DANIEL FOSTER: Rahm on the Stump

FALSE PROPHET

Obama and the end of liberal presumption

RAMESH PONNURU & RICHARD LOWRY
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**Contents**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVER STORY</th>
<th>Page 29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Bender Is Over</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whatever happens on Election Day, the heroic phase of Obama’s presidency is over. It is over not simply because he will spend the rest of his term playing defense rather than conquering new ground for liberalism. It is over because the assumptions that underlay that first phase of his presidency have already been discredited. |  
Ramesh Ponnuru & Richard Lowry  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTICLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 Out of the Loop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahm Emanuel stages a homecoming parade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 ‘President Who?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Senate race in West Virginia illustrates the danger of being associated with Barack Obama.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Rust Belt Revival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A GOP tide is surging through the Great Lakes region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 In the Irish Stew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This small nation presents the global financial crisis in microcosm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Oslo Scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Norwegian Nobel Committee gives the peace prize to a Chinese hero.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 The Bender Is Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals are watching their ‘40-year majority’ vanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Assassin-in-Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The War on Terror has blinded the Right to a disturbing expansion of executive power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Bard of the Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering Joe Sobran.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOKS, ARTS &amp; MANNERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42 Hope from the Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Statesmanship and the GOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 Young Lisbeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 Bill’s Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFB’s reading library—er, garage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Film: A Mighty Wurlitzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for ‘Superman.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Country Life: The Eternal Seasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell to a dry summer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Letters to the Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 The Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 The Bender Is Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 The Bent Pin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 The Long View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Athwart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Practically Idealist

In John Derbyshire’s most informative review of *The High Tide of American Conservatism* (“Bliss Was It . . .,” October 4), he uses a familiar quote from Calvin Coolidge in an unusual way: to describe Coolidge, rather than to criticize him. As a resident of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who must therefore admire Coolidge in secret, this was pleasing to read. But while the quote Derbyshire used is correct, it’s merely the half of it.

Those who wish to paint Coolidge as one-dimensional and terse have got away with leaving off an especially meaningful part of his characterization of Americans. Shortly after saying that “the chief business of the American people is business,” he added: “The chief ideal of the American people is idealism.”

Here is a statement from a well-rounded and perceptive observer. It might have been much better for all of us if Coolidge had chosen to run for reelection.

Lars Wiberg

Via e-mail

Daley’s Second Amendment Record

In the October 4 issue’s “Week” section, you had some positive things to say about Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley, while acknowledging that he is “a massive overspender, a friend of corruption, and a patsy for the unions.” But how could you fail to note his contempt for the Second Amendment?

Recently, after the Supreme Court struck down Chicago’s outright ban on the private ownership of handguns, Daley promised to comply with the ruling, but he is doing so in the most grudging manner possible—making it almost impossible for Chicago citizens to legally protect themselves.

Of course, as mayor, he has 24/7 armed security.

Bill Brockman

Atlanta, Ga.

Remedial Orthography

I will give *National Review* the benefit of the doubt that the misspelling of “dormitory” in the background of the illustration on page 38 of its October 18 issue is a satiric commentary on the poor quality of current educational standards rather than a mere mistake.

Kenneth Starke

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If Congress wants to prosecute those who accept foreign money, Tim Geithner had better keep a suitcase packed.

At his White House farewell, Rahm Emanuel, President Obama’s departing chief of staff, told his boss: “I want to thank you for being the toughest leader any country could ask for, in the toughest times any president has ever faced.” The second half of that statement is self-evidently ridiculous, though entirely in keeping with Emanuel’s baby-boomer myopia. But “toughest leader”? The man whose first legislative triumph was persuading Congress to vote itself $800 billion worth of pork? Whose greatest achievement was leading his party off a cliff with a widely detested health-care bill? Who dithered for half a year before sending more troops to Afghanistan, and then told every cave dweller in the Hindu Kush when they would be leaving? Who says he has to consult a panel of experts to figure out whose ass to kick? Let’s hope the good people of Chicago, whose next mayor Emanuel seeks to become, will be spared such notions of leadership.

The final jobs report before the election was a bad one for Democrats: The unemployment rate was unchanged at 9.6 percent, and the economy lost 95,000 jobs. Most of these losses were attributable to government layoffs, and liberal economists seized upon that fact in an attempt to bolster their economic spin du jour, which is that the stimulus was not big enough. According to them, the federal government should have borrowed even more money to give to state and local governments, most of which cannot engage in similarly reckless borrowing. A little perspective is in order: Since the summer of 2007, when the subprime-mortgage meltdown began, state and local governments have shed around 70,000 net jobs, while the private sector has shed over 7,700,000. The new spin is a tacit admission that the administration’s policies have failed to jump-start the private economy: The Democrats’ fallback position is that we should allow the public sector to remain insulated from the effects of the recession. The correct policy—shrinking the government so that the productive sector may expand—continues to elude them.

The Federal Reserve said that it would keep interest rates low for “an extended period” and signaled its willingness to engage in further “quantitative easing”—expanding the Fed’s balance sheet—should the economy slow. It is coming under pressure to provide more monetary stimulus. Outgoing Obama adviser Christina Romer says, “If fiscal policy makers won’t act, I think monetary policy makers must act.” Thomas Hoenig, president of the Kansas City Fed, is a dissenter, worrying about “long-run inflation issues that are not immediate but are out there.” The good news is that with a trillion dollars in excess reserves already in the banking system, quantitative easing should not do much to increase inflation. (It may also be pointless, for the same reason.) The better news is that the economy might not need stimulus: It is growing, albeit slowly. We will not strengthen our recovery by having Ben Bernanke devalue our dollars, any more than we will by having Nancy Pelosi burn through them.

The New York Times recently uncovered another curious fact about tea partiers: They reach to “dusty bookshelves” for “once-obscure texts by dead writers.” The writers, including Friedrich Hayek and Frédéric Bastiat, are indeed dead, although it seems a little strange to call a work by the Nobel Prize–winning Hayek “obscure.” By bravely plunging into this kooky book-reading, the Times discovered such “out there” concepts as the “rule of law,” which it explains is “Hayek’s term for the unwritten code that prohibits the government from interfering with the pursuit of ‘personal ends and desires.’” We bet it would be news to Hayek that he had come up with an idea invoked by Aristotle and John Locke, or that he believed that the best way to ensure predictable and fair treatment of citizens by the law was to have an unwritten code. Will the next news-flash be that Keynesian Democrats too read books by the dead? (Or is literacy exclusive to the Tea Party?)

While the Tea Party has been reading Atlas Shrugged and The Road to Serfdom, Alaska’s Joe Miller and West Virginia’s John Raese, Senate candidates both, apparently have been
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boning up on their Milton Friedman: Each has had intelligent and sober things to say about the minimum wage, which decades of economic analysis has shown to increase unemployment among the poor and unskilled, and which Friedman called “the most anti-black law on the books,” noting its exacerbation of joblessness among African Americans. Their Democratic opponents are howling, of course, never having quite got their heads around the fact that in their elementary economics textbooks, demand curves slope downward: The higher the price of x, the less x is demanded. Mr. Miller, a Yale law graduate who takes a narrow view of federal power, believes that Washington lacks the legitimate authority to impose a minimum wage on the states, while Mr. Raese has made the economically obvious point that an artificial wage floor will foreclose job opportunities for certain workers. American public policy is currently in the grip of three lifelong politicians without a milligram of business experience or economic acumen between them—lawyer Barack Obama, lawyer Harry Reid, and congressional heiress Nancy Pelosi—and it shows. When it comes to economics, Democrats are as reliably anti-science as flat-earthers trying to explain away evolution, and their dinosaur policies are long overdue for extinction.

The Democrats probably would have attacked their Republican adversaries on Social Security even if they weren’t desperate, but the cornered-animal fear coursing through their veins is causing them to attack more fiercely than usual. In South Carolina, the Democrats are running an ad against GOP House candidate Mick Mulvaney that depicts a granny in a pink gingham dress posing for a mug shot, then sitting forlornly in a jail cell with a sign that says, “Help!” “If he could,” a narrator intones, Mulvaney would make Social Security “illegal.” Charlie Crist, the Republican-turned-independent running for Senate in Florida, recently accused his Republican opponent Marco Rubio of wanting to “balance the budget on the backs of seniors.” To the best of our knowledge, none of the Republicans running this year has advocated any proposal that alters arrangements for anyone above the age of 55. Some, such as Rubio, have spoken honestly about the bad and worse options facing younger contributors to the system. That is the mark of a serious candidate. The critics are compounding irresponsibility with dishonesty.

Suppose you threw a party and only 200,000 people showed up. That’s what happened to the organized Left at its “One Nation” rally on the Washington Mall early in October. The 200K figure was the upper end of the organizers’ own estimates; aerial photos showed that their crowd was a good deal smaller. The prospects of “One Nation” seem rather similar about now.

Liberal activist Gloria Allred recently put on display an illegal alien who had worked as a maid for California Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman. The obvious goal was to derail Whitman’s run against Jerry Brown, just as similar charges in the past have hurt Zoe Baird, Kimba Wood, and Linda Chavez. But this time no full-blown nannygate scandal developed, for the simple reason that Whitman appears to have acted lawfully. She filled out the required paperwork, using the authentic-looking documents presented by Nicky Diaz Santillan; when Santillan finally acknowledged that she was illegal, Whitman promptly let her go. Whitman had received a no-match letter from Social Security about Santillan, to which Allred pointed as evidence of the candidate’s perfidy. But that letter specifically forbade Whitman to fire Santillan, warning that doing so could “subject you to legal consequences.” An indicator of the attack’s failure came when Saturday Night Live mocked Allred rather than Whitman. Nonetheless, this was a lost opportunity. By leaving the revelation to her opponents, she permitted them to paint a story of the billionaire vs. the hapless little guy (or gal). Instead, Whitman should have used the example to show how honest employers are in a bind—employees lie to them, but they can be punished for trying too hard to learn the truth and act on it.

Ahmed Ghailani, who has admitted his crucial role in al-Qaeda’s 1998 American-embassy bombings, was cherry-picked by the Obama administration to prove that civilian trials are the best way to deal with terrorism—no need for such Bush-era overreactions as military commissions. To distance itself still further from Bush policies, the Justice Department forswore any reliance on Ghailani’s confession, even though he had later repeated his admissions during gentler FBI questioning. But now, with jury selection under way, a federal judge has excluded the government’s key witness, who sold Ghailani the explosives, because his identity was revealed during Ghailani’s interrogation. So civilian due-process rules have left the prosecution with no confession and no witness tying the bomber to the bomb. Under military-commission rules, the case against the murderer of 224 people might have remained intact. But DOJ has opted not to appeal the exclusion. Obama rolls the dice.

In the final presidential debate two years ago, Barack Obama said, “If I’m interested in figuring out my foreign policy, I associate myself with my running mate, Joe Biden, or with Dick Lugar, the Republican ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, or Gen. Jim Jones, the former supreme allied commander of NATO.” Jones has been national security adviser since Obama’s swearing-in; he is on his way out now, to be replaced by Tom Donilon. Donilon is a career-long Democratic political appointee: an aide to Carter, Mondale, Biden, Dukakis, Clinton, all of them. He was key behind the scenes in bringing Robert Bork down, when Bork was nominated to the Supreme Court. From 1999 to 2005, he was a top executive at Fannie Mae. In the Obama administration, he has been
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deputy national security adviser. And now he is to have the top job. In Bob Woodward’s new book, the defense secretary, Robert Gates, is quoted as saying that Donilon would be a “complete disaster” in that job. In any case, we remember where the buck stops. Foreign policy will be determined by Barack Obama, whether his national security adviser is Jones, Donilon, Smith, or Brown.

- Middle East studies is one of the most absurd and offensive academic fields in America, at a time when it is critically needed. The field is dominated by apologists for Middle Eastern extremism, primitivism, and irreconcilability. No institution exemplifies these tendencies more than Columbia University, home of the late Edward Said. And Columbia seems to have gotten worse: with the opening of the Center for Palestine Studies, dedicated to the legacy of Said. The center’s co-director is Rashid Khalidi, the PLO man who is President Obama’s old friend. What a pity Yasser Arafat wasn’t available.

- A new wave of financial uncertainty is washing over the already unsteady housing market as questions about faulty legal documentation bring foreclosures to a standstill. After August saw a record 95,364 of them, Bank of America announced a total foreclosure freeze, while J. P. Morgan and...
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GMAC froze foreclosures in dozens of states. At issue are thousands of legal documents that were signed and filed without being properly vetted for accuracy. But that’s only part of the mess: As foreclosure-defense attorneys across the country have discovered to their delight, the process of securitizing mortgages has made it difficult and time-consuming to establish exactly who owns a mortgage—and who therefore has the right to sue for foreclosure. The bulk of securitized mortgages are technically owned by Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems (MERS), the electronic exchange set up to allow investors to trade mortgages without having to trek down to the county courthouse and update the public records every time a loan changes hands. But courts have found that since MERS loans no money and accepts no payments from homeowners, it does not have standing to sue. The MERS system has created conflicts between public records and the ownership claims of the foreclosing parties—meaning that unwinding who owes what to whom is going to be a really nasty furball to pick apart. The bright side is that it will create a lot of jobs—for lawyers and auditors. But at this point the Obama administration will take what it can get.

The South Fulton, Tenn., fire department drew national attention when it let a man’s house burn down because he had not paid the fee it requires for services outside the city’s jurisdiction. (The department suggested that it would have acted if the blaze had threatened to spread or to take anyone’s life.) The burnt-out family said it had forgotten to pay the fee—just as it had forgotten to pay three years earlier, when the department put out a chimney fire—and would have paid after the fact, as it did on that occasion. Liberals seized on the story to criticize libertarianism, but the department is a government agency. Paul Krugman asked, “Do you want to live in the kind of society in which this happens?” Answer: It depends on the alternative. Should the city pay for services outside its jurisdiction, or take over its surroundings to levy the appropriate taxes, or send the bill to Krugman in Princeton, N.J.? The department erred, but not in noticing that all good things come at a cost.

Most members of Congress appear to know two things about China’s relationship with the United States: We buy a lot of their stuff, and they buy a lot of our debt. But most members of the House either don’t understand the connection or don’t care about its consequences, because they just passed a bill that would allow President Obama to slap tariffs on the products we buy from China. Their theory is that this would bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States. It wouldn’t. What we buy from China and what we sell to China are very different things. A crackdown on China would be a full-employment program for other developing countries where lower costs vis-à-vis U.S. manufacturers offer a comparative advantage: It would probably not create a single low-skill job here. This is to say nothing of what would happen to the U.S. government’s borrowing costs if China stopped lending us our own money back. Having discovered that America cannot borrow and spend its way out of its past mistakes, policy-makers are searching for another magic bullet. Now would be a good time to remind them that trade wars tend to backfire on their initiators.

When Chris Christie promised to bring his state back from the fiscal brink, he forthrightly warned that this would involve painful cuts to worthy programs. Christie’s recent decision to kill the over-budget ARC tunnel project—barring last-minute concessions from the federal government—is just such a case. The project, which would alleviate the Hudson River bottleneck and dramatically increase rail capacity into New York over the next ten years, has merit. But it also depends on the continued raiding of the state’s Transportation Trust Fund to meet an opened-ended obligation. Over the last ten years, the TTF has annually taken in $900 million in revenue from gas taxes and other sources, yet Trenton has spent $1.4 billion on infrastructure projects—filling the gap with debt that, combined beginning next year, will cost every single dollar of annual revenue to service. We applaud Christie’s wisdom in seeing that a quickie commute is of limited value to a state heading in the wrong direction.

Michael Kinsley famously defined a gaffe as when a politician tells the truth. What do we call an activist’s telling too much truth? Richard Curtis, Brit filmmaker (Four Weddings and a Funeral), was asked to write a short film to celebrate 10:10, a campaign to reduce the developed world’s carbon emissions by 10 percent in 2010. Curtis’s filmlet, “No Pressure,” involved no weddings, lots of funerals. Those deficient in carbon awareness—children, office workers—were summarily blown to bits by hectoring teachers and bosses; their red remains splashed over the survivors. 10:10 pulled the film, without repudiating it: “10:10 would like to apologize to everybody who was offended…” This is the mental world of Goebbels or Beria: We will destroy our enemies and laugh at their destruction. The eco-freak hates humanity: skeptics first of all; all of us, at the end of the day.

The American Postal Workers Union’s officer elections have been delayed because too many members’ ballots were lost in the mail, which we suppose is like the American Meteorological Society’s summer picnic getting rained out. This is the same APWU whose current contract requires the Postal Service to keep all existing retail offices open, even though four out of five locations lose money; the same APWU whose president, William Burrus, wants the next contract to “reflect the entitlement to more . . . more control over activities at work, more money, better benefits—we want more.” Negotiations with the APWU are under way now—send a letter to your congressman about it. On second thought, better make it an e-mail.

The proofreader’s life is a lonely one, with its greatest triumphs going unnoticed, while the smallest mistake sits on the page in unchanging black print, ineluctably drawing the reader’s eye for eternity. Yet every typo hound’s soul aches to mark up a bigger canvas, and while lying awake at night, or lunching with fellow proofreaders at the Caret Club, he must sometimes allow himself to muse: “What if I could write ‘WRONG FONT’ on the entire world?” As it happens, the Federal Highway Administration has done just that, directing that all street signs must be printed in a
typeface called Clearview, and in upper and lower case instead of all caps. This upper-case ukase does not apply just to new signs; all non-complying ones must be replaced by 2018, a rule that will cost New York City $27 million. Supposedly Clearview is the easiest font for drivers to read, but the gain in legibility is quite modest, and in any case, local authorities will know best how to decrease accidents with limited funds. Yet none of these considerations deters the power-mad proofreaders of the Potomac, and weary citizens can only console themselves by reflecting that things could be worse: It could have been Comic Sans.

- Geert Wilders has made his career in the Netherlands on a group of related propositions: There are more than enough Muslims in the country, their Koran is a fascist book like Hitler’s Mein Kampf, and the time has come to protect Dutch culture. A lot of Dutch people share these opinions. Five years ago Wilders founded the Freedom party, and in the recent general elections the party won 24 seats in a parliament of 150. Dutch politics are splintered. Two other conservative parties need the support of Wilders if they are to form a coalition government. Discussions are continuing while Wilders stands trial on the grounds that he has been “inciting hatred” against Muslims. He could be fined and sent to prison. Jan Moors, one of the judges in the case, has accused him of being “good at making statements, but then you avoid the discussion.” Critics, and Muslims among them, make out that Wilders is some sort of fascist, and he replies that he is an elected parliamentarian speaking for all his fellow citizens and exercising his right of free speech. What’s at issue is whether Muslims are to have special privileges enshrined in law, and it is no exaggeration to say that the future far beyond the Netherlands hangs on it.

- In the last many years, the Nobel committees for peace and literature have not exactly covered themselves in glory. The peace committee, in particular, has produced a rogues’ gallery. Kofi Annan. Jimmy Carter. Mohamed ElBaradei. Al Gore. Barack Obama. Some of us said, “Why not Michael Moore?” The literature committee has not done much better. A low point occurred in 2005, when they gave the prize to Harold Pinter, the British playwright, then at the height of his anti-Americanism. It said a lot that he devoted his Nobel lecture not to literature, but to a gross attack on America as a criminal nation. This year, the committees chose Mario Vargas Llosa, one of the best writers of our time—and, as a bonus, a liberal democrat. He has defended freedom, including economic freedom, and done so in Latin America: a region that has had too few friends of freedom. The peace laureate is Liu Xiaobo, a Chinese democrat and dissident who sits in prison. Liu is an incredibly brave man, an example to us all, as are his many brother dissidents. As Jay Nordlinger says in his article on the peace prize (see page 26), just when you’re ready to write that prize off, the committee goes and does something valuable. The same can be said of the literature committee.

- British biologist Robert Edwards, now 85, received a Nobel Prize for his work in human in vitro fertilization. The technical achievement deserves the recognition. Its social impact has been mixed. Many people owe their existence to IVF, and others much of their happiness. But IVF has also spawned an industry, especially in the U.S., that too often destroys human life. And social acceptance of IVF has made it easier to produce children outside of the context of marriage. Most disturbingly, it has abetted a eugenics mentality that is willing to treat children as products to which “quality controls” may be applied. We see this in the increasingly common IVF practice of “screening” newly conceived embryonic human beings and discarding those judged to be inferior. The advance of knowledge is wonderful, but wisdom rarely keeps pace.

- A Canadian couple pressured their surrogate into having an abortion when it was discovered that the child would probably be born with Down syndrome. The surrogate was reluctant at first; the couple told her that she could go through with the pregnancy if she wanted, but the adoption would be off and the child would be hers to raise. The surrogate, a mother of two, acquiesced and had the abortion. Sally Rhoads of Surrogacy in Canada Online is on the biological parents’ side: “The baby that’s being carried is their baby. . . . Why should the intended parents be forced to raise a child they didn’t want? It’s not fair.” It’s not fair to punish the innocent—yes, exactly.

