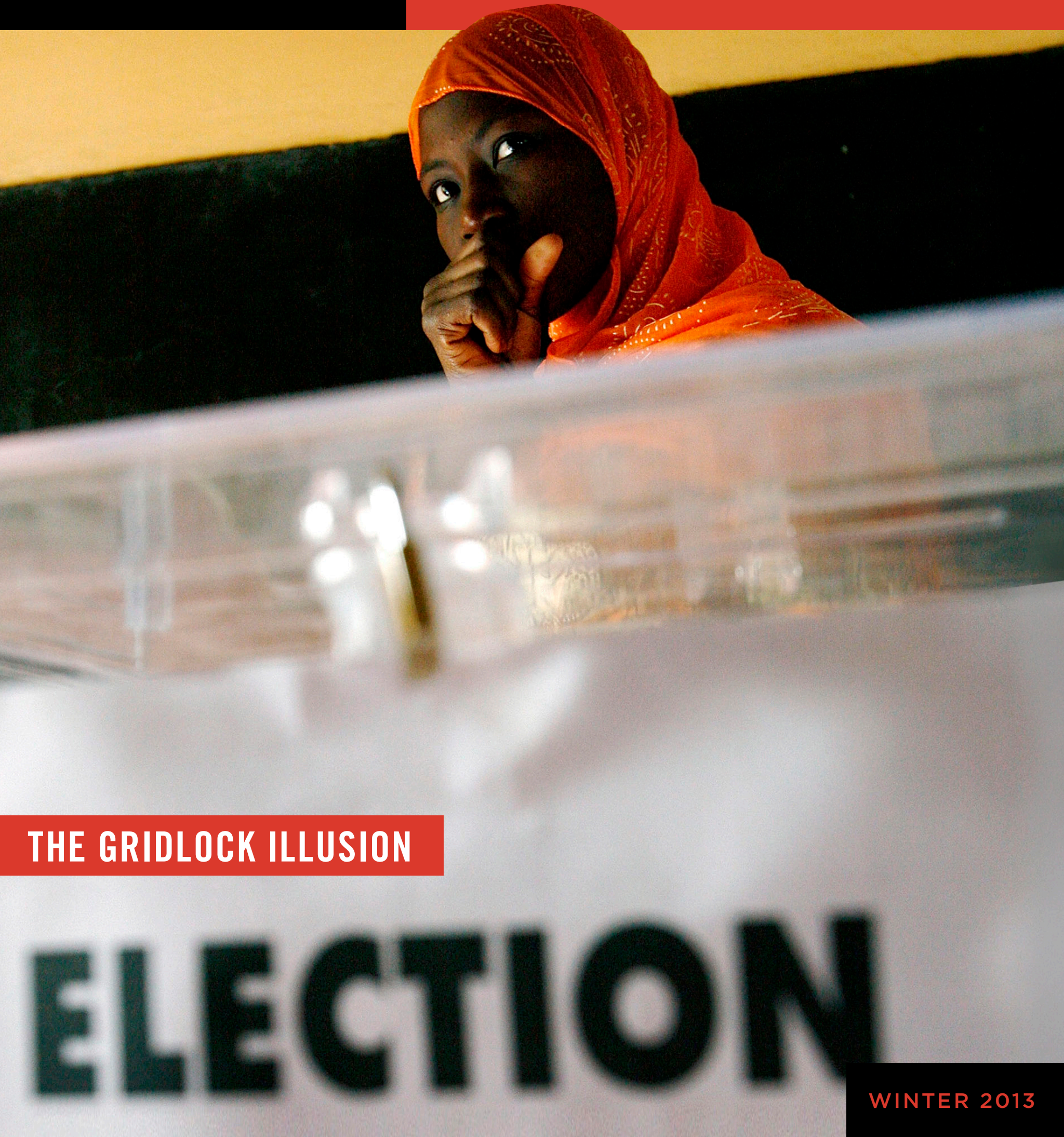




THE WILSON QUARTERLY  
SURVEYING THE WORLD OF IDEAS

# IS DEMOCRACY WORTH IT?



THE GRIDLOCK ILLUSION

# ELECTION

WINTER 2013





## COVER STORY

# IS DEMOCRACY WORTH IT?

The Arab Spring's aftermath brings fresh reminders that transitions to democracy are not painless. They bring instability and uncertainty. Some fail. Our authors weigh the risks and rewards in countries around the world.



### 1. WHY WAIT FOR DEMOCRACY?

by LARRY DIAMOND

### 2. VOTING AGAINST FREEDOM

by JOSHUA KUCERA

### 3. AFGHANISTAN IN THREE VOICES

by NORWAN, MARIAM, AND NASIMA

### 4. AFRICA'S LONG SPRING

by STEVE McDONALD

ABOVE: In the notorious Port-au-Prince slum of Cité Soleil, voters cast their ballots in Haiti's 2006 national elections. Photograph: Charles Eckert / Redux

## FEATURES

### THE GRIDLOCK ILLUSION

by R. SHEP MELNICK

Arguments that our political system is bedeviled by gridlock overlook its capacity for major policy change. From its strong response to the financial crisis to the passage of health care reform, Washington has chalked up more accomplishments than most people realize.

## EDITOR'S COMMENT

## FINDINGS

## IN ESSENCE

Our survey of notable articles from other journals and magazines

## CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

## LETTERS

## ABOUT US

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

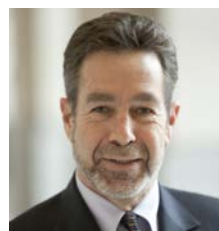
ON THE COVER: A woman waits to cast her vote in the Senegalese presidential election of 2007, in which President Abdoulaye Wade won a second term. Photograph: Finbarr O'Reilly / Reuters / Corbis

# EDITOR'S COMMENT

## THE ANSWER IS YES

Almost since the “Third Wave” of global democratization began in the 1970s, transitions to democracy have been a major focus of the Woodrow Wilson Center. Our cover “cluster” of essays in this issue is the latest product of a commitment grounded in the Center’s landmark *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule* (1986), a four-volume compendium of articles growing out of conferences, seminars, and other programs held at the Center in previous years. In April, Johns Hopkins University Press will reissue the series’ capstone volume, *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, with a new prologue by Abraham F. Lowenthal and Cynthia J. Arnson.

The authors—Lowenthal was head of the Center’s Latin American program when the *Transitions* project was launched, and Arnson holds that position today—make interesting points about the differences between then and now. In 1986 there was optimism aplenty, but also much worry about the pitfalls facing democratizing countries. Today there is somewhat less optimism, and a host of new challenges have arisen. Many of the countries now leaving authoritarianism behind have little or no historical experience with democracy. Most are also much poorer than



### STEVEN LAGERFELD

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

the relatively affluent societies that made the transition in the past. And while the Internet and social media help the democratic cause in many ways, they speed up the pace of decision making, abet the spread of rumor and misinformation, and add further complexity to political life.

At least one concern has remained constant since the Third Wave began: Hard as it is to establish electoral democracy, it may be even harder to establish true democracy. Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are elected leaders, for example, but their compatriots do not enjoy what we think of as democratic citizenship. It is because there are so many ways the quest for democracy can go astray that we ask in this issue, “Is democracy worth it?” Despite all the perils and new challenges, I myself cannot imagine any other answer but yes.

— STEVEN LAGERFELD



# FINDINGS BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

---

1.

## Prague's No Spin Zone

*Havel meets the press—on his terms*

**When Václav Havel spoke, Western...**



2.

## Prohibition Class

*The '20s didn't roar for all*

**Xenophobia-tinged class warfare helped...**

3.

## Death Watch

*Newsroom countdown*

**Insurance actuaries aren't the only...**



4.

## Open Covenants, Secretly Arrived At

*Fourteen Points' false promise*

**In 1918, enunciating the list of guidelines for the postwar world that would...**

5.

## Wilde's Women

*Constance and inconstancy*

**Beyond plays and bons mots, Oscar Wilde may be best remembered for...**



6.

## Distant Laughter

*Humor's calculus*

**Comedy is tragedy plus time.** Whoever said that—the line has been attributed...



## PRAGUE'S NO SPIN ZONE

*Havel meets the press—on his terms*

**When Václav Havel spoke,** Western journalists didn't just listen—they genuflected. The dissident-turned-Czech-president

was “an international icon of integrity” (*The New York Times*), a “genuine hero” (*Newsweek*), a “secular saint” (*Toronto Globe and Mail*), and “a moral giant in an era of pygmies” (*Der Spiegel*).

Not that the accolades were undeserved. A playwright, essayist, and poet,

Havel spent most of his adult life standing up to Czechoslovakia's communist regime. Security forces followed, wire-tapped, harassed, interrogated, and jailed him, once for a four-year term. After the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, Havel—just six months out of prison—helped lead protests that attracted hundreds of thousands of Czechs. The government didn't put up much of a fight. In late December, the federal assembly unanimously elected Havel president, a choice ratified by voters in June 1990. Except for one six-month period,



BETTMANN / CORBIS

**Substance over style:** When he addressed the U.S. Congress in 1990, Václav Havel, the newly elected president of Czechoslovakia, rebuffed the advice of a speech coach. Congress gave him a rapturous response anyway.



he served as president until 2003, first of Czechoslovakia and then of the Czech Republic. He died in 2011.

To Western ears, “everything he said sounded beautiful,” Yale historian Marci Shore observed by e-mail. “He didn’t sound like a politician, and that was part of our enchantment.” In *The Taste of Ashes: The Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe* (Crown), Shore quotes an American journalist on Havel’s speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 1990: “If I could talk like that, I would run for God.”

Yet the press’s relationship with Havel was more complicated than it seemed.

Although coverage in Western news media remained largely positive, much of the Czech media grew critical during Havel’s reign. At first purely political, the criticism ultimately became personal as well, according to Paul Wilson, Havel’s friend and the English-language translator of many of his works. In particular, Wilson said in an interview, the Czech press and public revered Havel’s wife, Olga, who had worked alongside him during his dissident years. Following a long illness, she died in 1997. Less than a year later, Havel married an actress, Dagmar Veskrnova. Some of the Czech press stepped up their attacks on the president by going after his new wife. In

2007, after his final term as president, Havel responded in his play “Leaving.” When reporters arrive to interview a chancellor at the end of his term, he expects questions about his political legacy. Instead, they care only about sex and scandal.

But Havel’s wariness of the press—Western as well as Czech—began long before his second marriage. From the outset of his presidency, some journalists found him “a difficult customer,” according to Michael Zantovsky, Havel’s press secretary in the early 1990s and currently the Czech ambassador to the United Kingdom.

During the communist era, Czechoslovakia’s official media routinely distorted Havel’s statements, Zantovsky said at a conference in Prague last October. In 1977, for instance, Havel pledged not to engage in “criminal activities” in exchange for a promise that he be released from prison. *Rudé Právo*, the Communist Party’s official newspaper, falsely claimed that he had pledged to avoid “all political activities.” Some of his supporters felt betrayed, and Havel was devastated. He developed a deep-seated distrust of the press, and it stayed with him.

In addition, Havel was a meticulous wordsmith. “By vocation, he was a



writer—and as a writer, he did not only think about the content of the message, but also about the shape of the message,” Zantovsky said. “He simply hated it when journalists would try to edit him, interpret him, rephrase him, because he felt that the original phrase was the right one.”

Havel’s demeanor in television interviews posed challenges, too. In 1990, a prominent TV reporter from the United States—Zantovsky declined to name her—interviewed Havel in Prague. He answered her first questions while gazing at the floor. She instructed him to look up. She asked another question; again, he looked at the floor. The journalist complained to Zantovsky, who remembers telling her, “Look, the man spent the last 10 years being interrogated by the authorities, and you *don’t* look them in the eye—this gives a lot away.”

The interview resumed. Five minutes later, the reporter stopped again and approached Zantovsky. Havel was coming across as too cerebral, she said; why wouldn’t he display his emotions on camera? “By that time I was a little upset,” Zantovsky recalled. “I said, Maybe he doesn’t *feel* any emotions.” The reporter finished the interview and stormed out without saying goodbye. (Barbara Wal-

ters conducted the first American TV interview with Havel that same year. Asked by e-mail if the reporter might have been Walters, Zantovsky responded, “It might.”)

Others tried to refine Havel’s public-speaking style. Before he addressed Congress in 1990, an American adviser—Prague-born Madeleine Albright, the future secretary of state—arranged for him to meet with a speech coach. In Zantovsky’s account, it was the TV interview all over again: The expert told Havel to look up while speaking, and Havel serenely ignored the instruction. Exasperated, the speech coach declared, “This man could not address a meeting of the local Parent-Teacher Association, let alone a joint session of the U.S. Congress!” Members of Congress ended up giving him a standing ovation anyway.

Just as he had resisted the dictates of communists, Havel resisted the dictates of journalists, publicists, and consultants. “He defended his identity more fiercely than any other man I’ve ever known,” said Zantovsky. “The forms of manipulating the press that are natural to any politician—the idea of a spin, the idea of a sound bite—were as foreign to him as the idea of a desert is to an Eskimo. . . . What you see is what you get—that was Václav Havel.”



## PROHIBITION CLASS

*The '20s didn't roar for all*

**Xenophobia-tinged class warfare** helped drive the temperance movement: Perhaps upstanding native-born Americans could hold their liquor, but immigrant laborers couldn't. In practice, the movement's landmark achievement, Prohibition, reflected the same sort of divide. "It was the working class that suffered the most," Andrew F. Smith writes in *Drinking History: Fifteen Turning Points*

*in the Making of American Beverages* (Columbia Univ. Press).

At the turn of the 20th century, the American workingman drank beer. Annual per capita consumption reached 20 gallons before Prohibition took effect in 1920, a rate that made beer the nation's second most popular beverage (water was first).

During Prohibition, though, beer all but vanished. Bootleggers concentrated on hard liquor. The higher alcohol content meant higher profits per gallon. In addi-



UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD / CORBIS

Prohibition cost working-class Americans their alcoholic beverage of choice—and sometimes, as in the case of these picketing brewery workers, their jobs.

tion, speakeasies had overhead costs, such as bribes to police, that hadn't affected pre-Prohibition bars. As a result, speakeasy cocktails were often too pricey for the quondam beer-drinkers.

Prohibition had other effects as well, according to Smith. Previously, most alcohol had been sold in saloons. Respectable women had steered clear of them. But women came to speakeasies, and after Prohibition's repeal, they no longer avoided bars. Cocktail parties grew common during Prohibition, too. Hosts would obtain illicit liquor and hire bartenders to dispense it. Cocktail parties remained popular after Prohibition, especially during the Depression—they were cheaper than dinner parties. In addition, Prohibition deprived the federal government of considerable money from excise taxes on liquor. After Franklin D. Roosevelt and a Democratic Congress took office in 1933, increasing federal revenues became a compelling argument for repeal. By the end of the year, Prohibition had ended.

Beer made a slow comeback. Per capita consumption didn't reach its pre-Prohibition level until the mid-1970s. Since then, beer consumption has increased slightly. But it's no longer the nation's second-most-popular beverage. Although data are hard to pin

down, Smith said by e-mail, beer now appears to occupy fourth place, behind water, soft drinks, and coffee.

The lineup may change if cities and states adopt proposals to restrict the sales of soft drinks in order to combat childhood obesity, as New York City has done. Some studies suggest that children from poorer families drink more soda than kids from wealthier families. Perhaps the next Prohibition, like the last one, will affect the working class most.

## DEATH WATCH

### *Newsroom countdown*

**Insurance actuaries** aren't the only ones who try to calculate life expectancy. In deciding when to draft an obituary for a still-living celebrity, journalists make their own predictions.

In Britain's *Telegraph*, where he's the obituary editor, Harry de Quetteville writes that he and his staff have "a large number of obits, perhaps several thousand, in various stages of readiness." The age of the subject is the principal factor in determining whether to prepare an obituary ahead of time, but de Quetteville and colleagues also watch for illness, substance abuse, and high-risk jobs



or hobbies.

*The New York Times* takes much the same approach, according to its obituaries editor, Bill McDonald. “For practical reasons we’re constrained in how many we can research and write in advance, so we have to be highly selective, the choices determined by fame, eminence, impact on the world, etc.,” McDonald said by e-mail. “One other consideration is the degree of difficulty an obituary might present if we were forced to write it on deadline. It would behoove us, for example, to prepare one in advance on a Nobel winner in particle physics, preferably by a writer who understands the subject.

Our deadline writers are quick-study generalists, but even they have limits.”

When the singer Whitney Houston died in early 2012, *The Telegraph* had its obit ready. Though she was only 48, she had a long history of drug abuse. “Her premature death was sad in itself,” de Quetteville writes. “How much sadder then, that judging by the speed that



BERTRAND GUAY / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

**Whitney Houston died young, at age 48, but obituary writers saw the bad news coming and had already drafted biographical articles.**

obituaries for her were posted online, newspapers around the world appeared to have anticipated it.”

But not *The New York Times*. “She was on our to-do list and an assignment was about to be made, believe it or not, when the news came,” McDonald said. “It happens, and of course we ritually kick ourselves when it does. But in this case

we scrambled to report the news immediately on the Web site and produced a very full and fine obituary within hours by Jon Pareles, our chief pop-music critic, who had much of the material already in his head.”

De Quetteville delicately suggests that *The Telegraph* prepared an obit when it learned of Prince Harry’s first deployment to Afghanistan in 2008. McDonald declined to say whether the *Times* has a Prince Harry obit on hand. “We don’t divulge the names of those in our advance file,” he said.

“Few people like to reflect on whether the Grim Reaper is hovering nearby, whetstone out, sharpening the old scythe,” de Quetteville writes. “But on the obituaries desk, I’m afraid, we do it all the time.”

## OPEN COVENANTS, SECRETLY ARRIVED AT

*Fourteen Points’ false promise*

In 1918, enunciating the list of guidelines for the postwar world that would become known as the “Fourteen Points,” President Woodrow Wilson gave first place to “open covenants of peace, openly arrived at.” A nice-sounding sentiment, but Wilson didn’t actually believe

it, according to *A Journalist’s Diplomatic Mission: Ray Stannard Baker’s World War I Diary*, edited by John Maxwell Hamilton and Robert Mann (Louisiana State Univ. Press).

In early 1919, when reporters arrived in Paris to cover the peace negotiations that followed World War I, they expected meetings to be open to the press. They learned otherwise from Ray Stannard Baker, an American writer who served as Wilson’s spokesman during the conference. Negotiations, Baker said, would be conducted in secret.

The announcement sparked “intense indignation” among the journalists, who considered it “a violation of the President’s famous ‘Point’ about ‘open covenants openly arrived at,’” said an editorial in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, adding that Baker, as Wilson’s emissary to the press, was “certain to become the most disliked man in journalism.”

Behind the scenes, Baker sided with the reporters. “Publicity,” he wrote in his journal, “is indeed the test of democracy.” But Wilson felt differently, Fourteen Points notwithstanding. The president, Baker wrote, harbored “a certain artistic repugnance to exposing half-done work to the light of day,” and believed that “settling the world by secret conferences is the only way.”



As the peace conference ended, Baker deemed its product, the Versailles Treaty, “a terrible document” that was animated by a spirit of “retribution to the verge of revenge” against the Germans—a judgment shared by many subsequent historians. Secrecy, Baker believed, had weakened the American negotiating position. Wilson should

have tried to rally public support for his proposals rather than acquiesce in an unjust treaty.

Assessing the events in Paris, Baker wrote that “*the greatest fault* of this whole peace conference is the failure to take the people into our confidence”—in other words, Wilson’s abrogation of the first of the Fourteen Points.



RDA / GETTY IMAGES

Within a few years of their marriage in 1884, Oscar Wilde and his wife Constance Lloyd had two sons, including Cyril, shown here with his mother in 1889. But soon Wilde’s eyes wandered from women to men.

## WILDE’S WOMEN

*Constance and inconstancy*

**Beyond plays and bons mots,** Oscar Wilde may be best remembered for the two years he spent in prison for “gross indecency”—sex with men. Few people know about Wilde’s female inamoratas or his wife.

As a college student in the 1870s, according to British author Franny Moyle, Wilde dated Florence Balcombe for two years. She ended up rejecting him in favor of a fledgling novelist: Bram Stoker, the future author of *Dracula*. Wilde pursued two actresses as well. During

college, he was often seen with Lily Langtry. Later, in 1879, he made a play for the world-renowned Sarah Bernhardt. When she arrived for her first visit to Britain, he was waiting at the dock with a bouquet of lilies, which he lovingly placed at her feet.

In 1881 Wilde began courting Constance Lloyd, a young woman from a prosperous Dublin family. Some of her relatives found Wilde's long hair and effete mannerisms off-putting. "I like him awfully much but I suppose it is very bad taste," Lloyd told her brother. But she came around. In 1884, she and Wilde were married. She gave birth to sons in 1885 and 1886.

In *Constance: The Tragic and Scandalous Life of Mrs. Oscar Wilde* (Pegasus), Moyle argues that Wilde was attracted mainly to women at the time he got married. A year later, though, he seemed infatuated with a Cambridge undergraduate named Harry Marillier. In a letter to Marillier, Wilde said that his attitude toward his wife had dwindled to "a curious mixture of ardour and indifference." Reviewers began to discern homosexual themes in some of Wilde's works, including his 1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

A *Dorian Gray* fan, Lord Alfred Douglas, known as Bosie, became

Wilde's lover in the early 1890s; the relationship ultimately precipitated Wilde's downfall. When Douglas's father, John Sholto Douglas, called Wilde a sodomite, the writer sued for libel.

As Moyle notes, the lawsuit was a fateful miscalculation. In court, the defense counsel identified 10 young men with whom Wilde had committed "sodomy and other acts of gross indecency and immorality." Wilde dropped his lawsuit, a de facto confession that the charges were true. He was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to two years' hard labor.

Shocked, Constance Wilde got a judicial separation, changed her surname to Holland, and fled into hiding with her children. "He says that he loved too much and that that is better than hate!" she told a friend. "This is true abstractedly, but his was an unnatural love, a madness that I think is worse than hate."

Wilde was released from prison in 1897. Though he and Constance exchanged letters—some warm, some testy—they never saw each other again. After undergoing surgery (surviving records don't say why) Constance died in 1898.

Wilde visited her grave in 1899, a few



months before his own death of cerebral meningitis. “It was very tragic seeing her name carved on a tomb—her surname, my name not mentioned of course,” he later recounted. “I was deeply affected—with a sense also of the uselessness of all regrets. Nothing could have been otherwise and life is a terrible thing.”

Moyle quotes a letter, more poignant than prescient, that Constance Lloyd wrote to Wilde before their wedding. “When I have you for my husband,” she promised, “I will hold you fast with chains of love & devotion so that you shall never leave me, or love anyone as long as I can love & comfort.”

## DISTANT LAUGHTER

### *Humor’s calculus*

**Comedy is tragedy plus time.** Whoever said that—the line has been attributed to, among others, Mark Twain, Lenny Bruce, Carol Burnett, and Woody Allen—got it mostly right, according to a study published in *Psychological Science* (Oct. 2012).

A. Peter McGraw of the University of Colorado, Boulder, and three coauthors tweak the equation a bit: Comedy

is tragedy plus time or other psychological distance. Psychological distance can be spatial as well as temporal. It can also be social (strangers are more distant than relatives) or hypothetical (imagined events are more distant than real ones). Without some sort of psychological distance, they say, tragedy isn’t funny. It’s painful.

But not all humor rests on tragedy. Modest mishaps can be comedy fodder, too. Here, the researchers suggest, the tragedy equation doesn’t apply. On the contrary, humor about mishaps diminishes with psychological distance. “In sum, we hypothesize that distance should increase the humor perceived in tragedies, such as getting hit by a car, but decrease the humor in mishaps, such as stubbing a toe,” they write.

A series of studies lends support to the hypothesis. In one experiment, participants recounted incidents that had grown either funnier or less funny over time. As expected, time added humor to tragedies and subtracted it from mishaps.

Another experiment looked at social distance. Participants were asked if they would be amused to learn that a young woman had inadvertently donated money to a charity via text messaging.



When the amount given away was fairly modest—\$50—the incident was funnier if it happened to a friend than to a stranger. But when the amount was sizable, participants had the opposite reactions: Told that the woman had accidentally given away nearly \$2,000, they were more amused when they learned that she was a stranger rather than a friend.

“Tragedies fail to be funny when one is too close for comfort,” McGraw and colleagues conclude, “but mishaps fail to be funny when one is too far to care.”

Their article features an epigraph from Mel Brooks: “Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.”

—*Stephen Bates*



What gridlock?

OGPHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

# THE GRIDLOCK ILLUSION

If Washington seems to get much less done than it once did, it is partly because it is trying to do so much more.

BY R. SHEP MELNICK



By R. SHEP MELNICK

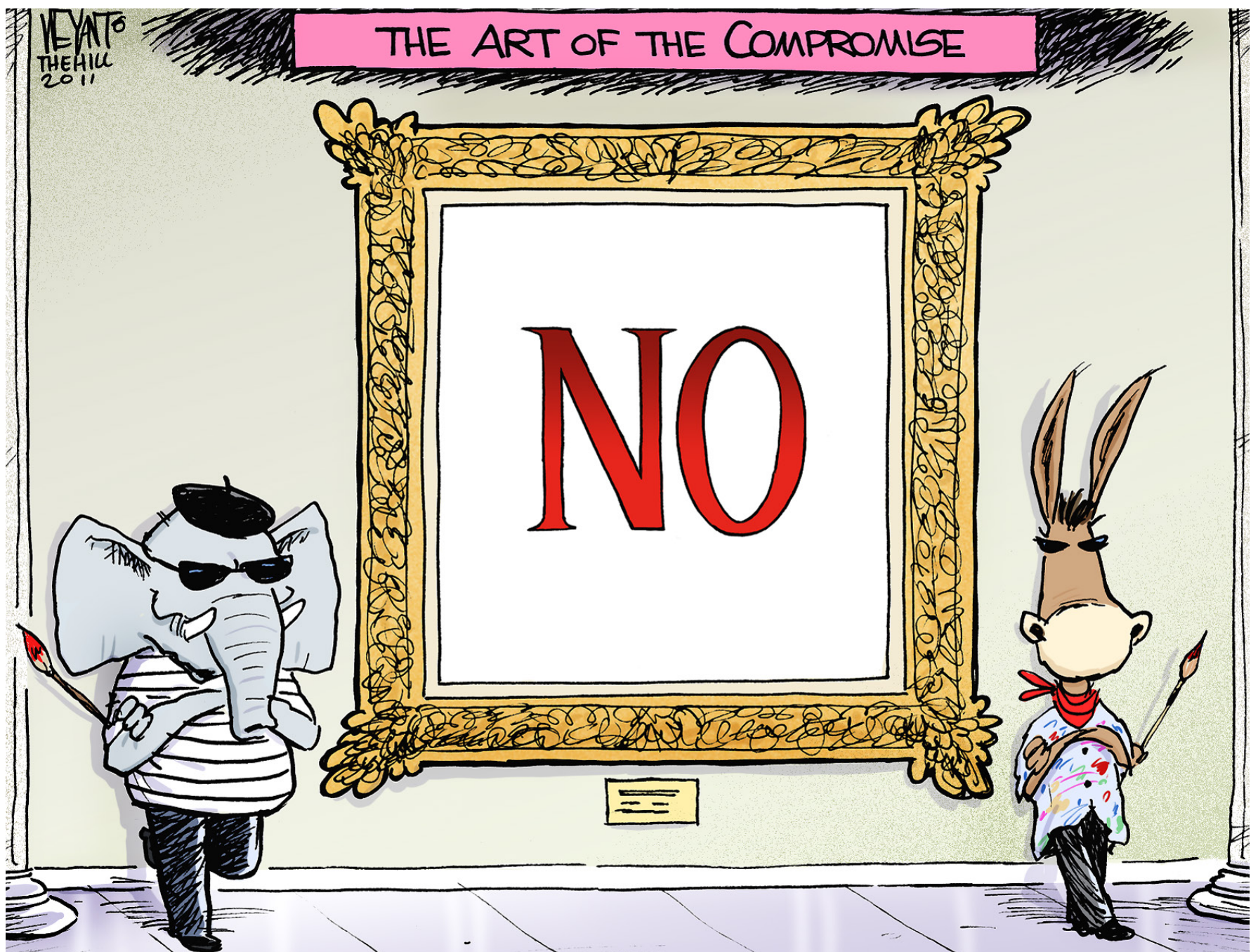
IT IS HARD TO FIND A NEWS ARTICLE ON Congress these days in which the word “gridlock” does not figure prominently. After months of tense negotiations, Congress and President Barack Obama barely avoided going over the “fiscal cliff” in January, and their last-minute agreement leaves many more months of inconclusive bargaining to come. The legislative branch has yet to revise a national immigration policy that pleases no one, or even to pass a stripped-down version of pathway-to-citizenship legislation that enjoys widespread popular support. Everyone knows that Social Security is headed toward insolvency, and that the longer we wait, the harder it will be to fix the problem. But Congress after Congress has done nothing. Most important, almost everyone recognizes that in coming years we must both raise taxes and cut entitlements in order to avert fiscal disaster, yet Congress has taken no significant steps in that direction. Meanwhile, its approval rating has slipped below 10 percent, to the lowest levels ever recorded.

The most common public response to these developments has been to blame our elected representatives for engaging in petty partisanship, to charge that

they are beholden to “special interests,” and to insist that all would be fine if our leaders would only listen to “the people.” But “the people” are really a fractious and increasingly partisan lot, and in 2012 they sent back to Washington nearly all of the hyperpartisan politicians who had achieved such stunningly low approval ratings during the previous two years. As the political scientist Richard Fenno has pointed out, voters may hate Congress, but they love their own member of Congress. Consequently, most members run for Congress by running against it. Voters routinely reward individual legislators for engaging in behavior that regularly produces the collective action they abhor.

This pattern has led some scholars to conclude that the heart of our current problems lies in our institutional arrangements. Our unusually complex structure of government—one that combines separation of powers, bicameralism, and federalism—not only embeds numerous “veto points” in the legislative process, but frustrates accountability by making it nearly impossible for voters to know whom to blame or reward for public policy. Our current discontents, particularly on budget issues, give new urgency to a critique





CHRIS WEYANT / CARTOON STOCK

of our constitutional arrangements that dates back to Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era. From the turn of the century through the 1960s, progressives and New Dealers insisted that our “horse and buggy” institutions were incompatible with the demands of modern government. The result, they charged, was the “deadlock of democracy,” which in effect meant that an unholy alliance of conservative Southern Democrats and Republicans in Congress could block the initiatives of liberal Democratic presidents.

