

Liberty

November 2010

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Drill Deep, Drill Smart

by Gary Jason

The Adventure of Liberty

by Tom Palmer

I Was a Teenage Liberal

by Robert P. Marcus

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Letters

Gaming the System

Gary Jason's comments (Reflections, October) are not surprising to someone like myself who once worked for a railroad. They had craft unions. If the light over a machinist's bench went out, only an electrician could change it. If the machinist changed it, the electricians union might go on strike. Under those kinds of conditions, a “penalty payment” might actually be an improvement.

Likewise, sick days, overtime, vacations, etc., were all spelled out in the agreement, and it didn't take long for the smarter union members to figure out how to game the system.

Full privatization may not be the solution that reasonable union contracts are. However, it may be that only a private employer would be willing to take the heat to force the unions to be reasonable.

Robert Peirce
Pittsburgh, PA

Symposium

I couldn't agree more with Michael Christian's article “In Vino Veritas.” Are not California cabs and Chardonnays — big (the bigger the better) and in your face, lacking in all subtlety — simply a reflection of the American character? If I want a blackcurrant drink, I'll buy Ribena.

Adrian Day
Baltimore, MD

Tooth and Claw

In the September issue of *Liberty*, Gary Jason posed the question: “Do

Animals Have Rights?” We might ask, for that matter, whether men have rights. The Founding Fathers thought so. In the Declaration of Independence they proclaimed that “men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” We have pretty much lived by that belief ever since. We may disagree about the nature of the Creator, whether it is a natural force as envisioned by evolutionists or a personal God as maintained by religionists, but, nevertheless, agree that men have a right to life. But what about animals? Might we not simply declare that animals are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights too?

Men have a right to life because they exist. It is no more logical to challenge whether men have a right to exist than it is to challenge whether the moon has a right to exist. Both men and the moon have a right to exist because they exist. It is not within our purview to question this. Those who advance the concept of animal rights may use the same reasoning: animals have a right to life because they exist. Well, fine. But if a lion kills a gazelle, what has happened to the gazelle's right to life? Similarly, if a lion kills a man, where is the man's right to life? Or, if a rock tumbling from a cliff kills a cat underneath, what has happened to the cat's right to life? From these observations might we conclude that the right to life of man, gazelle, or cat exists only if they can manage to exist? There does not appear to be any

Letters to the editor

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Liberty (ISSN 0894-1408) is a libertarian and classical liberal review of thought, culture, and politics, published monthly except February by the Liberty Foundation, 4785 Buckhaven Court, Reno, NV 89519. Periodicals Postage Paid at Reno, NV 89510, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Liberty, P.O. Box 20527, Reno, NV 89515.

Subscriptions are \$29.50 for eleven issues. International subscriptions are \$39.50 to Canadian and Mexican addresses. Email subscriptions are available; visit www.libertyunbound.com for details.

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“right” beyond that. And if the right to life exists only if the parachute opens, what is to be said of its unalienability?

Evolution has shaped the nature of both man and beast so that they are tolerant of their own species (if they were not, they would not long exist). It is a natural compact which exists among members of every species. Among men we are conscious of it: It is in my inter-

est to promote your right to life so you will promote my right to life. But these “compacts” exist only within each species. Outside of that and towards any other species there is generally a pitiless ferocity.

Behavior which promotes our existence is what we have termed morality. But whether morality can apply across species does not seem possible, because

From the Editor

I want to make an announcement about an important change in Liberty. After our next issue — December 2010 — Liberty will cease to be a print journal. Thereafter it will appear online, in a free, fully revised website that will carry features, reviews, reflections, comments from readers, and a complete archive of all the issues we have published since our founding in 1987.

This is a big change, and it brings both happy and unhappy thoughts. Unhappy, because we all value the printed word and the familiar appearance of Liberty. Happy, because online publication will enable our authors’ contributions to appear more frequently, and closer to the events on which they comment. And I predict that an online site will bring us more readers.

My thoughts right now, however, are with the people who read and support Liberty today. One of the great things about editing Liberty is the opportunity to meet its readers. They are great people — and I don’t even mind it when they yell at me. So I want all our readers to know why we’re making the transition from print to online publishing.

One reason is that these are bad financial times, and especially bad for print publications. Like every other intellectual journal in the country, we lose money. Actually, we lose a lot less than most, because we have a tiny staff and we are very careful about what we spend. But unlike many other intellectual journals, we are not sponsored by a large institution. This is good, because we have retained our independence, or what some have called our eccentricity or “quirkiness.” But it means that if we continue in print publication, we will have to stop in the easily foreseeable future. Online publication will allow us to continue indefinitely.

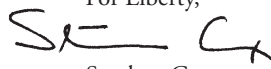
A second reason for the transition is the challenge that print publication presents to our very small and very busy staff. Some of its members have been with Liberty from the start, 23 years ago. But producing a print journal demands a tremendous commitment of time, and some of us find that this commitment has become impossible to sustain.

A third reason is simply that online publication appears to be the way to interest more readers. I myself spend large amounts of time reading news and commentary online, and much of what I read is very good. Our founder, R.W. Bradford, often spoke of the possibility that the day of online publication had come for virtually all intellectual journals. I think he would have wanted to see Liberty’s tradition continue in a form that is immediately accessible to everyone, throughout the world.

So our next print issue will be our last — in that form. We will, of course, send refunds for the unused portions of subscriptions. (Please don’t think you need to write and ask us about that!) In our next issue, I’ll tell you more about our new online way of publishing.

But again, the important person is you. You’ve supported Liberty with your subscriptions, your donations, your praise, your criticism, and your friendship always. I hope you will continue to support us as we change our way of coming to your home.

For Liberty,


Stephen Cox

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the continuation of existence for a member of one species is for the most part dependent on the end of existence for a member of another. We eat each other, almost all of us.

But what has outraged the animal rights people most is the indifferent, unnecessarily cruel, and brutish treatment accorded stock animals. And, in this, they are right. Because morality is not wholly applicable one species to another does not mean that we as human beings should not be as humane towards other creatures as possible.

Frank Ricciardone
San Diego, CA

Debtor State

In "Don't Default on Me" (October), Bruce Ramsey says that writing off the national debt would be catastrophic. He cites Murray Rothbard who deplores pouring more private capital down government ratholes. But then he defends the ratholes. He says that if you own a government bond, the rathole is you.

Wait a minute! I already know this experience. In the '90s, millions of people cashed out bonds and T-bills and invested in the stock market. The actions of millions of investors moving their money from public debt issues to private stock did not sit well with the feds. It threatened the treasury with a need to increase the interest it paid on national debt or experience a default.

The government is broke. It cannot cash out a significant number of debt instruments at maturity or pay greater interest rates on them. So the feds bashed the stock market. Beginning in 2000, they bashed and they bashed the economy with interest rate hikes until the market crashed. The stock market suffered some \$7 trillion in losses. The marketed federal debt was about \$4 trillion at the time. So the feds essentially chose to trash stockholders instead of debt holders.

Look at the political motive. The government can blame private enterprise for the economic tragedy. And anyone who thinks that the government was fighting an overheated economy with interest rate hikes is just not aware of the depth of political lying and treachery.

Regardless, this writer does not suggest we default the debt, we should default interest payments on it. And

simultaneously we must constitutionally freeze federal spending to a fixed amount of dollars per annum. If they cannot spend it, they will have no need to print it. A freeze is the economic equivalent of a gold standard. That could immediately appreciate the dollar and assuage debt holders. And debt notes could be held or traded as long-term appreciating assets while they are being methodically retired.

The default of interest payments on federal debt would allow income taxes to be cut in half. And that is an economic stimulus that could last indefinitely.

G. Peter Trygstad
Bremerton, WA

Leaving It on the Table

With regard to Bruce Ramsey's "Buying Consent" reflection (August), please consider the following:

Your friendly neighbor a few doors down tells you his new barbecue has been stolen. A few weeks later another neighbor offers you a barbecue, which looks strikingly similar to the stolen unit, at a ridiculously low price. Would you buy it? If you chose to make the purchase, then learned it was indeed the stolen barbecue, would you return it? A guess, based upon neighbors known: few would make the purchase, suspecting nefarious acquisition. Some who did might return the barbecue to its real owner, and with embarrassed guilt, take the purchase loss.

How different is the act of declining a tax-supported subsidy? You're a thoughtful libertarian, so you know the subsidy was forcibly taken from a taxpayer. Do you really want to be a party to a dirty deed?

Ramsey states that "almost everyone who qualifies for a subsidy is going to accept it. The government is giving out money: you're not going to take it?" Possibly this merely reflects his circle of friends? In another Reflection in the same issue Ramsey notes that he lives in an 85% Democratic district.

For the rest of us: how many people do you know who were eligible for a tax-funded subsidy but never applied? Because people often do not openly discuss this, one might suspect it occurs more frequently than we know. Yet I know many such cases just within my acquaintances. Laid-off working stiffs who quickly found less desirable employment rather than take government

handouts; single mothers who held two jobs because they did not want their kids to be welfare cases; families sustaining large, uninsured losses who rebuilt on their own rather than invite the government bureaucracy to their table; budding entrepreneurs who declined SBA loans because they wanted to make it on their own. And without these noble individualists, where does the cycle end?

Frank Chodorov, in his thoughtful and refreshing book "One Is a Crowd," offered a succinct suggestion:

The only "constructive" idea that I can in all conscience advance, then, is that the individual put his trust in himself, not in power; that he assume responsibility for his behavior and not transfer his personality to committees, organizations or, above all, to a super-personal State. Such reforms as are necessary will come of themselves when, or if, men act as intelligent and responsible human beings. There cannot be a "good" society until there are "good" people.

A simple example might be enlightening. An elderly couple (both in their 90s) of very modest means has never accepted either Social Security or Medicare. Oh yes, they've had some very painful medical expenses, and yes, their standard of living is low. Of course they paid the tax for both government programs during their working careers (the wife worked until she was 80, planning for sustaining them in retirement). They are aware both programs are unfunded; each dollar paid out for Social Security or Medicare must be taken from someone else.

When speaking of this issue, the husband remarked, "You can recognize us by the holes in our pants." To which the wife enthusiastically added, "And the smiles on our faces."

Dave Hendersen
Salem, OR

Bon Mot

Reading Jamie McEwan's "Psychology Grows Up" (July) I was reminded of something said by one of my philosophy profs in college: "Psychology is the art of trying to scientifically prove the obvious."

Dennis Dwinnell
Fairfield, IL

Reflections

Back scratching — General Motors, fresh from being taken over by the federal government, is making contributions to officials of the federal government.

According to the Washington Post (August 5), GM has resumed making donations to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation — lately, a cool 36 grand. The CBC, of course, is home to such moral luminaries as Charles Rangel (D-NY) and Maxine Waters (D-CA). Eleven CBC members sit on the board of the so-called charity.

The Post story adds that other corporations have made donations to charitable foundations connected with political figures. But this one reeks of corruption. GM is now using the taxpayers' money to curry the favor of officials of the very government that is keeping it afloat. — Gary Jason

Caliph — Why is it, if President Obama is such a great communicator, about one-fifth of his audience thinks he's a Muslim, and about two-fifths aren't sure? And those are the results of a survey taken even before his comments about the 9/11 mosque. — Stephen Cox

Diminishing returns — Vice President Biden recently predicted a Democratic victory in the November elections, because America will not choose to return to Bush's policies. In 2008, the Democrats won with a very simple strategy: run against George W. Bush. In 2010, the Democrats have that same simple strategy: run against George W. Bush.

This time, however, it won't work, because the Democrats are not running against the incompetent incumbent; this time they are running against scrappy, impassioned Tea Party candidates, and this time they will be forced to run on their own record of the last two years, which has seen economic decay and ObamaCare's socialized medicine. Obama's socialism is as out of touch with reality as is his wishful thinking that the public still associates Bush with the Republican Party. — Russell Hasan

Garbage out — The little town near where I live recently added an employee to its meager workforce — a trash inspector. Township officials claim the town makes money from the recyclables it collects. They are worried the town is losing revenue from residents mingling recyclables with regular trash. So, the township committee has decided to pay someone to inspect the trash. The inspector's job is to cut open trash bags set out for collection that he suspects may have recyclables thrown in with the regular trash. It is, of course, a mere coincidence that the newly hired trash inspector is the mayor's close friend.

I strongly doubt that the cost of the trash inspector's salary will be outweighed by monies realized from 100% recycling compliance. Though I hate government mandates, I am not offended by recycling per se. I am offended about this potential intrusion on my own and other citizens' privacy. One's trash is one's private property until it reaches the jaws of the trash truck.

I am very good about recycling recyclables. I am also very good about picking up after my several canine dependents. I am especially good about disposing canine "pickups" in the regular trash bags. So, if the newly minted trash inspector decides he should inspect the bags I put out at the road, his experience will be most unpleasant. I expect that my trash will be inspected only once. — Marlane White

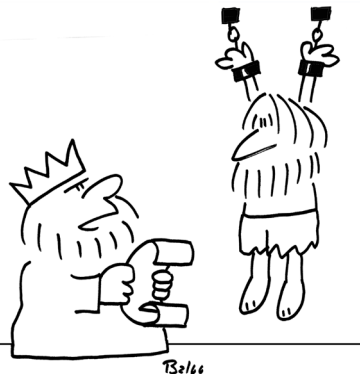
Outlook not so good — The economy looks pretty bad. In late August, the Federal Reserve chairman, Ben Bernanke, announced with some bravado that he still had weapons in his arsenal — shortly after Keynesian economist Alan Blinder said in The Wall Street Journal that "the Fed has already spent its most powerful ammunition; only the weak stuff is left." The Journal wrote on August 28 that the Democrats are beginning to face the "inescapable conclusion" that the economy is not going to get better before election day.

For whom is this a surprise? Not me. From the start, our problems resembled those that turned the 1929 market crash into the Great Depression — scary government tactics that make anyone with money unwilling to invest in the future (and many people have a lot of money, probably under their mattresses at this point). Superficially, the Great Depression is different because then the Federal Reserve drastically reduced the money supply, and today's Federal Reserve

is doing the opposite — expanding it to maintain liquidity. But with a raft of taxes about to rise, with healthcare costs impossible to predict, with deficits gigantic now and bigger ones looming (whether the Fed has options or not), it's natural that investors want to wait.

In his 2009 book "Intellectuals and Society," Thomas Sowell writes that for a year after the October 1929 stock market crash, unemployment "never went as high as 10%." But then the government started to intervene. "Once the unemployment rate rose into double digits in November 1930, an unemployment rate as low as 6.3% was not seen again for the remainder of the decade."

He contrasts that experience with the May 1987 stock market crash (admittedly, not as extended as the 1929 crash), after which the Reagan administration "did nothing." The market



"My records show that you haven't filed a tax return for 17 years!"

quickly got back on track, and the nation experienced a period of economic growth that lasted 20 years. We should be so lucky.

— Jane S. Shaw

Face off — George W. Bush was famous for his infectious grin — it made the Left sick. Sometime during his first term it became the smirk that launched a thousand blogs. I still can't figure out exactly why, except perhaps that it reflected not only self-confidence and self-satisfaction but also, at some level, the fact that he knew it would irritate lefties, simply because he'd got his way. Somewhat puerile (he *was* referred to as a frat boy); still — whatever you think of his policies — Bush was patently transparent (not really cunning enough for successful guile), artless, and guardedly candid (as candid as a politician might dare).

I'll never forget his on-camera reaction to 9/11 while entertaining 6-year-olds. First, he listened to his aide without interrupting or reacting. Note that he didn't cut the cameras. That would have been an indication that he was more concerned with his image than with the substance of what was happening. Then, seemingly at a loss for reaction and continuing the task at hand, he came across as indecisive — mostly, I suspect, because he didn't react dramatically. However, I think his wheels were in overdrive as he digested the import of the news. Perhaps I'm too charitable, but I'd have reacted the same way. Impulsiveness during a crisis is no virtue.

Most refreshing about *W*'s character was his self-deprecating sense of humor. Remember him crawling out from under a table declaring — with that infamous smirk on his face — “No WMD's here!”?

Lately, it seems as if each new president, after the honeymoon is over, makes the previous president — no matter how reviled he was at the end of his term — look oodles better. At the end of their second term the Clintons were widely despised. Then came George W., a breath of fresh air at the time. But by the end of *W*'s second term, the Clintons were nearly rehabilitated. George W. isn't yet a George Washington, but Obama is certainly greasing the skids for him.

At the healthcare forum with Republicans, where Congressman Ryan stole the show, our current chief executive looked bored and dismissive — as if students in his law class had detoured into pointless, irrelevant error. That's when I first noticed Obama's smirk: a supercilious, arrogant, patronizing half-grin of condescending superiority.

He purses his lips, making them look unnaturally thin, displaying determination and resolve, deep in thought, implying an even deeper insight hidden somewhere inside; rolls his eyes, then looks around conspiratorially (to those in the know) and exudes the air of a teacher exercising endless patience with a bunch of students who “don't get it.” Then — instead of persuading people or countering opposing arguments logically — he lectures his audience with an air of

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

This column ordinarily watches a single type of verbal problem, but sometimes there are just too many problems. One is spotted — then another pops up. Readers spot them too, and want something to be done about them, pronto.

So, in response to popular alarm about the verbal invasions coming in from every point of the compass, this Word Watch will attack as many of them as humanly possible.

Let's start with a quotation sent in by one of our best word spotters, Carl Isackson. It's a passage from Margaret Chan, director-general of the World Health Organization, on the subject of swine flu: “This pandemic has turned out to be much more fortunate than what we feared a little over a year ago.”

Well, if we're going to have a “pandemic,” let us have a “fortunate” one.

Carl considered the excuse that Chan was born in Hong Kong and may not be a native English speaker, but he didn't think that was good enough. After all, native speakers say Chan-like things all the time. For instance, we are constantly “making problems better,” aren't we? The issue isn't where you were born, but whether you have any sense.

Here's a phrase spotted by a friend who prefers to remain anonymous. It's from a corporate memo — although, these days, it could have been derived from anything. The memo refers to “a quagmire of things converging.” My friend comments: “The mental image I produced was of what I assume Swamp Thing would look like when having sex. While very drunk.”

Common speech and writing are now full of things going bump in the night. Here's another sample, unearthed from an

after-dinner speech that someone thought worthy to be immortalized on the internet. The speaker is complimenting a colleague, claiming that the organization to which both of them are stuck, like bugs on flypaper, “is very lucky to have hit a time nexus where our needs and her ability and availability have collided.” The anonymous friend who commented on this one exclaims: “Thank God no one was hurt! It could have been a black hole. Maybe aliens were involved.”

Why are people drawn to these weird spatial images? The friend just quoted suggests the influence of science fiction. But perhaps what we're reading is merely the language appropriate to life in a modern office. Lost in the bureaucratic fog of war, no one really knows what's going on; it's all nexuses passing in the night. But when “converge” becomes “collide,” it's time to look for the light switch.

And here's something that I found myself. It illustrates another, growing category of verbal mayhem, and it comes from an AP account (July 25) of the disaster that took place at the Love Parade concert at Duisberg, Germany. It's intended to answer everybody's question, “What the hell is Duisberg, Germany?”, and it goes like this:

“Duisburg is a city of 500,000 in western Germany's highly industrialized Ruhr region known for its coal mining and steel production. The region's economy has declined in recent years and it has been trying to bolster its image on the cultural scene. The entire Ruhr region is the European capital of culture in 2010.”

I won't worry about the difficulty of imagining a “bolster” pushing up an “image,” perhaps to keep it from falling out of bed,

finality, as if only a crank might counter his summary words of wisdom. Finally, he looks around once more with a fastidious patience that disassembles a sneering impatience.

I just can't imagine a future president who might make me wish for the good old Obama days. — Robert H. Miller

Bread line — The July jobs report (released in early August) painted the picture of a continuing jobless recovery. The economy actually *lost* 131,000 jobs, total — a figure that reflected the ending of 143,000 temporary Census jobs that had inflated earlier numbers. The private sector created a feeble 71,000 jobs, quite below expectation. These were fewer than the reported 83,000 jobs in the June report, but even that number was revised downward to just 31,000.

Also interesting was the loss of 38,000 jobs in local government, a result of the continuing deficits being seen at the municipal level. Democrats in Congress rushed through another \$26 billion in stimulus spending aimed at shoring up the municipal job market (public employees invariably vote Democratic).

The unemployment rate remained at 9.5%, but only because (as in earlier months) many thousands of unemployed gave up looking for work. It's obvious that the stimulus bills passed so far have failed to stimulate jobs.

President Obama's reaction was predictably narcissistic and delusional. He and his underlings started putting out

the risible claim that the stimulus bills averted a depression and created "or saved" three million jobs. Not many people bought it.

— Gary Jason

Blame it on the times — "The policy elite — central bankers, finance ministers, politicians who pose as defenders of fiscal virtue — are acting like the priests of some ancient cult, demanding that we engage in human sacrifices to appease the anger of invisible gods." — Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, August 21.

That is rich: a mainstream Keynesian economist accusing someone else of worshipping a false god. It led me to add Keynesian economics to my list of useless and often dangerous pseudosciences and superstitions — alongside management theory, psychology, environmentalism, education science, political science, and sociology. These scams resemble real sciences in that they advance theories, insights, and assumptions that try to explain phenomena, but the resemblance ends there.

Theories in real sciences inspire experiments; if these experiments don't provide support, then the theories are discarded. As Karl Popper taught us, scientific theories are falsifiable. An outgrowth of all this is that the results of experiments have to be reproducible and so can be used in engineering.

Pseudoscientists usually cite historical or anecdotal events to start forming their theories. We have no notion why they

like the bolster that my mom put on my own bed when I was small. Notice, however, that before you bolster something, you've already got to *have* it. What was Duisberg's image on the cultural scene before people started to bolster it? I guess I missed the whole thing. Maybe you did too. So the answer is kindly supplied: "The entire Ruhr region is the European capital of culture in 2010."

I don't want to know how this designation was awarded, or who awarded it. I refuse to look it up. It's just too silly. The silliness, indeed, is the interesting part. Everything about that last quoted sentence is hilarious. Whoever heard of a capital of culture? Whoever heard of an "entire region" (let alone the Ruhr!) being the capital of anything? And whoever heard of capitals changing year by year? Try this: "The Vienna region is the European capital of culture in 2010." See, it doesn't even work for Wien. Now try it for Youngstown, Ohio, which I take to be the American equivalent of Duisberg: "The entire northeastern Ohio region is the North American capital of culture in 2010." Ha. Ha. Ha, ha, ha.

How could anybody get this silly? My theory is that virtually all individual people now have resumes, padded with cheap euphemisms and bizarre awards — so why not cities? Why not regions? The Ruhr's moniker as "capital of culture" is simply the geographical equivalent of "Second Runner Up: The County-Wide Peer-Relations and Positivity Award, Council of Inter-Government Liaison Staff (2010)."

Hmmm . . . I see a theme emerging here. Something about bureaucratic words, bureaucratic systems . . .

No, let's move on to something else. Mehmet Karayel asks in despair, "Why do people insist on saying, 'He was traveling at a high rate of speed?'" My answer is, I don't know. Obviously, a high rate of speed is nothing more than a high speed. And "rate of" is funky in itself. I understand "rate of exchange," "rate of acceptance," and "rate of failure," but speed has nothing to do with

discounts, odds, or percentages. Either you're going fast or you're not.

But look, Mehmet, I don't know a lot of things. I don't know why high-class authors say that "the colonists were fewer in number than the Indians." How else could they be "fewer"? Could they be fewer in space or fewer in time? Neither do I know why people refer to "my other co-workers, who work with me." Or why they talk about "sharing a meal in common." And I can't imagine why people discuss "my friend Kenny, and this other girl he works with." Maybe it's because they assume that the more words you stuff into a sentence, the clearer it's going to be. But no, it doesn't work that way.

Speeding along at a high rate of speed . . . there's an omnipresent TV ad, contrasting one phone company with another, in which dissatisfied customers of Company B are shown denouncing their "enormous, humongous" bills. So bills exist that are enormous but not humongous? And we must be careful to stipulate that some of them are both?

Analogously (now, how often have you seen *that* word as a transition — eh?), a distinguished scholar, W. Bruce Lincoln, writing the history of Nicholas I of Russia, mentions "the destructive termites of change [that] were gnawing at the underpinnings of the Nicholas system." Apparently there are termites that are not destructive — termites that build houses, rather than destroying them; and we must be careful to distinguish the bad termites from the good ones. Well, good. I'd like my termites to be building me a new room.

Unfortunately, what that example indicates is that the distinction between high verbal culture and low verbal culture is practically nonexistent, and has been for a long time. Lincoln's book was published in 1978.

On to the land of politics, where everything has at least two

selected some events and not others. Pseudoscientists love numbers and will generate “studies” of internally referential subjects, running the results through statistical analyses that, amazingly, always confirm the hypotheses. So “poof,” they confer upon themselves the title of “scientists.”

I like to think of them as shamans peddling superstitions that appeal to the gullible. What is so dangerous is that many opinion leaders buy into these belief systems, license them, give them authority to run their affairs, and pay them good money, as they would to a good engineer.

Among the economic pseudosciences, Keynesianism (turning gold into paper), which appeals to politicians who want to engineer better societies, is the largest. It has been in charge for about 75 years. Real scientists would have rejected the Keynesian theories decades ago because of their results — numerous embarrassingly false predictions of economic events (“correctly predicting 11 of the last 3 recessions”), not to mention the stagflation of the 1970s. And Keynesian economics dominated policy when the rest of us were plunged into the current financial unpleasantness.

Keynes lived at a time when fiat currencies were created by government printing presses. He did not foresee modern financial practices, in which money supplies or currency are increased by the private use of credit — debts that have to be repaid. He could not have anticipated the shrinkage of the money supply that will occur when folks won’t spend “their” money, either because they are no longer credit worthy or are worried about paying off debts. Belief systems such as Keynesianism “work” as long as most people buy into the entire scheme — witness the glorious example of the medieval Church — but when the facade cracks, all hell breaks loose.

Japan illustrates what can happen. Keynesians were in charge when the Japanese real estate and stock market bubbles

burst in 1990 and people lost huge amounts of equity along with the hope of making easy money. The Japanese have had deflation for 20 years now, despite the full Keynesian program of easy credit and fiscal stimulus. Many young people have not been able to find good jobs, and they can’t afford to marry or have children. Keynesian economics is destroying Japan. Keynesian economists have no vocabulary to explain how this happened, and offer only more of the same to rescue the Japanese.

Other schools of economics offer little help. The Chicago school is a kind of squishy, wannabe Keynesian school that prescribes moderate inflation to “help manage” the economy; it’s been tried to some extent in small developing economies with success. Krugman’s editorial mocks “Austerians” who want us to return to a gold-based currency. Austrian economics has been tried only in sepia-colored recollections of the Victorian Age, never in contemporary large-scale economies. Objectively Austrians cannot obtain our loyalty simply by demanding that we choose among superstitions and so ought to pick the one we haven’t tried before.

Nevertheless, we must have currencies, and fiat currencies have led to destabilizing cycles of boom and bust, as the Austrian economists understood. Austrian economics makes few passionate claims, beyond a hope of decency and peace that has earned my respect, for what it’s worth.

As a result of Keynesian economics the western world now faces prolonged low-grade economic depression, diminished prospects for young people, and increasingly desperate measures by democratically elected governments that are expected to do something, anything. Libertarians who value truth should avoid making messianic promises for the success of other economic systems, but constantly emphasize the Keynesian source of our economic problems. — Erwin Haas

names, none of them the right one. The tendency to rename things is even more prevalent on the Left than it is on the Right — I suspect because Americans are more likely to be right-wingers than left-wingers, so it’s the left-wingers who have the most reason to disguise themselves. Hence, the president is said to have been a “community organizer” — meaning left-wing activist, which is what he was, but it doesn’t sound as good. Many of his friends are “healthcare advocates,” “poverty advocates,” and “environmental advocates” — in plain terms, left-wing activists. Odd, isn’t it, that a healthcare advocate is one who advocates doing something for healthcare, and an environmental advocate is one who advocates doing something for the environment, but a poverty advocate is not supposed to be one who advocates doing something for poverty? Yet that’s the one case in which the title fits.

