KING WRONG

KYLE SMITH ON NEW YORK’S BILL DE BLASIO, AMERICA’S MOST RIDICULOUS MAYOR
WHY I DON’T CALL MYSELF GAY
How I Reclaimed My Sexual Reality and Found Peace

“I encourage many to read this book which bears witness to the mercy and goodness of God, to the efficacy of His grace, and to the veracity of the teachings of His Church.”

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—Cardinal Sean O’Malley
Archbishop of Boston

“The tenderness of God is evident throughout this honest account, and is a powerful reminder for us all.”

—Cardinal Timothy Dolan
Archbishop of New York

Daniel Mattson believed he was gay. From an early age, he was attracted to other males even though he was raised in a Christian family. Finding the conflict between his sexual desires and the teachings of his church too great, he assumed he was gay, turned his back on God, and began a sexual relationship with another man. Yet freedom and happiness remained elusive until he discovered Christ and his true masculine identity.

In this frank memoir, Mattson chronicles his journey to and from a gay identity. Part autobiography, part philosophy of life, and part practical guide, the book draws lessons from Mattson’s fight for inner freedom and integrity, sharing wisdom from his own failures and successes. This book is for anyone who has ever wondered who he is, why he is here, and where God can be found when he suffers.

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No one credits Bill de Blasio with engineering New York’s current state of ease. When the history of the period is written, he’ll be a footnote to the two-decade revolution that was the Giuliani–Bloomberg period. He’s a six-foot-five-inch dwarf. Kyle Smith

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Letters

Shared Culture, Shared Beliefs

Michael Lind is to be commended for trying to reunite America under “cultural nationalism” (“The Case for Cultural Nationalism,” September 11). He defines this as “an American national majority defined by a common culture.” He affirms that “there is and long has been an American cultural majority.” I am with him completely, on all of this, so far.

I have one objection to make. He is also selling us short. Very short. He rejects the idea of a “common. . . creed.” But all groups have a creed, whether stated or implied.Everybody acts on some sort of belief or principle. And guess what the principle—the creed—is that Lind seems to have left out?

It is Honest Abe’s creed, which Lincoln got from the Founders, whom he revered. That creed is in the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence. Natural law, defined as: “Submission to the Creator—be creative, not destructive. Be honest.” Abe honored the Founders at Gettysburg when he said: “This nation, under God.”

Piers Woodriff
Orange County, Va.

Michael Lind responds: As the author of What Lincoln Believed: The Values and Convictions of America’s Greatest President (2004), I could not agree more that what is called the American creed has been and should remain the basis for our political community—the “state” half of the compound phrase “nation-state.” My point was that the American nation always has been united by more than the American creed, which, in principle, can be adopted by all nations and therefore cannot be used to distinguish one nation from another.

Correction

It was not Paul McCartney who took John Lennon to the roof of Abbey Road Studios during the latter’sacid trip of March 21, 1967, but George Martin (“That Magic Feeling,” September 11). However, Paul and George Harrison swiftly joined them there, and it was Paul who took John to Paul’s Cavendish home thereafter. The incident did not prompt Paul to take LSD for the first time—Paul had done that with friend Tara Browne the year before—but it did prompt him to take the drug with one of his fellow Beatles for the first time, an event that occurred later that night, at Cavendish.

Letters may be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com.
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“I was inspired to become a conservative leader on campus after seeing Ronald Reagan’s home. ANY YOUNG PERSON who is serious about conservatism MUST VISIT THE REAGAN RANCH.”

Marlena Bhathe, Rutgers University

Tory McClintock, The George Washington University
The Boston Red Sox announced the hiring of Edward Snowden as bench coach.

Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer wanted to extend the debt limit for three months, while their Republican counterparts preferred to extend it for six months. President Trump sided with the Democrats, for no obvious reason. Democrats cheered the break in Republican ranks while Republicans debated how damaging and whose fault it was. Some Republicans seem to believe that the longer-term extension of the debt limit could have been successfully coupled with conservative reforms and that such reforms will be much harder to get in three months. Maybe so, but it’s extremely speculative. Also speculative is the expectation that Trump is now going to make a habit of acquiescing to Democratic policies. What he is likely to do is what he has been doing, which is to improvise.

The Trump administration announced the end of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) on a delayed, rolling basis. The decision is the right one. DACA was a lawless amnesty implemented via executive fiat, and the delayed fuse gives Congress an opportunity to pass legislation dealing with this subset of the illegal population. In theory, there is a bargain to be had, a DREAM Act–style amnesty in exchange for tightening in the rest of the immigration system. But Democrats might well conclude that they don’t need to negotiate, instead insisting on a simple codification of DACA and daring the Trump administration to end the program. Trump’s statements about how fervently he hopes Congress will preserve DACA have, unfortunately, only given the Democrats more reason to believe they hold the whip hand.

Steve Bannon, the recently dismissed Trump adviser, is promoting primary challenges against Republican senators whom he deems insufficiently supportive of either President Trump or Bannon’s brand of “populist nationalism.” At the top of his target list is Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona, who has sharply criticized Trump while nonetheless voting in line with some of Trump’s top priorities, such as making major conservative changes to Obamacare. Another of Bannon’s targets, Roger Wicker of Mississippi, has not given Trump a moment of trouble. Perhaps some of these primary challenges will end up being worth supporting based on the specific circumstances. But it is hard to avoid the impression that behind this effort is the simple fact that Bannon is better at fighting Republicans than he was at helping Trump govern, and also likes it more.

Hillary Clinton inaugurated her tour for her election memoir, What Happened. Early takes from the book show her blaming herself for using her “home brew” email server—“the most important of the mistakes I made was using personal email”—but also blaming James Comey, Bernie Sanders, the Russians, and misogyny for her loss. Yet surely the proximate cause of her loss was ignoring her own husband’s advice to pay attention to the white working class (something he did in his two successful runs for the White House). The deeper cause of her loss was her lack of direction. Clinton’s slogan was “I’m with Her.” Trump’s one good scripted line from his entire campaign, in his Cleveland acceptance speech, was “I’m with you.” Given that choice, why would voters rally to her? Clinton told CBS’s Sunday Morning that “I am done with being a candidate.” If she means it, it would show a recognition, finally, that she is not cut out for this line of work.

In a letter to the FBI, two senior Senate Judiciary Committee Republicans, Chairman Chuck Grassley and Senator Lindsey Graham, publicized evidence showing that former FBI director James Comey began drafting his exoneration of Hillary Clinton months before announcing his recommendation that she not be charged with any crimes arising out of the email scandal—indeed, before 17 significant witnesses, including Clinton herself, were even interviewed. In effect, the investigation was a sham, with exculpatory conclusions drawn before the purported basis for them even existed. This should surprise no one. Even before Comey began drafting his findings,
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Obama publicly announced that he did not believe Clinton should be charged because her conduct was not intended to harm the United States. Never mind that the crimes of mishandling of classified information and destruction of government files do not require proof of such intent. Obama’s theory was soon being leaked by his Justice Department to rationalize not charging his former secretary of state and chosen successor. Comey’s remarks merely regurgitated Obama’s. The point of the emails probe was to make it appear that the Democratic standard-bearer had been cleared after a thorough investigation. It was not actually to do a thorough investigation.

Dianne Feinstein thinks that Amy Coney Barrett, a Trump nominee to a federal appeals court, is too religious: specifically, too Catholic. “The dogma lives loudly within you” was Feinstein’s unintended compliment to Barrett during her confirmation hearing. Barrett has written about how religious views should influence a judge’s reading of the law: They should not. In any case in which a judge cannot in good conscience apply the law, he should recuse himself. Feinstein’s office nonetheless defended her outburst by noting that Barrett had said such allegedly ominous things as that we play a role “in God’s ever-unfolding plan to redeem the world.” The presidents of Princeton University and Notre Dame University (where Barrett is a law professor) spoke out against Feinstein, as did liberal columnist Noah Feldman. Feinstein is certainly correct that an official’s religious bias can be so strong that it precludes fair and just decision-making. That’s why she should recuse herself from the vote on Barrett.

President Trump’s pardon of his political ally, former sheriff Joe Arpaio, was unmerited, unnecessary, and impulsive. The 85-year-old Maricopa County, Ariz., lawman was convicted of criminal contempt by a federal judge for violating court orders, which themselves arose out of his unlawful detention of aliens, mostly Latinos, on suspicion of being in the United States illegally—which is not a crime (it is a civil-law offense). By pardoning Arpaio, Trump aborted the proceedings prematurely: Arpaio did not qualify for a pardon under Justice Department guidelines because he had not even been sentenced yet. The judge’s denial to him of a jury trial presented a colorable appellate issue; if Trump had stayed his hand, there might have been no occasion for a pardon. Plus, Arpaio was looking at a maximum six-month jail term, so Trump could simply have commuted any sentence imposed, leaving the conviction in place (which would also have let appeals go forward). By instead pardoning Arpaio, the president effectively endorses Arpaio’s contempt of the judiciary. Trump clearly sees “Sheriff Joe” as a populist hero, but no one serious about immigration restriction should want Arpaio as poster boy for the cause.

As Hurricane Harvey ravaged Houston, Texas, many on the left accused Texas senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn of hypocrisy because they favored an immediate federal aid bill but had voted against an aid bill when Hurricane Sandy devastated much of the Northeast in 2012. The accusation ignores the grounds of their objection to the Sandy package. It contained all manner of unnecessary federal spending: highway improvements across the country, fisheries in Alaska and New England, and money for a community-development fund to aid the 47 states that had declared a disaster within the previous two years. These Texas politicians weren’t opposing federal disaster aid. They were opposing pork-barrel spending.

President Trump has taken to insisting on the stump that the United States is the highest-taxed country in the world, and his amen corner on cable news and talk radio has taken to repeating the claim. This is blessedly not true. The United States is in fact on the lower end of the spectrum when it comes to tax burdens among developed nations, with Americans paying in total about 25 cents on the dollar in federal taxes while the poor Danes pay about 50 cents. (There is something rapacious in the state of Denmark.) The average for the economically developed countries of the OECD is about 36 percent. The United States does have one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world, with effective tax rates varying wildly from firm to firm and industry to industry. Our taxes are relatively low—and they could be lower, if there were intelligent reform of the tax code and if there were intelligent reform of the big-ticket spending items in Washington. But there is no appetite for that at the moment: Donald Trump made it clear as a candidate that entitlement reform was not going to be on his agenda, and this position, at least, he has stuck with. Pro-growth tax reform would be desirable, but sooner or later, spending is going to have to be dealt with, too, and sooner will hurt less in the long run.

Ivanka Trump endorsed an expansion of the tax credit for children, which she said should at least be doubled, to $2,000 per child, and applied against payroll as well as income taxes. That tax credit has intermittently been a Republican cause, fading only when the party has become fixated on cutting tax rates for high earners to the exclusion of other worthy changes to the tax code. Ivanka’s embrace of the child credit represents an evolution of her views: She had previously favored proposals to expand paid leave and commercial child care. A larger credit will benefit a larger group of parents while leaving to them the decision of how to use the money: to finance a leave from work, to purchase day care, or to set aside for future educational expenses. The traditional formula for a politically successful Republican tax reform combines structural changes to promote growth with middle-class tax relief. Ivanka Trump is helping to ensure that this second component gets included this time, and in a pro-family form.

In a speech at George Mason University, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos indicated that the Department of Education would withdraw lawless Obama-era directives about how universities should adjudicate sexual-assault claims on campus. She would replace them with regulations intended to protect students from sex crimes while also protecting essential
Pill Used in Germany For 53 Years Relieves Joint Pain In 7 Days Without Side Effects

Approved by top doctors nationwide. Active ingredient numbs nerves that trigger pain. Relieves joint stiffness. Increases joint mobility and freedom.

By J.K. Roberts
Interactive News Media

INM — A pill that relieves joint pain and stiffness in 7 days without side effects has been used safely in Germany for 53 years. It is now available in the United States.

This pill contains an active ingredient that not only relieves pain quickly, but also works to rebuild damaged cartilage between bones for greater range of motion.

It can cut your pain relief costs up to 82% less than using pain relief drugs and pain relief cream and heat products.

An improved version of this pill is now being offered in the United States under the brand name FlexJointPlus.

FlexJointPlus relieves joint pain, back pain, neck pain, carpal tunnel, sprains, strains, sports injuries, and more. With daily use, users can expect to feel 24-hour relief.

The active ingredient in FlexJointPlus comes from a natural source. It is both safe and healthy. In 53 years of recorded medical use, there have been no reported harmful side effects.

“Relief in pain and stiffness is felt as quickly as 7 days,” said Roger Lewis, Chief Researcher for FlexJointPlus.

“And with regular use, you can expect even more reduction in the following 30-60 days,” added Lewis.

WHAT SCIENTISTS DISCOVERED

FlexJointPlus contains an amazing compound with a known ability to rebuild damaged cartilage and ligaments associated with joint pain.

This compound is not a drug. It is the active ingredient in FlexJointPlus.

Studies show it naturally reduces inflammation while repairing bone and cartilage in the joint.

Many joint pain sufferers see an increase in flexibility and mobility. Others are able to get back to doing the things they love.

“My left hip joint was so stiff and painful I could barely get to sleep at night,” says Amanda Johnson of Chatham, ON. “but since using FlexJointPlus my pain and stiffness has been relieved, and I am now able to get a good night’s rest again.”

With so much positive feedback, it’s easy to see why sales for this newly approved joint pain pill continue to climb every day.

IMPRESSIVE BENEFITS FOR JOINT PAIN SUFFERERS

The 8 week clinical study was carried out by scientists across six different clinic sites in Germany. The results were published in the Journal of Arthritis in July 2014.

The study involved patients with a variety of joint pain conditions associated with osteoarthritis. They were not instructed to change their daily routines. They were only told to take FlexJointPlus’ active ingredient every day.

The results were incredible.

Taking FlexJointPlus’ active ingredient just once daily significantly reduced both joint pain and stiffness compared to placebo at 7, 30, and 60 days.

In fact, many patients experienced greater than 50% reduction in pain and stiffness at 60 days.

They also enjoyed an improvement in stiffness when first getting out of bed in the morning, and an improvement in pain when doing light household chores.

With these studies medical doctors and researchers have now proven FlexJointPlus to be a clinically effective treatment for reducing pain and stiffness associated with joint and connective tissue disorders, especially osteoarthritis.

The findings are impressive, no doubt, but results will vary.

But with results like these it’s easy to see why thousands of callers are jamming the phone lines trying to get their hands on FlexJointPlus.

HOW IT REBUildS DAMAGED JOINTS

Scientists have discovered that after the age of 40 the body is no longer able to efficiently repair bone and cartilage in the joint. This results in deterioration and inflammation in the joint, leading to pain.

The natural compound found in FlexJointPlus contains the necessary ingredients needed for the body to rebuild damaged bone and cartilage.

This compound is known as ‘NEM’.

“Essentially, it contains the same elements found in your joints, which are needed to repair and rebuild cartilage and ligaments,” explains Dr. Sarah Brewer, renowned Author and graduate from Cambridge University.

There also have been no adverse side effects reported with the use of NEM.

This is a bonus for arthritis sufferers who have been taking prescription and over the counter medications that can cause severe gastric irritation over time, like NSAIDs.

This seems to be another reason why FlexJointPlus’ release has triggered such a frenzy of sales.

RECOMMENDED BY U.S. MEDICAL DOCTORS

“Based on my 20 years of experience treating people with osteoarthritis, FlexJointPlus receives my highest recommendation to any person suffering from joint pain and stiffness,” said Dr. David Vallance, Rheumatologist from Ann Arbor, MI.

“One of my patients taking FlexJointPlus has reported a significant decrease in pain when going up or down stairs, sitting with legs bent for an extended period of time, and even getting up from a seated position,” said Dr. Richard Gibson, chiropractor from Windsor, ON.

“I use FlexJointPlus everyday for my stiff and aching joints. I also have my wife and daughter taking it regularly as well,” said Dr. Ozee, G.P. from Lasalle, CA.

READERS GET SPECIAL DISCOUNT SUPPLY

This is the official release of FlexJointPlus Nationwide. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to any person who calls within the next 10 Days.

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Starting at 7:00 am today, the order hotline will be open for 10 days. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE 1-800-969-1470. The company will do the rest.

IMPORTANT: Due to FlexJointPlus’ recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call, and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

Current supplies of FlexJointPlus are limited. So consumers that don’t get through to the order hotline within the next 10 days will have to wait until more inventory is produced. This could take as long as six weeks.
civil liberties. Acting in response to the Obama administration’s mandates, campuses have created kangaroo courts that are engineered not to find the truth but rather to streamline disciplinary actions against presumptively guilty male students. The result has been not a paradise of social justice but rather a miasma of unfairness and absurdity. Universities now face a wave of litigation brought by male students and are losing cases by the dozen. Something has to give. While congressional Democrats are in lockstep in their condemnation of DeVos, she’s gaining support from surprising quarters, including from progressive academics who have traditionally defended due process. If she follows through, it will be a win for fairness and the rule of law.

Richard Posner retired as a federal judge. He was one of Reagan’s mistakes on the federal bench, so naturally he was lionized. “I pay very little attention to legal rules, statutes, constitutional provisions,” he said in a retirement interview. He deserves credit for candor, at least. When he ruled last year that discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation was illegal under federal law, he did not pretend that Congress had made it so:

He said he was engaging in “judicial interpretive updating” of the anti-discrimination law Congress actually passed in 1964. He ruled in favor of partial-birth abortion, too, opining that it could make no difference to a fetus whether or not it was partially outside the birth canal—a rationale that would just as easily have justified infanticide. He attacked Justice Antonin Scalia bitterly in life and attacked other people for saying nice things about him when he died. In the same interview, Posner said he had “lost interest” in his cases and asked himself, “Why didn’t I quit ten years ago?” He lost interest in doing his actual job a lot longer ago than that.

A baker in Colorado objected to making a cake for a same-sex wedding. The state said he was discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. He denied it, noting that he would have made any number of confections for the couple but objected to same-sex marriage. He sees his baking as a creative and expressive act, and he declines to express himself this way. He ruled in favor of partial-birth abortion, too, opining that it could make no difference to a fetus whether or not it was partially outside the birth canal—a rationale that would just as easily have justified infanticide. He attacked Justice Antonin Scalia bitterly in life and attacked other people for saying nice things about him when he died. In the same interview, Posner said he had “lost interest” in his cases and asked himself, “Why didn’t I quit ten years ago?” He lost interest in doing his actual job a lot longer ago than that.

Black-clad self-described “antifas,” also sometimes described as the “black bloc,” stormed what had been a peaceful right-wing protest in Berkeley, tossing smoke bombs and attacking Trump supporters with metal pipes. Mayor Jesse Arreguin equivocated. “I obviously believe in freedom of speech, but there is a line between freedom of speech and then posing a risk to public safety,” he said. He then urged conservatives at the University of California to cancel their scheduled Free Speech Week, which included events featuring right-wing speakers. To Arreguin, the mere presence of those speakers would constitute “a target for black bloc to come out and commit mayhem,” so they ought not to come. It’s that bloc itself that poses a risk to public safety—and the craven public officials who cede to it the power to define what is acceptable speech.