“Gridlock” is the new term favored by critics who are frustrated with Washington, and it is used by people across the political spectrum, not just liberals. The triumph of this neologism over the more conventional descriptors “stalemate” and “deadlock” is not an accident. It reveals how criticism of our institutional arrangements has subtly shifted as government has expanded. The term “gridlock” caught on in 1980 as a way to describe traffic congestion so severe that cars block multiple intersections,

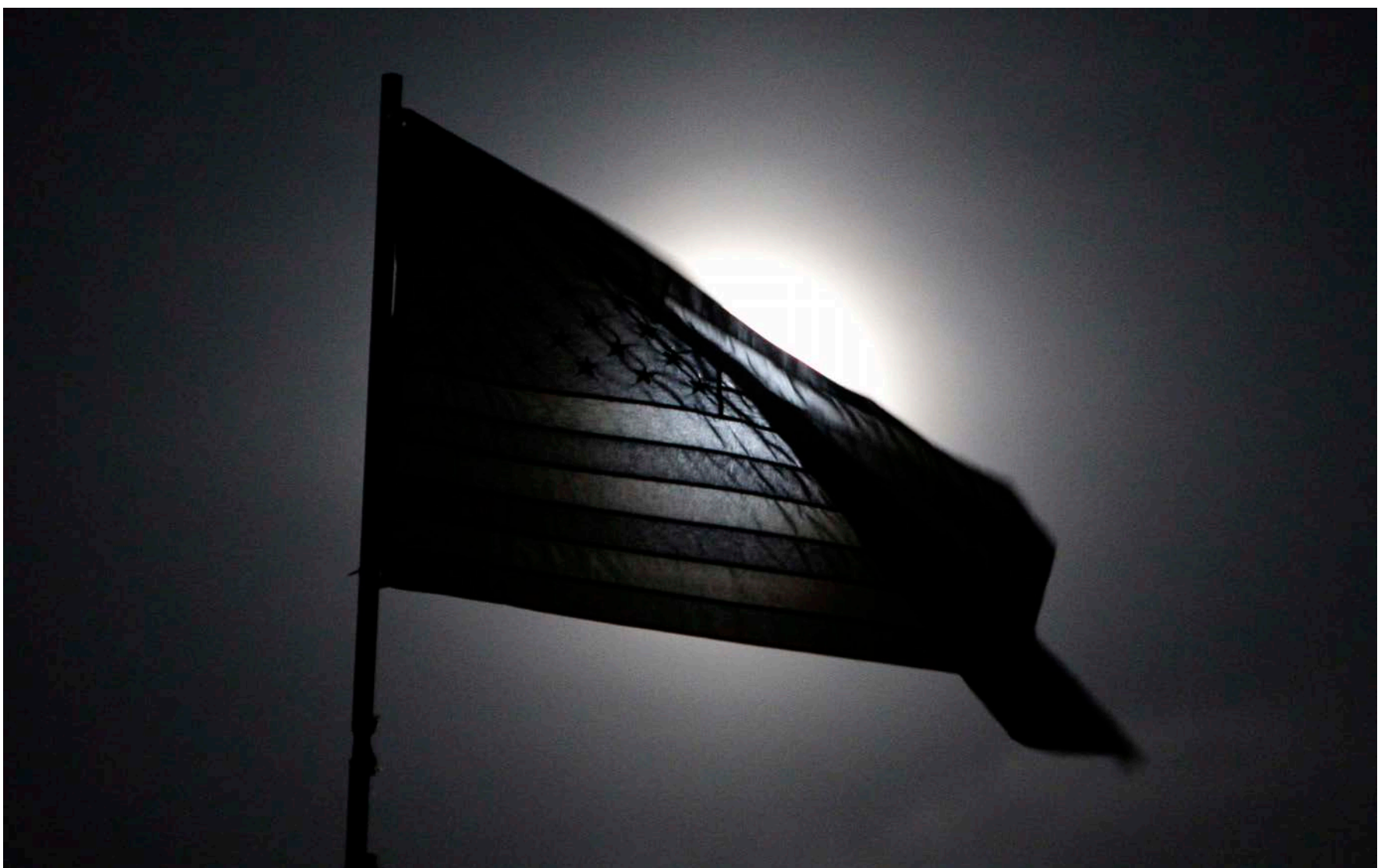


**As the government does more and more, policies increasingly overlap and, all too frequently, begin to contradict one another.**

preventing movement in any direction. It quickly became the leading metaphor used to describe congressional politics after President Ronald Reagan's initial legislative victories in 1981.

It was at about that time that the

United States began to feel the effects of what political scientist Hugh Heclo has aptly called "policy congestion." As the government does more and more, policies increasingly overlap, bump into one another, and, all too frequently, begin to contradict one another. For example, "energy policy," born in the 1970s, has grown into a motley collection of hundreds of conflicting policies and programs, some of which seek to subsidize or otherwise promote various forms of energy use and production that others tax and discourage. Similar contradictions are rife in welfare policy,



**Gridlock stops at the water's edge. Congress has sustained America's long commitment** STEFANO RELLANDINI / REUTERS / CORBIS  
in Afghanistan, where this moonlit flag flew in 2009, and enacted many other controversial policies.

health care policy, and what we now call budget policy—which includes virtually everything our enormous national government does. The “stalemate” argument focused on the obstacles to creating an extensive regulatory and welfare state. “Gridlock,” in contrast, refers to the difficulty of managing and coordinating the extensive welfare and regulatory state that we have somehow managed to build.

There can be no doubt but that the gridlock argument captures key features of American government. Who could deny that the Constitution establishes what civics textbooks call an “obstacle course on Capitol Hill” that makes it excruciatingly difficult to enact legislation on controversial issues? We should remember, though, that the Founders had good reason to make the legislative process so arduous. James Madison was not enamored of every component of the Constitution he had helped to create—he was especially dismayed by the clause providing for equal representation of all states in the Senate—but he provided a sophisticated defense of the features that are commonly blamed for gridlock.

Making it easier to pass legislation, Madison observed, would increase the “mutability of the law.” The resulting

“public instability” would not only undermine public confidence and weaken the United States internationally but would give an “unreasonable advantage” to “the sagacious, the enterprising, and the moneyed few over the industrious and uniformed mass of the people.” But by providing an opportunity for a “sober second thought,” bicameralism would reduce the possibility that legislation would be the product of momentary public passions or manipulation by political insiders.

Furthermore, by requiring very broad majorities to enact laws, the Constitution reduces the power of what Madison called “majority faction.” By combining a lower house whose members serve two-year terms with an upper house whose members enjoy six-year terms, the Constitution also combines responsiveness to current public opinion with attention to the long-term interests of the nation. Moreover, by dividing the legislature into two parts and granting veto power to the president, the Constitution prevents the legislative branch—which “necessarily predominates” in republican government, Madison wrote—from “drawing all power into its impetuous vortex.” In other words, it protects both judicial independence and presidential power.





A news ticker in New York City's Times Square announces the passage of the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program in 2008, one of several strong government responses to the nation's financial crisis. GETTY IMAGES

Today's critics of the Constitution tend to be less skeptical than Madison was of simple majoritarianism. From Woodrow Wilson a century ago to University of Texas law professor Sanford Levinson today, they have argued that the greatest shortcoming of the Constitution is its failure to allow popular majorities to prevail. What about the danger of majority faction and tyranny of the majority? Certainly no contemporary law professor can be indifferent to the plight of politically unpopular minorities. The unstated assumption of contemporary progressives is that this job can safely be left to the courts. Since we already have an activist judiciary, we can now tolerate an activist Congress. Let Congress do more, then let the

Supreme Court invalidate those portions of the law that five of the justices consider unfair.

The Constitution's critics also tend to assume that the dangers created by government inaction are far greater than those caused by rash, premature, or intemperate action. They express no concern about the "mutability" and "instability" that so worried Madison. They tend to assume—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary—that government's mistakes can be easily remedied. In reality, government programs create constituencies that are highly organized, acutely aware of the benefits they receive from government, and strategically placed to block substantial change. In other words,

delays are often temporary, but mistakes last forever.

Inaction can certainly be costly but sometimes there are advantages to inaction. Consider the case of acid rain. It became a political issue in the 1970s, but Congress did nothing to address it until 1990. For many years, this was considered a prime example of gridlock—just as congressional inaction on greenhouse gases is today. But the regulatory scheme Congress eventually used to control acid rain, marketable emission rights, has proved much better at reducing pollution quickly and cheaply than the kind of command-and-control regulation Congress relied upon almost exclusively in the 1970s. In other words, delay produced smarter government action.

**P**OLITICAL PARTIES HAVE LONG BEEN the chief mechanism for building majorities that pull together our constitutionally separated institutions. For most of the 20th century, ours were internally heterogeneous “umbrella” parties that provided the building blocks for legislative coalitions without guaranteeing partisan majorities in either house of Congress. In the early 1990s, however, it was clear that our legislative parties were undergoing a sea change.

By the time the Republicans took

control of Congress in 1995, party leaders in the House of Representatives had acquired powers that rivaled those of the famous “czar” Speakers of the House (Joe Cannon, for example) who had reigned a century earlier. Within the House, most of the “veto points” so frequently decried for promoting stalemate had been eliminated. Today, the Speaker effectively determines which bills come to the floor, as well as the rules for amending and voting on each. Committee chairs, who once rose to power on the basis of seniority and exercised near-baronial powers, are now under the control of party leaders. Votes on important issues follow party lines. What the majority-party leadership in the House wants, it almost always gets. During the presidency of George W. Bush, for example, Republicans briefly gained control of both the House and the Senate, and they rammed through a series of tax cuts and a major expansion of Medicare with virtually no support from Democrats.

Advocates of party government had assumed that stronger, more ideological parties would allow one dominant party to give coherent direction to the government as a whole. On occasion that is true. But neither the Republicans nor the Democrats have managed to build



resilient electoral majorities. Indeed, as soon as one party seems to be gaining effective control of government, the voters revoke its mandate. The 2010 election, which ended the Democrats' brief monopoly on power by giving the House to the Republicans, was just the latest manifestation of this dynamic. The same thing happened in 1994 and 2006. The public, it seems, is not enamored of either party, and prefers divided government to party government. In short, party polarization, once considered a cure for stalemate, now only seems to make the problem worse.

On the surface this combination of constitutional structure, partisan polarization, and a fickle electorate seems to create the perfect storm of gridlock. Before we despair, though, it would be worth taking a closer look at the extent of the problem. On many fronts, things are not as bad as they seem. Consider, for example, some of the steps the federal government took in response to the financial crisis of 2007–08:

- In the autumn of 2008, Congress created the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) to address the subprime mortgage crisis. The Bush

## Party polarization, once considered a cure for stalemate, now only seems to make the problem worse.

administration managed to push its proposal through Congress despite strong opposition from Republicans.

- With only tepid support from the White House, Congress bailed out—and essentially took over—the federally created mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, adding \$142 billion to the total bailout.
- Several months later, the Obama Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve announced a plan to pump an additional \$1 *trillion* into the banking system.
- After providing billions of dollars to keep General Motors, Chrysler, and AIG afloat, the federal government played a central role in managing their downsizing. The government suddenly became the largest stockholder in three of the nation's biggest companies.
- Even before the financial meltdown, Congress passed a \$168 billion bipartisan stimulus package negotiated by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader John Boehner,

and Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson.

The United States has responded to the financial crisis much more aggressively than has Europe, with its supposedly more effective parliamentary governments, and our banks are now in better shape than Europe's. Much of the TARP money has been repaid, and the auto companies seem to be recovering. Whether or not one approves of these policies, it is hard to describe the government that initiated them as gridlocked.

ONE COULD RESPOND TO THE REMARKABLE events of 2008 and '09 by saying that the American political system is capable of responding to emergencies, but not so good at fashioning policies that prevent them in the first place. So let's look back at the first seven years of the George W. Bush administration. Here, it seemed, was a recipe for stalemate. The electorate was divided 50-50 in presidential elections, with Bush losing the popular vote in 2000 and eking out a narrow victory in 2004. The Senate, too, was divided 50-50 in 2001, and soon shifted to the Democrats when James Jeffords of Vermont left the GOP. The Republican

margin in the House after the 2000 election was only nine votes, the slimmest partisan margin in 50 years. In the 2006 elections the Democrats regained control of both the House and the Senate, and the country returned to divided government. Animosity between the parties (and against the president) ran unusually high. But consider what Congress accomplished during those years:

- It passed the No Child Left Behind Act, the biggest change in federal education policy since 1965 and the most prescriptive federal education legislation ever enacted.
- It created Medicare Part D, the largest entitlement expansion since passage of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965.
- It passed the Bush administration's tax cuts in 2001, 2003, and 2004. Together they constituted the largest tax cuts in American history.
- Despite stiff opposition from Republicans, it approved the far-reaching McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law.
- It passed the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, which *CQ Weekly* described as "the biggest increase in the regulation of publicly traded companies since the Depression."



A few of these laws received bipartisan support; passage of others relied almost entirely on Republican votes. While some of these policies might have been ill advised and excessively partisan, no one would describe the Congresses that produced them as “do nothing.”

Foreign and defense policy rarely comes up in discussions of gridlock. Indeed, those who have complained most bitterly about legislative stalemate also criticized the Bush administration for acting too aggressively and Congress for delegating too much authority to the executive. Foreign policy during the Bush administration hardly looks like gridlock: The administration launched wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (in each case with congressional approval), announced a controversial new policy on “preventative wars,” and established the equally controversial detention facility at Guantánamo Bay. Meanwhile, Congress established the Department of Homeland Security, enacted the USA Patriot Act, overhauled the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, and passed several pieces of legislation on the use of military commissions and the rights of detainees. When one looks at the sweep of U.S. foreign policy over the course of the 20th century—especially the pivotal role the United States played in

defeating two vicious and expansionist totalitarian powers—our constitutional structure seems to have served us well.

The record of the Congress that convened in 2009 rivals that of any since the historic 89th of 1965–66. The 111th Congress demonstrates how partisan polarization can produce dramatic policy change when one party seizes control of the White House and both chambers of the legislative branch. While many of these enactments are well known, it is worth recounting them to indicate the range of congressional action:

- Most important, Congress enacted a profound overhaul of the American health care system, extending coverage to 30 million Americans; imposing extensive mandates on insurance carriers, employers, and state governments; creating new insurance exchanges; imposing an array of new taxes, fees, and penalties; extending drug benefits; and making significant cuts in the Medicare program.
- Four months later, Congress enacted a 2,300-page law to create a new regulatory structure for the entire financial services sector and to establish a mechanism for “winding down” failing banks and brokerage houses. According to *CQ Weekly*, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street

Reform and Consumer Protection Act “touches just about every major piece of financial regulatory law of the 20th century.” It created two new regulatory agencies, and required these and other agencies to produce 250 additional sets of regulations to govern the financial sector.

- Soon after convening, Congress passed another stimulus package, to pump \$800 billion into the slowing economy. The legislation included a diverse mix of tax cuts; an extension of unemployment benefits; grants to the states for infrastructure, education, and health care; and measures to encourage the development of clean energy.
- After decades of debate, Congress passed legislation authorizing the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate the content and marketing of tobacco products.
- Congress made major changes in the federal student loan program, and provided more than \$4.35 billion for the Obama administration’s “Race to the Top” initiative to encourage innovation in elementary and secondary education.
- By repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” Congress allowed gays to serve openly in the military. It also confirmed two Supreme Court nominees, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, by wide mar-

gins and without the threat of a filibuster.

On top of this, the Obama administration augmented the U.S. military commitment in Afghanistan, the second major American war zone “surge” in recent years. It substantially increased American drone strikes against suspected terrorists. In short, 2009 and ’10 were years of intense partisan animosity but not of gridlock.

To be sure, over the past four years Congress has failed to pass any immigration legislation. An omnibus, jerry-built climate change bill passed the House but died quietly in the Senate. The administration’s signature health care legislation nearly failed for want of a 60th vote in the Senate. If the Perils-of-Pauline story of the Affordable Care Act illustrates the difficulty of enacting major legislation, it also points to a shortcoming of the conventional gridlock narrative. “Gridlock” is almost always used to imply that an obstinate minority is frustrating the will of the majority. But in 2010 Obamacare was in grave danger because public opinion was turning against it. If anything, the health care battle shows that the federal government is capable of taking dramatic action even when public support is shallow.



**T**HE STALEMATE/GRIDLOCK ARGUMENT is misleading not only because it ignores so many accomplishments, but also because it focuses so intently on just one small part of domestic policy, namely passage of major pieces of legislation at the national level. Lost in this picture are the daily decisions of administrators, judges, and state and local officials, as well as members of Congress engaged in the quotidian business of passing appropriations, reauthorizations, and budget reconciliation bills. Taken individually, these decisions might seem like small potatoes, but collectively they can produce significant policy change.

Critics of the Constitution overlook the fact that by creating multiple “veto points,” our political system simultaneously creates multiple points of access for policy entrepreneurs and claimants. Every “veto point” that can be used to block action is also an “opportunity point” that can be used to initiate or augment government activity.

Consider, for example, the problem of global warming. Neither Congress nor the White House has yet taken steps to reduce carbon emissions. But state governments have acted. Nine northeastern states reached an accord promising to reduce power plant emissions by 10 percent by 2020. In 2006, California

governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed an agreement to curb global warming by capping certain emissions, declaring, “California will not wait for our federal government to take strong action on global warming.”

**Every “veto point” that can be used to block action is also an “opportunity point” that can be used to initiate or augment government activity.**

More important, the Supreme Court has ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate greenhouse gases. In response, the EPA has issued new rules that limit carbon dioxide emissions from industrial sources. This is just the beginning of its regulatory efforts. Given the structure of the Clean Air Act, it is unlikely that this will be a particularly effective or efficient form of regulation. But the worse the EPA proposal, the stronger the incentives for congressional action. After all, if Congress fails to act, the EPA’s flawed plan will go into effect. As *The New York Times* reported,

“Administration officials consistently say they would much prefer that Congress write new legislation . . . but they are clearly holding it in reserve as a prod to reluctant lawmakers.”

To take another example, how did Congress manage to pass controversial legislation guaranteeing every disabled student a “free appropriate public education,” complete with an “individualized education plan,” provision of “related services,” and a promise that each student would be placed in the “least restrictive environment”? The answer is that the courts acted first, suggesting (rather obliquely) that students with disabilities might have a constitutional right to an adequate education. This forced state governments to spend much more on special education, which led them to demand that the federal government provide the money needed to comply with this federal mandate, which led Congress to provide both more money and more federal regulation, which led to more litigation and more federal requirements, which led to state demands for even more money, and so on. This is a vivid illustration of how separation of powers and federalism can produce not gridlock, but a game of institutional leapfrog that results in a steady expansion of government programs.

How did affirmative action—highly unpopular with the American public—become embedded in so many federal programs? Slowly, subtly, and at times surreptitiously, a long series of court decisions, agency rules, and complex legislative provisions injected the presumption of proportional representation into federal civil rights programs. How did the federal government come to set national standards for state mental institutions, schools for the developmentally disabled, nursing homes, and prisons? Largely through litigation and consent decrees negotiated by the Department of Justice.

Why has the means-tested Medicaid program grown faster than the supposedly sacrosanct Medicare program? After all, the former serves the poor, while the latter provides benefits to one of the most potent political forces in American politics, the elderly. According to Lawrence Brown and Michael Sparger of the Columbia School of Public Health, part of the explanation is the shrewd incrementalism of congressional entrepreneurs such as Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), who steadily added federal Medicaid mandates to budget reconciliation bills in the late 1980s. The combination of state and federal funding and control over Medicaid, Brown and



Sparer note, had the effect of “prompting coverage expansions during good times (the feds paid most of the bill) and deterring cutbacks even in bad times (every state dollar saved meant two or three federal dollars lost).”

Instead of promoting a “race to the bottom,” our post–New Deal “cooperative federalism” has stimulated expansion of the welfare state. This effect is not limited to health care. The respected federalism scholar Richard Nathan has concluded that “U.S. federalism’s dominant effect has been to expand the scope and spending of the social sector.”

**“Incrementalism may not get much press, but it does work,” says one congressman.**

Those looking for evidence of gridlock in Washington might point to Congress’s failure in 1998 to pass legislation imposing a large tax on tobacco products and limiting tobacco advertising. Soon after that bill died in the Senate, though, state attorneys general reached a settlement with tobacco companies that included a \$250 billion settlement—to

be paid to state treasuries—and unprecedented limits on advertising, sponsorships, and lobbying by tobacco companies. Having lost narrowly in one arena, antitobacco activists prevailed in another.

When the Securities and Exchange Commission was criticized for regulating Wall Street too laxly, another state attorney general, New York’s Eliot Spitzer, stepped into what he perceived as a policy void. When the Obama administration appeared too tolerant of AIG’s bonuses, Spitzer’s successor, Andrew Cuomo, took aggressive steps to expose the miscreants. In area after area, the competition and multiple avenues of access created by the Constitution provide opportunities to prevail for those who seek to expand the public sector. Policy entrepreneurs have learned how to use these features of our political system to their advantage. As Representative Waxman, one of the most successful of these entrepreneurs, once put it, “Incrementalism may not get much press, but it does work.”

In *The Welfare State Nobody Knows* (2008), political scientist Christopher Howard argues that the American welfare state is much larger than is generally recognized. We fail to appreciate its size because our welfare state provides benefits through so many programs (at

least 77 separate means-tested federal programs provide assistance to the poor) and in such indirect ways (such as loan guarantees, refundable tax credits, and tax exemptions). Our fragmented welfare state reflects our fragmented political system. As Howard suggests, we need to understand how our peculiar political system has produced a different type of welfare state, not simply keep repeating the mistaken claim that it has produced a small one.

**A**T THE HEART OF ALL SERIOUS POLITICAL analysis lies Henny Youngman's famous response to the question "How's your wife?": "Compared to what?" At one time or another we have all been frustrated or even enraged by the delays, irrationalities, and complexities of our political system. If we were starting from scratch, no one in his right mind would give Wyoming, Vermont, or Rhode Island two seats in the U.S. Senate. The big question is, What is the alternative? Most critics seem to assume that the answer is parliamentary government. Not, of course, the unstable, factional, multiparty coalition governments one finds in Italy or Israel. Nor would they welcome the insulated, faction-ridden, and corrupt system of Japan, where a single party has dominated for more

than 60 years. Rather, reformers assume that we would naturally develop the stable two- or three-party Westminster-style parliamentary government found in Britain, Australia, and (at one time, at least) Canada.

My guess is that these reformers would have a hard time convincing most Americans that the British form of government is more democratic than what we have now. Who voted for Prime Minister David Cameron other than 34,000 members of his Witney constituency? What do you mean, ordinary people can't vote in party primaries—you intend to allow party bosses to choose the nominees? Elections held whenever the incumbent prime minister finds it convenient? A powerful elite senior civil service without much oversight by elected representatives? Significant movement in that direction would provoke a populist revolt in this country that would make the Tea Party look, well, like weak tea.

Do we have any evidence that parliamentary governments are any better at governing? The answer, I think, is no. The best analysis I know of is a Brookings Institution volume edited by political scientists R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad*. At the risk of



oversimplifying the book's careful analysis, let me note three of the editors' conclusions, which ring even truer today than when the book was published 20 years ago.

First, most of the problems facing the United States today "are shared by all industrial democracies." In particular, "problems with balancing budgets are ubiquitous. All elected (and most unelected) governments are reluctant to impose losses on pensioners. . . . Particular institutional arrangements do not cause these governance problems; they are inherent in complex societies and in democratic government."

Second, there are "direct tradeoffs" between institutional capabilities. The fragmented American political system "generates a lot of policy innovation" because it promotes "policy entrepreneurship from disparate sources." But this innovation "tends to be at the piecemeal level of individual programs rather than comprehensive, sector-wide policies." Unfortunately, institutional arrangements that are better at producing comprehensive reform are also "likely to create risks of policy instability" and to overlook interests not well represented within party organizations.

Third, the contrast between parliamentary and separation-of-powers systems "captures only a small part" of

the differences between regimes. "Second-tier institutional arrangements" such as electoral rules and norms established within legislative bodies "influence government capacity at least as much as do the separation or fusion of executive and legislative power."

If fundamental political change such as a shift to a parliamentary system is unlikely to produce significant benefits, and even less likely to gain public support, then it behooves us to focus instead on the "second-tier institutional arrangements" that are equally important and considerably more malleable. Consider, for example, that today a single U.S. senator can put a "hold" on a nomination or a piece of legislation because the Senate conducts so much of its business through unanimous consent agreements. Use of both senatorial holds and filibusters has escalated in recent years, often with serious consequences. Senate rules—even those on filibuster and cloture—can probably be changed by majority vote once obstructionism becomes too obvious and too unpopular.

In 2005, Democrats used the filibusters to block a number of President Bush's judicial nominees. This led the Republican majority to threaten to pull the trigger on "the nuclear option," that is, to limit filibusters

on judicial nominations. The result was a compromise: Democrats agreed to place holds on only two nominees if the Republicans would not change the formal rules. A number of Democratic senators have advocated instituting further limits on the filibuster when the 113th Congress convenes this January. Democrats and Republicans alike have been the victims of senatorial obstructionism, and the Senate's reputation has suffered. As a consequence, rules that once seemed invulnerable might soon be subject to revision.

There are many other ways Congress and the executive can alter second-tier rules to increase our capacity to cope with the serious problems that confront us. For example, during the 1990s the so-called PAYGO rules (for “pay-as-you-go”) helped Congress reduce the federal budget deficit by requiring that any new tax cuts or spending be offset by new revenue or by savings elsewhere in the budget. “Fast-track” procedures have helped temper parochialism in trade legislation. The Base Realignment and Closure Commission gave Congress a mechanism to reduce unnecessary military spending by shutting down the many congressionally protected bases the Pentagon

considered outmoded. Legislation exempting budget reconciliation bills from filibusters has made the budget process somewhat more rational and majoritarian—and allowed the Obama administration's health care proposal to become law.

**Our political institutions are surprisingly good at innovation, but depressingly bad at coordinating the many responsibilities we have taken on.**

Conventional arguments about gridlock not only ignore our political system's capacity for major policy change, but imprudently focus our attention on constitutional changes that are neither feasible nor likely to address our present discontents. The gridlock metaphor tends to gloss over the fact that our political institutions are surprisingly good at innovation, but depressingly bad at coordinating the many responsibilities we have taken on. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our inability



to bring taxing and spending into line. Since 2000, Congress has done an excellent job of enacting tax cuts and creating new entitlements. But that has only made our fiscal problems worse. Imposing budgetary pain in a political system as responsive to public opinion as ours is extraordinarily hard. Making progress on this crucial task does not require systemic institutional reform, but,

rather, adjustment of a variety of second-tier rules in order to focus public attention on the aggregate and long-term consequences of frenetic government activity. ■

**R. SHEP MELNICK** is the Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. Professor of American Politics at Boston College.

# IS DEMOCRACY WORTH IT?

**I**n the sobering aftermath of the Arab Spring, old questions about the pursuit of political freedom in the developing world have come into fresh focus. Are the risks too great? Is the time too soon?



**LARRY DIAMOND**

on the case for democracy now

**JOSHUA KUCERA**

on why some countries have little appetite for political freedom

**NORWAN, MARIAM,  
AND NASIMA**

on their experience as women in Afghanistan

**STEVE MCDONALD**

on Africa's long spring





Lisboans celebrate the end of a half century of dictatorship in 1974. Portugal's Carnation Revolution, occurring at a time when there were only 39 democracies in the world, marked the start of the Third Wave of global democratization.

HENRI BUREAU / SYGMA / CORBIS

# WHY WAIT FOR DEMOCRACY?

One after another, arguments that non-Western countries are not “ready” for democracy have been upended by experience.

BY LARRY DIAMOND

THE WILSON QUARTERLY WINTER 2013



By LARRY DIAMOND

**W**HEN ARAB SOCIETIES ROSE UP AND toppled four dictators during 2011—in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya—people around the world joined in the celebration. Yet soon after the autocrats’ fall, a wave of apprehension washed over many in the policy and intellectual elite in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East itself. The warnings and reservations were variations on a theme: Arabs are not ready for democracy. They have no experience with it and don’t know how to make it work. Islam is inclined toward violence, intolerance, and authoritarian values. People will vote radical and Islamist parties into power, and the regimes that ultimately emerge will be theocracies or autocracies, not democracies.

The cultural argument has often morphed into a second set of concerns. This is not the right time to be pushing for democracy in the region, the complaint goes. Democratization in the Arab world could endanger the fragile peace between Israel and Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan. Or it could threaten American security partnerships in the war on terror. What restive Arab countries should be focusing on, and what the West should be encouraging, are political

stability and economic development. Maybe someday, when they have a much larger middle class, democracy will be a safer, more viable option.

These doubts about the suitability of democracy for other peoples are far from new. From the era of Western colonial domination well into what became known as “the Third Wave” of global democratization (which began with the Portuguese Revolution in 1974), writers and policymakers questioned whether democracy could travel beyond the West. They not only questioned whether other cultures (and religions) could sustain democracy, but also whether it was in the West’s interest to have these other countries governed on the basis of elections that might mobilize the passions of the uneducated and poorly informed “masses.” Moreover, there was an empirical basis for this skepticism. Although democracy had emerged during the post–World War II era in a few developing countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, and Botswana, most of the newly decolonized states had fairly quickly settled into authoritarian patterns of governance. During the Cold War, many countries were, in effect, forced to choose between becoming



## أسماء المرشحين لانتخابات رئاسة الجمهورية ٢٠١٢

م	اسم المرشح وشهرته	الرمز	الصورة	إبداء الرأي
١	أبو العز حسن على الحريري وشهرته أبو العز الحريري			
٢	محمد عبد الفتاح محمد فوزي عيسى وشهرته دكتور محمد فوزي عيسى			
٣	أحمد حسام كمال حامد خير الله وشهرته حسام خير الله			
٤	عمرو محمود أبو زيد موسى وشهرته عمرو موسى			
٥	عبد المنعم أبو الفتوح عبد الهادي أبو سعد وشهرته أبو الفتوح			
٦	هشام محمد عثمان البسطويسى وشهرته هشام البسطويسى			
٧	محمود حسام الدين محمود جلال وشهرته محمود حسام			
٨	د. محمد سليم العوا وشهرته محمد سليم العوا			
٩	د. أحمد محمد شفيق زكي وشهرته أحمد شفيق			
١٠	حمدين عبد العاطي عبد المقصود صباحي وشهرته حمدين صباحي			
١١	د. عبد الله حسن على الأشعل وشهرته عبد الله الأشعل			
١٢	خالد على عمر على المحلاوي وشهرته خالد على			
١٣	د. محمد محمد مرسى عيسى العياط وشهرته د. محمد مرسى			

FREDRIK PERSSON / AP / CORBIS

Illustrated ballots helped the illiterate in the first round of Egypt's historic presidential election last May. Mohammed Morsi, running under the banner of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (bottom), prevailed in the June runoff with 52 percent of the vote.

a right-wing, often military autocracy backed by the West or a socialist one-party state, frequently born of violent revolution, backed by the Soviet Union and China.

The cultural arguments against the prospects for democracy in developing nations were the most tenacious, and they came both from the West and from political and intellectual leaders in the developing world. Latin America came into focus first because of its many Marxist insurgencies, left-wing populist movements, and military coups in the 1960s and '70s. During most of the Cold War, many conservative scholars and writers in the United States dismissed the idea of establishing democracy in the region as infeasible (or at least contrary to American interests, since it would mean sacrificing U.S. ties to friendly anticommunist autocrats). Because of their long histories of centralized, absolutist rule deriving from their experience of Spanish or Portuguese imperial rule and the hierarchical and authoritarian traditions of the Catholic Church, the Latin American countries were said to lack the emphasis on individual freedom, the willingness among their citizens to question authority, and the appreciation of pluralism and equality necessary to

sustain democracy. Similar arguments were made about Asia and the Middle East. “Asian values” and Islamic culture were seen to value order over freedom, consensus over competition, and the community over the individual. They not only lacked the intrinsic suspicion of authority that buoyed democracy in the West, it was said, but practiced a deference to authority that answered “deep psychological cravings for the security of dependency,” in the words of Lucian Pye, one of the most respected scholars of Asian political cultures. Elie Kedourie, a famous British historian of the Middle East, dismissed “the political traditions of the Arab world—which are the political traditions of Islam,” as completely lacking any understanding of “the organizing ideas of constitutional and representative government.”

In his influential 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations*, the American political scientist Samuel Huntington warned more generally of “fundamental [civilizational] divides.” He stressed the cultural distinctiveness of the West, “most notably its Christianity, pluralism, individualism, and the rule of law,” adding that “Western civilization,” in its commitment to liberal democratic values, “is valuable not because it is universal but because it is unique.”

**“Asian values” and Islamic culture were seen to value order over freedom, consensus over competition, and the community over the individual.**

Though they were not intended for this purpose, such cultural arguments served well the purposes of autocrats looking to justify their rule. If democracy was unsuitable for their countries, why should these leaders be expected to introduce it? If a strong hand were needed to deliver order and development, they would provide it. And in Asia, some of them did. Authoritarian rulers such as Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan (r. 1950–75), Park Chung Hee in South Korea (r. 1961–79), and Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore (r. 1959–90) delivered rapid development. Under Mahathir bin Mohamad, Malaysia followed this path for more than two decades beginning in 1981, as did Indonesia for most of Suharto’s three decades in power after 1967. Lee was the most outspoken in promoting the “Asian values” of order, family, authority, and community over what he saw as the indiscipline and



loose morals of the West, asserting both that Asians had different values and that they were not ready for democracy.

