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Ordeal in Iran

**Microcredit's
Micromagic**

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WINTER 2005

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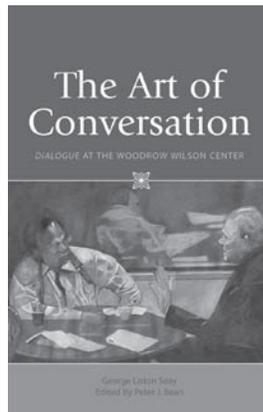
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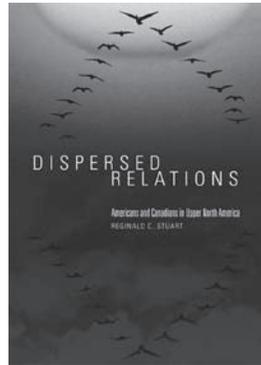
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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Developing Victories

Let's celebrate for a moment the great victory that's being won over poverty in the developing world, where the share of the population living on less than \$1 a day tumbled from 40 percent to 18 percent between 1981 and 2004. But only for a moment. That remarkable achievement also serves to remind us how far there is to go from \$1 a day, how many have been left behind, and how little billions of dollars in foreign aid from the United States and others have had to do with the progress that has occurred.

The tragic failures of development aid are a common theme of three essays in this issue. G. Pascal Zachary's cover story is an inspiring account of how small-scale African farmers are embracing potentially revolutionary agricultural changes almost in spite of leading donor organizations. Samia Altaf, the Wilson Center's current Pakistan Scholar, contributes a darkly comic sketch of a single meeting in Islamabad that crystallized the bizarre dynamics that lead to the creation of well-intentioned aid programs that serve few but their creator institutions and the recipient governments. And economists Karol Boudreaux and Tyler Cowen cast a critical eye on microcredit, the latest silver bullet of the development industry.

It's easy to scoff at the aid givers, but it's imperative that they find ways to be more effective. The appearance on the development scene of a breed of thoughtful dissident veterans such as Altaf is an encouraging sign of intellectual vitality in a realm where dysfunctional orthodoxies have long reigned.

Two members of the *WQ* editorial board recently published notable books. Congratulations to Wilfred M. McClay, editor of *Figures in the Carpet: Finding the Human Person in the American Past*, and Amy Chua, author of *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance—and Why They Fall*.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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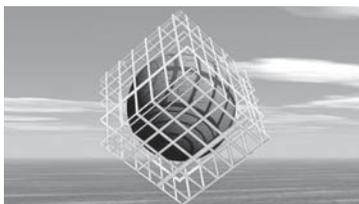
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LETTERS

IN IT TO WIN IT

THE *WQ*'S CLUSTER ON COMPETITION addresses an important issue that cuts to the core of American life ["Overdrive!" Autumn '07]. However, it troubles me that your authors conflate openness and fairness. Fair play occurs when all parties have more-or-less comparable abilities, not when some have an enormous advantage over the others.

It is in the interest of fair play that athletic contests tend to be segregated according to the basic characteristics of players. For example, intercollegiate athletic leagues are structured so that only similar schools compete. Williams College and Ohio State University both have storied football programs, but it would be ludicrous to match them up on the gridiron since the scale of the resources the schools devote to their football teams is so different.

In more consequential fields of American life, this criterion for fair play is rarely met. Take, for example, the increasingly competitive game of selective college admissions. Ending college admissions practices that explicitly favored white male applicants was a step in the right direction. But making the competition more open has not made it more fair. Admission to a selective school is a lot easier for those kids whose parents send them to the most academically rigorous high schools, hire private tutors, and nourish athletic and

artistic skills through elaborate extracurricular enrichments. Despite more-open admissions, the distribution of students admitted to selective colleges remains intolerably lopsided in favor of the upper and upper-middle classes.

What has changed over the last 25 years is that the adult lives of even the relatively privileged have become more uncertain. Since finding a lifelong employer is less and less common, maintaining middle-class comforts later in life is harder for this generation than it was for previous ones. It may be that America feels more competitive not because it is more open, but because the most basic prizes—stable work, decent medical care, and a dignified retirement—must be fought for throughout adulthood.

Mitchell Stevens

*Associate Professor of
Education and Sociology
New York University*

*Author, Creating a Class: College Admissions
and the Education of Elites (2007)
New York, N.Y.*

CONGRATULATIONS ON A GENERALLY excellent cluster on competition in American life. Daniel Akst's hymn to competition, however, took for granted what it needed to prove ["Strive We Must," *WQ*, Autumn '07]. Akst writes, "Life in this country . . . is better than it

has ever been—longer, fairer, freer, and richer." In fact, even a cursory look at quality-of-life indices for the world's rich countries reveals that nations in which competition is far more restrained have outperformed the United States in each of these areas except pure material wealth.

Despite the fact that Americans make the most money per capita, people in more than 40 other countries, including most of those in Western Europe, live longer than we do. A recent study indicates that as a result of the dramatic rise in childhood obesity, for the first time on record U.S. life expectancy may drop over the next decade. So, yes, our lives have gotten longer, but put in context, our gains appear less impressive.

It is hard to argue that American society has gotten fairer, unless we compare it with the pre-Depression era. The gap between rich and poor is now the biggest in the industrialized world and has been growing since the 1970s, when we tossed aside a more cooperative model of public policy and used tax cuts, privatization, and deregulation to increase competition. Moreover, our greater wealth hasn't made us happier. Levels of happiness in the United States have been flat since the 1950s.

Are we freer? Hardly. More than two million Americans are behind bars—up from 500,000 in 1980—mostly for nonviolent, victimless crimes. The U.S. incarceration rate is seven times that of Europe. And not very fair either, [Continued on Page 7]

LETTERS may be mailed to *The Wilson Quarterly*, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004-3027, or sent via facsimile, to (202) 691-4036, or e-mail, to wq@wilsoncenter.org. The writer's telephone number and postal address should be included. For reasons of space, letters are usually edited for publication. Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.

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Islam says there is a God,

but the way to him is that we must obey Muhammed, and therefore, the discipline of the Koran's teachings.

Hinduism says there is a God,

but we have to go through reincarnation to get to Him, from sub-human form to human form to improve the soul.

Christianity says there is a God,

Jesus died on the cross for our sins (he removed that burden from each of us), and he is the way to God.

Buddhism says there is no God.

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FROM THE CENTER

AFTER ANNAPOLIS

ONE WEEK AFTER NOVEMBER'S ANNAPOLIS Conference on Middle East peace, Sallai Meridor, Israel's ambassador to the United States, and Afif Safieh, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Mission to the United States, came to the Wilson Center for a forum called "After Annapolis: Where Do We Go From Here?"

The two diplomats began warmly, full of good words for each other. Meridor called Annapolis a "very positive event" and said Israel was pleased to see the Arab states represented. Because Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas is struggling for control of the West Bank with Hamas (which currently rules the Gaza Strip), Meridor noted, the conditions for talks are far from ideal. But Israel would rather negotiate now than in some indefinite future, when the environment may be less conducive to talks.

Safieh declared that "it is the optimists who make history," and he went on to cite several factors that could make a difference in the negotiations that will follow Annapolis, including the personal commitment of President George W. Bush and of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who has declared the "two state" solution to be in America's national interest.

But the mood changed once the speeches were over and the two diplomats began answering questions from the audience. The difficult issues that have hampered Middle East negotiations in the past quickly resurfaced, and a parade of old and new grievances served as a reminder that the passage of time in the Middle East only creates fresh wounds. Both speakers, however, made clear that control of the Gaza Strip by Hamas—which is sworn to Israel's destruction and attacks it almost daily with Qassam rockets—renders the path to peace virtually impassable for the present.

The forum in many ways recapitulated Middle East peace talks of the past, but that was in a sense

part of the purpose. It was one of an ongoing series of Wilson Center meetings—the Joseph and Alma Gildenhorn Middle East Forum of the Middle East Program—my wife and I have sponsored as a way of promoting dialogue and perhaps some small steps toward reconciliation. A month earlier, the forum brought three prominent Palestinians to the Center to analyze the internal politics of Palestine and their implications for successful peace negotiations. In January, three Israelis will discuss the situation in their country, to be followed later this year by a group of American analysts who will appraise U.S. options.

The majority of Palestinians and Israelis are ready for peace, and the Camp David meetings in 2000 provided the broad outlines of a workable agreement. But a settlement will require both sides to make painful concessions on key issues such as security, borders, Jewish settlements, the Palestinian demand for a right of return, and the future of Jerusalem. A sine qua non for a peaceful resolution is a Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.

Meanwhile, Hamas rockets rain down on Israel for one key reason—to prevent any prospect of progress in peace negotiations. Only bold and responsible Palestinian leadership that brings unity on the Palestinian side and an end to the rocket attacks can open the road to peace. Success in the continuing, lower-profile negotiations after Annapolis will also require the U.S. government to make a significant push and remain engaged. It is hard to be optimistic, but forums like the one that brought together Meridor and Safieh can play a role as well. The peace process has started again, and we must hope that somewhere, someday, after much effort, the two sides will travel the tiny distance that turns out to be the last long inch toward peace.

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[Continued from page 4] since we imprison blacks at five times the rate of whites.

On one point, Akst is right: We have gotten richer. But what have we gained? His assertion that we have more leisure now is surely debatable—as a study highlighted in the Spring '07 *WQ* indicates ["In Essence: No Rest for the Wicked"]. But even if he is correct, we still have far less leisure than those uncompetitive West Europeans—they work about 350 fewer hours each year than we do.

John de Graaf

President, Take Back Your Time

Coauthor, Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic (2001)
Seattle, Wash.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER I FINISHED reading Daniel Akst's article that I noticed his tendency to equate striving with competing. Novels are written, symphonies composed, and scientific research conducted not for the glory of besting others but out of a love for the field of endeavor. Sports competitions, in which for every match there is necessarily a winner and one or more losers, are the exception.

Stephen E. Silver

Santa Fe, N.M.

IN RESPONSE TO YOUR ARTICLES on competition, I asked my students—future social studies teachers—to come up with examples of how we, as Americans, cooperate. They accomplished the task with ease.

Americans cooperate when we put on a holiday dinner, take turns at a four-way stop, recycle waste, patiently wait in a line, drop a quarter into the Salvation Army kettle, shovel snow off a sidewalk used by others, perform in a musical group, collect our neighbors' mail

when they are on vacation, and in countless other ways. I don't know whether Americans are more competitive or cooperative, but we certainly don't lack a willingness to help out our friends and neighbors.

Clark Johnson

Professor, Social Studies
Minnesota State University
Mankato, Minn.

MILES HOFFMAN'S ARTICLE "Beautiful Victory" [*WQ*, Autumn '07] provides an excellent portrait of the competition in today's classical music world. As students of music become increasingly obsessed with outperforming both their predecessors and their peers, they specialize to a fault. Talk to a kid today who has a shot at becoming a professional musician, and you'll find that he or she may never even have listened to jazz or the Beatles, much less played a sport or entered a science fair.

The music community is making a superficial attempt to soften the focus on competition. The best players in today's youth orchestras don't necessarily sit first chair. Even elite youth orchestras regularly rotate section leaders. Some conductors go so far as to seat the better players at the back with those who need more help.

But the results are often unfortunate. Restraining competition encourages even those with no chance at success to pursue careers in music. They devote as much time to their instruments as possible. In the event they don't break into the elite world of classical performance, they have very few other skills to fall back on.

Hannah Neprash

Washington, D.C.

THE MARCH OF THE VALUES VOTER

JON A. SHIELDS'S ESSAY "IN Praise of the Values Voter" [*WQ*, Autumn '07] provides a useful corrective to critics who believe that conservative religious voters are irrational and dangerous. But like many correctives, it overstates the case.

Liberals and conservatives alike vote their values, which often conflict with their economic interests. Whatever is wrong with Kansas is also wrong with Connecticut, where affluent voters support candidates who might raise taxes to pay for health care for the poor.

Culture war issues have helped voters distinguish between parties and candidates, but the differences are not as stark as Shields suggests. Same-sex marriage was the central issue for many values voters in the 2004 presidential race. George W. Bush halfheartedly endorsed a constitutional amendment to ban such marriages, and John Kerry halfheartedly endorsed a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages in favor of civil unions.

Shields is right that most Americans can correctly pick the more liberal or conservative party on social issues. This allows values voters to cast rational votes balancing their moral, economic, and foreign-policy concerns. But an Ohio voter who supported Bush because of the many mailings she received on same-sex marriage might have rationally expected him to push this issue. Since the election, the president has only mentioned same-sex marriage fleetingly, though the issue helped him to carry Ohio.

Shields paints too rosy a picture of the civility of values voters on both sides of the political spectrum. In

fact, they are the targets of millions of dollars in propaganda that incites fear and distrust. Christian conservatives warn that liberals want to ban the Bible; liberal groups charge that religious conservatives want to establish a theocracy. The result is not as negative as many fear, but neither is it as positive as Shields posits.

On most social issues, we have shouting matches rather than civil debate. This is not primarily the fault of values voters, but rather of those who seek to frighten them into action.

Clyde Wilcox

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GLOBALIZATION: NEW AND IMPROVED

BY EXTRAPOLATING FROM CHINA'S remarkable economic performance over the past 25 years, Martin Walker raises the specter of China eclipsing the United States as an economic power within the next 20 years ["Globalization 3.0," *WQ*, Autumn '07]. In so doing, I wonder if he is repeating the mistake of those who in earlier decades conjectured, on the basis of past performance, that the Soviet and Japanese economies would surpass that of the United States.

China's remarkable economic performance since 1979 has been built on a highly mercantilist trade policy and an unhealthily high rate of capital accumulation. In the absence of sufficient consumer spending at home, China has needed its exports to grow at an annual rate of 30 percent and its trade surplus to steadily rise in order to absorb its surplus domestic production. It is increasingly questionable how sustainable

such an economic growth model will be now that China has become a major partner in the global economy.

Rising protectionist pressure against China is already in evidence in the West, and this pressure will almost certainly intensify in the event of a U.S.-led global recession. Will China really be able to sustain its very rapid rate of economic growth if its exports are increasingly shut out of Western markets?

Desmond Lachman

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HISTORY TELLING

MAX BYRD'S ESSAY ["THE BRIEF HISTORY of a Historical Novel," *WQ*, Autumn '07] is a reminder to those of us in the nonfiction world that fiction is simply too good to be left to novelists. The divide that separates fiction from nonfiction often leaves the latter devoid of what makes for good reading. While it is true that a biography should contain no fiction, that does not mean it cannot be written like fiction. Just as nonfiction does not have an exclusive purchase on truth, the novel should not hold a monopoly on technique.

Byrd's efforts to find a shape for his historical novel are no different in many respects from those of biographers. We strive to create a story out of a person's life, or, more precisely, from the flotsam, detritus, and debris they left behind. We seek to establish a bigger truth about the person. In other words, our details could be wrong but our portrait could remain honest.

Why is that? Because at the heart of our work, we are creating a portrait of our subject in a studio filled with shadows. In many cases, our brush strokes

are only guesses. In the end, Byrd's historical fiction may be as close, if not closer, to the truth as the best biography.

James McGrath Morris

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IN DEFENSE OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE

IT IS FALLACIOUS TO ASSUME THAT the purpose of a master's in education is to raise the test scores of public school students ["In Essence: The Myth of the Master's Degree," *WQ*, Autumn '07]. For the most part, the master's curriculum is concerned with pedagogy, not subject-area content. The purpose is to provide the opportunity for advanced study in child development, learning theories, methodologies, curriculum development, innovations in

education, and the science of teaching. Raising test scores is an appropriate goal of classroom instruction, not of master's degrees.

William M. Gordon

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WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

BRIAN SPAK, IN HIS REVIEW OF *A Buffalo in the House*, by R. D. Rosen ["Animal Needs," *WQ*, Autumn '07], states that bison are native only to North America. In fact, the wisent, or European bison (*Bison bonasus*), has hovered near extinction for many years, but is still hanging on.

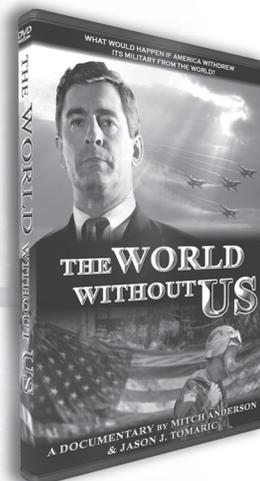
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FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

Lit Crit Retrofit

Bridging the two cultures

The academic study of literature is crumbling, according to Jonathan Gottschall, who teaches English at Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, Pennsylvania. And literary scholars know it.

“Enrollments are down, funding is down, morale is down, prestige is down,” Gottschall said in November at a conference sponsored by the Science Network, a group devoted to “enlarging the constituency of reason,” in La Jolla, California. “Books languish unpublished or unpurchased, because almost no one, not even other literary scholars—there’s data on this—can bear to read them.” For Gottschall, the trouble stems from “rotten disciplinary fundamentals.” Citing the literary critic Frederick Crews, he declared that “no literary scholar has ever failed to find evidence for his preferred idea.”

To cure the ailment, Gottschall prescribes an injection of scientific method. Consider, for example, Western literature’s emphasis on the appearance of female characters: Is it, Gottschall asks, truly “a social construction that

functions as a hammer of patriarchy, which is a standard position in literature departments?” To find out, he and his colleagues gathered hundreds of folktales from all over the world, counted their references to male and female physical attractiveness, and created a database. In every culture studied, stories turned out to stress female looks over male looks, with an overall ratio of about six to one. So whatever the cause, Western literature is hardly alone in obsessing over winsome women.

“Of course, we could be wrong,” Gottschall said—but that’s a plus. “The major barrier to the production of durable knowledge in literary studies has

been the sheer impossibility of demonstrating that anyone is wrong. And since no one can be wrong, no one can possibly be right.”

Perhaps science can save one more endangered species: the literary scholar.

Sour Note

American Idol-atry garners mixed reviews

“A Force for Democracy?” asked *Beijing Today*. The headline refers not to Tiananmen Square protesters but to an *American Idol*-style TV show on Hunan Satellite Television, *Mongolian Cow Sour Yogurt Super Girl Contest*.

In 2005, the program attracted



China’s top support-getter: Li Yuchun (center) was 2005’s Mongolian Cow Sour Yogurt Super Girl.

more than eight million cell phone votes, or, rather, “‘messages of support’—the term ‘vote’ was avoided,” writes John Hartley in *Politicainment: Television’s Take on the Real* (Peter Lang), edited by Kristina Riegert.

As in American elections, the victor wasn’t universally acclaimed. *China Daily* wondered, “How come an imitation of a democratic system ends up selecting the singer who has the least ability to carry a tune?”

Lite Food, Heavy Eaters

Children of Jared

“As the popularity of healthier menus increases, so does the weight of many Americans,” Pierre Chandon and Brian Wansink write in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (October 2007). One culprit, it seems, is those healthier menus.

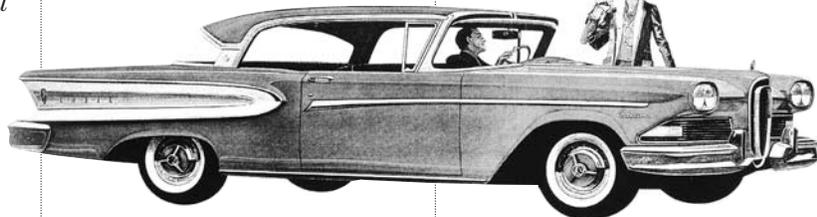
In an experiment conducted by Chandon and Wansink, participants were asked to estimate the number of calories in a Subway 12-inch Italian sandwich and in a Big Mac. Their answers averaged 439 calories for the sub and 557 for the burger. In truth, the sandwich has 900 calories and the Big Mac 600. The caloric disparity between the two meals was further increased by Subway patrons’ tendency to order high-calorie accompaniments. Dining on what they wrongly considered a low-cal main course, they splurged on drinks and desserts.

“From a public-health perspective,” the authors conclude, Americans ought to view “all restaurants serving large portions of calorie-dense foods, such as McDonald’s but also Subway, as an indulgence.”

Obesity is certainly a health issue—but a *public*-health issue? Not necessarily, physician Jay Bhattacharya writes in the *Hoover Digest* (Summer 2007). Public-health problems hurt other people, he says. Obesity doesn’t qualify.

The public-health argument often goes like this: Obese workers need more medical services than others, which raises the cost of workplace health insurance for everyone.

Bhattacharya concedes the disparity in medical care but contends that another factor tips the scale. When employers provide health insurance, he finds, obese workers earn an average of \$4.60 per hour less than other workers. That difference in wages is “at least as big as



Poet in the Boardroom

It blows by any other name

Who knows words better than a poet? That’s what executives at Ford Motor Company figured in the mid-1950s, so they recruited Pulitzer-winner Marianne Moore to help name a new car.

Moore once wrote that “the deepest feeling always shows itself in silence.” Alas, she was obliged to speak. In *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design* (Princeton Architectural Press), Michael Bierut lists some of her suggestions for the new Ford: the Silver Sword, the Resilient Bullet, the Mongoose Civique, and the Utopian Turtletop.

After rejecting the poet’s ideas,

the expected difference in medical expenditures.”

Workplace discrimination? Nope. When employers don’t provide health insurance, “the obesity wage gap never develops.” In jobs without insurance, obese employees earn about as much as others.

If Bhattacharya is right, hefty workers are no pricier to employ than slender ones. The obese aren’t gobbling up more than their share of workplace resources. So don’t scowl at supersized colleagues chowing down on Big Macs, or even bigger Italian subs, as you dip into your Mongolian Cow Sour Yogurt.

Utopian Turtletop, a.k.a. the Ford Edsel

Ford executives decided to honor Henry Ford’s late son, Edsel. They might as well have gone with Utopian Turtletop, or the name of the protagonist’s car in Martin Amis’s novel *Money*: the Fiasco.

When I Grow Up . . .

Hero and villain worship

Among the many factors that drive terrorism, don’t slight popular culture. That’s the view of Scott Atran, research director at the National Center for Scientific Research, in Paris.

Studying terrorism’s roots, Atran asked dozens of Muslim

boys in the barrios of Morocco and Spain about their heroes. Atop the pantheon: soccer star Ronaldinho, Osama bin Laden, and “the Terminator.” About the Terminator’s subsequent career in Sacramento, the children neither knew nor cared.

Burnt-Orange Revolution

The call of the cubicle

It’s hard to believe, but the office cubicle once symbolized liberation. In the late 1970s, the cubicle was going to banish “bureaucracy and hierarchy,” David Franz writes in *Culture* (Fall 2007), published by the University of Virginia’s Institute for the Advanced Study of Culture. The wobbly, fabric-covered partitions portended a luminous future of “equality, creativity, and change.” Ads from the era capture employees “in moments of frenzied, low-tech communication: pointing to each other across the room, handing papers over and around the burnt orange (‘aesthetically pleasing and humanly satisfying’) partitions, all while talking on the phone and jotting down notes.”

The moment didn’t last. In his novel *Generation X* (1991), Douglas Coupland termed cubicles “veal-fattening pens.” Nowadays, Franz writes, the cubicle exemplifies “all that is petty, uninspiring, and even dehumanizing in corporate life.”

Franz sees ’70s cubicle chic as “less a positive vision for the future than an expression of frustration with the present,” much like the giddy talk nowadays of workplace “change agents” and “disruptive technologies.” The

cubicle is dead, but the revolution lives on, and on.

The Unprivileged Press

Another time, another Times

During the 1950s, Hollywood’s blacklist had a less publicized counterpart in the news media. Edward Alwood, a journalism professor at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut, tells the story in *Dark Days in the Newsroom: McCarthyism Aimed at the Press* (Temple University Press).

Like screenwriters, many journalists declined to cooperate with congressional inquiries—and, also like screenwriters, they discovered the price of intransigence. Every citizen had the right to invoke the Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination, *New York Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger allowed in 1955. But there were “obligations which we feel every member of our news or editorial staff must assume.” As Sulzberger saw it, the constitutional “guarantee of a free press carries with it implicitly the conception of responsibility. Such responsibility demands frankness on the part of the newspaper as well as from all those who are employed in its sensitive departments.”

So reporters had to testify—or else. They couldn’t take the Fifth because of the First. Silence implied pinko, followed by a pink slip.

Neologorrhea

Feel-good phraseology

According to the Denver-based organization Compassion and Choices, “physician-assisted suicide” should be buried. Not the practice, the term. It’s

off-putting to patients, families, and clergy. Instead, we should use the less freighted “aid in dying.”

No, thanks. In the compassionate if confused words of a sign outside a Texas animal shelter, “We Do Not Euphemize.”

Euphemism runs amok in *The Political Imagination in History: Essays Concerning J. G. A. Pocock* (Owlworks). “Pocock has talked of himself as an historian ‘working on ideas in time,’” writes one contributor. “Again, ‘in time’ can be a location for the historian as well as for the ideas that hu studies.”

That’s right, hu. The editor of the volume, D. N. DeLuna, coined *hu* as a gender-neutral pronoun. *Hu*, pronounced “huh,” avoids the clunky “he or she” and the grammarian-grating “they.” And, reports the *Hartford Courant*, “hu” respects “folks in the transgender community,” who feel excluded by the traditional male and female pronouns.

Such hypersensitivity vexes New York-based essayist Peter H. Gilmore. In an incendiary new book, he decries “the minions of ‘political correctness’ and a new generation of whiner-spawn” who, with “egos fragile as sodden tissue paper,” simply “can’t bear anything being said against them.” A pillar of free speech, the freedom to offend, is crashing down around us: “It has become a thought-crime to voice the opinion that you don’t embrace everyone in one sloppy hug of ‘brotherhood.’”

Those bracing sentiments appear in Gilmore’s *Satanic Scriptures* (Scapegoat Publishing). Every First Amendment champion has a new ally, the High Priest of the Church of Satan. That’ll surprise hu.

Shopping Around

Intimate apparel

“Making a purchase is one thing, but shopping requires time,” Mark Moss observes in *Shopping as an Entertainment Experience* (Lexington). “It becomes a leisure activity when the time spent is unhurried. Shopping means looking, visualizing, and caressing.”

Caressing, indeed. In 18th-century Europe, Moss says, “shopping was often considered a male form of entertainment, in which flirting was synonymous with the process of making a purchase.” Often as not, the merchandise that the male shopper inspected was the female shop worker. So there’s ample precedent for today’s mall-roaming herds of male teens, stalking not Old Navy but young hotties.

Flag Down

Myth America, in tatters

The inspiring tale of Betsy Ross was first run up the flagpole in 1870. A fellow named William Canby claimed that in June 1776 George Washington and two others visited seamstress Ross, handed her a sketch of a striped flag with 13 six-pointed stars, and asked her to sew it. She remarked that five-pointed stars might be more comely. The visitors

concurred, and Ross set to work.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich unravels the story’s tangles in the online journal *Common-Place* (October 2007), www.common-place.org. Historians have been skeptical from the start. For one thing, Canby was no disinterested observer: He was Betsy Ross’s grandson. He did produce affidavits from elderly relatives, attesting that they’d heard the story from Ross. But the only contemporaneous evidence—a receipt from 1777, indicating that Ross sewed flags for the Pennsylvania navy—doesn’t link her to any American flags, much less the first one. Not even by a thread.

Moreover, Ulrich says, early flags varied. Some featured stripes of red, white, and blue. Further, the putative product of Ross’s eureka moment, the five-pointed star, didn’t become the standard’s standard for years. The flag in Charles Wilson Peale’s 1779 portrait of General Washington features six-pointed stars.

“The stars and stripes that we know today,” Ulrich writes, “had

multiple parents and dozens of siblings.” So Betsy Ross’s banner goes the way of George Washington’s cherry tree.

Branding Britannia

National pride, knackered

A British identity crisis? That’s one cause of current ethnic strife, Prime Minister Gordon Brown believes. His proposed cure: a national motto. The government is organizing a thousand-person “citizens’ summit,” *The Times* of London reported last September, to develop a motto that’s “truly representative” of the changing country.

On its website, *The Times* invited suggestions. Some didn’t quite capture the multicultural spirit: “I Want My Country Back,” “Welcome to Pakistan North,” and “Promoting Ahistorical Unity Myths Since 1066.”

Among the 4,000 other submissions:

- “Wallowing in a Postcolonial Miasma”
- “Move Along, Citizen”
- “Want to Buy a Peerage?”
- “They Saved Our Ass, We Kiss Theirs”
- “Come for the Weather, Stay for the Dentistry”
- “At Least We’re Not French”

Presented with a list of 10 potential mottos, *Times* readers chose “No Motto, Please, We’re British.”



Betsy Ross: another myth bites the dust

Pakistan Picaresque

A surreal encounter in an Islamabad office reveals in an instant why billions of dollars spent on aid to Pakistan have made so little difference in the lives of the country's poor.

BY SAMIA ALTAF

FOR OUR MEETING WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE Pakistan Nursing Council, we arrived punctually at a small two-room office tucked away in a corner of the National Institute of Health's campus in Islamabad. In the center of one room was a table covered with a flowered plastic tablecloth, as if awaiting a picnic. Resting on it were a pencil holder, some writing materials, and a telephone. On one side of the table was a rather ornate chair, and on the wall behind it was a framed photograph of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the man credited with creating Pakistan, in his signature oval cap and a severe black *sherwani*, a formal knee-length coat. Four rickety chairs, a bit dusty, lined the other side of the table. In the adjoining room were more rickety chairs and another table, on which an elaborate tea service was arranged. A small man wearing stained clothes sat on a stool by the door, and mumbled something as he rubbed sleep deposits from his eyes.

"She's what?" I heard my companion ask in a panic-stricken tone. "Dead! Oh, my God, do you hear that?" she said to me. "The director of the nursing council is dead." She stood still for a minute, as if paying her respects. "How did she die?" she said, again turning to

the fellow.

The man looked offended at our misapprehension. "Late. Mrs. S.," he said. Ah, Mrs. S. wasn't dead. She would be late.

My companion, a Canadian, was new to this part of the world and understandably confused by the way Urdu, the national language, is translated into English, the "official" language, especially by people who have minimal schooling. Mrs. S. had gone from merely being late to being "the late Mrs. S." In a way, this slip of the tongue—or of the ear?—was quite symbolic. For in its efforts to make any effective contribution to the changing needs of the health care system, the Pakistan Nursing Council—the federal institution that oversees nursing and all related professions—might as well have been dead.

We told the man that we would wait.

For the past several weeks, my Canadian colleague and I had been traveling through Pakistan as we prepared recommendations for a technical assistance program funded by the Canadian government. She was the external consultant on this project, and I was the local consultant. A pale woman in her early forties, she was dressed that day in loose trousers and a neutral-color top. Privately, I had taken to calling her "Lucymem-sahib," after a character in Paul Scott's novel of post-colonial India, *Staying On* (1977), who exemplifies the imperialist attitude of British hangers-on. True to this

SAMIA ALTAF, a public-health physician who has worked in the United States and Pakistan, is the 2007–08 Pakistan Scholar at the Wilson Center. She is currently at work on a book about aid effectiveness in the health sector in Pakistan.



Students at a nursing school in Chakwal, in Pakistan's Punjab province, take the Florence Nightingale Pledge in November.

model, Lucy had been undergoing a memsahib-like change by barely perceptible degrees each day. Both of us were at times in each other's way, at times at cross-purposes. We were unsure of who was actually in charge—she, by virtue of her status as “lead” consultant, or I, more experienced, though a “local” and hence inferior.

Mrs. S. arrived an hour later quite flustered. She was a shy-seeming, slightly built woman in her fifties wearing a flowery *shalwar-kameez*. On her head was a starched *dupatta*—a long scarf—from which raven black hair peeked out. Dyed, no doubt. She looked a bit startled to see me in a sari, wrinkling her nose delicately in what I interpreted as disapproval as she adjusted the *dupatta* with an elaborate gesture.

“You are not a Pakistani?” she asked, affecting nonchalance.

I told her that I was, and could see that she did not

believe me. Why, then, was I wearing a sari? The traditional sari—a single piece of cloth wrapped around the body—is worn by subcontinental women of many religious and ethnic backgrounds. Pakistani women wore saris until the 1970s, when in a period of Islamo-nationalist fervor, and with the tacit encouragement of the government, they adopted the *shalwar-kameez-dupatta* ensemble—loose, baggy pants and a long tunic with two yards of loose cloth that drape the shoulders. The rejected sari acquired an “Indian” tinge, and came to be seen as vaguely “Hindu” as well as anti-Islamic, a sentiment that hasn't entirely disappeared.

Mrs. S. apologized for the delay, telling us that she had been called away unexpectedly. “Must have been something important,” I said conversationally, for she was quite out of sorts. I worried that my sari-clad personage was a contributing factor. This turned out not

to be the case. A World Bank delegation was visiting, and she had been called to meet them “right away.”

Couldn’t she say that she had an earlier meeting and have them wait? Lucymemsahib wanted to know.

“How can you do that?” Mrs. S. asked. “They are the World Bank.”

And now, she asked, what could she do for us?

The year was 1992, and Lucymemsahib and I were helping the government of Pakistan prepare a grant proposal for the country’s Social Action Program (SAP)—a comprehensive effort to renovate Pakistan’s health, education, and water sanitation systems that the World Bank and a consortium of other multinational development organizations had pledged to support. Specifically, we were looking into ways to attract more women to provide midlevel health services in rural areas. As head of the Pakistan Nursing Council, Mrs. S. presided over the governmental organization responsible for the recruitment, training, and certification of nurses at Pakistan’s 60 civilian nursing schools and a handful of specialized military institutions.

The SAP we helped prepare, which ran from 1993 through 1998, turned out to be a dismal failure, as was the one that followed in 1999–2003. Subsequent programs, especially since 9/11, show every indication of being as unsuccessful. The critical indicators of maternal and child health tell it all. Estimates of Pakistan’s maternal mortality ratio since 1990 range from 300 to 800 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births; even the low end of this range is unacceptable. By contrast, Sri Lanka, another South Asian country, with an income per capita that was roughly comparable to Pakistan’s at the beginning of the 1990s, saw its maternal mortality ratio fall from 92 per 100,000 in 1990 to below 50 today. The infant mortality rate in Pakistan in 2003 was 76 per 1,000 live births, as compared with 11 in Sri Lanka. In the developed countries, the infant mortality rate is only about five per 1,000 live births.

Beyond the health care sector, the story is much the same. A report published in 2007 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., concluded that the \$1 billion in development and humanitarian assistance the United States has poured into Pakistan since 9/11 has saved lives in areas affected by a massive 2005 earthquake and has improved the lot of a small number of people, but “has done little to address the underlying fault

lines in the Pakistani state or society.” Assistance from other institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank has been equally ineffective.

These stories of failure are nothing new. They have been repeated over the years in numerous programs all over the developing world. The interesting question is why.

Some of the reasons are familiar. Developing countries—often beset by political instability, outmoded institutions, meager resources, and a host of other woes—are desperate for money. (When, in a conversation with a Pakistani official, I predicted the failure of the SAP, he replied that at least it would bring in “foreign exchange for the national kitty.”) At the same time, international lending organizations such as the World Bank are under pressure to make loans; otherwise they are out of business. Some baseline “tangible” results are expected when the project ends, but these mainly take the form of documented capital outlays (schools built, computers purchased, etc.) and published reports. There is little interest in assessing whether the projects have actually had an impact on people’s lives.

The development history of Pakistan, long before the first SAP, was full of hastily assembled programs that lacked adequate support institutions or other infrastructure. The legacies of this haphazard approach are everywhere. Health centers cobbled together sit locked and empty—sometimes because they lack staff and supplies, sometimes for reasons that aren’t readily apparent. The situation in education is at least as dire. “Ghost” schools, which show enrollment figures higher than the number of malnourished, bedraggled students living in the whole village they supposedly serve, are documented as major achievements.

The specialists who design the programs work for and are answerable to distant development agencies. Most are narrowly trained technicians from Europe or the United States who have very little understanding of the social conditions and institutions in the country they are dealing with. At a personal level, they bring with them something more destructive than ignorance: a certain kind of palpable arrogance. They have been designated “experts”: foreigners who represent high-profile donors and who command exorbitant salaries. Most are white, which, given Pakistan’s colonial experience, imbues them with a tincture of superiority in the minds of the general public. White Europeans were, after all, the colonial “masters.” Being human, these experts very quickly gain an exaggerated sense of their own authority and a disinclination to entertain ideas divergent

from their own. Consequently, they end up using their sometimes considerable financial decision-making power not to benefit the country they're supposedly there to serve, but in the interest of their own institutions or to protect their jobs.

Present in the country for a short period of time, they are focused on the product—an impressive report, expenditures made—they signed up to deliver. They favor technocratic “solutions.” Sickness is to be combated with clinically skilled people, for example; to deal with illiteracy, it is assumed, you need teachers and reading materials. The relationship between problems and their social context is left unexamined. Grandiose, fuzzy, and unrealistic plans that rely on capital outlays and numbers of people to be trained are quickly drawn up with the representatives of the host government, which participates happily—for this will bring in money—or unhappily, because there is no other option. Most funding agencies work on a short budget cycle, so even if some die-hard planner wants to, there is no time to consider larger issues and long-term solutions.

Yet those who give aid and the governments that receive it have the feeling they are “doing something” to respond to the nation's ills.

Most specialists do their jobs to the best of their abilities. People with experience know full well that most of the time they are just muddling through, trying to meet deadlines. In the end, government officials, technical consultants, and aid agencies all hope that “some” good comes out of the muddle. Alas, when muddle goes in, muddle comes out, as we have seen in the years since that afternoon in Mrs. S.'s tidy little office, where we witnessed that muddle with our own eyes.

Mrs. S. started by telling us about the background of Pakistan's nursing system, which was inherited from British colonialists.

“We use the same curriculum that was used to train British nurses during World War II,” she said with obvious pride.

“Surely it has been updated since then,” said Lucymemsaheb jokingly.

“No.”

“You really mean it has never been updated since then? Why not?” asked Lucymemsaheb, quite aghast.

