "Happiness Among the Garbage" by José Juan Vázquez, in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Jan. 2013.

EVERY DAY, DOZENS OF MEN, WOMEN, AND children in León, the second-largest city in Nicaragua, descend upon two garbage dumps. The refuse of the poverty-stricken city of 185,000 is their mine, and anything that can be sold to recyclers for a few centavos is worth the digging: metal, plastic, paper, glass, cloth. The "collectors," as they prefer to be called, carry bags in which they store the prizes they find while prospecting in the rubbish. They breathe toxic air and suffer from the social stigma attached to scavenging. Their meager earnings often fail to put enough food on the table.

Despite all this, most of the collectors think things are just peachy, reports José Juan Vázquez, a social psychologist at the Universidad de Alcalá in Spain. Nearly 70 percent of 99 collectors he surveyed reported that they were at least "a little"

happy. Fully half gushed that they were "very" or "quite" happy. A majority said they felt that the future held promise.

What keeps the collectors' outlooks so sunny? Relationships with loved ones seem to be the key. More than 80 percent of the survey respondents reported satisfaction with their domestic partners, their families, and their friends. And nearly 90 percent said they were satisfied with their "colleagues" at the dumps.

Nearly 70 percent of the garbage miners reported that they were at least "a little" happy. Fully half gushed that they were "very" or "quite" happy.

Vázquez found all these good vibrations in one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. Nearly 46 percent of Nicaraguans live below the national poverty line. The collectors, most of whom are men, toil at the very bottom of the economic scale. They have families while still in their teens and live in cramped dwellings. Only 16 percent of the workers surveyed by Vázquez reported finishing primary

school. Scavenging in the dumps of León entails coping with the threat of theft and violent crime on a daily basis.

But none of this keeps the collectors down. More than 70 percent of the respondents who reported that they lacked money to buy enough food in the previous month declared that they were happy anyway.

It's not all rosy, though. Even though 87 percent of the male collectors said they were happy, only 56 percent of their female counterparts did. This may be because women who work at the dump move in with partners and start families at younger ages than men. If these unions dissolve, which is common, the women are left to raise children on their own. Women currently in relationships reported being particularly unhappy. Fewer than a quarter said they found their relationships satisfying. That's in line with the findings of other studies showing that women generally report lower levels of subjective happiness than men.

Most of the collectors said they lived in homes with electricity and televisions, and Vázquez found that nearly 20 percent of his sample used cell phones.

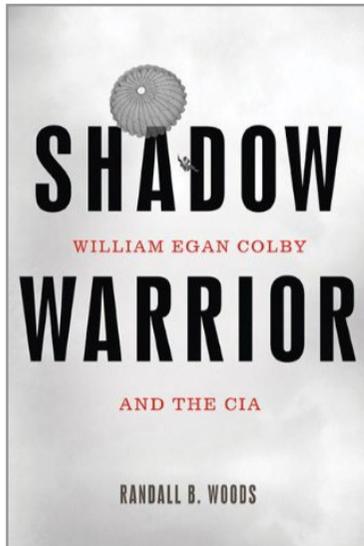
But access to these amenities appeared to have no impact on happiness. Two things made a difference: Those who played sports or read in their spare time were much more likely to report being happy than those who didn't. Team sports clearly make people feel good, but why does reading? Vázquez wonders whether "the information [reading] provides and the possible impact on the self-esteem of an individual who reads in a severely deprived environment" are what make the difference.

Vázquez also found higher levels of happiness among collectors who lived in less crowded homes and those who had waited until slightly later in life to have families. What he didn't uncover was any correlation between the collectors' widely ranging income levels—from less than \$25 a month to more than \$65—and happiness.

The collectors' buoyancy flies in the face of conventional wisdom among researchers, who tend to argue that happiness increases with income until people reach a certain level of affluence. "Individuals are more than mere consumers," Vázquez writes, "and there are other things in their lives beside money." ■

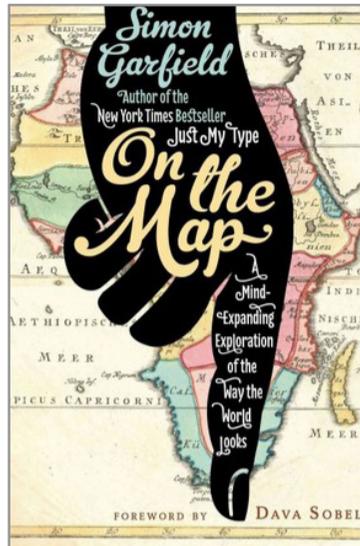
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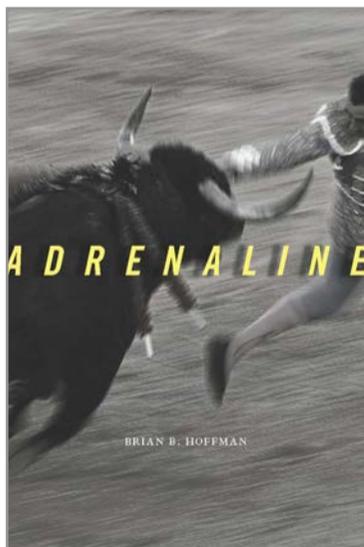
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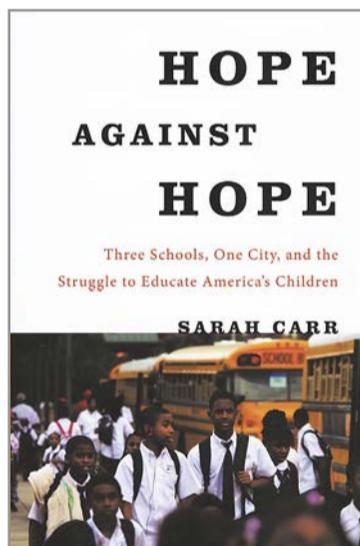
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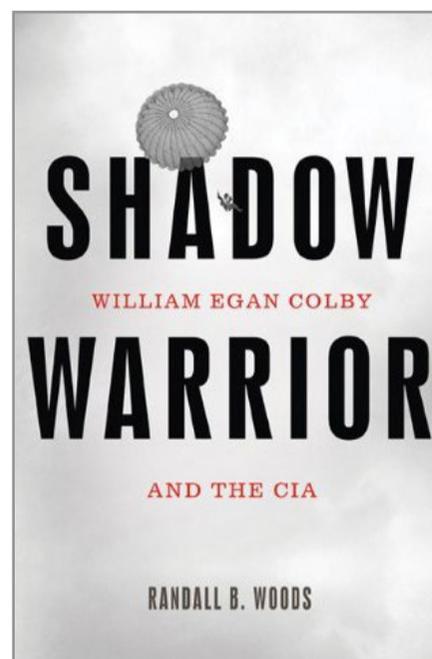
Divided Loyalties