Along these lines, more or less, consider the headline of a Yahoo! news report on the federal bailout of teachers and other unionized people, passed by the House of Representatives in early August: “House passes bill to help teachers, public workers.” “Public workers”? You mean government employees? Yes, that’s what you mean. But “public” sounds so much better than “government,” doesn’t it?

From a libertarian point of view, that renaming may actually be a good thing. It shows that even among the supporters of government, it’s still embarrassing to label yourself with that word “government.” Good, but maybe not quite good enough . . .

Another term for government employees — certain kinds

of them — has surfaced amid Congress’s mad attempts to bribe everyone in sight. It’s a new name for cops and firemen: “first responders,” as in “House votes funds for first responders.”

This is enough to make any honest person shudder. It’s like talking about dead people as “loved ones.” Yes, I agree that if you’re in trouble, the first person who reacts to your plight — after you notice that your heartbeat has become irregular, and you complain to your friend or spouse, and your friend or spouse calls 911, and the 911 person calls a fireman or some other rescue worker — can be called a “first responder.” And in the same way, a minister can be listed in the phone book as a “soul saver,” and a mother can be called a “child helper.” Is this the smarmy stuff we want to see? Are normal people and normal job titles assumed to be worthless, so that their worthlessness needs to be disguised by phony names?

Time for another issue. Readers of Word Watch never stop complaining about the the ritual adjective “alleged.” And it’s not just you all who complain. Virtually everyone has had enough of Stalin being called “the alleged murderer of tens of millions.” Enough already! He did it! Case closed!

But the universal disgust with “alleged” hasn’t hurt its career. It’s become like one of those alleged celebrities (there, I used the word correctly) whom nobody likes except the media: you can’t get rid of it. It has lodged itself so firmly in our secular liturgy that the following headline is possible: “Panel hits Rangel with 13 alleged ethics charges” (AP, July 29). Quick! Tell the congressman not to worry; those charges are only *alleged*.

Pensioners — On August 3, the Los Angeles Times ran a surprising story about my hometown. In just five years, the paper notes, L.A. may well be spending a third of its general fund just on pension and other retirement benefits for city employees. That's right — the cost of their benefits will grow by \$800 billion over the next five years, bringing the total retirement benefits paid to retired "civil servants" from the current \$1.4 to an astounding \$2.2 billion in 2015. The general fund is that part of the total annual budget spent on *basic* services, such as public safety.

The report was issued by Miguel Santana, City Administrative Officer. Its results mirror what is happening throughout the state, as ever-increasing amounts of money get switched from providing parks, libraries, fire and police protection, and so on, to supporting past government employees. In this respect, the story is not surprising — nobody ever dreamed that L.A. was in better shape than the rest of California.

What is surprising is that the L.A. Times, long the house propaganda organ for the city's leftist ruling class, is even reporting it. The pension crisis must now be so obvious that the ideologically obtuse Times finally notices.

The culprits in the financial mess — i.e., the public employee unions — cautioned everyone not to overreact (by, say, making all employees henceforth set up private 401k plans, like most ordinary workers do in private industry). The top award for self-serving bullshit goes to Pete Repovich, greedy director of the L.A. Police Protective League (the cops' union). He opined, "I highly recommend that we go very slow on this issue. It seems there's a lot of group-think going on across the state and nation." The cops, he said, don't want their pensions "tinkered with."

Of course they don't. Their pension and benefits went sky

high over the last decade. They don't want to give up all that stolen loot. No, they undoubtedly want higher taxes on everyone else so they themselves can continue living high.

— Gary Jason

The booboisie — A direct-mail appeal for funds to fight the large corporations reminded me of how *attitudes* enter into public policy.

José Ortega y Gasset diagnosed one destructive attitude in his "The Revolt of the Masses" (widely available in English, and available online in the original Spanish at <http://bibliotecaliberal.tripod.com/labiblioteca/>). Ortega's concept of the "mass-man" is not intended as a sneer at poor and ill-educated people: the mass-man is found in all social classes. One type, the "learned ignoramus," is inclined to think that his specialization and accomplishments in some narrow field entitle him to speak with special authority even on matters far outside that field.

The mass-man, wherever found, takes the marvels of modern civilization for granted. Ortega, writing in 1930, used automobiles and aspirin as his favorite examples. For the mass-man, these and other necessities and comforts of life just exist, like facts of nature, like sunlight and air. The mass-man scarcely thinks of the hard work, creativity, saving, risk-bearing, and failures as well as successes that were and are necessary to supply these marvels. He feels entitled to complain about just how they are produced or allocated. He expects the government to rectify whatever he complains about.

The fundraising letter that I mentioned makes much of BP's oil spill, calling on the government to punish that corporation and others. I make no excuses for BP, but I do remember that it performs other functions beyond ruining

But what are the students up to now? Up to no good, it seems. Jo Ann Skousen, a professional word spotter, wrote in a while ago to say, "Huge' is a huge problem for my students, and it gives me a huge headache." She also mentioned huge problems with "incredible." Naturally she would, because she is one of those odd people who think that words have meanings, and that the meaning of "incredible" is exactly that: not credible, not believable — in short, the opposite of "really, really good," which is what most Americans seem to think it means.

The problem with "huge" isn't quite the same. People aren't forgetting what it means; they're forgetting to ask themselves what picture it paints. "Huge" is ordinarily deployed in a complimentary way, but I find it hard to feel complimented when a student fills out a survey about my class and claims that "this prof is huge." I want to write back and inform my admirer that I weigh only 160 pounds. A huger problem is simply the overuse of words like this. Every generation overuses its "colorful" slang terms, but that doesn't make them colorful. Once such a word as "huge" (or, before it, "cool") gets loose, it behaves like an alligator in a duck pond; it soon annihilates all other forms of life.

And that's a good reason to object to the bureaucrats' favorite pair of terms, "negative" and "positive" ("I was negative about his presentation, but my boss was positive"). Just consider all the things that "negative" could mean: unhappy, disgusted, confused, disappointed, angry, outraged, or just mildly dissatisfied. You can expand the list as far as you want; "negative" obliterates every

alternative concept, every shade of meaning, just as "positive" obliterates all the shades between "ecstatic" and "somewhat favorably impressed."

I can understand the bureaucrat's desire to obscure meaning, but most people who use "negative" and "positive" are trying to express strong emotions, which are the antithesis of obscurity. When someone says that the president's stimulus plan "had a negative impact," he or she wants to communicate something like "disastrous effects"; but somehow, the availability of "negative" and that other default term, "impact," banished all possible alternatives.

Yet there are worse things than "impact," worse things even than "huge." "Sweet" is worse. Fad words can spread downward, from older people to younger people (example: "negative"), or they can spread upward ("huge"). "Sweet" started somewhere in junior high school and has now floated upward into the minds of old guys over 40. It's disconcerting to hear your doctor call the inside of your colon "sweet." If he called it "huge," that would seem a little goofy, but "sweet" makes emotional demands that "huge" never thought of. Is this quack asking for a kiss, or what?

Even references to a "sweet" computer program strike me as unduly intimate. Am I a prude?



A special note: As explained in the Editor's Introduction to this issue, Liberty will continue online after its next, and last, print issue. Word Watch will continue with it.

the environment and destroying livelihoods — namely, producing oil. Other corporations, too, perform other than their destructive functions.

The corporation-bashers could hardly deny these other functions if reminded of them, but they otherwise just take them for granted. They note that if I and others should care to support an “ambitious, hard-hitting agenda” for “challeng[ing] corporate power,” we can send money to Public Citizen, Washington, DC. I did not take up the invitation.

— Leland B. Yeager

Leading the blind — Thomas E. Perez is the statist hack who heads the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division. According to the DOJ’s web site (employing no sense of irony or shame): “Perez has spent his entire career in public service.”

Like the president, Perez attended a lesser Ivy League college for his undergraduate degree and then Harvard Law School. Also like the president, Perez is cagey about his academic performance at these schools — which allows the inference that he benefited from affirmative action admission and rentseeking. And, most significantly like the president, Perez has a poor grasp of the limits of government authority.

His latest adventure in statism is a war on the Amazon.com Kindle ebook reading device and the internet in general. His cudgel is the wretched Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); his theory is that, since a Kindle requires sight to operate, it discriminates illegally against the blind. His solution is that, since blind people have trouble using Kindle, no one should.

Specifically, the peevish Perez threatened to sue a group of colleges if they tested letting students use Kindles for reading textbooks. (Kindle does have a “text to speech” function that allows users to listen to book content; but you have to see to start this app.) “We acted swiftly to respond to complaints we received about the use of the Amazon Kindle,” Perez told a House committee. “We must remain vigilant to ensure that as new devices are introduced, people with disabilities are not left behind.”

Beware of rentseekers who talk about remaining vigilant.

The Justice Department demanded that the colleges stop distributing Kindles under a pilot program sponsored by Amazon. If blind students couldn’t use the devices, no one could. According to Perez, keeping the Kindles out of sighted students’ hands was essential to “full and equal educational opportunities for everyone.” The colleges capitulated — and agreed that the program would be shelved until Kindles had more text-to-speech features.

By the time the colleges issued their carefully-worded press releases, Perez had moved on to a new cause: declaring the internet a “public accommodation” under the ADA, which could require web sites to guarantee “disabled access” for everyone from manic depressives to halfwits with Attention Deficit Disorder.

There’s a lot to dislike about the ADA. But two things stand out from the rest: first, it doesn’t define “disability,” so just about any physical or psychological condition can be considered one; second, its definition of “public accommodation” is poorly worded enough to allow Perez’s Kafkaesque nonsense.

But reality counts for something. And watching Perez try to regulate the internet should be humorous. Maybe he’ll sue me for laughing. Putz.

— Jim Walsh

No takers — In May 2004, the price of a house in my hometown was going up by about 1% each month. At the time, my wife and I were living in a house we had bought only 30 months previously. The rate of increase puzzled us. We looked into it and decided that it was the result of mortgages being given to people on the assumption that the rate would continue for years. But, given that neither incomes nor rents were keeping pace with the rise in home prices, it seemed to us that the rate of increase was unsustainable.

Further, we decided that because so many mortgages were structured so that the payments were initially low but subsequently much higher, the increase in home prices would have to stop, and then turn into a decrease — sort of like musical chairs when the music stops. And from what we could tell, the trend was national. My wife and I are not economists, but we decided that a 50% increase in the value of a house in 30 months was a pretty good return. Since we had lived in it for more than two years, there was no capital gains tax. We sold the house and became renters.

A few months later, in summer 2004, Timothy Geithner bought a house in Larchmont, New York, for about \$1.6 million. The mortgage was about \$1 million. A few years later, he took out an equity line of credit on the house for an additional \$400,000. In February 2009, when he was appointed secretary of the treasury, he put the house on the market for \$1,635,000. After three months on the market with no takers, the asking price was lowered to \$1,575,000. There were still no takers. He ended up renting the house for \$7,500 per month. At 5%, the monthly payment on a \$1.4 million mortgage is \$7,515. That would not include insurance, property taxes, maintenance costs, or tax on the rental income. It is likely that the cash flow on the house was negative. Whether the house is now underwater — whether it is worth less than the mortgage — isn’t clear, but it has not, to date, been a good investment.

It is not my intention to pick on Secretary Geithner. Neither am I gloating. There are two points that need to be underscored here.

The first, and more obvious of the two, is that Timothy Geithner had no idea in 2004 that a decrease in home prices was coming. You might say, well, neither did most people. But the information that was available to my wife and me was available to him, and unlike most people, he is *supposed* to know about these things, to understand them, isn’t he? While I am sure that he is a very intelligent young man, the question needs to be asked: why in the world would you invite someone who bought a house near the peak of the housing bubble to become the Secretary of the Treasury?

The strategy selected by the federal government to deal with the bursting of that bubble was to shore up home prices. Given that they were artificially inflated by creative lending products in the first place, the task has not been easy. It included bailing out the banks that bought the creative mortgages, lowering interest rates so that homeowners in danger of foreclosure can refinance and lower their monthly payments, and buying up the bad mortgages wholesale and putting the taxpayer on the hook for the unavoidable losses. Now we hear

a proposal to have the feds guarantee mortgages if the banks will lower the principal of the loans by 10%.

In spite of all these efforts and more, the pile of bad paper grows. Trillions of dollars have been created out of thin air in an effort to shore up the prices of homes. This may be part of an overall effort to eventually inflate the dollar so that the old purchase prices seem cheap — the rising tide that sinks all anchored boats. Who knows? There have been many reasons given for the selection of this strategy of shoring up home prices.

I would like to add one more. But first, an alternative economic strategy: X borrows money from Y so that X can buy a house. If X fails to pay the money back as agreed, Y becomes the owner of the house. Y then sells the house to Z at whatever price Z is willing to pay.

Here, then, is the second point. I submit to you that Timothy Geithner, whether he knows it or not, has been trying to jack up house prices so that he can get \$1,635,000 for his.

By the way, my wife and I just bought a house. No, not in Larchmont. — Scott Chambers

Psych experiment — The other day I was staying in a hotel when the fire alarm went off at 4:16 a.m.

Like most other people on the third (and top) floor, I put on some clothes, opened the door cautiously, and went into the hallway. No smoke, no flames. I looked out the window. No smoke or flames visible there, either — only 10 or 15 people standing around on the sidewalk below. Then the alarm died away, and I returned to bed.

Five minutes later, the alarm blasted again. Everyone,

including me, concluded that there might be something we didn't know, and we all left the building. The people standing outside now numbered about 100. Half of them were young Japanese on some kind of tour; the other half were midwestern Americans, all middle class or working class (this was a cheap but decent hotel).

I detected no difference in behavior between the two national groups. Each might be described as stolid. They had started off as skeptical; they remained skeptical; but eventually they'd obeyed the official command of the fire alarm. They didn't like it, but they did it. Almost no one had anything to say. One old lady loudly claimed that she had smelled smoke three nights running, but no one paid any attention to her attempt at exposing the hostelry's hazards to health.

The surprise of the occasion was the fact that nobody except me took any possessions out of the place beyond the most basic clothing. We had all had plenty of time to establish that if there was a fire, it wasn't anywhere near us; we could all see at a glance from one end of the building to the other, noting clear escape paths at both ends; and we had all had time to pack something and take it out. When I finally decided to evacuate, I spent about a minute and a half putting my computer into its bag, adding money, my passport, and so on, and bearing the bag out of the building. My idea was that if even a small fire had broken out somewhere, there might be some official nonsense about not going back inside, once the fire was extinguished; and in that event I didn't want to be deprived of my most necessary possessions. Apparently no one else felt that way. Many people, including many who left when I did,

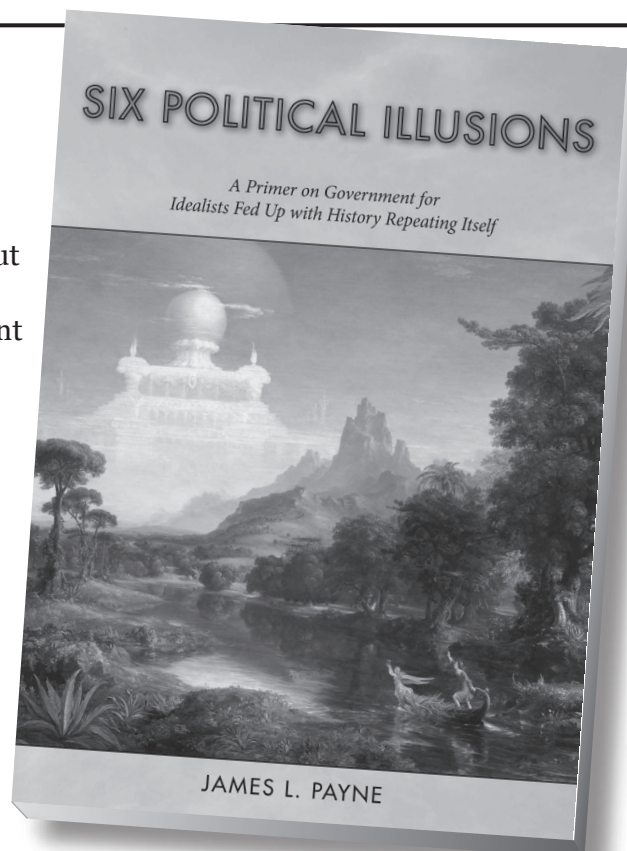
What Accounts for Government's Growth?

Politicians and the public succumb to illusions about government's abilities, says political scientist James L. Payne. These fallacies lead them to suppose government can solve problems even when the evidence keeps demonstrating that it can't.

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"I wish someone had put such a book into my hands at age 20. It would have advanced my political sophistication by decades," says Payne, age 71, author of 15 books on government and politics.



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hadn't even put on their shoes. It was cold outside, and they kept shifting miserably from one foot to another.

At about 4:30 a fire engine arrived and two firemen entered the building. Suspense built as the old lady kept exclaiming, "Why don't they *tell* us something?" Why not, indeed? From the solemnly disgusted looks on many faces, I guessed that many people agreed with her, but everyone remained silent. Even if she was right, none of us wanted to get stuck in her protest movement.

After 10 or 15 minutes of this, a white guy and a black guy came forward in the crowd, pushed open the main doors of the hotel, and peered inside, gathering their courage. Soon they had created a beachhead in the lobby — but the rest of us hung back. I know why I did; I didn't want to be caught and admonished by some boring fireman. I suppose that was the reason why the other 97 people acted like cowards, too.

Well, soon afterward, one of the firemen came out and proclaimed that there wasn't a fire and we might as well go back to our rooms. So we drifted into the building. The other fireman lingered in the lobby, explaining to a knot of interested persons that you can't always tell why an alarm goes off. And thus the party ended. It was a little experiment in what Americans are like (and Japanese too, apparently).

We hesitate, but we obey. That's our default position, especially when there's a possible threat to life, however remote the threat may be. After a while, we'll push back, or consider doing so. But we're remarkably bad about planning for our survival, or even our comfort. On the day of 9/11, mobs of congressmen and their flunkies fled the Capitol, running so fast that their shoes fell off, blanketing the grass on the east side of the structure. The people in my hotel didn't panic; their shoes didn't fall off; they just didn't consider the advisability of wearing them — much less the advisability of grabbing their valuables.

Americans are not fools, and we're not hysterics. We have the basic, unthinking good behavior on which civilization is built. But we're not as bright or as bold as we might be, that's for certain.

— Stephen Cox

Opportunity lost — Libertarian businessman Peter Schiff recently suffered a dismal loss in the Republican primary for senator in Connecticut, after a heroic run in which he gathered enough petition signatures to get his name on the ballot. Schiff had a chance at winning, and his mistakes should serve as a blueprint for what not to do when libertarians run as Republicans.

Schiff's followers probably believe that the winner, Linda McMahon, did not play fair because she spent \$16 million of her own money, whereas Schiff was only able to raise about \$3 million. Schiff's first mistake was constantly complaining about McMahon's buying the election. It makes no sense for a libertarian to complain about the wealth of the rich when it is imperative to our success to get campaign contributions from them, and I think that Schiff sent the wrong message when he complained.

Schiff's second mistake was running a campaign in which he focused solely on economic issues such as lower taxes and deregulation. Regarding such social issues as abortion and gay marriage he said only that the federal government should not regulate them. States' rights is a nice philosophy, but it

is a copout for a candidate not to take a stand on an issue as important as abortion. On purely political grounds, a libertarian running in the deep South needs to be pro-life, but Connecticut is a liberal state and in order to claim independent votes the Republican candidate should be pro-choice and pro-gay marriage. (Please note that I am advocating appealing to moderates and independents, not liberals.) Most libertarians are liberal on social issues and that could have been a huge asset for Schiff, but he failed to take advantage of it.

Schiff made his third and biggest mistake in the final two weeks of the campaign. McMahon had failed to put the race away, and if Schiff had spent all his remaining funds on a brilliant ad campaign he could have made a serious bid to win. What did he do? In a race where he was an almost total unknown, he ran a negative ad on McMahon featuring the slogan "Liberal Linda" with the claim that McMahon supported the bailouts, superimposed on the image of a pro wrestler kicking a man in the crotch, instead of doing what he should have done and running a positive campaign to introduce himself to voters as a libertarian. Voters are looking for something new, and an ad based on the slogan "libertarian" with an explanation of what that word means would have differentiated Schiff from McMahon.

McMahon countered with an ad saying that Schiff's ad was "politics as usual," and she was right: the claim that McMahon supported bailouts wasn't true. When libertarian Republicans run for office they will probably be underdogs, and the traditional campaign strategies will not work. A bold new alternative for a libertarian candidate would be to spend all of his or her resources introducing libertarian principles to the electorate, especially if libertarianism is the most important thing about that candidate.

— Russell Hasan

Oil and water — In two recent stories, The Wall Street Journal has told us much about the Obama administration's current ban on deepwater oil drilling.

The first story (August 21) gave us a glimpse into Obama's environmentalist mindset. The administration instituted a moratorium on offshore drilling in June (after the BP oil spill in late April), but a federal judge tossed it out shortly afterward because, among other reasons, it did not consider the economic effects of the moratorium on the Gulf Coast.

For you environmentalists, the "economic effects" of an institutional action are its environmental impact on a particular species, that is, homo sapiens. Admittedly, that species is not as noble and worth conserving as the spotted owl or the delta smelt, but it is still — you must admit — a lifeform.

The Obama regime, being devoutly Green, promptly reinstated the ban. In the latest court battle over the new moratorium, the Justice Department filed 27,000 pages of documents in defense of it. These documents reveal that the Obama regime actually did finally condescend to do an economic study of the moratorium's costs to the Gulf region. The regime's own top regulator when it comes to offshore drilling told Interior Secretary Salazar that a deepwater-drilling ban would cost, in six months alone, at least 23,000 jobs. This was reported in a memo on July 10.

Right after the judge in the original case overruled the original moratorium, the Justice Department estimated that it would affect fewer than 33 wells, which would mean fewer

than 12,000 jobs. But upon reflection, it eventually doubled that estimate.

So the Obama regime, in the midst of nearly double-digit unemployment, deliberately chose to snuff out 24,000 well-paying jobs — and kept quiet about the figure. Astonishing.

The other story (August 7) concerns the response of the rest of the world to the BP disaster. It was, Drill, but with due caution.

Norway, for instance, has put a temporary moratorium on new deepwater drilling, but it is allowing its existing wells to keep pumping. Moreover, it has announced plans to push into the deep waters of the Barents and Norwegian Seas, putting nearly 100 blocks up for leasing.

Australia has instituted no moratoria on offshore drilling and has offered 31 new leases for wells at twice the depth of the BP well. New Zealand has opened the east coast of North Island for the first offshore drilling.

Brazil is moving full steam ahead. It intends to spend \$200 billion over the next five years to exploit a huge, recently discovered reserve three miles down — a reserve containing perhaps 380 million barrels of oil. Petrobras is accordingly searching for 60 deep-sea rigs by 2017, and it is aggressively recruiting rig owners in the Gulf to sign agreements.

In short, other nations see that deepwater drilling is essential, although it needs careful monitoring. Would that we had a regime so realistic.

— Gary Jason

Obstacle course — Ultra marathons are endurance-defying races of 50 or 100 miles. One of the toughest and most (in)famous of these races starts in Death Valley and goes 100 miles to the top of Mt. Whitney — the lowest and the highest points in the continental United States. They require a certain type of dedication and masochism.

So (don't ask why), I decided to run one to celebrate an upcoming landmark birthday. Not the Death Valley-Mt. Whitney death-fest, mind you, but the Grand Canyon Rim-to-Rim-to-Rim, a 48-mile run that drops 4,600 feet from the south rim to the Colorado River, then climbs 5,600 feet to the north rim, then reverses itself for a return to the south rim.

The Grand Canyon is an intimidating and dangerous place, with few water sources. Temperatures at the rim on a winter's morning may be in the teens, but in the 80s down at the Colorado River by midday — a 70-degree swing. But summertime can be the real killer. Morning rim temps of 50–60 degrees can lure the unsuspecting down trails to places where, by early afternoon, when the full intensity of the sun reflects off the painted walls, temperatures can top 120. Rescues are common, particularly of French and Asian tourists impulsively drawn in by the magnificence and ease of access.

Luckily, my birthday falls in November, when temperature extremes are lessened, so my wife and I planned our run during Thanksgiving break. We started our ultra at 4 a.m. and covered the six miles to the Colorado River by 6. It was still dark, but we were right on schedule. Still, we had 36 miles up to and back from the north rim, with a final six-mile climb back to the south rim.

Down by the river, at the Phantom Ranch ranger station, a ranger asked to see our permit. Now, although permits are required for overnight camping stays in the canyon, day hikes don't require a permit. So we told her we were "day hiking,"

which, by any reasonable definition, we were. She looked us over, eyeing our fanny packs and water supply, and asked, "Are you running Rim-to-Rim-to-Rim?"

We said we were, and she notified us that Rim-to-Rim-to-Rimming was prohibited. I hate confrontations with government bureaucrats, so I told her we'd reviewed all the public notices to ensure that we complied with all NPS regulations — and I told her so nicely — and said that we hadn't run across that particular prohibition. That's when the exchange got interesting.

She explained that publicizing such a rule might inspire the unqualified to attempt the feat, possibly resulting in an increased number of NPS rescues. Silence settled upon us. All the possible convolutions of twisted bureaucratic thinking, and all the possible counterarguments, flooded my mind. How could keeping a regulation secret deter anyone, much less be effective? I dreaded responding to such a catch-22 without starting an endless exchange that would worm-hole us into the middle of a Monty Python skit.

Fortunately our tight time schedule forced wisdom to prevail. I fixed her understandingly in the eye and said, "Well, if you're not going to arrest us, we'd better get going so we make it out in time and don't become part of the problem."

Seemingly at a loss for words, hoist on the horns of a dilemma, unable to reconcile regulations with facts on the ground — a decent person — she sighed and waved us on our way.

— Robert H. Miller

Darwin waits — As we're going to press for this issue, there's a lively debate among economists about whether the United States is more likely to face deflation (the conventional wisdom) or inflation (the minority report) in the coming months. Both sides agree that, whichever is right, the outlook for 2011 is rough.

I think that the focus on inflation vs. deflation — like the popular media's focus on unemployment — is misplaced. The more urgent metric is the condition of our currency. The present recession seems to mark the beginning of a slide for the dollar. And that slide will be the most important political and economic factor in the coming months and years.

For a debtor nation, currency devaluation is like the dilution of equity value in a corporation's common stock. Long-time treasury bond investors are like shareholders. Bureaucrats, pensioners, and people on the dole are like employees with stock options; they're subordinates, in every sense of that word. But they have growing expectations. The interests of these groups — the long-time investors and the subordinates — are not aligned.

The challenge to executives: How do you satisfy the growing expectations of the subordinates without diluting the equity of long-time investors?

Venture capital lenders know the answer. You divide stakeholders (everyone with equity or options) into three groups: people you owe but don't care about, people you *want* to owe because you need to keep them around, and people you owe and care about. The smart VC guys then order a reverse-split of the corporation's shares. In government circles, politicians revalue the currency. Both moves debase the claims of stakeholders. In VC parlance, you "fuck 'em all."

Afterward, you still need two of the three groups; you

need to *unfuck* those. Your best tactic for keeping the people you want to owe is to offer them new compensation in the revalued currency; your best tactic for keeping the people you owe and care about is to offer them a fiat adjustment that restores some of the value of their long-time investments. Governments do this by “indexing” or otherwise increasing the value of specific sorts of Treasury securities.

The last group . . . well, they stay fucked. That’s everyone over 65 at the time of the revaluation. Or government pensioners. Or active government workers. Or all of them. Hilarity will ensue when those groups figure out what’s happening and fight like weasels and snakes to make sure *they’re* not actually in the last group. Which brings us to another VC saying: sooner or later, everything gets down to Darwin.

— Jim Walsh

Mail strippers — The latest news on the U.S. Postal Service is not happy news. In the most recent quarter, the USPS saw its losses increase to \$3.5 billion. The problem is that revenues continue to decline, as mail volume continues to drop dramatically — yet expenses have increased. The revenue decline is a natural consequence of the continuing movement away from physical to electronic mail. The volume of snail mail has dropped 20% in the last three years, and nearly 2% in the past quarter alone.