“There was no need to,” replied Mrs. S. “Only recently, after all this Alma-Ata business, there is pressure to change it,” she added, sounding as if this were completely unnecessary.

That “business” was an international conference held in the city of Alma-Ata, in what is present-day Kazakhstan, in 1978. Considered a watershed event for the design of health delivery systems in developing countries, the conference decreed that services based on the Western model were inappropriate for these countries. Since most health problems in developing countries were

THOSE WHO GIVE AID and the governments that receive it have the feeling they are “doing something” to respond to the nation's ills.

believed to be the result of environmental problems such as poor sanitation and malnutrition, it was decided that they should be tackled by making improvements in the environment. Any remaining medical needs could be addressed by minimally trained local health workers.

The wisdom or folly of this policy and the tale of its selective implementation are matters for another time. Most of the developing countries, including Pakistan, signed on to the resulting Alma-Ata Declaration, promising to reorient their programs according to a primary health care (PHC) model introduced at the conference. Since there was little discussion of how this was to be done, however, each institution in Pakistan translated the model as it saw fit.

“To meet the needs of the PHC model, we are going to stress more community medicine and family planning in the nursing curriculum. Nurses will be doing all this

along with their regular work,” said Mrs. S.

“Why?” asked Lucymemsahib. “Nursing is, as its name says, nursing. And equally important. What hospital can function without good nurses?”

“That is true. But it is in the declaration. We have to do community medicine.”

“But what about nursing?” insisted Lucymemsahib, clearly not happy about nurses’ involvement in this community medicine business.

“What particular aspects of community medicine?” I asked, knowing full well the many colors and constructions of this much-maligned term.

“Oh, just some things to do with the community,” offered the director nonchalantly.

After completing a 24-month curriculum, including a practicum rotation in a hospital, nurses take the examination administered by the Pakistan Nursing Council. Once they pass, they are certified and registered by the council. Sounds good. This means there are standards that can be monitored.

“But it does not matter,” our good Mrs. S. said, “whether they are certified or not. A lot of organizations hire nurses without any certification and registration. Especially the private hospitals and clinics. And since these institutions pay a lot more money than does government service, the nurses prefer to work for them rather than for the government. Many do not even wait to complete the training program.”

“Do these organizations then train these people themselves?” asked Lucymemsahib.

“Oh no, there is no need to train them. They can work.” At least Mrs. S. was honest.

“What do you mean, there is no need?”

“Well, they do know the work.”

“What work do they do?” Lucymemsahib was genuinely confused.

“Nursing work,” responded our hostess calmly, adjusting some papers on her desk.

“But nursing is a skilled profession. A nurse, to be effective, has to perform certain tasks which are technical, and many times critical.” Lucymemsahib looked at me, her face flushed and eyes shining with indignation. She was a registered nurse herself. In Canada, nursing is a highly skilled, well-organized, and respected profession.

“Ah, but you see, there is no rule which says that you

are not allowed to work as a nurse without certification,” Mrs. S. explained patiently. “And practically speaking, even if there were, there is no way we can reprimand them. There is no way to enforce this rule.”

“Can you not change the rules and put in regulations?” Lucymemsahib turned again to Mrs. S.

“What rules?” asked the lady mildly.

“The rules regarding the employment of people who are not properly qualified to do the job.”

“No, no, rules should not be changed, for this would lead to a lowering of standards, and it is very important to maintain high standards.” Mrs. S.’s voice rose with emotion. For all her life, she told us, she had fought to adhere to standards “against all odds.”

“What standards are you talking about?” Lucymemsahib’s voice was also high.

“The standards of nursing, the noblest profession in the world. It must have the highest standards in the world.” Mrs. S.’s voice cracked on the high note.

And, just as suddenly, both ladies stopped talking. Their faces were red and they were out of breath.

Lucymemsahib’s worry was justified. Even today, one need only visit any facility in the large cities to see what is going on. “Nurses,” whose only claim to the title is their little starched uniform, are blundering through people’s lives. I saw a nine-year-old boy die after a routine appendectomy because a nurse did not know that she needed to give him a test dose before administering penicillin, to check for allergic reaction. A hypertensive man had a stroke because the nurse who was monitoring his blood pressure did not think she had to alert the doctor when it became dangerously high. There are nurses who do not know how to read a thermometer.

At the same time, nurses have thriving private practices in towns where they are called “doctor.” They dispense medicines, suture wounds, treat ingrown toenails, perform abortions. One enterprising young lady was doing outpatient cataract removals in a small town just 50 miles from where we sat. Her name came up again and again whenever the subject of private medical care or palatial houses—the two go hand in hand in Pakistan, as in other countries—was under discussion. She had done well enough to build a mansion within two years of opening her “practice,” complete with marble foyer and imported toilets, which, though completely unusable because of the inadequate water supply, were

nevertheless the cause of much envy.

“Why do employers hire unregistered nurses, when they know that these women might not be adequately trained?” My friend was persistent.

“Because there is an acute shortage of nurses in the country, and no clinician can work without nurses,” replied Mrs. S. This, too, was a fact, consistently documented. “To date, 19,000 nurses are registered with the council, and given the population, this is an extremely poor nurse-to-population ratio. This means we have one nurse for 6,000 people. On top of that we think that easily half of these 19,000 are out of the country, and the other half are trying their best to get out too. As you can see, there are just not enough nurses to meet the demand. That is why even untrained girls are hired. That is why we need to train more nurses.” (According to the World Health Organization, Pakistan had 48,446 registered nurses in 2004—though there is no way to know how many of these nurses were actually in the country—and the fact that health indicators have barely budged shows this is mostly an improvement on paper.)

“This situation exists only in urban areas, does it not?” I asked, for Pakistan is certainly more than its three large cities; almost 70 percent of the population is rural, and rural-urban disparities are a major hurdle in developing standard programs or uniform employment salaries, benefits, etc.

“Of course. What need is there for nurses in rural areas where there are no hospitals? As it is, we do not have enough nurses for urban areas,” said Mrs. S.

“Why do you then not increase the output? Surely in a country where there is a shortage of jobs, this should be a very attractive option for women.” Lucymemsahib was being logical, applying the law of supply and demand. But this was Pakistan, and there were yet another 10 layers to the problem.

“This is easier said than done,” Mrs. S. replied, with a pursing of her lips. “It is not easy to attract girls and

women to go into the nursing profession, especially if they come from good families.”

“What on earth do you mean!” Lucymemsahib was horrified. “Is it because of poor salaries? Is the pay that low?”

“Oh, no, pay has nothing to do with it,” replied Mrs. S. “Girls prefer to go into teaching, although that has still lower pay. It’s just that nursing is not considered a . . . a decent profession.”

Lucymemsahib looked from me to Mrs. S. and back again, her mouth opening and closing like a fish’s.

“But *you* are a nurse, aren’t you?” she said, once she got her breath back.

“Oh, no, no I am not.” Mrs. S. was quick to correct her.

MRS. S. WAS FROM THE federal bureaucracy, a civil servant. Down to the present day, no nurse has served as the director of the Pakistan Nursing Council.

She was from the federal bureaucracy, a civil servant. Down to the present day, no nurse has served as the director of the Pakistan Nursing Council.

The institution of nursing in Pakistan is a strange hybrid. It is built on the foundations of the health and medical system created by the British in the 19th century to serve the colonial and local elite. Initially, nurses came from Britain. Later, especially during World War II, nursing programs were set up in local hospitals, and, as in Britain, women were recruited. This was a challenge. Educated women from middle-class households, who had some schooling, were reluctant to go into professions. Those that required close contact with people, especially males who were not part of a woman’s immediate family, were even less attractive. At the same time, Christian religious missions were well established on the subcontinent, and they had their own schools and hospitals. The missions also took in abandoned infants and children,

most of whom were the offspring of English men (often soldiers) and local women. These Anglo-Indians, like the mestizos of Latin America, were mostly the products of nonmarital unions and were shunned by society. They were therefore prime candidates for conversion to Christianity, and for less desirable jobs. Almost all Anglo-Indians on the subcontinent are Christians. At first, most of those who went into nursing were Anglo-Indian Christian girls who lacked other options. From the beginning, nursing in Pakistan thus suffered a double handicap, and it is still seen as an “inferior” profession.

all the qualified nurses. They go, for they too have families to take care of.” She looked to me for understanding. “They work for some years on short-term contracts, and after they have made enough money to build a house, or educate a brother, or collect a dowry for themselves or for a daughter, they come back again.” She added, after a brief pause, “In fact, it is better to let them go. Otherwise, they create trouble for us.”

The fact that international assistance pays for the training of new personnel but not for salaries to employ them is a major and unresolved problem in all rural health

programs in Pakistan. Aid organizations assume that trained workers are an asset to the government, and expect local health service delivery systems to absorb them. In reality, local governments do not have the institutional capacity to deploy, pay, and utilize the

NOT ENOUGH NURSES. Not enough jobs. Nurses working as “doctors.” What a strange and paradoxical situation!

“You have mentioned that nurses leave the country at the first opportunity. Is that a major problem?” I restarted the conversation on a topic that seemed safe.

“Oh, yes! It is a terrible loss,” Mrs. S. said, with genuine feeling. “Our own country desperately needs the manpower. But what can we do?”

“All governments can stop the qualified personnel from leaving the country,” said Lucymemsaheb. “The government can mandate this.” Poor Lucymemsaheb! For the life of her, she could not understand why it was so difficult for a government to stem the exodus of its trained womanpower, especially since the training was financed by taxpayers or other government-funded programs, as in the case of nurses and physicians.

“All government servants who wish to leave the country need only obtain a No Objection Certificate from the government, and they can go wherever they like,” Mrs. S. told us. “Most of the time people are granted this certificate. But it can be withheld in case of essential personnel.”

“Aha!” Lucymemsaheb pounced on this opening. “Then the government can refuse to give this document to people that it thinks are needed in the country. And it is clear that nurses, being in short supply, are essential personnel.”

“But why do it?” Mrs. S. asked patiently and sincerely. “As it is, there are not enough jobs in the country to absorb

trained work force. Hence, senior officials hope that trained personnel, who can be demanding and vocal, will just go away. Their exodus, though contrary to the objective of these programs, relieves the government of blame for not using these workers.

But because policymakers and development experts agree that skilled manpower is essential for improved services, they continue to design and fund training programs. Pakistan has been a recipient of aid for such programs many times. International experts don’t try to figure out how the workers turned out by these programs might be used. That is left to the host governments. In unstable regimes, administrators—who are often political appointees with little accountability and slim hope for long tenures in their jobs—have neither an interest in doing this nor an inkling of how it could be accomplished. Or their hands are tied because programs that have been developed outside the country rigidly bind funding to specific activities, even if they are of little use.

Unfortunately, most program evaluations, usually conducted in-house by the donor organizations, rate the training programs as successes, since their products are tangible and can be measured. The host country is happy because the programs bring in lots of money. The local managers are happy because they receive personal

rewards—special remuneration, a vehicle, trips to donor countries, and so on. Lending agencies, such as the World Bank, and grant-giving agencies, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, are happy because they are able to disburse funds in time for the next budget request.

“Oh, good,” said my companion, seeing some advantage even in this bizarre situation. “Once these nurses come back, they are more experienced and thus more valuable, so they can be hired at that time. At least the government will have the trained manpower it can use.”

“Oh, no, no.” Mrs. S. almost recoiled at this suggestion. “Now they cannot be hired at all. The government has placed a ban on re-employment of returning nurses. Any nurse who has worked outside the country in her private capacity cannot work for the government again.”

“But why not? They are more experienced. . .”

“Because,” and here Mrs. S. did a wonderful imitation of being hurt, “they have rejected us in the first place. Now why should we accept them?”

Actually, the ban is not based on sentimentality alone. Government rules forbid the hiring of anybody 35 or older in regular federal jobs. This, so the explanation goes, is because a government employee can retire with full benefits after 20 years of service. Older people will be more likely to depart as soon as they are eligible, taking their experience with them and drawing full benefits. Most nurses who return after spending some years out of the country are nearing or past age 35, and thus are automatically ineligible for federal employment.

Not enough nurses. Not enough jobs. Nurses working as “doctors.” Trained nurses being encouraged to leave the country. Untrained and uncertified “nurses” being recruited in sheer desperation by private hospitals. What a strange and paradoxical situation! Yet there is no discussion of these crucial issues. And new training programs are being developed, because there is pressure from international organizations to include more women, supposedly to meet the human resource shortage.

My companion sat shaking her head. Mrs. S. was starting to look restless. She signaled to the attendant for tea. In a government office, a tea break can become a project unto itself.

“The problem with women,” Mrs. S. volunteered con-

versationally, again adjusting the *dupatta* delicately on her hair as the tea service was laid out, “is that they all want to get married.” Quite a problem, and one the world over. “So eventually they must leave the profession to take care of their husbands and children.”

We let this pass, and raised another possible solution to the “problem” with women: training more male nurses. As the primary wage earners, they would not be compelled to leave once they married, and they could tend to the male patients, making it easier to attract women to the profession.

“Not a good idea,” according to Mrs. S. And why not?

“Because men are very unreliable. As students, they will agitate the girls,” she continued in the same conversational mode, oblivious to the effect of her remark on her audience. “If they are in classes together, they will induce them to strike on petty matters.”

“But the girls are under no obligation to do their bidding,” Lucymemsahib said.

“Yes, but the poor girls have no choice but to follow the boys. It is natural for them to do so. By themselves, girls never cause any problems. They quietly do what they are told or get married and go away.” Mrs. S. warmed to her subject. “Look what is happening in Liaquat National Hospital, Karachi.” Liaquat hospital is a major training institution for nurses, one of the few in the country that prepare male nurses. About a third of each entering class was male (as is still the case today). During the weeks before our visit to Mrs. S., the nursing students at Liaquat had gone on strike, demanding better living conditions, apparently at the instigation of male students.

“All because of these boys!” Mrs. S. continued. “So many headaches these boys are causing us.” She struck her forehead with the palm of her right hand in the traditional gesture of frustration, causing the *dupatta* to flop off her hair. She hastily retrieved it. “And the girls are not listening to us either. They are naturally listening to the boys. Stupid things!” She shook her head in indignation.

Lucymemsahib looked at Mrs. S. as if she had come from another planet. Thankfully, the tea arrived at this point, and we fell to it with gusto, under Mr. Jinnah’s enigmatic smile from his perch on the wall. Mrs. S. very generously ordered her attendant to run out for some mint chutney to go with the samosas, which were really out of this world. ■

Moving On

Whether in covered wagons or station wagons, Americans have always hit the road, driven by the belief that a better life lies over the hill and around the bend.

BY CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

MOVING IS ONE OF LIFE'S MOST STRESSFUL, TIME-consuming, and expensive experiences. It's also a sacred American rite, our version of the ancestral adventures of immigration and the frontier. Unless prompted by disaster of one sort or another, moving may be the most important form the individual pursuit of utopia can take, a brave and insouciant gamble that the future will be tangibly better than the past. If owning your own home is often described as the American dream, aspiring to a bigger and better one is an expression of the national faith that the best is yet to come. A new house is a new life.

To keep searching for the place where we will at last feel truly at home, truly ourselves, is to throw the dice with a recklessness sometimes reminiscent of Pickett's Charge. Conversely, to stay put for decades at a time is to be unimaginative, a bit stodgy, almost European in one's avoidance of risk. No wonder adversity in the subprime mortgage market is causing such loud and lingering rumbles. What is at stake is not only the stability of the larger economy but something psychologically even more important—a shared ideology of constant and universal mobility, the conviction that anyone who can plunk down five percent has an inalienable right to the pursuit of real estate.

According to an often-quoted figure from the U.S.

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Census Bureau, the statistically average American moves 11.7 times in a lifetime. The better educated and more affluent tend to move longer distances. About 60 percent of native-born Americans live in the state where they were born, which means that 40 percent don't. Between 2005 and 2006 some 40 million people changed addresses, almost 14 percent of the entire population, which is actually below the historical average for the period since the government started keeping records in 1948. One reason for the small decline may be the aging of the nation (older people move less); another is the rise in homeownership (owners move less often than renters, though, according to real estate professionals, they still take flight after an average of five to seven years). A third reason may be that most of us now own such a godawful amount of stuff that the mere thought of packing is unbearable.

Revealingly, of the many motives people give for moving, the desire for new quarters is overwhelmingly the most common. Moving for practical reasons such as a change of job or of family circumstances is less prevalent than relocating out of an urge to climb the housing ladder. Acquiring a bigger, more comfortable house, or one in a preferable location, seems to be





Westward ho! What romantic renderings of Oregon Trail pioneers don't show is that most walked beside their wagons. Americans have *always* overpacked.

a nearly inevitable corollary of ownership as soon as one can afford it—maybe sooner, judging by the number of home loan defaults recently. Anything with less than 2,000 finished square feet and two full baths is apt to be described by real estate agents as a “starter home,” while “McMansion” has been rapidly transformed from a term of derision employed by affluent intellectuals to a more-or-less neutral name for the large, highly visible tract houses that much of the middle class aspires to. If what you really yearn for in life is an 8,000-square-foot vinyl-sided simulacrum of the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg with twin heat pumps and garaging for six cars, there are a whole lot of people who

share your taste and a corresponding number of builders who can make it happen, as a drive through most new exurban developments will confirm.

The risk and drama involved in pulling up stakes to head for suburbia are often underappreciated by those whose parents or grandparents made the transition long ago, as well as by cultural commentators who make their living on Manhattan Island. Yet the panic and disorientation that seize you when your whole life is in boxes and there’s no turning back represent some bond with the emotions of immigrant and pio-

neer ancestors. According to one survey, it takes an average of two years before the trauma of moving wears off and people feel at home again. If change in the abstract is good, as Americans are taught to believe, then uprooting yourself and your family for a new place, however humdrum and perhaps nearby, must be not only a praiseworthy act of faith in the mysterious future, but an expression of confidence that new communities can be created from scratch. After all, immigrants to America and their descendants have been doing it for more than four centuries.

Alan Wolfe, a distinguished sociologist of religion

MY GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE and garden reflected his self-creation as a fully enfranchised 20th-century American.

who has studied American values for a long time, places the epic 20th-century movement to the suburbs in judicious historical perspective: "No doubt selfish motives were involved in the lure of suburbia: a home of one's own, a desire to be seen as successful, the two-car garage. But even with all that, the choice of suburbia was a choice in favor of a particular version of morality, one that resonated with utopian versions of the good life." *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, the poet laureate of the contemporary exurbs, makes the same point even more emphatically: "Why do people uproot their families from California, New York, Ohio, and elsewhere and move into new developments in Arizona or Nevada or North Carolina, imagining their kids at high schools that haven't even been built yet, picturing themselves with new friends they haven't yet met, fantasizing about touch-football games on lawns that haven't been seeded? . . . To grasp that longing, you have to take seriously the central cliché of American life: the American dream." In what often seem to be the most mundane aspects of their daily lives, ordinary Americans really are searching for paradise.

In this respect, as in so many others, Abraham Lincoln remains the representative American. Born in a

hovel in Kentucky, he moved as a child to Indiana, where his improvident father pursued a success that never came. Every reader of American history knows the anecdote in which the ambitious but penniless young lawyer, invited by a storekeeper named Joshua Speed to share his room in the frontier village of Springfield, Illinois, set down the saddlebags that contained all he owned and announced, "Well, Speed, I'm moved." But in a fairly short time, Lincoln achieved the affluence that had eluded his father. One major result was a house, unprepossessing at first but improved and enlarged by its prospering owner, that has become a national park and a shrine for close to half a million pilgrims a year.

More than Monticello or Mount Vernon, which were built on inherited estates, Lincoln's home represents the aspirations and accomplishments of democratic America, the land where all men are said

to be created equal and a home of your own is a national promise. Lincoln's vision of paradise, hitched to an ambition his junior law partner called "a little engine that knew no rest," led him from Springfield to the White House. It led the nation to the two most important social enactments of our entire history, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Homestead Act. Both of them drastically enhanced the freedom of ordinary people to move at their own volition; both took effect the same day. Henceforth, geographic and social mobility would be even more closely intertwined.

Once upon a time, the proprietor of a James River plantation proudly informed me that his children were the 10th generation of their family to live in the same house, which an ancestor had begun constructing in 1723. Even in Tidewater Virginia so much continuous history in one place is unusual, and although the stability it represents holds a certain attraction (as did the spectacular property to which the plantation owner was heir), stasis seems somehow out of keeping with the main impulses of American life. Why bother leaving the Old World in the first place if you

then spend eternity almost at the port of arrival? Just as we admire what we interpret as the durable harmony of so-called indigenous communities but wouldn't dream of living such a life ourselves, so the most venerable American roots, on the rare occasions when we uncover them, seem like something we might at best pay a qualified tribute, then bury again.

To nearly all of us, real life, modern life, means moving on, not standing still. The Homestead Act, which settled much of the West with intrepid newcomers who traded backbreaking work for land of their own, is among the most admired pieces of legislation in the checkered history of Congress. By the same token, the most reviled Supreme Court opinion of recent years was the *Kelo* decision of 2005, in which five justices declared it constitutional for local governments (in this case the city of New London, Connecticut) to seize whole neighborhoods of modest houses through the exercise of eminent domain and turn the land over to private developers. *Kelo* was one of those rare cases in which both liberal and conservative voters found the majority decision outrageous. It left nearly everyone with a sour taste reminiscent of *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck's novel about Dust Bowl refugees, in which the rich use the law to seize the houses and land of the poor. We all know people who started from scratch and made the desert or its equivalent bloom. Most of us, in fact, are related to them.

My paternal grandfather, the first member of his family born in the New World, was prophetically named Adam and began life in a Manhattan tenement at the corner of First Street and First Avenue. As a child, he moved repeatedly up and across town while his father tried in vain to make a decent living as a porter, shoemaker, and tailor. In desperation, the family migrated for a few years to what is now Jersey City, where they truck-farmed in an apparently idyllic interlude between hardships typical of working-class life in the late 19th century. At 12 Adam dropped out of school and went to work for a druggist, then for a succession of immigrant-owned grocery businesses, moving from one run-of-the-mill apartment to another. In 1905, at the age of 25, feeling frustrated with himself and stifled by his close German-American community, he enlisted in the Seventh Cavalry.

Incongruous a landing place as the cavalry sounds for

a young man from the New York slums, the Army, then as now, was one of the most common routes to Americanization and advancement for immigrants and their children. The first thing it did for my grandfather was take him out of New York and into a more mobile, less timid America. The second was to teach him a useful trade—pharmacology. What he learned in the Army would be valuable throughout what proved to be more than a half-century in the pharmaceutical business. The civilian life he returned to a few years later was very different from the one he had left. He was not only more mature but far more familiar with life beyond the Hudson. He had learned to move. In 1910 he married my grandmother, and within a few years they had two sons, Robert and John, whose names bore no connection to the community from which their father had escaped. When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, my grandfather forbade his wife ever to speak German again at home. Meanwhile, increasing prosperity led first to a large apartment on the Upper West Side, then, when he was 40, to a house in Passaic, New Jersey, part of a post-World War I suburban development on what had been raw fields a few months earlier.

What I remember most about that modest stucco house, from visits early in my childhood, is the garden my grandfather contrived on his eighth of an acre. It was an astonishing array of neat flowerbeds, carefully balanced and bordered with an aesthetic sense that was surprising for a person of his background. Perhaps the interlude in Jersey City had left its mark, or maybe the human affinity for flowers is innate and needs only opportunity to express itself. He even remembered the birds and what a man with his experiences might easily have imagined to be their own pleasure in mobility and freedom, a utopia after their particular fashion. The dozens of brightly painted birdhouses he built over the decades became heirlooms to his children and grandchildren. My grandfather's house and garden alike reflected his self-creation as a fully enfranchised 20th-century American.

If you spend your whole life in pursuit of paradise, you must be perpetually dissatisfied with the place where you actually live, with the result that your moves are apt to be frequent and frustrating. That's the more feverish, less happy side of the American dream.

At its most extreme, such restlessness is incapable of fulfillment in this world. After some 45 days working in space, John M. Grunsfeld, a NASA employee who helps maintain the Hubble Space Telescope, declared, "I finally found a place where I feel at home. This is where I belong: in space. It was a disappointment to have to come home, even though I wanted to see my family and friends." Yet if he could have spent the rest of his life on

ican than a move to California just before you turn 80? Never mind the fact that neither he nor his wife had ever lived west of Chicago. My aunt's reluctance stood no chance at all against the compulsion that had possessed her husband for so long. Off they went once more.

For people like him, the destination seems to matter less than simply moving on—the sheer act of assuming a new identity in a new place, adapting to a new community, making friends again, searching out new stores and libraries, banks and doctors, routes and routines. Whatever there may be of utopia appears to lie in the search itself.

WHATEVER THERE MAY BE of utopia appears to lie in the search itself. Americans always believe the next place will be better.

a space shuttle, one suspects he would soon have found new reasons for dissatisfaction.

On a more earth-bound level, I had an uncle, the son of immigrants, who could never stand to live in the same location for more than a few years. His successful career in advertising and public relations allowed him to move as often as he liked—when he wanted to try out a distant city, there was always a job waiting for him. This perpetual need to be on the move drove his wife (and eventually their two children) crazy. They began married life in New York in the early 1950s. During the years when I knew them best, they successively inhabited a turn-of-the-century mansion with a carriage drive in an exurb of Cleveland, another big house in Pittsburgh, a farmhouse in the Berkshires, something similar in Bucks County, and—after my uncle retired from the last of his many jobs—an elegant antebellum house in a sunny Savannah square. But something went wrong again. The taxes were too high or there were too many tourists, or perhaps it was termites. They sold the house and moved first to an apartment, then to a modern townhouse nearer the beach.

Surely, we thought, this would be the end of it. But my uncle felt the need for one last, spectacular move. A northeastern liberal, he suddenly discovered that he found Georgia politics offensive. His son lived in San Francisco. What could be more stereotypically Amer-

Nonetheless, immigrants and natives alike, we always believe the next place will be better. Whatever happens to credit, to border enforcement, or to a family over a span of generations, the gamble works out often enough for Americans to remain the world champions of voluntary mobility and the special variety of optimism that underlies it. Even Steinbeck's migrant Joad family found some of their hopes fulfilled at the end of their epic trek across the Southwest.

Naturally, there are exceptions. Think of the most disastrous move in history, the Donner family's carefully planned relocation from Illinois to California in 1846. After taking a wrong turn in the desert, the Donners and their fellow travelers spent a brutal winter trapped in the Sierras, where the survivors avoided starvation by expedients that turned their misfortunes into one of the best-known legends of the frontier. Experiences like that would have eaten up the resolve of a less driven nation. Yet the widely publicized story of the Donner Party deterred few 19th-century Americans from setting off beyond the wide Missouri. And so it continues, whether the projected move is to the suburbs or the desert, across the street or across the country. An insatiable national urge that incompetent navigation, hostile Indians, blizzards, hunger, and even cannibalism couldn't stop is unlikely to be slowed for long by misdoings in the mortgage market. ■

The Micromagic of Microcredit

The millions of tiny loans microcredit banks make to the world's poor do not work the miracles some advocates claim. But like the Wizard of Oz, microcredit does not need to be magic to do a great deal of good.

BY KAROL BOUDREAUX AND TYLER COWEN

MICROCREDIT HAS STAR POWER. IN 2006, THE Nobel Committee called it “an important liberating force” and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Muhammad Yunus, the “godfather of microcredit.” The actress Natalie Portman is a believer too; she advocates support for the Village Banking Campaign on its MySpace page. The end of poverty is “just a mouse click away,” she promises. A button on the site swiftly redirects you to paypal.com, where you can make a contribution to microcredit initiatives.

After decades of failure, the world’s aid organizations seem to think they have at last found a winning idea. The United Nations declared 2005 the “International Year of Microcredit.” Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared that providing microloans to help poor people launch small businesses recognizes that they “are the solution, not the problem. It is a way to build on their ideas, energy, and vision. It is a way to grow productive enterprises, and so allow communities to prosper.”

Many investors agree. Hundreds of millions of dol-

lars are flowing into microfinance from international financial institutions, foundations, governments, and, most important, private investors—who increasingly see microfinance as a potentially profitable business venture. Private investment through special “microfinance investment vehicles” alone nearly doubled in 2005, from \$513 million to \$981 million.

On the charitable side, part of microcredit’s appeal lies in the fact that the lending institutions can fund themselves once they are launched. Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, explains that you can begin by investing \$60 billion in the world’s poorest people, “and then you’re done!”

But can microcredit achieve the massive changes its proponents claim? Is it the solution to poverty in the developing world, or something more modest—a way to empower the poor, particularly poor women, with some control over their lives and their assets?

On trips to Africa and India we have talked to lenders, borrowers, and other poor people to try to understand the role microcredit plays in their lives. We met people like Stadile Menthe in Botswana. Menthe is, in many ways, the classic borrower. A single mother

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with little formal education, she borrowed money to expand the small grocery store she runs on a dusty road on the outskirts of Botswana's capital city, Gaborone. Menthe's store has done well, and she has expanded into the lucrative business of selling phone cards. In fact, she's been successful enough that she has built two rental homes next to her store. She has diversified her

90 percent in Asia to less than a third in the Middle East.

While 70 percent of microcredit borrowers are in Asia, the institution has spread around the world; Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa account for 14 and 10 percent of the number of borrowers, respectively. Some of the biggest microfinance institutions include Grameen Bank, ACCION International, and Pro Mujer of Bolivia.

The average loan size varies, usually in proportion to the income level of the home country. In Rwanda, a typical loan might be \$50 to \$200; in Romania, it is more likely to be \$2,500 to \$5,000. Often there is no explicit collateral. Instead, the banks lend to small groups of about five people,

THERE'S A PUZZLE at the heart of micro-credit: How can people in new businesses growing at 20 percent annually afford to pay interest rates as high as 100 percent?

income and made a better life for herself and her daughter. But how many borrowers are like Menthe? In our judgment, she is the exception, not the norm. Yes, microcredit is mostly a good thing. Very often it helps keep borrowers from even greater catastrophes, but only rarely does it enable them to climb out of poverty.

The modern story of microcredit began 30 years ago, when Yunus—then an economics professor at Chittagong University in southeastern Bangladesh—set out to apply his theories to improving the lives of the poor in the nearby village of Jobra. He began in 1976 by lending \$27 to a group of 42 villagers, who used the money to develop informal businesses, such as making soap or weaving baskets to sell at the local market. After the success of the first experiment, Yunus founded Grameen Bank. Today, the bank claims more than five million “members” and a loan repayment rate of 98 percent. It has lent out some \$6.5 billion.

At the outset, Yunus set a goal that half of the borrowers would be women. He explained, “The banking system not only rejects poor people, it rejects women. . . . Not even one percent of their borrowers are women.” He soon discovered that women were good credit risks, and good at managing family finances. Today, more than 95 percent of Grameen Bank's borrowers are women. The UN estimates that women make up 76 percent of microcredit customers around the world, varying from nearly

relying on peer pressure for repayment. At mandatory weekly meetings, if one borrower cannot make her payment, the rest of the group must come up with the cash.

The achievements of microcredit, however, are not quite what they seem. There is, for example, a puzzling fact at the heart of the enterprise. Most microcredit banks charge interest rates of 50 to 100 percent on an annualized basis (loans, typically, must be paid off within weeks or months). That's not as scandalous as it sounds—local moneylenders demand much higher rates. The puzzle is a matter of basic economics: How can people in new businesses growing at perhaps 20 percent annually afford to pay interest at rates as high as 100 percent?

The answer is that, for the most part, they can't. By and large, the loans serve more modest ends—laudable, but not world changing.

Microcredit does not always lead to the creation of small businesses. Many microlenders refuse to lend money for start-ups; they insist that a business already be in place. This suggests that the business was sustainable to begin with, without a microloan. Sometimes lenders help businesses to grow, but often what they really finance is spending and consumption.

That is not to say that the poor are out shopping for jewelry and fancy clothes. In Hyderabad, India, as in many other places, we saw that loans are often used to pay for a child's doctor visit. In the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam, Joel Mwakitalu, who runs the Small Enterprise Foundation, a local microlender, told us that 60 percent of his loans are used to send kids to school; 40 percent are for investments. A study of microcredit in Indonesia found that 30 percent of the borrowed money was spent on some form of consumption.

Sometimes consumption and investment are one and the same, such as when parents send their children to school. Indian borrowers often buy mopeds and motorbikes—they are fun to ride but also a way of getting to work. Cell phones are used to call friends but also to run businesses.

For better or worse, microborrowing often entails a kind of bait and switch. The borrower claims that the money is for a business, but uses it for other purposes. In effect, the cash allows a poor entrepreneur to maintain her business without having to sacrifice the life or education of her child. In that sense, the money is for the business, but most of all it is for the child. Such life-saving uses for the funds are obviously desirable, but it is also a sad reality that many microcredit loans help borrowers to survive or tread water more than they help them get ahead. This sounds unglamorous and even disappointing, but the alternative—such as no doctor's visit for a child or no school for a year—is much worse.



Bangladesh's Grameen Bank lends small amounts of money to groups of poor borrowers, who, like these women, attend weekly meetings where they repay their loans. If one cannot pay, the others make up the difference.

Commentators often seem to assume that the experience of borrowing and lending is completely new for the poor. But moneylenders have offered money to the world's poor for millennia, albeit at extortionate rates of interest. A typical moneylender is a single individual, well-known in his neighborhood or village, who borrows money from his wealthier connections and in turn lends those funds to individuals in need, typically people he knows personally. But that personal connection is rarely good for a break; a moneylender may charge 200 to 400 percent interest on an annualized basis. He will insist on collateral (a television, for instance), and resort to intimidation and some-

times violence if he is not repaid on time. The moneylender operates informally, off the books, and usually outside the law.

So compared to the alternative, microcredit is often a very good deal indeed. Microcredit critics often miss this point. For instance, Aneel Karnani, who teaches at the University of Michigan's business school, argues that microfinance "misses its mark." Karnani says that in some cases microcredit can make

IF YOUR SAVINGS ARE INVESTED in a cow, relatives can't ask for a small piece of it.

life for the planet's bottom billion even worse by reducing their cash flow. Karnani cites the high interest rates that microlenders charge and points out that "if poor clients cannot earn a greater return on their investment than the interest they must pay, they will become poorer as a result of microcredit, not wealthier." But the real question has never been credit vs. no credit; rather, it is moneylender vs. modern microcredit. Credit can bring some problems, but microcredit is easing debt burdens more than it is increasing them.

At microlender SERO Lease and Finance in Tanzania, borrower Margaret Makingi Marwa told us that she prefers working with a microfinance institution to working with a moneylender. Moneylenders demand quick repayment at high interest rates. At SERO, Marwa can take six months or a year to pay off her lease contract. Given that her income can vary and that she may not have money at hand every month, she prefers to have a longer-term loan.

Moneylenders do offer some advantages, especially in rural areas. Most important, they come up with cash on the spot. If your child needs to go to the doctor right now, the moneylender is usually only a short walk away. Even under the best of circumstances, a microcredit loan can take several days to process, and the recipient will be required to deal with many documents, not to mention weekly meetings.

There is, however, an upside to this "bureaucracy." In reality, it is the moneylender who is the "micro" operator. Microcredit is a more formal, institutionalized business relationship. It represents a move up toward a larger scale of trade and business organization. Microcredit borrowers gain valuable experience in working within a formal institution. They learn what to expect from lenders and fellow borrowers, and they learn what is expected of themselves. This experience

will be a help should they ever graduate to commercial credit or have other dealings with the formal financial world.

The comparison to moneylending brings up another important feature

of microcredit. Though its users avoid the kind of intimidation employed by moneylenders, microcredit could not work without similar incentives. The lender does not demand collateral, but if you can't pay your share of the group loan, your fellow borrowers will come and take your TV. That enforcement process can lead to abuses, but it is a gentler form of intimidation than is exercised by the moneylender. If nothing else, the group members know that at the next meeting any one of them might be the one unable to repay her share of the loan.

If borrowers are using microcredit for consumption and not only to improve a small business, how do they repay? Most borrowers are self-employed and work in the informal sector of the economy. Their incomes are often erratic; small, unexpected expenses can make repayment impossible in any given week or month. In the countryside, farmers have seasonal incomes and little cash for long periods of time.

Borrowers manage, at least in part, by relying on family members and friends to help out. In some cases, the help comes in the form of remittances from abroad. Remittances that cross national borders now total more than \$300 billion yearly. A recent study in Tanzania found that microcredit borrowers get 34 percent of their income from friends and family, some of whom live abroad, but others of whom live in the city and have jobs in the formal sector. That's the most effective kind of foreign aid, targeted directly at

the poor and provided by those who understand their needs.

Here again, microcredit does something that traditional banks do not. A commercial bank typically will not lend to people who work in the informal sector, precisely because their erratic incomes make them risky bets. The loan officer at a commercial bank does not care that your brother in Doha is sending money each month to help you out. But a microcredit institution cares only that you come to your weekly meeting with a small sum in hand for repayment. Because of microcredit, families can leverage one person's ability to find work elsewhere to benefit the entire group.

Sometimes microcredit leads to more savings rather than more debt. That sounds paradoxical, but borrowing in one asset can be a path toward (more efficient) saving in other assets.

To better understand this puzzle, we must set aside some of our preconceptions about how saving operates in poor countries, most of all in rural areas. Westerners typically save in the form of money or money-denominated assets such as stocks and bonds. But in poor communities, money is often an ineffective medium for savings; if you want to know how much net saving is going on, don't look at money. Banks may be a daylong bus ride away or may be plagued, as in Ghana, by fraud. A cash hoard kept at home can be lost, stolen, taken by the taxman, damaged by floods, or even eaten by rats. It creates other kinds of problems as well. Needy friends and relatives knock on the door and ask for aid. In small communities it is often very hard, even impossible, to say no, especially if you have the cash on hand.

People who have even extremely modest wealth are also asked to perform more community service, or to pay more to finance community rituals and festivals. In rural Guerrero State, in Mexico, for example, one of us (Cowen) found that most people who saved cash did not manage to hold on to it for more than a few weeks or even days. A dollar saved translates into perhaps a quarter of that wealth kept. It is as if cash savings faces an implicit "tax rate" of 75 percent.