SHADOW WARRIOR:

WILLIAM EGAN COLBY AND THE CIA

REVIEWED BY MARTIN WALKER

HENRY KISSINGER ONCE NOTED THAT President Richard Nixon believed the Central Intelligence Agency was “a refuge for Ivy League intellectuals opposed to him.” In the case of William Colby, who rose to become the director of central intelligence in 1973, Nixon was almost right. But this excellent and thorough biography by Randall Woods, a noted University of Arkansas historian of the Vietnam era in American politics whose biography of Senator William Fulbright was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, gives a more subtle and sympathetic analysis. Woods argues that Colby, a Boy Scout and devout Catholic who hated totalitarians of any stripe, was always loyal to the Constitution and to the president of the day. His loyalties were his undoing, driving him to pursue doomed counterinsurgency policies in Vietnam, which made him appear a villain to liberals, and then to disclose the CIA’s long-guarded embarrassments



By Randall B. Woods

Basic Books

546 pp. \$29.99

during congressional probes, which made him abhorrent to conservatives and many CIA veterans.

It is not easy to write a good biography without some respect or affection for the subject, and Woods holds Colby in considerable esteem. He stresses the sense of mission and commitment Colby felt about his work, which finally helped to end his first marriage after it had endured for three unhappy decades. And he concludes that Colby’s revelations of CIA scandals were in the long run beneficial to the agency, clearing out its cobwebs (and some of its cowboys) and finally reining in the disruptive and morale-destroying role of the counterespionage division, which caught few moles but sowed



HORST FAAS / AP IMAGES

William Colby, then head of the U.S. pacification program in South Vietnam, inspects the shotgun of a rural villager in Thua Thien province in 1969.

widespread internal distrust. Above all, Woods crafts a fascinating tale of an American life that was shaped by World War II, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War, and the challenge of remaining a decent and liberal human being while fighting these conflicts ruthlessly.

Colby had become a passionate supporter of the New Deal while an undergraduate in the 1930s at Princeton, where

one of his favorite professors was Edwin Corwin, an adviser to the Public Works Administration. After graduating, Colby attended Columbia Law School for a year before serving in the Office of Strategic Services in World War II, operating bravely with local resistance movements behind enemy lines in France and Norway. Colby then suggested to his superiors that he should be parachuted into Spain

to complete the antifascist campaigns by organizing the overthrow of the Franco regime. They demurred. After the war, armed with a newly fledged law degree from Columbia, Colby worked for the National Labor Relations Board, helping garment workers to unionize, before joining the CIA, which had just been formed.

Colby suggested to his superiors that he should be parachuted into Spain to organize the overthrow of the Franco regime.

The Agency “attracted what nowadays we would call the best and the brightest, the politically liberal young men and women from the finest Ivy League campuses and with the most impeccable social and establishment backgrounds,” Colby later wrote in a memoir, *Honorable Men* (1978). They were “young people with ‘vigor’ and adventuresome spirits who believed fervently that the communist threat had to be met aggressively, innovatively, and courageously.” (Change the word “communist” to “terrorist,” and the same might be said of the generation that joined the CIA after 9/11, and

doubtlessly will face similar disillusion.)

Colby himself did not quite fit this mold. His father, Elbridge Colby, who was descended from a long line of Massachusetts Puritans and seafarers, had converted to Catholicism and taught English literature at the University of Minnesota, where he met and married Mary Margaret Egan, the Catholic daughter of an Irish immigrant. After volunteering with the Red Cross in Serbia during World War I, he joined the U.S. Army when his country declared war in 1917. To his dismay he was posted to the Panama Canal, not to the battlefield in France. After the war, he returned to the university to complete his doctorate but soon rejoined the Army to provide for his wife and newborn son, William, who was born in 1920. Fatefully, Elbridge Colby was posted to Fort Benning, Georgia, where a black soldier was shot and killed for failing to yield the sidewalk to a white civilian; after an all-white jury acquitted the shooter, Lieutenant Colby wrote an outraged letter to the base newspaper that was republished in *The Nation*, an event that blighted his military career. He was later posted to Tianjin, which meant that William spent part of his boyhood in China, developing what his CIA file described as a “fair” grasp of

the language along with an affinity with Asia that would shape his future.

This was not the conventional WASP background of CIA legend. Nor was Colby to join the aristocracy of the CIA, its intelligence and counterintelligence sections focused on the Soviet Union and Europe. Instead, he was a paramilitary type who specialized in covert action and raising and training secret armies. In the alleged words of James Jesus Angleton, head of CIA counterintelligence for more than 20 years (whom Colby would later fire), the future leader of the CIA was “just a paratrooper.” As Colby himself later wrote, “The spymasters and counterspies feared that the high-risk, flamboyant operations of ‘the cowboys’ jeopardized the security and cover of their carefully constructed clandestine networks.”