- If President Obama is “out of Afghanistan psychologically,” as Bob Woodward reports in his new book, one can only imagine how detached he is from Iraq. He should pay some attention. Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, desperate to stay in power after a muddled election earlier this year, cut a deal with anti-American radical Moqtada al-Sadr that is a major step toward forming a governing coalition. If a Maliki-Sadr alliance excludes the Sunnis—who voted for the Iraqi party that won a bare plurality in the election—the resulting political discord will put the country’s fragile stability at risk. There are obviously limits to our influence over Iraqi politics, but our mad rush to draw down to 50,000 troops and our diplomatic passivity over the last year have decreased our leverage. The political situation in Iraq deserves the administration’s full engagement, lest we have to read in Woodward’s next book how it let the country slip away.

- History’s only Communist monarchy has a new dauphin. The son of Dear Leader Kim Jong Il was appointed to several key posts, including vice chairman of North Korea’s military commission with the rank of four-star general. Never mind that the twenty-something Kim Jong Un has never held any significant post of any kind: Regents are now in place to protect him until he can say “L’état c’est moi” on his own. In the meantime, North Korea is running out of benefactors (which is to say, countries to extort money from). It has alienated both Japan and South Korea; only China remains as a source of support for the decrepit relic of Stalinism. That spells bad news for Pyongyang. Globalization, which has become the organizing principle of China’s political economy, is pure poison to North Korea’s “fortress of socialism,” which seeks desperately to stifle contact with the outside world. Armed with nuclear weapons, the North will likely resort to another round
THE WEEK

of extortion. But now the dauphin will have to learn how to rattle a cage without overly annoying the great dragon that feeds him—and humility does not come easily to the Kim dynasty.

Do good neighbors make good fences? Depends on which end of Mexico you look at. On the north, Mexicans complain bitterly about the slowly lengthening fence meant to keep them from entering the U.S. illegally. But on the south, Mexico has started building a fence of its own, to keep illegal aliens from entering through Guatemala. After all, the Mexicans believe strongly in equal opportunity, human rights, the dignity of the individual, and the free movement of people, but let’s not get carried away here. And while the Obama administration is scathing in its condemnation of Arizona’s immigration law, it remains silent about Mexico’s fence, perhaps because the fence will also reduce the flow of those migrants into the U.S. (though Mexico could easily pick up the slack). This is the kind of infrastructure project conservatives can support.

The saga of the 33 men trapped in the San Jose mine in northern Chile had been an Edgar Allan Poe story—two months of live burial, 2,000 feet down. As we go to press, it is becoming a David McCullough saga, as the men are rescued by knowhow and valorous exertion. At dawn on October 13, the first miners took the 20-minute ride to the surface, one by one, in an escape chamber winched up through a specially dug tunnel. Now will begin their longest, and perhaps their roughest ordeal—trial by media, in the moral wilderness mapped by George Trow. They will be pried with money, exposure, and questions questions questions. The Chilean government, which has coordinated their physical rescue, has also given thought to their reentry. St. Barbara, the patron saint of miners, will have her work cut out for her.

We all know how much trouble a cartoonist can get into by drawing Mohammed. Now we have a case of a cartoonist’s getting into trouble for pointedly not drawing Mohammed. Wiley Miller is the creator of the widely syndicated “Non Sequitur” strip. His work falls in the clever-ironic category of cartoon, with light satire and some intellectual allusions to tickle the fancy of the educated urban reader. It doesn’t deal much with politics beyond a reflexive mild liberalism. For his October 3 syndication, though, Miller penned a one-frame cartoon titled “Where’s Mohammed?” In the style of the popular series of “Where’s Waldo?” children’s books, the frame showed a busy park scene, 30 or so adults, children, and animals doing various things. None bore the slightest resemblance to Mohammed. (Whatever he looked like, We don’t know!) The satire here was so gentle that even a CAIR spokesman could summon up no outrage for once. Several newspapers, including the Washington Post, pulled the cartoon anyway. The Post’s Style editor whimpered that “it seemed a mistake. Perhaps. Or how about adults?”

Remember Kids, the controversial 1995 movie showing adolescent New Yorkers wallowing in sex and drugs? Larry Clark, who directed that movie, went on to produce three more on closely related themes. Some of his scenes are unscripted, as when, to quote from a review of Wassup Rockers, two 15-year-olds “sit on a bed in their underwear and talk about themselves.” Well, Mr. Clark started out as a photographer, and Paris’s Museum of Modern Art is holding a retrospective exhibition covering his 40 years of work in that art, if art it can be called. Quelle surprise!—the photographs on display feature lots of young teenagers wearing little or nothing, and busy—often very explicitly so—in sex’n’drug-related activities. This was too much for the Paris city authorities, who have banned under-18s from attending the exhibition. That in turn was too much for the guardians of artistic freedom. “A staggering reversal of truth,” shrieked the leftist newspaper Libération, as if the mayor of Paris had declared the earth to be flat. Unstaggered, we support the authorities’ decision, and urge Mr. Clark to try his hand at some new subject matter—still lifes or landscapes, perhaps. Or how about adults?

POLITICS

Criminalizing Politics, Again

The Democrats, getting beaten badly in the midterm campaign, are turning their wrath on those who have had the temerity to organize against them.

Their latest target is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which President Obama recently accused of using foreign money to influence U.S. elections. The liberal advocacy group from which he borrowed the charge did not provide any evidence to back up its accusation—notice a theme here?—so the administration put the burden of proof on the Chamber. When Face the Nation host Bob Schieffer pressed the issue, Obama adviser David Axelrod could only muster, “Well, do you have any evidence that it’s not, Bob?”

This is also the method being deployed against a conservative group called Crossroads GPS, which Karl Rove advises. “Karl Rove is at it again,” House Judiciary Committee chairman John Conyers recently told a gathering of left-wing activists. Conyers continued: “While we were deciding what to do with him”—a reference to the fact that the Judiciary Committee under Conyers has hounded Rove for years, fruitlessly, over picayune matters—“he was out doing more mischief. And so I think that calls for a reinvestigation of him.”
During a recent stay in Tahiti, I watched veteran pearl divers at work. What I discovered was that growing perfectly-shaped, perfectly-smooth black pearls inside enormous Pinctada margaritifera oysters is still hit or miss. The complex process of culturing takes 2 to 3 years and all the expertise in the world doesn’t guarantee nature will deliver. Luckily, we found a way to turn an expensive gamble into a spectacular sure thing.

Our Tahiti Black Peacock Necklace gives you a better scientifically-created pearl using the same organic materials as Mother Nature herself. Brilliant bioscientists harvest the finest mother of pearl (or nacre) from some of the world’s most exceptional oysters. This costly material is then shaped, organically-coated and hand-polished into a spectacular sphere of iridescent color. The resulting black beauty is more round and radiant than the world’s most exclusive, luxury-priced cultured pearls. An equal-sized strand of genuine black Tahitians this size would be extremely rare and can cost over $10,000.

Capture the look of the South Pacific’s most elusive prize. Few natural gems are as sought after as the black beauties formed inside the massive black-lipped oyster. Cultivated only in the warm waters off Tahiti and surrounding French Polynesian lagoons, they glow with an incomparable luster that shows why fine Tahitians fetch some of the highest prices on record for cultured South Pacific pearls. But now you don’t have to break records (or the bank) to embrace the look of a legend.

By speeding up and taking control of the process, we created our Tahiti Black Peacock Necklace, a stunning strand of consistently round and luminous, iridescent black orbs. The 16” necklace plus 2” extender features exceptionally large 14mm spheres and is hand-strung, double-knotted and secured with an elegant, gold-fused toggle clasp. Each necklace captures the vivid luster and heavyweight feel without the exorbitant cost. Our Tahiti Black Peacocks are also more durable and less porous than natural pearls for better wear. They are the must-have accessory for those romantic nights that keep you out long after dark!

Your satisfaction is guaranteed. If you are not completely thrilled by the Tahiti Black Peacock Necklace, send it back within 30 days for a full refund of the purchase price.

Indulge your dark side with giant Tahiti Black Peacocks for under $80!

“I am definitely impressed…”
— TG, from San Francisco, CA

“Bravo, Stauer! One more satisfied customer.”
— ARL, from Western, MA

“We Finally Mastered the Art of “Black Magic”

“I can’t believe the quality... even more beautiful than the picture.”
— H, from Rainier, WA
THE WEEK

Democratic officials, liberal “good government” groups, and the Obama White House have accused Crossroads GPS of abusing its tax-exempt status to protect the identities of donors while engaging in prohibited campaign-finance activities. The group’s accusers have not presented any credible evidence that it failed to follow the rules governing organizations of its type. What they have are mere insinuations—and that is why some, such as Senate Finance Committee chairman Max Baucus, are asking the IRS to deploy the vast investigatory resources of the federal government to substantiate them.

Baucus’s request that the IRS get involved comes on the heels of a similar one from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which last August tried to set the IRS against the libertarian-leaning Americans for Prosperity. AFP was founded and nurtured by the Koch brothers, Charles and David, who play the role of evil conservative overlords in the Left’s imagination when Karl Rove is not available. The application of this kind of political pressure to the IRS would have Democrats howling if the investigatory targets were liberal and the pressure came from Republicans.

While we’re on the subject of the Kochs and the IRS: The White House has never sufficiently explained how its political operatives came to possess such a suspiciously high degree of knowledge about the Kochs’ tax returns—a knowledge they revealed in repeated attacks on Koch Industries. The Treasury Department’s inspector general for tax matters is now looking into whether Obama’s political appointees improperly divulged private taxpayer information.

The administration and its allies are trying to mobilize liberal voters and intimidate conservative donors by making accusations they must know are false. If Mr. Axelrod has any evidence to the contrary, we would love to hear it.

OBITUARY

Joseph Sobran, R.I.P.

He came to us when he was still a graduate student. Professors at his school, Eastern Michigan University, had protested a campus visit by Bill Buckley. Joe had taken them on, demolishing their arguments with what we would learn was his customary panache. A conservative professor sent the ripostes to WFB, who brought the young author to New York and to NR.

Have these pages ever been graced by a smoother stylist? Light but forceful, sweet but strong, funny without descending to bitchery on one hand or cuteness on the other: Joe’s voice was unmistakable and inimitable. Matt Scully’s tribute (page 35) quotes many examples. There could be hundreds more. When Joe had written a particularly good line, he would take his copy from office to office, grinning, to share it and show off. Well he might.

He was a typical NR conservative of the Seventies and early Eighties—for small government and traditional values, against Communism—but he showed the life in these sometimes rote categories. He had a dog’s sharp ear for liberal pretension, and mocked it suavely. He was a doughty defender of the right to life, and a critic of the culture of stimulation (the Human Life Review anthologized his contributions). He was a peerless book reviewer, who could find something important in a witless celebrity memoir, or timely in a philosopher’s argument.

Seemingly his only lack was an inability to put it all together for the long haul. What he did without effort, he did surpassingly well. But the important book eluded him; his time at NR was littered with false starts.

The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union made a profound impression on him. The United States had created a military-industrial complex to fight the menace; now that it was gone, maybe the state could follow. Who could resist such a vision? Unfortunately, Joe had an answer: Jews would drag us into new wars, to serve their particularist ends. His parting with us followed the first Gulf War, and it was bitter. Even WFB, patience himself, did not have entirely clean hands: He dismissed one Parthian shot of Joe’s as “perhaps medical” in origin. A low blow, and untrue. Joe chose his anti-Semitic poison wittingly.

In Milton’s sonnet “On His Blindness,” the poet agonizes about “That one talent which is death to hide / Lodged with me useless.” Milton feared that his loss of sight would prevent him from writing the great works he had planned. In fact, he learned to write with his affliction, composing in his head and dictating. Joe’s talent was much like Milton’s (Milton was greater, though Joe was funnier). Joe’s blindness was moral, and he could not continue to write under its spell. His new preoccupations shrunk first his audience, then his abilities. He ended up preaching to Holocaust deniers, “soft” truthers (we had it coming), and Shakespeare-was-Oxford cranks.

Milton’s sonnet ends in an astonishing reversal: God does not need writers. “Who best / Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.” There was nothing mild about the yoke of Joe’s last years; diabetes took a fearful toll on him, before taking his life. But at the end he bore that, and poverty, with the great virtue of patience. We hope he is now with WFB and all the other writers he so admired (not the 17th Earl of Oxford, the real one). R.I.P.
How it works:

where, the EdenPURE produces humidity or oxygen in the room. These imitators use ceramic heating elements that have a four-hour life expectancy to remain at record levels. The cost of heating our homes will continue to be a significant burden on the family budget. The EdenPURE is the only portable heater with a National Safety Council label. The EdenPURE GEN4 uses new SYLVANIA infrared lamps.

The EdenPURE GEN4 Portable easily rolls from room to room. Using zone heating keeps you comfortable and reduces your heating bills. This can drastically cut heating bills; in some instances, the savings may be substantial.

The EdenPURE will pay for itself in weeks. It will keep a great deal of extra money in a user’s pocket. Because of today’s spiraling gas, oil, propane, and other energy costs, the EdenPURE can provide even greater savings as time goes by.

With no increase in price, the EdenPURE GEN4 has been updated with the latest technological safety, and comfort features to provide you with even greater comfort, more savings, and years of reliability. The EdenPURE GEN4 Portable Heater comes with a comprehensive five year warranty and a 60-day, no questions asked, satisfaction guarantee—EdenPURE® will even pay for the return shipping. There is absolutely no risk. And EdenPURE® is the only portable heater with a National Service Network.

How to order:

There are two models to choose from: the new U.S. engineered GEN4 or our Personal Heater. The GEN4 comfortably heats an area up to 1,000 square feet while the Personal Heater covers up to 300 square feet. During our special, you are eligible for a STS DISCOUNT PLUS FREE SHIPPING AND HANDLING FOR A TOTAL SAVING OF UP TO $102 on the EdenPURE® GEN4. And now you can save an additional $100 on new Personal Heaters for a total savings of $192. This special offer expires in 10 days. If you order after that, we reserve the right to either accept or reject order requests at the discounted price. See our attached Authorized Discount Coupon to take advantage of this savings opportunity.

The EdenPURE carries a 60-day unconditional, no-risk guarantee. If you are not totally satisfied, return it at our expense and your purchase price will be refunded. No questions asked. There is also a 5-year warranty on all parts and labor for the GEN4 and a 3-year warranty for the Personal Heater.

Never be cold again

Firemen and safety professionals choose EdenPURE®. We all read about space heaters and the danger of fire. The EdenPURE® has no exposed heating elements that can cause a fire. And your pet may be just like my dog that has reserved a favorite spot near the EdenPURE®.

The EdenPURE® GEN4 heats better, faster, saves more on heating bills, and is almost maintenance free. A major cause of residential fires in the United States is portable heaters. The choice of fire and safety professionals every where, the EdenPURE® has no exposed heating elements that can cause a fire.

The EdenPURE® only gets warm to the touch so that it will not burn children or pets. Your pet may be just like my dog who has reserved a favorite spot near the EdenPURE®.

The EdenPURE® can also help you feel better. Unlike EdenPURE® imitators, it will not reduce humidity or oxygen in the room. These imitators use ceramic plates instead of our patented copper. The EdenPURE® GEN4 has over 1 pound of copper! Cheap ceramic plates reduce humidity, dry out your sinuses and make your skin dry. With other heating sources, you’ll notice that you get sleepy when the heat comes on because they are burning up oxygen.

The advanced space-age EdenPURE® GEN4 also heats the room evenly, wall to wall and floor to ceiling. Other heating sources heat rooms unevenly with some parts of the room heating fast, while other sources heat rooms unevenly with other parts of the room.

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The price of the EdenPURE® GEN4 is $472 plus $27 shipping and handling and $372 plus $17 shipping and handling for the Personal Heater, but, with this Authorized Discount Coupon, you will receive a $75 discount, free shipping and handling and be able to get the EdenPURE® GEN4 for only $397 delivered and the Personal Heater for only $197 delivered. After 10 days we reserve the right to either accept or reject order requests at the discounted price.

Check below which model and number you want:

□ GEN4 Heater, number _____
□ Personal Heater, number _____

☐ I am ordering within 10 days, therefore I get a $75 discount, free shipping and handling and my price is only $397 for GEN4 Heater delivered.

☐ I am ordering within 10 days, therefore I get a $175 discount, free shipping and handling and my price is only $197 for the Personal Heater delivered.

☐ I am ordering past 10 days, therefore I pay full price of $472 plus $27 shipping & handling for GEN4 Heater and $372 plus $17 shipping & handling for the Personal Heater.

To claim your discount or by phone: call toll-free 1-800-636-8983.

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Rahm Emanuel has juked me again. I let him out of earshot for the first time all day—to debrief a young couple who’d just finished chatting with him between bites of scrambled egg at the Lincoln Restaurant, a greasy spoon with purple vinyl booths and an Honest Abe theme in Chicago’s North Central neighborhood—and, just like that, he was gone.

I have spent much of the last week trying to massage his press flacks, to accclimate them to the idea of a NATIONAL REVIEW reporter trailing their candidate and assure them that this isn’t to be a policy piece so much as a look at the circus surrounding his homecoming after two years in the White House. They are polite enough, but aloof, and seem to be perpetually trying to shake me.

So I bid goodbye to the couple, quickly track north in the direction I think I saw Team Rahm driving, and after a few minutes spot him greeting shoppers outside a supermarket. There is something ridiculous, if not a little endearing, about Mr. Dead Fish, the most fearsome man in the Obama White House, glad-handing old ladies with their bags full of high-fiber cereal and cantaloupe.

Of all those angling for the mayoralty in the city that’s pulled the lever for Daley for the better part of a half century, Emanuel is the most formidable operator and the best fundraiser by far, and yet in the nebulous but already crowded field, it’s not clear that he’s the favorite. Immigration activists are gifting him with protest signs. Aldermen are skeptical. Labor hasn’t forgotten his perceived betrayal on the public option or his “F—the UAW.” And the simple fact is that Rahm was out of town during the worst of the recession as Chicago’s budget shortfall widened and violent crime went up. So these supermarket flesh-pressers, these diner stop-and-chats that compose his “Tell It Like It Is” listening tour, are about grabbing front pages and getting his name back out in the wards, about reconfiguring himself as both a native son and a reformer—as both the logical successor of, and the antidote to, the Daley dynasty.

All politics is local, but that doesn’t make local politics any less tedious, a fact that doesn’t seem lost on Emanuel when he gets bumped by a derelict shopping cart, turns, and shoves it off just a little harder than necessary toward the collection area.

Rahm has hitherto avoided any acknowledgment of my existence, as if there were an NR-reporter-shaped hole in his space–time continuum. But when his eyes shift from the offending cart and he sees I’ve caught up with him again, he looks amused. As he walks past me, he gives me a punch on the shoulder—playful, begrudging.

“You can’t be having that much fun,” he says. I don’t say, Neither can you.

The flacks told me that once I was in Chicago I’d get evening alerts about where Emanuel would be campaigning the following day. Mysteriously, the e-mails never come. I nag early and often—I’m on the clock here. They say something about them “bouncing back” from my address. It must be a peculiarly selective glitch, since I’ve been having no problem getting the perfectly useless recaps they send out after each day’s events.

So on the Friday morning of Week One of Rahm’s homecoming, I find myself at a downtown coffee shop, trying to get some research done and waiting for a response to my umpteenth request for information. When I finally get word, I’m already too late for one appearance and have less than an hour to get to the next one, clear across town in Chicago’s western hinterlands. If I were any farther away, I’d be in Lake Michigan. Still, after a lengthy, expensive, and highly improvisational cab ride, I manage to beat him to the spot, pen and pad in hand, by a good five minutes.

The Home Run Inn, a pizza shop in North Lawndale—on the edge of the city near the border with Cicero, where Al Capone set up shop when Chicago got too hot—is a family joint. Dark brick walls, wood panealing, the homey smell of pepperoni grease, wall mirrors etched with Budweiser emblems, cola sloshing in big frosted plastic glasses.

The workday lunch crowd at the inn is mixed: majority working class, plurality black; oxford shirts, retail uniforms, jerseys, and stenciled T-shirts all well represented.

Emanuel pulls up a little after noon, riding shotgun in a black minivan, eyes hidden behind a pair of dark wayfarers.

He’s dressed politician-casual—smart dark suit, no tie, shirt open at the collar—his space–time continuum. But when his eyes shift from the offending cart and he sees I’ve caught up with him again, he looks surprised. As he walks past me, he gives me a punch on the shoulder—playful, begrudging.

“You can’t be having that much fun,” he says. I don’t say, Neither can you.

The flacks told me that once I was in Chicago I’d get evening alerts about where Emanuel would be campaigning the following day. Mysteriously, the e-mails never come. I nag early and often—I’m on the clock here. They say something about them “bouncing back” from my address. It must be a peculiarly selective glitch, since I’ve been having no problem getting the perfectly useless recaps they send out after each day’s events.

