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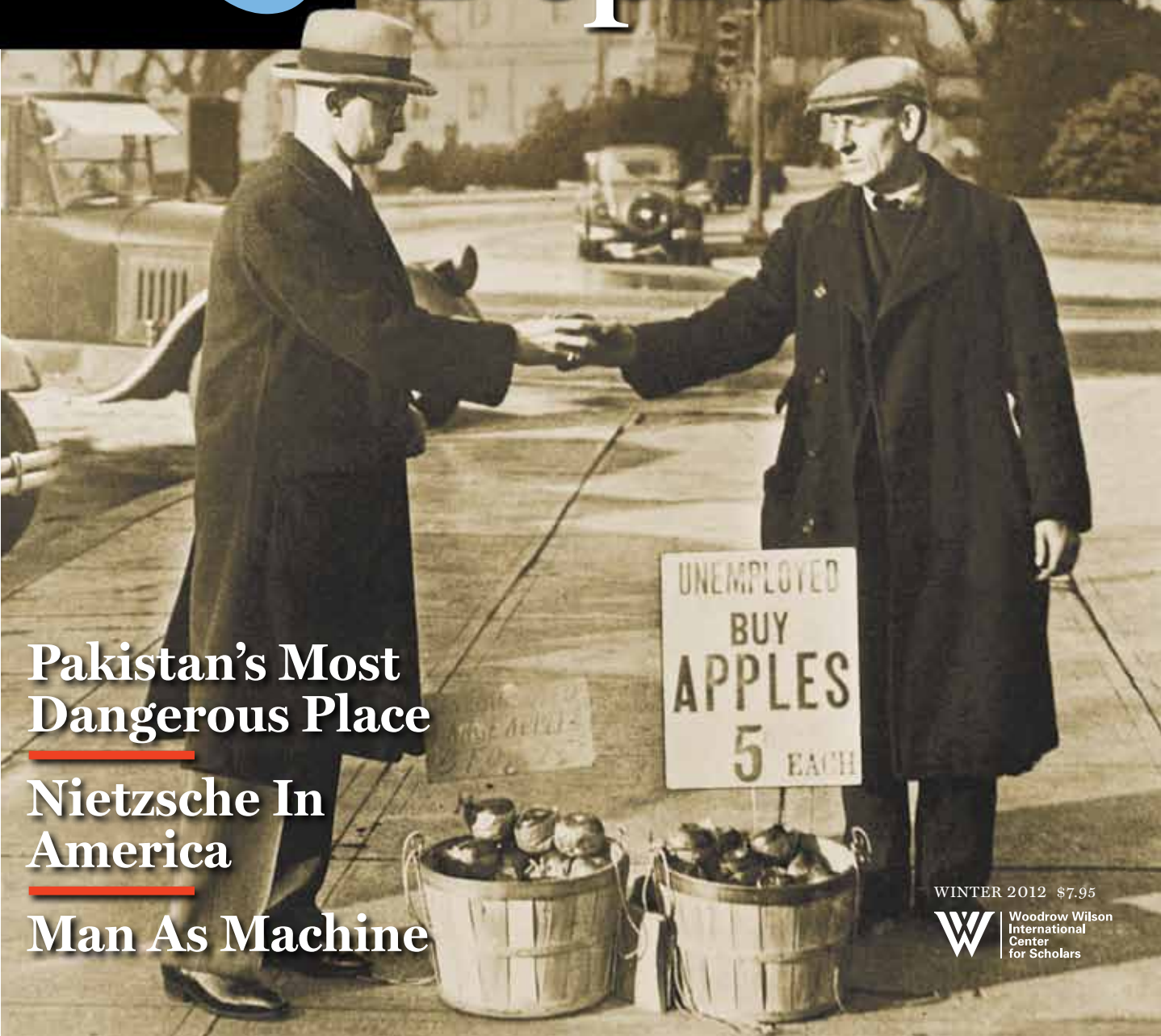
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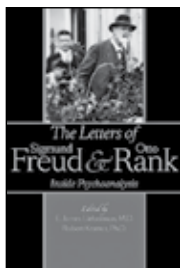
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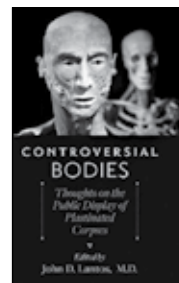
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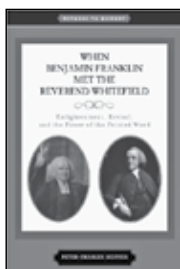
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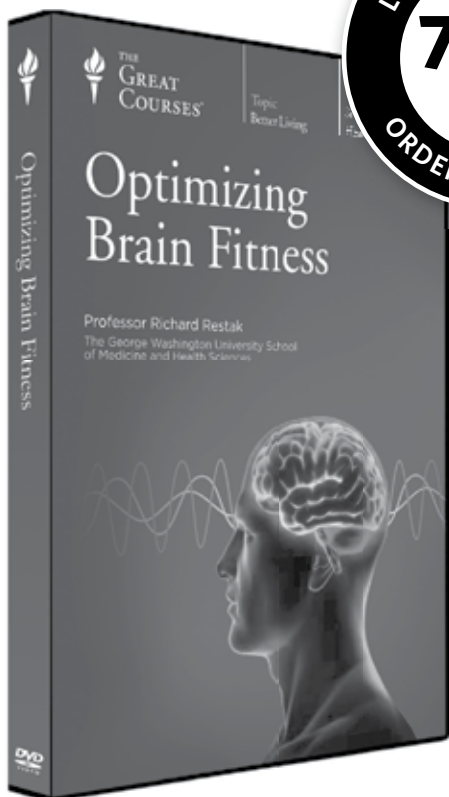
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FEATURES

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COVER STORY

35 LESSONS FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Great Depression has long been regarded as a one-off economic event, so catastrophic that, with the preventive measures now in place, it could never be repeated. Today, as we grapple with a years-long global economic downturn whose ultimate contours remain unknown, the Depression is increasingly relevant to the present.

36 Revisiting the Great Depression
| *By Robert J. Samuelson*

44 The Debt Bomb | *By Louis Hyman*

52 Great Recession or Mini-Depression? | *By Robert Z. Aliber*

16 Pakistan's Most Dangerous Place

By Zahid Hussain | The outcome of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, as well as the future of Pakistan, may hinge on whether Islamabad can bring its remote semiautonomous tribal areas into the national fold.

22 My Own Private Nietzsche: An American Story

By Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen | Why has America's obsession with the dour German philosopher endured for more than a century?

30 Man as Machine

By Max Byrd | The story of an 18th-century French inventor's quest to create mechanical life sheds light on what it means to be human.

ON THE COVER: Rep. Fred Hartley Jr. (R-N.J.) buys an apple from an unemployed man in front of the Capitol in 1930. Photograph: Bettmann/Corbis **ABOVE:** In Davie, Florida, an unfinished luxury townhouse development reflects the ravages of the financial crisis.

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

DEPARTMENTS

4 EDITOR'S COMMENT

6 LETTERS

10 AT THE CENTER

12 FINDINGS

IN ESSENCE

OUR SURVEY OF NOTABLE
ARTICLES FROM OTHER
JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES

57 FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Indispensable No More, from
The National Interest

The Empty Threat of Cyberwar,
from *Journal of Strategic Studies*

Stand by Taiwan, from
The Washington Quarterly

The Westphalian Mirage, from
International Studies Quarterly

61 POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Postpartisan Folly, from
The New Republic

Harding's Hidden Halo, from
The Weekly Standard

Polarization Without Parties,
from *Via Meadia*

63 SOCIETY

Staying Put, from *Journal of
Economic Perspectives*

Mending Malpractice, from
Health Affairs

Checks, Not Checkpoints, from
Journal of Conflict Resolution

66 ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Capitalism, Chinese Style, from
Business and Politics

Protectionist Psych, from
International Organization

68 HISTORY

It Was the Economy, Stupid, from
William and Mary Quarterly

68 RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Being Muslim in America, from
National Affairs

Holy Rights, from *Democracy:
A Journal of Ideas*

70 PRESS & MEDIA

Squawk Box, from *PS: Political
Science & Politics*

Climate Patterns, from *The Inter-
national Journal of Press/Politics*

71 ARTS & LETTERS

For Love or Money, from
Critical Inquiry

The Warhol Bubble, from
Intelligent Life

74 SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Body of Proof, from *The Lancet*

Retractions Under the Micro-
scope, from *Nature*

75 OTHER NATIONS

Brazil's Popularity Problem, from
*Latin American Politics and
Society*

Ukrainian Gloom, from *Foreign
Affairs*

India's Musical Menace, from
The Journal of Asian Studies

Democracy Deferred, from
World Policy Journal

CURRENT BOOKS

79 GEORGE F. KENNAN:

An American Life.
By John Lewis Gaddis
Reviewed by Martin Walker

83 GOD'S JURY:

The Inquisition and the
Making of the Modern World.
By Cullen Murphy
Reviewed by James Reston Jr.

86 BLUE NIGHTS.

By Joan Didion
Reviewed by Joshua Wolf Shenk

89 GUANTÁNAMO:

An American History.
By Jonathan M. Hansen
*Reviewed by Michael J.
Bustamante*

90 UNPRECEDENTED POWER:

Jesse Jones, Capitalism, and
the Common Good.
By Steven Fenberg
Reviewed by Mark Reutter

92 ROME:

A Cultural, Visual, and
Personal History.
By Robert Hughes
Reviewed by Andrew Curry

94 SMALL, GRITTY, AND GREEN:

The Promise of America's
Smaller Industrial Cities in a
Low-Carbon World.
By Catherine Tumber
Reviewed by Patrick Piuma

95 NEW:

Understanding Our Need
for Novelty and Change.
By Winifred Gallagher
Reviewed by James M. Morris

96 THE LETTERS OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY:

Volume 1, 1907–1922.
Edited by Sandra Spanier and
Robert W. Trogdon
*Reviewed by Michael C.
Moynihan*

98 THE HEIGHTS:

Anatomy of a Skyscraper.
By Kate Ascher
Reviewed by Jill Jonnes

99 THE NORTH AMERICAN IDEA:

A Vision of a Continental Future.
By Robert A. Pastor
Reviewed by Brian Bow

100 ROGER WILLIAMS AND

THE CREATION OF THE
AMERICAN SOUL:
Church, State, and the Birth
of Liberty.
By John M. Barry
Reviewed by Christopher Merrill

102 A THOUSAND LIVES:

The Untold Story of Hope,
Deception, and Survival
at Jonestown.
By Julia Scheeres
Reviewed by Darcy Courteau

104 PORTRAIT

Library of Dreams

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Of More Than One Mind

Four years ago, even the staunchest of pessimists might have been dismayed if they could have somehow learned that in 2012 the world economy would still be feeling the effects of recession. While the current economic downturn is the subject of a great deal of glum commentary, it has also, as demonstrated by this issue of the *WQ*, sparked much lively debate.

"Lessons of the Great Depression," our cover cluster of articles, features a range of contrasting views on that calamity of the 1930s and the causes of our own current economic distress. Robert J. Samuelson finds in the Depression-era gold standard a parallel to the contemporary welfare state—a straitjacket that exacerbates economic ills. Louis Hyman answers with a historically based argument that stagnating wages and growing economic inequality are the root cause of our current distress and the source of the "debt bomb" that exploded in 2007 and 2008. Robert Z. Aliber contends that today's "Mini-Depression" could have been avoided altogether if bank regulators and the Federal Reserve had acted to defuse that bomb, which was plainly visible amid the excesses of the last decade.

Elsewhere in the issue, journalist Zahid Hussain, the current Pakistan scholar here at the Wilson Center, offers an unusually well-informed report on Pakistan's impoverished, little-studied tribal areas, whose status, he says, is crucial not only to his own country's future but to neighboring Afghanistan's as well. Historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen provides a fascinating look at the appeal philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has held for Americans over the past century—I think of the essay as "Nietzsche and You." Digging a bit further back in time, historical novelist Max Byrd relates the true story of an 18th-century Frenchman's efforts to construct life-like mechanical beings, and reflects on these creations' connection to contemporary science.

One of the great rewards of editing the *WQ* is the opportunity to engage with that curious, intellectually demanding crowd that is our readership. Lately, readers have been telling me they want to see more contrasting arguments and ideas in our pages, the better to make up their own minds about things. In this issue, we are confident you will find, we deliver in spades.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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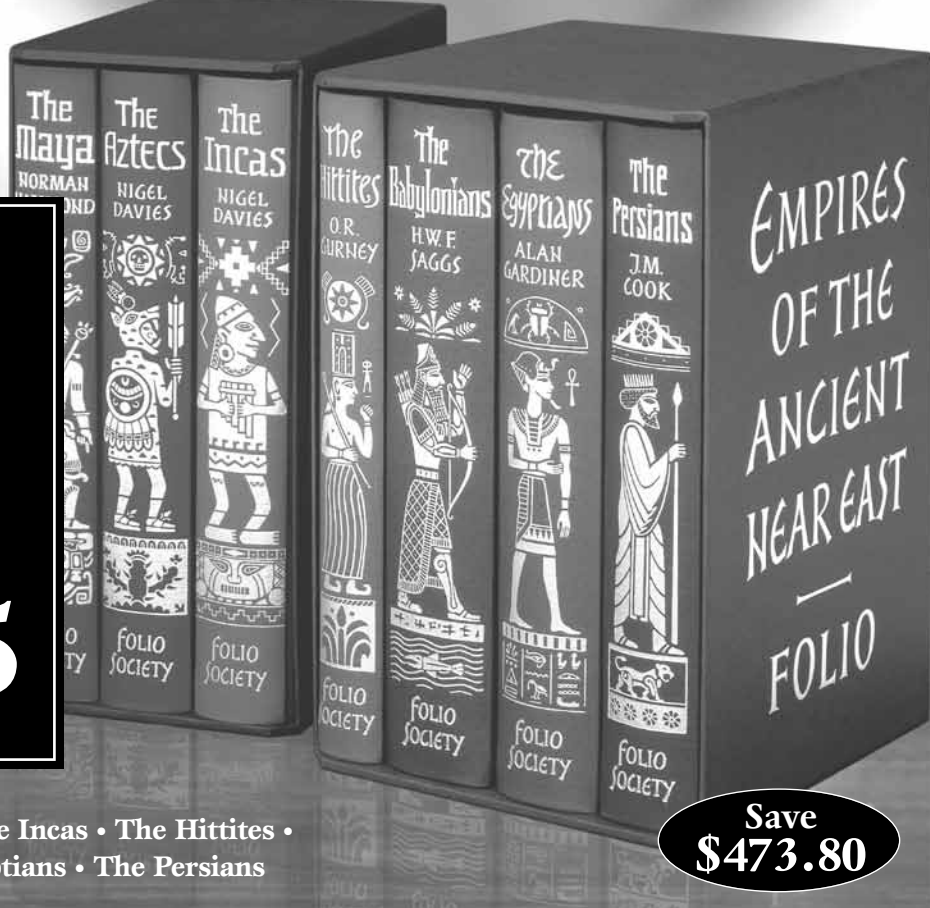
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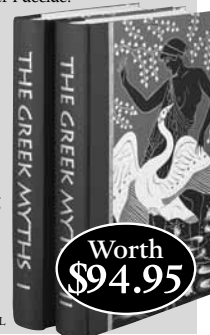
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FREDERIC RAPHAEL



LETTERS

SCHOOL STRUGGLES

TAKEN ON THEIR OWN TERMS, each of the *WQ*'s articles on education ["America's Schools: Four Big Questions," Autumn '11] makes more-or-less reasonable arguments and calls for reforms that are probably overdue. What strikes me about the articles as a group, though, is how little is said—and how much is taken for granted—about the purpose of education.

Of the four authors, Kevin Carey is perhaps the clearest on this question, writing that more education generally, and college graduates specifically, are "crucial to the nation's future prosperity" ["College for All?"]. Carey, like most of the writers, assumes that education causes—and not just correlates with—certain economic outcomes, whether for individuals or nations. Perhaps this is right. Even if it is, I fear that the discussion does not help us understand why we would want more college graduates or greater future prosperity.

These may be self-evidently desirable, but consider the matter of future prosperity. From 2002 to 2006, the most recent period of sustained economic expansion, the top one percent of income earners cap-

tured almost three-quarters of income growth. Conversely, the income of the bottom 99 percent barely increased. Economic growth is fine, but unless prosperity is widely shared, we only succeed in making the rich richer.

Despite the research of Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, whom Carey cites in another context, I am not convinced that greater educational achievement will necessarily lessen economic inequality.

Our discussions about education in the United States need to include not just *how* we will achieve superior learning for all, but *why* we would want to. I would love for superior student learning to be an end in itself, but usually—as is the case in these articles—it is a means to some other ends. We need to be clear about those ends.

John Marsh

Author, Class Dismissed:

Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way Out of Inequality (2011)

*Assistant Professor of English
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pa.*

ONE CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER why *The Wilson Quarterly* would

publish four articles about the future of education yet include none written by anybody who has spent time in a classroom.

The articles also completely ignore the elephant in the room. Children overall don't value education because their parents don't teach them the value of it, which is why they fail. The school systems based on local school boards turned this country into a global superpower on the strength of the parents who worked with their kids to make sure they acquired a solid education.

All four of the articles ignore the role of parents in their children's education and the role of the students themselves, apparently absolving both groups of responsibility. The unifying theme appears to be that only the federal government can educate our children—by taking more of our money from us to distribute back to the schools, with the inevitable force-feeding of whatever politically correct agenda reigns at the moment to accompany that redistribution of our money. That attitude, of course, is why the home school movement is growing by leaps and bounds.

Nigel Mends

Helena, Mont.

The Editors respond: *Not mentioned in the cluster is the fact*

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that three of the four authors have worked as teachers: Richard P. Phelps, Thomas Toch, and Peter W. Cookson Jr.

IN CASTIGATING TEACHERS FOR teaching test-taking skills, Richard P. Phelps echoes the assumptions of politicians who say that every student could pass tests if only teachers did their jobs ["Teach to the Test?"]. As classroom teachers know, however, some students do not have that ability. Many parents also know this, which explains why public opinion polls routinely show that while many may buy the prevailing rhetoric about the failure of our education system as a whole, they are happy with their local school. They know the students who are in class with their children and the difficulties facing the teacher.

Yet the teacher and the school are held accountable for the student who is incapable of a "meets or exceeds" rating under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The punishment and humiliation inflicted on schools that do not meet the standard for "annual yearly progress," as measured by a single test on a single day each year, have led teachers to an obvious course: They focus on those borderline students who may, with better test-taking skills, become a "meets." In 2014, according to the law, all students are to be at the "meets or exceeds" level. The goal is implausible, and educators can see the cliff ahead.

No Child Left Behind did have the positive effect of forcing schools to re-evaluate how children are taught, but the time has come to abandon it. We should look to Fin-

land, often considered to have the world's best educational system, for an example. Finnish students are tested infrequently, and oversight of the schools is conducted locally. To follow its lead, we should close the U.S. Department of Education. The states should set high standards for the education and certification of new teachers and empower local boards of education to make improvements. Let Washington tackle the difficult problems facing the nation, and let parents and concerned citizens with a stake in the outcome of their decisions establish the course of education in each community.

John L. Hasten

Superintendent

Palestine Community

Unit School District 3

Palestine, Ill.

RICHARD P. PHELPS DOES AN adequate job of defending standardized testing from certain critics. However, he does not address two more fundamental problems.

First, students are not held personally responsible for their performance on the tests. When Phelps refers to "high-stakes" testing, the stakes exist only for the schools and teachers. Except in the occasional instance when they are used as high school graduation exams, standardized tests do not normally affect students' grades or their chance to advance to the next grade level. How can we hold schools and teachers responsible for a result that the student (and the student's parents) has no personal investment in?

Second, Phelps predicates his entire article on a conjecture stat-

ed in his third paragraph: "If curricula are carefully developed by educators and the test is written with curricula in mind. . . ." He does not address whether these goals are ever achieved, or are even possible. Almost all the standardized tests in use today are multiple-choice, "fill in the bubble" exams. What future endeavors are students being prepared for in which they are likely to have the help of multiple-choice answers available? How do multiple-choice tests measure non-quantitative but still critical attributes that schools should be imparting, such as critical thinking, cooperation and leadership, a thirst for knowledge, citizenship, and unconventional thinking?

Once we grant that standardized tests only gauge a portion of the success of a school, other factors must be restored to importance: those that are under the control of schools, such as the experience and education levels of their teachers; and those that are not, such as the motivation imparted to students by their families and their society.

Above all, if we are going to have a useful debate about public schools, we need to avoid the fallacy that since some factors are easily measurable and others are not, the more measurable factors are the ones that should prevail.

Bob Adams

San Diego, Calif.

THOMAS TOCH REPEATS THE myth that the Common Core initiative was led by the National Governors Association ["Who Rules?"]. It is common knowledge that the Gates Foundation funded the development and post hoc validation

of these standards and appointed or approved members of the standards development and writing committees. Instead of raising concerns about one foundation's efforts to control taxpayer-funded elementary, secondary, and university education, its violations of civic procedures, and the absence of international benchmarking for our national English and mathematics standards, Toch criticizes those who want to safeguard the quality and rigor of the school curriculum at the local level.

Peter W. Cookson Jr. worries that the future is bleak for an "average" student who can't handle Algebra I in grade eight and suggests expensive technologies as the solution to his imaginary problem ["Is \$600 Billion Enough?"]. In most high schools, however, students can take, repeat, or complete Algebra I in grade nine or 10 if they can't handle it in the eighth grade. What Cookson should worry about is that the Common Core allows eight or more years for completing what most students in Asian countries complete in the first six grades. In Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan, for example, students are expected to complete much deeper studies in algebra and geometry by grade nine, putting them two years ahead of most American students.

Under the mistaken assumption that good wages are not possible without college credentials, Kevin Carey wants to add grades 13 and 14 to the existing K–12 system, effectively extending free education by two (college) grades. Can we really afford that? He also wants college credit given for the cours-

es students take from grade 10 on. Apparently, Carey doesn't realize that it would be cheaper to give everyone a high school diploma and a college degree simultaneously after grade 12, which is what passing a test based on the Common Core's college readiness standards in grade 10 will allow.

Sandra Stotsky

*Professor of Education Reform
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
Fayetteville, Ark.*

THE *WQ*'S "FOUR BIG QUESTIONS" are truly big, but they address large systems without getting to the heart of the matter—students themselves. Plenty is wrong with those systems. The system of funding public education, for example, is and always has been driven by brute financial calculations, not by consideration of those who lie at the heart of the matter. The system by which school districts are held accountable for student achievement constantly shifts with the political sands. The system of educational governance is as antiquated as the agrarian school calendar that in most communities still defines the school year. And the empty promise that the university system will do the job of expanding our literate society is only an outgrowth of the elitism of those who envisioned life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all, except those who were not white and male.

With more than 30 years' experience as a public school educator, I continue to meet teachers and others who have an answer to that question, and they give it one student at a time. Let's stop flying at

30,000 feet looking for the answers, and get grounded in the reality of what works. Perhaps the testimonials of those who walk the talk every day should be the subject of a future cluster in the *WQ*.

Louis Lafasciano

South Strafford, Vt.

UNDERSTANDING PTSD

IN THE PAST 10 YEARS, MORE than 2.5 million men and women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, many having had multiple deployments. Any career military service-member can tell you that they all have been changed in both good and bad ways. Against this backdrop, Katherine N. Boone's article ["The Paradox of PTSD," Autumn '11] is timely.

The number of American soldiers with emotional symptoms and invisible wounds is anyone's guess—perhaps 500,000 or more. All too often, the soldiers have suffered multiple IED blasts, serious injuries, and exposure to toxins or undetected infections. (Remember Gulf War syndrome?) These are complex conditions that defy conventional research.

Boone points out that the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis "emerged as much from politics as from medicine"—it was a product of the activism of Vietnam veterans. But the interaction of politics and pathology is not unique to this syndrome, or any other medical or psychiatric condition. The state of "being sick" goes far beyond the physiology of the injury or pathogen afflicting the individual. Illness is a state of being of the whole mind and body.

Social and financial factors mat-

ter. Across the country, high rates of suicide, unemployment, and homelessness among veterans attest to the economic hardships they are encountering. Just focusing on causation, diagnosis, or the medical science is shortsighted. Getting veterans to work and improving the quality of their lives should be the priority goals. Programs for disability compensation and providing benefits for employment and education are fundamental to the treatment and prognosis of PTSD.

More resources are essential, but innovation and new thinking are vital—especially integrating clinical care, vocational rehabilitation, and educational support. It is time to undertake a comprehensive review in preparing for the postwar epidemic that has already begun.

Stephen N. Xenakis, M.D.

*Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Ret.)
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THE PREMISE OF KATHERINE N. Boone's article appears to be that PTSD is a normal reaction to combat (or other) stressful events. Although she acknowledges that most people exposed to such stressors do not meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD, she fails to understand that one can only exhibit PTSD if the symptoms cause "significant distress or functional incapacity." In PTSD, the intensity of distress and magnitude of functional incapacity are abnormal and clinically significant. They set people with PTSD significantly apart from others.

The PTSD classification was developed in response to a growing demand for clinical help by veterans (and survivors of rape, natu-

ral disasters, and other calamities) who were incapacitated and suffering greatly from their posttraumatic symptoms. The development of the diagnosis has led to evidence-based treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapies and medications. It has also opened the door to important scientific advances demonstrating that traumatic psychological events may produce profound and enduring alterations in behavior, interpersonal relationships, brain mechanisms, and functional capacity. A major area of current research is resilience: Why do some traumatized people develop PTSD, while others do not?

The fact that there have been changes in PTSD diagnostic criteria since 1980 is a sign of scientific and

clinical progress, not, as Boone suggests, a weakness in the rationale for the diagnosis itself. Because the author has trivialized—and clearly does not understand—PTSD, this article does a great disservice to millions of people with PTSD. I hope that it will not discourage them from recognizing that they suffer from a disorder for which very effective treatments are available at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities and elsewhere.

Matthew J. Friedman

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AT THE CENTER

EXITING AFGHANISTAN

During the talks to end the Vietnam War, North Vietnamese negotiators asked Henry Kissinger a pointed question: Do you expect to have more success while withdrawing troops than you did at the height of the intervention? There was, Kissinger confessed at the Woodrow Wilson Center recently, “no good answer to that.” Today, he said, the United States is in a similar position as it withdraws from Afghanistan.

Kissinger spoke at the fourth event in the Center’s new National Conversation series. As Wilson Center president and CEO Jane Harman explained in introducing the former U.S. secretary of state, the National Conversation “provides a safe political space for deep dialogue and informed discussion of the most significant problems and challenges facing our nation.” The question regarding Afghanistan: “Is there a regional endgame?”

Kissinger argued that it is crucial for other countries in the region to play a role in the Afghan peace process. Regional players—chiefly India and China—share an interest in stabilizing Afghanistan. Rather than negotiate with the Taliban alone, the United States should attempt to include these countries in talks. Doing so might put additional pressure on the Taliban and potentially head off the disintegration of Afghanistan in the wake of an American exit.

While agreeing with Kissinger’s

emphasis on regional engagement, panelist Vali Nasr, a professor of international politics at Tufts University, pointed out a potential stumbling block: Iran and Pakistan, the two states that arguably matter most to the outcome in Afghanistan, are disinclined to cooperate. “They are beginning to sort of plan for their own post-American scenario in the region,” Nasr said.

President Barack Obama announced the broad outlines of the U.S. exit last June. Of the 100,000 American troops in Afghanistan at the time, 10,000 were slated to depart by the end of 2011. Another 23,000 will leave by this summer, bringing levels back to where they were before President Obama ordered a “surge” in late 2009. He has committed to a complete withdrawal of combat troops by 2014.

Echoing the concerns of Kissinger and Nasr, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, a senior correspondent and associate editor at *The Washington Post* who is writing a book on Afghanistan during his tenure as a public policy scholar at the Wilson Center, said that withdrawal dates deprived the United States of any strength in negotiations. “It just seems to be so difficult to conceive of how you really achieve a successful negotiated outcome when you have telegraphed your exit as clearly as we have,” he said.

Frank Ruggiero, senior deputy



Henry Kissinger with Wilson Center scholar Robin Wright.

special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the State Department, argued that the U.S. withdrawal timetable will spur the region to take action. Obama’s announcement, he said, “crystallized for the neighbors that this is a problem that is theirs.”

Journalist and author Robin Wright, a U.S. Institute of Peace–Woodrow Wilson Center Distinguished Scholar, asked Ruggiero about efforts by the U.S. and Afghan governments to reintegrate former Taliban fighters into civilian society. Ruggiero said that about 2,000 fighters have been disarmed and reintegrated. The significance of that figure depends on how many people are fighting for the Taliban. “The estimates vary on how large the Taliban is,” Ruggiero said. “I’ve heard 4,000; I’ve heard 20,000.”

“Having,” as Kissinger noted, “been involved in the termination of a war,” he seemed to relate to the Obama administration’s predicament. “Whatever administration is doing it should be given some scope and some sympathy in its effort,” he said, “because if you negotiate while your forces are withdrawing, you’re not in a great negotiating position.”

AVOIDING THE ARROW PEOPLE

In 2002, journalist Scott Wallace journeyed where few outsiders have ventured before. He canoed shallow rivers and trekked through dense jungles to the land of the Arrow People, a group of Indians in a remote corner of the Brazilian Amazon whose language and culture are completely unknown to the rest of the world.

Wallace, a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center in 2009, returned recently to present his book about the experience, *The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon's Last Uncontacted Tribes*. The Arrow People are so named because intruders into their patch of impenetrable jungle are likely to be greeted by a barrage of poison-tipped arrows.

On assignment with *National Geographic*, Wallace accompanied a team of Brazilians led by Sydney Possuelo, head of Brazil's Department of Isolated Indians, on a unique mission: mapping the Arrow People's territory in order to prevent encroachment on their lands while at the same time avoiding contact with the group.

It was a novel approach for both Brazil and Possuelo. For years, Wallace explained, the Brazilian government had pursued a policy of integration, which meant that isolated Indian groups were overrun. Possuelo notched seven "first contacts" with isolated tribes during an illustrious ca-

reer as a *sertanista*, a sort of Brazilian government frontiersman. Brazil reversed course two decades ago, and so did Possuelo, who witnessed the disastrous effects of integration on the Indians.

Accompanied by Wallace and a photographer, Possuelo and his team found evidence of the Arrow People—tools, paths, small camps—during the 2002 trip. Two of Possuelo's Indian scouts even had a grazing encounter with them, though the ban on direct contact was maintained.

Wallace ate nothing but monkey meat for days on end, losing 30 pounds on the journey, but he came away struck by Possuelo's efforts. The campaign has the effect of both protecting a culture and way of life and preserving millions of acres of the Amazon.

There is resistance in some quarters. Brazil's roaring economy thirsts for land and natural resources such as lumber and gold. So far the government has largely remained steadfast. "Frankly, I think Brazil is to be commended" for what it has done, Wallace said.

Wallace confessed he was "amazed at how much interest there is in this book." And he credited the Wilson Center for its contribution. "It's a better book because I was here," he said.

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FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

Vile Bodies

Rest for the wicked

Evildoers can exert power even after death. Followers may turn a gravesite into a shrine, where they gather to stoke their fury and plot their vengeance. Fearing that possibility, the U.S. military buried Osama bin Laden at sea in May, and the Libyan governing council interred Muammar al-Qaddafi in an unmarked grave in October.

Hiding the remains of villains is a venerable practice. In 1865, military authorities spread the word that sailors had dumped the body of John Wilkes Booth into the Potomac River; in truth, the body was buried in Washington's Old Arsenal Penitentiary. (Booth's remains now lie in Baltimore's Green Mount Cemetery—in an unmarked grave.) In 1946, the Nazis who were

hanged after the Nuremberg trials were cremated, and their ashes strewn in the Conwentzbach River in Munich. As for their leader, the Soviets spirited away Hitler's charred remains in 1945 and buried them in a series of secret graves. In 1970, according to Soviet archives, the KGB burned what was left of the Führer and threw the ashes into an East German river.

When asked about the disposition of the bin Laden and Qaddafi remains, F. Gonzalez-Crussi, the author of *The Day of the Dead: And Other Mortal Reflections* (1993), cites André Gide, the French novelist and memoirist. "Gide said that we badly need symbols—our imagination would perish from exhaustion if it did not have symbols on which to rest, like a bird in flight has to have a perch on which to repose," Gonzalez-Crussi ob-

serves in an interview. "Our 'perches' are flags, national anthems, memorial monuments, effigies, and tombs." For a bin Laden or a Qaddafi, a tomb might become "a solid perch for whole flocks of votary-fledglings to rest on."

But it's not just supporters who can rally 'round the tombstone. In Appleton, Wisconsin, according to *The Chicago Tribune*, detractors of Senator Joseph McCarthy periodically stop by St. Mary's Cemetery, find his grave, and urinate on it.

Grant Makers' Gambles

Failing upward

Applicants for grants typically must set forth their proposed projects in painstaking detail, and those who get funded must show quick results if they want more money. But according to the *RAND Journal of Economics* (Fall 2011), that may not be the most fruitful strategy for grant makers.

Pierre Azoulay, Joshua S. Graff Zivin, and Gustavo Manso studied two grant programs: those of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI). The NIH generally makes three-year grants that focus on particular projects. The grants for projects whose results fall

They knew where the bodies were buried, but their own final resting places remain a mystery.



short rarely are renewed. HHMI, by contrast, makes five-year grants that are usually renewed at least once, regardless of the results. And it funds people rather than projects. According to its Web site, HHMI wants researchers to take risks and “embrace the unknown—even if it means uncertainty or the chance of failure.”

Azoulay and colleagues compared the publishing output of HHMI-funded scientists with that of equally accomplished scientists in the same fields who had received NIH grants. Per dollar of funding, the two groups produced roughly the same number of articles. The HHMI scientists had more apparent failures. Nearly a third of their articles appeared in less prestigious journals than those in which these researchers had previously published. But they also had many more successes. Compared to the NIH group, the HHMI scientists published nearly twice as many frequently cited articles. They were more likely to branch out in new directions, too.

Grant makers, take notice: A tolerance for early failure may clear a path to later success.

The Silent Treatment

Hear ye—nothing

Supreme Court confirmation hearings have become virtually useless. Nominees once gave serious, substantive answers to questions about their judicial philosophies. Then in 1987, Robert Bork’s serious, substantive answers led the Senate to reject his nomination by a vote of 58 to 42. Afraid of meeting the same



Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork talked himself out of the job in 1987.

fate, subsequent nominees have engaged in tactical reticence. Consequently, today’s confirmation hearings are little more than “a vapid and hollow charade,” University of Chicago law professor Elena Kagan wrote in 1995. Kagan only reinforced her point in 2010 when, facing the Senate Judiciary Committee as President Barack Obama’s nominee for the Supreme Court, she danced around potentially controversial questions.

But this widely believed tale of decline in the quality of the hearings is mostly wrong, according to political scientists Dion Farganis and Justin Wedeking.

For one thing, evasiveness is nothing new, Farganis and Wedeking report in *Law and Society Review* (September 2011). In the 1950s, nominees refused to answer questions about, among other contentious topics, civil rights and communism. Complaints about unforthcoming nominees are longstanding, too. In 1968, Senator Sam Ervin decried “a new right not found in the Constitution, which might well be designated as the judicial appointee’s right to refrain from self-incrimination.”

Despite the evident similarities,

confirmation hearings have indeed changed over the years, and in noteworthy ways. For one thing, they’ve gotten considerably longer. Senators asked Byron White only six questions in 1962, for instance, whereas John Roberts (2005) and Samuel Alito (2006) faced more than 700 questions apiece. In addition, senators increasingly focus on the sort of divisive issues nominees want to avoid discussing. Further, starting with Sandra Day O’Connor’s nomination in 1981, hearings have been televised on C-Span, bringing them before a larger audience. Finally, recent nominees may seem unforthcoming because they often say they can’t discuss issues that might come before the Court, a practice that also began with O’Connor. Earlier nominees tended to evade such questions without bluntly refusing to answer them.

If our system for confirming Supreme Court justices doesn’t work today, the authors conclude, maybe it never has.

Dampening the Vote

The soggy factor

Hoping to increase turnout, some states have made it easier to vote.

They've allowed election-day voter registration, increased the number of polling places, and let people vote by mail. But one variable lies beyond their control. A 2007 study found that an inch of rainfall on election day can reduce a county's voter turnout by, on average, nearly one percentage point—a modest but potentially consequential margin.