Colby’s first assignment for the CIA was in 1950 in Sweden, where he was to set up secret arms dumps and recruit volunteers who would go underground to fight in the event of a Soviet invasion. In the early years of the Cold War, organizing such stay-behind forces was a major part of the CIA’s work. Colby then moved to Italy, where he took to the political aspect of covert operations like a duck to water, seeking to ensure that the Communists, Italy’s largest political par-

ty, would never come to power. Running the largest political action program in the CIA’s history, Colby had a budget of some \$30 million a year. One of his colleagues later recalled that their biggest problem was finding Italian cars with trunks big enough to hold the stacks of lire they were funneling to the non-Communist parties, politicians, and newspapers.

Colby’s New Deal sympathies put him at odds with the woman known as “La Signora,” the celebrated, influential, and very conservative U.S. ambassador in Rome, Clare Boothe Luce—although Colby’s second wife was later convinced that La Signora and Colby had an affair in the dolce vita atmosphere of Rome in the 1950s. Luce hated Socialists almost as much as Communists; Colby believed that they and the Social Democrats were potential allies in the anti-Communist

Their biggest problem was finding Italian cars with trunks big enough to hold the stacks of lire they were funneling to the non-Communist parties, politicians, and newspapers.

struggle. Moreover, Colby's New Deal beliefs led him to support the Vanoni Plan, a Keynesian-style economic policy that was also, Colby reported to Washington, a way to rally Socialist and working-class support. Luce opposed it bitterly, warning that it would become a Trojan horse for Moscow. (Colby's strategy proved to be correct; the Italian Socialist Party ended its pact with the Communists in 1963 and joined the Christian Democrats in a coalition government.)

Colby found himself running secret armies of mountain tribesmen in Laos, operating CIA-backed airlines, and dispatching guerillas to North Vietnam.

Colby's Asian affinities ensured that in 1956 he was invited to succeed the legendary Edward Lansdale in running the CIA station and its effective counterinsurgency operation in the Philippines. He declined, saying he wanted to secure the defeat of the Communists in Italy's 1958 election. Once that was achieved, Colby was appointed deputy station chief in Saigon (he quickly rose to

chief of station), where he arrived in the waning days of that brief interlude between the end of French rule in 1954 and the start of America's increasingly bloody involvement. It was sufficiently peaceful at first for Colby to have time to run a Boy Scout troop. That soon changed, and the next 17 years of the Vietnam engagement take up half of this book.

When Colby arrived in Saigon, opinion within the U.S. mission was already divided between Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. and his staff, who were trying to withhold military aid in order to force President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime to make democratic reforms, and the military staff and the Pentagon, which rejected any such condition. The election in 1960 of John F. Kennedy, who was fascinated by the spread of the Cold War to the developing world and by counterinsurgency and covert operations of the kind Colby knew well, gave Indochina a new prominence. Colby found himself running secret armies of mountain tribesmen in Laos, operating CIA-backed airlines, dispatching guerillas to North Vietnam, and trying in vain to dissuade the Kennedy administration from Operation Switchback, which gave the Pentagon prime responsibility for U.S. counterinsurgency policy in South Vietnam. "Mr. Secretary, it won't work,"

he told Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, referring to a Pentagon plan to insert commandos and saboteurs into North Vietnam, even as Ambassador Lodge was trying to get the CIA to run a coup against President Diem.

Always the loyal soldier, Colby put his heart into a U.S. program known as CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), which promoted rural development and sought to secure Vietnamese hamlets from Communist infiltration. CORDS also included the infamous Phoenix Program, the CIA-led covert war against Viet Cong cadres who routinely terrorized villages seen as loyal to the Saigon regime, often killing village leaders. The corrupt military regime in Saigon undermined Colby's best efforts to strengthen the hamlets. And despite strong evidence to the contrary, Colby always maintained that the Phoenix Program was designed to identify, arrest, and convert local Viet Cong leaders, rather than assassinate them; Woods, however, estimates that more than 5,000 Viet Cong operatives and supporters were killed and more than 10,000 others were captured.

Revelations of the CIA's role in the program were an important factor in discrediting the Vietnam War in the eyes of the American public. Colby, a serious

student of the special characteristics of peoples' wars and the lessons from the French and British experiences in Malaya, Vietnam, and elsewhere, believed that the war would be won or lost in the villages. But at a time when the U.S. Air Force was sowing Agent Orange to poison crops and defoliate jungles giving cover to enemy combatants, and increasingly demoralized U.S. Army conscripts were staging crude search-and-destroy missions, Colby's stubborn belief in rural development became quixotic. In 1975, welcoming back the bedraggled CIA teams after the fall of Saigon, he outraged many and startled more by insisting that the peoples' war had been almost won when the Nixon administration began its slow withdrawal. Perhaps the most charitable explanation is that one has to believe in something to maintain morale, and Colby believed that he and the CIA alone in the U.S. bureaucracy understood this kind of war.

But it was too late. By then, Colby's Phoenix Program had become notorious for torture and assassinations, and his beloved CIA was being discredited, in Congress as well as on college campuses. Its reputation was even lower at the White House, where Nixon and national security adviser Kissinger were outraged that they had received no

warning of the 1973 Egyptian attack that precipitated the Yom Kippur War. (Knowing their communications had been compromised, the Egyptians had sent false radio messages and hand-delivered the real orders.)

Colby had taken the helm of the CIA in May 1973, just before this deluge. The Watergate scandal was unfurling, the Nixon White House was swinging between panic and paranoia, and Congress would soon be investigating events revealed in a series of secret internal CIA reports that became known as the “family jewels.” The documents described botched assassination attempts, links to the Mafia, and illegal spying on Americans. The Justice Department was preparing charges against Colby’s predecessor, Richard Helms, who had misled Congress on such matters and become known among CIA loyalists as what a later book title would call *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*. Throughout his own book, Woods makes the case that in instances such as the CIA’s activities in Vietnam and its illegal domestic intelligence gathering, the agency was left taking responsibility for policy disasters that were really the result of presidential decisions.