So on the Friday morning of Week One of Rahm’s homecoming, I find myself at a downtown coffee shop, trying to get some research done and waiting for a response to my umpteenth request for information. When I finally get word, I’m already too late for one appearance and have less than an hour to get to the next one, clear across town in Chicago’s western hinterlands. If I were any farther away, I’d be in Lake Michigan. Still, after a lengthy, expensive, and highly improvisational cab ride, I manage to beat him to the spot, pen and pad in hand, by a good five minutes.

The Home Run Inn, a pizza shop in North Lawndale—on the edge of the city near the border with Cicero, where Al Capone set up shop when Chicago got too hot—is a family joint. Dark brick walls, wood panealing, the homey smell of pepperoni grease, wall mirrors etched with Budweiser emblems, cola sloshing in big frosted plastic glasses.

The workday lunch crowd at the inn is mixed: majority working class, plurality black; oxford shirts, retail uniforms, jerseys, and stenciled T-shirts all well represented.

Emanuel pulls up a little after noon, riding shotgun in a black minivan, eyes hidden behind a pair of dark Wayfarers. He’s dressed politician-casual—smart dark suit, no tie, shirt open at the collar—and has a small contingent of staffers in tow.

He’s done a number of these already: north to his old 5th congressional district strongholds in Lakeview and Edgewater, west to Austin, south to Bronzeville and Hyde Park—Obama country. A staffer calls them “retail stops,” a phrase that could with equal accuracy apply to the locations or the politics.

The first thing you realize watching him work the room is that he’s good at this. As good as Obama, and maybe bet-
Finally, a cell phone that’s... a phone!

“Well, I finally did it. I finally decided to enter the digital age and get a cell phone. My kids have been bugging me, my book group made fun of me, and the last straw was when my car broke down, and I was stuck by the highway for an hour before someone stopped to help. But when I went to the cell phone store, I almost changed my mind. The phones are so small I can’t see the numbers, much less push the right one. They all have cameras, computers and a “global-positioning” something or other that’s supposed to spot me from space. Goodness, all I want to do is to be able to talk to my grandkids! The people at the store weren’t much help. They couldn’t understand why someone wouldn’t want a phone the size of a postage stamp. And the rate plans! They were complicated, confusing, and expensive… and the contract lasted for two years! I’d almost given up when a friend told me about her new Jitterbug phone. Now, I have the convenience and safety of being able to stay in touch… with a phone I can actually use.”

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Employees International Union’s top man in Illinois, was signaling that he’d just as soon take his labor votes elsewhere. Emanuel, Morrison told the Chicago News Cooperative, was a NAFTA-supporting former investment banker who would be the Chamber of Commerce’s pet candidate, ensuring that the government spigot continued to flow for Chicago’s big businesses at the expense of the little guy.

Which raises the question: If not Rahm, then who?

The name most frequently mentioned is Cook County sheriff Tom Dart—a former prosecutor and state legislator who earned a heap of little-guy cred when in 2008 he unilaterally suspended foreclosure evictions in the wake of the subprime crisis. Though Dart has yet to declare (he’s running for reelection as sheriff in November), the conventional wisdom is that he’ll enter the field. His base in the working-class neighborhoods in the south and southeast is distinct and autonomous from Rahm’s north-side constituency, and he can compete for the support of the disgruntled unions.

The other big South Side name is James Meeks, a state senator and the pastor of the Salem Baptist megachurch’s 20,000-plus flock. If the black community were to rally to his cause, he could prove every bit as formidable as Emanuel and Dart. That’s a big “if.” The black vote in Chicago is wont to fragment. U.S. Reps. Danny Davis and Jesse Jackson Jr., and former U.S. senator Carol Moseley Braun, are also popping up on straw polls throughout the South Side ministries.

Then there is the West Side’s Rickey “Hollywood” Hendon, a member of the state-legislature leadership team perhaps most famous for a near fistfight in a senate cloakroom—with then-colleague Barack Obama. Though Hendon backed Obama’s presidential run in 2008, he’s never quite sheathed his dagger. On a recent radio-show appearance promoting his own mayoral candidacy, Hendon “guaranteed” that if Obama “endorses Rahm or [Tom] Dart, he’ll never be president again.”

The city’s Hispanic vote is just as fragmented. There’s far-left Rep. Luis Gutierrez, whose ardently liberal positions on immigration will surely prove popular with many Latinos. But he’ll compete for votes with Chicago City Colleges board president Gery Chico, a former aide and key ally of Daley, and current city clerk Miguel del Valle, a Puerto Rican from the northwest side who, as a state senator was a member of both the Latino and black caucuses.

Mayor Daley was a master of neutralizing identity-politics-driven opposition with strategic appointments and appropriations. But now every constituency is up for grabs—a balkanized political landscape in which Rahm finds himself ping-ponging from one side of the city to another, searching for votes.

It’s Saturday morning, and Emanuel is back on the pavement. This time it’s a farmers’ market in North Center, an old German neighborhood of detached houses and store-top apartments between Wrigleyville and the Chicago River. This is his backyard, near his house in Roscoe Village, and its growing population of young-professional gentrifiers is a juicy political target.

Rahm’s gone even more casual today. He’s lost the jacket and rolled up his sleeves, and the dress shoes have been replaced by a pair of off-white Chucks peeking out from under the frayed cuffs of his khakis. He makes a little circuit of the market stands—apple cider and honey and goat cheese, marmalade and fresh-baked focaccia and, yes, organic arugula.

It’s here that I see my only fleeting flash of “Rahmbo.” He’s leaving the Lincoln Restaurant—that greasy spoon with the Honest Abe theme—and a reporter from Time and I are flanking him. So far he hasn’t taken a single question from the press, but now he’s giving the Time girl the world’s safest answer on an education question: blab blab parental involvement and blab blab too much TV.

As soon as he finishes, I want to ask him where he stands on immigration, and about how he’ll mend the rift with Big Labor. I want to ask him what he thinks of Tom Dart, or his old colleague Gutierrez, or of Rickey Hendon’s prediction that an Obama endorsement would doom his old boss’s reelection bid. I want to ask him if his homecoming has been everything he expected it to be.

All I get out is “Rahm, real quick”—and then Emanuel grabs my writing wrist with his right hand—which is short half a middle finger from a teenage meat-slicer accident—and tells me, “We’re not doing a press conference right now, so be good.”

And with that, Rahm the former ballet dancer pirouettes around me and into his black minivan, off to the next stop.

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A Senate race in West Virginia illustrates the danger of being associated with Barack Obama

BY KATRINA TRINKO


As the Forest Festival parade, thousands of folding and lawn chairs are lined up on the sidewalks of the main thoroughfare, a street with a courthouse and fast-food chains, a Baptist church and a liquor store, all nestled beneath rolling hills cluttered with trees that are ripening into yellow and orange. The parade features high-school marching bands, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and local girls crowned Forest Festival royalty, who wear velvet dresses and wave to the crowd. When folks see someone they know in the parade, they holler at him.

Election Day being only about a month away, the parade also includes a stream of West Virginia politicians, smiling and glad-handing prospective voters. One of the politicians is Democratic governor Joe Manchin, who’s running to complete the late senator Robert Byrd’s term. Manchin is tall and broad-shouldered, genial and bluff-mannered, and clad in an orange campaign polo and khakis, works the crowd. He darts from side to side, taking pictures, waving, doing a little back step and turning around when he senses that he passed someone by. There are plenty who want a photo, and Manchin stops and poses with all of them.

“Business better?” he calls to a man sitting on the porch of a local business. “Yes, sir, senator,” the man shouts back.

Some time ago, the man’s comment wouldn’t have sounded hopeful, just realistic. When Manchin announced his candidacy in July, it seemed a foregone conclusion that he would win. Democrats outnumber Republicans nearly two to one in West Virginia, and the last time the state elected a Republican senator was in 1956. Manchin is personally popular, too, with two-thirds of West Virginians approving of the job he’s done as governor.

But recent polls show Manchin roughly even with Republican John Raese. How did Raese, a businessman who’s lost three statewide races, catch up?

Chalk it up to President Obama. Obama has an approval rating of 29 percent in the state, according to a Fox News poll—and a disapproval rating of 65 percent. “You can’t overemphasize how much this is about the blowback to the Obama administration,” says Hoppy Kercheval, a West Virginia talk-radio host who is employed by and a supporter of Raese. “People call my show, e-mail me, ‘Gosh, he’s been a pretty good governor, but I don’t like the Democrat majority, I don’t like the direction of the country.’”

Obama has never been much liked in the state: He was soundly defeated by Hillary Clinton in the primary and by John McCain in the general election. Nearly two-thirds of West Virginians favor repealing Obamacare, and over half support the Tea Party movement. Randy, a middle-aged, bearded man wearing a baseball cap, tells me that people are “getting fired up and fed up.”

“I have a garage,” he adds. “Customers come in, and they just voice their opinions about everything. So you hear from a lawyer, you hear from a doctor, you hear from a coal miner.” What are they saying these days? “In general, ‘I’m really ticked off with Democrats’… because of the government spending.”

Robert Rupp, a political-science professor at West Virginia Wesleyan College, puts it tersely: “It’s the Obama factor. If Raese can link Obama to Manchin, then he wins.”

Indeed, Raese’s campaign argues that Manchin would be “a rubber stamp for Obama.” At a “Reagan dinner” in Hurricane, W. Va., the night before the parade in Elkins, Raese points to the voting record of Sen. Carte Goodwin, whom Manchin appointed to replace Byrd until the election, as evidence. “Goodwin has voted 100 percent of the time in the favor and in the allegiance of President Obama. That’s hard to do if you’re not a rubber stamp.”

Arms folded across his chest, dressed in a dark striped suit and turtleneck, Raese has a commanding presence even when sitting on a bench, a leg casually stretched out. “I look at Obamacare, which Joe has come out and totally, publicly supported,” he continues. “Now he’s doing sort of a big 180 because he found that, politically, it isn’t a good thing to be around.” Raese adds that, unlike some governors, Manchin “accepted all kinds of stimulus money” for the state.

Raese says that a 2009 bill signed by Manchin is West Virginia’s version of cap-and-trade, a serious charge in a state that heavily depends on the coal industry. “Just 15 years from now, it limits the use of coal in all of our power stations by 25 percent,” Raese notes. “And then we have a little cap-and-trade that goes with it, where the public-service commission grants a credit for each megawatt that
is produced by alternative, renewable energy.”

Manchin, who has been endorsed by the NRA and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and is one of four governors to get an “A” from the Cato Institute for cutting both taxes and spending, believes Raese’s charge that he would be a rubber stamp for Obama isn’t fair. “It’s just so inaccurate it’s basically a downright untruth and lie,” he says angrily, talking to me at the Randolph County Democratic-party headquarters in Elkins shortly before the parade begins. He says he would not vote for a national cap-and-trade policy: “It would be devastating to our economic future.” And the Manchin campaign argues that, since cleanly produced coal qualifies as an alternative energy source, the 2009 bill’s requirements could be fulfilled without unduly harming the state’s coal industry.

In March, Manchin said he’d vote for Obamacare. Now he says he supports changing some parts of the bill, such as the mandates and the requirement that small businesses file “1099” tax forms every time they purchase more than $600 in goods or services. “There are so many parts that need to be fixed,” he says—but then he starts speaking more optimistically. “I’m understanding that there are Democrats and Republicans who agree on quite a few things they think are good in the bill. Well, that’s a pretty good start. Repeal the things you don’t [like], keep the things you got, and move on.”

But it’s not just Raese who thinks “Washington Joe” would act differently than “West Virginia Joe.” At the parade, a state-government employee named Jim, wearing a yellow T-shirt and sunglasses, tells me he plans to vote for Manchin. “I’ve gotten raises from working for the state,” he says. “And I think he’s created a lot of jobs. . . . I don’t think we’re near as bad off as . . . a lot of other states are.”

But Jim also mentions he’s not thrilled about either of the candidates. When I ask him what gives him pause about Manchin, he answers that he’s afraid the governor will vote for many of Obama’s policies.

About an hour after Manchin’s parade appearance, Raese comes bounding down the street. He’s energetically half-running and waving. Dressed in a baseball cap, plaid shirt, and blue jeans, he looks even more casual than did Manchin. He, too, works the crowd, talking to voters.

Raese has a different sort of appeal from Manchin’s. When I talk to him, he winks several times, peppering the conversation with little jokes and dry asides. But there’s a sharpness to his humor that may prove a double-edged sword with voters. During his speech at the Reagan dinner, Raese launches into an imitation of Obama. Holding up his hands, palms facing the audience, he announces that they represent Obama’s two teleprompters. Then he delivers a couple of lines, his chin yanked up high in an exaggeration of Obama’s presidential pose and his spine bent backward so he can see the raised “teleprompters” as his eyes dart from one imaginary screen to the other. It’s an antic sure to delight some Republicans—and to irritate anyone who expects senatorial seriousness or considers mocking a president inappropriate.

But as Manchin’s inability to translate high approval ratings into strong voter support demonstrates, this isn’t a race about likeability. It’s a race about which candidate will most vigorously fight the liberal policies, such as Obamacare and cap-and-trade, that are loathed by West Virginians.

True, West Virginia is the kind of place that the Obama administration’s policies seem intended, however naively, to help. In 2008, about 17 percent of the population was below the poverty level, compared with about 13 percent nationwide. The median household earned about $37,500, which is around $14,500 less than the national average.

But West Virginians are not seeing the change. “For years, people have been seeing jobs and tax revenue leave the state, and I think they’re starting to wake up that government policies have something to do with that,” says John Yoder, a Republican candidate for the state supreme court. “They’ve seen 70 years of Democratic rule in this state, and are we? We’re never 50 in virtually every category. . . . As time has gone on, there’s a pattern that people are saying this isn’t working.”

Raese is optimistic about November 2. “As we say here in West Virginia, I think some people in Washington are going to be eating some smartening pills,” he says. “A lot of people are going to wake up, because it’s a changed electorate out here.”

**Rust Belt Revival**

**A GOP tide is surging through the Great Lakes region**

**BY DUNCAN CURRIE**

**ALL THEM REAGAN-Hillary Democrats. That label may sound awkward, but it provides a useful description of the working-class whites who helped the Gipper secure a pair of landslides in the 1980s and then propelled Clinton to a series of primary victories in 2008. While these voters represent a declining share of the national electorate, they are heavily concentrated in the Rust Belt—the blue-collar manufacturing region centered around the Great Lakes. It’s a region where Republicans got absolutely clobbered in the last two election cycles. This year, however, the GOP has experienced something of a Rust Belt revival, which may yield big gains on November 2.**

Indeed, barring an eleventh-hour collapse, Republicans will capture the governor’s mansions in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin, while also picking up Senate seats in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Indiana (where they already hold the governorship). The polls are extremely tight in Illinois, but there is a decent chance that the GOP will win the governorship and/or Barack Obama’s old Senate perch. Across these six states, no fewer than 21 Democratic House districts (and perhaps several more) are either in play or likely to flip Republican. In some states—including Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana—Republicans seem poised to acquire full control of the legislature.

What explains the GOP comeback? Working-class whites obviously aren’t the whole story, but they’re a significant part of it. A recent AP-GfK survey found that whites who do not have a four-year college degree favor Republican congressional candidates by a margin of 22 percentage points (58 percent to 36 percent). Two years ago, according to exit-poll data, the corresponding margin was only eleven points. In 2006, it was just nine points.

Less educated whites account for a
shrinkng portion of the overall U.S. voter pool—the minority population is growing faster than the white one, and more whites are getting college degrees—but they still wield major influence in the Rust Belt. Shortly before the 2008 election, Brookings Institution demographers William Frey and Ruy Teixeira noted that Ohio and Michigan “feature eligible voter populations dominated by white working class voters.” Such voters also “play a central role” in Pennsylvania politics, said Frey and Teixeira, especially around Harrisburg (central Pennsylvania) and Allentown (northeast Pennsylvania), “where their absolute numbers are actually increasing.”

Those are the areas of the Keystone State—along with western Pennsylvania, another white-working-class (WWC) stronghold—where Hillary Clinton crushed Obama in the 2008 Democratic primary contest. Next door in Ohio, Clinton carried 83 out of 88 counties, losing the big cities but garnering huge support from WWC communities in the state’s myriad small towns. In the Indiana primary, she got drubbed in Marion County (Indianapolis) but more than made up for that by wallowing Obama in the southern and eastern-central parts of the state, which are loaded with WWC voters. As for Michigan—whose 2008 Democratic primary was rendered meaningless by the state’s loss of convention delegates (punishment for moving up its primary date) and by Obama’s non-participation—it is home to a large collection of traditional Reagan Democrats. Indeed, that term first became famous when pollster Stan Greenberg applied it to the socially conservative WWC voters in suburban Macomb County, outside Detroit.

The four states listed above—Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—constitute the vast majority of Rust Belt territory, with chunks of Wisconsin and Illinois forming its western outskirts. (The industrial swaths of other states, including New York and West Virginia, are also considered part of the region.) All four gave their electoral votes to Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, to George H. W. Bush in 1988, and to Barack Obama in 2008.

Obama’s Rust Belt success was driven by the same factors that boosted Democratic candidates throughout the country: the Great Recession, and the massive unpopularity of Republicans in general and George W. Bush in particular. Between November 2004 and November 2006, Bush’s approval rating among voters (as measured in the exit polls) plunged from 61 percent to 38 percent in Indiana, from 53 percent to 41 percent in Ohio, from 50 percent to 38 percent in Pennsylvania, and from 50 percent to 36 percent in Michigan. By November 2008, he had become even less popular in these four states, and Pennsylvania was the only one with a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate below the national average. In the 2006 and 2008 elections, GOP losses in the Rust Belt quartet amounted to 14 House seats, two Senate seats (in Pennsylvania and Ohio), one governorship (in Ohio), and four legislative chambers (one in each state). Republicans also lost a House seat and a legislative chamber in Wisconsin, plus a House seat in Illinois.

Today, of course, unemployment levels are much higher than they were two years ago, and Democrats are suffering the political fallout. Michigan’s jobless rate was the highest in America for a mind-boggling 49 consecutive months, from April 2006 to May 2010. As of August, it stood at 13.1 percent, compared with a U.S. average of 9.6 percent. The rates in Indiana and Ohio were both north of 10 percent, and Pennsylvania’s was 9.2 percent.

While economic issues are consuming most of the oxygen in Campaign 2010, many Rust Belt Democrats have found themselves on the defensive over abortion. In 2006 and 2008, the region elected to Congress a sizable number of self-identified pro-life Democrats, nearly all of whom subsequently voted for Obamacare (the lone exception was Rep. Jason Altmire of Pennsylvania), which was ardently opposed by the National Right to Life Committee and other anti-abortion groups. These Democrats hail from districts with lots of WWC social conservatives. So does 26-year incumbent Paul Kanjorski (D., Pa.), another nominal pro-lifer who backed Obamacare and has caught hell for it. (His district has been ravaged by the economic downturn, and Kanjorski is now trailing his Republican challenger, Hazleton mayor Lou Barletta, a prominent scourge of illegal immigration.)

Health care isn’t the only vote causing trouble for Rust Belt Democrats. Just ask Rep. Baron Hill, a member of the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, whose district (Indiana’s 9th) stretches into coal country. In June 2009, Hill voted to pass cap-and-trade; ever since, Republicans have been pounding him for it. The former hoops star is now highly vulnerable, as are Ohio Democrats John Boccieri and Zack Space, two of Hill’s fellow cap-and-trade supporters. Indiana derives well over 90 percent of its electricity from coal, and the equivalent figure in Ohio is not much lower.

Four years ago, when Hill and Space won their seats, Indiana and Ohio Repub-
launched ambitious health savings accounts to broaden insurance cover-
age among low-income Indians.

In Ohio, meanwhile, Tuit is gone, and Republicans are on the verge of retaking both the governorship and the state house of representatives. Yet this does not mean that Ohioans have suddenly rediscovered an affection for the GOP. “I think it would be a gross mistake for the Republican party to think that its brand has improved,” says Matt Mayer, president of the free-market Buckley Institute. “The Republicans are simply benefiting from the fact that they are not the incumbent party right now.” The party exercised complete control over state government during the 1990s and early 2000s, and its economic stewardship was hardly impressive. In that sense, Ohio Republicans bear at least partial responsibility for many of the problems they now want the opportunity to solve.

The same could be said of the Michigan GOP, observes Joe Lehman, head of the conservative Mackinac Center. Looking back on the past decade, “the Republicans share blame with the Democrats for not making the tough fiscal choices necessary to turn Michigan’s economy around.” The Wolverine State has been pulverized by job flight and out-migration, much of it fueled by union excesses. Its next governor will almost certainly be wealthy Republican venture capitalist Rick Snyder, a novice candidate who, in Lehman’s words, “has surprised just about everyone in the Michigan political establishment.” Snyder “has strong credentials as a businessman,” Lehman adds, and he “should know how to read a financial statement.”