New York’s law against assisted suicide is constitutional, the state’s highest appellate court ruled unanimously in September. “We have consistently adopted the well-established distinction between refusing life-sustaining treatment and [requesting] assisted suicide,” the judges wrote in *Myers v. Schneiderman*. Pro-life advocates could hardly have articulated their own line between the permissible and impermissible more plainly. Here their cause dovetailed with the care that the court took not to legislate. In New York, expect the debate to heat up in the state assembly and senate, which are, as they should be, more responsive than the courts are to public opinion. Opponents of assisted suicide have, at least in Albany, won the argument that banning the practice is constitutional. Now they must hone the argument that banning it is right.

The New York City taxi medallion is a financial instrument masquerading as an occupational license. The medallion, which gives drivers the right to operate taxis in the heavily regulated New York market, has long been treated as an investment on the assumption that the taxi cartel’s ability to restrict the number of medallions ensured that the price would always go up—which it did, for years, topping out at $1.3 million in 2014. But competition from new services such as Uber and Lyft, which have benefited mightily from the fact that taxi service in New York stinks, has sent the price of a medallion crashing. The *New York Times* recently published an extensive report about taxi operators, many of them immigrants, who had gone deep into debt to buy their medallions, which are now worth less than they paid for them. If that sounds a little bit like the subprime-mortgage boom—“Borrow all you like for a house, prices are going nowhere but up!”—that’s not an accident. Politics can warp the price of a product, license, or commodity for a long time, but markets eventually reassert themselves, and artificially high prices create alluring opportunities for entrepreneurs and contrarian investors. We feel for those poor New York taxi drivers, though we feel a bit less for them around 5 P.M. on a rainy Friday.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum pulled from its website a study concluding that it would have been “very difficult” for the United States to have stopped Syrian tyrant Bashar Assad from waging further chemical-gas attacks on his rebellious subjects in 2013. Critics noted that former officials of the Obama administration, which made just such a judgment, sit on the museum’s Memorial Council. There are often prudential arguments for inaction, and sometimes they deserve to prevail (e.g., if action has little or no chance of success). But a museum dedicated to the memory of one of humanity’s landmark genocides is not in the business of war-gaming, or of polishing the résumés of temporarily retired
strategists. Its mission is to rouse the conscience, and to call things by their right (and awful) names. The museum was right to take the study down.

- After launching what appear to be intercontinental ballistic missiles, North Korea has now detonated what appears to be a hydrogen bomb: a device many times more powerful than the weapons that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and many times more powerful than North Korea had detonated before. This ominous development brings the North closer to its obvious goal of deploying a force of city-busting intercontinental missiles, a force that it might, in the event of conflict, use to try to deter America from coming to the aid of South Korea. While there are no good options, it’s incumbent on the United States to make the North Koreans pay a high economic price for their dangerous defiance. It’s almost certainly true that nothing short of war could persuade the North to give up its nuclear arsenal, but effective sanctions, together with diplomatic, military, and covert pressure, can keep it weak and perhaps advance the long-term goal of regime change. Unless America is willing to risk a catastrophic war, there is little else that the Trump administration can do.

- James Mattis, the secretary of defense, was speaking to American troops in Jordan. They are deployed to wage the War on Terror, broadly speaking. Mattis said, “We’re gonna keep on fightin’ until they’re sick of us and leave us alone.” A perfect sentence, distilling the whole affair.

- The headline in the London Times read, “Macron gives bosses new powers to hire and fire in a bid to jump-start French economy.” The opening sentence: “President Macron began a high-stakes gamble to liberalise the French economy yesterday, loosening labour laws to encourage employers to recruit and easing curbs on smaller businesses.” Millions of Frenchmen are screaming at Macron, in protest. The president said, “I will not yield in any way, not to slackers, nor to cynics, nor to the extremes.” That made them scream all the more. May Macron keep his nerve, allowing his popularity to plummet even as he strives for vital, and revitalizing, reforms.

- The Kurds are famous and fearless soldiers who have done everyone a favor by putting paid to the fanatics of the Islamic State, something no one else was willing to undertake. There are at least 30 million Kurds, possibly as many as 40 million, and they believe that they have earned an independent state of their own. The vote in the referendum they will be holding on September 25 is likely to come close to 100 percent. And that’s when the trouble starts anew. Minorities have a hard time in the Middle East, and the Kurds have had it harder than most. They have their own language and they are further separated by living under the rule of either the Arabs of Iraq and Syria or the Turks and Iranians. A city such as Kirkuk, for instance, is half Arab and half Kurd, vulnerable to ethnic cleansing. Kurdish independence means redrawing boundaries, something all the neighbors are certain to fight to prevent. Kurds have previously attempted to set up a state of their own, only to be betrayed by the great powers whose fear of instability is greater than their pursuit of justice. This looks like a case of history repeating itself.

- For the past 300 years, Catalonia has been an integral part of Spain. Now many and perhaps most Catalans want self-rule, that is to say secession from Spain. An unforeseen consequence of the European Union’s dismantling of the nation-state has been the emergence of hitherto submerged national identities, for instance the Scots, Corsicans, Lombards, and Catalans. Some local officials have agreed to hold a referendum on independence, but others, including Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona, Catalonia’s capital, are holding back for fear that the whole project is unconstitutional and the courts will punish them accordingly. There won’t be a referendum, said Mariano Rajoy, the Spanish prime minister: “I will do whatever is needed, without relinquishing anything, to prevent it.”

- Yulia Latynina is a prominent Russian journalist and novelist. She is also a forthright critic of Vladimir Putin. She has now fled her country. Why? In July, she and her household were subject to a gas attack. In September, her car was set on fire. That was enough. Latynina left the country before she could wind up like so many of her colleagues, i.e., a corpse. Journalist is one of the most dangerous occupations in Russia. A deep, admiring bow to those who do it.

- The Soviet Union invaded Poland in 1939. And that’s what a blogger in Russia, Vladimir Luzgin, wrote: that the Soviet Union invaded Poland in 1939. For this statement, he was fined 200,000 rubles, which amounts to about $3,500. It could have been much worse: He could have been sent to jail. The overuse of the word “Orwellian” makes people, including us, hesitant to use it—but sometimes it is exactly right.

- It is a sign (as if we needed one) of the continuing rot of the American academy that publishing a eulogy of “bourgeois culture”—marriage, education, hard work, that sort of thing—amounted to an act of considerable bravery by its authors, Amy Wax of the University of Pennsylvania and Larry Alexander of the University of San Diego. Earning them particular scorn from the left was their remark that “all cultures are not equal,” which had liberals spitting as they explained that societies practicing theocracy, slavery, male dominance, and genital mutilation aren’t really that bad if you grade on a curve, and besides, what about Charlottesville? Critics called Wax and Alexander’s lament “racist” and “hate speech,” though most of the problems they cite (such as drug abuse, out-of-wedlock births, dwindling labor-force participation,
and a loss of community spirit) cut across ethnic lines. The op-ed was bracing and disarmingly honest. Recent months have provided too many examples of what actual racist rhetoric sounds like, and praising family, responsibility, and hard work isn’t it.

■ The New York Daily News, founded in 1919, had a peak daily circulation of 2.4 million; its former headquarters, complete with a giant globe sunk in the lobby floor, inspired the Daily Planet of Superman fame. Its long decline, to 200,000 daily readers, tracked the decline of urban populism. For 40 years, the News’s politics could be described as centrist dead weight, animated by left-wing twitches: When Ted Cruz decried “New York values,” the News ran a cartoon Statue of Liberty giving him the finger. Classy! Its mortal rival, Rupert Murdoch’s New York Post, better captured the city’s mood, despite its conservative editorial line, with sensa-
tion and sex; the ascendancy of Page Six regular Donald Trump was the apotheosis of the tao of the Post. Mortimer Zuckerman, the News’s most recent owner, just sold it to Tronc, owner of the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and other papers, for one dollar.

■ After 25 years, Graydon Carter will be stepping down as editor of Vanity Fair. Condé Nast tapped Carter to run the title—a flapper-era general-interest magazine revived in the Eighties—after the exit of celebrity editor Tina Brown. All he needed to do to keep it going was roll out breathless articles on Hollywood and the Kennedys, with a slather of sexual politics (was ever a magazine more aptly named?). But Carter added just enough to the formula to make it interesting: Christopher Hitchens, James Wolcott, Sam Tanenhaus. Hitchens’s tenure was particularly noteworthy, since his post-9/11 worldview was so at odds with Carter’s own. Vanity Fair under Carter was consistently more intelligent and more various than it had to be—no mean feat in the tunnel of the winds that is New York publishing. May he enjoy good luck, and show similar savvy, in his next act.

■ Taylor Swift, the pop star, is under fire—for not talking about politics. Her relative silence on matters political has led some to assume she’s for Trump. There was once a congregation who suspected that their rabbi was a Republican. The reason: He did not talk about politics. He talked about God, Moses, the Bible, and all that. The world is lousy with political commentary. If Taylor Swift simply wants to sing and dance, more power to her.

■ If the hometown team wins 15 consecutive games before October, we’ll pay for that home-improvement project you order in July. So Universal Windows Direct of Bedford, Ohio, promised its customers in a promotion to mark its 15th anniversary. The Cleveland Indians clobbered the Red Sox on August 24 and then reeled off another 14 straight wins, setting a franchise record on September 7 with a blowout against the White Sox in Chicago. The odds were astronomical. The Indians beat those too. The window company promptly paid out $1.7 million in rebates. It had taken out a $75,000 insurance policy to cover that eventual-ity, so the owners could enjoy the run like the rest of Cleveland. If you’re a fan, take heart from the knowledge that they have not offered to pay for your new windows, doors, siding, or roofing if the Tribe wins its first World Series in 69 years; the odds that it will are too high. October baseball is just around the corner. The forecast calls for another Indian summer.

■ “I believe in outdoor games,” Teddy Roosevelt told an audience in 1903, “and I do not mind in the least that they are rough games, or that those who take part in them are occasionally in-jured.” Indeed, but the president also worked to reform a bur-geoning and yet too dangerous American game. Between 1900 and October 1905, according to the Washington Post, at least 45 young men were killed playing football, “many from internal injuries, broken necks, concussions or broken backs,” so Roose-
velt summoned Yale, Harvard, and Princeton’s coaches to a White House summit aimed at restricting the violence, “especially by reducing the element of brutality in play.” In went the forward pass, a neutral zone at the line of scrimmage, and, eventually, the helmet; out went some types of mass formations. A hundred years on, football again requires innovations to prevent a great American game from gradually being abandoned over safety concerns. Rugby-style tackling—wherein players are trained to use their shoulders and to never lead with the head—should be taught at the high-school level and made mandatory, along with an absolute ban on high tackles. Replacing linemen’s three-point stance with a two-point stance would allow for blocking with players’ heads in a higher, less dangerous position. Risk of injury can never be fully eliminated, but these and other prudent reforms should be undertaken. Roosevelt would agree.

■ Twin Peaks, David Lynch’s television show last seen in 1991, concluded its revival season. The show put a surreal spin on the evils lurking beneath suburbia, and was first a cultural phenomenon when it aired on ABC. This year’s revival on Showtime drew far fewer viewers, trading mass appeal for crit-
ical ogling. But for all of Lynch’s abstruse surrealism, the Peaks revival also featured a humane exploration of the psyche and life of down-home, down-but-not-out Americans. That there is pain and hardship aplenty to be found out there in fly-over country is something Lynch, a native of Montana, apparently never forgot. The quintessentially American director delivered a fitting and timely tribute to American life, which after all has its surreal aspects.

■ Get ready: The Juggalos are marching on Washington. The, well, rather weird fans of Insane Clown Posse, a Detroit-area hip-hop duo, known for attending shows in clown makeup, chanting “Family! Family!” and wildly spraying one another with Faygo, a cheap soda, are protesting their 2011 FBI designation as a street gang with a march on the National Mall. Meanwhile, ICP and four Juggalos, represented by the Michigan ACLU, are suing in federal court to have the designation overturned. Fans have been turned away from enlistment in the armed services, targeted by law enforcement for having Juggalo tattoos, and sentenced to stricter probation terms.
While a few individual Juggalos have indeed been caught up in crime, neither ICP nor their fans at large endorse or organize such activity. If a Justin Bieber fan commits a crime, should all “Beliebers” be held to account? If a Parrothead gets into trouble, is Jimmy Buffett responsible? Juggalos are often derided as poor, unhip, and obnoxious—but that shouldn’t relieve them of their First Amendment right to speak or peaceably assemble.

Michael Cromartie experienced his first conversion as a teenager during the Vietnam War, when he declared himself a Christian as well as a progressive pacifist. Later, under the guidance of Chuck Colson, he underwent a second conversion and soon became, in the words of a Christianity Today profile, “a consigliere for conservative Christians in the nation’s capital.” Based for more than three decades at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Cromartie devoted himself to defending the role of faith in public life. His most prominent missionary work involved the secular media. Through books, programs, and his own exceptional ability to make friends, Cromartie shattered stereotypes, showing that most Evangelicals are neither fire-and-brimstone preachers nor knuckle-dragging creationists but rather thoughtful and charitable people. For all of its ongoing faults and irreligiosity, American journalism became better because of him. President George W. Bush appointed Cromartie to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and he served as its chairman twice, but Cromartie’s most famous job—or at least one that everyone wanted to hear about—was to have briefly worked as the costumed mascot of the Philadelphia 76ers. Dead at 67. R.I.P.

Kate Millett’s breakout book was Sexual Politics (1970), written as a doctoral dissertation at Columbia, which famously arraigned D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer as testosterone-fueled patriarchs. Camille Paglia fought a long war with Millett for subjecting writers to crude ideological tests—Puritanism 2.0. That Millett did. But it was worthwhile to have noted that Miller and Mailer (Lawrence was more complicated) were intermittently talented horn-dogs. The liberation of literature from censorship, pioneered by Lawrence, Joyce, and their partisans, yielded, in the first instance, the liberation of male gratification. What Millett wanted instead was the liberation of everyone from morality and common sense—which has ensued. Dead, on the eve of her 83rd birthday. R.I.P.

Jerry Pournelle lived a science-fiction life: By some accounts, he was the first person to publish work that was written on a personal computer with a word processor. Before that, he served in the Army and at NASA, where he contributed to the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs. Later, he promoted President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative. He made the case for SDI in Mutual Assured Survival, his 1984 book (with Dean Ing) on missile defense. Yet Pournelle was best known as a commercially successful science-fiction author,
especially for the books he co-wrote with Larry Niven: *The Mote in God’s Eye* (1974), *Lucifer’s Hammer* (1977), and *Oath of Fealty* (1981). In his books as well as his journalism, he expressed conservative views and an appreciation for martial virtues, making him a successor to Robert A. Heinlein, who once called *The Mote in God’s Eye* “possibly the best science-fiction novel I have ever read.” Everybody who knew him liked him, even liberals who bristled at his books: Pournelle was committed to his genre and famous for encouraging young writers. Dead at 84. R.I.P.

**DISASTERS**

**The Stuff of a Great Nation**

Two monster hurricanes have landed on American shores, with Harvey parking itself over Houston and dumping more than four feet of rain on the low-slung city and Irma tearing through the Virgin Islands before parading up Brickell Avenue in downtown Miami and on to parts north. Early estimates of the property damage have run to more than $100 billion.

Things are bad in the storm-smacked areas, and both the Texas Gulf Coast and Florida are going to need help—as will the U.S. territories in the Caribbean, which have suffered horrendous damage. We should not make light of the property damage, and the fact that loss of life has been minimal is of no comfort to those who have lost loved ones. Still, Texas and Florida have in fact weathered these storms admirably. There was a little sporadic looting in Florida and the usual post-disaster scourge of door-to-door scam artists, but there was much to take pride in, too: Governor Greg Abbott of Texas and Governor Rick Scott of Florida both showed themselves able administrators in the face of crisis, and the coordination between federal, state, and local authorities, as well as charities, utilities, volunteer organizations, and far-flung public servants—yes, that was the Los Angeles Fire Department coming down the Florida Turnpike—made an enormous difference, a reminder of the fact that in a hurricane what happens during the storm might not always matter as much as what happens after.

The “Cajun navy,” an armada of volunteers in flat-bottomed boats, was on the scene after both hurricanes, rescuing stranded residents and the occasional pet from rooftops and swamped automobiles.

With all due sympathy to our friends in Louisiana: This is how you do a hurricane.

In the aftermath, the petty political jockeying was kept at a manageable level, but it will get worse as things dry out: There is an effort under way to blame Houston’s relatively liberal zoning regime for the dire effects of the flooding, as though stricter green-space rules would have mitigated a thousand-year flood in a city surrounded by water. Certain progressive pundits complained that Texas and Florida should be punished through the federal emergency-relief process for their relatively low tax rates, as though people in those states did not pay the same federal taxes as everybody else. (Slightly higher ones, in fact: Those sky-high state income taxes in California and New Jersey are deductible, after all.) And the global-warming alarmists insisted that Irma was all about the popularity of SUVs and the failed Paris climate agreement, even though the scientists at NOAA (you know: the people we’re all supposed to be deferring to on this question) have said that such claims are premature. The political exploitation of such events is distasteful, true, but it also can lead us to pursue counterproductive policies, which in the long run is even worse than the ghoulishness of the political opportunists.

What’s most encouraging in this episode—from the Cajun navy to the long lines of volunteers in Houston to the generous response of Americans whose own homes are safe and dry—is that there is no culture of helplessness in evidence. In times of crisis, Americans can and will do what’s needed, still. And that will matter long after we’re done mopping up behind these storms.
Trump’s New Deal

On the president’s alleged triangulation

BY RAMESH PONNURU

Just after Labor Day, President Trump made two moves that pleased Democrats and worried Republicans. He sided with the Democrats on legislation to lift the federal government’s debt ceiling. He also seemed to call on Congress to grant an amnesty to illegal immigrants who were brought to this country as minors, and vaguely suggested that if Congress did not act he might grant it himself.

These moves set off another of the feverish rounds of speculation that have been a regular feature of Washington, D.C., under Trump. Was the president preparing to ditch congressional Republicans and not just criticize their leaders on Twitter? Were there other deals that Trump could reach with congressional Democrats? Would this strategy enable him to accomplish more of his agenda and raise his popularity?

It is probably a mistake, however, to think that Trump is following a new strategy of working with the Democrats or one of playing the parties against each other. Congressional Republicans should not worry too much about those possibilities. What Trump’s behavior showed, though, ought to worry them enough: Trump is frustrated with how little he has achieved working with them, and he has not come up with any solutions for his predicament.

One reason to think that Trump is acting out of impulse rather than strategy is that he was in a better position to fulfill a top campaign promise before he made these overtures to Democrats. For months he has been demanding that Congress provide funding for a wall on the Mexican border, even suggesting that he might shut down the government with a budget veto if it did not.

In early September, he created an opportunity to get Democrats to agree to that funding. President Obama had given an amnesty to the illegal immigrants who came here as minors. Republicans had criticized him at the time: some because they object to any amnesty on principle, but most because they considered it beyond the president’s legitimate power to act without congressional authorization. President Trump said he would halt Obama’s policy in six months, giving Congress time to enact an amnesty the right way. Since Democrats wanted the amnesty more than Republicans while Republicans could live with it, a deal was possible: Congress could grant the amnesty and fund the wall. A deal was not inevitable, since Democrats could decide that they cannot live with a wall, or work with Trump. But the need to secure Republican cooperation on the amnesty could bring them to the table.