Under these kinds of conditions, a cow (or a goat or pig) is a much better medium for saving. It is sturdier than paper money. Friends and relatives can't ask for small pieces of it. If you own a cow, it yields milk, it can

plow the fields, it produces dung that can be used as fuel or fertilizer, and in a pinch it can be slaughtered and turned into saleable meat or simply eaten. With a small loan, people in rural areas can buy that cow and use cash that might otherwise be diverted to less useful purposes to pay back the microcredit institution. So even when microcredit looks like indebtedness, savings are going up rather than down.

Microcredit *is* making people's lives better around the world. But for the most part, it is not pulling them out of poverty. It is hard to find entrepreneurs who start with these tiny loans and graduate to run commercial empires. Bangladesh, where Grameen Bank was born, is still a desperately poor country. The more modest truth is that microcredit may help some people, perhaps earning \$2 a day, to earn something like \$2.50 a day. That may not sound dramatic, but when you are earning \$2 a day it is a big step forward. And progress is not the natural state of humankind; microcredit is important even when it does nothing more than stave off decline.

With microcredit, life becomes more bearable and easier to manage. The improvements may not show up as an explicit return on investment, but the benefits are very real. If a poor family is able to keep a child in school, send someone to a clinic, or build up more secure savings, its well-being improves, if only marginally. This is a big part of the reason why poor people are demanding greater access to microcredit loans. And microcredit, unlike many charitable services, is capable of paying for itself—which explains why the private sector is increasingly involved. The future of microcredit lies in the commercial sector, not in unsustainable aid programs. Count this as another benefit.

If this portrait sounds a little underwhelming, don't blame microcredit. The real issue is that we so often underestimate the severity and inertia of global poverty. Natalie Portman may not be right when she says that an end to poverty is "just a mouse click away," but she's right to be supportive of a tool that helps soften some of poverty's worst blows for many millions of desperate people. ■

THE BRAIN: A Mindless Obsession

Despite stunning advances in neuroscience and bold claims of revelations from new brain-scan technologies, our knowledge about the brain's role in human behavior is still primitive.

BY CHARLES BARBER

A TEAM OF AMERICAN RESEARCHERS ATTRACTED national attention last year when they announced results of a study that, they said, reveal key factors that will influence how swing voters cast their ballots in the upcoming presidential election. The researchers didn't gain these miraculous insights by polling their subjects. They scanned their brains. There was just the latest in a lengthening skein of studies that use new brain-scan technology to plumb the mysteries of the American political mind. But politics is just the beginning. It's hard to pick up a newspaper without reading some newly minted neuroscientific explanation for complex human phenomena, from schizophrenia to substance abuse to homosexuality.

The new neuroscience has emerged from the last two decades of formidable progress in brain science, psychopharmacology, and brain imaging, bringing together research related to the human nervous system in fields as diverse as genetics and computer science. It has flowed into one of the hottest fields in academia, where

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almost anything “neuro” now generates excitement, along with neologisms—neuroeconomics, neurophilosophy, neuromarketing. The torrent of money flowing into the field can only be described in superlatives—hundreds of millions of dollars for efforts such as Princeton's Center for the Study of Brain, Mind, and Behavior and MIT's McGovern Institute for Brain Research.

Psychiatrists have been in the forefront of the transformation, eagerly shrugging off the vestiges of “talk therapy” for the bold new paradigms of neuroscience. By the late 1980s, academic psychiatrists were beginning literally to reinvent parts of the discipline, hanging out new signs saying Department of Neuropsychiatry in some medical schools. A similar transformation has occurred in academic psychology.

A layperson leafing through a mainstream psychiatric journal today might easily conclude that biologists had taken over the profession. “Acute Stress and Nicotine Cues Interact to Unveil Locomotor Arousal and Activity-Dependent Gene Expression in the Prefrontal Cortex” is the title of a typical offering. The field has so thoroughly cast its lot with biology, and with the biology induced by psychoactive drugs, that psychiatrists can hardly hope to publish in one of the mainstream



Brain imaging can reveal key structures of this 42-year-old woman's brain, but the ability to read (and heal) minds remains a distant prospect.

journals if their article tells the story of an individual patient, or includes any personal thoughts or feelings about the people or the work that patient was engaged with, or fails to include a large dose of statistical data. Psychiatry used to be all theories, urges, and ids. Now it's all genes, receptors, and neurotransmitters.

As a result of these changes, the field, once seen as the province of woolly-headed eccentrics, has gained a

new public image. Psychiatry is now seen as a solid branch of medicine, a bona fide science built on white-coated certitude. It has joined Big Science. The completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003 contributed to the growing popular belief that psychiatric disorders proceed in neat Mendelian inheritable patterns, and that psychiatrists are starting to methodically unlock these patterns' mysteries. But if anything

has been gleaned from the last two decades of work in the genetics of psychiatric disorders, it is that the origins of these maladies are terribly complex. No individual gene for a psychiatric disorder has been found, and none likely will ever be. Psychiatric disorders are almost certainly the product of an infinitely complex dialogue between genes and the environment.

Nevertheless, earlier paradigms in academic psychology and psychiatry—"soft" disciplines such as old-fashioned psychoanalysis and behaviorism and psychotherapy—have been chucked aside like so many rotting vegetables. Ironically, this shift—which is terribly premature—is occurring even as psychotherapy is rapidly improving. Psychiatry used to be brainless, it's said by some in the field, and now it's mindless.

Sea changes such as the advent of biopsychiatry are not unusual in the history of American psychiatry. In fact, they have been common. One paradigm replaces another, and each one is embraced with certainty and passion. Only in hindsight are the revolutions questioned and discredited.

Fifty years ago, psychoanalysis enjoyed the same prestige and influence that biopsychiatry does today. In 1959, during the heyday of psychoanalysis, the sociologist Philip Rieff observed that "in America today, Freud's intellectual influence is greater than that of any other modern thinker. He presides over the mass media, the college classroom, the chatter at parties, the playgrounds of the middle classes." The literary critic Lionel Trilling, in 1947, called Freud's thought "the only systematic account of the human mind, which, in point of subtlety and complexity, of interest and tragic power, deserves to stand beside the chaotic mass of psychological insights which literature has accumulated through the centuries." Today, of course, psychoanalysis is largely a cultural afterthought for all but a few wealthy acolytes.

The history of American psychiatry can be divided into three overlapping eras: Asylum Psychiatry, Community Psychiatry, and today's Corporate Psychiatry. In its improbable odyssey, psychiatry has gone from the back wards of hospitals to the boardrooms of corporations, from invisible to virtually omnipresent. As the psychiatrist and author Jonathan Metzl has pointed out, for its first century at least, psy-

chiatry dealt with what were considered obscure mental processes and was conducted in the shadows. Now it is everywhere—in the movies, in advertisements, on television shows, and, most significantly, in our bloodstreams.

Asylum Psychiatry was born around the beginning of the 19th century with the founding of a number of institutions for the mentally ill, such as Maryland's Spring Grove State Hospital. By 1904 there were 150,000 patients in U.S. psychiatric hospitals, and by midcentury the asylum population peaked at more than a million. Asylum Psychiatry followed two tracks—one perfectly well intentioned and generally benign, the other horrific. The initial impetus was to provide retreats, often in sylvan settings, where, in the absence of any actual evidence-based treatments, patients could at least be left alone in a tranquil setting. But there was an equally long tradition in the asylums of providing (or imposing) the most wretched treatments imaginable. What Daniel Defoe wrote in 1728 has been echoed many times since: "If they are not mad when they go to these cursed Houses, they are soon made so by barbarous Usage they there suffer. . . . Is it not enough to make anyone mad to be suddenly clap'd up, stripp'd, whipp'd, ill fed and worse. . . ?"

In his 1948 book *The Shame of the States*, journalist Albert Deutsch compared state mental hospitals with Nazi concentration camps, their "buildings swarming with naked humans herded like cattle and treated with less concern, pervaded by a fetid odor so heavy, so nauseating, that the stench seemed to have almost a physical existence of its own." Not uncommonly, patients were sterilized so as to permanently halt the moral contagion of their illness. Editorials in *The New York Times* and *The New England Journal of Medicine* endorsed the practice. By 1945 some 45,000 Americans had been sterilized, almost half of them psychiatric patients in state facilities.

In 1916, Dr. Henry Cotton of Trenton State Hospital, believing that germs from tooth decay led to insanity, removed patient's teeth and other body parts, such as the bowels, which he thought might be the causes of their madness. He killed almost half the patients who received his "thorough" treatment, more than 100 people. Cotton's practices were covered up by the hospital board and the leading figure in American psychiatry of the day, Adolf Meyer, and Cotton was allowed to continue practicing at

the hospital for nearly 20 more years. In a eulogy for Cotton in 1933, Meyer lauded his “extraordinary record of achievement.”

Two years later, the Portuguese neurologist Egas Moniz performed the first lobotomy, or what he called a “leucotomy” (white cut). Moniz had failed to win a Nobel Prize for his earlier brain research and was eager to make a splash. After hearing a lecture in which the speaker conjectured that the pre-frontal cortex was the site of psychopathology, he decided to try out a method of destroying that part of the brain in his patients. One of the brutalized subjects of these experiments repaid Moniz in 1939 by shooting him, leaving him partially paralyzed. Nonetheless, Moniz’s efforts were rewarded with the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1949.

The American champion of the lobotomy, Walter Freeman, roamed the country as a veritable Johnny Appleseed of the technique, to which he added his own refinements, which amounted to jamming an ice pick through the patient’s eye sockets and destroying the frontal lobes. A successful operation, in Freeman’s view, was one in which the patient became adjusted at “the level of a domestic invalid or household pet.” Between 1935 and 1950 some 20,000 American psychiatric patients were subjected to lobotomies, or, as the procedure was more gently called, “psychosurgery.”

What finally ended the lobotomy era was not any newfound compassion or enlightenment, but the emergence of antipsychotic drugs that made psychosurgery “redundant.” The groundwork of the new Community Psychiatry had been laid when the psychiatric profession



A patient under restraint in 1946, when America's asylum population was near its peak of more than a million.

took its first, tentative steps from universities and hospitals into office practice between the world wars, led by émigré European psychoanalysts who established themselves in prestigious private practices, mainly in the big cities of the East. Especially after World War II, American-born psychiatrists rapidly abandoned their bases in universities and hospitals for private practice in order to serve the cash-carrying middle and upper classes. (Psychiatrists are medical doctors with a specialization in psychiatry; psychoanalysts may have either an M.D. or, thanks to relatively recent rule changes, a Ph.D., in addition to psychoanalytic training.) By 1955, more than 80 percent of American psychiatrists were

working in private practice. At the time, neither group was very large—there were only 1,400 psychoanalysts in the world in 1957, and a somewhat larger number of psychiatrists in the United States alone. (Today, there are some 45,000 psychiatrists and more than 3,500 psychoanalysts in the United States.) But the influence of the two groups was profound, greatly amplified by legions of social workers, assorted therapists, and popular culture (see sidebar on page 38).

As with Asylum Psychiatry, there have been two prongs of Community Psychiatry. One has proved a great success, the other a national disgrace. For the “worried well,” the 1960s through the ‘90s saw an explosion in the number of non-psychiatrist therapists (social

THERAPISTS TREATED an ever-expanding proportion of the population: By the early 1980s, one in 10 Americans was being treated for mental problems.

workers, clinical psychologists, addiction counselors), who have treated an ever-expanding proportion of the population. By the early 1980s, one in 10 Americans was being treated for mental problems.

Community Psychiatry for the seriously mentally ill began with the introduction of Thorazine in the 1950s, which led relatively quickly to the mass depopulation of the asylums. At first, “deinstitutionalization” was thought to be a wonderful thing. By giving their patients a medication that appeared to work and then sending them on their way, biologically minded psychiatrists thought they were setting patients free. Those with an activist bent saw the release of patients into the community as an act of liberation from the oppressive institutions and hierarchies of medical care. State governments were only too happy to divest themselves of the bad karma and expense of massive networks of long-term care facilities.

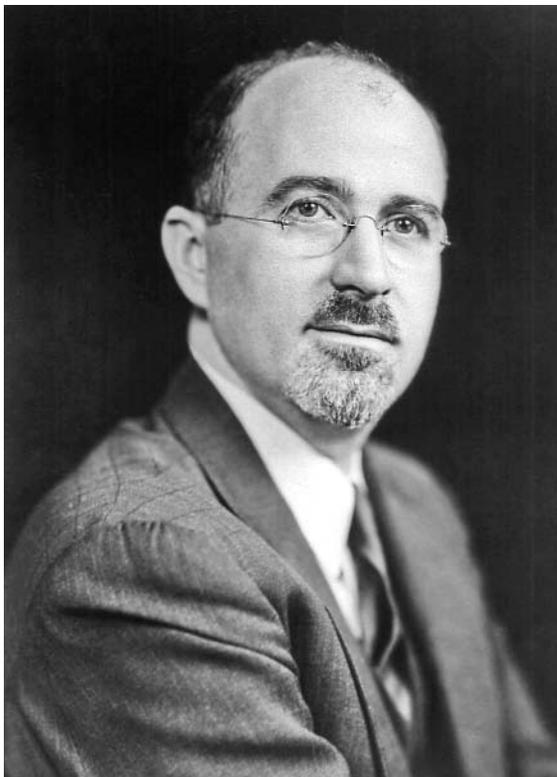
For all the high expectations and lofty rhetoric, the reality was that the effectiveness of the drugs was overestimated and the necessity of appropriate community sup-

port for patients was underestimated or ignored. The goal of John F. Kennedy’s 1963 Community Mental Health Act to create a national network of outpatient clinics proved too ambitious. The clinics that were opened were quickly co-opted for therapy sessions for the middle-class worried well, and funding withered during the prosecution of the Vietnam War. Kennedy’s death, too, certainly played a part. He was an early advocate of community treatment, influenced no doubt by the experience of his sister Rosemary, who was developmentally disabled and mentally ill, and who herself had been subjected to a lobotomy.

Eventually there was simply no place for patients to go but the parks, the bus stations, the public libraries, the emergency rooms, and the homeless shelters. Deinstitutionalization coincided with the arrival of AIDS and the emergence of crack cocaine in the early 1980s, and the numbers of the homeless mentally ill rose dramatically across the country.

Today, state hospitals house only about five percent as many patients as they did at their peak. Community Psychiatry is being eroded by managed care and the national obsession with psychiatric medications instead of therapy. The new, biologically driven Corporate Psychiatry, with its blockbuster products and its hi-tech glow, is where the juice is now.

And today’s psychiatry really is corporate. A large proportion, arguably the largest portion, of the major pharmaceutical companies’ extraordinary profits in recent decades has come from psychiatric drugs. The medical historian Carl Elliott has written that antidepressants were one of the most profitable products in the most profitable industry in the world over the course of the 1990s. The first tremors of Corporate Psychiatry were felt in the late 1960s and the ‘70s, when Valium became the top-selling drug in America, and the earthquake began in 1988 with the introduction of Prozac, which eventually became one of the best-selling drugs in history. Antidepressants are now the sixth-best-selling category of drugs in the world, and antipsychotics the seventh. By 2002, more than 11 percent



Walter Freeman, the American champion of lobotomies, aimed to leave his patients adjusted at “the level of a domestic invalid or household pet.”

of American women and five percent of American men were taking antidepressants, or about 25 million people. And the use of antidepressants, despite bad press and black-box warnings indicating the resultant risk of suicidal thoughts in young people, has only increased in recent years. Counting the multiple and serial prescriptions often issued to patients, along with renewals, some 227 million antidepressant prescriptions were dispensed in the United States in 2006.

Two developments were at the heart of the revolution that has brought us the biologically based Corporate Psychiatry—the discovery of drugs that actually work, at least for some people, and the rise of brain imaging.

Thorazine was the first drug to work. Its invention has been called one of the seminal events in human history, and it was the beginning of the revolution in psychiatry, comparable in its importance to the introduction of penicillin in general medicine. Like many other significant drugs, it was discovered by accident, and when it worked, no one had any idea why. In 1952, Henri Laborit, a French

surgeon, was looking for a way to reduce surgical shock in patients. Much of the shock came from anesthesia; Laborit reasoned that if he could use less anesthetic, patients could recover more quickly. Casting about for a solution, he tried Thorazine, a shelved medication that had been developed to fight allergies. Laborit noticed an immediate change in his patients’ mental state. They became relaxed and seemingly indifferent to the surgery awaiting them. Laborit thought Thorazine might be helpful to psychiatric patients, but at that time “no one in their right mind in psychiatry was working with drugs. You used shock or various psychotherapies,” says psychiatrist Heinz Lehmann, Thorazine’s first champion in North America.

The psychiatrist Pierre Deniker heard about Thorazine from his brother-in-law, a colleague of Laborit’s, and Deniker tried it on his most agitated, uncontrollable patients in the recesses of a Parisian psychiatric hospital. This was a startlingly novel idea. “Those cases were in the back wards and that was it. The notion you could ever do anything about [them] had never occurred to anyone,” said John Young, an executive at the drug company that later bought the rights to Thorazine (and first put it on the market as an anti-vomiting treatment). Another French doctor, Jean Perrin, gave Thorazine to a barber from Lyon who had been hospitalized for years and was unresponsive to any intervention. The barber promptly awoke and declared that he knew who and where he was, and that he wanted to go home and get back to work. Perrin hid his shock and asked the patient to give him a shave, which he did, perfectly. Another patient, suffering from catatonic schizophrenia, had been frozen in various postures for years. He responded to the drug in one day. Within 24 hours, he was greeting the staff by name and asking for billiard balls to juggle.

After Deniker and others got over their initial shock and enthusiasm, it became clearer what antipsychotic drugs can do—and what they can’t. In no fashion do they cure the illness, but for many, if not most, people with psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, they do help to make the condition eminently more tolerable. In many cases the medications, quite literally, lower the volume. Many patients have told me that the drugs dampen the volume of the voices that plague them, reducing the screams and rants to faint echoes, and occasionally drowning them out entirely. Psychiatrists compare the way in which such drugs help, when they are effective, to how insulin works for people with diabetes: Although far from being a cure, they do help the

majority of patients manage, and allow them, for the most part, to function, or function better. Or, as *Scientific American* more clinically put it, “Antipsychotics stop all symptoms in only about 20 percent of patients. . . . Two-thirds gain

some relief from antipsychotics yet remain symptomatic . . . and the remainder show no significant response.”

What also became evident over time were the incredibly harsh side effects of the first antipsychotics: involuntary

How Freud Conquered America, Then Lost It

PSYCHOANALYSIS WAS INTRODUCED to the United States in 1909 when Sigmund Freud (accompanied by Carl Jung) delivered a famous lecture at Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts, but its influence grew fairly slowly for the next three decades. Bizarrely, it was World War II that brought psychiatry, and more specifically, psychoanalysis, into the mainstream of American culture.

During the war, for the first time in any national conflict, all recruits and draftees were screened by psychiatrists and physicians for their mental fitness. An astounding number of men—at least 1.1 million and perhaps as many as 1.8 million of the 15 million men evaluated—were rejected because of psychiatric and neurological problems. The war then produced an unprecedented stream of new patients for psychiatry: an endless supply of, to use the euphemism of the day, “battle fatigued” soldiers suffering from guilt, anxiety, and terrifying flashbacks. There were 1.1 million admissions for psychiatric disorders in military hospitals over the course of the war.

There was no coherent system of care to treat this unprecedented amount of anguish other than psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic practices and concepts were directly infused into mil-

itary policy beginning in 1943, when William C. Menninger, an outspoken and articulate member of the Topeka Psychoanalytic Society, was appointed chief military psychiatrist. His ability to act as psychiatry’s salesman, both during and after the war, was helped immeasurably by his hyper-normal, squeaky-clean, Chamber of Commerce image. Within two years, Menninger assertively brought psychiatry into the mainstream of military life.

In 1944, he issued a bulletin for Army physicians, “Neuropsychiatry for the General Medical Officer,” in which the role of the subconscious in symptoms was explained, as well as the influence of infancy and childhood on adult character. Menninger’s recommended treatment methods for war neurosis included hypnosis and psychoanalytic therapy. In 1945, Menninger introduced an entirely new diagnostic nomenclature for the field. He created new categories specifically geared to incorporate the war experience, such as “transient personality reactions to acute and special stress,” which included “combat exhaustion” and “acute situational maladjustment” as diagnoses. The section on neurosis was lifted directly from Freud, with sections on repression, conversion (the expression of psychological distress as physical complaints), and

displacement (the shifting of emotions from the original object to a more acceptable substitute). Menninger’s taxonomy had influence far beyond the war, becoming the basis for the American Psychiatric Association’s first diagnostic manual in 1952, the direct predecessor of today’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals.

The war also saw the advent of new treatment techniques. Group therapy was invented by beleaguered and overwhelmed medical staff, and it showed great promise for soldiers suffering from what we would now call post-traumatic stress disorder. It has been suggested that one of the reasons that group therapy worked so well is that it broke down the hierarchies of military life and the prewar social structure. Medical staff rarely wore white coats, and patients and staff referred to one another by their first names.

The experience and trauma of war bolstered belief in the environmental causes of mental illness. Genetic and hereditary explanations lost substantial ground in the face of the demonstrable evidence of the damage that experience could do.

In the optimistic glow immediately following the war, Americans really did believe that psychoanalysis could help make the world a better place. In 1945,

muscle movements, endless pacing (or the “Thorazine shuffle,” as it became known), and, for some, a horrible restlessness, the feeling of needing to crawl out of one’s skin. Later antipsychotics, though they generally have a better

side-effect profile, still can lead to major problems, such as massive weight gain and high cholesterol. Patients vote with their feet on the tradeoff between the positive and negative effects of these drugs. In a massive “real world” study

Menninger could write that “psychiatry, for better or worse, is receiving a tremendously increased interest. This is manifest on all sides by articles in magazines, in the newspapers, frequent references to psychiatry and psychiatric problems on the radio and in the movies.” Shortly thereafter, the central dilemma of the psychoanalyst was identified in the journal *Daedalus*: There weren’t enough of them to be everywhere at once. It was seriously argued that if only statesmen were to go through psychoanalysis there would be no more wars, and articles in psychiatric journals pondered the psychoanalytic implications of President John F. Kennedy’s death for the nation.

How soon, and how easily, it would all crumble away.

It is fashionable now in academic psychiatry to condemn the fancies of the last century. “All sciences have to pass through an ordeal by quackery,” wrote the psychologist Hans Eysenck. “Chemistry had to slough off the fetters of alchemy. The brain sciences had to disengage themselves from the tenets of phrenology. . . . Psy-

chology and psychiatry too will have to abandon the pseudo-science of psychoanalysis . . . and undertake the arduous task of transforming their disciplines into a genuine science.”

evolutionary biologists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, psychophysicists, linguists, computer scientists—you name it. . . . The odd thing is that everyone but its practitioners

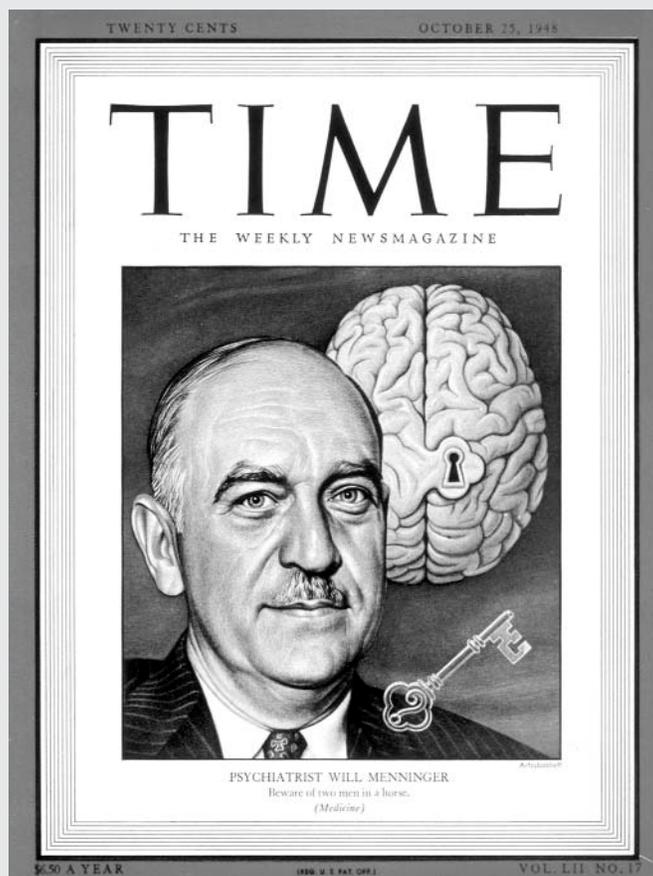
knows about the death of psychology.”

Ironically, Freud essentially predicted what would happen—that is, he predicted his own death. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1924), he wrote about psychoanalysis: “The deficiencies in our description would probably vanish if we were already in a position to replace the psychological terms with physiological or chemical ones. We may expect [biology] to give the most surprising information and we cannot guess what answers it will return in a few dozen years of questions we have put to it. They may be of a kind that will blow away the

whole of our artificial structure of hypothesis.”

Freud, it turns out, still has at least one lesson for today’s biopsychiatry enthusiasts: humility.

—Charles Barber



“In no other field of medical knowledge does the average man know so many things that ain’t so,” *Time* said of psychiatry in a 1948 cover story on William Menninger.

“Psychology itself is dead,” writes Michael Gazzaniga, a prominent neuroscientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in *The Mind’s Past* (1998). “Today the mind sciences are the province of

published in 2006, three-quarters of those given antipsychotic drugs stopped taking them by the end of the study's 18 months.

Almost as soon as Thorazine became available, psychiatric hospitals in the United States gave it to nearly all their patients, and it was widely prescribed for various uses outside hospital walls. From 1954, when Thorazine was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, through 1964, 50 million people took the drug.

If Thorazine started the revolution in psychiatry, brain imaging finished it. While brain imaging has its origins with computerized tomography (CT) in the 1960s, its most spectacular contributions have occurred in the past 15 years.

ALMOST AS SOON as Thorazine became available, psychiatric hospitals in the United States gave it to nearly all their patients.

Even when CT scans did reveal startling images in the 1970s, the results were received with doubt. A landmark 1976 study that showed that the brains of people with schizophrenia had much larger ventricles than “normals” did was met with skepticism, as schizophrenia was assumed to be a psychological disease.

As George H. W. Bush's 1990 presidential proclamation announcing “The Decade of the Brain” explained, three things happened simultaneously in the 1980s that set up the miraculous pictures to come: Technologies such as positron-emission tomography (PET) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) allowed researchers, for the first time, to observe the living brain; computer technology reached a level of power and sophistication sufficient to handle neuroscience data in a manner that reflected actual brain function; and discoveries at the molecular and cellular levels of the brain shed greater light on how neurophysiological events translate into behavior, thought, and emotion.

The first brain-imaging technologies, CT scans and MRI, could image brain *structure*: what the brain would look like if you could take it out of the skull and place it on a table. MRI had the advantage of producing better-quality images without requiring the use of ionizing radiation in

the brain, as CT scans do. The resolution of MRI is superb—it yields “slices” of brain that look like they were obtained in a postmortem pathology lab. PET and SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography) scans, which came later, provide an image of brain activity—or *function*, by measuring blood flow in the brain as a reflection of brain activity. PET actually shows how neuroreceptors live in the brain—allowing one to see the distribution and number of receptors in particular areas of the brain, the concentration of neurotransmitters at the synapse, and the affinity of a receptor for a particular drug. PET specifically measures glucose metabolism, an indicator of which parts of the brain are using the most energy, which allows neuroscientists to

undertake the process of mapping the neural basis of thought and emotion in the living brain.

The most spectacular technology of all, fMRI—or functional magnetic resonance imaging—burst on the scene in the early 1990s.

Unique in that it is able to

provide images of both structure and function, fMRI produces not just slices of the brain but what are, in effect, extremely high-resolution movies of what the brain looks like when it is working. By measuring blood flow, which is an indicator of brain activity, fMRI reveals which parts of the brain are being used most actively during a given task. That permits observation of the brain while it is actually functioning as a mind—thinking, remembering, seeing, hearing, imagining, experiencing pleasure or pain.

Unlike earlier technologies, fMRI requires a very short total scan time (one to two minutes), and it is entirely non-invasive and extraordinarily comprehensive: It can measure brain responses at 100,000 locations. Of the wonders of brain imaging, and in particular fMRI, the leading neuropsychologist Steven Pinker has written exuberantly, “Every facet of mind, from mental images to the moral sense, from mundane memories to acts of genius, has been tied to tracts of neural real estate. Using fMRI . . . scientists can tell whether the owner of the brain is imagining a face or a place. They can knock out a gene and prevent a mouse from learning, or insert extra copies and make it learn better.”

While the sudden visibility of the brain is indeed remarkable, the greater significance is perhaps more symbolic.

Brain images are still far cruder than one would think after reading the sensational revelations attributed to them in the science pages of newspapers and magazines. And it must be remembered that these are *secondary* images of blood flow and glucose in the brain, and not of brain tissue itself. We seem to forget that it is not as if a camera were entering the brain and taking pictures of what is going on. At this point, the most that can be said is that brain imaging indirectly and very broadly measures the activity of groups of thousands of neurons when the brain is engaged in a physical or mental task. While there are some correlations between brain activity in certain regions and external, observable behavior, it is very hard to gauge what the pictures really mean. How does the flow of blood in parts of the brain correspond to feelings, moods, opinions, emotions, imagination? It remains a daunting task to create theories to “operationalize” what is going on underneath all the pretty pictures.

The state of the art right now is that we can read brains—to some very crude extent—but we can’t even begin to read minds. *Wall Street Journal* science writer Sharon Begley has coined the term “cognitive paparazzi” to describe those who claim they can. “What does neuroscience know about how the brain makes decisions? Basically nothing,” says Michael Gazzaniga, director of the SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Another limitation of contemporary neuroscience, Gazzaniga says, is that many brain imaging studies are based on averages of the scans of many patients. “The problem is if you go back to the individual scans, you will see wide variation in the part of the brain that’s activated.” And if you were to do the same scans of the same activity a year later, you might get quite different results.

Patients with anxiety often have pain



Thorazine® brand of chlorpromazine helps relieve anxiety, reduces reaction to pain

with LM, administration: epinephrine effects may be reversed; dermatological reactions; parkinsonism-like symptoms on high dosage (in rare instances, may persist); weight gain; miosis; lactation and moderate breast engorgement (in females on high dosages); and less frequently cholestatic jaundice. Side effects occurring rarely include: mydriasis; agranulocytosis; skin pigmentation, lenticular and corneal deposits (after prolonged substantial dosages).

For a comprehensive presentation of 'Thorazine' prescribing information and side effects reported with phenothiazine derivatives, please refer to SK&F literature or PDR.

 Smith Kline & French Laboratories

Thorazine was the wonder drug of the 1950s and '60s, used to treat everything from schizophrenia to severe hiccups. Available today as the generic chlorpromazine, it is still prescribed for several purposes.

“The community of scientists was excessively optimistic about how quickly imaging would have an impact on psychiatry,” says Steven Hyman, a professor of neurobiology and provost at Harvard as well as former director of the National Institute of Mental Health. “In their enthusiasm, people forgot that the human brain is the most complex object in the history of human inquiry, and it’s not at all easy to see what’s going wrong.”

There are currently no standard ways of treating or assessing mental illness based on brain images. The

only unequivocal clinical use of imaging is in detecting raw abnormalities. “The only thing imaging can tell you is whether you have a brain tumor or some other gross neurological damage,” says Paul Root Wolpe of the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Bioethics. The unfortunate fact remains that the most accurate way of gauging the thoughts and feelings of others is simply by asking them what they are thinking and feeling.

Steven Pinker, again: “We are still clueless about how the brain represents the content of our thoughts and feelings. Yes, we may know where jealousy happens—or visual images or spoken words—but ‘where’ is not the same as ‘how.’”

THE THREE-TO-FOUR-POUND human brain is the most complicated object in the universe.

Nevertheless, the smashing victory of biological psychiatry was almost universally endorsed by the end of the 1990s. David Satcher, U.S. surgeon general, declared in 1999, “The bases of mental illness are chemical changes in the brain. . . . There’s no longer any justification for the distinction . . . between ‘mind and body’ or ‘mental and physical illnesses.’ Mental illnesses are physical illnesses.” Nobel laureate Francis Crick put it more directly: “‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll’s Alice might have phrased it: ‘You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.’”

The ultimate indicator of our newfound faith in scientific psychiatry may be the mysterious growth of the placebo effect in tests of the drugs the new psychiatry dispenses. When Columbia University psychiatrist B. Timothy Walsh analyzed 75 trials of antidepressants conducted between 1981 and 2000, he discovered that the rate of response to placebos, which are, of course, nothing more than sugar pills, increased by about seven percent per decade. Simply because people thought they

were taking the all-powerful medicines, they thought they were getting better.

All of the evidence points to the conclusion that today’s full embrace of biological psychiatry is terribly premature, especially since we have available an increasing number of nondrug therapies of proven effectiveness. We are only in the very early stages of understanding how the brain works and what alters its functioning. Somewhere along the way we seem to have misplaced the notion that, at this stage of our scientific evolution at least, the brain’s capacity to understand itself is minimal. The task is endlessly daunting. There are, for example, more than 100 billion neurons in the human brain.

Each neuron is connected to hundreds of thousands of other neurons, and each can fire electrical and neurochemical messages hundreds of times a second to other neurons across synapses. Altogether, there are 100 trillion synapses through which these signals flow.

All of this activity happens within the confines of a three-to-four-pound object. And the brain is not even mainly composed of neurons. Ninety percent of the cells in the brain are not neurons but glial cells, which provide nutrition and protection to the neurons.

The brain is the most complicated object in the universe. Nobel Prize-winning psychiatrist Eric Kandel has written, “In fact, we are only beginning to understand the simplest mental functions in biological terms; we are far from having a realistic neurobiology of clinical syndromes.” Neuroscientist Torsten Wiesel, another Nobelist, scoffed at the hubris of calling the 1990s “The Decade of the Brain.” “We need at least a century, maybe even a millennium,” he said, to comprehend the brain.

“We still don’t understand how *C. elegans* works,” Wiesel said, referring to a small worm often used by scientists to study molecular and cell biology. In my own travels in the world of neuroresearch, I have consistently found that the elite scientists are surprisingly modest about how much we know about the brain, despite the

spectacular progress in recent decades. It is the midlevel scientists who are prone to making large claims.

To this day, no one knows exactly how psychoactive drugs work. The etiology of depression remains an enduring scientific mystery, with entirely new ways of understanding the disease—or *diseases*, since what we think of as “depression” now is probably dozens of discrete disease entities—constantly emerging. Indeed, the basic tenet of biological psychiatry, that depression is a result of a deficit in serotonin, has proven to be one that was too eagerly embraced. When this “monoamine” theory of depression emerged in the 1960s, it gave the biologically minded practitioners of psychiatry what they had long been craving—a clean, decisive scientific theory to help bring the field in line with the rest of medicine. For patients, too, the serotonin hypothesis was enormously appealing. It not only provided the soothing clarity of a physical explanation for their maladies, it absolved them of responsibility for their illness, and to some degree, their behavior. Because, after all, who’s responsible for a chemical imbalance?

Unfortunately, from the very start there was a massive contradiction at the heart of the monoamine theory. Whatever it is that Prozac and the other members of the widely used class of drugs called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) do to change brain chemistry, it happens almost immediately after they are ingested. The neurochemical changes are quick. However, SSRIs typically take weeks, even months, to have any therapeutic influence. Why the delay? No one had any explanation until the late 1990s, when Ronald Duman, a researcher at Yale, showed that antidepressants actually grow brain cells in the hippocampus, a part of the brain associated with memory and mood regulation. Such a finding would have been viewed as preposterous even a decade earlier; one of the central dogmas of brain science for more than a century has been that the adult brain is incapable of producing new neurons. Duman showed that the dogma is false. He believes that the therapeutic effects of SSRIs are delayed because it takes weeks or months to build up a critical mass of the new brain cells sufficient to initiate a healing process in the brain.

While Duman’s explanation for the mechanism of action of the SSRIs remains controversial, a consensus is building that SSRIs most likely initiate a series of complex changes, involving many neurotransmitters, that alter the functioning of the brain at the cellular

and molecular levels. It appears that SSRIs may only be the necessary first step of a “cascade” of brain changes that occur long after and well “downstream” of serotonin alterations. The frustrating truth is that depression, like all mental illnesses, is an incredibly complicated and poorly understood disease, involving many neurotransmitters, many genes, and an intricate, infinite, dialectical dance between experience and biology. One of the leading serotonin researchers, Jeffrey Meyer of the University of Toronto, summed up the misplaced logic of the monoamine hypothesis: “There is a common misunderstanding that serotonin is low during clinical depression. It mostly comes from the fact that many antidepressants raise serotonin. This is a bit like saying pneumonia is an illness of low antibiotics because we treat pneumonia with antibiotics.”

The flimsiness of the entire enterprise was brought home to me in devastating fashion in a conversation with Elliot Valenstein, a leading neuroscientist at the University of Michigan, and the author of three highly regarded and influential books on psychopharmacology and the history of psychiatry. I was talking to Valenstein about why today’s psychiatric drugs address only a very small proportion of the neurotransmitters that are thought to exist. Virtually all these drugs deal with only four neurotransmitters: dopamine and serotonin, most commonly, and also norepinephrine and GABA (technically known as gamma-aminobutyric acid). While no one knows exactly how many neurotransmitters there are in the human brain—indeed, even how a neurotransmitter is defined exactly can be a matter of debate—there are at least 100.

So I asked Valenstein, “Why do all the drugs deal with the same brain chemicals? Is it because those four neurotransmitters are the ones understood to be most implicated with mood and thought regulation—that is, the stuff of psychiatric disorders?”