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Gerald Seib reminds us that Rust Belt GOP governors were once at the forefront of conservative policy innovation. During the 1990s, Michigan’s John Engler and Wisconsin’s Tommy Thompson introduced bold school-choice and welfare-reform initiatives that earned nationwide attention and inspired Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Today, the GOP’s most visible policy pioneer at the state level is Governor Daniels, who has become the darling of right-leaning journalists and think-tankers. At a moment when state budgets need trimming and health-care programs need revamping, Daniels has offered a robust example of practical, effective conservative leadership. Whether other Republicans will embrace that example remains to be seen.

In the Irish Stew
This small nation presents the global financial crisis in microcosm

BY ANTHONY DANIELS

A nyone who remembers the Dublin of the 1960s, when Ireland had barely emerged from its decades of self-inflicted penury, will look about him in the city of today and ask, “Crisis? What crisis?”

True, it is not difficult to find shiny new offices standing empty of tenants; cranes motionless by the skeletons of half-completed buildings; whole estates of new houses that have no buyers. Shops hope to attract customers by discounting goods; restaurants in which it was once difficult to find a table are closing. But still the city is far from those grim and grimy days, when nothing seemed to have been cleaned for decades, Georgian buildings had fallen...

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The transformation of Ireland came in two phases, the first healthy and sane, the second fevered and mad. It is the second phase that is at the root of the current crisis.

into disrepair, and the food was monotonous, tasteless, and overcooked. The pubs were better in those days, or at least more entertaining, for smokers were still welcome and there were no flat-screen televisions relaying sporting non-events like political propaganda in a totalitarian state to dampen the conversation; but one sensed that pubs were lively because the rest of life was not.

Whatever else may happen to Ireland as a result of its present economic crisis, it will not return to what it was. No omelette was ever turned back into eggs just because the dish didn’t turn out the way the cook wanted. Ireland has changed from the intensely inward-looking place I knew into one of the most outward-looking countries in Europe. A foreigner was once a comparatively rare bird in Dublin; now you can hear every language under the sun in the streets, even after many immigrants have gone home and young Irishmen are once again thinking of emigration. The land of bacon and cabbage is no more. The archbishop of Dublin no longer makes politically inspired, wanting to prove that the Catholic Irish, after generations of denigration and contempt, could be as good as, and better than, the Protestant English. So when, at long last, Ireland gave up its goal of autarky, it had a population and a diaspora well prepared to take advantage of the new conditions. The irony for the religious orders was that the new society for which they had prepared so much of the ground would comprehensively reject them, with all the intergenerational fury of a son towards a father.

Real output rose very fast; Ireland paid its way and almost every economic indicator was to the good. The flow of people reversed; the Emerald Isle was no longer just a mythical trope in the minds of Irish Americans, but a real place, with real economic opportunities for real Irishmen. So good were the times, indeed, that within a few years a tenth of the population were non-Irish immigrants.

But then the pursuit of real wealth changed gradually into the pursuit of fool’s gold. Several people told me that the Irish were particularly susceptible to a property bubble because of their age-long preoccupation with the possession of land (the natural psychological result of dispossession), powerfully illustrated in such films as The Field. Underneath the surface of a thoroughly modern training in electronics or financial services, there beat the heart of a landless peasant, who viewed a scrap of land and a cow as the only real haven against destitution.

Be that as it may, other factors were no doubt more important. Ireland is a very small country, population-wise, in which it is easy for cronynism to flourish. The dominant political party, Fianna Fáil, United Kingdom, which had a population 15 times the size and was itself no stranger to property speculation.

Money flowed into the coffers of the government, which collected 40 percent of the cost of new constructions by the time they were sold. So long as they were sold, then, government finances were rosy: Budgets were balanced, no rates of interest that membership in the eurozone allowed and indeed mandated; asset inflation followed, so that property prices in Dublin reached eye-watering levels even for people, such as Londoners, well used to rising property prices. Good Victorian or Edwardian houses sold for up to $40 million. Speculation followed the Dutch tulipomania model, and as much property was built in Ireland as in the...
African Gem Cutter Makes $2,689,000 Mistake...Will You?

This story breaks my heart every time. Allegedly, just two years after the discovery of tanzanite in 1967, a Maasai tribesman knocked on the door of a gem cutter’s office in Nairobi. The Maasai had brought along an enormous chunk of tanzanite and he was looking to sell. His asking price? Fifty dollars. But the gem cutter was suspicious and assumed that a stone so large could only be glass. The cutter told the tribesman, no thanks, and sent him on his way. Huge mistake. It turns out that the gem was genuine and would have easily dwarfed the world’s largest cut tanzanite at the time. Based on common pricing, that “chunk” could have been worth close to $3,000,000!

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In the decades since its discovery, tanzanite has become one of the world’s most coveted gemstones. Found in only one remote place on Earth (in Tanzania’s Merelani Hills, in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro), the precious purple stone is 1,000 times rarer than diamonds. Luxury retailers have been quick to sound the alarm, warning that supplies of tanzanite will not last forever. And in this case, they’re right. Once the last purple gem is pulled from the Earth, that’s it. No more tanzanite. Most believe that we only have a few years supply left, which is why it’s so amazing for us to offer this incredible price break. Some retailers along Fifth Avenue are more than happy to charge you outrageous prices for this rarity. Not Stauer. Staying true to our contrarian nature, we’ve decided to lower the price of one of the world’s rarest and most popular gemstones.

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The Norwegian Nobel Committee gives the peace prize to a Chinese hero

BY JAY NORDLINGER

On the second Friday in October, the customary day, the Norwegian Nobel Committee made its big announcement: This is the committee that determines the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. And, this year, the committee announced for a Chinese dissident—an imprisoned Chinese dissident named Liu Xiaobo. This is a gratifying, even a thrilling, Nobel decision.

Last year’s was much different. The 2009 laureate was, is, President Obama. He has not made human rights or democracy a hallmark of his foreign policy. He has certainly not lent a hand to the Chinese democracy movement. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signaled the mood of the administration early. In February 2009, a month after Obama was sworn in, she was discussing Sino-American relations. And she said that human rights would not “interfere” with such urgent issues as the global climate-change crisis.

The Nobel Committee noted and appreciated Obama’s unwillingness to rock the boat, where human rights were concerned. Presenting the award to Obama in December 2009, Thorbjorn Jagland, the committee chairman, cited the president’s “cooperation with Beijing.”

This year, the committee showed a different face. Every now and then, the committee will give a human-rights award, or a freedom award. When did this start? The peace prize started in 1901, along with the other Nobel prizes, but the first human-rights award was the one for 1960, really. It went to Albert John Lutuli, a leader of the African National Congress in South Africa. Andrei Sakharov, the great Russian dissident and physicist, won in 1975. Lech Walesa, the Solidarity leader in Poland—whose foe was Soviet Communism, broadly speaking—won in 1983. The Nobel Committee honored the anti-apartheid movement three times.

Chinese Communism took power in 1949, but Chinese dissidents were always overlooked, until now. They were frequently nominated. And they were frequently “frontrunners,” according to speculation in the press. It became kind of a joke. It would be rumored that a Chinese dissident was in the running. The Chinese government would warn Norway, “You’d better not!” (The committee is independent from the Norwegian government, though appointed by the parliament.) And the laureate would always be someone else.

Wei Jingsheng, the Chinese democracy hero, was often an also-ran. Laureates, in their Nobel lectures, would hail him, the way Oscar winners hail their colleagues who lost out on the statue. Take 1996: Bishop Belo of East Timor said, “I think of...
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The Evolution of Hearing Products

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China, and I pray for the well-being of Mr.
Wei Jingsheng and his colleagues, and hope
that they will soon be liberated from
their jail cells.” His co-laureate, José
Ramos-Horta, praised Wei as “one of
China’s best children.” Some consolation,
perhaps.

To its credit, the Nobel Committee
honored the Dalai Lama in 1989—the Dalai
Lama being the spiritual and political
leader of Tibet, a land swallowed by the
Chinese Communists in the 1950s. The
Nobel chairman told the press that the
prize to the Dalai Lama should be taken as
encouragement, not just to Tibetans, but
also to the Chinese democracy movement:
The authorities in Beijing had slaughtered
peaceful protesters in Tiananmen Square
earlier in the year. When the announc-
ment for the Dalai Lama was made, a
Chinese official in Oslo said, “It is inter-
ference in China’s internal affairs. It has
hurt the Chinese people’s feelings.” Per-
haps the government provided Kleenex.
The Chinese democrats thought they
might win in 2009: Obama’s year. It was
the 60th anniversary of the Communist
takeover, the 50th anniversary of the Dalai
Lama’s flight out of Tibet, and the 20th
anniversary of Tiananmen Square. (The
Nobel Committee is very fond of annivers-
aries, I should say.) But no. Passed over
again, some of the Chinese activists were
bitter.

And pressure mounted on the commit-
tee. How long could they continue to snub
the men and women risking everything,
even their lives, for freedom, democracy,
and human rights in the most populous
nation on earth? Candidates for the prize
included Gao Zhisheng, Hu Jia, and a
group called Tiananmen Mothers, as well
as Wei. It really didn’t matter who got the
prize: as long as an advocate of Chinese
freedom got it.

And that turned out to be Liu Xiaobo, an
intellectual associated with the Charter 08
movement. This movement is modeled on
Charter 77, the Czechoslovakian move-
ment from which Vaclav Havel emerged.
Havel—often a nominee himself, but
ever winning—backed Liu for the prize.
So did a great many others, of various
nationalities. Liu has stuck his neck out
for many years. He was at Tiananmen
Square—and imprisoned for a year and
a half after that. He was imprisoned again
in 1995. From 1996 to 1999, he was in a
“reeducation-through-labor camp.” He
was most recently seized in December
2008, and sentenced a year later. He sits
in prison today. Learning of the Nobel
Committee’s decision, he said through
tears that the prize “goes first” to the dead
at Tiananmen Square.

The Chinese government had warned
the committee not to honor Liu, or any
other Chinese dissident. Again, the gov-
ernment has always issued such warnings.
So did the Nazis in 1936. But the Nobel
Committee defied Beijing, as it had Ber-
lin. The committee selected Liu as the
“foremost symbol” of the Chinese strug-
gle for a democratic life. Predictably, the
Chinese government reacted badly: call-
ing the award an “obscenity” and placing
Liu’s wife under house arrest. The govern-
ment also did its best to shut Liu’s name
out of all media.

Some Westerners were sympathetic to
the Chinese government. A host on
BBC Radio said to me (I paraphrase, just
slightly), “Doesn’t the Chinese govern-
ment have a legitimate concern about its
national security? Did not Liu Xiaobo
help lead an insurrection at Tiananmen
Square?” I wonder whether a BBC host
went ahead and does something magni-
ficent. Walesa told me that it meant
everything to him: everything to the cause
of Solidarity. Sometimes the prize has no
impact, at least in the near term. Liu’s
prize will certainly not overthrow China’s
one-party dictatorship; it may not even
succeed in unlocking his prison cell. But
it has lifted the morale of the Chinese
democracy movement. It is late in com-
ing—and Cubans are still waiting, after 50
years of Communist dictatorship—but it is
welcome and important. Just when you’re
ready to give up on the Nobel Peace Prize
as absurd and worthless, the committee
goes ahead and does something magnifi-
cent.

Last December, after his latest farce of
a trial, at which he received eleven years,
Liu said, “The sentence violates the
Chinese constitution and international
human-rights covenants. It cannot bear
moral scrutiny and will not pass the test of
history. I believe that my work has been
just, and that someday China will be a free
and democratic country.”
Whatever happens on Election Day, the heroic phase of Obama’s presidency is over. It is over not simply because he will spend the rest of his term playing defense rather than conquering new ground for liberalism. It is over because the assumptions that underlay that first phase of his presidency have already been discredited.

Cast your mind back to December 2008. Democrats had just won their second back-to-back blowout election. President Obama had won the highest percentage of the vote of any Democratic presidential candidate since 1964, and the highest for a non-incumbent Democrat since 1932. The 2008 election, just like those earlier ones, had produced a Congress firmly controlled by the president’s allies. It was the most liberal configuration of power Washington, D.C., had seen since at least 1965–66.

The trends seemed to be Democrats’ friends. A rising non-white population; an increasingly unchurched youth; a growing tendency of college-educated voters to back Democrats: If demography was destiny, the Republicans’ fate looked bleak. To add to conservatives’ misery, the country was in the midst of a financial crisis widely blamed on deregulation.

The new majority was led, finally, by a president with immense popularity and political talent. Obama inspired an enthusiasm not seen for a new president since John F. Kennedy—or maybe even Andrew Jackson. He was smart, cool, a gifted orator and a canny strategist. Republicans counseled one another not to criticize him by name.

The liberal journalist Peter Beinart noted that for decades Democratic leaders had treated the American public’s latent conservatism as a sleeping bear: The chief imperative was to avoid sudden moves that would rouse it. But the Reagan era was now over, and Democrats no longer needed to live in fear. That’s what Obama’s “yes we can” slogan meant to liberals: Yes we can move past both conservatism and Clintonian triangulation. Liberalism was living in its favored political tense: the future perfect.

Democrats could look at the political landscape with confidence, assured of three things. The country had decisively rejected conservatism and moved leftward. The idea of small government had been discredited by the financial crisis. And the president’s persuasive powers could get the Democrats through any remaining difficulties.

Now those assumptions lie in tatters. Republicans are unified and enthusiastic, independents favor government retrenchment, and Democrats have been reduced to scolding their base to stop whining and vote.

It was a misunderstanding of their previous success that...
brought them to this pass. Democrats couldn’t have had better conditions for electing a president in late 2008 if James Carville and Paul Begala had designed them in a laboratory. A party occupying the White House must above all fear unpopular wars and recessions, and the Republicans were beset with both. On top of the Iraq War and the recession that had officially begun in December 2007 came the financial crisis of September 2008. Bush’s team had once hoped to get his approval rating back up near 50 percent in 2008. A month before the election, it stood at 50 percent of 50—an astonishing 25 percent in the Gallup poll.

The GOP tide from earlier in the decade had receded so far that it could barely be seen from shore. In mid-February 2004, 50 percent of people (including so-called leaners) identified themselves as Republicans, 43 percent as Democrats. By mid-November 2008, Republicans had only 37 percent to the Democrats’ 55 percent. The GOP’s prior dominance had been reversed, and then some. At the beginning of 2006, Democrats and Republicans were even in terms of their favorability ratings, at just under 50. Then Republicans began a rapid retreat. By November 2008, according to Gallup, only 34 percent of people rated them favorably.

Yet neither the Democratic ascendancy nor the Republican humiliation meant the country had made a fundamental shift to the left. People had fired Tom DeLay’s congressional majority and quit on President Bush, but they had not become latter-day McGovernites. In fact, the opposite. A July 2009 Gallup report noted that by a 2-to-1 margin, people said their views had become more liberal in recent years. Republicans, independents, and even Democrats had all moved to the right, although Democrats just barely so (34 percent had become more conservative, 40 percent hadn’t changed, and 23 percent had become more liberal). Gallup noted that “the results are inconspicuously incongruous with the results of the 2008 elections.” Incongruous, indeed.

As memories of Bush began to fade and as Obama started to govern against the American grain, the rightward drift in public opinion continued. Gallup detected a snap-back in conservative attitudes across the board within a year of Bush’s leaving office. Fifty-three percent of Americans wanted government to promote traditional values—“a return to the prevailing view from 1993 through 2004.” Half of Americans wanted less immigration—“a return to the attitudes that prevailed in the first few years after 9/11.” Fifty-one percent of Americans called themselves pro-life—“a significant shift from a year ago.”

As of June 2010, Gallup had 42 percent of the public identifying themselves as conservatives, with 35 percent calling themselves moderates and 20 percent liberals. Over the last 18 years, moderates have generally outnumbered conservatives. In 2008, conservatives and moderates were tied at 37 percent. Since then, the number of conservatives has gone up and of moderates and liberals gone down. If the current number holds, the percentage of conservatives will be higher than in any other year since Gallup began asking the question in 1992.

Even the great Baker Street detective himself might have been puzzled at the dog that didn’t bark in American politics: the crisis of confidence in capitalism that was supposed to follow on the heels of the financial crisis. It was reasonable to expect that conservatives would spend a decade trying to explain why an economic explosion that included blatantly reckless behavior on Wall Street didn’t discredit free-market ideas. But they won the debate before it even got started—perhaps because people understood that the housing bubble was a society-wide mania, perhaps because the role of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in helping stoke the bubble was so obvious, perhaps because Washington, through TARP and other bailouts, took partial ownership of the crisis immediately, perhaps because people are mature enough to understand that no system is perfect.

Regardless, the mood that everyone expected would be favorable to 1930s-style activism turned out to be more favorable to government retrenchment. According to Gallup, as early as the fall of 2009, 57 percent of Americans said government was trying to do too many things best left to the private sector. More Americans said there is too much business regulation (45 percent) than too little (24 percent), the worst showing for regulation ever in a Gallup survey. Obama would have to build his new New Deal on the foundation of a quasi-Reaganite public.

This national disposition belied the self-deluding premises of Obama’s boosters, who mixed the Kool-Aid and threw it back in big sugary gulps. Some observers suggested that the Republicans were dwindling into a conservative southern rump party with no appeal beyond their partisan and geographic base. In a book titled 40 More Years: How the Democrats Will Rule the Next Generation, James Carville predicted, well, you can probably guess. It was a poor man’s version of Arthur Schlesinger’s cyclical theory of American politics, ridiculously extrapolating from 2008 to the next four decades of our political life. Oddly enough, one of the few threats to Democratic generational dominance that Carville identified was hubs. He apparently never considered that his own fulsome projection might contribute to this very vice.

Sam Tanenhaus of the New York Times wrote a more sophisticated version of Carville’s triumphalism, first in an essay in The New Republic and then in a short book, respectively titled “Conservatism Is Dead” and The Death of Conservatism. Tanenhaus violated a first principle of the undertaker’s art, which is to make sure one’s subject really is good and dead. (George Washington, who had a morbid fear of being prematurely pronounced dead and buried alive, would have given Tanenhaus a wide berth.)

At bottom, Tanenhaus was making a high-toned case for his favored version of conservatism, an idiosyncratic Burkeanism
The Myth of “Settlements”

Are they indeed the “root cause” of violence in the Middle East?

One of the enduring myths about the Arab-Israeli conflict is that the “settlements” in Judea/Samaria (often called the “West Bank”) are the source of the conflict between the Jews and the so-called “Palestinians.” If that problem were solved—in other words, if Israel would turn Judea/Samaria over to the “Palestinians”—peace would prevail and the century-old conflict would be ended.

What are the facts?

Erroneous Assumptions: Various fallacies and erroneous assumptions underlie that belief, so often repeated that even those who are friendly to Israel, even many Jews in Israel and in the United States, have come to accept it. Our government, generally friendly to and supportive of Israel, has bought into the myth of the “settlements;” it has regularly and insistently requested that the “settlements” be abandoned and, one supposes, be turned over lock, stock, and barrel to those who are sworn to destroy Israel. The very designation of the Jewish inhabitants of Judea/Samaria as “settlers” is inappropriate, because it connotes something foreign, intrusive and temporary, something that is purposefully and maliciously imposed. But that is nonsense of course. Why would the quarter-million Jews who live in Judea/Samaria be any more “intrusive” or any more “illegal” than the more than one million Arabs who live in peace in what is called “Israel proper” or west of the so-called “green line”? Nobody considers their presence as intrusive; nobody talks of them as an obstacle to peace.

Most of us, regretfully perhaps, are too worldly and too “sophisticated” to put much stock in the argument that the territories in question, Judea and Samaria, are indeed the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, that they were promised by God to Abraham and his seed in perpetuity. Jews have lived in that country without interruption since Biblical times. There is no reason why they shouldn’t live there now. Why should Judea/Samaria be the only place in the world (except for such countries as Saudi Arabia) where Jews cannot live?

Legal Aspects: But how about the legal aspect of this matter? Isn’t the “West Bank” “occupied territory” and therefore the Jews have no right to be there? But the historic reality is quite different. Very briefly: The Ottoman Empire was the sovereign in the entire area. In 1917, while World War I was still raging, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration. It designated “Palestine”—extending throughout what is now Israel (including the “West Bank”) and what is now the Kingdom of Jordan—as the homeland for the Jewish people. In 1922, the League of Nations ratified the Balfour Declaration and designated Britain as the mandatory power. Regrettably, Britain, for its own imperial reasons and purposes, separated 76 percent of the land—that lying beyond the Jordan River—to create the kingdom of Trans-Jordan (now Jordan) and made it inaccessible to Jews. In 1947, tired of the constant bloodletting between Arabs and Jews, the British threw in the towel and abandoned the Mandate. The UN took over. It devised a plan by which the land west of the Jordan River would be split between the Jews and the Arabs. The Jews, though with heavy heart, accepted the plan. The Arabs virulently rejected it and invaded the nascent Jewish state with the armies of five countries, so as to destroy it at its birth. Miraculously, the Jews prevailed and the State of Israel was born. When the smoke of battle cleared, Jordan was in possession of the West Bank and Egypt in possession of Gaza. They were the “occupiers” and they proceeded to kill many Jews and to drive out the rest. They systematically destroyed all Jewish holy places and all vestiges of Jewish presence. The area was “judenrein.”