**L**EE'S ARGUMENTS CARRIED GREAT weight globally and within Singapore because he delivered for his people. More broadly, the success of the East Asian "miracle" states led many scholars during the 1960s and '70s to sing the praises of these regimes' remarkably quick economic growth. The lack of popular sovereignty and political accountability, the abuses of human rights and the rule of law—these were prices that perhaps had to be paid in order to achieve development. Looking at the chronic political instability and relatively poor economic performance of countries such as the Philippines and Argentina that tried to make democracy work during the 1960s, many commentators concluded that autocracies were the better bet for development, and that political repression was a necessary evil that had to be endured along the way. Often, from the late 1950s through the '80s, the comparison between China and India was cited. While India was growing at the "Hindu rate of growth," China was making dramatic progress in improving education and health care. (The fact that China had suffered famines under

Mao Zedong, who was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of innocent Chinese, while famine never gripped democratic India, was glossed over.) But there were other unfavorable comparisons. After Brazil's generals seized power in 1964 following a chaotic period of multiparty competition, the country's unfolding "economic miracle" and the comparison with the turbulent and polarized politics of Chile and Argentina (until their militaries intervened in 1973 and 1976, respectively) also seemed to underscore the authoritarian advantage.

Two schools of thought in the social sciences fed into this debate. Those in the modernization school, led by thinkers such as Seymour Martin Lipset, argued theoretically and showed statistically that poor countries were unlikely to sustain democracy; if they would first acquire the facilitating conditions—widespread education, a large middle class, an independent civil society, and liberal democratic values—then democracy would be more viable. The implication—at least as it was drawn out by some politicians and intellectuals in the West and elsewhere, even though it was never Lipset's argument—was that there was a necessary, if unfortunate, sequence to development: First, countries had to grow rich under authoritarian rule; then they would be able to sustain democracy.

The second intellectual tradition was dependency theory, which insisted that Third World countries were poor because the West had trapped them in a structural condition of economic dependence and servitude (a modern form of imperialism). To break out, argued theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, and Immanuel Wallerstein (who spawned a related body of “world systems theory”), peripheral countries needed to concentrate power, assert control over their natural resources, seize and redistribute land, expel multinational corporations or expropriate their holdings, renegotiate unfair terms of trade, and sideline a domestic business class that was doing the bidding of foreign governments and business interests. While (socialist) dictatorship was not necessarily the political prescription of this school, its critical analysis tended to reinforce the narratives and legitimize the claims of Marxist revolutionary movements and one-party dictatorships.

**W**HEN THE THIRD WAVE OF DEMOCRACY began in the mid-1970s, democracy seemed to be where the world had been or where the West had settled, but not where the rest of the world was going. In a pair of widely noted

works, two of the most eminent political scientists of the time, Robert Dahl and Samuel Huntington, dismissed the prospects for significant democratic expansion. Given chronic poverty, Cold War competition, and “the unreceptivity to democracy of several major cultural traditions,” Huntington speculated in a 1984 *Political Science Quarterly* article, “the limits of democratic development in the world may well have been reached.”

**When the Third Wave of democracy began in the mid-1970s, democracy seemed to be where the world had been or where the West had settled, but not where the rest of the world was going.**

The developments of the last four decades, however, have proved the skeptics wrong. Even as Huntington was writing the words quoted above, a wave of democratic expansion was gathering momentum, which Huntington himself would document and analyze definitively



just seven years later in his influential book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. In the decade following his 1984 article, the world witnessed the greatest expansion of democracy in history, as political freedom spread from southern Europe and Latin America to Asia, then central and eastern Europe, then Africa. By the mid-1990s, three of every five states in the world were democracies—a proportion that persists more or less to this day.

**For every Singapore-style authoritarian economic “miracle,” there have been many more instances of implosion or stagnation—as in Zaire, Zimbabwe, North Korea, and (until recently) Burma.**

While it remains true that democracy is more sustainable at higher levels of development, an unprecedented number of poor countries adopted democratic forms of government during the 1980s and '90s, and many of them have sustained democracy for well over a decade.

These include several African countries, such as Ghana, Benin, and Senegal, and one of the poorest Asian countries, Bangladesh. Other very poor countries, such as East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, are now using the political institutions of democracy as they rebuild their economies and states after civil war. Although the world has been in a mild democratic recession since about 2006, with reversals concentrated disproportionately in low-income and lower-middle-income states, a significant number of democracies in these income categories continue to function.

The lower- and middle-income democracies that did come through the last two decades intact have shown that authoritarianism confers no intrinsic developmental advantage. For every Singapore-style authoritarian economic “miracle,” there have been many more instances of implosion or stagnation—as in Zaire, Zimbabwe, North Korea, and (until recently) Burma—resulting from predatory authoritarian rule. Numerous studies have shown that democracies do a better job of reducing infant mortality and protecting the environment, and recent evidence from sub-Saharan Africa (see, for example, economist Steven Radelet’s 2010 book *Emerging Africa: How Seventeen Countries are Leading the Way*)

shows that the highest rates of economic growth in Africa since the mid-1990s have generally occurred in the democratic states. Once they achieved democracy, South Korea and Taiwan continued to record brisk economic growth. When the G-20 was formed at the end of the '90s out of the old G-8 organization of the world's major economies, eight of the 10 emerging-market countries that joined were democracies, including India, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey, and South Korea.

Further refuting the skeptics, democracy has taken root or at least been embraced by every major cultural group, not just the societies of the West with their Protestant traditions. Most Catholic countries are now democracies, and very stable ones at that. Democracy has thrived in a Hindu state, Buddhist states, and a Jewish state. And many predominantly Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Bangladesh, Senegal, and Indonesia, have by now had significant and mainly positive experience with democracy.

Finally, the claim that democracy was unsuitable for these other cultures—that their peoples did not value democracy as those in the West did—has been invalidated, both by experience and by a profusion of public opinion survey data showing that the desire for democracy

is very much a global phenomenon. Although there is wide variation across countries and regions, with low levels of trust in parties and politicians in the wealthier democracies of Asia, Latin America, and postcommunist Europe, people virtually everywhere say they prefer democracy to authoritarianism. What people want is not a retreat to dictatorship but a more accountable and deeper democracy.

Despite the persistence of authoritarianism under Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and the authoritarian tendencies of left-wing populist presidents in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, the bigger story in Latin America has been democratic resilience and deepening. Chile and Uruguay have become stable liberal democracies, Brazil has made dramatic democratic and economic progress, and even once chronically unstable Peru has seen three successive democratically elected presidents deliver brisk economic growth with declining poverty rates. In fact, Latin America is the only region of the world where income inequality has decreased in the last decade.

The new popular embrace of democracy is particularly striking in sub-Saharan Africa, where five rounds of the Afrobarometer opinion surveys have uncovered a surprisingly robust public



commitment to democracy. In 2008, an average of 70 percent of Africans surveyed across 19 countries expressed support for democracy as always the best form of government. But only 59 percent perceived that they had in their country a full or almost full democracy, and only 49 percent were satisfied with how democracy was working in their country. This finding simply does not fit with the image of a passive and deferential populace ready to exchange freedom for bread. In Africa, people have learned through bitter experience that without democracy they will have neither freedom nor bread.

Throughout most of the non-Western world, majorities of the public have come to see that the right to choose and replace their leaders in competitive, free, and fair elections is fundamental to the achievement and defense of all other rights. This is strikingly the case now in the Arab world, where the Arab Barometer surveys show that upward of 80 percent of the citizens of most countries name democracy as the best form of government, even if they do not define democracy in fully liberal and secular terms.

It is much too early to know the fate of the popular movements for freedom in the Arab world, and we should not minimize the continuing assault on movements for democracy and accountability in countries as diverse as Venezuela, Russia, and Iran. Over the last decade there has been a slowly rising tide of democratic breakdowns, and more reversals could follow due to corruption and abuse of power by elected rulers. But the data show that popular attitudes and values are not the principal problem, and there is little evidence to support the claim that postponing democracy in favor of strongman rule will make things better. The people of Burma have made that point repeatedly at the polls and on the streets, and finally their rulers seem to be listening to them. The best way to democracy is *through* democracy. ■

**LARRY DIAMOND** is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford University. He is also coeditor of the *Journal of Democracy*.



Enough votes: Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev greets supporters in 2011 after being reelected with 96 percent of the vote.

YURI KOCHETKOV / EPA / CORBIS

# VOTING AGAINST FREEDOM

Recent history in the countries of the former Soviet Union suggests that the appetite for freedom may not be as strong everywhere as we assume.

BY JOSHUA KUCERA

THE WILSON QUARTERLY WINTER 2013



By JOSHUA KUCERA

WITH ITS INSPIRING IMAGES OF CITIZENS around the Middle East taking to the streets to demand an end to dictatorship, the Arab Spring rekindled our faith in democracy. As the dramatic events unfolded on television, it was impossible not to believe that however tightly autocrats may try to hold on to power, and however messy transitions may be, in the end, despotism must yield to the will of the people.

But a look to the east and north, toward the former Soviet Union, provides a sobering reminder that democracy is not the inevitable result after dictatorships fall. The 15 former Soviet republics have seen dictatorial regimes ousted in not one but two distinct waves—the first after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the second a dozen or more years later in the so-called color revolutions that brought down autocrats in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Yet no real benefits have accrued to political and civil rights in the region; indeed, they are more limited than before. (The three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, are exceptions; not absorbed into the Soviet Union until 1940, all three have become democracies and members of the European Union.) Freedom

House, an American organization that promotes the advancement of democracy worldwide, produces annual measures of political and civil freedoms in every country. According to its data, only two of the ex-Soviet republics outside of the Baltics—Georgia and Moldova—have better scores today than they did when they gained independence in 1991. Armenia's have not changed. The scores of the other nine states have gone backward.

Two leading scholars on democratization, Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, of Harvard and the University of Toronto, respectively, have written that “expectations (or hopes)” for democracy in the former Soviet Union have “proved overly optimistic,” and that it may be “time to stop thinking of these cases in terms of transitions to democracy and to begin thinking about the specific types of regimes they actually are.” And that was in 2002. Yet U.S. officials still cling to the notion that the region is in a “transition” to democracy. When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid a visit in 2011 to Uzbekistan and its president, Islam Karimov, one of the harshest dictators on the planet and perhaps the least likely leader



Kazakhstan's domed presidential palace in Astana is flanked by golden office towers.

JANE SWEENEY / JAI / CORBIS

The city has been rebuilt on a monumental scale after becoming Kazakhstan's new capital in 1997.

in the region to move anywhere close to democracy, a State Department official told reporters on the trip that “President Karimov commented that he wants to make progress on liberalization and democratization, and he said that he wants to leave a legacy of that for his—both his kids and his grandchildren.” Pressed by an incredulous reporter, the official added, “Yeah. I do believe him.”

Evidence, however, is mounting that not only has democracy failed in most countries of the former Soviet Union, but that people there do not particularly regret it. Surveys by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project have found that the percentages of Lithuanians, Russians, and Ukrainians

who believe that a “strong leader” is preferable to a democratic government have risen significantly over the past 20 years. A survey last year of 10 ex-Soviet states by the Russian research institute Integration found that Russian strongman Vladimir Putin is even more popular in other parts of the former Soviet Union than in Russia itself. “People

**Not only has democracy failed in most countries of the former Soviet Union, but people there do not particularly regret it.**



want a strong hand, stability, growth, and prosperity,” explained the institute’s director, Sergei Moroz.

The divergent trajectories of two neighboring countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are illustrative. In the early days of independence, Kyrgyzstan was widely described as an “island of democracy.” It had genuinely competitive political parties, an open, combative press, and a parliament that was popularly elected, not a rubber stamp. In 1993, Strobe Talbott, then President Bill Clinton’s special envoy to the new post-Soviet countries, called Kyrgyzstan’s president “a true Jeffersonian democrat.” And while Kyrgyzstan’s politics have had their ups and downs since then, it still has the most open government in Central Asia. For instance, the constitution promulgated in 2010 established a parliamentary system, a marked departure from the strongman model that is ubiquitous in the region.

Kazakhstan, meanwhile, is still ruled by the same ex-Communist Party boss who was in control in 1991, Nursultan Nazarbayev. He has systematically eliminated any political competition and built an extensive cult of personality. In the last presidential election, in 2011, his three token opponents endorsed him and one said he voted for him. Nazarba-

yev won 96 percent of the vote.

Yet Kazakhstan is prospering and stable, and is building a middle class, while Kyrgyzstan is chronically mired in chaos. Kazakhs, at least in the big cities, can shop at nice malls and afford beach vacations in Turkey. One Western expat who has worked throughout Central Asia told me that Kazakhstan is the only place in the region where you can go to a restaurant where entrées cost more than five dollars and be surrounded by locals, not other expats. One of my visits to Kazakhstan, in 2010, happened to coincide with a bout of horrific ethnic violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan. Several hundred people, mostly Uzbeks, were killed. When I broached the subject of Nazarbayev’s rule with Kazakhs, I heard the same thing over and over. After some complaints about cronyism and corruption, my interlocutors would add, “But at least we’re not Kyrgyzstan.” An opinion poll conducted around the same time found that 39 percent of Kazakhs blamed the violence in Kyrgyzstan on a “low standard of living,” while 38 percent attributed it to “the authorities’ weakness.” The same poll found that only seven percent of Kazakhs opposed recently passed constitutional amendments that cemented Nazarbayev’s rule

into the future, giving him the title “Leader of the Nation.”

In 2009, Kazakh human rights advocate Yevgeny Zhovtis, who had testified several times before the U.S. Congress about his country’s lack of progress toward democracy, was sentenced to a disproportionately long prison term following a conviction for vehicular manslaughter. The harsh sentence drew the ire of human rights groups around the world, which argued that its severity was related to Zhovtis’s political activities. Yet in Kazakhstan his plight did not appear to move anyone. One official at a Western democracy-promotion organization told

me about observing a rally in support of Zhovtis shortly after his sentencing. The official approached carefully, not wanting to appear to be part of the event and give credence to the inevitable government claims that it was organized by foreigners. But when he got to the demonstration, he realized that “it was maybe 25 people, and I knew all of them—they all worked for NDI, DRL,” and other Western democracy-promotion organizations, he said, referring to the National Democratic Institute and the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. The ranks of such groups in the region have been shrinking



**In Tbilisi with President Mikheil Saakashvili in 2005, President George W. Bush hailed Georgia as a “beacon of liberty.”**

KEVIN LAMARQUE / REUTERS / CORBIS



for years. Some have simply closed their operations, while others have shifted their focus to consumer rights and other issues more relevant to the day-to-day concerns of Central Asians, concluding that, at least for now, the ground in the region is simply not fertile for democracy.

**In 2010, disillusioned Ukrainians voted back into office Viktor Yanukovich, the very apparatchik whose attempt to steal the election six years earlier had sparked the Orange Revolution.**

And Central Asia is not unique in the former Soviet world. In 2010, disillusioned with the 2004 Orange Revolution that was supposed to have ushered in democracy, Ukrainians voted back into office Viktor Yanukovich, the very apparatchik whose attempt to steal the election six years earlier had sparked the “revolution.” In Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, pro-democracy movements have failed to gain any traction, and autocrats seem as entrenched as ever.

**S**O WHAT HAPPENED? WHY HAS DEMOCRACY failed to gain any purchase in the former Soviet Union? Political scientists have identified a number of possible explanations. Some are not specific to the region: Low levels of economic development mean that people are more focused on economic issues, while countries that do succeed economically, but only on the strength of oil and gas or other natural resources (e.g., Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan), tend to breed autocrats.

But some explanations are unique to the region. All the countries of the former Soviet Union maintain close ties to Russia (often willingly, sometimes not) and, increasingly, China, neither of which do much to help the cause of democracy. In particular, China’s economic success has inspired poor countries around the world, not least those just across its northern and western borders in Central Asia. And the fact that Beijing has achieved such success while maintaining the Communist Party’s monopoly on power feeds into the widespread belief in the former Soviet countries that a leader’s strong hand is what is needed to grow. Meanwhile, the other major regional power, India, is a democracy—and has not done

nearly as much to relieve the crushing poverty under which many of its citizens suffer.

“China is a model to be copied—India is just a basket case,” said Stephen Kotkin, a historian who specializes in the former Soviet world. Central Asia’s leaders know that China is rising, and that its model will be the dominant one in the region, he said in an interview.

Some scholars advance cultural explanations for the region’s lack of interest in democracy. The dominant religions of the former Soviet lands are Orthodox Christianity and Islam, both of which cultivate values not conducive to democracy, this argument goes. In the case of Orthodoxy, writes former Georgian government official Irakli Chkonia, those values include “submission to authority, discouragement of dissent and initiative, discouragement of innovation and social change, [and] submissive collectivism rather than individualism.”

Citizens of the former Soviet states also suffer from ideology fatigue. Especially on the periphery of the former Soviet Union, where communism was experienced as a reform imposed from a distant capital, many people today see democracy in similar terms, as a foreign ideology that has little to do with their lives. Sean Roberts, an anthropologist

and Central Asia specialist at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs, writes that “most citizens of Kazakhstan, and perhaps most post-Soviet peoples outside the Baltic states, engage the concept of democracy much as they embraced communism before—as a mostly empty ideological framework to facilitate deference to the authority and power of the state, not as a system of formal institutions that can effectively represent people’s interests and make governance more successful in serving the people.” Roberts further observes that “if many Americans saw in the end of the Cold War the victory of American ideals, per [Francis] Fukuyama’s ‘end of history,’ most former Soviet citizens viewed it more as an ‘end of ideology,’ or a sign that grand ideals are essentially incompatible with the realities of life.”

In each of these countries, the dictator, too, has done his part to discredit democracy, painting it as “alien to the country’s history, tradition, and identity, funded by foreign security services, or driven by U.S. and Western geopolitical and economic interests,” political scientists Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny wrote in a recent article. And in every case, the ruler has taken aggressive steps to nip democratic movements



in the bud by restricting independent media, muzzling opposition, trying to censor the Internet, and using state resources to buy political support. The dictators of the region reacted to the color revolutions by kicking out Western democracy-promotion organizations they believed were responsible for orchestrating those events.

Fear of democracy per se has not been a driving force in the region. To Western audiences the Arab Spring and color revolutions may have looked like inspiring outbursts of people power, but they were read very differently by the leaders, and many of the citizens, of the former Soviet countries. There, the Arab Spring was seen from the beginning more as an outbreak of chaos and Islamist extremism. The color revolutions, too, failed to inspire many people in neighboring states—the events in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, were seen primarily as events that weakened those countries.

**I**F DEMOCRACY CAN HAVE ANY CLAIM TO success in the former Soviet Union, its best case is Georgia, whose 2003 Rose Revolution, led by the U.S.-educated Mikheil Saakashvili, brought dramatic reforms and a sharp geopolitical turn toward the West. Saakashvili's affection

for the United States was reciprocated: President George W. Bush visited the country in 2005 and famously called it a “beacon of liberty.”

**The Arab Spring was seen more as a dangerous outbreak of chaos and Islamist extremism than an inspiring outburst of people power.**

But “democracy” was never quite the right word to describe what Saakashvili was trying to implement. His successes, while undeniable, are better thought of as progress toward modernization or good governance. Saakashvili's youth (he became president at 36), fluency in English, and rhetorical embrace of “democracy” cleverly disguised what was in effect a more enlightened version of the strongman model favored in many parts of the former Soviet Union.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia was notorious as its most corrupt republic. After independence, things failed to improve. The government of Edward Shevardnadze was so corrupt that when the noted

foreign-affairs writer Robert Kaplan visited in 2000, he couldn't imagine the pervasive venality ever being weeded out: "Corruption is deeply rooted—perhaps the most corrosive ultimate consequence of communism. It will continue at high levels long after Shevardnadze's death." But Saakashvili wasn't so fatalistic, and he undertook an ambitious project to reform the police, then one of the most corrupt institutions in the country. In a massive housecleaning, he laid off 16,000 police officers. He also dramatically restructured the police bureaucracy and raised salaries. The reforms worked: By all accounts, Georgian police are far less corrupt now than they used to be. In 2010, the international corruption watchdog Transparency International found that 78 percent of Georgians believed that corruption overall had decreased in the previous three years—the highest such figure in the world. (And for what it's worth, despite Kaplan's prediction, Shevardnadze is still alive.)

This was Saakashvili's greatest achievement. But the reforms were far from democratic, and couldn't have even taken place in a democracy, according to Matthew Light, a University of Toronto criminologist who has studied Georgia's police reform. Saakashvili "was able to

do those things because there was no one he had to bargain with," Light said in an interview. "Institutional change of the kind Saakashvili implemented would involve more stakeholders in a fully functioning democracy."

While the reforms succeeded in rooting out corruption and improving the performance of the police, it did so at the cost of remaking the force into a politicized institution responsible to Saakashvili personally. The fruit of that politicization was visible in 2007, when the police violently broke up anti-government protests and shut down a major opposition-friendly television network, events that did "serious damage to Georgia's reputation as a champion of human rights," Human Rights Watch said in a report analyzing the crackdown. Furthermore, the reforms failed to create the sort of oversight of a police department that would be expected in a democracy, and other parts of the justice system remained unreformed. Of cases brought to court, for example, 99 percent resulted in convictions. In other words, Saakashvili's reforms were about strengthening the power of the state, not democracy.

Meanwhile, according to Freedom House, measures of civil and political rights in Georgia flatlined from 2003



to '10 (but did tick up slightly thereafter). The organization bluntly concludes, "Georgia is not an electoral democracy." That is hardly surprising, given that Saakashvili has frequently cited authoritarian Singapore as a model (as does Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev). "Singapore has a lot going for it, but that [Saakashvili] says that is revealing," Light said. "He doesn't say Switzerland, or Sweden, or Canada, or the U.S.; he says Singapore." It was not democratic principles that inspired Georgia's focus on police reform. That was motivated largely by Saakashvili's fear of Russia and his worry that a dysfunctional state would not be able to defend itself against its superpower enemy to the north.

"I don't think they were lying when they said they wanted a democracy, but they saw Georgia as on the brink of state failure," Light said, referring to Saakashvili and his allies. The president gave "lip service to democracy, and he believed it on some level, but it just wasn't the priority. That's the benign interpretation. The less benign was that he genuinely saw the model for Georgia as authoritarian capitalist development like [that in] Singapore."

The contradictions of Georgia's democracy were on full display during the 2012 parliamentary election, the first in

which Saakashvili's party faced a truly credible opponent. When billionaire businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili formed a political party called Georgia Dream to vie for power, Saakashvili's government threw up substantial roadblocks. It stripped Ivanishvili of his Georgian citizenship (after several years of living in Paris, he had also acquired French citizenship), levied extraordinary multimillion-dollar fines on his party for campaign finance violations, and harassed and intimidated his supporters. In the end, however, Ivanishvili's deep pockets helped Georgia Dream overcome these obstacles. While Georgians were pleased by the drop in corruption under Saakashvili's administration, that was outweighed by their discontent over its failure to raise living standards.

Ivanishvili had warned his supporters to be ready for the incumbent president to steal the election, and even sympathetic outsiders wondered how Saakashvili—who holds an outsized impression of himself and his role in Georgian history—would take a loss, but he graciously accepted defeat. "There are very deep differences between us, and we believe that their views are extremely wrong, but democracy works in this way—the Georgian people make decisions by majority," he said. "That's what we of course

respect very much.” Peacefully handing over the reins of government to a rival was perhaps Saakashvili’s most democratic move.

---

**Saakashvili had to pretend that Georgia was “transitioning” toward democracy, while the United States had to pretend it cared.**

---

In the end, Saakashvili was trapped by his own rhetoric: Though he knew that democracy wasn’t what he was bringing to Georgia, his legacy depended on outsiders perceiving that to be the case. Democracy, while it may not be particularly relevant in places such as the former Soviet Union, remains the standard of the “international community,” or at least the portion of it that wields the most power—the United States and its allies. So Saakashvili and his Western backers had to carry out a sort of mutual charade: He had to pretend that Georgia was “transitioning” toward democracy, while the United States—which wanted good relations with Georgia for a variety of geopolitical reasons—

had to pretend it cared. This phenomenon can be seen in the emergence of several ersatz “democracies” in the former Soviet Union, with varying degrees of credibility.

**K**AZAKHSTAN PROVIDES AN ESPECIALLY stark example. President Nazarbayev has shrewdly developed what he calls a “multivectored” foreign policy, trying to maintain good relations with many powers so as to not be too dependent on Russia. Ties with the United States and Europe depend to some degree on being democratic, so even while it in no way resembles a democracy, Kazakhstan makes great efforts to pretend to the world that it is one. The country’s diplomats campaigned hard, over several years, for it to be given a turn as chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a multinational body that is perhaps best known for its election monitoring. Many OSCE members had reservations, but as part of its campaign Kazakhstan’s government promised wide-ranging reform of laws relating to national elections, political party registration, and the news media.

The gambit worked, and Kazakhstan was awarded the chair for 2010. But the reforms were only partially implemented, and the experience of chairing



the OSCE for a year seems not to have done much to whet Kazakhstanis' appetite for democracy. Indeed, 2010 was the very year they named Nazarbayev their de facto president for life. Kazakhstan recently celebrated a new national holiday in his honor, First President's Day, amid a fresh assault on opposition media and political figures.

Meanwhile, the government's PR efforts continue unabated. Shortly after the Arab Spring began, Nazarbayev published an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* touting Kazakhstan as a model for Middle Eastern countries. "It took the great democracies of the world centuries to develop," he declared. "We are not going to become a fully developed democracy overnight. But we have proved that we can deliver on our big ambitions. Our road to democracy is irreversible, and we intend to provide economic and political opportunities for our citizens."

The Kazakhstani government has on retainer several Washington lobbying and public-relations firms, and it has contributed to prestigious Washington think tanks. In 2009, for example, it gave the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a smaller organization, the Institute for New Democracies, a \$290,000 grant to create a task force to

prepare for Kazakhstan's then-upcoming OSCE chairmanship.

Ironically, when Kazakhstan held parliamentary elections early last year, the OSCE was critical, saying the process "did not meet fundamental principles of democratic elections." Nazarbayev fired back at the organization he had been so eager to have his country chair, saying that "hired" monitors with an agenda would not be invited to observe his country's elections in the future. But in Washington, Kazakhstan's lobbyists put a brave face on the results, and a Kazakhstan-funded group of American experts who made up their own smaller observer mission praised the vote. "Kazakhstan has taken an important step forward towards a multiparty polity with the election," the group said in its official statement. "The conduct of the election, while falling short in some respects of the 'gold standard'... demonstrated a commitment to widen voter choice."

At a press conference, one member of the group lauded what he called the "orchestrated approach" to the elections. "The opening of the political process cannot proceed in a chaotic, disorderly fashion," said Vladimir Socor, an analyst with the Jamestown Foundation, a Washington think tank that recently signed a partnership agreement with

the Nazarbayev Center, an institute run by the Kazakhstani government. “When that happens, as in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, the consequences can be disastrous. Reforms need to be coordinated from above.”

But could all this be changing? In Russia, the massive, unexpected protests that erupted in 2011 in reaction to Vladimir Putin’s announcement that he would seek another term as president have changed the political landscape. Putin still won handily, and democracy still seems a distant prospect, but the demonstrations—in a country with an illustrious thousand-year history of despotism—suggested that the relationship between the Russian government and its citizens has changed. Russians seem to be demanding more say in how things are run. More than half now believe that voting matters, according to the Pew Research Center’s surveys, a significant increase from only a few years ago.

Russia is the wealthiest of the ex-Soviet republics, with the largest middle class. A substantial scholarly literature has correlated rising incomes with increased expectations of political liberalization, and indeed it was Moscow’s middle class that led the anti-Putin protests. Over the past three years, Pew’s surveys found, Russians have in-

creasingly come to value a judiciary that treats all citizens equally, a civilian-controlled military, uncensored media, and honest elections—the building blocks of democracy.

## **The massive, unexpected anti-Putin protests that erupted in late 2011 have changed Russia’s political landscape.**

Even in Kazakhstan, a few months after Nazarbayev bragged in *The Washington Post* about how his country avoided mass protests by meeting its people’s economic needs, riots broke out (and were violently put down) in the remote city of Zhanaozen among oil workers who had been striking for months. This was a different sort of protest from those in Moscow: mounted by the working class rather than the educated elite, and demanding not political rights but higher wages. Yet it similarly demonstrated the fragility of the strongman model.

Could these developments in Russia and Kazakhstan be the first cracks in the antidemocracy façade of the former



Soviet states? As fearful as people in this region are of chaos, could that fear one day soon be outweighed by their desire to have more say in how their countries are run? Even if that is the case—a big “if”—that is the easy part, said Stephen Kotkin, the historian specializing in the former Soviet states. Far harder, he noted, is the work of building the institutions of a democratic society, such as a responsible

parliament and an effective bureaucracy. Protests can't do that, he said, drawing a parallel to the Arab Spring. “You can break the regime with protests, but then you're Egypt,” he said. “Then what?” ■

**JOSHUA KUCERA** is a freelance journalist in Washington, D.C., who specializes in the Caucasus and Central Asia.



Afghan painter Hangama Amiri's "Girl Under the Taliban" depicts a burqa, the full-body covering that the militants forced women to wear. The artist fled to Canada with her family in 1996 when she was six years old. A 2010 visit to Afghanistan inspired her series *The Wind-Up Dolls of Kabul*.

HANGAMA AMIRI

# AFGHANISTAN IN THREE VOICES

Three Afghan women talk about violence and shelter, the Taliban, and getting to vote.

BY NORWAN, MARIAM, AND NASIMA



By NORWAN, MARIAM, AND NASIMA

IT'S ONE THING TO THEORIZE ABOUT THE transition to democracy, another to live it. Here, three Afghan women, Norwan, Mariam, and Nasima, describe life in a country that, after 30 years of war, has vowed to become more liberal.

They all know refugee life, as part of an immense Afghan diaspora that grew following the 1979 Soviet invasion (in the 1980s, one of every two refugees in the world was Afghan), the 1996 Taliban takeover, and the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. The chaos kept school out of reach for many children, especially girls. Today, Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, at 43 percent for males and less than 13 percent for females. A recent survey by Trust-Law, a legal news service, named Afghanistan the most dangerous country in the world for women. In becoming educated women who could write their own stories, Norwan, Mariam, and Nasima really have all but walked uphill both ways to school.

The three women contribute regularly to the Afghan Women's Writing Project, an online workshop and magazine that publishes several dozen writers, and where, as a volunteer editor, I first encountered their work. Animated

with anger, hope, and sweet humor, the poems and essays tell the story of a people who will never reconcile themselves to tents and funerals. Children, families, friendships—they're all important, but the writers refuse to be confined only to domestic concerns. Facing the looming withdrawal of U.S. combat troops next year and the prospect of peace negotiations with the Taliban, the writers were eager to talk about the future of democracy in their homeland.

While they've written here in English, it is not, of course, their first language, nor even their second—among the other languages they speak are Dari, Pashto, and Urdu. For their own security, they use only their first names, and have omitted identifying details.

—Darcy Courteau

## A WAY OF GOOD THINKING

In the cold winter nights when I was a child and my father talked about the meaning of freedom and democracy, I could not really understand those words, even though I thought they were the names of my dreams.

Then the Taliban took power when I was 15 years old. Six years after that, democracy came together with B-52



HANGAMA AMIRI

**“Raining Stones” by Hangama Amiri. In areas under their control, the Taliban still orders executions of women accused of social crimes such as adultery. Some are stoned to death.**

bombers following 9/11. We had a small, old radio running on dying batteries, and we listened to the news. That is how I learned about the war against terrorism.

I’d grown up in war and had heard rockets and bombs. When the Mujahedeen were fighting in Kabul, I understood which kind of rockets they shot, but the

bombs from the United States’ B-52s made sounds that I still can’t forget, as if the mountains above had become angry and suddenly crashed down. Sometimes I went deaf for hours and could not hear anything. For the first time I experienced the fear of being dead. When one of the bombs blasted very close to our house, I cried and hugged my father



and looked at his eyes. He told me that the war would be over and we would experience freedom soon.

**When one of the bombs blasted very close to our house, I cried and hugged my father and looked at his eyes. He told me that the war would be over and we would experience freedom soon.**

I told myself to wait for the end of the war, and for the day to come that I could go to school. At that time nothing was important for me but to be out of the blue cage, my stupid burqa, and to go to school.

I heartily welcomed democracy. With it I changed from an uneducated Afghan girl to a proud, educated woman—a golden achievement. After six years of being locked in the house, I could go to school with a pen and paper in my school bag. At school, however, some of my teachers said that democracy is a bad word, and that anybody who likes democracy is against Allah. In my class I learned that democracy

is not for Afghans; it only belongs to Western people.