Ever the lawyer, Colby followed the law and the Constitution and came clean to Congress. He believed this was the only

Some in the CIA never forgave him, and his death in a supposed canoe accident in southern Maryland in 1996 sparked rumors of a revenge killing.

way to save an institution that remained vital to American security, even as he firmly supported the arms control and détente policies of the Nixon-Ford administrations that were easing Cold War tensions. He was finally sacked by President Gerald Ford in November 1975, remaining in office three months until replaced by future president George H. W. Bush. Colby turned down Ford’s offer to become ambassador to NATO, and retired into private life and law practice.

Some in the CIA never forgave him for his forthrightness, and his death in a supposed canoe accident in southern Maryland in 1996 sparked rumors of a revenge killing. Local watermen were left wondering how Colby’s body, which showed few signs of water immersion, could have ended up on one side of a sandbank while his sand-filled canoe was found on the other. If he was murdered, and Woods explains the

evidence thoroughly, the vengeance took 20 years to be exacted.

By that time, the Cold War was over and the CIA had not only survived but remained at the heart of the vast U.S. intelligence empire. To that extent, Colby was vindicated, even though his heirs at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, would have to relearn all the hard lessons of counterinsurgency warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. Woods casts Colby as a flawed hero in an impossible time, an honorable man fighting a series of vicious wars, in Washington as well as abroad, during a period of American

self-questioning and political division. Colby sought to remain loyal both to his CIA and to the Machiavellian court of the Nixon White House, and for that, many contemporaries judged him harshly. Wood's solid and intriguing biography suggests that history may be kinder. ■

MARTIN WALKER, a Wilson Center senior scholar and a member of *The Wilson Quarterly's* board of editorial advisors, is the author of *The Cold War: A History* (1994). His latest novel, *The Devil's Cave*, will be published this summer.

Where We Are

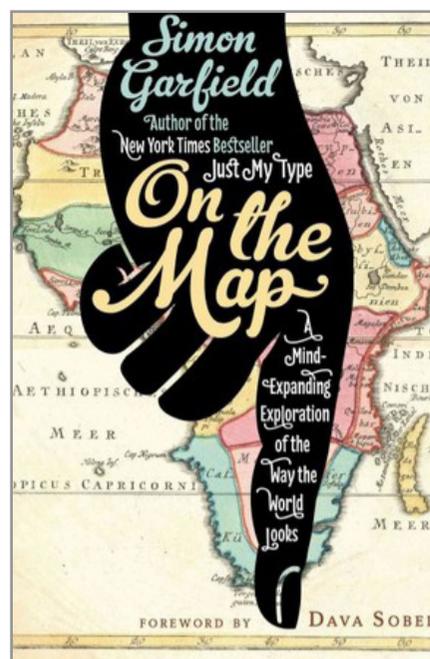
ON THE MAP:

A MIND-EXPANDING EXPLORATION
OF THE WAY THE WORLD LOOKS

REVIEWED BY DANIEL ROSENBERG

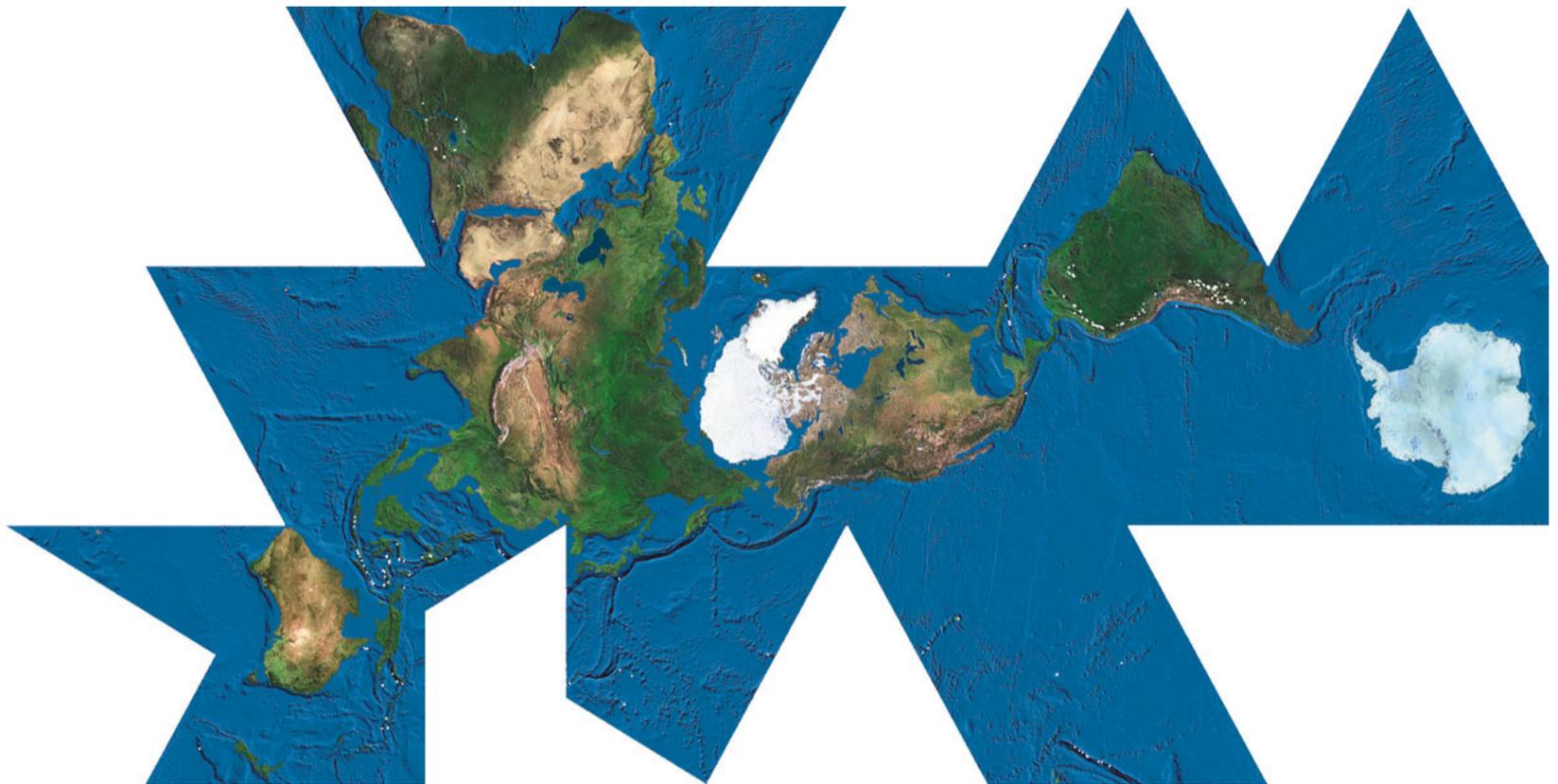
OUR INFORMATION AGE IS ALSO AN AGE of location. It seems that every day the news media reveal a new exploit made possible by geolocation systems, whether a dramatic snow rescue or a precision bombing. A recent exposé by the German Green Party politician Malte Spitz showed that his phone provider, Deutsche Telekom, was not only *able* to track his location minute to minute, but was doing so systematically. It was not only *able* to identify him, store his information, and make it available for analysis—it was doing all of this as a matter of course. Deutsche Telekom was following him automatically on the principle that the personally identifiable information might somehow be useful. The German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* assembled data released under court order and put it online as an interactive map showing Spitz's movements in astonishingly fine detail.