Another problem is the fact that Congress passed a law in 2006 requiring the USPS to pay about \$5.5 billion into its employee benefits fund every year. The Post Office’s CFO is now arguing that it will not be able to pay these funds this coming year and still cover its costs.

Even after costcutting — including reducing work hours by the equivalent of 36,000 full-time workers — the company has lost \$5.4 billion so far this year. It has estimated that it will lose about \$238 billion over the next decade if it isn’t allowed to change its “business model” by doing such things as cutting Saturday deliveries and exploring “new products.”

Not mentioned is the possibility that the USPS could be privatized, given *carte blanche* to do as it sees fit, so long as it allowed other companies to deliver first-class mail as well.

— Gary Jason

Slips of the tongue — I depart from Reflections about politics and economics to mention a couple of curiosities of English style that intrigue me.

The first curiosity is weakening intensifiers. While skimming an article in *Architectural Digest* (August 2010) about a luxurious home on Lamu Island, Kenya, I read: “Most of the island’s streets aren’t wide enough to accommodate cars, and as a result there aren’t really any to be found.” Without “really,” the sentence would mean that there are no cars on the island, period; with it, the sentence concedes that, well, there are a few.

I have made up a couple more examples. In reply to “Where is Gingrich speaking tonight?”, the answer, “Surely at the Elks’ Lodge,” or “At the Elks’ Lodge, I’m sure,” implies some doubt that is absent from the straightforward “At the Elks’ Lodge.”

“Surely you’re not going to have another beer,” especially if pronounced with a questioning tone, implies a suggestion or admonition, not a prediction or a resolve. Without the “surely,” the sentence implies a statement of fact, something

like “We [your companions] are cutting you off,” or “We’re driving you home right now.”

More puzzling than weakening intensifiers is a style in use by docents at historical places. In a TV program about W.R. Hearst and his castle, a docent says: “Here is where Hearst would have stood to greet his dinner guests.” Why not just “stood” or “used to stand”? The “would have” suggests to me something like: “Here is where Hearst would have stood to greet his guests if he hadn’t died before his castle was completed.”

In a tour of a pre-Revolutionary plantation, the docent says of the separate kitchen building, “Here the servants would have prepared the meals before carrying them into the big house.” The “would have” suggests that the kitchen did not in fact serve as intended; perhaps the owner’s bankruptcy left the plantation and its house and outbuildings unoccupied for many years.

In a tour of an early American village, the visitor hears: “This is the church where the townspeople would have held their annual town meetings.” Well, did the townspeople in fact hold their meetings there, or somewhere else? Apparently it’s a mystery, though not as mysterious as why our fellow Americans go so far out of their way to say things they don’t literally mean.

— Leland B. Yeager

Beer summit — My late father, a lifelong Democrat, sometimes to an absurd degree, told me two stories about presidents that illustrate why the current Democratic president is not beloved by all.

The first story is about Warren Harding. President Harding made a long trip to Alaska and the west coast, and near the start of this journey his train stopped briefly in Bridgeport, Illinois, my dad’s hometown. My father (14 years old at the time) heard that the train was coming through at noon, so he got on his bike and went down to the station. And there was the train, with the president standing by himself on the back platform, intending to greet the assembled populace.

But for some reason, the populace had not assembled. Maybe people hadn’t known that the train was going to stop. Anyway, there was my father, looking for the president; and there was the president, looking for the crowd, and finding only one teenage boy. The two spent a lonely moment, gazing at each other. My father stared at Harding, and Harding stared back at him. Then the president’s face crinkled into a smile, and he waved, very friendly, as if there were no one else in the world besides my father, as if his presence was more than sufficient to make the president happy (as well it may have been, because Harding was a pretty good guy); and my father smiled and waved happily back at him. Then the train pulled out. “And that,” as my father put it, “was his last trip, the one on which he died.”

I’ve said that my dad was a more or less fanatical Democrat, but he was so impressed by the Republican President Harding’s unpretentious friendliness that half a century later, when for some business purpose he had to visit Harding’s hometown, Marion, Ohio, he sought out Harding’s tomb, walked up to the barred gate, shook the bars, and called to the president, “Warren, I’m here!”

Can you imagine this happening with Obama and any stray fellow citizen? For one thing, Obama would never ap-

pear at any time without a crowd of guards and political handlers surrounding him. For another, the idea of having to waste time on a mere solitary, useless individual would put him in one of those nasty tempers we see whenever The President Is Disappointed. And perhaps his instincts are right; perhaps he can appear to advantage only in the midst of a cheering throng.

Well. My second story is about Franklin Roosevelt, my father's idol. It seems that during the 1932 campaign, Roosevelt's train stopped at some place near Bridgeport — I think it was Vincennes, Indiana — and FDR made a little speech from the back of the train. It was long after dark, but there was a throng, all right, some part of it very drunk and very concerned about getting rid of Prohibition. Roosevelt started his remarks, only to be interrupted by a group of men yelling, "We want beer! We want beer!" (And rightly so.)

Obama would have been stymied by this disruption. He wouldn't have been able to find a response on either of his teleprompters. Besides, his shtick is pretending that he's just a common guy, like the rest of us — so how could he object, or even pay attention, to anything that a bunch of common guys might say, or shout? Also, he's a stickler for the idea that he gets to lecture us; we don't get to lecture him — and being nothing more than a television figure, he can't allow for any dead air. "We want beer!" would blow his circuits; he couldn't imagine what to do with it.

But Roosevelt could. He had no conception, ever, of pretending to be the common man. Why should he? He was a phony, but he wasn't that much of a phony, or a phony in that obvious way. He knew that people wanted to get something out of politics besides a reflection of themselves, in their most ordinary moods.

So he paused deliberately, turned his head majestically in the direction of the disrupters, and announced, in his strange, slow, nasal, almost incredibly artificial voice, a voice that could never be mistaken for that of a common person: "You'll. Get. Your. Beer." He made a similarly definite gesture with one hand, extended toward the shouters. Then he went on with his speech.

Notice that he didn't say, as Obama certainly would have said (eventually), that, uh, his position had, uh, always been favorable toward the, uh uh, possibility that alcohol of, uh uh um, some variety or uh *type* might someday be, um, legalized, pending the, uh, report of a commission, um, appointed to consider . . . Roosevelt wanted to do away with Prohibition, so why go on and on about it, as if he didn't want to abolish it after all? Indeed, a year or so later, Prohibition was dead.

But here's the point. Roosevelt wasn't a threatened person, trying to assert his authority in a high-school-principal way. He wasn't a puppet, crafted by the David Axelrods of this world, that can't depart from its script. He was capable of astonishing demagoguery (my words, not my dad's), but he was not the kind of demagogue who has trouble communicating with people who fail to appreciate the mystifying promises conveyed by such phrases as "the audacity of hope."

So those guys at Vincennes got their beer. They got it the very next year. What have Obama's voters gotten from Obama, the very next year?

— Stephen Cox

Money pit — As President Obama set out on yet an-

other vacation, news arrived of yet another of his triumphs.

On August 20, YahooFinance.com reported that Obama's \$75 billion program to stop foreclosures is not working very well. About half of the 1.3 million homeowners once enrolled in the mortgage-relief program had dropped out. Only a third had actually received mortgage modifications and were now paying their mortgages on time. Many applicants were complaining that it is a bureaucratic nightmare to try to take advantage of the program.

Meanwhile, foreclosures are increasing. The country looks likely to have a million homes lost to foreclosure this year, up from the 900,000 last year. (By way of comparison: foreclosures were averaging about 100,000 per year before the mortgage meltdown.) Predictions are that the number of foreclosures and short-sales will hit 1.5 million next year.

It appears that by the time this massive program peters out, only about 500,000 people will have been helped. Just as massive stimulus programs have failed to stimulate the economy, the mortgage modification boondoggle has failed to result in the desired modifications.

— Gary Jason

He gets his — Jerry Brown is seeking restoration to his throne in California. He's always counted on the loyalty of government-employee unions. And reciprocated. A new term as governor will surely worsen the Golden State's economic circumstances. *Après lui, le deluge!*

Perhaps for that reason, Brown has been dogged throughout his campaign by rumors that he may have padded his own government-funded pension account.

In 1990, rightly disgruntled California voters passed Proposition 140, which ended several luxe special retirement funds designed for elected state officials. But Brown and a few other long-time California state employees are grandfathered into a remaining honeypot — the "Legislators' Retirement System" (LRS).

CalPERS, the state's big public-employee retirement fund, administers the LRS; and the conflicting public-disclosure and individual-privacy requirements that apply twist administrators into knots. But with few people in the plan, it's relatively easy to deduce who earns, contributes, and stands to collect what.

Making such deductions, media outlets including the Orange County Register have concluded that Brown may have accumulated more years of service toward LRS pension money than he actually served.

The discrepancy could be a simple error . . . or a complex accuracy. In either case, it highlights the statist obtuseness involved.

Some public pension experts have suggested that the LRS may have credited Brown for the time he served as mayor of Oakland and in other government positions (though this would seem to run against LRS guidelines). CalPERS spokespeople say they know how the LRS beneficiary likely to be Brown has earned his pension credits but are "prohibited by law" from sharing the answer with the public. Brown's campaign has hidden behind the law, too.

Here I'll add a personal impression of Brown's regal self-regard. Years ago, I was on an afternoon flight from Sacramento to Burbank with a few dozen tired lobbyists and state-employee types. One was a very attractive woman

whose looks and demeanor suggested that she (or her family) had come from India. She was seated across the aisle from me and smiled nicely as we settled in.

As soon as the 737 was in the air, Brown — who was then between government gigs and had recently spent time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta — beelined back from the first class cabin and stood over the attractive woman, breaking out some hoary pickup lines involving tandoori chicken and his fancy house in L.A. The flight attendants were in a rush to get their beverage service started on the short flight. One asked Brown to return to his seat. He asked the attractive woman to join him, but the flight attendant said that wasn't allowed. Brown's face fell, in a look of infantile disappointment. He complained that the rule was silly (to his credit, he didn't bust out, "Do you know who I am?"). He then asked the attractive woman what *she* wanted to do. She demurred to the flight attendant's reading of policy. So, Brown took the seat next to her and some intense, whispered conversation followed.

After downing my Diet Coke, I went to the restroom. When I got back to my seat, Brown and the woman were gone. Up to first class, no doubt, while the flight attendants were otherwise engaged. At the time, I thought, "Good for them." But the road to public profligacy is paved with a million small, selfish choices.

— Jim Walsh

Pupal stage — I was recently browsing in my local Barnes & Noble bookstore, when I saw two interesting things on the magazine rack.

First, there was a cover story in *National Review* criticizing Ayn Rand. The essay began by quoting the famous "to a gas chamber — go!" line and then proceeded to argue that the scene in "Atlas Shrugged" in which the train full of looters crashes into the army train in the tunnel was Rand's gas chamber, a call for the deaths of Rand's enemies.

Second, I was amazed to see on the rack a physical copy of *The Objective Standard*, which to my understanding is a publication sanctioned by Leonard Peikoff's dogmatist excommunicate-the-infidels Randroid sect, the Ayn Rand Institute (which I sometimes call Orthodox Objectivism, in contrast to the various Reform Objectivism sects).

I have no interest in either refuting the *National Review* article (it is too silly to bother with) or critiquing Orthodox Objectivism (I would need a full-length essay to do that justice). But I will say that the resurgent popularity of Rand, and the fact that her recent book sales have jumped, bodes well for libertarianism.

It was Rand who first led me to libertarian ideas, and I represent a persistent pattern: a smart young person reads her novels and discovers a heroic vision of capitalism, then becomes disillusioned with the cult-like obedience that Orthodox Objectivism demands and leaves Orthodox Objectivism for the broader, more open-minded libertarian movement. This pattern is no coincidence: it is the nature of Objectivism to appeal to people who are highly intelligent, but it is precisely this type of person who chafes at intellectual closed-mindedness.

— Russell Hasan

Politician, heal thyself — California Attorney General Jerry Brown, former state governor and now candidate for the office once again, has set a new record for irony. Eager to score political points with the voters — and to keep

the focus of the campaign on anything but his record of miserable failure — Brown grandly announced that he is investigating the scandal in Bell.

For those of you who are blessed with citizenship in some other state and may have missed the news, the fabled city of Bell is a small suburb of Los Angeles. It has a population of around 37,000, mainly poor and working class. Somehow the officials of the city found a way to loot this already impoverished berg. In what has to be the most hilarious existing illustration of public choice theory, the city manager, Robert Rizzo (yes, nicknamed "Ratso" Rizzo by his associates), was found to be earning \$787,000 a year in salary, with obnoxious pension and health benefits to boot. The police chief is pulling down a tidy \$457,000 a year, and the assistant city manager is receiving \$376,000. Four of the five city council members "earn" six figures, too. All with great pension and healthcare coverage.

Brown has loudly demanded records regarding pay and pension benefits, issued subpoenas, and promised to depose all Bell officials "under oath." But this is really rich, coming from Brown. I'll explain.

To begin with, the fiscal crisis in California is in the main attributable to the outrageously high public employees' salaries, benefits, and pensions, which are in turn largely attributable to the well organized public employee unions. Because of the vast sums of money these unions extract from members, they are effective at getting people elected to offices both high and low. At bargaining time, unions control both sides of the table.

Now, in California, the governor who signed into law the permission for public employees to unionize was — Jerry Brown.

Adding another layer of irony is Jerry Brown's own pension situation. As mayor of Oakland, he earned \$115,000 a year in salary, all the while pocketing a \$20,000 pension for prior "public service." At present, because of all the time he's spent in public office (secretary of state, governor, attorney general), he's eligible for a nearly \$75,000 pension, and it appears that he may be qualified under the special Legislators' Retirement System (a little-known special system for politicians) to get as much as \$110,000.

Maybe he should subpoena himself. — Gary Jason

Heaven or hell — I have been meaning for several months to bring to our readers' attention a fascinating study published last year. It is "Tax Burden and Individual Rights in the OECD: an International Comparison," by economist Pierre Bessard, of the Institut Constant de Rebecque, in Lausanne, Switzerland. (The paper is downloadable gratis on the internet.)

Bessard's paper does two useful things. First, it very nicely articulates the benefits of international tax competition, that is, encouraging countries to keep separate tax regimes. Second, it develops a novel "Tax Oppression Index" to measure the real impact of any taxation regime.

Regarding tax competition, Bessard makes some strong points. In the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), pressure is building for action against "tax havens" (a pejorative term for countries low in taxes and high in financial privacy), so as to bring their taxes more in line

with those of the high-tax countries. As the secretary general of the OECD, Angel Gurría, put it, "At a time when governments need every tax dollar legally due to combat the world recession, such practices can no longer be tolerated." Putting aside the ridiculous Keynesian notion that high taxes are the key to ending recessions, note that the goal of this bureaucrat is to shield high-tax countries from competition from low-tax ones. It is all an exercise in protectionism, with high-tax states such as France and Germany berating low-tax ones such as Luxembourg and Switzerland for offering more attractive environments for business.

But as Hayek made clear, competition is a heuristic (discovery) process. It is how we test things for quality. That is why governments seek to prevent monopolies in the private market. So why should they try to prevent other nations from competing when it comes to tax regimes? Bessard notes that even the OECD's own research shows a correlation between high taxes and low growth.

Still more interesting is the index Bessard has devised to rank countries in regard to the real severity of their tax regimes. Rather than simply looking at, say, the top marginal personal income tax rate or corporate tax rate, his metric uses 18 criteria in three broad categories: "tax attractiveness," "public governance," and "financial privacy."

Under his index, on a scale of 10 to 0, 10 being the highest in tax oppression (tax hells), and 0 being total lack of tax oppression (tax heaven), the most tax oppressive countries in the OECD are Italy and Turkey, at 6.0. Following closely are such countries as Poland, Mexico, and Germany, at 5.9. The Dutch come in at 5.8. France, Belgium, and Hungary score 5.6; Greece 5.5, and the UK 5.3. Australia, Portugal, and the Czech Republic score 5.1; Spain and Japan rate a 5.0; and Korea, Finland, and Sweden are all a surprising 4.9. Denmark stands at 4.8, New Zealand at 4.7, Ireland at 4.6, and Iceland and Slovakia at 4.5. Canada scores a surprising 4.4 and Austria 4.2. Luxembourg comes in at 3.4 and Switzerland at 2.0.

How does the U.S. score? Surprisingly badly, given how much politicians and pundits complain that Americans are undertaxed. We rate a 5.3 — tied with the UK, and only slightly better than Greece.

— Gary Jason

Toxic relationship — This summer, the mainstream media spent much time and energy discussing the case of Shirley Sherrod, an Obama appointee in the Department of Agriculture (USDA) who spoke indiscreetly about racism and reverse-racism at that agency. Internet provocateur Andrew Breitbart posted a video of Sherrod's remarks (made to a regional NAACP convention); the video turned out to have been edited so that Sherrod seemed to be endorsing racist behavior. She insisted that the full context of her story was a lesson in learning *not* to judge people by the color of their skin.

Along the way, she was fired from her post, then offered another job, after President Obama concluded that her firing had been a mistake by poltroon USDA head Tom Vilsack.

The details of Sherrod's words and employment woes are unimportant. The critical lesson is that the USDA has become a cesspool of bad management.

Case in point: in 1997, a group of 400 black farmers sued the USDA, alleging that between 1983 and 1997 they had been systematically denied government loans because of ra-

cial discrimination. The black farmers won their case (called, in Dickensian fashion, *Pigford v. Glickman*) and, in 1999, the USDA agreed to pay \$50,000 or more to *any* black farmer who'd been denied a loan during the period described in the lawsuit.

Lawyers for the farmers and the USDA agreed that many claimants would have trouble meeting the burden of proof in demonstrating that they'd been discriminated against illegally. So, they set up two "tracks" for claimants: one would require only minimal evidence ("Track A") and would result in a fixed \$50,000 payout; the other ("Track B") would have to meet the standards of a civil case and had no cap on how much could be awarded in damages.

By the government's estimate, up to 2,000 farmers would qualify for settlement payments. True to form, this estimate was wrong. Wildly. Some 22,500 farmers applied for settlement money. Over the next decade, the USDA shelled out close to \$1 billion to aggrieved agriculturists.

That wasn't the end of it. More than 73,000 *additional* people applied for cash awards, but the USDA rejected their applications for various reasons, most often that the forms had been filed after a court-approved deadline. But an obscure provision in a 2008 farm bill allowed rehearing in civil court for any claimant whose application had been denied because of the deadline. So, earlier this year, the USDA agreed to pay *another* \$1.25 billion.

One problem with these numbers: According to various editions of the USDA's "Status Report: Minority & Women Farmers in the U.S.," there were only 18,816 black farmers in 1992, and similar numbers during the years covered by the *Pigford* claims. So, how do fewer than 20,000 farmers end up multiplying into more than 90,000 claimants? Some call this "Chicago math" because, as a senator and presidential candidate, Barack Obama supported the extension of *Pigford* money to those who'd missed the original deadline. Others call it "slavery reparations under a different name."

Aside from highlighting continued managerial incompetence at the Department of Agriculture, what does the multi-billion-dollar *Pigford* settlement have to do with Shirley Sherrod?

Quite a bit. Sherrod and her husband received millions in settlement of *Pigford*-related claims they made on behalf of New Communities, an agricultural cooperative that they'd run unsuccessfully. After New Communities failed, the Sherrods claimed that its failure had been the USDA's fault. The group's \$13 million "Track B" settlement included \$150,000 each to Sherrod and her husband for the pain and suffering they experienced.

So, Shirley Sherrod began her tenure at the USDA after settling claims against it. Is it any surprise that this plaintiff-employee spoke indiscreetly about her adversary-employer?

— Jim Walsh

Parasites — Two reports from unlikely sources suggest that the public is beginning to wake up to the lavish compensation our government workers enjoy.

USA Today (August 10) has divulged the fact that federal employees' average compensation (salary, bonuses, pensions, healthcare, etc.) is now more than twice the average for workers in private industry. As of last year, federal workers

averaged \$123,000 in total compensation, compared to \$61,000 for private workers. This disparity has grown during the last decade: total compensation for federal workers has increased nearly 37% since 2000, while for private workers it has risen less than 9%.

When this report hit, public employee union spokeswhores immediately put out the claim that federal workers have higher education and training. Yeah, right. As if postal workers, airport screeners, and ag department bureaucrats are all Ph.Ds.

The second story comes from an even more unlikely source, *The New York Times* (August 26). It notes that across the nation, cities have cut such services as policing and fire protection, because of budget shortfalls caused by the rapidly increasing costs of the pensions and health benefits that past public employees are receiving.

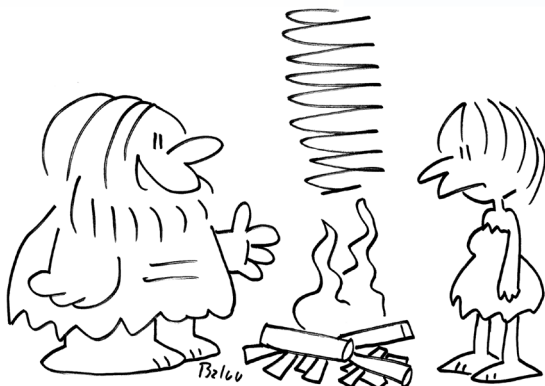
In particular, fire departments are starting to cut back on personnel and firehouses, and instituting “rolling brownouts” in which firehouses are closed on different days. The president of the International Association of Fire Fighters, Harold Schaitberger, says that he’s “never seen it so widespread.”

The story recounts (in typical *Times* style) the death of a two-year-old San Diego boy, Bentley Do, who choked to death less than a block away from a fire station that happened to be shuttered that day. (San Diego has hovered near bankruptcy for a number of years because of the costs of public employees.)

Cities are reporting that they are forced to cut services because the public employee unions are absolutely unwilling to make any concessions concerning the lavish pay and benefits their members receive. Certainly the aforementioned union president has said that his number one priority this year is to protect the pensions his members have won.

This all prompts the question of why the public allows public employees to unionize in the first place. — Gary Jason

Growing up — Beyond the entertainment value of its more childish expressions (think “The Jerry Springer Show”), disagreement is today generally avoided, in respectable society, as — well — disagreeable. It is viewed with suspicion, as something from which nice people should shrink. We realize that we will never agree about important issues, and the best we seem to be able to manage, in the interest of keeping the peace, is polite silence or a sanitized refusal to talk about anything controversial.



“Finally — an alternative source of energy!”

But if we can’t talk about anything controversial — that is to say, anything interesting — can we learn anything new? In fact, a free society is based, at least partially, on our willingness to put up with the occasional loudmouth. Many of yesterday’s crackpots are today hailed as visionaries. And today’s crackpot notion may, tomorrow, save the world.

Libertarianism is a generous, mature philosophy. It treats citizens like grownups. It assumes that most people are capable of recognizing a good argument and coming to understand the truth. And it’s willing to allow the same degree of freedom to everyone — even its enemies.

Too often, libertarians are caricatured as people who want the poor to starve and every individual to sink or swim alone. But we really believe in mutual respect, the power of voluntary cooperation, and the ability of the best in people to emerge. We know that coercion destroys this respect and cooperation, making enemies of those who might otherwise be friends.

No other issue can be settled before this one: what sort of a society will we be? Libertarians are sometimes accused of favoring a society dominated by contentiousness, over-competitiveness, and winning at any cost. But this is what happens to society when people try to force their will on everybody else, as too many people in modern America do, using political means to accomplish their purposes. This has not happened because there are too many libertarians, but because there are not enough. Until the rules of the game change, the game will stay the same. And nobody will win.

If we can show that the rules themselves must change, and offer a blueprint for changing them, we can rebuild the entire arena. Again, it may be possible for ideas to be discussed on their own merits. Not every decision will be viewed as life-or-death, I-win-and-you-lose. Experiments will be permitted, rewarded if successful and, if not, then shelved in favor of better options. Indeed, is there any other way a free society can be saved?

— Lori Heine

The new transparency — Escaping mainstream media notice was another case in which Obama violated his promise to create the most transparent administration ever. As noted in the *Washington Examiner* (August 12), he has now abolished the position he set up to push transparency in government. The so-called “ethics czar” job is gone, and the fellow who held the job is now going to be the U.S. ambassador to the Czech Republic. Most of the duties that the “ethics czar” was supposed to have performed will be shifted to the White House counsel, Bob Bauer.

Bauer is a partisan hack of the first water. His law firm represented John Kerry in 2004. It represented Obama in his race for the presidency. It represented the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. It even represented the infamous Sen. Robert “Rolex” Torricelli (D-NJ), whose legislative career was ended by a lobbying and contributions scandal. Bauer was a lobbyist (I know — Obama promised that he would not have ex-lobbyists in his administration), working on behalf of America Votes, Inc., a Dem 527 organization funded by the AFL-CIO and ACORN.

Yes, the most transparent administration *ever*.

— Gary Jason

Obama the Ordinary

by Wayland Hunter

What's the worst thing anyone can say
about our president? That he's ordinary.

Throughout this summer, Democrats were groaning and Republicans were crowing over President Obama's miserable performance in the polls. Certainly Obama had no reason to celebrate the July 4th holiday, which began with 44% of voters strongly disapproving of him and only 24% strongly approving, according to the Rasmussen daily tracking poll. In the same poll, 45% approved of him to some degree, but 55% disapproved. Since then, his Rasmussen numbers have continued in the same way, though some other polls show him dipping even lower.

Obama has fallen far since his inauguration, when 65% approved, 44% strongly, and only 30% disapproved, 16% strongly. This is interesting, but still more interesting is the fact that Obama's slide corresponded with none of the major problems that began to worry even the mainstream media during the first months of 2010. I refer to the abject failure of the stimulus plan; the long slog toward a hopelessly unpopular healthcare bill; the attempt to claim responsibility for saving the Gulf Coast, while boodling most aspects of the salvation try; and the brilliant idea of suing Arizona over an immigration law that is wildly popular throughout the country.

No, as the Rasmussen people pointed out, the big slide had already happened. It happened during the first five months of Obama's administration. By mid-2009, his numbers were down pretty much to the place where they are right now. This can't be explained by the president's recent, disastrous failures. There's a much more important factor.

A hint at the right explanation comes from Wesley Pruden of the Washington Times, who recently referred to Obama's habit of being "puzzled" when his propaganda gets "no applause."

That was a good observation. Pruden correctly identified the weird woodenness of the Obama persona. The reason why Obama is puzzled that his propaganda doesn't work is that, strangely, he believes his own propaganda. Not every detail, of course — nobody could — but in general, he's convinced

that it's perfectly okay. He has no capacity for self-criticism or self-irony, and this is not a mark of intellectual distinction. Neither does it engender popularity with the American people. It's light years away from Fiorello LaGuardia, whom people still remember fondly for saying, "When I make a mistake, it's a beaut!"

A second hint can be found in a series of adjectives that the talking heads started to use this summer. When discussing the president they began, somewhat to their own surprise, using words like "predictable" (as in, "Such and such Obama nominee was a predictable choice"), "normal" (as in, "That's normal behavior for any White House"), "usual" (as in, "That's the usual thing for the presidential press secretary to say"), and finally, hesitantly, and with the air of a great theoretical discovery, "ordinary" (as in, "He's turned out to be an ordinary president").

It's that last word that's killing Obama. Yet it's a word that had occurred to normal Americans, more than a year before the pundits thought of it.

It's also the right word. Obama is a very ordinary man.

I don't mean that he's a cross-section of the American populace. No one gets to be president, these days, without a peculiar degree of ambition and baseless egotism. Peculiar because very few people actually consider themselves qualified to be president; people are more perceptive than that. Baseless because no one could possibly be qualified to assume the ridiculous degree of power that the president possesses. Obama is, and always has been, one of the most egotistical, self-centered, and gratuitously ambitious men on the planet.

His ambition, however, lacks any other quality that would make it interesting. Despite all the terms of abuse that the Right so easily finds for him, his ambition is not like Caesar's or Napoleon's or Franklin Roosevelt's. Neither is it similar to the ambition of an Albert Schweitzer or a Desmond Tutu. It's simply the amorphous, featureless, yet remorseless ambition one sees in anyone who always wants to be chosen for the highest post he has some chance of obtaining.