In the Six-Day War of 1967, the Jews reconquered the territories. The concept that Jewish presence in Judea/Samaria is illegal and that the Jews are occupiers is bizarre. It just has been repeated so often and with such vigor that many people have come to accept it. How about the “Palestinians,” whose patrimony this territory supposedly is and about whose olive trees and orange groves we hear endlessly? There is no such people. They are Arabs—the same people as in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and beyond. Most of them migrated into the territories and to “Israel proper,” attracted by Jewish prosperity and industry. The concept of “Palestinians” as applied to Arabs and as a distinct nationality urgently in need of their own twenty-third Arab state, is a fairly new one; it was not invented until after 1948, when the State of Israel was founded.

But here’s a thought: How about a deal by which the “settlements” were indeed abandoned and all the Jews were to move to “Israel proper.” At the same time, all the Arabs living in Israel would be transferred to Judea/Samaria or to wherever else they wanted to go. That would indeed make Judea/Samaria “judenrein,” and what are now Arab lands in Israel would be “arahrein.” The Arabs could then live in a fully autonomous area in eastern Israel and peace, one would hope, would descend on the holy land.

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Thinking.

ly refresh itself—to think and act anew, in Lincoln’s phrase. But public. That doesn’t guarantee it victory, and neither does it relieve it of the responsibility to persuade people and constant—which still has a great reservoir of strength in the attitudes of the party—demography has not yet buried American conservatism, the struggles of its main electoral vehicle, the Republican able and effective. He hasn’t excelled at either.

Obama liberalism. But what Obama was really being granted ident taking office during a crisis for the public’s assent to 2008. He and many others mistook goodwill toward a new pres-

donced the federal government must seize command of a rav-
ged economy.” They were left with only two choices: “shine in [the] reflected radiance” of ascendant liberalism, “or spin futile-

In the book, Tanenhaus penned a long passage on the import-
ance of political consensus and deference to public opinion, which liberals supposedly understand in a way conservatives, consumed by ideological orthodoxy, don’t. He rapped Rep-

culated the liberal presumption that characterized the aftermath of

He scolded Charles Krauthammer and Newt Gingrich for their early opposition to Obama’s agenda. “The politics of con-
sensus,” Tanenhaus wrote, “would have required Krauthammer and Gingrich to acknowledge an inescapable fact: the public favored Obama’s proposals.” (Before too long, that fact was eminently escapable.) According to Tanenhaus, Burk

The dominant health-care stories of the summer and fall have

A

gain and again during the Obama presidency, liberals have assumed that the public either sided with them or could be persuaded to do so—and again and again their hopes have been dashed. Congressional Democrats expected the stimulus to become more popular as grateful communities received federal money and as the economy improved. Instead it became so unpopular that Democrats in 2010 avoided the word “stimulus” as much as possible.

Another early sign that the Democrats had miscalculated came in the form of the first election results of the Obama years. In Virginia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, Republicans won elections with overwhelming support among those voters not tied to either party. All three were states that Obama had carried in 2008. The South, to which so many Democrats and media sages had consigned the Republicans, had evidently expanded.

Democrats thought that health care would be a winning issue for them—and at the start of the Obama presidency not a few Republicans agreed. As public opposition began to mount in the summer of 2009, liberals were not fazed. They blamed the commotion on an extremist fringe and claimed that as the debate progressed the public would come to like what they styled “reform.” That didn’t happen either.

Throughout the debate liberals insisted (as they continue to insist) that the individual elements of the health-care bill are popular. Some of them are, and so is the goal of expanding cov-
erage. But raising taxes, cutting Medicare Advantage, raising premiums, forcing people out of their health-insurance arrange-
ments, requiring everyone to buy an insurance policy to Washington’s liking: None of this is popular, and the public was not willing to pay these costs for the elements of the plan that sounded nice.

So the Democrats’ fallback position became that the public would like the legislation once it was enacted and the ugly process that led to it was forgotten. The legislation included early “deliverables”—benefits that would come into effect quickly and, they hoped, defuse opposition, such as checks to the elderly and protections for people with preexisting conditions.

The dominant health-care stories of the summer and fall have been very different. Premiums are up, insurers are dropping cov-
erage for Medicare Advantage recipients, companies are aban-
doing their workers’ coverage—and the voters, particularly the elderly, are unmollified. Pollster.com’s average of polls shows opposition to the health-care law to be rising still.

The president’s oratorical powers have proved unavailing to the Democrats. He talked, and talked, and talked about health care, but the public did not come around. In September 2009, he made a heavily publicized address to a joint session of Congress making the case for his bill. Look at a graph of public attitudes about the issue and you won’t be able to tell when he spoke. Indeed, there is no topic on which Obama has moved public opinion in his favor during his presidency. He has chiefly pers-

Democrats assumed that Republicans would pay a political price for attempting to obstruct their agenda. For a year and a half they devoted much of their communications apparatus to purveying the message that Republicans were “the party of no”—a label some Republicans feared would stick to them. Republican prospects have improved as that accusation has been spread, which is why the slogan has been heard less and less as the election has neared.
Many journalists have noted, with puzzlement, that Democrats have rarely demonstrated so much legislative productivity and yet have rarely stood lower in public esteem. Yet there is no paradox here: The public dislikes their legislative output and wishes there had been less of it. Voters may disdain partisanship, but that does not mean they wanted the parties to cooperate on Obama’s terms—which is to say, on liberal legislation.

The latest Democratic message—-as of press time anyway; desperation is breeding rapid change in this department—is that Republicans are planning either to bring back Bush’s policies or to impose something more extreme. The anti-Bush message does not appear to be taking. (Neither does the anti-extremist message, except in a few races.) Democrats hoped that bad memories of Bush would help them for at least as long as bad memories of Jimmy Carter had helped the Republicans. The parallel was mistaken. The public in the late 1970s had turned on liberalism. Today’s public had merely turned on Bush.

The president, never shy about praising himself, told a group of Democratic congressmen that they would avoid the fate of their predecessors in the 1994 elections because this time they had him on their side. One of those congressmen, Marion Berry of Arkansas, promptly announced he would not seek reelection. In the summer of 2010 Obama warned Republicans that they had forgotten that he was “pretty good at politicking.” As the election draws near, polls suggest that a connection with Obama hurts rather than helps Democrats in tight races, and so those Democrats are for the most part avoiding him.

The president’s political talents have increasingly been called into question. Even his liberal admirers have begun to worry that his cool expresses detachment. Mark Halperin of Time, a reliable barometer of conventional wisdom, says, “Most politically engaged elites have reached the same conclusions: the White House is in over its head, isolated, insular, arrogant and clueless about how to get along with or persuade members of Congress, the media, the business community or working-class voters.”

We do not yet know whether Republicans will win statewide races in such heretofore blue states as California, Washington, Illinois, and Wisconsin. We do know that they have mounted competitive races, and this fact alone must come as a shock to anyone who still adheres to the conventional wisdom of December 2008.

Even now some liberals cannot accept that their dream palace is moving into foreclosure. They insist that the Democrats would be faring better if they had governed in an even more liberal manner. The polls, meanwhile, show that the percentage of Americans who consider Obama too liberal has steadily climbed during his presidency—and now constitutes a near-majority.

The key mistake that Obama and his allies made in 2008 was one that political movements find hard to avoid: making too much of favorable election results. It seems clear enough with hindsight that the elections of 2006 and 2008 were rejections of a group of Republicans and their approach to governance. Elections almost always produce negative mandates: The electorate’s instructions rarely consist of more than the admonition not to be like the losing party. That’s a lesson that Republicans should take to heart, lest they repeat the errors of the Democrats they seem poised to vanquish.

**Assassin-in-Chief**

_The War on Terror has blinded the Right to a disturbing expansion of executive power_

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

Here are two facts: 1. Anwar al-Awlaki is an American citizen and an al-Qaeda propagandist. 2. Pres. Barack Obama proposes to assassinate him. Between the first fact and the second falls the shadow.

The Awlaki case has led many conservatives into dangerous error, as has the War on Terror more generally. That conservatives are for the most part either offering mute consent or cheering as the Obama administration draws up a list of U.S. citizens to be assassinated suggests not only that have we gone awry in our thinking about national security, limitations on state power, and the role of the president in our republic, but also that we still do not understand all of the implications of our country’s confrontation with Islamic radicalism. The trauma of 9/11 has deposited far too much emotional residue upon our thinking, and the Awlaki case provides occasion for a necessary scouring.

Contra present conservative dogma, the Constitution has relatively little to say about the role of the president in matters of what we now call national security, which is not synonymous with combat operations. What the Constitution says is this: “The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States.” That is all. Upon this sandy foundation, conservative security and legal thinkers have constructed a fortress of a presidency that is nearly unlimited or actually unlimited in its power to define and pursue national-security objectives. But a commander-in-chief is not a freelance warlord, and his titular powers do not extend over everything that touches upon national security. The FBI’s counterterrorism work, for example, is critical to national security, but its management does not fall under the duties of a commander-in-chief; it is police work, like many of the needful things undertaken in the War on Terror. The law-enforcement approach to counterterrorism is much maligned in conservative circles where martial rhetoric is preferred, but the work of the DOJ, FBI, NYPD, etc., is critical. It is not, however, warfare.

A commander-in-chief does not have unilateral authority to invade foreign countries or to name belligerents, and it is clear that the Founders did not intend to give the president that kind of unchecked war-making power, much less to compound it with unchecked domestic police and surveillance powers, which is why the power to declare war resides with Congress rather than with the president. Our Constitution, as in all things, relies upon checks and balances when it comes to the conduct of war. It is significant that the final powers—to declare war, to ratify a peace treaty, to punish treason—do not rest with the president, but with Congress.

Congress deploys its checks and balances through passing laws, but many conservatives now argue that the president need not
follow them. It is no exaggeration to write that a key plank in their platform is the belief that the law does not apply to the president or to his employees. Being a co-equal branch of government, conservatives argue, the executive is not bound by what my colleague Andrew C. McCarthy habitually refers to as mere “congressional statute”—i.e., the law—when pursuing its constitutional national-security duties. I do not wish to exaggerate Mr. McCarthy’s position, so I will let him speak for himself. For example, he acknowledges that “Bush’s ‘Terrorist Surveillance Program’ did not comply with the letter of a congressional statute, the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act,” but maintains that the administration was not obliged to follow the law in this case, because of a superseding constitutional investiture. Mr. McCarthy dismisses the notion that “the president acts illegally whenever he transgresses a statute” and argues that Congress “violated constitutional separation-of-powers principles” merely by issuing subpoenas to White House staffers in the course of a criminal investigation. He argues that in national-security matters, the president’s conduct is “more a political matter than a legal one.” For a great many conservatives, President Nixon’s most cracked assertion—“When the president does it, that means it is not illegal”—is now an article of faith, but President Reagan’s Executive Order 12333 banning assassinations is a dead letter.

RUNNING with the ball we passed him, Obama and his administration now insist on the president’s right not only to order the assassination of U.S. citizens, but to do so in secret, without oversight from Congress, the public, or anybody else. Barack Obama today claims powers that would have made Julius Caesar blush.

An assassination may have military consequences, but it is not mainly a military act—war and assassination are different and distinct branches of politics. That does not mean that the law does not come into play: Mr. McCarthy may believe the president can set aside mere statutes, but he frequently justifies our detentions of al-Qaeda suspects as necessary prophylactics against “war criminals,” and the legal contortions that have been used to justify what we’re still calling with mostly straight faces the “enhanced interrogation” program have been a thing of wonder to contemplate. The necessary thing to remember, these conservatives insist, is that since 9/11 the nation has been at war. In truth, we’ve been inching our way toward carrying out assassinations since well before the terrorist attacks of 2001. Clinton-administration officials told the Washington Post in 1998 that targeting Saddam Hussein was one possible contingency in case of hostilities with Iraq. Killing a hostile head of state as a prelude to combat operations is probably defensible; the slippery slope to assassinating American citizens was lubricated by the grief and rage of 9/11. There was remarkably little discussion given to it, the War on Terror having brought out the destructive strains of American exceptionalism. It is impossible to imagine that the United States would accept that the King of Sweden or the Grand Duke of Luxembourg has the legitimate right to conduct assassinations in the United States on the theory that we might be harboring enemies who wish them ill; to say the words is to appreciate their inherent preposterousness. But our own president is empowered to target our own citizens, wherever they may be found, without even so much as congressional oversight.

Among other intolerable consequences, this line of thinking means that if the president starts assassinating U.S. citizens helter-skelter, then the law is powerless to stop him, Congress is powerless to stop him (short of impeachment), and we’ll just have to wait for the next election. That is what is meant by “political limits” on executive power, as opposed to legal limits. It is an inadequate control.

These beliefs are relatively new to conservatives, being for the most part an artifact of the Bush years. One needn’t roll the clock back very far to discover a time when conservatives took a starkly different view of executive powers. After the fiasco at the Branch Davidian cult compound near Waco, Texas, the Right not only was willing to see executive-branch personnel subjected to the indignity of answering a subpoena but was in fact insistent that “mere statute” be used to put some of them in prison. Elliott Abrams, writing in National Review, called for investigations, arguing that “the balance between energetic law enforcement and limits on excessive government power will not be maintained if the Justice Department does not seek vigorously to maintain it.”

On National Review Online, Deroy Murdock lamented the “maddening culture of impunity in which few officials face serious consequences for violating the law. This double standard, in which federal badges become licenses for lawlessness, typified the Clinton-Reno years.” He added that federal actions “involved an unlawfully extreme indifference to human life. Such misconduct often yields second-degree murder charges. But not at Waco.” Or for the would-be assassins of Awlaki. The Clinton administration was enough to make a limited-executive man, at least for a little while, out of John Ashcroft, who wrote: “The Clinton administration’s paranoid and prurient interest in international e-mail is a wholly unhealthy precedent, especially given this administration’s track record on FBI files and IRS snooping. Every medium by which people communicate can be subject to exploitation by those with illegal or immoral intentions. Nevertheless, this is no reason to hand Big Brother the keys to unlock our e-mail diaries, open our ATM records, read our medical records, or translate our international communications.” John Ashcroft felt differently after 9/11, as we all did. But John Ashcroft’s feelings are not what govern the United States.

The evolution of conservatives’ attitudes toward unchecked executive power is cautionary: If some of us who have historically been skeptical of the state and its pretenses are so quickly seduced by the outside observation of absolute power,
how much more alluring must the prospect prove to the men who actually employ that power? Conservatives ought to admit that the presence of one of our own in the White House made us much more amenable to executive arrogations, and that the antiterror movement that tormented the Bush administration brings out a kind of Pavlovian response in us: Whichever side of the barricades the placard-carrying hippies and ANSWER dirbagnes are on, we want to be on the other. That’s a salubrious instinct, but it can distort our thinking, inasmuch as the civil libertarians are not always wrong about everything. And we should appreciate that the Obama administration has intentionally made this matter public, leaking the details to the Washington Post: This is not a covert operation, but the establishment of a precedent. It is time to restore our ancestral suspicion of executive power.

But we have failed to do so, and now we are enduring the consequences as the Obama administration draws up a list of American citizens to be targeted for premeditated, extrajudicial killing that is part of no conventional military campaign, which brings us to two destructive illusions that must be shed: First, the War on Terror is not a war—not in the conventional sense of that word. Like the War on Drugs (but infinitely more serious and more important), it is a metaphorical war that sometimes has the characteristics of a real war. Awlaki is not a soldier or a man at arms: He is an author of invective and a preacher of sermons—it was not until the administration had been castigated for its assassination plans that it retroactively promoted the hateful homilist to “commander.” His crimes are real, and there is precedent for punishing them—we hanged Der Stürmer editor Julius Streicher at Nuremberg, but felt the need to conduct a trial first: Even a Nazi got more due process than we today are willing to extend to U.S. citizens. Awlaki is a traitor, to be sure, but hanging American traitors is a job for the American federal courts, not for assassins.

Second, and equally important: We are not going to win. Neither is al-Qaeda. Here, Mr. McCarthy is dead on: “There will be no treaty, no terms of surrender, no conquering enemy territory. Instead, there is only vigilance.” The War on Terror is not a military campaign, but a risk-mitigation project—a dangerous, bloody, and often thankless one. Jihad is and will be a constant low-level menace that may from time to time produce a spectacular attack. Al-Qaeda and its sympathizers will try to kill Americans, and we will try to stop them. If Awlaki happens to find himself on the wrong side of an American munition during the course of combat, he will not be missed.

But combat is a different thing from assassination, and regular combat is increasingly rare in the War on Terror, now that the actual war part—in Iraq and Afghanistan—has mostly wrapped up. And that is why the war model, and all of the lawlessness that flows from it, is defective: When the war is a metaphor, the battlefield is everywhere, and the timeline of operations is history’s horizon, we invite the creation of a state of “permanent emergency” by acquiescing to the growth and glorification of the state in arms. The defect in our pre-9/11 antiterrorism program was not that it was based on a law-enforcement model or that it lacked sufficient martial vigor, but that it was incompetently executed, a low-level, back-burner priority for a fat and happy nation cruising toward the millennium with very little on its mind beyond investment returns and Bill Clinton’s sexual shenanigans. That much changed on 9/11, but this did not: Decent governments do not assassinate their own citizens.
sitting—and at NR, on an electric typewriter. His Shakespeare “obsession” gave critics one more pretext to write him off as a crank, and that didn’t trouble Joe either. He was just happy in the knowledge that the case had been made and the work completed—as he told me at the time, “It exists.”

When his name came up at all in Washington journalism circles, it was in sympathy over Joe’s travails, or as a supposed case study in why the Right needs a good purge now and then, or else as a horror story in career management. Even fellow conservatives, at least the younger ones, tend to remember Joe’s troubles more than his writings. You know you’ve been around awhile when a rising conservative columnist presumes, as happened once in my company, to denigrate Joseph Sobran as if he were some old nobody—that bum who got run off for being a hatemonger. And lest we allow any tender feelings to slip in now that Joe has been buried, his critics are still at it—one fellow making the late-breaking announcement that along with everything else, Joe was “a Nazi fellow-traveler.” The People’s Meeting isn’t over yet, those who haven’t finished can still denounce this enemy who “spent much of his life articulating evil ideas, which deserve to be exposed and opposed as much now as when he was alive.”

As a generation of NR readers will attest, along with friends who knew Joe Sobran longer and better than I did, such talk does a grave injustice to a good man, to his work, and to those final years when even his judgment deserted him. And it’s certainly no way to speak of the finest writer ever to pass through NATIONAL REVIEW. To paraphrase Joe in his defense of Laurence Olivier (another Sobran hobbyhorse) against the disparagements of fellow actors, the critics might as well belittle him; there is no hope at all of rivaling him.

His case for the Earl of Oxford rested in part on “voiceprints,” the signature patterns, technique, and tone that could be no one else’s. Joe left his own on 40 years’ worth of essays, columns, and reviews that someone needs to finally gather up into a published collection by our era’s master of plain-English prose. Don’t bother checking his house for the old clips, either, because Joe himself hardly thought to save his own writings, and this in a way was part of his secret: He wrote with so little self-regard. It was a style so natural, comfortable, and unpretentious that even praise like “graceful,” “elegant,” or “polished”—though it was all of those—doesn’t exactly fit Joe’s writing because it suggests intended effect, a desire to impress. And Joe was so convincing because he couldn’t have cared less about impressing—which might also help explain his troubles later on.

Whatever the controversy, he kept your attention on the matter at hand, applying his vast learning instead of displaying it, inviting agreement instead of demanding it. Hugh Kenner described Joe’s early work as “a mind in exemplary action.” Bill Buckley recalled the thrill of detecting “singular powers” that first time he read something by Joe. It was a style that looked easy, except no one else could duplicate it, making points that seemed obvious, except no one else had thought of them. The quality of Joe’s thinking was so evident that you could forget to compliment the quality of the writing.

There was actually going to be a collection of his best NR stuff in the early 1990s, but the idea was dropped when he was. Ed Capano, our publisher at the time, liked the title Sobran Thoughts, while I proposed Order Out of Chaos—with a picture of Joe’s smoky landfill of an office on the cover—to convey the mystery of how such clarity of analysis could be sustained in a life so cluttered. The book would have included classics like his 1985 meditation on the basic differences in outlook between conservatives and liberals (a piece given the title “Pensées” against Joe’s will—he disliked “out-of-town words”). An example, pulled almost at random from the essay, shows not how Joe wrote at his very best, but how he wrote consistently:

There are natural limits to our sympathies, limits liberalism can only condemn, never respect. And there is no reason to credit its attitude with “idealism.” A robin that took worms to every nest in the forest would not be an ideal robin; it would only be an odd bird.