That average turns out to hide significant nuances, Bernard Fraga and Eitan Hersh show. In a study published in the July 2011 issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, they examined county-level turnout data for presidential elections from 1948 to 2000, focusing on states that were either uncompetitive or highly competitive. By their definition, uncompetitive states were those in which the ultimate margin of victory was at least 30 percent; in highly competitive states, the victory margin was no greater than four percent.

Fraga and Hersh found that precipitation in uncompetitive states did reduce turnout, a result consistent with those of the 2007 study. Not so in highly competitive states, where voters may be more energized. In fact, precipitation actually increased turnout in those states. The authors speculate that bad weather may cause skittish campaign officials to ramp up their get-out-the-vote efforts. Volunteers may make more phone calls to supporters and offer more rides to the polls than they would on a cloudless day.

They may go to great

lengths, too. Preparing for the Iowa caucuses in 2008, Hillary Clinton's campaign workers bought snow shovels for each precinct and instructed volunteers to clear supporters' driveways if necessary. Clinton ended up coming in third in Iowa, behind Barack Obama and John Edwards. Being shovel ready isn't always enough.

Final Thoughts

Risk elevated?

The Utah Office of Tourism has trademarked the slogan "Utah: Life Elevated." Unfortunately, not all residents share the high spirits. In October, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that, per capita, Utah leads the nation in suicidal thoughts.

It's an unexpected finding. Utah doesn't have the nation's highest suicide rate; Alaska does. It's not number one in suicide attempts, either; Rhode Island leads in that category. But compared with residents of other states, more Utahans—nearly seven percent—said they had considered killing themselves during the past year. At the bottom of the list, just over two percent of Georgians acknowledged thoughts of suicide.

Experts aren't sure what ac-

counts for Utah's dubious distinction.

Among the regions of the United States, the intermountain West—which includes Utah—generally has the nation's highest suicide rate, according to John L. McIntosh, a psychologist at Indiana University, South Bend. In an e-mail, he notes that people in the region may have readier access to firearms, fewer mental health resources, greater distances to medical facilities, and "personalities that might be more rugged and individualistic." But, he adds, "we have no idea" how or even if those factors fuel suicidal thoughts.

Lanny Berman, executive director of the American Association of Suicidology, says that no matter how large the sample—the CDC study is based on interviews with 92,264 respondents—"self-report data are always open to criticism." It's conceivable that Utahans don't ruminate on suicide any more than other Americans. They're just more forthright about it.

Neither Berman nor McIntosh knows of any studies indicating that Mormons, who make up around three-fifths of Utah's population, are particularly prone to thoughts of suicide. So what's behind Utah's ranking in the CDC

report? At least for now, says Berman, "there is no definitive explanation."

Right Turn

Early Gipper

The historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. was no fan of Ronald Reagan. In





Red herring? Ronald Reagan (left) and Olivia de Havilland, shown here in *Santa Fe Trail* (1940), each assumed the other was a Communist.

1980, Schlesinger wrote in his diary that there was “no reason to believe anything” Reagan said, for he would “play whatever script is required.” Yet Schlesinger unwittingly helped bring about Reagan’s shift from FDR liberal to, well, Ronald Reagan conservative. Steven J. Ross tells the story in *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (Oxford University Press).

In 1946, *Life* published an article by the 28-year-old Schlesinger on the menace of communism in the United States. “In Los Angeles Communism flourishes along with the other weird cults,” he wrote. “It has made particular headway among the intellectuals of Hollywood, who find in the new faith a means of resolving their own frustration and guilt.”

At the time, Reagan served on

the executive council of the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP), a liberal group that promoted disarmament and international cooperation. HICCASP’s executive director, George Pepper—later identified as a member of the Communist Party—asked the council to rebut Schlesinger’s characterization. Reagan and several others proposed a public statement denouncing communism. But in what Reagan later recalled as “a Kilkenny brawl,” other members of the council responded by calling them “fascists,” “red-baiters,” and “capitalist scum.”

Afterward, Reagan and other anticommunists in HICCASP decided to submit their own statement to the executive council. They assembled in actress Olivia de Havilland’s apartment to write it. Reagan told de Havilland that he was surprised she was hosting—he’d thought she was a member of the Communist Party. She replied that she’d thought *he* was a member. The group drafted a statement saying that although capitalist and communist countries could coexist “in peace and good will,” communism was not “desirable for the United States.”

But even this gentle criticism proved unacceptable. Screenwriter John Howard Lawson, who secretly led the Communist Party in Hollywood, declared that the executive committee would “never adopt a statement of policy which repudiates Communism or endorses private enterprise.” When Reagan suggested that the statement be cir-

culated to the full membership of HICCASP to get their views, Lawson responded—at least in Reagan’s recollection—that the rank and file “would not be politically intelligent enough or educated enough to make such a decision.”

Reagan resigned from HICCASP in protest and began to rethink his politics. He voted for Eisenhower in 1952 and led Democrats for Nixon in 1960. In 1961—while Schlesinger was working in the Kennedy White House—Reagan became a registered Republican.

Paper Treadmills

Diet: books

Public health experts maintain that a sedentary lifestyle is a major factor behind obesity. But the truth may be more complicated, Fred C. Pampel reports in *Sociology of Health and Illness* (forthcoming).

Using data from international surveys, Pampel found that education, employment, and other components of socioeconomic status correlate with body mass index (BMI). No surprise there: Lots of studies have shown that well-off people tend to be thinner.

But even when he controlled for socioeconomic status, Pampel found a correlation between different sedentary leisure activities and BMI. In particular, readers are less likely to be overweight than TV watchers. Indeed, regular book-reading seems to predict lower BMI about as reliably as regular exercise. Not all couch potatoes are created equal.

—Stephen Bates

Pakistan's Most Dangerous Place

Pakistan's remote and poorly understood tribal region has emerged as key to the future of both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

BY ZAHID HUSSAIN

AS THE UNITED STATES STRUGGLES TO BROKER AN endgame to the decade-old war in Afghanistan, an arid mountain region in northwestern Pakistan not much larger than Vermont has emerged as the key to the beleaguered Afghan state's future—and perhaps Pakistan's as well. Often described as the most dangerous place on earth, Pakistan's semiautonomous tribal region serves as a haven for Al Qaeda operatives, Pakistani militants, and jihadists from across the Islamic world, as well as Muslim radicals from the United States and Europe who come for ideological instruction and to plot terrorist attacks in their home countries.

Once mainly a springboard for cross-border attacks into Afghanistan, the region now harbors militants who have taken the battle deep inside Pakistan itself. Their ambitions expanded in 2007, when escalating conflicts between religious militants and the government of the then president Pervez Musharraf exploded during a government effort to expel militants from the famous Red Mosque in the capital city of Islamabad. A long standoff that concluded with an assault by Pakistani army and paramilitary troops left scores of people

dead. That December, some 40 militant leaders from the tribal region and elsewhere gathered in South Waziristan, a regional district, to unite under the banner of a new organization called Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). With thousands of fighters, the group seeks to enforce draconian Islamic rule in the tribal areas and neighboring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly called the North-West Frontier Province).

Most of the leaders had long experience fighting U.S. forces in Afghanistan and attempting to overthrow the government of President Hamid Karzai. But now they turned their wrath against Pakistan's security agencies and the military. Within a year, the TTP had swept through almost all the tribal territory as well as part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By the middle of 2009, Taliban fighters had advanced to the districts of Swat and Buner, only 70 miles from Islamabad.

A massive army operation pushed back the advancing Taliban, but the insurgents maintained their hold in some of the tribal territory. That August, U.S. drone aircraft killed TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud (who had been blamed for the 2007 assassination of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto); the attack was one of the highest-profile successes of the CIA's aerial campaign in the tribal areas. But the insurgency was not dampened by the death of Baitul-

ZAHID HUSSAIN, the Pakistan scholar at the Wilson Center for 2011–12, is an Islamabad-based correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Times of London*. He is the author most recently of *The Scorpion's Tail: The Relentless Rise of Islamic Militants in Pakistan—and How It Threatens America* (2010).



After capturing Kotkai, the South Waziristan stronghold of Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud, in 2009, Pakistani troops destroyed a training camp for suicide bombers, along with other facilities.

lah Mehsud; he was replaced by an even fiercer commander, Hakimullah Mehsud, who unleashed a fresh wave of deadly terrorist attacks across the country to avenge his comrade's death.

Over the past five years, thousands of Pakistani civilians and military personnel have been killed in terrorist attacks and in the fighting in the country's northwest. The TTP has launched suicide bombings and other attacks in Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore, targeting crowded markets and other civilian targets as well as security installations. In a stunning attack in 2009, mil-

itants stormed the army's heavily guarded national headquarters in the city of Rawalpindi, killing several officers and holding off Pakistani troops for hours.

These events made it clear to knowledgeable Pakistan observers that their worst fears were being realized. Not only had the Taliban forged a new unity, but it was forming an increasingly well-coordinated web including Al Qaeda and outlawed militant groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen whose primary objective is to drive Indian forces from the disputed Himalayan border state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Despite the wave of U.S. drone attacks that have killed many of its leaders, Al Qaeda is gaining strength. A flood of recruits from Pakistan's well-educated urban middle class— young people, professionals, and retired military officers—have flocked to its strongholds in the tribal areas. This new generation of militants, committed to global jihad, act as a magnet for Muslim radicals from across the world. They are part of a new Al Qaeda that has taken root in Pakistan, one whose influence is

no longer confined to the distant mountains. The port city of Karachi, a metropolis of 18 million people that is Pakistan's economic capital, has become a significant militant hub and source of funding. Thousands of madrassas in the city provide a steady stream of new recruits and suicide bombers.

The economic and political costs of the spreading militant violence have been huge, threatening to destabilize the country. Last January, Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab, Pakistan's most powerful province, was shot to death by a member of his security detail who

claimed that the governor had committed blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. Hard-line clerics publicly hailed the assassin as a hero of Islam. Weeks later, a government minister was shot dead by militants outside his house in Islamabad for the same reason. In May, days after U.S. Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden in his hideout in Abbottabad, a city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a band of Taliban fighters infiltrated a Pakistani air base in the southern city of Karachi and managed to keep it under siege for 16 hours. It was clear that the attackers had been helped by insiders. The audacious attack on the high-security defense installation dealt a serious blow to ordinary Pakistanis' confidence in the military's ability to deal with the militant threat.

Meanwhile, high inflation and growing unemployment have fueled discontent among Pakistanis, providing an even more conducive environment for religious extremism. The beleaguered government of President Asif Ali Zardari has been unable to deal with the country's grave political, economic, and security challenges. Pakistan, a country with more than 100 nuclear weapons and an army half a million strong, has descended into near chaos. The fragmentation of the country, perhaps with Pakistani security forces losing control over some parts of the tribal areas to the Taliban insurgents, has become a real possibility.

The region officially known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas has a long history of fierce independence and lawlessness. Occupying less than five percent of Pakistan's total area, it is divided into seven semiautonomous districts. The thick forests and numerous caves that dot the treacherous mountains make the region a natural redoubt for insurgents. Six of the districts border Afghanistan. Two are at the heart of the current tribal unrest: North and South Waziristan. The division is mostly a matter of administrative convenience; it is generally more useful to think in terms of one Waziristan. Most of Waziristan's population is composed of Wazirs and Mehsud, two of the fiercest tribes of an ethnic group, the Pashtuns, whose homeland extends into Afghanistan.

Tribal members zealously guard their independence under a code of honor known as *pashtunwali*, and no foreign invader, from Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan to the British in the 19th and 20th centuries, has ever tamed them. Sir Olaf Caroe, who had the misfortune to be a British colonial administrator in the region during the 1940s, likened the Wazirs to panthers and the Mehsud to wolves: "Both are splendid creatures; the panther is sly, sleeker, and has more grace, the wolf pack is more purposeful, more united, and more dangerous." The two tribes, segmented into a complex array of

Along the Afghan border, a Pakistani soldier stands silhouetted against the forbidding mountains that militants have found so hospitable.



clans and other subgroups, have long coexisted in a state of chronic feuding, though they have always united when faced with an invader.

In 1850, that invader was Britain, intent on creating a buffer zone between British India and the Russian Empire. The British launched six major expeditions into Waziristan between 1850 and 1880. All six failed. Finally, in 1893, they were able to compel King Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan to accept a formal demarcation of the frontier between his country and the part of British India that is now Pakistan. It was called the Durand Line, after the British diplomat who negotiated it, Henry Mortimer Durand. By heedlessly dividing the Pashtun population in half, however, the map-makers sowed the seeds of endless conflict. Predictably, the tribesmen despised the artificial divide, and continued to move freely across the border as if it did not exist.

The British granted the territories a high degree of autonomy, ruling indirectly through Pashtun *maliks*, or tribal elders, using a mix of persuasion, pressure, and regular armed intervention to govern. Nevertheless, they faced a series of major revolts, led in most cases by mullahs. Waziristan's landscape is dotted by early-20th-century British forts, monuments to a largely futile effort to control the territory.

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the tribes pledged their loyalty to the new government, and in return the authorities withdrew regular army troops from the region, replacing them with locally recruited paramilitary forces. But Pakistan largely retained the British colonial administration and legal structure, so that the tribes were deprived of basic civil and political rights and other protections under Pakistani law. Only in 1997 did residents gain the right to vote

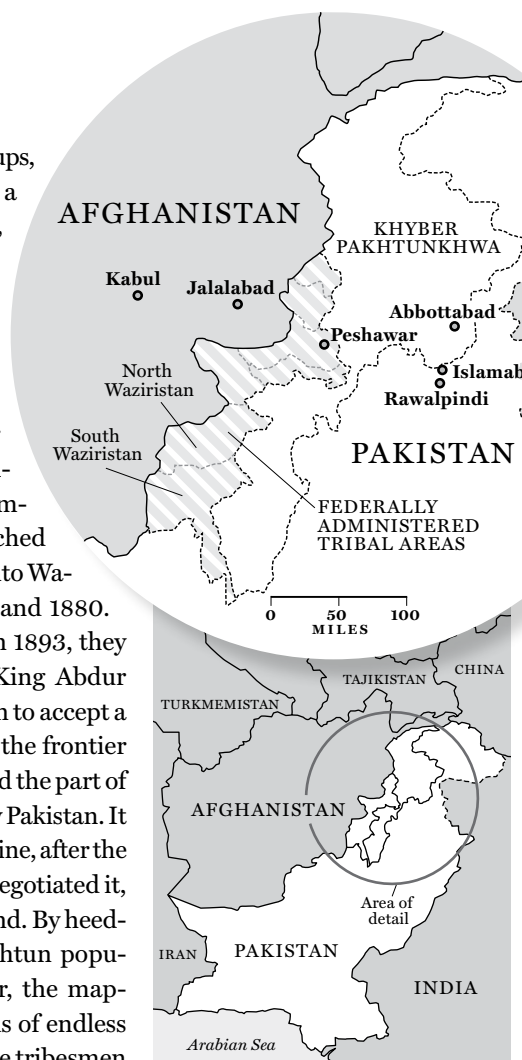
in Pakistani elections.

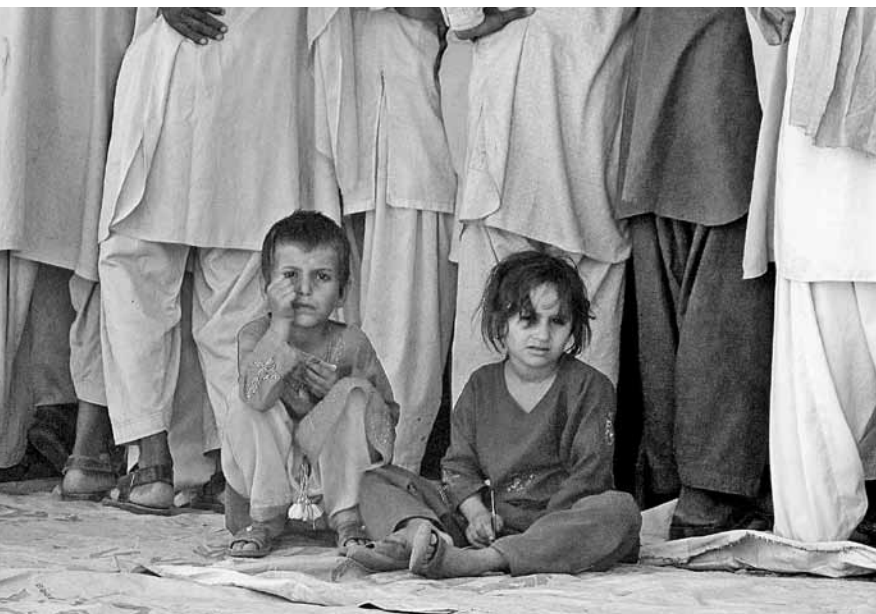
All power in each district rests with a centrally appointed political agent who operates through the *maliks*; some of these agents are chosen by tribes, others by the government. The perpetuation of the old colonial administrative arrangement is largely to blame for the continuing lawlessness, neglect, and social and economic backwardness of the region. Less than 30 percent of tribal members attend school, and of this group, 90 percent drop out before completing their education. Poverty is pervasive. Smuggling, gunrunning, and drug trafficking are common occupations.

Radical Islam took root in the region only after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when Pakistan became the frontline state in the U.S.-backed Afghan resistance war. Afghan mujahideen fighting

the Soviets used Pakistan's tribal areas as their base, and Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in collaboration with the CIA, funneled weapons and millions of dollars into the region. Thousands of tribesmen joined their fellow Pashtuns across the border in the holy war. Strategically located Waziristan became the main training center for thousands of Arab fighters who came to wage jihad against the Soviets.

American money and arms stopped flowing into Pakistan after the end of the Soviet occupation in 1989, but a civil war in Afghanistan kept the kettle boiling. Fearful that India, Pakistan's great rival, might gain a foothold to the north, Pakistan's military and the ISI helped Pashtuns in the tribal areas link up with their Taliban brethren across the border who were fighting the secular regime left behind by the Soviets. The fighting drove hundreds of thousands of Afghan Pashtuns across the border, causing severe





Thousands of refugees were displaced by fighting in South Waziristan in 2011.

social and economic strains in the impoverished tribal areas. Meanwhile, Saudi- and Pakistani-funded madrassas flourished, strengthening the influence of militant clerics.

The invasion of Afghanistan by American forces in October 2001 pushed thousands of Al Qaeda operatives and Afghan Taliban fighters into the Pakistani tribal region, where, for the most part, they were welcomed. Not only did *pashtunwali* demand it, but many were not strangers to the region at all—indeed, some had married local women after the anti-Soviet war and had families there. Al Qaeda was helped, moreover, by the simple fact that it had money to spend.

The region's lush valleys became home to clusters of sprawling, rugged, mud-brick compounds—Al Qaeda's new command-and-control centers. Humming inside nearby caves were sophisticated propaganda factories, complete with video-editing capabilities. Several camps sprung up in the area to provide training to new recruits from across Pakistan and from other Muslim countries. Money was freely distributed to tribesmen to secure their loyalty, bringing a newfound prosperity to many communities.

In 2002, Pakistani troops entered the tribal area for the first time in 55 years, albeit under an agreement that confined the army to development work. The

main objective was to secure the border and prevent Al Qaeda operatives fleeing U.S. and other NATO forces in Afghanistan from entering tribal areas, but the treacherous mountain passes made it impossible to completely fulfill the mission. Foreign fighters moved freely through the region, using it as a base for cross-border attacks on NATO forces in Afghanistan. Pakistani military leaders were reluctant to launch military operations to drive the foreigners out, a policy of appeasement that later cost Pakistan hugely when the militants turned against Islamabad.

Early in 2004, under pressure from the United States, Pakistan finally launched an offensive against Al Qaeda in South Waziristan, but

it soon turned into an undeclared war between the Pakistani military and rebel tribesmen, spreading into other tribal areas. Despite the commitment of more than 100,000 troops, the military's efforts have yielded only questionable gains. The Taliban and Al Qaeda have shown themselves capable of regrouping and striking back after defeats, and they have resumed attacks in some areas that were thought to be secure. American drone attacks have killed a number of senior Al Qaeda leaders but have had little effect on the group's operations. Indeed, the drone strikes have helped fuel the insurgency by stoking public anger over the increasing toll on civilians, including many women and children. *Pashtunwali*, moreover, requires the families of those killed to seek revenge. In the crucial district of North Waziristan, meanwhile, the frustrated Pakistani military struck a peace deal in 2006: Local Taliban groups would sever their ties to the TTP but would be free to keep fighting U.S. and Afghan forces across the border.

North Waziristan is now the eye of the storm. It has become the main sanctuary for the TTP and other Pakistani militant groups driven from South Waziristan and other tribal regions. Pakistani military officials admit they cannot contain militant violence in the country without clearing North Waziristan of

TTP sanctuaries. Yet the region is also the home base of one Afghan Taliban group, the Haqqani network, that they are not prepared to act against. Led by legendary former Afghan mujahideen commander Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin, the Haqqani network has perhaps 10,000 fighters battling U.S. and other NATO forces in Afghanistan. Its strong connections with Al Qaeda have made the network the most dangerous insurgent faction in Afghanistan.

Pakistani military leaders maintain that the Haqqani network has not been involved in the TTP's activities inside Pakistan. But their deep reluctance to take action against the network is also a reflection of Islamabad's concern about what will happen after the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan, which is supposed to be completed by the end of 2014. The Pakistani military establishment doesn't believe the United States has a clear strategy for an orderly exit from Afghanistan. Its leaders are convinced that if the United States and NATO leave in 2014 without first putting a political settlement in place in Afghanistan, civil war will again break out in the country. If that happens, the Haqqani network and other Pashtun-dominated Taliban groups will be needed as proxy forces to protect Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan against other tribes and the much-feared Indian influence.

Meanwhile, a series of spectacular attacks by the Haqqani network on Western installations, including a strike on the U.S. Embassy in Kabul last September, has led to a complete rupture in relations between Washington and Islamabad. "The Haqqani network acts as a veritable arm of the ISI," charged Admiral Mike Mullen, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a hearing in September before the Senate Armed Services Committee. In November, a NATO attack on a Pakistani border post that killed 24 troops provoked Islamabad to halt all NATO supply shipments to Afghanistan through Pakistan. The United States has suspended all military cooperation with Pakistan, the most serious blow yet to what has



In November, these North Waziristan tribal elders met with Pakistani army officers.

been a tortured alliance.

No Afghan peace effort will succeed if the trust gap between the United States and Pakistan is not bridged, and an unstable Afghanistan would pose a threat to the entire region. In the interest of both its own national security and regional peace, Pakistan must eliminate militant sanctuaries in North Waziristan, but as long as the standoff with the United States persists, it will be extremely difficult for Islamabad to launch a major military operation in the region.

Over the longer term, however, military action alone does not offer a solution to the complex problems of the tribal areas. Pakistan needs to take urgent measures to end their alienation and backwardness, and the ongoing military operation provides an opportunity to push for the long-delayed integration of the region into Pakistan and end its semiautonomous status. The oppressive, century-old administrative system must be scrapped, and the people of the region must be accorded the full protection of the nation's legal system. Massive investments in human and physical infrastructure are needed. A modern road network, for example, would help end the tribal areas' economic isolation and link them with the rest of Pakistan, and Afghanistan too. In other words, in this crucial, strife-torn region, more war is not the answer. ■

My Own Private Nietzsche: An American Story

The German philosopher whose ideas would leave an indelible mark on Europe was embraced by Americans eager to see in him a reflection of their own image.

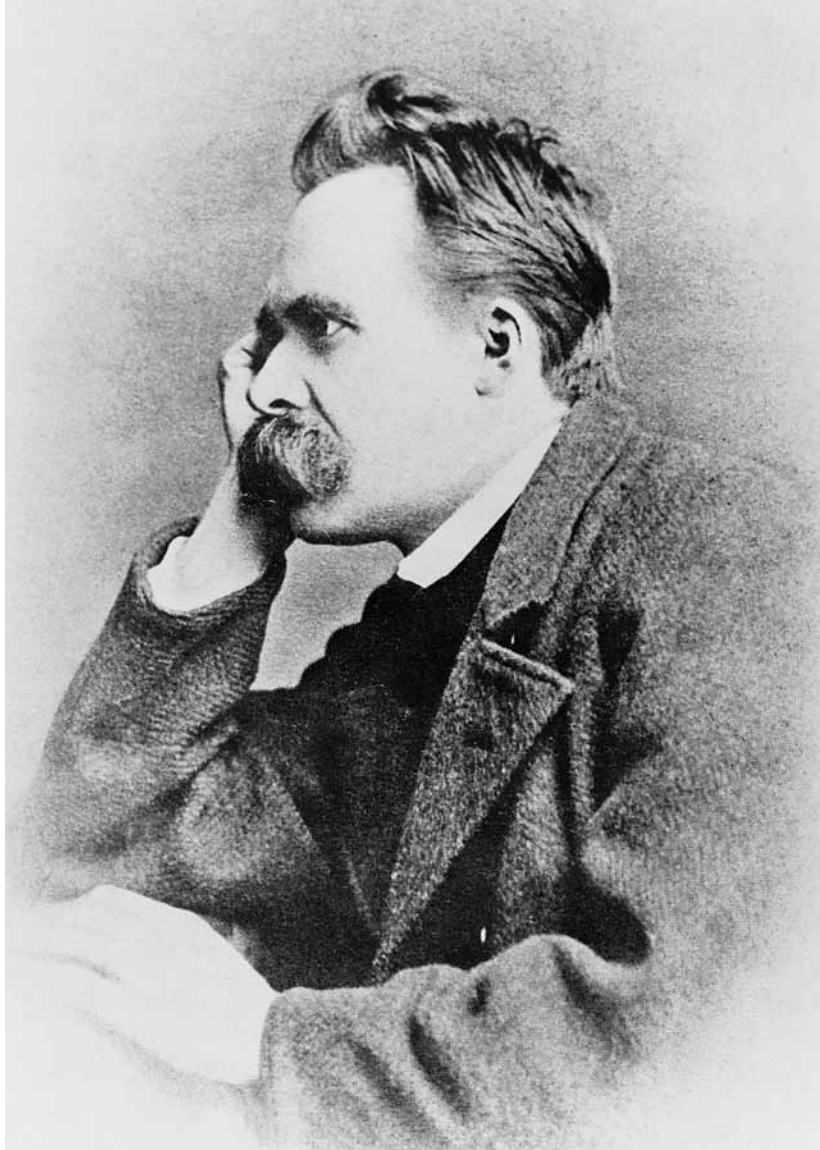
BY JENNIFER RATNER-ROSENHAGEN

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 1913, 67-YEAR-OLD JENNIE Hintz of Yonkers, New York, penned the first of two long letters to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Friedrich Nietzsche's sister and literary executor. Hintz, a self-described "spinster," introduced herself as a "great admirer of your brother's philosophy and his morals." There was so much to tell Förster-Nietzsche, so much to reflect on—with every stroke of her rusty German *Schrift*, Hintz etched her longings and disappointments into the stationery. She shared a bit of her background (she was born in Königsburg, moved to Boston at age 10, and now lived in Yonkers with her sister's family), chronicled her break from Christianity as a teenager, and confessed her frustrations in trying to find her own "voice." She explained that she felt drawn to Nietzsche precisely because "in many points I had already arrived at these truths before He expressed them, but I remained mute keeping them for myself."

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Learning about his catastrophic mental collapse in 1889, which extinguished his mind and left his body to languish until his death in 1900, "brought me to tears," she wrote. Had she only known that this suffering saint existed, "that He had the courage to write his ideas out and to publish them, already in 1887 I could have come to him, stood by his side," and proved to him that she was "another soul who understood him." Rather than give in to frustration, though, she understood that she must turn to the resources in herself. After all, that is what Nietzsche had taught her: not the truth, but how one finds it in and for oneself.

Hintz was not alone in her fascination with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In the closing years of the 1890s, as Nietzsche entered the final phase of his mental twilight, his philosophy experienced a popular dawn in the United States. It was at this time that discussions of his thought began studding philosophical journals, literary magazines, political manifestoes, Sunday sermons, and public lectures. American readers took an interest not only in Nietzsche's radical



Friedrich Nietzsche, shown here in a photograph taken in 1882, was widely seen as a tragic genius.

ideas, but also in the tortured life that gave birth to them. They examined why his pious upbringing as the son of a Lutheran pastor gave way to atheism, catalogued his battery of illnesses, questioned why he left his university professorship for a lonely life of intellectual itinerancy, assessed friendships collapsed and abandoned, and debated whether “madness,” “genius,” or “mad genius” was the appropriate explanation for his tragic biography. The interest in Nietzsche grew so dramatically that by 1910 observers could, without hyperbole, claim that it was one of the most significant “intellectual romances” of the period. Virtually unknown during his productive lifetime in his native Germany, now, across the Atlantic, in an America he had known little of, Friedrich Nietzsche had become a posthumous popular celebrity and public intellectual.

When Hintz professed her reverence for Nietzsche in 1913, the American “Nietzsche vogue” (as it was referred to at the time) was only in its infancy. Indeed, what looked like a fleeting intellectual fashion in the 1910s proved so durable that by 1987 it had accomplished, in the words of University of Chicago classics scholar Allan Bloom, nothing less than the “Nietzscheanization” of the American mind. In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bloom surveyed the wreckage of late-20th-century “value relativism” in American culture and traced it back to the 1930s and ’40s, when German-speaking intellectual émigrés fleeing Nazism brought Nietzsche’s philosophy with them as they found refuge in the American academy. According to Bloom, though they introduced Americans to Nietzsche’s terrifying insights into the bankruptcy of Western thought and morality, these refugee scholars also in-

structed them in the larger European cultural framework from which they had come. But as his philosophy made its way from the academy into the radicalized culture of the 1960s, it became transfigured into a blank check for late-20th-century “nihilism, American style.”

“On enchanted American ground the tragic sense has little place,” Bloom asserted, insisting that restless leftists of the 1960s threw down just enough fertile soil to nourish Nietzsche’s assaults on universals but not enough to support the moral reckoning his ideas required. For Bloom, the fact that American ideologues at century’s end could so badly botch the ideas of a genius who took the likes of them as his enemy bespoke the unbridgeable chasm between Nietzsche’s robust aristocratic radicalism and the slack, impoverished American culture that worshipped it. Bloom not only

dedicated a good portion of his best-selling book to his thundering lament, but editors of this very magazine of ideas—*The Wilson Quarterly*—gave him an additional 14 pages to examine the spectacle of “How Nietzsche Conquered America” [Summer ’87].

In the most general sense, Bloom got this story right—Nietzsche *had* conquered America, though not by the route he imagined. As Hintz’s letter indicates, Nietzsche’s philosophy had insinuated itself into the American moral imagination long before Bloom assumed it had, and had pulled into its orbit a much wider and more diverse readership than he recognized. Indeed, throughout the 20th century, the American fascination with the German philosopher worked its way along the political spectrum, and through cultural hierarchies that ostensibly divided “high” scholarly thought from “middlebrow” and “popular” culture. Just a tiny sampling of Nietzsche’s American readers points to a larger and more complicated history

speech to Congress launching the “war on terror.”

Though American commentators’ interpretations and uses of Nietzsche have ranged considerably, they reveal similar pathways through which he became so ubiquitous in 20th-century American life. What holds together Nietzsche’s array of readers is the same sentiment Jennie Hintz expressed—that he spoke to them personally. They discovered in Nietzsche a philosopher who wrote to and of the distinctive, rare, exemplary self, and they took it as axiomatic that they were the self Nietzsche had in mind. If Nietzsche became a modern celebrity, secular savior, bogeyman, and towering public philosopher in American popular discourse, he traveled this crucial path by way of private longings.

Friedrich Nietzsche thought that if a culture was clutching calcified truths, one needed to sound them out relentlessly. And that’s exactly what he tried to do. From his earliest essays on aesthetics, history, and genius in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Untimely Meditations* (1873–76), to his experiments in philosophical aphorism in *Human, All Too Human* (1878) and *The Gay Science* (1882),

to his later works assailing Christian morality, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) and *The Antichrist* (1895), this “philosopher with a hammer” (as he came to identify himself) spent his career tapping that hammer against Western ideals turned hollow idols. Central to his philosophical project was challenging the notion of eternal truth. Nietzsche sought to demonstrate that nothing is inherently good or evil, but rather that all values are culturally and historically contingent. Likewise, he argued that all claims to truth are nothing more than “human, all-too-human” desires for a particular version of the good life, not mirrors of a supra-historical reality.

While Nietzsche sought to dismantle the notion of universal morality, so too did he try to upend his readers’ faith in God. He shocked them with the declaration that “God is dead,” and disturbed them with his insistence that God had not created man in his image; it was *man* who had created an image of God in order

A SURPRISING NUMBER of Americans found in Nietzsche a philosopher who seemed to have the uncanny ability to speak to them personally.

here: William James, William Jennings Bryan, Ruth Benedict, Thomas Mann, Hans Morgenthau, Mark Rothko, Jack Kerouac, Lionel Trilling, Huey P. Newton, Judith Butler, and Cornel West, not to mention countless Jennie Hintzes lost to history.

In virtually every reading, a new Nietzsche emerged. While birth control advocate Margaret Sanger celebrated the “*Überfrau*” she hoped her emancipated New Woman would become, free-market lioness Ayn Rand discovered in the German philosopher a fellow hater of enfeebling altruism, “who believed that a man should have a great purpose . . . for his own sake . . . and his own selfish motives.” Just as “death of God” theologians used Nietzsche’s philosophy to reformulate religious meaning after the horrors of World War II, speechwriters for George W. Bush drew from it an indispensable formulation—the “will to power”—to explain the evils of Al Qaeda in the president’s September 2001

to give his life meaning, purpose, and a moral center. According to Nietzsche, the entire basis of modern Western culture was a slippery slope of lies: transcendent truth, the Enlightenment faith in reason and scientific objectivity, absolute morality, a Supreme Maker. These were mere fictions, products of human imagination and the struggle for power.

From time to time, Nietzsche put down his hammer as he tried to imagine a world after moral absolutes. Even he wondered what would happen once every article of faith had been shed and every claim to universal truth exposed as a human construct. It

with a hammer but with a divining rod, and in doing so sought to prophesy rare instances of human grandeur in a world after the death of God.

Beginning with the earliest English translations of Nietzsche's texts in 1896, the first generation of his American readers struggled mightily to make sense of this philosopher who worked with a hammer in one hand and a divining rod in the other. Christian clergy, philosophers, cultural critics, political reformers, and literary radicals were the first to jump into the speculative fray, trying to figure out how—or if—to put the ideas of an antidemocratic, anti-Christian

iconoclast to work in their lives. Though none could offer a clear version of the ideal self or society Nietzsche had in mind, they nevertheless agreed that his philosophy demanded that they reckon with the moral and material health of their modernizing America. Invariably, they sized up his philosophy in the familiar terms of their own early-20th-century moral concerns and political commitments.



Nietzsche's early American champions included feminist Margaret Sanger and journalist H. L. Mencken.

would require a special kind of individual to thrive or even survive in such a world—a figure he called the “*Übermensch*” (“superman,” or, literally, “over human being”). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85), his most poetic, prophetic text, and the one that enjoyed the broadest readership in the United States, Nietzsche proclaims, “*God is dead. . . . I teach you the Übermensch*. Man is something that shall be overcome. . . . All beings so far have created something beyond themselves. . . . What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the *Übermensch*: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. . . . The *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth. . . . I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes!” The Nietzsche of *Zarathustra* conducted philosophy not

The satirist and sharpshooting critic H. L. Mencken did the most to welcome Nietzsche as an unyielding, godless, dionysian aristocrat into the American imagination. As the author of *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908), the first American monograph dedicated to Nietzsche's life and thought, Mencken popularized a Nietzsche with a searing intellect and ruthless wit, armed with an unapologetically differentiated view of human natures and guided only by the gospel of “prudent and intelligent selfishness, of absolute and utter individualism.” Mencken's Nietzsche was indifferent to the weepy resentment of the Christian-minded and racially inferior “under-dogs” in American life.

Predictably, many religious commentators confirmed Mencken's portrait of a hypertrophied egoist, not to endorse Nietzsche's philosophy but to prevent

it from drawing young hearts and minds away from Christian ethics. Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister and leading light of the liberal Social Gospel movement, spoke for a generation of religious reformers who regarded Nietzsche's philosophy as the disturbing reflection of the brutal, tooth-and-claw social ethics of laissez-faire industrialization. Modern Christians, Rauschenbusch argued, would need to reformulate their convictions as "the direct negation of Nietzsche."