The intensity of Obama's ambition is peculiar, but its kind is not. It's the kind of ambition that makes someone crave to be the mayor of Akron or the CEO of a long-established firm,

Obama is, and always has been, one of the most egotistical, self-centered, and gratuitously ambitious men on the planet.

with lots of consultants to write reports and speeches and lots of people waiting for him to show up and chair the conference. It's the kind of ambition that makes someone who doesn't like research or teaching crawl up the administrative ladder until he becomes the president of some locally important college.

You can picture Obama, can't you, in any of those jobs? And it's hard to imagine that he would perform really badly in them. They're fully within his range of competence. Even the college presidency would pose no problem. Like many other opponents of Obama, Jonah Goldberg, who is often right, pictures him as an "ivory tower intellectual." Oh no, he's not. If

he were, he'd be living in an ivory tower right now. Nothing easier for a black man who went to Harvard. But Obama has no interest in assessing intellectual issues, or even in reading books. And he has no interest in being left alone in his tower. What he wants is to attend a lot of meetings, present a lot of official awards, make a lot of speeches, and hear that a lot of people he never met and cares nothing about hold him in high regard.

As a CEO, or a bush-league college president, he'd play golf and trade pleasantries with his buddies on the course. When he thought the worker bees needed cheering up, he'd read them a "dynamic" speech that some flack had written for him, and he'd deliver it with many gestures. If his enterprise got into trouble, he'd do what is fashionable for mayors or CEOs or college presidents to do in such circumstances — he'd blame the previous administration and make embittered remarks about people who disagreed with him. Sometimes his schemes would work, and he'd take credit for them; sometimes they wouldn't, and he'd contrast them favorably with those of other administrators, real or imagined.

So far, that's a pretty good description of what Obama has done. The difference is that the putative mayor or college president or whatever would be flirting with fewer dangers. His schemes would usually work — partly because they were devised by people who needed to think more practically than he did, just to keep their jobs, and partly because a mayor or a CEO or a college president manages an enterprise of contracted scope. He or she doesn't have the opportunity to screw up in as many ways as a president of the United States.

There are some presidents who, for bad or good, can't be pictured in any of the roles I've mentioned. Think of George Washington. Andrew Jackson. Lyndon Johnson. Ronald Reagan. But Obama is easy to picture that way.

And here's what I think happened. After a few months of watching Obama in action, the American people began picturing him in exactly the way I've stated. One by one, it occurred to them that he was a lot like their mayor or their college president or their boss' boss. Maybe like their priest, who's known for giving "inspiring" sermons but lets his secretary run the parish.

Once people pictured Obama in that perspective, they saw his limitations, and they turned away. In particular, they stopped listening to his speeches.

A while ago, someone commented in these pages about a news report indicating that few people, even those who profess to admire Obama's public speaking, can actually remember any specific words he says. But political enemies remembered his gaffes. Independent voters started to notice them too. Political friends remembered his response to forecasts of Democrat doom in the elections of 2010. He was reported as saying something like, "Don't worry; this time around, you have me speaking for you" — as if he actually believed the propaganda about his "soaring rhetoric." No one seemed capable of remembering any particular place to which the rhetoric soared — just that it was always soaring. Then, as I say, people ceased to care.

Obama's constant, seemingly compulsive public speaking became his mark of Cain, the infallible indication that he was just an ordinary pol. An extraordinary person speaks only when he has something important to say; an ordinary

person chatters away. Heard once or twice, Obama fitted the image of the inspiring preacher: you didn't need to remember the ideas, if any, that he intended to convey; you could just enjoy the feeling he aroused. Heard three or more times, Obama became the blowhard boss or the relentlessly pontificating uncle, the person whom you don't need to hear again, because you already know what he's going to come out with. It's predictable. It's normal. It's ordinary.

It's also very thin stuff, and thinner when you catch it *ex tempore*. Absent a manuscript and a teleprompter, Obama is a very poor talker: slow, hesitant, sometimes fumbling, and always deadly dull. He's the college president who's forgotten where he put the notes his assistant wrote for him. One of the few amusements you can look forward to on these occasions is the opportunity to count how many times he says "uh." It averages around 20 a minute. Sometimes it goes up to 24 or 25. And it's getting worse. Obama used to specialize in spatters of short, discreet noises — a leakage of brief little "uhs" that were almost as hard to count as the pulses in your forearm. It was more like a stutter than anything, and it presented a welcome relief from the sad, deep, rumbling "uhhhhs" of such servants of the public as his press secretary, Robert Gibbs. Now, however, Obama is increasing the frequency of his "uhs"; he's increasing the length and volume of what now amount to growls; and he's doubling or tripling up, sneaking in a second or third "uh" after the first one.

We all do this kind of thing from time to time. We do it when we're not sure of what we want to say, or when we're sure that we don't have anything to say and need time to make something up. We do it when we're afraid, consciously or unconsciously, that someone more articulate will break in on our discourse, and other people will prefer to listen to him or her. "Uh" is a mark of the ordinary person who isn't willing to concede the floor to anyone else. And it's the mark of a tedious blowhard — for that's what Obama is.

"Eighty- uh seven uh years ago the uh ancestors, men and women uh black and white uh of this country uh uh came together on uh uh uh this part of the country uh where we're uh standing today uh uh . . ." That would be Obama's version of Lincoln's speech.

It has been said that some people are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. To put this in slightly different terms, the members of that third group are ordinary, yet are changed by their reaction to extraordinary challenges. Their reactions may turn out well or badly, but they are significant reactions.

Harry Truman was an ordinary person, forced to make unprecedented decisions. He rose, or fell, to the occasion, and became of much more interest than the little machine politician he started out to be. The same can, perhaps, be said of John Tyler, an insignificant ticket-balancer ("Tippecanoe and Tyler too") who faced the great sectional disputes of the 1840s with a remarkable — almost a creepy — stubbornness. The same can be said of James K. Polk, an ordinary politician who wrested the empire of the West from Britain and Mexico (both potent enemies in those days) and emerged victorious from one of the most difficult wars that any politician ever fought.

There have also been presidents of unusual interest as personalities — Madison, Van Buren, Pierce, Buchanan — whose responses to their times were drearily predictable. These peo-

ple's interest lies entirely in their personal character. But only a handful of presidents have been ordinary both by their character and by their reactions to the events of their time.

James Monroe was one of them. So were Benjamin Harrison, Chester Arthur, and William Howard Taft. The two Bushes fit in here. Faced with extraordinary circumstances — the collapse of communism, the attack of 9/11 — the Bush presidents took a predictable course. "Predictable" doesn't mean right or wrong. It means ordinary. They were ordinary people.

Now comes Barack Obama, whose birth and upbringing made him appear completely out of the ordinary, and whose circumstances required him to face unusually difficult economic, political, and diplomatic problems. Despite these challenges, however, he consistently achieved the ordinary.

Only one of his decisions has surprised me — his bizarre idea that it would somehow aid him politically to berate the Supreme Court in person, during his state of the union address.

Obama showed no better knowledge of history and economics than the normal office holder — which is to say, virtually none.

The idea was original; no one had thought of it before. Yet it was only a *divertissement*. Obama's major actions, however strange they may seem when compared to what might reasonably have been expected from a thoughtful person, aren't the least surprising for a contemporary American politician.

What's to be surprised about? Before coming to office, Obama showed no better knowledge of history and economics than the normal Democratic or Republican office holder — which is to say, virtually none. If you want to search his books for some extraordinary knowledge or insight, go ahead, and let me know when you find it. Good luck. Since then, he hasn't improved.

It's sometimes interesting to identify people's intellectual age: find the newest idea that's important to them, and that's how old they are, intellectually. (This can also be done with people's technological age. What's the last device or invention you really understand? Mine is the washing machine. That makes me about 100 years old, in technological terms.) In this connection, let's consider Obama's ensemble of economic ideas.

I believe that the last significant element of his economic ideology dates from the 1920s. I refer to the silly business about stimulating the economy, promoting consumer spending, guaranteeing mortgages, supporting badly managed enterprises with government bucks, and all the other stuff. This little package of false ideas was popular even before John Maynard Keynes.

So that makes Obama about 90 years old, intellectually. Time for retirement from the job of planning the economy.

You can calculate this stuff in another way, too. You can try to identify the earliest big idea that a person *missed*. That's harder to do with ordinary people — because, being ordinary, they miss almost all the big ideas. But again, let's stick

to economics. I'd say that Obama's innocent trust in the welfare state and the managed economy puts him back around Bismarck's time. (This is a generous calculation.) He isn't a Marxist; he obscurely realizes that Marxism must be wrong, for some reason — perhaps the contributions that wealthy capitalists make to his political campaigns. Yet he shows not the slightest awareness of any intellectual critiques of a government-managed economy, which means that he hasn't

Obama's personal management was taken over by a bully (Emanuel), a used car salesman (Axelrod), and a mouthpiece (Gibbs).

the slightest awareness that this argument was decided, conclusively, by the later 19th century. And that means that our president, the person who has by far the greatest influence on our \$16 trillion economy, is actually more than 120 years old. Can we trust a man that old to make decisions for us?

Right or wrong, Obama's decisions certainly *seem* perfectly ordinary, as viewed from inside the intellectual nursing home in which he and his friends reside. Jefferson observed, sarcastically, that ordinary people seldom have occasion to "revise their college opinions." Obama's college opinions consisted of a naive post-'60s leftism, coupled with an unwillingness to probe the implications of any idea he was taught. His politics operated, and continues to operate, entirely at the level of unexamined assumptions — a sure sign of the ordinary man. Thus, he became a "community organizer," but did virtually nothing in the job. Thus, he became a member of a leftist, black nationalist church, but did nothing special in that role, either. Martin Luther King Jr read books, thought about them, and tried to find his own way. He made difficult decisions. He went to jail. He was an extraordinary man. Contrast Obama. He cites books, joins a political machine, and runs for president.

But I mentioned Obama's friends. One of them was the Reverend Mr. Wright, a racial demagogue. Obama spent a long time lauding Wright as if he were a conventional Christian. When he was shown not to be, Obama lied, then shrugged him off. Wright became a nonperson. Many other Obama associates have suffered the same fate. But he hasn't thrown David Axelrod, Rahm Emanuel, or Robert Gibbs under the bus. Why not? Is this evidence of some principled, or at least unusual, loyalty?

Not at all. A more than ordinary politician would realize that these purported wizards were destroying his administration, and dismiss them. But Obama doesn't realize that. He knew that his association with Wright would destroy him if he didn't do something about it, but Wright was easy to sacrifice, because Obama was never really intimate with him, despite what he said. If he had been, we would have heard, by now, all the damaging details. But he wasn't. He never got carried away by an extraordinary religious enthusiasm. For a while, Wright was helpful to his political career; then he wasn't, and he disappeared. But other people's advice, operational politi-

cal advice, has always been vital to him. He can't live without it — and in his case, the other people happen to be Axelrod, Emanuel, and Gibbs.

It's like the mystery of a failing corporation. After it's gone belly-up, you read its history and discover that the CEO kept relying on the same kind of surface-level experts who'd been wrongly advising the firm for years. Get rid of them? Not a chance. You can't expect him to manage things by himself, do you?

This is Obama's situation. There was nothing special about him. He was the kind of acceptable, superficially credentialed pretty boy whom political machines typically adopt as their figureheads. He was a little more respectable, a little more credentialed, a little prettier, a little more boyish — that was all. He didn't have an unpredictable idea in his head, and that was fine. Essential, in fact. So his personal management was undertaken by a predictable crew: a bully (Emanuel), a used-car salesman (Axelrod), and a mouthpiece (Gibbs). These people were so ordinary, so predictable, that they all looked exactly like their roles. There hadn't been people so typecast since the Nixon regime.

Obama was undoubtedly surprised when his trial-balloon presidential candidacy got real. The timing hadn't been entirely predictable. He had thought in terms of 2012. But living for nothing but ambition, he went for it, and won, because he seemed less ordinary than his opponent, George Bush. And he was . . . superficially.

Consider his inaugural address. Here's a passage, chosen at random from the White House Blog:

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched. But this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control. The nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity, on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart — not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good. (Applause.)

What does any of that mean? Nothing. A question is asked — Is the market good or bad? — in order for the question not to be answered. The market is said to generate wealth and expand freedom, which seems like a good thing; but it is also said to have an ability that other generators don't possess, which is to go spinning out of control. That seems like a bad thing. But how exactly does a market "spin"? No answer — only a non sequitur about how "the nation" (which appears to be the same as "the market") "favors only the prosperous." How does that contention comport with the preceding ones? Again, no answer.

The next sentence, the one about "success," is another benchmark of mediocrity. As anyone can see, "success" can mean an infinite number of things. To Fyodor Dostoyevsky, it meant the triumph of the Russian Orthodox Church. To Eleanor Roosevelt, it meant the triumph of niceness. To other people . . . Well, you get the point. Obama says that success depends on something called "the reach of our prosperity," which I suppose means the number of people who are

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Drill Deep, Drill Smart

by Gary Jason

Of all the failures before and after the Gulf oil spill, the worst would be failing to construct a sensible energy policy.

How did the Gulf oil disaster happen? What does it mean, and what should be our petroleum policy be in the future?

The blame for this fiasco is shared, in my view, by four parties: BP, naturally, but also the governmental regulatory agencies, the environmental movement, and the president of the United States.

BP has already admitted blame and taken responsibility for paying for the whole cleanup — although, to be fair, the corporate responsibility will likely extend beyond BP. The lease for the drilling site was partly owned by Anadarko Petroleum, the rig was owned by Transocean, the blowout protector was built by Cameron International Corporation, and work on the production was performed by Halliburton.

Nevertheless, BP workers missed something like 20 separate “anomalies,” incidents just prior to the explosion that they should have explored, such as the fact that in a test hours before it happened, more fluid left the drill pipe than was expected during a standard test, and later tests showed higher than expected pressure. There appears to have been poor communication between BP employees and Transocean

employees. BP apparently chose a cheaper well design than was prudent. Moreover, a supervisor for BP has testified that a month before the accident BP workers detected a leak in the hydraulic system that controlled the blowout preventer, a crucial collection of valves that is supposed to shut down the well in the case of an emergency, and corporate management failed to transmit that information to the regulators. A BP official overruled the Transocean employees by using seawater instead of protective mud.

Blame also accrues to various regulatory agencies, but most especially the Minerals Management Service (MMS), the agency that is directly responsible for monitoring the safety of the oil and gas industry and collecting revenues from it. At this point, it seems clear that the MMS was a classic case of “regulatory capture,” meaning that it colluded with the

industry it was supposed to regulate. (The Obama administration was pretty well tied in with BP, too. BP was one of the biggest contributors to Obama's \$750 million campaign in 2007–2008, and Obama's evil genius Rahm Emanuel lived rent-free for years in a deluxe D.C. apartment owned by a top BP adviser, Stanley Greenberg.)

A recent report by the Inspector General's (IG) office on the MMS charged that many MMS employees accepted gifts (such as free meals and tickets to sporting events) from oil and gas company executives. This IG report confirms a similar IG report of two years ago, which found "a culture of ethical failure" including not just accepting gifts from people in the oil industry but in some cases having sex with them. (Talk about being in bed with the industry you are supposed to regulate!) The MMS habitually ignored the warnings given by its own staff biologists and engineers.

It's not that government regulation is a cure for all problems, but regulation of this kind creates false confidence and a thick fog of ignorance. In a weird synergy of dysfunction, BP formulated its plan for dealing with oil spills on faulty data supplied by — the MMS! Actually, BP and the other oil companies are required to use computer models provided by the MMS. Yet these models were outdated, and they overstated the degree to which oil would evaporate or be dispersed by wave action.

Also worth noting is the role of the Coast Guard in the original sinking of the platform. It appears that in combating the initial fire, the Coast Guard failed to follow its own policies. It did not put a firefighting expert in charge of the half-dozen ships spraying salt-water on the fire. As a result, the water may have overrun the ballast system that kept the drilling platform upright, causing it to sink. It was the rig's sinking rather than the initial explosion that caused most of the damage that led to the spill.

The EPA deserves mention, too, for holding up the deployment of skimmer ships from other countries, on the ground that those ships removed less oil from the water than the ultra-tight EPA regulations call for. Common sense suggests

The Dutch offered free use of their ships to clean up the Gulf oil spill. Obama said no. He wanted to train union workers to do the job.

that it is better to have ships removing (say) 85% of the oil spewing into the ocean than to wait three months for ships that can remove 99%. But common sense is scarce in a bureaucratic maze such as the EPA.

Not to be overlooked in the blame department is the role of environmentalist groups. Over a period of three decades, they blocked the building of new nuclear power plants, thus increasing our reliance on petroleum and the need to drill for more of it. They also succeeded in putting most of America's shallow waters and much of its land — including the safely exploitable ANWR — off-limits for drilling, thus making certain that drilling would be done more and more dangerously, in ever deeper waters.

From day one, the president's mistakes were legion. He was grotesquely slow in responding, and when he did respond he refused to work with local officials, such as Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and Plaquemines Parish president Billy Nungesser, who kept requesting permission to build protective barriers (sand berms) and kept being denied the necessary permits by the Army Corps of Engineers. Having assumed the role of universal regulator and rescuer, the administration refused to act.

It was likely because of political reasons, not just because of the EPA's obstruction, that Obama waited forever before accepting help from other nations, many of whom offered skimmer ships. Within three days of the spill, the Dutch offered their ships (each of which *by itself* had more clean-up capacity than *all* the ships we were then employing in the Gulf to clean up the spill). The Dutch also offered to prepare contingency plans for building berms to protect the Louisiana coastline — all for free. Twelve other nations offered assistance within days of the accident. Obama just said no. He wanted to give his supporters, the labor unions, time to train union workers to do the job.

Catering to labor is also the reason he waited so long to waive the Jones Act, which Bush waived within days of the Katrina disaster. (The Jones Act, more correctly called the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, regulates shipping in the U.S. territorial waters and between U.S. ports. It requires that all passengers and cargo carried between U.S. ports be conveyed by American-built and -flagged ships. Also, at least 75% of the crews must be American citizens, and ships must be refurbished almost entirely at domestic shipyards.) This made accepting foreign help impossible.

It should be noted that Obama never ran a business, not even a law firm, never administered a large institution, and never ran a municipal or state government. It is no surprise that in his first major test of emergency leadership, he failed as miserably as the defective blowout protector on that doomed oil well. His education hadn't prepared him to be of any real use during an engineering failure of this magnitude. After weeks of doing nothing, his first major act was — to appoint a group of attorneys!

Since then, his approach has been to bash BP and facilitate the flood of lawsuits it will inevitably (and deservedly) face. He obviously feels that a crisis of this nature and magnitude will be good for generating public opinion in favor of his environmental agenda, much of which involves replacing petroleum with so-called green sources of energy. During his campaign for president, his green agenda was put aside only when McCain used the spike in oil prices to push the idea of drilling — at which point Obama said that he, too, supported more domestic drilling. Once in office, however, he put all that aside and actually increased restrictions on domestic drilling.

After more than a year of this, rising gas prices again forced his hand, and he started making sweet promises and token concessions; but the Gulf disaster allowed him to promulgate a moratorium on domestic deep-water drilling. His first attempt was to impose a moratorium on all offshore drilling. It was quashed by a federal judge, but it showed the importance he places on taking environmentalism to the most radical extreme possible. (And he later reimposed a ban on drilling.) The moratorium, after all, was passionately resisted

by the people living closest to the spill, people who knew how many jobs it would cost. But there are many things more important to the president than the economic health of the people he claims to protect.

It has been noticed, by people who follow the media, that environmentalists have generally withheld criticism of Obama for the Gulf disaster. The reason, I would contend, is that they know he will use it to cut back on drilling.

The oil spill is a fascinating study in this country's failed energy and environmental politics. It is bad in itself, but it ought to lead us to consider still larger problems of America's energy policy.

Did you know that China has now overtaken the United States as the world's largest energy consumer? The International Energy Association announced that fact this summer, to practically no public notice. Yet competition for oil is a major feature of the world economic and political reality.

So let's talk about reality, in its various forms — physical reality, geopolitical reality, economic reality, and yes, military reality. Even with the most pacific intentions, the United States faces a world in which its security is endangered by its dependence on supplies of foreign fuel that might be suddenly withdrawn. Energy policies — good or bad, well meditated or imposed by hysteria — will be formed to respond to this fact. So the question is, What should an energy policy aim at?

Voices from many quarters, both Right and Left, argue for "energy independence." To be energy independent is either to import no energy fuels of any kind from abroad, or to export fuel roughly equal to what we import.

This is not the policy that I would urge.

While in theory energy independence is possible, it is both politically and economically unrealistic. It equates buying fuel supplies from enemies with buying them from allies, and it fails to limit costs. To see what I am getting at, consider the fact that Australia and Canada have the biggest known reserves of uranium, and it is highly unlikely that they will become enemies of the United States. Why should we go to the trouble and expense of trying to become uranium-independent of them?

On the other hand, buying crucial supplies of oil from the Russians and Iranians carries serious political costs. As it is, we import 60% of the oil we consume; and 42% of what we import (i.e., 25% of all the oil we consume) comes from OPEC countries — a tightly organized group, dedicated to keeping prices up. In this respect, we are sitting ducks. The fact that an embargo, organized by a cartel of oil exporters, would eventually be broken (all cartels eventually break up) is not reassuring. Under current conditions, an embargo of any significant length could be disastrous. And, under the same conditions, we are already paying immense military and diplomatic prices to keep would-be enemies from ganging up on us and disrupting our oil supplies.

This is simply a fact of life. We do not exist in a stable environment of free trade and are not likely to, so long as the trade in energy is vulnerable to noneconomic (i.e., religious and political) coercion.

As Frédéric Bastiat advised many years ago, when we assess the consequences of a policy or action, we need to look not only at the salient or striking costs and benefits but also

at the hidden or "unseen" ones. In getting what you think is cheap oil from the Middle East and Russia, for instance, are you counting in the costs of the treasure and lives spent in keeping those sources open? And if we are embargoed again by OPEC, what will be the general economic and political costs of the resulting recession or depression?

Under these circumstances, the goal that I think is best — that is, realistically achievable, yet beneficial to national security and a functioning economy — is what I would call "energy immunity." Energy immunity is different from energy independence. Energy immunity means simply that our nation's

After weeks of doing nothing about the Gulf oil spill, President Obama's first major act was to appoint a group of attorneys.

energy supply is secure from major external threats such as oil supply cutoffs and massive wealth transfers to our enemies abroad. A coherent approach to energy would allow for production from many sources — petroleum, natural gas, coal, nuclear reactors, and the sun and wind. A satisfactory energy policy would be economically realistic — not costly in terms of lower national employment, lost economic growth, or high deficits.

But to make any progress in this area, one must recognize certain things. One is that petroleum is not going away any time soon. Right now, 40% of all American energy comes from petroleum products.

The two largest uses for energy are transportation and the generation of electric power. While petroleum is used to some extent in electrical power generation (as in diesel-powered generating stations), it is mainly used (when refined into either diesel or gasoline) as fuel for engines employed in transportation. To some extent, petroleum's role in transportation can be replaced by electrical energy. Already, a fair number of hybrid vehicles (powered both by electricity and by a gasoline or diesel engine) are being sold; and every time the price of gas jumps up, hybrids get attractive again, despite their higher up-front costs and the inconveniences of charging their batteries.

More potentially game-changing are purely electric vehicles ("EVs"). Nissan is planning to introduce the Leaf, GM the Volt, and Tesla its Roadster. Mitsubishi is working on its own EV, called the i-MiEV. Honda is working on an EV (currently called the EV-N) for production within the next few years (though Honda has been researching EVs for two decades). Carlos Ghosn, Nissan's CEO, predicts that within the next two years his company will have the capacity to produce 500,000 EVs annually.

The Wall Street Journal recently ran an enthusiastic piece about the potential for EVs, pointing out that cities around the country are building the infrastructure to accommodate them, such as electrical charging stations. Utility companies are working to help ensure that people can charge cars at home, using the 220-volt outlets ordinarily used by washing machines.

All this sounds good, but for the next decade at least, it is unlikely that EVs will take off in a major way, or even that hybrids will come to dominate the motor vehicle market. EVs have short driving ranges — between 40 and 100 miles at best, and much less at high speeds, or if the temperature outside is hot or cold, or if the car is carrying a good deal of weight (such as today's bulky passengers). The batteries in EVs (and even hybrids) take a long time to charge. Tomohiko Kawanabe,

The government has subsidized ethanol heavily; yet it still plays hardly any role in fueling cars.

chief of research and development at Honda, says that his company isn't particularly confident about EVs. "I can't say I wholeheartedly recommend them," he says, because "it is questionable whether consumers will accept the annoyances of limited driving range and having to spend time charging them."

Add to that the fact that EVs cost more than conventional cars of the same type. The Tesla roadster, for instance, will cost \$100,000, and the Chevy Volt will cost \$41,000 — about \$24,000 more than the Chevy Cruze, the non-electric compact upon which the Volt is based. Add also the fact that these cars are smaller, hence less comfortable and more dangerous in a crash — and it appears that EVs will be at most only 1–2% of auto sales by 2020. Hybrids will continue to gain market share, but petroleum products will continue to be their primary fuel. All of this assumes the continuation of the substantial federal tax credits now given to people who buy such cars.

The problem lies in battery technology. Even the best available batteries (lithium ion) face problems in being scaled up to the size needed. Getting a really acceptable battery — meaning safe, reliable, durable, scalable, and cheap enough to sell widely — is still more promise than reality.

There is another fuel touted as a way to replace petroleum for transportation: ethanol (and biofuels more generally). Ethanol (ethyl alcohol) is that potent chemical found in all forms of booze. We get it by fermenting the sugar found in plants. It is combined with gasoline to fuel cars. Ethanol deserves an extended discussion in its own right, but let me be brief.

Suffice it to say that even Brazil — the country that made a large push decades ago to convert cars to partial or full ethanol — is now pushing expansion of its petroleum production past the present 2.8 million barrels a day. It produces about half a million barrels a day of ethanol and biodiesel, and about one-fifth of that is exported abroad. And Brazil is almost uniquely suited for ethanol production, since its tropical climate makes growing sugar cane easy. In the United States, we have mainly tried using corn, a plant with less than half the sugar content of sugar cane. This drives the price up, and as a result, the government has subsidized ethanol heavily; yet it still plays hardly any role in fueling cars. Ethanol is also harder to ship (because it easily combines with water), and it damages the rubber hoses in cars. Its near-term pros-

pects, accordingly, are limited.

Natural gas is another option, and this is another major topic in its own right. For now, let me just note that while gasoline engines can easily be made to run on natural gas, storage is a problem — the gas has to be compressed in large tanks. Natural gas is therefore more of a solution for trucks and buses than for passenger cars.

So, what should be done in the near term — say, the next 15 years or so?

If I had to offer a slogan, it would be: "Still drill, baby, still drill — but do it carefully." Here are eight major recommendations. Some of them relate more to the issues directly raised by the Gulf disaster; others are larger in scope; all, I believe, would be helpful steps in the formulation of a realistic energy policy.

1. I would encourage the formation of an independent, nonpartisan group of engineers, economists, and physical scientists (*not* politicians, bureaucrats, or journalists), like the panel appointed to investigate the "Challenger" space shuttle disaster, to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the BP spill. The commission Obama set up to investigate is headed by an ex-governor and an ex-EPA head, precisely the sort of people who should never be on any such panel. This is hopeless. But a different kind of commission could be given the job of discovering what exactly caused the explosion, how it could have been prevented, why the blowout protector failed, how that can be prevented in the future, and what new reliable backup systems can be added.

Already some bright technological minds are working on ideas. An article published in the MIT Technology Review (July 10) reviewed some suggestions, such as requiring a linear design of well casing, in which a short string of casing is installed at the bottom of a well (allowing better monitoring for leaks and giving gas more time to release), instead of the continuous string of threaded casing pipes BP chose (apparently because it is cheaper). The article also suggests that deepwater response tools be created to stop spills, and better blowout protectors be designed. Just recently physicist Michio Kaku suggests that in the future, on deep wells, relief wells should be drilled at the same time the original one is. These seem to be good ideas. An independent panel would have the time and brainpower to examine such ideas, and winnow out the best for implementation.