By tweeting that Congress had six months to legalize DACA, that he might “revisit” his decision to end Obama’s, and—at Nancy Pelosi’s suggestion!—that the affected illegal immigrants had nothing to fear, Trump made that deal much less likely. He told the Democrats, in effect, that they would get the amnesty they want without having to build the wall. (He also undercut those, including his own attorney general and his White House spokesmen, who had said that Obama’s amnesty had to end because it is unconstitutional.)

Trump could still use the threat of a shutdown to try to get funding for the wall. It does not seem likely to work: Democrats would probably just expect any political trouble from the shutdown to accrue to Republicans, since their party controls the White House and Congress and their leader has been talking about precipitating it. But Trump seems to have reduced the likelihood of this scenario, too, by agreeing with the Democrats on the debt limit. (He did not make a “deal” with them; he simply sided with them rather than engaging in any give-and-take.)

So wall funding seems to be as far off as ever. Neither Paul Ryan nor Mitch McConnell is likely to lose much sleep over that fact: Like most Republican elected officials, they have evinced less enthusiasm for the wall than Trump has. Trump’s overtures to Democrats have set back his own stated goals, which are also the goals of many of his most fervent supporters, more than they have set back the goals of the congressional leadership.

This result should give pause to those supporters about a view that has become an article of faith among them: that Trump is not getting his agenda into law mainly because congressional Republicans have been letting him down. Steve Bannon, the recently fired Trump aide, told 60 Minutes that Ryan and McConnell were “trying to nullify the 2016 election,” citing among other things their opposition to protectionist tariffs. A lot of free-traders were elected or, like Ryan, reelected in 2016 too, of course, and may not see why they should consider Trump’s election to have nullified theirs.

Anyway, Ryan has not been blocking protectionist legislation: Trump has not proposed any. Nor has Trump done everything he could outside Congress to get tariffs. He has hired some free-traders for top positions and fired one of his top protectionist aides: Bannon himself. Bannon’s surface complaint is that congressional Republicans are not letting...
There are worse frustrations than having Trump be Trump. His real complaint is that Trump isn’t Bannon. Bannon has also expressed discontent on Obamacare. Congress has considered only modifications to Obama’s law, not a true repeal and replacement, and has failed to pass even those modifications. It is a complaint with which most conservatives will agree. Congressional leaders surely deserve some blame for this inaction, even if it is implausible to suppose they have failed because they lacked commitment to Trump.

F. H. Buckley, a law professor at George Mason University, is another strong supporter of Trump who believes that Ryan has been an anchor pulling down the Trump presidency. But his idea of a liberated Trump is in some respects the opposite of Bannon’s: He wants Trump to embrace a single-payer health-care system akin to the one in Buckley’s native Canada.

This disagreement suggests that there is no pure Trumpist program waiting to be enacted once the Republican establishment gives way. Is Trump a Bannonite or an (F. H.) Buckleyite? Neither. President Trump is a golfer, as Russell Kirk said of President Eisenhower in another context. Nobody needs to let Trump be Trump: He has never been anything else. Being Trump has obviously served him very well in life, and especially over the last two years.

But Trump’s actions on the debt limit and the amnesty illustrate how some of his traits can impede his ability to deliver on his promises to his core voters. It is much more plausible that he acted on impulse than from strategy. He did not like the bad press he got after his initial announcement that he was canceling the amnesty; he is irritated at McConnell and Ryan for various slights and failures; Pelosi and Chuck Schumer probably flattered him. (It has been reported that he mentioned to those Democrats the good press they got over the debt limit.)

Impulse could turn into strategy as Trump finds that continuing to side with the Democrats will get him even more good press. But that would at best be a strategy for enhancing his own popularity, not one for making Ryan, Bannon, or Buckley happy. And if Trump’s undercutting of congressional Republicans contributes to their losing the House in 2018, the president might discover that there are worse frustrations than having Ryan as Speaker.

But that’s not the end of the story. When we take a more granular look at the millionaires and billionaires of Silicon Valley, where most of America’s biggest new fortunes are being minted, we find that they are overwhelmingly Democratic. A new survey from journalist Gregory Ferenstein and the Stanford political scientists David Broockman and Neil Malhotra finds that contrary to musty stereotypes, elite technology entrepreneurs aren’t straightforward libertarian ideologues. Rather, the model tech grandee is best described as a business-friendly cosmopolitan left-liberal. But because “business-friendly cosmopolitan left-liberal” is such a mouthful, let’s call them “cosmocialists.”

The left-liberalism of the Silicon Valley elite is reflected in support for drastically higher taxes on the rich, much higher levels of anti-poverty spending, and every environmentalist cause under the sun, views that are very much in tune with rank-and-file Democratic voters. Their cosmopolitanism is reflected in adamant support for free trade and for increasing immigration levels, which puts them somewhat out of step with less affluent Democrats, who are both more protectionist and more restrictionist. And their business-friendliness, which garnered the most attention in the immediate reactions to the survey, is reflected in their general skepticism towards regulation and organized labor.

As an electoral constituency, elite technology entrepreneurs are trivial. But as the women and (mostly) men who increasingly bankroll the Democratic party, they are profoundly important. They will help set limits on what Democratic politicians can and cannot say, and they are already influencing the agenda that Democrats are choosing to pursue.

Consider the intensifying effort to purge pro-life Democrats from the party, or the Left’s sharp turn against religious-liberty protections for orthodox Christians. Can either really be understood without reference to the rising influence of Silicon Valley cosmocialists?

Or take immigration, arguably the most contentious issue facing the country. Over the past decade, the Democratic party has embraced a more stridently pro-immigration position. This is sometimes described as a by-product of the rising influence of naturalized citizens, which...
makes intuitive sense, as these are the voters most intent on keeping America’s borders open to their close relatives. But this constituency isn’t especially large—according to one recent estimate, naturalized citizens are no more than 6 percent of eligible voters, and naturalized citizens vote at much lower rates than the native-born on average.

My impression is that the cosmocialists have played at least as large a role, if not a larger one. According to the Silicon Valley Competitiveness and Innovation Project Report, 57 percent of the technology workforce in the Bay Area is foreign-born. Although conservative immigration-reform proposals would likely allow for high levels of skilled immigration, it is easy to see why elite technology entrepreneurs, many of whom are immigrants or second-generation Americans themselves, would look upon immigrants favorably. Silicon Valley donors have played a mostly unheralded but enormously important role in mainstreaming the case for more-open borders, through support for immigration-advocacy groups such as FWD.us and for academic research devoted to the same cause.

And most surprisingly, perhaps, elite technology entrepreneurs are cheering on the Democratic party’s headlong rush to the left. The cavalcade of would-be Democratic presidential candidates scrambling to co-sponsor Vermont senator Bernie Sanders’s single-payer healthcare bill are of course hoping to appeal to the party’s activist left. But let’s not discount the possibility that they are also looking to woo billionaire cosmocialists who, if properly flattered, will supercharge their fundraising.

Needless to say, the rise of the cosmocialists is not the only important development in the Democratic party’s ongoing evolution. As Luke Thompson has documented in these pages (“Clinton in Purgatory,” August 1, 2016), the Obama years saw the Democratic coalition gain ground among white college-educated professionals as it hemorrhaged white working-class voters. The result is that Democrats find themselves divided between relatively affluent whites on one side, with views that are mostly though not perfectly aligned with those of the cosmocialists, and non-white working-class voters on the other.

Without the working-class whites who were once at the heart of the Democratic coalition, it is vitally important that the party motivate Hispanic and, more crucially still, African-American voters. While the Hispanic share of the U.S. population now greatly surpasses the black share, a higher proportion of black adults is eligible to vote. In 2008, voter turnout among blacks (65.2 percent) came very close to turnout among whites (66.1 percent), and in 2012 black turnout (66.6 percent) surpassed white turnout (64.1 percent). In 2016, in contrast, whereas white turnout remained in the same ballpark as in previous elections (65.3 percent), turnout fell dramatically (to 59.6 percent) among blacks. Hispanic turnout also fell between 2008 and 2012, but far less drastically (from 48 percent to 47.6 percent).

### Democrats find themselves divided between relatively affluent whites on one side and non-white working-class voters on the other.

Can a cosmocialist Democratic party succeed in energizing the non-white voters who are so crucial to its success? It’s hard to say. In theory, devoting even more time and effort to immigration advocacy might move the needle among Hispanic voters. But it’s hard to see how the salience of immigration could be any greater in 2018 or 2020 than it was in 2016, when Donald Trump devoted much of his campaign to calls for stepped-up immigration enforcement in language that can hardly be characterized as warm and fuzzy.

As for African-American voters, the picture is even less clear. One possible strategy would be to ramp up attacks on President Trump as a racist, perhaps by focusing on Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s push for a more punitive approach to criminal justice. However, it’s not obvious that such rhetoric will do anything other than appeal to the ideologically committed, who are of course not on the fence about whether to vote.

The most obvious strategy for Democrats would be a reprise of the Obama formula, i.e., to identify a talented candidate, whether Hispanic or (ideally) black, who could appeal to the cosmocialist donors while also inspiring her or his co-ethnics in the public at large. There are many Democrats who could fit the bill. Allies of former President Obama are encouraging Deval Patrick, the African-American former Massachusetts governor, to run in 2020. There is also enthusiasm for California senator Kamala Harris (the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant father and an Indian immigrant mother), New Jersey senator Cory Booker (like Patrick, an African American), and Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti (a descendant of Mexican and Jewish immigrants), all of whom are, in their own ways, vying to be the next Obama.

Will the prospect of electing a second black president prove quite as compelling as that of electing the first? Will Harris, Booker, and Garcetti be seen as inspiring figures, or will they be seen as milquetoast liberal technocrats, more in tune with the cosmocialist funders of the Democratic party than with America’s little guys (and gals)?

The answer will depend almost entirely on the occupant of the White House, who can either play into the cosmocialists’ hands by alienating minority voters or else shake things up by giving at least some of them a reason to rethink their allegiances.

And what might get them to do that? Oh, I don’t know. How about having a thing or two to say about the value of private-sector unions, which ordinary Democrats love but cosmocialists evidently do not? No Republican is going to call for wanton tax hikes. But arguing that Silicon Valley bigwigs who shelter their profits in Ireland and the Cayman Islands ought to be reined in is another story. The cosmocialists could turn out to be the president’s perfect foil.
The Curious Case of the Disappearing Laptop

House Democrats face a brewing IT scandal

BY ANDREW C. McCARTHY

Wasserman Schultz (D., Fla.) so worried about a laptop computer that she claims she has never seen before? So worried, in fact, that she has spent five months trying to block investigators from searching it?

Investigators found the laptop on Capitol Hill along with other intriguing items tied to a potentially explosive scandal that the mainstream media seem determined not to cover. The probe, now

Alerted in February to cyber-security breaches, Democratic lawmakers promptly cut ties with the Awans.

All but two Democrats, that is: Gregory Meeks and Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

The apparent ringleader, 37-year-old Imran Awan, had been doing IT work for House Democrats—several at a time—for 13 years. First retained by Florida congressman Robert Wexler in 2004, he joined Wasserman Schultz’s staff the next year, her freshman term. Gradually, other family members were brought on board.

Congressional staffers earn modest taxpayer-subsidized salaries, with IT posts among the least well compensated, in the low $30,000 range per annum. Yet Awan clan members, who worked for about 80 different Democratic lawmakers over time, were pulling down more than five times that amount—youngest brother Jamal, for example, was soon taking home about $160,000 a year after being brought into the arrangement as a 20-year-old in 2014. The Daily Caller’s Luke Rosiak, who has reported extensively on the story, calculates that just since 2009, the family raked in over $4 million.

There are indications that some of their positions were sinecures. Some of the Awan clan were rarely seen on Capitol Hill, though mounting evidence shows they had thriving outside business interests, including real-estate and automobile concerns beclouded by suspicions of financial fraud. The ongoing investigation, moreover, is auditing exorbitant losses of public funds on missing House computer equipment. In a single instance in 2016, the office of Representative Yvette Clarke (D., N.Y.) which retained Imran and Abid Awan, wrote off $120,000.

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Meeks kept Hina Alvi (Imran Awan’s wife) on the payroll for the rest of the month. She used that time to pack up her household, tie up financial loose ends, and abruptly yank her three young daughters out of school, fleeing with them to Pakistan on March 5.

By the time Alvi left, she and her husband had sent ahead nearly $300,000, much of it now traced to a fraudulent loan from the Congressional Federal Credit Union. Imran Awan had pretended to be his wife in a phone call with the credit union. Told that the couple’s preferred reason for the loan—“funeral arrangements”—would not be approved, “Mrs.” Awan repurposed without missing a beat, claiming to be “buying property.” Asking no more questions, the credit union wired the money, from Capitol Hill to, yes, Pakistan.

Stranger still: Investigators were on to the Awans by then and raced to Dulles airport upon learning that Alvi was leaving. Yet the FBI agents did not stop her from boarding her flight to Qatar (with a connection to Pakistan), notwithstanding their belief that she had no intention to return, and despite the fact that they had a basis on which to detain her. Besides the already emergent evidence of fraud and cyber hijinks, agents searched her luggage and found $12,400 in cash. It is a felony to carry more than $10,000 in U.S. currency out of the country unless one files a report describing the ownership and provenance of the funds. There is no indication in the reporting that Alvi filed the required paperwork; if she had, she’d inevitably have made false statements, also a felony.

Meanwhile, in spite of the February security alert, indications of fraud, and news of Alvi’s flight from the country, Wasserman Schultz kept Imran Awan on the payroll for nearly seven additional months—even though he was banned from the House Internet system and thus not authorized to do the job for which he’d been hired. When called on it by the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, she absurdly claimed to be concerned that Awan, a Muslim, was being religiously profiled. Wasserman Schultz did not fire Awan until July 25. That was the day after he
was arrested by the FBI at Dulles airport, attempting to flee via the same route his wife had taken. Awan and Alvi were finally indicted in mid-August. The indictment is peculiar: four counts of financial fraud, centering on bilking the credit union and drawn so narrowly that they omit what any prosecutor would regard as the best evidence in the case: viz., the efforts of the two defendants to flee to the foreign country to which they had sent the money.

Most notable: There is no mention of information theft from House members, nor any allusion to the other Awan-clan schemers implicated in it. Manifestly, the FBI is continuing to probe the security breaches. They raise alarming possibilities that sensitive House communications have been compromised and that black-mail fodder might have had something to do with why the Awans were hired en masse, retained for years, and so lavishly compensated despite giving off flashing-neon danger warnings.

Are the long-overdue fraud charges an attempt to squeeze Awan into cooperating? Very little information about the case has been made public by the Justice Department. That is to be expected, of course, when there is a continuing investigation—even if it weren’t one in which Democrats could be profoundly embarrassed, the U.S. attorney overseeing the case is an Obama holdover, and a senior prosecutor in the office just happens to be the younger brother of Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

Which brings us back to that laptop. Ever since it was seized on April 6, Wasserman Schultz has made Herculean efforts to prevent investigators from searching it. Clearly, Awan was using the computer, although it was purchased through Wasserman Schultz’s office—when investigators turned it on, the home-screen initialials read “RepDWS.” As Rosiak has reported, the laptop was found in a cranny of the House’s Rayburn office building (Wasserman Schultz’s office is in the Longworth building). Alongside it were Awan’s Pakistani identification card, copies of his House ID badge and driver’s license, notebooks annotated with the heading “attorney client privilege,” and letters addressed to the U.S. attorney. The contents of the notebooks and letters have not been disclosed.

Initially, Wasserman Schultz demanded that the Capitol Police surrender the laptop to her on the ground that it was the lost equipment of “a member”—presumably her. During a hearing on the Capitol Police’s budget, she heavy-handedly threatened “consequences” if the agency did not turn over the laptop to her. The police refused because of its patent relevance to the Awan investigation. Wasserman Schultz continued to thwart investigators, however, claiming the laptop might be immune from investigation under congressional speech-and-debate immunity. After Awan was arrested, she changed tack, conceding that the laptop was not hers and maintaining that she neither had seen it before nor had knowledge of its contents. Yet, while acknowledging that the laptop belonged to Awan, she claimed a proprietary interest owing to its purchase with public funds for the equipping of her congressional office.

Normally, if there is an immunity issue based on the Constitution’s speech-and-debate clause, it is flagged by staff counsel for the House. Wasserman Schultz, however, has recently retained a private attorney—William Pittard, former acting general counsel of the House—to argue that the computer must not be searched.

Why is the congresswoman interfering with the investigation? Having been humiliated as Democratic National Committee chairwoman when DNC servers were hacked and emails showing her pro-Clinton bias exposed during the 2016 campaign, one might think she of all people would be encouraging a cybersecurity probe. Of course, Awan was her IT guy during that debacle.

The tea leaves suggest the Awans may be of a mind to cooperate with investigators. The Washington Examiner reports that Alvi is negotiating with prosecutors a deal in which she would return to the United States, surrender on the charges, and remain free on bail but subject to severe travel restrictions. As for her husband, who is on bail with electronic monitoring, speculation about a possible plea deal with cooperation has been heavy. It is fueled by the manner in which Awan, a sophisticated actor, neatly packaged the laptop with his identification and mis-stating that she neither had seen it before nor had knowledge of its contents. Yet, while acknowledging that the laptop belonged to Awan, she claimed a proprietary interest owing to its purchase with public funds for the equipping of her congressional office.

Could Awan have wanted investigators to find it? Makes one wonder what could be in it, and why Debbie Wasserman Schultz doesn’t want the FBI to find out.
The Neo-Brandeisian Attack on Big Business

Large firms benefit society in underappreciated ways

BY ROBERT D. ATKINSON & MICHAEL LIND

The ghost of Louis Brandeis is back—and he’s angry. Brandeis, nominated to the Supreme Court in 1916 by Woodrow Wilson, was the leading opponent of corporate bigness in his era. As economic historian Thomas K. McCraw writes, “Brandeis decided that big business could become big only through illegitimate means. By his frequent references to the ‘curse of bigness,’ he meant that bigness itself was the mark of Cain, a sign of prior sinning.”

Today, many on the left want to revive Brandeis, arguing that corporations not only are bigger than ever but also have become sinners against the progressive goals of greater fairness and democracy. Yet as we write in our forthcoming book, Big Is Beautiful: Debunking the Mythology of Small Business, not only are the progressives’ claims about increasing economic concentration mostly in error, but large corporations are vastly more “progressive” than small businesses are. Bigger companies provide higher-wage jobs, better workplace benefits, lower prices, stronger environmental protection, and greater workplace diversity, safety, and stability, while engaging in less tax evasion. Regardless, neo-Brandeisians want to go back to an economy in which most Americans are employed in small, locally owned firms or worker co-ops, and they want to use aggressive antitrust enforcement to get there.