“It’s entirely a historical accident,” he said. “The first psychiatric drugs were stumbled upon in the dark, completely serendipitously. No one, least of all the people who discovered them, had any idea how they worked. It was only later that the science caught up and provided evidence that those drugs influence those particular neurotransmitters. After that, all subsequent drugs were ‘copycats’ of the originals—and all of them regulated only those same

four neurotransmitters. There have not been any new radically different paradigms of drug action that have been developed.” Indeed, while 100 drugs have been designed to treat schizophrenia, all of them resemble the original, Thorazine, in their mechanism of action. “So,” I asked Valenstein, “if the first drugs that were discovered had dealt with a different group of neurotransmitters, then all the drugs in use today would involve an entirely different set of neurotransmitters?”

“Yes,” he said.

“In other words, there are more than a hundred neurotransmitters, some of which could have vital impact on psychiatric syndromes, yet to be explored?” I asked.

“Absolutely,” Valenstein said. “It’s all completely arbitrary.”

The irony is that the shift to drug-oriented treatments has occurred even as the techniques of psychotherapy have improved dramatically. The old one-size-fits-all approach of long-term, fairly unstructured, verbally oriented psychoanalysis or dynamic psychotherapy has been replaced by a number of new approaches specifically geared toward particular kinds of patients.

Traditional therapies can work well for highly verbal “worried well” patients with a fair degree of insight into their problems and motivation to do something about them. But such therapies clearly don’t work for many other people. Among the new, more tailored approaches developed during the past 20 years is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which gives patients the tools to examine the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that lie behind their behavior, and develops the skills they need to enact change at a practical level. CBT has often been shown to be as effective as drugs in treating mild to moderate depression, with a significantly lower recurrence rate. It has also been used effectively to treat a broad variety of conditions, including bulimia, hypochondriasis, obsessive-compulsive disorder, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and it has even emerged as a means of reducing criminal behavior.

Two other innovative treatment approaches—the Stages of Change model and Motivational Interviewing—have helped caregivers understand how to motivate (and help) people to change. These methods’ tenets, in a nut-

shell, are that change should be viewed as a cyclical rather than linear process; that the job of bringing about change is the responsibility of the patient, not the caregiver (a reversal of the centuries-old hierarchical construct of the doctor-patient relationship); and that the caregiver’s approach must vary according to the client’s “stage of change”—that is, the patient’s level of insight and motivation to move forward. The positive outcomes of these kinds of “psychosocial” approaches in addressing some of the most difficult human problems—including addiction and the resistance of people with mental and other illnesses to being drawn into treatment—have been shown repeatedly.

These and other verbally oriented treatments are increasingly used by mental health professionals, but they have less appeal in the citadels of modern psychiatric thought. There, the biological model has triumphed, and not only because of the glittering promise it holds. Biopsychiatry is driven by a complex network of forces, not the least of which are the allure of treating patients expeditiously with drugs rather than time-consuming and sometimes-messy therapies, and the huge profits to be reaped from antidepressants, antipsychotics, and other psychoactive drugs. For patients, however, the benefits of the new paradigm are not nearly so unambiguous. By focusing so heavily on drugs—though they can be highly effective, particularly for severe conditions—we are neglecting to expose patients to the full array of treatments and approaches that can help them get better.

If there’s any lesson to be gleaned from the recent history of psychiatry, it is, in the anthropologist Tanya Luhmann’s words, “how complex mental illness is, how difficult to treat, and how, in the face of this complexity, people cling to coherent explanations like poor swimmers to a raft.”

We don’t know much, but we should know just enough to recognize how primitive and crude our understanding of psychiatric drugs is, and how limited our understanding of the biology of mental disorder. The unfortunate fact remains that the ills of this world have a tantalizing way of eluding simple explanation. Our only hope is to be resolute and careful, not faddish, in assessing new developments as they arise, and to adopt them judiciously within a tradition of a gradually but steadily growing arsenal in the fight against genuine human suffering. ■

Ordeal in Iran

An Interview with Haleh Esfandiari

On December 30, 2006, Haleh Esfandiari, director of the Wilson Center's Middle East Program, was stopped and robbed on her way to the Tehran airport. Trapped in Iran without a passport, she was interrogated by intelligence agents almost daily for six weeks. Then, on May 8, she was taken to Tehran's Evin Prison and placed in solitary confinement, accused of the capital offense of attempting to overturn the Iranian government.



Haleh Esfandiari in September, four weeks after her release from Evin Prison

WQ: How did you endure 105 days in solitary confinement?

Esfandiari: I either had to succumb to emotion or I had to completely shut my husband, my daughter, my grandchildren, and my mother out of my mind. That's what I decided to do. You despair when you are in solitary confinement. You don't know what's going on in the outside world. You don't know whether people are working to get you out. You don't get to see your lawyer. I coped by concentrating on the monotonous regimen I had established to keep myself from falling apart.

WQ: Your survival techniques were exercise and composing a book in your mind?

Esfandiari: Once I was in prison, there was not much interrogation because the bulk of the questioning was done before I was taken into custody. I have macular degeneration, so I couldn't read 10 hours a day. I would get up at a certain time in the morning, exercise on the floor, then go and shower, have breakfast, continue exercising, and start walking around my cell. I would count. I would time myself and walk maybe three hours a day. While walking, I would try to memorize what I had been asked during my last interrogation and what I had answered. I didn't want to put any-

thing down on paper. I also started drafting in my mind a biography of my paternal grandmother, with whom I was very close. If I was called, I would go for my interrogation, come back, and, if I wasn't finished with my exercise, I would continue. I would shower again at six, read a book until 10, then read the newspaper. At 11, I would do another hour of exercise, and at midnight I would try to go to sleep.

WQ: Was your cell the typical bare room with a cot and a toilet in the corner?

Esfandiari: I had two cells with the wall removed between them and a metal sink with two faucets. The hot-water faucet did not work. There was a shared bathroom in the hallway, but I never saw anybody else there. The prisoners were responsible for keeping the bathroom clean, and I did the cleaning. Through my two large barred windows I had access to daylight from 4:30 in the morning until nine at night in the summer, plus the fluorescent light, which was on 24 hours a day. They told me this was a prison requirement. The women guards were very human. I suppose it was partly my age [67]. If I asked them for something, they would provide it if they could.

WQ: Did you ever think about your first meal when you got out, or what you would wear when you could walk down the street?

Esfandiari: Oddly enough, one day I thought that when I got home the first thing I would do will be to make myself two sunny-side-up eggs. That same evening, I came back from my interrogation around eight o'clock. I don't eat meat, so one of the women guards said, "Unfortunately, we have a meat dish for dinner; would you like me to make you two sunny-side eggs?"

WQ: Did you have to wear a head covering all the time?

Esfandiari: In Iran, I always wear the headscarf. In winter, I wear a raincoat, in the summer, a robe. In prison they gave me two chadors. When I was taken for interrogation, I wore the chador on top of the scarf and the robe and removed it when I got there. I mentioned being tired of my clothes once on the phone to my mother, and she said, "I absolutely refuse to let you bring anything that you wore in prison into the house."

WQ: What did they ask in all those hours of interrogation?

Esfandiari: They asked why I, an Iranian American, was hired to run the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. Was there a sinister motive?

I tried to explain that the United States is a country where Henry Kissinger could come at the age of 14 and become secretary of state. I said this is a country where nobody asks you where you come from. It was very difficult to convince them. The mentality is different. Iran has a Shiite population and a Sunni population, but only Shiites can become president. So in a country where opportunity is open mostly to one sect, it's hard to explain that employers never ask your religion or your background. It's your merit that counts.

They are very suspicious of foundations, think tanks, scholarly programs, even university programs that deal with the Middle East or Iran. Conferences are not seen by them as a way to exchange academic knowledge. They think their purpose is to put together like-minded people who would work toward the goals of the United States government. For them, the Democrats and the Republicans were the same.

WQ: Did they try to trip you up?

Esfandiari: Sure. We would start Q&A orally. They would write the same questions, and I had to answer them in writing. I'm not a person of too many words, so my answers were brief and they were very annoyed. They wanted me to explain every single meeting held by the Middle East Program of the Wilson Center. For the life of me, I could not remember who said what six years ago. Sometimes we had 30 meetings a year. Before I was sent to prison, I would call my husband [Shaul Bakhash, Clarence J. Robinson Professor of history at George Mason University] and ask him to send me lists of the meetings. Then Shaul had to ask the Wilson Center staff to put the lists together and e-mail them to him. He would e-mail the list to me and—since I didn't have a printer—I would copy the information by hand. It would take until two or three in the morning. I was hoping I would answer their questions so they would just let me go.

WQ: Did they threaten you with physical abuse or withhold food, make you go without sleep or pour water down your mouth?

Esfandiari: They never threatened me with physical abuse. The way they would threaten me is to say, "We are not satisfied with your answers, so your situation is going to worsen." "Worsen" meant that eventually you'll end up in prison and that's what happened.

I think they must have Googled my name and gotten a copy of all the talks I'd given. They would take sentences out of context to incriminate me and would make me sit and translate. I would spend hours translating my own speeches.

WQ: The confirmation process for Attorney General

Michael Mukasey nearly stalled over what kinds of prisoner interrogations are legal. What is your view of what interrogation methods should be allowed to get prisoners to tell the truth?

Esfandiari: Torture goes on in Iranian prisons. I was very lucky that I was neither harassed physically nor tortured. I wasn't deprived of sleep. In prison, after two hours of interrogation, always very polite, they would say, "If you are tired, we'll stop. You can go back to your room and then we'll

who went through Evin Prison and were beaten up or tortured or harassed. Torture is immoral.

WQ: Do you think your interrogators really believed that you were guilty of trying to foment revolution?

Esfandiari: I don't know. The first time they used the expression "velvet revolution," I said, "What is that?" They thought I was being clever. But then they found out that I truly didn't know.

From their point of view, it makes sense. Their argument

is that the United States is probably not going to attack Iran because it is bogged down in Afghanistan and in Iraq. But the United States would like to bring about a regime change in Iran. How would they go about it but through a soft revolution or a velvet revolution? How do you succeed in fomenting such a revolution? Through foundations, universities, and think tanks. By organizing conferences and workshops, and empowering women. By providing money for local NGOs, supporting civil society activities, and by looking for the best and the brightest among the intellectuals,



Haleh Esfandiari appears on Iranian television. "Whatever I have been telling you and writing to you I'm more than happy to say on camera," she told her captors, but the interview was edited to suggest guilt.

come back tomorrow."

And I would say, "No, let's finish," because I was always hoping that it would be over.

But solitary confinement is a kind of torture. I could call my mother, but our conversation was very brief: "How are you, how is my husband, the children?"

She would say, "Everybody is fine. We are all doing all we can for you."

I didn't want to go any further lest they would stop me from calling her.

I'm horrified by "waterboarding"—that American leaders actually discuss whether it's torture or it's not torture. I was always very cautious not to complain to my interrogators because if I said something they would immediately come back and say, "What about Guantánamo? What about Abu Ghraib?" There are hundreds, maybe thousands, of people

bringing them together with colleagues in the United States and Europe and creating a network of like-minded people who then go back to Iran and discuss democratization, opening up the society, and then push for regime change.

According to my interrogators, the Ministry of Intelligence had a room full of charts proving this. They dismissed the notion that the Wilson Center is nonpartisan. The mission statement of the Center says it "aims to unite the world of ideas to the world of policy by supporting preeminent scholarship and linking that scholarship to issues of concern to officials in Washington." They highlighted that sentence and said, "Here you are. Your mission is to link."

And I said, "Yes, but to link means to bring together people of different backgrounds and different ways of thinking and expose them to each other." They didn't buy that. They said, "People would accept your invitation, would come to the

Wilson Center, and through you would meet intelligence officers and members of the State Department.”

Iran has convinced itself that it is encircled by the United States. They see the U.S. in the Persian Gulf, in Central Asia, in Afghanistan; and NATO is in Turkey. They feel as if they are under siege. They don't expect a military offensive, so what is left, they think, but to use NGOs and women's groups and universities to bring change? They have convinced themselves this is true.

WQ: How did they treat you: as an American or an Iranian, as a grandmother or a scholar?

Esfandiari: They convinced themselves that I was misguided and was of no use. I think it was partly because I was

MAYBE THEY THOUGHT, “She is sick, and if we raise our voice or keep her here for long hours she will fall apart.”

an older person. I could have been either their mother or their grandmother. They were very much concerned that I was losing a lot of weight. Maybe they thought, “She is sick, and if we raise our voice or keep her for long hours she is going to fall apart.” Because I was an Iranian American, they thought there would be an outcry.

WQ: When you went to Iran, did you realize the risk you were taking? One of your colleagues remembers saying to you before you left, “It's so dangerous to go there. Aren't you worried?” And your answer was, “Oh, they know me.”

Esfandiari: I have been going several times a year for almost 14 years, and of course, every time you go to the Middle East, you take your life in your hands. I thought I was secure. But my experience showed that despite being a student of Iran I was very naive. I should have known that eventually they would become suspicious as to why someone like me goes to Iran so often. The reason is that my 93-year-old mother lives there. I would go two or three times a year, and my sister would go once a year. Between us, we made sure that somebody was with her every three months to help her with her accounts, to look after her for a week to see what her needs are, and so on.

WQ: Has your mother ever considered leaving?

Esfandiari: No. Never. She married my father and came to Iran and has lived all her life there. She wants to die in Iran and be buried next to my father.

WQ: She's not afraid?

Esfandiari: Of what?

WQ: Of the government.

Esfandiari: No, absolutely.

WQ: Is she worried about losing her apartment because she had to put it up for bail so you could be released?

Esfandiari: We just have to wait and see. I have not been charged, and they haven't announced a court case. I have a lawyer in Iran, so if it comes to that, we'll see what we can do.

WQ: At one point, Iranian television ran a “documentary” that some commentators called a “confession.”

Esfandiari: I haven't seen it yet. Three other people were featured as well. I'm told they showed clips of Central Asian countries and focused on the idea of a velvet revolution.

During my first week in prison, they said they wanted to interview me on camera. I said that “whatever I have been telling you and writing to you I'm more than happy to say on camera.” I didn't want to start bargaining, because I had nothing to hide.

One day they announced that we were going to do the taping on Thursday. I talked for an hour; it was as if I was lecturing. I gave my age. I said I was raised in Iran, went to school in Iran, went to university in Austria, came back, worked as a journalist, and then joined a women's organization. My last work in Iran before the revolution was running a group of museums and cultural centers. They still exist and are quite active. There was nothing political.

WQ: There's one place in the TV program where you're talking about foundations, and then all of a sudden you're quoted as saying, “The objective is to bring about change in Iranian decision-making institutions.” In what context did that come up?

Esfandiari: What I was saying was that the erroneous perception in Iran is that if you take part in conferences, if you arrange workshops, if you talk to like-minded people, it's with one aim only and that is to bring about change. My husband and my daughter said my sentences sometimes didn't hang

together and a lot of cutting and pasting had taken place.

WQ: Going back to December 30, 2006, when your ordeal began, you were going to the airport in a taxi at about 1 A.M. Is robbery a problem in Iran?

Esfandiari: Tehran used to be very secure, but no longer. Four men blocked the car, jumped out with knives, and told the driver to open the trunk. One took my suitcase, the other pulled my carryon bag from the front seat, and a third took my purse. "At least give me my ticket and my passport," I asked, but they took everything. They could easily have kidnapped me, which also takes place in Tehran. As days passed, more and more friends and acquaintances said this is not your ordinary robbery. This must have had a political motive.

WQ: Those of us around for the Iranian hostage-taking in 1979 remember that when the hostages were eventually released, they tried to sue the Iranian government. Have you thought of suing?

Esfandiari: No, absolutely not. I'm an Iranian. How would I sue my own government?

WQ: How is Iran different from other countries in the Middle East?

Esfandiari: Iran is a real country, not one carved up or put together in the last century. It has a 2,500-year history. Persian is an Indo-European language. Iranians are not Arabs, they are Aryans. They are highly educated people, highly nationalistic, and very much aware of their culture and tradition. Although it's an Islamic country, the majority of the people are Shi'ite, not Sunni. What is important and is Iranian and not Islamic is the Persian New Year, which starts on the 21st of March, a tradition that goes back to pre-Islamic days. That really sets them apart from the rest of the region.

WQ: Given its legacy, do you think it's ironic that Iran is now regarded as the bad guy in the Middle East?

Esfandiari: Political development has nothing to do with the culture and history of a country. The United States and Iran have been at odds since the Islamic Revolution. It started with the hostage crisis and went gradually from bad to worse. The Iranians on a number of occasions have tried to show goodwill, but every time the Iranians tried to reach out, the United States either didn't welcome it or understand it, or something came up. So now such bad feelings—that's putting it very mildly—exist between the two governments that unless they sit and talk to each other, there is no way to settle their differences. They have to sit face to face and talk. Diplomacy, exchanges among NGOs, conferences, are all wonderful. But at the end, it's the governments who have to

make the ultimate decisions. And so far these two governments, the United States and Iran, have not really talked to one another. As long as they don't, relations will probably get worse. There are many problems on the table: the nuclear issue (on which I am not well versed), Iran's involvement in Iraq, Iran's support of Hezbollah, Iran's support of Hamas. It's the question of terrorism, although the Iranians were not at all involved in the 9/11 incident in the United States.

WQ: Do you think the United States can accept a nuclear Iran?

Esfandiari: I think the United States probably will not have much choice; it will have to accept a highly developed peaceful nuclear program there. The United States has accepted and is living with a nuclear Pakistan. Pakistan is a much more volatile country than Iran. Iran's foreign policy, although often problematic, has also been measured and pragmatic. The Iranian population supports a peaceful nuclear program. It's not a whim of the government. It started under the shah and it has continued. Taking out these nuclear facilities or bombing them would alienate the population against the United States and only delay the nuclear program for another 10, 15 years, but that's it.

Iranians are the only people in the region who *like* the United States. Average Iranians are very fond of America and would like to send their children to study there and visit and so on, but there are visa restrictions.

WQ: Do you think Iran sponsors terrorism in Iraq?

Esfandiari: I can't say. I think they have a presence in Iraq. Sure. The majority of the population is Shi'ite in Iraq, and there is a close relationship between the two holy places of Najaf on the Iraq side and Qom in Iran. The head of the judiciary in Iran has roots in Iraq. Ayatollah Sistani, the leader of the Shi'ite community in Iraq, is an Iranian. The Revolutionary Guards are probably there; they don't deny it. But whether they are the reason for the mess in Iraq, I don't think so. I really don't think so. ■

As part of an international effort by intellectuals, NGOs, and her colleagues, Lee H. Hamilton, director of the Wilson Center, appealed to the Iranian president, vice president, speaker of the parliament, and eventually to Ayatollah Ali Khameni, Iran's spiritual leader. Two months later, Khameni wrote back. The issue would be addressed, he said. Esfandiari was released on August 21. She returned to work at the Wilson Center within days. She was interviewed by Wilson Quarterly senior editor Judith Havemann.

THE COMING REVOLUTION IN AFRICA

Even as headlines bring grim news of misery, disease, and death in Africa, an agricultural transformation is lifting tens of millions of people out of poverty. A rising generation of small farmers promises not only to put food on the African table but to fundamentally change the continent's economic and political life.

BY G. PASCAL ZACHARY

THE HEAT IS DEADENING. AFTER A MORNING PICKING cotton on the side of a hill, Souley Madi, wearing a knock-off Nike T-shirt and thongs made from discarded tires, staggers down a steep slope, a heavy bag of cotton bolls on his back. Reaching his small compound 10 minutes later, he greets his two wives. The older one nurses a baby while preparing a lunch of maize and cassava. The second wife, visibly pregnant, rises from a seat under a shade tree, responding to Madi's instructions. He wants to impress his foreign visitor, so he prepares to introduce

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his latest agro-business brainstorm.

Ducks.

A few words from Madi, and wife number two dashes out of sight. When she reappears, some three dozen baby ducks waddle behind her. Madi beams, scoops up a duck, then hands it to me. He asks me to guess how much it will sell for at maturity.

I guess too low. Three dollars, Madi says. He is the first to raise ducks in the parched village of Badjengo, in the far north of Cameroon, about 45 minutes from the provincial capital of Garoua. Madi is a shrewd risk taker. Despite the challenging climate of Africa's rain-sparse savanna belt,



Souley Madi and his two wives grow cotton, run a store, and breed ducks to sell, a trio of enterprises that puts them in the vanguard of change in Africa.

Madi's ducks thrive, thanks partly to the diligent care provided by his new wife.

Madi, who is 41, sells nearly all of the ducks he raises, saving only a few for his family to eat. The birds are big sellers around local holidays, when Cameroonians in Europe and the United States send cash to relatives back home. Madi uses part of his duck money—about \$100—to buy inventory for a small grocery store he maintains on the side of a main road. The store, a shack really, is secured by a heavy Chinese-made padlock. When people want to shop, they must first find Madi and coax him to open (he's got too few customers to justify an employee). From the sale of cotton, dry goods, and the ducks, Madi has accumulated a cash hoard he hides in his sleeping hut.

Having finished high school, Madi is better educated than most of his fellow farmers, and he embodies an important rule in rural Africa: The more educated the farmer, the more effective his practices and the higher his income. Madi won't allow his two school-age children to skip class in favor of fieldwork. "They should study instead," he says.

Short and stocky, Madi sits down on a low wooden bench and begins to eat roasted corn. He tells me through a translator how he—a Muslim—took a second wife, not for status or love, but to help him take advantage of the farm boom. He complains that prices, especially for cotton, should be higher. Yet he says he's never had more money saved.

To Americans, bombarded with dire images of Africa—starving Africans, diseased Africans, Africans fleeing disasters or fleeing other Africans trying to kill them—Madi may seem like a character from a novel. But he is no fiction. Despite the horrors of Darfur, the persistence of HIV/AIDS, and the failure to end famines and civil wars in a handful of countries, the vast majority of sub-Saharan Africans neither live in war zones nor struggle with an active disease or famine. Extreme poverty is relatively rare in rural Africa, and there is a growing entrepreneurial spirit among farmers that defies the usual image of Africans as passive victims. They are foot soldiers in an agrarian revolution that never makes the news. In 25 visits to the region since 2000, I have met many Souley Madis, and have come to believe that they are the key to understanding Africa's present and reshaping its future.

After decades of mistreatment, abuse, and exploitation, African farmers—still overwhelmingly smallholders work-

ing family-tilled plots of land—are awakening from a long slumber. Because farmers are the majority (about 60 percent) of all sub-Saharan Africans, farming holds the key to reducing poverty and helping to spread prosperity. Over the longer term, prosperous African farmers could become the backbone of a social and political transformation. They are the sort of canny and independent tillers of the land Thomas Jefferson envisioned as the foundation for American democracy. In a region where elites often seem more committed to enjoying the trappings of success abroad than creating success at home, farmers have a real stake in improving their turf. Life will still be hard for them, but in the years ahead they can be expected to demand better government policies and more effective services. As their incomes and aspirations rise, they could someday even form their own political parties, in much the way that farmers in the American Midwest and Western Europe did in the past. At a minimum, African governments seem likely to increasingly promote trade and development policies that advance rural interests.

Improved livelihoods for farmers alone won't reverse Africa's marginalization in the global economy or solve the region's many vexing problems. But among people concerned about Africa—and certainly among those in multinational organizations who must grapple with humanitarian disasters on the continent—the unfolding rural revival holds out new hope. Having once dismissed agriculture as an obstacle or an irrelevance, African leaders and officials in multinational organizations recently have come around to a new view, nicely summarized by Stephen Lewis, a former United Nations official who concentrated on African affairs. "Agricultural productivity," Lewis declared in 2005, "is indispensable to progress on all other fronts."

The potential for advances through agriculture is large. African farmers today are creating wealth on a scale unimagined a decade ago. They are likely to continue prospering into the foreseeable future. Helped by low costs of land and labor and by rising prices for farm products, African farmers are defying pessimists by increasing their output. They are cultivating land once abandoned or neglected; forging profitable links with local, regional, and international buyers; and reviving crops that flourished in the pre-1960 colonial era, when Africa provided a remarkable 10 percent of the world's tradable food. Today, that share is less than one percent.

“The boom in African agriculture is the most important, neglected development in the region, and it has years to run,” says Andrew Mwenda, a leading commentator on African political economy.

The evidence of a farm boom is widespread. In southern Uganda, hundreds of farmers have begun growing apples for the first time, displacing imports and earning an astonishing 35 cents each. Brokers ferry the fruit from the countryside to the capital, Kampala, where it fetches almost twice as much. Cotton production in Zambia has increased 10-fold in 10 years, bringing new income to 120,000 farmers and their families, nearly one million people in all. Floral exports from Ethiopia are growing so rapidly that flowers threaten to surpass coffee as the country’s leading cash earner. In Kenya, tens of thousands of small farmers who live within an hour of the Nairobi airport grow French beans and other vegetables, which are packaged, bar-coded, and air-shipped to Europe’s grocers. Exports of vegetables, fruits, and flowers, largely from eastern and southern Africa, now exceed \$2 billion a year, up from virtually zero a quarter-century ago.

Skeptics still insist that farmers in the region will be badly handicapped, in the long run, by climate change, overpopulation, new pandemics, and the vagaries of global commodity prices. Corruption, poor governance, and civil strife are all added to the list of supposedly insurmountable obstacles. But similar challenges haven’t stopped Asian and Latin American farmers from advancing. Even people who see future gains for African farmers agree, however, that food shortages and famines will persist, at least within isolated or war-torn areas.

But while Malthusian nightmares dominate international discussions of Africa, food production in the most heavily peopled areas is outstripping population growth. In Nigeria, with the largest population of any African country, food production has grown faster than population for 20 years. In other West African countries, including Ghana, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Benin, crop output has risen by more than four percent annually, far

exceeding the rate of population growth. Farm labor productivity in these countries is now so high that in some cases it matches the levels in parts of Asia.

“The driver of agriculture is primarily urbanization,” observes Steve Wiggins, a farm expert at London’s Overseas Development Institute. As more people leave the African countryside, there is more land for remaining farmers, and more paying customers in the city. The growth in food production is so impressive, Wiggins argues, that a “green revolution” is already under way in densely populated West Africa.

The growing international demand for food is also helping Africa’s small farmers. The global ethanol boom has raised corn prices, and coffee is selling at a 10-year

WHILE MALTHUSIAN nightmares dominate international discussions of Africa, food production in the most heavily peopled areas is outstripping population growth.

high, for instance. Multinational corporations are becoming more closely involved in African agriculture, moving away from plantation-based cultivation and opting instead to enter into contracts with thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of individual farmers. China and India, hungry to satisfy the appetites of expanding middle classes, view Africa as a potential breadbasket. Finally, African governments are generally more supportive of farmers than in the past. Even African elites, long disdainful of village life, are embracing farming, trying to profit from the boom—and raising the status of this once-scorned activity.

No one model explains the surge in African agriculture. Diverse sources of success befit an Africa that, across the board, defies easy generalizations. One recent study finds 15 different farming “systems” in sub-Saharan Africa. At the level of the single African farm, diversity abounds too. Most individual farmers juggle as many as 10 crops. Outcomes among small farmers also vary. The top 25 percent of smallholders are believed to produce

four to five times as much food as the bottom 25 percent. Just as in America not everyone is rich, in Africa not everyone is poor.

African farmers do share much in common. “A man with a hoe” remains an accurate description of nearly all who till the soil. Mechanization is rare. Less than one percent of land is worked by tractors. Only 10 percent is worked by draft animals. Nearly 90 percent is worked by hand, from initial plowing to planting, weeding, and harvesting. Irrigation is also rare; only one percent of sub-Saharan cropland receives irrigation water. Unpredictable weather, often drought and sometimes too much rain, bedevils farmers in many areas. Relatively little fertilizer is used; globally, farmers apply nine times as much per acre as Africans do. “Much of the food produced in Africa is lost” after harvest, according to one estimate, because of inaccessible markets, poor storage methods, and an absence of processing facilities. Finally, use of improved seed varieties is very limited by global standards.

But these sobering characteristics feature a silver lining: The potential for gains is large. Some ways farmers can move ahead are simple. One is to plant crops in straight lines. In Uganda, for instance, it was long the practice of many farmers to sow seeds haphazardly; they have been taught in recent years to plant in regularly spaced rows that vastly improve yields. When so simple a change delivers such great benefits, the importance of human choice is clear. In discussions of African affairs, the central role of the power of the individual and the desire of ordinary people to do better is often lost in a haze of dubious statistics, gloomy futuristic scenarios, and impossible calls for improved ethics, leadership, and institutions.

To glimpse a different picture of Africa, imagine traveling on a journey, not to Joseph Conrad’s “heart of darkness,” but to an uncharted, elusive, almost mythical part of the world’s poorest region, where hope, personal responsibility, and new incentives are reshaping the lives of ordinary people, turning Conradian imagery on its head.

The first stop on our journey is the village of Bukhulu in eastern Uganda. From Kampala, I take an old van jammed with 15 people and rumble along dirt roads so pockmarked that pieces of

the vehicle fly off during the journey without eliciting any reaction from the driver. The next morning, from the provincial center of Mbale, I hitch a ride through the foothills of towering Mount Elgon with an agricultural extension officer who works for a South African company that pays Ugandan farmers to grow cotton for export. On the final leg of the journey, I switch to a bicycle taxi. Balanced precariously on a makeshift rear seat, the man in front cycling leisurely, I pass cornfields brimming with ripening ears nearly ready to harvest. The ride costs a dime.

I am here to visit one of my favorite farmers, Ken Sakwa, who is in the forefront of a significant yet little-noticed back-to-the-land trend. The movement is powered by city dwellers who either can’t earn enough money in the cities or are earning so much that they want to plow their savings into agribusinesses. Doomsayers constantly point to Africa’s urbanization as a relentless scourge, stripping the countryside of talent, but quietly, some Africans are going back to “the bush.” Sakwa, 37, is one of them. He spent a decade in Uganda’s mushrooming capital, doing odd jobs for cash. He enjoyed the excitement of city life but survived only because of the goodwill of relatives. Ultimately, he exhausted that goodwill. “I was a parasite,” he admits.

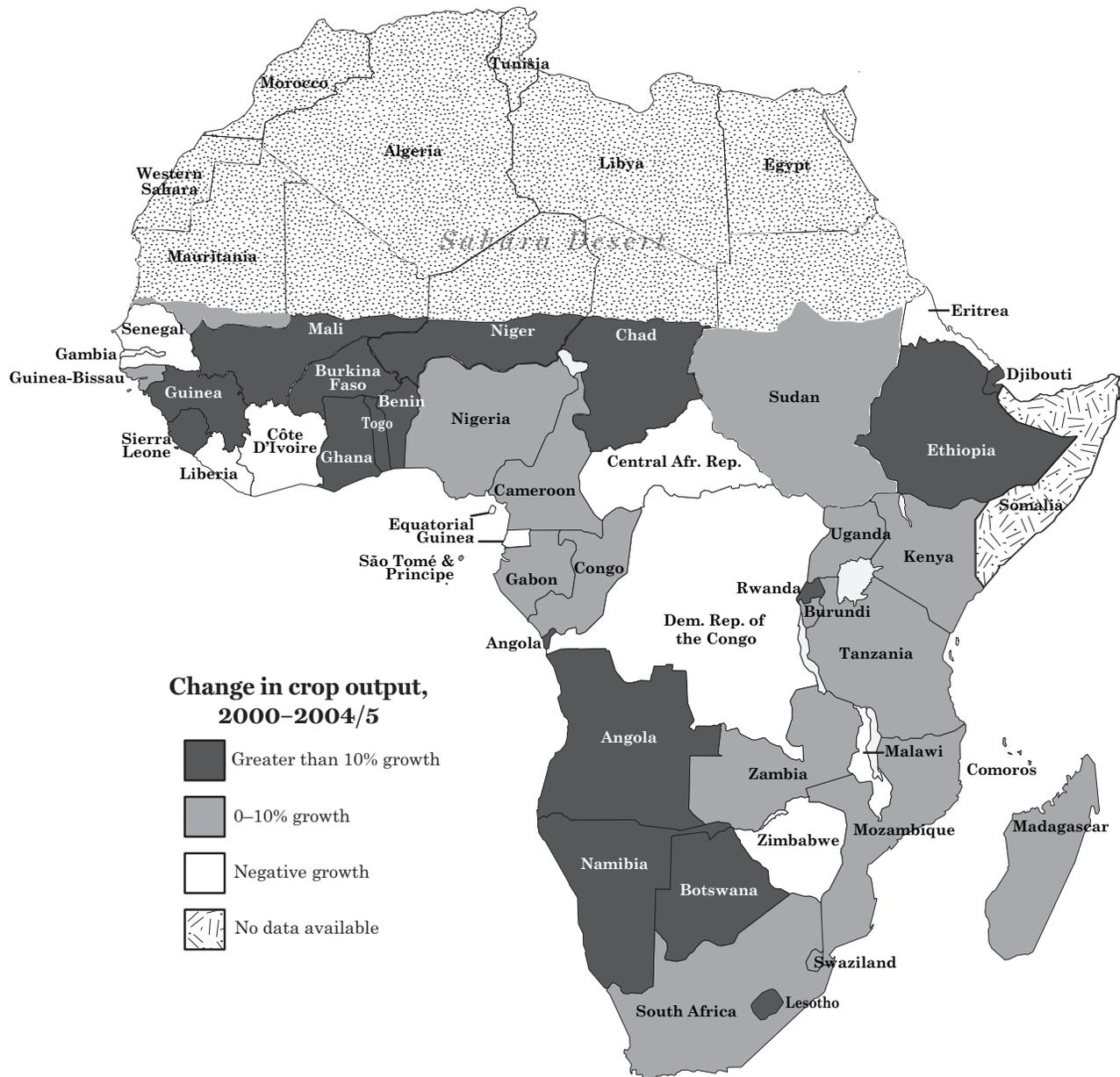
Five years ago, Sakwa decided to claim the vacant farm of his deceased father in Bukhulu, the village of his birth. None of his brothers and sisters wanted the land, so he got it all. His wife in Kampala refused to join him. He divorced her and went back alone.

“I knew I’d achieve if I went back to my father’s land,” he recalls. “I felt ambition inside me.”

Farmers in Bukhulu mainly grow cotton, corn, peanuts, and beans. Even the largest farms encompass no more than a dozen acres. In his first year back, Sakwa grew corn and beans on one acre, opening the ground alone, with a small hand hoe. “I worked like an animal,” he recalls. Even before his first harvest, he looked for a wife. A few months after his return, he met Jessica in a nearby village. He decided to court her when he learned her parents were farmers.

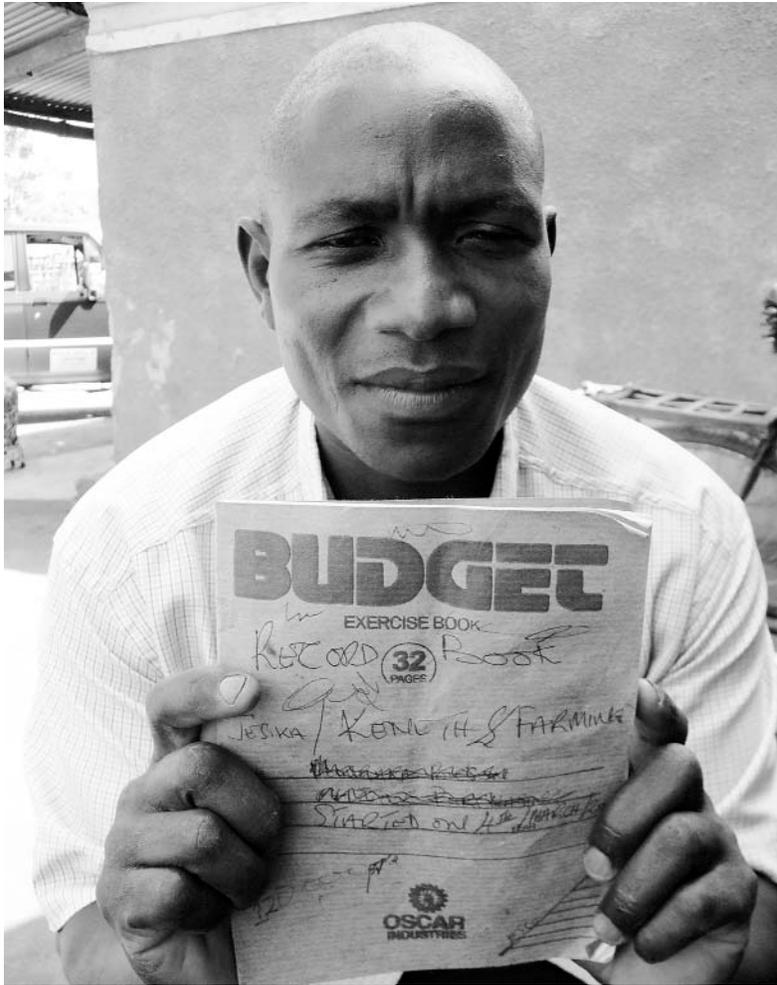
“I wanted a wife who could help on the farm and would be happy doing so,” Sakwa says. He married Jessica and, with her considerable help, he prospered. In

Africa's Rising Farmers



Source: *Africa Development Indicators 2007*, The World Bank

Violence, drought, and other disruptions can deal devastating blows to farmers, but in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa their output is expanding. The World Bank reports that many African economies “appear to have turned the corner and moved to a path of faster and steadier economic growth.”



Successful farming isn't only about working the fields, Ken Sakwa knows. The Ugandan farmer has more education than most people in his village and a stint of city living under his belt.

his second year in Bukhulu, he tilled two acres of land, hiring a tractor to assist in plowing. From an American aid project, he and some neighbors learned to plant crops in straight lines. By the third year Sakwa mastered basic farming, “doing much, much better.” When his old Kampala friends visit him, they ask, “How is this poor village man getting all this money?”