At that time, everybody had a special definition for democracy. A woman imprisoned for killing her husband said that she killed him because he was not a good man, and she could do it because now we had democracy in Afghanistan.

Other women understood they had civil rights. Women who had been forced into marriages, having their first child at age 13—some did not want their daughters to be child brides, too, and started to fight against oppression. Other women ended their lives by burning themselves. Now that they knew their rights, they could not tolerate the wrong decisions of men in their family. In Kabul, I went to the hospital to talk with burned girls and women. They all told me they did it because there was no other option to release them from their family's decision to stop their education, or force them into arranged marriage.

**After six years of being locked in the house, I could go to school with a pen and paper in my school bag.**

Other families showed that if they could not make big changes, at least they could say no to barbarism. Some families that were not educated sent their daughters to schools, even in unsecured and remote provinces such as Kandahar, Paktiya, Logar, Bamyan, and Badghis. Families believed that we needed educated women, especially women doctors. Even old women could go to literacy courses and get a job outside the house. And now, Afghan women could join the military.

A good telecommunications system meant that people from a shopkeeper to a help man with his donkey could own a mobile phone. Telephone companies held midnight specials, and young boys called their girlfriends secretly and could not sleep until morning. (I pity this misuse of the energy of our young generation.)

We had freedom of speech. Anyone could own a radio station or TV channel. We had about 10 TV channels that all broadcasted dance clips and music. Most of the young boys and girls wanted to be singers! Ariana Sayed and Muzhda Jamalzada, who'd fled the country as children and became pop stars abroad, returned to give concerts.

I got to vote in the second parliamentary election, in September 2010. My father had died by then, and none of my family members had decided wheth-

er or not to vote. If they did not, then I didn't have permission to go out on Election Day. It was almost the end of the day when my brother came and told my mom and me, "We are going to vote!"

**My brother supported Rocketi because the former warlord was paying \$100 to each person who voted for him.**

In the car my brother said that both of us should vote for Mullah Abdul Salam Rocketi, a warlord during the Majaheen time who had killed a lot of innocent Afghans. My brother supported him because Rocketi was paying \$100 to each person who voted for him. I was shocked, and thought that it is better to commit suicide than vote for Rocketi. My brother gave us a camera so that we could take a picture of our ballots to show we'd voted for the right person. When I went to the polling station and mom took the camera, my hands were shaking as if somebody stood beside me with a knife. I selected my favorite person who I thought could do something for Afghans.





War has plagued Kabul since the Soviet invasion in 1979, leaving street after street lying in destruction. As shown in this 2001 photo, families still manage to live in the hollowed remains of homes.

LUCIAN PERKINS / THE WASHINGTON POST

But my hope for having a democratic country was like a paper boat in the water.

Now I feel ashamed of myself when I remember that when the world introduced Hamid Karzai as president of Afghanistan, and the U.S. government and international community hugged him and kissed him, while watching him on TV I was clapping for him and welcomed him with tears.

We trusted Karzai and thought that because he was selected by the international community, we would experience big changes. The world paid special attention to the situation in Afghanistan, and

money rained down from everywhere. But it went to Karzai and his family, his corrupt, lazy cabinet, and people around him. Throwing away their turbans and wearing ties and suits, they were very successful in pretending to support democracy while they filled their pockets with money. The international community would give money to build highways, for example, but because in Afghanistan there is no transparency, a contractor would keep the money and use mud for the roads instead of concrete.

Afghans were disappointed in Karzai's misgovernment, and some thought that the Taliban would be better. Now, when

people have problems with corrupt courts, some turn to the Taliban and ask them to help solve their most important issues.

The past 12 years have not brought changes to the lives of poor, ordinary Afghans. Women still suffer violence at home. Children as young as seven are in the streets begging, and they are the supporters of the house.

We had presidential and parliamentary elections again, and all went well according to media announcements. The Afghan people selected a president for themselves, Afghanistan had a parliament, and, by the way, again the world congratulated our failures!

## **It is still a puzzle for Afghans that the United States is thinking about making peace with the Taliban.**

But it was not only Afghanistan's government that did not understand the meaning of democracy. Some people really considered it a bad word, while they expected the United States and other countries to rebuild Afghanistan! Many Afghan people really counted on

Obama to bring democracy and stability to Afghanistan. But with the bombing of women and children in the villages, and then, worst of all, talking about making peace with the Taliban, the U.S. government showed that their efforts to bring democracy to Afghanistan were a commercial—it looks so attractive in the newspaper, but if we go and buy it, it isn't worth a penny. It is still a puzzle for Afghans that the United States is thinking about making peace with the Taliban. I feel pity for those Americans who paid the high cost of losing their lives in 9/11, for American soldiers who died in Afghanistan's war, and for Afghans who died in wars against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Making peace with the Taliban means that, yes, we forgive you! And who can guarantee that Afghanistan will not become a nest of terrorists that will bring up other bin Ladens?

Democracy is a way of thinking, good thinking. It doesn't mean that whatever your heart wants to do, do it. I think that democracy cannot go together with war. As long as we Afghan people ourselves don't work for real change and freedom, and as long as we put the Quran in the high shelves of our houses and instead respect ignorant mullahs as leaders, we can never experience democracy in Afghanistan.

— *Norwan*



## WHY AM I REMEMBERING SAD STORIES?

I was a teacher in a primary school, with a university degree, when the Taliban captured Afghanistan in 1996. The Taliban did not allow women to go outside their homes unless they were sick, and then they were not allowed to go alone to see a doctor. Outside, they had to wear burqas. But one day I went out without wearing one. I had to accompany my mother-in-law to a doctor's appointment, and my family owned just one burqa. I covered my body with a big shawl and I covered my face. At a crossroads, we ran into some members of the Taliban. I looked away with my eyes, but the Taliban began beating me. There was no law to defend my rights as an Afghan woman. I thought that there was not any other choice for me but to leave my country.

I migrated to Pakistan with my husband, three sons, and my daughter (I now have two more children, a daughter, eight years old, born in Pakistan, and a son, two years old). Most Afghan refugees in Pakistan made carpets, and they had to work very hard for 16 hours a day to make rent money, and to cover their huge daily expenses. They could not afford to send their children to school. I decided to work as a servant in a

Pakistani house to earn money for my children to go to school rather than weave carpets. But every day when I started to sweep the Pakistani house, I started to cry. I not only felt my life's pain—I felt all of our homeland's hardships. Finally, I was able to start a school for immigrant children with funds from the International Rescue Committee, and I established some classes for young girls and women.

**One day I went out without wearing a burqa. I had to accompany my mother-in-law to a doctor's appointment, and my family owned just one burqa. I covered my body with a big shawl and I covered my face.**

After the United Nations and United States helped create an Islamic republic in Afghanistan, we returned to our country. I started a job in a different nongovernmental organization that helps provide opportunities for rural women in order to raise their income

and their awareness about their role and rights. Women have the right to education, work, and legal support. According to Afghanistan's constitution, every citizen who is at least 18 years old, male or female, has the right to vote. We are evidence of a big change.

**According to Afghanistan's constitution, every citizen who is at least 18 years old, male or female, has the right to vote. We are evidence of a big change.**

Today, women can go everywhere, with permission from family. As an Afghan woman, I have the permission of my husband to go alone outside of our country to attend events and programs related to my job. We are in a Muslim country, and it is a basic requirement of our religion to get this permission. I am very happy with my rights. Currently, I am very happy with my life and my job.

But even while I talk about democracy, I think of all the crimes that I hear about on the news every day. For example, there was 15-year-old Sahar Gul, rescued from the home of her in-laws

after being tortured for months. She had refused to be forced into prostitution. And there are thousands of similar stories of Afghan women and girls, gloomy tales. But why I am remembering such sad stories while I am talking of democracy and freedom?

Some of our people face problems because of security issues. Many of our problems are caused by ignorance, misconceptions, and illiteracy. In city centers the problems are fewer, but in remote areas there are a huge number of violent attacks against women. My concern is that the Taliban will destroy our security and deprive women of their rights. I think we need to work more through various programs and projects to provide awareness about law.

We tolerated a lot of problems caused by decades of war in our country. Today there are gains in education, construction, and civil rights, especially women's. There are scholarship opportunities, employment opportunities, and so on. I don't want the United Nations or the U.S. Army to leave Afghanistan after 2014. Please provide support for Afghanistan in the upcoming election and for the establishment of a good policy to bring peace and democracy in our country.

— *Mariam*



## A MESSAGE OF PEACE

I was born in a refugee camp in Iran, but my family had a bad time as immigrants there, so in June 2001 my father decided to move us back to our country, Afghanistan. He said that we should destroy all of our photos, books, mementos, notes, and music CDs, because the Taliban don't let people have these things. He warned us that women must have burqas for hiding their faces, and being a woman means not having rights to make choices or go to school, or to have rights of expression. We just had the right to listen to men and do what they wanted us to do.

It was very hard for me to accept these laws because at that time I was a 16-year-old and had so many wishes as a woman. I wanted to continue my education and travel to other countries to learn about different cultures.

When we put feet to our country's ground, instead of there being leaves and fruits on trees, there were pieces of cassette tapes and CDs. There were rough men with soiled faces, high turbans, long beards, and guns full of bullets. They were Taliban soldiers.

Everywhere was dirt and dust. There was no sign of peace or friendship or prosperity. War was hungry and thirsty children sitting on the streets to beg rather than going to school.

We arrived in our city. Frightened people ran toward us to watch; they knew that we had come back from living in Iran. They were good people, and their wish was that we would be OK. Their hearts burned to us; their faces told us, "God will save you from this situation."

**When we put feet to our country's ground, instead of there being leaves and fruits on trees, there were pieces of cassette tapes and CDs. There were rough men with soiled faces, high turbans, long beards, and guns full of bullets.**

Four months later, we heard on the radio news that the tyrants had been pushed out. It was a free country. Children could go to school, and both men and women could go to jobs according to their experience and education. Even the sky knew that this country needed rain, and it poured that night. This rain was the sign and message of peace and friendship and for the people of Afghanistan to flourish.

I married in 2003 and became a teacher, and when the government had an election for president the next year, I got a voting card. I saw an old woman, about 90 years old, crying from delight. She said, “My God, I arrived to my wishes!” and kissed her voting card.

**I saw an old woman, about 90 years old, crying from delight. She said, “My God, I arrived to my wishes!” and kissed her voting card.**

The promised day arrived. I wanted to go to the voting site; it was my school where I was a teacher. But I faced some problems from my husband. He was a fan of Yunus Qanooni, one of the candidates. I didn’t like Qanooni, but so I could participate in the voting process, I lied to my husband and said, “Fine and OK, I will vote for Yunus Qanooni.” Five minutes before the polls closed, I was the last person to vote. I got a pen and with pleasure voted for Hamid Karzai, and I was so happy for completing my duty as one human, an Afghan woman.

Now I am divorced, and I am living with my mother and my young son,

whose name means “my hope and wishes.” Sometimes I feel like my ex-husband is a shadow in back of me, and I feel like he wants to kill me or beat me again. I always try to travel by car, not as a pedestrian, because I am afraid. Most painful for me is when I think he will come and take my son away.

Now I am not a teacher. I work for an organization that supports fair elections. Elections face serious challenges. If we don’t pay attention to them, we will endanger the achievements of 12 years. Lack of security, lack of awareness among people in villages, and election rigging are all problems.

What I see in Afghanistan is not true democracy. The Islamic republic countries cannot accept components of democracy; for example, there is not freedom of opinion and expression. The culture of the people cannot understand it, because a lot of people speaking on the radio and TV are against the government or public authority or are fans of one person or one political group based on ethnic prejudice.

Democracy can be realized in a society where people have knowledge about the word “democracy,” and people have experienced peace in the country for several years. But years of war in Afghanistan have caused a backward mentality



in people. Now it is not that easy for people to accept democracy.

Finally, I want to share with you some of my search for the meaning of democracy:

If I asked some children, “What is democracy?” they would answer me: “To follow the ball and kite, to play and build snowmen in winter and wait for the coming of spring.”

If I asked a farmer, he would say: “To plow land in the spring and harvest in the summer and have a slice of bread in winter.”

If I asked a woman, she would say: “Having life without violence.”

If I asked a mother, she would say: “To foster children and give them kindness.”

If I asked a shoemaker on our street, he would say: “For a moment I can warm my frozen hands in winter.”

If I asked street children, they would say: “Going to school to be a doctor or engineer or manager.”

If I asked students in schools: “To turn the pages of books and color on our hands with pens.”

**If I asked some children,  
“What is democracy?”  
they would answer me:  
“To follow the ball and  
kite, to play and build  
snowmen in winter  
and wait for the coming  
of spring.”**

If I asked some birds: “Soaring in the sky and not in a cage.”

Fishes of seas: “Clean seawater.”

The blind: “To see the light of day and sun, and not always see the dark of night.”

The deaf: “Hearing the beating of mother’s heart and the sound of friends.”

If asked a patriot, the patriot would say: “I love my beautiful country, and I want to fall in it and feel the roses and smell the plains and mountains, not the reek of war and blood.”

– *Nasima* ■





Nelson Mandela, with his then-wife Winnie, waves to a crowd in 1990 on the day after he was released from prison. He had been jailed for 27 years. In 1994 he was elected president of South Africa, a post he held for five years.

WALTER DHALDHLA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

# AFRICA'S LONG SPRING

In a process almost unnoticed by the rest of the world, Africa has become significantly more democratic since the early 1990s. Its transition toward political freedom offers both inspiration and cautionary lessons.

BY **STEVE McDONALD**



By STEVE McDONALD

**L**ONG BEFORE IT CAME TO THE ARAB world, spring swept through sub-Saharan Africa. In 1990, Mozambique drafted its first multiparty, democratic constitution. The next year saw multiparty elections in what had been one-party states in Benin, Gabon, and Zambia, as well as the overthrow of Mali's dictator and, subsequently, the election of new leaders. Every succeeding year brought new steps forward for democracy—in Ghana, Kenya, and the Republic of the Congo in 1992, and elsewhere on the continent in subsequent years. The world only paid attention when South Africa joined the ranks of democratic nations in 1994.

Many of the states making the transition to democracy have since suffered setbacks, but just as many have weathered the storm and function today as multiparty democracies. Certainly the transition cannot be called complete, but it has gone much further than many recognize. The Africa I first came to know as a young Foreign Service officer in 1970 no longer exists. It was a continent still in the throes of colonialism in some areas, with wars of liberation being fought in the Portuguese territories of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau,

Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Apartheid still reigned in South Africa, victimizing a vast black majority of perhaps 24 million. Colonial rule was in its final years in Rhodesia and Southwest Africa, but white minorities still clung tenaciously to power. The Comoros, Seychelles, Djibouti, and Western Sahara had yet to gain their independence from their colonial masters. In many other African nations, the exhilarating winds of change that had swept through the continent as they shook off their colonial yokes after World War II had been stilled, as a myriad of “big men” took power in country after country, either through arrangements with departing colonial rulers or in coups d'état.

**The exhilarating winds of change that had swept through the continent after World War II had been stilled by 1970.**

Some of the new leaders were popular, usually because they had led the fight against a colonial power and now

claimed the mantle of liberation leader. But even those who did not rule through violence and intimidation showed little interest in pursuing political freedom for their people. Caught up in corruption, they moved to close whatever democratic political space remained in their countries as their objectives increasingly narrowed to one: keeping themselves in power. Brutality was the rule, and many an African big man built his authority on the foundation of a ruthlessly efficient secret police, notably Jean-Bédel

Bokassa in the Central African Republic and Milton Obote, and later Idi Amin, in Uganda. During his reign in Uganda between 1971 and '79, for example, Amin killed hundreds of thousands of political and ethnic "enemies." Often the former colonial powers averted their eyes from the horror in order to preserve their commercial interests, as France did in the Central African Republic, where it tolerated Bokassa, and Gabon, where it underwrote the election fraud of President Omar Bongo.



**After 10 years as dictator of the Central African Republic, Jean-Bédel**

PIERRE GUILLAUD AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE / NEWS.COM

**Bokassa arranged his own coronation as emperor in 1976, attracting international attention. His bloody reign led to rumors, since disproved, that he engaged in cannibalism. He was finally overthrown in 1979 by French troops after Paris lost patience with its longtime client.**



For the superpowers, Africa in the 1970s was little more than a pawn in the Cold War. The United States and Soviet Union vied for the loyalty of African states by providing aid and other support, and often used their power to manipulate local politics. The United States supported governments it thought would resist Soviet pressure to move into the “red” column. The Soviets courted leftist governments. Both demanded their clients’ support for their pitched battles in the UN General Assembly. In return, the superpowers agreed to turn a blind eye to their clients’ brutal and corrupt governance.

**At one point, it was rumored in the diplomatic community that Mobutu’s Zaire consumed more French champagne than France itself.**

The United States, for example, did not care that Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) relentlessly oppressed his people during his long reign (1965–97) and siphoned off massive amounts of foreign

aid and mineral revenues for himself and his supporters. He could be counted on as an ally against the Soviets and Chinese. At one point, it was rumored in the diplomatic community that Zaire consumed more French champagne than France itself. Mobutu, who owned at least two chateaus in Europe, was known to charter the supersonic Concorde for shopping trips abroad. China played a similar game, supporting clients in exchange for recognition and support for their aspiration to displace Taiwan as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Some big men—such as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania—were not as brutal as many others, but they played the Cold War game along with the rest and ran centrally controlled economies of “African socialism” that left their people impoverished.

If there was a pretense of democracy during the first few decades of independence—roughly from 1958 to 1990—it was “dominant-party democracy,” but that was only a euphemism for autocracy. Both the international community and Africans voiced support for democracy promotion, but most viewed this exercise as a charade. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in

1963, carried in its charter a sacrosanct codicil that no African state could violate the sovereignty of another for any reason, including oppression or even the massacre of its citizens. The continent's leaders remained not only inert but silent in the face of even the most horrifying violations. Rarely was an African big man criticized or challenged. The only breach of this principle that I know of came in 1972 when Tanzania aided Milton Obote in trying to recapture Uganda from the man who had deposed him, Idi Amin. That effort failed, but it nevertheless caused great discomfort at the OAU's 10th-anniversary summit the next year in Addis Ababa, when both leaders attempted to be recognized and seated as the legitimate head of state of Uganda. Two years later, Amin was named the OAU's chairman.

**W**HEN THE BERLIN WALL FELL IN 1989, the Cold War logic that virtually guaranteed a foreign patron to any leader willing to sell his UN vote crumbled with it. Changes were already afoot in white-ruled South Africa, a development almost unthinkable to most observers, who saw the country headed only for chaos and probably a race war of apocalyptic proportions. In fact, there had been a few hopeful signs.

South Africa had helped broker the deal that ended white minority rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1978, and it had gradually loosened its hold on Southwest Africa, which became independent Namibia in 1990. That same year, F.W. de Klerk's Afrikaner government lifted the ban on pro-liberation political parties in South Africa and began releasing hundreds of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. The next year, it inaugurated negotiations among virtually all parties in the country that ultimately led to an overhaul of the constitution and, in 1994, the first-ever all-inclusive elections. By then, the Soviet Union had gone to its grave. De Klerk and Mikhail Gorbachev were to be forever enshrined in history as the leaders who gave in to the masses, who saw the writing on the wall and chose self-preservation over trying to maintain unfettered power.

Africa's frustrated masses were inspired by the demise of the Soviet Union and the rebirth of South Africa, and calls for change began to reverberate more loudly through the continent. The big men, facing a new reluctance among international donors to underwrite their autocratic regimes and the unprecedented growth of civil society organizations, began to respond. They scheduled elections and began at least



to show the institutional face of democracy by writing constitutions, setting up supposedly independent judiciaries, and allowing multiparty elections. Yet the big men were not ready to give up easily, and they manipulated elections, put off constitutional conventions, bought off or intimidated the opposition, and sometimes just ignored the verdicts of the voters, hoping the West would be more interested in stability than in true democracy.

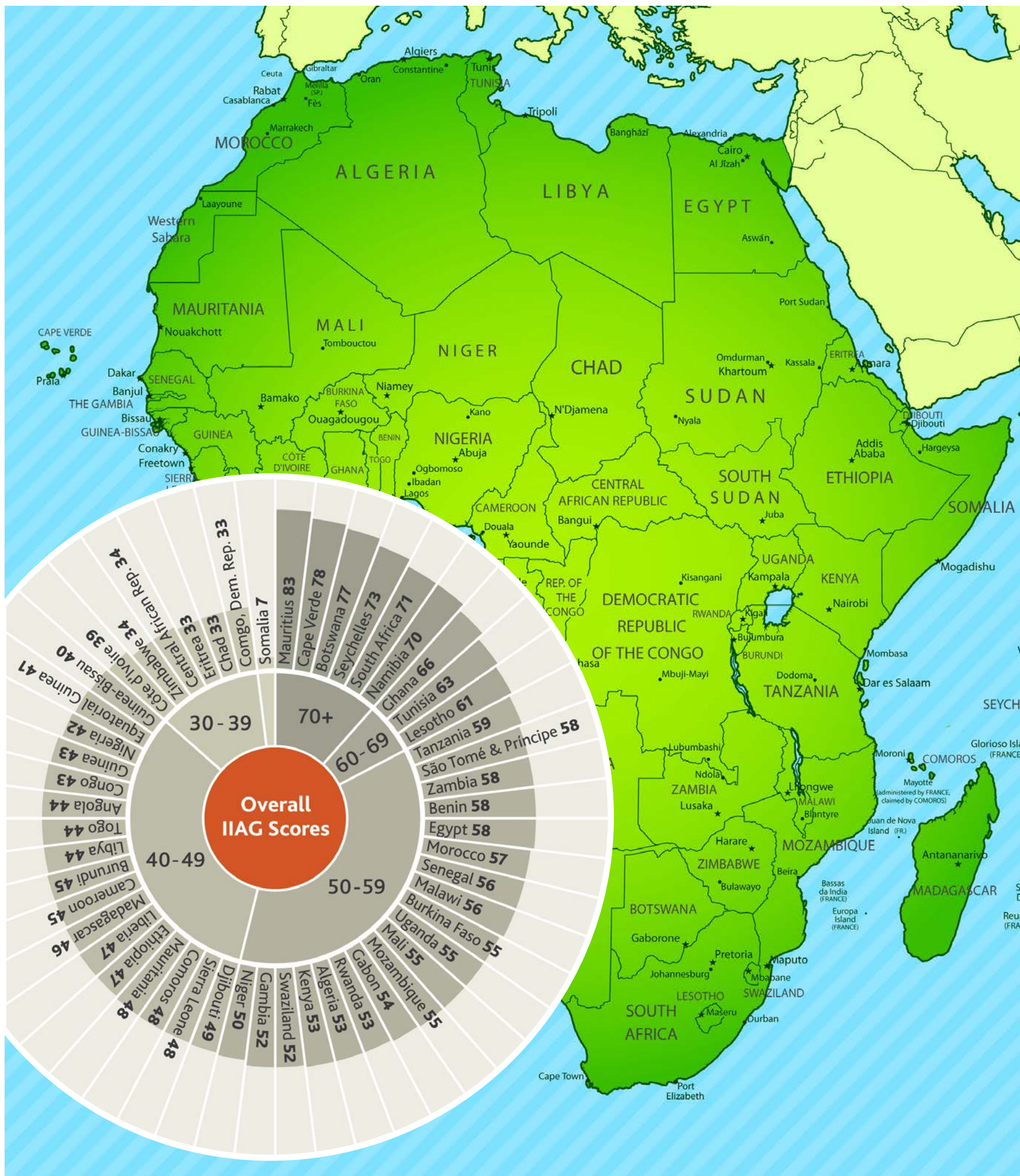
From abroad, the old rulers faced a new kind of pressure: Aid was increasingly tied to meeting certain standards. The term used by the U.S. government was “conditionality,” which meant that the extension of aid was dependent on a country’s progress toward such goals as raising living standards, holding free and fair elections, and opening up opportunities in education, employment, and development. This approach first appeared during the economic crises of the 1980s with the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, policies that caused near rebellion among recipient countries as they were asked to implement austerity programs rivaling those that, more recently, have been imposed on Greece, Spain, and Italy by the European Union.

**The “big men” were not ready to give up easily, and they hoped that the West would be more interested in stability than in true democracy.**

Nowadays, the principle of conditionality is well established among aid donors. The U.S. government’s Millennium Challenge Corporation, established in 2004, gives billions of dollars in aid, but only to countries that commit to “good policies,” which the corporation defines as “ruling justly, encouraging economic freedom, and investing in people.” That means enacting market-oriented policies designed to open economies to competition, fight corruption, and encourage transparent business dealings. In addition, governments must invest in their citizens’ health care and education.

**W**ITH ALL THE PRESSURE FOR THE establishment of democracy in Africa, is it really happening? Multiparty elections have become commonplace, with sitting presidents sometimes losing and stepping down





MAP: ISTOCKPHOTO / CHART: MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION

Like other regions, Africa has experienced a perceptible “democratic recession” in recent years. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation’s Index of African Governance rates countries along five broad dimensions: safety and rule of law; participation and human rights; sustainable economic opportunity; and human development. The 2012 edition sounded a discouraging note, pointing to declining scores over the previous six years in the first two categories for regional powerhouses Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.



peacefully. In some cases, ruling political parties, which often hold sway through a succession of presidents, have accepted the verdict of the voters. This has happened in Mauritius, Ghana, Somaliland, Zambia, Cape Verde, Benin, São Tomé and Príncipe, Botswana, Senegal, Namibia, and elsewhere. The record has not been as inspiring in countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Ivory Coast, and Ethiopia. In these countries, ruling parties and presidents still manipulate the political process. Kenya's Daniel arap Moi, for example, called for multiparty elections in 1992, and every election since has been contested. But violence, intimidation, and a victory by Moi's Kenya African National Union party were the predictable result every time, until 2002, when it lost. Because of Kenya's strategic and economic importance and its overall stability, the international community always found

**Coups, which occurred at the rate of about 20 a decade through the 1990s, are much less common now.**

a way to accept the results. Nigeria, the continent's most populous country, endowed with enormous oil wealth, also gets a free pass. Most foreigners are eager to get on with business.

But electoral chicanery rarely happens anymore without challenges from the people and the international community. Coups, which occurred at the rate of about 20 a decade through the 1990s, are now much less common. There have been only six since 2000, and one of those, in Guinea-Bissau, resulted in the coup makers holding democratic elections. And while political violence occurs frequently—notably in Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, Mali, and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo—the era of constant coups d'état is over. Strikingly, the African Union, the organization that replaced the OAU in 2002, has changed the old organization's non-interference codicil and created a "peer review" mechanism to monitor democratic progress. It does not recognize governments that come to power through a coup.

Freedom House, an American organization that monitors political freedom around the world, lists 30 of 49 sub-Saharan African countries as "free" or "partly free." In its "Democracy Index 2011," the Economist Intelligence

Unit, which uses a different set of criteria, counts 21 African countries as “full” or “flawed” democracies or hybrid regimes, and 23 as autocratic. In an earlier report, it said that “the number of elections held annually in recent years has increased; since 2000 between 15 and 20 elections have been held each year. African democracy appears to have flourished and the holding of elections has become commonplace, but not all ballots pass the test of being ‘free and fair’ and many have been charades held by regimes clinging on to power. Similarly, coups d’état have become more infrequent, although conflict, failed governments, and human rights abuses remain widespread. For every two steps forward over the past 20 years there has been at least one step back, but the overall trend appears to be in the right direction.”

Africa’s strong economic growth adds to the case for long-term optimism. The McKinsey Global Institute’s *Lions on the Move: The Progress and Potential of African Economies* (2010) is one of two widely noted studies from the business world that draw attention to sub-Saharan Africa as the fastest-growing region in the world. Many critics of the thesis that economic growth and democracy go hand in hand point out that a strong economy can sometimes take the pres-

sure off autocrats, as has been the case in Ethiopia and, of course, China. But the investment bank Renaissance Capital, in a study authored by its staff, *The Fastest Billion: The Story Behind Africa’s Economic Revolution* (2012), argues that growing investment in education, health, transportation infrastructure, and manufacturing is creating an atmosphere conducive to democracy. Poor, illiterate citizens are easy marks for autocrats; rising levels of income and education have already created an increasingly activist public that is putting pressure on governments to be responsive and transparent.

Charles Robertson, global chief economist at Renaissance Capital, writes that his company counts 31 African democracies today and expects to see more than a dozen new ones by 2050, “with just a few autocratic, energy-rich exporters left that are wealthy enough to buy off their middle class.” This year, he writes, “South Africa will join a few others such as Botswana and Mauritius above the key \$10,000 per capita GDP level above which no democracy has ever died.”

Even if Robertson’s forecast is correct, the road to 2050 will not be easy. The conventional wisdom in the West is that if we put in place a constitutional framework and a body of laws and regulations,



and get the structures and institutions of state right, then democracy will follow. But that view is grounded in the assumption that people in every country share a sense of national unity and connection. In Africa, that has not been the case until very recently. The 1884–85 Berlin Conference divided the continent into entities whose boundaries cut across ethnic, regional, religious, natural resource, and geographic lines. It created countries gripped by ethnic conflict and competition for resources, which, despite the beginnings of democratic culture in Africa, still poison many of these states.

Let's not forget the example of Mali, which not very long ago was lauded as the paragon of democracy in Africa. A 1991 coup led to a new constitution and a democratic, multiparty state. The coup leader, Amadou Toumani Touré, won election as president in 2002, and the ensuing years brought free and fair elections and all the other trappings of constitutional democracy. What they did not bring was a government that dealt with the inequality of resource distribution, education, and opportunity, primarily for nomadic Tuareg tribesmen in the north, who felt culturally and politically marginalized by the dominant Mandé society of the south. The Tuareg

were especially embittered by threats to their pastoralist way of life. Kept under control by the Malian military for years, these tribal groups surged back into rebellion after men and arms came pouring into the region from the war against Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi. The Malian army, taking increasing losses, overthrew Touré early last year, and since then Al Qaeda and other Islamist extremist groups have exploited the instability to establish an Islamist stronghold in the north. Now it seems very likely that a multinational force will be assembled to drive the Islamists out.

**T**RUE DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON A SET of underlying understandings, a sense of interdependence, a definition of a national community, or, in brief, a common “vision.” With my longtime colleague the late Howard Wolpe and others, I have spent years in Africa trying to build just such understandings. This means physically bringing together key leaders representing all ethnic, political, geographic, and religious groups to rebuild trust and ordinary communications that were lost in times of strife. This sort of contact helps engender the sense of interdependence without which they cannot collaborate on a sustained basis on the recovery, development, and

democratization of their countries. Wolpe, who, among other accomplishments, served 14 years in the House of Representatives, chairing the subcommittee on Africa for a dozen of them, spoke with the wisdom of a political veteran. “You can’t expect an individual to feel any different about his competitor the day after an election than he did the day before,” he more than once reminded me. That says it all.

## Democracy has a new resilience and undeniable momentum.

Democracy in Africa is fragile. Single parties still tend to dominate and backsliding is common. There will be more setbacks. But democracy has a new resilience and undeniable momentum. Last April, when Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade forced his way onto the ballot in a bid for a third term that the constitution seemed to forbid, Senegalese took to the streets in protest and the international community pushed

back. Wade lost a runoff election in a landslide and was forced to accept the verdict of the people. This is emblematic of the new Africa.

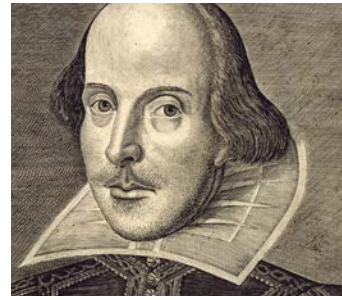
Throughout Africa, the young, educated, and technology-savvy Africans who now make up the majority of the continent’s one billion people are demanding freedom. Economic opportunities, the free flow of outside investment capital, the move to drop intra-Africa barriers to trade and commerce, a globe united by technology, and many other forces mean that democracy’s future in Africa is about as safe as it can be. The four decades that I have spent witnessing this transition have been filled with excitement, sometimes danger and horror, frustration and anger, but in the end, inspiration and fulfillment as Africa takes its rightful place in the global village. ■

**STEVE McDONALD** is director of the Wilson Center’s Africa Program and the Center’s Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity. He has served as a diplomat and a leader of nonprofit development and peace-building organizations focused on Africa for more than 40 years.