Joe elaborated:

Nothing is easier than to imagine some notionally “ideal” state. But we give too much credit to this debased kind of imagination, which is so ruthless when it takes itself seriously. To appreciate, on the other hand, is to imagine the real, to discover use, value, beauty, order, purpose in what already exists; and this is the kind of imagination most appropriate to creatures, who shouldn’t confuse themselves with the Creator.

The highest form of appreciation is worship. I don’t insist that there is a correlation between formal religion and conservatism. But there is an attitude prior to any creed, which may make a healthy-minded unbeliever regretful that he has nobody to thank for all the goodness and beauty in his life that he has done nothing to deserve. One might almost say that the crucial thing about a man is not whether he believes in God, but how he imagines God: as infinitely good and adorable, or merely as an authoritarian obstacle to human desire? The opposite of piety is not unbelief, but crassness.

So much of what he wrote in those days was appreciative, and in the way of “hatemongering,” what Joe seemed to despise most was a ruthless streak in his fellow man, bullying in any form, and the euphemisms that trait inspires. “Most of the world is a mystery,” he wrote in “Pensées,” “Consciousness is a little clearing in a vast forest; every individual has his own special relation to the area of mystery, his own little discoveries to impart.” In Joe’s little clearing, he kept coming upon crass and violent things done in the name of high-sounding causes, and he revealed them for what they are with reason and wit.

His 1983 book Single Issues, gathering his work for the Human Life Review, is as eloquent and persuasive a defense of the unborn as I know of, because even there, where Joe’s feelings ran deepest, he retained his sense of calm and courtesy. He wrote an open letter in the mid-1980s to Mario Cuomo, when the New York governor was being lionized in the media as the Catholic champion of the pro-choice position. Joe’s letter is unanswerable, and most of all the opening paragraphs where he describes the thing chosen, based on some pictures a doctor had given him showing a second-trimester baby boy who never reached the third:

I told you I’m no theologian. It didn’t take much theology to understand those pictures. I reacted about the same way I’d have reacted before I was a Catholic: I just stared at them. . . . Not that it was a highly emotional experience. Just the opposite. All my emotions were very still. It didn’t seem to make much difference what I felt, or whether I felt anything. Outrage would have seemed as hollow as nonchalance. I just kept staring until it sank in.

He didn’t like the word “issues”—it bought into the premise that everything in life is on the political agenda, awaiting gov-
It all sounded awful, he added, predictable verdict, as in a 1989 review in which he described and he’d come back with some funny, judicious, and never quite predictable verdict, as in a 1989 review in which he described Paul Johnson’s method in Intellectuals as “Will Durant with a beadle’s whip.” The book is a tour of the flawed lives of leftist intellectuals, and Joe didn’t care for it:

There is something wrong with a writer who arouses in me an impulse to defend Lillian Hellman. Bitch, slut, liar, tyrant, crypto-Communist, self-deluded fool, yes. But is it fair to pile on the rumor that she once made herself the prize in a poker game? Does the inductive method require such detail? Doesn’t the beadle’s arm ever weary?

It all sounded awful, he added, but such characters could probably be found among people whose politics Johnson shares. Noam Chomsky is dragged in solely for his detestable radical views, with no evidence—apart from the very fact that he appears in this book—that his personal life is in any way defective. Mentioning him in this context seems unfair. . . . [John-

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autobiography could start the same way. It would end a little differently, though.

I guess what I like about it is the simple charm and efficiency of starting that way, instead of reaching, as he easily could have, for some larger reflection on the “meaning” of our national pastime. He described a fellow commentator’s writing as too fine and showy (producing “the column as master’s thesis”), and resisted all temptations in that direction. Joe didn’t “craft,” he just wrote, turning out copy instead of performing for his public. For a good lead, he advised, you’ve got to “run on the pitch.”

Other times he’d start off with some thought, casually offered as usual, that would throw you back a bit, as in a 1989 review of a book about Orwell called The Politics of Literary Reputation. In a dozen or so words, Joe dispenses with all conventional opinion on the subject at hand: “I have always enjoyed reading George Orwell, except for his fiction, especially Nineteen Eighty-Four.” He summarizes the book’s thesis, about Orwell and literary politics, in a couple of sentences, and then informs the author that he “takes it all much too seriously”:

To make matters worse, he writes sentences that don’t suggest he’s alive to Orwell’s syntactical vigor: “We will return to these conceptual points as we relate the anomalies of Orwell’s present-day educational institutionalization and their implications for canon- and reputation-formation to the development of his curricular reputation.” I’m quoting out of context, but only because I would spare you reading the context too. Four hundred pages of this stuff is a lot of context.

When I asked Joe once if he’d read a particular book, he replied, “No, but I reviewed it,” and I have a feeling this Orwell study got the same treatment. Yet even when he was having fun, he wasn’t mean or condescending, though a man of his superior gifts could so easily have been both. He observed of another author and former NR contributor, in a 1974 piece, that “learned as he is, he writes as if he had graduated from erudition to omniscience, and as if the ignorance of his enemies (he seems to assume enmity between himself and his subjects) deprived them of any dignity.”

Joe’s own writing assumed friendship with his reader, in a perfect mix of the formal and colloquial, always so pleasantly offhanded even when he was giving bad ideas and conduct their due. No one ever got the better of him in any rhetorical clash, because such debates are usually lost when a posture is revealed, and Joe assumed no posture, just an attitude of relaxed discourse that would gladly yield to a better argument if one were offered.

His favorite conservative was Samuel Johnson, because, explained Joe, Johnson knew his reader’s instincts and trusted his reader’s intelligence. He assumed no special wisdom of his own, but held truth as “a common possession.” Indeed, “he may fairly be called the great champion of the obvious. To Johnson, the great truths are above all public, available equally to all reflective men.” Joe himself wrote in this spirit, in a tone that won your trust even when you couldn’t quite agree, or, as in later years, when you thought he was carrying matters past the point of useful inquiry. You could doubt his judgment, if you heard him out, but never his integrity. And maybe the surest sign that his judgment and fine Johnsonian disposition were beginning to fail (doubtless along with his health and financial fortunes, which were both very bad in recent years) was that the sense of humor was fading too. He told me in his NR days that getting a funny line down on paper was one of the hardest things to do, but when Joe Sobran was in form, he was at least the equal of Johnson, Chesterton, or even Malcolm Muggeridge.

He called Hugh Hefner, before Playboy moved west, “the most pretentious meatpacker in all Chicago,” and began a 1974 essay—“The Sage and Serious Doctrine of Hugh Hefner”—with an observation about the captions under the pictures. I’m not sure Joe would count the passage among his “best of,” but there’s no doubting that only he would lay it out quite this way:

If the playmates have changed, the captions have changed more. They have always been aloof, but they used to be more humorous. Though Gloria, or whoever, might look ecstatic with desire for the reader, the caption would just ignore that, according her instead something of the detached admiration that is the need of fine horses—she was described in fancy phrases like “amply endowed,” “pulchritudinous,” “canted,” and “39-21-35.” The jocose circumlocution was necessary, for Playboy’s specialty is not merely sex but attitudinizing about sex, putting it in the comforting setting of sophisticated camaraderie.

The difficulty of writing texts for such pictures is greater than one might assume. Try it. What can you say? “The reader will note that Gloria has huge knockers”? No! No! You have to be more elegant than that, or why say anything? And Playboy has this compulsion to say something. It has, easily, the largest words/knockers ratio in the history of girlie magazines, and that ratio helps account for its success.

He reviewed The Last Temptation of Christ, the 1988 film by Martin Scorsese, noting at the outset: “The movie begins with a disclaimer to the effect that any resemblance to real persons—living, dead, or resurrected—is purely coincidental.” The movie, of course, was notorious for a scene in which the Jesus character dreams of sleeping with Mary Magdalene, and the fantasy is played out on screen. Joe’s piece is entitled “Jesus, We Hardly Knew Ye,” and after a series of hilarious observations he concludes:

Whatever you think Jesus was, he wasn’t this fumbling pretty boy, torn between being a Messiah and settling down with a whore-turned-Hausfrau. The options are too opposite. They belong to different scales of personality. You might as well imagine Napoleon torn between conquering Europe and becoming a Parisian chef. That would be less pathetic than this Jesus who wouldn’t even rate a statue in the town square, let alone change the world forever. . . .

That’s why the alignment of attackers and defenders [in the controversy over the film] falls along such rigidly predictable lines. They’re all fighting for possession of the sacred name. It’s still the secret name of what we now call “Western” civilization.

If there is ever a Sobran authorship controversy, we will know just what to look for. All we have to do is search the text for a single false note, a self-consciously literary touch, a forced sentiment or piece of flattery, a loss of calm or fairness, an insult standing in place of wit, or an attitude in place of an argument, and finding any one of these, we could rule out Joe. If, on the other hand, we detect a lightness and charm in the tone, a modesty in literary manner, an original use of common words, arguments that are devastating but never aggressive, and a sense of fun that has us dissolving in laughter before we can even complete the analysis, that would be our man.

You can see these same qualities at work in Joe’s early commentaries addressing the anti-Semitism suspicions, back in the late 1980s, when all the trouble started. He had been in many controversies before, and seemed to assume this was just...
one more along the way. Freedom was more than the right to ask permission, and why should these new adversaries in debate command any more deference than all the others? Only now he had stumbled into a tough section of town, where his arguments invited more than counterarguments, his witty lines didn’t have their usual effect, and his doggedness in debate didn’t hold the audience. Joe either didn’t notice or refused to acknowledge the different circumstances. He just went right along, as in a 1987 NR column entitled “Le Nouveau Canard,” not only addressing his accusers but, to make matters worse, teasing them:

My putative bigotries include anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. I’ve been accused of others (hating Italians, for example), but these are the Big Four. I’ve also been diagnosed as “obsessive.” . . .

Last summer I discovered the utter futility of trying to defend my own motives against those who claim to be more authoritative and more honest about them than I am. Norman Podhoretz and his wife, Midge Decter, took up the theme that I was anti-Semitic. That was when Norman charged me with writing “obsessively” about Jews and Israel. Since then I’ve hardly mentioned these subjects, by the way, but Norman is still on the warpath. I guess he finds it hard to stop thinking about my obsession.

Wherever Joe stood with Norman Podhoretz, what mattered much more, as friends told him, was where he stood with Bill Buckley. Honorable retreat is available when a man who discovers you, hires you, and over many years protects you from personal troubles asks for your silence on the matter—in deference to his judgment, and never mind all the endless particulars of an argument already made many times over.

Whatever he believed about the first Gulf war, the Middle East in general, and American-Israeli relations, there were, moreover, ways to state the case without letting a principled difference devolve into literary warfare. It was Joe who reminded others that before you criticize people and causes, you have to first appreciate them. So why not a few words like those he had written earlier in his career, about the greatness and heroism of the people of Israel, if only to show himself a credible observer of their country’s conduct?

There was also an obligation to his own talent, not to squander it in pointless intellectual battles when there were so many good and worthy causes that needed him. The protection of life, the defense of freedom, the advancement of “Western” ideals, and hell, even the cause of Edward de Vere, were all more important than settling this one ultimately fruitless quarrel in which Joe had gotten himself trapped.

He had his own views on all of this, of course, and Buckley got it just right in noting Joe’s “obstinate tendentiousness” on the subject. Reading this further criticism in NR, he would doubtless run us through the entire matter again, point by point, fallacy by fallacy, just as rigorously and affably as he did in reply to Buckley’s painstaking, book-length essay, *In Search of Anti-Semitism*. Joe agreed with an observer’s description of Bill’s extended review of the anti-Semitism case against him as that of “an extremely scrupulous judge at a show trial,” and began his defense:

> When a man shouts “Wolf!” it’s not really necessary to remind us that the wolf is a dangerous animal, or to inform us that its Latin name is *Canis lupus*, or to discourse on its breeding and migratory patterns. We just want to know if there’s really a wolf there. And if we find no trace of a wolf, it may be helpful to know whether the man doing all the yelling uses the word “wolf” to include, say, terriers and spaniels.

Had he only left it there—with this rebuttal that perhaps only Buckley, among magazine editors, would even have solicited for inclusion with his statement of the case—how much better off he would have been. “I learned a lot of things from Bill Buckley,” Joe said in one of his last writings, “but the best thing he taught me was how to be a Christian.” Yet for a time, happily ended before both were gone, Joe traded a friend and mentor who loved him for new company that was beneath him, *National Review* for the Institute for Historical Review. His appearance before that sorry outfit a few years ago (it’s the kind of group where they talk about “the Holocaust story”) remains impossible to explain, at least if you’re trying to absolve him. If, as I had always supposed, Joe was just one damn stubborn spaniel who didn’t know when to let the point go, then what was he doing with all those wolves? It calls to mind a Sobran line directed at Mario Cuomo, in that letter rebuking the governor’s way of sounding pro-life while encouraging exactly the opposite cause: “The worst thing I can say about you is a thing that is too obvious to deny: that these fanatics accept you as one of their own.”

He was, as another former colleague of Joe’s put it to me, “the co-author of his own misfortunes.” Yet we all hope to be remembered for our best moments, and pardoned for our worst ones, and those who knew Joe Sobran can still remember a person who seemed incapable of hateful or cruel thoughts of any kind, much less hatred for an entire people. If anti-Semitism were not beneath that man morally, it would surely have been beneath him intellectually. It’s a crass, wicked, and irrational view of the world that just can’t be squared with the wisdom and goodness of heart that shine through the rest of his work. You might say the ideas and the man belong to different scales of personality.

I spoke to him on the phone once around 1998, when Joe was really down, which he wasn’t often, and he mentioned some new benefactors who were trying to help him get his career back together. It was small money but needed, and he felt miserable at having really down, which he wasn’t often, and he mentioned some new benefactors who were trying to help him get his career back together. It was small money but needed, and he felt miserable at having.

He had his own views on all of this, of course, and Buckley got it just right in noting Joe’s “obstinate tendentiousness” on the subject. Reading this further criticism in NR, he would doubtless run us through the entire matter again, point by point, fallacy by fallacy, just as rigorously and affably as he did in reply to Buckley’s painstaking, book-length essay, *In Search of Anti-Semitism*. Joe agreed with an observer’s description of Bill’s extended review of the anti-Semitism case against him as that of “an extremely scrupulous judge at a show trial,” and began his defense:

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The Bent Pin by Florence King

The Defenestration of the Shmoo

It has hit me all of a sudden that Rand Paul might have been named after Ayn Rand. I’m too scared to Google him and find out, but just to be on the safe side I have decided to offer up my bona fides to the tea partiers so they won’t come and take me away in the middle of the night. I heard that they let you live if you can attest that reading Ayn Rand for the first time was an experience you’ll never forget. This I can do . . .

It was a hot spring night in 1950 and the segregated public schools of Washington, D.C., were embroiled in controversy. Citing the city’s growing black population, the school board transferred Central High School to the black system and renamed it Cardozo. Immediately, our foremost native Washingtonian and Central alumnus, J. Edgar Hoover, flew into a rage. Other prominent Central alumni entered the fray and the city became what is now known as “racially tense.”

I was slated to go to Central after junior high, so people kept asking me what I thought about it.

“I don’t think about it,” I replied frostily. I was reading The Fountainhead while a race riot brewed. The awkward age is the worst time to read Ayn Rand. She liked people who were tall, slim, and beautiful, and I was slouched, dumpy, and pustular, but I took up Objectivism anyway because I wanted to be like the novel’s porcelain-delicate heroine, Dominique Francon. She pursued the highest ideals so I stopped walking and started striding, taking care to turn my flat feet inward so I would look like an egoist instead of a duck. I kept my eyes locked straight ahead, causing a number of collisions, and forced my jaw into a rational clamp, which broke the rubber bands on my braces and made me drobble down my front.

One night while the city seethed I lay on my bed rereading the scene in which Dominique throws a marble statue out of her window because she cannot bear the thought that unworthy people might gaze upon such perfection. A thrill coursed through my fat-slabbed body. Maybe if I threw something out of my window . . .

I looked around the room. I did not have a marble statue but I did have a Shmoo, an armless blob of a doll that bore a striking resemblance to me. I picked it up and went to the window.

“Do this as an act of scorn,” I intoned, and let fly the Shmoo.

A few minutes later I heard an uproar in the hallway, followed by a violent knocking at our door. Peeking out from my room, I saw our neighbor, Miss Collier, burst in bearing the incriminating tableau when my father walked in.

“Dominique and Roark are the only two people they’ve ever met who blend exaltation with degradation! She hates him because she loves him!”

Miss Collier was still sobbing, Granny was still patting her, and Mr. Karras was still holding the Shmoo. He turned it over and looked at it as though seeking the key to my freeform book report in its batty smile. We were poised in this tableau when my father walked in.

He chided me gently for frightening Miss Collier and then, being the only other reader in the family, he picked up where I left off. “She was acting out a scene in a novel,” he explained. “It’s about two contrasting views of the self. You see, the egoist and the compromiser—”

“Don’t you start!” Mama yelled.

. . . Such, such were the joys, as Orwell said in remembrance of school days past. Later on I read The Fountainhead several times and lots of other books as well before writing a few of my own, which is why I am always glad when anybody reads anything at all. However, to tea partiers who have just discovered Ayn Rand, I give warning: You are approaching her backwards.

You are presently hooked on her third and final novel, her tour de force, Atlas Shrugged, because it demolishes socialism and exalts capitalism. The trouble is, it reads like a first novel by a writer who has yet to learn control. It’s much too long, her characters talk too much, and she talks too much, i.e., she commits that most mortal of literary sins: She “tells” instead of “shows.”

Her second novel, The Fountainhead, shows vast improvement, but the characters still talk in philosophical tracts instead of dialogue. For the best of Ayn Rand you must read her first novel, We the Living. Set in early Bolshevik Russia, its narrative thrust is flawlessly timed, the heroine has two lovers, an aristocrat and a Communist cast in the Ashley Wilkes/Rhett Butler mode, and it has a heart-wrenching final scene reminiscent of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s description of Eliza crossing the ice in Uncle Tom’s Cabin—except it’s even better.
From the Twitter feed of Kim Jong Un, @youthcaptain

Hey! So this is Twitter? Prtty cool. Wondering if @aplusk or @mrskutcher will follow me. Hello?

Heading to big mtng of Com. Party of NoKo. Will prbly become new leader. So why am I already like, NBFD?

First order of bidness: remove porn filter from nation's internet.

@youthcaptain is now the Mayor of North Korea #foursquare

Wondering if they'll ever let me host SNL? #lettheyouthcaptainhost

Hard to understand what Dad wants. Have tried to be all OMG! OMG! about being new leader of NK, but seriously, big surprise?

Spent day looking at self on youtube. Have come to realization that black is NOT slimming. #neednewlook

@organizingforamerica Love the website. Jealous of the loyalty of your followers. Wish we had the same kind of press here in NoKo.

Can't decide if Youth Captain is a cool nickname or if it makes me sound gay. What do you say, Tweeps?

How many rooms does this place have, anyway? Every time I think I'm getting to the video game room, I end up in another party assembly room.

Played golf with Dad today. Mentioned to him that in rules of golf, each stroke is counted individually. Got silent treatment rest of round.

Pis RT! Pis RT! Need to get to 10mill followers by Tuesday. Made bet with @dearleader.


Only way to get through big party conference? Imagine all the chicks naked.

So tired of dad's criticism. Am trying to look menacing, but my features are too round. Why not love me for me?

Psyched for Glee season opener. Wish I didn't have to watch it in underground bunker.

Do not think Dad knows exactly what "who's your daddy?" means or when it's appropriate.

Let this be a lesson: heavy kimchi lunch plus sitting still during my dad's speeches does not equal awesomeness.

I check in at PRESIDENTIAL PALACE #gowalla

To all the girls who wouldn't go out with me when I was in school in Switzerland: who's sorry now? #iarosey

Apparently, I look fat in all of the official photographs. Thanks, Dad, for pointing that out. #astrokeodoesnt-giveyoutherighttobeunsupportive

When u know u can have someone executed for looking at u funny, hard to resist. Not asking for sympathy, just saying.

Wondering why @barackobama is following me for, if he's not going to answer any of my direct messages.

Memo to synchronized games choreographer: put hotter chicks closer to dais next time. Thought we had a food shrtge in NoKo? Not evident from some dancers.

Long chat with dad re: expectations and demonstrating affection. His dad very withholding. Understanding him better. Good talk.

Have asked generals several times to see cool Death Star plans Dad talks about. Get awkward silence and strange vibe every time. What's up with that?