Accumulation is only part of Sakwa's story. How he spends his profits is significant. One early purchase was a mobile phone, which allows him to keep abreast of local markets and negotiate better prices for his crops. That a farmer who lives without electricity or running water should be able to receive phone calls from anywhere in the world is perhaps the most radi-

cal change in African material life in decades. Though wireless service came late to the region, nearly one in five sub-Saharan Africans now owns a cell phone, and the World Bank estimates that the region's wireless phone market is the “fastest-growing in the world.” One morning, after he plants cottonseeds in a small field, Sakwa receives a call from the headmaster at his daughter's boarding school (yes, he can afford that too!). The headmaster asks for 500 pounds of beans. Sakwa, who has the beans bagged for sale, wants 15 cents a pound. “Will you accept?” he asks.

The headmaster wants to pay less. Sakwa refuses. “I can hold my beans until I get a fair price,” he says.

A few days later, the headmaster calls back and agrees to the price.

One day, I walk with the Sakwas to one of their fields. The ground is wet from recent rains. We cut through a path separating the land of different farmers and soon meet a family harvesting beans. A husband and wife and their

two children are haphazardly tossing uprooted beans on a wooden cart. Sakwa greets them and stops to explain that they will fit more on the cart if they make neat piles. The man acts as if he's received a revelation. Sakwa starts rearranging the beans to make sure the man grasps his advice. The man begins to shift the beans around, and his wife flashes Sakwa a big smile, thanking him.

We turn off the path, slice through another field, and come upon a patch of peanuts. Ever the innovator, Sakwa is experimenting with different types in order to see which grow best. He pulls a few samples from the ground to show me. Just as I begin to chew on a peanut, Jessica screams in the distance.

Sakwa races off toward his wife. I follow. When we reach

her, she cries out, "Someone has stolen the beans!"

The plants have been ripped from the field. "They must have come in the night," Sakwa says. He has been forced to hire a neighbor to guard this field in the daytime. He tells the man he will harvest the corn soon.

One of Sakwa's innovations isn't agricultural but commercial. In order to expand output and raise his income, he leases land from his neighbors and hires them as casual laborers, enriching them as well as himself.

Land sales are virtually impossible in rural Africa, but informal leases are becoming more common. There are no formal land titles in Sakwa's village, nor in nearly every other African village, so his claim to his father's land is grounded in the community's knowledge of Sakwa and his lineage. Until recently, no one ever bought or sold rural land in Uganda, but with the rise of small-

scale commercial farming the value of farmland can now be "monetized," in rough terms, by estimating profit from cash crops grown over a period of years. Land is coming to be viewed as a commodity. Informal land deals are flexible, but because they are not supported by unassailable titles, there is always a possibility of costly disputes. Sakwa recently experienced such a problem when he leased a half-acre of very productive land from a neighbor for nearly \$800. But one of the man's brothers, who didn't get any money in the deal, has sued Sakwa in court. He wants to be paid.

Sakwa and his friend Francis Nakiwuza are the most active acquirers of land in Bukhulu, having each leased four different plots over the past three years. The lawsuit worries them. One day Nakiwuza and I sit in Sakwa's living room as he sifts through his business records, which he stores in a worn leather briefcase stowed under his bed. He keeps records on each of his "gardens," listing the costs and income.

One reason for disputes: poorly drawn contracts. The lease for his newest plot, written in Sakwa's own hand, boils down to a single sentence in which a neighbor agrees to permit Sakwa to use "my swampy land of 61 strides in length and 32 strides in width" for about \$200.

The contract lacks any surveyor information and isn't registered with any government agency or court. "We trust people," Sakwa says.

The rudimentary contract partly reflects the inexperience of the parties involved. Desiring land is new to Sakwa, and he dreams of obtaining more. He wants to double his current holding of 10 acres. "I want to make 20 acres," he says. "That will make my life good."

Across the table sits Nakiwuza. He wants more land too, and brings news of a neighbor who needs to raise money. The man was caught in a sex act with a young girl. In years past, there would have been no legal consequences. But today men caught abusing underage women can go to prison or pay a large fine. For this man, the only

**KEN SAKWA'S FRIENDS in Kampala ask,
"How is this poor village man getting all
this money?"**

way to avoid prison is to raise money by leasing land.

Sakwa is sorry for the man but happy that either he or Nakiwuza will get to expand his acreage. "Why shouldn't the stronger farmers have more land?" Nakiwuza asks. Often, the land they lease had been sitting idle. "We are using the land well," he says. "Others did nothing with it. Now they have our money, and we have crops to sell."

Ken Sakwa is Africa's future writ small. Gilbert Bukenya is the future writ large. He is the vice president of Uganda and a rarity among African politicians: He is passionate about the value of farming, is himself an innovative farmer, and publicly encourages farmers to work smarter. One of Bukenya's greatest achievements has been to encourage a can-do spirit in Uganda's farmers and a sense of pride among other Ugandans in what their farming compatriots produce.

I met Bukenya one balmy afternoon at his home on the shores of Lake Victoria, where he experiments

with fruits, vegetables, and dairy cattle. “By farming smarter, Ugandans not only grow more, they earn more money,” he tells me. Bukenya is an advocate of food self-sufficiency, pointing to the example of rice. Ugandans pay tens of millions of dollars annually for rice imported from overseas—sub-Saharan Africa as a whole imports nearly \$2 billion worth. In order to expand the output of homegrown rice, Bukenya promoted a new African variety that grows in uplands (as opposed to paddies) and requires less water. Then he argued for the imposition of a 75 percent duty on foreign rice. The measure passed Parliament and brought rapid benefits: A few of the country’s largest rice importers invested in milling plants, thus becoming customers of local farmers. The new mills created jobs and lowered the cost of bringing domestic rice to market, so that consumers now pay more or less the same for rice as always.

Since foreign rice exporters—notably the United States, Thailand, and Pakistan—subsidize their grow-

ers, Bukenya thinks it only fair that Uganda defend its own rice farmers, even though he realizes that some import-substitution schemes fail. (And rice is only one of the African crops hampered by U.S. and European farm subsidies and trade barriers.)

Fresh from his rice success, Bukenya is now promoting the benefits of raising livestock. One September morning I find him lecturing before a classroom full of ordinary farmers, about 50 of them, gathered in a school about an hour from Kampala. Wearing a loose-fitting shirt and sandals, Bukenya jokes easily with his audience, speaking in a local language. The classroom has no electricity, a concrete floor, and exposed wooden rafters. Bukenya recalls how his mother earned the money to send him to school from sales of a beer she concocted. Switching to a prepared talk, he preaches a simple lesson: “Make money daily.” One way they can do that, he tells the small crowd, is by keeping a milk cow or egg-laying chickens. Only a few of the farmers do anything like this now, and



For decades, African leaders scorned and exploited farmers, but now some are beginning to support—and even participate in—agriculture. Uganda’s vice president, Gilbert Bukenya (right), inspecting a rice field, is one of those who now believe that farming is crucial to their country’s future.

Bukenya spends a good deal of time explaining how they can get started.

Then he criticizes the country's traditional big-horned Ankole cattle. These animals are beautiful and beloved but provide very little milk, he says, "no matter how hard you squeeze." He prefers European Friesian cows. "Five of them will produce the same as 50 Ankoles," he says.

Bukenya asks one of the women in the audience to stand up. He praises the bananas she grows and notes the high output of her Friesian cows. "You are a model for the others," he says. The woman smiles. Then, spreading out his arms and looking across the room, he says, "Everybody must be a model."

That kind of exhortation might seem hokey to Americans, but in an African context Bukenya's words are incendiary. It is the mental attitude of African farmers, as much as their lack of money,

that holds them back, Bukenya argues. For ordinary farmers to be called heroes, or even recognized at all, by a senior political leader is unprecedented. And Bukenya's message makes perfect sense. Surprisingly, few farmers in Uganda or other parts of Africa keep livestock. In some locales, that's because of the extreme heat; disease is another limitation. Yet many farmers don't raise animals (at least productive ones) even when conditions for doing so are favorable, because of the irrational pull of tradition and a lack of knowledge. But teaching skills to farmers isn't enough, Bukenya says. "You have to instill confidence in them that by working harder, they will benefit."

The potential for breeding (as Souley Madi knows) is large. Two government ministers in Uganda have recently launched poultry operations. Uganda's farm output is soaring, having helped push total exports in 2006 to nearly \$1 billion, double the value of 2002. Much of the growth came in agriculture: Exports of coffee, cotton, fish, fruits, and tea doubled. Corn exports nearly tripled. Cocoa quadrupled. Sesame seed exports are up nearly 10-fold. Says Bukenya, "We are doing very well, but we can run even faster."

The beginnings of a profarmer political movement represents a watershed in African history. During the 1960s and '70s, in the first decades after independence from European colonial rule, African political leaders blatantly exploited farmers as part of a calculated effort to speed economic development and make food cheaper for Africa's then-tiny urban elite. They essentially nationalized cash crops, such as cotton and coffee, forcing farmers to sell everything they grew to government "marketing boards" at fixed prices, often well below the going rate. That destroyed the incentive to produce. Worse, the boards were corrupt and inefficient, and they did little or nothing to introduce farmers to new growing techniques, crop vari-

IT IS THE MENTAL ATTITUDE of African farmers, as much as their lack of money, that holds them back.

eties, or customers. Meanwhile, the industrial schemes financed by the agricultural "surplus" virtually all flopped.

By the 1990s, African countries were importing large amounts of food, at great cost and sometimes under absurd circumstances. Fresh tomatoes rotted in Ghana's fields, while canned tomatoes from Italy dominated grocery sales. The story was similar elsewhere, with the exception of South Africa. A lack of canneries and other means of preserving fresh fruit and vegetables meant that a third or more of African output spoiled.

The reliance on imported food, and the demoralization of farmers, drove many Africans from the bush to the city. But the situation also spawned a backlash. Change came in two forms. First, international aid agencies, which during the 1980s and '90s had essentially abandoned support for agriculture and encouraged Africans to develop light industry and services, began to realize the folly of their approach. As the World Bank admitted in late 2007, "Agriculture has been vastly underused for development."

African leaders also reversed course, albeit by fits and starts, liberalizing agriculture and permitting multinational corporations to begin buying cash crops such as coffee and cotton directly from smallholders, who were eager to sell to

these private buyers after being underpaid or even stiffed by government agencies. In Uganda, once called the “pearl of Africa” by Winston Churchill because of its enormous agricultural output and excellent climate, thriving colonial-era agro-businesses were destroyed by the predations of government after independence in 1962. When a rebel leader named Yoweri Museveni assumed power in the mid-1980s, he took steps to reverse course, including a gradual dismantling of the socialized structure that made every farmer a de facto employee of the state. But the farmers, having been burned, did not respond quickly. They remembered the worthless IOUs dispensed by the government.

Besides, telling farmers to grow more is not enough; even giving them the freedom to sell to whomever they wish is not enough. Farmers need cash buyers. Without willing customers, paradoxically, growing more food can grievously hurt farmers—it raises costs and saddles them with worthless surpluses.

Incredibly, this commonplace escaped farm experts in Africa for half a century. They have learned the hard way that food shortages and famines often result not from a scarcity of food but from too much food. When farmers can’t convert their surplus into cash, they stop growing extra. No less a farm expert than Norman Borlaug, celebrated for launching the “green revolution” in Latin America and Asia, made a sobering error in Ethiopia five years ago (for which he later apologized). Having helped introduce higher-yielding grains to Ethiopian farmers, he witnessed a huge growth in output. But because no one thought about who would purchase the expanded supplies of grain, in a bumper harvest the surplus rotted and the farmers, who had borrowed money to obtain seed and other “inputs,” suffered badly.

Now farm experts are beginning to change their views, putting the customer ahead of production. In 2004, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) became the first aid donor to pledge to organize its spending around the principle that the end customer is the prime mover in African agriculture. Given a ready buyer who is offering a fair price, African farmers will defy stereotypes of their inherent conservatism and backwardness. “They move like lightning when money is on the table,” says David Barry, a British coffee buyer based in Kampala. “Cash is king.”

USAID realized that expanding farm output only makes sense when farmers respond to the right signals from buyers about which products are in demand. Part of the answer was for the agency to pay the costs of training farmers to

grow those crops, and in higher-quality forms and greater volumes, that the private buyers sought. It also directly assisted private agro-firms, paying part of their costs for training farmers.

A method known as “contract farming” has become a crucial instrument of African empowerment. Buyers agree to purchase everything a farmer grows—coffee, cotton, even fish—freeing him from the specter of rotting crops and allowing him to produce as much as possible. And because the buyers—some of them domestic companies, others multinationals—profit, they have a stake in farmer productivity and an incentive to provide such things as training and discounted seed.

A wonderful example of this virtuous circle has unfolded in Uganda. The country’s largest provider of cooking oil, Mukwano, had long sold only palm oil imported from Southeast Asia. As an experiment, the company hired Ugandan farmers to grow sunflower seeds, which were then crushed into oil locally. In two years, Mukwano enlisted 100,000 farmers, hiring an experienced trainer from India, C. P. Chowdry, to organize farmers into groups, train leaders, distribute seeds, and collect the harvest.

Even though Mukwano is the only seller of the particular seed variety needed, and so sets the price, sunflowers are attractive to farmers because they require little tending or water, can be “intercropped” with corn or cotton, and are harvested three times a year. During the planting season, the company broadcasts a weekly radio program that gives advice on how to manage the crop. The effort is wildly popular among farmers. When I visited Uganda’s sunflower belt on the eve of planting season, I witnessed one farmer, Isaac Aggrey, ask Chowdry for seeds. In the previous season, Aggrey had earned a whopping \$300 from three acres of sunflowers, putting enough cash in his pocket to buy a motorbike. When Chowdry told him, “The seeds are gone,” Aggrey became distraught. Chowdry reminded him that he had warned that this could happen. “Next time, set aside the money and buy as soon as we put the seeds on sale,” he said sternly.

About the same time aid donors recognized the necessity of helping farmers grow more of what buyers want, the mentality of agricultural experts underwent a sea change. For nearly half a century, starting in the 1960s, there seemed to be an inverse correlation



A Ugandan food processing company hired Indian agricultural specialist C. P. Chowdry (left) to teach farmers how to maximize their output of sunflowers, a new cash crop. Emmanuel Kairagura (right), one of Chowdry's district coordinators, works directly with growers as a teacher and organizer.

between the application of agricultural expertise by national and international aid agencies and the productivity of African farming: the greater the number of experts, the worse Africa's agricultural performance.

Disdainful of the market, these agricultural specialists preferred to obsess over arcane questions about soil quality, seed varieties, and some mythical ideal of crop diversity. In classic butt-covering mode, they blamed "market failures" and Africa's geography for farmer's low incomes and their vulnerability to famine and food shortages.

Then, about five years ago, a few brave specialists suddenly realized that under their very noses some of Africa's most significant farm sectors were booming—and booming without any help from the legions of agricultural scientists and bureaucrats in Africa. In West Africa, corn production doubled between 1980 and 2000. Harvests of the lowly cassava—a starchy root that provides food insurance for many people—steadily expanded. In East Africa, sales of fresh flowers soared. Once-moribund cash crops, such as cotton, saw a large expansion, first in West Africa and then in Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The list of improbable winners went on and on.

Even as a steady diet of stories about "urgent" food crises in Africa dominated public discussion, these successes became impossible to ignore. In 2004, the International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) published a series of papers titled "Successes in African Agriculture." The papers both reflected and provoked a revolution in thinking about African farming. They also ended a long conspiracy of silence among aid agencies and professional Africanists. For decades the "food mafia," led by the World Food Program and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, had refused to acknowledge any good news about African farming out of fear that evidence of bright spots would reduce the flow of charitable donations to the UN's massive "famine" bureaucracy, designed to feed the hungry.

The IFPRI report shattered the convenient consensus among experts, donors, and African governments that farmers south of the Sahara were doomed, perpetual victims who could never feed themselves and hence must permanently proffer the begging bowl. Now, because of IFPRI (itself a junior member of the "mafia"), some African agricultural successes could not be denied. That raised a logical

A Wish List for Africa's Farmers

Bigger Cities: Often presented as a bane of African life, urbanization increases the demand for food and helps farmers and local agro-businesses strengthen their links to world markets.

Land and Legal Reform: Vast amounts of African farmland lie fallow or underused. In some countries, such as Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia, land locked up in large plantations created by colonial-era land grabs could be more productively employed if put in the hands of small farmers. But poor people also control a great deal of fallow land. Legal reforms are needed to allow efficient farmers to buy or lease land more easily.

More Technology and Infrastructure: Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's lowest utilization rates for irrigation, fertilizer, and genetically modified crops (which are illegal everywhere except South Africa). The continent lacks canneries, mills, and other ordinary food-processing facilities; even storage facilities are rare. Small improvements could make a big difference.

Better Farm Policy: Every successful agricultural country in the world—from the United States and France to Brazil and China—has relied on government intervention and incentives to assist farmers. Poor though they are, African governments can do much more to help growers—for example, by imposing tariffs on imported food and offering modest subsidies for fertilizer and other farm productivity enhancers.

Agricultural Airpower: For decades, poor or nonexistent roads have crippled African farmers. Reformers should be bold. Think planes, not roads. Impossible? Just a dozen years ago, there were virtually no mobile phones in Africa. Today, nearly one in five Africans owns one. Just as the mobile phone bypassed the vastly expensive challenge of upgrading dysfunctional African land-line systems, a big push into rural-based aviation, aimed at moving crops from the bush to African cities and beyond, would leapfrog the problem of bad roads.

Globalization: African farm exports have increased, along with farm prices, but the continent's farmers mostly serve local markets. They are still hampered by the trade barriers and farm subsidies in wealthy countries that hurt growers throughout the developing world. Such obstacles should be reduced. Over the longer term, rising worldwide demand for crop-based fuels such as ethanol and Asia's growing appetite for food will benefit African farmers. Because the continent has the world's lowest growing costs, some food production is likely to migrate there from India and China.

—G. Pascal Zachary

question: If some African farmers can succeed, why can't even more?

The sea change in serious thinking about African farming is now of more than academic interest. In nation after nation, farming is commercially viable, expanding, diversifying, and generating profits at all levels of society. Though doomsayers continue to see a bleak outlook for African farmers (the new specter is climate change), even elites are catching farm fever, recognizing that record prices for many foodstuffs, along with growing domestic markets and the possibility of expanding farm acreage in most African countries, means a brightening future.

Not coincidentally, the World Bank devotes its newest *World Development Report* to the status of agriculture globally, and the authors highlight Africa's recent gains and future potential. What a turnaround. As recently as five years ago, economists at the World Bank were telling me that farm production mattered little since Africans could always import the food they needed. They would explain that Africans should exploit their "comparative advantage" in labor costs by building world-class manufacturing or service industries and allow others, "low-cost producers" elsewhere in the world, to deliver the necessary foodstuffs to African cities.

Today, Africans have a much greater appreciation of the value of food self-sufficiency. Africa never spawned the industries the World Bank favored, and in the face of the withering onslaught from rapidly industrializing China and India, it isn't likely to. Yet Africans are some of the world's lowest-cost producers of food. And the absence of large plantations (except in parts of Kenya, Ivory Coast, and southern Africa) is beneficial. International buyers of major African crops from Europe, Asia, and the United States have told me repeatedly that small farmers in Africa, relying on their own

land and family labor and using few costly inputs such as chemical fertilizers, are more efficient producers than plantations. Counterintuitively, Africa's attractiveness to global food buyers is growing precisely because its agriculture is dominated by small farmers. And there are plenty of them.

The marriage of capitalism and agriculture is not a panacea for rural Africans. Uganda and Cameroon boast some of the best land in the sub-Saharan region. Many other African countries are doing well enough in farming that they can continue to raise output and incomes rapidly by working smarter, notwithstanding the challenges of climate change and poor soil. Yet a few parts of Africa live up to the nightmarish visions of the pessimists.

Malawi is one of those places. In this poor southern African country, Lorence Nyaka, a postal worker turned farmer, is fighting a losing battle.

On less than an acre of dry and dusty land, Nyaka, who is 51, tries to support his wife, Jesse, and 10 children, growing corn and cassava with only a hoe. Without fertilizers or irrigation, his yields are poor and he's totally dependent on

uncertain rains.

Not long before I visited Nyaka, he lost a third of his land to his wife's brother, who had become old enough to collect his share of the family's inherited property. As he explained the situation, Nyaka slashed at a patch behind his house that was barely larger than a pool table. He was preparing furrows for corn seeds that he would plant at the onset of the rains, still months away.

Worse, thanks to disease, Nyaka has more mouths to feed. AIDS took the lives of Jesse's brother and his wife, so their four children now live with the Nyakas. That means less food for their own six children, but to Nyaka his obligation is clear. "If I don't help these children," he says, "they probably die."

In these parts, people are so crowded that there's little space for cattle or other domesticated animals. Nyaka does have six chickens, one of which stays, for safekeeping, in his bedroom.

"Our problem in Malawi is we do work hard, but we don't get enough food," Nyaka says. He and his family subsist on a diet of cassava and a fluffy corn dish called *nsima*; both provide calories but scant protein. There is nothing he



Near the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, a worker packs roses for export to Europe. Cut flowers are just one component of the country's surging farm exports.



On the day they discovered that much of their bean crop had been stolen, Ken and Jessica Sakwa show off the results of their experiment with peanuts.

can do, he says, to alter his routine except wait for the rains—and pray. His fatalism, however frustrating, is typical of poor farmers in these parts.

In truth, Nyaka's options are limited. Thomas Malthus, the English economist and demographer, is getting his revenge on Lorence Nyaka and hundreds of thousands others in Malawi, the most densely populated country in Africa, where 13 million people jam into a narrow strip of land. Two hundred years ago, Malthus described a world undone by too many people and too little food—a world much like Malawi today, where life expectancy is less than 40 years and food shortages are chronic. With about half its population under the age of 15, Malawi is expected to approach a population of 20 million by 2020.

While much of the world now worries about the effects of plunging birthrates and declining populations, in Africa overpopulation remains the most serious threat to well-being, and perhaps nowhere is the problem worse than in Malawi, a 550-mile-long wedge between much larger Zambia and Mozambique. “The challenge here is to enable the population to survive,” says Stephen Carr, a specialist on rural development who has worked in Africa for 50 years.

Few Malawians use birth control, and any coercive action to cap family size is unthinkable. Nyaka says that whether he and his wife have more children “depends on God.” Even in the midst of the AIDS pandemic—one in five Malawian adults is HIV positive—condom use is infrequent. Only one in two Malawians can read. The government seems confused, at best, over how to help farmers. “The distribution of the spoils of office takes precedence over the formal functions of the state, severely limiting the ability of public officials to make policies in the general interest,” according to a 2006 study from a British think tank.

Carr, who advises the World Bank, says that migration “may be the only way to prevent a Malthusian meltdown.” With aid from the World Bank, the Malawian government has started a resettlement scheme, bringing people from the country's overcrowded south to the north, but the effort helps relatively few. Another possibility is to encourage people to leave the country, just as migrants left Germany and Ireland during times of economic hardship. Land is plen-

tiful in neighboring Mozambique, for example, and many people in both countries speak the same indigenous language and share customs. Zambia, another neighbor, needs more farm workers for its fertile land. Mobile Malawians could benefit both countries.

Time and again, of course, human ingenuity has provided an escape hatch, giving the lie to Malthus's central claim that population growth invariably outstrips food pro-

WHILE MUCH OF THE WORLD worries about declining birthrates, overpopulation is the most serious threat to Africa's well-being.

duction. In Malawi, however, the chances are growing that his grim forecast is right on target.

Even here, though, there is reason for hope, if only farmers can be roused to do more. Nyaka, for instance, lives within 200 yards of a working well. Water flows all day long. If he carried water to his land, he could bucket-irrigate vegetables during the long dry season. When I ask him why he won't irrigate in this manner, he creases his brow and shakes his head. The possibility is inconceivable.

Yet 30 miles away, outside the old colonial town of Zomba, nestled in the central highlands of Malawi, Philere Nkhoma, an inspired trainer in one of the Millennium Villages demonstration projects masterminded by Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs, is showing farmers the benefits of hand-irrigation. On the morning I visit, dozens of men are dripping water on row after row of vegetables in a “garden” the size of a football field. This method of babying high-value crops goes beyond watering. While Nkhoma chews on a piece of sugar cane, men feed spoonfuls of fertilizer to a row of cabbage plants. Nkhoma shouts encouragement to one farmer, addressing him as “brother” and complimenting him on his effort. “One secret of this thing” she says later, “you need to know how to speak to the people. You should make sure you're part of them.”

Nkhoma's close involvement with hundreds of small farmers in central Malawi won't grab headlines, but it represents a radical new beginning for farmers, long ignored by the very people paid to help them. Malawi's “agricultural

extension service has collapsed,” according to a confidential British report. The gap is partly filled by aid projects such as the one that employs Nkhoma, whose own life story mirrors the shift in the status of farming in Africa. She’s part of a new generation of urban Africans unafraid of getting their hands dirty. After more than 10 mostly frustrating years as a government farm adviser, she was chosen by a foreign donor to earn a bachelor’s degree in agriculture. After graduation she joined the Sachs project, where she has wide latitude to innovate and the resources to carry out plans. “If you have an energetic extension worker, you only need to change the mindset of the people,” she says. “When that happens, change can occur very quickly.”

Indeed, last fall Malawi posted a record corn crop, far exceeding expectations and eliminating, at least for now, any threat of general famine in the country.

Men and women do not live by bread alone. I am reminded of this cliché on a cool September afternoon in Kampala, where I meet Ken Sakwa inside a fast-food restaurant called Nando’s. Sakwa is in the capital alone, having traveled from his village in eastern Uganda in a rickety van. He looks fit, if a bit thinner than I recall him.

As we munch on grilled chicken and french fries, he recounts his latest achievements. In February he leased another piece of land, bringing his total acreage to 12, and he now regularly employs six of his neighbors to help him work his fields. In a sign of his standing in his community, village elders brokered a favorable settlement of his vexing dispute with the brother of a neighbor from whom he had leased land. Managing the resentments of less prosperous farmers in the village remains a burden. Sakwa tells me that lately he has been finding small bottles, stuffed with curious contents, near his house. He ignores them, though he knows they are meant as a form of juju, intended by his neighbors to put a hex on him. To smooth relations, Sakwa now lends money to people in need, but he admits, “I usually don’t get paid back.”

Sakwa’s success is indeed striking. He has saved more than \$10,000 out of his farm profits over the prior five years, and he’s now constructing a large commercial building along the main road near his village. He plans to rent out about a dozen shops, then sell the building and bank his profits.

While we talk, one of Sakwa’s cousins, a younger man who lives in the city, joins us. “My relatives in Kampala think I am rich now,” Sakwa says. “But I feel I overwork myself.” He normally works from dawn until dusk, and unlike many farmers he never drinks alcohol, sparing himself the expense of buying the local brew from the makeshift village pub.

I ask Sakwa whether he might make an exception today and share a Club beer with me. We have something to celebrate. His wife, Jessica, gave birth to twin daughters a few months before, and I imagine he must be proud. He says nothing. When his cousin steps away to the toilet, Sakwa whispers to me, “The children are sick.”

He adds, “I am here to get medicine for them.” Oh, no. Earlier, I told a friend of mine that Sakwa was traveling to Kampala for no apparent reason. She is from the same region and ethnic group as Sakwa and guessed that he must need “special” medicine that he is afraid to obtain near his village. I scoffed at her suggestion. I lean toward Sakwa and say softly, “Your newborn babies have AIDS.”

Sakwa purses his lips and nods. Suddenly, his loss of weight seems ominous. His eyes look gaunt. “And you?” I ask.

“I tested positive. Jessica also.”

I ask Sakwa if I can telephone my friend. She counsels people with the disease, helping them to get services and anti-retroviral drugs, often provided at no charge by foreign donors and the government. The ARVs are indeed remarkable, bringing many years of health to most who take them properly.

An hour later, I sit in an outdoor café with Sakwa and my friend. They immediately begin speaking in Gisu, the language of their ethnic group. “You can still be a successful farmer, even more successful,” she tells Sakwa. “So long as you get treatment, you can still farm as well as you do now.”

I wonder whether he believes her. She looks him in the eyes and says, this time in English, “Don’t let the disease take away your success.”

The woman, who is a few years younger than Sakwa, realizes that her sister attended school with him. She promises to help him and Jessica get treatment quickly.

Sakwa thanks us when he leaves. It is night in Kampala now, and I sit in the darkness. The electricity is out, and I clutch my Club beer, sipping at the bottle even though it is empty.

My friend orders me another beer, and a soda for herself. “It is good we can deal with what is,” she says. ■

In ESSENCE

REVIEWS OF ARTICLES FROM PERIODICALS AND SPECIALIZED JOURNALS HERE AND ABROAD

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SOCIETY

The Downside of Diversity

THE SOURCES: “*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century*” by Robert D. Putnam, in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, June 2007, and “Bowling With Others” by James Q. Wilson, in *Commentary*, Oct. 2007.

FEW CONCEPTS ARE MORE celebrated in modern America than racial and ethnic diversity. Yet casual talk-show racism and fierce hostility toward the current wave of Hispanic immigrants make the glorification of “difference” seem glaringly out of step with reality. Although it is alluring to think that living in diverse communities fosters tolerance and social solidarity, Harvard sociologist Robert D. Putnam, author of the influential book *Bowling Alone* (2000), which warned of Americans’ growing social isolation, says the evidence points overwhelmingly in the opposite direction. The more we are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more we with-

draw into our shells, he writes.

A complex statistical analysis of data collected in half-hour interviews with 30,000 Americans in 2000 found that people who live in heavily racially and ethnically mixed communities “distrust not merely people who do not look like them, but even people who *do*,” Putnam says.

Diversity triggers a tendency to hunker down and to have less confidence in local government, community leaders, and news media, the study data show. In homogeneous North and South Dakota, 70 to 80 percent of survey respondents said they trusted their neighbors a lot. In diverse Los Angeles and San Fran-

Diversity triggers a tendency to hunker down and have less confidence in local government, community leaders, and news media.

cisco, only about 30 percent said the same thing.

Living in a diverse community without a lot of trust in the people next door makes residents less likely to register to vote and more likely to participate in protest marches, Putnam found. People are also less likely to give to charity or to volunteer in the community. Residents of racially or ethnically mixed areas have fewer close friends and confidantes, report being less happy, and say they have a lower quality of life. They spend more time watching television.

The effects are similar regardless of age, gender, economic status, political philosophy, or race. Living in a diverse community has a slightly greater negative impact on conservatives than on liberals, but the effect is “significant” among liberals too. Its impact on whites, Putnam says, is “definitely greater,” but it is “visible” among nonwhites as well.

In the long run, Americans can handle diversity, Putnam says. A century ago, new immigrants from Eastern Europe married only each other, as did migrants from Southern Europe. But by 1990, only one-fifth of white Americans had spouses with an identical ethnic background.

Putnam says the country should look to what worked in the past to

foster social solidarity, from building community centers and athletic fields that immigrants and natives can enjoy together to making English-language training more accessible. Because the long-run benefits of immigration and diversity are national in scope, the federal government should help local governments bear the short-term direct costs of increased expenditures on education, health care, and other needs.

But Putnam's former Harvard colleague James Q. Wilson, the well-known conservative thinker, dismisses his long-term solutions as "wishful thinking." It's almost impossible to forge social cohesion among diverse groups, Wilson says. The few institutions that have succeeded, such as the U.S. military and some churches, possess two key ingredients that neighborhoods lack: authoritative leaders and discipline.

More important, Wilson argues, Putnam has a cramped understanding of solidarity. His ideas draw on rights-based notions about how we must learn to manage relations with others and respect differences. That's only half the battle, according to Wilson. People get a sense of belonging from the things they *share* with others, such as an ethnic heritage or moral beliefs. If your neighborhood is populated with people whose values and beliefs are close to your own, you're naturally more likely to join in community life.

Putnam thinks that diversity can help create community. Wilson counters that it's a competing value, albeit a worthy one. "As when it comes to other arrangements in a democracy, balance is all."

SOCIETY

The Religious Shall Multiply

THE SOURCE: "Falling Human Fertility and the Future of the Family" by Philip Longman, in *The Family in America*, July 2007.

THERE'S HEAVY COMPETITION for the biggest threat of the 21st century, what with terrorism, global warming, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. But all pale in comparison to the force that will most affect the future of society in the new millennium, according to Philip Longman, a fellow at the New America Foundation. That's the decline in birthrates.

Women are having fewer children in every hemisphere, in countries rich and poor, in families that are Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim, and under all forms of government. Even though the world's population is growing by about 76 million annually—that's the equivalent of pasting a new country the size of Egypt onto the globe every year—it's not because people are having more children. They're not. It's because everybody is living longer. "The absolute number of children aged 0 to 4 is actually six million lower today [worldwide] than it was in 1990," Longman says.

Over the long term, the average woman needs to bear 2.1 children for the population to remain constant. Mothers need to replace themselves and their partners, and provide an extra tenth of a child to make up for the individuals who never reproduce. But there are fewer and fewer places with fertility rates above the replace-

ment level. China, Iran, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Kazakhstan? All below 2.1. And among the major industrialized countries, only the United States comes close to a population-sustaining birthrate. Even India, with an overall fertility rate of 2.5, is finding that births in its southern states have fallen below the rate necessary to maintain current population levels.

In developed countries the trend toward having only one child is driven by "sheer economics," Longman says. In many cases, fertility rates peak in the school-age years. The cost of raising a middle-class child has risen, according to U.S. government estimates, to more than \$200,000, not including college tuition. Urbanization also drives down fertility; and around the world more than 50 percent of married or cohabiting women are using modern contraception.

But there are larger cultural and religious issues at play, Longman writes. Scholars who have scrutinized polling data have found a strong correlation between "modern, individualistic, secular values" and low fertility rates. Do you distrust the army? If you do and you live in Europe, you are far less likely to marry and have children. Do you think the most important goal in education is to develop imagination and independence? There is little chance you'll have a large family.

Once the population is broken down in this fashion, it becomes clear that a relatively small segment of the nation is having a disproportionate share of the children. This segment is quite likely to be deeply religious, Longman says. Although religious

fundamentalists are themselves having fewer children than in the past, Mormons, Orthodox Jews, and Islamic and Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals have, on average, far larger families than others.

Fertility crashes have happened before, for instance, in Greece in the second century BC. But when “cultural and economic conditions discourage parenthood, not even a dictator—and many have tried—can force people to go forth and multiply,” Longman writes. Still, as the Greeks and Romans shirked their child-producing duties, Europe did not sink into a vegetative state. As the Roman empire slowly collapsed, the population didn’t die out, it just changed. Some sociologists believe that nearly all of the spread of Christianity in late antiquity was the result of the higher birthrates and lower death rates of Christians. Out of their fecundity, medieval Europe was born.

SOCIETY

East Egg Moves West

THE SOURCE: “The Right Side of the Tracks: Affluent Neighborhoods in the Metropolitan United States” by Barrett A. Lee and Matthew Marlay, in *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 88 (3), 2007.

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS HAVE chronicled nearly every possible aspect of poor and middle-class neighborhoods over the last century. Finally, sociologists are beginning to probe one of the remaining under-researched territories of America: the enclaves of the rich.



Metropolitan Washington, flush with the lucrative industries that service the federal government, contains 74 rich neighborhoods, more than anywhere else in the country. Most are in the suburbs.

The comfortable class is hardly confined to the hedge-fund manager haunts of New York and the stately formality of Boston, where previous students have usually looked, write Barrett A. Lee and Matthew Marlay, sociologists at Pennsylvania State University. The well-off have moved to the suburbs. And to the West. In the most recent census figures, 30 percent of affluent neighborhoods—the top two percent of census tracts (each populated by about 4,000 people), with median family incomes of about

\$110,000 and over—are located in the West, 27 percent in the South, 26 percent in the Northeast, and only 18 percent in the Midwest. Nearly eight of 10 rich neighborhoods aren’t in central cities at all.

The flush communities are populated by families with children, for the most part, and about 88 percent of their residents are white. Roughly two percent are African American and about the same percentage are of Hispanic descent. Asian Americans, however, are overrepresented. On Main Street in a hypothetical

Richville, eight of 100 residents would be of Asian descent, compared with five of 100 in Average-town. About 13 percent of the households would be headed by somebody born in another country, compared with 14 percent for all communities. Nearly 70 percent of adults would have college degrees, compared with 26 percent overall.

Not too many full-time coupon clippers would live in these rarified reaches. Men in these census tracts would be more likely to be working than their counterparts in areas lower on the income ladder; women less likely. But most affluent households—70 percent—do report “unearned” income from interest, dividends, and rents, the authors write. Lee and Marlay were unable to squeeze out precise information on overall wealth—the oceanfront vacation home or the odd private jet—from the data available. But they did find that long before the current housing downturn, the top two percent of houses cost nearly \$400,000, compared with just over \$100,000 in the average sample census tract. The richest neighborhoods are not likely to be gated communities. Such developments are more often home to people some notches down the wealth ladder and worried about crime.

With a grand total of 74 wealthy census tracts, the Washington metropolitan area tops the list in terms of quantity. Metropolitan New York City is second with 54. Nationwide, there are 764 wealthy neighborhoods as defined by Lee and Marlay’s criteria. Interested though most of us are in how

the other half lives, the authors note that the evidence produced by their statistical analysis is “rather predictable.” But the “modest surprises” offered by the authors’ research are somewhat comforting: Even the rich in America tend to hold down jobs, and a substantial number of them are first-generation immigrants.

SOCIETY

New York, Immigration 101

THE SOURCE: “How Exceptional Is New York? Migration and Multiculturalism in the Empire City” by Nancy Foner, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Nov. 2007.

TO UNDERSTAND HOW NEW YORK differs from other cities in the way it deals with immigration, look no further than street parking. New York matter-of-factly bows to its infinite variety of ethnic groups by suspending alternate-side parking restrictions on no fewer than 34 legal and religious holidays, including the Hindu celebration of Diwali, the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, the Catholic feast of the Assumption, the Jewish holiday of Purim, and the Asian Lunar New Year.

A “particular New York way” of absorbing vast numbers of new

New Yorkers pride themselves on a tradition of successfully absorbing immigrants, even if the story is not always quite true.

immigrants has taken root in the city, writes Nancy Foner, a sociologist at Hunter College, in part because New Yorkers have had so much practice in accommodation.