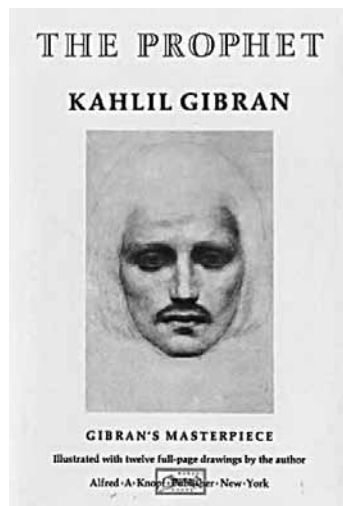
Literary radicals and socialist reformers protested both versions of Nietzsche, offering interpretations of their own. While anarchist Emma Goldman enlisted Nietzsche's concept of "slave morality" to challenge the fearful psychology behind American racism, gender inequalities, and militaristic nationalism, the young progressive Walter Lippmann marshaled Nietzsche's epistemology in his revolt against the airy idealism of late-19th-century political thought and his quest for a more pragmatic democratic theory.

Yet despite the competing uses of Nietzsche's philosophy in the opening decades of the century, a theme runs throughout. Readers both enthusiastic and enraged described their experience with Nietzsche in deeply private terms; indeed, many of them confessed to feeling as though Nietzsche had developed his philosophy expressly for them. As Mencken put it, his own ideas "were plainly *based* on Nietzsche; without him I'd never have come to them."

The prominent Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce was an early critic of this American tendency to craft a Nietzsche in one's own image. Though himself a philosophical idealist in an age when his friend William James's pragmatism was pulling academic philosophy in another direction, Royce nevertheless recognized in Nietzsche's assaults on idealism a serious meditation on the new moral rigors of the modern world. Royce argued that Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch*

expressed beautifully the struggle of man in his personal quest to discover for himself what his individuality means. Royce understood the popular temptation of individual American readers to declare Nietzsche a prophet of their own, and enlist his philosophy to sanction the conventional self or the vision of society they already held. However, Royce insisted that Nietzsche's philosophy was a summons to a higher aspiration, a more demanding vision. For Royce, Nietzsche called upon his readers to create the terms by which they would create a moral self or society yet to come.

No one was more instrumental in popularizing



Poet Kahlil Gibran and killers Leopold and Loeb represent two extremes of Nietzschean influence.



Nietzsche's image of the liberated self as the font of its own spirituality than the Lebanese-born, Boston-based poet and illustrator Kahlil Gibran. His 1923 book of prose poems, *The Prophet*, became an instant bestseller in America. But before millions of readers over the course of the 20th century found inspiration in his poetic voice, using his words to guide them through brisses, baptisms, bar mitzvahs, graduations, weddings, and funerals, Gibran came to his quotable insights by way of Nietzsche. Gibran's prophet, the fictional Almustafa, just like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, heralds the coming of a day when the higher soul lives beyond the ethical cage of good and evil: "[H]e who defines his conduct by ethics imprisons his songbird in a cage." Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Gibran's Almustafa calls upon his readers to understand that "you are good when you are one with yourself." Gibran

regarded Nietzsche as “a great giant,” and, in a letter to a friend, confessed that “the more you read him the more you will love him. He is perhaps the greatest spirit in modern times.” But for Gibran, Nietzsche’s genius was in helping him to discover his own. As he later reportedly put it, “Nietzsche took the words out of my mind. He picked the fruit off the tree I was coming to.” Gibran, like so many American readers before and after him, understood Nietzsche’s exhortation to the liberated intellect as his own conscience announcing its arrival.

Just a year after the publication of *The Prophet*, Americans witnessed the awful potential of Nietzschean self-construction when two University of Chicago students, Nathan F. Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb, randomly selected 14-year-old Bobby Franks and murdered him in cold blood. The national news published the teenagers’ morbid confessions while an army of experts rushed to explain the roots of their pathologies: their wealthy backgrounds and poor Jewish genetic constitutions, their high IQs and low moral development. But all the arguments about why these boys killed tracked back to a common cause: They thought they were Nietzschean supermen.

In what became known as the “trial of the century,” Leopold and Loeb’s high-profile defense lawyer, Clarence Darrow, admitted that the pair killed Bobby Franks, though “not for money, not for spite, not for hate. They killed him as they might kill a spider or a fly, for the experience.” An avid reader of Nietzsche himself, Darrow could understand the philosopher’s ineluctable appeal. He explained to the judge—having persuaded his clients to plead guilty so as to avoid a jury trial—that Nietzsche offered a powerful “criticism of all moral codes as the world understands them; a treatise holding that the intelligent man is beyond good and evil; that the laws for good and the laws for evil do not apply to those who approach the superman.” Darrow hoped to distribute some of the blame to the big publishing houses that printed Nietzsche’s works and to

the University of Chicago’s library for making them accessible to his clients. But in all of Darrow’s efforts to depict Leopold and Loeb as victims of Nietzsche’s philosophy, to suggest that it had “destroyed” their lives, he intimated that it was their mistake to think that they were the supermen Nietzsche had in mind. (In the end, they were given life sentences.)

The tainted image of Nietzsche’s philosophy as an endorsement of a grotesque, unbridled self that was popularized by the Leopold and Loeb trial lasted just long enough to be confirmed by Benito Mussolini’s hypermasculine theatrics and Adolf Hitler’s racist vitriol. Though political commentators in the 1930s and early ’40s debated the connections between Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, the dictators’ shared exaltation of Nietzsche helped Americans identify their complementary worldviews. Mus-

**ON BENITO MUSSOLINI’S 60th birthday,
Adolf Hitler gave his fellow dictator a specially
bound set of Nietzsche’s collected works.**

solini left no doubt about the importance of Nietzsche: “I am sure that he is the most impressive and influential author of modern Europe.”

In the years leading up to World War II, American popular and scholarly commentators began interpreting Nazism’s emphasis on the Aryan race as an expression of Nietzsche’s “blond beast” and “master morality,” neither of which recognized any law above the “will to power.” With increasing revulsion, American newspapers reported on the spectacle of the “Nietzscheanization” of German politics. Though some who wrote about the Nazification of Nietzsche wondered if the Nazis had gotten Nietzsche right, they did note how his rejection of bourgeois values, democracy, and Christian sympathy made it easy for the Nazis to enlist him. Could anyone dispute how trippingly Nietzsche’s rhetoric—such as his dismissal of democracy as “the historic form of the decay of the State” and

his praise for “the magnificent blond brute, avidly rampant for spoil and victory”—flowed from Nazi tongues through bullhorns at National Socialist conventions and marches? Confirming the popular consensus on Nietzsche’s responsibility for Axis horrors, *The New York Times* informed readers in 1943 that Hitler had sent Mussolini a specially bound edition of the philosopher’s complete works for the Duce’s 60th birthday.

But barely a decade passed before Nietzsche’s American career experienced another dramatic reversal, as he went from being seen as the mastermind of totalitarianism abroad to the hero of critics left and right eager to root it out at home. The task of rescuing Nietzsche for the Cold War fight against cultural repression fell to a German-Jewish émigré, Princeton University philosopher Walter Kaufmann, who himself, as a teenager in 1939, had had to flee the murderous regime that worshiped a Nazified

self.” Nietzsche’s philosophy was not for the man in the mass; Nietzsche wrote for the “single one.” Yet Kaufmann averred that there were few “single ones” capable of the philosophical exegesis and enlightened self-mastery Nietzsche endorsed, concluding that “some people are more favored by nature than others.” No interpreter did more than Kaufmann to popularize a privatized Nietzsche for the select few.

Kaufmann’s vision of Nietzsche defining the struggle for authentic selfhood worked its way into virtually all registers in Cold War thought. For existentialist seekers of self-sovereignty in the face of an indifferent universe, postwar political liberals anxious about the deadening effects of mass political ideologies, and sociologists and literary critics concerned about the loss of authenticity and “inner-directedness” of modern man, Kaufmann’s Nietzsche gave them an armory of words and concepts. Indeed, this privatized Nietzsche

proved so salient that it carried on in American Cold War culture in different forms, right up until “the end of history.”

IMAGES OF NIETZSCHE and his imposing mustache emblazon coffee mugs and T-shirts, while his phrases pepper our films and popular music.

Nietzsche. Beginning with his monumental 1950 study *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, and subsequently with his hugely popular *Existentialism From Dostoyevsky to Sartre* (1956), in which he established Nietzsche’s importance to existential thought, as well as decades of Nietzsche translations, Kaufmann vigorously worked to rescue Nietzsche’s philosophy from its damaged reputation.

Taking exception to the dominant views of Nietzsche as a freakish aberration from Enlightenment epistemology and liberal humanism, Kaufmann sought to establish him as an important interlocutor within these traditions. He presented a Nietzsche for the enlightened everyman—a philosopher of unmistakable unity and clarity, unimpressed with physical manifestations of power and scornful of ideologies. Nietzsche talked hard talk, but only because he privileged the “hardness of the creator who creates him-

Nietzsche as philosopher of and for the distinctive, private self animates

one of the most prominent of the immediate post-Cold War texts—political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s *End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Because one of Fukuyama’s premises was that the American combination of liberal democracy and capitalism was proving to be the “final form of human government,” critics alternately lauded and derided the book as an expression of American triumphalism. But this misses Fukuyama’s larger point. While he indeed argued that world history was leading to a universalization of the American model—as evidenced by the collapse of Soviet communism—this alone did not capture the “deeper and more profound question . . . [about] the goodness of liberal democracy itself.” Here, he turned to “Nietzsche’s greatest fear . . . that the ‘American way of life’ should become victorious,” and one of the book’s aims was to explain why his fear was warranted.

Fukuyama used Nietzsche’s characterization of de-

mocracy as the triumph of “slave morality” to frame the book, drew chapter titles and epigraphs from Nietzsche’s texts, and took the philosopher’s cautionary diagnosis of the slovenly “last men” to characterize the “typical citizen of a liberal democracy.” What mattered more than the survival of liberal democracy, Fukuyama maintained, was whether it was *worthy* of survival. Nietzsche disturbed Fukuyama with his vision of the “last men” waiting at the end of history, perfectly content to keep their bellies full and their heads low. Modern Americans were already showing evidence of this insidious contentment, Fukuyama lamented. They

vision shows, and popular music peppered with his phrases; and images of his furrowed brow and imposing mustache emblazoned on our coffee cups, T-shirts, and bumper stickers, it was not hard to believe, as Bloom had, that Nietzsche is *us*. But as the uses of the philosopher over the long 20th century testify, he only became an American “us” because so many readers with diverse moral, intellectual, and political commitments and temperaments first discovered in the pages of *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *Twilight of the Idols* an American “me.” The history of Nietzsche in America is a story of individual readers coming to terms

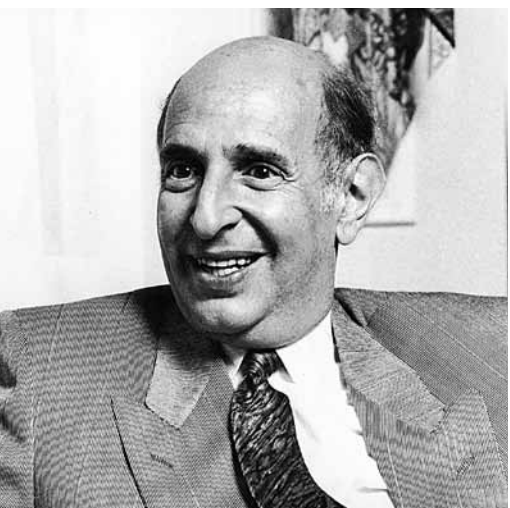
with themselves and their country, as they imagined Nietzsche speaking to and of them. If there is a Nietzsche for all seasons, it is because there was a Nietzsche for every self.

On his 44th birthday, in October 1888, Nietzsche found an occasion to reflect upon his life’s work, and began to write his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*. He recalled how his entire intellectual career had been greeted with a deafening silence. And so it is

were too willing to settle for goodness, no longer capable of striving for greatness, a little too satisfied with liberal freedoms, and much too complacent to strive for individual distinction, valor, and “*thymos*” (“spiritedness”). In Fukuyama’s conception, Nietzsche was no jingoistic, chest-thumping unilateralist, but a fellow seeker for “thymotic” moral selfhood in a world after absolutes. *The End of History* may have been largely concerned with geopolitical realignments at the end of the Cold War, but it was also a personal confession of one Nietzsche reader longing to achieve the rare self he wrote to and about.

None other than Allan Bloom, Fukuyama’s former mentor at Cornell University, understood Friedrich Nietzsche’s potency in American life by century’s end. With Nietzsche’s books filling college syllabuses; entire courses devoted to his philosophy; our movies, tele-

tempting to view his chapter titles, including “Why I Am So Wise,” “Why I Am So Clever,” and “Why I Write Such Great Books,” as testaments to his brutally wounded ego. Though Nietzsche was thrilled at the prospect that one day readers would have ears to hear and eyes to see his once untimely message, he also worried about what potential “followers” might do in his name. He argued that his philosophy was written for generations yet unborn, and he shuddered to think of what might happen to his name after he was gone. And though madness was closing in on him when he wrote *Ecce Homo*, he uttered a truth borne out by his posthumous American career. For when Nietzsche referred to himself as a “Destiny,” it is hard not to see this as a mark of unparalleled foresight rather than pathetic self-delusion. When he wrote, “I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced *holy*,” perhaps he could see what was coming. ■



Allan Bloom (left) and Francis Fukuyama put Nietzsche at the center of books on contemporary affairs.

Man as Machine

A peculiar experiment inspired by the Enlightenment sheds light on the age-old question of what makes us human.

BY MAX BYRD

ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR FRANCE'S NATIONAL Museum of Technology, on the nondescript rue Vaucaanson in Paris, announces a special demonstration. On the second floor, at the end of a corridor of antique steam engines and jacquard looms, the museum's Theater of Automates swings open its doors. At the bottom of a small, dark auditorium, the Keeper of Automates takes a few of his oldest, most fragile exhibits from their locked glass cases.

White gloved, wearing a lab technician's spotless coat, he places the items gently on a table. A capacity crowd of perhaps 80 people, nine-tenths of them (it seems) screaming children, leans forward as he spreads out his gaily painted mechanical toys—*automates*—and under a single focused light winds them up, one by one.

The climax of the demonstrations is always the same. After the clown who tips his hat and rolls a ball, after the tin rooster that hops and crows, after a half-dozen such wood and metal creatures strut across the table and perform their stunts, the Keeper's ghostly hands reverently lift into the light a doll seated before a miniature dulcimer.

The doll is about 18 inches high. She wears a beautiful golden silk gown. Her hair is also golden, her eyes sky blue. She was created in 1784, just before the

Revolution, by a German clockmaker named Peter Kintzing and a French cabinetmaker named David Roentgen, and one year later she was presented as a gift to Marie Antoinette.

The Keeper's fingers turn a key, and the doll begins to strike the dulcimer's strings with two tiny hammers she holds in her long, delicate hands. This is not a music box, you understand; there is no rotating drum in sight, no clockwork brass teeth. Virtually all automates are powered by some kind of wind-up engine. In this case, a spring motor hidden under the stool sets in motion an astonishingly complicated system of cams and levers, so that the dulcimer player's hands actually raise and lower the hammers and visibly tap the individual strings of the instrument. The doll periodically turns her head to regard, with a smile, her audience. Her chest seems to rise and fall. She actually plays her music, her admirers sigh, just like a real person.

But there are always a few who watch her performance not with admiration but with panicky unease. Once in a while, seized perhaps by the same spooky feeling that made early audiences flee movie theaters, someone will jump abruptly to his feet and hurry out. Such a person, I have had it explained to me, is probably experiencing what Freud called the feeling of the "Uncanny"—the terrifying sensation that arises when something cold and inanimate starts, mysteriously, to move and stir before us—when, say, a doll comes to life.

Automates of various kinds have been around since

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antiquity, as toys or curiosities. But in the middle of the 19th century, in one of the odder artistic enthusiasms the French are famously prone to, a positive mania for automates like the dulcimer player swept the country. People flocked to see them in galleries, museums, touring exhibitions. Watchmakers and craftsmen competed to make more and still more impossibly complex clockwork figures, animals and dolls that would dance, caper, perform simple household tasks—in one case, even write a line or two with pen and ink. The magician Robert Houdin built them for his act. Philosophers and journalists applauded them as symbols of the mechanical genius of the age. Like so many such fads, however, the Golden Age of Automates lasted only a short time. By about 1890 it had yielded the stage to even newer technologies: Edison's phonograph and the Lumière brothers' amazing cinematograph.

Yet as every novelist knows, a story always starts earlier than we think. The strange French passion for automates had its true beginnings not in the middle of the 19th century but at least a hundred years ear-

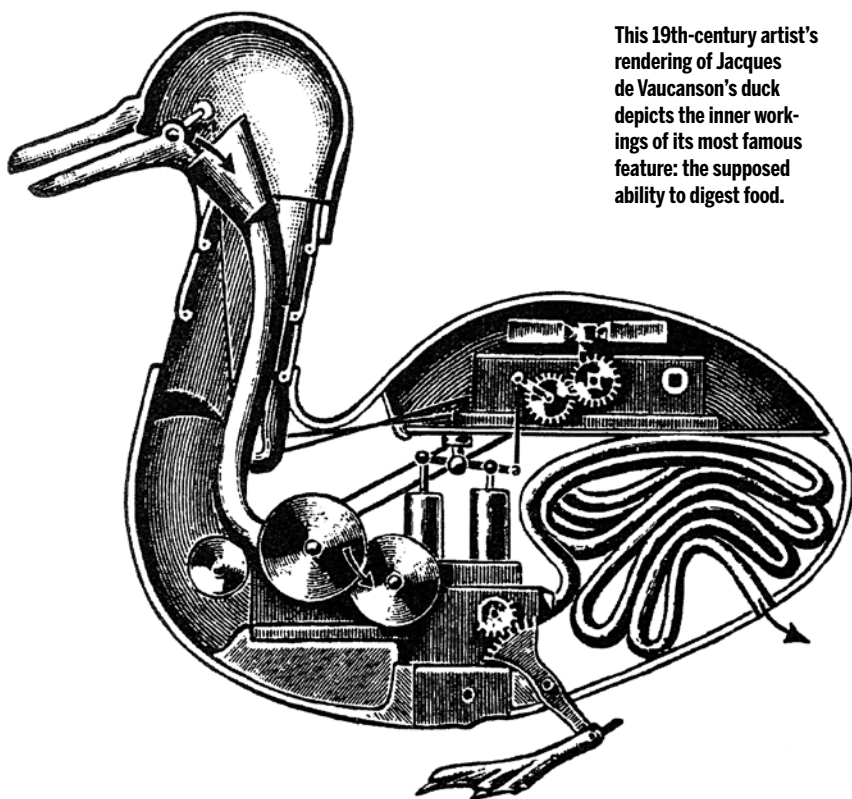
lier, in the cool, absurdly overconfident philosophical speculations of the Enlightenment. And paradoxically enough, this passion had less to do with philosophy than with blasphemy, hypochondria, and a cheerful and Frankensteinian hubris.

We can step back outside to the little street where the Museum of Technology sits. Jacques de Vaucanson, for whom the byway is named, was born in Grenoble in 1709, at the very dawn of the Age of Reason. From earliest boyhood, he exhibited both an obsessive hypochondria and a remarkable aptitude for mechanics. At the age of six or seven, he built a clockwork boat that propelled itself across a pond. A few years later, as a novice in the religious order of Minimes in Lyon, he constructed several automates or androids—maddeningly, we have no description of them—that could serve dinner and clear away the plates. A mechanical boat was one thing. But an automate that acted like a human being! The creation of life, the monks angrily reminded their young novice, was God's business, not man's; Vaucanson's experiments must

cease. The frustrated youth suddenly declared (not for the last time) that he was suffering from an unnamed but grievous illness, whereupon the monks released him from his vows. He gathered his tools and sped off to Paris to study, of all things, human anatomy.

Soon enough, Vaucanson found himself in the company of certain philosophical "materialists"—notably the celebrated surgeon Claude-Nicolas Le Cat—who were inspired by the audacious Enlightenment idea that life is a physical, not a spiritual, phenomenon. In a few years, Julien La Mettrie would crystallize their

This 19th-century artist's rendering of Jacques de Vaucanson's duck depicts the inner workings of its most famous feature: the supposed ability to digest food.



thought in his scandalous book *L'homme machine* (1746), in which he argued that the human body was no more than an automate itself and might be imitated (or created) by a sufficiently clever mechanic. Indeed, the surgeon Le Cat had long been at work on such a project, though without much success. His lofty goal was to create an “automated man” whose blood flowed, whose leather lungs inhaled and exhaled, and whose brass glands exuded secretions. Le Cat intended no blasphemy, however. His creature was merely to serve for surgical demonstrations and experiments.

Vaucanson was an extraordinarily apt—and competitive—student. In early 1738, following another obscure bout of illness, he rented a showroom in the center of Paris and announced, like a Gallic P. T. Barnum, the exhibition (to paying customers) of his own mechanical man. This, we know from numerous witnesses, including Denis Diderot, who wrote about it for his *Encyclopédie*, was a large wooden automaton—more precisely, an android—painted entirely white to look like marble and modeled after a well-known statue in the Tuileries Garden called *The Flute Player*.

It is almost impossible to overstate the sensation it caused. Like the golden-haired doll in the Museum of Technology, the Flute Player was no simple music box. Vaucanson’s wooden android *really played the flute*: His lungs pumped air through his trachea and mouth, his lips opened and closed around the mouthpiece, his fingertips—possibly covered with bits of human skin—moved confidently across the various stops on the instrument. “It was,” says historian Gaby Wood, “as if the marble statue had come to life.”

Wood’s wonderful book *Edison’s Eve* (2002) is the single best account of the Enlightenment’s quest for mechanical life. She sees clearly that what was so remarkable about Vaucanson’s Flute Player was not its mechanical ingenuity, the gears and pulleys and levers hidden in its torso, but the fact that it *breathed*. Other musical automatons over the years had simply rung bells or struck drums, like marching figures on a church clock. But the Flute Player, thanks to a pair of bellows in his chest, did something that seemed to go beyond mechanics and into the world of biology. And in doing so, as Wood notes, it raised the philosophical question of what it meant, exactly, to be human.

This is, of course, the question at the core of so much Enlightenment thought. It marches across the titles in any 18th-century library—David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). It lies behind the period’s fascination with so-called wild boys—abandoned children found living alone in the French and German forests: If they cannot speak and have no sense of social relations, can they be truly human? It is nearly the whole point of that central Enlightenment text, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), in which the character of human nature is graphically explored: Are we insignificant and comic like Lilliputians? Great and brutal like giants? Rational like the talking horses? Hopelessly bestial like the grunting and snarling Yahoos? Are we only flesh-covered automates, fashioned by the celestial Watchmaker?

It is our question too, of course. We see it raised today in the profound psychological studies of Steven Pinker, in the “robot” novels of Isaac Asimov, and in the theories of artificial intelligence of Raymond Kurzweil, which propose that the brain is essentially a computer that can be replicated mechanically. In September a conference was held in Paris, not far from the rue Vaucanson, on the subject of “Le Cerveau et la Machine” (The brain and the machine), based on the speculative work of Swiss artificial intelligence researcher Frédéric Kaplan. As if to create a kinder, gentler Frankenstein monster, an MIT graduate student recently devised a robot that can bake chocolate chip cookies. And to bring the idea full circle, scientists at Waseda University in Tokyo have created a robot, complete with top hat and rubber fingers, that . . . plays the flute.

Vaucanson, however, was less a philosophical theorist than a practical, even greedy businessman. In 1739, as profits from the Flute Player’s performances began to decline, he added two new automatons to his exhibit. One was a pipe-and-drum player. The other—which was to make him, for a time, one of the most famous men in Europe—was a mechanical duck.

And not merely a wind-up duck that flapped its wings and quacked and turned its head. If you held out a bit of food in your palm, the duck’s head would lower, its beak would fall open, and the automaton would actually gulp down the morsel. And then, some

minutes later—Reader, I am not making this up—the duck would excrete it.

I have devoted more hours than I like to recall thinking about the question of why—why would a sane person create something as bizarre as a metal duck that ate, digested, and excreted? It was no toy. A single wing of the duck contained more than 400 tiny articulated parts. The food was digested in a stomach that contained chemicals to transform it, and it exited, Vaucanson wrote helpfully in an explanatory booklet, through “the anus, where there is a sphincter which permits it to emerge.” (The excretion part was a fraud, of course. The grain the duck ate was caught in a receptacle in its throat, and the material it excreted was stored inside it before demonstrations.)

I have wondered if the project had something to do with the well-known French fascination with intimate plumbing. Or if Vaucanson was projecting his own imagined bodily frailties—his hypochondria—onto a living creature that would, in contrast to him, perform its functions flawlessly. Or did the duck represent a daring progression from Outer to Inner, from the statue-like frame of the Flute Player to the hidden bowels of a living creature? Granted, an automate of a man or a flute player doing the same thing would have presented certain problems. But even so—why a *duck*? *Un canard*? Was it all just a very odd, sophomoric joke? Voltaire, equally baffled, fell back, as usual, on irony, remarking only that “without Vaucanson’s shitting duck there would be nothing to remind us of the glory of France.”

There was at least one person who regarded the duck without irony.

Louis XV was not quite 30 years old when he traveled from Versailles into Paris to see Vaucanson’s exhibition. He was motivated by his passion-



Eighteenth-century inventor Jacques de Vaucanson devoted himself to the nuts and bolts of creating life.

ate interest in science; but the “Beloved King” was also quite conscious of his own frail health and was unusually close to his team of physicians. Descriptions of the automate had evidently sparked an idea in his mind. After studying the duck closely, he called its creator to his side and posed a bold question, scientific but tottering on the edge of blasphemous: Could Vaucanson possibly make something of the same sort . . . in which the blood flowed?

Thus was born Vaucanson’s double life. On the one hand, having sold his automates and

sent them off on a European tour, he took up, as a perk of his new friendship, the remunerative post of Royal Inspector of Silk Manufacture. Quickly, almost casually, he redesigned the looms used in the great factories in Lyon, displaced a huge number of silk workers from their jobs, and set off one of the first riots of the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, more or less secretly, he began work on the king’s project.

Secretly, because what he and the king had in mind was far grander and more outrageous than Le Cat’s surgical model. What they intended to construct was nothing less than a life-size figure that would imitate the human body in all its biological functions—breath, blood, digestion, movement—a perfect android, an automate that would stand and walk and no doubt peer curiously at the brave new world around him, that had such creatures in it. Or, as Vaucanson sometimes more poignantly called it, “*L’homme saignant*,” the Bleeding Man.

No one knows how far he got. The work was carried out away from the Church’s disapproving eye, some of it perhaps in the countryside near Lyon. Certainly Vaucanson was paid large sums of money for a number of years, through intermediaries and concealed accounts. But he was handicapped not only by secrecy. He faced the nearly impossible challenge of making his android with only the materials available to him

in the middle of the 18th century—brass, wood, wax, copper, and glass. Other inventors have encountered the same problem, of course. The gifted 19th-century mathematician Charles Babbage probably would have invented the modern digital computer—he had the theory right—except for the fact that he had to build his “Difference Engine” with brass and mahogany, not silicon. But one development in materials suggests that Vaucanson may have made more progress than we imagine.

In 1745 a scientist named Charles Marie de la Condamine returned from South America carrying a remarkable discovery. The Amazonian Indians called it *cahuchu*, the French *caoutchouc*, the English *rubber*. It was, at first glance, exactly what the inventor needed to make the artificial veins and arteries of his Bleeding Man. But La Condamine brought back only a small sample—and in transport the resin had dried out and lost much of its elasticity. For his experiments, Vaucanson needed better samples in greater quantity, so the king’s ministers made secret efforts to secure more from the French colony of Guyana. The technical problems were daunting, however, and they would not be solved until the next century.

As far as we know, Vaucanson continued to work on the Bleeding Man as best he could until his death in 1782. And from notes left by his assistants we gather that the discovery of rubber had inspired him to add one more dimension to the project: With *caoutchouc* to serve as vocal cords, could the Bleeding Man be made not only to stand, digest, secrete, but also . . . speak?

Meanwhile, the duck and the other automates had continued their European exhibitions, changing owners often. We read accounts of their appearances in England and Holland. In 1805 Goethe visited them in Germany. The Flute Player vanished, but the duck reappeared in Milan (at La Scala!) in 1843, in Paris in 1844, and then again in Krakow in 1879, where it was reportedly burned to cinders in a fire. But the duck was clearly, as Gaby Wood says, a “clockwork

phoenix.” In the 1930s, in a drawer in the Museum of Technology, a conservator turned up several photographs of a skeletal bird with wings and springs, sitting on a complex pedestal of gears. It looked, if one can say it of something made of brass, quite moth eaten. The photographs are relatively modern and they are marked “images of Vaucanson’s duck, received from Dresden,” but nobody knows when they were taken, or by whom.

As for the Bleeding Man, though we have all seen images of his presumed descendant, Frankenstein’s monster, no traces of him have ever been found. It is pleasant to think of someone wandering into an old abandoned barn or attic near Lyon one day and

**AS IF TO CREATE a gentler Frankenstein,
an MIT graduate student recently devised a
robot that can bake chocolate chip cookies.**

swinging open its doors. In a cabinet, or simply sitting, waiting in a dusty corner, might there be the duck’s great cousin, the tall, glassy-bodied, strangely uncanny Bleeding Man? Would he speak . . . or defecate? Would he lurch and stand up, creaking and clanking, and finally step forward into the sunlight of the 21st century, a ghoulish ambassador from another world?

He would be a brilliant reminder of the modernity of the French Enlightenment, and the genius of his creator. At the same time, he might also remind us that, at bottom, Vaucanson’s vision of human nature, like that of some of his contemporaries, was reductively, soullessly mechanical. The Church was not wrong to be uneasy about him. A century earlier the philosopher René Descartes, also fascinated by automates, had insisted that though we are obviously material creatures, there must also be something more to us, something spiritual in our nature. If not, he asked, turning to look at the passersby on the street below his window, “What do I see but hats and coats that cover ghosts, or simulated human beings who move only by springs?” ■

Lessons of the Great Depression



In 1931, jobless New Yorkers built a "Hooverville" in Central Park, one of many such encampments that appeared around the country during the Great Depression.

FOUR YEARS AGO, a recession of historic proportions slammed the U.S. economy. By standard definitions, the slump is long over, but high unemployment, grinding austerity, and economic upheaval in Europe make it feel very much alive. Like the Great Depression, today's economic ordeal is more than just another turn of the business cycle, and in that earlier calamity lie the most profound insights into the causes and likely course of today's.

Robert J. Samuelson on the deeper causes of crisis

Louis Hyman on the perils of borrowing

Robert Z. Aliber on America's Mini-Depression

Revisiting the Great Depression

The role of the welfare state in today's economic crisis recalls the part played by the gold standard in the calamitous 1930s.

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

THE GREAT DEPRESSION CAST A DARK SHADOW over the 20th century. It arguably led to World War II, because without the Depression, Adolf Hitler might never have come to power. It discredited unfettered capitalism—which was blamed for the collapse—and inspired the expansion of government as the essential overseer of markets. This economic catastrophe has long fascinated historians and economists, but for decades serious reflection on the Depression didn't extend much beyond the scholarly world. It couldn't happen again. We knew too much. There were too many economic and regulatory controls. But the Great Recession has made us wonder. Can we learn from the Depression? Are there parallels between then and now? Most ominously, could we suffer another depression? The conventional wisdom still says no. Unfortunately, the conventional wisdom might be wrong.

There is no precise definition of a depression; it's a term of art. Generally speaking, it's a broad economic collapse that produces high unemployment from which there is no easy and obvious escape. The crucial difference between recession and depression is that recoveries from run-of-the-mill recessions occur

fairly rapidly in response to automatic market correctives and standard government policies. Businesses work off surplus inventories or repay excessive debt. Governments reduce interest rates and allow budgets to swing into deficit. A depression occurs when these mechanisms don't work, or don't work quickly. The pivotal question becomes: Why?

One answer is that powerful historical, social, and political changes overwhelm the normal market and policy responses. Modern depressions are not ordinary business cycles susceptible to routine remedies, because their origins lie in institutions and ideas that have been overtaken by events. But letting go of or modifying these powerful attachments is a painfully slow process, precisely because the belief in them is so strong and the alternatives are often unclear. Hence, adjustment occurs slowly, if at all. Change is resisted or delayed, or wanders down dead ends. Economies languish or decline. The Great Depression was one of those moments. We may now be in another.

There are parallels between then and now, largely unrecognized. Then, the forces suffocating economies stemmed from a jarring historical rupture: the end of the gold standard. In the late 1920s and early '30s, countries clung to the gold standard—backing paper currencies with gold reserves—as a defense against hy-

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BETTMANN/CORBIS (TOP), AP PHOTO/SETH WENIG (BOTTOM)

In 1931, panic sent depositors flocking to institutions such as Washington, D.C.'s Perpetual Building Association Bank, where bank officials tried to calm them. Amid another epochal economic crisis, Occupy Wall Street protesters in New York City express a different kind of worry.

perinflation. Gold was thought to be the foundation of sound money, which was deemed necessary for prosperity. Most simply, gold regulated economic activity. When gold drained out of a country, supplies of money and credit tended to shrink; when a country accumulated gold, they tended to expand. But defending the gold standard caused country after country to suffer banking runs and currency crises. These fed each other and deepened the economic collapse. By 1936, more than two dozen countries had reluctantly jettisoned gold. Once this happened, expansion generally resumed.

Something similar is happening today, with the welfare state—the social safety net of wealthy democracies—playing gold’s destructive role. In Europe, government spending is routinely 40 percent or more of national income. In the United States, it exceeds a third. Like the gold standard 80 years ago, these protections command broad support. They mediate between impersonal market forces and widely shared norms of fairness. The trouble is that many countries can no longer afford their costly welfare states. Some nations have already overborrowed; others wish to avoid that fate. Their common antidote is austerity: spending cuts, tax increases, or both. The more austerity spreads, the greater the danger it will feed on itself. What may make sense for one country is disastrous for many—just as in the 1930s.

The exhaustion of economics is another parallel between our time and the Depression. Then, as now, economists didn’t predict the crisis and weren’t able to engineer recovery. “Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers, liquidate real estate,” said President Herbert Hoover’s Treasury secretary, Andrew Mellon. In the 1930s, this “liquidationist” view dominated. Let wages, stocks, and land values fall until prices are attractive, it said; recovery will occur spontaneously as businesses hire and investors invest. It didn’t work. Today’s orthodoxy is Keynesianism (after John Maynard Keynes), and governments responded to the 2007–09 financial crisis with its textbook remedies. The Federal Reserve and other central banks cut interest rates; governments ran huge budget deficits. Arguably, these measures did prevent a depression. But, contrary to expectations, they did not promote a vigorous recovery. As in the 1930s, economics has disappointed.

Of course, analogies shouldn’t be overdrawn. We’re

still a long way from a second Great Depression, even if such an economic disaster is conceivable. Compared to what happened in the 1930s, the present distress—here and abroad—is tame. From 1929 to 1933, the output of the U.S. economy (gross domestic product) dropped almost 27 percent. The recent peak-to-trough GDP decline, from the fourth quarter of 2007 to the second quarter of 2009, was 5.1 percent. From 1930 to 1939, the U.S. unemployment rate averaged 14 percent; the peak rate, in 1932, was 23 percent. Rates elsewhere in the world were as bad or worse. Unemployment among industrial workers had reached 21 percent in the United Kingdom a year earlier; it hit 44 percent in Germany in 1932. The social protections we take for granted barely existed. Congress didn’t enact federal unemployment insurance until 1935.

Still, the economy’s present turmoil resembles the Great Depression more than anything since. As this is written, Europe is sinking into recession. In the United States, unemployment stayed above nine percent for 21 consecutive months, and then another seven after a short period slightly below that level. The longest previous stretch was 19 months, in the early 1980s. Against this backdrop, it’s natural to reexamine the Depression and search for parallels.

The Depression is usually dated from late 1929 to the eve of World War II. But people didn’t immediately recognize that they had entered uncharted economic waters. “Down to the last weeks of 1930, Americans could still plausibly assume that they were caught up in yet another of the routine business-cycle downswings that periodically afflicted their boom-and-bust economy,” David Kennedy writes in his 2001 Pulitzer Prize-winning history *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945*. Unemployment, for example, reached nearly 12 percent in the recession year of 1921 and was 8.9 percent in 1930. The riddle is: What caused the Depression to defy history? Over the years, many theories have been floated and discredited.