# IN ESSENCE

OUR SURVEY OF NOTABLE ARTICLES FROM OTHER JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES



## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### NANNY ACADEMIES

From *The Chronicle Review*

### DEBATING AMERICA'S PIVOT

From *Foreign Affairs*, *Commentary*, and  
*The National Interest*

### THE SURGE GOES AWRY

From *The American Interest*

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

### GREATNESS AND THE MERE POLITICIAN

From *National Affairs*

### IT'S NOT THE SCIENCE, STUPID!

From *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

## ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

### THE GREAT MANAGEMENT DEBATE

From *Harvard Business Review*

### THE HIDDEN ROOTS OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

From *The Annals of the American Academy  
of Political and Social Science*

## SOCIETY

### A FIRE'S UNSEEN BURNS

From *Plos One*

### THE LIMITS OF MENTORS

From *American Economic Journal:  
Applied Economics*

### DISTRACTED INTO DEBT

From *Science*

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### FAREWELL TO FOOTBALL

From *The Christian Century*

### WHOSE ENLIGHTENMENT WAS IT?

From *The American Historical Review*

CONTINUES >

## ARTS & LETTERS

### MANUSCRIPTS ILLUMINATED

From *The Sewanee Review*

### TELEVISION'S NEW GOLDEN AGE

From *The Chronicle Review*

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### HERDERS UNCOWED

From *Conservation*

## DECODING AUTISM

From *Scientific American*

### THE WIKIPEDIA WAY

From *The Journal of Military History*

## OTHER NATIONS

### NATION OF IMITATORS

From *Prospect*

### INDIA'S BILLIONAIRE BOOM

From *Economic and Political Weekly*



## FOREIGN POLICY &amp; DEFENSE

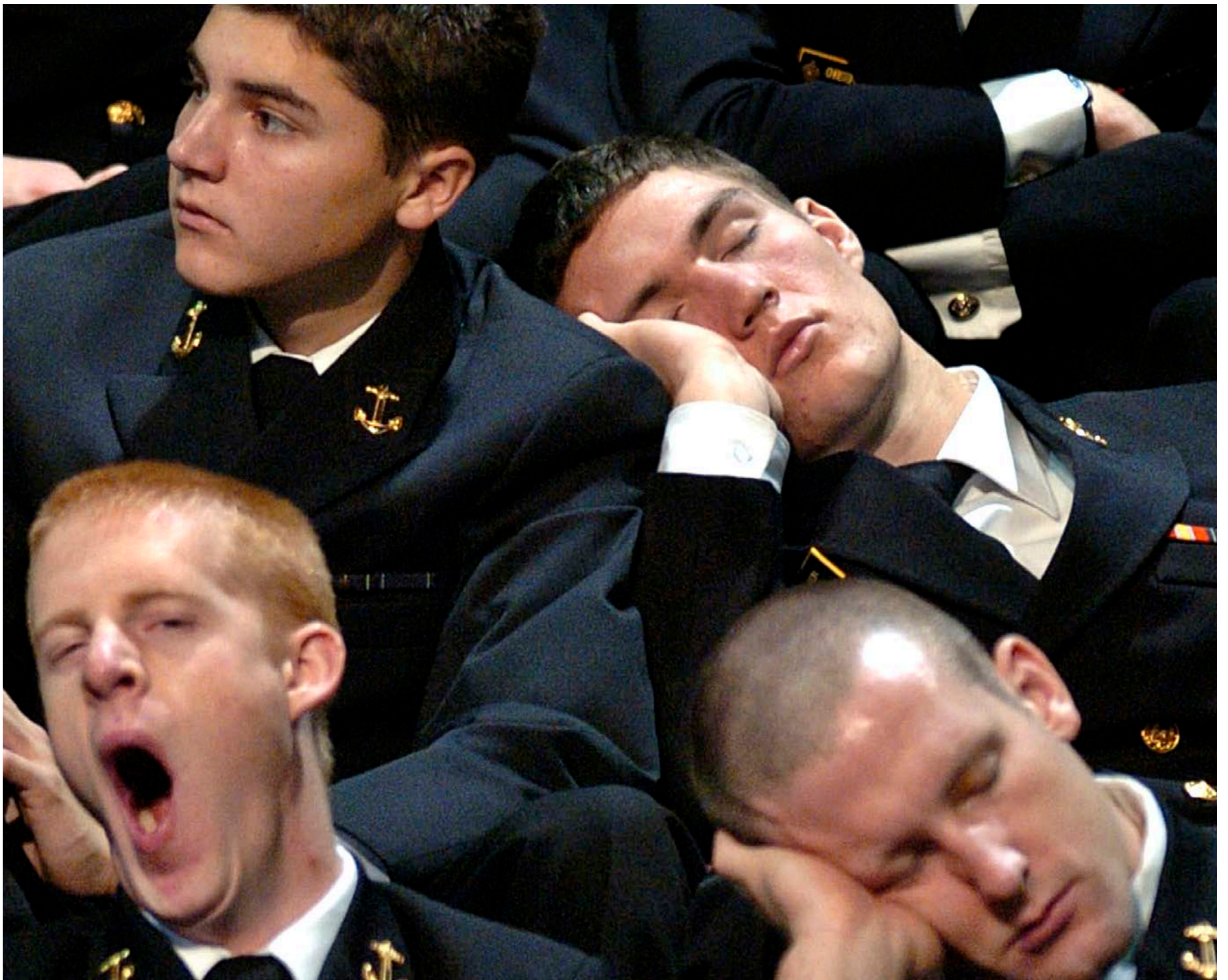
## NANNY ACADEMIES

**THE SOURCE:** “The Few, the Proud, the Infantilized” by Bruce Fleming, in *The Chronicle Review*, Oct. 8, 2012.

WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS, THE U.S. MILITARY academies conduct business much as they did a century ago: Cadets march in lockstep through the quads and shout the menu options at chow. The atmo-

sphere is saturated with reverence for honor and tradition. Bruce Fleming, a professor of English at the U.S. Naval Academy for 25 years, isn’t impressed. The service academies are a “military Disneyland,” he contends, where cadets are coddled and happy pretenses disguise mediocrity and cynicism.

High school seniors who sign up expecting the academies to be “a combination of an Ivy League university and



JONATHAN ERNST / REUTERS / CORBIS

**Wake me when it’s over.** Cadets enter the U.S. Naval Academy expecting an academic and physical crucible, but some say the experience proves underwhelming.



a commando school” quickly discover otherwise. Affirmative action and athletic priorities, among other factors, skew meritocratic admission. A fifth of new midshipmen have to be shipped off to a year of remedial education before they enter Annapolis.

The academies have a few first-class students, Fleming says, but too many have little real interest in their studies. Small wonder, since cadets hardly have skin in the game. Uncle Sam pays the entire bill for every student—they even receive a small salary—about \$400,000 per graduate.

Happy PR talk about the “best and brightest” only breeds disrespect for authority. Outstanding students across the academies—Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard—tell Fleming the same thing: They are “angry, disillusioned, and frustrated.”

## At the nation’s military academies, gone are the days of “shape up or ship out.”

Training is compromised, too. “Gone are the days of ‘shape up or ship out.’” Cadets who repeatedly fall short on physical tests do not face expulsion.

“Inspections are announced and called off at the last minute, or done sloppily,” Fleming scoffs. “Students aren’t motivated to take care of their own uniforms or abide by the rules because they realize it’s all just for show.”

“The academies are the ultimate nanny state,” he concludes. The “central paradox” is that they draw in alpha types but smother them with mundane regulations on studying, training, and living. “When are they going to let me make some decisions?” a student fumed to Fleming. “The day I graduate?”

Fleming recommends radical changes. After all, Reserve Officer Training Corps programs at universities across the country mint twice as many officers per year as the academies, at a quarter of the cost, and “no data suggest that ROTC officers are of worse quality.” A fundamental problem at the academies is that academics and military training compete for cadets’ attention. Belgium’s undergraduate military academy, where cadets alternate between several months of study and several more of training, may offer a solution. The academies should also relax trivial rules that breed resentment and contempt, as the Royal Military College of Canada has done. They should be less forgiving with wayward students; brighter and fitter candidates



can take their places. And they ought to scrap the tradition of military brass serving as presidents. Better to have civilian academics—“ideally women,” Fleming suggests, “because so much of what we do seems to be just the nonsense of older men trying to force younger men to do what they say to get a simulacrum of respect.”

Fleming insists that he makes these observations out of concern, not scorn. “What hurts the most is that the average midshipman has no respect for the institution. I, by contrast, deeply respect its goals—not its lamentable reality.” ■

## DEBATING AMERICA'S PIVOT

**THE SOURCES:** “The Problem With the Pivot” by Robert S. Ross, in *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.–Dec. 2012; “The Turn Away From Europe” by Josef Joffe, in *Commentary*, Nov. 2012; and “Asia’s New Age of Instability” by Michael Wesley, in *The National Interest*, Nov.–Dec. 2012.

MANY AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGISTS AGREE: Europe is slumbering and Asia is stirring. China is the great power the United States should keep an eye on. In 2010, the Obama administration announced a long-term “pivot” toward Asia, which involves, among other things, drawing down long-deployed military forces in Europe and inking defense deals and basing agreements with allies in East Asia.

The pivot will leave little in the realm of international affairs unaffected. America has been a sturdy presence in Europe for 70 years, stationing fleets of ships and hundreds of thousands of troops there. After the Vietnam War, it took the opposite approach in the Pacific, preferring a lighter touch of economic engagement and maritime dominance.

## America's “pivot” to Asia has gone little discussed amid more pressing concerns.

The sudden switch has gone little discussed amid a welter of more pressing concerns, from Iran to the domestic fiscal crisis. Now, however, a few foreign-policy specialists are weighing in.

Robert S. Ross, a political scientist at Boston College, thinks the pivot is a mistake. China has made more trouble than usual for the United States over the last few years, he admits. That’s not because it seeks conflict. Rather, the regime in Beijing is skittish. The global recession wreaked havoc on the Chinese economy and spurred social unrest. The communist regime could no longer buy popularity with spectacular economic growth. Instead, it resorted

to “appeasing an increasingly nationalist public with symbolic gestures of force.”

Since 2010, Washington has responded to China’s new nerve by rekindling old friendships in the Pacific and bolstering defense ties with offshore nations such as New Zealand, Japan, and the Philippines. These moves were necessary, Ross says, and in some ways were consistent with a long-standing trend toward increased engagement in the region.

But Ross feels that the pivot has spun too far, citing China’s displeasure with Obama administration policies such as refurbishing ties between Seoul and Washington (which had weakened somewhat under George W. Bush) and expanding military cooperation with Cambodia and especially Vietnam, which borders China. In 2010 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton openly expressed support for the Philippines and Vietnam in their spat with China over the Spratly Islands—a break with the past U.S. policy of staying out of territorial disputes.

Beijing is livid. China halted cooperation with the West in dealing with belligerent states such as Iran and North Korea. Also, in 2012 China announced plans to drill for oil in disputed waters in the South China Sea, and it

has taken steps to enhance its military capabilities there.

In short, the pivot appears to be a dangerous flop. “A strategy that was meant to check a rising China has sparked its combativeness and damaged its faith in cooperation,” Ross argues. Chinese leaders have concluded that the United States has abandoned its decades-old policy of strategic engagement.

Nor is it only America’s position in Asia that could suffer. Josef Joffe, editor of the German weekly *Die Zeit* and a professor of international politics at Stanford, warns that America’s turn away from Europe—greeted so far with “astounding” silence on both sides of the Atlantic—is an invitation to trouble.

It is true that Europe is no longer the world’s strategic fulcrum and that the Soviet threat is gone. The “core” of Europe is stable. But “the fringes are brittle,” Joffe says. If fighting breaks out in the Balkans, the former Soviet states, or nearby neighborhoods such as the Levant and North Africa, Europe will need much more than a few brigades of American soldiers to restore stability. (Only 30,000 U.S. troops remain in Europe, one tenth of the peak total during the Cold War.)

The fact is that the Europeans are not up to the job themselves. Except for



France and Britain, the European states invest little in their militaries. Only with the help of the United States and the NATO alliance, which has “built a precious edifice of command and training,” can Europe accomplish much of anything militarily. France led a European charge into Libya in 2011, but the effort sputtered until the United States arrived with crucial surveillance technology, smart bombs, and know-how.

Yet for all their maddening feebleness, the Europeans are stauncher allies than other candidates—India, Australia, Saudi Arabia. Finally, Joffe argues, “Europe is simply closer to the theaters where the U.S. might need to fight tomorrow.” That’s important for more than one reason. “Forces in situ are even better for *not* having to fight; they are there for *deterrence*.”

Michael Wesley, a professor at the University of Sydney in Australia and a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, warns that Americans must be more clear eyed about Asian realities.

The Asian order that predominated between 1975 and 2000, in which the United States presided over a regional system of alliances without a clear Asian leader, is vanishing, Wesley says. What he calls “hegemony lite” is history. China’s rise has awakened old tensions

throughout Asia, stirred new conflicts, and pushed up military budgets as well as the level of belligerent rhetoric. For the United States, Asia is becoming a much more complicated place. Petty disputes between America’s friends in the region and Beijing, for example, “pose a never-ending dilemma over when to demonstrate commitment to allies and when to stay silent to keep China’s neighbors from becoming too assertive.”

Wesley recommends that the United States rise above the fray and let others in the area keep China in check. This, he argues, will “present China with a much more complicated challenge than direct military competition with the United States.”

Trade and regional integration also counterbalance China’s power. Asia’s prosperous powers increasingly rely on their neighbors to keep their economies growing. War would put a dent in everyone’s profits and cut off vital sources of raw materials. Promoting further economic integration in Asia would build a strong sense of shared interest.

What happens to Europe, then? *Die Zeit* editor Joffe accepts that some kind of pivot to the Pacific is necessary, but not one in which America turns its back on Europe. “The Atlantic is home. Home is boring and exasperating, yet, in

the words of Robert Frost, it is also the place ‘where they have to take you in.’” ■

## THE SURGE GOES AWRY

**THE SOURCE:** “Bureaucracy Does Its Thing, Again” by Frances Z. Brown, in *The American Interest*, Nov.–Dec. 2012.

IMAGINE YOU’RE A DISTRICT GOVERNOR IN war-torn southern Afghanistan. A few years ago, nobody wanted your job. It was too dangerous; the Taliban lurked. In faraway Kabul, an unelected governing body widely seen as a tool of President Hamid Karzai appointed you anyway. Then, in 2009, President Barack Obama announced a “surge” of money and troops to Afghanistan, with an emphasis on winning hearts and minds in hotly contested areas such as yours. American soldiers harried the Taliban. Eager American civilians bypassed the ministries in Kabul and brought you cash to build schools, repair roads, and clean irrigation canals. You, an unelected political lightweight, suddenly became a very powerful local king.

Welcome to the wild world of post-surge Afghanistan. The United States sought quick gains in security and development at the local level, so it poured money into the most contentious of the country’s 399 districts, explains Frances

Z. Brown, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the U.S. Institute of Peace. In Nawa, in the southern province of Helmand, American aid generated jobs for more than half of the men in the district and totaled \$300 annually per person, a sum equal to almost a third of Afghanistan’s per capita gross domestic product.

The bonanza bred fundamental problems, however. “District governors became the primary distributors, and thus, the primary political beneficiaries, of an enormously effective new patronage system,” Brown recounts. This occurred while central government ministries, which have historically played a key role in Afghan governance, received less attention.

A reckoning awaits in 2014, when the U.S. military will withdraw and the governors’ power to distribute jobs and other favors will consequently recede. The central ministries’ abilities to secure and manage the provinces “have not measurably improved and in some respects have atrophied as the action moved away from them,” Brown says. At the same time, all that American aid has inflated the population’s expectations.

The surge has not been totally without benefits, Brown allows. It “enabled district governors rather than insurgents



to be the men the population viewed as their problem solvers.” Some district governors ably served their constituents.

---

## **Afghanistan’s governors are stronger, but governance is not.**

---

But empowering them has had perverse effects. The governors are stronger, but governance is not. And the system is not democratic. The governors bend to the will of their bosses in Kabul and to the Americans who provide aid and security. They are less inclined to listen to the people in their district.

Directly elected district councils were supposed to make district governors more accountable to their constituents.

President Karzai had other plans. “Year after year,” Brown writes, “a host of logistical and political hurdles, mostly emanating from the vicinity of the Presidential Palace, postponed the election of these councils.” The United States and its allies set up sundry interim councils, but these did little more than sow confusion and frustration.

Showering far-flung district governors with aid may yield fast results, but it is no way to build a lasting government, Brown observes. As 2014 approaches, she argues, America should instead focus on bolstering the ministries and other government institutions both in Kabul and Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. “The United States must, at last, truly cultivate durable Afghan government systems rather than a series of tactical-level workarounds.” ■

## POLITICS &amp; GOVERNMENT

# GREATNESS AND THE MERE POLITICIAN

**THE SOURCE:** “Lincoln’s Constitutional Leadership” by Steven B. Smith, in *National Affairs*, Fall 2012.

IN HIS FIRST MAJOR POLITICAL SPEECH, “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions,” a young Abraham Lincoln lamented the “mobocratic spirit” and lynch mobs of the Jacksonian era, then in full swing. Americans, he said, needed to rekindle their “reverence for the Con-

stitution and laws.” Lincoln gave the speech in 1838, at age 28, in Springfield, Illinois.

A quarter-century later, as president of the United States, Lincoln stayed true to his own counsel, embodying what Yale political science professor Steven B. Smith calls the constitutional style of leadership. The constitutional leader, Smith says, preserves constitutional order while promoting liberty and change. It’s a balancing act that requires equal parts boldness and restraint. Lincoln cast the challenge of this style of



Campaign banners couldn’t lift the spirits of President Abraham Lincoln in the summer of 1864. Though he expected to lose his reelection bid, he would hear nothing of using wartime exigencies as an excuse to postpone the vote.

DAVID J. & JANICE L. FRENT COLLECTION / CORBIS



leadership in the form of a question included in an 1861 message to Congress: “Must a government, of necessity, be too *strong* for the liberties of its own people, or too *weak* to maintain its own existence?”

Juggling these conflicting priorities sets constitutional leadership apart from other leadership types, Smith says, focusing on three in particular. The first, which the 20th century would label “realpolitik,” was enunciated by Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1513): Leaders aspiring to greatness should let the ends justify the means. Charismatic leadership, described by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), is another type. Charismatic leaders have a passionate devotion to a cause that, in turn, inspires devotion in others, but such leaders are not constrained by any “fixed principles of action.” Progressive leaders—Woodrow Wilson, for example—believe that all problems of governance can be solved by scientific or technical means. The leader’s mission is to spearhead change. If the Constitution needs to be reinterpreted to accommodate this process, so be it.

Constitutional leadership incorporates elements of these styles while avoiding one major pitfall, according to Smith. None of the three types pay much heed

to preserving the institutional bases of governance.

Lincoln “argued that preserving and maintaining institutions may be more difficult than founding them,” Smith writes. Constitutional leaders will constantly face the challenge of thwarting Machiavellian competitors hungry for the glory that comes with creating a new order. To meet this challenge, Lincoln prescribed political inoculation: “Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap,” he proclaimed in his 1838 speech. “Let it become the *political religion* of the nation.”

## Lincoln founded his political faith on reverence for the Constitution.

Yet all constitutional leaders must also find a way to move forward. For Lincoln, this meant a return to the Republic’s fundamentals: equality for all and consent of the governed. He seized on the Declaration of Independence for the eloquence with which it expressed inviolable natural laws. In 1861 he avowed that “I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from

the sentiments embodied in the Declaration.” The commitment to equality articulated in the document, for example, informed Lincoln’s opposition to slavery.

Lincoln honored the Constitution even in the breach. During the Civil War he suspended habeas corpus, cracked down on antiwar demonstrators, and issued the Emancipation Proclamation. All these steps exceeded his explicit constitutional powers. But in each instance, Lincoln was careful to provide a constitutional basis for his action: his duty as commander in chief to “preserve, protect, and defend” the Constitution.

Lincoln recognized that the Constitution imposed clear limits. For instance, as his hopes for reelection dimmed in 1864, some suggested delaying the balloting. There was a war on; a vote could jeopardize the Union. Lincoln demurred, vowing to “co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration.”

Lincoln was no superman. Smith quotes political scientist Bernard Crick, who described the 16th president as “an indifferent administrator, disorderly, inconsistent, and even slothful.” But Smith concludes, “It is in this possibility of the mere politician serving as a great leader

in times of challenge—a paradox made possible by our constitutional forms—that the hope of our republic rests.” ■

## IT'S NOT THE SCIENCE, STUPID!

**THE SOURCE:** “Climate Science as Culture War” by Andrew J. Hoffman, in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2012.

REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS LIVE ON THE same planet. But you could be forgiven for thinking they don’t. Polls taken in 2010 found that nearly 70 percent of Democrats believed that global warming was occurring. Only 30 percent of Republicans agreed. The gap between the two groups was *wider* than it was in 2001.

The debate over whether greenhouse-gas emissions are raising global temperatures—and whether humans are to blame—has exited the realm of science and become an issue of “culture, worldviews, and ideology,” according to Andrew J. Hoffman, a professor of sustainable enterprise at the University of Michigan. That’s not entirely a bad thing. But it means that those who want to forge a national consensus to address climate change must learn to think in different terms.

People are “boundedly rational,” Hoffman says; they can’t fully investigate



the facts on all issues, so they use other means to arrive at their positions, often taking cues from groups they identify with, whether on the basis of ideology, occupation, or some other form of association or affinity. Bounded rationality is one of the forces that has overtaken the climate change debate. Research shows, for instance, that the more informed about climate science Republicans are, the less concerned they are about its effects. Deeper immersion in the issue seems to correlate with tighter group affiliations.

## **Don't dismiss politics, culture, and emotion from the climate change debate—they're all useful.**

The debate often isn't really about science at all. "When people hear about climate change, they may . . . hear an implicit criticism that their lifestyle is the cause of the issue or that they are morally deficient for not recognizing it." They feel attacked. Given that, as Hoffman believes, dealing with climate change will require taking a hard look at everything from the kinds of lawn mowers suburbanites use to "new and

perhaps unprecedented forms of global ethics and governance," it's no wonder some people dig in their heels.

What to do? Get over the notion that it's all about the science, he urges. Don't try to dismiss politics, culture, and emotion. They are going to be needed. No matter what their beliefs, few people are going to make the "the abiding commitments" to sacrifices that will be necessary to tackle climate change purely on the basis of rational argument.

Some of Hoffman's other suggestions: First, recognize that science still matters. The argument can't be left to bull-headed climate-change deniers and shrieking doomsayers. In 2011, only 39 percent of Americans believed that "most scientists think global warming is happening." In reality, there's a scientific consensus (though not unanimity) on the point. Scientists as a group still sway public opinion; the public needs to know about their collective judgment.

Remember that people are committed to more than one principle. Some conservatives may distrust scientists, for example, but care deeply about national security and competitiveness. They might be persuaded by arguments about the threat that oil dependency poses to the United States.

Even careful language choices can make a difference. Only 44 percent of Republicans in one recent study said they considered “global warming” to be real. When asked about “climate change,” however, 60 percent acknowledged its existence. The challenge needs to be re-framed in a positive light: Scientists and others who would shape opinion should “stress American know-how and our capacity to innovate.” Climate “brokers” from doubters’ own communities can also make a difference. For example, in

2010 Pope Benedict XVI cited climate change as a threat to humanity.

Science rarely provides a smoking gun, and it won’t in this case, Hoffman observes. Yet its arguments can prevail. For years, major portions of the public doubted the scientific link between smoking and lung cancer. “Absolute certainty” is still lacking. Yet today, those doubts are history—and so is the argument over the issue. America’s war over climate change could go the same way. ■



## ECONOMICS, LABOR &amp; BUSINESS

# THE GREAT MANAGEMENT DEBATE

**THE SOURCE:** “The Management Century” by Walter Kiechel III, in *Harvard Business Review*, Nov. 2012.

IN 1927, AT WESTERN ELECTRIC’S Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois, professors from Harvard Business School set about determining what made workers tick. Their simple but elusive objective: maximizing productivity.

The researchers tried all kinds of strategies on a group of young women assembling parts: more breaks, financial incentives, even better lighting. None of those accounted for much, recounts Walter Kiechel III, former head of Harvard Business Publishing and former managing editor of *Fortune* magazine. To everyone’s surprise, social factors proved pivotal. Elton Mayo and his Harvard colleagues realized that productivity increased because of the simple fact that the Hawthorne workers had been



WESTERN ELECTRIC COMPANY HAWTHORNE STUDIES COLLECTION. BAKER LIBRARY HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS, HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

These workers, shown assembling electromagnetic relays at Western Electric Company’s Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois, in 1930, were among the subjects of a study that revolutionized modern management thinking. Harvard Business School professor Elton Mayo said the women’s output rose because they “became a team and the team gave itself wholeheartedly and spontaneously to cooperation in an experiment.”

consulted by the researchers during the experiment and because the women had developed a strong, positive group dynamic.

The Hawthorne studies revealed that “workers were not mere automatons to be measured and goosed with a stopwatch; that it was probably helpful to inquire after what they knew and felt; and that a group had substantial control over how much it was prepared to produce.” At a time when management was thought to be a simple science of supervision and incentives, these were novel insights.

## For decades, management’s “numbers people” have battled its “people people.”

Ever since, Kiechel says, management’s “numbers people” have battled its “people people.” Before World War II, the former swore by texts such as *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), by Frederick Winslow Taylor, an engineer who held that there was “one best way” to accomplish any task.

On the strength of works beginning with *Concept of the Corporation* (1946), by management maven Peter Drucker,

the “people people” overtook such mechanistic and impersonal thinking in the middle of the century. Call theirs the warm-and-fuzzy approach to management. Following from the experiments at Hawthorne, it holds that every employee has potential and every institution is a delicate social system. Treat both with care, and your organization will be handsomely rewarded.

Economic setbacks and technological change brought the numbers people back to the fore in the 1970s and ’80s, led by number-crunching consultants in the mold of Bruce Henderson’s pioneering Boston Consulting Group. Strategy was their mantra. Where companies used to react to the market, consultants implored executives to dictate to it—and to their employees. “Strategy’s constant companion and facilitator,” Kiechel writes, was “the imperative to take a sharp pencil and a stopwatch . . . to every aspect of the company’s operations.”

At business schools, finance professors and hardnosed management theorists such as Michael Porter, author of *Competitive Strategy* (1980), displaced teachers who’d been offering courses in “soft” fields such as organizational dynamics. Professional managers were in high demand—the number of MBAs



awarded per year grew from 26,000 in 1970 to 67,000 in 1985.

Concern for “stakeholders,” such as labor unions, gave way to solicitude for shareholders. As executive pay ballooned and the pressure grew to reward stock shareholders, many companies lost sight of Drucker’s emphasis on the centrality of employees. Layoffs and financially risky hostile takeovers ensued. A new “corporate reengineering” theory inspired many corporate makeovers and upheavals. The days of treating employees as people were over.

Or were they? The softer side of management persisted, exemplified by *In Search of Excellence*, the smash 1982 bestseller by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman Jr. “For the next 30 years, right down to our own day,” Kiechel says, “the two strains of thought . . . would coexist in uneasy tension.”

Managerialism has now gone global. In 2011, some 500,000 people around the world earned an MBA or an equivalent degree. This is all to the good, Kiechel insists. “Capitalism and the managerial ideas that struggle to make it more productive have indisputably rendered the world richer and better educated. . . . [T]here will never be ‘the one best way.’ But there’s almost always a better way.” ■

## THE HIDDEN ROOTS OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

**THE SOURCE:** “The Politics of Consumer Debt: U.S. State Policy and the Rise of Investment in Consumer Credit, 1920–2008” by Louis Hyman, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Nov. 2012.

DON’T BLAME GREEDY BANKERS AND HEDGE fund managers for everything that went wrong in the financial crisis of 2007–08. Decades of poorly conceived government policies set the stage by channeling money into consumer borrowing.

A crucial step, writes Louis Hyman, a historian at Cornell’s ILR School, was the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) during the Great Depression. Previously, mortgage finance had been the domain of local banks, constrained by local resources. The new institutions tapped much larger sources of capital. The FHA insured mortgage loans, and Fannie Mae bought mortgages from banks and re-sold them to investors. Under the FHA’s Title I program, moreover, the agency insured small home-improvement loans to consumers. In 1935, lenders committed nearly a half billion dollars to loans for home improvements, an amount several times greater than the budget of the New

Deal's Public Works Administration.

All of these measures unlocked desperately needed capital and helped the economy, but there were other effects. Commercial banks in the past had been wary of lending to consumers; the new federal financial infrastructure encouraged the banks to dip their toes into that market. And to the degree they did they siphoned credit away from small and medium-sized businesses.

The real problems began in the 1960s, Hyman says, "as federal policymakers lost sight of how the economy was constructed by their policy." Watching America's suburbs flourish while its cities moldered, Congress wrongly concluded that easy credit (rather than good jobs) was responsible for the suburbs' growth and set about trying to increase the flow of mortgage dollars. In the past, Fannie Mae had resold individual mortgages to investors, but on February 19, 1970, along with another institution, it issued the first mortgage-backed securities, packaging mortgages into bonds that had many more potential buyers. Again, the price was paid in reduced credit available to businesses.

In 1983 came another crucial federally sponsored financial innovation, the collateralized mortgage obligation (CMO). Now mortgage bonds were sliced into tranches, each with different interest

## Federal policymakers lost sight of how much credit they were funneling to consumers.

rates and maturity dates. Investors loved them—so much so that financial institutions applied the idea to credit card debt, car loans, and many other forms of debt. The credit explosion was born.

In the past, Hyman says, banks and other mortgage lenders had asked themselves, "Can I sell this loan if I make it?" Now they asked, "How can I produce more loans for the market?" They flooded high-risk borrowers and redlined neighborhoods with aggressive loan offers, even as businesses in those same neighborhoods found loans hard to get.

Until 1970, Hyman concludes, a "virtuous system . . . balanced business and consumer debt." The federal government had often used its power to steer credit into business investment, which led to the creation of high-paying jobs. "Even now, as we consider remedies to the financial crisis, we should be considering not just what the state can restrict but what it can do" to shape credit markets and help industry. "Personal debt," Hyman reminds us, "is anything but individual." ■



## SOCIETY

# A FIRE'S UNSEEN BURNS

**THE SOURCE:** “The Long-Term Impact of Physical and Emotional Trauma: The Station Nightclub Fire” by Jeffrey C. Schneider, Nhi-Ha T. Trinh, Elizabeth Selleck, Felipe Fregni, Sara S. Salles, Colleen M. Ryan, and Joel Stein, in *Plos One*, Oct. 2012.

ON FEBRUARY 20, 2003, THE 1980S metal band Great White opened its set at the Station, a nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island, with an impressive pyrotechnic display. The packed house of more than 450 fans roared their approval. But sparks landed on flammable sound insulation near the stage, igniting a furious blaze. The fire became one of the deadliest in U.S. history: In the panicked rush to escape, 100 people were killed and 200 more were injured.

The trauma that night left an indelible mark on the survivors. Surveying them several years after the event, Jeffrey C. Schneider, a physician at Harvard Medical School, and his colleagues found high rates of alcohol abuse, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms. There may be lessons in the experience on how to treat survivors of all kinds of trauma, from war to natural disasters.



REUTERS / CORBIS

**Jack Russell, front man of the hard rock band Great White, grieves the day after the 2003 Station nightclub fire. Great White guitarist Ty Longley was killed in the blaze. Even uninjured survivors struggled to cope with its trauma long after the fire.**

Schneider and his colleagues were surprised to discover that victims who emerged from the Station physically unscathed suffered long-term setbacks as serious as those that afflicted burn victims. Of the 104 injured and uninjured victims who returned a survey sent to all known survivors between 2005 and '07, both groups reported an abnormally low general quality of life.