For much of the 20th century, one in five New York residents was foreign born. That figure reached 41 percent in the 1910 census, a level it’s again approaching, at 36 percent in the last census. Those New Yorkers who weren’t born in a foreign country themselves are likely to have a relative who was, Foner writes.

As a magnet for immigrants, New York may be fortunate that its three million newcomers are not dominated by one group that can gang up on the others. The top three groups—Dominicans, Chinese, and Jamaicans—made up less than 30 percent of all foreign-born people in the five boroughs in 2000. Many immigrants still come from Europe. The countries of the former Soviet Union are the fourth-largest source. Even among blacks—a group often counted as if it were a monolith—there is tremendous diversity. More than a quarter of the city’s two million non-Hispanic black residents were born abroad.

New York also has historical advantages, Foner writes. Migration into the boroughs has been steady and diverse for more than a century, unlike some cities that have been surprised by a large recent influx after generations of little change. New York’s low-skilled immigrants have been balanced by an equal number of highly skilled newcomers. The city’s 51 city council seats, 65 state assembly positions, 25 state senate slots, and 59 community boards—with up to 50 members

each—offer abundant opportunities for ethnic representation.

New Yorkers pride themselves on a tradition of successfully absorbing immigrants, Foner notes, even if the story is not always quite true. They are proud of their innu-

merable ethnic festivals and parades, their settlement houses, the huge City University of New York, and their ethnic politics. If, as some say, the Italians are yesterday's newcomers and today's establishment, maybe recent immigrants from

Latin America and Asia are the "new Italians." And with much of the country's media industry based in New York City, what happens in New York may not stay in New York, but be subtly broadcast throughout the country.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Time for Plan B

THE SOURCE: "The Case for Restraint" by Barry R. Posen, in *American Interest*, Nov.–Dec. 2007.

THE BICKERING OVER THE Iraq war has obscured the bigger truth about U.S. foreign policy, writes Barry R. Posen, a political scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Since the end of the Cold War the foreign-policy establishment, though differing over details, has stood solidly behind a "grand strategy" of international activism. Now the results are in: The experiment has failed.

For nearly two decades, Democrats and Republicans alike have supported a policy of maintaining America's overwhelming military superiority, using force under a range of circumstances, employing extraordinary measures to prevent countries from laying their hands on nuclear weapons, and trying to spread democracy.

The nation's vast wealth and technical know-how have tempted policymakers to take action in each of these areas almost simul-

taneously, even as the costs have escalated. The Pentagon has strained to pacify Iraq, population 27 million. But other potential trouble spots are of a different order of magnitude: Iran has 65 million people; Pakistan, 165 million. Even with the U.S. military

Since the end of the Cold War, the foreign-policy establishment has stood solidly behind international activism, but the experiment has failed.

confronting weak forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration has been unable to muster public support to finance its foreign policy; it has largely used the national credit card.

And America's enemies have proliferated. No longer faced with one giant military adversary, the United States has been fighting costly battles against minuscule groups—Somalis, Serbs, Al Qaeda—and losing equipment

and soldiers at a rate that is unsustainable.

Globalization complicates American foreign policy because it seems to have exacerbated the insecurities of modern capitalism. When industrial capitalism swept across the West in the late 19th century, it created an urbanized citizenry whose members were vulnerable to nationalist, communist, and fascist appeals, Posen says. Similarly, today's globalization is likely to increase the supply of those who might be susceptible to new troubadours of extremism. The consensus policy of weighing in on everything, everywhere, cannot be maintained.

Posen proposes instead a "grand strategy of restraint." The United States should abandon its permanent land bases in Arab countries while relentlessly pursuing Al Qaeda, using its intelligence services rather than the military. It should be a genuine "good guy" internationally, using its great power to help—even more than it has in the past—in disaster relief and other humanitarian interventions under careful guidelines.

American leaders need to develop a more measured view of the risks of nuclear proliferation, Posen writes. "Without

the promiscuous use of preventive war, it will not be possible to stop all new nuclear weapons programs," but the "imperfect regime" of the International Atomic Energy Agency and non-proliferation treaties can slow them down and provide intelligence about their activities. Emerging nuclear powers should be made to worry that they might be vulnerable to preemptive nuclear attacks.

At the same time, the United States should encourage its "longtime wards" to look after themselves. It should withdraw all its military forces from Europe over 10 years and wean Israel and Egypt from financial assistance. Japan should be nudged toward making itself more "alliance-worthy" in Asia.

When the Cold War ended, Posen writes, the nation's leaders gambled that good intentions, great power, and action could change both the international and domestic politics of the world in ways that would be advantageous to the United States. Now it is clear that "transformation is unachievable, and costs are high." America's new policy lodestars should be: Conceive security interests narrowly, use military power stingily, pursue enemies persistently, share responsibilities equitably, and watch and wait. Patiently.

EXCERPT

Musharraf's ATM

Why has the U.S. stayed with [President Pervez] Musharraf long after it became evident that Pakistan was not an effective partner? There was apparently a belief that he was a truly outstanding leader. . . . Thus, there was no thought of making our multi-billion-dollar aid program conditional upon performance. So in effect we've wasted several billions of dollars becoming Musharraf's ATM machine, allowing him to build up a military establishment that was irrelevant to his (and our) real security threat, yet presiding over an intensification of anti-American feelings in Pakistan itself, and failing to provide adequate aid to Pakistan's failing social and educational sectors.

—STEPHEN P. COHEN, author and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, at www.brookings.edu (Nov. 5, 2007)

wielded these weapons experienced legendary death rates. Traditional flamethrowers are gone from the new kind of war being fought in Iraq, but fatality rates there are still vastly different from front to rear, mission to mission, and rank to rank, write Emily Buzzell, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania now serving with AmeriCorps, and Samuel H. Preston, a demographer on the university's faculty.

Overall, the death rate of military personnel in Iraq is about four per 1,000 per year, roughly three times that of Americans of similar age at home. The Vietnam War mortality rate among American troops was nearly 22 per 1,000, five

times that for the war in Iraq. The ratio of dead to wounded in Iraq is only about a third of what it was in Southeast Asia because wounded soldiers get faster and better care.

Reflecting the differences in exposure to combat, the Marine Corps death rate is double that of the Army, nine times higher than the Navy's, and 23 times higher than that of the Air Force. Among all servicemembers, the greatest danger in the war is faced by Marine lance corporals.

Active Army forces are three times more likely to die per deployment than are members of the Army Reserve. But Marines are at very high risk regardless of

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Safer Than 'Nam

THE SOURCE: "Mortality of American Troops in the Iraq War" by Emily Buzzell and Samuel H. Preston, in *Population and Development Review*, Sept. 2007.

IT DIDN'T TAKE A CREATIVE Hollywood scriptwriter to manufacture the dangers of operating a flamethrower during World War II. Lumbering across the battlefield with 70 pounds of weaponry strapped on their backs, silhouetted like the cartoon character SpongeBob SquarePants as they sought to get close enough to incinerate their targets, the men who

whether they are active-duty members or reservists.

Consistent with their official exclusion from primary combat positions, women have a mortality rate one-sixth that of men. Largely as a consequence of their lower rank, younger troops are more likely to die in the line of duty than older ones.

Hispanics face a higher risk of

death in Iraq than non-Hispanics. Blacks face less than whites. Part of the reason may be that they are overrepresented in lower-risk categories: 19 percent of blacks in Iraq are women, compared with nine percent of nonblacks, and seven percent are Marines, compared with 11 percent of nonblacks, according to Buzzell and Preston.

Deaths in Iraq—2,706 at the time the authors compiled their data and 3,894 on December 19, 2007—are rare in comparison to woundings. From 2003 to the end of 2006, one of every 31 U.S. troops serving in Iraq was wounded. The pattern of woundings, Buzzell and Preston say, is quite likely to be the same as the demographics of death.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Geezers on the Court

THE SOURCE: “Where Have You Gone, Sherman Minton? The Decline of the Short-Term Supreme Court Justice” by Justin Crowe and Christopher F. Karpowitz, in *Perspectives on Politics*, Sept. 2007.

ARE SUPREME COURT JUSTICES staying on the bench so long that the Court itself is in need of constitutional reform? The average tenure of justices has climbed past a quarter-century. The average age of a justice upon leaving office has soared to 79. Stephen Breyer spent 11 years handling the junior justice’s job of doorman at the Court’s conferences before a new colleague arrived to relieve him of the chore.

Law professors across the political spectrum have discovered something to agree on: Lifetime tenure for Supreme Court justices is a very bad idea and term limits are needed. But “both this diagnosis and the associated remedy are misguided,” contend Justin Crowe and

Christopher F. Karpowitz, political scientists at Pomona College and Brigham Young University, respectively. The problem is not that justices are serving unusually long terms—they aren’t. It’s that a whole breed of judge has

disappeared: the short-term justice.

Before 1970, nearly one in three appointees spent less than about seven years on the bench. Most of the short-termers, in the years before modern medicine, became ill or died, but the next-largest category simply didn’t like the job and walked. John Rutledge, one of George Washington’s original appointees, resigned to become chief justice of the



Sherman Minton (top row, left), with fellow Supreme Court justices in 1955, resigned the next year after only seven years of service. The Court hasn’t had a short-term justice in 38 years.

South Carolina Court of Common Pleas. John Hessin Clarke quit in 1922, complaining that he had spent too much time on trivia such as “whether the digging of a ditch in Iowa was constitutional.” Sherman Minton served barely seven years before a combination of ill health and boredom drove him to retire. President Lyndon Johnson sweet-talked Justice Arthur Goldberg into resigning to take the toothless position of United Nations ambassador so that he could appoint his friend Abe Fortas to the Court. Then Fortas himself was forced to

resign less than four years later because of a financial controversy.

But since 1970, the short-termer has been extinct. Critics contend that ever-lengthening tenure decreases the democratic accountability that occurs with turnovers, increases the politicization of the confirmation process because vacancies occur so rarely, and can result in justices suffering from “mental decrepitude.” (Both William O. Douglas and Thurgood Marshall are widely considered to have been afflicted in this way by the time they stepped down.) As a remedy, some reform-

ers propose to limit Supreme Court justices to 18-year terms.

Crowe and Karpowitz say that such a limit would only marginally increase Court turnover, and would not necessarily lift the “dead hand of the past” from the high bench. More frequent confirmations might merely speed up the cycle of messy, divisive confirmation fights. Besides, the authors note, several of the nation’s most distinguished justices stuck around for some three decades, including John Marshall, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and William Brennan.

EXCERPT

In Search of the Public Interest

Concern for the public interest, the sense of the commonwealth, is largely confined these days to high school civics courses, to the degree they are even offered. An effort by a political leader today to reawaken this ideal would be met with curiosity at best and a good deal of skepticism at worst. We find ourselves, after all, in an age of personal achievement, if not self-aggrandizement. . . . Yet, particularly among the young, there is a lingering feeling that we are all in this together, that we have a lot more in common than we often realize. This latent sense of community is often very near the surface.

—Former senator **GARY HART**, author of *The Shield and the Cloak: The Security of the Commons* (2006)

Over the past 50 years the federal government’s desire to serve the public interest has also led it into areas in which it was not best suited to advance the public good. History has demonstrated that when government acts too aggressively, even in pursuit of a

common goal, it can overreach and actually exacerbate the ills it seeks to reverse.

—**CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN**, formerly governor of New Jersey, former administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and cochair of the Republican Leadership Council

Conservatives and liberals, both taking pride in their “realism,” argue that the notion of the public interest is nothing but a figment. . . . For conservatives, the rights of the individual trump all; for liberals, it is the rights of the group. A rigid individualism on the one hand and an ideological multiculturalism on the other have hollowed out the public good.

—**ADAM WOLFSON**, editor of the magazine *The Public Interest*, before its demise in 2005

It is always right to ask how the public interest may be promoted. But that is not a question that social scientists or philosophers or theologians can answer. The answer is worked out in the thrust and parry of political competition. Not better theory, but rather better practice is the remedy for the ills that befall the body politic.

—**WILLIAM A. GALSTON**, author of *Public Matters* (2005) and other books

All excerpts are from the Fall 2007 issue of *Daedalus*, whose theme was “On the Public Interest.”

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Chinese Chardonnay?

THE SOURCE: "Market Focus: Wine Wars" by Philip Martin, in *The Milken Institute Review*, Fourth Quarter, 2007.

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, one industry after another has abandoned the West for the world's developing countries. Now, a product that predates the Bible looks vulnerable to the same siren call. Wine, writes Philip Martin, an agricultural economist at the University of California, Davis, is one more commodity that technology and marketing ability can make into a profitable industry on almost any improbable hillside where fruit will grow.

Europe is swimming in surplus wine, he writes, as consumption decreases and upstart countries compete. The European Union, which spends \$1.6 billion annually to subsidize its wine-grape growers, is proposing to pay growers to remove 500,000 acres from production, and cheap table wine is regularly distilled into industrial alcohol. Europe both produces and drinks the bulk of the world's annual 6.5 billion gallon output, but its industry is under siege. While the average adult in France, Italy, and Spain consumes 22 gallons each year of what is at bottom fermented grape juice, younger Europeans are increasingly

choosing other alcoholic beverages and even imported "New World" vintages.

European wines are quite different from the wines of America and other new producing countries. They are made under heavily regulated conditions that haven't changed much in generations. Most growers are small,

The United States now produces 10 percent of the world's wine, Argentina five percent, and South Africa, Australia, and Chile, three percent each. Will we see Chinese wine next?

and many wines are made by cooperatives that crush several varieties of regionally grown grapes and market the result under their area's name. Vines are generally not allowed to be irrigated, and unusual weather conditions can wreak havoc with the fruit, so a wine's taste can veer from premium to plonk in a year's time. European wines are less alcoholic than those of the New World—an alcohol content of 11 to 12 percent is common, in contrast to the 13 to 14 percent typically found among the European product's competitors. And wines

are often aged in old wooden casks, producing a taste that some new wine consumers reject as not "fresh."

New World vintners make heavy use of technology. They use mechanical pruning and harvesting techniques and make their own decisions about irrigation. Their wines are often made from a single variety of grape, rather than a mixture. And New World producers are willing to try novel techniques to achieve a consistent taste. Such innovations have vaulted once parvenu producers into the top ranks: The United States now produces 10 percent of the world's wine; Argentina, five percent; and South Africa, Australia, and Chile, three percent each.

Wine, Martin writes, offers a "glimpse of the global economy's future." And it's "not a bad vision for what Americans seem to do best—innovate, market, distribute." But such skills are hardly an American monopoly. In the future, if he's right, "red Chinese" could have a whole new meaning.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Stay Inside the Box

THE SOURCE: "Breakthrough Thinking From Inside the Box" by Kevin P. Coyne, Patricia Gorman Clifford, and Renée Dye, in *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 2007.

YOU'RE IN A BIG BRAINSTORMING meeting. The CEO is in charge, so you don't intend to say a word. A few loudmouths are

Management strategists now suggest it may be better to think *inside* the box.

expounding their pet ideas. Think outside the box, the boss says. No idea is too wild. Be bold. You can predict the outcome of the session: nothing.

Now, three management specialists have finally seen the light. Think *inside* the box, say Kevin P. Coyne, Patricia Gorman Clifford, and Renée Dye, all veterans of McKinsey and Company. The trick is constructing the box.

Most professionals are quite capable of thinking effectively within constraints. They are used to it, and automatically explore alternatives. Most people are not very good at unstructured, abstract brainstorming. The key to productive corporate sessions lies in posing smart, concrete questions.

Modern psychologists have learned a lot about how people work best in groups, according to Coyne, who left McKinsey to form a partnership in his own name. Most people won't volunteer a word in gatherings larger than 10, but in groups of four everyone feels obliged to participate. Pushy people can be bundled into the same groups so they cancel each other out. Cheap parlor games work: "We once had the top six executives of a \$100 billion company working full tilt because each had bet \$20 that his team

could come up with the best idea," the authors write.

Good questions—the territory *inside* the proverbial box—establish boundaries for ideas: Is the company looking for risky big ideas or more modest sure things? How much money can be spent? What staffing is available? Then management can narrow down the resulting ideas and follow up immediately.

The think-inside-the-box approach may take time to bear fruit, the authors write. But when those who have suffered silently through outside-the-box sessions open up, a company will get the benefit of more intellectual expertise than in the past, and, just possibly, more thoughtful firepower too.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The False Promise of Recycling

THE SOURCE: "Curbside Recycling in the Presence of Alternatives" by Timothy K. M. Beatty, Peter Berck, and Jay P. Shimshack, in *Economic Inquiry*, Oct. 2007.

THE THREATENED CATAclysm of global warming has eclipsed the environmental battles over bottle deposits and recycling that once engaged city and state governments. But three economists who have studied the effects of curbside recycling in California have found surprising results: Cities that launch expensive programs to pick up bottles and cans at the curb—rather than ask residents to drop them off at recycling centers—get little extra for

their money.

Americans produce 375 million tons of municipal solid waste every year, about 1.3 tons for every man, woman, and child. Between 25 and 30 percent of it is recycled, and municipal programs to collect bottles and cans at the curb now cover about half of the U.S. population, according to Timothy K. M. Beatty of the University of British Columbia, Peter Berck of the University of California, Berkeley, and Jay P. Shimshack of Tufts University.

Most of the research on curbside recycling has merely toted up the amount collected by the trucks plying the neighborhoods. The authors examined all recycling (not including newspapers) in 44 California counties over six years, comparing costs and benefits. They found that expanding curbside programs had a positive effect on recycling overall, but it was very small. Recycling of aluminum and glass containers remained about the same, but residents recycled more plastic containers under the curbside programs. What apparently happened was that some of the same faithful recyclers who had taken their beverage containers to the neighborhood centers and received rebates now rolled them out to the curb, but few new recruits joined them.

Beatty and colleagues did find that the richer the neighborhood, the more likely the residents were to forgo the redemption payments, especially for glass, and put items out on the curb. But,

oddly, as curbside programs expanded across the state, the authors found, even high-income areas turned in more light alum-

inum cans and bottles at recycling centers than ever. They speculated that curbside access had increased scavenging, with poorer

people finding it easier to scoop up large numbers of cans from the curbs and take them to recycling centers for cash.

PRESS & MEDIA

Not So High in Vietnam

THE SOURCE: "The Myth of the 'Addicted Army': Drug Use in Vietnam in Historical Perspective" by Jeremy Kuzmarov, in *War and Society*, Oct. 2007.

MORE THAN 30 YEARS AFTER THE U.S. military pulled out of Saigon, last year's popular movie *American Gangster* used heroin smuggling during the Vietnam War as a universally recognizable backdrop for a thriller about drug dealing. But Jeremy Kuzmarov, a visiting historian at Bucknell University, says that the 'Nam junkie is largely a myth fostered by the news media and sensationalized by Hollywood.

Drug use among U.S. troops in Vietnam, he writes, was "far from omnipresent, confined largely to the

rear," and did not cause "combat breakdown or the military's collapse." Drugs were less prevalent than alcohol and less socially destructive. A 1970 study showed that 28.9 percent of GIs surveyed had experimented with marijuana during their tour of duty, a figure comparable to rates in the United States for men 18 to 21. But newspapers and magazines inflated the results of a study showing that a majority of U.S. personnel jailed at the Army's stockade in Long Binh had used marijuana to suggest that 60 to 90 percent of American soldiers in Vietnam were on drugs, according to Kuzmarov.

The Washington Post reported

that the first thing soldiers did after killing a North Vietnamese fighter was to search him for his "stash," although Kuzmarov writes that Vietnamese who used drugs rarely smoked marijuana, preferring to chew betel nuts or smoke opium. CBS News broadcast a report that American soldiers were getting high from opium-laced marijuana inhaled through the barrels of their guns, failing to note that the incident in question was staged as an antiwar stunt. *The New York Times* said, without citing evidence, that the North Vietnamese were peddling "brain dulling marijuana" to American GIs.

Pentagon research showed that about half of American soldiers who smoked marijuana had done so fewer than 10 times, and less than 10 percent of soldiers used drugs more than two or three times. About six percent of departing sol-

EXCERPT

One Expensive War

Totting up exorbitant expenses became a matter for competition among journalists [during the Falklands War]. One Californian woman planned to buy a cottage in Ireland with the proceeds of her war; somebody else was going on a special holiday; another was determined to put in a new kitchen at home in

north London, when the conflict was over. The record for expenses (upward of £20,000 in three months) was held by a man called Ross Benson, from the London Daily Express. North American journalists complained that United States employers demanded expense accounts submitted in local currency. This had to be abandoned as inflation grew. The millions of pesos in which business was transacted overflowed the screen on pocket calculators.

—ANDREW GRAHAM-YOOLL, editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, in *Antioch Review* (Fall 2007)

diers tested positive for drugs in 1971, a number that dropped below two percent in 1972, although the latter number is disputed because of laboratory problems.

Americans, Kuzmarov says,

overlooked a real alcohol epidemic in Vietnam, and absorbed a sensationalized media portrait of an “addicted army” ravaged by drugs. The media linked “wasted” Vietnam veterans to a rise in the

nation’s crime rate. Subsequent research, Kuzmarov writes, has shown that less than one half of one percent of Vietnam veterans committed a single crime after they returned from the war.

HISTORY

Uppity Abigail

THE SOURCE: “Abigail Adams, Bond Speculator” by Woody Holton, in *William and Mary Quarterly*, Oct. 2007.

IN 1783, AS FUTURE PRESIDENT John Adams, in Paris, wrapped up the treaty ending the Revolutionary War, and his wife, Abigail, managed the family farm back in America, the couple had one of their rare quarrels. The subject was money. John wanted to buy neighboring farms in Massachusetts; Abigail wanted to speculate in 18th-century junk bonds and Vermont real estate.

The famously like-minded pair held almost polar views on investment strategy. John thought that speculation diverted capital from productive uses and merely redistributed it from poor creditors to rich investors. Abigail wanted to make money. She considered the dour and righteous John’s paltry salary a poor reward for his years of public service, and thought nothing

of buying bonds at fire-sale prices and investing in real estate using “straw men” in order to conceal her identity.

Moreover, she carved out £100 of the family’s available sterling and began playing the bond market on her own, even though, under Massachusetts law, everything belonged to John. Woody Holton, a historian at the University of Richmond, writes that Abigail is well known for

denouncing laws that left all property “subject to the controul [sic] and disposal of our partners.” Less known is that her views were not utopian musings. She took family money “which I call mine,” she wrote, speculated (successfully) with it, and set up a fund she used for personal charity.

She was remarkably candid about why. “I derive a pleasure from the regret of others,” the poor and needy whom she would not be able to help further, she confessed before departing for Europe.

Through forthright disagreement with her husband, occasional wheedling, and surreptitious instructions to managers, Abigail managed the family’s assets far more profitably than John ordered her to. When he directed his wife in 1783 to sound out two neighbors about selling their farms, she wrote back that she had a better alternative: state bonds. Unpersuaded, John tried again a year later. By that time, Abigail had joined her husband in Europe and turned her family’s affairs over to her uncle, Cotton Tufts.

When John asked Tufts to buy the farm of

EXCERPT

What Might Have Been

Just as there are phantom limbs there are phantom histories, histories that are severed and discarded, but linger on as thwarted possibilities and compelling nostalgias. After the amputation we live as if, it feels as if, the limb is still there. Its loss is known, even mourned, but it is still experienced as somehow present; it is a loss at once acknowledged and invisible.

—ADAM PHILLIPS, editor of the forthcoming *Book of Interruptions* and author of *Intimacy*, also forthcoming, in *Raritan* (Summer 2007)

William and Sarah Vesey, Abigail wrote a letter calling off her uncle, just three days later. “Between you and I, don’t be in a hurry about that. . . . Vesey’s place is poverty,” she wrote, “and I think we have enough of that already.”

Speculation in securities was hugely controversial at the time. During the war, some currency-strapped colonies paid soldiers, farmers, and traders in paper certificates. Desperate for gold and silver, the holders resold the paper to speculators at a fraction of its face value. Abigail bought a £100 certificate for

about £25. In four years, she collected £27 in interest. In another venture, she bought 1,650 acres of disputed former Indian land in



First Lady Abigail Adams was a shrewd speculator who pressed and wheedled her husband, John, to get out of farmland and invest in bonds.

Vermont, using four straw men to secure parcels for each of her four children. Despite her protestations that she had set her heart on the

investment, John responded flatly, “don’t meddle any more with Vermont.” John’s investment strategy could be summed up in a single word: *farmland*.

Writing from Paris, John found it easy to “wax eloquent about land’s ennobling qualities,” Holton writes. Abigail had to find sober tenants, handle their grievances, help them sell their crops, and collect rent. On a rhetorical level, she shared John’s repugnance toward speculation, and she was careful not to let news of her dealings become public. But for all John’s denunciation of

speculators, he allowed Abigail to make him one. In a sense, Holton says, she dragged him into the modern era.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Limits of Liberal Islam

THE SOURCE: “The Politics of God” by Mark Lilla, in *The New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 19, 2007.

TO MANY AMERICANS, THE rise of militant Islamism is inexplicable. Why can’t Muslims keep politics separate from religion? Behind that question, says Mark Lilla, a professor of humanities at Colum-

bia University, is an assumption that secularism is the natural condition of humankind. But it isn’t. The West’s own break with political theology was a unique historical event—and the fragility of that separation is underscored by the way political theology has occasionally returned, notably in Protestant thinkers’ support for Nazism.

We owe what Lilla calls the “Great Separation” of politics and religion in the West to Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Amid the furious wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics in 17th-century Europe, the English philosopher “did the most revolutionary thing a thinker can ever do—he changed the subject, from God and his commands to man and his beliefs.” Ignoring divine commands, Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* (1651) that peace must be the first imperative of life on earth, and that humans must surrender to absolute rulers in order to achieve it. An exhausted Europe accepted the secular prescription, as

later modified by John Locke and others.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) represented the proverbial fly in the ointment. No friend of organized religion, Rousseau nevertheless argued that human beings need religion both as an expression of their natural goodness and as a moral compass. The “children of Rousseau” flourished in continental Europe, especially after the traumas of the godless French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests. Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel were among the thinkers who embraced a romantic vision of religion’s purifying force. Hegel argued that religion alone could forge social bonds and encourage people to sacrifice for the common good—it was the source of *Volksgeist*, a people’s shared spirit.

Among both Protestants and Jews in 19th-century Germany, these ideas bred a stolid liberal theology that prescribed “a catechism of moral commonplaces” and dutiful citizenship. But the horrors of World War I put an end to this complacent belief system. Germans were not alone in demanding something more exalted—the purchase on redemption that is the ultimate promise of biblical religion—but it was in Weimar Germany that the demand got its fullest expression. The Jewish thinker Martin Buber, later regarded as a kind of ecumenicalist sage, called for a “Masada of the spirit” and declared that “a beautiful death” was preferable to a plodding bourgeois existence. The theologian Karl Barth forged a more

militant Protestantism, and though he never rallied to the Nazi cause, a number of others did. The respected Lutheran theologian Emanuel Hirsch, notes Lilla, “welcomed the Nazi seizure of power for bringing Germany into ‘the circle of the white ruling peoples,’ to which God has entrusted the responsibility for the history of humanity.”

Is there a new Hobbes lurking among today’s Muslim thinkers? Lilla is respectful but skeptical of those who simply promote a more liberal and tolerant Islam. “The history of Protestant and Jewish liberal theology reveals the problem: The more a biblical faith is trimmed to fit the demands of the moment, the fewer reasons it gives believers for holding on to that faith in troubled times, when self-appointed guardians of theological purity offer more radical hope.”

Lilla has more hope for theological “renovators” of Islam, such as Tariq Ramadan, the controversial Swiss-born cleric, and Khaled Abou El Fadl, a law professor at UCLA. Just as Martin Luther and John Calvin found theological grounds for modernizing Christianity—ending priestly celibacy, for example—Muslim renovators are working to renew Islam from within. But Ramadan and El Fadl have been harshly criticized by Western intellectuals because they do not necessarily accept the Great Separation. That’s too much to ask, Lilla believes. Even in the West, the separation is constantly challenged. A self-confident, modernized Islam that is able simply to coexist with the West ought to be enough.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Not Catholic Enough?

THE SOURCES: “The Faculty ‘Problem’” by Wilson D. Miscamble, in *America*, Sept. 10, 2007, and “Catholic Enough? Religious Identity at Notre Dame” by John T. McGreevy, in *Commonweal*, Sept. 28, 2007.

NOBODY REACHES FOR THE smelling salts when a college is accused of failing to have enough African-American, Latino, Native American, or female professors. But the University of Notre Dame is now embroiled in a growing dispute over whether it is hiring enough Catholics.

Catholic universities in the United States have a “Potemkin village” quality, writes Rev. Wilson D. Miscamble, a Notre Dame historian. With their crucifixes and chapels, they look like religious institutions from the outside, but inside the classrooms, students learn the same secular lessons they do in other universities. Notre Dame’s faculty was barely 53 percent Catholic in 2006, and a spate of Catholic retirements is coming. The history department, with 32 members, has only 12 Catholics, and when three new hires were made last year, only one was Catholic.

Notre Dame’s distinctive Catholic character and intellectual tradition are threatened by a hiring process that favors candidates who can boost its visibility among its secular peers, Miscamble charges. Despite a papal declaration that a Catholic university must “consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth,” Notre Dame hires atheists who deny that absolute truth even exists. Scholars who are branded “Catholic apologists,” or too polemical, meanwhile,

are shunned.

Defenders of the status quo say there is a weak Catholic supply chain in the arts and humanities—they claim that “all the really smart Catholics have gone into law or medicine or business,” Miscamble notes. Applicants are dismissed as “not good enough” if they lack the “imprimatur of an elite graduate school (the Ivy League, Chicago, Berkeley, or Stanford, with an occasional stoop down to Michigan).” Unless the university’s trustees seize the initiative, requiring two-thirds of all faculty hires to be Catholic, schools such as Notre Dame will surrender their distinctiveness, abandoning the prospect of creating communities “animated by the spirit of Christ,” Miscamble says.

John T. McGreevy, one of Miscamble’s successors as chair of the Notre Dame history department, says that

The University of Notre Dame is now embroiled in a growing dispute over whether it is hiring enough Catholics.

Miscamble ignores certain pesky facts.

Much of the work of a professor in a Catholic university is not confessional, McGreevy says. Rather, it involves the cultivation of areas of expertise that “resonate with the long, rich heritage of Catholic Christianity.” These include medieval philosophy, sacred music, the sociology of religion, and political theory. History classes are more likely to focus on religious history and on Latin America and Europe than at other institutions. To that end, Notre Dame has hired Protestants, Muslims, Jews, and non-

believers who are all enthusiastic about the university’s mission.

But McGreevy agrees that Notre Dame students need the “witness of Catholic intellectuals attempting to live out faith commitments in the modern world.” The problem truly is numbers, he says. Only six percent of the tenure-track scholars in the arts and sciences or business at the nation’s top universities identify themselves as Catholic, according to a 2006 study. Moreover, two-career couples are often reluctant to relocate to small college towns such as South Bend, Indiana, where one spouse may wind up without a job or underemployed. Despite these challenges, however, more than half of Notre Dame’s faculty hires last year were Catholic. Properly understood, McGreevy says, his university’s Catholic identity is quite secure.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Checkers Terminator

THE SOURCE: “Checkers Is Solved” by Jonathan Schaeffer, Neil Burch, Yngvi Björnsson, Akihiro Kishimoto, Martin Müller, Robert Lake, Paul Lu, and Steve Sutphen, in *Science*, Sept. 14, 2007.

MARION TINSLEY, THE GREATEST checkers player who ever lived, managed to narrowly beat a computer in 1992. Today, the best a player of his caliber could manage would be a tie. That’s because computer researchers at the University of Alberta have managed to “solve” the game. By analyzing an opponent’s moves, their program can

counter with a winning strategy or, at worst, play to a draw.

Despite checkers’ reputation as an easy game, solving it, say Jonathan Schaeffer and his colleagues, “pushes the boundary of artificial intelligence [AI].” The game’s possible positions, with 24 pieces moving on 32 black squares, amount to 500 billion *billion* (5×10^{20}).

Efforts to construct a checkers-playing program capable of beating a human began back in the 1950s with pioneering work by Stanford

University’s Arthur Samuel; in 1963 his program won a game (but not the match) against a capable player. That victory was “heralded as a triumph for the fledgling field of AI,” say the authors, all of whom are connected with the University of Alberta. But it was the Chinook program, launched by Schaeffer in 1989, that took on Tinsley (whose declining health prevented him from finishing a rematch). The version of the program available at the time relied on a database of all possible endgame positions once players were down to four pieces a side. Anything beyond that outstripped existing computing capacity.

The current version of Chinook employs a five-piece-or-fewer-per-side endgame database (39 trillion

possible positions!), as well as two forward-searching algorithms that kick in from the first move, analyzing possible outcomes of moves in terms of achieving a win, loss, or draw.

The database still does not contain all possible positions that can arise in the game. Compiling such a database, the authors say, though theoretically possible, would make playing the game “impractical with today’s technology.” It would take too long for the computer to crunch the data. Nonetheless, Schaeffer and colleagues believe that, armed with their current program, they could do no worse than tie a mistake-free player. (Even the great Tinsley lost three times from 1950 to 1991.)

Is there any significance to all of this, beyond mere game-playing?

Schaeffer and his coauthors think so. “The project has been a marriage of research in AI and parallel computing, with contributions made in both of these areas”; they performed computations on up to 50 computers simultaneously.

Behind such practical concerns, though, lurks the geeks’ grail: With checkers now largely conquered, will chess ever be solved? Maybe, the researchers say, but not for a long time. The possible moves in checkers, though vast, represent only the *square root* of the possible chess moves, which are something on the order of 10^{120} . (Scientists estimate the number of atoms in the known universe at only 10^{75} .) “Playing chess is like looking out over a limitless ocean,” Tinsley once said. “Playing checkers is like looking into a bottomless well.”

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Snows of Kilimanjaro

THE SOURCE: “The Shrinking Glaciers of Kilimanjaro: Can Global Warming Be Blamed?” by Philip W. Mote and Georg Kaser, in *American Scientist*, July–Aug. 2007.

STARTLING BEFORE-AND-AFTER images of the retreating glacier on Tanzania’s Mount Kilimanjaro in *An Inconvenient Truth*—the 2006 documentary that helped Al Gore win a share of the Nobel Peace Prize—bear seemingly convincing witness to the growing perils of global warming. As in so many instances in the global climate debate, however, the reasons why Kilimanjaro’s 11,000-year-old glacier is dwindling are complex, and “bear only indirect connections, if

EXCERPT

The New Salmon Route

For ordinary humans, the extraordinary migration of salmon is difficult to imagine. Take Chinook salmon. Some of these fish swim from the Columbia River up to Canada and beyond. That would be the equivalent of a human swimming more than 160 miles a day—fast enough to circumnavigate the equator in 150 days. . . .

If the mileage clocked by these fish sounds impressive, it is nothing compared to the journeys some of them take after their death. In the case of salmon, it is all because of their pin bones—dozens of tiny bones not connected to the rest of the fish’s skeleton that cannot be dealt with by filleting machines. Pin bones must be extracted by hand using tweezers or small pliers. It is a laborious process that

when carried out in North America or Europe is costly. Not in China, though, with its low wages and high productivity. . . .

A typical . . . Norwegian salmon destined for sale in a supermarket in America or Europe [would pass, frozen, through Rotterdam or Hamburg, before sailing to Qingdao in China for processing by young women from rural villages]. Using nimble fingers and small scalpels, they swiftly skin the salmon, remove its bones, and cut it into the exact portions specified by a Western supermarket chain on the other side of the world. Once the fish is filleted and in pieces, it is refrozen, packed onto a ship, and sent back to Europe or the United States. By the time it reaches the supermarket, our “fresh” salmon may have been traveling for an astonishing two months.

—**SARAH MURRAY**, author of *Moveable Feasts: From Ancient Rome to the 21st Century, the Incredible Journeys of the Food We Eat*, adapted in *Orion* (Nov.–Dec. 2007)

any,” to global warming, according to Philip W. Mote and Georg Kaser.

Tropical glaciers, such as the one on Kilimanjaro’s Kibo Peak (19,340 feet) or the Quelccaya ice cap in the Andes (18,600 feet), occur when mountain summits penetrate the subzero air of the upper troposphere. Snow precipitation helps them grow; melting, usually as the result of solar radiation and light

wind, and sublimation (ice converting instantly to water vapor due to dryness in the atmosphere) makes them retreat.

As Mote, a researcher at the University of Washington, and Kaser, a glaciologist at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, point out, a rise in the global temperature “fails spectacularly” to explain the disappear-

ance of Kilimanjaro’s glacier, since the air temperature at the site almost never goes above freezing. (This is not the case with the world’s receding nontropical glaciers, and global warming “appears to be the primary culprit” in their decline.)

Observers have been tracking the shrinkage of Kilimanjaro’s glacier ever since Europeans first scaled the peak in the 1880s, but the ice cap at that time may have been unusually large following several decades of above-normal precipitation. Judging from nearby Lake Victoria’s water level, the climate in the region has gotten progressively drier since the Victorian era. Global warming may have contributed to the pattern in recent years, but that would only account for “at most a fraction of the recent decline in ice,” say the authors.

Kaser, a longtime student of tropical glaciers who journeyed to Kilimanjaro in 2001, says diminished snowfall has allowed solar radiation and other forces to whittle away the glacier’s edges, creating steep walls. As a result, the glacier also retains less of each year’s snowfall than it did in the past. In effect, the glacier is being starved of ice.

Ironically, the authors say, “substantial global warming accompanied by an increase in precipitation might be one way to save Kilimanjaro’s ice.” If temperatures near the summit rose enough to encourage melting, gentler slopes might form, allowing snow to build up. An onslaught of snow might help too. The glacier could vanish, but if it does, global warming won’t be to blame.



Source: E. Oehler, Kilimanjaro, 1912



The glacier on Mount Kilimanjaro, shown in 1912 (top) and in 2006, is shrinking, but don’t blame global warming. The 19,340-foot peak penetrates the upper troposphere, where the air is almost always subzero.