To understand the world we now live



By Simon Garfield
Gotham
464 pp. \$27.50

in, we need to understand maps. So when a journalist with the dexterity and breadth of Simon Garfield takes on the long history of maps, it is happy news. We are, as Garfield puts it, “on the map,” whether we like it or not. And the map we are on is new. It is simultaneously everywhere and right here, centered on us, articulating itself in every direction from our current position (“me-mapping,” to use Garfield’s phrase). With GPS in our cars and Google Earth on our phones, we consult maps more often than ever before. In some ways, this cartographic explosion is opening up our ways of seeing; in others, it is inuring us to the processes by which maps are created and to the structures they impose. Technology allows us to feel that we choose our



WIKIPEDIA

Unsatisfied with traditional flat world maps that distort landmasses and show some as artificially isolated from one another, Buckminster Fuller created a truer-to-scale “Dymaxion Map.” Life magazine unveiled it in 1943, providing readers with a pullout map and instructions to fold it into a 3D structure at home.

geographies, but we can’t really do so unless we have some understanding of which projections we are using, how we got them, and what alternatives we might consider.

On the Map wears its substance lightly. It tells a big story, but it is also an omnibus of little stories from the history of cartography, composed of short chapters on key artifacts—such as the 1507 Waldseemüller Map, the first to employ the name “America”—and curious examples—for instance, an 1812 electoral map from which we got the term “gerrymander,” a portmanteau of “Gerry,” from the name of the Massachusetts governor at the time, Elbridge Gerry, and “salamander,” for the shape of the

new districts crafted by Gerry’s allies in the state senate.

If you love cartography, it won’t take any work to convince you of the virtues of *On the Map*. More likely, you’ll be foisting it on friends who are not yet cartophiles, since Garfield has the goods to lure them into the fold. He presents his work as another in the popular object-that-changed-the-world genre, of which his own *Mauve: How One Man Invented a Color That Changed the World* is a fine example. But that characterization isn’t quite right, since there’s no single object at the heart of the book, but rather a vocabulary for seeing. *On the Map*, like Garfield’s recent book *Just My Type: A*

Book About Fonts, is good for dipping into, but it also merits being read cover to cover.

From Ptolemy to Mercator to the satellite navigation provider TomTom, Garfield shows how maps have both reflected and shaped ways of understanding the world. And the *world* is really at the heart of the project. Little maps matter: John Snow's 1854 map of the London cholera epidemic demonstrating that the disease was waterborne, Hollywood star maps, and sensational maps from the tabloid press, such as the 1817 "Map of the roads, near to the spot Where Mary Ashford was Murdered." But the book is tied together by the history of the world map. Each one of these *mappae mundi* shows us the world as it has been imagined.

Great maps that put in question our expectations look weird.

Among the contemporary examples Garfield gives is a map consisting of nothing more than simple arcs connecting the geographic positions of Facebook friends around the world projected on a plain, dark background. Remarkably, this network of lines, with no landmasses or

cities drawn in, creates a detailed and faithful map of much of the world, with fine physical contours and densities in the cities, just as one might expect to see in a satellite view. At the same time, this map produces telling distortions, including the omission of entire regions where Facebook is prohibited or unpopular. The Facebook map demonstrates the ubiquity of electronic social networking in everyday life, as well as its balkanizing effects. It also says something about how we see maps, embodying a fantasy of a map that "writes itself," that requires no art, only data. Great maps that put in question our expectations look weird. Take, for example, the Dymaxion Map of Buckminster Fuller, which projects the world onto the surfaces of an icosahedron (a 20-sided three-dimensional polyhedron) that may be unfolded in many directions. The Facebook diagram, plotted onto some recent Mercator projection, perhaps a Google map, looks like the world inscribing itself by itself.

Garfield doesn't take himself too seriously. That's mostly an advantage, and *On the Map* is a real pleasure to read. Yet in some ways, it doesn't push its own best points. At a deep level, it is not a book about maps but about knowledge systems, of which maps are one example. And it is intellectually strongest when it pursues this

intuition. In places where it vaults from one interesting map to another, it occasionally loses its thread. Scholars will want more detailed notes, longer accounts of key artifacts (Harry Beck's iconic 1933 London Underground map, for example), and a bit less on the extraordinary and the curious. Maps in this account are often the first, biggest, or smallest of one type or another. General readers will wish for color images of the amazing artifacts depicted here, or—better yet—an exhibition. These quibbles aside, readers interested in history, technology, and ideas who liked the more chrono-

logically local accounts in Dava Sobel's *Longitude* (1995), Simon Winchester's *The Map That Changed the World* (2001), and Steven Johnson's *The Ghost Map* (2006) will enjoy this voyage through two millennia of cartographic history very much, too. ■

DANIEL ROSENBERG is a professor of history at the University of Oregon and editor at large at *Cabinet* magazine. With Anthony Grafton, he is author of *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline* (2010) and, with Susan Harding, editor of *Histories of the Future* (2005).