Bear in mind: Cheetos plus black jumpsuit equals black jumpsuit covered with orange dust.

Hey, @leodicaprio! Wld luv to get 2gether 2 talk about filmmaking and the environment and whatevs. And to commiserate re: fame issue. Try being the only celebrity!

Do not understand why NeNe and Kim are suddenly friends again. Everyone forgot Kim's betrayal re: Don't Be Tardy for the Party? #realthewivesofatlanta

Saw a red button on desk. Pushed it. Then everyone ran in and had total CRAZY SCREAMING FIT. Then don't put the button on my desk with a light in it!

Woke up today and thought, so is this all there is? Eat, listen to speeches, give speeches, eat, listen to more speeches, give more speeches, eat, sleep, repeat? Makes me want to declare war on China.

Apparently, official photographs can't have Bluetooth device visible. Once again it's Dump on Youth Captain Day. Not liking this job so much.

Getting dirty looks from generals every time I open up my iPad. I promise, it's just solitaire! Not the WSJ app.

Another day of boring meetings and speeches. Was promised more stuff to fiddle with on desk. Today, same cookies as yesterday. #thiscountryneedsbettercookies

Hard to form a rock band with 60-year-old army general on drums.

Just learned that they won't let me go to the Oscars this year, even if I'm nominated. This country sucks.

Another long talk with Dad re: my attitude as it relates to possible coup. I think he's overreacting. On the other hand, noticed toaster suspiciously close to bathtub this AM.

Tried to get through another long day of speeches without going nuts. Went down the line, imagined all girls naked. Then got to Mom. YIKES.
Books, Arts & Manners

Hope from The Past

ARTHUR W. HERMAN

So we get paragraphs like this, de-

scribing the young Washington on the

verge of his first command in the French

and Indian War:

This young careerist brooded inter-

minably over the discrimination leveled

against colonial officers and betrayed

a heightened sense of personal injus-
tice—feelings that would assume a

more impressive and impersonal ideo-

logical form during the American Revo-

lution. Nevertheless there was a gravitas

about the young Washington, a serious-

ness of purpose and a fierce determi-

nation to succeed, that made him stand

out in any crowd.

The media catchphrase “gravitas”

is particularly jarring. What should be

the best one-volume life of George

Washington reads at times more like

The Audacity of Hope in 18th-century

fancy dress.

Still, it doesn’t pay to give up on Cher-

now so quickly. His exhaustive research

and command of detail supply more than

enough material to make a Washington

who does speak to our time—and also,

like the one in Richard Brookhiser’s vol-

ume, for all time.

“It was Washington’s nature to pon-

der the dark side of things,” Chernow

writes. Born in 1732—the same year as

Haydn—George Washington grew up

divided between two powerful impulses.

One was a desire to enjoy the serenity

and domestic peace of his rural Virginia

boyhood and, later, Mount Vernon: a

world of foxhunting (he was the finest

equestrian himself), crop growing, and adventurous business

schemes with friends, framed by the

domestic intimacy of fussing with chil-

dren and grandchildren. Washington

borrowed a phrase from Micah 4:4 to
describe this peaceful life in his famous

“Answer to the Hebrew Congregation of

Newport”: “Every one shall sit in safety

under his own vine and fig tree and there

shall be none to make him afraid.”

Against this ran a growing sense that

a faraway government in London had

grown too large and tyrannical, and was

set to tax and oppress its American chil-

dren without regard to their wishes or

interests. Washington realized that con-

fronting the challenge of the one might

mean giving up the pleasures and happi-

ness of the other. This seemed intoler-

able. Washington’s life became a quest to
discover how men might achieve liberty

without giving up the things that make

it sweet. Like almost all the Founding

Fathers (Alexander Hamilton might be

the sole exception), he entered public life

primarily as a defensive measure—not

in order to exercise power, but in order

to keep power at arm’s length and out of

people’s lives.

This required an ever more extraor-
dinary balancing act the more famous

Washington became, as well as consider-
able self-discipline. It was in some ways

easier for Washington because he was

a soldier. The discipline of military life,

and the responsibilities of command

earned during the French and Indian

War, convinced him that fulfilling both

our public and our private duties requires

a constant inner strength, buttressed by

moral rectitude on one side and unhes-

itating self-sacrifice on the other, and bol-

stered by a deep religious faith.

Washington stuck to this formula all

his life. The ancient Romans had a name

for it: virtue. No wonder contemporaries

compared Washington to the ancient

Romans, and no wonder Washington

loomed as the inevitable choice for

commander-in-chief when the Contri-

dental Congress desperately needed one

in 1775.

He was not only the logical choice (the

other candidate, Israel Putnam, was too

old) but the only one with any strong

strategic sense. Washington realized that

if he couldn’t win the war, he could keep

the other side from winning—and that

eventually patience across the Atlantic

would run out and independence would

be achieved. This too required extraor-
dinary self-control, to wait out an enemy

and avoid the temptation of a decisive

battle. But with some help from the

French, especially on the naval side, this

is precisely what happened. After the

war, Washington was able to step down

as commander-in-chief but remain the

most revered man in America—the true

father of his country or pater patriae, in

the classic Roman formula.

Mr. Herman, a visiting scholar at the American

Enterprise Institute, is a historian. His most recent

book, Gandhi & Churchill, was a finalist for the

Pulitzer Prize.
“Having now finished the work assigned me,” he told Congress, “I retire from the great theater of Action”—and back to his beloved Mount Vernon. What drew him back four years later was the failure of another government, the one established by the Articles of Confederation, to honor its commitment to pay his veterans who had served him loyally in the Continental Army and now faced financial ruin.

The problem this time, he concluded, was not a government that was too strong but one that was too weak. Although he sat only as an ordinary delegate, such was Washington’s reputation at the Constitutional Convention in the autumn of 1787 that when he heard his young friend James Madison’s sketch of a new Constitution, his approval virtually ensured its passage, while its new chief executive’s powers and prerogatives were as clearly composed with Washington in mind as High Noon was written for Gary Cooper.

Once again he had to give up the pleasures of Mount Vernon—“the most charming seat I have seen in America,” a Philadelphia visitor said, and where, writes Chernow, “light portable tables [were] brought onto the piazza in warm weather, which allowed guests to enjoy alfresco dining, cooled by river breezes and serenaded by parrots.” Yet Washington saw that his private serenity and his business ventures, including cutting a canal from the Potomac to the Ohio Valley, would have no secure future with a government that could not enforce its laws and was swimming in debt—and unless he assumed and molded the office of chief executive to be a bulwark for, not an obstacle to, free government.

It was an awesome task. More people, slave and free, worked at Mount Vernon than worked for the entire executive branch of the federal government. With everything he did becoming instant precedent, President Washington tried to keep the focus away from himself and on making a government that worked. One of his major challenges was keeping the quarreling factions of Federalists and Democrats from tearing each other, and the country, apart. Their leaders, Hamilton and Jefferson, were deeply critical of Washington’s seeming diffidence, for different reasons. But they showed he was right when they broke off their feud to beg him to stay for a second term.

This he did, while setting the future of the American presidency in two decisive ways. The first was raising and taking command of the army that would suppress the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794, an army five times larger than the one he had commanded at Yorktown. Self-restraint must never be mistaken for lack of decision, as Washington powerfully proved; and the presidency’s twin roles as chief executive and commander-in-chief became melded into one, not just for Washington but for every president since.

The second was making the president the prime mover in American foreign affairs.

His Farewell Address of 1796 is truly the foundation of a distinctly American diplomacy, one that balanced the ideals of American exceptionalism with the realities of dealing with the world. It tends to be remembered more for the quasi-isolationist line, “‘Tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances,” than for what Washington said next: “so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it—for let me not be understood as capable of patronising infidelity to existing engagements.” From Britain in World War II, to Israel and Iraq today, Washington’s enduring pledge was that America’s honor rested on supporting its friends.

When Washington died at Mount Vernon on Dec. 14, 1799, many feared the American republic could not survive without his presence. They were wrong. His presence would persist, as it still does, in the formula according to which he lived his life. The eternal price of liberty is not just vigilance, but also self-discipline; and the pursuit of happiness requires a framework for fulfilling our public obligations, as well as our private passions.

It was Parson Weems—the same one who gave us the cherry-tree-chopping boy Washington so despised by later biographers, including Chernow—who said, “Think of Washington—and HOPE.” It’s still the watchword for our future.

—DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

THE SUIT

My grandfather, nineteen years of age,
Falls from the pages of the unabridged
Dictionary where I keep him pressed,
A sepi a print of him in his second suit,
A double-breasted serge. The satin tie
Flows from a knot held by a silver pin.
His second suit. The first, he bought
With six years of savings, pennies earned
As cabin boy, deckhand, and seaman.
The night he put it on and went ashore
Some shipmate cracked wise about the cut
Of the cloth or the man who wore it, that
Somewhow one was unsuited to the other,
The one being too fine, the other crude.
Whereupon my grandfather swung at him,
And one blow led to another until the men
Whirled into a blur of fisticuffs and blood,
Fought until their clothing was in tatters.

So now he appears in his second suit,
Bought off the rack in Hong Kong or London
Just after the Great War. He’s tough
And handsome, bright-eyed, proud,
Daring the whole world to call his bluff,
Cocksure the clothes don’t make the man.

—DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN
welcome his calming explanation of modern Republican views. So should the rest of sane America.

Dueck is unquestionably right to emphasize the continuities in post–World War II Republican foreign policy, and to point out that “the most important such continuity is a consistent, hard-line American nationalism. Republicans believe in American exceptionalism, have sought to preserve their country’s freedom of action in world affairs, and have tried to avoid what they view as excessive accommodation toward hostile or threatening nations.”

In years past, at least some elements of the Democratic party shared these characteristics. Today, of course, no one would accuse Barack Obama of trying to avoid “excessive accommodation” with our adversaries.

Dueck identifies “four broad tendencies or schools of thought” in conservative foreign policy: realism, hawkishness, nationalism, and anti-interventionism. But listing all these “schools” together is an apples-and-oranges mistake, confusing policy with implementation. Nationalism is a policy mindset, a kind of philosophy that informs unfolding policy decisions. But both “anti-interventionism” and “hawkishness,” by contrast, are simply tactical alternatives, operational modalities that flow from policy preferences, and thus are not conceptually equivalent to policies. And “realism,” to Dueck, is the prudent management of foreign affairs for America’s interests, which emerges, in light of his critique of George W. Bush’s Iraq policy, as his preference. Dueck’s version of “realism” is thus also implementation rather than policy, and to him a decidedly Good Thing.

Dueck makes another mistake in applying the labels like bumper stickers to individual Republican leaders. Although he concedes that such labels do not accurately describe real-life political actors, he essentially ignores his own caution both in analyzing presidents in office and in prescribing future policy. The sample is, obviously, extremely small. Burkean red flags should be rising up profusely to warn us away from reaching broad conclusions for future policy on so inadequate a basis, or in bandying around labels that hinder analysis rather than facilitate it.

Also problematic is Dueck’s conclusion that “the real story” of Republican foreign policy’s evolution “is not progress to internationalism [from isolationism] but rather the transition to interventionism from anti-intervention.” This erroneous conclusion again confuses policy with technique, and ignores the real-world threats that actually confronted contemporary presidents.

Dueck argues, for example, that George W. Bush’s Iraq policy weakened the Republican brand’s reputation for foreign-policy competence, and should therefore caution us against an excessively interventionist policy in the future. But surely, the lessons learned from any particular intervention must depend on the circumstances that prompted it in the first place, together with an assessment of how it was implemented. There is simply no way, divorced from the precise circumstances, to reach tenable conclusions about “intervention” in the abstract.

Thus, Dueck himselfconcedes that President Eisenhower’s 1958 military intervention in Lebanon “did maintain a pro-Western government” there. And Dueck likewise concedes that Eisenhower’s 1956 opposition to the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt to reverse Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal “apparently won the United States little gratitude” in the region. In fact, U.S. support for our allies’ Suez intervention could have advantageously and significantly reshaped the Middle East, and also had a dramatic effect on the U.S. role in Europe. The French felt betrayed and humiliated by the U.S. over Suez, prompting German chancellor Konrad Adenauer to predict to French prime minister Guy Mollet, “Europe will be your revenge.” Indeed it was.

Moreover, while Dueck is right to assign responsibility for post-Saddam U.S. difficulties in Iraq to Bush, his theoretical, political-science constructs lead him to conclude wrongly that their cause was Bush’s abandonment of prudent realism. While Bush did in fact take an excessively optimistic view about the prospects
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for and pace of democratization in Iraq, his real mistake was the failure to provide clear direction within his own administration. The disquieting gap between the short, sharp conflict that overthrew Sadd- dam Hussein and the 2007–08 “surge” strategy—and everything that went wrong during that gap—was a failure of presi- dential leadership in operational matters. What caused that precise failure remains debatable, but it was not a failure of the original decision to intervene and remove Saddam from power, and eliminate the threat he posed to U.S. interests and friends in the Middle East.

Proving the point that there was a failure of White House leadership on operational matters are the dramatically different understandings of our post-Saddam Iraq policy displayed in the memoirs of Jerry Bremer (My Year in Iraq) and Doug Feith (War and Decision). Bremer headed the Coalition Provisional Authority in Bagh- dad, and Feith was under secretary of defense for policy. Here are two highly intelligent, honest, dedicated, hard- working senior officials, both of whom worked to implement what they thought U.S. policy to be. Yet any fair-minded observer carefully reading their respective books would be justified in concluding they were working in parallel universes for two different presidents. It is simply not possible that two such individuals, over a sustained period of time, misunder- stood or consciously deviated from their policy instructions. The only explanation is that they were receiving mixed, indeed contradictory, signals from the White House. It explains further why, I regret to say, Dueck is correct (albeit for the wrong reason) that the Bush White House dam- aged the Republican reputation for competence in foreign policy.

Consider also the criticism from Eu- rope and the American Left of Bush- administration “unilateralism.” This too elevates a tool into an abstraction. No one working for Bush arose each morning asking, “What unilateralist policy can I pursue today?” We asked instead which of several alternative tactical lines would be most likely to achieve our policy ob- jectives. All the decisions that generated so much criticism—withdrawal from the 1972 ABM Treaty, signing the treaty creating the International Criminal Court, and rejecting the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, to name three—rested on substantive assessments of the policies’ defects, not an unconstrained desire for “unilateral” action. Indeed, where Bush was seduced into pursuing a traditional multilateral course (as in seeking new and arguably unambiguous Security Council authority to overthrow Saddam), he suf- fered. And yet, notwithstanding these travails, the administration did not hesi- tate to create new forms of multilateralism, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, where appropriate to advance American interests.

Thus, endless cud-chewing over inter- ventionism or unilateralism in the abstract is ultimately unenlightening, because real-world operations are never carried out in the abstract. Nonetheless, as we enter another presidential season, it is worth remembering Dueck’s central insight about the importance of presidential discre- tion in shaping foreign policy. Once a Republican president takes office, the various factions within the party defer to their elected leader in a fashion very different from their conduct on important domestic issues. Although the 2012 Republican candidate will doubtless fall within the broad outlines of contemporary party thinking, there is every prospect that his or her views will not be carefully examined prior to the party’s nomination. The con- ventional wisdom is that domestic policy will dominate the primary/caucus and general-election campaigns, given our current circumstances, and the aspirants will not have to articulate their foreign- and national-security policy preferences beyond the level of platitudes.

Perhaps even more likely, foreign-policy naïveté or outright incompetence, in both formulation and execution, will not stand out in the career patterns of the vast majority of candidates. Thus, there is every prospect that, absent a vigorous pre- nomination debate, anomalous views, or professional or personal inadequacies, might emerge only after a president has been sworn in. This is obviously far too late. We need, therefore, a more robust vetting on foreign-policy issues during the candidate-selection process. While far from foolproof, this vetting process is the only thing that stands between the Republi- can electorate and potentially disastrous foreign-policy and political consequences. Otherwise, conservatives and Republicans might well succeed in defeating Obama, only to find they have elected a foreign-policy wild card at a time of grave inter- national peril.

Young Lisbeth

ANDREW STUTTAFORD

I got Dan Brown, I really did. The history was bunk, the prose was Lego, and yet there was something there—that maddening, tantalizing what’s-going-to-happen-next—that kept me turning, turning, turning the pages deep into the night. By contrast, the success of Stieg Larsson, the Swedish thriller writer, who would—had he not died tragically young (only 50) in 2004, leaving just three (completed) novels behind—now be seen as a challenger to the impious Mr. Brown, leaves me more than a little amazed.

Collectively known as the Millennium trilogy, those three books have together sold over 30 million copies worldwide and quite a few bytes beside: Larsson is the first author to be downloaded over a million times on Kindle. Each installment has been made into a movie in Sweden. The first two films (I haven’t seen the third) were characterized by fine acting, land-of- Bergman pacing, and, of course, land-of- Bergman language, a tough sell anywhere much south of Malmö. Sure enough, a Hollywood remake is on the way, com- plete with James Bond, well, Daniel Craig, as Mikael “Kalle” Blomkvist, Larsson’s journalist-hero, and, for that matter, Lars- son’s fantasy Larsson.

Mr. Stuttaford is a contributing editor of National Review Online.
Craig was a smart choice: Borrowed glamour is better than none. Blomkvist may, in his painstakingly proper, pragmatically Scandinavian way, be something of a Lothario, but he’s also a middle-aged, excruciatingly priggish leftist, steeped in the shopworn pieties and bottomless paranoia of a certain strain of Northern European political correctness. A bracing suggestion of 007 will be just what this tatty scribbler needs.

Mercifully, Hollywood’s filmmakers will probably follow the lead of their Swedish predecessors and dilute the “progressive” preaching that drones on throughout the Millennium saga, most loudly in the shape of a septic feminism fueled more by an apparent dislike of men than anything else. As a teenager, Larsson is said to have witnessed the gang-raping of a girl by some of his friends, a horror that he failed both to stop and to report. The form his feminism takes is thus a very public atonement. It’s not subtle—the Swedish title of the first novel is Män som hatar kvinnor (Men Who Hate Women), and its narrative is festooned with factoids designed to show just how hateful men can be. In all three novels his (almost invariably male) villains are brutish, sexist pigs, include abusers of prostitutes amongst their sleazy ranks, and, all too often, are in pursuit of underage entertainment.

Intriguingly, Larsson’s heroine and Blomkvist’s sometime lover, Lisbeth Salander, a busily bisexual 25-year-old (more or less) room whodunit complete with truly hideous family secrets—that pulled me in. Even so, by themselves neither the dreadful doings of the decadent Vanger clan nor the occasional glimpses of hauntingly wintry landscape would have been quite enough to do the trick. Throw in a brilliant investigator compared with whom old cocaine-and-Stradivarius Sherlock is Andy Griffith, however, and airport bookstores’ Steig-crammed shelves begin to make sense.

Heavily pierced and tattooed, Larsson’s surly, taciturn, and thoroughly antisocial Salander is a pattern-finding genius with a hauntedly wintry landscape would have been quite enough to do the trick. Throw in a brilliant investigator compared with whom old cocaine-and-Stradivarius Sherlock is Andy Griffith, however, and airport bookstores’ Steig-crammed shelves begin to make sense.

The more conventionally left-wing opinions that flavor the book are less bothersome and more predictable. The precincs of Schwedenkrini (a subset of literature extensive enough to boast its own German compound noun) are a thoroughly Social Democratic (or worse) place. The genre’s pioneers (Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, co-authors of an enjoyable series of books between 1965 and 1975) were Stockholm-style soixante-huitards. Their most prominent successor, Henning Mankell (best known internationally for his marvelous Inspector Wallander), is another red-flag man, and a veteran of the embattled Gaza flotilla earlier this year. Under the circumstances, Larsson, an erstwhile Trotskyite who, like the fictional Blomkvist, spent much of his career working for a small leftist periodical, fits right in.

If Larsson’s politics are an irritant, his prose is a catastrophe. Nordic crime fiction tends to be written in a matter-of-fact way, but at his worst, Larsson is just a matter of lists:

She was back in Söder by 5.00 P.M. and had time for a quick visit to Axelsson’s Home Electronics, where she bought a nineteen-inch TV and a radio. Just before closing time she slipped into a store on Hornsgatan and bought a vacuum cleaner. At Mariahallen market she bought a mop, dishwashing liquid, a bucket, some detergent, hand soap, toothbrushes, and a giant package of toilet paper.

No, the translator is not to blame.

For all that, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo passed the Dan Brown test. Easily. There was something about the mystery that forms its dark core—a classic locked room whodunit complete with truly hideous family secrets—that pulled me in. Even so, by themselves neither the dreadful doings of the decadent Vanger clan nor the occasional glimpses of hauntingly wintry landscape would have been quite enough to do the trick. Throw in a brilliant investigator compared with whom old cocaine-and-Stradivarius Sherlock is Andy Griffith, however, and airport bookstores’ Stieg-crammed shelves begin to make sense.