2. I am not one to respond to cases in which regulators aren't doing their jobs or are behaving corruptly by passing new regulations and hiring new regulators. Instead, I prefer stiffer penalties for corruption and malfeasance. Additionally, since the government hasn't been able to police its own, let's throw open enforcement to private investigators and bounty hunters: any private eye who discovers a regulator engaged in criminal misconduct should be given a reward of, say, \$50,000. Public choice theory tells us that regulatory capture is inherently a risk with all regulation, but maybe with Dog the Bounty Hunter on the case, the degree of such capture would be limited.

3. Congress should pass a law making rational cleanup procedures automatic, whenever (or if ever) there is a spill, and making it mandatory for legitimate offers of aid from allies

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Slippery Slope

by Jacques Delacroix

Virtue is a harsh mistress.

It happened a long time ago, right before my children began pretending they had no parents, that they had been raised by wolves, like Kipling's Mowgli.

I am taking a Christmas vacation in India with my Indian-born wife and our two children, the man-cubs. I hate everything about the Christmas season. India is a good place to be at that time of year because you easily miss Christmas altogether there. I especially dislike the false saintness of the Christmas season.

I know there is no such word as "saintness." So? There should be. "Sainthood" refers to an eternal condition, "saintliness" refers to a person, or to his actions, not to a collective mood, and "holiness" refers to a sacramental condition, or to a state of grace, rather than to the collective mood I have in mind. I wouldn't mind "factitious piety," but that's longer and more artificial. But to return to my story . . .

We are doing ordinary tourism — at least, I am. One day, in Agra, I decide to go and see a minor palace or fort, rather than the Taj Mahal. My wife wants to spend time at our hotel with her sister whom she has not seen for years. Besides, if truth be told, she does not enjoy India much; that's why she

emigrated, after all. My children are still young. They are California-reared wimps. Of course, they will claim to want to visit with their aunt just so they can stay in the air-conditioned hotel. That is a major point of this story: Although we are in December, it's hot. It's always hot in the northern Indian plain anyway, very hot, extremely hot, or merely kind of hot.

As a refugee from the near-insularity of northern California, I am a dutiful tourist. (Look at the map: northern California is an island, for practical purposes. It costs a fortune to fly anywhere from the San Francisco area, except to Los Angeles or Las Vegas. I like Las Vegas — every five years or so. I have never been able to find L.A.) Anyway, when I am abroad, I do visit the sites; I really do.

When I was growing up in Paris, before global airline deregulation, it seemed that you could never afford to go anywhere

under your own power. You might travel on the government's dime as a public servant, or if you were in the military. Other than that, foreign countries seemed pretty much out of reach. The day I crossed the border into Switzerland with the Cub Scouts was a big day. I brought back white milk chocolate such as I had never seen before, and cool matches made of wax paper.

With the fabulous, unexpected jump in prosperity of the '60s and '70s, I became an experienced traveler. Of course, I take pride in my adaptability and my readiness for everything. So, in India that winter, I am wearing shorts (of decent

Since I am now a member of the old rickshaw-wallah's family, I feel obligated to add a big tip, equivalent to the fare. What the hell; I don't want my nephews and nieces to go wanting.

length so I won't be barred from temples), which facilitate ventilation of a man's hottest parts, and a light, short-sleeved cotton shirt. My feet are shod in ankle boots with thick soles because the heated blacktop can burn your feet through thin soles. Also, I have been in India before. I really like that country, but the truth is, you can never be sure what you are going to step into. And when you are sure, it's even worse.

There are taxis waiting outside the hotel, but I don't want them. Indian taxis are ugly, hot, cramped, uncomfortable. They usually stink, and they have small windows. Also, it's a nice clear day, without much air pollution, and there are a dozen bicycle rickshaws, with their drivers, in the shade of a big neem tree. All the drivers make vigorous, enticing gestures — in my direction, of course. Middle-class Indians are usually bad tippers, and they tend to be harsh with working people. (That's an interesting lagging effect of caste. Unlike most prosperous Western adults, I would guess they have never performed menial work.) Compared to the locals who are financially able to take a taxi, a large, pink sahib looks like a gift from Ganesh. (That's the elephant-headed god of prosperity.) Most Westerners tip well. Americans tip generously and they are almost always nice and appreciative.

Whom to choose? Most of the rickshaw-wallahs are in their 20s. There is just one older guy sitting quietly by himself. He has gray hair and he is very thin under his off-white athletic shirt. He looks at me silently, with hopeful eyes. I motion to him and climb into his rickshaw.

"Taj Mahal?" he asks. (Of course.)

"No, I want to go to the Red Fort. Do you know where it is?"

"No English, Sahib."

No matter, he pedals right on ahead. Frankly, it does not matter when I get to the fort. But this is interesting. Perhaps the rickshaw guy knows something I don't know. After all, it's his job.

After a short ride, we stop at a street-side tea shop. Of course, I buy tea for both of us. He is staring at the samozas, so I order a few.

I ask around in English where the Red Fort is. Several men give me directions in the infuriating Indian way: vague on distance, vague on the time it takes; won't ever get you to the end of the trip, only to the general vicinity. Two of them more or less agree. I ask them to explain it to my rickshaw-wallah in Hindi. His eyes seem to say that he does not want to go there. Religious interdiction? Caste problem? I can't even ask him. I take out my wad of rupees to pay him off. His eyes darken with disappointment. "Okay," I tell him in California English, but with the help of my French hands, "I pay now or you go to where those guys said to go."

He gets back on his saddle with resignation written all over his face. I climb back into my own seat. After a short time, the road starts going up. Speed decreases to less than that of a man walking. What the hell, I figure, it's still reasonably cool; I can use the exercise; I have been eating too much greasy food; I can walk a while, for sure. I tell the guy, "Stop." He does. I get off and start walking alongside the rickshaw. He looks vaguely embarrassed but is doing much better without my 200 pounds in the back seat.

Then the slope becomes even steeper. (Forts are usually built on a hill, I realize then, not in a valley.) The thin man is wheezing. I have no choice: I start pushing the rickshaw from behind. I push for a good 15 minutes. It's now hot. My shirt is dripping with sweat. My forehead is burning. It gets so steep that the rickshaw is slipping back down, in spite of my thick shoes.

Finally, we reach the fort. There is a space under the shade of big trees where other rickshaws are waiting. I push mine in that direction and let go. The rickshaw-wallah is coasting. The rickshaw stops and I catch up. My man gets off his saddle and shakes both my hands with obvious emotion. He touches his heart several times with his closed fist and he repeats a word I recognize — at least I think I do — as "brother," in Hindi. (It sounds like the Sicilian "*paesano*." I know my movie classics.)

Of course, I have no choice but to pay him the full tourist fare he asks for. I don't usually bargain over services in poor countries, anyway. I am not keen to save three dollars at the moral risk of depriving someone of goat meat ("mutton" in Indian English, from the middle-French "*mouton*," sheep and sheep meat). Since I am now a member of the old rickshaw-wallah's family, I feel obligated to add a big tip, equivalent to the fare. What the hell; I don't want my new nephews and nieces to go wanting today.

By now, however, I am too tired to really visit the fort. It looks to be of mediocre interest anyway, as seen through the sweat burning my eyes. I need a shower, a meal, and a nap. I take a taxi, a motor-taxi, back to the hotel. It's less than 15 minutes away.

Every story has a moral, whether it's a moral one or not. Here's the moral of this one: virtuousness is a lot like criminality. It involves a slippery slope. Unlike any specific "virtue," it's a general disposition, one that prompts to action, almost automatically. You can't be too careful. You step on the top with insouciance, and then you begin sliding down. If you aren't careful you become very good and you turn into a stranger to your old, moderately evil self. I would guess that's what happened to Mother Teresa — in India, precisely.

Young people: think hard before you travel to poor countries. Temptation is everywhere in those places. □

Working for Liberty

by Tom G. Palmer

If you try to achieve liberty, you may find
adventure too.

After spending many years in the libertarian movement, I'm enormously pleased to know that it has grown so large and that it continues to attract so many bright young people. It warms my heart to see so many wonderful people at libertarian gatherings all over the world. I'd like to muse a bit about what motivates us to do what we do, and about the various shapes that our action has taken over the years.

In the early 1970s, I was active in organizations and even causes that are no longer around. In late 1971 I joined the Young Americans for Freedom, read some libertarian works, and joined YAF's remaining libertarian faction. I became a state officer. In 1974, I ran a statewide Republican youth campaign on behalf of H.L. "Bill" Richardson's Senate candidacy, then quit the conservative movement and never looked back. Of much greater significance for my life was the fact that I managed to meet some libertarians who were more visionary than others and — this is really the key — more effective and more linear in their thinking.

One of those people was Ed Crane, whom I met at a libertarian meeting in 1973 in southern California. Ed went on to found the Cato Institute. It was at a libertarian meeting

at UCLA shortly after that, I think, that I met R.A. Childs, Jr., a truly brilliant libertarian writer, as well as the economists David Henderson and Harry Watson, and others whom I admired greatly. That year I started my studies at the University of Southern California and had the honor of learning (if only a little and inadequately) from John Hospers, the philosophy professor who had been the 1972 presidential candidate of the then brand-new Libertarian Party. John served as campus adviser to our Campus Libertarian Society, which campaigned for tax cuts, marijuana legalization, and elimination of the draft, much to the confusion of leftists and rightists who couldn't quite "get" us. During my time in high school and then my early entry (at 16) to USC I met and became friends with such interesting people as the late Priscilla "P.K." Slocum, who was a pioneering libertarian

bookseller and a wonderful libertarian mentor, Tibor Machan, Murray Rothbard, George H. Smith, Manuel Klausner, Wendy McElroy, and others, most of them still very much alive and still valued friends.

It was an exciting time. The world seemed ready to embrace our ideas. The state was clearly on its last legs. To characterize some enthusiastic libertarians of the day, Murray Rothbard, the economist and libertarian political theorist, deployed the term *Luftmensch* (“air person”), which could be translated as “someone who floats through life without connection to anything substantial.” The label was appropriate for more than a few. There were some rather colorful people around.

In any event, I pursued my passion for liberty as a youthful organizer, making trouble for “the state,” and driving all over California to visit high school and college campuses, trying to spread the ideas of liberty and hasten the collapse of the welfare-warfare regime. I helped set up libertarian clubs, worked for marijuana decriminalization, campaigned against the draft and militarism, organized antitax rallies, and so on. In 1975, after a stint writing copy for an advertising agency, I started working full-time as one of two employees of the Libertarian Party — Linda Webb was the other. Our base was the party’s national office at 550 Kearney Street, San Francisco. We were a convenient two blocks away from the office of Ed Crane, who was then party chairman. I had an apartment on Larkin Street for which I paid \$100 a month. When I opened the bed, there was literally no place to stand.

What was the cause of my enthusiasm for the libertarian movement? Books were a major inspiration. I had read Lane and Rand and Rothbard, Bastiat and Hazlitt, and Mises and Hayek (but did not appreciate Hayek at the time as much as I did later), and I wanted to change the world, to rid it of communism, fascism, socialism, and all other forms of oppression. (I also tried to read various conservative and socialist books, but found the disconnection from basic principles of economics — indeed, of the ideas of cause and effect — too jarring.) In high school I had subscribed to *The Freeman*, from which I learned a great deal, and had also bought from its

Nixon brilliantly combined many things for a friend of liberty to hate: prosecution of a pointless war, wage and price controls, fiat money and inflation, illegal exercises of power.

publisher, the Foundation for Economic Education, Mises’ “Planned Chaos,” “Human Action,” and other works. I sent tons of money to Laissez Faire Books, Books for Libertarians, and Academic Associates — a book and audio recording review and sales service that Nathaniel Branden and others set up. I remember how impressed I was when I preordered George H. Smith’s book “Atheism: The Case Against God” from Academic Associates; after my check was cashed, the firm went broke, but I got what I ordered and it came out of the individuals’ own pockets. That devotion to paying their debts made an impression on me.

Loathing for Richard Nixon was another inspiration. He was the great political presence in the late 1960s and early ’70s in America, and you loved him or hated him. By 1973–74, more and more people seemed to hate him. He brilliantly combined so many things for a friend of liberty to hate: prosecution of a pointless and destructive war; wage and price controls; fiat money and inflation; illegal and arbitrary exercises of power. The collapse of the GOP seemed the perfect moment for the growth of a new party, a new political alignment, and a libertarian movement that would put an end to coercion, war, theft, censorship, and oppression. Well, we made a good start, I think. The world might be a lot worse if we hadn’t made our best effort.

Knowing the interesting people of the libertarian movement was also important. I worked with Ed Crane on a number of projects, including the presidential campaigns of Roger MacBride in 1976 and of Ed Clark in 1980. In 1982 I was statewide campaign manager of the Dan Dougherty for Governor campaign in California. In 1975 I was on the Libertarian Party’s platform committee and got to work with a lot of interesting people — including Rothbard; Walter Grinder, then teaching economics and later involved with the Institute for Humane Studies and other organizations; Williamson M. (Bill) Evers, now at the Hoover Institution; and Robert Nozick, whose 1974 book “Anarchy, State, and Utopia” would have a huge influence on academic understanding of libertarian thought — to craft what we considered a definitive statement of libertarianism. (Rothbard in his newsletter had backhandedly congratulated Bob for winning the National Book Award for his “quasi-libertarian inquiry into political philosophy, ‘Anarchy, State, and Utopia.’” Bob autographed his copy for me with the question whether autographing an unread copy of a book would induce the reader to read it. It did.)

I recall defeating a proposal to include a denunciation of circumcision, on the ground that outlawing religious communities didn’t sit well with libertarian thinking, regardless of what one might think of the practice. But most of the topics covered were major issues of public policy, such as nuclear weapons, foreign policy, taxes, and even environmental policy, by establishing property rights in fisheries and oyster beds, for example — leading to the quip that we were defending the virtues of shellfishness.

Those attempts to formulate and, more significantly, to apply libertarian thinking to concrete issues were later much expanded and improved in the outstanding “White Papers” and position papers issued in 1980 by the Ed Clark for President campaign. The documents were edited by a team that included a number of thinkers who were later involved at Cato and other organizations, people such as Crane, Childs, David Boaz, Sheldon Richman, Tyler Cowen, Joan Kennedy Taylor, and Earl Ravenal (memory fails to provide the complete list). The documents were significant steps forward for the libertarian movement. Articulating libertarian principles is important, but not really very valuable if you can’t show how to apply them, or if you can’t produce any kind of roadmap to their implementation.

I knew all the founders of Cato, which was established in 1977. Ed had gotten acquainted with some businessmen who were devoted to liberty. There was, for instance, a remarkable circle of libertarians in Wichita, including many involved

with Coleman Lanterns, Love Box Company, and other firms, and they had put out some really radical antiwar libertarian publications in the 1960s. Notable among Ed's associates from the world of business was Charles Koch. Charles had been involved in libertarian activities for years. He was, and is, a passionate defender of liberty and foe of war, violence, and coercion. After his involvement with Cato, he has continued his support for liberty through the Institute for Humane Studies, the Mercatus Center, and other groups. Ed was fond of telling him, "Charles, with your money and your brains, you and I could go far."

Charles helped to launch Cato financially, with the idea that it would become independent of his funding. Ed realized that dream brilliantly, and created what I consider the single most important libertarian institution in the United States and quite probably the world. I was invited to work there in the summer of 1978, as one of the first three summer interns. We three, Ross Levatter, David Lips, and I, were known as the "Cato Clones." Our supposed clonishness caused some paranoia at the first Cato University Summer Seminar on Political Economy, held that summer. I remember one participant asking "Who are the Clones, and why are they here?"

I also recall sitting in the institute's fabulous conference room in San Francisco with Rothbard and others as we came up with the reading lists for the seminar — an absurd project that generated a gigantic stack of books and photocopied readings on everything from Earl Ravenal's writings on the contours of U.S. foreign policy, to Robert Carneiro's sociological theory of the formation of the state in the coastal valleys of Peru, to Ludwig von Mises' theory of the dynamics of interventionism, to a historian's description of the usurpation of the land rights of the mestizo population of New Mexico. All had to be included. None was too minor to be left out. The movement had to be informed . . . on everything! Stacked together, they were enough to fill a gigantic box for each participant. We've since learned how to be a bit more selective.

I later worked in Cato's academic affairs department, which was subsequently moved to the Institute for Humane Studies, then located in Menlo Park, California. (I ended up working at IHS in 1984, after it moved to George Mason University, and launched some adventures there.) After the MacBride for President campaign, I entered St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland for an education. After tutorials and seminars and reading groups I spent hours standing at the pay phone at the end of the hall of my dormitory, calling libertarian students and professors around the country on behalf of Cato's campus speakers bureau, study guides, and other programs. That was before Facebook. Before the internet. Before the mobile phone. Before the personal computer. Before the fax. Before the era when students could have phones in their rooms. Put like that, it seems like a long time ago, but it really wasn't. It was just a few years ago — but technology has changed the world so much, and with it, both the means the state uses to coerce us and the means we use to fight against it.

Just to give you an idea of how primitive the world was then, let me tell you a little more about how we communicated. When I worked for the Clark campaign in 1979 and 1980 as assistant director for communications, we had a "Mailgram machine." It was huge. In those days, to send out a press release or to reach people quickly, you sent them letters. You

typed a letter directly onto a piece of paper, folded it, put it in an envelope, added a stamp, then gave it to a uniformed agent of the U.S. government. Eventually, it might arrive at the right address. With this machine, however, you could actually send a letter over the phone lines to a Western Union office in or near the city of the intended recipient, and Western Union would print it out, fold it, put it in an envelope, add a stamp, and give it to a uniformed agent of the U.S. government. That cut delivery time down, so it was worth the effort.

The Mailgram machine had a big black-and-white screen with a blinking white cursor, and you would type on it — very laboriously — every name and address of every recipient, along with the letter you wanted to send. The machine

Our attempts to apply libertarian thinking to concrete issues were later expanded and improved in the "White Papers" issued in 1980 by the Ed Clark for President campaign.

had no memory — at all. So if you bumped it or jiggled the power cord, it would "lose" all the information you had so painstakingly entered. Hours and hours of work. Gone. Never to be retrieved. If anyone went near the power cord, he was in mortal peril.

Here's another anecdote to tell you how far libertarian message work has come. Back in San Francisco, Cato had a really advanced IT department, as I suppose it would have been called, if the phrase had existed then. It had machines that allowed you to print out personalized letters, using either long paper tapes that had the letter content encoded in little holes punched in the paper that you would feed as a belt into a machine to control the sequence of keys striking the ribbon on the electric typewriter, or information that was encoded on magnetic cassette tapes of the kind used in Sony Walkman machines, which did the same thing. The manager worked two full-time jobs, of which this was one (he slept two or three hours a day).

One day when I was showing visitors around I introduced them and he told them, "Oh, it's a delight to work with Tom. He's one of our best content originators." This led me to consider the division of labor, and the role of pride in one's work, a bit more closely. He took pride in his work, without which mine would have been without effect, and he was generous to mine. Each colleague in the libertarian movement contributes to our common goals, whether as a writer, or building manager, or speaker, or data entry specialist, or accountant, or analyst, or editor, or receptionist, or petitioner, or conference organizer. And each should take pride in that contribution to our common goals.

Cato's San Francisco offices were cool and in one of the coolest cities in the world. I used to take the cable car to work, before they made it illegal to dangle by one hand on the post and swing out as the car quickly turned a corner. Working at Cato during the summer of 1978, I loved hanging out at the City Lights book store at night, reading anarchist beatnik poetry and having coffee at the Italian cafes in North Beach. Ed

didn't hang out at City Lights, but he also loved San Francisco and, after moving Cato to D.C. in 1981, he remarked that satellite photos of the U.S. landmass clearly showed his fingernail marks as he was dragged eastward. The national media,

After Ed Crane moved Cato from San Francisco to D.C., he remarked that satellite photos of the United States clearly showed his fingernail marks as he was dragged eastward.

the Congress, the administration, and the Supreme Court are based in Washington, and if you want to influence public discussion and opinion, to put libertarian reforms on the national policy agenda, and to influence the courts, it certainly helps to be where the media are and the three branches of government deliberate.

After that cool summer, I did a lot of other things in the movement; but all that time, wherever I was, I kept in touch with Cato. I wrote lots of book reviews and studies on many topics: public goods, infrastructure and private roads, public choice analysis and regulatory policy, U.S. foreign policy in El Salvador and Chad, and so on and so forth. I edited a few publications (Dollars & Sense, the monthly paper of the National Taxpayers Union, Update, a political newspaper on the libertarian movement, and some others) and wrote articles for various libertarian mags, as well as the Washington Star, the Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal. I had some fun focusing attention on "industrial policy," indicative planning, and national foresight capability.

You see, Rep. Newt Gingrich had proposed creating a special government office tasked with predicting future technologies — a job that, I pointed out in a Wall Street Journal article, was absurd, since if you know what knowledge you will have in the future, you already have it now. Warren Buffett wrote to the Journal to denounce me. I also caused a stir, and made a tiny footnote in the history of public choice, when I toted up for a piece I published in the Journal the number of full-time professional public relations specialists employed by the federal government to lobby the public for more money for their agencies; I think I got to over 1,000, almost all of them disguised under other job titles. I explained in an essay in The New York Times that taxation is legalized theft and that the IRS's claim of "voluntary compliance" is an absurdity.

I worked as a reporter, a lobbyist, an editor of newsletters on politics, government, tax policies, and the libertarian movement, a troublemaker, a political researcher and organizer, an academic organizer for the Institute for Humane Studies, a smuggler of books, fax machines, and photocopiers into communist states, and a few other jobs I've forgotten. I started working with European libertarians in the early 1980s and traveled to Austria a few times to collaborate with libertarians there, after which I moved to Vienna to work with the now defunct Carl Menger Institut to find and help libertarians in communist states hasten the demise of those states and — very importantly — to promote institutions and attitudes

conducive to the realization of freedom. IHS supported my initiative to move to Austria and start the "Eastern European Outreach Program," in conjunction with many other groups. When I worked in Austria I helped Cato set up its first conference in the USSR, held in Moscow in 1990.

I helped to fund the translation into Russian of Mises' "Socialism," Hayek's "The Fatal Conceit," and many other books and essays by buying rubles from people leaving the USSR and giving them cash in the West. Instead of going by the absurd official rate (which was dangerous, in any case, as you had to show receipts for what you had spent your rubles on), I figured a better way. People leaving the USSR were allowed to take only a suitcase and 100 rubles with them, enough to buy a sandwich and a drink in Vienna. Some flights on Aeroflot from Moscow to Vienna would contain me and a lot of departing Jews. I remembered how Jews got their money out of the Third Reich — having foreign businessmen give them cash in the United States, or France, or England, and then having their relatives in Germany give them their Reichsmarks. So I made arrangements with a family of engineers (we had elaborate flow charts to show what money would go where) to deliver dollars to relatives in the United States, and their cousins would deliver their life savings of 30,000 rubles to me in Moscow. It worked.

I was in Prague during the collapse of the state and gave lectures at the universities when the students had expelled all of the professors. I assisted in the establishment of the still-functioning Liberalni Institute in Prague. I had smuggled out a single typed copy (on carbon paper) of a Czech translation of Hayek's "The Road to Serfdom" and made 100 stapled copies in Vienna, which I then smuggled back in, along with a photocopier and 5,000 sheets of paper. It was a bit unnerving, as I was detained by the Czech police and arrested at the border train crossing. I flourished my official invitation (with a red stamp) from the Academy of Sciences of the Czech and Slovak Federal Socialist Republic and insisted on talking to the chief. He listened, realized he didn't want problems in case Comrade Bruzek was disappointed to discover that his invited guest speaker was detained, and told the soldiers to load my luggage on the train, all carefully camouflaged with layers of gifts for Czech friends, mainly toys and ladies' cosmetics, which were scarce in communist countries.

As they oofed and grunted, lifting the heavy suitcases, I was pretty sure they were asking in Czech, "What the hell is in this?" Luckily, they didn't find out. I learned the same lesson when taking photocopy machines into the USSR: never admit anything; produce official documents — even if outdated — that have red stamps on them; and talk the officials to death. They will finally realize that this guy might have friends, and they don't want to end up reassigned to the Tajik-Afghan border. When asked why I had two photocopy machines, I said that I always traveled with two, as I had to make lecture notes for the students, since I had an official invitation from the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and would give lectures at Moscow State University.

I was in Bucharest right after the Ceausescu were executed, and helped Maria Valeanu organize the first libertarian seminars in Bucharest and in Transylvania. I was on one of the first flights to Tirana from Budapest when the Albanian regime collapsed, and became deathly ill from the decaying,

slippery food that Albanians had to eat at that time. On that flight, I was befriended by the first Russian protocol officer to be sent to Tirana since the split between the USSR and Albania. He was very kind, gave me his card, and encouraged me to eat only in the Hotel Dajti, the “hard currency” hotel for foreigners. I asked why, and he said, “Well, I cannot really recommend the cuisine very highly, but under normal circumstances you can usually keep it down.” I could not take his advice, but wished on a number of occasions that I had.

Speaking of dinners, after some lectures and seminars in Lublin, Poland, I invited the attendees to a dinner; we went to the poshest restaurant in town, at the Hotel Urania, which seemed primarily a state-run brothel for Arab clients to meet Polish women. I paid \$5 to the cacophonous rock band to stop playing and go home, after which the various guests stood and introduced themselves. I recall a line of bearded professors who were identified by the dignified chairlady of the philosophy department in ways like this: “Professor X was in labor camp under the Nazis, then was free for a short time, and then was sent to labor camp under the communists, then was free, and was jailed again and was recently released, so we’re pleased to have him with us this evening.”

I spent a lot of time driving about Bulgaria in a tiny East German Trabi, with my knees under my chin. It ran out of gas on the way to the airport (there was a serious nationwide gas shortage), so I had to walk the rest of the way with my luggage. I had to be driven to the Tirana airport by the Minister of Light Industry, who later left the country, as there was no private transportation in the country and the public transportation had all broken down. I flew from Tirana to Bucharest on a little plane that had only a few big swivel seats; a chain-smoking Transylvania German lady from Hermannstadt (Sibiu in Romanian) was the only other passenger. We had two flight attendants with little 1960s flight attendant hats; instead of just talking to us about the flight, as they were only a few feet away, the attendant spoke into a microphone that issued in a malfunctioning little speaker that was dangling by wires from the ceiling. When we flew over Bucharest and I saw that it had electricity, which Tirana did not, it was like landing in Paris. That’s how it was in those days.

One of my proudest accomplishments was arranging the publication of what was often the first non-Marxist economics textbook that some countries had seen since the communist takeovers, Paul Heyne’s outstanding “The Economic Way of Thinking,” which I arranged to have translated and published in Czech, Russian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Albanian. I also arranged publication of books by Hayek, Mises, and Friedman into Russian, Estonian, Czech, Hungarian, and several other languages. (Arranging translation and publication of such works remains a project of mine; lately, I’ve focused on getting the works of Frédéric Bastiat into publication in numerous languages, including Swahili, Hindi, Bahasa, Arabic, Kurdish, Persian, Russian, Japanese, Nepali, Azerbaijani, and Vietnamese.)

Upon returning in 1995 to the United States from England, where I was working on my doctorate in politics at Oxford, I was offered a very cool job: coming to work full-time at the Cato Institute as Director of Special Projects. I could tell you all the projects I worked, on, but, of course, I’d have to kill you later. One project that it’s permissible to reveal was the

internship program, with which I have been very proudly involved ever since. The other was Cato University, which I also still direct. I got to work on expanding Cato’s influence worldwide, in Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and other languages. After we libertarians failed to stop the juggernaut to war, and the United States invaded Iraq, I decided to see what could be done to promote liberty there and gave lectures and held seminars and meetings in Iraq a number of times, as well as in other countries in the region. I made friends with some remarkable people. At the beginning of last year we moved those programs to the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, where they are flourishing. I’m Vice President for International Programs at Atlas and a Senior Fellow at Cato, and our programs at Atlas still work closely in partnership with Cato, but we’ve been able to expand them significantly at Atlas and to integrate them with the international network of classical liberal thinktanks and related organizations. It’s very rewarding work.