The similarities didn't end there. Sixty-two percent of burn victims needed

psychological counseling; 58 percent of those who were not injured needed it as well. Thirty-five percent of the injured and 21 percent of the uninjured suffered severe posttraumatic stress symptoms. (Another 21 percent and 24 percent, respectively, reported moderate symptoms of posttraumatic stress.) While 38 percent of the injured admitted to alcohol misuse since the fire, some 47 percent of the unhurt also reported it.

Employment after the fire proved the exception; burn victims were harder hit by work-related problems than their uninjured counterparts. Less than 70 percent of burn victims returned to the job they had held at the time of the fire, compared with more than 90 percent of the people who were unhurt. The injured, many of whom endured long hospitalizations and bore significant scars, reported higher rates of unemployment or only part-time work subsequent to the fire. A third of injured survivors who responded to the survey said they were currently out of a job.

Though burns compounded survivors' problems, especially in employment, emotional trauma was the main source of longer-term ills, the authors conclude. As in war zones and areas hit by natural disasters, the uninjured probably received no medical care and thus had

## Whether they suffered burns or not, the fire's survivors bore similar psychic scars.

little access to services to help them cope. The lesson of West Warwick, Schneider and his colleagues believe, is that such services should be urged upon survivors of trauma. ■

## THE LIMITS OF MENTORS

**THE SOURCE:** "Longer-Term Impacts of Mentoring, Educational Services, and Learning Incentives: Evidence From a Randomized Trial in the United States" by Núria Rodríguez-Planas, in *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, Oct. 2012.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A MEDIOCRE HIGH school student from a disadvantaged background receives special attention? Beginning in 1995, at a cost of nearly \$25,000 per pupil over five years, the federal Quantum Opportunity Program put this question to the test. The program, whose goal was to raise high school graduation and college enrollment rates, showered 580 students at 11 high schools in cities such as Washington and Houston with professional mentors, tutoring, and cash awards throughout their high school years. The long-term



results were decidedly mixed, reports Núria Rodríguez-Planas, a research fellow at the Institute for the Study of Labor in Bonn, Germany.

Initially, Quantum students graduated from high school or obtained a GED both more quickly and at higher rates than their peers in a control group, largely thanks to strides made by female participants in the program. But two years after the initial survey, that advantage disappeared as high school dropouts in the control group reversed course and earned GEDs.

Employment was also a disappointment. Five years after the end of the program, the Quantum students were no more likely than the control group to be holding down a job. The poor performance of Quantum men was the key cause. The women in the program were more likely to be employed, and many had higher-quality jobs—they were 25 percent more likely to have a job with health insurance than women in the control group.

**Young people who had mentors were more likely than others to get in trouble with the law.**

A more dubious distinction set the Quantum cohort apart: By the time they reached their mid-twenties, they were actually a bit more likely to have been arrested for a crime than the control group. One possible explanation is that by pleading with schools and the police on their charges' behalf, mentors may have sheltered these young people from consequences when they got into trouble, thus increasing the likelihood of riskier behavior down the road.

Quantum's biggest bright spot was its impact on education. Students in the program went to college at higher rates than their peers. Women can claim credit for this trend, too. They were 20 percent more likely to attend a postsecondary institution (nearly 69 percent of Quantum women versus 55 percent of the control group), while the impact for men was half that much (and deemed statistically insignificant). Monetary incentives may have played a part in this superior performance; Quantum graduates who enrolled in college received an average of more than \$1,000 in awards from the program.

Quantum was "widely regarded as successful" in short-term evaluations conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Rodríguez-Planas says the picture over the long run is not so rosy. ■

# DISTRACTED INTO DEBT

**THE SOURCE:** “Some Consequences of Having Too Little” by Anuj K. Shah, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Eldar Shafir, in *Science*, Nov. 2, 2012.

WHY DO POOR PEOPLE SO OFTEN WASTE money and pile up debt? For years, social scientists have blamed environmental factors and personality traits unique to the poor. But Anuj K. Shah, a behavioral scientist at the University of Chicago, Harvard economist Sendhil Mullainathan, and Eldar Shafir, a professor of psychology at Princeton, say something both more innate and more universal is at work.

Call it the tunnel vision of scarcity. When funds are low, all humans—not just the poor—focus much more intently on short-term demands. We put so much cognitive energy into immediate concerns that there is little left for long-term considerations. The same dynamic prevails in other domains: People short of time or hungry for food also have short time horizons.

Shah and colleagues devised a series of clever laboratory experiments to show how the dynamic works. In an Angry Birds–style video game, players could score points by clearing targets with a slingshot. Some players, the “poor,” were

given 30 shots (three per level), while others received 150 (15 per level). In each group, some players were given the option of borrowing shots from later rounds in order to avoid having to repeat a level. But they would pay an “interest rate” of 100 percent—one shot.

**Poor people put so much cognitive energy into meeting daily needs that little is left for longer-term planning.**

With just three shots per level at their disposal, the poor faced a great temptation to borrow. Those who were allowed to borrow performed worse in the game than the poor who had to make do with three shots per round. In effect, scarcity caused the poor players with borrowing rights to misjudge, and they overborrowed. (The ability to borrow had no impact on the scores of “rich” players, those given 15 shots per level.)

Remarkably, all of the poor players in the experiment took longer to aim their shots than the rich players did. And that often paid off: The poor players who couldn’t borrow scored more points per



shot than their rich counterparts. But trying hard to make every shot count came with a cognitive cost for the poor who were allowed to borrow: The more time they spent aiming their shots, the more shots they borrowed from later rounds.

To make sure these results weren't a fluke, the authors designed a similar test, based on the television game show *Family Feud*, making time rather than shots the scarce commodity. The results were essentially the same. In another version of the same game, the researchers gave some players the ability to preview the next round's question. With more cognitive resources to spare, rich players took advantage of the preview feature to improve their performance. Poor players failed to notice this feature, and their scores did not improve.

Shah and colleagues also found that the cognitive costs of poverty are measurable. In another experiment, based on the game show *Wheel of Fortune*, the researchers administered a simple cognitive test after the game. With many more guesses to use, the rich players might exhibit more fatigue and record lower scores. But it was the poor players who suffered, scoring lower.

The three researchers don't think their findings show that poor people are forever condemned to short-term thinking. In the real world, the poor generally do not save much money, but many will for very particular purposes—to buy a vacuum cleaner, for example. That tendency provides an opportunity to change behavior by getting people to focus on more of their specific future needs and desires. ■

## RELIGION &amp; PHILOSOPHY

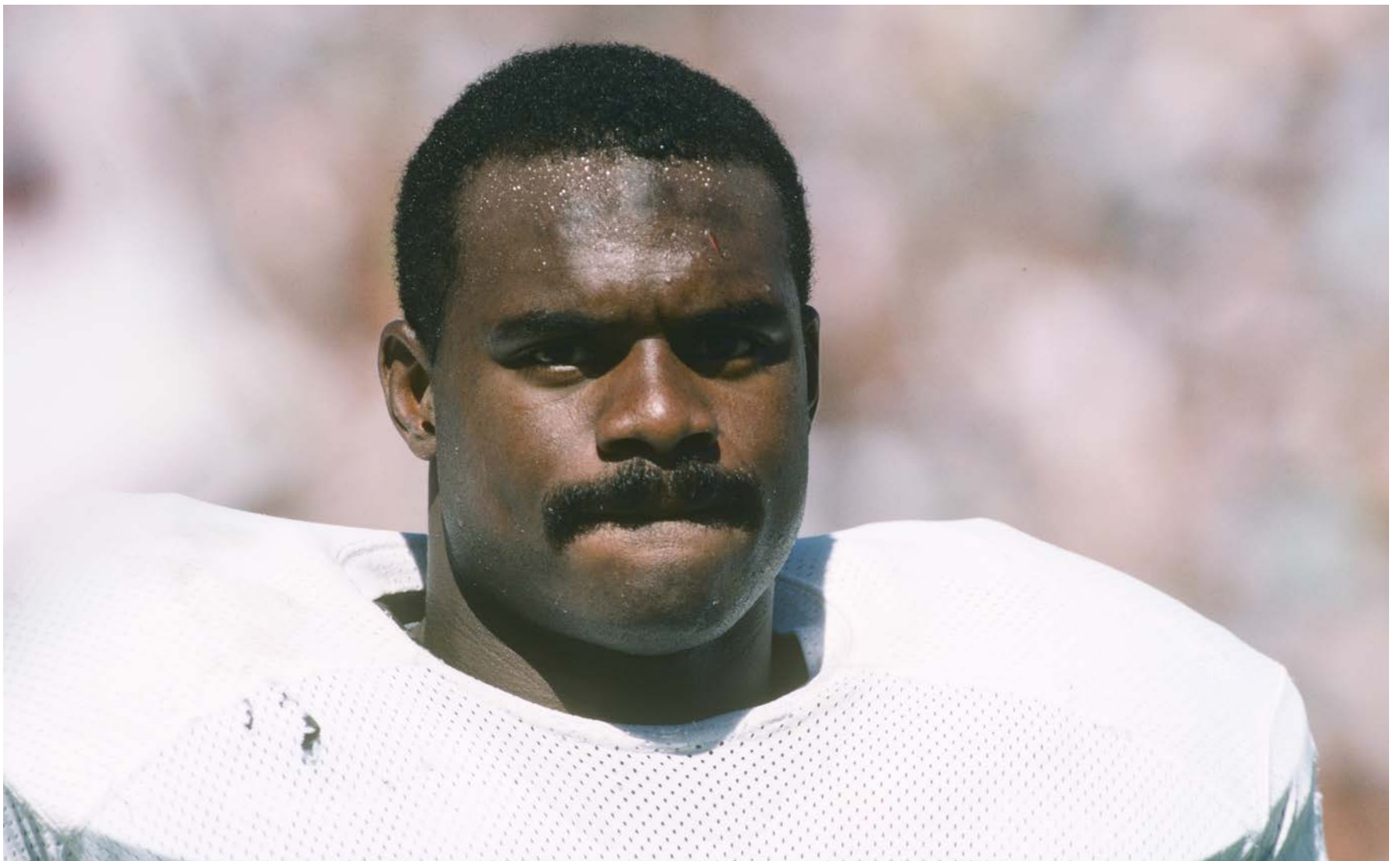
## FAREWELL TO FOOTBALL

**THE SOURCE:** “Unnecessary Roughness: The Moral Hazards of Football” by Benjamin J. Dueholm, in *The Christian Century*, Sept. 19, 2012.

FOOTBALL IS THE NEW GLADIATORIAL COMBAT, and players bear the wounds to prove it. Sixty-three percent of National Football League players sustained an injury of some sort during the 2010 season. One in 20 suffered at least one concussion, an injury which, if incurred

repeatedly, is linked to cognitive and emotional problems that appear years after players hang up their cleats. Benjamin J. Dueholm, a Lutheran pastor in Wauconda, Illinois, and a die-hard Green Bay Packers fan, loves the gridiron. But he argues that it’s time for American Christians to take a long look at the damage done by the game.

It wouldn’t be the first time Christians have cried foul on popular sport, Dueholm notes. Church fathers objected to violent spectacles in ancient Rome, not least the bouts between gladiators. “The man who when he sees a quarrel



**Former NFL safety Dave Duerson committed suicide in 2011. Duerson suspected near the end of his life that he had a degenerative brain disease associated with head trauma. An autopsy revealed that he was correct. Duerson’s son is suing the NFL and Riddell, a helmet manufacturer, for negligence.**

NFL PHOTOS / AP IMAGES



on the streets coming to blows will try to quiet it,” wrote the early Christian theologian Tertullian, “will in the stadium applaud fights far more dangerous.” Tertullian mourned the fate of the bloodied gladiators, many of whom were criminals serving out sentences. Like Augustine, another Church Father, Tertullian worried that the deadly games desensitized eager onlookers and stripped them of compassion.

## Some 67,000 high school football players suffer concussions every year.

Dueholm argues that the same spiritual and, particularly, physical concerns apply to America’s most popular sport. Some 67,000 high school football players suffer concussions every year, according to official tallies, and many more concussions go unreported. At the youth and college levels, moreover, players receive no salary or health benefits. At the professional level, thousands of former NFL players and their relatives have recently filed scores of lawsuits against the league for treating concussions too lightly and withholding information linking head trauma to long-term cognitive ailments.

The worst of these is chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease. Through brain autopsies, more than 30 former NFL players have been posthumously diagnosed with the disease. Several affected players have committed suicide. One of them, Dave Duerson, a retired safety for the Chicago Bears, shot himself in the chest in 2011 in the tragic hope that research could be advanced through study of his brain. An autopsy confirmed that he had had CTE.

Spectators are affected, too. One study found that fans derive particular enjoyment from matchups that are perceived to have higher levels of violence. “Sensation-seeking” football viewers in a different study showed a spike in stimulation during violent plays. Those plays can make for incongruities, especially for Christians who preach peace. “I have more than once noticed myself reproaching my children for garden-variety squabbling,” Dueholm admits, “even as we watched [Packer linebacker] Clay Matthews land a bone-jarring hit on a quarterback.”

As “the central liturgical act of American civic religion,” football unites people of all stripes in a way that few national rituals do, Dueholm writes. Nonetheless, he warns, “the time may have come

for Christians to exercise what remains of our culture-shaping power by turning away from a game whose dangers are grave even as their extent is not fully known.” ■

## WHOSE ENLIGHTENMENT WAS IT?

**THE SOURCE:** “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique” by Sebastian Conrad, in *The American Historical Review*, Oct. 2012.

MOVE OVER, VOLTAIRE, AND MAKE ROOM for Yu Kilchun, Rammohan Roy, and a host of other strangers in the Enlightenment pantheon. Scholars and intellectuals have been hacking away at the Enlightenment for years, arguing that the “age of reason” was just a mirage or a cleverly veiled vehicle of oppression. Now Sebastian Conrad, a historian at Berlin’s Free University, argues that the very idea that the Enlightenment was solely a European creation is wrong.

The great ideas of the Enlightenment—individual rights, secularism, the belief in science—were not merely invented in the West and disseminated elsewhere, Conrad contends, but continuously reinvented around the world. And the Enlightenment didn’t end in 1800, as standard accounts say, but continued into the 19th century and beyond.

As if to blur the old boundaries, Conrad often speaks of Enlightenment rather than *the* Enlightenment.

**The very idea that the Enlightenment was solely a European creation is wrong.**

“Much of the debate about Enlightenment in Europe can be understood as a response to the challenges of global integration” as European explorers’ contacts with the Indians of North America, China’s Mandarins, and others raised new questions about human existence. But it wasn’t a one-way street. During the French Revolution, the National Assembly “explicitly denied the extension of civil rights to slaves.” It was only after a 1791 slave revolution in their Haitian colony that the French were compelled to rethink their position. Three years later, they abolished slavery.

It’s condescending and “Eurocentric,” Conrad continues, to cling to the traditional notion that the Enlightenment ended around 1800, because doing so excludes others’ contributions. “Whenever we open our mouths, it is to speak of ‘enlightenment,’ ” Japanese reformer



Tsuda Mamichi (1829–1903) declared in the 1870s. That’s not to say that non-Western experiences of Enlightenment always shared the same principles with their Western counterparts. Tsuda, for example, argued that Christianity was the vehicle of Enlightenment, precisely the opposite of what thinkers such as Voltaire and Denis Diderot believed. India’s Rammohan Roy (1772–1883) was a reformer who also defended Hinduism.

As it developed beyond Europe, Enlightenment came to be linked less to freeing individuals from the fetters of church and state than to “collective and

national projects” of improvement, according to Conrad. Often modernizers grafted new ideas onto existing traditions. “In Japan, the term *ri*, which in Confucian thought denotes the principle that bestows order and harmony on human society, was used to express the idea of laissez-faire and the rationality of market exchange.”

Ultimately, Conrad concludes, “it was only this process of global circulation, translation, and transnational coproduction that turned the Enlightenment into the general and universal phenomenon that it had always purported to be.” ■



## ARTS &amp; LETTERS

# MANUSCRIPTS ILLUMINATED

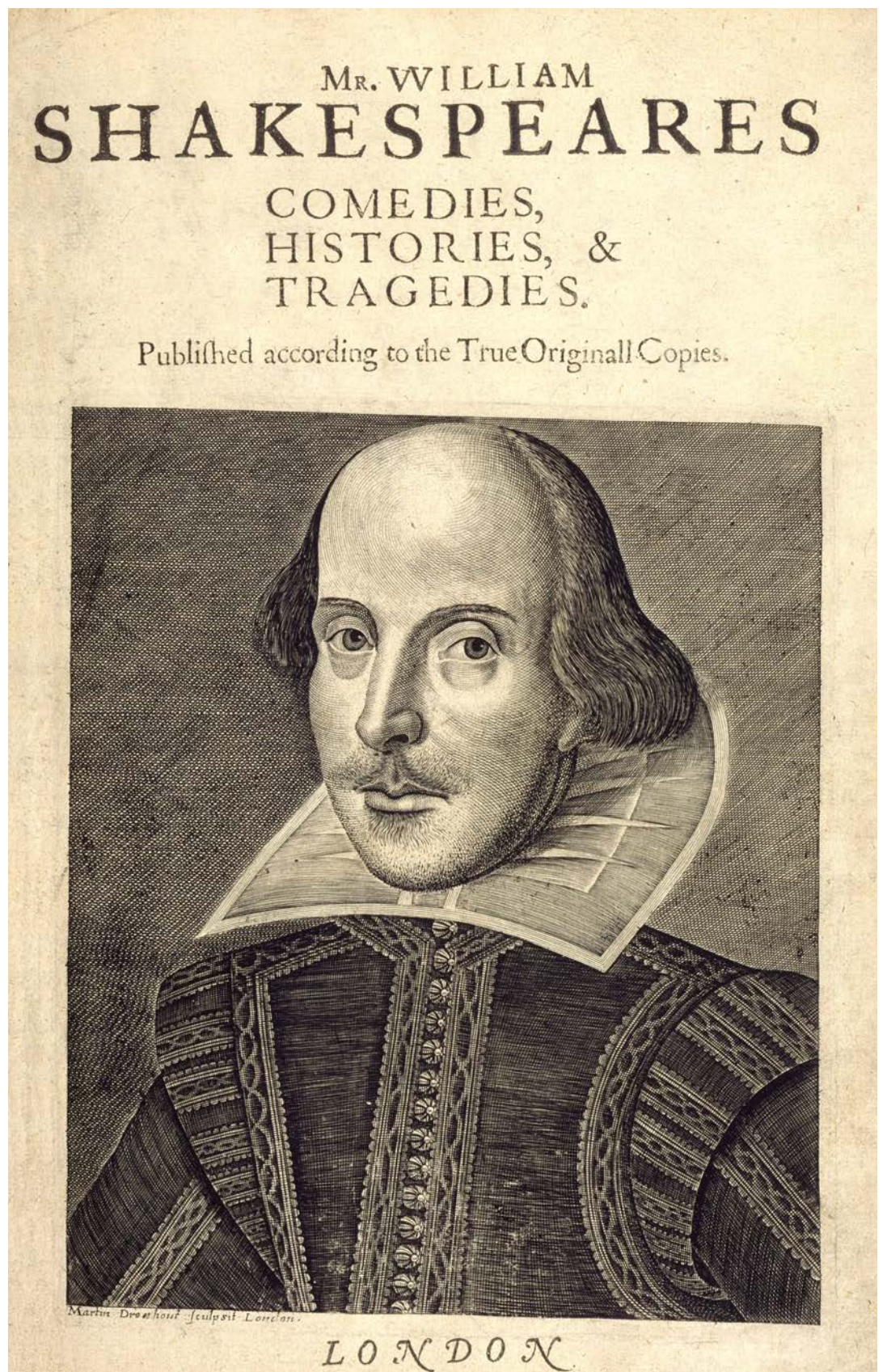
**THE SOURCE:** “What Is a Rare Book?” by Fred C. Robinson, in *The Sewanee Review*, Fall 2012.

IN 1623, SEVEN YEARS AFTER William Shakespeare died, two of his friends and fellow actors collected 36 of his plays, half of them never before published, thereby wresting such titles as *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest* from oblivion. An original copy of this collection of the Bard’s work, known as the First Folio, now has an asking price of nearly \$5 million. It is considered a rare book, writes Fred C. Robinson, a librarian of Yale’s Elizabethan Club collection of rare books, yet copies are not scarce: 230 are known to exist today. But as is the case for the Gutenberg Bible, printed in the 15th century and now surviving in 47 copies, the First Folio’s “desirability far exceeds its availability.”

Rare books’ real value, Robinson maintains, is not monetary but historical. Such books provide a window

on the emergence of printing and, indeed, the “intellectual founders” of the modern age.

Books published before 1501, called incunabula (“swaddling clothes” in Latin, indicating their arrival during the



THE BRITISH LIBRARY / ROBANA VIA GETTY IMAGES

**In 2001, a copy of Shakespeare’s First Folio, published in 1623, fetched \$6.2 million at Christie’s in New York. The First Folio is precious but not very scarce; 230 copies are known to exist.**



“infancy of the art of printing”), tell a lot about the cultural history of their countries of origin. Early English printers, for instance, are notable for producing books in the vernacular, not Latin. Pioneer printer William Caxton strove for “the edification of ‘simple persones’ as much for ‘erudicion and lernyng,’ ” Robinson notes, and this populist bent would become “increasingly important in English intellectual history.” Even the typeface used in early books is instructive: Because schools taught children to read gothic type, or black letter, modern scholars infer that pages printed in that font were meant for lay audiences, while texts in roman or italic were for sophisticated readers.

Association copies, rare books containing evidence that they were “associated with an important person,” are especially collectible, and getting your hands on one confers more than boasting rights. Scholars are intrigued by verses a reader inscribed in Sir Thomas Overbury’s *A Wife Now the Widdow of Sir Thomas Overburye Being A most exquisite and singular poem of the choice of a wife* (1614). Signed with the initials J. M., the stanzas echo the rhyme scheme, meter, and imagery of some of John Milton’s published work.

The majority of rare books are prized

because they are the earliest printings of treasured literary works. To illustrate the practical value rarities have in fostering “appreciation and understanding,” Robinson turns again to Shakespeare. His *Hamlet* survives in three seminal editions, but only one is truly the author’s. The first edition, of 1603, was printed by manuscript pirates who hired an actor (he’d once played a minor role in *Hamlet*) to recite the play from memory. A bad memory it was—even the famed “To be or not be” soliloquy is corrupted; only the words of the minor character Marcellus are rendered almost perfectly.

**The first edition of *Hamlet* was a pirated text created by hiring an actor to recite the play from memory.**

The owners of the play, the acting company to which Shakespeare had sold the rights, countered the pirates with a quarto printed the following year, 1604, proclaiming it “the true and perfect copie” on its title page. It is still considered as such. The First Folio of 1623 is close to the original, but it was published using only what the acting company had on hand—a working copy from which

a director had cut and added lines and inserted stage directions.

All three editions—1603, 1604, and 1623—are considered rare. The 1603 edition can teach us about the pirating practices of Shakespeare's day; from the First Folio, we can learn about the staging of his plays. But only the 1604 edition is authentic, only three copies of it survive, and only one of those is in perfect condition. That copy is assessed at \$10 million, Robinson writes, "but the book is in fact priceless." ■

## TELEVISION'S NEW GOLDEN AGE

**THE SOURCE:** "Storied TV: Cable Is the New Novel" by Thomas Doherty, in *The Chronicle Review*, Sept. 21, 2012.

A RANDOM EPISODE OF THE MULTISEASON AMC drama *Mad Men* or HBO medieval fantasy *Game of Thrones* is not likely to enlighten a first-time viewer. What's this allusion to adman Don Draper's secret past? Who rules the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros? Welcome to the world of "Arc TV," Thomas Doherty's name for a new breed of television shows that throw old conventions out the window. Tidy endings to every episode and static characters are out. Long arcs of character and plot development filmed in big-ticket productions are in.

Doherty, chair of American studies at Brandeis University, says this is a game changer: The tube may have pulled ahead of the silver screen as the premier medium in Hollywood. Arc TV is "where the talent, the prestige, and the cultural buzz now swirl." These shows may appear on the small screen, but they are watched like movies and unfold like novels. "For the viewer who tunes in late, the strands of the intricate plot lines may seem too tangled ever to unthread, but the insular complexities are how the shows pack their punch."

## Hollywood moviemakers are watching their backs.

So much of a punch that viewers who invest hours upon hours in these series demand artistic perfection. That's often what they get. Meticulous set design lends *Mad Men* an uncanny 1960s verisimilitude. The desert cinematography of *Breaking Bad*, an AMC series about a teacher-cum-methamphetamine manufacturer in Albuquerque, would leave a big-screen director envious.

Doherty says the shift to Arc TV is no accident. Networks are less wary than



they used to be of airing shows with adult content, which opens up a world of thematic possibilities. More important, the way people watch TV has changed dramatically. Digital video recorders, plus access to shows online via computer, phone, or tablet, mean that fans never miss an episode. Every subtle plot twist or nuance of character—and there are many of both—is noted. DVD box sets give viewers the chance to consume shows in movie-length chunks, supplemented with bonus footage and commentary. Large, high-definition screens in dens and family rooms display action and drama in all their glory. “Heretofore

a medium of blinkered perspectives and talking heads, television now possesses the high resolution and horizontal space for expressive cinematography and precision-point mise en scène,” Doherty writes.

He credits *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) and the Baltimore-set crime drama *The Wire* (2002–08), both telecast on HBO, with being the first series to take advantage of these trends. They’ll hardly be the last. “The lineup hasn’t quite yet dethroned the theatrical feature film as the preferred canvas for moving-image artistry, but Hollywood moviemakers are watching their backs.” ■

## SCIENCE &amp; TECHNOLOGY

## HERDERS UNCOWED

**THE SOURCE:** “What Tragedy? Whose Commons?” by Fred Pearce, in *Conservation*, Fall 2012.

THE ANIZZAH, A BEDOUIN TRIBE IN EASTERN Jordan, once had free range of a 600-mile-wide swath of desert stretching between the Jordan and Euphrates Rivers. As nomads, the self-sufficient Anizzah herded sheep and camels, periodically shifting them to fresh pastures. Today, however, the Anizzah are “stuck behind the national boundaries of Jordan, Syria,

Iraq, Israel, and Saudi Arabia,” notes author and environmental consultant Fred Pearce, and they’re getting rid of their camels, once a status marker. Still, many families manage to get their sheep to pasturage by selling them to fellow Anizzah in adjacent countries and buying the animals back at the end of the season.

Pastoralists number in the hundreds of millions worldwide; another billion people combine farming with herding on common pastures. Herders “occupy, along with forest dwellers, many of the planet’s surviving commons.”



**A Gabbra herdsman drives his camels across Kenya’s Chalbi desert.**

JOHN WARBURTON-LEE / GETTY IMAGES

**Pastoralists depend on shared lands, but they’re increasingly squeezed by state borders and privatization.**



But pastoralists have gotten a bad rap, Pearce says, from environmentalists such as Garrett Hardin, who, in his 1968 article “The Tragedy of the Commons,” maintained that sharing pastures causes overgrazing and advocated private landownership.

## Pastoralists have gotten a bad rap.

There’s scant evidence of pastoralists inflicting permanent damage on the environment, Pearce counters; in fact, they’ve successfully managed collective pastures for generations. Farming is the real menace, plowing under native grasslands, whereas “in most places, cattle and other animals grazing the grasses and browsing the bush are, as a recent report from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature put it, ‘vital for ecosystem health and productivity.’”

Pastoralists contribute hugely to their countries’ economies. One-third of Mongolia’s gross domestic product comes from livestock; in Morocco, one-fourth. From the alpaca of the Andes to cashmere goats in Tibet, to India’s cattle, whose dung is burned in cooking fires, grazing animals provide “food, fuel,

clothing, and transportation.” Other goods gathered or produced by pastoralists include gum arabic, honey, milk, meat, and leather.

The rise of privatization endangers all of that, as in the case of the Oromo, an Ethiopian ethnic group numbering 30 million people. The cattle-herding Oromo have lost 60 percent of their pastureland in the past 50 years. Some of it became a national park, and several thousand acres more went to Dutch- and Indian-owned sugar estates. The land left to the Oromo is now overgrazed, and conflicts arise with neighboring ethnic groups in the struggle for space. Some crowded Oromo have turned to farming, smuggling, or city life—others to a violent secessionist group. Indeed, nomads pushed off their land have become prime recruits for terrorist and criminal organizations. Some members of West Africa’s Tuareg, in one startling example, have joined Al Qaeda groups in kidnapping and murdering foreigners in Mali and other countries.

“Africa is the last great stronghold of the commons,” Pearce writes: Four-fifths of its six billion acres are “not formally owned by anyone other than the state.” But that hardly secures the land for its residents. Take, for instance, Mozambique, which recently offered foreign

investors 50-year leases on 15 million acres—at the fire-sale price of nine dollars an acre per year. Herders must fight for laws to protect “customary land tenure.” Their indigenous counterparts in some corners of the globe have managed to do just that. Among them are Canada’s Inuit, Scandinavia’s Sami, America’s Indians, and Australia’s Aborigines. ■

## DECODING AUTISM

**THE SOURCE:** “Autism and the Technical Mind” by Simon Baron-Cohen, in *Scientific American*, Nov. 2012.

WHY DO KIDS DEVELOP AUTISM? BEFORE THE 1980s, scientists blamed environmental factors, particularly inattentive and unloving mothers. Now they know better: Autism has a lot to do with genetics—and, perhaps, testosterone levels.

Simon Baron-Cohen, a professor of developmental psychopathology at the University of Cambridge in England, says the hereditary details remain murky, but researchers are uncovering some surprising patterns in children with autism and the families they come from.

Extreme difficulty communicating and interacting with others is perhaps the most salient trait associated with autism, a condition that affects about one percent of the population. People with autism also exhibit a strong bias

toward what Baron-Cohen calls “systemizing,” which he defines as “the drive to analyze or construct a system,” whether mechanical (cars or computers) or abstract (mathematics). Even as children, autistic people are prodigious systemizers. They obsess about details—putting all the light switches in the same position, for example—and perform impressive feats of memorization. Scientists, engineers, and mathematicians have this particular mental gift in spades. (In a 1998 study, Baron-Cohen and a colleague found that Cambridge math students were nine times more likely to be autistic than their counterparts in the humanities.)

Baron-Cohen says it’s no coincidence that autism is especially prevalent among children whose parents are themselves systematic thinkers. Through “assortative mating,” he believes, systemizing people such as mathematicians and engineers tend to find mates with similar abilities. This leaves their kids more likely to develop autism.

There’s anecdotal support for the assortative mating theory. Children with a parent who attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are 10 times more likely than average to have autism, according to alumni reports. In a study of Eindhoven, the Netherlands’ Silicon



Valley, Baron-Cohen and a colleague found that elementary schools reported rates of autism nearly three times higher than those for grade schools in Dutch cities of similar size.

But assortative mating doesn't explain all of the peculiarities of autism. Among children with the classic form of the disorder, boys outnumber girls by a ratio of four to one. Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism with less severe symptoms, stretches that ratio to as much as nine to one. Girls with autism often prefer to play with toys traditionally associated with boys' play: Legos, trains, Erector Sets, and almost any other "system" with moving parts. And autistic girls suffer a high rate of polycystic ovary syndrome, which results from abnormally high testosterone levels.

Could testosterone, which is produced by males and females, play a role in autism? Baron-Cohen and a colleague at the Autism Research Center in Cambridge studied the amniocentesis results of 235 pregnant women to measure prenatal testosterone's impact on development. The prenatal stage is crucial because a male fetus produces, on average, more than twice as much testosterone as a female one. The two researchers found what they had expected: "The more testosterone surrounding a fetus in the

womb, the stronger the children's later interest in systems, the better their attention to detail, and the higher their number of traits associated with autism."

## Prenatal testosterone levels may help explain autism—and the mental worlds of men and women.

The role of testosterone makes sense, according to Baron-Cohen. After all, "strong systemizing is much more common in men than in women." That, he argues, is why men dominate the hard sciences but are underrepresented in psychology and medicine.

"Prenatal testosterone, if it is involved in autism, is not acting alone," Baron-Cohen writes. "And we should not draw the simplistic conclusion that all technical-minded people carry genes for autism."