Despite cloaking itself in progressive goals, Brandeisianism began as a movement to protect the owners of small firms, such as banks and retailers, from rising competition from bigger, more efficient corporations. The protection would come from measures such as anti-chain-store laws and prohibitions on interstate banking. After World War II, when it became clear that large firms weren’t going anywhere, antitrust advocates shifted their focus to keeping firms from getting big in the first place; they developed an antitrust doctrine known as the “Harvard school,” which espoused a belief that industry structure (above all, companies’ market share) mechanistically determined firms’ conduct and performance. In other words, the greater a firm’s market share, the more it hurts competition. The Supreme Court reflected this thinking in the 1966 case United States v. Von’s Grocery Co., in which it rejected a merger that would have produced a firm controlling just 7.5 percent of the relevant market, citing a “threatening trend toward concentration.”

However, the neo-Brandeisian approach fell out of fashion in the 1970s, largely as a result of its clear overreach and the emergence of the rival “Chicago school,” which focused on efficiency concerns more than size per se. This basic approach has rightly dominated U.S. antitrust law since. It reflects the understanding that in some industries high levels of concentration can be pro-consumer and pro-growth, and that companies should not be punished for gaining market share as long as they did so legally.

But the last few years have seen a remarkable convergence of the Left, and increasingly across the political spectrum, on the belief that U.S. companies have become too big and too powerful, and it’s time for Washington to step in. This new Brandeisianism has found a home in the Democratic party, in part because it reinforces the political message that the party stands in solidarity with the working class and small-business owners by demonstrating its desire to break up big companies. The “Better Deal” agenda, a document released this summer to lay out a new Democratic economic platform, for example, promised that Democrats would “crack down on monopolies and the concentration of economic power that has led to higher prices for consumers, workers, and small business.”

The revival of Brandeisianism stems from progressive think tanks and scholars’ push, since the Great Recession, to return to a pre-1970s approach to antitrust enforcement, according to which it’s suspect for a firm to have even modest market share.

The Roosevelt Institute wants to “tame the corporate sector” by reviving “an open markets agenda for the 21st century.” The Center for American Progress asserts that “our economy needs a progressive competition policy.”

Today’s Brandeisians would have us believe that industry concentration has reached crisis proportions and that breaking up big companies should be the animating goal not just of antitrust policy but of U.S. economic policy generally. For them, there is almost no economic problem that cannot be laid at the feet of large corporations and solved by the cure-all of antitrust enforcement.

The Brandeisian revival is fundamentally motivated by progressives’ long-standing desire for a redistribution of income to counter what they claim is a rapid and corrosive growth of income inequality. The policies they seek to achieve that goal also include a higher minimum wage, universal health care, and higher taxes on the rich. But those policies require legislative approval, which is not likely in a Republican-controlled Congress. Progressives have
realized that, of the steps a Democratic president can take on his or her own, a tough antitrust policy would have the greatest symbolic impact.

The new Brandeisians believe that even limited economic concentration hurts consumers because it reduces competition for both workers and customers, enabling higher profits by way of artificially low wages and high prices. The scholarly literature generally finds that bigger firms do enjoy higher profits. But the key question is whether these higher profits come from market share or from superior productivity and performance. A comprehensive review of the economic literature on this question conducted by academics David Szymanski, Sundar Bharadwaj, and P. Rajan Varadarajan found that firms with greater market share enjoy higher profits because they are more efficient than smaller firms—and that this efficiency benefits workers, consumers, and shareholders.

But this does not deter the neo-Brandeisians, who paint a dark picture in which most of what American consumers buy is controlled by rapacious corporations making what economists call supernormal profits. Liberal icon Robert Reich writes that “antitrust laws have been relaxed for corporations with significant market power, such as big food companies, cable companies facing little or no broadband competition, big airlines, and the largest Wall Street banks. As a result, Americans pay more for broadband Internet, food, airline tickets, and banking services than the citizens of any other advanced nation.”

But they don’t. According to the OECD, U.S. broadband prices are higher than those of some countries but lower than those of at least eight other OECD nations, including the Netherlands and France—no mean feat, given that the U.S. is the second-least densely populated nation in the group, which makes deploying broadband wires expensive. The United States does not even make the list of the ten countries with the highest food costs. According to the 2017 Kiwi Aviation Cost Index, of 80 nations, the United States has the 30th-cheapest air travel. And the consulting firm Oxera finds that of eleven major developed nations, U.S. banking costs for consumers are the second-lowest.

Still, the new Brandeisians attack big corporations for rising inequality. The Center for American Progress writes: “A renewed focus on antitrust enforcement could make a significant contribution toward” reducing inequality. Reich writes that increased economic concentration has “resulted in higher corporate profits, higher returns for shareholders, and higher pay for top corporate executives and Wall Street bankers—and lower pay and higher prices for most other Americans.”

This is not true. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, not only did establishments with more than 500 workers pay their workers 77 percent more than establishments with fewer than 50 workers, but from 2004 to 2016, inflation-adjusted compensation for their workers grew by $3.88 per hour compared with just $1.45 for establishments with fewer than 50 workers.

Nonetheless, neo-Brandeisians argue that breaking up big firms would reduce profits, leading to higher wages or lower prices. So how much would the average American benefit if the corporate-profit rate (net income as a share of total receipts) were the same today as in the glory days of the 1950s and ‘60s, when antitrust enforcement was much tougher and wage growth much higher?

In fact, returning to the profit rate of that era would make American workers worse off, at least in the short term, since corporate profits were higher then. But for the sake of argument, assume that neo-Brandeisians get a president whose Justice Department is able to fragment the largest corporations into medium-sized businesses and that this reduces corporate profits 25 percent. If all that money goes toward lowering prices for the bottom 90 percent of earners, the median income will increase a whopping—get ready for it—3.1 percent, or $1,750 per household.

But second-order effects would quickly more than negate this one-time gain. This is because on average small and medium-sized businesses are less productive than large ones (that’s why they pay their workers less). If the U.S. had the same firm-size structure as Canada, where on average businesses are smaller and less productive (which is one big reason Canada is less wealthy than the U.S.), U.S. per capita GDP would decrease by 3.4 percent. Lower profits would also mean reduced investment in research and development and machinery and equipment, which would in turn reduce future productivity and wage growth.
On average, large firms are more productive, sell at lower prices, and pay higher wages than small firms. As much as neo-Brandeisians want to argue the opposite, facts are stubborn. But in any case, their claims that smaller firms would be better for consumers is a ruse, because for many, the real goal is reducing the power of corporations. Roosevelt Institute scholar Sabeel Rahman admits as much when he writes, “If consumer prices are our only concern, it is hard to see how Amazon, Comcast, and companies such as Uber need regulation.”

Liberal activist and scholar Zephyr Teachout explains one key motivation: “For the last 40 years, we have seen unprecedented levels of concentration of power. . . . Democrats can’t change things if they don’t take on concentrated power and corruption.” Just as many Republicans seek to weaken political opponents by reducing the role of unions, the Brandeisian Democrats believe that it will be easier to achieve their political goals if corporate America is broken up. But it is a fantasy to believe that if the largest 500 American corporations were each split into two, the resulting 1,000 corporations’ lobbying prowess would be any less. They would have the same amount of funding, if not more, available to pay for lobbyists and PAC contributions. Moreover, most of the top ten spenders on lobbying from 2008 to 2016 were not individual corporations but trade associations, some of them, like the National Association of Realtors, representing predominantly small firms. So it’s not as if breaking up large firms could cut the power of business in Washington.

In short, there is no evidence that American firms are too big or too concentrated today and need to be whittled down to size by the neo-Brandeisian ax of antitrust enforcement. In the lion’s share of U.S. industries, to the extent firms are big, most bring real value to the economy, including its workers and consumers. The best thing the Left could do to help workers and consumers would be to accept large corporations as a group for the economically and technologically progressive force most are, while putting in place policies to increase living standards for most Americans, including policies to spur greater productivity growth, which is the major long-term source of increased per capita incomes. Restoring Brandeis is a sure path to regress, not progress. 

David Mamet’s Prescience

Oleanna anticipated today’s campus ‘rape culture’ fights

BY GRAHAM HILLARD

In 1992, eight years after Glengarry Glen Ross won a Pulitzer Prize, the American playwright and film director David Mamet premiered his newest work before an audience of Brown undergraduates. Oleanna, which dramatizes a series of increasingly nightmarish conversations between a professor and his student, would go on to receive the kind of press that most writers can only fantasize about, with the Village Voice heralding it as “a tragedy of language that Wittgenstein might have relished” and the Boston Globe declaring that Mamet had “raised outrage to an art form.” The student audience, however, had a different reaction. “Don’t you think it’s politically questionable,” one person asked at the show’s conclusion, “to have the girl make a false accusation of rape?” Indeed, Oleanna does contain a false accusation of rape—or an accusation in which the meaning of that word, like the word “racism” today, is stretched beyond any definable limit. Yet the play predicts far more than that, anticipating such contemporary phenomena as the ability of victimhood to confer power, the tendency of leftists to willfully misunderstand their opponents when political gain can be had, and the inclination of “progressives” to engage in censorship. In short, Oleanna seems like it was written fifteen minutes ago, despite its quarter-century of age. That the indignation of the original audience would almost certainly be echoed in 2017, at far greater volume, were Mamet to bring out the play now is but one illustration of his work’s remarkable farsightedness.

The play’s action takes place in a single room, described, in Mamet’s characteristically terse notes, as “John’s office.” John, a harried professor who has recently received good (though not yet formalized) news from his college’s tenure committee, is attempting to balance the demands of his profession with telephone calls concerning his purchase of a new house. With him is Carol, a student by turns perplexed and self-pitying, who begins their meeting by asking John to define the phrase “term of art” (tellingly, his answer is distracted and incomprehensible) and soon confesses that she understands almost none of what she has been hearing in class.

For veteran teachers, or for anyone who has eaten the bitter ration of educational failure, this opening scene contains no small amount of pathos. Carol’s writing is drivel (“I think that the ideas contained in this work express the author’s feelings in a way that he intended”), yet John’s instruction is alternately defensive and patronizing. Carol struggles even to define her confusion, yet John, an incorrigible theorist, can offer only bromides about education-as-“hazing” and the “virtual warehousing of the young.”

Making matters worse, both John and Carol speak in classic Mamet style—a punchy (but believable) hyperrealism in which, as the scholar Verna A. Foster has written, characters drift around a subject “while each asserts that he understands what the other is talking about.” The resulting conversations, as the following example illustrates, can feel startlingly uncommunicative, even when a message finally does come through:


John: No. I’m sure you . . .

Carol: But . . .

John: . . . but . . .

Carol: I don’t . . . lots of the language . . .

John:. . . please . . .

Carol: The language, the “things” that you say . . .

John: I’m sorry. No. I don’t think that that’s true.

Add to this mutual inarticulateness the problems inherent in arguments between unequal participants (John is, after all, Carol’s teacher), and one can glimpse a disaster in the making.

When that disaster finally strikes, early in Act Two, it does so with a speed that is frankly terrifying. As far as the audience has been able to tell, John and Carol’s first conversation has ended amicably enough,
with John rushing off to a party and Carol no longer in hysterics. No resolution has been reached, but neither have things escalated, and one can imagine a tutor and a bit of extra credit putting an end to the matter.

In the space between acts, however, Carol has been radicalized. Buoyed by an unnamed “group,” she has gone to the tenure committee with a list of complaints: that John “said he ‘liked’” her, that he “wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student,” that he “put his arm around” her—claims that are at once true and grossly false. They happened, all of them, but they didn’t happen like that.

Rather, Mamet has engineered a dramatic role reversal—one designed to illustrate the mercenary character that campus feminism has acquired. Unsatisfied with John’s sympathy (his attempts to comfort her in Act One are bumbling but sincere), Carol has moved from despondence to aggression, first eliciting John’s compassion, then turning that compassion against him. What John has failed to understand, and what the audience soon realizes, is that Carol covets not sympathy but John’s power to grant or withhold it as he chooses: a power inextricably linked to their roles (professor and student) in a predetermined system. The plot of Oleanna is Carol’s substitution of one such system for another. The teacher–student dynamic will always render her comparatively powerless. But the abuser–victim dynamic, in an ad hoc court of inquisition of the sort so often seen on today’s campuses, will grant her as much power as she desires.

And so Oleanna proceeds, with an appalled and mystified John maintaining that he’s done nothing wrong and an increasingly aggrieved Carol insisting that “wrong”—here again the play anticipates our time—is no longer his to define. By Oleanna’s end, Carol has reported John for battery and attempted rape (he took hold of her at the end of Act Two to keep her from leaving his office) and produced a list of books, including John’s own, that her group finds objectionable. Should John agree not to teach them, Carol will “speak to the committee” in his behalf. John’s career and freedom, if not his self-respect, will be restored.

As Thomas Carlyle might have put it, tell me what a man thinks of Oleanna, and I will tell you his politics. Is John, as Carol suggests, an “exploiter” who, from a “so-protected, so-elitist seat,” strives for “unlimited power” over his students? Or is Carol “a deranged . . . revolutionary,” ready to betray “freedom of thought” in the name of “political correctness”? Relatedly, is it to society’s benefit that few male professors these many years later would ever “closet with a student,” to borrow Carol’s phrase? Or have we, in our paranoid readiness to see a potential sexual affront in every human interaction, foolishly pathologized what were once straightforward, respectful relationships?

A different playwright might have given his audience time to consider these questions. Oleanna, however, offers no such opportunity. Instructed by Carol not to call his wife “Baby” (she has overheard his telephone call home), John “grabs her and begins to beat her,” to quote the blunt wording of Mamet’s stage directions. John’s violence is despicable and obscene, but it is also, in its wretched way, a political act. Just as Carol has seized the advantage by replacing one system with another, so John attempts to take the upper hand by making a substitution of his own. Gone in an instant is the language and ideology of weaponized feminism. In its place is the harsher reality of raw physical strength.

Six years before Oleanna’s completion, Mamet had tested this very theme in an essay in Vanity Fair. In arguments between husbands and wives, “the ultimate response the man feels is . . . physical violence,” he asserted. “People can say what they will, we men think, but if I get pushed just one little step further, why I might, I might just _______ (FILL IN THE BLANK) because she seems to have forgotten that I’M STRONGER THAN HER.”

To the extent that feminism has discredited such barbarism, it has been successful. Yet feminism has not stopped there, wedding itself instead to the Left’s project of silencing all opponents, a strategy on display both in Oleanna and on campuses now. Stripped of any legitimate recourse, persecuted and shamed, John resorts to a noxious and self-defeating violence. How many of today’s college students will be driven into the arms of thuggish “protest” movements by similar circumstances?

Unhappily, Oleanna offers no answers, just as we seem to have none in 2017. It is, however, a work of exceptional prescience: “a play,” in the words of The Spectator’s Sheridan Morley, “about who[m] shall be given the power of deciding what things mean.” Such language should feel very familiar these days. And terrifying.
NEW YORK CITY’s mayor, Bill de Blasio, was elected with 73 percent of the vote, and on November 7 he’ll probably be reelected in a comparable landslide. On September 12 he faced token opposition in the Democratic primary, to be followed by token opposition in the general election. (Staten Island assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis is the GOP’s sacrificial lamb, while celebrity private detective Bo Dietl is running as an independent.)

Employment is up. Crime is down. The New York City economy and Wall Street are in bloom. In the grumbliest city in America, New Yorkers have little to kvetch about, except the trains, which, everyone knows, aren’t run out of City Hall. Yet in a fiercely progressive city, the progressive mayor’s approval rating hovers around 50 percent and has been underwater for much of his first term. In a City Hall that still rings with echoes of the footsteps of outsized personalities—Ed Koch, Rudy Giuliani, Mike Bloomberg—de Blasio barely makes a sound. No one credits him with engineering New York’s current state of ease. When the history of the period is written, he’ll be a footnote to the two-decade revolution that was the Giuliani–Bloomberg period. He’s a six-foot-five-inch dwarf.

Why doesn’t New York love Bill de Blasio?

It’s a question that preoccupies the mayor as he coasts to his second (and final, given term limits) stint in City Hall. “You’d assume they’d be having parades out in the streets,” he tells New York magazine. Actually, New Yorkers are having parades out in the streets, such as the Puerto Rican Day parade, in which de Blasio marched behind a convicted terrorist, Oscar López Rivera, to whom the parade initially planned to give a place of honor. De Blasio initially said he would march behind López Rivera but then, after major sponsors, Governor Andrew Cuomo, and his own police commissioner dropped out, told reporters he had quietly been campaigning behind the scenes to get López Rivera dropped, calling the FALN separatist movement Rivera co-founded “mistaken from the beginning, because it
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used violence in the context of a democratic society, and that is not acceptable to me.” Then, after López Rivera announced he would not accept a ceremonial honor but would march at the head of the parade anyway, de Blasio joined him, albeit keeping his distance a few blocks behind.

That was pure de Blasio—allying himself with the most vicious and extreme elements of the Left, bumbling in an attempt to get himself out of a jam of his own creation, and coming off comically foolhardy and inept. The mayor whose big college experience was a trip to work for the Sandinistas in 1988, who toured the Soviet Union in 1983 and later honeymooned in Cuba, would love to turn New York into New Stalingrad. But he can’t figure out how to do it. So he settles for fuming about the ills of private property, luxury housing, and income inequality. The more he does so, the more he resembles background static in New York’s glorious cacophony—irritating but irrelevant.

“A wallflower. There is no sense of alpha male about him,” wrote *Vanity Fair’s* Bryan Burrough. This was in a sympathetic profile.

“He just didn’t have the stars lined up,” Al Sharpton, another fan, told the *New York Times*, as though already looking back on the man who becomes a lame duck on January 2.

In a *Politico* list of 18 hot mayors, de Blasio wasn’t even mentioned. The *Times* reported that he is such a nonentity that he has to wear a nametag at national conferences, even gatherings of mayors. The tallest man in most any room is somehow the most pathetic one in it, the Empire State gelding. Among his best-known and least New Yorky traits is a penchant for oversleeping, rendering him late to, for instance, a memorial service for victims of a plane crash and three different events on one St. Patrick’s Day, including a reception at Gracie Mansion—“his own house,” noted the *Times* with exasperated italics. Exhausted from his morning workouts, he has a habit of following up with naps in his office. The city that never sleeps has a narcoleptic chief.

When de Blasio is awake, one of the few things he manages to accomplish is doing favors for political donors, for which habit state and federal officials both launched investigations of him. Both announced they would not file charges, although taking the side of the yellow-cab industry, which dentally taking the side of the yellow-cab industry, which

Exhausted from his morning workouts, de Blasio has the zealots among the diehards—the kind of people who hear de Blasio went Sandinista and think, “How romantic!”—one of the most hotly contested issues in that race was (I kid you not) de Blasio’s advocacy of getting rid of the horse-drawn carriages around Central Park, which he vowed to do on Day One. The horses stayed after cooler minds realized that the proposal would mainly benefit glue factories, and the City Council swatted away de Blasio’s signature promise. Later de Blasio took on Uber, seeking to cap the number of cars the service could put on the streets, coincidentally taking the side of the yellow-cab industry, which had given some $550,000 to his mayoral campaign. In a town where a fight for a cab in rich neighborhoods can quickly turn into a scene out of *Mad Max*, and where many low-income neighborhoods are not served by yellow taxis, this would have gone over a bit like telling New Yorkers that this would have gone over a bit like telling New Yorkers that the only pizza they could order in was Domino’s. Once again, though, de Blasio’s ineffectuality was his savior, as the idea died in the City Council.