I’m still on the road a lot. I just got back from Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Dushanbe, where I helped to launch two new libertarian thinktanks, Cato’s granddaughters, in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. I met people in government, the media, and academia, and I gave lectures on individualism, civil society and pluralism, toleration, the political theories of limited government, property rights, externalities, economic development, the successes of the economic reforms in the Republic of Georgia, and how the Georgian libertarians helped to transform a nation from a disastrous failed state to a growing liberal democracy.

But I know that you do work like this, too. You make the case for liberty regularly with friends and family and co-workers. You know why you want to be free, and you know how to explain the benefits of liberty.

What is harder to explain is why we promote liberty for others, often at great cost to ourselves. We donate to causes and organizations. We work long hours. We rock boats. We’re

I learned the same lesson when traveling in the USSR: never admit anything, produce official documents, and talk the officials to death.

promoting a classic public good — even the paradigm case of a public good. Liberty is nonrivalrous in consumption: when you have more liberty, it doesn’t mean that I have any less. And it’s costly to exclude people from enjoying liberty: indeed, taking actions to exclude others is precisely the opposite of what a libertarian would do. But standard economic analysis tells us that public goods are underproduced, that no one has any incentive to produce them if everyone can free-ride on the efforts of others. So why do we do it?

It’s a harder question than it might appear. But here’s a stab at answering it.

We value our identity. Each of us wants to become and to be a certain kind of person. We establish our identity through our acts and our affiliations. Cato and Atlas sponsors whom I’ve met around the United States and the world typically identify themselves in this way: “I’m a member of

the Cato Institute" or "I'm a member of the Atlas Economic Research Foundation." To speak precisely, those groups don't have dues-paying "memberships," but that's one of the ways in which people have constituted their identities. They're the kind of people who stand up for freedom, who stand up for peace, who stand up for the persecuted, who not only live and let live but also want to persuade other people to do so. It's not only good; it's right. And that act of standing up for liberty as right is a part of their identity. It's who they are.

Liberty is our cause. It is our passion. We will live free. And we will die free. Our cause is the cause of justice. Of truth. Of

peace. Of life itself.

I was introduced to the ideas of the Brazilian liberal abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco by former Cato intern and now Atlas colleague Diogo Costa. Nabuco dedicated his life to eradicating the evil of slavery from his country. Here is how he put the matter:

Educate yourself, educate your children in love for the freedom of others, for only in this way will your own freedom not be a gratuitous gift from fate. You will be aware of its worth and have the courage to defend it. □

Drill Deep, Drill Smart, *from page 28*

abroad to be accepted. The intent here is to keep government officials from using the prospect of harm to enact their own political and environmental programs, as the Obama administration has done. And actually, if the government were ever to spend money on something . . . while the Europeans have very large and well-equipped fleets of state-of-the-art Oil Spill Response Vessels, we have pathetically few. The Taiwanese have developed a vessel that can collect an amazing 300,000 gallons of oil a day from the ocean. Having a few of those pup-pies would help.

4. Congress should repeal the archaic Jones Act. We have just seen how this law, meant to protect a few union jobs in shipyards and on the docks, costs the country vastly more jobs elsewhere — in tourism, fishing, and oil production, to name a few. As John McCain noted recently when he introduced legislation to repeal the Act, it "hinders free trade and favors labor unions over consumers"; it "only serves to raise shipping costs." It hasn't saved our domestic shipbuilding industry, which now only builds 1% of the world's ships; indeed, it is a major reason for that industry's virtual extinction. Relevant to the current issue, it interferes every time we need to get foreign ships to administer aid in a disaster.

5. We must keep offshore wells online. The moratorium on deep-sea wells must be lifted except on BP wells. All other companies have a clean record, so why punish them — especially when it costs the country jobs, raises the price of gasoline, and subjects us to the political and economic costs of dependence on other nations for fuel?

6. Rather than trying to limit private responsibility for oil spills, Congress should set up a mechanism for allowing the private insurance industry to insure against future spills. This could include setting up a special mechanism for rapid adjudication of contested claims — say, "oil courts." If a spill occurred, insurance companies would have their adjusters try to settle with all harmed parties. Any disputes would first go to a special federal court, where three judges (one lawyer, one engineer, and one economist) would review contested settlements. Appeals from the oil courts could go to the federal appellate courts, but in a strict "loser pay" setup. That would remove the incentive for lawyers to exploit disaster with endless, exorbitant lawsuits, and make it economically feasible for insurance companies to step up to the plate.

7. With private insurance thus able to play its role, the time would be ripe to open rich oil lands (such as ANWR) and the shallow waters off the continental shelf for drilling, subject to a new provision, which I call "All in, help." Under this provision, all oil and gas companies that get leases anywhere must

allow their cleanup resources and technical personnel to help with any oil spill, no matter which company is responsible. This seems like a deal any company would be happy to make for access to easily exploitable resources, and it would make it more attractive for people with environmental interests to support drilling.

8. We should find ways to deal with the NIMBY ("not in my backyard") sentiment in states where new drilling would be permitted. The solution appears to lie with the Alaskans. Why have these people — even after the famous Exxon Valdez oil spill — supported oil production in their state, including ANWR? It's because they're paid. The environmental risks they take to supply the rest of us with oil are compensated by a fund that gives them a yearly share of the state proceeds from oil production. Called the Alaska Permanent Fund, it was set up in 1976, when voters approved a state constitutional amendment that puts 25% of all state proceeds from oil, gas, and other mineral lease and royalty payments, as well as federal revenue sharing payments, into a permanent trust fund. The purpose of the Fund, as clearly understood at the time, was "to stem the tide of state spending."

The fund's principal is a permanent resource invested in various financial instruments paying dividends and interest, which are then paid out every year to Alaska's residents, with each resident who has been in the state for over a year getting an equal share. In other words, the fund dispenses state money to the citizens. The current payout is about \$1,300 a year, down from previous years, because the amount of oil from the North Slope is beginning to dwindle. The fund is beautifully transparent, with the agency that administers the fund, the Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation, keeping a website that lists all pertinent information about current investments, payouts, and management decisions. This is why Alaska residents strongly favor opening up ANWR as soon as possible.

Such a fund could be set up in every state in which new offshore or land leases are granted. As I put it in a reflection in *Liberty* a few years back, you fight NIMBY with MIMBP — "money in my back pocket." Certainly, this is not a completely laissez-faire, free-enterprise proposal. But it's the endorsement of a program that allows for more enterprise, less money lodging permanently in state government, and less control vested in the crazed environmentalists of the federal government.

It is time to take seriously the energy challenges that the country faces. Whether the Obama administration can do that remains to be seen. Observe how many of the proposals above are designed to get around the federal government's present mode of operation — a way of proceeding that, if it continues, will result in astronomical political and economic costs to this country, and to each of us. □

The Importance of Being Ignorant

by Aaron Ross Powell

When you're constructing a political philosophy, never forget how much you don't know — and even more, how much the government doesn't know.

Humans come into the world ignorant. We make a good effort at digging ourselves out of our pit of ignorance by accumulating knowledge through experience and education, but we never quite reach the surface. We learn things, of course. We can recall our home address and the names of our children. Most of us can say who the president is (though fewer the vice president, and fewer again our state governor). The truths of science are also accessible. Many know that force equals mass times acceleration and that fish breathe through their gills. But the world contains an awful lot to know, and none of us can approach grasping it all.

In fact, the mere existence of human ignorance creates the wonder of our world and the drive to explore. Ignorance is our intellectual blank canvas and, so long as we strive to fill it in, we should not lament its presence. Yet ignorance has its dark side too. It can be blamed for racism and homophobia, for religious violence and quack medicine. What is important is to limit its harmful effects while encouraging its motivational benefits.

How much damage a bad idea can do is a function not only of how bad it is but also of the power held by those who

believe it. A plumber who has bad ideas about pipes can cause a lot of leaks in my house. He's unlikely, however, to destroy my children's future. But if a bad idea is held by someone in government, its reach can expand dramatically, along with its potential harm. This is not because the ideas of those in government are worse or their ignorance more pronounced, but because these people's power is greater. I can tell a plumber to leave me alone and never touch my sink again, but Congress is inescapable.

Thus we should be particularly concerned by the actions that those wielding state power may take, and limit their power to enact bad ideas. In other words, we should structure our state along libertarian lines. What follows is an argument for that idea. Much of it may seem intuitively true; certainly it may seem that way to libertarians. Yet one of the corollaries of

this idea is a truth that is often forgotten in the complexities of political life: the truth that we should be wary of the strength of our own convictions. Forcing the world to behave in accordance with our knowledge is one thing, when that knowledge turns out to be real, but quite another when it turns out to be false. Given how little we know for sure, it's best to err on the side of hesitancy and humility when implementing what we think we know. The precautionary principle is hard to accept, but here it is: while I may believe that X is true, X may very well be false. Therefore, I should be cautious when requiring others to act as if X were true.

Ignorance? Which Ignorance?

When discussing ignorance from a policy perspective, we often misunderstand the kind of ignorance at issue. Ignorance in comparison to others is given primacy and ignorance in comparison to the world is often ignored. We assume that, while any one of us may not be an expert, there are experts out there with knowledge great enough to tackle any problem. It is almost as if recognition of our personal ignorance blinds us to the existence of general ignorance. In other words, if I know less about climate change than Al Gore, then Al Gore knows everything there is to know on the topic. In effect, the fact that he knows more than I do makes it seem as if he were virtually without ignorance of the topic in his "field."

The result is the emergence of a cult of experts, people just as burdened by ignorance of a complex world as the rest of us but insulated from recognizing it by their comparative lack of ignorance on specific topics. Experts thus become a privileged problem-solving class. Yet given that all of us are ignorant, and given that this ignorance extends even to experts, what power should we give them to enact changes in the world?

Of course imperfect knowledge need not induce paralysis. If we had always been delivered to inaction by our lack of complete information, we would still be hunter-gatherers on the earth's savannahs. No, we are free to act while ignorant, but we must be careful — and the degree of caution demanded is directly proportional to the likelihood of ignorance, by experts or anyone else.

To demonstrate what I mean, imagine making a prediction about driving your car — a subject on which you are an expert. If you know it's been working well, you can confidently predict that you'll be able to back it out of your driveway tomorrow morning. Though you are making a prediction about

Given how little we know for sure, it's best to err on the side of hesitancy and humility when implementing what we think we know.

future events, a prediction hampered by a certain degree of ignorance (you don't know that a meteorite won't fall through the car's engine block while you're asleep), the knowledge you do have easily trumps the knowledge you don't.

But what if I were to ask you if you'll be able to drive that same automobile three years from now? Suddenly the ignorance you bring to the question is a little greater. A lot more can happen in three years than in 24 hours: accidents, exces-

sive wear and tear, a loss of the job that lets you make auto payments. That said, however, you'll probably still feel pretty good about betting that you'll drive the car three years from now.

But what about ten? Twenty? As the point predicted moves farther out, the number of possible occurrences about which you are ignorant increases. It quickly eclipses whatever real knowledge you have.

The concept is by no means limited to such simple questions as the longevity of an automobile. In the summer of 2008, as gas prices rose above four dollars, it was widely assumed that a crisis had come to America. Politicians fretted about how to solve the issue. Gas tax holidays were proposed, as were tax rebates. Many believed that prices would continue to rise, forcing people to drive less or buy more fuel efficient vehicles. But by early November 2008, the average cost for regular unleaded in the United States was \$2.40 a gallon and falling rapidly. The predictions made by experts just four months before proved entirely wrong.

Prices are not alone in their long-term unpredictability. Even consensus science frequently goes wrong. In the 1970s, American scientists warned of the impending crisis of global cooling. Climatology researchers pointed to global trends demonstrating a significant and continuing drop in temperatures. In 1980, Carl Sagan, in an episode of his popular television show "Cosmos: A Personal Voyage," warned viewers that we were on the verge of a new ice age and the catastrophic danger resulting from the burning and clear cutting of forests. Of course, 30 years later, scientists know the global cooling theory was incorrect. They now warn of global warming. Politicians and environmentalists call for drastic changes in America's industry and economy to prevent rising seas and planet-wide extinctions.

It is crucial to understand that, just because scientists were wrong about global cooling, it does not follow that they are wrong about global warming. And just because the gas prices predicted in July 2008 didn't materialize in November, it doesn't follow that future predictions about the cost of gasoline are bound to fail. Incorrectly guessing nine coin tosses has no effect on the accuracy of a tenth guess.

No, the lesson to be learned from five-dollar-a-gallon gas and global cooling is that present certainty is often exaggerated. We don't like to admit our own ignorance, even as we are happy to point to ignorance in others. What we can do is deal with ignorance realistically, by operating within a governing structure that maximizes its benefits (the drive for discovery) while minimizing its detriments (the harm from bad ideas). This is where the question of state action and coercion becomes important.

Ignorance and Coercion

The forgotten fact of state action is this: legislation is a mandate for men employed by the state to point guns at our faces. This applies to all legislation, from statutes prohibiting rape to regulations keeping restaurants from allowing their patrons to smoke. The truth of this assertion is easy to demonstrate.

Imagine you have just committed murder. This is against the law, and now the police are after you. If you submit to their authority — if you act in accordance with the laws that

take effect after you've broken the statute prohibiting homicide — then guns don't have to be drawn. But if you don't submit, then men wearing uniforms will most assuredly draw their service revolvers. If you continue to resist, those guns will eventually be aimed and fired at you.

If this weren't the case, state legislation — which is not the self-enforcing laws of society, such as the rules against being rude to your neighbor or lying to your spouse — would have no effect. It would be merely a set of suggestions about how we ought to behave, not rules we are forced to conform to. This holds true even in cases a great deal less serious than murder.

Imagine that, instead of killing someone, you've just received a parking ticket. It's ridiculous, you think. Your car was nowhere near the fire hydrant. So you take the ticket, wad it up, and toss it on the curb. After months of not paying, your car is booted. Not willing to submit to the state's authority, you get a mechanic friend to remove the boot and continue driving. At some point, if you evade enforcement long enough, the state will seek to have you arrested — and resisting arrest will immediately bring those guns to bear.

What the two examples above have in common, however, is that they're both prohibitive laws. Don't murder. Don't park in front of the fire hydrant. It's easy to see how prohibiting citizens from taking certain actions necessitates the threat of force. But what about more positive state actions? What about grants for people to do cancer research?

If the federal government creates a grant for cancer research, providing a huge block of funds for public and private universities working to cure the disease, it certainly doesn't seem to be preventing anyone from taking any action. Indeed, it is facilitating the act of solving one of humanity's most pressing medical problems. Is even this act coercive?

If the money comes from taxing others, then yes, it is coercive. Not paying taxes for long enough will bring out the state's violence in pursuit of the delinquent taxpayer. Thus all of us are coerced into funding cancer research instead of using that money to pay for autism studies or big screen TVs, or cancer research funded in some other way.

What if, instead of taking money directly from taxpayers and transferring it to research institutions, the government granted tax incentives for private parties to donate to cancer research? No one would be forced to fund the universities. People would merely be encouraged to do so. But the trouble here is that the state places a burden on anyone choosing to engage in a non-incentivized activity. It is as if the state were telling us, "Oh, I'm not coercing you. But if you don't act in the way I'd like you to, you're going to pay for someone else to do it." If a company gives away money to cancer research, the government will demand only, say, 20% of each dollar that company earns. If it doesn't make the donation, the government will coerce away 30%.

But why should we be concerned about a coercive state? For many people, the answer is obvious and intuitive. Others have grown used to government coercion and don't realize that state sanction doesn't make an action moral, or prudent in the face of ignorance.

Indeed, we need only recast the state's actions as performed not by a duly elected governing body, but by an individual no different from ourselves, to see just how cautious

we ought to be. Take the innocuous example discussed above. Most of us are happy with the state redirecting tax dollars to cancer research. It is a noble thing for society to do, using its resources to help those most in need. But what if the entity doing the redirecting wasn't Congress but the guy who lives

It is crucial to understand that scientists being wrong about global cooling does not mean that they are wrong about global warming.

across the street? What if he showed up at his neighbor's door one morning, brandishing a firearm, and demanded that the neighbor hand over her money so it might be used to find a cure for cancer?

Chances are that these demands would not be greeted with as much good will as if they came from elected officials. At a fundamental level, we recognize that forcibly taking someone's property against his will is a moral wrong; we're just willing to look the other way when the aggressor is our own government. This is a type of willful ignorance.

Any action that makes us uncomfortable when performed by an individual, however, should also make us uncomfortable — though sometimes, perhaps, to a lesser degree — when performed by the state. And let us not forget that the state is, quite literally, just a collection of individuals to whom we've granted privileges. It does not exist as a thing in and of itself, exempt from the bounds of ignorance. An individual may donate all his money to inefficient medical research or a group of quacks; so may the state, and it may do so with a degree of impunity that private individuals usually do not possess.

This is not to argue that no coercive act by government is ever justified. Instead, we must recognize the moral troubles inherent in coercion, rather than neglecting to examine them just because the organization exercising coercive force is the product of a democratic system. All of us should see coercion as *prima facie* wrong and only change our view on a case-by-case basis — and only when we are presented with considerable evidence against our initial hunch, not simply relying on an ignorant assumption that the government, or the voters, must be right. Any system that assumes otherwise, any system that acts as if coercive force by a particular actor were *prima facie* right — should be viewed with deep suspicion.

Ignorance and Imperatives

As I have said, the existence of ignorance does not mean that we should refrain from action. It does, however, introduce the question of imperative action versus other kinds of action. Imperatives must be distinguished from preferences — and I would argue that only imperatives justify the use of force.

Not every want carries the same weight with the people around us. Not every want creates obligations or even demands respect. That I may want a candy bar does not, in any way, require you to give me one, nor should you particularly care about my preference for Snickers. But if I want medicine for my dying child or want not to get my head beaten in

by a soccer hooligan, then it may be more reasonable for me to expect you to take notice.

Much of what we take to be imperative (“We must do something about all these cars on the roads”) is actually just preference (“I don’t like all these cars on the roads.”). And while it may be permissible, in some circumstances, to use the force of law to fulfill imperatives, the consequences are often undesirably grave when that same force is used in the service of preferences. The preference for expansive homeownership

Forcibly taking someone’s property is a moral wrong; we’re just willing to look the other way when the aggressor is our own government.

among low income Americans led to laws and programs that inflated the housing bubble and precipitated the financial crisis.

The simple fact is that very few people agree on the imperatives for human behavior. We might all agree it’s imperative that people not murder one another, that they not engage in rape, that they not burn down each other’s homes. But all of these fall within a very specific category, the protection of rights in property. If I own my body, it is wrong for you to invade that property by rape or to deprive me of it by murder. The same logic applies to my home. Imperatives can exist in other categories, too, but they diminish quickly outside the generally recognized and understood private property context. Confining people to their homes during a plague outbreak is a likely imperative — supposing that we know, or think we know, that the quarantine will protect other people’s lives. But a preference for a smoke-free environment, which often presents itself as an imperative to take action against deadly secondhand smoke — this is a matter on which serious debate exists about the extent of our understanding. The ban on smoking may be strictly a preference.

The confusion of the two — the ignorant assumption that our personal interests are, in fact, universal — is a common mistake. I prefer urban living. I love having the city close around me, with the option to do nearly anything at a moment’s notice. The crush of humanity is comforting, both for its broad anonymity and for the availability of diverse and interesting personalities. So I might easily assume that all people should live in urban settings so as to enjoy the features I find so enticing. But I would be wrong to think so. Strange as it may appear to me, a great many of my fellow humans cherish the quaint tedium of suburbia. I may think they’re crazy, but it’s their right to be that way. Should I make the judgmental error of turning my preference for urban living into an imperative that all follow my example — and should I use the coercive power of the state to enact my worldview — I would be perpetrating a moral wrong, turning my own sense of “oughts” into the world’s “is.” Instead of learning more about the world that exists, I will be trying to impose my own world, with no moral sanction behind my actions.

The inability to recognize this distinction — between my preferences and the world’s imperatives — is the root cause of many frustrations about freedom. Take so called “market fail-

ure.” When the free market allows a situation that goes against a given preference, those who hold it are quick to claim that the market has failed them. But it is equally true that, while “failing” them, the market has benefited others — namely the people who don’t hold the preference in question.

How to Change the World

How can we go about changing the world? All of us want to do that in some way or other, from making our upcoming dinner tastier than it might otherwise have been to ending the scourge of AIDS. Possible actions to change the world can be divided into three categories: design, experimentation, and evolution.

As is normal in human life, each of the three brings its own unique set of tradeoffs. Recognizing these tradeoffs is a crucial step toward understanding both the benefits and the harms of state action. If one method brings with it considerable costs, we ought to be more concerned if the state dictates its use.

In discussing design, experimentation, and evolution, I draw upon the four concepts that I emphasized before: ignorance, coercion, imperatives, and preferences. How these interact within the three methods exposes the risks and tradeoffs of government action.

Most state actors begin by believing that they are engaged in design work. This is a reasonable attitude, given the type of behavior typically called for by government — and, indeed, for most of the tasks each of us engages in every day.

Let’s say that I want to drive my car to the store. If I’m at home, then I seek to change the state of the world from one less desirable (me at home) to one more desirable (me at the store). All that’s left is for me to design my way between one worldly state and the other.

Why design? Because, presuming I’ve done this sort of thing many times before, I know every step that is necessary. I know I have to go to the garage, get in my car, start it, pull out (after opening the garage door, of course), and then follow a sequence of streets already memorized. The process is easy and, barring random and unlikely circumstances, fool-proof. That is the crucial characteristic of design: the process and needs for success are known (almost) totally in advance. Design, then, is predicated on something close to perfect knowledge.

But any project of significance — any great change to the world — will almost never approach even the degree of “perfect” knowledge I have when making my crosstown drive. Design is ordinarily useful in implementing immediate individual preferences — not great moral or national imperatives.

Of course, this doesn’t stop us from trying to design solutions to problems about which we have far from perfect knowledge, although this often turns puzzles into crises. We see a problem — too few people owning homes, say, or the thinning of bird eggs caused by DDT — and assume that, if we don’t solve it now, with the tools we have, we’ll never solve it. There is absolutely no way any one of us — or any group of us — can have perfect knowledge of the housing market or the global ecosystem, but compelled by our ability to ignore our own ignorance, we pretend that we do.

This leads to the policy equivalent of exorcisms and blood

lettings. Action takes place, but the patient is not made well. Instead, the housing market collapses and millions throughout Africa die from the malaria that returns with the banning of DDT. The risks of design failure grow in proportion to our ignorance. Without perfect knowledge, design will rarely work. For large-scale problems (the kind the state most often seeks to “solve”), we will never have anything close to perfect knowledge.

That’s a large claim, but it has been borne out again and again in experience. We need only look to the failure of centrally planned economies to see an especially tragic example. For a more thorough look at the problems of imperfect knowledge, one can do no better than the work of Friedrich Hayek, whose economic arguments against socialism are hard to surpass. “Human reason can neither predict nor deliberately shape its own future,” Hayek wrote in “The Constitution of Liberty.” “Its advances consist in finding out where it has been wrong.” While such advances are crucial to human progress, the effort of trial and error must be approached cautiously, with a recognition of its limits and a wariness of those who would use coercive power to direct it.

If design, which assumes near-perfect knowledge, is made impossible for most situations by the fact of our ignorance — and thus coercing us into participating in the process is wrong — then experimentation is the next method open to us. If we can’t be sure how to get from point A to point B, then we can try something, see if it works, then try again, with variations if it doesn’t.

This isn’t a bad way of solving problems. It’s responsible for the invention of airplanes, automobiles, and antibiotics. It’s the cornerstone of the scientific method. The problem of ignorance remains, but experimentation offers us a way around it, by chipping away at what we don’t know through a slow but steady increase in what we *do* know. The microchip took a long time to get from Geoffrey W.A. Dummer’s proposal in 1952 to Steve Jobs’ introduction of the iPhone 55 years later, but it works quite well. Couldn’t the state do the same kind of thing?

One difficulty is that experimentation isn’t cheap. Imagine that I want to bake a cake, but I don’t have a recipe. I’m not entirely ignorant of the process: I know that eggs are involved, as are flour, sugar, oil, baking powder, chocolate, and heat. I concoct a combination of these and see what happens. Strangely, the result is not a cake, so I throw it out and try again. The second try is a little better — at least the object rises a bit — but it’s not quite there. Obviously, a lot of ingredients will wind up in the trash before a cake results, if it ever does.

This may be acceptable when all that’s wasted is flour and sugar, but when the experimenter is not a home chef but the state exercising its coercive power, then the experimental costs take the form of people’s lives. To fix healthcare, for instance, we might propose the experiment of a single-payer approach. Clearly, the health of a nation is such a large system that a great deal of ignorance will be present. This rules out the design process, meaning that the state must turn to experiment, with all its wastes — in this case, not the waste of flour but the diminished health of millions, and, very likely, substantial loss of life.

It might be argued that if the eventual benefits of experimenting outweigh the accumulated costs, we are better off

trying and failing than not trying at all. In the aggregate, such a claim sounds plausible. But it risks a perverse form of future-oriented utilitarianism: the wellbeing of potential future people is more important than the wellbeing of the real people who exist today. And we certainly cannot know what the eventual benefits may be; we cannot know whether, for every person whose life is made worse in 2010, some person’s life will be made better in 2100. Our ignorance grows with the size and length of the experiment.

When a private party experiments, the basic costs are internalized to him and anyone who chooses to take part with him. If scientists want to live in Biosphere 2, experimenting with their own lives and the money of their sponsors, they are free to do so. But if the state enacted a policy requiring cities to be 100% ecologically neutral and self-sufficient, the people living there would have no choice about bearing the costs and accepting the benefits.

It is this lack of freedom that makes the distinction between preferences and imperatives so profound. Given the waste inherent in experimentation, it is morally repugnant to force people to give up their livelihoods — or their lives — for a simple preference that the victims may not even hold. Large political imperatives make coerced experimentation more palatable, but only barely. The potential for waste, and even ultimate failure, is so great when the state acts on the macro scale that only the most pressing of imperatives can justify the risks. Again, this is especially true the farther out the goal lies and the less information the state has when conducting its experiment. Thus we should be particularly concerned when the government exercises its coercive power to force us to participate in non-acute and far-from-settled “imperatives” such as alternative energy and aesthetic community restructuring.

Design and experimentation are teleological processes: the designer or experimenter begins with a result in mind and uses the tools available to make that result happen. While they differ in their efficiency and their ability to deal with systemic ignorance, each progresses toward some imagined conclusion.

Evolution, on the other hand, is an algorithm without a goal. In effect, it is experimentation without an experimenter and design without a designer.

Even in the social sphere, we see the dazzling success of evolution. It is difficult to imagine how a goal-oriented experimenter could have created something so lush as human culture. Yet evolution lacks something important. Because it

The confusion — the ignorant assumption that our personal interests are, in fact, universal — is a common mistake.

cannot predict its own results, it cannot be used as a method for producing any specific change, whether preference or imperative. It is logically impossible to “evolve” the implementation of an imperative, for the state or anything else. The only options the state has are design and experimentation, both of which suffer from the problems associated with coercion and ignorance.

If what I have said so far is at all convincing, then the reader should come away not with an equation he can use to decide whether Government X should take action Y, but a general skepticism toward all actions, A through Z and beyond, that Government X might propose. How much skepticism is warranted depends on what kind of action the government is seeking to take, how much knowledge it can bring to bear, and what method it is adopting to execute its plans. These considerations should make us more or less willing to grant the government freedom of action.

The first step in critically examining a proposed state action is to ask whether it is in furtherance of a preference or an imperative. Because coercion is involved in any state action, we should allow the state to act only when it is advancing a true imperative. To do otherwise is to grant the state the ability to decide among competing preferences, effectively giving some citizens (those in control of the state) undue influence over others.

If, however, it is determined that an imperative is in play, we cannot simply give the state free rein. We must next look to the question of ignorance. The greater the government's ignorance in any situation, the greater our skepticism should be. It is always worse to be coerced along a path guided by deep ignorance than one illumined by some degree of knowledge. If you're going to be forced to make a cross-country trip, it's at least nice to know how to get there. Given that ignorance grows as plans are projected into the future, big changes, taking a long time — weaning America from fossil fuels, or fixing public education, for example — tend to be burdened with

much more ignorance than short-term projects, and so should be approached with greater skepticism.