Chief among the fallen is the stock market crash of 1929. True, it was terrifying. From October 23 to November 13, the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped almost 40 percent, from 327 to 199. Fortunes were lost; Americans were fearful. But steep market declines, before and since, have occurred without causing a depression. The most obvious connection would be

the “wealth effect.” Shareholders, being poorer, would spend less. However, very few Americans (about 2.5 percent in 1928) owned stocks. Moreover, stocks rebounded, as historian Maury Klein has noted. By March 1930, the Dow had recovered 74 percent from their December level. Stocks later fell, but that was a consequence of the Depression, not the cause.

Another familiar villain is the Smoot-Hawley tariff. It has “become synonymous with an avalanche of protectionism that led to the collapse of world trade and the Great Depression,” writes Dartmouth economist Douglas Irwin. But Irwin’s recent book *Peddling Protectionism* demolishes the conventional wisdom. The tariff’s direct effects were modest, and its timing also argues against its significance. President Hoover signed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act in June 1930, well after the Depression had begun. Average U.S. tariffs on imports did rise from 40 percent in 1929 to 59 percent in 1932, but two-thirds of U.S. imports had no duties at all. Europe did retaliate with higher tariffs, but only six percent of Europe’s exports came to the United States. Trade did collapse in the Depression, but (again) that was consequence, not cause.

Finally, there’s Herbert Hoover. The anti-Hoover indictment is that he passively let the Depression deepen and, by trying to balance the budget, made it worse. This argument is unfair and inaccurate. After the crash, Hoover urged businesses to maintain wages and continue investment projects. In three years, he nearly doubled federal public works spending and pushed the states to do likewise. In 1932, he did successfully propose a tax increase—Roosevelt also advocated balanced budgets, a widely shared goal—but the federal budget still ran a large deficit: four percent of GDP. “It would be hard to find an economic historian to argue that fiscal [budgetary] tightness was a significant factor in worsening the Great Depression,” writes Timothy Taylor, managing editor of *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

None of these familiar scapegoats solve the puzzle: Why did the economy continue getting worse? Some

other force or forces must have been responsible. Scholarship on this question has proceeded in spasms.

In 1933, Irving Fisher of Yale, then one of the nation’s most prominent economists, published an article titled “The Debt-Deflation Theory of Great Depressions.” The chief causes of the Depression, he argued, were “*over-indebtedness* to start with and *deflation* following soon after.” Debts were written in fixed dollar amounts, and so deflation—falling prices, wages, and profits—made it harder for farmers, businesses, and households to repay loans. Defaults dumped more land and jobless workers onto the market, causing prices and wages to fall further and worsening the slump. It was a vicious circle. Still widely accepted, Fisher’s analysis explains why modern economists dread deflation. From 1929 to 1933, prices for wheat, corn, and other farm products

JUST AS THE GOLD STANDARD amplified the effects of the Depression, so the modern welfare state is magnifying the effects of the recession.

dropped 54 percent; those for building materials fell 25 percent. But Fisher didn’t explain precisely what caused the 1930s’ deep deflation.

In 1936, Keynes provided his answer in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. The culprit was insufficient “effective demand”—what economists now call “aggregate demand.” People and firms weren’t spending enough. Keynes rejected the “classical” economists’ view that spontaneous shifts in wages and interest rates would generate recovery. Wages might be rigid. Low interest rates might not stimulate new investment in plants or products, because businessmen’s “animal spirits” had deadened. The economy “seems capable of remaining in a chronic condition of subnormal activity for a considerable period without any marked tendency either towards recovery or towards complete collapse,” he wrote. Keynes’s remedy was to boost “effective demand” through more government spending.

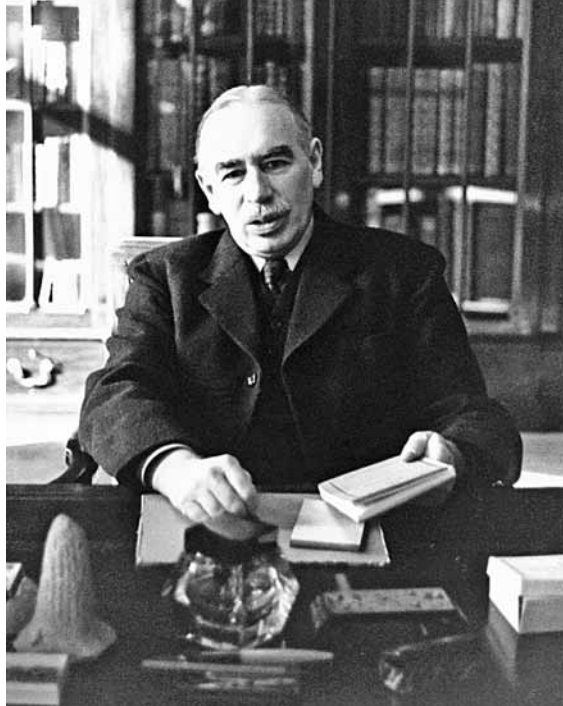
But his argument, like Fisher’s, was abstract. It lacked a detailed explanation of the Depression itself.

Since then, scholars have scoured the historical record to obtain a fuller answer. A breakthrough occurred in 1963 with the publication of *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* by Milton Friedman (a subsequent Nobel Prize winner) and Anna Jacobson Schwartz. Friedman and Schwartz argued that the Federal Reserve caused the Depression by failing to rescue the banking system. From 1929 to 1933, more than two-fifths of

the nation's 24,970 banks disappeared through failure or merger. The nation's money supply—basically, bank deposits plus currency in circulation—shrank by a third. This steep decline, said Friedman and Schwartz, drove prices and production down. The irony was that Congress created the Fed in 1913 to backstop the banking system.

What would have been a normal, if severe, recession became a depression. Friedman and Schwartz blamed the Fed's passivity on the death in 1928 of Benjamin Strong, head of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, who had been the Fed's most forceful figure and would have, they contended, acted aggressively to limit bank failures. By contrast, economist Allan Meltzer cites the "real bills" doctrine as the cause of the Fed's passivity. Under "real bills" (bills are a type of loan), the Fed lent to banks only against collateral they presented. During the Depression, they didn't present much; the supply of money and credit shrank. Whatever the truth, these accounts had the Depression starting in the United States and spreading abroad. It was an American story with global side effects.

Not so, argued the economic historian Charles Kindleberger in his 1973 book *The World in Depression, 1929–1939*. The collapse was international and reflected the inability of a Britain weakened by World War I to continue to stabilize the world economy. Among other things, Kindleberger wrote, Britain's leader-



John Maynard Keynes's ideas became the new economic orthodoxy after the Depression, but economists' guidance still often disappoints.

ship role had required it (a) to act as "lender of last resort" to stem banking crises, (b) to keep its markets open to sustain trade, and (c) to maintain stable exchange rates. After the war, Britain couldn't perform these tasks. It lacked sufficient gold reserves to make loans to stop foreign banking crises. High joblessness weakened its commitment to free trade. Consequently, it couldn't stabilize exchange rates.

The gold standard transmitted the break-

down around the globe, argue economic historians Barry Eichengreen and Peter Temin in, respectively, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, 1919–1939* (1992) and *Lessons From the Great Depression* (1989). Countries that backed their paper currency with gold sacrificed much economic independence. For example, gold outflows through trade deficits might trigger recessions, because the loss of gold could automatically contract the supply of money and credit. But countries could not respond by devaluing their currencies to boost exports; gold fixed currency rates. Gold's straitjacket was its supposed virtue. By eliminating inflation and currency fluctuations, it reduced uncertainty and encouraged commerce. This was the theory and belief.

After World War I, countries sought to restore the gold standard, which had been widely suspended during the fighting. Because the reliance on gold had delivered prosperity, this was understandable. But there were daunting problems: Prices had exploded during the war; gold was relatively scarce; exchange rates had shifted; countries were saddled with large debts. As a result, the restored gold standard was unstable. Skewed exchange rates meant that two countries, the United States and France, ran large trade surpluses and accumulated disproportionately large gold stocks. By 1930, they owned nearly 60 percent of the world's gold.

The resulting gold scarcity—for most countries—

created a fatal interdependence. If one country raised interest rates, it might drain gold from others. Depositors and investors, foreign and domestic, would withdraw their money or sell their bonds, convert the receipts into gold, and transfer the gold to the country with higher interest rates. There, the process would be reversed: Gold would be converted into local currency and invested at the higher rates. The gold standard created a potential domino effect of tighter credit that would make the Depression feed on itself. While credit was plentiful, the danger was theoretical. Once economies turned downward, the scramble for gold intensified the slump.

Germany's Reichsbank, the Bank of England, the Fed, and other central state financial institutions were handcuffed in their efforts to aid their countries' banks. The Depression weakened banks by increasing their customers' loan defaults; loan losses then made the banks more vulnerable to depositor runs. But a central bank couldn't inject too much money and credit into the system without raising doubts about its country's commitment to gold. Politics compounded the effect by closing another avenue of escape: international rescues to stop bank runs. In May 1931, Austria's largest bank, Credit-Anstalt, faced a panic. The Bank of England's reserves were too meager for it to provide an adequate loan on its own, and France—still scarred by World War I—insisted that Austria renounce a customs union with Germany before providing funds. The rescue was delayed. Panic spread and confidence fell.

Gold's oppressive consequences ultimately caused countries to abandon it. Austria, Germany, and Britain did so in 1931. (The United States left two years later, while France hung on until 1936.) The process was long and punishing because faith in gold was so pervasive. It was hard to let go. But once countries did let go, they could spur their economies. Eichengreen writes, "They could expand the money supply. They could provide liquidity [cash] to the banking system at the first sign of distress. They could increase the level of government expenditure. They could take these actions unilaterally." By 1937, world manufacturing output was 71 percent above its 1932 level and had exceeded its 1929 level.

Why was the Depression so deep and long? All this scholarship provides a crude answer. Whether the cause was the gold standard, the "real bills" doctrine,

Benjamin Strong's death, Britain's postwar weakness, or rancor from World War I—or all of these factors—government economic policies perversely reinforced the original slump. Banks were not rescued. Defaults and bankruptcies fed deflation. Unemployment spiraled up, production down. Prevailing economic doctrine was suicidal. The good news, it's said, is that we understand what happened and can prevent a repeat. Heeding Fisher, we can avoid deflation. Following Keynes, we can prop up aggregate demand. Per Friedman and Schwartz, we can defuse financial panics. Learning from Kindleberger, Eichengreen, and Temin, we can practice international cooperation.

Unfortunately, these reassurances omit an obvious and more discouraging lesson: The Depression couldn't end until people changed their beliefs and behavior—a lengthy and tortuous process, because people cling to what's familiar. Here is where the parallel with the present becomes relevant and sobering. Just as the gold standard amplified and transmitted the effects of the Depression, so the modern welfare state is magnifying the effects of the recession. The United States, Europe, and Japan, together representing about half of the world economy, face similar pressures: aging societies, high government spending, and soaring debt levels. These pressures impose austerity on country after country—just as the gold standard did. The cumulative effect is to make it harder for the world to recover from what started as an ordinary, though severe, recession—just as happened under the gold standard.

Casting the welfare state in this role will strike many as outrageous. After all, the welfare state—what Americans blandly call "social spending"—didn't cause the 2007–09 financial crisis. This dubious distinction belongs to the huge credit bubble that formed in the United States and elsewhere, symbolized by inflated real estate prices and large losses on mortgage-related securities. But neither did the gold standard directly cause the 1929 stock market crash. Wall Street's collapse stemmed, most simply, from speculative excesses. Stock prices were too high for an economy that was already (we now know) entering recession. But once the slump started, the gold standard spread and perpetuated it. Today, the weakened welfare state

is perpetuating and spreading the slump.

What has brought the welfare state to grief is not an excess of compassion, but an excess of debt. After World War II, governments in most advanced countries grew enormously, a reaction to the suffering of the Depression coupled with early postwar optimism about the power of social engineering. By 2007, government spending totaled 53 percent of GDP in France, 44 percent in Germany, 45 percent in Britain, and 37 percent in the United States, reports economist Vito Tanzi in *Government Versus Markets* (2011). Most spending represented income transfers. Even in the United States, with its sizable military budget, “payments for individuals” (which means entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare) amounted to two-thirds of federal spending in 2010, up from a quarter in 1960.

But this system required favorable economics and demographics—and both have moved adversely. A younger population was needed to lighten the burden of supporting the old, the largest claimants of benefits. Rapid economic growth was needed to generate the tax revenues to pay for benefits. Indeed, the great expansion of benefits started in the 1950s and '60s, when annual economic growth in Europe and the United States averaged about four percent or more, and the expectation was that this would continue indefinitely. Long-term economic growth is now reckoned closer to two percent a year, a little more for the United States, a little less for Europe. Meanwhile, older populations are exploding. In 2010, the 65-and-over population in Italy was 21 percent, and heading toward 34 percent by 2050; for the United States, the figures were 13 percent and 20 percent.

The means of escape from these unhappy trends was to borrow. Some countries with extensive welfare systems that didn't borrow heavily (examples: Sweden and Finland) have fared well. But most governments became dependent on bond markets. Until the financial crisis, they coexisted in a shaky equilibrium. Most European governments could borrow cheaply. Their bonds were considered safe investments. Perhaps

inevitably, the financial crisis shattered this equilibrium. Economic growth fell from already low levels; government debt rose. Suddenly, financial markets—banks, pension funds, insurance companies, wealthy investors—turned skittish. Perhaps debts wouldn't be repaid. Greater risk translated into higher interest rates on government bonds.

Once this happened, welfare states became an engine of international austerity. Countries' choices were constricted. To maintain existing levels of spending, they needed to borrow. But lenders demanded higher interest rates, and to keep these down, governments had to



Reform meets reality: Protesters in 2010 denounce changes in French pension laws.

resort to austerity, which meant cutting social programs and raising taxes. Some countries were completely shut out of private markets and had to rely on international financial bailouts; but these bailouts (i.e., loans) came with a string attached: austerity. First Greece, then Ireland and Portugal submitted to this logic. But almost all advanced countries, including the United States, are potentially subject to it. Countries embrace austerity to keep their credit worthiness. Or they embrace it because they lose their credit worthiness.

What this means is that governments, against their will, are being forced to reconsider some basic post-World War II premises around which their economies and societies are organized, much as countries in the 1930s were forced to reconsider economic premises based on the gold standard. Now as then, the process is

unwelcome, painful, and agonizingly slow. It involves a balancing of political and economic imperatives: not dismantling the welfare state, but shrinking it to a size that is politically acceptable and economically viable. Social protections and benefits must be reduced so that the resulting obligations don't impose crippling levels of debt or taxes. It is not clear where this point is and whether wealthy democracies are capable of identifying and reaching it. It will differ for different countries, depending on their underlying economic vitality and political culture.

The ultimate danger is that the welfare state will go into a death spiral. The political impetus to provide promised benefits keeps taxes and debt high, to the point that economic growth suffers; but slower growth or longer recessions make it harder to pay promised benefits, an outcome requiring still further cutbacks. As political leaders grapple with these problems, they are constantly reacting to events—doing too little too late. The fact that many governments are caught in this trap simultaneously means that their collective actions exert a drag on the world economy that makes it harder for all of them to reconcile political and financial-market pressures. The further fact that Europe's banks are large holders of government debt means that a debt crisis could become a banking crisis—with failures and runs—or a credit squeeze, as banks suffer large losses on their bond portfolios.

Governments are losing control over their economic fates, because high debt also undermines standard Keynesian anti-recessionary tools, a.k.a. “stimulus,” spending more and taxing less in times of economic weakness. The prospect of more debt simply sends interest rates up, nullifying some or all of any “stimulus” and, for some countries, closing access to private credit markets. It's true that some major debtor countries, notably the United States and Germany, have so far escaped this squeeze. Their interest rates (at this writing) remain low, about two percent on 10-year bonds. But there's no ironclad reason why these countries should remain immune forever. If investors come to believe that the United States can't control its debt, they might dump Treasury bonds and other dollar securities. Interest rates would rise; on foreign exchange markets, the dollar would fall.

So it's not preposterous to compare the gold stan-

dard then with the welfare state now. In both cases, a framework is imposed that impedes recovery from what might otherwise be a recognizable recession. The obstacles lie in institutions and beliefs that are deeply woven into the social, political, and intellectual fabric of societies. It takes time to adjust—and sometimes adjustment doesn't happen at all—because the status quo has established stubborn habits of thought and strong vested interests that can be dislodged only by powerful, incontestable evidence and experience to the contrary. Even then, the destruction of the old does not ensure replacement by the new. There may simply be a void.

This does not mean we are condemned to a second Great Depression. The messy process of grappling with overcommitted government may lead to slow growth, long recessions, or stagnation—but not the dramatic collapse of the 1930s. China, India, Brazil, and other developing countries, representing about half of the world economy, don't face the dilemmas of mature welfare states. Their economic growth may provide a safety net for the “old world” of Europe, North America, and Japan. But here, too, there are cautionary comparisons. China's rise and America's problems have fragmented economic power. Cooperation is strained. The analogies with Britain's post-World War I weakness and the paralyzing rancor between Germany and France are obvious. Another parallel with the 1930s is the euro, which, as the gold standard once did, has created a straitjacket that makes recovery harder.

All of these challenges suggest that a second depression or some prolonged period of economic disappointment and hardship is no longer implausible, as it seemed for most of the past half-century. The mastery of economic activity we thought we had achieved—not in the sense that we could eliminate all business cycles or financial panics, but in the more limited way that we could avoid pervasive instability—can no longer be taken for granted. The mistake, popularized largely by economists, was to believe that regulation of the economy could be derived from theory and converted into practical precepts for policy. The reality is that economic life is not solely described or dictated by rhythms suggested by economic models. It moves in response to institutions, technologies, beliefs, and cultures that follow their own logic, sometimes with completely unexpected, mystifying, and terrifying consequences. ■

The Debt Bomb

When wages stagnate and inequality rises, Americans try to borrow their way toward the American dream. Inevitably, the bubble bursts. But we can learn from the lessons of 1929.

BY LOUIS HYMAN

DICK AND JANE SMITH MET SHORTLY AFTER THEY moved to the city. Sparks flew, declarations of love were exchanged, rings and vows inevitably followed—and then they began their search for a home of their own. Though he didn't have a college degree, Dick had recently found work in a new industry that was sweeping the country. The company's initial public offering a few years back had been one of the most successful in history. Dick and Jane, like the rest of the country, were caught up in the heady optimism of what pundits called a new era of perpetual growth.

Flush with love and short on cash, the Smiths went to their local bank to find out if they could get a mortgage. After a few calculations, the mortgage officer informed them that an "amortized" mortgage—which required payments on both interest and principal every month—would not get them the house they wanted. Dick's income was just not enough to cover the payments, but there was another option that, the loan officer told them, most smart people were using these days: an interest-only "balloon" mortgage. It would allow them to buy a house immediately, and sleep soundly with the knowledge that their household income had nowhere to go but up, along with

real estate values. When the time for bigger payments finally came a few years down the road, they could simply refinance with a new loan.

The couple moved into their house, and Dick went to work. Jane filled the house with contemporary furniture purchased on an installment plan. While she bought sofas, Dick bought a Chevy. His father had only ever paid cash for cars, but now consumers could get auto loans. Though the Smiths didn't have savings, they did have Dick's steady income. If they could have all their dreams come true in 1928, then 1929 could only be better!

The parallels between Dick's manufacturing job at General Motors in Flint, Michigan, in 1928 and today's tech job in Silicon Valley are unsettling, but the larger structural similarities between the 1920s and the present are truly terrifying. With credit, the Smiths and millions of other Americans of that time and our own borrowed their way to the American dream. In both eras, a boom in consumer credit was made possible by the invention of new ways to repackage and sell individuals' debt in the financial marketplace. And in both eras, the world made possible by credit came crashing down in a financial cataclysm.

In the last hundred years, economic inequality in America has peaked twice: in 1928 and in 2007. It is no coincidence that our periods of greatest inequality have coincided with excessive lending. An industrial

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In 1975, fewer than half of Americans held a bank-issued credit card; today the average American consumer carries three.

economy based on mass production requires mass consumption. Either credit or wages must be provided to keep the wheels of industry turning. When wages stagnate and inequality widens, debt gains nearly unstoppable momentum.

In the decades between those two moments in our socioeconomic history lies the great era of post-World War II prosperity, and here too there are lessons to be learned. That prosperity rested to a large extent on policies the federal government put in place in response to the crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. Yet those same policies laid the foundation for today's financial crisis, as the New Deal order dissolved and some of its innovations were turned to new ends. It would be almost comforting to embrace the tales journalists and others now spin that place all culpability at the feet of bankers of vast cunning and greed, or at the other end of the spectrum, with big government, but the true causes are more complex and unsettling than such morality tales suggest.

Borrowing is as ancient as humankind, but markets for consumer debt are as modern as a bobbed haircut. In the 1920s, a handful of changes in business

and law (such as the easing of restrictions on loan interest rates) combined to move personal debt from the margin of capitalism to its center. Although your grandparents told you nobody borrowed in the good old days, it was debt, ingeniously packaged and commodified, that enabled the growth of the 20th-century economy. In the Roaring Twenties, Americans relied on it to buy their first automobiles, and retailers began to promote installment credit to sell other goods.

In 1930, before the full consequences of the crash of 1929 had become apparent, the economist W. C. Clark wrote that when the "economist of the future compiles the business annals of the past decade, he will find the key to our prolonged and unprecedented prosperity in the stimulus provided by two great industries—building construction and automobile manufacturing." Houses and cars could not be more dissimilar, one the epitome of rootedness and permanence, the other the emblem of the 20th century's new ethos of mobility and disposability. But houses and cars were oddly similar, as Clark noted, in how they were purchased—on credit.

Balloon mortgages played to the optimism of 1920s home buyers like Dick and Jane, who, prodded by

resurgent prosperity and rapid urbanization, bought into one of the great housing booms of the 20th century. Most of the money that fueled this boom didn't come directly from banks, but from financial instruments called "participation certificates" or "mortgage bonds" that resembled today's mortgage-backed securities. Banks lent mortgage money to home buyers, then sold participation certificates to investors, who received regular interest payments from home buyers' monthly mortgage payments. As long as investors kept buying certificates, the banks had no trouble refinancing homeowners' balloon mortgages when they came due. In 1926, *Time* reassured readers that "real estate bonds are by no means jeopardous investments. In fact, they should be the best of all securities, for they are backed by tangible buildings and real estate."

Investors' appetite for mortgage bonds grew enormously. Sales increased more than 1,000 percent in the first half of the decade. Yet the system was seriously flawed, in much the same way the contemporary mortgage business is flawed: The people selling the mortgages usually didn't put their own money at risk. Banks that issued mortgage bonds frequently insured them through large insurance companies, paying the premiums with investors' capital. If a borrower defaulted, the bank was covered. It didn't have a strong incentive to pick the most creditworthy borrowers,

but it did have an incentive to lend at volume, since the bank earned additional fees with every loan.

The first real portent of trouble came from a distant quarter in 1925, as the fizzy Florida real estate market, fueled by New York mortgage bond funds, began to burst. In the wake of the Great Miami Hurricane of 1926, acres of sun-splashed housing developments sank back into the swamps, taking the interest payments on many bonds with them.

Credit-fueled purchases of cars and houses propelled the American economy in the 1920s—and into the Great Depression.

Mortgage bankers around the country wrung their hands but consoled themselves that the system itself was sound. Those who grumbled, such as the economist C. Reinhold Noyes, who warned in *The Yale Review* against "financing prosperity on tomorrow's income" and preached the inevitability of another turn in the business cycle, were ignored. Noyes predicted that "the motor industry" would "be the storm center of the next period of depression," and would "be entirely to blame" for infusing installment credit so thoroughly into the economy. This depression, which he correctly predicted in 1927 to be "two or three years" away, would be "automatic and inevitable," as it would be the result of "retribution for economic sin."

In 1929, Noyes's much more famous colleague, Yale professor Irving Fisher, pronounced that stocks, in this new economy, would never fall again. Three days later, on October 24, 1929, the world watched slack jawed as the stock market began to crash.

After the crash, which saw the stock market drop by nearly 40 percent, the public's faith in the fundamental stability of American finance disappeared. Abruptly, investors withdrew \$195 million from American banks—the first decline in deposits in 20 years. Banks that offered mortgage bonds collapsed at twice the rate of those that did not. Skittish investors stopped sinking money into mortgages. As a result, banks began demanding that homeowners facing balloon payments pay off their loans. Few borrowers had that much cash, and a wave of foreclosures hit the real estate market, scaring off more investors. A full-scale rout was under way.

By 1933, Americans were losing a thousand homes a day to foreclosures. The housing industry was effectively dead. The next year, the number of new homes built was exceeded by the number that burned down. One-third of the families on

The Literary Digest for August 25, 1928 21

4-cylinder Sedan
\$610

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In dollar-for-dollar value there are no other cars on the market comparable to the Whippet Four and Sixes. This is true not only because these cars are the lowest priced in the world, but because they represent the most advanced, latest and greatest in automobile design. The featured Whippet Four and Sixes are full featured, reliable, quiet, strong, light, and easy to drive. Both models are available in a variety of colors and finishes. The Whippet Four and Sixes are the most advanced, latest and greatest in automobile design. The featured Whippet Four and Sixes are full featured, reliable, quiet, strong, light, and easy to drive. Both models are available in a variety of colors and finishes.

Whippet
FOURS and SIXES

6-cylinder Sedan
\$770



The Great Miami Hurricane of 1926 devastated bond investors as well as property owners.

the dole found their way there due to the loss of a construction job.

When he took office in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt assured Americans that while the economic crisis was unprecedented, it was within the government's ability to remedy. It wasn't a "plague of locusts" sent by an angry God that was to blame, but rather the "stubbornness" and "incompetence" of the "rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods." Restoring the mortgage markets was crucial to national recovery, and that meant that the financial instruments that had gone so badly awry—balloon mortgages and participation certificates—would have to be replaced.

Launched in 1933, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) stopped the free fall in house prices by swapping government bonds for past due mortgages held by lenders, averting massive numbers of foreclosures and steadying the nation's housing markets. (Like several other New Deal reforms, the agency had its origins in President Herbert Hoover's 1931 White House Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership.) But the real financial innovations were the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934 and the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) in 1938.

As is the case today, private capital during the Depression was piling up in the coffers of bankers who were too afraid to lend it. The most imaginative part of the FHA plan was that it used this capital for public purposes. If they met certain requirements, lenders could chip in to an insurance pool, organized but not paid for by the federal government; if a mortgage loan went into default, the lender would be reimbursed from the pool. Strict eligibility criteria for the borrowers and houses limited moral hazard—the possibility that lenders backed by insurance would lend indiscriminately.

The FHA also made it possible to offer Americans much

longer mortgages of 20 and (later) 30 years, which reduced the size of monthly payments and allowed borrowers to pay off both interest and principal. That step made home loans more affordable and eliminated the need for constant refinancing that had made balloon mortgages so dangerous.

Fannie Mae's job was to fund these new mortgages. Whereas in the 1920s banks had to seek out investors to buy their participation certificates, under the new system they could simply sell mortgages they made to Fannie Mae, which would then resell them to insurance companies and other large institutional investors. The impact was huge. No longer were mortgage lenders limited by the amount of money they could raise locally. Now, thanks to Fannie Mae, bankers everywhere in America had ready access to the capital of Wall Street and other financial centers. By the end of the 1930s, at virtually no cost to taxpayers, the government had stabilized America's housing markets.

The new mortgage system inaugurated a long period of stability. The suburbs, where the American dream would flourish, were built on its loans. But the new system had another effect: It further legitimated borrowing of all kinds. Indeed, the suburban housing supported by the FHA all but required that Americans

acquire that other great generator of debt: the automobile. New Deal-era plans for urban housing that would have produced a landscape ripe for mass transit were scrapped. The FHA planners preferred colonials and lawns, and their regulations determining what would be eligible for cheap financing reflected their ideals.

Living in mortgaged homes, driving in financed cars, postwar Americans relaxed at new shopping centers. They borrowed more but also earned more, which meant that while the habit of borrowing grew, debt as a share of income remained relatively stable. Consumer credit kept factories humming, and those well-paid industrial jobs kept the debt burden contained. Banks and finance companies rather than capital markets funded the borrowing, which kept a leash on the credit available. The lender always had skin in the game.

The origins of the shift from a relatively egalitarian manufacturing economy to an unequal financial economy can be seen in the midst of this prosperity. During the 1960s, however, retailers confronted a dilemma. To keep growing, they needed to supply their customers with more credit, but if they did that, most of their capital would be tied up in consumer debt, unavailable for other needs. Into this gap stepped bank-funded credit cards—the forerunners of today’s VISA and MasterCard. At the same time, large corporations such as General Electric began to take over and upgrade merchants’ credit operations.

All of these developments during America’s flush postwar years helped breed new financial attitudes. The fullest expression of the era’s optimism was the resurrection of 1920s-style mortgage finance, albeit in a new form. In 1970, Fannie Mae began bundling large numbers of mortgages into a kind of security that could be easily

traded in markets around the world, and which had the implicit guarantee of the U.S. government. The mortgage-backed security was first proposed in the Fair Housing Act of 1968 as a mechanism to help low-income families buy housing. After the riots of the 1960s, it was clear to many policymakers that America’s cities needed more investment. But insurance companies, which had been the workhorses of American mortgage finance, were losing ground to pension funds as the largest investors, and they had no interest in buying individual mortgages. They would, however, buy bonds. Since FHA lending had buoyed the fortunes of the middle class in the postwar era, surely enabling more borrowing to help less affluent people couldn’t be a bad idea, policymakers reasoned.

The timing was unfortunate. Slowly, inexorably, the world that supported Americans’ postwar assumptions began falling apart in the 1970s as the international economic order shifted from American-dominated recovery back to a more normal state of global competition. The economic dislocations of the 1970s—inflation and deindustrialization—stemmed fundamentally from this return to normalcy. The sta-

H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS/CLASSICSTOCK/CORBIS



A dream rises in 1955, a time when wages rose as rapidly as debt, breeding a new ease about borrowing.

ble growth of the postwar period that had rewarded budgeting and borrowing disappeared. With surging inflation and stagnating pay, real wages began to fall. In part to close the gap in household budgets, a greater proportion of married women than ever before entered the work force. But consumers also began to rely more on borrowing to make ends meet. The careful balance between rising debt and rising income was coming undone.

Now that the genie of securitization was out of the

EVEN CORPORATE CEOs were appalled to see some of America's great manufacturing firms gradually transformed into financial companies.

bottle again, that shift spelled extraordinary trouble. By the 1980s, car loans, credit cards, and even student loans could all be financed through the sale of bonds in the capital markets. Policymakers had hoped that the mortgage-backed security would be an easy fix for inequality, spreading the postwar prosperity to everyone. But what they had spawned was a value-neutral financial instrument that would enable investment in any kind of consumer debt. As profits in other parts of the economy receded, the profits of this kind of lending exploded. And as consumer debt began to crowd out business debt, less money was available to invest in productive businesses and create the kinds of good jobs that had made America's postwar formula work.

When Jack Welch took the helm at General Electric in 1981, largely on the strength of his success in managing the company's consumer finance division, his vision was clear; he would later write: "Finance is not an institution—it has to be . . . the driving force behind making General Electric 'the most competitive enterprise on earth.'" Some older divisions, such as the lighting operations, would be continued, but the profits would be reinvested in financial products. Other GE businesses that were experiencing declining profitability, such as the one that made toasters and clocks, would be sold.

Turning the great centers of American manufacturing into financial companies appalled many chief executive officers who prided themselves on making *something*. In a joint interview in 1995, *Fortune* magazine asked Welch and Roberto Goizueta, then the CEO of Coca-Cola, to look ahead. For Welch, the answer was obvious. Financial services would become a bigger share of GE's business. Goizueta demurred, saying, "I would never find excitement in the financial services. I would like to produce something that I could touch."

While GE's profits grew, its manufacturing businesses shrank. In 1980, the year before Welch took control, the company had employed 285,000 people in the United States. By 1998, the U.S. payroll was down to 165,000. For Welch,

and for successful American corporations generally, profits mattered more than all those well-paid factory jobs. The incentive was plain. CEOs had a responsibility to the shareholders to produce more profit. A dollar invested in debt made more money than a dollar invested in a factory. For the country as a whole, however, the rising profitability of finance came at a devastating cost.

As finance gained in strength and in its importance to the American economy, bankers increasingly complained that their creativity was being hampered by those pesky regulations that had safeguarded the economy since the 1930s. Gradually many of the old strictures were shaken off, a process that culminated in the repeal in 1999 of the Glass-Steagall Banking Act of 1933, which had cordoned off banking from insurance. Like the repeal of Glass-Steagall, many financial "innovations" of the 1970s and '80s actually involved the revival of financial instruments or practices that had existed in the 1920s and earlier. But one was stunningly new.

In 1983, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac), which the federal government had created in 1970, and two private firms launched an otherworldly financial instrument called the collateralized mortgage obligation (CMO). While the

mortgage-backed security and its ancestor, the participation certificate, had paid all investors in the same way, the CMO was structured to allow the creation of many different kinds of securities out of a bundle of mortgages. It did so by slicing the interest and principal payments the mortgages generated into many tranches. In CMOs there was something for every kind of buyer, from long-term investors to speculators guessing at tomorrow's interest rates.

There was a practical public motive behind the creation of the CMO. As interest rates rose in the late 1970s, American savings and loan associations were thrown into crisis because depositors began demanding higher interest on their accounts than these financial institutions could earn from making mortgage loans. As a result, the S&Ls were collapsing. In this dire situation, the CMO worked like magic. Freddie Mac bought vast numbers of mortgages from the S&Ls and repackaged them. New money flowed in. By 1985, pension funds were investing more than \$1 trillion a year in American mortgage debt. Oil money from the Middle East financed housing developments in the Midwest. Global finance and American finance aligned to produce a new global economy of debt.

The CMO story underscores an important lesson about the origins of the financial crisis. Contrary to what many politicians and pundits have claimed, the upsurge of securitization was not simply a product of "de-regulation." Regulations may have changed to promote a certain kind of financial system, but at no point did the state abandon the market to itself. It was the interplay of public and private purposes and mechanisms—Freddie Mac, S&Ls, mortgage-backed securities—that made these new sources of capital possible.

Freddie Mac's innovation provided an important template for another part of the financial services sector. Credit cards had become tremendously profitable, re-orienting commercial banks and manufacturing companies toward consumer finance as never before, and securitization offered fresh opportunities. In 1990, only

one percent of U.S. credit card balances were securitized. By 1996, the proportion had grown to 45 percent.

By the late 1990s, the volume of uncollectable credit card loans was rising. But by sequestering the greatest risk of defaults into high-risk/high-return tranches, much as Freddie Mac had disaggregated mortgages, issuers could still gain a good rating for their securities. And despite the increase in defaults, repayments were rising. That seemed to indicate that debtors were financially able to borrow more. True, the source of these repayments was often home equity loans, but investors didn't care where the money came from. As long as homeowners could continue to borrow against their houses, securities based on credit card debt looked like good investments. Indeed, because of the high repayment rates, lenders believed they had actually overestimated the risk of default, a surmise that further encouraged their lending. Easy mortgage credit enabled easy credit card payments. The entire credit system leaned on the different kinds of debt, all securitized, that ultimately rested on one support: rising house prices.

Then, in the autumn of 2006, the impossible happened: Housing prices began to fall. As credit-rating

AMERICANS HAVE PULLED back from the worst excesses of the past decade, but prosperity will not return until wages start rising again.

agencies began to reconsider the AAA they had conferred on so many mortgage-backed securities, insurance companies had to pony up more collateral to guarantee the insurance policies on the bonds. The global credit market rested on the same assumption that guided American home buyers: Prices would always go up. Foreclosures would be randomly distributed, as the statistical models assumed. Yet as those models, and the companies that had created them, began to fail, a shudder ran through global capitalism. Lehman Brothers, the venerable investment bank, held a massive exposure to subprime mortgage-backed securities,



A dream ends in 2011 amid a wave of foreclosures that shows very few signs of weakening.

a position that contributed to its demise in 2008. The insurance giant AIG watched its entire business collapse as it was required to make good on its mortgage bond guarantees. The crisis began in subprime mortgages, but it quickly spread throughout the economy, as complex financial instruments betrayed both their inventors and their investors, just as they had in 1929. The global resale of debt had enabled borrowing on a scale unimaginable to the world of 1929, but the consequences were all too familiar.

In most speculative bubbles, the participants choose to be involved. Speculators in Dutch tulip bulbs or tech stocks knew what they were getting into, and, in the end, they were the main people who got burned. Speculation in housing, however, affected the two-thirds of Americans who owned homes. The speculation took hold of their most important asset and played havoc with their lives. If the collapse in prices had been confined to houses, then perhaps the damage would have been more limited, but during the 1990s, as wages stagnated, Americans had borrowed against this rising equity to pay for goods and services.