Technological Fixes

TO SAVE EVERYTHING, CLICK HERE:

THE FOLLY OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONISM

REVIEWED BY **EVAN SELINGER**

TECHNOLOGICAL OPTIMISM IS SILICON Valley's most pervasive export. As indicated by recent remarks from Google's senior vice president and chief financial officer, Patrick Pichette, this rosy outlook is guided by the conviction that the world is broken but can be fixed if we use technology to save us from ourselves. Emphasizing the success of projects such as Google's self-driving car, Pichette envisions a future without auto accidents and traffic jams, when human fallibility—our flawed judgment, inefficient behavior, and propensity to make mistakes—is kept in check.

Evgeny Morozov pushes back against this techno-fix ideology. While *To Save Everything, Click Here* is a difficult read—filled with references to diverse theorists and thick with case studies—it also provides an exemplary



By Evgeny Morozov
PublicAffairs
415 pp. \$28.99

philosophy of technology. Morozov challenges widespread claims that life will improve dramatically once technology makes more decisions for us, makes it easier to track and analyze behavior, dismantles long-standing hierarchies, and erodes barriers to the flow of communication.

This is not to say that he is against progress. Furthermore, unlike many who engage in humanistic critiques of technology, Morozov, a *New Republic* contributing editor, displays a thorough grasp of the complexities that structure debates about policy, markets, and governance. In his previous book, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (2011), he challenged “cyber-utopianism,” the “naïve belief in the

emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside.” The ideology gives rise to “Internet-centrism,” which depicts the current era as a revolutionary time in which “everything is undergoing profound change.”

In his new book, he continues to take to task people such as the young Cairo-born Google executive Wael Ghonim, who saw the Arab Spring as a watershed moment in history, the product of a leaderless movement that, as Morozov puts it, supposedly demon-

strated the “superiority of decentralized and horizontal networks” as protesters communicated via social media. After Hosni Mubarak abdicated, Morozov points out, organizational challenges and hierarchical conflicts challenged this Revolution 2.0 model.

And he adds “solutionism” to the list of mistakes that mar discussions about the role of technology in political reform, crime reduction, privacy, and behavior modification. Solutionism—a term Morozov draws from urban planning and architecture studies—results when



KHALED DESOUKI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

In Cairo's Tahrir Square in February 2011, a man joins protestors calling for the ouster of Hosni Mubarak's long-term regime, while holding a sign praising Facebook. Voices once crediting social media's role in the revolution have grown quieter since.

someone (1) invents a problem, (2) misrepresents this fiction as a genuine and urgent dilemma, and (3) advocates using technology to fix it.

We continue to expect technology to deliver us from the imperfections of the human condition, though history doesn't support that idea.

Consider one of Morozov's examples: In the pages of this very magazine ["A Small World After All?" Spring 2012], Ethan Zuckerman, director of the MIT Center for Civic Media, proposed modifying Facebook to connect people in the developed world with those in developing nations. This could happen, he said, if Facebook were to recommend strangers from far away with whom users might have a friendly chat. In Morozov's mind, Zuckerman's first mistake was to frame the general public's limited interest in global affairs as a communication problem that could be solved with technology. In so doing, Zuckerman ignored people's complex social, cultural, political, and psychological

reasons for limiting their circle of empathy and, frankly, sometimes even indulging in xenophobia. At its core, Morozov worries, the proposal presumes that previous generations were inferior, imprisoned by biases they wished to shed but were forced to bear due to technological constraints.

Tinkering with the Internet won't address many of the root causes of provincialism, Morozov insists, and pretending that it will lends authority to other misguided claims. For example, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has proclaimed that animosity in the Middle East persists because of a lack of connectedness, not deep hatreds. This self-serving notion implies that if everyone had a Facebook account, Morozov writes, "all wars would stop."

Overcoming solutionism isn't easy. The outlook is evident throughout history, dating back to ancient Greece, when Plato defended the primacy of using mathematical reasoning to organize an ideal city. Morozov predicts that new versions of solutionism will emerge long after the technologies we're familiar with become outdated. He's right. We continue to expect technology to deliver us from the imperfections of the human condition, though history doesn't support that idea.

Despite the merits of his argument, *To Save Everything, Click Here* is sometimes a bitter pill to swallow. To make his critique, Morozov portrays key boosters in the public debates about the role of technology, such as Jeff Jarvis and Clay Shirky, as opportunistic peddlers of bombast. He's also very selective about the material he presents to bolster his arguments, but right now the marketplace of ideas is so imbalanced in favor of idealistic conceptions of technology that Morozov should not be blamed too

much for using all the ammunition at his disposal. In a climate of excessive technological optimism, Morozov's book offers a timely consideration of the consequences of investing resources—not just material ones, but also our hopes and dreams—in projects that offer impossible redemption. ■

EVAN SELINGER is an associate professor of philosophy at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

A Heart-Racing History

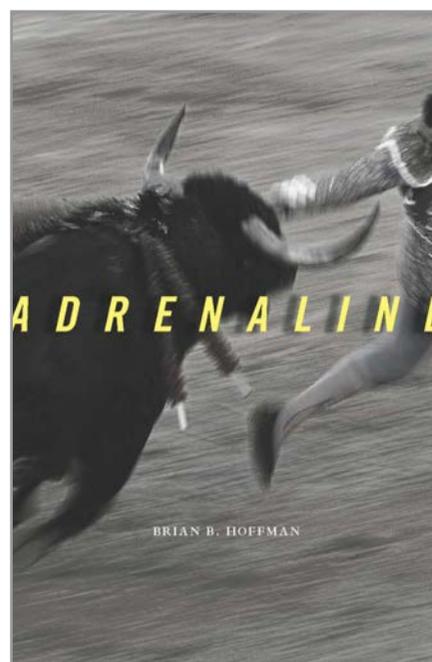
ADRENALINE

REVIEWED BY HANNAH HOLMES

MEDICAL HISTORY IS PULSE-RAISING STUFF. In our buttoned-down age, we forget that there was a time when no one objected if you tried to transfuse blood from a sheep to a child, or remove parts from a dog to see if it might live without them. Books about such fumblings put us in a place where we can watch the human mind striving for clarity in a candle-lit era. *Adrenaline*, by Harvard professor of medicine Brian B. Hoffman, opens such a portal.