The pattern seems plain enough, however. "Genes that contribute to autism may overlap with genes for the uniquely human ability to understand how the world works in extraordinary detail," Baron-Cohen writes, "to see beauty in patterns inherent in nature, technology, music, and math." ■

# THE WIKIPEDIA WAY

**THE SOURCE:** “Military History on the Electronic Frontier: Wikipedia Fights the War of 1812” by Richard Jensen, in *The Journal of Military History*, Oct. 2012.

WIKIPEDIA IS NOTHING IF NOT THOROUGH. Take the entry on the War of 1812. More than 2,400 self-appointed editors contributed to the 14,000-word article. Some 627 people spilled 200,000 words’ worth of digital ink arguing over its exact content. In April 2012, it garnered 172,000 page views.

Wikipedia is an impressive Internet ecosystem. The problem is that Wikipedians are running out of new material to write—and argue—about, and the number of dedicated editors is dwindling, according to Richard Jensen, a retired history professor and himself an avid Wikipedia editor.

Over a typical month in 2012, the English-language Wikipedia was the sixth most frequently visited Web site in the United States. Yet not even one visitor in a thousand opts to write or edit an article. In terms of productivity, Wikipedia’s heyday came and went in 2006 and 2007. Unpaid amateurs churned out 2,000 articles per day in the summer of 2006. But “by the time one million articles are written, it must tax ingenuity to think up something new.” Still,

narrow-gauge articles have proliferated; Wikipedia passed the four-million mark last year.

A core group of a few thousand highly active editors keeps Wikipedia humming. Fifteen hundred administrators, elected by their peers, have special powers. Ninety percent of active editors are male; 27 percent are under 21. (Some 13 percent are only in high school.)

With fewer articles to be added comes more scrutiny of what’s already been written. Just 15,000 of the four-million-plus entries on the English version of Wikipedia earn the “good article” classification, meaning that they are accurate, fully footnoted, neutral, and illustrated.

## Number of Wikipedia articles on warships of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: 56.

This is where the passions of Wikipedia’s partisans shine through. The history category has 905 “good” articles. But warfare blows that away, with 1,937 such articles, including 56 devoted to warships of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.



The novel-length dispute over the War of 1812 centered on which side won: Canada (then a British colony) or the United States. Some alleged that the entry leaned toward an American interpretation of events, a grave violation of Wikipedia's rigorous commitment to the principle of Neutral Point of View. In response, users painstakingly compared 13 draft versions of the article. They settled on a compromise. "In recent decades the view of the majority of historians has been that the war ended in stalemate," Wikipedia's entry concludes.

Jensen says a broader problem is that like so many other war-related entries, the War of 1812 article is long on battlefield details and short on politics and

context. "Social history content is rare, and cultural history even rarer," Jensen writes of Wikipedia, "but every little battle gets its own article."

On the flip side, *Encyclopedia Britannica's* entry on the War of 1812 is "sketchy on military and naval affairs," according to Jensen.

As encyclopedias go, Wikipedia has grown to maturity. But "it is not mature in a scholarly sense," Jensen says. In military history, he suggests ways to fix that, such as giving prolific editors access to professional scholarship and encouraging them to attend military history conferences. But such dedicated editors may be a vanishing breed. "The numbers keep falling as more and more have had their say and moved on." ■

## OTHER NATIONS

## NATION OF IMITATORS

THE SOURCE: “Copycat China” by Yu Hua, in *Prospect*, Sept. 2012.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA HAS ENDORSED a Chinese knockoff cell phone. Or so a manufacturer named “Harvard Communications” seems to claim. “This is my Blackberry,” reads a Chinese advertisement bearing the American president’s smiling face, “the Blockberry Whirlwind 9500!”

If a “Blockberry”—or a Nokir, Suny Ericcsun, or Samsing—fails to make

you feel like Obama, you can always commission a Chinese architect to build you an imitation White House. Some wealthy Chinese businessmen swear by them: work in the Oval Office and sleep in the Lincoln Bedroom.

Modern China, explains the popular Chinese novelist Yu Hua, is a playground of imitation, mimicry, and outright theft. “We don’t see anything wrong with copycatting Obama,” he explains in this excerpt from his new book, *China in Ten Words*. “With the exception of the party in power and our current government leaders,” he adds, “everybody else can be



Welcome to the village of Hallstatt, Guangdong, an exact copy of Hallstatt, Austria—minus the Alps. China’s *nouveau riche* don’t seem to mind.

VINCENT YU / AP IMAGES



copycatted and ridiculed, imitated and spoofed, at will.”

With no outlet for political expression, citizens turn to parody. In a popular Internet send-up of a government news broadcast after Beijing’s slow response to the 2008 powdered milk scandal, a pair of faux anchors straightfacedly explain that the usual crew is in intensive care after consuming contaminated milk.

## Modern China is a playground of imitation, mimicry, and outright theft.

Copycatting is a good thing when it empowers the voiceless. But it’s also symptomatic of the “moral bankruptcy and confusion of right and wrong” fostered by rapid change in China. And it reflects the tension between China’s closed political system and freewheeling economy, Yu says. “We find ourselves in a reality full of contradictions: conservative here, radical there.” Browse Chinese stores and you’ll find *shanzai* (“copycat”) cameras, sodas, milk, and laundry detergents. Surf the Web, and you’re sure to stumble upon copycat pop songs and TV shows. The word

itself has acquired a strange kind of legitimacy. Yu found a counterfeit copy of his novel *Brothers* at a stand outside his apartment. “No, it’s not a pirated edition,” the vendor assured him. “It’s a copycat.”

Yu sees the trend in journalism, too. Decades ago, his statements to reporters were always heavily edited by state censors. Now he often reads “interviews I have never given—remarks the reporter has simply concocted.” He once confronted an offending reporter. The journalist’s nonchalant response: “That was a copycat interview.”

Copycatting is not without historical precedent in China. During Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution, the Chinese masses wiped away the old set of Communist Party institutions and rigged up revolutionary replacements. “Soon there were too many copycat organizations and too little power to go around,” Yu says. After chaotic infighting, triumphant copycats shed their counterfeit roots and became “official” party leaders.

Will China, land of Mao (and a Mao copycat contest), somehow lurch forward in spite of the latest copycat craze? Yu isn’t sure. “The social fabric of China today is shaped by a bizarre mixture of elements, for the beautiful and the ugly,

the progressive and the backward, the serious and the ridiculous, are constantly rubbing shoulders with each other,” he concludes. “The copycat phenomenon is like this too, revealing society’s progress but also its regression.” ■

## INDIA’S BILLIONAIRE BOOM

**THE SOURCE:** “Where Do India’s Billionaires Get Their Wealth?” by Aditi Gandhi and Michael Walton, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct. 6, 2012.

INDIAN BILLIONAIRES ARE A NEW AND POWERFUL breed. There were only two in the mid-1990s; today there are 46. Entrepreneurs and heirs alike are reaping the rewards of India’s burgeoning economy. Is the billionaire boom a sign of healthy business dynamism, or does it suggest that a tiny cabal of oligarchs is taking over?

The evidence is mixed but troubling. Using data compiled by *Forbes* magazine, economists Aditi Gandhi and Michael Walton, of the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research, generated an overview of Indian billionaires’ social and business backgrounds. Some are breaking the caste mold—18 of the 46 come from outside the traditional merchant classes. A small number, including Shiv Nadar, the founder of technology

and outsourcing giant HCL, rose from lower and “backward” castes. Only one Muslim, Wipro chairman Azim Premji, has penetrated the uppermost echelons of the business elite. (Almost 15 percent of India’s population is Muslim.) Overall, the billionaires’ wealth equals about 10 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product, more than twice the proportion of GDP claimed by billionaires in China, South Korea, and other developing countries.

**The question is whether India is strong enough to police its business big shots.**

To do the bulk of their analysis, Gandhi and Walton split the billionaires into two groups based on how they made their fortunes. One group struck it big in “rent-thick” industries such as media, telecommunications, real estate, mining, and cement—sectors in which government favoritism and other forces often allow businesses to reap extra profits. The other group prospered in industries with sound regulation and less government intervention, such as information



technology and software, finance, manufacturing, and pharmaceuticals.

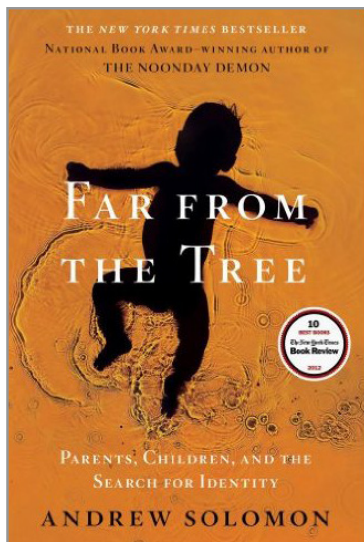
Walton and Gandhi found that while only 20 of the 46 billionaires were primarily involved in rent-thick industries, 60 percent of billionaire wealth was generated in these sectors. And that share has grown in the past dozen years. Not every rent-thick fat cat is crooked, of course, but the potential for corruption is clear. Massive scandals in real estate and construction have captured headlines, and India's Supreme Court recently forced cell phone companies to give up licenses for the wireless spectrum granted by the government in sweetheart deals.

Collusion between the state and the super-rich rarely ends well. In East Asia, Gandhi and Walton argue, rampant cronyism contributed to the financial crisis of the mid-1990s. But there are hopeful precedents too: The excesses of America's robber barons in the late 19th century sparked a wave of reform. Popular support for a corruption crackdown abounds in India. The question is whether the state is strong enough to police its rent-seeking business big shots. If it can't do the job, the authors warn, India will face a future of stunted growth, rising inequality, and feeble governance. ■

# CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

---



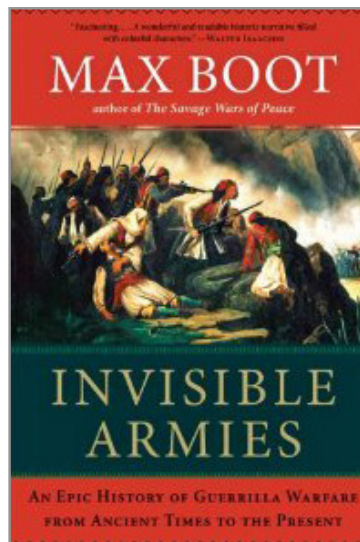
## FAR FROM THE TREE

By Andrew Solomon

**Reviewed by**  
**Sarah L. Courteau**

---

“Depression is the flaw...



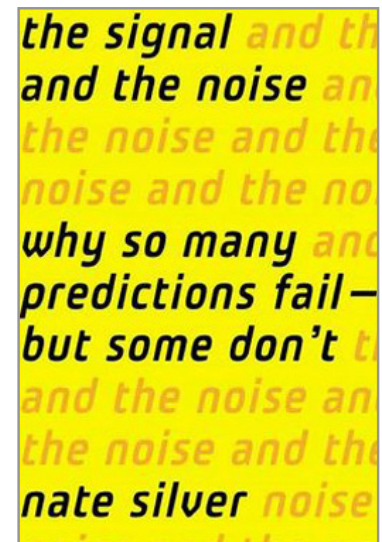
## INVISIBLE ARMIES

By Max Boot

**Reviewed by**  
**Martin Walker**

---

The Sioux and Apache  
tribes of North America...



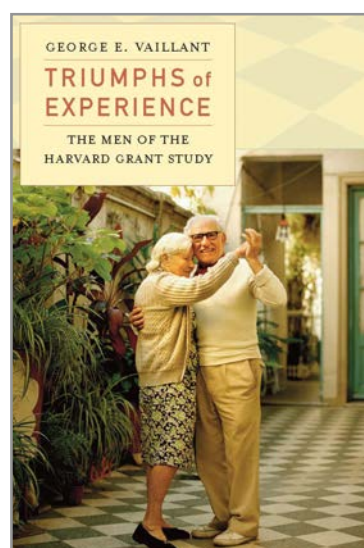
## THE SIGNAL AND THE NOISE

By Nate Silver

**Reviewed by**  
**Steven Lagerfeld**

---

Nate Silver is the new...



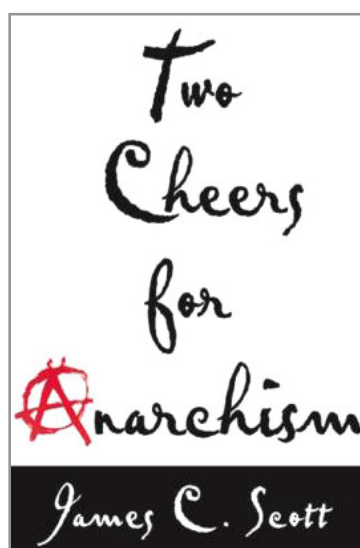
## TRIUMPHS OF EXPERIENCE

By George E. Vaillant

**Reviewed by**  
**Charles Barber**

---

When the psychiatrist...



## TWO CHEERS FOR ANARCHISM

By James C. Scott

**Reviewed by**  
**Nick Gillespie**

---

For those of us who...



*The Ties That Bind*

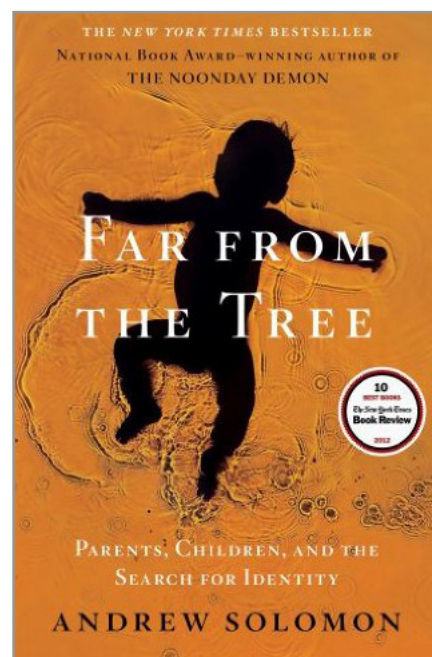
# FAR FROM THE TREE:

PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

REVIEWED BY SARAH L. COURTEAU

“DEPRESSION IS THE FLAW IN LOVE,” wrote Andrew Solomon in *The Noonday Demon*, his exploration of the disease that won the National Book Award in 2001. “To be creatures who love, we must be creatures who can despair at what we lose.” Depression was a scourge he had experienced personally, and the book he produced was intimate yet clinical: Solomon claims that he can veer into self-pity, but it’s not a thing he indulges in on the page. *Far From the Tree*, the book he has spent the last decade working on, addresses another vast subject, one that isn’t discussed as often as the dark caul of depression. This is a book about families in which a child is flawed—at least in the eyes of much of the world. In it, Solomon expounds on what has turned out to be his great and enduring theme: love and its costs.

In a gargantuan volume that weaves together personal histories (he in-



By Andrew Solomon  
Scribner  
962 pp. \$37.50

terviewed more than 300 families), cultural and historical background, and scientific research, Solomon, a journalist and lecturer in psychiatry at Cornell University, describes the steep challenges parents face when they raise children who are not like themselves. He includes chapters on families with children who are deaf, autistic, schizophrenic, severely disabled, transgendered, categorized as dwarfs, diagnosed with Down syndrome, classed as criminals, and conceived as the result of rape. He even has a chapter on prodigies—focusing on musicians—that demonstrates the gulf that being extraordinarily gifted can create between child and parent. While the focus remains on the families



**“Difference unites us,” Andrew Solomon writes in his work on parents with children not like themselves. Many parents come to see conditions such as deafness or Down syndrome as markers of not illness but identity.**

LAURA DWIGHT / CORBIS

he interviewed, Solomon frames his book with two autobiographical chapters. In the first, he describes the alienation he felt growing up with the “horizontal identity” (that is, an identity his mother and father did not share) of a gay man. The final chapter recounts the decision he and his husband made, during the writing of *Far From the Tree*, to raise from birth a child that was biologically Solomon’s own. (The biological mother was a surrogate.)

The gift Solomon gives readers is insight into situations that many with “normal” families (a term he ceaselessly

interrogates) don’t think they could imagine, much less manage. The gift Solomon gives his subjects is sympathy without pity. Solomon encounters not just acceptance but often celebration among the parents of these kids—and an attachment so fierce that it defines for him the universal parent-child bond. In support of that bond, parents of children with extraordinary needs, health issues, or abilities outside the realm of their own experience go to extraordinary lengths. They become researchers, teachers, activists, nurses, coaches, parole officers, and linguists. They move across the



country so their children can go to a better school. They spend every cent they have on treatments they can't afford. They learn sign language. They commit to having their children with them for life, or, equally difficult, to placing them in a home where they can receive the care they need.

Along the way, many parents are surprised at the strength and resourcefulness they discover in themselves. Timid personalities are transformed into “won't take no for an answer” advocates. Nancy Corgi, the mother of two children with autism, told Solomon, “My entire personality has changed. I'm quick to pick a fight; I'm argumentative. You don't cross me. I have to do what I have to do, and I'm going to get what I want. I never was like this at all.” Several parents who cared for a child with disabilities and were later diagnosed with cancer or another serious disease told Solomon that their child had instilled in them the fortitude to face their own treatment or even death.

But Solomon does not sugarcoat the cost of raising a child with a horizontal identity. Some couples' relationships, he found, are strengthened by the challenge. A number of his subjects' marriages, however, weren't able to endure the strain, even when both parents

remained devoted to their child. Perhaps most difficult of all is the lot of parents whose children don't appear to absorb or return the love they give. Some kids with autism or multiple severe disability can appear emotionally affectless. People who develop schizophrenia can grow openly hostile and even violent toward family members. As Solomon puts it, “Emotion is not gratis. To love a child who does not evidently mirror your love exacts a more terrible price than other love.”

---

**Perhaps most difficult of all is the lot of parents whose children don't appear to absorb or return the love they give.**

---

The stories Solomon tells and the history he recounts illustrate how far scientific understanding and social acceptance of many disabilities and differences have come. School programs and education centers tailored to the needs of autistic learners have been founded, and there are support and advocacy groups for parents as well as autistic people that did not exist until relatively

recently. Only a few decades ago, parents who gave birth to babies with Down syndrome were advised in the hospital to have their children immediately institutionalized, or were told that their “‘mongoloid’ would never learn to speak, think, walk, or talk.” People with Down syndrome in the public eye, including Jason Kingsley, who in the 1980s was a regular guest on *Sesame Street*, for which his mother was a writer, and Lauren Potter, a star on the current TV series *Glee*, have changed social attitudes toward Down syndrome.

But there is still a long way to go. A heartbreaking chapter on transgendered kids tells stories of utter acceptance at the same time that it documents instances of horrific bigotry. Anne O’Hara found that she and her children could no longer live in the Southern community where she grew up when her transgendered adopted son transitioned to a female identity and started going by “Kelly.” When they began receiving threats that Kelly would be killed or mutilated, O’Hara and her children moved out of state.

The subjects of Solomon’s book are, of course, those who agreed to talk to him, and as he acknowledges, they are the parents whose approach to rearing a child who is far from the tree is likely to have been positive and accepting. Many

are also well to do, a circumstance that is perhaps in part a function of Solomon’s social circle. (He is independently wealthy.) This means they can afford to go to extraordinary financial lengths, even though, as Solomon found, having money is not necessarily crucial to achieving a better outcome. Icilda Brown, a black woman living in the Bronx who worked as a housecleaner to support her five children, one of whom has learned to live with autism, now speaks to other parents of autistic kids. “I’ll say, ‘You see my son now. And now see your kid’s running and not talking. That was him. If you give up, your child doesn’t have a chance. I looked back, and I said to the Lord, ‘Oh, thank you for bringing me from such a *long* ways.’” Solomon remarks that Brown “seemed more at peace with her son’s condition than almost any other mother I met.”

There’s a reason *Far From the Tree* is more than 900 pages long—and that the version Solomon originally sent his publisher was twice that length. The stories he tells and the complex moral and philosophical questions he explores take time and space to tease out, and often he stands aside and lets his subjects tell the stories themselves. A major theme of the book is that what is best for one may not be best for all. Solomon



**Many of the parents he interviewed wrestle with the fact that their children may experience pain and distress as the price of their very existence.**

mostly leaves it to individuals, both his readers and his subjects, to decide how and where to draw those lines. At one point, he describes a woman who chose to give up her child with multiple severe disability to foster care, commenting, “I am enough of a creature of my times to admire most the parents who kept their children and made brave sacrifices for them. I nonetheless esteem Julia Hollander for being honest with herself, and for making what all those other families did look like a choice.” There are a few times when he is direct about the need to intercede on behalf of a child. After a two-page catalog of cases in which parents have murdered or attempted to kill their autistic children, some out of desperation and others out of a conviction that doing so is altruistic, Solomon balks at the suggestion that there are cases in which mercy killing is justified: “Courtroom

leniency sends a message to the society at large, to other parents, and to people with autism that autistic lives are less valuable than other lives.”

Many of the parents he interviewed wrestle with the fact that their children may experience pain and distress as the price of their very existence. Was it right to bring them into the world? Given what they know now, would these parents do it again? Those questions are particularly pointed in the case of a disability such as Down syndrome, for which increasingly sophisticated prenatal tests are available. Once they have children with disabilities, the question these parents face is whether they should wish for a cure for a son or daughter whom they’ve come to accept and love on the child’s own terms—or, barring a cure, what interventions are merited: cochlear implants for the deaf? limb lengthening for dwarfs? hormone treatment for transgendered children?

Not every parent, of course, will choose to bear and raise a child with differences. Many women abort fetuses diagnosed in the womb with a disability. Others carry the pregnancy to full term and give the child up to foster care or adoption. But many of the mothers and fathers Solomon interviewed can’t imagine choosing those options—or are glad they didn’t

have them at the moment of decision. “Most of us believe that our children are the children we had to have; we could have had no others,” Solomon concludes. “They will never seem to us to be hap- penstance; we love them because they are our destiny. Even when they are flawed, do wrong, hurt us, die—even then, they are part of the rightness by which we measure life itself, and they bring us to life as profoundly as we do them.”

Unlike many of the parents in Solo- mon’s book, Tom and Sue Klebold didn’t know from the time of their son Dylan’s birth about the “identity”—that of a homicidal and suicidal criminal—that would eventually separate them from him forever. Dylan Klebold was one of the two young men who shot 13 people to death at Columbine High School in 1999. But like the other parents Solo- mon interviewed, the Klebolds have grappled with the complex emotional and moral calculus of having brought their child into the world.

Solomon ends his chapter on ju- venile criminals with Sue Klebold’s words: “When it first happened, I used to wish that I had never had children, that I had never married. If Tom and I hadn’t crossed paths at Ohio State, Dylan wouldn’t have existed and this terrible thing wouldn’t have happened. But over time, I’ve come to feel that, for myself, I am glad I had kids and glad I had the kids I did, because the love for them—even at the price of this pain—has been the single greatest joy of my life. When I say that, I am speak- ing of my own pain, and not of the pain of other people. But I accept my own pain; life is full of suffering, and this is mine. I know it would have been better for the world if Dylan had never been born. But I believe it would not have been better for me.” ■

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



*David and Goliath*

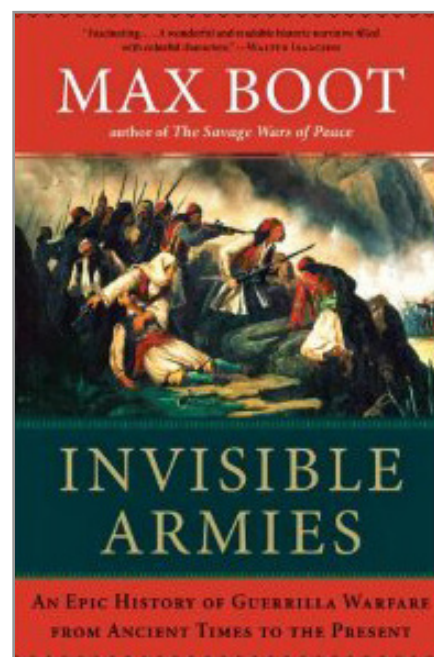
# INVISIBLE ARMIES:

## AN EPIC HISTORY OF GUERRILLA WARFARE FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE PRESENT

REVIEWED BY **MARTIN WALKER**

THE SIOUX AND APACHE TRIBES OF NORTH America had something profound in common with the colonists who established the United States. Like the Viet Cong, the Spanish irregulars who frustrated Napoleon, and the Afghan tribesmen who defeated the Soviet army and continue to challenge U.S. and NATO forces in our own day, they were guerrillas. The word “guerrilla” comes from the Spanish for “little war,” used to describe Spain’s 1808 uprising against Napoleon’s troops, but such a way of fighting is as old as human civilization itself. Guerrilla warfare is a rational response to overwhelming and organized force, the means by which the weak can frustrate, wear down, and overcome the strong, whether they be British troops at Lexington and Concord, French and later American troops in the Mekong Delta, or Hitler’s Wehrmacht in Yugoslavia.

It is the great merit of Max Boot’s



By Max Boot

Liveright

750 pp. \$35

study of guerrilla war that he stresses the venerable history of this style of fighting, starting with Thucydides’s account of how the Aetolian highlanders used their maneuverability and knowledge of the local terrain to defeat the hoplites of Athens in 426 BC. As soon as organized states began to form and to equip themselves with disciplined armies, they were opposed by enemies fighting in an older style. Boot writes, “Throughout most of our species’ long and bloody slog . . . warfare has been carried out primarily by bands of loosely organized, ill-disciplined, lightly armed volunteers who disdain open battle. They prefer to employ stealth, surprise, and rapid movement to harass, ambush, massacre, and terrorize their enemies





THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NYC

**American guerilla Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox,” operated in the wilds of South Carolina, as depicted in this 19th-century engraving, to help defeat the British during the Revolutionary War.**

while trying to minimize their own casualties through rapid retreat when confronted by equal or stronger forces. These are the primary features both of modern guerrilla warfare and of primitive, pre-state warfare.”

This does not necessarily imply that the guerrilla is a primitive. The surviving gold artwork of the Scythians of the sixth century BC demonstrates that they were a sophisticated people who

preferred the nomadic existence that was suited to their grass-land steppes. When the Persian emperor Darius demanded that they stand and fight, the Scythian leader Idanthysrus replied, “We Scythians have neither towns nor cultivated lands, which might induce us, through fear of their being taken or ravaged, to be in any hurry to fight with you. . . . We shall not join battle unless it pleases us.”

Armies are large and complex organizations, with training academies for officers and their own medical, financial, judicial, and logistics services; and they are usually designed to fight other armies of similar type. Sometimes armies develop the necessary skills and doctrine in time to prevail over unconventional forces. At the turn of the last century, the British eventually defeated the Boers of South Africa, brilliant guerillas of Dutch descent who had trekked north from the Cape



Colony in a vain attempt to escape British rule. And British troops were able to quell a mainly Chinese and communist insurgency in Malaya in the 1950s. But they lost to the Jewish irregulars in Palestine in the 1940s, and spent 30 grim years after 1968 convincing the Republicans of Northern Ireland that democratic politics would be preferable to continued urban guerrilla warfare.

Given the extraordinary range of

**For a political leader, the decision to pursue or to end a war comes down to a cost-benefit analysis: Can the political price of military defeat be afforded?**

experience the British Empire accumulated in fighting various guerrilla campaigns, Britain's armies have a better record than most. But their leaders could still be convinced, as in Palestine, that the possibility of success was too remote and too expensive to justify the effort. The Obama administration, having reviewed the results of a decade of war, seems to have made a similar appraisal of the current Afghan campaign.

Professional military men usually find such calculations difficult to make. They are trained to apply force and accept casualties in order to achieve military victory. A great merit of democratic government is that the politicians can overrule the generals and apply political considerations to the overall strategy, which is what President Richard Nixon did in Vietnam, reducing the American investment in the draining conflict and leaving another president to swallow defeat in 1975, when Saigon finally fell. Sometimes the politicians find it hard to persuade the soldiers. French president Charles de Gaulle was confronted with a military coup and then a prolonged terrorist campaign by the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète, a French paramilitary group, when he gave up on the cause of French Algeria in 1961.

For a political leader, the decision to pursue or to end a war comes down to a cost-benefit analysis: Can the political price of military defeat be afforded? In wars of choice, when little save prestige and moderate strategic advantage are at stake, the price is often worth paying if the opponent is sufficiently determined to keep inflicting costs and casualties. Opponents tend to understand this, and their target is not simply the enemy forces but their political will. This was

how Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh fought the French and the Americans. It was also how George Washington endured the winter at Valley Forge, before going on, with help from the American guerrilla Francis Marion, known as the Swamp Fox, to outlast the British resolve to continue the war. (Boot makes the neat point that the term “public opinion” made its first appearance at this time, in the works of historian Edward Gibbon. As Boot comments, “A parliamentary government could not prosecute a war that did not enjoy popular backing.”)

For the guerrillas, the stakes are usually much higher than they are for their enemies. The guerillas are fighting wars of necessity rather than of choice, against foreign (or heretical) domination or intolerable rule. The Swamp Fox wore a leather hat with a silver plate engraved with the motto “Liberty or Death.” But one contradiction inherent to guerrilla warfare is that in order to survive, guerillas usually have to impose at least as draconian a level of discipline and punishment as their opponents do. The guerrilla cannot afford to give quarter to traitors, spies, or deserters; and atrocities against enemy troops and their civilian sympathizers are common in waging war on the enemy’s morale and political

will. The line between a guerrilla and a terrorist can be a fine one.

Marion, a guerrilla of genius who had learned his trade fighting the Cherokees, raided British and Loyalist outposts, attacked their supply trains, and eluded capture by fleeing to the South Carolina swamps. Directed by South Carolina governor John Rutledge to target escaped slaves who had joined the British in return for their freedom, Marion was also ordered to execute slaves who had helped the British with supplies or intelligence. It is worth recording that at least one of Marion’s own slaves ran away to fight for the British, a detail excised from the hagiographic Hollywood film *The Patriot* (2000), in which Mel Gibson’s character was based in part on Marion.

Another contradiction is that in order to achieve full success, the guerrilla usually has to build a conventional army, or at least find an allied army for the final, decisive battles. It was North Vietnamese regulars who took Saigon, not the Viet Cong, and regular French and American forces who forced the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781, just as it was Wellington’s troops who finally ejected from Spain the Napoleonic armies that had been shredded by six years of guerrilla war.



And a hazard of guerrilla fighting is that organized armies can themselves exploit guerrilla tactics, as was done, for example, during World War II, when Britain's Long Range Desert Group sent commando troops deep behind German lines in North Africa to destroy warplanes at their bases, a trick the British repeated in the Falkland Islands in 1982. Britain wasn't the only country to use such tactics during World War II: The Red Army fought a conventional war against the Wehrmacht while partisans behind German lines attacked the railways and logistics bases on which the Germans depended.

**Guerrilla warfare is deeply political, since the fighters' lack of formal organization means they depend on civilians for food and intelligence.**

The lesson of the endless examples Boot cites is that guerrillas can be militarily defeated, if a conventional army is itself prepared to go guerrilla and form small, fast-moving units for hunting down the enemy, often with the help of

local trackers and renegades. Boot notes that in 1886 General Nelson Miles finally hunted down the Apache fighter Geronimo with "a picked force of 55 soldiers, 30 mule packers, and 29 Apache scouts" after "one of the most arduous operations in the history of the U.S. Army."

Boot made his name with *The Savage Wars of Peace* (2002), an accomplished history of America's small wars that made him a useful source of advice for American generals in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Invisible Armies*, after an exhaustive but brisk canter throughout the small wars of history, brilliantly sums up the lessons of the centuries. Guerrilla warfare is deeply political, since the fighters' lack of formal organization means they depend on civilians for food and intelligence. The civilians thus become a strategic factor in the battle, wooed and also targeted by both sides, and sometimes removed from the battlefield altogether, as in the Boer War, when the British were finally able to defeat the Boer farmers by removing their wives and families to concentration camps. As the cases of the Irish Republican Army and the Basque separatist force known as the ETA show, guerillas can sometimes be bought off with political concessions. But the conflict does not simply hinge on winning the hearts and minds of the

local population from whom the guerrillas draw fighters and support. Just as important is the state of the people's physical security and their assessment of which side is likely to prevail.