That structural connection between economic in-

equality and the nation's financial crisis is still largely ignored. The dangerous investment choices that precipitated the crisis are but a symptom of this underlying cause. Income stagnation continues, pushing Americans toward greater borrowing and less saving. Unemployment remains extraordinarily high. And those who do find work often have to accept lower wages.

Meanwhile, as those at the bottom hang on, profits continue to concentrate at the top. Without a good alternative, capital continues to be invested in consumer debt rather than in the businesses—big and

small—that provide jobs. Bankers are once again skittish about lending. If we are to find solutions to the crisis, it is more important to ask why so much money flowed into mortgage-backed securities and so little into productive businesses than to search for villains to blame for what went wrong.

During the Great Depression, New Deal policymakers figured out ways to harness the resale of debt, but they recognized that increasing the supply of credit without also increasing wages would only lead to another crash. But in the last 40 years, debt levels have climbed while wages have remained stagnant because securitization made it much easier to lend to consumers than to businesses. That continuing imbalance is a threat to the long-run stability of the American economy.

Today, as in the Great Depression, we have a choice about the policies that redirect the flow of capital. But it is much more difficult to increase wages. Americans have pulled back from the worst excesses of the past decade, but they haven't seen bigger paychecks. Without that crucial ingredient, it is hard to see how we will be able to regain our lost prosperity. ■

Great Recession or Mini-Depression?

Words may be failing economists and others who characterize the economic downturn that began in 2008 as “the Great Recession.” “Mini-Depression” may be more like it.

BY ROBERT Z. ALIBER

THE RECESSION THAT BEGAN IN JANUARY 2008 was more severe than any of the other 10 recessions the United States has endured since World War II. The decline in the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) surpassed previous records and the percentage of American workers without jobs nearly did so. And the expansion of the U.S. economy since the recession officially ended in June 2009 has been sluggish, challenging the economists' adage “The sharper the decline, the quicker the recovery.” The growth rate in 2011 fluctuated around two percent, much too low to make a significant dent in the number of Americans without work, despite the Obama administration's injection of more than \$750 billion into the national economy and the provision of virtually free money to financial institutions by the Federal Reserve.

Most recessions since World War II have come about because the Federal Reserve curbed the growth of credit to restrain inflationary pressures. The Fed sold bonds, the bonds' prices fell, and individuals, commercial banks, and other financial firms bought the bonds at their attractive new prices. That reduced

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GEORGE WIDMAN/AP

The recession of 1981–82 was especially severe because the Fed was determined to stamp out the expectations of accelerating inflation that had developed in the second half of the 1970s. An increase of tenfold or more in oil prices during the 1970s had kindled boom condi-

The contractive monetary policy adopted by Fed chairman Paul Volcker in October 1979 led to the highest interest rates since the Fed was created in 1913—short-term rates climbed to more than 20 percent and long-term rates to more than 10 percent. Unemployment rose above 10 percent. As inflationary expectations were reversed, the prices of hard assets people had acquired in the late 1970s as inflation hedges—gold and silver, farmland, real estate, and collectibles—declined, in some cases sharply, as bubbles in these

assets burst. The recession brought grain prices down, which caused the price of farmland to tumble. A handful of large

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ARE YOU?

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banks failed, and the federal government was forced to bail out hundreds of smaller banks and savings and loan associations. But, as had been the case in every previous postwar recession, real estate prices remained stable at the national level, even though there were significant drops in areas that had experienced booms.

The distinctive feature of the most recent recession was the massive failure of leading financial firms, including Countrywide Financial, Washington Mutual, Wachovia, and many small community banks in Georgia and Florida. The U.S. investment banking industry was decimated: Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers failed, and Merrill Lynch was saved in early 2009 only because Bank of America bought it. But then Bank of America and Citibank needed huge infusions of government money to stave off collapse. AIG, the largest insurance company in the world, would have closed without the tens of billions of dollars pumped into it by the Fed.

Countrywide and Washington Mutual had been extremely aggressive in extending mortgage credit after 2000 as each battled to become the nation's dominant mortgage lender. They weakened their credit standards and became inventive at developing new kinds of mortgage loans that reduced the interest payments that borrowers were required to pay in the first few years, allowing home buyers to take on debts that were large—much too large—relative to their incomes.

Easy credit contributed to the surge in real estate prices, which climbed by 10 percent annually at the national level between 2002 and 2006 and by 20 percent a year in the nation's 16 most rapidly growing states, in the South and West. Two government-sponsored lenders, the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac), which between them indirectly provided half of the nation's mortgage money, were aggressive buyers of mortgages from Countrywide and Washington Mutual. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were able to sell their

bonds to investors because some foreign governments and their sovereign wealth funds were of the impression that these bonds were guaranteed by the U.S. Treasury.

Eventually, rational exuberance morphed into irrational exuberance, and Americans started buying homes and apartments simply because prices were increasing and they saw an exceptional opportunity for profit. And prices were increasing mainly because Americans were buying property. The surge in prices led to a boom in construction; the number of new housing units constructed was one-third larger than the number needed to accommodate the growth of the population and fulfill other needs. By the end of 2006 there were more than two million unoccupied homes

BY LATE 2006 there were more than two million unoccupied homes in the United States, all built with the expectation that prices would rise.

in the United States, all built with the expectation that prices would continue to increase.

The decline in real estate prices that started at the end of 2006 was not prompted by any Fed action but by a slackening of foreign demand for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac bonds. Many of the high-risk borrowers who had received mortgage loans from Countrywide and Washington Mutual were unable to make their first payment, often because the mortgage refinancing that had supplied so much easy money suddenly dried up. Borrowers began defaulting on their mortgages. One of the great puzzles of the recession is how the Fed could have been so oblivious to the bubble in home prices and the surge in housing starts.

The decline in real estate prices in the first few months of 2007 was gradual. The true dimensions of the crisis became clearer in August, when Countrywide suddenly experienced a “run”; it was no longer able to roll over the maturing short-term loans it had been using to underwrite its aggressive funding of new mortgages. Other lenders stumbled, too. Coun-

trywide was saved only when Bank of America bought it early in 2008 (much as the giant bank would avert the extinction of Merrill Lynch the following year). Once property prices stopped increasing, the calculus of developers and investors changed radically. Now the interest rate on their debt was higher than the annual increase in prices. Some decided to sell, pushing prices down further. Then millions of people who had recently bought property found themselves with “upside-down” mortgages—the amount they owed on their mortgage was greater than the market value of their property. Others who had taken out home equity loans based on the increase in the value of their property and had slim equity also were underwater. More houses went up for sale, putting additional downward pressure on the housing market. A race to the bottom was on.

The hangover from the property price bubble is one major cause of the sluggishness of the economic expansion over the last several years. New housing starts and completions have remained at low levels as the economy absorbs the excess homes built during the bubble years. The process has moved slowly, despite low interest rates, because of high unemployment and the continuing decline in home prices. Annual housing starts have averaged much less than half their average level in the 1980s and '90s. If starts were running at the

old rate of 1.5 million annually rather than in the current range of 500,000 to 600,000, the nation's GDP growth rate would be two percentage points higher and the unemployment rate two percentage points lower than they are today.

Unlike recoveries from typical Fed-induced recessions, postbubble economic expansions typically are slow because people are intent on rebuilding their wealth by increasing their saving relative to their spending. At the same time, banks and other financial institutions become more cautious lenders, so that while interest rates are low, credit is relatively scarce.

The current recovery has also been slowed by the \$300 billion increase in the nation's trade deficit since 2008. Each increase of \$1 billion in the trade deficit—either because Americans are spending more on foreign goods or foreigners are spending less on U.S. goods—represents a loss of 12,500 American manufacturing jobs. If the trade deficit in 2011 had been in the same ballpark as in 2008, the United States would have had two to three million more manufacturing jobs than it did.

What remains distinctive about the recession of 2008–09 and its continuing aftermath is the decline in home prices. The last time such a drop occurred at the national level was during the Great Depression. That calamity, however, was marked by a much more

Potential home buyers tour a neighborhood in Cape Coral, Florida. A steady flow of foreclosures is keeping the U.S. economy down.



severe decline in stock prices—which dropped more than 90 percent between 1929 and 1933. Several thousand banks failed, consumer prices fell by more than 30 percent, and exports declined as many countries in Latin America and Europe abandoned the gold standard and devalued their currency. Unemployment in the United States at one point reached 25 percent.

The conditions in the 1920s and mid-2000s in the run-up to economic collapse were surprisingly similar. The American economy grew strongly in the '20s, with surges in the production of automobiles and the construction of highways, and the introduction of electricity and the telephone in millions of households.

HAD THE GOVERNMENT intervened a few weeks earlier in 2008, the recession would have been much less severe.

Home prices increased, but far less dramatically than they did in the 2000s. Stock prices tripled from the beginning of 1927 to the autumn of 1929, when the crash occurred. Irrational exuberance took hold. Investors were buying stocks because stock prices were increasing, and prices were increasing because investors were buying stocks. Stock market wealth was a smaller component of household wealth than it is today, but higher stock prices helped reduce the cost of capital and increase business investment.

In both the 1920s and the mid-2000s, economic euphoria was pervasive as bubbles in asset prices led to surges in spending—and those spending increases further inflated the bubbles that had fostered them in the first place. Then asset prices imploded, household wealth shrank, and banks suffered large losses when borrowers were unable to repay their loans.

The recession of 2008–09 and its aftermath more closely resemble the Great Depression than any of the other post–World War II recessions. Indeed, this episode might aptly be called the Mini-Depression of 2008–09. Both economic declines involved the

interplay among the collapse of real estate values, the decline of banks' capital and their willingness to lend, and the desire of households to rebuild financial wealth. By contrast, the standard postwar recessions did not involve significant declines in either stock or real estate values or large loan losses by lenders (apart from the localized failures of banks and thrift institutions in the oil- and grain-producing states as a result of the 1980–81 recession). The decline in the capital of banks and other financial institutions between 2007 and 2009 was much greater than the combined declines during the previous 10 recessions.

The 2008 recession did not cascade into another depression because the U.S. Treasury and the Federal Reserve provided abundant funds to recapitalize the banks and limit their distress selling of assets. This intervention—which began in September 2008—sharply reduced the likelihood that a liquidity crisis would morph into a solvency crisis. Had the

Treasury and Fed intervened several weeks earlier, however, the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers would have been prevented, the 2008 recession would have been significantly less severe, and the postrecession expansion would have been more robust.

Even this intervention would have been unnecessary had the Fed and government bank regulators recognized the emerging bubble in property prices in 2004 and 2005 and used their authority to curtail the risky and pernicious credit practices of Countrywide, Washington Mutual, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and other financial institutions. There was abundant evidence, based on the growth rate of the American population, that housing starts far exceeded demand, and the decline in the credit standards of some of the most aggressive mortgage lenders was no secret. Yet when real estate prices began to fall and the tightening of credit led to the collapse of big lenders, it became clear that neither the Federal Reserve nor the U.S. Treasury had contingency plans to deal with runs on banks and other financial firms. A few ounces of prevention would have yielded a ton of cure. ■

IN ESSENCE

REVIEWS OF ARTICLES FROM PERIODICALS AND SPECIALIZED JOURNALS HERE AND ABROAD

57 Foreign Policy & Defense // 61 Politics & Government // 63 Society // 66 Economics, Labor & Business // 68 History
68 Religion & Philosophy // 70 Press & Media // 71 Arts & Letters // 74 Science & Technology // 75 Other Nations

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Indispensable No More

THE SOURCE: “The End of the American Era” by Stephen M. Walt, in *The National Interest*, Nov.–Dec. 2011.

THE COUNTRY’S CHATTERING class seems fixated on the question of whether the United States is on the verge of a fatal decline. Stephen M. Walt says the alarm is exaggerated. “Whether the future world is unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, Washington is going to be one of

those poles—and almost certainly the strongest of them,” he writes. Walt, a Harvard professor of international affairs, argues, however, that the “American era”—in which the country was the “sole superpower in a unipower world”—is over. In light of its diminished influence, the United States must be careful about where and how it deploys its power.

The 1990s marked the height of the American era as well as its end, Walt observes. Eastern Europe shook off the shackles of communism and China’s economy soared. Within the past decade, India, Turkey, and Brazil have experienced economic surges that brought them to the forefront of international affairs. The United States has made mistakes that hastened the diminishment of its authority, namely the “expensive defeats” in Iraq and Afghanistan and the financial crisis. The country’s inability to broker a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israel

and Palestine has also weakened its hand, Walt says.

How should the United States deal with its attenuated influence? “Instead of trying to be the ‘indispensable nation’ nearly everywhere, the United States will need to figure out how to be the decisive power in the places that matter,” Walt writes. The United States should return to “offshore balancing” as its governing strate-



In the emerging international order, the United States will need to bring more partners to the table, such as Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi, pictured here with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

AP PHOTO/DAVID KARP

No longer the “indispensable nation,” the United States must still be the “decisive power” when it matters.

gy, presiding over a peaceful Western Hemisphere and ensuring a balance of power in Eurasia and the Persian Gulf. It should only consider military engagements of the sort that have been effective in the past—such as those aimed at preventing or reversing conventional acts of war, as when it countered Iraq’s 1991 invasion of Kuwait. American nation-building and counterinsurgency efforts have failed; they should stop. A wiser course would be to encourage allies to step up and take the lead more often, a policy that bore some success in the European-led intervention in Libya last year.

The primary focus of U.S. foreign policy should be Asia, Walt says. In addition to a strong network of committed allies, Washington needs to maintain a capacity to project force by land, sea, and air in the region. At the same time, it must be careful not to unduly provoke China.

But the United States must also remain mindful of “domestic imperatives,” such as fostering first-class capabilities in education, research, and infrastructure, Walt argues. That’s what will keep the country strong over the long term—not meddling in “strategic backwaters” such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Empty Threat of Cyberwar

THE SOURCE: “Cyber War Will Not Take Place” by Thomas Rid, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Feb. 2012.

THE SPECTER OF CYBERWAR haunts American leaders. “The next Pearl Harbor could very well be a cyberattack,” Leon Panetta warned last year when he was still CIA director.

Rubbish, says Thomas Rid, a reader in the Department of War Studies at King’s College London. There are plenty of dark doings online, but they fall far short of war. “Cyberwar does not take

place in the present. And it is highly unlikely that cyberwar will occur in the future,” he asserts.

The 19th-century Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz formulated the classic definition of an act of war: It must be violent, purposeful, and overtly political. Few cyberattacks on record have met even one of these criteria. Instead, cyberattackers of a political bent—government sponsored and otherwise—prowl the Web with three old-fashioned objectives: espionage, subversion, and sabotage. Online or off, acts of these kinds can accompany war, but they also occur in peacetime.

Online espionage is “booming,” Rid writes. In 2008, the Pentagon reported that spyware—allegedly of Russian provenance—had slithered its way onto a laptop at a U.S. military base in the Middle East. Initially, only the Pentagon’s unclassified network was compromised. But the bug was crafty. It automatically copied itself onto removable thumb drives, leading an unwitting user to transfer the spyware to the military’s secret network. Defense officials blamed the incident on an unnamed “foreign intelligence agency.”

Subversion is also common. In 2007, assailants bombarded



dozens of Estonian Web sites after a statue revered by Russians was moved from the center of Tallinn, the Estonian capital. Estonian officials blamed Moscow for the chaos, but they lacked conclusive evidence. During the clash between Georgia and Russia a year later, Georgian Web sites were attacked. Again Moscow was blamed, and again the accusers lacked proof. In any case, Rid says these were mere “cyber scuffles,” even though they made headlines. The attacks weren’t violent, and they had little effect.

The Stuxnet computer virus is the latest and most serious instance of cybersabotage. In 2010, the super-sophisticated bug infected thousands of computers worldwide, but evidently its ultimate target was two computer systems at the heart of Iran’s nuclear program. The programming of the bug bore Israeli—and possibly American—fingerprints.

But even the unleashing of Stuxnet did not qualify as an act of war. The virus was not violent. Its origins—and the goals of those who created it—can only be guessed at.

Stuxnet has escalated cyberconflict to a new level, Rid allows, but it also shows how much more difficult life is becoming for attackers. Whoever designed the bug needed impeccable intelligence to know where and how to deliver it. A computer security expert joked that Stuxnet’s masters “probably even knew the shoe size” of the people operating the targeted computers. Would-be saboteurs aren’t always so well in-

formed. Nor are they always so well financed; the price tag to engineer Stuxnet was probably very high. The advantage may be shifting to the defense.

What’s certain, Rid concludes, is that war on the Web is hardly inevitable. “There was no and there is no Pearl Harbor of cyberwar.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Stand By Taiwan

THE SOURCE: “Should the United States Abandon Taiwan?” by Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and Bonnie Glaser, in *The Washington Quarterly*, Fall 2011.

EVERY YEAR CHINA PUBLICLY grumbles about the United States’ support of Taiwan, and every year Washington pretends not to hear. Some U.S. foreign-policy specialists are sick of this dynamic, arguing, according to Georgetown University historian Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and analyst Bonnie Glaser of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, that Taiwan is a “strategic liability, an expensive diversion

and . . . an obstacle to more important U.S.-China relations.” Don’t take the bait, say Tucker and Glaser. If anything, the United States should increase its support of the small democratic island.

Even if the United States did bow to China’s wishes and pull the plug on its Taiwan support, there is no guarantee that relations between the rival superpowers would get any smoother, the authors argue. China would continue to oppose U.S. interests on nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea. And Beijing would be more likely to view U.S. capitulation on Taiwan as a cowering dodge than a proffered olive branch. Walking away from Taiwan could sap the United States’ negotiating power throughout the region, moreover, and possibly send friends in the area, such as Japan and South Korea, into China’s arms.

Scrapping ties to Taiwan would also hurt the U.S. economy. The two nations have a vibrant economic relationship: Taiwan ranks as America’s ninth-largest trading partner, and the United States is Taiwan’s leading foreign investor.

EXCERPT

Flower Power

Lenin taught, “Power is mass multiplied by cohesion.” Arab violence generates Jewish cohesion. Cohesion turns mass into power. Israel has had very small mass, very high cohesion. If only the Palestinians understood that, they would have attacked the Jews with flowers.

—EDWARD LUTTWAK, military strategist, in *Tablet Magazine* (Sept. 6, 2011)

Furthermore, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan are big business; the United States has sold almost \$13 billion in weapons to Taiwan over the past two years.

To prevent the Chinese from even thinking that Washington is going to relinquish its commitment, the United States should step up its engagement with Taiwan, Tucker and Glaser argue. The priorities: making progress on stalled negotiations on trade, a U.S. visa waiver program, and a bilateral extradition agreement. Without the United States' support, Taiwan would almost certainly "be compelled, in some form, to accommodate China's unification agenda," possibly laying to rest one of Asia's most successful forays into democracy.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Westphalian Mirage

THE SOURCE: "To Order the Minds of Scholars: The Discourse of the Peace of Westphalia in International Relations Literature" by Sebastian Schmidt, in *International Studies Quarterly*, Sept. 2011.

FEW SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS OF globalization go very far before sage allusions to "the Westphalian system" start flying. The term is a catchall description for the rules of the game that have prevailed in international politics since the European treaties collectively called the Peace of Westphalia were signed in 1648. Today, we tend to measure the uncertainties created by glo-

balization against the solid foundation established by the Peace.

The only problem, writes Sebastian Schmidt, a graduate student in political science at the University of Chicago, is that the foundation is a mirage. The Westphalian system that scholars and others confidently cite as a standard was not what it seems. The ructions of our present-day globalization may not be as unprecedented as we think.

The Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years' War, which began as a bloody struggle between Protestants and Catholics in Germany and later drew in other European powers, and the Eighty Years' War, fought between Spain and the Dutch Republic. That much is beyond dispute. But the Peace is also said to have replaced the unsettled state of international borders and politics with a system of "sovereign, equal territorial states" immune to intervention by outsiders. (No longer, for example, would the Holy Roman emperor meddle in the domains of German princes.)

From that perspective, the 21st century certainly looks very different. Interdependence and integration are the order of the day. The International Monetary Fund routinely tinkers with the affairs of countries that are in economic distress, while nations and international organizations such as the United Nations increasingly intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states in the name of humanitarianism, human rights, the environment, and nuclear nonproliferation. Fierce debates

The Peace of Westphalia ushered in an international system that was more complicated than is recognized.

surround all these issues.

But Schmidt says that we have an exaggerated view of how different our own time is. He traces the problem to international relations specialists within political science who virtually stopped thinking about what really happened in the 17th century.

In an influential 1969 essay, Princeton's Richard Falk essentially argued that it would be more "convenient" to use a fixed conception of the Westphalian system than to continue squabbling over historical details. However, Schmidt thinks there is a lot worth squabbling over. A handful of scholars have soldiered on in the history books, demonstrating, he says, that the Peace "did not establish anything resembling the Westphalia concept." The Westphalian system's supposed rule against intervention by outsiders, for example, was not absolute. The Peace protected the rights of religious minorities and barred sovereigns from determining the faith of their subjects, leaving the door open to outside enforcers.

The old notion of proud Westphalian autonomy belongs in the dustbin of history, Schmidt contends. The world is better seen as a "society of states" in which no nation lives in splendid isolation.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Postpartisan Folly

THE SOURCE: “The Mirage” by Sean Wilentz, in *The New Republic*, Nov. 17, 2011.

REMEMBER THE LAST TIME Americans elected a “postpartisan” president? Why, it was only four years ago! It was Barack Obama who hoped to soar above the sordid political wars with “eloquence, rational policies, and good faith,” writes Princeton historian Sean Wilentz. After Obama’s first year in office, however, Gallup found that he was the most polarizing president in the history of its polling efforts.

The American yearning for a politics without partisan conflict is as old as the republic, Wilentz says. It’s also a snare and a delusion. President George Washington gave voice to it in his Farewell Address of 1796, famously warning that political parties were not “natural,” and that they were led by “artful and enterprising men” (which he did not intend as a compliment). Yet Washington’s deeds belied his words—the very timing of his speech was highly partisan. Having long before decided not to accept a third term, Washington informed his vice president and chosen successor, the Federalist John Adams, but delayed a public announcement until he delivered the Farewell Address in September of that election year, handicapping Ad-

ams’s rival, Thomas Jefferson.

When Jefferson finally won the presidency four years later, he famously declared, “We are all republicans, we are all federalists,” but his words, too, were deceptive. Jefferson and his allies in what eventually became the Democratic Party were avowedly partisan, and the Jacksonian Democrats of the next generation went on to build a “disciplined, even quasi-military” party organization, Wilentz notes.

The antiparty spirit has surged forth on many occasions in American history—among the abolitionists, for example, and in the Civil War Confederacy, with its single-term six-year presidency, a classic political design for minimizing partisan conflict. After the Civil War, upper-class northern liberal reformers in the Republican Party (Mugwumps and others) rose up in fury at what they saw as the nation’s debased politics of corruption and spoilsmanship, championing causes such as depoliticization of the civil service and restrictions on immigration.

It may seem new, but the American yearning for a politics without partisanship is as old as the republic.

One of their standard-bearers, Henry Adams, declared that the reformers were independent of the corrupt major parties, forming a “party of the center.”

When the nation’s attention turned in the late 19th century to the disruptions caused by the Industrial Revolution, the burgeoning Progressive movement united behind the antipartisan banner. As the Confederates had done, the Progressives often looked to institutional design to cleanse politics. Primary elections, ballot initiatives, and the direct election of U.S. senators were among the devices Progressives used to weaken political parties. Whenever possible, they favored putting decision-making powers in the hands of disinterested “experts.” Ironically, though, the two presidents who most effectively advanced the Progressive agenda, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, were astute party politicians.

The latest postpartisan upsurge began with Jimmy Carter—a morally upright engineer who promised to end politics as usual when he was elected in 1976—and a trio of third-party candidates who ran for the presidency beginning in 1980: John Anderson, Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader.

The problem with postpartisanship, Wilentz warns, is that leaders need “the trust and continuing cooperation born of strong party loyalties” to get things done in Congress. “Whenever political leaders have presumed that their expertise and their background make them special repositories of wisdom” above

the fray, “the result has been a fatal disconnection between themselves and the citizenry.”

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Harding's Hidden Halo

THE SOURCE: “Time for Another Harding?” by Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, in *The Weekly Standard*, Oct. 24, 2011.

SCAN THE PRESIDENTIAL RANKINGS historians and pundits produce, and you’ll find one consistent bottom feeder: Warren G. Harding. The Teapot Dome scandal and other instances of corruption badly damaged the reputation of the onetime newspaper publisher and Republican senator from Ohio. “Yet the truth about his presidency is quite the opposite” of today’s general impression, write historians Ronald and Allis Radosh. “He achieved a good deal more in the two and a half years he served before his sudden death than many presidents accomplish in a full term.”

Harding’s main feat was “setting the country’s economic house in order.” When he took office on March 4, 1921, after winning the 1920 election by a landslide, the U.S. economy was sagging under the weight of an economic depression, high taxes, and a national debt that had ballooned from \$1 billion in 1914 to \$24 billion.

With the Revenue Act of 1921, Harding “cut income tax rates for Americans at every income level,” which some scholars credit with bolstering employment and busi-



Warren Harding gave a more spirited performance than historians acknowledge.

ness. The act also repealed the wartime excess-profits tax. “Harding was consistent in his dedication to fiscal responsibility,” the authors write, noting that he vetoed a popular bonus for World War I veterans in order to avoid increasing the national debt.

Harding also scored a major economic policy win with a long-needed reform of the federal budget process. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 streamlined what had been a haphazard and frustrating ordeal, and established the nonpartisan Budget Bureau, the precursor to the Office of Management and Budget. Harding’s long list of shrewd hires included Charles G. Dawes, a former McKinley administration official and successful businessman, who used the new bureau to reshape government spending.

On one famous occasion, Dawes appeared before federal officials and held up two brooms, one issued by the Army and the other by the Navy. The Army had a sur-

plus of brooms, Dawes explained, and the Navy a deficit, but the Navy refused the Army’s brooms because the bristles were bound with twine rather than wire. Dawes wouldn’t tolerate such harebrained thinking, and he made good on his disapproval by reducing federal spending from \$6.3 billion in 1920 to \$3.3 billion in 1922. When Dawes left his post, the Radoshes note, “he took two brooms home with him as mementoes.”

Who knows what else Harding would have done had he not been felled by a heart attack in 1923 at the age of 57. He had, for example, a strong interest in racial equality, and had “called for a federal antilynching law” that was nixed in the Senate by southern Democrats. Harding may not have been Abraham Lincoln, but he deserves to be more highly valued for his presidential contributions, the Radoshes conclude.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Polarization Without Parties

THE SOURCE: “The American Political Parties Are Breaking Down” by Walter Russell Mead, in *Via Meadia* (blog), Oct. 31, 2011.

PARTISANSHIP MAY HAVE reached scorching levels, but even partisans don’t have much use for actual political parties these days, argues Walter Russell Mead, a professor of foreign affairs and humanities at Bard College. The parties “are increasingly being reduced to flags of convenience,” he writes.

At a time when the United States faces serious long-term challenges, American politics is becoming “less coherent and more subject to rapid mood swings.” Politicians are more likely to buck the party line, making it harder to reach agreement and get legislation passed.

Republicans particularly are choosing to meet, strategize, and raise money outside of the party apparatus, the Republican National Committee. (The Democratic National Committee has retained its primacy, as President Barack Obama’s success as a fundraiser keeps its coffers full.) American Crossroads, a political action committee founded by former Republican presidential adviser Karl Rove, plans to spend \$240 million during the 2012 election season, according to *The New York Times*.

The Supreme Court’s controversial decision in the *Citizens United* case in 2010 partly explains the move away from party structures: Groups such as American Crossroads are now able to spend unlimited amounts without disclosing their sources of financial support. Another factor is simply that fewer Americans identify with political parties. Politicians have little incentive to heed party leaders and every reason to play to public opinion, and they have the cash to go it alone.

Two kinds of politicians thrive in this environment, Mead argues: “insurgency candidates” who command grassroots support regardless of their political experience (including populists such as Republican representative Michele Bachmann and celebrities

such as Democratic senator Al Franken, both of Minnesota), and office hopefuls who have access to especially deep pockets, whether their own or someone else’s. (If you’re not a Bloomberg, in other words, you’d better have the connections of a Kennedy.) The politicians who lose out? Those who plan to “rise patiently through the ranks of the party machine,” and perhaps care more about the public interest than personal power.

The country’s size and diversity mean that when populism flour-

ishes, as it does today, it’s likely to come in many varieties. Fortunately, that means that no single populist leader is likely to get very far. Still, if politicians don’t figure out a way to assuage the current discontent, according to Mead, “we risk something like a national version of California’s political death spiral: dissatisfaction with the status quo leading to populist interventions that make the political system more dysfunctional, increasing voter dissatisfaction, and so on down the chute.”

SOCIETY

Staying Put

THE SOURCE: “Internal Migration in the United States” by Raven Molloy, Christopher L. Smith, and Abigail Wozniak, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Summer 2011.

AMERICANS LIKE TO THINK OF themselves as a restless people, always ready to pack up and move in search of opportunity. But in the past 30 years, they have been increasingly stuck in place.

In the 1980s, for example, 3 percent of men migrated from one state to another every year; by the 2000s, only 1.7 percent made such moves. What lies behind this “historically unprecedented” 30-year decline? Raven Molloy and Christopher L. Smith, economists at the Federal Reserve Board, and Abigail Wozniak, an economist at the University of Notre Dame, say the trend defies easy explanation. It has en-

dured for too long to be blamed on the ups and downs of the economy, and it has affected virtually every segment of the population.

Data gleaned from the Census Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service show that younger people and the more educated migrate at higher rates than others. Renters are more likely to pile their goods into a moving van than homeowners, as are childless households versus those with children. (While there has been much talk about the large number of people said to be stuck in their current homes because their mortgages are underwater, the researchers say there is little evidence in their data that this is a factor in decreased mobility.) Blacks and Hispanics migrate at lower rates than whites. The unemployed move



A rarer sight: Fewer Americans than ever are packing up and moving to new states.

more than those with jobs. Yet all these groups have migrated at declining rates since 1980.

In Europe and Canada, geographical mobility hasn't changed much. Americans remain more footloose, even now. They are more than twice as likely as Italians to pull up stakes, for example. In 2009, almost a third of native-born Americans lived in a state outside the one in which they were born. (The intriguing exception to the rule is Britain, which has levels of geographical mobility comparable to those in the United States and has also experienced declining mobility.)

What is keeping more Americans in one place? The rise of telecommuting and more flexible work arrangements may play a role. Job markets and amenities have grown more homogenous over the years, possibly reducing the hunger to venture out in search of greener pastures. It may be that what economists call "labor mar-

ket frictions" have increased—it has become harder to change jobs. In any event, the authors say, there could be a bright side to the new trend if Americans who don't have one foot out the door are willing to invest more in the communities they currently call home.

SOCIETY

Mending Malpractice

THE SOURCE: "Dropped Medical Malpractice Claims: Their Surprising Frequency, Apparent Causes, and Potential Remedies" by Dwight Golann, in *Health Affairs*, July 2011.

IT'S A COMMON ENOUGH HEADACHE for American doctors: Treat a patient using a routine procedure, but instead of getting a check in the mail, get served legal papers. To add insult to injury, much of the cost and conflict of malpractice litigation is unnecessary. A surprising number of cases "simply disap-

pear, as plaintiffs abandon them," writes Dwight Golann, a professor at Suffolk University Law School, in Boston. Golann studied 2,094 malpractice cases in Massachusetts that closed between 2006 and 2010. Almost half—46 percent—were dropped by the plaintiff. (The remainder resulted in a settlement or went to court.)

There are plenty of checks in the state's system that should prevent frivolous complaints from going forward, including a mandatory viability review by a screening tribunal. Medical malpractice attorneys and insurance claim managers Golann interviewed said that the primary reason so many cases are dropped is simple: During the legal process, plaintiffs uncover information about their treatment that makes them re-evaluate the merits of their claim. A patient may discover, for instance, that one step in a complex procedure he thought his doctors had skipped was just not recorded, leaving him with an inaccurate perception of the treatment he received. The length of legal proceedings—2.75 years, on average, for dropped cases—leaves plenty of time for such information to come to light.

The costs of dropped cases are consequential: Insurers in Golann's sample spent an average of \$44,200 on each dropped case in 2010. These costs are passed on to medical providers and, eventually, patients through such mechanisms as higher insurance premiums.

Remedies are available, Golann says. A University of Michigan Health System initiative that

made a cornerstone of quickly and aggressively investigating malpractice claims saw the number of malpractice cases filed within its system dip by 36 percent, case resolution times shrink by 30 percent, and case expenses, including payments offered by insurers, drop by 44 percent.

Lawyers for both plaintiffs and the defense should take a cue from Michigan and disclose information at the outset instead of waiting for it to be unearthed during the costly discovery process, Golann says. And when a claim is found to have validity, the defense should offer a good-faith settlement in a timely manner. Medical malpractice litigation still won't be a walk in the park, but it should cause fewer headaches.

SOCIETY

Checkpoints, Not Checks

THE SOURCE: "Do Working Men Rebel? Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines" by Eli Berman, Michael Callen, Joseph H. Felter, and Jacob N. Shapiro, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Aug. 2011.

IN THE 1960S, CRIMINOLOGISTS developed the theory that employed men are less likely to commit crimes because they are meaningfully occupied. The logic eventually migrated to conflict zones: Unemployed men with lots of time on their hands have the opportunity and motivation to participate in political violence, the thinking went. Put these men to

work and insurgent violence will decrease. Job creation programs led by aid and development organizations have sprouted up around the world in order to put this wisdom into action.

But these efforts may be for naught, according to economists Eli Berman and Michael Callen of the University of California, San Diego; Colonel Joseph H. Felter, a

al explanations. One is that insurgents are prompted to act when the economy is doing well, because the resources and land that insurgents want to seize are more valuable. Another theory posits that when unemployment is high, governments find more willing sellers of intelligence about insurgency efforts. Still another theory asserts a different kind of causality: The



Unemployed Iraqi men queue up to find jobs in war-ravaged central Baghdad in 2003.

research fellow at the Hoover Institution; and political scientist Jacob N. Shapiro of Princeton. They studied the relationship between unemployment and insurgent activity in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines during discrete periods over roughly the past decade. Their findings: Higher unemployment rates correlated with *less* political violence overall. In Iraq, for example, a 10 percent increase in the unemployment rate dovetailed with 0.74 fewer acts of insurgent activity per 1,000 people.

How could this be? Berman and his colleagues offer sever-

al checkpoints and other security measures that suppress insurgent violence also hamper local economies, driving up unemployment.

The authors caution that unemployed men may still be drawn to insurgent activity—it's just that this correlation is "overshadowed by other forces." Still, if aid and development groups truly want to dampen insurgent violence, they may be better off pouring their money into programs that enhance civilian cooperation with counterterrorism efforts than ones that focus on putting the unemployed back to work.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Capitalism, Chinese Style

THE SOURCE: "China's Changing *Guanxi* Capitalism: Private Entrepreneurs Between Leninist Control and Relentless Accumulation" by Christopher A. McNally, in *Business and Politics*, Aug. 2011.

CHINA TODAY HAS ALL THE SOBER trappings of modern capitalism: contracts, corporations, and institutions enshrined in law. Yet *guanxi*, or relationships with kin or associates who are tapped for favors with the understanding of reciprocity, continue to play a large role in the business dealings of everyone from the humble dumpling vendor to the iPhone-wielding Shanghai executive. The most useful *guanxi* are with Communist Party officials, facilitating a "state-capital symbiosis" that has become a unique feature of Chinese capitalism, writes political scientist Christopher A. McNally of Chaminade University in Honolulu.

Guanxi are handy beyond business. The practice has its roots in Confucian teachings that emphasize familial relationships, respect for elders, and social status. The spheres of trust these teachings elaborate became a fulcrum of Chinese society and the basis for *guanxi*. An individual may purchase a nice gift on the anniversary of an influential person in his or her *guanxi* network with the expectation that the recipient will provide useful help in the future.

Under Mao Zedong, the Communist Party tried to stamp out *guanxi*, but individuals still drew on these special connections to survive. As the Chinese economy began to open up following market reforms in 1978, *guanxi* provided "entrepreneurs with channels to navigate government restrictions and ambiguous institutions."