Heavily pierced and tattooed, Larsson’s surly, taciturn, and thoroughly antisocial Salander is a pattern-finding genius with a

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo is a decent, self-contained story. If Larsson had stopped there, all would have been well. Unfortunately, he didn’t. The remaining two books are in fact one (they are separated by an abrupt break of Dickensian shamelessness) and they should have been none. Despite a MacGuffin involving sex trafficking (a suitably modish variety of XY villainy, and much in the Swedish headlines when Larsson was writing), The Girl Who Played with Fire is really all about Salander, the eponymous Girl. She shifts from being puzzle-master to puzzle, a transition that Larsson fumbles and, in the course of the final part of the trilogy, drops. Part of what made Salander so interesting in the first place was the depth of her detachment, an idea that cannot survive her transformation in the second and third books into tough-grrl cliché, a lethal and seemingly indestructible combination of avenging angel, Modesty Blaise (an endearingly enduring heroine throughout Scandinavia), and, as underlined by a few sly hints in the text, Pippi Longstocking. Larsson had become so infatuated with his own creation (he had plans for ten books about her) that he came to believe that Salander, and the baroque background he dreamt up for her, would be enough to bring his readers along for the balance of the trilogy. Millions of the misguided have proved Larsson right, but your reviewer sticks to his opinion: Salander’s legend was allowed to overwhelm the story—and it wrecked it.

Mind you, as baroque backgrounds go, Salander’s is a doozy. It ranges far from the obligatory wretched childhood, venturing into territory that the borrowed 007 could easily call his own, all the while retaining an aura of suspicion and resentment that has a lot to do with the author, and not much with the plot. To read Larsson is to be given the impression of a Sweden where a handful of dedicated comrades struggle for their vision of justice against the overwhelming power of the Man. Given how
BILL’S BOOKS

NEAL B. FREEMAN

In my long association with Bill Buckley, I had only two serious arguments with him. One was about the Iraq War, and it lasted for a handful of years. The other was about books—and that one lasted from just about the day I met him, in 1963, until nearly the day he died, in 2008.

Bill was a man of many books, and it required three libraries to house them all. At his duplex on East 73rd Street in New York, he displayed copies of his own books, handsomely bound, alongside special editions from a few other authors. Dinner guests would browse furiously while sipping a preprandial cocktail. A much larger library was constructed at National Review, a working library that, although compact, seemed to contain all of the basic texts of political discourse; it was perfectly right-sized for deadline writing. His personal library, by far the largest of the three, was packed in the capacious garage of his weekend home in Stamford, almost 5,000 volumes stacked in rickety shelving rising to a height of twelve feet. On seeing Bill hunched over his desk in the well-laid out collection of dictionaries, historians, and memoirs; the works in which he kept the books he had actually read, and the like. most important, it was here that he kept the books he had actually read or planned to read—the biographies, novels, histories, and memoirs; the works of political philosophy; the occasional tome on economics.

This astonishingly eclectic collection never failed to provide occasion for argument. A good place to start was with Willmoore Kendall, the gifted and contumacious political theorist. Bill and I had both studied (or cowered) under him as undergraduates, and we had both attempted to manage him in later associations, Bill as his editor at NR and I as the director of a political campaign Willmoore had agreed to serve as policy adviser. For both Bill and me, these collaborations proved to be more memorable than productive. Willmoore had the soul of an insubordinate and, when even slightly inconvenienced, would produce long, explosive letters of resignation, painstakingly composed by hand in bright green ink. Of our friend Willmoore and his books, as they stood trial years later before their peers in the garage, the principal question was hierarchical: Where should he be placed in the ranks of political philosophers, conservatives, and polemics? Just how important had his intellectual contribution really been? It was a question, agreeably, to which a definitive answer could never be affixed. (I note for the record that Willmoore would never have acknowledged Bill, much less me, as his peer. Augustine, probably. Spinoza, maybe.)

Of other authors, the arguments would involve questions of trajectory. For example, as we pondered the half-shelf of Theodore White’s groundbreaking campaign books, which appeared quadrupled under the designer-label The Making of the President, we would ask: At exactly which point did Teddy peak before beginning the inexorable if still highly profitable slide into tedium and reportorial astigmatism? (I can say without fear of contradiction now that it was 1968.)

Of still other books we were more concerned with the relationship to, and the collateral damage inflicted by, the Zeitgeist. Bill was pleased to identify our instrumentation in this inquiry as the Freeman Gap, by which we sought to measure the disparity between an author’s intrinsic merit and the critical esteem he contemporaneously enjoyed. I would advance the claims of, say, Louis Auchincloss and Bill would demur. He would then advance the claims of Constantine Fitzgibbon and I would demur. And so on down through the years.

The most richly layered arguments swirled around proxy books, by which I mean books that stood not just on their own feet but as representatives of either...
through misty eyes, I thought of how much he had meant to my life and how much I would miss him.

Shortly after Bill’s death, it became clear that he had made no special provision for the books and that his estate had decided, sensibly, to convey the collection intact to a local library. But one day, months later, word raced around the Buckley grapevine that the library was preparing to sell Bill’s books. One of our old brothers-in-arms called and, almost puling, stated the obvious: “You have to do something.” I dashed off a precatory note with an offer to buy the books, at which point the deliberations took an abrupt and disappointing turn into bureaucratic underbrush. The library’s evolving position was that it would proceed with the sale through its bookshop of the “like new” volumes, many of them review copies submitted to WFB by publishers and publicists. Other titles, in good but not quite mint condition, would be shuffled into the library’s public stacks. A third batch, the books inscribed by Bill’s intergalactic circle of friends and acquaintances, would be sequestered as a permanent WFB collection. The fourth and most forlorn bunch—the tatty, tagged, ballpoint-pen-flecked volumes—were deemed unpresentable to the reading public and would be consigned to a cobwebbed corner of the basement.

If you have read this far in the story, you will anticipate that a happily Solomonic resolution would ensue. As dust settled over Bill’s books, what surely must have been the hand of God so arranged matters as to allow the library to sell some spiffy volumes and make a buck, freshen its own holdings with some fine works, and allow me—with the blessing of Bill’s estate—to acquire the books I most dearly prized: the ones he had read, marked up, and stickered, the ones that traced his own supersonic intellectual journey.

I am working my way through the books now. Some he read for research on current writing projects: How else to explain the books on Elvis and harpsichords and Micronesia, not to mention a Joe McCarthy file that would impress even M. Stanton Evans? Some books he read out of a manic, undifferentiated curiosity—authors ranging from Vladimir Nabokov to Ann Coulter. (Years ago, when we were both young, he insisted that I take him to a “Rob Dylan” concert. He didn’t much enjoy the evening, but he was relieved to have plugged an ignorance hole.) I can’t wait to read the marginalia scratched in the Tanenhaus biography of Whittaker Chambers.

There is much more here, four more cases yet to be opened—more books, possibly, than I will be able to get to. But not to worry, Bill. I’ll give them all a good home.

the ideas that animated them or the people who wrote them. A classic case was The Warren Revolution, by L. Brent Bozell Jr., Bill’s brother-in-law and a once-in-a-generation talent gone astray. Bill and I had snippet-conversations about The Warren Revolution, as an antiseptic way of talking about Brent, for more than three decades. (For a definitive account of the late Brent Bozell, I recommend a biography by the fine scholar and writer Daniel Kelly. I have not seen a word of it—indeed, it may not be published for another year or two—but Brent’s story is hellacious and Kelly will tell it well.)

On my last visit to the garage, we talked of many things, personal and practical, both of us aware that the conversation was likely to stand as a summing up of our long friendship. (He was never a careless writer; his invitation had described his condition as “terminal.”) As always, he was the fussy librarian. He was mortified, as he put it, to have discovered that a book he had given me actually belonged to a British friend. Would I be sure to get it to him? Of course I would. Was there another book I wished to accept in its place? There was not. . . . I did not wish to violate his library’s—what’s the word?—integrity. He nodded, looked around, and with a hint of the old wolfish grin said, “I’ll have to give it away, you know.” On my long drive home that day, much of it observed

In the garage
there are few genres I find as wearying as the political documentary. This is true even when they’re competently done: The more skillfully the film makes its points, hails its heroes, and skewers its villains, the more I tend to sit squirming in my seat, resisting the urge to hurl rejoinders at the screen, and muttering over and over again under my breath: “It’s more complicated than that . . .”

In part, I’m usually just allergic to the political point that’s being made: In the world of documentary filmmaking, after all, the ideological spectrum runs from Al Gore on the right to Noam Chomsky on the left, with Michael Moore’s girth striding most of the territory in between. (And the less said about the occasional right-wing “answers” to Moore’s efforts, the better.)

But after watching Davis Guggenheim’s much-lauded Waiting for Superman, I’m beginning to suspect that my problem with the political documentary isn’t just ideological. Here, for once, is a piece of docu-agitprop that I actually agree with: a heart-tugging, blood-boiling brief against America’s educational bureaucracy, with teachers’ unions playing the heavy and school choice held up as a panacea. And it still annoyed the heck out of me.

Guggenheim’s personal story has a classic neoconservative trajectory. He’s the husband of Elisabeth Shue, as it happens) who directed both Al Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth and Barack Obama’s biographical film for the 2008 Democratic convention, and who apparently never considered that government failures might be even worse than market failures until the time came to put his kids in school. Early in his career, Guggenheim made a documentary about the heroism of first-year public-school teachers. But ten years later (as he tells it, in the movie’s overture), he drives past one . . . two . . . three public schools every day, on the way to the private school where his own children are enrolled.

The movie that he’s spun out of this mugged-by-reality realization follows five children, four urban (from L.A., Harlem, the Bronx, and Washington, D.C.) and one suburban (from Redwood City, Calif.), in their quest to win a place in a charter school and escape the mediocrity or outright failure of their local public institution. It has real heroes: the kids themselves, their dedicated parents, and such figures as Michelle Rhee, D.C.’s reforming school superintendent, and Geoffrey Canada, the indefatigable founder of the Harlem Children’s Zone. It has a sour-faced villain, in the form of Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers. It has disquisitions on public policy, helped along by animation, in which we learn just how hard it is to fire a poor-performing teacher. And it has a suitably wrenching conclusion: the public lotteries that determine admission to the charter schools, in which parents and children gather in auditoriums and gymnasiums to watch as the tumbling of colored balls determines their fates for the next year, and for years and years to come.

I bought Guggenheim’s premise (our schools are broken, and the bureaucracy’s to blame). I bought his solution (more charter schools, more merit pay for teachers, and a teachers’ union that doesn’t prevent lousy instructors from being sacked). I definitely bought the personal drama: It would take a heart of stone to watch these families being let down by America’s public institutions without feeling for their plight.

Yet sitting there in the theater, I kept resisting the film, picking out its overgeneralizations, noting its elisions and evasions, letting its crusading spirit irritate me instead of being uplifted by it. I tried to imagine how a smart left-winger would critique the movie—by focusing on issues of race and segregation and “white flight,” probably, which the movie tap-dances away from at every opportunity. I wondered what a conservative sociologist might say about the movie’s insistence that schools and schools alone can make so great a difference—as though family breakdown and single parenthood, which scar the lives of many of the movie’s children, don’t play a greater role in keeping the underclass where it is. And I scoffed at Guggenheim’s Pollyannish suggestion that with the right schools and the right teachers, socioeconomic differences could all but melt away.

Don’t get me wrong: This is a good movie (if perhaps a bit too sprawling, covering too many families, cities, and bureaucracies in too little time), made with noble purpose, in the service of an essentially righteous cause. And given that I spend my career in the world of opinion journalism, I’m hardly in a position to criticize somebody for being polemical, and for giving short shrift to caveats and countervailing arguments.

But there’s still something about a political documentary that feels different from the written word—more clausrophobic, more one-sided, more oppressively unfair. A written argument you can put down, set aside, click away from; whether on the Internet or in a library, a countervailing view is never far away. But in the dark of a theater the film becomes the world entire, and throughout the running time, at least, the director controls the contours of debate completely. It’s a particular kind of intellectual tyranny, however well-intentioned—and even when I admire its message and execution, I don’t think I’ll ever learn to like it.
Country Life

The Eternal Seasons

RICHARD BROOKHISER

As torrents in summer, Half dried in their channels, Suddenly rise, though the Sky is still cloudless, For rain has been falling Far off at their fountains, So hearts that are fainting Grow full to o’erflowing, And they that behold it Marvel, and know not That God at their fountains Far off has been raining.

EDWARD ELGAR set these lines of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in a choral arrangement that is popular with high-school choirs. Elgar and Longfellow—it doesn’t get any more upholstered than that, yet despite the too-obvious metaphor and the pat assurance of the last two lines, composer and poet somehow—rising and falling phrases? feminine endings?—convey yearning and consolation.

This summer was very dry upstate. There were enough far-apart sprinkles to keep lawns and pastures from being entirely parched, but wherever you stuck a shovel or a trowel you hit drought. Even with soaker hoses, vegetables (such as cucumbers) that are essentially water bags sprouted small and seemingly angry: Why did you bother growing us? Mediterranean herbs, masochists, thrived under the torture of sun and rock: Ah, Sicily, again. Bella! Leaves experienced an early, dishonored fall, running to brown and dull red long before the first chill: Enough already. In the woods my seasonal stream, which flows down a fold of ground, picks its way around rocks and trees, then loses itself in a marsh, gave up in June. Only a thread of stones marked its former path, and a few small pools in which frogs dove before I could see them.

I did not think of visiting the U-pick corn patch; I imagined the poor Hasids from the next county out there in their all-weather holiness gear. I supposed that the Mexicans who also pick there were used to the punishment, though perhaps one reason they have come to el norte is to get away from it. The swimming hole in the kill on the ridge got lots of custom; you could see the crowds—kids, dogs, families, couples—as you drove past; but as the summer wore on, the hole got smaller.

You take the sweet with the bitter. Outdoor weddings are a roll of the dice, but this year, even into September when storms form in the Atlantic and roll up the coast, the odds were favorable. Two young friends decided to tie the knot at an old summer camp, now a nature center. Of course there would be a tent, but a downpour on all four sides makes for a hunkered occasion. Age looks at the calendar and worries; joy is hopeful. They lucked out.

There wasn’t a cloud in the sky. The grass in the field where the service was held was yellow where it had gone to seed. The arch that framed bride and groom was wound with blood-red cranberry viburnum. The clergywoman was New Age, but she sounded like Maggie Gallagher: Marriage, she told them, is older than religions, societies, cultures. You feel the sustaining force of the universe, she said, conventionally, then added, unconventionally, your vows give strength back. The music, both at the service and during dinner afterwards, was first-rate: a fiddle, two guitars, and a double bass, all acoustic; no ear-bleed rock ‘n’ roll. Almost uniquely in my experience of weddings, no family member embarrassed the assembly with inappropriate behavior or self-centered remarks. Good food too: One of the main courses was a whole roast pig. Two high-school girls behind me in the buffet line were put off their feed by the lingering personality in Freddy’s face, and the intimacy of his rib cage. More for me then. High in the air over the tent buzzards flew in at day’s end, circling together before they roosted, comparing notes. The bride’s uncle sent up an RC airplane, bright orange, which swooped and buzzed among them. They took no notice.

When the band circulated among the diners taking song requests, our table asked for “Red River Valley” and “Down by the Salley Gardens.” Wistful songs, both of them. “For they say you are taking the sunshine that has brightened our path for a while.” “But I was young and foolish, and with her did not agree.” Wistful, but not therefore unsuited to the occasion. Great happiness can play with sorrow; it knows sorrow will come, but it is ready.

The weather broke at the end of the month, when one of those equinoctial storms made landfall. Five inches of rain fell in two days; everywhere water ran madly for low ground: Lemme outta here! My stream sprang to life, and parallel streams joined it. The water was stained brown from flowing over thousands of fallen pine needles; when it foamed over a ledge, it looked like beer. In the valley they closed the state road when the creek rose; that water was muddy from torn-up soil. Big trees shrugged off old dead branches: I don’t need that arm anymore. Leaves fell like confetti. Goldenrod and apple mint bent beneath the pelting. As in spring, the ground sprung a dozen little leaks where underground currents rose to the surface.

Joe Sobran died just then. He got a prayer in the Corner and an obit in the New York Times, and friends and students of Rightworld will sift his life and work. I said my piece already, in my book about our common boss. His humor, his talent, and his quirks were part of the glamour of this magazine when I joined it, and his unraveling was one of life’s problems that surprise us because we have not seen enough, or because we do not want to see what is so close at hand. When I met him he could hit singles and doubles effortlessly; when I stopped knowing him he feasted on filth. In his last years he found his faith again, which carried him through terrible torments. Hail, and farewell.
Athwart  
BY JAMES LILEKS

Action-Game Activism

We’re told the election will be about the economy. As in, “We would like to have one again.” No luxuries like social issues: When businesses can hire without worrying that parental leave will be extended to include caring for a puppy, we can get back to arguing over whether we’re in a moral swamp up to our knees, or our necks.

Doesn’t mean we can’t kick back and indulge a little social-issue action just for relaxation. *Time* magazine served up a good one recently, writing about a video game that’s violent AND degrades women! But not how you’d think. It’s called *Hey Baby,* and no, it’s not a first-person shooter that takes place entirely in a womb. You play a woman who walks around town shooting men who annoy her. As the website says: “Ladies, are you sick and tired of catcalling, hollering, obnoxious one-liners and creepy street encounters? Tired of changing your route home to avoid uncomfortable situations? IT’S PAYBACK TIME, BOYS.”

Indeed. A man walks up, mumbles a bad pick-up line. *Bang!* The gun jerks, the blood flies, the miscreant stumbles back—and a tombstone rises where he fell, engraved with his final words. One guy says, “I don’t mean to be disrespectful, but you’re really beautiful.” *Bang!* Should have said, “You appear to be underpaid for the same job as a man due to the result of systemic sexism,” and then you’d only blow out his kneecaps. The old wolf-in-feminist’s-clothing dodge. Creep. The lines get more salacious as you go along, the men angrier, and soon the street is studded with tombstones. Still they come! They never run out of lines; you never run out of bullets.

It’s dull, ugly, and boring, but since it combines videogame violence and feminism, that leads to all sorts of knicker-twisting. Let’s handle the violent aspect first, and do so with care: The Right often overreacts to video-game violence, which strikes younger voters like Grandpa yelling about the TV showing Elvis’s hips.

Sure, gamers will tell you, the graphics are better, but “realism” is still a subjective opinion. In some WWII games, multiple gunshot wounds can be healed by walking over Red Cross packages conveniently strewn all over Europe. Talk to a vet; not quite how it worked. No one got to save his game at Normandy so he wouldn’t have to start over from England when he died on the beach. *Doom,* a hugely influential game, made many blush with its “realism” in 1994, but now it looks like you’ve packed Vaseline in your eyes and gone gummin’ for angry Lego blocks.

Hey Baby!

It’s the moral context that counts. In the *Grand Theft Auto* series you play a brutish sociopath in an amoral world, which helps compensate for the fact that you are actually a nerd with a bag of Doritos in your lap. *Bioshock* puts you in an underwater city founded on Ayn Rand principles, undone by human nature. It all depends, as it always has; for every Spillane there’s a Chandler. Even Salman Rushdie has come out in favor of video games as an art form. Granted, a game based on his story would be dull—shave your beard and stay offscreen for 20 years—but he understands it’s a new form of storytelling.

The moral context in *Hey Baby,* however, is banal: *Doncha just wanna? Wuncha just loveta?* Most feminists would probably deplore the game for its gunplay and prefer a game that shows “Race for the Cure” ribbons out of a handbag and turns attackers into chestless men with clipboards ready to go door-to-door for NARAL. But feminists would also bristle if you suggested that female nature makes them less interested in splatter-fests. Them’s fightin’ words—or, passive-resistance words. Women may not want to shoot men in a video game, but you have to understand the underlying anger, and they should be able to do so without anyone thinking it’s unladylike. Er, unfeminine. Er—GENDER IS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT!

Movies abound with action heroines now, so young women can have Strong Role Models and young boys can have . . . well, who cares. The actress may have the physique of a praying mantis, but she can still punch out a 350-lb. brute amped up on steroids and meth. A comic-book movie adaptation called *Kick-Ass* has an eleven-year-old girl who kills people while performing moves that would make Nijinsky throw a disc. The actress described in interviews her initial reluctance to appear in a *Kick-Ass* sequel, but said she was convinced it was really a female-empowerment story.

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It’s a remake of a 30-year-old film. There’s been a little empowering between here and there, but progress just shows us how far we have to go. As long as our overwhelminglly male-dominated education establishment still slaps the math books out of girls’ hands and makes them go to the Home Ec room to be measured for pink aprons, you’ll get the righteous anger of *Hey Baby.* We also need a national debate on video-game ratings, studies that suggest a link between Pac-Man and obesity, and some guidance from Oprah at the very least.

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