ARTS & LETTERS

How Frankenstein Came to Life

THE SOURCE: "Who Wrote Frankenstein?" by Jonathan Gross, in *The Common Review*, Fall 2007.

YOU'VE HEARD THE ARGUMENT before: How could a Stratford grain hoarder and a rube who didn't own books possibly be the real Shakespeare? The answer, according to some, is that Shakespeare is merely the nom de plume of a writer with a proper pedigree: Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, schooled at Cambridge at age eight. Most scholars disagree.

Now the authorship question is being applied with a misogynistic twist to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851). How could an 18-year-old girl possibly have written the soaring prose of *Frankenstein*? How could she have conceived its homoerotic themes? How could she have conjured a plot so deep and enduring? How could she have recognized the danger inherent in creating life, of usurping both God's and women's role? The answer, coming from a new klatch of critics, is that she didn't. They say the author of the most

famous horror story of all time was a man, her husband: Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The dispute over the authorship of *Frankenstein* might never have emerged were it not for the extraordinary revival of interest in the novel in academic and popular circles that has resulted from the sometimes-frightening advances in genetic engineering and other fields. Though "rarely considered literature for a century and a half,"

writes Jonathan Gross, an English professor at DePaul University, *Frankenstein* has become the subject matter of entire college courses. The book is available in no fewer than 53 editions.

The story goes that Frankenstein appeared to Mary Shelley in a nightmare after Lord Byron issued a challenge to write a horror story during a summer holiday in Switzerland. When the book was published anonymously in 1818, Sir Walter Scott gave it a favorable review and treated it as the work of Percy Shelley. Mary Shelley wrote to disabuse him of "continuing in the mistake of supposing Mr. Shelley guilty of a juvenile attempt of mine."

The "Percy-as-author" school

says that Mary could not be the creator because her subsequent books, several of them written after her husband drowned, are not as well written. She brought on suspicion by destroying some documents from the period during which *Frankenstein* was written. But the principal charge against her is that no teenage girl could possibly have written such a masterpiece.

Mary Shelley, however, was no ordinary 18-year-old. Daughter of anarchist philosopher William Godwin and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (who died from complications of childbirth after her daughter was born), Mary



The 18-year-old author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, had the help of a good editor, her poet husband Percy.

Shelley read Latin, French, and Italian and was tutored in science, history, and literature. Those destroyed documents? They were writings that she feared might anger her hostile father-in-law and damage her son's chances of inheriting his estate.

Shelley specialists have examined the penmanship of *Frankenstein*, letter by letter, concluding that Percy Shelley wrote at least 1,000 and possibly more than 4,000 words of the finished volume of roughly 270 pages. They say that Percy Shelley changed spelling, grammar, and awkward phrases, but the book remains Mary Shelley's creation. Her husband's work was little more than the contributions of an editor. "Perhaps those of a *very* good editor," Gross says.

ARTS & LETTERS

Brooklyn Dodgers

THE SOURCE: "Wonder Bread" by Melvin Jules Bukiet, in *The American Scholar*, Autumn 2007.

A WARM-AND-FUZZY POX HAS infected Brooklyn, New York's newly hip borough. There, a clique of extremely successful young writers has taken up residence and begun producing Brooklyn Books of Wonder (BBoWs). BBoWs, says novelist and Sarah Lawrence College writing teacher Melvin Jules Bukiet, are produced according to a sure-fire recipe: "Take mawkish self-indulgence, add a heavy dollop of creamy nostalgia, season with magic realism, stir in complacency of faith, and you've got wondrousness."

Among those infected with wonder are Jonathan Safran Foer, Dave Eggers, Myla Goldberg, and Nicole Krauss, all of whom have written briskly selling novels (in Eggers's case, a novelistic memoir, *A Heart-breaking Work of Staggering Genius*) in recent years. Others belong to this writing school in spirit. Pulitzer winner Michael Chabon, for example, is a wonder boy, though he lives in the San Francisco Bay area and is slightly older; Alice Sebold is an out-of-state lady of the club. It's time, Bukiet suggests, that these books come in for the shaming they deserve.

Most BBoWs display several of the following symptoms: child protagonists (often orphans); triumphs over great adversity; epiphanies and lessons learned; "mothy, softcore sex" and "pallid, softcore religion"; wisdom doled out by sage elders; and escapist fantasies "garnished with intellectual flourishes."

Take Sebold's 2002 novel *The Lovely Bones*, which is narrated by Susie, a 14-year-old who has been raped and murdered and looks down on her family and friends from heaven. The real crime in *The Lovely Bones*, according to Bukiet, is the healing handed out to everybody. Even the heaven-bound Susie eventually gets to experience beautiful sex vicariously by occupying a young friend's body during the act.

Ditto for Foer's treatment of the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks, the subjects, respectively, of *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). In both books, wonder is history's antidote. The young protagonists' quests for personal

answers to grand tragedies evoke "deep nostalgia" for the past and an inability to confront the "grotesque reality" of the present.

Yet people buy BBoWs "by the truckload" because they "instantly trigger the 'Awww' reflex of narcissistic empathy," Bukiet sniffs. To make matters worse, some BBoWs are actually well written, rendering them even more "insidious."

Serious fiction sharpens reality, Bukiet says, while BBoWs rescue us from it. "Your father is dead, or your mother, and so are most of the Jews of Europe, and the World Trade Center's gone, and racism prevails, and sex murders occur. What is, is. The real is the true, and anything that suggests otherwise, no matter how artfully constructed, is a violation of human experience."

ARTS & LETTERS

At Odds Over Architecture

THE SOURCE: "America's Favorite Buildings" by Witold Rybczynski, in *Wharton Real Estate Review*, Fall 2007.

WHEN IT COMES TO GOOD architecture, the public and the professionals don't always see eye to eye, but just how rarely they agree is disquieting. Almost three-quarters of the "most important buildings" selected by architects in a recent survey didn't show up at all on a new list of the American public's favorite buildings.

The three best-loved structures on the people's list are the Empire State Building, the White House, and the Washington National Cathedral, designed by men most

Americans have never heard of. Architects chose the work of stars: Fallingwater and the Robie House, by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Kimbell Art Museum, by Louis I. Kahn.

The public gives great weight to the symbolic role of a building, writes Witold Rybczynski, a professor of urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania. This explains its admiration for the White House and the Washington National Cathedral, and perhaps even its somewhat surprising regard for the 1998 neoclassical Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, home to *The Wilson Quarterly*, which came in at 79th. Americans like public buildings, Rybczynski notes. All of their top 25 favorites fit that definition in some sense, whereas the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings were built as private homes. Popular admiration for modern architecture over-

Americans give great weight to the symbolic role of a building, and tend to favor the old over the new.

all is lukewarm, with only the minimalist Vietnam Veteran's Memorial and St. Louis's Gateway Arch making the top 25.

All but three of the public's 50 favorites were built before 1980. Old railroad stations outpooled new airports. Old churches beat out contemporary houses of worship. Old museums trumped new ones. The one post-1987 edifice that managed to make the popular top 25, the Bellagio hotel and casino in Las Vegas, has caused "consternation" within the profession, Rybczynski says. The building includes a faux-Tuscan lakeside village, and its style is

sneered at by critics and architectural prize juries.

When judging movies, the public goes for the latest and the most modern; in architecture, tradition triumphs. But the architectural profession's low regard for the nation's most cherished buildings shows the gap that now exists between professional and public values. The professionals' fixation on novelty and design innovation causes them to dismiss the wide staircases and tall columns so loved by the average American.

The point, Rybczynski concludes, is not that architects should imitate designs of the past, but that they should recognize their appeal and produce work that will speak to the public in the future. A building that is actively disliked, no matter how architecturally innovative, is one that has failed.

OTHER NATIONS

Indonesia's Vulnerable Strivers

THE SOURCE: "Lasting Impacts of Indonesia's Financial Crisis" by Martin Ravallion and Michael Lokshin, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Oct. 2007.

ONE OF THE REMARKABLE things about the 1998 financial crisis in East Asia was how quickly some of the victims seemed to recover. In Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous

country, the number of destitute people doubled in a single year, but the poverty rate improved immediately as the economy stabilized. Infant mortality rates in urban areas surged, then fell back. By 2000, the economy of the archipelago had begun to expand again. In 2006, it grew by about six percent.

But a detailed statistical analysis

by World Bank economists Martin Ravallion and Michael Lokshin shows that the crisis followed an unexpected pattern. The poorest of Indonesia's poor were not its most vulnerable. The slightly less poor areas—villages better integrated into the national economy, such as those that had moved beyond subsistence farming and were engaged in trade—were more vulnerable. Areas that were desperately poor before the crisis stayed that way; the people it struck hardest were those who had begun to climb the economic ladder.

Indonesian living standards had been rising robustly for more

than a decade before the collapse. Since 1981, the poverty rate had been declining by 2.5 percentage points a year. “Our results suggest that a majority of those living below the poverty line,” the authors write, “would not have done so except for the 1998 crisis.”

OTHER NATIONS

Postcommunist Shuffle

THE SOURCE: “Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The Failed Post-Soviet Revolutions” by Theodor Tudoroiu, in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Sept. 2007.

STARTING IN 2003, WHEN democracy seemed to be spreading to the most improbable nations,

revolutions broke out in three former Soviet republics. The Rose Revolution toppled a blindsided Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia and replaced him with a 36-year-old former New York lawyer. The Orange Revolution of 2004 in Ukraine installed a Westernized Viktor Yushchenko as the true winner of disputed elections, supplanting a thuggish clique later suspected of nearly killing him by dioxin poisoning. And the Tulip Revolution in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan sent authoritarian president Askar Akayev high-tailing to Russia, succeeded by an opposition leader promising constitutional reform.

The revolutions followed a common pattern: a fraudulent election, massive protest demon-

strations, and the installation of a new “revolutionary” leadership. All three were hailed in the West as proof that a new civil society had grown strong enough in the post-communist countries to check fraud and corruption. In former Soviet republics with incomes as low as that of Swaziland, enthusiasts saw the birth of a new era of Jeffersonian democracy.

Alas, writes Theodor Tudoroiu, a political scientist at McGill University, all three regimes now represent “nothing more than failed revolutions.” In fact, no fresh heroes rose from the grassroots, swept into power by a newly robust civil society and banished Soviet-era apparatchiks. The “revolutions” were really the product



Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko's supporters hand out certificates to participants during the Orange Revolution in 2004. Since then, democracy has gone downhill. Winners of the three botany-themed revolutions in the former Soviet republics have all lost their hero's luster.

of a split in the “political elite” surviving from the Soviet era. The Rose, Orange, and Tulip revolutions were initiated and controlled by “outs” seeking to replace the “ins.”

Georgia’s new leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, once the justice minister under the regime he overthrew, has ripened into a little Napoleon Bonaparte, accumulating outsized powers and fending off lurid charges of murder and

The Rose, Orange, and Tulip revolutions in three former Soviet Republics, says a political scientist, have amounted to little more than a limited rotation of the ruling elites.

corruption. Ukraine’s president, a former prime minister and head of the national bank under the regime he defeated, did little after winning power, and finally was forced to offer the office of prime minister to a leader of the clique suspected of trying to kill him. Kyrgyzstan, whose president has polished coercive institutions to a brighter shine than in the Soviet era itself, is mired in corruption and nepotism and has suffered business-linked killings and political assassinations.

The democratic revolutions so beautifully named in the euphoria of mass street demonstrations, Tudoroiu writes, have proven to be not much more than a “limited rotation of the ruling elites within undemocratic political systems.”

OTHER NATIONS

Cuba’s Race Problem

THE SOURCE: “The Erosion of Racial Equality in the Context of Cuba’s Dual Economy” by Sarah A. Blue, in *Latin American Politics and Society*, Fall 2007.

IT DIDN’T TAKE LONG FOR Fidel Castro’s 1959 revolution to have a dramatic impact on race relations in Cuba. In a society so hung up on whiteness that even President Fulgencio Batista was denied membership in the Havana Yacht Club because he was a mulatto, relative racial equality arrived within a generation. Equal proportions of blacks, whites, and mixed-race Cubans graduated from high school and college. Life expectancy and infant mortality rates became virtually the same for all groups, writes Sarah A. Blue, a geographer at Northern Illinois University. Precisely equal percentages of the three racial categories held professional jobs.

But after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, an economy fueled by favorable trade deals with the Eastern Bloc countries went into near free fall. Starting three years later, Castro was forced to formally expand tourism and self-employment, and to allow relatives to send remittances from abroad. Cuba’s economy stabilized, but its hard-won racial equality was eroded, Blue writes.

Blacks are still likely to land good jobs with the state. But whites are five times more likely than blacks to have an annual income above about

\$700. The difference derives from access to dollars—or currency convertible to dollars, which whites are better positioned to possess.

Starting in 1993, residents could legally earn productivity bonuses paid by foreign (mostly European) companies in dollars, and engage in 157 specified commercial activities, such as selling crafts or homemade food, driving taxis, and opening restaurants.

In theory, dollars are equally available to all. In practice, whites are more likely to be hired for tourism jobs because managers say that foreigners feel “more comfortable” with lighter-skinned Cubans, according to Blue. Whites can open restaurants more easily because they are more likely to have room in their homes—fewer of them live with extended families because whites have emigrated at far greater rates. Moreover, 44 percent of white Cuban families receive remittances from abroad, but only 23 percent of black households do, according to a survey Blue conducted.

Living in historically disadvantaged areas with substandard housing, blacks are more likely to have moved into new Soviet-style apartment complexes far from the tourist haunts conducive to starting bed-and-breakfasts. And relatively few black or mixed-race Cubans have inherited vehicles that can serve as makeshift taxis.

A “nouveau riche” class is rising in Cuba, Blue says, but it is not equally open to all. Mere equality in education and government employment is no longer enough to level the playing field.

Also in this issue:

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Alice B. Toklas

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CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

Bath and Body Works

By Winifred Gallagher

IN THE WELL-SCRUBBED MODERN WEST, it's easy to assume that what constitutes personal cleanliness is an objective matter. Upon arriving in India, however, I found that my spotless hotel's bathroom wasn't furnished with the familiar toilet and roll of paper but with a "squatter," a spigot, and a pitcher. As I absorbed the realization that the world is divided between wipers and washers—each group convinced of its method's superiority—I also saw that in India, as in many places, people have long been concerned not just with cleanliness, which focuses on the body, but with purity, which also involves the soul, or at least one's religious and cultural status. Thus, an observant Hindu fresh from the shower may be considered ritually impure if he or she previously touched something regarded as unclean.

Such variations on the theme of what's "clean" and what's "dirty" are important to the history of Homo sapiens in general and of the personal care of the body in particular. Virginia Smith, a British historian and fellow of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, begins *Clean*, her survey of hygiene's "material empiricism" and purity's "immaterial

imagination," at the beginning, observing that our grooming rituals are rooted in those of our primate ancestors. Indeed, well into the 17th century, artists depicted wealthy women apparently proudly delousing their children, much as monkeys pick their progeny's nits—perhaps a skill worth cultivating again in this era of resurgent lice and bedbugs.

By the Eurasian Bronze Age (4000 BC), says Smith, our forebears had progressed to *ellu*—a Mesopotamian word for a new kind of "beautiful cleanliness," which involved lots of "pampering." Then as now, the rich indulged themselves with numerous beauty products and rituals—baths, facials, hairdressing, cosmetics, mani-pedis (manicures and pedicures, for the uninitiated). Good grooming was an increasingly important sign of status. Egypt was the first capital of cleanliness deluxe, and its practices of mummifying and making up the dead are with us still.

CLEAN:
A History of Personal
Hygiene and Purity.
By Virginia Smith.
Oxford Univ. Press.
457 pp. \$30

**THE DIRT
ON CLEAN:**
An Unsanitized
History.
By Katherine
Ashenburg. North Point
Press. 358 pp. \$24

As anyone who's seen *Troy* or *Ben-Hur* knows, ancient Greeks and Romans enjoyed being clean and getting that way. In *The Dirt on Clean*, Toronto-based journalist Katherine Ashenburg begins her chatty history with ablutions in the *Odyssey*. The Greeks not only brought us hygiene, which made cleanliness part of healthfulness, but also their sociable public baths. Taking this concept and running with it, the Romans created baths where, says Ashenburg, you could have "sex, a medical treatment, and a haircut" in one convenient stop.

In England, Elizabeth I declared that she bathed once a month "whether I need it or not."

With the fall of Rome and the spread of Christianity, baptism was in, and bathing—both public and private—was out.

Like its founder, the early Christian church prized spiritual purity over physical cleanliness, which facilitated "sins of the flesh." Thus, a Christian ascetic who crawled with vermin and reeked of body odor was venerated as a paragon of virtue. (For their part, pious pagans and Jews were appalled that Jesus had touched the impure, including lepers, strange women, and even the dead, and that his followers venerated saints' corpses and graves.) For centuries, Ashenburg says, married Jewish women of menstruating age were among the cleanest people; ritual purity mandated thorough monthly baths.

Cleanliness improved during the Middle Ages—particularly after the Crusaders imported the Turkish bath. Medieval courtly love encouraged dainty ways, and Saturday baths became commonplace. Public bathhouses were popular and well run, Smith says, and expectant mothers even used them for "baby showers," or festive "lying-in baths," with their female friends. Paris and London had many of these jolly communal "stews"—a term later applied to houses of prostitution.

The real Dark Ages of cleanliness began in

the 16th century. Fear of disease helps explain why people just stopped bathing—indeed, doing any meaningful washing. Ashenburg blames the plague, which produced so many corpses that they were layered in mass graves "just as one makes lasagne," wrote one Florentine. Smith thinks the likelier culprit is syphilis, which by the 16th century was both virulent and prevalent. Clueless doctors declared that bathing was dangerous, because it opened the skin to the malign "vapors" thought to cause much illness. The church chimed in that the baths encouraged concupiscence, and the stews were closed. From the mid-16th century well into the 19th century in much of Europe, a person could go from cradle to grave without a good wash. As Ashenburg says, "Water was the enemy, to be avoided at all costs."

Most of the deliciously dreadful things you know about how dirty people used to be are drawn from this lengthy Age of the Great Unwashed. Even aristocrats were filthy and louse ridden beneath their jewels, brocades, and furs. In England, Elizabeth I declared that she bathed once a month "whether I need it or not." In Spain during the Inquisition, Ashenburg says, Jew and Muslim alike could be condemned by the frightful words "was known to bathe." Nor was sanitation prized in France, where feces left in the halls of Versailles were carted away once a week. Instead of bathing, smelly, grimy people changed into fresh linens, which became a consumer craze among the Dutch. When John Wesley famously remarked, in 1791, that "cleanliness is, indeed, next to godliness," he wasn't talking about the body, but about clothes.

Rising above the miasma of this long, dirty era, Smith examines the ways in which, as Europe slowly moved toward the Enlightenment, various social movements interpreted cleanliness according to their own lights. In 17th-century Britain, for example, the combined influences of

PEARS' SOAP



· a Specialty for Children ·

Rub-a-dub-dub. By the late 19th century, cleanliness was an American gospel.

reforming Protestant sects and neoclassicism's interest in Greek hygiene associated the ideas of "coolness, cleanness, and innocence." Cold air, vegetables, and baths were in vogue, and the last became a hallmark of the Englishman.

By the 19th century, the industrial revolution was spewing its soot and smoke onto the newly crowded cities, which grew filthier than ever. Queen Victoria's beloved Prince Albert himself died of typhoid, one of the new plagues that accompanied urbanization, and British reformers made sanitation a political issue. Cities were gradually equipped with sewage systems, and their dwellings with indoor plumbing. These amenities often benefited the average citizen before the aristocrat, who preferred to wash in isolation. As late as

the 1920s, an English lady, who bathed in her boudoir's portable tub, could say, "Bathrooms are only for servants."

By the late 19th century, the United States was much cleaner than Europe. Towns and cities in the young country were newer and easier to equip with municipal sanitation and water systems. Americans liked innovation, and hotels proudly advertised showers and flush toilets as tourist attractions. As more young women took jobs in offices and factories, the shortage of servants sped the introduction of new cleanliness technology into the average home. In an age of class upheaval and upward mobility, the black educator Booker T. Washington preached the "gospel of the toothbrush" to his students at the Tuskegee Institute.

When it comes to modern cleanliness, Ashenburg's account is more zestful than Smith's. Between 1900 and 1950, Ashenburg explains, advertising upped the ante by

insisting that to be clean you needed not just soap and water but new inventions such as deodorant and mouthwash. "Feminine products," as modern drugstores still call them, deserve a book of their own. Who knew that the first disposable sanitary pad for women evolved from a material used to bandage soldiers' wounds during World War I? Long before those enigmatic Modess ads that featured the word "Because" and an elegant woman in an evening gown, the Kotex brand was promoted with illustrations showing female nurses and male soldiers.

Although Smith calls modernity the "most grimly fascinating" and best documented era in the history of cleanliness, her heart is clearly back in the good old days of the Egyptians and Puritans. She does make the inter-

esting point, however, that even the reader's notions of cleanliness have probably changed over his or her lifetime. Pollution has become the new filth, for example, and the "green" movement upholds the new purity.

Smith and Ashenburg both end on the same note: *Plus ça change*. . . . According to one survey, half of the French still don't bathe daily, Ashenburg drolly remarks, but they continue to lead Europe in the consumption of perfumes and cosmetics. Despite hundreds of new "antibacterial" products, Smith notes that we're as worried about cleanliness as our distant, far dirtier ancestors—actually more so. Indeed, Ashenburg says, the only certainty is that a century from now, people will look back on our era "in amusement if not amazement at what passed for normal cleanliness."

Both histories of cleanliness necessarily offer much of the same information, but their presen-

tations may determine where each is shelved.

Clean is the more complete and academic, replete with the subheadings favored by university presses, 80 pages of notes, and Smith's politically correct disclaimer—"I am unashamedly looking for universal trends, but do not claim to be anything other than a local European (in fact a British) historian." Ashenburg's style is livelier, and her text is riddled with gossipy anecdotes about the rich and famous. Whatever you think of Napoleon's politics, it's fun to know that he bathed daily for two hours.

In the end, readers may decide to keep *Clean* in the study and *The Dirt on Clean* in the bathroom.

WINIFRED GALLAGHER is the author of *House Thinking: A Room-by-Room Look at How We Live* (2006), *It's in the Bag: What Purses Reveal—and Conceal* (2006), and *The Power of Place: How Our Surroundings Shape Our Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions* (1993), among other books. She has written for numerous publications, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*.

Everybody's Business

By Gary Alan Fine

AH, BRITNEY. THE LATEST SUPERNOVA among our tabloid stars. In a culture awash in celebrity, it's easy to assume that the study of reputation is confined to the rich and the famous and their infamous sibs, too. As sociologist Charles Horton Cooley remarked a century ago, societies need the famous to define shared values. They provide us with a common set of references, and a map of the achievements that we, as a community, believe are noteworthy. Yet reputation belongs to us all, celebrity and ordinary citizen alike.

Reputation is an essential feature of the human condition. People care how others see them. A sterling reputation is, as Shakespeare recognized, worth more than a purse of gold. A bad one is a dark stain that limits relationships, rewards, and options. And because oth-

ers may assign us a status that differs considerably from how we wish to be known, the reputation domain can be a hard world. That's one reason the middle school years—when our reputations are being formed—can be so brutal.

Two recent books by law professors assess the complexities of reputation—past and future—particularly as they relate to another human need: privacy. Lawrence Friedman, of Stanford University, focuses on how American law in the 19th century became a tool by which courts

GUARDING LIFE'S DARK SECRETS:

Legal and Social Controls Over Reputation, Propriety, and Privacy.

By Lawrence M. Friedman. Stanford Univ. Press. 348 pp. \$29.95

THE FUTURE OF REPUTATION:

Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet.

By Daniel J. Solove. Yale Univ. Press. 247 pp. \$24

preserved some reputations while diminishing others. Daniel Solove, of George Washington University, examines how reputation is being transformed by the Internet. Both authors' plentiful anecdotes—many drawn from legal cases—are dramatic and exceptional, but they illuminate the workings of reputation at the mundane level as well.

We moderns are tempted to believe that past generations were more “moral,” and that social decay has been continuous and linear. But belief in a golden age is misleading. Perhaps in bygone days actresses did not flaunt their absence of undergarments quite so publicly, but the censure that comedian Michael Richards and shock jock Don Imus received after their racist remarks reminds us that, Cole Porter notwithstanding, we do not believe that “anything goes.”

The question is how vigorously we should search out and expose violations of the right and proper, and thus damage the offenders' reputations. Our culture has enshrined a “penumbra” of privacy in the Bill of Rights. Still, sophisticated surveillance technologies flower, and databases record our purchases and preferences. Privacy may be rhetorically secure, but much of what was once treated as private is now public. And as a consequence, we are less able to shade our reputations to our liking.

We share warm notions about the communalism of the past, even as we condemn the restrictions on behavior that communalism exerted. Friedman emphasizes that life in 19th-century America was rough. Heavy drinking, fighting, and con games were common in public spaces. The goal, Friedman writes, was less to eliminate these behaviors than to moderate them. In a society in which tight boundaries on action were held to be essential, how should we regard the reality that many, rich and poor, violated these principles? Prostitution, for example, was widely condemned

from pulpits and on soapboxes, yet skid rows and zones of public prostitution were common and widely known in every large city. Every so often the police made a show of cracking down, but they, as well as politicians and the public, knew that prostitutes would not disappear.

In practice, the existence of commandments is more important than the fact that they are always

obeyed. What seems like hypocrisy was mere realism. Yet the rules remained in place to be used as necessary to

preserve social order. Society, through enforcement by the courts, recognized that citizens inevitably would falter, but attempted to preserve the positions of those deemed respectable. Although respectability was a somewhat uncertain category with vague boundaries, according to Friedman an imperfect consensus existed among the public and the courts as to who was to be protected.

What resulted, he says, was the “Victorian compromise,” the practice by which (most) respectable citizens were protected from being discredited by their moral lapses, except when public notice demanded otherwise. It was a culture of “don't ask, don't tell.” For the middle class and the elite, it was a world of second chances. The working class served as society's scapegoats. Thus, even though gambling was common at all levels of society, it was the gambling dens of the poor that were raided, not the salons of the wealthy. These miscreants, not so different from their fellow citizens, were discredited, isolated, and stigmatized.

Although Friedman calls America “perversely moralistic,” the changes that have occurred in the last 200 years have tended to shift—rather than increase—the regulation and publicizing of moral shortcomings. As the government's regula-

One reason the middle school years can be so brutal is because that's when our reputations are being formed.

tion of social behavior has lessened, the media's influence has increased. In today's "peeping Tom society," the Victorian compromise is a thing of the past. Celebrities and other elites are more likely to be the focus of prying eyes, and it is the common people who are accorded a zone of privacy that protects their reputations.

In this new world, public esteem still matters, but the forces that shape it are different. The all-important difference is the Internet, which has created a reputational economy as well as an electronic one. The virtue of cyberspace—the possibility of knowing everything now—is also its vice. In *The Future of Reputation*, Solove cites one estimate that as of July 2006 there were 50 million online blogs. Even if this figure is inflated, the blogosphere is a crowded neighborhood where people often share intimate details of their personal lives. (Exhibit A is perhaps Jessica Cutler, a Capitol Hill staffer who dubbed herself "the Washingtonienne" and openly described her sexual exploits with members of the capital elite.) Factor in the huge popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, as well as the in-your-face ubiquity of videos on YouTube, and the opportunities for connection and defamation are enormous. Where once gossip cultures were local—occurring in small towns, secretarial pools, and high school home-rooms—they are now global.

The Internet is a particularly effective tool for reputational entrepreneurs, those who take as their responsibility the shaping of the public personas of others—maliciously, for amusement, or from a sense of moral outrage. A minor offense—for instance, failing to clean up after your dog near someone who snaps a picture with a cell phone camera—can earn a "digital scarlet letter" from anonymous critics the world over. Much of *The Future of Reputation* catalogs the ways in which privacy has diminished in an age in which technology allows for the diffusion of information and in

which punishments for this diffusion are weak or sometimes simply impracticable. In such a world, privacy is a scarce commodity, particularly as the laws against defamation have become musty relics. The fact that personal attacks cannot be punished means that reputations can no longer be easily defended, and everything and everyone is fair game.

Solove's goal is to create a new compromise for a world of Victoria's secrets. He sings the praises of "the virtues of knowing less." The law, he believes, has a role in obstructing the malicious and protecting the private, but there is only so much that any legal system can do in a culture of global talk. Although Solove argues that people should be permitted to sue others for invasions of privacy and seek redress (including the deletion of their names from webpages), and that the understanding of individual privacy should be expanded to include activities in public spaces, he has no illusion that information can be easily contained. Far better, if possible, would be the establishment of social norms that punish those who reveal too much about the lives of others.

Much has changed since the age of Friedman's Victorian compromise. Today, when everyone—responsible or, as is more often the case, not—has a say, and in which the opinions of all are archived in the Google maw, are second chances still possible? We have only to look at our celebrities for the answer. Crimes and peccadilloes are now widely broadcast on grainy streaming videos, and moral opprobrium sets in. But we know the routine: The violator issues an unabashed, humiliating apology, sincere or not, and, after some time has passed, forgiveness is granted. The offense becomes part of the celebrity, not a detraction from it. This is not the Victorian compromise, but it is ours—applicable equally to celebrities and to common folk accorded their 15 minutes of fame. Just ask Don Imus.

GARY ALAN FINE is John Evans Professor of Sociology at Northwestern University. He is the author of numerous books, including *Difficult Reputations: Collective Memory of the Evil, Inept, and Controversial* (2001), and is coauthor of *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* (2001).

Literary Companions

By Brooke Allen

JANET MALCOLM'S BOOKS ARE USUALLY written with an ulterior motive, some hidden subject encased within the stated one. *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (1994) was a meditation on the art and business of biography, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (1990) a comment on the relationship between journalist and subject, *The Crime of Sheila McGough* (1999) a portrait of trial law as the struggle between conflicting narratives. Each book dealt, if only obliquely, with the search for an ever-elusive

ideal of "truth."

Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice has no such ulterior motive; indeed, it is difficult to perceive any motive for the book at all. It seems to have germinated when Malcolm stumbled on a passage in her old copy of *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*, a cult volume during Malcolm's youth in the 1950s, in which Toklas (1877–1967) wrote of the years she and writer Gertrude Stein had spent in the Bugey

TWO LIVES:
Gertrude and Alice.
By Janet Malcolm. Yale
Univ. Press. 229 pp. \$25



How did Gertrude Stein (left) and Alice B. Toklas, shown here in 1944, manage to while away the Nazi occupation in the French countryside?

region of eastern France during the Nazi occupation. “When I had occasion to read this chapter again,” Malcolm writes, “I was struck by its evasiveness, no less than by its painfully forced gaiety. How had the pair of elderly Jewish lesbians escaped the Nazis? Why had they stayed in France instead of returning to the safety of the United States? Why did Toklas omit any mention of her and Stein’s Jewishness (never mind lesbianism)?”

This certainly seems a promising line of inquiry, but the story itself, once Malcolm dug it up, turned out to be the usual tale of wartime expediency, and while the pair behaved no better than most, in that dire time and place, they also behaved no worse than many. Stein and Toklas proved to be what the French at that time dubbed *débrouillards*: They accommodated themselves to those in power in order to get by, just as most of the population did.

Rich and spoiled, Stein (1874–1946) had in her youth been protected from grim economic realities, and her politics were those of the rentier class from which she sprang. She was a snob, as well as “a conservative with an increasingly reactionary bent—she loved the Republican Party, she hated Roosevelt, and she actually supported Franco.” Living in an anti-Semitic world had conditioned her, and Toklas too, to downplay their Jewishness to the point where the subject eventually became unmentionable. Stein’s *Wars I Have Seen* (1945) never refers to it, and when Toklas entered the Roman Catholic Church in 1957, she contrived to make her action sound more like a return than a conversion.

As late as 1937—during the Spanish Civil War—many of Stein and Toklas’s French friends were members of the Croix de Feu, a right-wing organization founded by veterans of World War I, but the two ladies adjusted their ideas somewhat as Hitler’s armies overran Europe. Still, they never turned their backs on their reactionary friends, and Stein

always expressed open admiration for Marshal Pétain, who headed the collaborationist Vichy government during France’s occupation. It was one of Pétain’s advisers, Bernard Faÿ, who served as Stein and Toklas’s protector during the war years.

Faÿ, who came from a family of rich Catholic royalists, was appointed head of the Bibliothèque Nationale during the Occupation, replacing a Jew. A writer and professor, he specialized in American history and culture and had long been a promoter and translator of Stein’s work. Throughout the war he saw to it, via the *sous-préfet* of police in the Bugey town of Belley, that the two American ladies were protected from harassment and provided with a sufficiency of food and coal. Faÿ would be arrested and imprisoned after the liberation; in 1951 he escaped from a prison hospital with the aid of a group of friends that included—according to the scholars Malcolm consulted—Alice Toklas, who apparently sold artwork by Picasso to help with costs. (Stein by this time had been dead for five years.)

This tale may cast no great glory on the American couple, but it is not terribly damning either. While it is true that wartime France had its share of heroes, the vast majority of the population simply did what they had to in order to survive. Which of us, under those circumstances, would have done better? This seems to be the way Malcolm sees it too, for she soon abandons the unedifying little story and proceeds to examine Stein as a writer.

Here, again, her treatment of the subject is cursory, if occasionally amusing. The three eminent Stein scholars she interviews at length are high-modernist purists: They are pitying when Malcolm tells them she doesn’t care for Stein’s more avant-garde works, and appalled when she admits to having enjoyed Thornton Wilder’s middlebrow, sentimental play *Our Town*. (“At these times I feel like someone who has ordered a cheeseburger at

Lutèce,” she remarks dryly.) The background reading Malcolm took on during her research for *Two Lives* seems to have been something of a chore. “For a long time I put off reading *The Making of Americans*” (Stein’s hefty modernist novel), she writes. “Every time I picked up the book, I put it down again. It was too heavy and thick and the type was too small and dense. I finally solved the problem of the book’s weight and bulk by taking a kitchen knife and cutting it into six sections.” (Malcolm is in good company: Even the voracious Edmund Wilson said defiantly, “I have not read this book all through, and I do not know whether it is possible to do so.”)

Once she finally gets down to reading the book, she is not encouraged. “It is called a novel, but in reality it is a series of long meditations on, among other things, the author’s refusal (and inability) to write a novel.” Stein’s style, as other non-fans of her work will testify, is egregious and deliberately challenging—some might say stupefyingly self-indulgent. “It is as if Stein had made a rule for herself that she must allow every subject to exhaust itself before letting go of it,” Malcolm says. “Nothing is ever said once. It is always said many times with slight variations creeping in as they do in repeats in music.” The excerpts from the novel Malcolm includes in her text richly confirm this description.

Malcolm comes close to declaring Stein an artistic fraud, bolstering this case with copious quotations from the writer’s disaffected brother Leo, who believed that his sister’s eccentric style derived from the fact that she couldn’t write proper English, referred to her admirers as “fatuous idiots who go to hear her silly twaddle,” and called her most popular book, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, “a rather clever superstructure on a basis of impenetrable stupidity.” Yet after describing her own reservations about Stein’s work and her laborious delvings into the oeuvre, a task that appears to have

been both painful and unrewarding, Malcolm draws few conclusions, and ends up softening her sometimes sharp remarks with a few morsels of praise. “The alacrity with which [Stein] catches her thoughts before they turn into stale standard expressions may be the most singular of her accomplishments,” she writes, and opines that “every writer who lingers over Stein’s sentences is apt to feel a little stab of shame over the heedless predictability of his own.”

Surely not every writer—and perhaps not even Malcolm herself. The statement seems disingenuous, the mark of an unwillingness to render an

aesthetic judgment that might place Malcolm in the unaccustomed role of critic rather than her usual guise of journalist. But *Two Lives* is not really a work of journalism; it is an uneasy mixture of essay and reportage that lacks a unifying idea or direction. Malcolm includes her by-now-familiar philosophic digressions on the elusiveness of truth, the control of narrative, and the nature of biography. “Biography and autobiography are the aggregate of what, in the former, the author happens to learn, and, in the latter, he chooses to tell.” There is nothing too surprising in this. She goes on: The biographer “turns the bracing storylessness of human life into the flaccid narrativity of biography.” Why bracing? Why flaccid? Couldn’t the two adjectives just as easily be switched around?

But the nature of biography is not really Malcolm’s subject in *Two Lives*, and it’s not really clear what is. It’s hard to figure out what Malcolm is trying to achieve with this book, or what originally sparked her interest in two women she doesn’t even seem to like very much.

BROOKE ALLEN’s most recent book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (2006).

Janet Malcolm comes close to calling Gertrude Stein an artistic fraud, bolstering her case with quotations from the writer’s disaffected brother.

HISTORY

Mortal Nation

By Robert Wilson

AFTER MY BROTHER WAS killed in 1969 in the Vietnam War, I spent a decade having dreams that it was not really true. My family knew that no mistake had been made, but because the Air Force jet in which he had crashed was loaded with bombs, nothing was said, at least to me, about what was in his casket. The absence of a visible corpse, added to the general ravages of grief, produced irrational hopes, some of which I nursed while waking as well as asleep.

Imagine then, as Drew Gilpin Faust invites us to do in this valuable study, the bewildering intensity of sorrow the families of so many Civil War casualties must have felt. Even after the Confederacy's surrender at Appomattox, Faust writes, "Many soldiers lay unburied, their bones littering battlefields across the South; still more had been hastily interred where they fell, far from family and home; hundreds of thousands remained unidentified, their losses unaccounted for."

One reason for this appalling situation was the unprecedented number of soldiers killed on both sides, by more efficient weapons as well as infection and disease. Neither government was prepared to handle so many casualties. The task of burying the dead often fell to the victorious army, which controlled the battlefield, but which could barely be bothered to take care of its own casualties, much less the enemy's. Shockingly little official accounting of the dead was done immediately after a battle. Faust points out that neither government felt a responsibility to provide the families of the missing or dead any definitive information. So the bereaved often took on this burden, traveling to battlefields and hospitals in search of news. Some relatives of the missing kept looking for

them for the rest of their own lives.