De Blasio just doesn’t matter much, and New Yorkers, convinced as we are that the universe revolves around us, chafe at that. We like to think of ourselves as the sharpest tool in the American shed, hardened cynics, seen-it-alls. We love to be represented by a combative, smart-alecky tough guy. Instead we’re led by an oaf. We’re supposed to have fun.
with dreamy-eyed clods who just fell off the yam wagon on their way in from Tulsa. Now they’re making fun of us.

D e B l a s i o is “really more like a liberal professor or political activist than he is actually a mayor,” a long-time acquaintance told Vanity Fair. “When Bill is presented with a problem, I always imagine him musing, ‘Hmm, what’s my political philosophy on this?’ He’s not a natural manager—I mean, that’s an understatement.”

Which would explain Mayor de Blockhead’s absurdly insensitive remark when businesses that operate in or near Trump Tower were devastated by the chaos outside the building last fall: “I will not tell you that Gucci and Tiffany are my central concerns in life,” he said, as though luxury retail were not an important driver of New York City employment, tourism, and tax revenue. A woman who runs an art gallery across the street presented with a problem, I always imagine him musing, “What’s been hardest is the way our legal system is structured to favor private property. I think people all over this city, of every background, would like to have the city government be able to determine which building goes where, how high it will be, who gets to live in it, what the rent will be. I think there’s a socialistic impulse, which I hear every day, in every kind of community, that they would like things to be planned in accordance to their needs. And I would, too. Unfortunately, what stands in the way of that is hundreds of years of history that have elevated property rights and wealth to the point that that’s the reality that calls the tune on a lot of development.

I’ll give you an example. I was down one day on Varick Street [in the pricey Tribeca neighborhood], somewhere close to Canal, and there was a big sign out front of a new condo saying, “Units start at $2 million.” And that just drives people stark raving mad in this city, because that kind of development is clearly not for everyday people. It’s almost like it’s being flaunted. Look, if I had my druthers, the city government would determine every single plot of land, how development would proceed. And there would be stringent income requirements around income levels and rents. . . .

The problem is at the top end. In very few ways can we address the rampant growth of wealth among the one percent. The state

Free Speech is Under Assault on College Campuses

Take a Stand for Campus Free Speech

Colleges should be places where freedom to think and learn is unassailable. But this past year, concerned citizens have watched as colleges have become places where free speech is under daily attack by censors who are ready to silence anything that challenges their ideology.

A new set of campus rules has emerged that has little to do with educating young minds and much more to do with enforcing political correctness. At Yale, students waged furious protests after a professor criticized attempts to regulate Halloween costumes. At Middlebury, students disrupted the invited remarks of social scientist Charles Murray—and assaulted their own political science professor for attempting to host a dialogue with him. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, George Will, and Ben Shapiro were “dissinvited” from Brandeis, Scripps, and DePaul, respectively. The list goes on and on.

On too many college campuses, students, faculty, and administrators expect freedom from speech, not freedom of speech. This is no way to prepare students for adulthood.

The good news is that the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) works with alumni, parents, and donors to stand up against these practices that betray America’s long tradition of free expression and liberty.

ACTA is an independent higher education policy organization

Join the fight for free speech. Pre-order ACTA’s Campus Free Speech information packet with exclusive resources for concerned citizens and alumni.

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We aren’t afraid to fight the tough battles. Will you join us?

American Council of Trustees and Alumni
and the federal government have the power to do that. . . . It frustrates me greatly that we don’t have the power here to tax the wealthy in this city. You’d expect a deeper understanding of economics from Mayor McCheese. Denouncing private property? Citing Marx on everyone being accommodated according to their needs? Calling for a mayoral right to approve who gets what apartment? It’s not only vapid, it demonstrates total cluelessness about what keeps the lights on in New York. “There’s no sense this man has any interest, unlike Bloomberg, in the nuts and bolts of how the city works,” a veteran journalist told Vanity Fair. Income inequality—i.e., the presence of Wall Street—is what funds all the stuff progressives love. Knock out the finance industry and equality of income would skyrocket, but there’d no longer be a way to keep paying de Blasio’s bills, as he has hiked spending from $75 billion to $85 billion in just four years. Cultural institutions that get propped up by Wall Street would falter, and that in turn would devastate New York’s huge tourism industry. De Blasio’s “druthers” amount to a rerun of the 1970s dynamic of taxmen chasing New Yorkers out to the suburbs, which is why the city’s population shrank by 800,000 in that decade. That’s comparable to a city the size of San Francisco fleeing New York. God save us from de Blasian druthers, and God has. Well, at least Andrew Cuomo has.

A recent NY1/Baruch poll that gave de Blasio a 48 percent approval rating showed Governor Andrew Cuomo with a 60–20 approval–disapproval split. New York respects alpha dogs and so it gives Cuomo the nod of approval, not least for the way he treats de Blasio like Biff Tannen treated George McFly. Tax policy goes through Albany, and Cuomo keeps rebuffing de Blasio’s bid for increasing taxes on the affluent. When de Blasio asked for a surcharge on the wealthy to pay for pre-K, Cuomo allowed the pre-K but not the tax. When de Blasio went to Albany to lead a demonstration to push for the tax, Cuomo trolled him by going to a different rally, to back the charter schools de Blasio and his pals at the teachers’ unions despise, and then forced de Blasio to find more space for the charters. In effect, Cuomo ordered de Blasio to go clap erasers for the mayor’s archenemy, Eva Moskowitz, the founder of the Success Academy charter network, which provides an increasingly visible daily rebuke to every liberal cliché about the supposed impossibility of educating New York kids. “People don’t fear Andrew,” a politico told the Daily News. “People don’t fear de Blasio.” Just to make it clear that he would run over any pet of de Blasio’s that ever appeared in his driveway, Cuomo even killed the mayor’s fervent wish for a plastic-bag fee at supermarkets, which de Blasio grandly and typically framed as a way to combat global warming and the petroleum industry at the same time.

De Blasio does have a gift for one thing, though: getting himself humiliated. Hence the folly of his imaginary national profile. Fancying himself a progressive idol on the same level as Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, he announced in 2015 a presidential forum in Iowa at which he pictured himself as the star attraction discussing inequality. Nobody accepted de Blasio’s invitation, and he was forced to cancel the event. Then he meekly reassured voters that he would not run for president in 2020. So de Blasio will have four more years to try to persuade New Yorkers to hold a parade in his honor. If we do, though, he’ll probably sleep through it.

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The most urgent priority in this regard is E-Verify, a program that employers may voluntarily use to confirm that their workers are in the country legally. Making the system mandatory should be non-negotiable; it is the best way to turn off the jobs magnet for illegal immigrants regardless of how they got here. Only once this is agreed to should legislators hash out the details of wall funding or other enforcement measures, such as hiring more Border Patrol officers and immigration judges or implementing a system to track those here on temporary visas.

There’s another issue that must be addressed in a DACA deal as well: If these individuals are given full citizenship instead of some other form of legal status, they will be able to sponsor their parents—i.e., the people who broke the law to get them here—for permanent residency. This is obviously not acceptable. Either the Dreamers shouldn’t become full citizens, or their parents should be banned from applying for green cards.

Some restrictionists would like to go much farther than this, mainly by making changes to the legal-immigration system. The most aggressive want to put a dent in the 1 million total green cards handed out annually, perhaps cutting that number by as much as half. But the above three measures—E-Verify, border security, and ensuring that Dreamers’ parents don’t benefit from any deal—likely push the limits of what the Left is willing to pay for legal status for Dreamers.

Remember, what’s at issue here is not summary deportation, but basically a return to the status quo ante of 2012. Immigration maximalists are not going to want to significantly reduce the number of people we bring in every year going forward just to legalize a relatively small group of people who are already here. Further, restrictionists lose the moral high ground as their demands shift toward policies that have no substantive connection to legalizing the Dreamers.

As for a broader immigration reform, no one would call this the perfect opportunity. Republicans, with just 52 votes, are far short of a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, and many members of their own caucus famously supported previous “comprehensive” bills that would have increased legal-immigration levels, granted amnesty to the current illegal population, and failed to adequately control illegal immigration going forward.

Those comprehensive bills failed spectacularly when the public’s opposition to these policies became clear. One would hope this had chastened wayward Republicans. Further, the backlash demonstrates how far to the left of the general public Congress tends to be on this issue. Today that gap is the smallest it will be for a long time, simply because it’s so rare for the GOP, the more restrictionist of the two parties, to control the House, Senate, and presidency simultaneously. (The last time was more than a decade ago, and George W. Bush supported “comprehensive” reform.) So there’s now an opportunity to use popular opinion against politicians who otherwise might not vote for even basic immigration restrictions.

Even if an ambitious effort fails, the GOP can still make a limited DACA deal and hold out hope for the 2018 elections. The GOP has an advantage in the Senate this cycle, because Democrats will be defending 25 seats (including those of two independents who caucus with the Democrats) while Republicans defend just eight. Should Republicans hold the House and gain seats in the upper chamber—perhaps on the
strength of championing a sensible approach to immigration—they could bring back measures that narrowly fall short.

The goal should be to advance the following package of reforms, which has clear popular support—a combination of the DACA deal outlined above and several bigger, equally commonsensical measures. This means restrictionists won’t get everything they want, but public support will keep squishy Republicans in line and put pressure on vulnerable Senate Democrats.

Public opinion on immigration is hard to nail down; frustratingly, different ways of asking a question can yield dramatically different results, and many pollsters have obvious agendas in the way they phrase their queries. Should illegal immigrants be deported, given legal residence, or offered a path to citizenship? A majority will go with the final option, and a huge majority will steer clear of the first. Should illegal immigrants be given legal status or encouraged to go home? A majority will pick the latter.

But there’s a way to thread this needle. It starts with the DACA deal: The most sympathetic illegal immigrants are immediately given legal status while E-Verify encourages others to leave by making it harder to find employment, and stepped-up border security and other enforcement measures stop the illegal population from growing further. Once this system has had some time to work, and only then, do we move on to a broader amnesty. The bill this year should spell out the timing and conditions of that amnesty, a concession to the Left that will create leverage for further reforms.

That’s where our legal-immigration system comes into play. Senators Tom Cotton (R., Ark.) and David Perdue (R., Ga.) have already laid the legislative groundwork for reform in their Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment (RAISE) Act, about which Reihan Salam has written in these pages (“The Case for Skills-Based Immigration,” August 28). The bill can be boiled down to three main changes: It would restrict family-based immigration to spouses and minor children (current policy allows sponsorship of adult children, siblings, etc.), it would grant employment-based green cards through a new skills-based point system, and it would reduce the total amount of legal immigration by about half over time.

The last part is the problem. I personally think it’s unwise as policy; high-skill immigrants are much less of a problem than low-skill immigrants are. They don’t compete with our most vulnerable workers for jobs, they pay far more in taxes than they consume in services, they rarely commit crimes, and almost all of them speak English. So if we limit immigration to the highly skilled, it becomes less pressing to cut total immigration.

But more to the (political) point, reducing immigration isn’t popular, with just 35 percent supporting it in the most recent Gallup survey. Since the 1960s, the organization has repeatedly asked Americans whether they’d prefer higher, lower, or current immigration levels, and, while the numbers bounce around, two surveys in a row haven’t found majority support for cutting immigration since 1995 (or 2002 if you remove those with “no opinion”). Support for increasing immigration has been even lower, rarely having poked its head above the 25 percent mark. Leaving the overall level the same has usually won a plurality in the current decade.

Without the cut in total immigration, the message of the RAISE Act would be this: Today, only 13 percent of immigrants are admitted for employment reasons, and only about half of those are selected for having particularly high skills; most immigrants come because of family relations. We also have a “diversity lottery” that hands out 50,000 green cards each year literally at random. Instead, why don’t we give green cards to the people with the best education and the highest-paying job offers, and let them bring only their spouses and minor children?

If the concern is that we need some low-skill immigrants too, even as less-educated Americans are struggling to find jobs and automation is threatening low-skill work, fine. Let’s have a forthright public debate about the number.

Meanwhile, the RAISE Act does not touch temporary “nonimmigrant” visas such as H-1Bs, but those need similar reforms. While H-1Bs are restricted to certain technical fields, they are handed out by lottery—and outsourcing firms such as Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services flood the application pool, winning up to half the visas. As a result, the program largely helps companies replace their American-citizen, middle-class tech workers with cheaper foreigners procured through these firms. The visas instead should go to the most skilled, highest-paid applicants. This could be accomplished by having companies bid for the visas in an auction or through a RAISE-style point system. Even many liberals have long been clamoring for H-1B reform; the lefty Economic Policy Institute, for instance, has criticized the program relentlessly over the years.

Republicans should bundle all of this together, slap it down on the negotiating table, and ask Democrats to publicly explain their objection to legalizing the Dreamers, clamping down on illegal immigration going forward, offering legal status to the broader illegal population once enforcement measures are in place, and reorienting legal immigration around skills.
A Missile Defense Agenda

We must ‘rebalance’ in the right way

BY THOMAS KARAKO

I

n the 1990s, the U.S. intelligence community assessed that North Korea might acquire an intercontinental ballistic missile by 2015. That threat is now here. North Korea demonstrated ICBM capability twice in July, with a missile that might be able to reach Chicago. This demonstration came only a year and a half later than those old warnings had estimated. North Korea has also shown that it has hydrogen-bomb technology that it could mate to its new missile.

It is good that the United States has in place a limited defensive capability against this threat. That this capability exists, however, was far from automatic. It required sustained leadership and vision. In 2000, even while declining to move forward with deployment, President Bill Clinton declared that national missile defense would be an important form of insurance. In 2001, President George W. Bush withdrew the U.S. from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and in 2004 he deployed the first ground-based interceptors in Alaska. Had that old 1972 treaty with the former Soviet Union remained in place, today’s defense would not have been possible. In 2010, the Obama administration observed that the U.S. was, at least at the time, in an “advantageous” position relative to the threat.

The situation facing us today is different. From the Middle East to Europe to the Asia-Pacific, one sees a surge in the global supply of and demand for a wide variety of missile-based precision-guided weapons and the means to counter them. Collectively, this represents a kind of missile renaissance. The Iranian-supported Houthi faction in Yemen has fired a significant number of missiles at both civilian and military targets in its conflict with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, as well as at the USS Mason (DDG-87), which was the object of a cruise-missile attack last October. In June, Iran launched several Zolfaghar missiles at ISIS targets in Syria, demonstrating a willingness to use its significant missile arsenal for more than just deterrence. Russia has used its long-range Kalibr cruise missiles to strike targets in Syria, sending a signal to the U.S. and NATO. China, too, is developing and fielding a wide array and significant number of strike missiles and air-defense systems.

The Pentagon is currently conducting a review of missile defense policy and programs. Unlike the review in 2010, this one occurs in the face of new threats. At presidential direction, it will “identify ways of strengthening missile defense capabilities, rebalancing homeland and theater defense priorities, and highlighting priority funding areas.”

To address this strategic environment, the U.S. should reorient missile defense policy and programs along three major lines of effort: greater emphasis on protecting the American homeland, the fielding of a space sensor layer, and revigoration of research-and-development efforts to outpace current and emerging threats.

Rebalance to the homeland. As of today, America’s only line of defense against a long-range ballistic missile is the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system, an integrated network of interceptors and sensors. GMD provides a critical but thin layer of defense against small-scale attacks of relatively unsophisticated missiles. In the event of a more sophisticated or larger-scale attack in the near future, America’s homeland defenses could be strained unless we take steps to improve their reliability, capability, and capacity.

The need for such improvement applies particularly to the ground-based interceptor (GBI). Besides the booster that propels it into space, a GBI includes an exo-atmospheric kill vehicle (EKV) that hunts down and collides with an incoming warhead. Around 37 GBIs are currently deployed in Alaska and California. That number will rise to 44 by the end of 2017. To keep pace with North Korea’s ICBM development, however, additional steps are required.

At current levels of funding, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) can make only incremental improvements. Between fiscal years 2007 and 2016, funding for MDA decreased approximately 24 percent. The effort devoted to homeland defense decreased by 46.5 percent in that same period, from $3.7 billion in 2007 to $2 billion in 2016 (in constant 2017 dollars). The administration’s request for fiscal year 2018 did not correct it, but congressional appropriators still have time to do so.

With greater resources, several options to improve the homeland-defense system become possible between now and 2020. One would be to expand existing missile fields at Fort Greely, in Alaska, to add capacity for both the latest configuration of interceptors and, more important, the redesigned kill vehicle (RKV), which is not yet available but will be around 2021. Adding another 14 to 20 interceptors would cost around $900 million over several years.

Another option remains the addition of a site on the continental U.S., possibly on the East Coast, at a cost of perhaps $2 billion. Besides housing ten to 20 interceptors, such a site would add depth to the existing site in Alaska and improve our ability to shoot at a threat missile more than once. In the longer term, there are good operational reasons for creating such a full-up East Coast site, but for now its construction would entail significant opportunity cost. Significant investments would be required for concrete and site infrastructure before a single interceptor would be put into the ground.

Other, less expensive alternatives must therefore be considered. Today’s GBIs are all in silos, but developing a transportable version is one option, perhaps as a bridge to a full site sometime in the future. Such a concept would take GBIs like those fielded today out of the silo. They would instead be carried on trucks and readied for launch during times of heightened threat. They could be stored at a depot on the East Coast or at Vandenberg...
Air Force Base in California, where some four GBIs are already currently deployed.

While homeland missile defense merits greater attention, regional missile defense for U.S. forces will remain critically important for the foreseeable future. Regional missile defense programs include the Navy’s sea-based missile defenses on Aegis ships and the Army’s Patriot and THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) programs. Each of these faces various stresses and a lack of modernization. The fleet of 34 Aegis ships capable of ballistic-missile defense (BMD) is now down by two, owing to recent at-sea collisions. To put all this in perspective: The Navy’s stated goal is 40 advanced BMD-capable ships, and Combatant Commanders have requested 77.

The Army’s Patriot and THAAD force may also require greater capacity. Although improving air and missile defense is one of the highest priorities of the Army’s broader modernization effort, it has been slow-going. The Army is still on pace to receive only seven THAAD batteries; nine were considered necessary even in the rosier geopolitical environment of 2012. The Army’s current air and missile defense is a wisp compared with what it was during the Cold War. It would be seriously challenged to meet more-advanced threats from Russia or China today.

Rebalance from Earth to space. A second major way to advance U.S. missile defense capability would be to field a new space layer of orbiting sensors.

Space provides a unique vantage point for missile defense sensors, qualitatively different from that of the ground-based radars currently in use. Observing a missile from space improves our ability to distinguish the deadly warhead from the associated flying junk pile of debris that accompanies it. Because of its position high above the Earth, an orbiting satellite can follow a threat missile for a longer time than can a ground-based radar. The combination of sensors both on the ground and in space would substantially improve our picture of incoming missiles, permitting earlier intercept and reducing the likelihood of wasting interceptors on false targets.