Glands have long labored in the shadow of organs. In autopsies of yore, the adrenals were cast aside by anatomists dazzled by the allure of the large and obvious kidneys. Sitting near (or *ad*, in Latin) the kidneys (*renes*), the adrenal glands are neither small nor tidy. They sag over the tops of the kidneys like globs of errant fat. They were ignored in medical texts until Bartholomaeus Eustachius noted them in 1563, after which they were by and large ignored.

Then Thomas Addison, an English physician, noted abnormal adrenal



By Brian B. Hoffman
Harvard Univ. Press
298 pp. \$24.95

glands during autopsies on a number of patients who had suffered fatigue, faintness, weight loss, vomiting, and darkened skin. Writing in 1855, he tentatively proposed a link. Although nobody paid much attention, he was eventually rewarded with immortality when the malady became known as Addison's disease.

In 1884, a hapless German farm girl was admitted to a hospital. She had bouts of anxiety, headaches, vomiting, and vision difficulties. Under a doctor's fingers, her arteries were rigid. An eye exam found blood in the back of her eyes. She soon died. The anatomist who did the autopsy on her body noticed twin tumors in the girl's adrenal glands, but knew not what to make of them.



FRANS LANTING / CORBIS

An impala in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya.

As decades passed, enough of these tumors were found—by surgeons probing the bodies of patients who had endured bouts of illness and rigid blood vessels—that the link was strengthened. Surgical removal of those cancerous glands proved remarkably (if mysteriously) curative.

It was another English doctor, George Oliver, who first got the notion to collect extracts from the adrenal glands of sheep and calves, and feed them to people. This being 1893, gaslight had supplanted candlelight, and Dr. Oliver had even invented a rudimentary instrument that measured the radius of arteries. Under these laboratory conditions, he concluded that sheep adrenaline caused human arteries to constrict. With adrenaline having been tested on humans, the next logical step was to try

it on dogs. Upon injection, the dogs' blood pressure spiked also, and their hearts raced.

This was news. The circulatory system was notoriously hard to control. A substance that could alter its behavior was worth money. By the turn of the century, competing chemists had purified the active ingredient of the adrenal glands. Adrenaline restored free breathing to people with hay fever, stemmed bleed-

Adrenaline restored free breathing to people with hay fever, stemmed bleeding, and, if you believed all the accounts, cured hemorrhoids and bedwetting.

ing, and, if you believed all the accounts, cured hemorrhoids and bedwetting. Drug companies went wild.

More important, a shot of adrenaline could rescue surgery patients whose blood pressure cratered due to complications of anesthesia. In fact, its pop-culture story began when a researcher overdosed a dog with anesthetic, then restored life with an injection to the heart. Adrenaline also relieved asthmatic constriction of the airways with life-saving speed.

Adrenal history unfolded in measured steps during the years when an offending body part was summarily plucked out. But because the chemical itself held such promise as medicine, investigators continued to investigate, on smaller and smaller scales.

Medical history is a fine kettle of fish. But biochemical history is a completely different dish, and one not easily digestible by the average consumer. When adrenaline lands on the laboratory bench halfway through this book, Hoffman slips on the white coat and the attribution style of the academic. Paper by academic paper, and in traditional passive voice, this history is detailed—the discovery of cyclases, kinases, cAMP, GDP, then genetics. The various receptors that grant adrenaline access to a cell are thrice diagrammed. No discoverer of

an obscure protein is overlooked.

None of this translates from the lab bench to the bedside table. Beta-blockers, which Grandpa takes to prevent adrenaline from spurring his weary heart, are known in this academic portion of the book only as “ β adrenergic receptor antagonists.” (That funny-looking β is a Greek letter, beta.) The drugs we might take for migraine, tremor, hyperthyroid symptoms, gut bleeding, or alcoholism are briefly recognized as additional “ β receptor antagonists.” Closely, we follow the fight over adrenaline’s name and its Greek synonym, epinephrine, but there is no mention of the EpiPen injector that severely allergic people carry today.

As the units of scientific discovery shrink, from entire organs, to small glands, to cells, and to the synaptic spaces between the cells, the chasm between researchers and the public yawns wider. These conjoined books—the first a popular history and the second a biochemistry review paper—present an awkward but illuminating study of science history. ■

Science writer **HANNAH HOLMES** is the author, most recently, of *QUIRK: Brain Science Makes Sense of Your Peculiar Personality*. Her blog, *Human/Nature*, appears at www.hannah-holmes.com. She lives in Portland, Maine.