This Republic of Suffering approaches Civil War deaths first from the viewpoint of the soldiers themselves, who did the dying and the killing, and who saw death around them on an unimaginable scale. But just as in *Mothers of Invention* (1996), her award-winning history of Southern women's experience of the war, Faust's focus is on the emotional effects of the war on those back home, not only during the war but in the decades after. The Civil War worked innumerable changes in individual lives, evoking fervent patriotism and religiosity in some and profound skepticism in others—including such writers as Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, and Ambrose Bierce, each of whom helped usher in a modern form of consciousness that called into question the possibility of certainty.

The search for meaning that uncertainty created expressed itself in two seemingly opposite ways. One was a heightened sensitivity to the individual death. The idea of the Good Death, one in which the soldier died calmly speaking of his family, country, and creator, was ritualistically reported to families of the fallen by fellow soldiers, commanders, clergymen, or surgeons. But when so many soldiers died anonymously, "identified only, as Walt Whitman put it, 'by the significant word UNKNOWN,'" the need increased throughout the war for the governments to ensure that the names and bodies were preserved in an orderly way. "The strongest impetus for these changes," Faust writes, "was the anguish of wives, parents, siblings, and children who found undocumented, unconfirmed, and unrecognized loss intolerable."

The second result of the search for meaning was "the emerging notion of the Civil War dead as a describable and shared national loss that transcended individual bereavements." The dead on both sides had a collective importance that gave the war a heightened meaning and ennobled the impulses that had led to it. This idea, and the widespread local tendency after

THIS REPUBLIC OF SUFFERING:
Death and the
American Civil War.

By Drew Gilpin Faust.
Knopf. 346 pp. \$27.95

the war to desecrate the graves of the enemy, led to the creation of vast national cemeteries where isolated gravestones and bodies spread across the countryside could be gathered, tended, and protected. This process of reburial continued for many years, as did attempts to identify the unknown dead and to compile lists of those who had served. These efforts, supported by Congress and the War Department, “involved a dramatically new understanding of the relationship of the citizen and the state,” affirming the importance of individuals as the “lifeblood” of the nation, Faust writes.

Faust, the president of Harvard and a distinguished scholar, builds her book by accretion rather than through narration. If it is sometimes repetitive and schematic, it is also comprehensive and persuasive. She directs her attention always to the South as well as the North, as befits her thesis that the shared suffering of the two finally made the nation one again.

ROBERT WILSON is the editor of *The American Scholar* and the author of *The Explorer King: Adventure, Science, and the Great Diamond Hoax—Clarence King in the Old West* (2006).

Lost and Found

By Rebecca A. Clay

JOHN ROWLANDS'S MOTHER never taught him not to lie. She had neither the time nor the moral inclination: She abandoned her illegitimate son shortly after his birth in Wales in 1841 and didn't reconnect with him in any real sense until he was well on his way to becoming the world-famous explorer known as Henry Morton Stanley.

That rejection—and his insecurity about social status—drove the grown-up Stanley to say anything for the sake of a good story. A new name wasn't his only invention. After spending much of his youth in a workhouse, he arrived in the United States in 1859 and created a new nationality (American) and a new father (a wealthy New

Orleans cotton dealer). Even “Dr. Livingstone, I presume”—his famous greeting to the long-lost missionary and explorer David Livingstone—turns out to have been a fabrication. Stanley's efforts at self-invention not only shaped his life, they also proved his undoing. Drawing on a vast trove of newly available materials from the Stanley family archives in Brussels, Tim Jeal's rip-roaring biography—overflowing with cannibals, exotic diseases, and treacherous cataracts—aims to set the record straight and undo the damage wrought by critics and by Stanley himself.

Even by the time of Stanley's death in 1904, his reputation was in tatters. Though he had reclaimed his British citizenship, he was denied the honor of being buried in Westminster Abbey near Livingstone's grave, as he had wished. These days, if remembered at all, Stanley is regarded as a racist who brutalized the natives on his African expeditions and helped King Leopold II of Belgium establish his own personal colony in the Congo—a horrifying regime that led to the exploitation, mutilation, and death of millions of Africans. Indeed, Stanley is often thought to be the model for the evil Mr. Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. But Jeal makes a convincing case that Stanley was not only the most impressive but also the least racist of the European explorers trudging around Africa during the Victorian era.

Clad in a pressed flannel suit and a white helmet, Stanley found Livingstone—emaciated from dysentery, without supplies, and accompanied by only four of his original 59 followers. The newspaper accounts he wrote about the expedition for *The New York Herald* became literary sensations. He then made a 7,000-mile journey across Africa, during which he mapped the course of the Congo River and thus solved many of the geographic puzzles of the central African watershed. And he led a relief mission to rescue Emin Pasha, a shadowy German serving the British government in Sudan. At a time when “the planet's remotest places seemed as inaccessible as the stars,” Jeal writes, the mere fact that Stanley came back from these expeditions alive was extraordinary.

STANLEY:
The Impossible Life
of Africa's
Greatest Explorer.
By Tim Jeal. Yale Univ.
Press. 570 pp. \$38



Fame found Henry Morton Stanley after he searched through Africa for the missionary David Livingstone, as depicted in this 1872 illustration.

But again and again, Stanley undermined his own accomplishments by failing to tell the truth. Because, as Jeal notes, finding “a forgotten saint made a better story than to have found an embittered recluse” (which Livingstone was), he “gave birth, almost single-handedly, to the Livingstone myth of the noble, self-sacrificing missionary,” and suffered by comparison ever after. Far more troubling are his exaggerated accounts of beating his bearers and killing the natives, which Jeal convincingly argues were the product of a workhouse boy’s desire to appear tough and a journalist’s desire to tell a sensational story. Stanley also published a book that inflated the number of treaties he negotiated on King Leopold’s behalf, setting himself up for criticism that he stole Africans’ land.

In reality, Stanley viewed Europeans as tenants rather than sovereigns in Africa and did his best to negotiate fair treaties with local rulers. He became a “blood brother” of several African chiefs, formed lifelong friendships with many Africans, and “preferred the company of his ‘Dark Companions’ to that of most Europeans,” Jeal says. In

Africa, as in America, Stanley escaped from the rigid class system of his own society and felt free to create a new life for himself. By uncovering the truth behind the myth, Jeal paints a sympathetic portrait of the ultimate self-made man.

REBECCA A. CLAY, a writer living in Washington, D.C., has traveled to each of the world’s seven continents.

The Vice Squad

By Amy E. Schwartz

MOST AMERICAN ACADEMICS start their careers researching something small and obscure, and then—if they’re lucky—work their way up to topics of larger import and scope. Only at the pinnacle of their profession are they permitted to muse on sweeping themes. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich is at or near that pinnacle. She has received a MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” and is the 300th Anniversary University

**WELL-BEHAVED
WOMEN SELDOM
MAKE HISTORY.**

By Laurel Thatcher
Ulrich. Knopf.
284 pp. \$24

Professor at Harvard. And the urge to muse, rather than strictly analyze, is evident in *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, a quirky meditation on women's lives and the ways they are portrayed or, more often, forgotten by the retellers of history.

Women's lives are Ulrich's scholarly territory. In 1990, after raising a family and starting a career late, she leapt to prominence with the publication of *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. In this painstaking, groundbreaking tour de force, Ulrich reconstructed a Maine midwife's life from her diary and teased out of it a vast trove of information concerning the workings of a New England community in the early days of the American republic, from how people traveled and what drugs they took for their ailments to the way they dealt with sexual liaisons outside marriage.

The book won a Pulitzer Prize, a Bancroft Prize, and half a dozen other honors, and was made into a PBS documentary. Meanwhile, a line from a scholarly article Ulrich had written in 1976, "Well-behaved women seldom make history," had achieved escape velocity. Taken up as a feminist mantra by young activists, it started appearing online, then on T-shirts. Ulrich began to wonder what larger lesson she had stumbled on about her chosen work, the unearthing and teaching of women's history.

Exploring that lesson requires a technique very different from the one Ulrich used to rediscover Ballard. The midwife, rare among women of her era, kept a record of a regular life filled with such "women's work" as delivering babies, bartering goods, and doing laundry. But women who "made history" in the standard sense were different: To attain anything recognizable to historians as status or influence, Ulrich suggests, women have had to "misbehave." And misbehavior brought danger and, frequently, oblivion. We remember only those who successfully "negotiated the boundary between invisibility and scandal."

Of necessity, this story must feature women heard of before. Ulrich weighs the conflicting views and accounts of figures as various as the classical Amazons, Harriet Tubman, and Virginia Woolf, pondering their forms of "misbehavior" and where they led. Sometimes women are remembered for things they didn't even do. Lady Godiva, for example, was a pious 11th-century philanthropist who would have soon been forgotten, but the story of her riding naked through the streets to spare her people heavy taxes, likely later concocted by an English monk, earned her a place in history.

Ulrich's imaginative way with sources occasionally shows itself, notably in her use of records from English "bawdy courts"

of Shakespeare's day, in which the church tried women (and men) for sexual crimes such as fornication. Documentation

abounds, of course, of women accused of misbehavior as a way of stymieing their other activities. But some finds are still striking. The antebellum Southern writer William Gilmore Simms exclaims of abolitionist writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Mrs. Stowe betrays a malignity so remarkable that the petticoat lifts of itself, and we see the hoof of the beast under the table."

Yet Ulrich's true soul mates in this book are not her eminent troublemakers but women such as the medieval writer Christine de Pizan, who recast women's history and argued for their dignity in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). Pizan herself was rediscovered during a wave of transformation in the field of history in the 1970s and '80s, when narrow visions of how women *should* behave were expanded as evidence amassed of how women *have* behaved over the centuries. As a historian who draws intellectual sustenance from that movement, Ulrich knows deep down that a fascinating fact trumps a clever aphorism every time. "Details," she writes, "let us out of boxes created by slogans."

AMY E. SCHWARTZ is a contributing editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*.

To attain anything recognizable to historians as status or influence, women have had to "misbehave."

ARTS & LETTERS

Vanity Projects

By Aaron Mesh

"I AM BIG," GLORIA SWANSON declared in Billy Wilder's film *Sunset Boulevard*. "It's the pictures that got small." It's one of the iconic lines in American movies, but it means something very different now than it did when Swanson, playing a faded silent-picture star, said it in 1950. Then, it was a clever rejoinder in a piece of slightly disreputable popular entertainment. Now, it's part of the national artistic canon.

Shyon Baumann, a sociologist at the University of Toronto, traces this shift in *Hollywood Highbrow*, a swift, absorbing academic study of "the acceptance of Hollywood films as art among a large segment of the public, particularly (though not exclusively) those with post-secondary education." His argument isn't that movies have improved—the works of *There Will Be Blood* director P. T. Anderson do not sit on a loftier plain than those of Preston Sturges, the 1930s screwball-comedy genius; rather, Baumann makes the case that the real change is in the way we talk about movies. The assumption of artistic merit is embedded in the language of filmgoing—even in the way I describe *Sunset Boulevard* as "Billy Wilder's film." That's an implied characterization of the director as artist, and one that Wilder didn't accept. "Look here, my friend," he told an interviewer in 1960, "I don't want to talk about Art."

How did the conversation shift? Or, as Baumann puts it, after citing a particularly overheated piece of film-studies prose on *Jaws*, "How did we get to the point where the analysis of the shark is perhaps more frightening than the shark itself?" He spreads the responsibility around, emphasizing several developments in the 1960s: The rise of film-studies programs, the self-promotion of second-

HOLLYWOOD Highbrow:

From Entertainment
to Art.

By Shyon Baumann.
Princeton Univ. Press.
225 pp. \$35

generation directors as auteurs, and movie critics who borrowed terms from French film theorists. For the first time, movies were discussed in the same breath as operas or paintings, and directors could project the fantasy that they were making art, not simply trying to pack theaters.

But art is not ordained by wishful thinking alone—or by quality, for that matter. It requires a dash of snobbery, too. Baumann's book is most revealing in its second chapter, where he demonstrates that the movies stopped being mere popular entertainment at precisely the moment they stopped being popular. The rise of film's acceptance as an art form coincided with a drastic decline in movie attendance; from 1945 to 1960 weekly audiences shrank from 90 million to 25.1 million, as Americans abandoned movie palaces for television programs. At the same time university enrollment skyrocketed, with the result being an educated class that could champion a less vulgar leisure activity. "Cultural gems can only look like lost treasure," Baumann observes, "if they are not currently being worn by those who are thought to have bad taste."

Studios began catering to people who saw film not as a cheap diversion but as an estimable creative form. At the same time, they put on offer mass-entertainment spectacles (*Jaws*, released in 1975, has been called the first blockbuster) to attract whomever they could. Today, both *Blue Velvet* and *Batman Begins* are discussed in terms of creative vision, and artistic distinction has become another marketing tool. (Baumann includes tables that show a sharp increase, starting in the 1960s, in the frequency with which high-art phrases appeared in movie advertisements.)

Hollywood Highbrow is not a book that's quick to offer a moral to its story, but it brings to mind another line from a classic film, *Chinatown*: "Politicians, ugly buildings, and whores all get respectable if they last long enough." Movies have been around long enough to join the list.

AARON MESH is the screen editor for *Willamette Week*, an alternative weekly newspaper in Portland, Oregon.

An Artist's Intuition

By Anthony Aveni

"THERE ARE NO QUALITIES which are so occult . . . that [their] reason cannot be given" by the principles of the mechanical philosophy. So wrote French philosopher

René Descartes. Three centuries later, his dictum crumbled in the quake of a scientific revolution. Max Planck dissolved the billiard balls thought to make up the atom into probability smears whose positions and orbits could never to be pinpointed with certainty. Einstein changed the meaning of the words "here" and "now" by warping deeply ingrained concepts of space and time. Darwin hurled the monkey wrench of long-term randomness into the teleological view of life. And Freud violated the limits of our cognitive experience by asserting that conscious thought is but the tip of the human mind.

But this early-20th-century revolution was not strictly an ivory tower affair, argues Jonah Lehrer, whose collection of pithy essays shows how eight artists, writers, poets, musicians—even a French chef—anticipated science's discoveries about the workings of the human brain. Those earlier discoveries, richer if less precise, broader if less explicit than those that scientists subsequently homed in on, seem more relevant to life's everyday meaning.

Take Marcel Proust (1871–1922), a devout disciple of metaphysician Henri Bergson's anti-mechanistic view of the universe. Lehrer explores the sentimental aspects of our senses of taste and smell via the French novelist's celebrated encounter with the madeleine and what he wrote about the vivid memories that accompanied successive visitations with that cookie. Lehrer shows how Proustian prose about deceptive memories reflects the "molecular truth" that every memory depends on subtle neuronal connections inhabited by prions, curious proteins that, like our larger selves, are unpredictable and unstable.

Musical dissonance was born on the eve of the Russian Revolution, when Igor Stravinsky's *Rite*

PROUST WAS A NEUROSCIENTIST.

By Jonah Lehrer.
Houghton Mifflin.
242 pp. \$24

of Spring premiered and sent the audience into a screaming riot. Like Jackson Pollock's fractal pourings, the genius of Stravinsky (1882–1971) lay in the controlled violation of form. There *was* pattern—the audience just wasn't ready to apprehend it. Then why today do we flock to the concert hall to listen to it? Neuroscience's belated answer lies in the brain's corticofugal network, Lehrer explains. Noises repeatedly heard are memorized. Feedback from higher regions of the brain reorganize the auditory cortex so that hidden patterns are easier to recognize in the future.

You literally change with the music.

Lehrer's account of Auguste Escoffier's (1846–1935) insight into the sense of taste, as it is understood today, transports us from the complexity of a good veal stock to the mysterious essence of *umami*, the Japanese "sixth sense" of deliciousness. Lehrer dissects the mystery by tracing the pathway from tongue receptor to DNA. (His service in the kitchen of Le Cirque and in the lab of a Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist serves him well in this cross-disciplinary endeavor.)

Young Lehrer's book (he is 26!) is a welcome antidote to science trade texts that bash the humanities and debunk worldviews that fail to incorporate scientific method and theory. His final chapter challenges attempts by icons E. O. Wilson and Steven Pinker to explain science to the public. Such works, he contends, are largely uninformed efforts to reduce the humanistic disciplines to mere symptoms of science. But the postmodernist retort, which reckons science as just another set of descriptions of reality amidst an infinite sea of equally valid ways of knowing, serves no better purpose, Lehrer says.

Having taught and written about science for 45 years, I think I know why public understand-

Proust's writings about deceptive memories reflect the "molecular truth" that every memory depends on subtle connections that, like our larger selves, are unpredictable and unstable.

ing of our sphere is so deplorable. Too few of us make any attempt to connect our ideas and subject matter to the rest of human experience and inquiry. Lehrer makes no claim to having found the secret bridge that might link the sciences and humanities, but he does suggest that my students might benefit by paying more attention to what Virginia Woolf penned about the emergent self and what Walt Whitman wrote about the body electric. He's right! We will never reduce feeling to physics, nor consciousness to chemistry—not so long as the voice of the artist remains alive.

ANTHONY AVENI is Russell Colgate Distinguished University Professor of Astronomy, Anthropology, and Native American Studies at Colgate University. His most recent book is *Uncommon Sense: Understanding Nature's Truths Across Time and Culture* (2006).

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

The Poverty Myth

By Walter Reich

THE BELIEF THAT POVERTY is a root cause of Islamist terrorism has been thoroughly discredited. Numerous studies of terrorism have debunked the notion. Islamist terrorists themselves, as well as those who live among them and know them well, have repeatedly attributed Islamist terrorism primarily to religious and ideological motivations and to the logic that—against America and the West—terrorism is used because it works. As Abdel Aziz Rantisi—a Hamas leader until he was assassinated by the Israelis—said of suicide bombing, “It is the most effective strategy for us. For us it is the same as their F-16.”

Somehow, though, the idea that poverty is the culprit refuses to die. Journalists, academics, opinion makers, terrorism experts, and Nobel Prize winners (including those recognized for economics and peace) repeat it, as have U.S. presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and British prime minister Tony Blair. Imbued with this belief, leaders are inclined to launch or sup-

port antipoverty policies that do little or nothing to stop terrorism.

Fortunately, in one small book, Alan B. Krueger, a Princeton economist, has collected much of the evidence that demolishes this argument. In *What Makes a Terrorist*, he performs a much-needed act of intellectual hygiene. Some of the evidence Krueger cites is based on examinations of the biographies of terrorists, as well as public polls and sophisticated economic analyses. A number of studies were carried out by Krueger and his colleagues.

It turns out that members of Islamist terrorist groups—Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, etc.—tend to be from relatively privileged backgrounds. “As a group,” Krueger notes, “terrorists are better educated and from wealthier families than the typical person in the same age group of the societies from which they originate.” For example, one study compared 48 Palestinian suicide bombers from Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad with 18,803 fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and found that the bombers were less than half as likely as the general population to come from families below the poverty line, and that “almost 60 percent of the suicide bombers had more than a high school degree, compared to less than 15 percent of the general population.”

The same general pattern holds for terror's most avid supporters. Opinion polls, Krueger notes, show that “the best-educated members of society and those in higher-paying occupations are often more radicalized and supportive of terrorism than the most disadvantaged. The illiterate, underemployed population is often unwilling to express an opinion about policy issues, probably because they have more pressing matters on their minds.” If anything, it has been the lack of civil liberties in their societies, rather than excessive poverty, that has helped foster terrorism.

Krueger concedes the possibility that well-to-do terrorists are motivated by the poverty and deprivation that bedevil their societies. But he is skeptical: “A range of socioeconomic indicators—

WHAT MAKES A TERRORIST:

Economics and the Roots of Terrorism.

By Alan B. Krueger.
Princeton Univ. Press.
180 pp. \$24.95

including illiteracy, infant mortality, and gross domestic product per capita—are unrelated to whether people become involved in terrorism.” Besides, if poverty breeds terrorism against the West, why isn’t it being carried out by people from places much poorer than many countries in the Muslim world—large swaths of sub-Saharan Africa, for example?

We shouldn’t need Krueger’s book to be persuaded of his conclusions. Arab writers have been making similar arguments for years. Saudi commentator Muhammad Mahfouz, for example, has argued that religious teachings inciting violence, rather than poverty, are the main cause of terrorism among Saudi youth. “These youths,” he writes, “were brought up in a special cultural atmosphere which finds its roots in a stereotyped understanding of religion. This understanding serves as a basic incubator to this group.”

Maybe a distinguished economist, surveying reams of social-scientific studies, will finally succeed in convincing Western opinion leaders, many of whom don’t consult Arab sources, of this truth. Perhaps they’ll read Krueger’s book and understand that if terrorism has identifiable root causes, they’re the ones most frequently cited by Islamists themselves—the desire to achieve what terrorists see as holy ends, and the conviction that, in the service of these ends, terrorism works.

I fear, though, that despite Krueger’s definitive and persuasive book, conventional wisdom and wishful thinking will keep alive the idea that poverty causes terrorism. Intellectual hygiene is an honorable enterprise but, alas, often unsuccessful—especially in a world in which familiar, easy, and hopeful explanations that leave us thinking the problem has a ready solution are preferred to explanations that leave us feeling vexed, powerless, and perpetually afraid.

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Gotham’s Melting Pot

By Mimi Schwartz

NEW YORK CITY, FOR many, means the borough of Manhattan, with its skyscrapers, Fifth Avenue shops, Central Park, and Wall Street. But just to the east is a lesser-known gem:

THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF QUEENS.

By Claudia Gryvatz Copquin. Yale Univ. Press. 265 pp. \$35

Queens. The largest of the city’s five boroughs (110 square miles) and the second most populous (after Brooklyn), Queens is unique. It is, as historian Kenneth T. Jackson points out in his introduction to *The Neighborhoods of Queens*, “the most heterogeneous place in the world.” Of its two million residents, 44 percent are foreign born—a population that tops Miami’s. One Queens neighborhood, Elmhurst, has immigrants from 110 countries. Another, Astoria, “has the largest Greek population outside the Mediterranean.” Richmond Hill is home to the largest population of Sikhs outside India. And on it goes.

The Neighborhoods of Queens—written by Claudia Gryvatz Copquin, a free-lance journalist raised on the turf—is a practical, easy-to-use guide to every one of the 99 neighborhoods and smaller yet distinct sub-neighborhoods of this fascinating, multi-cultural borough. Each chapter offers a brief narrative overview of the area it covers and is generously illustrated with photographs and a detailed map. Before Yale launched its “Neighborhoods of New York City” series (in collaboration with the Citizens Committee for New York City), to which this book is the latest addition, no one had attempted to map all the city’s neighborhoods.

My family arrived in the borough as refugees from Nazi Germany in 1937, three years before I was born. I grew up in Forest Hills, and when I opened to the chapter on that neighborhood, there was a photo of the West Side Tennis Club, where we used to watch the U.S. Open before it moved to Flushing Mead-



Geography was destiny for Long Island City, the most industrialized neighborhood in Queens, directly across the East River from Manhattan.

ows in 1978. Other pictures captured the mix of apartment houses and neat single-family houses—five or six to a block—that I used to pass every day as a child. Across the dozen or so lanes of Queens Boulevard is the more exclusive Forest Hills Gardens, the nation's first planned community, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and Grosvenor Atterbury in the early 1900s to look like a quaint English village. Jews and Catholics were not welcome there in my day, but when I walked in this neighborhood a few years ago, signs on telephone poles and lawns indicated the presence of a thriving Asian community.

Aside from its rich diversity, what makes Queens special is a tradition of tolerance that began more than a century before the Declaration of Independence. When the Dutch controlled the area in the 1600s, citizens revolted against Governor Peter Stuyvesant's efforts to limit how they worshiped, producing the Flushing Remonstrance of 1657. This petition, Jackson writes, "remains the most eloquent defense of religious freedom in all of American history."

One man, John Bowne, went to jail rather than submit to a law that forbade Quakers from worshipping in his house. He appealed, and the Dutch government overruled Stuyvesant. It all happened in Flushing, Queens, in what is now the heart of a thriving Chinatown. Bowne's house, the oldest structure in the borough, has been converted to a museum on the street named after him.

Queens still attracts people looking for opportunity and peace. Despite its latest influx of diverse newcomers—from China, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Jamaica, South Korea, India, Haiti, and Ecuador—this borough of New York has fewer homicides than many American cities with smaller populations, including Atlanta and Baltimore. We should all go to Queens to see how it's done.

MIMI SCHWARTZ is professor emerita of writing at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She is the author of *Thoughts From a Queen-Sized Bed* (2002) and coauthor of *Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction* (2006), among other books. Her latest book, *Good Neighbors, Bad Times: Echoes of My Father's German Village*, will be published in March.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Why God Won't Die

By Jay Tolson

SOMETHING CURIOUS HAPPENED on the way to the 21st century. Religion—which modernization theorists had said was destined for the dustbin of history—didn't go away. It even seemed to gain new strength, popping up in the culture wars, claiming space in the public square, and (in its worst manifestations) inspiring angry young men to acts of unspeakable violence. Why, it's all enough to drive a good secular humanist crazy—or at least to the bookstores to purchase the reassuring screeds of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, or any of the other so-called New Atheists.

Making sense of secularism, its achievements and its failings, is one of the great intellectual challenges of our time. The word itself has several interlinked meanings, from the political (the separation of church and state) to the sociological (describing the abandonment of religious belief by individuals or society in general) to the ideological (the programmatic conviction that secularity is the logical outcome of enlightenment, science, and progress). A fourth sense is more anthropological, and arguably lies at the root of the other three. This secularism names a profound shift in worldview, one that the eminent McGill University philosopher Charles Taylor defines as a “move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and, indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”

It is this fourth sense that mainly occupies Taylor in his long-awaited magnum opus, *A Secular Age*. For nearly 800 pages, Taylor, winner of the 2007 Templeton Prize (religion's own “genius award”), wrestles mightily with a fascinating subject: how Christianity became the religion that produced the first exit from religion, and how that exit, secularism, never entirely disentangled itself

A SECULAR AGE.

By Charles Taylor.
Belknap/Harvard.
874 pp. \$39.95

from the religion that made its existence possible. The book is, loosely, a history of ideas, but Taylor's project is to get at something deeper and broader than the activity of intellectuals and other elites, something he calls the “social imaginary,” an ungainly term describing the various ways people “imagine their social existence.”

Taylor begins, not surprisingly, with the Reformation—into which he lumps late medieval developments and the Counter Reformation—because of its crucial role in paving the way for a host of “modern” afflictions, from the confusion of morality with materialism to the disconnection of the individual from tradition and the larger corporate body of fellow believers.

If this seems like a fairly well-trod road, well, it is. But the richness and pleasure of the journey is in seeing how a profoundly learned thinker (who is also a believing Christian) examines the landmarks along the way. For example, Taylor's treatment of the emergence of a new kind of public sphere in the 18th century allows us to see how radical a development it is. Previously, what brought people together was always

“something action-transcendent,” Taylor writes, “be it a foundation by God, or a Chain of Being which society bodied forth, or some traditional law which defined our people.” This new sphere was “grounded purely in its own common actions.” Whatever happened within it—crowds clamoring for lower taxes or members of the Third Estate calling for the end of the Old Regime—was no longer important in relation to eternal time but only in relation to the actually unfolding present and its ideal goal: the future.

Particularly rich is Taylor's dissection of deism as the crucial intermediate stage between an age of belief and one of an increasingly exclusive humanism. In his handling, deism has several closely related facets. One emphasizes the creator role of God. Another involves the primacy of an impersonal order, though still created by God. A

Making sense of secularism, its achievements and its failings, is one of the great intellectual challenges of our time.

third is the “idea of a true, original natural religion, which has been obscured by accretions and corruptions, and which must now be laid clear again.” This last notion became so widespread that Unitarianism effectively reached beyond those who belonged to that denomination.

A book of such large proportions finally defies encapsulation, but one of its greater accomplishments is to challenge the modern (or is it post-modern?) orthodoxy that the hunger for religion is no more than the expression of some innate human need for meaning. Introduced by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber, the idea has more recently been elaborated (and “scientized”) by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists. Taylor rejects it on the grounds that it usually ends up denying transcendent reality in the name of a generalized human longing for it.

For all his wariness of the factors leading to a secular age, Taylor appreciates the good that has come with a largely secular public sphere, not least because the alternative, in our time, would be endless violent conflict among contending faiths. But he is equally dismissive of postmodern sentimentalities, including the view that the sacred is merely one human construct among many. No, Taylor tirelessly and sometimes even eloquently insists, it is more than that. Much more. Including the ground on which our secularism stands.

JAY TOLSON is a senior writer at *U.S. News & World Report* and an editor at large of *The Wilson Quarterly*.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Time Beings

By Sharman Apt Russell

IMAGINE A COUPLE SLOW-dancing. One partner leads. The other seamlessly follows. Now imagine that time—the natural progression of day and night, morning followed by afternoon and evening—is

**SEX SLEEP EAT
DRINK DREAM:**

*A Day in the Life of
Your Body.*

By Jennifer Ackerman.
Houghton Mifflin.
253 pp. \$25

the lead partner. Imagine your body dancing with time.

In fact, this is happening right now. Your internal clock (a big clock in the brain and smaller clocks scattered in cells throughout the body) keeps track of the passing minutes and signals for certain physical responses. As you move through the day, your body temperature steadily rises, along with your heart rate and blood pressure. Your muscle flexibility increases and your reflexes quicken. The level of the stress hormone cortisol declines. Hormones and neurotransmitters ebb and flow according to the hour, as does your white blood cell count. During the night, the hormone melatonin surges; your temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure fall; and the cortisol level begins to climb so as to peak when you must wake again.

The new research on chronobiology, or the effect of time on our bodies, is so compelling that some scientists suggest we should timestamp each visit to the doctor. A morning test might not reveal the hypertension of afternoon. Asthma is often worse at night, when adrenaline levels are low and bronchial passages shrink slightly. When we take certain drugs may determine how well they work. Late in the day, higher body temperatures cause medication to break down more quickly. In a recent study of colorectal cancer, the tumors in patients who were given drugs in a conventional steady dose were reduced in size by 30 percent. In patients treated in a chronotherapy regimen—in which drugs are administered at the time of day calculated to maximize their benefit and minimize their toxicity—tumors shrunk by 51 percent, and side effects were less severe.

Science writer Jennifer Ackerman takes us through the most recent discoveries about the body’s natural rhythms, explaining that organisms on earth evolved these rhythms to deal with a rotating planet and its patterns of light and dark, warm and cold. Her larger point is that understanding this dance with

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

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time can help us make better choices. Morning is best for activities that require balance and fine motor skills. After reading this book, you might schedule your next medical operation before lunch, when you could expect your surgeon to be at peak efficiency. Late afternoon is when most swimmers and runners set speed records. This is also when your pain tolerance is highest—a good time to be in the dentist's chair. Sperm concentration is higher in the late afternoon. By early evening, your body is often physically strongest. Later in the evening, you should avoid exercise if you want a good night's sleep. While these patterns are typical, they can vary. Sleep patterns are particularly individualistic, occurring along a

It is not surprising that mistakes that led to nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl were made by night-shift workers.

continuum of "larks," people with peak alert times in the morning, to "owls," who are most alert in the late afternoon and evening.

Knowledge of the body's natural rhythms could also influence labor policy. About 15 percent of the American work force now labors through the night—when the body's clock is signaling sleep. Workers on the graveyard shift may be at higher risk for heart attack and cancer, as well as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, mood disorders, and infertility. They may also be a danger to others. Ackerman connects the major nuclear plant accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl to mistakes made by night-shift workers.

In her account of a day in the life of your body, Ackerman explores a number of intriguing byways—orgasms, napping, the common cold, and nightmares. She provides a cascade of odd facts: Kissing your partner can involve an exchange of five million bacteria, for example, and fetuses yawn in utero. Her astonishment appears to grow with each chapter, and so does ours. Our bodies know just what to do

and when to do it. With a languorous dip and a graceful slide, we follow our partner's lead—a miracle in motion.

SHARMAN APT RUSSELL teaches at Western New Mexico University, Silver City, and Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her most recent book is *Hunger: An Unnatural History* (2005).

Calculated Decisions

By Alexandra Vacroux

WORRIED THAT YOUR personal information is being collected and manipulated? Wonder why your favorite websites know your taste in books and movies better than your own mother does? In *Super*

Crunchers, Ian Ayres answers these questions and more as he tells a numerical tale both exciting and cautionary.

In the past several years, advances in computer storage capacity have made possible massive databases that are changing the ways government agencies, market research firms, and universities run their operations—and our lives. Ayres, an economist and law professor at Yale, sets out to explain how these databases, some of which contain thousands of times the information stored in the Library of Congress, can be quickly analyzed to shape real-world decisions.

Super Crunchers is not the dry econometrics textbook you couldn't get through in college. Ayres relies on baseball scouts, wine critics, entrepreneurs, and doctors to illustrate his argument, and goes into the gory mathematical details only in the last chapter. He illustrates regression—a statistical procedure that exploits databases to estimate how various factors influence a single outcome—by describing how electronic matchmaking sites such as eHarmony and True.com put people together. These companies propose matches by collecting clues to personality traits and social skills with detailed questionnaires. The

SUPER CRUNCHERS:
Why Thinking-by-Numbers Is the New Way to Be Smart.

By Ian Ayres. Bantam.
260 pp. \$25

clues become data, which are then crunched to calculate how compatible one person might be with others who have also submitted information. Sometimes, opposites do attract.

The basic idea underlying super crunching is that using regression techniques produces far more accurate results than the intuition and experience of the traditional expert. The debate over how decisions should be made is nowhere clearer than in Ayres's chapter on "evidence-based medicine." No human brain, even that of a good doctor, can actively recall all 11,000 human diseases and their symptoms. Enter the Isabel database, which serves as the "Google of medical diagnosis." The doctor logs a patient's symptoms, and Isabel generates a list of possible diagnoses. In about 10 percent of cases, Isabel points doctors toward a diagnosis they didn't consider but should have.

Though Ayres initially titled his book *The End of Intuition*, he does leave a role for the gut. People are bad at weighing the relative importance of factors that affect a given outcome, but they have good hunches about which variables should be considered in the first place. Databases alone do not always yield definitive results; some have been so manipulated that they resemble "prisoners who will tell you anything you want to know." Ayres advises all crunchers to check their assumptions carefully and, if possible, to allow results to be independently verified.

He offers the cautionary tale of John Lott, a scholar who, in 2000, created and analyzed a

crime database and found that when citizens are allowed to carry concealed weapons, would-be attackers are discouraged and crime decreases. Lott's conclusions were instrumental in the passage of at least nine state laws permitting concealed weapons. When he shared his database with Ayres and others, however, they discovered that slight changes to the

regression equations negated the more guns/less crime relationship, and that after coding errors were corrected, the data set suggested that concealed weapons laws are, if anything, likely to increase crime rates.

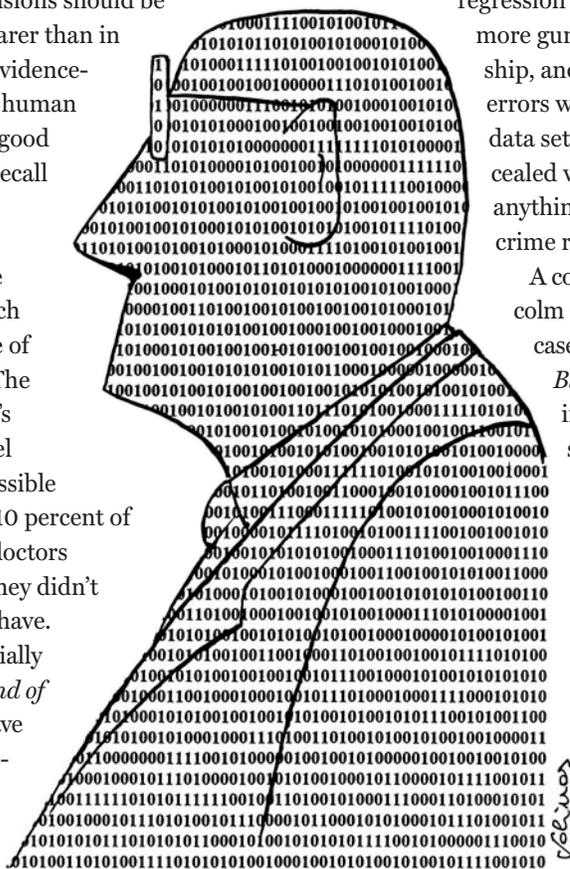
A couple of years ago, Malcolm Gladwell made the case for intuition. In

Blink, he argued that instantaneous, subconscious decisions based on accumulated knowledge and experience are often superior to those derived from "more deliberate and exhaustive ways of thinking."

What Ayres and Gladwell do agree on is that the brain does not make good decisions when flooded with

information. We are biased by preconceived ideas, prone to rationalization, and easily influenced. We think we are right far more often than we are. After reading Ayres's book, some may be ready to throw intuition to the wind. The more cautious among us will take comfort in Gladwell's conviction that the human mind may still yield insights not readily supplanted by those of a computer.

ALEXANDRA VACROUX is a senior scholar at the Wilson Center.



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PORTRAIT



Detail from Skating Before the Saint George's Gate (c. 1550s), after Pieter Bruegel

Slip Sliding Away

“See how they skate at Antwerp, some going this way, some that; some stumble and fall while others walk proudly upright. Learn, then, from this picture, how we conduct ourselves in this world, wisely or foolishly, slipping and slithering our way through a life whose basis is even more ephemeral and fragile than ice.” So reads the inscription in the margin of this 16th-century etching after renowned Flemish artist Pieter

Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525–69). The words probably were not his, but the message likely was. Bruegel was fond of illustrating proverbial wisdom, and skating, which was enjoying a popularity boom due to the invention of metal blades, was often a source of metaphors for the struggle to lead a moral life. “To go on skates” meant to go astray, for example, and those in jeopardy were said to “stand on cracking ice.”



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