On paper, each of the last five administrations has had plans for a space-based sensor layer for national missile defense, but so far none has been deployed. The U.S. operates the legacy Defense Support Program and space-based infrared satellites for early warning. But detection of a missile’s launch is not the same as more precisely monitoring its trajectory and location so as to tell the interceptors where to go. Today, the U.S. still has no operational space-based system for the critical missions of tracking threat missiles and distinguishing the warhead from other objects in space. And unfortunately, MDA’s funding for such efforts has suffered a dramatic decline over the past decade. A space-sensor layer for this mission would significantly improve the capability of today’s missile defenses—and would do so for all the various missile defense families, regional and homeland alike.

Rebalance toward research and development. A third area requiring attention is the need to rebalance the objects of funding within missile defense, specifically to reverse a trend that has squeezed out much research and development for advanced technology. Some of these efforts include directed-energy weapons, including a laser mounted on an unmanned aerial vehicle, to defeat missiles in their boost phase. Such a capability flying off the coast of North Korea would dramatically alleviate the pressure on GMD interceptors based in Alaska or elsewhere. Lasers are unlikely to remove the need for kinetic interceptors any time soon, but such a capability even for shorter-range threats would considerably redress current vulnerabilities of U.S. deployed forces.

In 2013, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter warned about the Pentagon’s temptation to “eat our seed corn”—that is, to raid longer-term research and development in favor of nearer-term capabilities. Research and development is necessary to develop new technologies necessary to outpace future threats, but funding for such critical efforts has dramatically declined as MDA has assumed significant obligations—in the procurement, operation, and maintenance of missile defense assets—beyond what were envisioned in its original charter, further squeezing limited resources.

MDA was originally chartered as an entity focused on research and development, with the understanding that the several services, primarily the Army and Navy, were expected to procure and operate the missile defense system that MDA developed. The planned transfer from MDA to the services of budgetary responsibility for procurement and operational spending has been remarkably slow in coming. MDA has therefore had to deal with more responsibility and a lower topline, and the effect has been to squeeze out the investments in high technology.

Foreign assistance has been yet another underappreciated source of pressure. Year in and year out, Congress appropriates significant increases in funding related to missile defense for Israel, well above the amounts requested in the president’s budget. All this missile defense support for Israel comes out of MDA’s budget, and all too often the increased funding for Israel is not accompanied by a comparable addition to the agency’s topline. As a result, U.S. missile defense programs again get further squeezed. In 2014, 9.4 percent of MDA’s budget went to Israeli programs. None of this is to say that Israel should receive less assistance. But congressional appropriators must be more careful to avoid an unhealthy competition whereby increased funding to help our ally defend itself comes at the expense of America’s ability to defend Americans.

One of this is easy. Missile defense can be a complicated enterprise, but it is no longer mere theory. It has moved from vision to real-world capability.

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OCTOBER 2, 2017
A plunge into correspondence past

BY JAY NORDLINGER

AFTER many and legendary years at 150 East 35th Street, NATIONAL REVIEW moved to 215 Lexington Avenue. That was at the end of 1996. Two years later, I came along. (I don’t mean that I was born but that I arrived at NR.) Never will I forget my first phone call with Jack Fowler. He was then the associate publisher, I believe, and would rise to the rank of capo. In a classic Bronx voice, he said, “Jay, welcome aboard and all that stuff.” I had him at hello, so to speak.

Now we are moving once more, to 19 West 44th Street. (Have I mentioned that this is Manhattan in New York City?) In preparation for our move, we are sorting through and clearing out old stuff, some of which has not been touched in many years. I came upon a file of letters and notes—even printed-out emails. They come from the famous and infamous. The soon-to-be famous, and the soon-to-be infamous. From a range of types.

I have a thank-you note from Jim Geraghty, who stopped by to talk about a career in journalism. Now he is a world-beater. He sent a card from Washington, D.C., with a scene from that city on the front: Lafayette Park and the White House in the snow. I also have a note from Jean-François Revel, the eminent Frenchman, written in a fine hand. The back of his envelope is pre-printed. “J.-F. R.,” it says, and it shows that he was living in Paris.

He contributed to our millennial issue, published in January 2000. Another great writer, Czeslaw Milosz, sent his regrets (from Krakow). Overburdened with “many duties,” he said. We did have a Nobel laureate in that issue, however—Saul Bellow. (Milosz won the prize for literature in 1980, Bellow in 1976.) I have no surviving correspondence from Bellow, I’m sorry to say.

Mark Helprin should win the Nobel prize. What would the committee say to a note he sent in 2002? For reasons I could explain, he is talking about Chubby Checker, of “Let’s do the twist” fame. “When I was 15 or 16,” Helprin writes, “I was walking in midtown and passed the Peppermint Lounge. I looked into the window and saw Mr. Checker doing the twist. Thus began the decline of a great nation (France).” Honestly, I’m not 100 percent sure what that means, but I think it’s funny. At the bottom of his note, instead of signing his name, Mark draws an animal. What kind? I’m not sure, but it, too, is funny.

Let me share an email from January 1999: “Why is the Goldberg File days old on your site? Signed: His Mother.” I must have given some satisfactory reply—for she then writes, “His mother thanks you.” Notes from Lucianne Goldberg, Jonah’s mother, are a hoot, however many years have passed. One note ends, “My words for the day? A Thong Is a Thing to Be Thung.” (I believe this refers to a song, lisped, rather than to slitty underwear.)

Also in 1999, David Pryce-Jones writes about a profile I had done of Condoleezza Rice, who was advising the governor of Texas, George W. Bush, on foreign policy. In those days, incidentally, P-J was faxing letters he had written with a fountain pen. Beautiful writing it is, too (in both senses). Anyway, he says, “She’s a good reason to vote for W. and would be better than that grounded old coast-guard vessel M. Albright, née Korbelová.” In a peculiar twist of history—not Chubby Checker’s kind—Madeleine Albright learned about the world from her father, Josef Korbel, and so did Condoleezza Rice, who was a student of his at the University of Denver. In another letter, P-J appreciates my appreciation of a piece of his: “It makes all the trouble of writing (a form of madness, really) worthwhile.”

Naturally, writers write about writing, especially when writing to one another. In 1999, I had a back-and-forth with James L. Buckley concerning the verbs “entitle” and “title”: Do you entitled a book or title one? JLB was arguing for the former, I for the latter. He said that his way had perhaps become archaic, “but as I myself am archaic, I feel more comfortable with it.” (Please note that, in 2017, Jim is still writing.) On another occasion, he set me straight on some matter of family history, which had been imparted to me by a famous—very famous—sibling of his. “In correcting the record,” he begins, “I do not intend to cast a shadow over brother Bill’s reputation for absolute accuracy.” A nice, brotherly zinger.

Speaking of Buckley brothers, I have letters from Reid, too—who begins one of them, “I often don’t get around to reading my NRs until topicality has long passed; on the other hand, I relish them.”
From Jeffrey Hart, that immensely learned professor of English and NR figure, there are long, learned letters. One of them starts out, “You are even more correct than you could know in associating me with Columbia rather than Dartmouth. But that has been a ‘complex fate,’ to use a Henry James phrase. And it leads me to some Proustian reflections on things past, and they will be at Proustian length, I must tell you.” I’ve never minded. What a writer, what a mind, he is.

In 2002, we published a piece by Stephen Ambrose, the best-selling historian. He asked me to send him a copy of that issue. “I live in a small fishing village with no National Reviews.” That was on the Mississippi coast, I believe. Another best-selling historian, in London, declined to review a book we had sent him. In a faxed letter—with artistic handwriting, by that writer-artist—Paul Johnson says, “I would have to write a totally negative review, which I hate doing. So please excuse me on this one.” Before closing, he notes, “I have decided that Brahms’s Intermezzo in B-flat minor, Op. 117, No. 2, is the finest short piece of piano music I know.”

Speaking of music, I was glad to discover—glad to fish out—a letter from George Malik, whose father I had written about. He was Nicolai Malik, an important Russian conductor who lived from 1883 to 1961. Re-reading his son’s letter brought back another world—Shostakovich, Stalin, and talented refugees circling the globe. (Nicolai Malik worked in cities as far-flung as Grand Rapids and Sydney.)

If you ever need a letter of recommendation, I recommend that you get one from Harold Bloom, the renowned literary critic. If he likes and approves of you, you will have a powerful advocate. In 2001, he recommended his student and assistant Emmy Chang (who indeed came to us). Bloom writes, “She is a remarkable literary editor: erudite, independent, energetic, and devoted.” He goes on to say, “Since I am a dinosaur, a Truman Democrat in his early seventies, my only disputes with Emmy have been political, since she is a realistic conservative, and a traditionalist, which I find culturally refreshing.”

I kept a letter from Caspar W. Weinberger, Reagan’s secretary of defense (and Nixon’s HEW secretary, and budget director). He signs it “Cap.” I loved that. I had never met him—and never would meet him—but I got the “Cap.” Conversely, I did not get the “Zbig”—but I do have some letters from Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s national-security adviser. In one of them, he issues a fair reminder to us Reagan nuts: “The nature of ‘victory’ in the Cold War is a very broad subject, and other presidents (going all the way back to Truman) deserve a share of the historical accolades.”

Speaking of Reagan: We planned an issue about him—a memorial issue—well before he died. One of the people we asked to contribute was Milton Friedman. He writes,

I believe I am not the right person for you. I am roughly the same age as Mr. Reagan and so far as I know not in any better physical shape but fortunate in that I do not have Alzheimer’s disease. Even if I were to write it beforehand, were I to predecease him, you would not want to use it, so I think you are much better off going to someone much younger.

I appreciate your asking. I am a great admirer of President Reagan and would be more than willing to pay him honor, but I believe the actuarial tables suggest that it is a risky proposition.

Friedman wrote that letter in 2000. As it happened, Reagan died in 2004, Friedman in 2006. While we’re on the subject of presidents: I smile at a note from George W. Bush, penned in his bold, no-nonsense hand. He asks me to give “un abrazo,” an embrace, to a Cuban dissident we both admire (Juan Carlos González Leiva). Bush adds, “We must never forget the horrors of Cuba.”

In 2011 came a note from Eugene D. Genovese, the singular historian. It had a mysterious P.S.: “The word on the street is that NR will endorse Obama’s re-election. È vero?” (“Is it true?”) No, non era vero. Era pazzo. (No, it wasn’t true. It was crazy.)

And you will be interested in a line from Senator Mitch McConnell, which I publish now with permission. (I have not sought permission from anybody else. Those who are living are welcome to sue. But me, personally, please, not the magazine.) In 2013, McConnell was Senate minority leader, soon to be majority leader. Some of the Right was on his back as a squish. He says, “As someone who has spent most of his career being decried as a right-wing lunatic, it’s been something of an out-of-body experience to be condemned in some quarters as an establishment moderate.” This sentence seems ripped from this morning’s headlines.

I will leave you with some words from William A. Rusher, who was our publisher for many years. In 2000, he wrote from San Francisco, where he was retired. After agreeing with an article of mine, bemoaning President Clinton and the America that had embraced him, he says, “But please give some thought to balancing such gloomy comments with some upbeat stuff, by way of contrast. One old geezer out here told me not long ago that he no longer reads NR because it’s so unreliedly gloomy. Glints of humor, and a general tone of optimism, are indispensable.”

Amen. The other Bill—William F. Buckley Jr., our founder and friend—would agree. Hang on, why have I included no WFB here? Where are his notes and asides (to coin a phrase)? Oh, that would take an article by itself, plus a book or two.
O

In other words, American action movies dubbed in other tongues. Bruce Willis, in French, sounds like he’s upset about a bad review of his philosophy book; in German, he sounds like he’s gargling bottle caps. In the Japanese-dubbed movies, he sounded like a bull with bad gas. And so on.

The commercials say just as much about a culture as the movies do. Ads always tell some interesting truths en route to telling a lie, and vice versa. You’re being taught how you should want to be.

There was a cruise-ship ad, and it showed all the basics. A spa, where women had small rocks placed on their backs. Apparently this gives one the well-being that comes from having enough money to pay someone to put small black rocks on your back. There were gray-haired men of the senior-executive stripe, looking to the horizon with the confident smile of someone who knows the blue pill will kick in soon.

Standard vacation stuff. But then you realize the details are wrong. The commercial showed people striding through the buffet area with purpose, instead of toddling two abreast at the pace of sloths in the tar pit.

A well-manicured hand caresses the wooden railing on the promenade deck, as if this were some long-awaited sensual pleasure. Really? No one pages the glossy brochures and says, “Let’s choose this ship! They seem to have sanded the railing.”

Wouldn’t have remembered any of this if it hadn’t been for the last scene: a late-thirtysomething man is standing before the mirror, trying to put on a bow tie for formal night. He can’t do it. From the looks of his incompetent attempt you fear he will somehow get his big toe stuck in the knot. Cut to the elegant wife, who of course finished dressing before he did—a sign, perhaps, that the ship travels to exotic destinations such as “planets other than Earth”—and she’s looking at bow-tie instructions on her iPad.

Then she rises, and with the self-satisfied and self-indulgent smile you see on women in ads for cruise ships, spas, and hair conditioners, she walks to her flustered man-child and ties his bow tie for him.

So what’s the truth in this ad? That’s why you got Trump.

This may seem a stretch so long it vanishes over the horizon, but it’s true—at least for many who weren’t enthusiastic about the man himself. People on the left sometimes think that every Trump voter carries around a pillowcase and some scissors in case the Kluxers project a cross on the clouds with a searchlight, signifying the long-awaited White Uprising. Make your hood, Ma! I’ll saddle up Privilege, our White mare, and we’ll ride!

No. Of course not. It makes the Left feel good about themselves to think this about Trump voters, but that’s nothing special; feeling good about themselves is the Left’s primary motivation. What the Left failed to grasp is how decades of accumulated cultural shifts made millions eager to put a thumb in their eye.

It’s not that men should always be shown as confident creatures who can figure out underwear. It’s the sense that any such depiction is “problematic” when compared with the alternative, i.e., the woman knows best. You almost expected the ad to conclude with an appearance from the captain, who would say: “Our ships always arrive on time at the proper port, because our navigator is female and not afraid to ask directions. If it were up to me and the lads, we’d be three days up the Mississippi trying to make the Yucatan Peninsula.”

A small thing, but there are millions of small things, and they add up. Note: These ads are much preferable to the women of old TV ads who fretted over their coffee—it was always horrible, and their husbands looked like they wanted to take off their belt after one sip—or spent their day admiring the shine on their newly waxed floors before little Jimmy, dressed in a cowboy outfit, shooting a cap pistol, ran over the floor with muddy shoes, thereby upholding the Manifest Destiny foundational myth that justified white men in ruining everything.

Well, maybe the last part wasn’t true unless you were a social-sciences major.

Point is, the Left acts as if the culture were still mired in the ‘50s because half the cruise ships aren’t captained by women, and the Right regards the cultural shifts like a TV weatherman hanging on a lamppost in a hurricane report.

There are millions of disaffected people out there who might not have fixed positions on tax rates and have squishy indistinct views on social issues but regard the Left as smug scolds who want to do away with everything that existed prior to last Tuesday and won’t be happy until James Bond is a woman and Playboy’s centerfold model has a penis now and then.

If the Left wants to get back the vast middle, they’ll have to hide their truths.

If the Left wants to get back the vast middle, they’ll have to hide their truths.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXCERPTS FROM
WHAT HAPPENED,
BY HILLARY CLINTON
(Simon & Schuster, 512 pages)

Publisher’s Note: In this honest, searching memoir of the most controversial and unexpected presidential campaign in modern history, Hillary Rodham Clinton describes the triumphs—and the setbacks—in blunt, no-holds-barred terms. Please use the excerpts below for all of your marketing and editorial needs.

Free from the constraints of running a general-election campaign, Hillary Clinton reflects on politics, feminism, and the mistakes she made in the 2016 presidential race, all with her trademark frankness.

FROM CHAPTER 2:
“WHY I LOST (AND WHY IT’S YOUR FAULT)”

. . . many of whom obviously had a big problem with a woman running for president and preferred a slightly batty older white-haired socialist man with odd stains on his one good suit. And it’s hard, I know, to reframe the past, but it was clear to a lot of observers on the day after the election that Bernie and His Bros had done a lot to put Donald Trump into the White House.

I bear a lot of the blame, too, of course. After all, I was the candidate, and I should have been more attentive to the numbers coming out of Wisconsin and Michigan (though I’m not sure I know how I could have been, but whatever) and I should have tried harder to connect with ordinary Americans (though at times it seemed I made meaningful eye contact with every obese voter in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, and let me tell you, that’s not a small number), and I suppose I could have done a lot of things differently, but let me ask you a question: What did you do to get me elected? Because whatever it is you did, it wasn’t enough. You should have tried a little harder, gotten up a little earlier, gone the extra mile. The simple truth is, you let me down.

FROM CHAPTER 7:
“BEING MY FUNNY, ZANY, UNPREDICTABLE, GRANDMOTHERLY, TOTALLY NORMAL SELF!”

. . . making sure that Chelsea’s current speaking fees—about $150,000 plus travel—and her consulting duties at the Clinton Foundation remained part of her regular outreach and active life. I was merely trying to take what I thought was a perfectly fair “management fee” from the cash flow she was generating for the operation, but in talking it over with her and her attorney, it was clear we needed to reach some agreement vis-à-vis cash outlays from the core business and the long-term-value split we had agreed upon. So it was a complicated Christmas dinner, to say the least!

FROM CHAPTER 13:
“But When a Man Does It . . .”

. . . hard not to see it for what it was: sexism pure and simple. For all the cries of “Lock her up!” I had a hard time believing that they would treat a male candidate the same way. “Obstruction of justice” is really just another way of saying “guilty of being female,” and everyone knows it.

FROM CHAPTER 22:
“YA GOTTA KNOW WHEN TO FOLD ’EM”

. . . which is obviously the last thing on my mind at this point, but then I’ll run into young women at the local yoga studio, or sometimes grandmothers like me, out with their granddaughters, and they’ll approach me (I’m very approachable) and touch me on the arm (I’m very touchable and squeezeable and huggable) and say, “You just have to run again!” And I’ll smile (I smile a lot and thank them for their good wishes (because gratitude is very important to me), and I’ll say something like, “Oh, well, thanks, but it’s really time for me to step aside.” I don’t always say it the same way (I’m spontaneous!!) because I haven’t worked out the words yet with my team (love you guys!!), but that’s usually my response: Thank you but not gonna happen.

But then at some point I’ll be in the back seat of the Escalade and looking out the window and I’ll think to myself, “You know, you could do it, one more time,” and of course that’s silly, but then, isn’t that what life’s all about? Being silly and approachable and squeezeable and spontaneous and also the goddam president of the United States?

FROM THE EPILOGUE:
“LET’S STAY CONNECTED!”