Guerrillas must be fought tactically on their own terms, hunted down, denied bases and support, and forced to keep moving and to abandon (or kill) their wounded. Strategically, however, they are fought through the politics of effective local administration. The British won in Malaya because they took the landless Chinese laborers from their shantytowns and installed them in well-run and well-guarded "New Villages" with medical services and sanitation, an arrangement that made the Chinese amenable to the daily searches that ensured that no rice was being smuggled out to the guerrillas. The British dried up the sea in which the guerrillas swam, even as their own guerrilla-style troops hunted down the bands relentlessly, one by one. When the Americans tried to do the same in South Vietnam, their good intentions were frustrated by corrupt local administrations that stole funds and supplies and extracted bribes or free labor from occupants. The "strategic hamlets" cordoned off by U.S. forces became unpleasant for their inhabitants and thus counterproductive.

Thanks to its experience against Iraqis and Afghans, and to the wisdom of thoughtful soldiers such as General David Petraeus (who was the driving force behind the excellent new U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual), the Army should now be well equipped to wage guerrilla warfare and to pursue the joint civil-military operations such conflicts require. Ironically, it is seeking to do so just as American politicians appear intent on withdrawing from Afghanistan. The public seems to have had quite enough of such distant fights, and the rise of a strategic peer competitor in China is focusing U.S. military attention back on conventional strategies. This may be a mistake. An army often finds itself fighting a war for which it is not well prepared, since that is precisely the kind of war an intelligent enemy will choose to wage. And if there is one arena where the hit-and-run and clandestine tactics of the guerrilla seem likely in the future, it is the electronic swamps and jungles of cyberspace. The next Swamp Fox may be armed with a laptop. ■

**MARTIN WALKER** is a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center. His new novel, *The Devil's Cave*, will be published later this year.



*Don't Bet on It*

# THE SIGNAL AND THE NOISE:

WHY SO MANY PREDICTIONS FAIL—BUT SOME DON'T

REVIEWED BY STEVEN LAGERFELD

NATE SILVER IS THE NEW TOAST OF THE punditocracy. The author of *The New York Times*' widely followed FiveThirtyEight blog, he correctly predicted the winner of the presidential vote in all 50 states, besting his already impressive record of 49 correct calls in the 2008 election. But what if Silver had been wrong? The last person to be surprised probably would have been Silver himself. That is what makes *The Signal and the Noise*, in which he surveys methods of prediction in everything from Texas hold 'em to global climate change, such a useful and important book.

Throughout human history, people have ascribed special and sometimes sacred qualities to those who seem able to see the future, from the Oracle at Delphi in ancient Greece to Nassim Taleb, the PhD-holding derivatives trader who famously warned right before the recent financial crisis that unforeseen "black swan" events occur

the signal and the  
and the noise and  
the noise and the  
noise and the no  
why so many and  
predictions fail—  
but some don't t  
and the noise and  
the noise and the  
nate silver noise  
noise and the no

By Nate Silver  
Penguin Press  
534 pp. \$27.95

more often than we think. Before Silver, Warren Buffett was the prophet of the hour.

In modern times, the human preoccupation with the future has become a near obsession. Our lives revolve around questions about what will happen tomorrow: When will terrorists strike America next? How severe will the effects of climate change be? Will I outlive my retirement savings? We are bombarded by honest but flawed forecasts as well as ones designed chiefly to scare or lull us into certain courses of action. Silver's fame is deserved, but picking election winners is a relatively trivial business. What makes him special is that he is probably the first celebrity prophet not only to help us

think more intelligently about the future but to caution that there is very little that we can know about it with certainty.

That has something to do with his life story. After getting an undergraduate degree in economics at the University of Chicago, Silver worked in the early 2000s as a low-level international tax consultant before turning his talents to baseball (his childhood passion) and developing PECOTA (Player Empirical Comparison and Optimization Test Algorithm), a statistical database designed to predict players' performance. His interest was sparked by the success of the Oakland Athletics under the statistically minded general manager Billy Beane—a tale later chronicled by journalist Michael Lewis in *Moneyball* (2003). PECOTA was successful—Silver later sold it to another firm that sells forecasts to professional baseball teams and others—but it was also frequently wrong. Looking back over six years at the end of 2011, Silver found that his system had identified a good number of minor league players who went on to success in the big leagues, but it had also been outperformed by a competing system emphasizing scouting reports. It is a lesson that he repeats throughout the



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

**Weather prediction has come a long way since 1942, when this New York City high school student learned to use a weather vane in his meteorology class.**

book: Data crunching is not enough; there is no substitute for experience and judgment.

Even as he was working on PECOTA, Silver slid into the world of professional gambling, quickly making his way to the World Series of Poker. Play at that level requires a prodigious ability to calculate probabilities on the fly, along with other skills, and Silver prospered for a time. After a string of losses, however, he abandoned poker in 2007,



concluding that the competition had stiffened and he had not improved his own methods. “My years in the game taught me a great deal about the role that chance plays in our lives and the delusions it can produce when we seek to understand the world and predict its course,” he writes.

---

**Silver’s key point is that we need to think in terms of probabilities rather than comforting certainties.**

---

That is not the kind of autobiographical lesson we are likely to hear from the soothsayers on the political talk shows and stock market Web sites. Silver’s key point is that we need to think in terms of probabilities rather than comforting certainties. His FiveThirtyEight prognostications (the blog’s name derives from the number of electoral votes in a presidential election) are always expressed in these terms: At various times during the last election, Silver put Barack Obama’s chances of winning as low as 59 percent and as high (on the eve of the vote) as 91 percent. That made clear that the prediction could be wrong—sometimes even a full house can lose. Remember that the

next time you hear some bold forecast about the coming of American energy independence or the size of the federal government’s budget deficit in 10 years.

Silver’s methods involve taking huge amounts of data—in the case of the presidential election, mostly state-level political polls—and averaging and adjusting them for demographic and other factors using techniques based on the principles of the 18th-century English statistician Thomas Bayes. Bayesian probability theory requires us to make our best guess about the future and then continually revise it as we get new information.

Most of *The Signal and the Noise* is not concerned with Silver’s work but with other fields, from poker and chess to economic and climate prediction, in which Bayesian principles can be applied. Climate modelers come off pretty well in this light, though Silver says their predictions are still surrounded by high levels of uncertainty. Social scientists take perhaps the biggest drubbing. Late in 2007, for example, economists surveyed by *The Wall Street Journal* said there was only a 38 percent chance of recession in the next year. In fact, as data would later reveal, the economy had already slid into a downturn.

One surprise winner in the prediction sweepstakes is weather forecasting, which has measurably improved in recent decades. In the 1980s, the National Hurricane Center couldn't predict within 100 miles where a storm would make landfall more than a day in advance, but now, because researchers have been able to build sophisticated models of how storm systems behave, it can do so three days out, giving people in threatened areas precious time to evacuate. When the National Weather Service says there is a 20 percent chance of rain, it actually does rain 20 percent of the time.

Good predictions have two main sources. There are lots of data that provide plenty of feedback, which allows forecasters to constantly check and adjust their models against reality. And there is a reasonably solid understanding of how the underlying weather system works. Economists do a dreadful job because they have mountains of data but, lacking a good model of how the economy works, are hard put to understand what it means. They have difficulty

separating the “signal” from the “noise.” As Silver puts it, “The signal is the truth. The noise is what distracts us from the truth.” Finding the signal, however, is not merely a matter of creating better techniques. There were clues that could have alerted us to the 9/11 terrorist attacks before they occurred, for example, but defense and intelligence officials had already dismissed the possibility of attacks on such a scale by suicide bombers. They simply couldn't imagine such a thing.

“We just aren't that good at prediction,” Silver writes. It is an unexpected and important message to hear from a certified celebrity seer. Prediction is a necessary but peril-ridden art. We need to be less confident in our own ability to see around corners, he argues, and more skeptical of others' claims. Those are among the many lessons that give this book a very high signal-to-noise ratio. ■

**STEVEN LAGERFELD** is editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*.



*Work and Love*

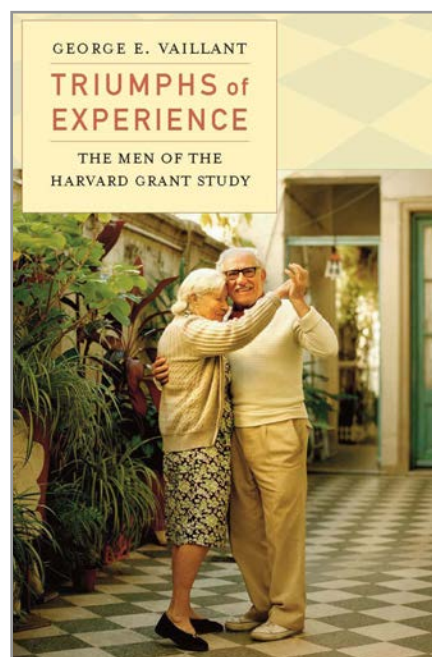
# TRIUMPHS OF EXPERIENCE:

## THE MEN OF THE HARVARD GRANT STUDY

REVIEWED BY **CHARLES BARBER**

WHEN THE PSYCHIATRIST GEORGE VAILLANT was a teenager, he received in the mail his father's 25th Harvard class reunion book, which detailed in short paragraphs the activities of classmates who were by then in their late forties. Young George found the twisting narratives fascinating, and pored over them obsessively. The very arrival of this book must have been extremely difficult for him, as a few years earlier, George's father, a privileged and successful man with no overt signs of depression or distress, had fatally shot himself in his backyard after a nap. George, then 10 years old, was the last to see his father alive.

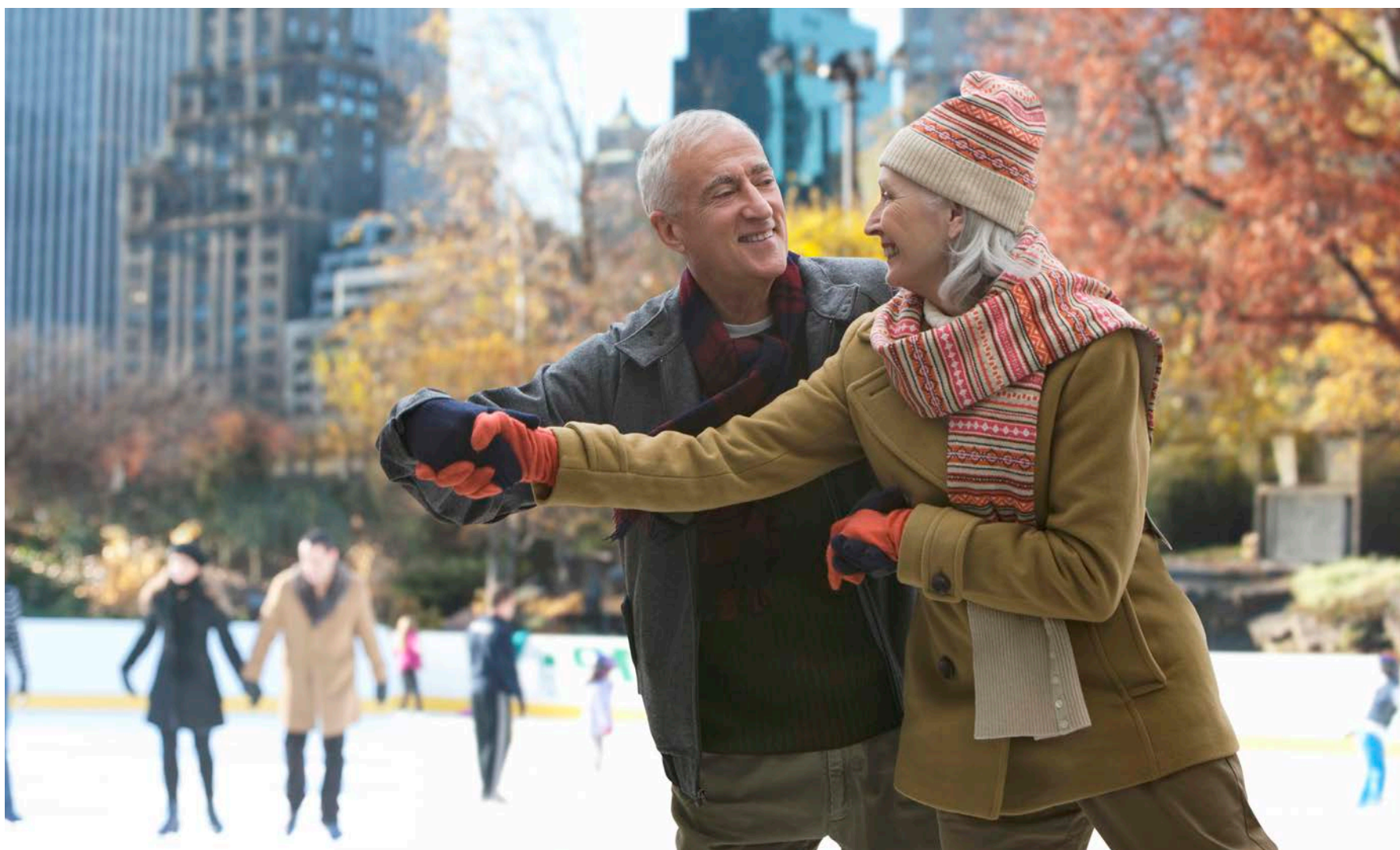
Drawing upon the resilience that characterizes the themes of *Triumphs of Experience*, Vaillant has presided for the last five decades over the ultimate class reunion book, the Grant Study. Named after its patron, the variety-store magnate W. T. Grant, the study began tracking 268 Harvard students, most



By George E. Vaillant  
Harvard Univ.  
457 pp. \$27.95

members of the classes of 1942, '43, and '44, in 1938. Vaillant inherited the project in the 1960s, directed it for over 30 years beginning in 1972, and remains a co-director. Exact criteria for selection to the study remain obscure—the original investigators declined Norman Mailer and Leonard Bernstein, but included John F. Kennedy. Sixty-eight members of the original cohort, now in their nineties, are still living.

Over the last 70 years, Harvard scientists have checked in on the members of the group at regular intervals, and poked and prodded them using virtually every psychological and physiological instrument. The sheer amount of data is astonishing, most of it collected by Vaillant himself. "Some men came to



JOSE LUIS PELAEZ / GETTY IMAGES

**Intimate friendships and relationships are the key to a happy—and healthy—life.**

Cambridge . . . but in most cases I went to them—to Hawaii, Canada, London, New Zealand,” writes Vaillant, who himself is now 78.

*Triumphs of Experience* elegantly summarizes the findings of this vast longitudinal study, unique in the annals of research. (Sustaining the funding for it has also been a herculean feat.) Vaillant has written two previous books about the Grant Study—*Adaptation to Life* (1977) and *Aging Well* (2002)—which provide snapshots of the men’s lives at earlier stages. This latest book analyzes how the men fared over their late adulthood, and indeed their entire lives. In it, Vail-

lant masterfully chronicles how their life successes, or lack thereof, correlate with the nature of their childhoods, marriages, mental health, physical health, substance abuse, and attitudes.

Extensive quantitative findings are interspersed with the detailed stories of individual study participants, under pseudonym, and with identifying details expunged or changed. Here Vaillant proves that his skills are literary as well as scientific. The case histories are engaging novelistic capsules that artfully bring the quantitative material to life. Vaillant, who of course has aged along with his subjects, includes scenes from



his own development, honest stories that involve both struggle and maturation.

The study, a product of the period in which it was conceived, has its limitations. Its only subjects are white, privileged men. Still, many of its findings seem universal. If they could be boiled down to a single revelation, it would be that the secret to a happy life is relationships, relationships, relationships. The best predictors of adult success and well-being are a childhood in which one feels accepted and nurtured; an empathic coping style at ages 20 through 35; and warm adult relationships. Regarding finances, just one of Vaillant's 10 measures of adult well-being, men who had good sibling relationships when young made an average of \$51,000 per year more than those with poor sibling relationships or no siblings at all, and men who had warm mothers earned \$87,000 more annually than those who did not (in 2009 dollars). Overall, reflecting their privilege, the Grant Men made a lot of money. The findings go on and on like that, and the message relentlessly emerges: The secret to life is good and enduring intimate relationships and friendships. Mental health, as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson indicated, is embodied by the capacity to love and to work.

The other overarching message of this book is that resilience counts. Men with the most mature defense mechanisms—defined as altruism, humor, sublimation (finding gratifying alternatives to frustration and anger), anticipation (being realistic about future challenges), and suppression (yes, “keeping a stiff upper lip”)—were three times more likely to flourish in later life. Furthermore, men with good defense mechanisms were able to alter their paths by developing the capacity for emotional warmth and connection to others despite difficult upbringings or individual setbacks.

**Men with good defense mechanisms were able to alter their paths by developing the capacity for emotional warmth and connection to others despite difficult upbringings or individual setbacks.**

Vaillant provides compelling evidence that many individuals—by no means all—can write (or rewrite) their own scripts, disproving F. Scott Fitzgerald's maxim that there are no second acts in



American lives. Other studies of quite different populations have arrived at similar conclusions. In *Making Good*, a 2001 study of hardcore criminal offenders, the criminologist Shadd Maruna documents that those who learned to desist from crime scored vastly higher on measures of self-agency (taking control of your life) and generativity (being able to respond positively to negative events) than those who continued their criminal careers.

Resilience plays out at a physiological level too, of course. Vaillant found that maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, not drinking much, and controlling blood pressure before age 50 made all the difference in the health of the men at 80 and 90. But here, too, relationships seem to lay the groundwork. In 1978, Vaillant reviewed a subset of the men who had been healthy at age 40; they were now about 55 years old. Of those who had had the bleakest childhoods, 35 percent were dead or chronically ill, as compared to only 11 percent of those with the warmest childhoods.

There is a small but vital call in medicine and psychiatry to pay much greater heed to the stories of patients, as a means of building empathy and guiding care. Psychiatry, like so much of medicine, has been overrun by technologies and pharmacologies. In the excitement over this supposed progress, the old-fashioned

“healing arts” have often been neglected. In response, Rita Charon, a professor of clinical medicine, has created a highly influential program in narrative medicine at Columbia University’s medical school, predicated on the value of listening to the stories of patients. This past fall I taught a course on the narratives of illness and recovery at Wesleyan University. The students, up to their ears in neuroscience and psychological science, couldn’t get enough of the real-life first-person narratives of people suffering from mental illness and trauma. The point of all this is not to revel in the illnesses, but to learn what constitutes health.

Vaillant is that rare thing: a psychiatrist more interested in mental flourishing than in mental illness. With *Triumphs of Experience*, he has turned the Harvard men’s disparate stories into a single narrative and created a field guide, both practical and profound, to how to lead a good life. ■

**CHARLES BARBER** is a lecturer in psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine and director of the Connection Institute for Innovative Practice, dedicated to the study of the narratives of people recovering from mental illness. He is the author of *Comfortably Numb: How Psychiatry Is Medicating a Nation* (2008).

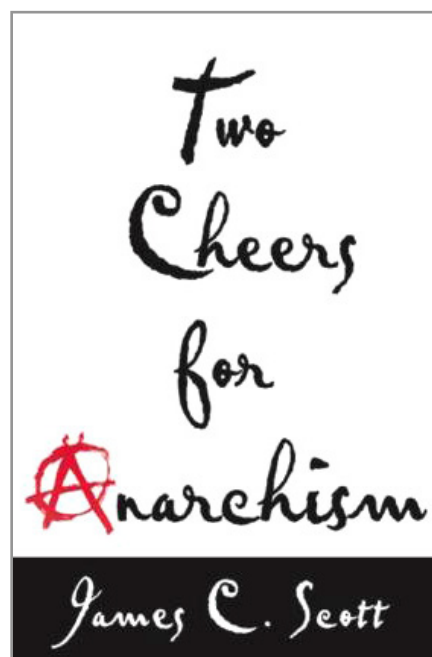
*Mere Anarchy*

## TWO CHEERS FOR ANARCHISM:

SIX EASY PIECES ON AUTONOMY,  
DIGNITY, AND MEANINGFUL WORK  
AND PLAY

REVIEWED BY **NICK GILLESPIE**

FOR THOSE OF US WHO REMEMBER THE 1970s as a time of lifestyle liberation and economic malaise, the word “anarchy” was nothing less than a punk cry of affirmation and an existential call to action. “I am an anti-Christ/I am an anarchist,” snarled Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols in 1976, in one of the great forced rhyme schemes of all time. Yet the band’s song “Anarchy in the U.K.”—and punk more generally—presaged not a collapse of British or American or even Western civilization, but a do-it-yourself revolution in cultural production and consumption that rejected top-down, centralized authority and hidebound tradition. Not coincidentally, economic decentralization took place too—President Jimmy Carter deregulated airline pricing and interstate trucking rates, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher loosened government controls on business, and



By James C. Scott  
Princeton Univ. Press  
169 pp. \$24.95

even French president François Mitterrand, a Socialist, ultimately sold off state-owned industries. The Iron Curtain, rusted out for decades, finally collapsed by the early 1990s, literally incapable of keeping its repressive, soul-killing act together.

In *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, James C. Scott channels Proudhon more than punk while making a case for a kinder, gentler form of rebellion than the sort of bomb-throwing, street-fighting revolution typically associated with anarchism. Following Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the 19th-century French theorist who asserted that “property is theft,” Scott defines anarchism loosely as “mutuality, or *cooperation without hierarchy or state rule*” (emphasis in the original).





FK PHOTO / CORBIS

**The anarchist spirit can be found in the lives of shopkeepers and other members of the petite bourgeoisie, who, like this fly-fishing store owner, trade the security of a salaried job for autonomy.**

His rejection of “a comprehensive anarchist worldview and philosophy” is mirrored in the structure of the book, which consists of what he terms “fragments” rather than traditional chapters, the better to underscore the provisionality and narrow scope of his insights.

For Scott, anarchy is less a full-blown program than a tendency that privileges “politics, conflict, and debate” and shows a robust “tolerance for confusion and improvisation that accompanies social learning.” Most of all, it’s a rejection of rule by elites of any and all stripes,

especially those who seek to remove themselves from scrutiny by claiming some sort of impersonal scientific basis for their rule.

Scott recognizes that total revolution often leads to something worse than what it replaces. “Virtually every major successful revolution ended by creating a state more powerful than the one it overthrew, a state that in turn was able to extract more resources from and exercise more control over the very populations it was designed to serve,” he writes. *Two Cheers for Anarchism* thus echoes themes from Scott’s previous books, including *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998). That work analyzed how disaster routinely results from grand plans to remake society according to some leader or elite’s unified field theory of how the world should be. This book explores how the little people work around the grand plan imposed on them.

Scott uses what he engagingly calls his “anarchist squint” to find all sorts of generally unacknowledged minirevolts happening around us. These range from the puny—stepping off sidewalks in defiance of “don’t walk” signs—to the profound. For instance, he describes an art project created by anarchists in West Germany shortly before it was reunified with its communist counterpart in

## Scott recognizes that total revolution often leads to something worse than what it replaces.

1990. The activists, Scott writes, hauled a papier-mâché statue called *Monument to the Unknown Deserters of Both World Wars* around cities in East Germany, creating an unauthorized display that inevitably raised the ire of local officials. The statue “bore the legend, ‘This is for the man who refused to kill his fellow man.’” Scott calls the statue “a magnificent anarchist gesture, this contrarian play on the well-nigh universal theme of the Unknown Soldier: the obscure, ‘every-infantryman’ who fell honorably in battle for his nation’s objectives.”

For Scott, such acts of “insubordination” are exemplary because they bring paradoxes in our everyday lives to the foreground and push us toward a new understanding of the typically latent cultural, political, and economic forces that actually structure our lives. Other examples of everyday anarchist rebellion include work slowdowns, the removal of traffic signs by some localities in the Netherlands, and the refusal



of some K–12 students in Massachusetts, Michigan, and elsewhere to take achievement tests implemented in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This is all fine as far as it goes, and I think very few readers with even a passing knowledge of history would argue with Scott’s large conclusion that “the great emancipatory gains for human freedom have not been the result of orderly, institutional procedures but of disorderly, unpredictable, spontaneous action cracking open the social order from below.”

Yet there’s a curious and palpable sense of datedness to much of *Two Cheers for Anarchism*. References to high-1960s theorists such as Jane Jacobs, Antonio Gramsci, and E. F. Schumacher abound as if their insights were brand-new. Reading Scott, one would think very little had changed since Schumacher’s *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* burst on the scene in 1973. In a world that is increasingly artisanal when it comes to food production and preparation, culture, lifestyle, and everything else, Scott quotes Schumacher to denounce McDonalds for its “Fordist production.”

There’s nothing wrong with Scott’s analysis of Robert McNamara and Vietnam-era body counts—“an infernal audit system that . . . blocked a wider-ranging

dialogue about what might . . . represent progress.” But Scott seems to be fighting not even the last war but one several wars removed. He seems less interested in looking at the role of elites in the private and public sectors in precipitating the housing crisis of a few years ago than in settling a score with Enron and “market fundamentalists.” In a book that seeks to celebrate participatory culture, little is said about the rise of the personal computer and the Internet—and the vast decentralization of knowledge, expression, and power they have helped bring about.

Scott rightly castigates the nation’s K–12 public school system as “a ‘one-product’ factory” and laments the centralization of curricula and expectations. But in an American context, school, at least since it was made mandatory in the 19th century, has always been a crucible of conformity. (Go ask Mark Twain and Laura Ingalls Wilder.) What is actually new and “insubordinate” in a way that Scott should appreciate is the rise over the past several decades of a robust school choice movement that cuts across existing partisan political lines, racial and economic divides, and even long-standing distinctions between public and private education.

While around 90 percent of K–12 students still attend conventional public



More people are not only viewing the world through an “anarchist squint,” but actually getting on with the important project of living their lives the way they want to.

schools, each year an increasing number of children at all levels of learning and income are attending schools more tailored to their and their parents’ desires. (An increasing number of kids are also being homeschooled, arguably a more profound disruption of the norm.) There are more than 5,000 charter schools—publicly funded institutions with voluntary attendance and individualized curricula—serving more than two million kids in the United States. In 1991, there wasn’t a single one. Charters encompass a wide range of methods and educational programs—some follow “great books” curricula and others teach Afrocentrism or emphasize work-study. While their student outcomes vary, they represent the sort of decentralized experimenta-

tion Scott champions.

None of this is meant to suggest that contemporary America—or the wider world—is at some utopian tipping point toward self-actualization. But Scott’s well-meaning *Two Cheers* is too limited in its survey. According to Wikipedia, which describes itself as “the free encyclopedia anyone can edit”—talk about anarchy!—Scott, 76 years old, is a chaired professor at Yale in political science and anthropology, and director of the Agrarian Studies Program there. In other words, he is not simply a member of an everyday elite, but of a superelite. As such, and despite his best intentions, he must find it difficult to see past the privilege and sense of entitlement that surely still surround him in New Haven. But if he could, he would realize that more people than he recognizes are not only viewing the world through an “anarchist squint,” but actually getting on with the important project of living their lives the way they want to. ■

**NICK GILLESPIE** is editor in chief of Reason.com and a coauthor of *The Declaration of Independents: How Libertarian Politics Can Fix What’s Wrong With America* (2011).

# LETTERS

In “The Tocquevillean Moment . . . and Ours” [Summer ’12], Wilfred M. McClay offers a valuable reminder of Tocqueville’s insight into the great promise of democracy and his foresight concerning the threat of a democratic devolution into a society that values only the most radical and atomizing sense of the individual and their place in the world.

I do, however, question McClay’s assessment of the history of liberal education in this country, as well as his concomitant apotheosis of the four-year residential university as the most appropriate site for that education to take place. McClay romantically asserts that the four-year residential higher-learning institution has been the preeminent site of a profound commitment to the “shared enterprise [of] . . . serious and careful reading and discussion of classic literary, philosophical, historical, and scientific texts.” While there is a certain amount of truth to his claim, scholars who have studied the American academy have made clear that throughout the 20th century (and particularly since World War II) the American university has increasingly become a site for carefully focused (perhaps too focused)

technical education. To be sure, entering freshman are forced to read classic texts, but there is no systematic effort to integrate such learning into their discipline majors. Those of us who have taught the humanities at four-year institutions are continually confronted by students who question the validity and applicability of such courses, and who want to know just how much of the texts they must memorize in order to get an A so they can show prospective graduate schools a perfect GPA.

These experiences are not limited to the 21st-century classroom. In his 1956 classic *The Organization Man*, William H. Whyte described the American university as a remarkably anti-intellectual place concerned with providing its charges a kind of advanced vocational education largely devoid of any significant consideration of the philosophical, literary, and historical legacies of humanity.

In light of this extensive legacy of apathy and disdain toward the humanities in the university, I question McClay’s defense of the existing American academy as our last best hope for the preservation of classical learning. It seems to me that in order to foster a societal ethos

that favors such learning, we would be better served by an all-out effort to restore classical learning to our elementary and high schools. I recognize the quixotic nature of this suggestion, but in a very real sense our nation's waning interest in preserving liberal education in its universities is a reflection of the significant absence of such learning in our K–12 institutions.

— ERIK GREENBERG

Director of Education  
Autry National Center  
Los Angeles, Calif.

### WILFRED McCLAY RESPONDS:

I am in sympathy with most of what Mr. Greenberg says. But I am afraid he mischaracterizes my argument. I do not “apotheosize” the current status quo in higher education. Far from it! I complain in the article about higher education's failures and exorbitant costs, and support the idea that we need to rethink its structure and goals dramatically. What I am not willing to do, though, is dispense with it altogether, in favor of technological inno-

vations that will lower costs but make it all the more difficult to accomplish the things that only a classroom and human interaction make possible. It is not “romantic” to say that the four-year residential college has been preeminent in upholding the ideal of a physical community devoted to the study of foundational ideas and classic texts. There is no other institution in American society that even comes close in that regard. That it does so imperfectly, even disappointingly, is another matter. But it is not yet a sufficient reason to dispense with it.

I applaud Mr. Greenberg's desire to remake primary and secondary education in America. He will get no argument from me there. But let's be fair: The word “quixotic” barely begins to encompass the enormity of the task he is proposing. Compared to that, the revitalization of liberal education in the colleges would be a breeze. But both jobs deserve our attention.

*Letters may be sent via e-mail to*

**wq@wilsoncenter.org**





THE WILSON QUARTERLY

EDITOR Steven Lagerfeld

LITERARY EDITOR Sarah L. Courteau

ASSOCIATE EDITORS Darcy Courteau, Cullen Nutt

EDITORIAL INTERN Alexandra Tate

EDITORS AT LARGE Ann Hulbert, James Morris, Jay Tolson

COPY EDITOR Vincent Ercolano

PHOTO RESEARCHER Madeline Kelty

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Daniel Akst, Stephen Bates,  
Martha Bayles, Max Byrd,  
Linda Colley, Denis Donoghue,  
Max Holland, Walter Reich,  
Alan Ryan, Amy E. Schwartz,  
Edward Tenner, Charles Townshend,  
Alan Wolfe

BOARD OF EDITORIAL ADVISORS K. Anthony Appiah, Cynthia Arnson,  
Amy Chua, Tyler Cowen, Harry Harding,  
Robert Hathaway, Elizabeth Johns,  
Jackson Lears, Robert Litwak,  
Wilfred M. McClay, Blair Ruble,  
Peter Skerry, S. Frederick Starr,  
Martin Walker, Samuel Wells

FOUNDING EDITOR Peter Braestrup (1929–1997)

BUSINESS DIRECTOR Suzanne Napper

APP DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN iAuthorscape

CONTINUES >

THE WILSON QUARTERLY is a window on the world of ideas for general readers. Historical perspective and a commitment to consider all sides are the hallmarks of its articles on foreign affairs, politics, culture, science, and other subjects. By making new knowledge accessible to all, it aims to foster more informed public debate.

The Wilson Quarterly (ISSN-0363-3276) is published in January (Winter), April (Spring), July (Summer), and October (Autumn) by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at One Woodrow Wilson Plaza, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004-3027. Complete article index available online at [www.wilsonquarterly.com](http://www.wilsonquarterly.com)

Please direct all editorial correspondence to [wq@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:wq@wilsoncenter.org).

Microfilm copies are available from Bell & Howell Information and Learning,  
300 N. Zeeb Road,  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

ADVERTISING    Suzanne Napper, Business Director,  
Tel.: (202) 691-4021 / Fax: (202) 691-4036  
E-mail: [Suzanne.Napper@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:Suzanne.Napper@wilsoncenter.org)