If the state were not ignorant to any significant degree, design would be the best way to implement its imperatives. But state imperatives are almost always so large as to preclude design; the surrounding ignorance is too great. The only method remaining for accomplishing the goal is experimentation — which is, however, both uncertain and costly. The fact that most costs are paid not by the experimenters, but by people coerced into participating in the experiment, should again raise our skepticism about the permissibility of the state's action. The last thing any of us should want is for the state to coerce us into participating in an enormous experiment.

The skeptical attitude should lead us to err on the side of seeing proposed imperatives as actually preferences, and claims to design as masked experiments. The evidence against state ignorance and for a genuine imperative must be vast to overcome this attitude of doubt.

But suppose that doubt never is overcome. Suppose we act on our doubts and keep the state from acting. That doesn't prohibit further action. In the absence of state direction, the powerful force of evolution can work its magic, as successes spread and failures are abandoned by individual people seeking to get the best out of life. And private citizens, spending their own resources, free from coercion and not coercing others, will use the tools of design and experimentation to find individual paths to a better world. We need only look at the fabulous wealth the free market has created to see the value of a healthy skepticism about the ignorant and coercive state. □

Obama the Ordinary, *from page 24*

prosperous. So what's an acceptable number? Seventy percent? One hundred percent? Still, no answer. And no answer is conceivable, given the next contention, that the success of an economy depends on its "ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart."

Every willing heart? I know a person who was a decent football player in a rural high school. He's five feet, eleven inches tall, and he weighs 180 pounds. This young man conceived the idea of starring in the NFL. To get there, he accepted sports scholarships from a series of small, obscure colleges — nonprofit institutions that gave him "opportunity." After many years of this he gave up and joined the Navy. His is the story of a willing heart that had every chance to participate in the great marketplace of American sports. According to President Obama, it is the kind of story that should inspire our nation's economic policy. According to me, it's a story of illusion and failure. It has precisely nothing to do with "our common good." Only the most mediocre, cliché-driven politico could mistake it for an account of the American economy as it ought to be.

Should I blame Obama for failing to test his clichés against such common examples as this? Indeed I should. You, and every other reader of Obama's speeches, can think of a hundred other proofs that his words are nothing but syllables. There are no ideas here — no historic truth, no inspiring wisdom, no insights gained from the experience of life — only the sort of abstractions that a bad writer (likely, more than one bad writer) can generate from the chance impressions of

an ordinary politician.

Distinctive concepts, the fruits of long reflection and careful analysis? Obama has none. Among his political notions, we find the bailout, the stimulus, and government health-care. These notions became giant initiatives, in terms of their economic expenditures and effects; but each of them entailed only a paltry expenditure of intellect, a mere endorsement of discredited notions. Weren't skill and intellect required to get them enacted? By no means. The first two happened quickly, because people were scared; the third happened with excruciating slowness, despite the fact that Obama's party held an immense majority in both House and Senate.

The important thing to remember is that this majority resulted from the people's disgust with the ordinariness of the preceding administration, which in its waning days maintained a popularity rating at the irreducible low of both American parties, 40%. And that's more or less where Obama is now.

Some of the 40% who like Obama are dumb enough to think that he is in fact a genius, simply because he is a member of their party. Some of them are smart enough to see him for what he is, while continuing to vote for him, as the exponent of policies they advocate. This also is ordinary and predictable.

But to another 40%, the people who wouldn't vote for a Democrat if he parted the Red Sea, belongs the choice of politicians who will oppose Obama. The question for them is: what extraordinary men and women do you have among you? And I don't mean extraordinarily stupid. □

I Was a Teenage Liberal

by Robert P. Marcus

No one is born a libertarian. We all have to start somewhere.

I admit it. Back in the '60s I went to Columbia University and emerged as a modern liberal. I had a belief in government by the best and brightest, though my politics were otherwise somewhat vague. In the cloistered halls of my college, I didn't meet many nonliberals. I assumed they were mainly denizens of totalitarian states and third-world sinkholes, plus a few misbegotten souls somewhere in the deep South.

Later, when I actually spent time in the South, I met people who styled themselves conservatives and who were, surprisingly to me, both compassionate and intelligent. This presented something of a conundrum, given my view that only modern liberals so qualified. I solved it by deciding that these people were really liberals; they just didn't like the word. How's that for logic — when confronted with facts that challenged my beliefs, I simply changed the facts. Liberal dogma stayed intact. As I was later to learn, I was not alone in my conceit *cum* political philosophy.

The term "liberal" does have *cache*. I sometimes discover people who are not really modern liberals in any ideological sense of the word but who are enamored of the label and refuse to see themselves differently. The very idea of doing so engenders a bad reaction; it's like waking up in a Kafkaesque nightmare to discover you are a giant cockroach.

Modern liberals derive their political philosophy not from classical liberalism but from late-19th-century progressivism, though they are typically unaware of this. Nevertheless, while

vague on the provenance of their ideology, they are supremely confident of their compassion and intelligence, and often, like many modern conservatives, eager to force their political vision on those who do not share their mental and moral advantages. For a long time, I had no idea what liberalism really meant. I thought it was a political philosophy; I discovered it was a state of mind.

Ask modern liberals, "What is the purpose of government?" Almost invariably they will treat it as if it were a trick question. When pressed, their answer is usually some variation on "To make people healthy, wealthy, and wise." Fair enough, but that is not what the founders of our country had in mind. As they stated in the Declaration of Independence, governments are instituted to preserve our rights. That is the purpose of government, no more and no less. It's hard to understand how people can read the Declaration without realizing how far they have strayed from its precepts. It's almost as if they visualized a different Declaration, a Declaration of the Divine Right of Liberals:

"We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that some Men

are created more compassionate and intelligent than others, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Welfare, Redistribution, and the Pursuit of Cosmic Justice. That to manifest their Paternalism, Governments are instituted among Men, basing their populism on the Politics of Envy; that whenever any Rule of Law becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of Liberals to reinterpret it, and to institute new meaning, laying its Foundation on such Prejudices, and in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Will over others."

Winston Churchill famously suggested that liberalism is an affliction of the young and idealistic, an affliction that in a healthy individual runs its course with age.

I was still in college when JFK issued his famous dictum, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Now, I was OK with the first clause; I had a long wishlist for my family, friends, and especially for my girlfriend, but little that I actually wanted from my government, other than to keep the streets safe. Okay, maybe subsidized student loans, but that was about it.

On the other hand, what was I supposed to do for my country, except to pay taxes on my small earnings and stand ready to put on a uniform when my student deferment was up?

I had volunteered for Civil Defense, though I was unimpressed with its leadership, its clarity of mission, and its pitiful resources. I remember being promised that in the event of a national disaster, civil defense wardens would be taken care of first. That made a kind of sense, but it left a bad taste in my mouth.

I thought of signing up for NROTC (the Navy version of ROTC), but I couldn't qualify because of my uncorrected vision. That seemed idiotic to me, since there would be plenty of room for my eyeglasses on a battleship, and even on a smaller vessel if such was my lot.

After I graduated I took an interest in the Foreign Service. I went through an inept screening process and met some very mediocre people. Doubts began to creep in. The final straw was a pamphlet entitled "Protocols for a Junior Foreign Service Officer." The chapter on seating people at a table expounded the various rules, but for groups of a certain size it was impossible to meet all of them. So it was suggested that one simply not have groups of those unfortunate sizes. What was one to do – not invite someone who should have been invited, or invite someone who shouldn't have been? I decided that perhaps this was not an organization in which I would prosper. I finally despaired of any job in the public sector. Noble as government service might be, I could best serve my country by being a good citizen, paying my taxes, and adding to the GNP.

I learned a lot about liberalism over the years, sometimes in surprising circumstances. I once attended a private showing of a film called "Prejudice." It was supposed to be a study of racial discrimination. It centered on a group of men of various races discussing how they were either the perpetrators (the whites) or the victims (everyone else) of prejudice. No one fitted into a neutral category. Just perps and victims. The group made short work of one man who steadfastly held that he was neither. I remember one black man complaining about how uncomfortable he felt walking through a certain commu-

nity. Well, it just so happened that a few weeks earlier, I had found myself driving in that same forbidding community. I had locked my car doors, hunkered down in my seat, and fingered my can of Mace. And I'm not black. Some neighborhoods are just not that friendly. Prejudice? Sometimes a cigar is only a cigar.

The discussion period after the documentary was what I would label "a liberal guilt wallow." Virtually every attendee was beating his breast and confessing personal responsibility for racism, even slavery. A number of white-haired women who looked like Norwegian grandmothers confessed to all kinds of guilt, though always nonspecifically. When it was my turn – we were all expected to confess – I started by pointing out, no insult intended, that the overwhelming majority of the people there appeared to come from good peasant stock, like myself. I stated categorically that I owned no slaves, and neither had my father or his fathers before him. Otherwise, I'm sure someone would have mentioned the fact.

I tried to make clear that I was not insensitive to issues of prejudice, having, as a Jew, been on the receiving end of both subtle and unsubtle forms of it. Nevertheless, not all the problems in life are attributable to prejudice. The fault, dear Brutus, lies in ourselves sometimes. I even pointed out that I had black friends, and that my fraternity in college was the first to pledge blacks. I was Pledge Master at the time, and I might add that I scrupulously saw that they had to swallow exactly the same number of goldfish that everyone else did. *Disclaimer: No goldfish were harmed in this event.* No matter; thereafter I was treated like an unrepentant sinner at a revival meeting.

So what is modern liberalism? It has a murky history and it has a dark side – a willingness to force solutions on people who do not want them. A complete definition of modern liberalism might read as follows:

Modern liberalism . . . the heartfelt desire to impose one's values and choices on the powerless for their own good (cf. conservatism, which also sanctions coercion, but heartlessly); in politics . . . the belief that all human problems can be solved by wise government and tax dollars; in philosophy . . . the Platonic ideal of a government of the best and brightest, without a clue about how to achieve it; in economics . . . the belief that free markets are suspect and that capitalism is inherently immoral (cf. Marxism-lite); in psychology . . . the self-congratulatory delusion that one holds a monopoly on compassion and intelligence; in race relations . . . a modern belief in "the white man's burden"; in law . . . a belief that the Constitution is a mere collection of words, given meaning only by current political appointees, based on their social-political prejudices and without reference to original meaning or intent (cf. Newspeak); in morality . . . a belief that good intentions are more important than consequences; in government . . . a belief that any government program is workable, given good intent and more funding; in theology . . . the New Age belief that we can heal the world through wallowing in guilt; in public policy . . . a curious belief that consenting adults should be free of government interference in the bedroom but not in the workplace.

There you have it – not a pretty sight.

For a depiction of the darker side of modern liberalism,

continued on page 54

Reviews

"A Generation Awakes: Young Americans for Freedom and the Creation of the Conservative Movement," by Wayne Thorburn. Jameson Books, 2010, 558 pages.

Starting a Movement

Stephen Cox

Suppose you want to learn the history of the libertarian movement. What books should you read?

Before finding an answer to that question, you'd need to make a rough definition of what you mean by "libertarian movement." If you regard the Founding Fathers, or certain 19th-century abolitionists, or the ancient Stoics, or some obscure early Renaissance philosopher as essentially libertarian, you can go and read books about them; but it will take you a long time before you get to the libertarian movement that we know today. You can say, with Albert Jay Nock, that Rabelais was "one of the world's great libertarians," because he imagined a community in which the rule was "do as thou wilt," but it's very doubtful that the libertarian movement began in the 16th century.

Movements should be defined, not in terms of all their possible sources or distant predecessors, but in terms of the people and ideas that seem most

likely to have given them their distinctive shape — in other words, in terms of their distinct and proximate influences.

I think this leads us to a definition of the libertarian movement as something that established an independent outline in the 1930–80 period, the period in which some conservatives and old-fashioned liberals stated their ideas in a way that made them different from those of most modern conservatives and most modern liberals — and, in the words of that sage of public relations, Dale Carnegie, began to win friends and influence people.

Now, because the dominant intellectual regime of America during the 1930–80 period was the kind of modern liberalism associated with the New Deal, and libertarians dissented from that regime, they usually found more friends among conservatives than liberals, and there was a great deal of mutual influence between libertarians and conservatives. Most of the old libertarians called themselves conservatives at one time or another and in one

way or another. Even Ayn Rand, who among them became the greatest foe of conservatism, once classed herself with the conservatives. And the history of the modern conservative movement is inseparable from the history of the libertarian movement. Indeed, most authorities regard the formation of an institutionalized modern conservative movement, which is usually dated from the foundation of William F. Buckley's *National Review* in 1955, as an alliance of traditionalist conservatives, formerly liberal anticommunists, and libertarians.

To study this aspect of conservatism, one should start with the path-breaking book by George H. Nash, "The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, since 1945" (1976). More of Nash's book is devoted to people whom I would call conservatives than to people whom I would call libertarians, because the former were more numerous; but his book is still the indispensable introduction to the intellectual history of both movements. It

is an engaging study — a study of real people, of real personal interest. One should also read a good biography of Buckley. I think the best is still John B. Judis' "William F. Buckley, Jr." (1988). Judis is a left-liberal, but that doesn't hurt the story.

On the strictly libertarian side, continuing the history that Nash began is Liberty's contributing editor Brian Doherty, in "Radicals for Capitalism:

The basic narrative is emphatically that of individuals with pungent views and unforgettable personalities.

A Freewheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement" (2007). The basic narrative is emphatically that of individualists with pungent views and unforgettable personalities. Continuing, then, with the early libertarians: Charles H. Hamilton's introduction to his fine collection of Nock's essays — "The State of the Union: Essays in Social Criticism" (1991) — remains the best biographical treatment of that figure. Liberty's senior editor Bruce Ramsey has written a beautifully researched biography of the financial and historical writer Garet Garrett, whose popularity was strong in the 1930s: "Unsanctioned Voice" (2008). William Holtz contributed a solid biography of Rose Wilder Lane, "The Ghost in the Little House" (1993). It is short on Lane's politics but long on her adventures, which were many, even if one doesn't believe all her stories about them. For Ayn Rand, one cannot do without Barbara Branden's "The Passion of Ayn Rand" (1986) and Anne Heller's new "Ayn Rand and the World She Made" (2009). I'm not hesitant to mention my own "The Woman and the Dynamo: Isabel Paterson and the Idea of America" (2004).

Now add to this list of basic histories the new book by Wayne Thorburn. It is a history not of an individual but of an organization, YAF — Young Americans for Freedom — once the premier youth organization on the Right. YAF began in 1960 and developed even

more rapidly than its leftwing contemporary, Students for a Democratic Society. YAF was a conservative organization, but it included many libertarians. Mr. Thorburn has written on this subject for Liberty; his essay appears in our October 2010 issue. There he shows how many important libertarians were also important in YAF, and how significant YAF's internal debates between libertarians and conservatives were in defining what libertarianism meant to young people of the '60s and '70s.

This in no sense means, nor does Thorburn imply, that libertarians are merely a sect of dissident conservatives. Libertarians have their own history of ideas. Yet that history often crosses the history of conservatives, just as it crosses the history of modern liberals. It's not only that libertarians endorse many modern conservative positions, such as the idea of limited government and fastidious interpretation of the Constitution, and many modern liberal positions, such as the idea that drugs and sex should be fully legal for all adults. Modern libertarians, modern conservatives, and modern liberals are all branches of the great tree of liberalism, planted in the early 18th century and bearing rich and various fruit in the writings of Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Smith, Madison, Wollstonecraft, Jefferson, Burke, De Tocqueville, Macaulay, and Mill — all of whom began, at least, as "liberals," advocates of individual liberty.

So it's not surprising that many libertarians got their early political experience in a "conservative" political organization. It's not surprising, either, that the conservative organization, YAF, should also have been in a dither about so many completely non-libertarian issues, most of them having to do with the religious and "moral" tone of the nation; or that young libertarians should have used the education in activism that YAF gave them to reject YAF and start their own ideological enterprises.

We need to know this history, and Thorburn gives it to us in an extraordinarily well researched book. He has fought his way through jungles of libertarian and conservative periodicals, many of them obscure or fugitive in their own time; he has read many books; he has conducted many inter-

views; he has ransacked the manuscript archives of many libraries; and he has clearly *organized* the important facts he has found. The result is a daunting work of scholarship, one of the most thorough ever conducted on a subject of this kind. It will never be surpassed; no one will ever do this work again.

I asked Thorburn about the history of his project, and this is what he said: "As one who spent a considerable amount of his youth involved in YAF, I wanted to ensure there was a complete history of the organization and the impact it had on creating both organizations and leaders who influenced late 20th-century American politics and society. I left a position in Texas state government in 2007 after ten years and had some time to devote to this project."

As someone familiar with archival research, I can testify that three years or so is a shockingly short time in which to assemble all the information that Thorburn presents. He must have been working night and day. And don't be misled by his reference to his youthful years with YAF. He is by no means a partisan. He is one of the coolest historians I have ever read.

One of the good things about his book is that it conscientiously presents all the opinions — or, to dignify them, "recollections" — that it can gather regarding important events; it notes the differences among them, which are often vast; and whenever possible it compares them with real and documented history. Thorburn insists on this as a principle of method: you can "remember" all you want, but if there's a document out there that contradicts you, he will bring it to the fore. He

It's not surprising that the conservative organization YAF was in a dither about so many nonlibertarian issues.

doesn't do so with an ironic purpose, as I might; he plays it straight and lets his readers make their own response. It seems to me that this is truly a libertarian performance. Thorburn's scholarship presents; it does not impose.

Many libertarians hold the opinion that the 1969 convention of YAF was a kind of Armageddon at which self-identified libertarians and self-identified conservatives hurled lightning bolts at one another, then parted, never to meet again on this side of the grave; and thus the libertarian movement began. Thorburn isn't quite so sure. The more one considers the details, the more the drama ebbs away. Yes, there was a huge quarrel. Yes, the self-identified libertarians failed to win internal elections or get their views enacted as resolutions, and loud arguments broke out. Yet most libertarians appear to have continued in the organization, where their strength is reliably estimated at about 25%. That's a lot, though it is not everything. It's not true that "the conservatives stole the org from us."

Neither is it true, as some people may think, that YAF was the origin of the libertarian movement. It wasn't. It is true that YAF, just as Thorburn describes it, was the spearhead of anti-statist student activism in the 1960s; and it's probably not possible to find large numbers of libertarian *activists*, in the way that leftwingers were activists, existing before YAF. But the libertarian movement had existed, both as a set of ideas and as groups of people advocating them, for at least two generations prior. This intellectual movement had mounted organizations and periodicals, and its members had contributed very influentially to mainstream publishing. Many of its leading lights — Nock, Paterson, Garrett, Lane, Rand, John Chamberlain, H.L. Mencken, Friedrich Hayek — were known to the nation; they needed no activists to advertise their views. And if you go back to the '30s and read what the Liberty League published, you will see that a militant (adult) organization with essentially libertarian principles existed long before YAF.

As for "young Americans," let's face it: the 1960s could not have passed without activist organizations of every stripe. Rebellious youth will create rebellious groups. Among them, there was bound to be something like YAF, although YAF, remarkably, seems to have predated the rest of the '60s activist organizations (depending on how exactly you define them). There was

also bound to be a libertarian activism — whether associated with YAF, or nurtured by rebellion from YAF, or oblivious to YAF.

I confess my own bias: I was alive back then, more or less, and I was oblivious to YAF. It looked to me like a bunch of young fogeys, dressed in suits and ties and shouting something about radical regression. That was a superficial view, as Thorburn shows; you could find every kind of person in YAF, even people after my own silly heart. But I think I was right in a way. YAF wasn't the origin of the libertarian movement, not just because Isabel Paterson had identified all of that movement's crucial ideas, three decades before, but because no organization of that kind could express libertarians' informal, individual, virtually anarchistic *style*. What I see in Thorburn's history is conservatives and libertarians writing manifestoes, circulating resolutions, and campaigning for in-group elections, as if this were something vital and important. Even the "anarchists" in YAF did that. It wasn't a libertarian style, and most of the young libertarians abandoned it.

I am not objecting to political organizations. If libertarians work effectively within the Libertarian Party, the Republican Party, or the Democratic Party, I commend them. I admire the long, excruciatingly boring hours they spend in committee meetings — bad work, if you can get it. But there's a difference between action and a parody of action. What I see in YAF, as in some organizations of libertarian activists, is too often a parody of political action — and a reality of political arrogance.

Both libertarians and conservatives have long lamented the nasty effects that political power can have on individual personalities. We see this constantly among employees of the state; we see it also among many of the militants who attack the state — people who, to paraphrase William Blake, have "become what they beheld."

I recall, from my own stints of student activism, how severely personalities can be deformed when they are presented with even the forms of power. I saw it in myself. I see it now in college kids involved in student government, where they scheme for votes, "forge alliances," cadge support for res-

olutions that no one else will ever read, and "take hard decisions" and "adopt firm positions" about issues they have thought about for at most a minute. Thorburn's history is loaded with intra-YAF politicking of this kind.

The assumption of every student organization in the 1960s was that everything it did would influence the

Both libertarians and conservatives have long lamented the nasty effects that political power can have on people.

course of the republic. If YAF or SDS passed a resolution or conducted a demonstration, something important was expected to happen as a result. It almost never did. Americans did listen, in a way, to certain leftwing demonstrators, because the American establishment was (and is) modern liberal, and the demonstrators were merely expressing, in dramatic form, the beliefs that their parents already held. (That last is Ayn Rand's point, and it's a good one. When I was a leftwing "activist," I never met any leader of the revolution who didn't come from a wealthy family, and usually from a politically influential family, of leftist principles.)

But suppose that YAF's ideas were good (as many of them were) and deserved to be listened to. Why should a student organization assume that it ought to instruct the rest of the country? Historically, this is an un-American idea; it has almost never come up in America. There was the Young America movement in the 1850s, which incited the nation to annex foreign territory and generally behave in an aggressive manner, but the Young Americans were actually writers and politicians of quite adult years. There were leftist youth organizations, mainly socialist or communist, in the 1930s, but nobody except other far-leftists paid much attention to them, except occasionally to satirize them.

Even in the abstract, student activism is a peculiar idea. Why should students get active in telling other people what to do? The question answers

itself. Granted, one can hardly imagine a group of randomly selected college students who would have governed the country worse than Lyndon Baines Johnson and Robert Strange McNamara, but they're too easy a target.

Looking back, I can summon very little respect for student activism *per se*. I can — like Thorburn — summon a great deal of respect for the people who survived it, learned from it, and devoted years thereafter to productive work for liberty, as authors, researchers, leaders of movements that might actually win some battles, or just people willing to stand up to their neighbors and express the principles of liberty.

Principles of liberty . . . where do they come from? Were they ever originated by YAF, or the Libertarian Party, or any other organization, politically effective or politically ineffective? Give me an example. Until you do, I'm not going to believe that a committee or a party or any kind of Americans for X ever gave birth to an inspiring idea. What Thorburn's book suggests to me (I speak for myself, not Thorburn) is that there's a world of political ideas and a world of political people, and when we're lucky, the former gives birth to the latter; but never does the latter give birth to the former.

An example: Murray Rothbard, the economist and political leader (and senior editor of *Liberty*), was important in the libertarian movement because of his lucid and compelling expositions of economic thought, not because of his eager political activity. Rothbard the politician could never have generated Rothbard the intellectual. In the 1960s and '70s, a few young people read Rothbard and became, at least for the moment, political activists. Many more read Rothbard and thought, "Say, a lot of this makes sense," and gave their vote and their dollars to whatever "libertarian" or "conservative" or "liberal" cause appeared to serve the cause of liberty, as Rothbard had helped to clarify it.

Those people were true, though becomingly modest, libertarian "activists" — men and women who had, and have, strong, long-term, often influential libertarian principles. They became libertarians, not because they attended a convention, but because they read a book. It might have been a book by

Rothbard. It might have been a book by Hayek, Or Ludwig von Mises. Or Paterson. Or Friedman. Or even Goldwater or Buckley. Later, it might have been a book by P.J. O'Rourke. All the hundreds of movement members whom Thorburn catalogues don't add up to even one good writer — although they sometimes turned into good writers, on their own.

Writers write. Voters vote. Capitalists invest and strive for profits. Organized researchers, such as those of the Cato

Institute and the Mises Institute and the Institute for Humane Studies, do research and teach. Lobbyists meet people and introduce them to new ideas. What do activists do, in the throes of their self-conscious activism? In my experience, they don't do much, and that's probably a good thing. In my experience — and it may not be representative — the degree to which people are overt activists is generally proportional to the number of books they haven't read and the number of people they

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haven't met. That's why activism is so appropriate to the young.

When I was a young libertarian — back in the days of YAF, though not in its early days — I read a few libertarian authors. I read Rand, Mises, and Rothbard, principally. From my reading I identified certain principles I called my own. The fact that my ideas kept changing as I went from one author to the next (just as they had when I had been a callow leftist) didn't keep me from regarding them as defining principles. From the existence of these principles I deduced the goodness or badness of the people who held or rejected them, people who, for the most part, I had never met. The fact that these people seemed to have been influenced by different books than I had read gave me the right to call them bitter names and grow upset by their existence.

This is a terrible thing to say about oneself. The only exculpation that occurs to me is that I engaged in very little actual activism, compared with Thorburn's young libertarians and conservatives. I wasn't morally opposed to doing so; I certainly didn't feel that I was too ignorant to direct the course of the nation (quite the contrary). I was just too shy and self-conscious, and I had to worry about keeping up with my classes and having enough money to stay in school.

Alas for those days! As the character in Chaucer says, the devil go therewith. Forgive me, and all of Thorburn's 20-year-olds. Yet some of his leading characters were not 20-year-olds at the time. Some of them were adults and should have known better than to fall victim to political trends in the way that callow young people did. Some of the crucial debates within YAF were between adults who believed that the libertarian movement stood for essentially the same things that the Black Panthers and SDSers did, and adults who believed that the conservative movement should be devoted to rooting out marijuana and keeping porn out of the hands of grandmothers. Adults should have known better, and done better.

Fortunately, both the libertarian and the conservative movements have, by and large, moved forward from there. The evidence that Thorburn presents shows clearly that most people in

YAF moved forward also. They moved forward because of their own wider experience and wider reading, not because of any advice from a political organization.

The older I grow, the more I value the root of liberty, which is the individual heart and mind. Societies don't

learn. Parties don't learn. Organizations don't learn. And people who define themselves in terms of societies, parties, and organizations don't learn either. Individuals learn, and in their learning lies the strength of all organizations, all parties, and all societies that deserve the name of human. □

"Get Low," directed by Aaron Schneider. Sony Pictures, 2009, 100 minutes.

Grave Doubts

Jo Ann Skousen

"Get Low" is about as close to perfect as a movie can get. It has mystery, romance, danger, comedy, beautiful cinematography, great characterization, and a wonderful story. Its muted sepia-brown palette and rich natural lighting contribute to its somber 1930s atmosphere. Most of all, it has Robert Duvall.

Duvall began his film career as Boo Radley, the ghostlike title character hiding behind the bedroom door in the final scene of "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1962). In the 1970s he hit the big time with roles in the award-winning "Godfather" series and big-budget films such as "Network" and "Apocalypse Now." Who can forget his iconic line, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning"? Duvall used the fame (and money) he earned from those films to produce films he really cared about — thoughtful, character-driven movies such as "Tender Mercies" (1983), "The Apostle" (1997), and "Crazy Heart" (2009) (see my review, April).

"Get Low" may be his best film

yet. It is inspired by the true story of Tennessee hermit Felix "Bush" Brazeale, who threw himself a funeral party in 1938, five years before he actually died. The film also owes a little creative debt to Mark Twain. But the story created by Chris Provenzano goes far beyond the narcissistic desire to hear what others might say about one at one's own funeral. "Get Low" is a story of unresolved guilt, self-imposed atonement, and eventual redemption.

Felix Bush (Duvall) is a grizzled old codger living in self-imposed isolation in a one-room cabin he built for himself. The family graveyard is filled, not with people, but with the remains of his dogs, and he talks by choice only to his mule. Everyone in town has a story to tell about him, and not one of those stories is nice. They are afraid to tell him what they have heard about him, because his anger is swift and his retaliation is physical. "Gossip is the devil's radio," one resident explains.