Please fill out the enclosed card with your name and email address and indicate by checking the appropriate box your preferred level of support, from the Silver Level to the Platinum Premium Plus Level, which includes all of the premiums and gifts associated with the Silver Level, with the addition of a “Private, Exclusive Dinner Opportunity” with Secretary Clinton in an American hotel function room (to be scheduled) and a “Premium Event Invitation” for a photo-op and VIP “in conversation experience” with Hillary Rodham Clinton via group Skype.
Regime Change

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

Gorbachev: His Life and Times, by William Taubman (Norton, 880 pp., $39.95)

MIKHAIL SERGEYEVICH GORBACHEV was the seventh general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, which had held undisputed power in Russia since the 1917 revolution. The man in that position was at the mercy of an ideology stating that the Party could do no wrong. Decisions had to appear to be unanimous because open disagreement ran the risk of ending in schism, in which case one or the other side had to be in the wrong. Lenin and Stalin warned that schism was the greatest danger facing the Party, and to guard against it they had an inflexible operating principle: Those who stand by opinions different from the Party’s must be met with whatever degree of compulsion is needed to shut them up. First comes ostracism, then imprisonment, deportation to the Gulag, exile, and finally murder. Protected like that, the rule of the Party looked unbreakable. Literary amateurs, such as Malcolm Muggeridge, and Russian dissidents with a vested interest in change, such as Vladimir Bukovsky or Andrei Amalrik, used to maintain that Communism was contrary to human nature and therefore bound to fail one day, but there was no immediate evidence of it.

A professor at Amherst and an experienced Kremlinologist, William Taubman is the author of Khrushchev: The Man and His Era (2003), a 929-page biography. According to footnotes in the 880 pages of this new biography, Gorbachev, Taubman began a series of interviews with his subject in 2003. Since then, he has been in close touch with some of Gorbachev’s loyal collaborators and aides, and has made full use of source material in Russia and the United States. What sets this volume apart from other serious biographies of Gorbachev and the extensive literature devoted to the Soviet collapse is that Taubman takes at face value the man and everything he did and said. For him, Gorbachev was a high-minded intellectual, charming and persuasive, genuinely and deservedly popular, big enough to admit that socialism was a mess yet determined to make it work in some democratic sense. As in a Shakespeare play or an opera by Verdi, here is a great man destroyed by the nobility of his ambitions. On the fifth page of the text, Taubman calls Gorbachev “a tragic hero,” and he repeats this encomium in the final sentence of the text.

Born in 1931 in a village in North Caucasus, the young Gorbachev lived through the hardships and injustice of the times, for instance the arrest of both grandfathers and the wartime German occupation. Taubman captures the context in prose mercifully free from jargon. It says something about Soviet Communism that a farm boy like Gorbachev’s very own marching order. But Gorbachev was able to rise to the top. Similarly, it says something about him that he joined the Komsomol, a self-selected elite within the Party, in 1946, when Stalin was preparing one more paranoid purge. Gorbachev played the Kremlin game, Taubman writes, “watching and waiting, with policy and practice in pretty well all fields, internal and external. “Perestroika” (reform) was called for; more than a slogan, the word became a directive for the Soviet Union, Gorbachev’s very own marching order. But Communism is absolute, by definition unable to be anything except itself. “You cannot be half pregnant,” as a quip at the time expressed it. Reform introduced confusion, and confusion necessitated more reform, until suddenly the Soviet Union became unrecognizable.

“For Taubman, Gorbachev was a high-minded intellectual, charming and persuasive, genuinely and deservedly popular.”
Communist. Fearful of losing control, the Party or ideological secretaries in almost all the Soviet republics and satellites asked Gorbachev for permission to use live ammunition against demonstrators, and were at a total loss when he did not grant it. The KGB did shoot the demonstrators in a few places, for instance in Tbilisi and Riga, but the moment the peoples behind the Iron Curtain realized that they could take to the streets with impunity, the Soviet empire was bound to fall apart, and it did. (Still, even the indulgent Taubman can find no good reason for Gorbachev’s concession of German unification without any reciprocal concession for the Soviet Union.)

Astonishment in the wider world gave way to delight. Whenever Gorbachev traveled to international meetings in Europe or the United States, and even to official ceremonies in some capital city of the Soviet bloc, huge crowds welcomed him with ecstatic chants of “Gorbi!” In 1990, he received the Nobel Peace Prize, and his Nobel lecture had a defiant boast aimed at dis-obliging Russians: “Nothing and no one, no pressure, either from the right or from the left, will make me abandon the positions of perestroika and new thinking. I do not intend to change my views or convictions.”

On the right were the old-timers already planning a coup against him, and on the left was Boris Yeltsin, his nemesis. Wild, coarse, unlettered, often drunk, a bully and an opportunist, Yeltsin in all likelihood understood even less than Gorbachev about democracy. Taubman thinks Yeltsin was motivated by self-pity and can hardly bring himself to say more than that, so disdainful is he of the man. Yeltsin’s move from Communism to Russian nationalism opposed him, personally and politically, to Gorbachev, setting up exactly the condition of schism that Lenin and Stalin had gone to such lengths to make impossible. At the time of the August 1991 coup against Gorbachev, General Pavel Grachev, in command of the tanks, resolved the schism by coming out for Yeltsin. The operating principles of Communism were good for one last gasp. Some five months later, by happy chance on Christmas Day, the Soviet Union ceased to exist and there was no longer a Communist general secretary in the Kremlin.

Why did Gorbachev put an end to the Party-state responsible for his career and reputation as a statesman? Could he really have intended to rid Russia of Communism and then devised this unique implosion from within? He has given a good many written and spoken accounts of his achievement, in versions that are not always compatible but invariably do him honor. To this day, one way or another, he makes sure to claim the high moral ground.

When Gorbachev was in power, I suspected that he was neither sincere nor truthful. Confident that his vaunted perestroika was the usual Soviet smoke-screen for some renewed offensive against us or his own people, I expected that one day he would order the KGB to commit a massacre somewhere that would reveal the real motive behind this whole dubious experiment. Rather than abandon the Eastern Europe that the Red Army had conquered at such cost, surely Gorbachev would find excuses to whip up an emergency, closing frontiers and declaring a nuclear alert. Yeltsin, I assumed, would spend years in Siberian Vorkuta or be murdered, like Leon Trotsky and Lavrenti Beria. When none of this happened, I felt obliged to search for an explanation and began the research for my book *The Strange Death of the Soviet Union* (1995).

Gorbachev was willing to talk to me, I was informed, but the fee payable in advance would be $25,000, so I was never able to question him in person. What I did learn from those who spoke without financial inducement was that Gorbachev really did believe he had only to fine-tune Communism by dispensing with out-of-date stuff like the Party’s operating principles and we would all live happily ever after. Academician Nikolai Petrov was once Gorbachev’s principal economic adviser, and I never came across a more telling formula than his of Gorbachev’s naïveté. He said, “I draw a parallel with Columbus, who discovered America but, to the end of his days, believed it was India.” The person most likely to believe wholeheartedly in Taubman’s sentimental portrayal of Gorbachev as a tragic hero is Gorbachev himself.

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**Gods and Monsters**

**Andrew Stuttaford**

DOLF HITLER once argued that National Socialism represented “a cool and highly reasoned approach to reality based on the greatest of scientific knowledge and its spiritual expression.” If there are any people foolish enough still to fall for that, they will not enjoy this book. While the enthusiasm of some Nazi leaders, most notoriously Himmler, for the occult has been a staple of pop culture and the more disreputable corners of historical “investigation” for years, this volume shows that many others felt much the same way.

Kurlander depicts a Third Reich in which, despite uneven and often ambiguous efforts to rein them in, seers, magicians, and psychics flourished. Buddha was drafted into the master race, parapsychology “so long as it comported with ‘Nordic-Germanic feeling’” was recognized as legitimate, and the grounds were laid for an “Ario-Germanic” national religion as a syncretic (it wouldn’t all be Wotan) “substitute for Christianity.” Meanwhile, charlatan-historians and charlatan-archeologists hunted for proof that large swathes of Europe were part of an ancestral German homeland, charlatan-archeologists searched for evidence of “the Nordic origins of Asian civilization,” charlatan-doctors worked on monstrous human experiments, and charlatan-scientists struggled to develop weapons designed to draw on mysterious untapped electromagnetic forces. This
arsenal was intended to include death rays, sound weapons, and anti-gravity devices—an absurdity and a waste made all the more grotesque by the contrast with the remarkably sophisticated technology successfully deployed by Germany during the war.

If the magical weapons proved harmless, the same cannot be said of the mix of superstition and pseudoscience that ran through the Nazis’ thinking about race, a mix that goes some way to accounting for both the intensity of their anti-Semitism and the meticulousness of the slaughter that followed. “Traditional” anti-Semitism rested on a distrust of difference reinforced by religious and then economic resentment. It generated exclusion, violence, and, as time went by, increasingly elaborate conspiracy theories. But the notion of Jews as perpetual enemies of an advanced “Aryan” race was a fairly new confection, dating back only to the mid-19th century.

When it comes to the supernatural, what people believe and what they say they believe are frequently very different—more so, indeed, than they might themselves understand.

When studying the translation of concepts of such malevolence into the deeds that became the Holocaust, it is easy to make the all too common mistake of treating the Nazis as a case apart, as an unparalleled eruption of evil. And, yes, there were aspects of the Third Reich—from the particular horrors it devised to an ideology that was as bizarre as it was sinister—that distinguished it from the other mass-murdering regimes of the last century. But take a step back and the similarities between National Socialism and its totalitarian counterparts on the left quickly become visible.

This is true of their shared “supernatural” dimension. All were essentially millenarian. Communist revolutionaries (nominally philosophical materialists despite a fundamentally mystical view of historical forces) would not have appreciated the connection, but it was there all right—the religious impulse is hard to discard—complete with the promise of a merciless sorting, after which the saved would march to a better world. Untethered to atheism, the Nazis could be more explicitly millenarian, referring to a “thousand-year” Reich. This number has, notes Kurlander (citing another author), “deep biblical overtones,” overtones to which he pays too little attention—a curious misstep in a history of this type, as is his relatively cursory handling of the Nazis’ knotty relationship with Christianity.

As Kurlander makes clear, the Nazis’ racial and occult obsessions did not come out of nowhere. The party that evolved into the National Socialists had roots in the Thule Society, a group formed in early 1918, focused on the occult, anti-Semitism, and, as Germany descended into defeat, politics. Its members sported a swastika in homage to the Aryans’ supposed Indo-European heritage—an important, if counterintuitive, theme that ran through much of esoteric German racism and was associated with the admiration for “Eastern” spirituality of the sort later felt by quite a few leading Nazis. The Thule Society (the name is a reference to a “Nordic” interpretation of the Atlantis myth) had in turn emerged out of a broader Germanic intellectual community that had wallowed in a swamp of Grenzwissenschaft (or “border science,” to give this nonsense—astrology, anthroposophy, “natural” medicine, parapsychology, radiesthesia, theosophy, and all the rest—a kinder name than it deserves), Aryan fantasy, and racial hysteria for decades.

There is no “right” side of history, no law that makes what we call progress inevitable. Other parts of Europe were also doing their bit to let the Enlightenment down. As Kurlander points out, it was a Frenchman, Arthur de Gobineau, who, writing some 40 years before the beginning of the Dreyfus Affair, did much to popularize the idea of a superior Aryan race. Anti-Semitism was far from being...
agriculture (a more straightforwardly superstitious variant of organic farming)—were largely innocuous, but the fact that there was a biodynamic “plantation” on the grounds of Auschwitz is a reminder of where the retreat from reason can lead, a lesson that, judging by our own overly relaxed response to resurgent pseudoscience (the antivaxxers come to mind) or political attacks on the scientific method, has not been learned.

The dream of restoring a lost whole—even one that had never seen the light of day—was particularly toxic when applied to ethnicity. Imagining a heroic national past (even one with mythic or supernatural undertones) was not confined to Germans, nor was a sense of being a cut above other races, but in Germany, such prejudices were unusually intense. Kurlander never specifies quite why, but the comparatively late (1871) creation of a unified German state—a state then partly unruled by the Treaty of Versailles—must have increased the pressure on Germans, including, in different ways, their kin in the multiethnic Austria-Hungary of Hitler’s youth or the truncated Austria that was left after World War I, to define who they were. Among the ways they responded was by emphasizing who was not German, most notably the Jews, reviled for the threat they were meant to represent to the unity of the Volk: They were an Other that could have no place in a nation that wished to survive as a nation.

Even if he might occasionally exaggerate the contribution of the specific outlandish beliefs he describes to the catastrophe that unfolded, Kurlander provides a careful, clear-headed, and exhaustive examination of a subject so lurid that it has probably scared away some of the serious research it merits. In remedying that, Kurlander offers a strikingly different and deeply disturbing perspective on the rise and subsequent trajectory of the Third Reich, and, most unsettling of all, on the numinous appeal of its Führer. Hitler both shared and channeled (some contemporaries referred to him as a medium) the discourses of a people so drastically detached from reality that they were seduced by a conjuring trick, albeit one in which the conjurer himself may well have believed. It was a dark magic so potent that it took an apocalypse to break the spell.

Zombie Lenin

BRIAN C. ANDERSON

October marks the centennial of the Russian Revolution, the event that opened the disastrous experiment of Marxism-in-power. The Revolution should be remembered for the then-unprecedented misery and death it unleashed, and for the Luciferian ruthlessness of its principal architect, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the first of the 20th-century totalitarian adventurers.

The Slovenian social thinker and intellectual celebrity Slavoj Zizek has a different take. The Revolution, he believes, however destructive it became, carried an enormous “emancipatory potential.” The task in 2017, he says, is to recover that promise through a “radical rethinking of Communism, reactualizing it for today.” And far from being obsolete, Lenin—especially in his final years, as he struggled to consolidate Bolshevik power in a post-October Russia reeling from civil war and foreign embargo—offers a model for proceeding. Lenin 2017 brings together a representative sample of Lenin’s turgid and hate-ridden late writings with a long interpretive essay by Zizek, whose argument is at once preposterous and chilling.

Lenin held the “bourgeois” freedoms of contempt. Freedom of speech, for instance, was a fraudulent concept, a weapon of counter-revolutionaries. As Lenin put it in 1922 to those fellow revolutionaries disturbed by his increasingly authoritarian methods, “Either you refrain from expressing your views or, if you insist on expressing your political views publicly in the present circumstances”—when the Bolsheviks were fighting to wipe out the “white guards” faithful to the old regime—“then you will have only yourselves to blame if we treat you as the worst and most pernicious white-guard elements.” The freedom to criticize the Bolshevik government amounted to the freedom to defeat the workers and the peasants, Lenin contended, and therefore had to be crushed.

Zizek seems to enjoy speaking and writing freely: He jets from one academic conference to another, has no problem finding publishers, and regularly appears on the op-ed pages of such elite press outlets as the Guardian and the New York Times. But he nevertheless maintains that Lenin’s position is worth considering seriously. The way free speech works in liberal democracies, Zizek says, is to trick us into believing that we’re not slaves of illegitimate capitalist power; liberal societies are in “some sense” worse than totalitarian ones when it comes to political conformity, because thinking of ourselves as free cuts off revolutionary possibilities. When Lenin insists “that we should always ask apropos of any freedom, whom does it serve, what is its role in the class struggle,” writes Zizek, “his point is precisely to maintain the possibility of a true radical choice.” The Revolution is what really matters. While not demanding the execution of conservatives and other opponents, Zizek appears open to silencing them.

Formal democracy has no deeper legitimacy than does free speech, as Robespierre (another Zizekian hero) recognized, well before Lenin. The “sovereign will” of the people expressed itself through the French Revolution, claimed Robespierre. If subsequent votes—even lots of votes—betrayed that will, they had to be suppressed. There was a higher egalitarian truth than democracy, and Robespierre’s Jacobins launched the infamous Terror, imprisoning and beheading political opponents who refused to acknowledge it. This was another bloodletting with an “emancipatory kernel,” Zizek informs us. At a revolutionary moment, he writes, “there are no innocent bystanders, because, in such a moment, innocence itself—exempting oneself

Mr. Anderson is the editor of City Journal and the author of Democratic Capitalism and Its Discontents.
Does Zizek really believe any of this? Does he really think we should dismiss the importance of free speech and representative democracy, look to new Great Leaders to save us, and thrill to political violence and fanaticism? As the great historian Robert Conquest documented, Lenin’s Bolshevik regime was far more oppressive than the czarist government it overthrew. Conquest put the maximum number of deaths from executions, in pogroms, and in prison under the czarist regime from 1866 to 1917 at 25,000. Over the first half century of Bolshevik rule, by contrast, the executions were at least 50 times as numerous and the maximum number of prisoners 70 times greater. There was, in other words, no “emancipatory potential” in Lenin’s revolution. Yet neither in Lenin 2017 nor in his many other works does Zizek detail exactly what a “reactualized” Communism would look like and how it would avoid the horrors and failures of the past. Given Zizek’s apologetics for the Leninist record, one wonders how much he even cares. His writing—filled with not only close readings of the Marxian canon but also abstruse psychoanalytic concepts and clever takes on popular films—at times comes off like an elaborate postmodern gag. One of his books is called “Zizek’s Jokes: Did You Hear the One about Hegel and Negation?”

Yet take a look at American university campuses, with their angry-baby students shouting down speakers they’ve never heard or read and radical faculties promulgating theories about speech as violence and democracy as a sham. Consider polls of Millennials showing rising sympathy for socialism and lukewarm devotion to free speech. Walk through a riot-torn American inner city, where the ignorant media celebrate marauders as social-justice warriors. Think about the Left’s public fantasies of killing President Donald Trump and the thuggery of Antifa and other protest groups. One of liberal democracy’s enormous achievements has been the pacification of political violence—no easy thing, and always partial, as much of human experience reminds us. The troubling developments of our recent history suggest that Zizek’s dark theory may capture a perilous moment, and that Lenin’s return from the grave may be nothing to laugh at.
Word Games

ELIZABETH POWERS

The Seventh Function of Language: A Novel, by Laurent Binet, translated by Sam Taylor (Farrar, Straus, 368 pp., $27)

Binet's debut novel, *HHhH*, was awarded the Prix Goncourt for first novel in 2010. The title is an abbreviation for “Himmler’s Brain Is Called Heydrich” (“Himmlers Hirn heißt Heydrich”), referring to the very dark SS figure Reinhard Heydrich, who, until his assassination in Prague in 1942, was one of the chief architects of the plan to exterminate all Jews in German-occupied lands of Europe. The novel centers on the special operation to assassinate Heydrich and the subsequent scorched-earth response of the Nazis, in which the entire Czech village of Lidice was wiped from the face of the earth. Binet’s narrator, in postmodernist fashion, wrestled with the convention of writing a realist novel about events of such magnitude. Could fiction truthfully portray, for instance, for pampered 21st-century Westerners, the heroism of the Czech operatives Gabčík and Kubis?

In *The Seventh Function of Language*, Binet has left behind the difficulty of writing about historical events and has created fake history, bringing together a cast of characters that will be familiar to anyone who was in graduate school in the humanities circa 1980, while tying them who was in graduate school in the humanities circa 1980, while tying them into a narrative about historical events and has created fake history, bringing together a cast of characters that will be familiar to anyone

It will help if you know what semiotics is about. The novel’s appearance in English translation is indicative of the continuing seductive power of the French intellectual Left.

Among the most prominent of French intellectuals was the literary theorist Roland Barthes, who was hit by a delivery van on a Paris street on February 25, 1980, and died a few weeks later. One can imagine that this scenario would provide rich material for a novel, as Barthes just happened to be returning at the time from lunch with François Mitterrand, the Socialist candidate for president of France. Indeed, it is surprising that such a novel hasn’t been written before: Consider the speculation that would have ensued had Noam Chomsky or Steven Pinker been killed within hours of dining with one of the 16 Republicans running for the office of U.S. president 18 months ago. Binet has risen to the challenge.