New Schools, Old Problems

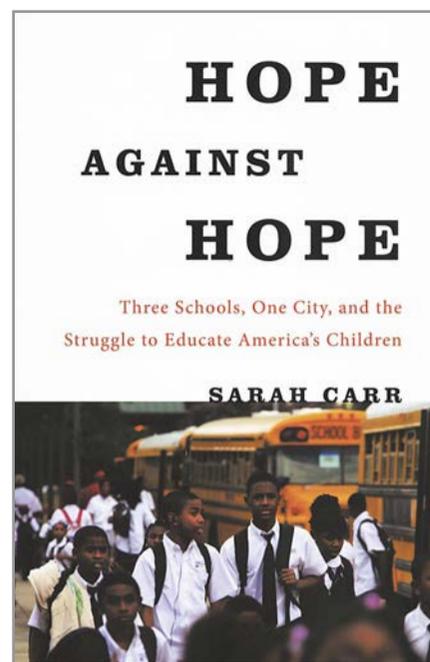
HOPE AGAINST HOPE:

THREE SCHOOLS, ONE CITY, AND THE STRUGGLE TO EDUCATE AMERICA'S CHILDREN

REVIEWED BY **P. L. THOMAS**

NEW ORLEANS SURVIVED HURRICANE KATRINA in 2005 only to experience a second flood, this time as educators from outside the city spilled in to reform its schools. Though not all shuttered classroom buildings had been damaged, reformers saw the storm as an opportunity to rebuild the school system. Many of the city's historically struggling public schools were closed or converted into charter institutions. These new charters, heavily staffed by young Teach for America (TFA) recruits creamed from elite colleges to serve two-year stints and other educators with similar philosophies, emphasize testing and curtail extracurricular activities in favor of college preparation.

Sarah Carr, an education reporter for more than a decade, most recently for *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, set out to discover how this transition from local control to “technocratic gover-



By Sarah Carr
Bloomsbury
316 pp. \$27.00

nance” would play out in a city whose “decayed infrastructure, overwhelmed social services, long-simmering racial tensions, and gross inequalities make it perversely American.” The potential for tension was heightened by the fact that most of the young educators hired to teach in the new, state-run Recovery School District were white, while 90 percent of the public school student body is composed of African-American children. From 2010 through 2012, Carr shadowed three people representing three schools: Geraldlynn Stewart, who was a 14-year-old charter-school freshman at the start of Carr’s research; TFA recruit and Harvard graduate Aidan Kelly; and charter school principal Mary Laurie.



SUSAN POAG PHOTOGRAPHY

Raquel Dillon with her daughter, Geraldynn, who wears a KIPP school uniform. Dillon hoped the school's focus on academics—maintained through chants, finger snapping, and strict enforcement of rules—would give her daughter opportunities she'd lacked. Dillon's faith faltered as the school's culture failed to connect with students.

Geraldynn, who attends Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) Renaissance High School, expresses ambivalence about her education, complaining about the school's strictness. No-excuses ideologies such as those embraced by KIPP place an emphasis on discipline and an intense culture of personal responsibility in which teachers and students are held accountable for outcomes that

critics have warned are often beyond the control of either. But Geraldynn's mother, who works two jobs and is determined to ensure that her daughter has access to the best schools the two of them can find, likes the KIPP school's approach.

Kelly teaches at new charter school Sci Academy, a hyper-regimented "technocrat's dream: run by graduates of the nation's most elite institutions, steeped in data, always seeking precision, divorced from the messiness—and checks and balances—of democracy." Kelly personifies the "missionary zeal" of TFA recruits. But his ideals clash with the reality of day-to-day schooling. His self-esteem often wilts under

his students' lack of interest (or success) in the lessons he has spent hours crafting.

Laurie, a New Orleans native, emerges as a survivor. Once a young unwed mother, she returned to college after giving birth and eventually raised four children, only to lose two of them to gun violence. She was a successful public school educator before Katrina, but lost her job when the school district laid off public

school teachers and neutralized the teachers' unions. O. Perry Walker, the charter school Laurie heads, gave her a new start, but not without complications. Having taught in public schools her whole professional career, Laurie had concerns about the charter takeover of so many of the city's schools. But her dedication to education won out.

Education journalism often offers facile solutions. Some writers champion "miracle schools" as the way to close the achievement gap as well as raise the test scores and graduation rates of low-income students. And several recent books have held out "grit" as the solution for kids who come from underachieving communities, arguing that teachers should demand that students develop a personal drive to overcome all obstacles by neither offering nor accepting excuses—see, for example, Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed* and *Whatever It Takes*, David Kirp's *Improbable Scholars*, and Jay Mathews's *Work Hard. Be Nice*.

Carr casts a critical eye on simplistic policies that embrace school choice and competition as the primary tools for reform while ignoring the complicated problem of child poverty, though she offers nuanced praise when reformers succeed. For example, she approvingly describes the Cherokee legend taught

at KIPP in which everyone embodies a good wolf and a bad wolf. "The fable's power over [the students'] actions," Carr writes, "seemed to suggest that appealing to a person's higher self, no matter whether they are young teenagers or adults, carries more influence than rules or demerits ever could."

For schools to succeed, says Carr, "the education they offer must become an extension of the will of a community—not a result of its submission."

Carr's reporting is some of the best education reform journalism to date, largely because it is rooted in individuals' stories, which have often been lost amid the relentless focus on data since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and high-stakes testing. Through Laurie, she articulates some of the core challenges facing the education reform movement: "I think we've done good work, but I don't know that the numbers (test scores, attendance, and graduation rates) will always reflect our good work because of the kids

we take on,' said Laurie, referring to the fact that the school accepts some of the city's most challenged and challenging students." Laurie's concern parallels the often-ignored problem at the center of universal public education in the United States, a system created to serve any and all students equally, regardless of background.

While Carr challenges education reform and the limits of good intentions among KIPP and TFA advocates, she also grounds her confrontations in a larger commitment: "At times, both KIPP's staunchest supporters and its fiercest critics insult and demean the very families they purport to protect by assuming they, and they alone, know what is best for other people's children."

Hope Against Hope is a cautionary tale about reformers honoring market-based

models over democratic values by stressing indirect change through choice and competition instead of directly reforming failing public institutions. In the book's epilogue, Carr offers this advice: "If the schools want to succeed in the long run, the education they offer must become an extension of the will of a community—not a result of its submission." For anyone seeking to understand U.S. education and education reform, Carr's story of New Orleans is an essential place to start. ■

P. L. THOMAS, an associate professor of education at Furman University, in Greenville, South Carolina, previously taught high school English in rural South Carolina. His recent books include *Ignoring Poverty in the U.S.* (2012) and the edited volume *Becoming and Being a Teacher* (2013).



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