Guanxi are instrumental in allowing business owners to gain access to credit, win government grants, procure licenses, cut through red tape, and influence policy. They allow the Communist Party to maintain a good deal of control over the private sector. In a 2010 survey, 93 percent of Chinese proprietors said *guanxi* were integral to success. As one real estate developer told McNally, "If you have *guanxi*, you will have access to capital. However, if an entrepreneur has capital but no *guanxi*, the business cannot survive." Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2010, policy researcher Ryan Streeter offered an apt comparison: "Generally, enterprising

Ninety-three percent of Chinese business owners say that *guanxi* relationships are integral to their success.

individuals in India believe they succeed in spite of the state, while in China they think they succeed through their connections to it."

Will *guanxi* continue to reign in their current form? In Taiwan, *guanxi* have come to shape the way industry on the island is organized, with groups of collaborative businesses developing out of *guanxi* connections. But, McNally says, *guanxi* capitalism may also "gradually give way to rational-legal principles, thus eroding any distinctly Chinese cultural references."

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Protectionist Psych

THE SOURCE: "Explaining Mass Support for Agricultural Protectionism: Evidence From a Survey Experiment During the Global Recession" by Megumi Naoi and Ikuo Kume, in *International Organization*, Fall 2011.

THE NEW PRIME MINISTER OF Japan, Yoshihiko Noda, made a bold move last fall when he announced that his country would participate in talks to join a Pacific free-trade agreement. Japan provides generous support to its agricultural sector through subsidies to farmers and hefty tariffs on rice and other food imports. These protections would likely shrink under the terms of a free-trade deal.

In theory, consumers ought to prefer free trade because it brings down prices. But most people are producers as well as consumers, and the more they think of them-



Subsidies under threat: A Japanese farmer harvests rice in Iwate Prefecture.

selves as producers, the more likely they are to oppose dropping trade barriers that protect struggling sectors such as agriculture. Political scientists Megumi Naoi of the University of California, San Diego, and Ikuo Kume of Waseda University, in Tokyo, show that in the midst of the 2008 global downturn, Japanese strongly supported protections for their country's farm sector when they were encouraged to identify with farmers as producers.

In Naoi and Kume's experiment, 1,200 Japanese adults were shown images that "primed" them to think of themselves as either consumers or producers. Those in the first group viewed a food-filled supermarket, an electronics store, and a casual clothing store. Those in the second saw an office, a car factory, and a rice field. (A control group was not shown any images.)

At least half of the people in all three groups described food imports as bad or very bad, but those who were primed to think

of themselves as producers were most likely to express a negative view. Sixty percent of them did so. People who were primed to think as consumers indicated dislike of food imports at about the same rate as those in the control group.

People were much less opposed to imports in general, but priming had effects there, too: Thirty-two percent of those encouraged to think as producers rated general imports as bad, while only 14 percent of those primed as consumers did.

People who reported difficulty finding a job or were older were much more likely to support agricultural protectionism when primed to think from the producer perspective. More than 64 percent of participants with either attribute expressed a negative view. They seemed to project their own job insecurities and desire for government assistance onto the agricultural sector, the authors say. The forces that nurture protectionist sentiment are much more powerful and complex than economists generally recognize.

EXCERPT

Just the Facts

The one thing that has disillusioned me [as a federal policymaker] is the discussion of fiscal policy. Policymakers and far too many economists seem to be arguing from ideology rather than evidence. . . . The evidence is stronger than it has ever been that fiscal policy matters—that fiscal stimulus helps the economy add jobs, and that reducing the budget deficit lowers growth at least in the near term. And yet, this evidence does not seem to be getting through to the legislative process.

That is unacceptable. We are never going to solve our problems if we can't agree at least on the facts. Evidence-based policymaking is essential if we are ever going to triumph over this recession and deal with our long-run budget problems.

—CHRISTINA D. ROMER, economist and former chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, in a speech at Hamilton College (Nov. 7, 2011)

HISTORY

It Was the Economy, Stupid

THE SOURCE: "Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence" by Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher, in *William and Mary Quarterly*, Oct. 2011.

"WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO be self-evident, that all men are created equal," may be among the most famous phrases in the English language. Similarly inscribed on the hearts of Americans are the personal liberties the Declaration of Independence enshrines. But "the final text of the Declaration was anything but a transparent ranking of all the real reasons for independence," argue Staughton Lynd, an independent scholar, and David Waldstreicher, a historian at Temple University. Economic frustrations, not a desire for "certain unalienable rights," planted the seeds that grew into the American Revolution.

Scholars tend to view the ideological arguments for independence as building to a critical point and preoccupying the colonists thereafter. That's inaccurate, Lynd and Waldstreicher write: From the mid-18th century right up to the signing of the Declaration, Americans objected to a myriad of British imperial policies principally on economic grounds. The antitax sentiment of the Boston Tea Party in 1773 is well known, but Americans also protested British attempts to requisition resources

during the Seven Years' War (1756–63), imperial currency manipulation that left the colonies strapped, and prohibitions on trade with the French West Indies, along with many other policies.

To make the strongest case possible, American patriots were often forced to subsume their economic frustrations within a broader argument for sovereignty, setting up the natural rights arguments associated with the Declaration. The debate over the Navigation Acts during the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1774 was one such moment. These laws required that American rice and tobacco be shipped to England so that British merchants could resell the

commodities for marked-up prices and reap the rewards. "In arguing for the conclusive right of the colonists to govern the relationships among the colonies and between them and other countries, airtight precedents were lacking," the authors note. There were no common-law traditions or charters to back up their arguments. The "principles of justice," however, could do the trick.

There's nothing wrong with the fact that colonists were initially motivated by economic concerns, Lynd and Waldstreicher say. What's dismaying is that principles such as the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" seeped into the mythology of the American character at the expense of everything else and fed the belief that America is an exceptional nation. In reality, the authors assert, "the American Revolution was basically a colonial independence movement and the reasons for it were fundamentally economic."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Being Muslim in America

THE SOURCE: "The Muslim-American Muddle" by Peter Skerry, in *National Affairs*, Fall 2011.

MORE THAN A DECADE AFTER 9/11, U.S. Muslims are struggling to forge a distinctively Muslim-American identity. One of their challenges, argues political scientist Peter Skerry of Boston College, is a "muddled" sense of loyal-

ty to the United States.

Such confusion is common in the history of American immigrant groups. What's distinctive about the case of Muslim Americans is the "lingering influence of Islamist leaders, institutions, and ideology" on the organizations that claim to represent them.

On the surface, Muslim Amer-



Muslims worship at the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan.

icans are highly assimilated. Numbering less than three million (not six to 10 million, as is commonly said), according to the Pew Research Center, they have levels of income and education that generally match those of the general population. About 60 percent are foreign born, and about 95 percent of those who arrived during the 1980s have since become citizens. (Unity efforts are hampered partly by the fact that the many Muslim Americans who have immigrated to the United States hail from a great variety of countries.) According to Pew, the majority rarely or never attend mosque services. Less than five percent of Muslim Americans' children attend full-time Islamic schools.

But Muslims in the United States face a dilemma most other majority-immigrant groups have not: Many have felt that "their salvation was threatened by their very presence" in un-Islamic America, Skerry writes. In the 1970s and '80s, encouraged by Islamic thinkers such as Muzammil Siddiqi, Muslims often formed enclaves amid the green lawns of

suburbia in a bid to remain faithful to Islam's strict tenets. Be polite to non-Muslim neighbors, they were told, but remain close to Islamic institutions. Try to convert nonbelievers to Islam.

Even before 9/11, many Muslims were chafing at this "Islamic fortress" idea. After it, Muslim activists changed their tune, encouraging their coreligionists to vote and to fight for their civil rights.

But the major Muslim-American organizations, from the Islamic Society of North America to the Muslim American Society, were all founded by Islamists. They have not reconciled their ideology with their commitment to politics or renounced their origins. The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) developed in 1994 out of a movement aligned with Hamas, which the U.S. government classifies as a terrorist organization. In a recent Gallup poll, only 12 percent of American Muslims surveyed said that any of these organizations represent their interests.

CAIR has played an important

role in encouraging young Muslim Americans to "lay full and unapologetic claim to their rights as citizens, while admitting no corresponding duties," Skerry asserts. But those followers, he says, "refuse to acknowledge that their organizations and leaders bear any responsibility for the suspicions that other Americans continue to harbor toward them."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Holy Rights

THE SOURCE: "The Church of Labor" by Lew Daly, in *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Fall 2011.

WHY DO ROUGHLY 70 PERCENT of European workers have collective bargaining coverage, while only 13 percent of their American counterparts do? Religion is a surprisingly big part of the answer.

In Europe, politics evolved hand in hand with forms of Christianity—especially Catholicism—that were sensitive to "labor's dignity in a religious sense," observes Lew Daly, author of *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State* (2009). As a result, in many parts of Europe, natural associations such as the family, churches, and labor unions were incorporated into public structures and protected from market competition because they were seen "as vital instruments of the common good."

In the United States, however, politics and religion developed separately—the Constitution, after all, establishes a strict divi-

sion between church and state. And that's one of the main reasons unions are so enfeebled, in Daly's view: American culture just isn't set up for them. In the United States, individual rights are the bedrock of politics, not natural associations. That unions exist in the United States at all is due in large part to influential Catholic Americans inspired by the labor protections the Vatican began to endorse in the late 19th century. Collective bargaining and fair wages and hours can be traced to their activism. Other union-friendly policies they supported got the ax in the decades following the New Deal.

Unions in the United States are further hobbled by the fact that the majority of progressives, the most labor-friendly group in U.S. politics, maintain a studious distance from religious causes. Only a handful of groups, such as Sojourners and Faith in Public Life, have melded religion and the pursuit of progressive social welfare policies.

If progressives really want to see labor unions flourish, Daly contends, they need to rethink their commitment to "pervasive institutional and legal secularism." Progressives should draw on "the authority of the 'social faith' [they] inherit from the great religious forebears of collective bargaining, social insurance, and the just wage." Unions are weak in the United States for a plethora of reasons, he says, but progressives should not "underestimate the potential for coordinating family, labor, and religion in newfound solidarity and a new common path."

PRESS & MEDIA

Squawk Box

THE SOURCE: "Understanding the Rise of Talk Radio" by Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj, in *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Oct. 2011.

HIT THE "SCAN" BUTTON ON your car radio and you're just as likely to land on a station with a right-wing pundit lambasting health care reform as the latest Rihanna hit. Talk radio is thriving: About 3,500 American radio stations use that format today, up from about 1,750 in 2007 and just 500 in 1991. Political scientist Jeffrey M. Berry and sociologist Sarah Sobieraj, both of Tufts University, argue that the boom is more a matter of money talking than politics.

As with virtually all advertising-dependent media, the AM-FM, or "terrestrial," radio industry has suffered from technological disruption and the harsh economic climate, Berry and Sobieraj write. The old methods of covering the bills aren't working: Total radio revenues declined from \$20 billion in 2000 to \$14 billion in 2009.

Tuning in to some easy listening on the commute home was once commonplace, but drivers now relax to commercial-free playlists uploaded on their MP3 players and smartphones. Listener loyalty has been further eroded as big corporations have bought out mom-and-pop music stations and laid off local on-air personalities to consolidate costs. As audiences for

radio music programs have dwindled, so too have the ad dollars music stations are able to command.

Talk radio defies this trend. Because it is highly topical, reflecting news of the day, its audience has not readily decamped to competitors such as podcasts. Radio listeners are relatively well educated and wealthy, and pay attention to what's being broadcast to them—all plusses for advertisers. One radio professional in Los Angeles reported that "even in the current soft economy, some of [local AM station] KFI's programs have waitlists for advertisers who want to buy commercial time." And most radio stations in the United States are now owned by a few corporations, so local stations can easily fill their schedules with syndicated talk shows that cost little and bring in ad dollars.

Some cite talk radio's politically conservative cast as the reason for its growth. But it's just natural that talk radio would swing to the right, Berry and Sobieraj say. Liberals listen to a wider array of radio—blacks and Hispanics tend to tune into niche stations, for instance—and there's always National Public Radio. The explosion of talk radio is a matter of dollars and cents, they insist. "For many stations music became unprofitable and switching to talk was an attempt to stay in business."

PRESS & MEDIA

Climate Patterns

THE SOURCE: "Climate on Cable: The Nature and Impact of Global Warming Coverage on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC" by Lauren Feldman, Edward W. Maibach, Connie Roser-Renouf, and Anthony Leiserowitz, in *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Nov. 2, 2011 (online).

AMONG SCIENTISTS, THE IDEA that global warming is occurring and that humans have contributed to it is an article of faith. There's much more skepticism among American political and media elites: Only 20 percent of the program hours devoted to climate change that the Fox News Channel aired in 2007 and 2008 reflected that idea. Sixty percent of global warming airtime featured attacks on it, and 20 percent was mixed or neutral, reports a group of researchers from American, George Mason, and Yale Universities. During that same period, more than 70 percent of MSNBC and CNN segments reflected the view of mainstream science, with most of the remaining segments being neutral.

Researchers have long held that media partisanship affects viewers' opinions, but the study suggests that the relationship is not entirely straightforward. Of about 2,100 Americans the re-

Only 20 percent of Fox News programming devoted to climate change asserted that global warming is occurring.

searchers surveyed, Republicans reported opinions on climate change that varied with the cable news channels they watched, but Democrats did not.

The more Fox broadcasts a Republican took in, the more sharply that viewer disagreed that global warming is occurring. (Fox airs far more material about global warming than its competitors—it accounted for nearly 70 percent of the climate change airtime the researchers studied.) Republicans

who watched CNN and MSNBC generally accepted that global warming is occurring and represents a threat.

Democrats' belief that global warming is occurring didn't change much whether they watched Fox or not, an indication that Democrats are more solidified in their position on climate change than Republicans. Would a change of channels by Republicans or a change at Fox help bridge the partisan divide? The authors don't say.

ARTS & LETTERS

For Love or Money

THE SOURCE: "Big Criticism" by Evan Kindley, in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 2011.

IN 1946, POET AND CRITIC R. P. Blackmur sent a letter to many of America's most prominent writers and critics. "For reasons that will later become apparent," it began, "we should be very grateful for your best opinion as to what literary magazines now being published in the United States are of the most use to literature." The impetus behind the query was the Rockefeller Foundation, which had decided to support literary magazines and had asked Blackmur to determine which were the most deserving.

The letter's mysterious introduction and "flat bureaucratic tone" elicited some extraordinarily candid assessments of the country's literary present and future, writes Evan Kindley, a Princeton

doctoral candidate and the managing editor of *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. Many respondents weighed in as well on the benefits and perils of offering financial support to publications whose marginal status and anti-commercial stance were part of their identity.

The friction between aesthetics and politics was a central concern for many of the respondents. Poet and critic Randall Jarrell admired the leftist *Partisan Review* (which ceased publication in 2003), but also expressed reservations, in a critique that, with a couple of substitutions, might well apply to many literary magazines today: "Although its politics are doctrinaire and academic in that funny New York professional-left way, they haven't prevented it from printing other groups, Stalinists excepted. . . . The worst

things about it are its extraordinary limitations and lack of imagination: everything is looked at from the point of view of someone who's semi-Marxist, fairly avant-garde, reasonably Bohemian, anti-bourgeois, cosmopolitan, anti-Stalinist, lives in New York, likes Mondrian, etc., etc., etc."

Many of the writers saw the advantages of foundation support for little magazines—a number had folded under the twin pressures of the Depression and World War II, and those that remained were struggling. But these writers were also concerned about the effects such support might have on literary culture. Writing of *Poetry*, in whose pages he himself had been published, Wallace Stevens observed that even with a lavish endowment, the magazine would still only be "a modest establishment." The difference, he added, would be that "no-one will write for it any longer for love. *The New Republic* would discover that it was the tool of the luxurious. Everyone would expect poets to buy the drinks, and so on."

Stevens's ambivalence points to an inherent conflict in the endowment of literature by virtually any big institution—even if such support allows writers to avoid rank commercialism. "Literature could perhaps become big without selling out to the market," Kindley summarizes, "but at the cost of making itself explicable, rationalizable, justifiable."

Respondents had less anxiety about supporting criticism than imaginative literature, Kindley notes. *The Partisan Review*, *The*

Kenyon Review, and *The Sewanee Review*—"the 'big three' little magazines" that were the top vote-getters—were regarded, "first and foremost, as *critical* magazines." And "there is just not the same sense of sacredness, and hence violability, attached to criticism. . . . The thinking may have been, if you have to institutionalize something, institutionalize criticism." But perhaps most important, criticism naturally feeds the grants-based literary economy, because foundations are forever in search of justifications and distinctions in deciding where to put their money.

Though only *The Kenyon Review* and *The Sewanee Review* received Rockefeller money, a new institutions-based age in literature dawned. Out of this grew what Kindley terms "Big Criticism," and, on its heels, "Big Theory" (as practiced by the likes of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault). Both Big Criticism and Big

Theory "owe their existence to a standing need to *justify* literature and literary culture, which means, in a capitalist society, justifying their subsidization." This modern arrangement, Kindley concludes, has fostered "the literary and intellectual culture we know in the United States today."

ARTS & LETTERS

The Warhol Bubble

THE SOURCE: "A One-Man Market" by Bryan Appleyard, in *Intelligent Life*, Nov.–Dec. 2011.

IN 1962, A 33-YEAR-OLD GRAPHIC designer turned artist held his first solo show at a gallery in Los Angeles. The response was unremarkable. The gallery sold only five of the 32 paintings it displayed—each a painstaking reproduction of a Campbell's soup can (one for each

EXCERPT

The Buzzard Poet

Tranströmer seems to hang over [Sweden's] landscape with a gimlet eye that sees the world with an almost mystical precision. A view that first appeared open and featureless now holds an anxiety of detail; the voice that first sounded spare and simple now seems subtle, shrewd, and thrillingly intimate. There is a profoundly spiritual element in Tranströmer's vision, though not a conventionally religious one. He is interested in polarities and how we respond, as humans, to finding ourselves at pivotal points, at the fulcrum of a moment.

—ROBIN ROBERTSON, translator of 2011 Nobel Prize–winning poet Tomas Tranströmer, in *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 10, 2011)



Andy Warhol's paintings are pulling in big bucks at auctions today, but the trend is unlikely to last.

variety) for \$100 apiece.

More than 30 years later, in 1996, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City bought the series for \$15 million. The man behind the soup cans, Andy Warhol, had come to be seen as a contemporary artist of singular importance. Now, it looks like MoMA got a bargain; one Warhol painting, *Eight Elvisses*, went for more than \$100 million in 2008. In 2010, Warhol's works accounted for a jaw-dropping 17 percent of contemporary art auction revenues worldwide.

Warhol partisans argue that the oeuvre of the controversial artist, who died in 1987, is worth all that cash. Warhol's "ravishing visual cornucopia" inspired some of today's most important artists, such as Jeff Koons and Banksy, they point out. But arts journalist Bryan Appleyard is skeptical. He concedes that Warhol has had

a tremendous influence on the contemporary art world's movers and shakers, but believes the artist was a one-trick pony. The Warhol market is experiencing a bubble that's bound to burst.

People usually look to art as "a physical embodiment of wider meanings," Appleyard writes. A pair of boots painted by Vincent van Gogh is not just footwear—it's "a statement about a world that lies beyond the painting—the hard life and work of the peasant who wore these boots." Even abstract expressionism, a school that included Jackson Pollack and Mark Rothko and came into vogue after World War II, prized meaning. It just overturned the expectation that artists had to convey it through figurative representation.

Warhol, on the other hand, consciously resisted creating meaning with his art. He only adopted the Campbell's soup can as a

subject after he asked a friend to tell him what to paint and she suggested "the most common, everyday, instantly recognizable thing," Appleyard relates. Intentionally or not, Warhol was building on what Marcel Duchamp had done when, in 1917, he signed a urinal and pronounced it art. Warhol challenged convention with subjects that were even more contemporary and ephemeral; in addition to Campbell's soup cans, he painted Brillo Pads and portraits

of pop icons such as Michael Jackson and Marilyn Monroe. But he never progressed beyond this gimmick, and his later paintings seem merely to ape the passion that can be seen in his early work.

Appleyard proposes that Warhol may be experiencing "a moment" in part because his unpretentious approach to art is temporarily in tune with the zeitgeist. "With the instant publication of digital pictures and videos, anybody can become a cyber-Warhol." But he feels confident that, in time, other artists of the mid-20th century, such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jackson Pollock, will be rightfully recognized as greater talents. Warhol wanted to "make art that is beyond human," Appleyard writes. Yet at the center of the artistic urge is a desire "to define, synthesize, and express the human condition." For all of Warhol's glamour, he does not do that well.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Body of Proof

THE SOURCE: "Post-Mortem Imaging as an Alternative to Autopsy in the Diagnosis of Adult Deaths: A Validation Study" by Ian S. D. Roberts, Rachel E. Benamore, Emyr W. Benbow, Stephen H. Lee, Jonathan N. Harris, Alan Jackson, Susan Mallett, Tufail Patankar, Charles Peebles, Carl Roobottom, and Zoe C. Traill, in *The Lancet*, Nov. 22, 2011 (online).

AMERICANS SEEM TO LOVE television dramas revolving around the work of medical examiners, but in the real world, pressure has been mounting for medicine to develop an alternative to autopsies. Grieving families shocked by the unexpected death of a loved one are often reluctant to consent to the grim procedure, and Jews and Muslims object on religious grounds. (Autopsies are most often performed in cases where the cause of death may have been unnatural.) A study by British medical scientists suggests that imaging technologies can establish an accurate cause of death in many cases, sharply reducing the number of autopsies that need to be performed.

In the study, radiologists used computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to determine a cause of death for 182 people. They also rated their confidence in their diagnosis. After the scans were completed, pathologists performed traditional autopsies. Radiologists produced a cause of death that accorded with pathologists' find-

ings in 68 percent of cases when they used CT scans and in 57 percent of cases when they used MRI scans. (The most frequently misdiagnosed conditions were coronary heart disease and pulmonary embolism, which are difficult to detect with imaging technologies.) More important, though, is that the diagnoses in which the radiologists used the scans and reported a high degree of confidence were correct 84 percent of the time. That success rate is high enough to give the techniques practical value.

Imaging has several advantages over autopsy, the authors note. It more accurately detects collapsed lungs and select fractures and brain tumors. It also produces a permanent record of images that can be revisited and easily audited.

The rate of error is too significant for imaging to replace autopsies altogether. But used in tandem with other methods, the technique can make formulating the cause of death easier and more accurate. The authors propose using imaging as a "preautopsy screen" that can

Imaging technologies could sharply reduce the number of traditional autopsies that must be performed.

help determine when autopsies are unnecessary. If MRI and CT scans were coupled with an angiogram to check for ailments that imaging technologies aren't good at capturing, the authors predict, the number of conventional autopsies could be cut by about 50 percent.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Retractions Under the Microscope

THE SOURCE: "The Trouble With Retractions" by Richard Van Noorden, in *Nature*, Oct. 6, 2011.

NO SCIENTIST LIKES TO HEAR that a publication labored over for months or years contains a flaw so major that it must be withdrawn from the public record. Yet the number of retractions of published research has boomed in recent years. It was projected last fall that the Web of Science, an authoritative publication database, would record 400 retractions in 2011, up from an average of about 30 a year a decade ago.

What accounts for the surge? Scientists can breathe a sigh of relief—an explosion of shoddy research is probably not the culprit. The field has likely just developed more ways to detect flaws, writes Richard Van Noorden, an editor at *Nature*. After all, articles can now be run through computer programs that uncover plagiarism and image manipulation. Online publishing means greater circulation and more eyes to spot errors. In-

EXCERPT

False Idols

[Writer and investor] Peter Bernstein may have been right when he observed that the future no longer belongs to the gods, but we have made a habit of finding God in the strangest places, whether it be the Shroud of Turin or the formula for a derivative's price.... Our technologies belong to us; we create them, and they amplify our abilities and our reach, yet we exhibit a strange eagerness to relinquish our dominion over them, endowing them with a monstrous authority that demands our accommodation and surrender.

—JENNIFER SZALAI, writer, in *Lapham's Quarterly* (Fall 2011)

stitutions such as the Office of Research Integrity in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have enacted regulations that improve the quality of research establishments and the publications they produce.

Yet a better system for identifying errors has not necessarily solved all the problems, Van Noorden reports. Flawed research often remains in circulation. Journal editors inconsistently apply the guidelines for determining what a retractable offense is. Scientists are reluctant to voluntarily withdraw their material, even if the error is merely due to an honest mistake. And since many scientists now read PDF files rather than go to the original source, even research that has been retracted may remain in circulation. Researchers at the University of Missouri, Columbia, reported that of 391 recent citations of retracted biomedical publications, only six percent noted that the cited paper

had been withdrawn.

Scientists also complain that journals don't publish adequate explanations for why a paper has been pulled. Vanilla statements such as "At the request of the au-

thors, the following manuscript has been retracted" hardly further scientific understanding. (There's some reason for this. Most editors don't have time to comb through flawed papers and develop substantive explanations for the decision to retract. And a detailed explanation could prompt a lawsuit.)

Some think that the scientific community should develop a way to distinguish between retractions due to misconduct and those prompted by human error and other basically innocent causes. Others argue that journals should be purposely obscure. More scientists may be willing to come forward if the gory details of the errors are kept under wraps. As the editor in chief of the *Journal of Neuroscience* told Van Noorden, "My feeling is that there are far fewer retractions than there should be."

OTHER NATIONS

Brazil's Popularity Problem

THE SOURCE: "A Leader Without Followers? The Growing Divergence Between the Regional and Global Performance of Brazilian Foreign Policy" by Andrés Malamud, in *Latin American Politics and Society*, Fall 2011.

AFTER DECADES OF FAILING TO fulfill predictions that it would become Latin America's great power, Brazil seems to have made good on its singular potential. Its humming economy has earned it recognition as one of the four

international up-and-comers known as the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). It took on a high-profile role in the G-20 negotiations in 2008 and 2009, and has snagged spots in the G-8+5 and other negotiating bodies. But while Brazil is enjoying its spot on the crowded global stage, it has failed to command a strong following in its own backyard, writes political

scientist Andrés Malamud of the University of Lisbon's Institute of Social Sciences.

There are several reasons for the “growing mismatch between the regional and global performance of Brazilian foreign policy,” Malamud writes. For one, “Brazil scares nobody.” The country boasts the largest defense budget in the region, but “Brazil is not—and has no intention of becoming—a military power,” preferring to be seen as a “peace-loving, law-abiding, and benign” force. And while Brazil does have the largest economy in Latin America, several neighbors—notably Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay—consistently outperform it in gross domestic product per capita and human development indicators.

Furthermore, Brazil's success at regional power-brokering has been mixed. It was able to pioneer the notion of South America as an “autonomous political-economic area” distinct from Latin America, elbowing Mexico out of its regional foreign-policy realm and orchestrating the conditions for its own predominance. But Mercosur, the regional economic integration project Brazil helped spearhead, has seen its promise wane considerably since its heyday in the 1990s. Worse still, other countries in the region have publicly flouted Brazil's global ambitions. In 2004 Argentina opposed Brazil's efforts to win a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, infuriating then-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela are strong competitors for influence in the region, along with

the United States. Brazil will have its work cut out for it even maintaining its regional stature.

The country's new president, Dilma Rousseff, who took office in January 2011, has been less vocal about Brazil's foreign-policy ambitions than her predecessor. But make no mistake, Malamud says: Brazil is on the world stage to stay.

OTHER NATIONS

Ukrainian Gloom

THE SOURCE: “Counterrevolution in Kiev” by Rajan Menon and Alexander J. Motyl, in *Foreign Affairs*, Nov.-Dec. 2011.

IN A STUNNING REVERSAL OF fortune, the villain of Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Viktor Yanukovich, won the January 2010 contest for the country's presidency fair and square, five years after he was denied the office following allegations of electoral fraud. How has the onetime Soviet republic fared in the two years since he became its chief executive? Horribly, say Rajan Menon, a professor of international affairs at Lehigh University, and political scientist Alexander J. Motyl, who teaches at Rutgers.

As many Ukrainians feared, Yanukovich has revealed himself to be a power-hungry, Soviet-style administrator. In his short time in office, he has broadened the powers of the presidency and brought the judiciary under his control. He has canceled government programs that promote Ukrainian language and culture, upsetting a large portion of the country that believes that the language deserves

support after being suppressed by the Soviets. And he has signed over valuable port space in the Crimea to the Russian navy's Black Sea fleet for what some see as a pittance. The recent imprisonment on corruption charges of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, the populist firebrand who has considerable support in western Ukraine, is widely believed to be politically motivated and has further damaged the president's image both at home and abroad.

Yanukovich came to power promising badly needed economic reform: A poor country of 46 million people, Ukraine is struggling with high unemployment and an underdeveloped economy. But as an economic reformer, Yanukovich has also proven unsatisfactory, relying on Soviet-style governance that fails to meet the country's needs. Furthermore, the elite he presides over have little interest in changing a system that allows them to control economic and political resources.

Yanukovich has looked to Europe to drum up results for his embattled presidency. (He may have been disappointed by the spare thanks he received from Moscow for the Black Sea fleet deal; Russia continues to charge Ukraine sky-high prices for oil and gas.) The straw he's currently grasping at is a free-trade agreement with the European Union, which, however, would require Ukraine to make economic and governance reforms. While it seems unlikely that Ukraine will meet these terms under Yanukovich's leadership, Russia is none too pleased about even

the hint of a westward pivot. The EU must not withdraw the carrot of closer relations no matter how implausible the prospect; “it is a means to promote significant change within Ukraine,” the authors say.

Signs that the president is on increasingly thin ice include recent surveys in Ukraine’s eastern-most province, Luhansk, which borders Russia and was once a Yanukovych stronghold. There, the former coal miner saw the proportion of the population who said that they would vote for his party in the parliamentary elections fall from 53 percent in November 2009 to 30 percent recently. Yet no credible alternative to his rule has emerged, and the press and other democratic institutions are under increasing pressure from elements of his administration. Ukrainians may need to mount another revolution to get him out of office, but given the paucity of options, they may well decide it’s not worth it.

OTHER NATIONS

India’s Musical Menace

THE SOURCE: “That Ban(e) of Indian Music: Hearing Politics in the Harmonium” by Matt Rahaim, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Aug. 2011.

THE POET AND COMPOSER Rabindranath Tagore famously pronounced it the “bane of Indian music.” One listener described it as “a torture only fully appreciated by those who have undergone it.” An-



The harmonium graces stages across India, but its wheezy strains still rankle music purists.

other called it simply “a menace.” The contraption responsible for all this suffering? Why, the harmonium, one of India’s most widely played musical instruments.

According to University of Minnesota ethnomusicologist Matt Rahaim, the harmonium has played a fraught but indispensable role in modern Indian music. The benighted keyboard instrument was developed by a French inventor in the mid-19th century. Homesick colonists in India liked the harmonium, a cheaper and more durable alternative to organs and harpsichords, as the latter two often finished the long voyage east warped and unplayable. Indian craftsmen quickly learned to manufacture harmoniums, and soon their compatriots incorporated the instrument into performances of Indian classical music. In comparison to traditional instruments, the harmonium was easy to tune and a cinch to learn to play. It also lacked the cultural baggage of instru-

ments such as the *sarangi*, an Indian fiddle that had an unsavory association with the world of courtesans.

As the Indian independence movement gained steam in the early 20th century, however, the harmonium became a target of anticolonialists. High-minded Indian music critics began to elaborate an indigenous theory of Indian tuning with a “single, unique Indian gamut of pitches” that some said the Eu-

ropean import could not produce. In 1930, the instrument was effectively banished from Indian classical music performances; 10 years later, All-India Radio, the influential state-run broadcaster, banned it from its programs.

The ban was loosened in 1970, after a critic, noting its elitist, caste-oriented character, argued that the harmonium “should not be treated as an ‘untouchable.’” The harmonium would be allowed under certain circumstances (depending, for instance, on which instrument it accompanied). Solo performances of the harmonium are still banned on All-India Radio, and musicians specializing in the instrument are not eligible for full-time staff positions with the network.

As elites have struggled to cleanse modern Indian music of what they argue is a “foreign” intruder, the masses have used the harmonium as a gateway to an understanding of their musical her-

itage, Rahaim explains. The harmonium is well suited to teaching the fundamentals of Indian musical grammar and to accompanying choral groups. Today, “the harmonium is seen and heard in villages and cities, in concert halls and private homes, in trains, temples, and theaters,” Rahaim writes. Tagore must be rolling over in his grave.

OTHER NATIONS

Democracy Deferred

THE SOURCE: “Morocco: In the Kingdom of Illusions” by Martine Gozlan, in *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2011.

LIKE NEARBY TUNISIA, MOROCCO had a raucous spring in 2011. Protesters from Tangier to Marrakesh took to the streets to protest poverty and corruption in an act of defiance that became known as the February 20 Movement. Many demanded restrictions on the power of King Mohammed VI, who has ruled the North African country since his father, King Hassan II, died in 1999.

The 48-year-old Muhammed, or “M6,” as he is popularly known, staved off prolonged unrest by proposing that the Moroccan constitution be overhauled. Even though Moroccans approved a revised constitution in a July referendum, the idea that the country is on the road to being a healthy democracy is an illusion, writes Martine Gozlan, editor in chief of the French newsweekly *Marianne*.

The much-ballyhooed constitutional changes don’t amount to

much. Muhammed VI did give up some powers, such as the ability to dissolve Morocco’s parliament, and language on gender equality made its way into the document for the first time. But the lion’s share of authority remains in M6’s hands, including control over foreign policy, security, and the judiciary. “The king understood that he needed to make changes in appearance in order to change nothing fundamentally,” Gozlan observes. For instance, a reference to the king’s “sacredness” was struck from the constitution only to be replaced with one to his “inviolability.”

Others see progress in the fact that the Justice and Development Party, a moderate Islamist group that ran on a platform of economic development, won the majority of seats in November’s parliamentary elections, outdoing the monarchist Istiqlal. Yet the party is pretty

tame, Gozlan observes. It pledges allegiance to the king and endorsed his cosmetic constitutional reforms.

Reformers, in short, face a steep uphill battle. Muhammed VI sits on a vast fortune and has the news media under his thumb. The country is “profoundly poor and patriarchal,” Gozlan notes, and lags far behind Tunisia and neighboring Algeria in the percentage of its young people who go to college and in the amount it spends on health care. Half the country’s mosques adhere to the ultraconservative Salafist school. Last April a fundamentalist suicide bomber in Marrakesh killed 17 people, sparking fresh fears about terrorism. “No matter how hard the king nourishes the illusion of a ‘Royal Spring of Democracy,’” Gozlan says, a winter wind still blows in Morocco.

EXCERPT

Brussels’s Boredom Surplus

It is tempting to see the procedures of the EU as a long-term conspiracy to bore the public into submission. . . . If the EU is to survive, . . . politicians will have to learn how to speak clearly and plainly about Europe. They will furthermore have to learn how to listen to their citizens and change proposals in response to their demands. They will have to learn how to argue with one another in public over Europe-level politics and Europe-level reforms. . . . It is through arguing about politics that we learn how to participate and pay attention. For a long time, the EU has cultivated the art of being boring. It has succeeded all too well. Now it must learn how to be interesting again.

—HENRY FARRELL, professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University, in *The Nation* (Dec. 12, 2011)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

James Reston Jr.
on the Inquisition

*Joshua Wolf
Shenk* on what's
eating Joan
Didion

*Michael J.
Bustamante* on
Guantánamo Bay

Mark Reutter on
Jesse Jones

Andrew Curry on
Rome

Patrick Piuma on
midsize industrial
cities

James M. Morris
on what's new

*Michael C.
Moynihan*
on Ernest
Hemingway

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skyscrapers

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North America

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on Jonestown

CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

The Uncontainable Diplomat

Reviewed by Martin Walker

A WEEK AFTER THE DEATH OF JOSEPH Stalin, in March 1953, the new U.S. secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, called in George Frost Kennan, America's most illustrious diplomat, to inform him that there was "no niche" for him in the Eisenhower administration. Nominally still the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, which had declared him persona non grata the previous year, Kennan (1904–2005) was not simply the leading American expert on the country, but also the author of "containment," a strategy for resisting Soviet expansion by all measures short of war.

That was the trouble. Although containment had been (and was to remain) the cardinal principle of bipartisan foreign policy since shortly after Kennan had coined the term in 1946, it was deemed by the Republicans, in the age of McCarthyism and loyalty checks, to be too passive an approach. Dulles, with an eye to the ethnic vote in the 1952 presidential election, had replaced it with a clarion call for the liberation of the captive nations of Eastern Europe. Kennan believed this was lunacy. There was no place in foreign policy, he declared in a speech in Pennsylvania the day after Dulles had stressed

**GEORGE F.
KENNAN:**

An American Life.