Nevertheless, there is something endearing about this old coot. Like the grandfather in "Heidi" (1937), he is imprisoned by a dark secret that has broken his heart. We know there is

something more to him than the neighborhood gossips see. "People believe what they want to believe. They make it up most of the time. Nobody knows what's really true." Finding the courage to tell the true story is Felix's real reason for staging his funeral.

He first goes to the local preacher (Gerald McRaney) and asks to buy a funeral. Instead, Reverend Horton asks him, "Are you right with God?" "I've paid," Felix responds somberly. "You can't buy forgiveness," Horton tries to explain. "It's free. But you do have to ask for it." These are wise words that would give comfort to most sinners. But Felix doesn't want comfort. He has been carrying his guilt around like a penance for 40 years.

Felix next turns to the local undertaker, Frank Quinn (Bill Murray). Quinn's pragmatic approach to business and death and Murray's perfectly understated delivery provide many comic moments throughout the film. In his first scene he is lamenting how slow business has been. "Not a person has died in weeks!" he complains. "What are the odds of a funeral home going broke?" When his long-suffering assistant, Buddy (Lucas Black) tells him about seeing Felix with a wad of money at the church, Quinn responds gleefully, "Hermit money!", and the funeral party is underway.

Quinn is a great example of a good businessman. Yes, he is motivated by money, but not by greed. He understands that in the free market both the buyer and the seller gain. Whether he is selling cars or caskets, Quinn knows that in the end, the customer will value the product more, and he will value the cash more. Both walk away happy. Sometimes one or the other will regret his choice later, but that's part of the free market too. When Buddy worries that people won't show up for the funeral party and Bush will be disappointed, his wife wisely tells him, "You aren't responsible for what other people do. Just you."

While arranging the details of his funeral party, Felix reconnects with recently widowed Mattie (Sissy Spacek), the woman he courted 40 years ago. He hasn't seen her in all that time, yet she is still beautiful. Spacek is another perfectly cast character. We remember her youthful beauty in such films

as "Carrie," "Coal Miner's Daughter," and "Crimes of the Heart," films we continue to see on television. Now suddenly she is 30 years older, gray-haired, wrinkled — and radiantly beautiful. We know what Felix sees and feels, because we see and feel it too.

We know that Mattie is somehow connected to Felix's secret, but not in the expected way; it isn't about their romance or unrequited love. The mystery of his secret unfolds slowly. He has carried this burden for 40 years, and he isn't going to reveal it easily. Perhaps, after all this time, he isn't entirely confident in his own memory. "Right and wrong, good and bad, truth and lie — it's all tangled up together," he says at one point. And he's probably right. Many of us harbor painful memories and stories that, if told from the perspective of other people and their memories, would be completely different.

Who knows what is really true? The gradual revelation of Bush's sorrow allows us to step inside his heart and experience the anguish of his remorse, substituting our own secret sorrows in the process.

The title of this film has many possible meanings. The most obvious reference is to the funeral itself — getting six feet below the ground. In the church it means humbling oneself enough to seek and receive forgiveness. When Felix first meets with Quinn he says, "Let's get low — you know, let's get down to business," and they talk about the financial arrangements of the funeral party. In the end, I think it's all of these things. Felix needs to bury the guilt-ridden soul he has become, ask for forgiveness from the one he has wronged, and then get on with the business of life. It takes a wise man to realize this while he's still living. □

"Eat Pray Love," directed by Ryan Murphy. Columbia Pictures, 2010, 133 minutes.

Everything but "Think"

Jo Ann Skousen

Investment guru Howard Ruff used to joke about writing the perfect bestseller. It would be titled, "How I Found God and Lost Weight while Having Great Sex and Making a Million Dollars." That seemed to cover all the bases for self-help books. It might also explain the popularity of "Eat Pray Love," Liz Gilbert's chatty memoir about a year she spent traveling the world trying to find herself. In the film, her husband (Billy Crudup) pleads, "Why can't you find yourself in our marriage?" But evidently she thought

she might have misplaced herself in Italy, India, or Indonesia, since that's where she went looking.

Notice that all of these countries begin with the letter "I." It says a lot about the source of Gilbert's angst and the scope of her search. The book and the movie on which it is based are less about self-discovery than about self-absorption. In the book she whines, she cries, she whines some more. But it's hard to feel sorry for someone who has the wherewithal to travel around the world for a year. Yes, her writing style is funny and open, with short, easy-to-read anecdotal chapters. But she

turns everyone into her own personal shrink. Moreover, she never seems to realize that she spends most of her time with expatriates instead of locals, so she never really engages with the local culture she sets out to embrace. Yes, she eats, she prays, and she loves, but she does it mostly with Europeans, Americans, and Brazilians.

The film based on her memoirs is less whiny, but it still lacks any depth of discovery. It ends where it begins, with Liz dabbling in meditation and in love with a man who requires that she completely change her style of life. As it begins, Liz (Julia Roberts) decides she doesn't want to be married any longer to her handsome, loving husband. The final straw for her? She wants him to come with her on a business trip to Aruba, while he plans to return to college for a master's degree. That certainly sounds like grounds for separation to me!

I guess we are expected to admire her courage in being true to herself, except that her first step in that search is to move in with a handsome, loving actor (James Franco) and immediately embrace his own style of life, including his furnishings (Spartan), diet (vegan), and religion (he's a yogi). As she puts it, "I dove out of my marriage and into Dave's arms." So far, she hasn't learned a thing. You don't find yourself by embracing someone else's life.

Eventually Liz hits on a plan to spend a year abroad, where she will eat in Italy, pray in India, and find balance in Bali. As she tells us, "Americans know entertainment, but not pleasure." She takes pleasure in eating pizza and pasta, in bicycle rides around the countryside, and in the friendships she makes during her four months in Italy. It's almost insulting, however, when Liz self-righteously recommends saying a prayer before eating a feast in the home of a deeply traditional Italian family and teaches them to hold hands around the table. Director Ryan Murphy has the family matriarch react as though she had never prayed before, but come on — they're in the heart of Catholicism! If the grandmother is surprised by anything, it would be that they aren't making the sign of the cross.

When Liz arrives at the ashram in India, she is assigned to scrub floors as her "selfless devotional work required of everyone who stays here." I had to

laugh; it sounded so much like Obama's oxymoronic "mandatory volunteer service" plan. If it's mandatory and it's unpaid, it's slavery. And if it's required of those who live there, it isn't selfless. It's an exchange.

Liz doesn't do well with meditation. In fact, she says, "Now I'm at the source but I feel more disconnected than ever." She falls asleep during meditation or uses the time to plan her day. After a fellow inmate (I'm not sure what else to call them) spends four weeks in silence, she ends her vow with a gushing babble of words about how healthy the experience was for her throat, but nothing about how it has affected her spirit. In short, Liz's time in India seems to be spent in an effort to empty herself, without filling herself with anything good.

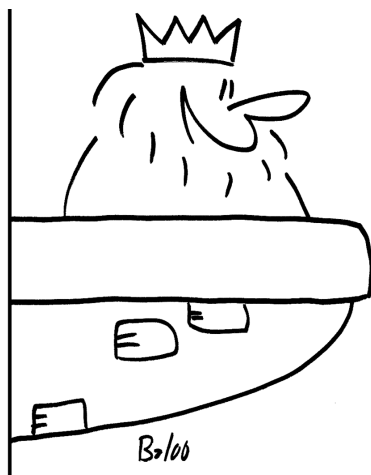
In Bali she becomes more balanced — not too much God, not too much pleasure. She learns to embrace the stillness of meditation when it is by her choice and not by an imposed regimen. But she still hasn't found the courage to be herself. She needs alcohol to let go of her inhibitions, dance, and have fun. She also finds love again, this time in the form of a hunky Brazilian gem merchant, Felipe (Javier Bardem). Once again, it is all about the "I." In the book Gilbert writes luxuriously about Felipe's "growing into the role of being my attendant knight."

Felipe's life is in the Pacific; Liz's career is in New York. She writes, "I've been watching the expatriate society in Ubud, and I know for a stone-cold fact this is not the life for me." Nevertheless, when Felipe suggests that they divide

their time between the two places, a compromise that seems to be a metaphor for the balance she is trying to achieve, she happily agrees. Cue music and sunset.

Finding the balance between satisfying physical and spiritual desires is nothing new. The ancient Greeks developed opposite philosophic camps: the Epicureans, who embraced physical pleasure, and the Stoics, who rejected it in search of a higher plane of spiritual enlightenment. Nearly all religions incorporate some form of physical denial in the search for faith and spirituality. Herman Hesse's "Siddhartha" is a modern example of a man who seeks fulfillment in sacrifice by living with ascetic monks, then travels to the world of business and gluttony, and finally returns to the middle ground where he finds peace of mind through a balanced serenity. In short, Gilbert's journey is nothing new, nor is her discovery of the importance of balance. Her book is successful because the quest itself resonates within the human psyche.

What did Liz Gilbert learn after all, and what do her readers find fascinating about the book? I'm still not sure. I suppose it's different for each reader. That's the nature of self-help books. To me, Liz's Italian landlady gives her the most valuable advice in the film when she says, "The only thing permanent in life is family." It's good to get away for a while, but it's also good to have someone to come back to. Falling in love is a heady, overwhelming experience, but *staying* in love—now there's the challenge. And the reward. □



"I know it seems like a war, but it's actually an all-out struggle for peace!"

"Step Up 3D," directed by John Chu. Walt Disney Studios, 2010, 97 minutes.

Selling Out

Jo Ann Skousen

Sometimes it's the values filmmakers take for granted that reveal the most about cultural trends. Take "Step Up 3D," for example, the most recent of choreographer-producer Adam Shankman's films about street kids who dance. There's only one genuine reason to watch these films, and that's for the dancing. And wow, can these kids dance! But it's the things the kids don't do that reveal the most about this generation's attitudes toward work, play, and most importantly, pay.

The films borrow heavily from traditional story formulas to create a loose conflict around which the kids can perform their dances. The plot of this one is similar to those of the old Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland films: "Hey kids, let's put on a show to save the farm!" Here, the "farm" is a Manhattan warehouse that has been converted to a performance gym-flophouse-dance club. Luke's parents bought the building and renovated it, but they died in a car accident and now Luke (Rick Malambri) is struggling to pay the mortgage while opening the house to dozens of homeless dancers. Five months behind in the payments, he needs to win the World Jam Dance contest and its \$100,000 prize money, or the house will be foreclosed and all the kids will be back on the streets. Julien (Joe Slaughter), the captain of a rival dance team, has threatened to buy the house as soon as it goes into foreclosure, using money he has inherited from his wealthy parents.

This story is a simple, useful vehicle for presenting an amazing array of contemporary street dances, including hip-hop, krump, b-boy, pop-n-lock, stepping, and some new moves so creative that they don't have official names yet. The 3D format works especially well, enhancing the audience's appreciation of the dance performances rather than focusing on 3D camera tricks that are becoming far too familiar.

Street dancing is one of the most liberating and libertarian of dance styles, as well as the most physically demanding. As with jazz, there are no rules per se, except to push the boundaries as far as they can go. Until recently, when TV shows like "So You Think You Can Dance" began to legitimize this style of dance, there were few formal classes in the style, beyond a watered-down version of hip-hop. Instead, street dancers have learned from one another, creating their own styles and techniques.

The athleticism and physical strength of these performers is often jaw-dropping, as they support their body weight on their fingertips, spin on their heads, rise up sideways using just the muscles in an ankle, and leap from the equivalent of a rooftop. They can isolate their body movements to create a ripple effect or appear to leave their heads hanging in midair while the shoulders gyrate. All this is performed in time to energetic music and in perfect sync with a "crew" of dancers who practice together in parking lots, basements, and gyms. The tone is often aggressive and in-your-face, but it is

just as likely to be playful and even joyful. If you love dancing (and I do) these films are a great way to enjoy a couple of hours.

But back to our story, and my concern about how it resolves Luke's problem about how to save the group house and its dance studio. The film presents only two options for raising the money: win the dance jam prize, or inherit wealth from a rich relative. No one in this film works or appears to have a job. In fact, when Luke decides to get a job at a diner, he is criticized for "selling out" and ends up walking out in the middle of his shift, never to return. The one crew member who attends college is constantly encouraged to cut classes in order to attend dance practices. Supporting the community is vastly more important than supporting the individual.

Meanwhile, the filmmakers completely overlook two obvious (to me) free-market solutions. First, on the ground floor of the warehouse Luke operates a thriving, crowded, dance club where hip young people come to dance together and show off their moves. He appears to keep it open as a community center, however, with no tickets or remuneration of any kind. Imagine how much money he could raise if he simply charged admission!

A second possible solution involves a second storyline. It concerns a young NYU student, Moose (Adam G. Sevani) who majors in electrical engineering by day and dances with Luke's crew by night. Using his engineering skills, he creates a small light attached to a magnet that both provides its electromagnetic power and makes it instantly attachable to any steel surface. The other dancers love tossing the neon colored "fireflies" at wire cables and even give them a name, "neo-lights." I leaned over to a companion and said, "Aha! They'll market the neo-lights and save the day." But that thought never enters their minds. Yes, they use the neo-lights in the routine that leads to their winning the competition (forgive me if that gives away the plot, but you didn't seriously think it might end any other way, did you?). Yet they never think of packaging the lights and selling them to make a profit, even though everyone in my group walked away saying, "Wouldn't it be cool to have some of those?"

Nor do they think of other obvious possibilities, such as busking or coaching. Gambling goes on at the competitions, but the dancers don't seem to be involved. (And I was a bit put off by the fact that all the gamblers were middle-aged Asians. What a stereotype!)

Over the past several years we have seen film after film with overt commerce-bashing themes. "The Other Guys," a current buddy cop spoof starring Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg, presents a slimy, villainous CEO (Steve Coogan) who runs The Center for American Capitalism with the theme, "live for excess." I bristled at the stereotype, but laughed at it as well. At least the film's point of view was up front and in the open. But many of this year's

films, especially those geared toward children, have been much more troubling, because their community-first, anticapitalism themes have not been an intentional message. The filmmakers simply take for granted that redistribution of wealth based on need rather than merit is the appropriate, acceptable way to raise money. Developing and marketing a product, or even getting a job, isn't presented as a bad choice; it just isn't presented as an option at all.

Perhaps this point of view comes from the fact that so many filmmakers have to rely on the good will (and deep pockets) of wealthy benefactors in order to fund their films. But it concerns me, as I'm sure it concerns most of Liberty's readers. □

"The Expendables," directed by Sylvester Stallone. Millenium Films, 2010, 103 minutes.

Hambo

Jo Ann Skousen

"The Expendables" should have been the best action film of the summer. Written and directed by Sylvester Stallone and rumored to star some of the best action heroes of the 20th century, its release was anticipated as the new "Dirty Dozen." Even Arnold Schwarzenegger came out of retirement for a cameo appearance. Nevertheless, the film is a real groaner, with barely sketched characters, stilted acting, and an incomprehensible plot. It is laughably bad, perhaps the worst of the season.

What went wrong?

Perhaps it was a problem of too many prima donnas, each demanding a certain share of screen time instead of letting the plot dictate their roles. It almost seems as if Stallone and his bud-

dies sat around drinking beers, shooting the breeze, and imagining one last, great, action movie, with each building up his own character and virtually ignoring the others. Several actors dropped out of the project before it was even under way, including Jean-Claude Van Damme, Steven Seagal, Wesley Snipes, Forest Whitaker, and even rap star 50 Cent. Many of them cited scheduling difficulties for bowing out, but that is often a euphemism for problems with the plot. Van Damme came right out and said it: his character lacked substance. *Van Damme* complained about lack of substance!

Did somebody mention plot? I think it was MIA from this mission. Barney Ross (Stallone) is the leader of a band of highly skilled mercenaries who can be hired to rescue kidnapped businessmen, for example, or to "neutralize" dictators of banana republics. His crew

includes the improbably monikered Lee Christmas (Jason Statham), Ying Yang (Jet Li, looking sadly middle-aged), Gunner Jensen (Dolph Lundgren), Dan Paine (Steve Austin), Toll Road (Randy Couture), and Tool (Mickey Rourke). Wesley Snipes was supposed to play a character named "Hale Caesar." Who came up with these corny names? Bruce Willis appears as the mysterious Mr. Church, who hires the men to fly to the fictional South American island of Vilena and take somebody out — it isn't really clear to the audience who or why, since most of this scene is spent mugging menacingly at the camera.

Nevertheless, off Barney goes with Christmas in tow, posing as anthropologists in order to get through customs. After shooting up the town they get back on their plane and fly away, having aborted the mission and leaving behind Sandra (Giselle Itié), the beautiful woman who has warned them that they are walking into a trap. She refuses to be rescued, however, saying "My place is here," although we never learn why. Does she have a child somewhere? Is she concerned about her paintings? (She makes pictures that look like the kind you see painted on velvet and sold on street corners in California.) Is it because she's a daddy's girl? (Her father is the dictator of Vilena.) We never find out her motivation, but Barney is hot to go back and try rescuing her again, this time with the whole crew.

A quick look at the film's official IMDb website provides a hint as to what was supposed to have happened. The trivia section indicates that Sandra is a member of INTERPOL and has been providing medical supplies and guns to the revolutionaries who are working to oust the military dictator. Wait a minute — isn't he her father? No wonder they left that out. None of this actually appears in the movie. Apparently the film underwent a hasty re-editing just before it was released, and the website wasn't updated to reflect the changes. Nevertheless, viewers should not be expected to go to a website to find out what a movie was supposed to be about.

"The Expendables" is another film that simply can't compete with the thrill of staying home and washing the dishes. It is thoroughly, utterly, and completely expendable. □

Filmnotes

Comic book comedy — I hate to tell you this, but you may be too old for “Scott Pilgrim vs. the World” (Universal Pictures, 2010, 112 minutes). It’s a tongue-in-cheek romp through the world of comic books, videogames, garage bands, and young love. If Andy Warhol had been born in 1971 instead of 1921, this is the kind of film he would be making.

The film is based on a graphic novel. One of the challenges of transferring this genre to film is finding a way to project the atmosphere of the two-dimensional page. Director Edgar Wright does it effectively by using several techniques familiar to readers of graphic novels: inserting handprinted

signs to identify characters, spelling out sound effects when a telephone or doorbell rings, and moving characters from place to place without transition, the way graphic novels move abruptly from panel to panel. The result is, as in Warhol’s paintings, funny, funky, and fun.

The story is as simple as a video game narrative: in order to win the beautiful girl, Scott Pilgrim (Michael Cera) must defeat her seven evil exes, who appear in different settings. It’s almost like entering new levels of a game. Scott is the bass player for a garage band and seems to have outgrown video games, but his past has prepared him well for battle. He even gets showered with

golden coins after each victory, and earns a do-over with a second life when all seems lost. Anyone under 40 will recognize the music of “Zelda,” one of the narrative video games that was popular in the ‘90s, as Scott moves down a hallway during a quest.

Scott is accompanied by bandmates Stephen Stills (Mark Webber), Young Neil (Johnny Simmons), and girl drummer Kim (Alison Pill); his gay roommate Wallace (Kieran Culkin); his cynical sister Stacey (Anna Kendrick); and the band’s 17-year-old groupie Knives Chau (Ellen Wong). The supporting cast provides the film’s most comedic moments.

“Scott Pilgrim vs. the World” is the funniest films I’ve seen all year — hip and cool, yet sweet and innocent. The dialogue is clever and witty, full of pop culture allusions. It is funny without being raunchy or simple-minded. You may be too old to get it, but go see it anyway. It’s about time you found out what the latest generation is laughing at. — Jo Ann Skousen

I Was a Teenage Liberal, *from page 44*

there is none better than “Rabbit Proof Fence,” a movie about Australian aborigines who were taken from their families to give them the putative advantages of white culture and, through selective breeding, white color. That was 1960s Aussie liberalism. The roads to hell are usually paved with good intentions. An inquisitor crams something down your throat (or up the other end) to save your soul; a conservative does it for the good of society; but a liberal does it for your own good.

Fortunately, as Churchill hoped would happen to all young people, my infatuation with liberalism ran its course. The decline began with a question I posed to myself while still in college: *If legislators are so smart, how do we get such bad laws?* I couldn’t come up with an answer.

Admittedly, it was a complex question. The answer awaited my reading of Henry Hazlitt’s treatise on concentrated benefits and distributed costs, “Economics in One Lesson,” many years later. But that question was the first chink in my liberal belief in the concept of government by the best and brightest.

I had another *aha!* moment when I spent three months in the South on a training assignment. I shared an office with a Bircher. On the one hand, he had the most distorted worldview of anyone I had ever met. On the other hand, he was intelligent and willing to engage in discussions without rancor. I found that he had a consistent (if sometimes odious) belief system, he spoke with candor, and he possessed a lively wit and sense of humor. He referred to the new base metal coinage that had entered circulation under President Johnson as “LBJ slugs.” Imagine that — a sense of humor on an ultra-conservative! Of course, the only thing really surprising was

my surprise, but such was my own inexperience and prejudice. We parted, if not friends, then at least friendly.

I met a lot of other conservatives during that sojourn, people whose worldviews were very similar to my own, without the government intervention part — decent, hardworking, educated people. The oddity, to me, was that they rebelled in horror against the notion that they might actually be liberals. I was amused at the time. Here were liberals in all but name, but hating the name. Later, I came to realize that it was I who was bemused; I wasn’t listening to the differences between us. I fell back on my prejudice that only liberals were intelligent and compassionate, and if you met people who measured up, then, well, they were liberals. I’m embarrassed just recalling this episode. Nonetheless, it was clear that conservatives were more varied and complex than I had imagined.

Then I discovered the Cato institute. From there it was all downhill: Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, Thomas Sowell, F.A. Hayek. Funny how none of them was on my list of prescribed readings in college. I checked. There was a bit of Adam Smith, but only a small fraction of the pages devoted to Karl Marx. Really. (I still have the books; I counted the pages.) I should add that there was also a bit of Locke and Hume and other classical liberals who bore a similar name though otherwise no resemblance to modern liberals.

But it was with the classical liberals that I eventually found my roots: the sovereignty of the individual, self-ownership, individual responsibility, free association, free markets, voluntary exchange, limited government, inalienable rights, the rule of law. Heady stuff. A set of concepts worth living by — and fighting for. I had gained a political philosophy.

So now I can go to liberal guilt wallows with impunity — as if anyone would ask me back. □

High Seas

Suspicious statement noted in a lede from the *London Telegraph*:

Sailors can note unusual sightings on the ocean waves in their ship's logs, the Navy said.

But they are not required to do so and none of the information is assembled in a central archive devoted to sea monsters.

Washington, D.C.

Looking for the union label, in *The Wall Street Journal*:

Billy Raye, 51-years-old and unemployed, is looking for work.

Fortunately for him, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council of Carpenters is seeking paid demonstrators to march and chant in its picket line outside the McPherson Building, an office complex here where the council says work is being done with nonunion labor.

"For a lot of our members, it's really difficult to have them come out, either because of parking or something else," explains Vincente Garcia, a union representative who is supervising the picketing. So instead, the union hires people, at the minimum wage, to walk picket lines. Mr. Raye says he's grateful for the work, even though he's not sure why he's doing it. "I could care less," he says. "I am being paid to march around and sound off."

Mr. Garcia sees no conflict in a union that insists on union labor hiring nonunion people to protest the hiring of nonunion labor.

Guilford, N.C.

Testament to the importance of a public education, from the *Charlotte Observer*:

Crews painted "shcool" on the approach road to Southern Guilford High School. The road had been recently repaved and crews were working to mark out the school zones. The company responsible said it had "made a mistake" and it would be fixed. A spokesperson said the paint was "interim paint" that is used before the final paint is applied.

Almaty, Kazakhstan

Enlightened leadership is alive and well, according to *The Economist*:

Earlier this year Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, ordered his officials, on pain of dismissal, not to stage any festivities for his 70th birthday on July 6th. They should focus only on celebrating the city of Astana, which became the national capital in December 1997, but whose anniversary party Mr. Nazarbayev later shifted to, by a remarkable coincidence, July 6th.

This year's was a big bash, attended by several heads of state, including the presidents of Russia and Turkey. But the state-owned press, braving Nazarbayev's wrath, still managed to pay him tribute by publishing congratulatory letters sent by his peers, such as Bill Clinton, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Shimon Peres. Already last month the one-party parliament had bestowed on Nazarbayev the title "Leader of the Nation," granting him special powers for the remainder of his life. It includes immunity from prosecution and protection of all assets of the president's family. Nazarbayev opposed the bill, but failed to veto it, so it automatically became law.

Wilmington, N.C.

Is you is or is you ain't his constituency, in the *Wilmington Star-News*:

Political theater hit the mat at the Wilmington National Guard armory, site of a wrestling event for the United Pro Wrestling Association. There was over-the-top boasting, mud-slinging and a cheering crowd. It was not so unlike a campaign rally, except with spandex.

It all started when Republican House candidate Tristan Patterson and wrestling promoter and UPWA owner Donald Brower traded barbs on a talk radio show out of Whiteville. Patterson questioned the authenticity of pro wrestling, and Brower, who lives in New Jersey, knocked southeastern North Carolina. Brower challenged Patterson to a duel, with the Tabor City resident saying he would drop out of the race if he lost.

Following matches that included Big Dog vs. Crazy Ivan and Djinn (or big genie) vs. Cold Cash D, Patterson entered the ring, prepared for battle in a gray dress shirt, blue tie, and campaign sticker.

Naturally, it turned into a free-for-all, with wrestlers from both sides rushing the ring. A rogue Patterson supporter flew into the ring with the classic folding chair sneak attack, bringing it down over Brower's head and allowing the political hopeful to pin his opponent and declare victory.

Chesterfield, MO

Lamentable failure to protect children from jubilation, from KSDK-5 in St. Louis:

A ban on singing "Happy Birthday" lasted all of four days at Chesterfield Elementary School in Missouri after angry parents bombarded the school with complaints.

Kim Cranston, a spokesperson for the Rockwood School District, said the initial ban on the birthday song was meant to protect the students.

"One of the things that she (Principal Davidson) had explained to me is they always want to be sensitive to all children," Cranston said. "And there are some children in their school — as there are in many schools — who don't participate in holiday or birthday celebrations."

Washington, D.C.

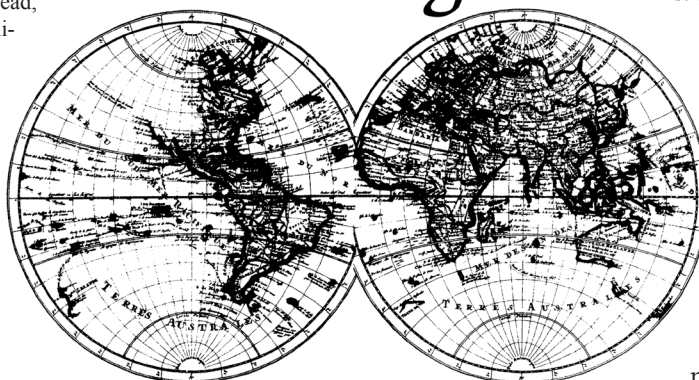
Team America hits the books, from the *Washington Post*:

FBI Director Robert Mueller told Congress that he does not know how many of his agents cheated on an important exam on the bureau's policies, an embarrassing revelation that raises questions about whether the FBI knows its own rules for conducting surveillance on Americans.

The Justice Department inspector general is investigating whether hundreds of agents cheated on the test. Some took the open-book test together, violating rules that they take it alone. Others finished the lengthy exam unusually quickly, current and former officials said. The test was supposed to ensure that FBI agents understand new rules allowing them to conduct surveillance and open files on Americans without evidence of criminal wrongdoing.


Mueller told Congress that, despite the cheating investigation, the FBI understands the rules and is following them.

Terra Incognita



Special thanks to Bryce Buchanan, Russell Garrard, Tom Isenberg, and Paul Michelson for contributions to Terra Incognita.

(Readers are invited to forward news clippings or other items for publication in Terra Incognita, or email to terraincognita@libertyunbound.com.)



I saw a government-backed casket cartel overcharging grieving families.

I saw not only an injustice—I saw an opportunity to change things.

I now sell caskets in nine different states, saving people money while giving them peace of mind.

I am the power of one entrepreneur.

I am IJ.

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