Barthes’s death would not seem to be cause for a police investigation, except, in Binet’s telling, the van driver was Bulgarian, which leads the president of France, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, to suspect Soviet meddling in French affairs. Enter Jacques Bayard, a conscientious investigator in the French police’s intelligence service who doesn’t need to have it spelled out for him that his task is also to ferret out any information that could damage Mitterrand. From Bayard’s questioning of Barthes in his hospital room, we learn that Barthes had been carrying a document that is now missing. For the detective, “the disappearance of the papers is a curious gray area in what otherwise looks like an ordinary accident,” and things snowball from there. In seeking to recover the missing document, which concerns the “seventh function of language,” Bayard enters the Alice in Wonderland world of French poststructuralism, which, at its most basic, posits that reality is constituted by language, not by the commonsense intuitions of people like Jacques Bayard. Since Bayard doesn’t understand anything these lefties (as he calls them) have to say, he drafts into service a doctoral candidate at the Sorbonne campus at Vincennes, Simon Herzog, who is teaching a class there on James Bond films.

From Paris, the investigation takes our detective pair far afield (at Giscard’s direction): to Bologna (where they meet with Umberto Eco minutes before the bombing of the Bologna train station on August 2, 1980), Cornell University (site of a conference on “the linguistic turn”), and Venice. Among those who sport across the novel’s pages are Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Tzvetan Todorov, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Louis Althusser, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Jacques Derrida . . . not to forget Morris J. Zapp, a character in David Lodge’s 1984 novel *Small World*. Binet does a credible job of portraying the celebrity status of these figures and the inanities of po-mo-speak.

Bayard hears the jabberwocky of Foucault in a lecture at the Sorbonne—“Between this system of law that governs actions and relates to a subject of will, and consequently the indefinite repeatability of the error, and the outline of the salvation and perfection that concerns the subjects, which implies a temporal scanion and an irreversibility, there is, I think, no possible integration . . .”—and bitterly asks himself whether “the big baldy” earns more than he does.

The seventh function of language of the novel’s title takes its name from a work by the grand old man of linguistics, Roman Jakobson, who distinguished six elements of spoken language that were necessary for communication to take place. We learn that Barthes at his death was in receipt of a document from Jakobson concerning a seventh function. Although the meaning of the seventh function is never spelled out, knowledge of it is believed to endow its possessor with immense rhetorical superiority. During a conversation minutes before the explosion in Bologna, Eco tells Bayard: “Whoever had the knowledge and the mastery of such a function would be virtually the master of the world. . . . He could win every election, whip up crowds, provoke revolutions, seduce any woman . . .”

As it turns out, the document is being sought after for reasons that have nothing to do with realpolitik or sex. This is where the secret societies come in. Barthes’s accident, the murders of two others who had knowledge of the document, the deaths of the Bulgarian assassins and of Jacques Derrida (who meets his end at the Cornell conference in a scene reminiscent of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*), and the suicide of John Searle (among other events) were all set in motion by Julia Kristeva (a Bulgarian by birth) and Philippe Sollers to get hold of the document so that Sollers could
become the Great Protagoras of a secret global debating society called the Logos Club. (The current Great Protagoras turns out to be Eco.)

Unbeknownst to them, however, Mitterrand’s man, Jack Lang, had managed to extract the document from Barthes’s jacket during the fatal luncheon, have Régis Debray deliver it to Jacques Derrida (who falsified the contents with some substitutions), and get it back into Barthes’s pocket, all before he was mowed down by the Bulgarian van driver. At the end of the novel, the function is known only to Mitterrand, who is able to use it effectively in a televised debate with Giscard d’Estaing, thereby becoming the first Socialist president of the Fifth Republic. In this counterfactual universe, knowledge of the function dies with Mitterrand.

Got all that? That was the easy part.

In the end, everything comes down to language. The Logos Club, like all secret societies, is all about rituals, code words, and special languages. The judges of the contests wear Venetian masks. The stakes are high, as those who fail the initiation are mowed down by the Bulgarian van driver. At the end of the novel, the function is known only to Mitterrand, who is able to use it effectively in a televised debate with Giscard d’Estaing, thereby becoming the first Socialist president of the Fifth Republic. In this counterfactual universe, knowledge of the function dies with Mitterrand.

But The Seventh Function of Language was not written by a conservative. In an interview in the online magazine Partisan, Lydia Perovic congratulated Binet: “The feat of this novel is that while you’ve turned some of the greatest thinkers of our time into comic characters, you’ve also honored their writing to a T.” Perhaps she is referring to didactic passages in which Simon explains to Bayard the differences between Continental philosophy and the ideas of the French theoreticians? Binet, who was eight years old in 1980, concurred with Perovic’s judgment. After the age of poststructuralism, the glamour apparently lives on. I am hazarding a guess that the U.S. reception of this novel will indicate to what extent we are still enthralled by French intellectual fashions of bygone years.

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**LOOKING EAST**

A Yes or No answer, black or white, is
Not found staring at the ocean, much as
The sea magnetizes our attention.
It holds us more completely than we feel
It does, the eternal shift that catches us
Again, repeatedly; of all places
Looking out of a hotel window, where
An oblique procession of white waves comes
In from the northeast on a windy day
At a slant, a bright crest two hundred feet
From the shore, a formality that seems
Beyond the capacity of the force
Driving the waters of the world to this place,
Where they stop for a moment, desist somehow,
Then draw away from the land in massive Undertows dragging them back to their course,
Away from the shore, from the fifth-floor hotel Window, as the gray immensity moves,
Neither canyon nor mountain, but covering
The world to the horizon where future
And past seem to meet, if they do anywhere.

—LAWRENCE DUGAN

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Do we Christians still believe in the capacity of the faith we have received to attract those we encounter . . . [with] its disarming beauty?” That’s the question or challenge that Julián Carrón, head of Communion and Liberation, a lay ecclesial movement centered in Italy, puts before his reader in Disarming Beauty. The book relies heavily on the writings of Luigi Giussani, the founder of Communion and Liberation.

The essays here were originally published separately but have been reworked with the aim of creating a coherent presentation. The volume is at times diffuse and at times repetitive, yet its manner of framing the contemporary situation of belief and theology is arresting and largely persuasive. Its core teaching is that of Giussani, whose life and thought Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, speaking at Giussani’s funeral, encapsulated thus: “He understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a packet of dogmas, a moralism; Christianity is rather an encounter, a love story; it is an event.”

Carrón presents the key insight with greater theological precision and depth: The “contemporaneity of Christ’s presence” means that each believer has access

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**The Christian Encounter**

**THOMAS S. HIBBS**

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[Mr. Hibbs is the dean of the Honors College at Baylor University and the director of the Baylor-in-Washington program.]
Carrón insists that certain fundamental questions endure and are unavoidable; the longing for the infinite is unquenchable.

If Carrón worries that the so-called Religious Right is too eager to assert arguments and rules, he also accuses the Left of dishonesty in affirming universal values, dignity, rights, and equality while it severs the links of these values to their historical roots. One might note that the deeper problem here is not so much the abandoning of history but the nonchalance about the absence of any conceptual basis for much of what passes on the left for self-evident principles. Carrón points out that many of the truths we have held for some time to be self-evident became obvious only after the advent of Christianity; with its current decline, so too goes the obviousness.

Carrón could have said more here about the differences between Christianity and modernity. While it is certainly correct that many modern motifs grow out of the culture of Christianity, only in modernity is there a promise, indeed a boast, that humanity is rapidly approaching enlightenment—a period in which clear and evident principles of freedom will be universally affirmed. The current deterioration of self-evident shared principles is, therefore, a failure principally of enlightened, secular modernity, not of Christianity.

An objection that some might raise concerning Carrón’s account is that the insistence on the primacy of the encounter and on the futility of argument might seem to entail relativism or historicism. But that objection is wide of the mark: Carrón is most emphatically not advocating a soft relativism. He insists that certain fundamental questions endure and are unavoidable, the longing for the infinite is unquenchable. More dramatically, he insists that “knowledge of faith becomes knowledge of reality” and that faith submits itself to the tribunal of human experience. The encounter that originates faith is an experience of what one can touch, see, and recognize. The chief task of faith in our time is to reawaken the religious sense, which is not a matter of a retreat into some private, idiosyncratic way of seeing the world.

The religious sense teaches us to see reality anew and as it is.

What we are experiencing is a crisis of the human as such. Carrón cites a revealing passage from Philip Roth’s novel The Counterlife: “All I can tell you with certainty is that I, for one, have no self. . . . What I have instead is a variety of impersonations. . . . I am a theater and nothing more.” This is the diminished, evanescent self that lingers in the wake of consumerism: the self of market preferences and progressivism, the self that has cast off any and all encumbrances to self-validating choice. It is important to see that for Carrón, religion, understood generically, is not necessarily a corrective to this situation. He quotes the late Catholic thinker Ernest Fortin: “The death of God is perfectly consistent with a burgeoning religiosity.” In our time, religion itself is often a “product to be consumed, a form of entertainment, . . . an emotional service station.”

The encounter with the disarming beauty of God resists translation into utilitarian projects—of self-help or progressive social reform. Another danger Carrón fears is legalism. He repeatedly insists that the Christian encounter is not moralism; it is not a law. And that, as the earlier quotation from Ratzinger indicates, is certainly correct. The primacy is the relationship with the person of Christ; apart from that relationship, the Gospel is “not a manual for living.”

But here again Carrón’s account, cogent as it is, would profit from greater differentiation. The Jewish and the Christian conceptions of law are quite different from narrow, modern conceptions of morality and law, which tend to be abstract, impersonal, and procedural. Instead, on the Christian view, articulated brilliantly for our time in the work of the Belgian Dominican Servais Pinckaers (see his book The Sources of Christian Ethics), law is intimately connected with virtue and with traits of character, and all three of these are incorporated into a vision of human beatitude.

In other words, the encounter with divine beauty not only disarms; it also calls to unyielding allegiance. It is a purification of the heart that enables us to will one thing. What Ratzinger calls the “love story”—and Carrón the “encounter”—is a call simultaneously to freedom and obedience, happiness and suffering, rejoicing and mourning.
Film

Sunlit Horror

ROSS DOU ThAT

STEPHEN KING’S novels and stories have been adapted for the screen about 40 times, and the less said about most of those movies, the better. Back when King was in his prime, in the 1970s and 1980s, some great directors took up the challenge of translation—Brian De Palma and David Cronenberg and of course Stanley Kubrick (though The Shining is so overwhelmingly Kubrickian that the King original is just another ghost in its hotel). But King’s powers have waned, the movie industry’s big players have moved on to other stories, and in the 23 years since The Shawshank Redemption, the list of King adaptations includes a few decent B-movies and a lot of mediocrity and dreck.

This summer’s The Dark Tower was the first attempt at a King-based big-budget movie since Dreamcatcher (a dud adapted from a dud) in 2003. It failed, not surprisingly, because, while King’s Dark Tower novels are superbly perfect for this age of world-building and endless sequels, in reality they are way too recondite and weird and King-specific (some would say, King-up-his-own-posterior) to compete with the Marvels of the world. The Dark Tower movie tried to be more accessible and simple and non-arcane, but that just made it thin and weightless and disposable, and audiences treated it accordingly.

This autumn’s It, however, is a different beast entirely. It is by no means a great movie, but simply by virtue of being competent and entertaining, it vaults into the top ten of King adaptations, and, by virtue of capably adapting one of his most beloved and terrifying books, it will command a substantial box office. In a few ways it suffers by comparison with Netflix’s successful miniseries Stranger Things, an exercise in King-infused nostalgia that had a lot more space to make its characters and setting come to life. But in certain ways it casts Stranger Things into its shadow by reminding you of how much of that show’s formula was just a straight homage to King.

It, as anyone who ever feared white pancake makeup and a rubber nose well knows, is the tale of a Maine town, Derry, terrorized by a monster known as Pennywise the Dancing Clown. Pennywise (played in this incarnation by Bill Skarsgård) feeds off the fears of children and the pathologies of adults; he’s a parasite on Derry’s rotten soul, emerging from hibernation every 27 years to pick off kids and inspire bigotry, madness, chaos, and mob violence among the grown-ups. He lurks in storm drains and sewers but can manifest himself just about anywhere—bedrooms, libraries, garages, old photographs, and bad dreams.

Ranged against this monster are six boys and a single girl—the self-styled “Losers’ Club,” a gang of misfits whose sort-of leader, Bill Denbrough (Jaeden Lieberher), lost a baby brother to the clown’s long arm and teeth. In the novel, we watch them struggle with Pennywise as children and then return to do the same as adults, in overlapping timelines. In the movie, we get just the children’s story, set in 1989, which holds out the promise of a present-day Part II.

That story, as filmed by Andy Muschietti, aspires to something rare in King adaptations, even the successful ones: the integration of both of his artistic modes, the melancholy and gritty Americana and the bloodcurdling-nightmare-monster stuff, into a successful narrative whole. All the outdoor scenes are shot like a dream of an American summer—the light falling just so, the main street a Rockwellian picture postcard, the trees green, and the deep water gleaming. The cast of children (including one Stranger Things vet, Finn Wolfhard, and the magnetic Sophia Lillis as Beverly, the lone girl) is almost uniformly excellent, their banter and sport and nerdish angst triggering nostalgia without slipping toward the treacly or too cute. (My only regret, as a descendant of Maimers, is that the film doesn’t have them try the real King-country accent, deah.)

But leave the sun-kissed summers outdoors behind and enter the body of Derry, its homes and apartments and public works, and suddenly you’re in a true horror movie—all shadows and grime and rot, populated by adults who are either too clueless to notice or too sinister to care. This is where Pennywise lurks, where every corner or picture or TV screen could hide some personalized horror, where the camera-work and music constantly build toward jump-scares, screams, and flight.

And I do mean constantly: The main weakness of the movie is that eventually you come to expect the unexpected, that the scenes that actually advance the plot—rather than lingering with the kids, their hormones, and their bikes—are just one fright after another, with somewhat diminishing returns. The film doesn’t always know how to hold its fire, to make your skin crawl while your imagination spins. It needs more moments in which the horror can be glimpsed in the background without having it rushing at you screaming.

In a passing scene early on, you notice (but none of the characters do) that an unwatched but glaring TV in one of the homes has been taken over by a maniacal chant about the joys of playing in the sewer. There’s more horror in that unnoticed television than in the jump-scares that bookend it, and I wish the filmmakers had realized that.

But audiences do like jump-scares, and those in the theater when I saw It seemed like satisfied customers. Which is the best way to think about this movie: It’s not great, it’s imperfect, it lacks the fullness of what King does best—but unlike many adaptations of his work, it’s both faithfully enough and frightening enough to be genuinely satisfying. It’s not a masterpiece, but it gets the master right.

NR
Happy Warrior

by David Harsanyi

Modified Limited Hangouts

C

olleagues—

It has recently come to the management’s attention that last month a male member of Google’s software team launched an unprovoked attack against one of his female co-workers. I won’t repeat the odious specifics because they perpetuated stereotypes about women, but let’s just say that here at Google we do not believe that one sex is “fairer” than the other, and any intimidation otherwise won’t be tolerated.

Upon learning of the incident, our team immediately launched an exhaustive investigation into the employee’s actions. What we uncovered was both disconcerting and alarming: a widespread, years-long pattern of intolerable behavior from not only this employee but many others.

Needless to say, our investigation, since leaked to the press, has now impacted our work family in ways that are both hurtful and destructive. We’re sorry this happened. For those who feel unsafe at work, take all the time you need. Yet we believe that this incident has become a teachable moment for everyone in our group on appropriate workspace behavior.

Here, for example, are some of the things you shouldn’t do.

In one interface late last year, a male department head told a woman co-worker through our reliable and intuitive Hangouts service that he found her far “more cooperative” than his male colleagues because she “listened” to his ideas and reacted to his bad ones with “tact” rather than mocking and dismissing him as male counterparts had been doing for years. In a related interaction, male engineers were overheard discussing their team leader using an inappropriate masculine frame of reference, calling him the “church lady.”

Neither is acceptable.

In another email missive, a male employee accused women engineers of “generally” displaying a “stronger interest in people” and of having “empathy” and “openness” to “feelings and aesthetics” and of being less “pushy” and showing more interest in “results” and less interest in professional “status” than his male colleagues.

This too is improper. Need it be repeated that pigeonholing women as more caring, friendlier, or more prone to finding a healthy “work–life balance” is hurtful and demeaning?

Another male employee committed dozens of similar infractions of the code of conduct, including referring to his life partner as his “better half” in front of a female cubicle mate, noting that a female co-worker’s skirt was “really cool,” and making a really big deal out of the fact that a then-female intern hadn’t seen the movie Notting Hill.

This employee’s relationship with the company has been terminated.

As you know, at Google our ideology is quite simple: Everyone deserves respect, regardless of age, race, color, hair color, height, weight, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, “sex,” including male and/or female, gender, gender identity, gender expression, transgender gender, nongender, gender fluid, nonconforming; those who are androgyne, androgynous, bigender, cisgender, gender variant, neither?, non-binary or binary or tri-binary; and those with predisposing genetic characteristics that do not comport with ideas pushed by “Western” “science.” This respect should be afforded equally to all people despite their pregnancy status (whether they be male or female), handicaps, disabilities, different-ableness [?], or alienage or citizenship status; including but not limited to self-identifying Americans, including past, current, or prospective Americans; marital status, including but not confined to monogamy, monogam-ish, polyamory, polyfidelity, quasifidelity, swinging, open marriages, and other fictional designations such as sapio-sexualism and or morphilia. The company expects this respect to be afforded regardless of self-identified victim status, familial status, economic status, noneconomic status, status, and all statuses of people who have not yet been identified but will be retroactively deserving of such status—and we sincerely apologize for failing to include you on this list. Finally, there is no excuse for enabling any stereotypes regarding sexual orientation. None. You must respect people of any actual or perceived sexual orientations or unrealized sexual orientations, and even those who once dabbed in a sexual orientation other than their own.

It is also worth noting that these simple rules should never inhibit our employees from continuing to engage in robust conversations and debates regarding the issues that affect them and the world around them. This, after all, is what we do at Google. We make the world a better place. Everyone has the right to express their opinions on an array of topics—in fact, we encourage the flourishing of an open and safe environment for dialogue and the sharing of viewpoints.

In these deeply troubling times, however, we implore you to use a measure of common sense when interacting with your fellow employees. Our Code of Conduct explicitly states (volume 8, section 76, part xii, number 29(b)) that “each employee must do their utmost to create a workplace culture that is free of harassment, intimidation, bias, discomfort, upsetting opinions, or social science that does not comport with the rest of the group’s notions.”

It has come to our attention that while members of the video-chat team in the common area were exploring the chilling parallels between the rise of Nazi Germany and Donald Trump, an employee walked by and said, “C’mon, the guy’s not that bad.” A number of people in the discussion group no longer felt free to openly exchange ideas. Reminder: It is one thing to have an opinion and quite another to share it with those who might be offended.

If you have been put in a situation wherein your comfort level has been reduced, please contact our new human resources director VP of Diversity, Integrity, and Governance.

Don’t be evil,

Sundar Pichai

Mr. Harsanyi is a senior editor of the Federalist.
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