By John Lewis Gaddis.
Penguin Press.
784 pp. \$39.95

his commitment to liberation during his confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, for "emotionalism, the striking of heroic poses,

and demagoguery of all sorts."

Bizarrely, on the day Dulles fired him and the whole Western world was pondering the implications of Stalin's death, Dulles asked Kennan for his views, saying, "You interest me when you talk about these matters. Very few other people do." It was, Kennan wrote, as if Dulles had asked his wife for a divorce, but added that he liked the way she prepared scrambled eggs and would she cook a quick plate for him before leaving.

Yet there was some method to Dulles's apparent madness. Kennan was a national treasure, but a difficult and often wayward subordinate, who nurtured some very odd and lugubrious views about his own country that only seemed to ripen with time.

After his forced exit from the State Department, Kennan found refuge at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton,

New Jersey. In 1957, he accepted a visiting professorship at Balliol College, Oxford, and an invitation to give that year's prestigious Reith Lectures, an annual series of talks on public issues broadcast over the BBC. On the ocean liner heading for Europe, recounts Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis in his excellent new biography, Kennan drafted a lecture plan "that would begin with the sterility of American society, point out the overpopulated nastiness of the rest of the world, and conclude by proposing a new country composed of Great Britain, Canada, and the

George F. Kennan was a national treasure, but a difficult and often wayward subordinate, who nurtured some very odd views about his own country.

healthy parts of the United States (the South, Texas, and California would go elsewhere), with its capital to be near Ottawa. Democracy would then save itself from itself by half a century of benevolent dictatorship."

Part of the difficulty that so many of his colleagues had with Kennan was that they were never sure if he had his tongue in his cheek, or indeed if he was capable of irony. The evidence of Kennan's diaries, strewn with waspish rants about the awfulness of American culture and politics, suggests that he might have been serious. (Gaddis received full access to the diaries, from which Kennan had published only selected excerpts in his memoirs.) In the event, for the lecture he decided on a less controversial topic—the West and the Soviet Union in the age of the atom.

Kennan being Kennan, the lectures he gave proved controversial anyway. He proposed a withdrawal of North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Soviet forces from Germany, which would be allowed to reunite on condition that it remain neutral. He also suggested that since the atomic arms race was suicidal, NATO was outliving its usefulness and its member states might reduce their armed forces to militias "somewhat on the Swiss pattern." The So-

viet Union, he could assure everyone, represented no military threat to Western Europe, so to strengthen NATO was to risk war, and to maintain it was to delay peace.

Only the year before, Soviet tanks had brutally re-established communist rule in Budapest after crushing the Hungarian revolution. At the same time, the Eisenhower administration had used its financial muscle to bully the British and French into ending their military intervention in Egypt to seize the Suez Canal. Since the Soviet leadership had simultaneously threatened "to rain missiles" on London and Paris if they did not withdraw their forces, this U.S. repudiation of its main allies had thrown NATO into deep confusion and dismay. Kennan was also speaking in the wake of the Soviet Union's triumphant launch of the *Sputnik* satellite, an act of extraordinary technological prowess. So Kennan's views, coming from a man still regarded as the strategic sage of the free world, caused great alarm in West Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Anxious diplomats pestered their American colleagues to ask if Kennan was speaking for America, or perhaps for the Democratic Party.

It fell to that other great American diplomat and Kennan's former boss, Dean Acheson, to put Kennan in his place and to stress in a public statement that his views "most categorically" were not representative of Democratic policy. While Kennan was a great expert on Russian history and on Marxist-Leninism, Acheson said, he "has never, in my judgment, grasped the realities of power relationships, but takes a rather mystical attitude toward them." As for Kennan's personal assurance that the Red Army was no military threat, Acheson asked, "On what does this guarantee rest, unless Divine revelation?"

Acheson knew Kennan well and admired him, though Acheson—a martini-loving lawyer and *bon viveur*—had little in common with the scholarly and self-doubting Kennan. The New England statesman and the insecure midwestern visionary had worked fruit-



A year before he posed for this 1947 portrait, Kennan wrote the “Long Telegram” that put him on the map as one of Washington’s most visionary diplomats.

fully together in that glorious postwar period of American grand strategy when the Marshall Plan and NATO were formed to wage the Cold War by nonmilitary means. Kennan had the ideas, and Acheson had the political talents to give them practical shape and get them implemented with (in the crucial early phases) bipartisan support.

Moreover, the Kennan whom Acheson had worked with in the Truman administration had been much tougher and more pragmatic than the Kennan of the Reith Lectures. His famous “Long Telegram” from the Moscow embassy in 1946 had galvanized the U.S. establishment out of its sentimental wartime view of Stalin. As Gaddis writes, “Only Kennan had

the credibility to show, at a time when too many Americans still viewed the Soviet Union as a wartime ally, that for reasons rooted in Russian history and Marxist-Leninist ideology, there could never be a normal peacetime relationship with it: Stalin’s regime required external enemies.” Kennan’s genius lay in his parallel argument, that there was no need for despair, nor for appeasement, nor for war; the Soviet Union could be managed with “a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” until the regime toppled under the weight of its own inefficiencies and its deepening unpopularity in its Eastern European empire.

From that grand design, Kennan, as head of policy planning at the State Department, and as State’s representative on the newly created National Security Council, helped craft the tools of political, economic, and covert war, which included an Office of Special Projects within the Central Intelligence Agency. The stakes were high; at one overheated moment Kennan even suggested military occupation of Italy if it appeared likely to vote in the Communists in the 1948 elections. He later came to regret the support he had lent to covert operations, but at a time when the Soviet Union had recently taken over Czechoslovakia in a post-election political coup, such measures were wholly consistent with the containment strategy he had devised.

It is extraordinary that a man of such influence and vision enjoyed a relatively limited ca-



Kennan returns with his family in 1952 from Moscow, where the U.S. ambassador had been declared *persona non grata*.

reer. Head of policy planning and ambassador to the Soviet Union and to Yugoslavia were the most senior posts he reached. But real power is not always measured by rank. Many far more senior and ostensibly successful figures had only a fraction of Kennan's impact. As Henry Kissinger wrote in *White House Years* (1979), Kennan came "as close to authoring the diplomatic doctrine of his era as any diplomat in our history."

Yet Kissinger too found some of Kennan's later advice to be outlandish, including one warning against the Kissinger-Nixon opening to China, which Kennan said would alarm the Soviets to a dangerous degree. But there were moments where Kennan chose correctly to challenge the conventional wisdom of the American foreign-policy establishment, and his first public critique of the Vietnam War, in December 1965, followed by his electrifying and nationally televised testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two months later, was a classic example.

The argument he made was realist rather than idealist: "There is more respect to be won in the opinion of this world by a resolute and

courageous liquidation of unsound positions than by the most stubborn pursuit of extravagant or unpromising objectives." And given that he had been the first American diplomat to recognize in Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia that cracks could be opened and widened in the Soviet bloc, and that local nationalisms would eventually trump Moscow's priorities, his suggestion that Ho Chi Minh was no puppet of Moscow or Beijing carried force. Kennan's bombshell may have contributed to the steep drop in early 1966 in the proportion of Americans who approved of how President Lyndon Johnson was handling the war.

More than 30 years ago, Kennan chose Gaddis, a professor at Yale and doyen of Cold War historians, to be his biographer, and granted him access to all of his papers. The resulting book is as sensitive to the quirks of the man as it is scholarly on the broader context of Kennan's career. But this is no hagiography; Gaddis clearly rejects Kennan's contemptuous dismissal of Ronald Reagan's role in the Cold War endgame and finds some of Kennan's fastidious critiques of American society and of democracy in general to be more than eccentric. To his credit, he deals with Kennan's complex private life and his love affairs with judicious care, and persuasively scotches the rumor, circulated in Moscow in the 1950s, that Kennan had exposed himself to Soviet blackmail through an affair with a Russian woman. In sum, this is as near a definitive biography as we are likely to get of one of the most singular and significant Americans of his century.

It was always when he was most pragmatic and hardheaded that Kennan had the most influence, however much he was taken up by liberal and pacifist opinion. But in his anguished vacillations between idealism and realpolitik he was quintessentially American, embodying the characteristic schizophrenia of America's global engagement with eloquence and grace.

MARTIN WALKER is senior director of A. T. Kearney's Global Business Policy Council, a Wilson Center senior scholar, and author of *The Cold War: A History* (1994). His latest novel, *Black Diamond*, was just published.

Pointed Questions

Reviewed by James Reston Jr.

THE HISTORY OF VATICAN CITY STRETCHES back to the first century AD, and it is a story filled with more heroes and villains, saints and sinners, high-minded visionaries and lowbrow crooks, than Hollywood's morgue of B-movie scripts. Everyone who has done research in the exquisite Vatican Library comes away with a few experiences that can enthrall any dinner party. When, in 1991, I was researching the life of Galileo, I was escorted by a bloodless German priest, the head of the Vatican Archives, through the narrow corridors of the stacks, up serpentine staircases, past multiple locked doors and glass cases filled with the golden gifts of kings to popes over the centuries, into an inner sanctum. There, I would be shown the transcript of the Inquisition's four withering interrogations of Galileo. The priest removed a strap lock across a steel cabinet and reverently opened a middle drawer,

GOD'S JURY:

The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World.

By Cullen Murphy.
Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt. 310 pp. \$27

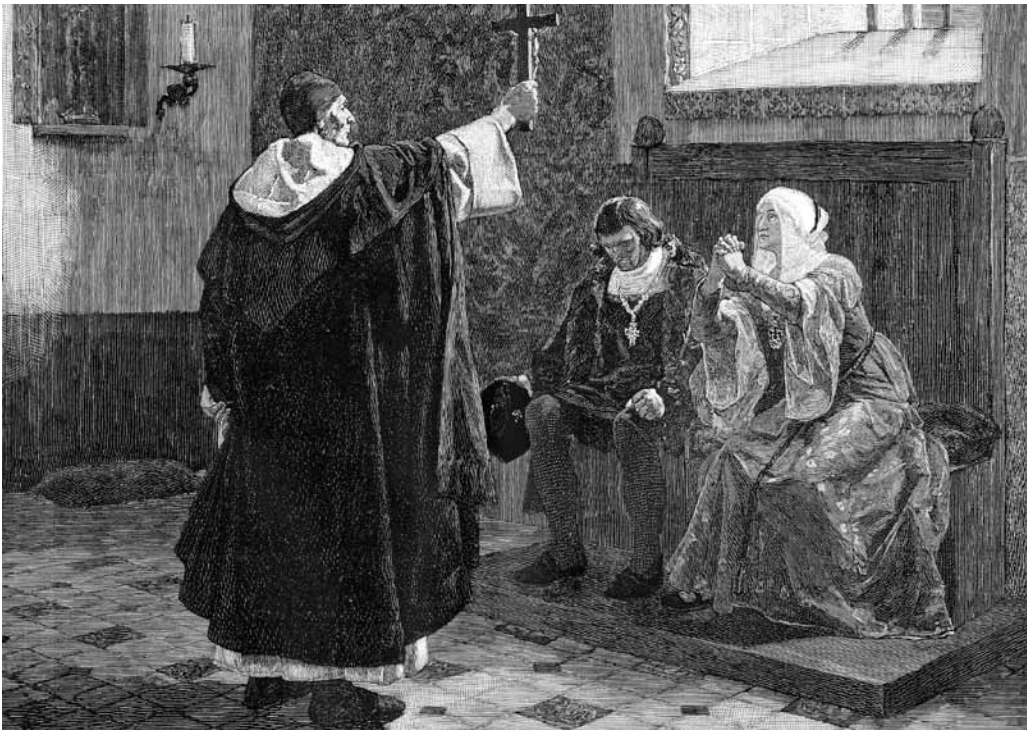
reaching for the leather-bound record. Next to it was another volume.

"What's the other book?" I asked.

"Oh, those are the letters between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn," he answered.

Like me, *Vanity Fair* editor Cullen Murphy is a member of the Vatican Archives fraternity. In *Are We Rome?* (2007), he plumbed the history of the ancient empire for parallels to modern America. His provocative new book, *God's Jury*, examines the Catholic Inquisition for insight into our own time.

Early in *God's Jury*, Murphy introduces himself as a Catholic and an American. This suggests that perhaps his book will be a personal journey into the moral center of his faith



Tomás de Torquemada, chief architect of the Spanish Inquisition, put the fear of God into King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella.

and his citizenship. "I ventured into the world of the Inquisition and its offspring in the 1990s, motivated at first by the Vatican's attempts to silence or censor a significant number of prominent theologians, some of whom I had come to know," he writes. Issues of torture and domestic surveillance surfaced after 9/11. And so, he thought, the Inquisition offered a "lens" through which to view—or a "template" against which to contrast—issues of our time.

He divides the historical Inquisition into three major categories—the Medieval, the Spanish, and the Roman—and analyzes its later globalization. For Murphy, an authentic inquisition must consist of five elements: a bureaucratic machine, secret monitoring and surveillance, censorship, paranoia about an enemy operating secretly within, and, perhaps most important, moral certainty. "Moral certainty," he writes, "ignites every inquisition and then feeds it with oxygen."

The machinery of the Inquisition was established in the early 13th century, when the Roman Catholic Church was confronted with the so-called Cathar heresy in southern France. (The Cathars deviated from official doctrine with their belief in a Manichaean world of good and evil, in which God could be responsible only for the good, not the evil. They viewed Rome as the offspring of the Whore of Babylon and regarded its priests as licentious and corrupt.) After the assassination of a papal legate in Languedoc, Pope Innocent III initiated a bloody holy war called the Albigensian Crusade. When agents of the Church massacred all the residents of a town to rid it of the few heretics in its midst, the mantra was, "Kill them all. Let God sort them out."

With this anecdote, as with many sprinkled throughout the book, Murphy leaps from the past to the present, linking episodes of medieval history to current reality. In this instance, he points out that the same rallying cry appears on bumper stickers and T-shirts at U.S. military installations.

After the violence subsided and the here-

tics moved underground, the Dominican Order came into existence, named for its founding father, St. Dominic. The Dominicans were to be the Church's policemen, charged with defending and protecting official doctrine by rooting out the wayward. These militant priests became known as the Hounds of God.

In the decade that followed the end of the Albigensian Crusade, the rituals, procedures, and punishments of the Medieval Inquisition were codified. At the Council of Tarragona, in 1242, the varieties of heresies were given definition and graded for severity. Record keeping and data collection became a central element of the Inquisition. This could be pushed to absurd lengths, such as accounting for the cost of wood and straw for burning the worst heretics, along with the fee for the civilian executioner. Burning convicted heretics at the stake, a procedure known as "auto-da-fé" (in Portuguese, "act of faith"), was delegated to a secular arm, for a priest was forbidden to shed blood. And so the culprits were "relaxed" to laymen for the dirty work. Hence begin the euphemisms for aberrational punishment. Peering through his lens, Murphy cites "extraordinary rendition" in our time as one such modern euphemism for an act that really means kidnapping, spiriting away to secret prisons, and, usually, torture.

The infamous Grand Inquisitor, Tomás de Torquemada, presided over the Spanish Inquisition, which has become synonymous with the most hideous and perverted extremes of this system for enforcing doctrinal purity. In each case before the tribunals for the Holy Office, precise notes were kept, including a record of everything said or screamed during interrogations. In 1998, the Vatican opened its Inquisition records to scholars. This new access is partially responsible, Murphy asserts, for the golden age of Inquisition scholarship. In a number of rooms in the Vatican Archives, millions of pages await perusal.

One of the more intriguing interviews Murphy conducts is with the preeminent In-

quisition scholar, Henry Kamen. Together they focus on the most profound question in this undertaking, at least as it applies to America after 9/11: "What turns a society, any society, from one thing into another? What combination of factors—economic distress, ethnic hostility, physical threat, moral fervor, latent envy, political manipulation—can alter the historic character of a people or place?" But we do not get an answer.

Murphy's bold purpose is to link the past and present and suggest their relationship. Suggest he does, but occasionally the links can be breathtaking. After briefly treating the Spanish Inquisition's methods of torture, for example, he jumps to George W. Bush's methods. "The Bush administration's threshold for when an act of torture *begins* is the point at which the Inquisition stipulated that an act of torture must *stop*." Earlier, we were told that Torquemada burned 2,000 people at the stake.

When Murphy turns to his brief overview of the Roman Inquisition, the focus shifts to censorship. The Index of Forbidden Books was established in 1542 as a response to the challenge of Martin Luther. Luther is mentioned only briefly in *God's Jury*, and this seems like a missed opportunity. Luther's wrangles with Rome over his many deviations from Catholic doctrine are among the most dramatic examples of pushing back against this awe-inspiring, fear-inducing institution. That rebellion, of course, was a turning point in Church history.

Murphy misses another opportunity for drama as well as explication with the trials of Galileo a century later, first in the examination by Cardinal Robert Bellarmine over the nature of scientific proof, but more important, in the four interrogations of the scientist by the Grand Inquisitor, before Galileo's humiliating recantation on the altar of the Basilica di Santa Maria sopra Minerva in 1633. The transcripts of these crushing interrogations were released in the early 1990s as part of the Church's re-examination of the Galileo case.

As a prelude to the onset of the third mil-

lennium of Christianity, Pope John Paul II announced that the Church would engage in a process he called historical purification, forthrightly addressing the darkest aspects of its history. This bid for renewal began unsteadily with the Galileo case; the re-examination took 13 years before the Vatican feebly admitted that errors were made without saying who made them. The next case was supposed to be that of Jan Huss, the 15th-century Bohemian reformer whose offenses included challenging the hierarchical power structure of the Church and questioning the use of papal indulgences. Huss refused to abjure his beliefs and was burned in 1415. But the Huss case has not been formally reopened.

Roman Catholicism maintains a "ban" or excommunication on Luther and all his followers, even to this day. When two years ago I asked the provost of the Cathedral in Worms, Germany (where Luther was examined for his disobedience at the Diet of Worms in 1521), whether, after 500 years, the Church shouldn't, in the spirit of ecumenism, scrap its anti-Luther stance, he replied, "The time has not yet come to lift the ban."

But the elephant in the room remains the Inquisition. The most the Church could muster by way of apology was John Paul II's pastoral letter in 1994 admitting that some "children" of the Church may have "departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel," and a penitential Mass at St. Peter's in the Jubilee Year of 2000 in which the pope asked for forgiveness for all the transgressions committed by sons and daughters of the Church. Murphy leaves it to the Vatican scholar Carlo Ginzburg to provide the response: "What I didn't hear the pope say today, and what I haven't heard anybody in this discussion say, is that the Catholic Church is *ashamed* of what it did. Not *sorry*. Sorry is easy. I want to hear the Catholic Church—I want to

Is it fair to talk about an American Inquisition after 9/11? Did the repressive measures brought to bear fundamentally change the nature of the land?

hear the pope—say he is *ashamed*.”

Cullen Murphy has written a wonderfully interesting and courageous book. His command of Inquisition literature is impressive, as are his interviews and the literary and biblical connections he makes in his argument. The questions he raises about repression, torture, censorship, corruption, and contrition are profound. If *God's Jury* is also a frustrating book, perhaps it is because, as a Catholic and an American, Murphy cannot quite bring himself to argue pointedly what this link between past and present means for his church and his country. Is it fair to talk about an

American Inquisition after 9/11? Did the repressive measures that were brought to bear after that devastating attack fundamentally change the nature of the land? With the abuses of Abu Ghraib, enhanced interrogation, and extraordinary rendition, has America lost the moral high ground? And did America ever really occupy that lofty perch? Murphy does not ask these questions, much less answer them.

JAMES RESTON JR., a senior scholar at the Wilson Center, is the author of *Galileo: A Life* (1994), *Dogs of God: Columbus, the Inquisition, and the Defeat of the Moors* (2005), and *Defenders of the Faith: Christianity and Islam Battle for the Soul of Europe, 1520–1536* (2009). His forthcoming book, a novel, is *The Nineteenth Hijacker*.

Then She Came to the End

Reviewed by Joshua Wolf Shenk

MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO, JOAN DIDION channeled the dark heart of the American zeitgeist in her dazzling, kaleidoscopic essay “The White Album,” a chronicle of the collective cultural breakdowns of the late 1960s that became an instant classic. It included a portrait of one of the Manson murderers, an account of an evening with Doors singer Jim Morrison, and the story of Black Panther Party cofounder Huey Newton, bleeding from a gunshot wound as he stood in a hospital lobby, being told he could not see a doctor until he produced his insurance card. The essay consists of a series of flash-cuts among these scenes. “We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” Didion wrote. What she meant was that, without realizing it, we human beings are constantly simplifying, clarifying, and ordering what is happening around us—or trying to.

Didion articulates the fragility of meaning as well as any writer alive. In her work—more than 40 years’ worth of essays, criticism, and fiction—she not only attempts to tell stories, parse evidence, and present the truth of experience (all these are the basic job descriptions of a writ-

BLUE NIGHTS.

*By Joan Didion. Knopf.
188 pp. \$25*

er), but to call attention, all the while, to how stories are made, to the variety of ends to which evidence can be turned, and to the complexity of “truth” itself. Her subjects have ranged from an actress in a hospital after a nervous breakdown (in her 1970 novel *Play It as It Lays*) to Bill Clinton on the campaign trail (in a 2001 essay collection, *Political Fictions*). Always, she returns to California, to her “bad nerves,” to the cognitive disorder of a writer’s life.

Whatever she writes, whether fiction or documentary, Didion peels back the skin of comfortable meanings to expose the blood and sinew beneath. In the hands of a French philosopher, this project might yield something dense and impenetrable. But as a writer, Didion is more akin to George Orwell than to Michel Foucault. Like Orwell, she moved from journalism to a kind of essay writing that takes the body politic and the common culture very seriously.

Because her essays often include her as a first-person character, they can easily be mis-



Joan Didion, the grande dame of the American essay, has devoted her last two books to her response to personal tragedy.

taken for memoirs. Her last book, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), recounted the grave illness of her daughter, Quintana Roo Dunne Michael, which coincided with the death of Didion's husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne. But this was not a memoir of grief—that is, Didion was not preoccupied with assembling shards of memory into a form that had an identifiable crisis, a journey, and a resolution—so much as a meditation on the way grief exposes the precariousness of the human mind.

In *Blue Nights*, Didion returns to her daughter's life and death (Quintana died after Didion finished *The Year of Magical Thinking*), to their connections and disconnections. The subject matter may suggest that this book is a sequel. But for Joan Didion, the apparent subject of her work is never the real subject. Her aim here is not to establish a narrator's identity by plotting it on a relational matrix, but to dismantle narrative and tear apart identity—to be more precise, to call attention to

how we labor to *make* workable stories and characters, to the way we walk on suspension cables over mad seas.

Didion deals with her own madness not just as metaphor but as condition. "The White Album" includes a long excerpt from her 1968 psychiatric report, and in *The Year of Magical Thinking* she recounts the flights of her mind after her husband's death, including the moment she consented to an autopsy believing it would reveal a simple problem that could be fixed, and her discomfort at throwing out her husband's shoes, believing he would need them when he returned.

This internal turmoil is often not apparent. In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Didion describes an exchange at the hospital where her husband was rushed after his heart attack. A social worker approaches her with a doctor. "He's dead, isn't he," I heard myself say to the doctor. The doctor looked at the social worker. "It's okay," the social worker said. "She's a pretty cool customer." The reader of Didion's prose could easily make the same assessment. The essay as a form is meant to make sense of disparate images and experiences through unifying ideas, structure, and voice, and she is probably our greatest living essayist.

Yet it's rather plain that the meaning, engagement, and order exhibited in Didion's work are a response to an underlying experience of meaninglessness, detachment, and disorder. I say it's plain because she tells us so—and has, as the years have passed, become increasingly explicit and urgent on the point. "The White Album" has an undercurrent of Didion's own madness, but even as she draws attention to the arbitrary and imperfect way in which that order is imposed, she dishes off the question of whether she was mad, or just lived in a mad time. "By way of comment," she writes after reproducing her psychiatric report, "I offer only that an attack of vertigo and nausea does not now seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968."

In *Magical Thinking*, she drops the veil

somewhat, and even begins to suggest that her own efforts to impose control have somehow kept from her the underlying truth, that her work has established a kind of “impenetrable polish.” And yet, she confesses, “I need more than words to find the meaning. . . . I need whatever it is I think or believe to be penetrable, if only for myself.” It’s as though her writing has obscured as much as it has revealed—to herself most of all. She’s trying to write her way out of the box her writing has put her in.

Blue Nights is even more wrenching in this regard. The narrative regularly dissolves into a series of questions—in one passage I counted 16 in a row. The book is the opposite of the victory lap one might expect from an aging writer. Didion is poking and prodding at her fears and shortcomings—as a mother, a writer, and a human being.

“When I began writing these pages,” she explains, “I believed their subject to be children, the ones we have and the ones we wish we had, the ways in which we depend on our children to depend on us, the ways in which we encourage them to remain children, the ways in which they remain more unknown to us than they do to their most casual acquaintances; the ways in which we remain equally opaque to them.”

This assignment, on its own, would have been tough enough—especially given the complexities of Didion’s relationship with her daughter, who was adopted and suffered from an unspecified illness. (Though Didion does not provide a great deal of detail about the nature of Quintana’s problems, she does mention her daughter’s “quicksilver changes” and the variety of diagnoses thrown at her, including, eventually, “borderline personality disorder.”)

But Didion discovered, as she wrote, that her “actual subject was not children after all, at least not children per se, at least not children *qua* children.” The “actual subject was this refusal even to engage in such contemplation, this failure to confront the certainties of aging, illness, death.” The person who has re-

fused to engage in such contemplation is Didion herself. At one point she describes going over the bric-a-brac in her apartment—saved baby teeth, an old school uniform. “In theory,” Didion writes, “these mementos serve to bring back the moment. In fact they serve only to make clear how inadequately I appreciated the moment when it was here. How inadequately I appreciated the moment when it was here is something else I could never afford to see.”

This passage is typical in the way that it digs into the deepest and most difficult layers. And it shows the juxtaposition of Didion’s disordering questions with her trenchant voice. There’s something hypnotic about her prose, and so, while she exposes us to these veins of inquiry, we are also calmed and comforted. She is an Aikido sensei, turning all the disorder she summons into force and energy for greater order. Except that sometimes it feels as though she’s doing the reverse—using whatever order her writing creates to convey a sense of the larger chaos.

What makes *Blue Nights* so exciting—and so viscerally troubling—is that, at age 75, Didion is not just reckoning with the epic questions of human parenthood. (Why do we have children? How do we hurt them? How do we live with their vulnerability? How do we face our own frailty and death?) She is also using her craft to direct a withering inquiry about herself and her use of craft as she nears the end of her life. *Blue Nights* is Didion’s attempt to pull off her own writer’s skin and show us what’s underneath.

But even as she flays herself for the ways she has smoothed over experience in the past, she cannot stop. She cannot turn off the voice, the rhythm. Reading *Blue Nights* is like watching that mime routine in which the performer chokes herself with one hand and tries to save herself with the other. It almost seems that if you finish the book feeling satisfied, Didion will have failed.

JOSHUA WOLF SHENK’s essays have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Harper’s*, and other magazines. He is the author of *Lincoln’s Melancholy* (2006) and a forthcoming book about collaboration and creativity, tentatively titled $1 + 1 = \infty$.

HISTORY

No Man's Land

Reviewed by Michael J. Bustamante

PERHAPS NO SINGLE WORD evokes images of the divisive legacy of the war on terror more vividly than “Guantánamo”: orange jumpsuits, chainlink fences, “enhanced” interrogations. No wonder we forget that Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, is a beautiful place, and not solely the site of one of the world’s most notorious prisons. In *Guantánamo*, Jonathan Hansen, a professor of intellectual history at Harvard, captures both the natural splendor and the troubled past of the United States’ oldest naval outpost overseas, placing it front and center in the annals of American empire.

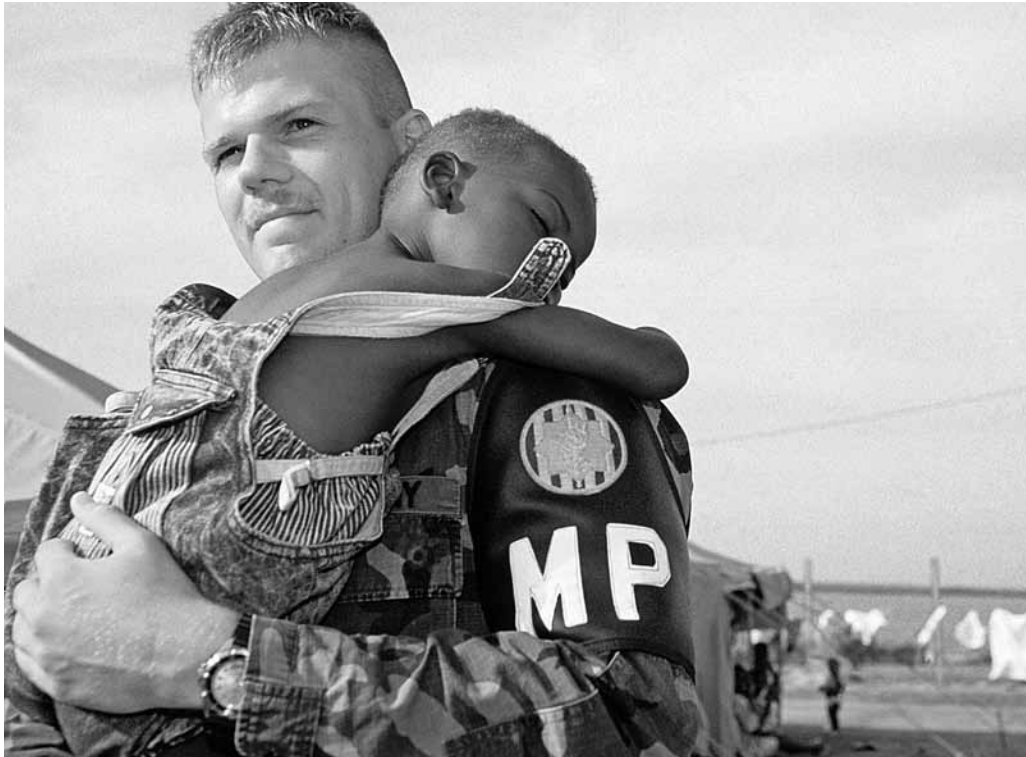
Occupying 45 square miles along Cuba’s

GUANTÁNAMO:
An American
History.

By Jonathan M.
Hansen. Hill & Wang.
428 pp. \$35

southeastern coast, U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay sits astride the bay’s picturesque southern channel. According to the terms of a lease agreement between the United States and Cuba, signed in 1903 in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War and renegotiated in 1934, the base can only revert to Cuban jurisdiction with U.S. consent. Thus, although formal diplomatic relations between the two countries ended in 1961, every year the U.S. Treasury Department issues a perfunctory \$4,085 rent check to the government of Cuba, which authorities in Havana steadfastly refuse to cash.

Foreign interest in Guantánamo predates the Founding Fathers. Hansen masterfully reconstructs the little-known British occupation of the bay in 1741 during a war with Spain for control of Atlantic trade. The participation of George Washington’s half-brother and several hundred other American colonists in this escapade sets the stage for what follows:



Corporal Colin Kelly bears the burden of a sleeping Haitian child as he inspects a refugee camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in 1994.

NAJLAH FEANNY/CORBIS SABA

an account of creeping U.S. aspirations to seize Cuba, from the early days of the Republic (Thomas Jefferson was among the first U.S. politicians to regard Cuba's acquisition as inevitable) through the mid-19th-century annexation intrigues of agitators in the South who saw Cuba as a place to expand slave territory. Readers acquainted with the long arc of U.S.-Cuba relations will find much of this

Every year the U.S. Treasury Department issues a perfunctory \$4,085 rent check to the government of Cuba, which authorities in Havana refuse to cash.

history familiar, but Hansen also digs up less known tales, including the aborted plans of Spanish reformers to transform the bay into a major trading port.

In 1898, in the aftermath of a mysterious explosion that destroyed a U.S. battleship, the *Maine*, in Havana harbor, the United States declared war on Spain and began an overt intervention in Cuba's ongoing war for independence. The Platt Amendment of 1901 subsequently forced Cuba, by then putatively independent, to concede partial sovereignty over its internal affairs as a condition for ending U.S. military occupation—and mandated the creation of the U.S. naval station. Hansen's exploration of the conflicted relationship between the base and Cuban society—including the emergence of "Gitmo" as a Cold War hotspot after the Cuban Revolution—draws noticeably on Tulane historian Jana Lipman's 2009 study *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History Between Empire and Revolution*. Nonetheless, Hansen's work stands out for its impressive synthesis and use of new sources (including original interviews with Charles Ryan, a former base resident gone AWOL to join Fidel Castro's fighters in the late 1950s).

In time, U.S. policymakers learned to take advantage of Guantánamo's ambiguous legal status. Because it is subject to U.S. "jurisdiction and control" but not U.S. "sovereignty," according to the lease, the base became a con-

venient place to bypass domestic strictures on whom the United States could detain, for how long, and under what conditions.

Hansen barely alludes to the tens of thousands of raft-borne Cubans held at Guantánamo for several months in 1994 before they were permitted to enter the United States. Instead, he focuses on the plight of Haitian refugees stuck in immigration limbo at the base during the late 1970s and the early 1990s. The significance of this story quickly becomes clear: The arguments the U.S. government advanced for denying due process to "enemy combatants" after 9/11, and indeed for bringing them to Guantánamo in the first place, drew on earlier court rulings concerning the rights of Haitians that held that the Constitution does not always follow the flag.

The Haitian story thus leads to a final chapter in which Hansen indicts Washington's use of the base in the post-9/11 era. Hansen's take on these matters certainly packs a political punch, but it is both moving and analytically rigorous. As one former base official remarks, "Gitmo is a silent bridge between history past and history future." *Guantánamo: An American History* strongly attests to such links.

MICHAEL J. BUSTAMANTE is a doctoral candidate in Latin American and Caribbean history at Yale University. He is a former research associate in Latin America studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Jesus H. Jones

Reviewed by Mark Reutter

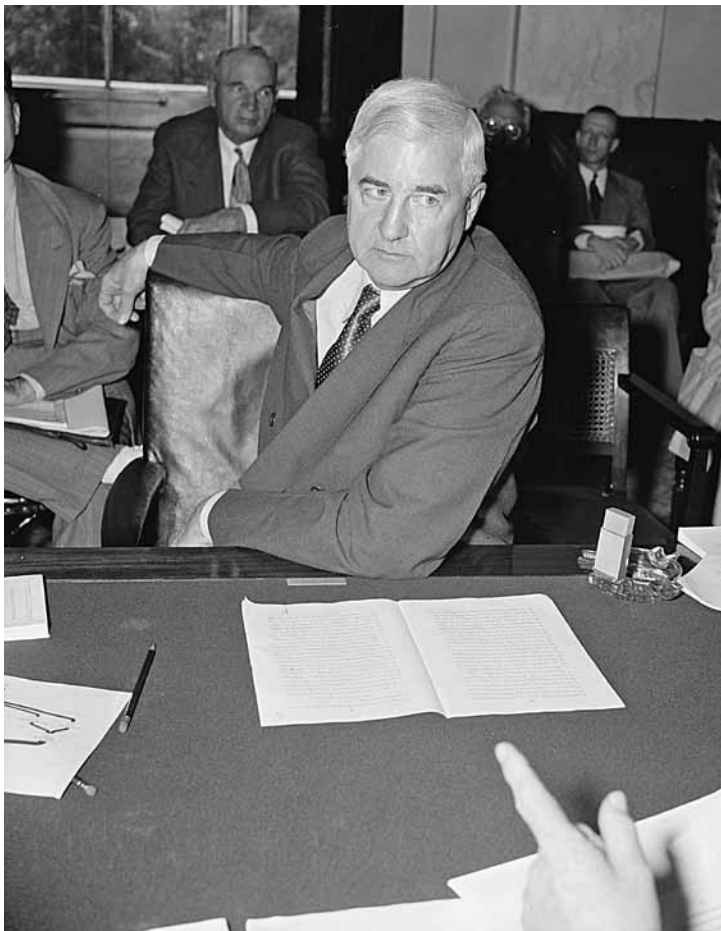
HE RODE OUT OF TEXAS IN THE DEPTHS OF the Depression and was credited, during his reign as chairman of the Reconstruction Fi-

UNPRECEDENTED POWER:

Jesse Jones, Capitalism, and the Common Good.

By Steven Fenberg.
Texas A&M Univ. Press.
611 pp. \$35

nance Corporation (RFC), with saving American capitalism and mobilizing the nation for World War II. "You'd better see Jesse" became a mantra in New Deal Washington, referring to the pug-faced, fast-drawling Houston banker



Texas businessman Jesse Jones, shown here in 1939, held the federal purse strings to billions during the Great Depression. President Roosevelt called him “Jesus H. Jones.”

named Jesse Holman Jones.

Under Jones’s watch, the RFC and its subsidiaries lent hundreds of billions (in today’s dollars) to farmers, banks, railroads, and city and state governments, as well as various “incubator” enterprises, such as the Rubber Reserve Company, which pioneered synthetic rubber. Given his unprecedented power—which provides the apt title of Steven Fenberg’s meaty new biography—it’s no wonder that in 1941 *Time* magazine dubbed Jones the second most powerful man in Washington (after President Franklin D. Roosevelt). Roosevelt himself teasingly called him “Jesus H. Jones.”

Fenberg, a community affairs officer at a Houston foundation Jones founded, has two

objectives: to tell the story of this largely forgotten figure and to demonstrate how his ideas could be relevant to our present financial crisis. He is successful on the first count, drawing from archival research a comprehensive account of a man who built much of Houston’s downtown skyline before he went to Washington in 1932 and made his mark there.

The second quest is more elusive. Creating a “usable past” seems a prescription for platitudes. And Fenberg tosses them around in his opening pages—about how government “can help people” and become “a catalytic force for progress”—before he lets the lessons from Jones’s life grow organically out of the narrative.

Born on a Tennessee farm in 1874, Jones

dropped out of school at 13 to help run his father’s tobacco business. The urge to see a wider world, spurred by a trip to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, led him to Dallas, where he secured a job with his uncle, and eventually to Houston.

It took Jones several years to channel his energies, diluted by a fondness for poker and fancy clothes, into the art of making money. But once he started, he was unstoppable. He formed the South Texas Lumber Company in 1902 and was a millionaire five years later. From lumber he jumped into construction, erecting some of Houston’s first steel-framed buildings, then blazed into banking, which not only paid for his buildings but was a natu-

ral habitat for a mind that “could read and analyze a balance sheet or a financial statement like a high-speed computer,” Fenberg writes.

Lesson 1: Leverage your debt conservatively. When Jones took out a loan, he kept part of it in reserve. Thus he endured unscathed the Panic of 1907, which scalded many of his fellow builders. Lesson 2: Use your powers to “do good” while doing well. For example, Jones championed a joint local-federal effort to straighten and deepen Buffalo Bayou so that Houston could be connected to the Gulf of Mexico, paving the way for the city’s rapid expansion.

Jones’s success as a banker handed him a national platform. As the Depression’s headwinds gathered force in 1932, President Herbert Hoover, a Republican, appointed Jones, a Democrat, to the board of the RFC, which had been established to shore up the country’s financial system by buying the preferred stock of banks. Many conservative politicians, not to speak of bankers, saw the agency as stepping too close to private enterprise. To Jones, though, the RFC “was entirely too timid and slow.”

Calling for bold government lending to farmers, small-town banks, and railroads, Jones became the chair of the RFC and the go-to guy when Roosevelt’s New Deal swept into Washington in 1933. Roosevelt found the structure of the RFC very useful: It had been set up as an executive agency with the ability to obtain funding through the Treasury. Thus, it could finance a variety of projects and programs without obtaining legislative approval. In today’s parlance, the RFC was a “special vehicle” whose transactions were “off the books” and therefore not reflected in the federal budget.

What made a situation fraught with pork barrel politics work, according to Fenberg, was Jones’s resistance to letting others, including Roosevelt, sway his decisions. “Neither a theorist, an ideologue, or an intellectual,” Jones was a banker seeking a reasonable return on his investment. Thus another lesson: Best business practices applied to government lending could yield steady and some-

times spectacular earnings to the taxpayer. This was especially true as the RFC, almost single-handedly, militarized American industry in anticipation of World War II.

The success of the RFC ultimately speaks to the character of its top leadership, not to the elephantine rules and preset formulas that characterize government contracting today. Except for \$18 million lost investing in Howard Hughes’s *Spruce Goose* airplane experiment, no major scandal sullied the agency during Jones’s 12 years at the helm.

In 1945, the banker was forced out of the agency in a political reshuffle, and returned home to become a leading Texas philanthropist. When he died, in 1956, he was eulogized with equal reverence by Democrats, Republicans, businessmen, government bureaucrats, and workers. Fenberg’s comprehensive biography should revive interest in this remarkable capitalist and public servant.

MARK REUTTER is a fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute and a former Wilson Center fellow. He edited *Railroad History* for eight years and is the author of *Making Steel—Sparrows Point and the Rise and Ruin of American Industrial Might* (1988, rev. ed. 2004).

Mythical City

Reviewed by Andrew Curry

ROME HAS HAD AN INFLUENCE like that of no other city. Its 2,500 years of unbroken history make Paris and London seem like recent arrivals. In *Rome*, Robert Hughes gives a thorough account of the Eternal City’s history and its influence on two millennia’s worth of artists, architects, and writers. A former art critic for *Time* and the author of books on subjects as diverse as Barcelona, Australia, and modern art, Hughes was first awed by Bernini’s fountains at the Piazza Navona a half-century ago. He sees traces of Rome just about everywhere, from the works of Goethe to Manhattan’s original Pennsylvania Station.

The ancient Rome of our imagination—

ROME:
A Cultural, Visual,
and Personal
History.

By Robert Hughes.
Knopf. 498 pp. \$35



Pennsylvania Station was one of the “finest landmarks” of New York City’s “age of Roman elegance,” lamented *The New York Times* when the building was demolished in 1963.

and as conjured by the sculptors and painters Rome has attracted for millennia—is a pristine marble sculpture garden populated by orators in clean togas. The reality was more like “Calcutta-on-the-Mediterranean,” Hughes writes, “crowded, chaotic, and filthy.” Flimsy apartment buildings lined streets strewn with human and animal excrement, garbage, and the occasional corpse. Residents commonly hurled full chamber pots out the window, braining anyone unlucky enough to be passing below.

Yet rising among the slums were astounding feats of engineering that still inspire, including the Coliseum, the Pantheon, and the monuments of the Forum. Others, just as spectacular, are lost: The Circus Maximus, now buried under modern Rome, had seats for 250,000 spectators, who crowded in to watch charioteers careen around a mile-long course, of greater length than some NASCAR tracks.

Hughes can be an overeager tour guide. It’s fascinating that the Pantheon’s dome—whose diameter exceeds St. Peter’s by a few feet—was made possible by the pioneering use of concrete, but do we really need to know the precise thickness of its walls at the top *and* the bottom? As a short course in the stories behind the

art and architecture of Rome, though, the book is useful and often entertaining.

Rome survived the fall of the Roman Empire, but just barely. By AD 1000, centuries of plunder and scavenging had rendered the imperial capital nearly unrecognizable. Romans themselves did much of the damage—stealing or selling off ancient statuary, melting down bronzes, and burn-

ing marble statues and friezes to make lime for building mortar. In the 15th century, the once glorious Forum was being used mainly as a cow pasture.

Beginning in medieval times, however, the city underwent wave after wave of rediscovery and re-creation. Dozens of Roman churches, St. Peter’s among them, are built with marble recycled from ancient Roman structures. During the Renaissance, Italian artists flocked to the city, accepting commissions from popes and cardinals to give the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church physical form.

The art of the Renaissance, in turn, made Rome an essential stop on the “grand tour” popular with educated Europeans. Like tourists today, they were often disappointed. “The streets are narrow, dirty, and filthy. Even the palaces are a mixture of dirt and finery and intermixed with wretched mean houses,” one English visitor wrote. Even while sniffing at their hosts, travelers took inspiration—and plenty of art, real and forged—home as a souvenir, spreading a taste for classical architecture and enriching museum collections around the world.

Rome endured, and continued to reinvent

itself. It became the capital of a reunited Italy in 1871, then the seat of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini's power in the 1920s before welcoming American troops as liberators in 1944. Throughout, its power to lure art lovers such as Hughes never diminished.

But in an angry epilogue, Hughes laments the death of high culture in Italy. The combination of mass tourism and Italian apathy, he contends, threatens the city's heritage. "Most Italians are artistic illiterates," he writes. "They like to invoke the splendors of their *patri-monio culturale*, but when it comes to doing anything about them, like turning their considerable energies toward preserving that inheritance in an intelligible way . . . nothing or little happens."

Yet how much has really changed? Even at the empire's peak, most Romans were more interested in gladiator bouts and chariot races than in sculpture and poetry. And recent archaeological discoveries reveal that the refined white statuary that inspired Renaissance artists is yet another instance of modern mythologizing: The Romans painted their marble, often in garish colors that would make a clown wince. If there's a lesson to be learned, it's that the Eternal City will survive, somehow, to be creatively remembered by future generations.

ANDREW CURRY is a freelance journalist based in Berlin and a contributing editor to *Archaeology*.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

New Life for Old Cities

Reviewed by Patrick Piuma

NOT LONG AGO I CAUGHT SIGHT OF A BUMPER sticker that read "86-64" affixed to a bicycle parked outside Harvest, a popular new locavore restaurant in Louisville's burgeoning arts district. One of Harvest's founding partners is a Kentucky farmer and leader in the urban agriculture movement that is taking hold in this riverfront municipality of nearly

600,000 residents. The sticker referred to a controversial grassroots initiative to tear down an elevated section of Interstate 64 that separates the city from the Ohio River and replace it with a tree-lined boulevard and an expansion of Waterfront Park. It struck me that here was yet more proof that Louisville, an aging midsize industrial city, is undergoing a transformation.

Louisville isn't alone. Across America, small and midsize cities, particularly those that traditionally have relied on manufacturing, are struggling to forge new identities in a globalized world gripped by recession. Many are seeking to move toward a "green economy" that reduces reliance on fossil fuels and uses resources efficiently. In *Small, Gritty, and Green*, journalist and historian Catherine Tumber proposes that the undervalued assets of such cities—including their proximity to agricultural lands, skilled manufacturing work forces, and greater flexibility compared to their larger counterparts—poise them to capitalize on the green economy trend.

Tumber traveled the Midwest and the Northeast to interview people in more than two dozen Rust Belt cities that are often portrayed in the media as has-beens: Syracuse, New York; Peoria, Illinois; and Janesville, Wisconsin, to name a few. She presents a range of views—from the crusading talk of self-proclaimed "environmental Nazis" to the nuanced statements of public policy makers and the brutal assessments of skeptics. As a woman in a rural Illinois convenience store tells Tumber when asked about

the wind turbines on the surrounding farmland, "We have to live with these ugly things, but the electricity goes to New York City. We have to live off coal."

Tumber covers a lot of territory quickly, including the budding urban agriculture movement, cities' efforts

SMALL, GRITTY, AND GREEN:

The Promise of America's Smaller Industrial Cities in a Low-Carbon World.

By Catherine Tumber.
MIT Press.
211 pp. \$24.95

to foster “smart growth,” and the rise of green manufacturing. She cautions that midsize cities need to rein in suburban sprawl, which destroys the small farms and other agricultural land close to urban cores that give them an advantage over large metropolises. Cities that were hollowed out as a result of white flight, urban renewal, and other misfortunes are examining ways to put vacant and underutilized land to productive use, at least temporarily, through urban farming initiatives.

Some Rust Belt cities also have begun to retool their work forces and economic development goals to mesh with the emerging low-carbon practices of the green economy. I was surprised to learn that Muncie, Indiana, a town only a three-hour drive from my Louisville home, is becoming a major producer of wind turbine components. Proximity to a major wind corridor and a work force whose skills were honed manufacturing automobile transmissions place the city in a green technology sweet spot.

Of course, not every city is in a wind corridor or has the manufacturing base to create products that will be needed in a low-carbon economy. But Tumber is right that many small and midsize cities share a number of characteristics that could be the basis for an economic renaissance. Their futures depend on what they do with those assets. As Tumber suggests, the quality of a community’s education is one significant determinant. Residents of Louisville know about the challenges of engineering education policy all too well—in 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the city’s attempt to integrate its classrooms with race-based school assignments.

Small, Gritty, and Green offers inspiration and hope for older manufacturing cities that have been written off by the rest of the country as casualties of globalization. If cities like Louisville are able to adapt, their best years may be yet to come.

PATRICK PIUMA is the director of the Urban Design Studio at the University of Louisville.

What’s Next?

Reviewed by James M. Morris

THE ASSURANCE IN ECCLESIASTES was mere wishful thinking: “There is no new thing under the sun.” Rather, like the Gospel’s poor, the new we have always with us. And thank goodness for that,

Winifred Gallagher would argue, for without the challenge of the new and our capacity for neophilia, we’d be nowhere. Literally. Had our African ancestors tens of thousands of years ago not been able to adapt to environmental disruption, the entire history of the race might have been inscribed on a large rock.

So there’s a fundamental evolutionary purpose to neophilia, says Gallagher. Just as the race developed early on in response to a changing world, it has had to keep adapting to survive and flourish. The trick is to know which novelty to embrace because it’s genuinely useful, and which to consign to a dust heap of wan or dangerous diversions.

Gallagher provides an engaging, if somewhat repetitive and diffuse, account of humanity’s need for the new. Neophilia “is both a state, or transient psychobiological condition, and an abiding trait,” and we must understand its several dimensions if we’re to harness a 21st-century aptitude for it. “For better and worse,” she notes, “the United States is history’s most neophilic culture.” Some of us resist change, some embrace it eagerly, and most regard it from a middle distance, receptive but wary, or, if you will, wary but receptive.

In part, our response to the new is genetically encoded. A disproportionate number of Westerners of European descent, for example, have a gene (DRD4 7R) that encourages “robust novelty seeking.” (Exquisite torture for a restless 7R-endowed individual? Having to read Proust.)

And, in part, our response to novelty and change is shaped by environmental factors, physical and mental. Experience and biology work as a team.

NEW:

Understanding Our
Need for Novelty
and Change.

By Winifred Gallagher.
Penguin Press.
259 pp. \$25.95

Gallagher calls on an array of neuroscientists, psychologists, anthropologists, media theorists, marketers, and more to make her case. The result is a thoroughly readable mix of science hard and squishy, speculation, and personal observation. You'll not soon find another book whose playful author makes room for Kit Carson (neophile extraordinaire), Fran Leibowitz (cranky New York wit and technological neophobe), Eleanor Roosevelt (shy young neophobe, courageous self-made adult neophile), and, inter alios, Galileo, Jackson Pollock, Keith Richards, and Larry Summers.

Gallagher's final chapters offer some practical guidance to perplexed, and possibly overwhelmed, contemporary American neophiles/phobes. It's not her fault that the curve of the book bends toward bathos—from humanity's early heroic struggle to avoid extinction to our current embarrassing struggle with gadget addiction. Under the circumstances, her advice can't help but sound a little Oprahesque: Find the level of novelty that suits your biology and your temperament. Avoid multitasking; it's a myth, anyway. Teach the young to use their riveting devices with moderation. Think. Rediscover the lost pleasures of reverie.

We live in a world juiced by change of every sort—by technological surfeit and infatuation with the trivial—and each of us needs to decide how much of that rampant energy is healthy. Clever phones, for example, have made social morons of millions. T. S. Eliot, unfamiliar with data plans or texting teenagers, knew more than 75 years ago what it was for “strained time-ridden faces” to live “distracted from distraction by distraction / Filled with fancies and empty of meaning.” Gallagher summarizes in two words the advice of experts on how to make our way through this “world of potentially limitless distractions”: selectivity and balance. These criteria would have been old news to the ancient Greeks and Romans. It's a fine measure of our predicament that they should now seem novel.

JAMES M. MORRIS is an editor at large of *The Wilson Quarterly* and a senior scholar at the Wilson Center.

ARTS & LETTERS

Papa's Beginnings

Reviewed by Michael C. Moynihan

FIFTY YEARS AFTER HE ended his life, Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) resides in the American consciousness mostly in caricature. The brilliant war journalist and writer of spare, evocative fiction has been overtaken by the macho, absinthe-swilling bohemian, the writer's life having become more important than the writer's writing.

There is, of course, something to these cartoonish portrayals. In *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway: Volume 1, 1907–1922*, the first of a slated dozen or so volumes of his complete, unexpurgated correspondence, the future Nobel laureate recounts, often in tedious detail, his love of fishing, his heroics on the Italian front, and his burgeoning friendships with expatriate American writers Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Unlike previous collections of Hemingway's letters, this one leaves nothing on the cutting room floor. (The volume begins with a note from an eight-year-old Hemingway to his father.)

Much of the material in this collection, meticulously edited by Hemingway scholars Sandra Spanier and Robert W. Trogon, will be of interest only to academics and obsessives. The earliest material is a slog: anodyne correspondence with family members, quotidian letters about school life, an exhaustively detailed expense report to his employers at *The Toronto Star*.

But the multiple accounts of his wounding in World War I—boastful, repetitive, and sometimes stingy with the truth—are fascinating, offering a glimpse of Hemingway's late teenage worldview. The young men he encountered in Italy, the cannon fodder for Kaisers and kings, would ultimately provide the

**THE LETTERS
OF ERNEST
HEMINGWAY:**
Volume 1,
1907–1922.

*Edited by Sandra
Spanier and
Robert W. Trogon.
Cambridge Univ. Press.
431 pp. \$40*

contours of his most famous literary creations (Nick Adams, Jake Barnes), though the famously economical prose style isn't on display here; his letters are slang filled and overwritten, providing few hints of the crisp style that characterizes his first story collection, *In Our Time* (1925).

It's commonly believed that Hemingway was emotionally scarred by his experience in the Great War. Indeed, Thomas Putnam, director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, which houses many of these letters, argued in an essay a few years ago that "in reaction to their experience of world war, Hemingway and other modernists lost faith in the central institutions of Western civilization." In *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Fred-eric Henry, a character largely drawn from

Hemingway's experiences in Italy, famously declares, "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene."

But if Hemingway believed that Western civilization was in crisis, these letters suggest that his views were arrived at after the armistice. For writers including Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Wilfred Owen, the battlefield was where their antiwar beliefs were forged. Hemingway's opinions were likely influenced by the intellectual ferment of Paris, where he and his wife lived for several years in the 1920s.

In a 1917 letter to his sister, Hemingway writes that he "cant [sic] stay out much longer," and that he is considering enlisting in the Canadian military if America remains on the sidelines. When a munitions plant explodes at the front, Hemingway writes to a friend that it was his "baptism of fire" and that he is "having a wonderful time!!!" He mentions a field "black" with corpses, not to reflect on the hideousness of the fight, but to explain the provenance of his pile of war souvenirs, and he later confesses that "what makes me hate this war" is that there is no place to fish. The Hemingway of 1918 is more Ernst Jünger than Erich Maria Remarque.

It is only when Hemingway and his new bride, Hadley Richardson, relocate to Paris in 1921 that the reader notices the emergence of a distinct voice, full of the stylistic flourishes and vivid descriptions that would become his trademark. In letters to Pound, Stein, and novelist Sherwood Anderson, whose attention and validation he craved, Hemingway writes to impress, taking significantly more care than in any previous correspondence. The juvenilia are replaced with comments on T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and anecdotes about teaching Pound to box.

This volume ends just as Hemingway is getting started. It's a collection whose existence goes against his wishes; he had instructed that "none of the letters written by me during my lifetime shall be published." We can be grateful that his wish was betrayed.

MICHAEL C. MOYNIHAN is managing editor of *Vice* magazine.



Ernest Hemingway was wounded only weeks after joining the fight in Italy in World War I as a Red Cross ambulance driver.

Building Up

Reviewed by Jill Jonnes

IN 2006, AS MY FAMILY AND I rode from the Shanghai airport toward the city's downtown, our young guide proudly pointed out the multitude of luminous skyscrapers—dazzling in their shapes, jeweled colors, and sheer height—soaring into the night sky. For millennia, men and nations have striven to build the tallest edifices—from Egypt's pyramids (the tallest originally reached 481 feet) to America's art deco Chrysler Building (1,046 feet) to Dubai's Burj Khalifa (2,717 feet)—as monuments to their advancing technology and supremacy. Shanghai's 60-some-odd skyscrapers proclaim China's status as a modern international powerhouse.

Today, in the entire world there are just over 500 skyscrapers (defined as buildings more than 600 feet tall). Hong Kong is the globe's "tallest" metropolis; the combined height of its skyscrapers is triple that of New York City's. In her illustrated guide *The Heights*, Kate Ascher, a real estate and development consultant and the author of *The Works: Anatomy of a City* (2005), details the history, design, and upkeep of these man-made marvels.

In the late 1880s, architects and builders in Chicago and New York City invented this ambitious architectural form, creating "cathedrals of commerce" to address the need for office space in congested downtowns where real estate prices were at a premium. The skyscraper's ever greater heights were possible only because electricity had supplanted gaslight, cities had developed water and sewage systems, and, above all, because in the 1880s the electric motor was incorpo-

THE HEIGHTS: Anatomy of a Skyscraper.

By Kate Ascher.
Penguin Press.
207 pp. \$35

rated into inventor Elisha Otis's "safety elevator," whose basic principles of cables, counterweights, and a catch system still govern the lifts that zoom us skyward.

Wind remains such a significant factor in skyscraper design that a building's aerodynamics must be simulated and tested in wind tunnels. Miscalculations can be calamitous—Boston's 60-story John Hancock Tower gained notoriety in the 1970s when winds exceeding 45 miles per hour caused its 500-pound windows to pop out and crash to the ground.

Though few of us have heard of structural engineer Fazlur Khan, in the 1960s he revolutionized skyscraper construction by devising a framing system around a tubular core that increased structural stability, allowing buildings to "rise to unprecedented heights," Ascher writes. The World Trade Center towers were among the first framed-tube structures. On 9/11, the fuel-laden passenger jets that struck the towers dislodged asbestos sprayed on the steel support beams to protect them from heat. In the intense fire that followed, the beams weakened and buckled, causing both buildings' swift collapse.

Skyscrapers reflect the societies whose

Boston's John Hancock Tower became a patchwork of plywood, when, in 1972, as construction neared completion, winds sent many of its windows crashing to the ground.



AP PHOTO/J. WALTER GREEN

needs they are constructed to serve: In the United States, short commercial leases (typically 15 years) mean that large, flexible floor plans prevail, so that space can be easily converted for different uses. In Europe, where workers by right cannot be more than 25 feet away from natural light, the resulting narrow buildings often also have natural ventilation. In Japan, the country's frequent earthquakes dictate bulky, wide structures. In India, where chronic water shortages and inadequate infrastructure require some skyscrapers to receive drinking water on trucks, water from toilets, showers, and sinks is processed in graywater distribution systems for the buildings' flushing and irrigation needs. Many Western skyscrapers cater to superstition by having no 13th floor. In China, Ascher notes, the number four "sounds like the word for death, and thus carries a negative connotation." So some skyscrapers just skip floors 40 to 49, as well as 14, 24, 34, and so on. Another fun fact: If all 445 tons of paper recycled in 2008 by workers in Chicago's Sears Tower had been stacked up, each week the resultant pile would have equaled the building's height.

With more than half of the world's seven billion people jammed into urban cores, skyscrapers are now often designed as mixed-use "vertical cities." Ascher shows what an efficient use of space these buildings can be. A typical suburban landscape comprising 135,000 square feet of strip-mall retail space, 225,000 square feet of residential development on quarter-acre lots, and 875,000 square feet of office space in five- and six-story buildings with adjoining parking lots would take up the equivalent of 21 square blocks in New York City. Yet all of these activities and functions can be accommodated in a skyscraper occupying a little more than half a typical Manhattan block. More of us work (and live) in skyscrapers than ever before. Ascher delivers an engaging guide to these amazing structures.

JILL JONNES, a Wilson Center public policy scholar, is the author of *Eiffel's Tower* (2009) and *Empires of Light* (2003), among other books.

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

Continental Rift

Reviewed by Brian Bow

ROBERT PASTOR IS AN EXTRAORDINARY thinker who happens to have extraordinarily bad timing. His previous book on North America, *Toward a North American Community*, brought together all the best

arguments for a post-NAFTA deepening of regional cooperation among the United States, Canada, and Mexico. But it was published just before 9/11, after which no one in Washington wanted to hear about "streamlining" America's borders, especially if the proposal was framed as lessons drawn from European integration.

Since then, most of those who had jumped on the North American bandwagon have jumped off again, but Pastor, the founding director of the Center for North American Studies at American University, has stuck tenaciously to his call for a trilateral community. His new book, *The North American Idea*, was not written with the aim of influencing bureaucrats and business leaders, but rather of convincing the broader "attentive public" and rising political leaders to set aside old conceptions of sovereignty and move toward a regional future. Even as he was writing the book, however, Mexico was overwhelmed by a wave of violent crime and the United States was staggered by a financial crisis that turned into a deep recession that was also felt in Canada and Mexico. And again the political confidence and creativity Pastor was counting on seem to have evaporated.

The core of the book is Pastor's argument for a rejuvenation of trilateral policy coordination, aimed at creating a regional community of nations (not, as he is at pains to make clear, a political union like that in Europe). He argues that the North American Free Trade Agreement, which went into effect in 1994, was generally good for all three economies. But its benefits and limitations

THE NORTH AMERICAN IDEA:
A Vision of a
Continental Future.

By Robert A. Pastor.
Oxford Univ. Press.
264 pp. \$24.95

were not well understood, and it stirred up deep-seated anxieties about national identity and sovereignty. After 9/11, political leaders weren't able to work together on security challenges, the result being onerous border restrictions that rolled back the extraordinary economic growth NAFTA had unleashed. Now North America is faced with a new set of transnational challenges, including immigration, drug trafficking, and infrastructure building, that call for new regional initiatives.

For years, Pastor has been vilified by critics on both the left and the right as the mastermind behind an elite conspiracy to pursue "integration by stealth." Here he turns that argument upside down, making the case that the general public in all three countries is actually supportive of (or at least open to) closer cooperation, and that the real opponents are blowhard pundits (e.g., the United States' Lou Dobbs) and antiglobalization activists (e.g., Canada's Maude Barlow), along with lazy, shortsighted business leaders and politicians.

Pastor argues that the status quo—three sets of national policies working at cross-purposes, "dual bilateralism," and a general tendency to fight fires rather than coordinate proactively—is growing more and more dysfunctional. His accounts of NAFTA's limitations and the pernicious effects of political neglect are compelling. He makes the case, for example, that trivial differences in the regulated height and weight of trucks on U.S., Canadian, and Mexican highways are a persistent form of hidden protectionism. Consumers end up paying for the cost of transferring a load of, say, produce to several different trucks in its trip from a Mexican field to an American supermarket.

Most readers will probably agree that each government has something to gain from closer cooperation with its neighbors, and that the region's governments need to build some kind of new institutional structure. But many in the United States will balk at Pastor's arguments that some post-9/11 border security measures should be replaced with a new system based on preclearance of previously screened travel-

ers and transport companies, and that support of Mexico's economic development will produce dividends for the United States.

The most problematic part of the core argument is the pitch for a specifically *trilateral* community, as opposed to the established tendency to rely on bilateral talks, even within supposedly regional forums such as the Security and Prosperity Partnership. Ultimately, Pastor's argument for trilateralism boils down to his pointing out that dual bilateralism hasn't worked. This is a sensible argument, but it is not likely to win over the skeptics, especially in Canada, where many still worry that Mexico is a dead weight and believe they are better off focusing on the bilateral "special relationship" with the United States.

Pastor concludes with an overview of specific policy areas that would benefit from greater trilateral coordination: development assistance, transportation and infrastructure, customs, and regulation. Policy specialists may be frustrated at the lack of practical guidance, but that is not what this book is for. When *Toward a North American Community* was published in 2001, there was political momentum for trilateral dialogue, and policy advice was what was needed. Today, the challenge is to renew the dialogue itself, and that is what *The North American Idea* is all about.

BRIAN BOW, a political scientist at Dalhousie University and a former Wilson Center scholar, is the author of *The Politics of Linkage: Power, Interdependence, and Ideas in Canada-U.S. Relations* (2009).

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

A Man of Conscience

Reviewed by Christopher Merrill

WHEN HISTORIAN JOHN M. Barry set out to write a book examining the role of religion in modern American public life, his exploration took him instead back to the settling of New England and the unsettling figure of Roger Williams, the first colonist to cul-

**ROGER WILLIAMS
AND THE
CREATION OF THE
AMERICAN SOUL:
Church, State, and
the Birth of Liberty.**

*By John M. Barry.
Viking. 464 pp. \$35*

tivate the freedom of thought we regard as our birthright. Williams proposed a radical understanding of the relationship between the civic and the spiritual—what is owed to Caesar and what to God. Advocating liberty of conscience, he built a wall between the wilderness of the world and the garden of faith that has shaped our political discourse for the last 400 years.

Williams was born in England around 1603, the son of a shopkeeper in the burgeoning middle class. When he was hired as a teenager to take shorthand for Sir Edward Coke, the leading jurist of the age, he had the chance to witness, in the Star Chamber and Privy Council, battles over the issue of royal prerogative that laid the groundwork for civil war. He studied the foibles of all sorts of men, beginning with the monarch, and the perils of absolute power. The rivalry between Coke and his nemesis, Sir Francis Bacon, was likewise instructive. Barry argues that Williams adopted Coke's reverence for the law and Bacon's respect for empirical evidence, an uncommon mixture of intellectual traits that distinguished him from his countrymen—and launched him on a collision course with the authorities in England and America.

After attending Cambridge, a seedbed of Puritanism, Williams became chaplain to Sir William Masham, a Puritan leader in whose service he met many men destined to play large roles in the English Civil War, including Oliver Cromwell. He also fell for a woman above his station; rebuffed in his suit for her hand, he nearly died of a fever, and soon after his recovery he married another woman and sailed for the New World, possibly to escape imprisonment for his revolutionary views.

Upon his arrival in 1631, Williams impressed the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Yet when they offered him a teaching post in the colony's church, he refused on the grounds that it had not separated from the Church of England. The colony was not a theocracy, strictly speaking, but its civil and religious powers were working hand in glove

to dictate how individuals were supposed to think—anathema to Williams. "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils," he wrote. And his clashes with the authorities led to banishment for his "dangerous opinions."

He headed into the woods, in the dead of winter, eventually settling with his followers on Narragansett Bay. There he established the New World's first democracy, which he called Providence. Beset by men from within and without who were avid for land, he mediated disputes between settlers and their native neighbors. (In the Indian war of 1637 he furnished Massachusetts Bay leaders with intelligence about the movements of the tribes in the area, whose motives he understood better than any other settler.) He traveled twice to London to secure patents for the plantation later known as Rhode Island. And he published important texts on religion and political theory, as well as a seminal work on Native American language and life. All this he did in the interest of creating the right relationship between the things of this world and those of the next.

Barry is no biographer—Williams does not really enter the story until a third of the way through the book; the opening chapters are devoted to historical background—but he does draw a vivid portrait of the time. Williams was a Zelig-like figure present at decisive historical events throughout his long life. (The exact date of his death in 1683 is unknown.) Barry is adept at connecting those events—the Puritan migration, the English Civil War, the Restoration, King Philip's War—to Williams's "lively" experiment in democracy, the results of which are still under review.

The achievement of this forgotten founding father is indeed a continuing challenge to every American: "For he knew," Barry writes, "that to believe in freedom and liberty required faith in the freedom of thought, of conscience. And that was soul liberty."

CHRISTOPHER MERRILL's latest book is *The Tree of the Doves: Ceremony, Expedition, War*. He directs the University of Iowa's International Writing Program.

True Believers

Reviewed by Darcy Courteau

ON NOVEMBER 18, 1978, more than 900 Americans living in a socialist collective in Guyana were murdered or took their own lives. Many poisoned themselves with Flavor Aid laced with cyanide. Their bodies were found scattered around Jonestown, the plantation they'd carved out of the jungle four years earlier at the behest of their leader, Jim Jones. He had promised his followers an egalitarian utopia, but Jonestown defectors had returned to the United States calling the place a prison. Leo Ryan, a Democratic congressman from California, led a small entourage to Guyana to investigate. When Jonestown gunmen killed Ryan and several others, Jones ordered aides to roll out stockpiles of poison; he and his followers would find peace in death before the authorities arrived.

Americans have been darkly fascinated with the event ever since—it's the subject of numerous books and documentary films. Today, we mock blind followers of any stripe by saying they have "drunk the Kool-Aid." In *A Thousand Lives*, journalist Julia Scheeres attempts to correct that unsympathetic characterization of the Jonestown faithful. She knows evangelism's destructive side intimately—in her 2005 memoir, *Jesus Land*, she described how her zealot parents packed her and an adopted brother off to a brutal Christian re-education camp in the Dominican Republic.

Scheeres brings her special understanding to bear on the lives of five Jonestown residents, most of whom survived the mass suicide: a man trying to keep his troubled family together, his rebellious son, an elderly black woman searching for a desegregated house of worship, an idealistic schoolteacher, and a kid from the Oakland ghetto determined to stay out of jail. Scheeres is a gifted storyteller, and

A THOUSAND LIVES:

The Untold Story of Hope, Deception, and Survival at Jonestown.

By Julia Scheeres.
Free Press.
307 pp. \$26

her characters' reconstructed conversations and thoughts are a testament to extensive interviews and research that relied, in part, on the hundreds of audiotapes and 50,000 pages of diaries and personal notes the FBI recovered from the site.

When Jones founded his Peoples Temple in the mid-1950s in Indianapolis, desegregation was a cornerstone of the church—a majority of his followers were black. (Jones himself was a white man born in rural Indiana.) A decade later he moved the congregation to California, where he performed phony healings even as he trashed the Bible and claimed personal divinity.

The Temple's live-and-let-live ethos soured. Jones slept with congregants, demanded their paychecks, and meted out spankings with a belt. Eventually, a journalistic exposé spurred his retreat to Jonestown, whose remote jungle location allowed for even greater abuses. People worked soil too poor to feed them while Jones feasted on barbiturates, chicken dinners, and Diet Pepsi. Naughty chil-

BETT MANN/CORBIS



Followers gather around Jim Jones (far left) in this undated photograph found in an album among the dead in Jonestown.

dren were fed hot peppers or dangled upside down in a well. And Jones staged a series of “White Nights,” during which he pretended that Jonestown was under attack, and conducted suicide drills with fake poison.

Jones’s actions were horrific, but some of the book’s most anguished accounts are of the cruelty his followers heaped on each other, ratting out family members or offering to kill a captured runaway. Ultimately, however, Scheeres concludes that the people of Jonestown were “noble idealists” and innocent victims betrayed by a single man.

The reality seems more complicated than that. It is true that not everyone who died at Jonestown freely chose to cash it in. An iconic photograph of Jonestown corpses shows a pair of tiny legs lying in a stack of jeans-clad rumps. Among the dead were 304 children; dozens of adults were forcibly injected with poison. Certainly, many of the faithful ended up being exploited instead of finding the equality they sought: Blacks slaved in the plantation’s fields, and women became Jones’s concubines. But it is also true that camp guards carrying weapons they could have used for self-defense forced their comrades to die and finally killed themselves. The man who terrified and seduced wasn’t all-powerful.

Indeed, Jones was so messed up on downers by the time he summoned the cyanide that he slurred his words as he recorded what now circulates on the Internet as the “Death Tape”: Residents, each carrying a private mix of reasons they’d sought to live in Jonestown—fears, loyalties, ideals, the need to be close to a father or to absorb just a bit of Jones’s power—have crowded around. For several minutes, Christine Miller, a black woman, argues with Jones. There are alternatives, and it isn’t right to kill the children. “We all have a right to our own destiny as individuals,” she tells Jones, who listens patiently, paternally—before allowing the others to shout her down.

DARCY COURTEAU, a former assistant editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*, has written for publications including *The Atlantic* .com, *The American Scholar*, and *The Oxford American*.

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(Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

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PORTRAIT



Library of Dreams

In California's San Joaquin Valley, a reconstruction of the Tulare County Free Library's first branch stands in Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park. Built in 1913, with shelf space for 1,000 books, the library served the needs of Allensworth, a town founded by ex-slave, former Union soldier, and Baptist minister Allen Allensworth and other blacks who desired to live in a place free of discrimination.

For a few years, residents bent on self-betterment filled the modest building, before a series of misfortunes and the ravages of the Great Depression turned the idealistic hamlet into a ghost town. This image is part of *Public Library: An American Commons* (www.robertdawson.com/portfolio.html), photographer Robert Dawson's survey of hundreds of public libraries around the country.

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