

Liberty

Cash and Burn

January–February 2010

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Skirting the Surveillance State

by Andrew Ferguson

How the Greens Went Red

by Randal O'Toole

Mr. President, Lay Down That Bible!

by David Puller

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Inside Liberty

January–February 2010
Volume 24, Number 1

4 Letters Our readers have their say.

9 Reflections We love free money, embrace the leash, feed the wolves, insist that the lining is silver, demand our Nobels, and raise the dead.

Features

21 A Libertarian and a Comedian Walk Into a Bar *Tim Slagle* hits the road, chasing the next fix for an addiction that has enthralled him for three decades.

27 Skirting the Surveillance State For one day in London, *Andrew Ferguson* watches the watchmen.

33 Crash and Burn *Edmund Contoski* looks on as the federal government hurls a big rock through our economic windshield.

37 Man and Groom *Bruce Ramsey* chronicles the success of a referendum whose advocates wanted it to fail.

39 How the Greens Went Red *Randal O'Toole* reports from inside the environmental movement.

43 How We Got Well *John Goodman* catches a glimpse of a world in which sound minds inhabit sounder bodies.

45 How Liberty Helps the Poor For capitalism to thrive, *Russell Hasan* argues, libertarians must do a better job reaching the working poor.

47 Is Scripture Statist? Contrary to popular opinion, as *David Puller* explains, the Bible is not the government's friend.

Reviews

51 When Communism Was Cool *Bruce Ramsey* sets out to recover the origins of the anticommunist movement.

54 Liberty, Ahoy! *Jo Ann Skousen* takes to the high seas, where neither she, nor anyone else, is owed anything.

55 The Muslim Myth *Stephen Cox* busts a common misconception about the Islamic precedents of libertarianism.

58 I, That Am Rudely Stamp'd *Jo Ann Skousen* considers the defense for a great historical villain.

59 Tainted Love Michael Moore's assessment of capitalism is not precisely that of *Jo Ann Skousen*.

60 Homeland Insecurity It can be a thrill, *Jo Ann Skousen* discovers, to see revenge served cold.

61 Ode to an English Poet *Jo Ann Skousen* finds that film has not lost all sense of beauty.



52 Notes on Contributors Our Yuletide cheers.

63 Terra Incognita Caution: contents under pressure.

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Letters

Discretionary Parceling

The November article by Timothy Sandefur ("Property Rights — or Property Permissions?") is one of the most important I have read in at least 20 years.

I live in a rural county in western Colorado that still doesn't have building codes or zoning. Not formally, anyway. Our "Republican" county commissioners here would dearly love to see these land-use restrictions passed, but the pesky loud-mouthed citizens keep rising up and getting in the way. But this has not stopped them from sneaking these restrictions in wherever they can, in other ordinances and under other names. And if this causes the ordinance to be illegal under state law, so be it. Attempts to litigate the illegal ordinances are brushed aside by district attorneys and judges who always side with the government officials, saying "the commissioners have discretion" — whether state law clearly prohibits their actions or not.

Our county commissioners even decided to try their hand at being land developers, with taxpayer money, and

contrary to state law. (We are a statutory county, thus supposedly cannot supersede state law). This is not actually uncommon. But citizen attempts to bring the matter before a court have been unsuccessful, in spite of clear-cut violations of state law.

Our commissioners recently adopted new subdivision regulations, which have absolutely bizarre zoning twists in them. They decided that all property splits would be treated as if they are major subdivisions, and no one would be *allowed* to make lots smaller than the average of all the lots surrounding the property split in question. "Family splits" are no longer allowed. They say this is "to protect our rural lifestyle" by "slowing down growth." When they were developing subdivisions — and acting as a finance company — with taxpayer money, it was to "encourage growth."

Meanwhile, we all have to listen to lots of talk about "the vision for the county" (which we are not allowed to participate in) and how "we don't have the right to depreciate our neighbors' property values." This has caused a lot of animosity here, as it is clearly becom-

Erratum

In Edmund Contoski's "Killing the Big Three" (December 2009), a layout error created the impression that the quotation from Hans Sennholz (p. 44) was a single paragraph which was followed by an explanatory paragraph from Mr. Contoski. In fact, the second paragraph ("The Wagner Act . . . made it unlawful to resist the demands of labor union leaders") was also part of the quotation from Dr. Sennholz. *Liberty* wishes to apologize to our readers, Mr. Contoski, and the estate of Dr. Sennholz for our mistake.

Letters to the editor

Liberty invites readers to comment on articles that have appeared in our pages. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. All letters are assumed to be intended for publication unless otherwise stated. Succinct letters are preferred. Please include your address and phone number so that we can verify your identity.

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Or send mail to: *Liberty*, P.O. Box 20527, Reno, NV 89515.

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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ing what we call "property rights vs. property values." The land-use regulations increase significantly in page numbers, even as they become more and more vague. This is supposedly to allow for individual situations, but in actuality, it serves only to give more and more "discretion" to the county commissioners. The oblivious "progressive" citizens (a tiny minority) applaud these efforts, saying they "feel that it is best for the community." There is no bridging the gap, because the difference is philosophical — not political, as so many assume.

Sandefur's article really hits the nail on the head, and gives enlightening historical perspective to this noxious phenomenon. I will be sharing this article with everyone here who cares. Thanks.

Debbie Schum
Cedaredge, CO

Send 'Em Packing

Andrew Ferguson's account of the Reason-TV interview with LP Chairman Bill Redpath (Reflections, December 2009) omits several key issues, which he is legitimately forgiven for not having known. In particular, in my opinion:

First, it is no wonder that Redpath "contorted himself to avoid talking

about Barr's collapsed campaign." After all, at the front end of that campaign was the National Convention with Barr as the nominee. Redpath there boasted that he was the man who recruited Barr. For Barr's collapsed campaign there is plenty of guilt to share, and first in line is Bill Redpath.

Second, the primary reason for the collapse of the Barr campaign is that the campaign was a sham, a fundraising scam on the Libertarian wallet politic. Readers will recall a decade ago the proud role that the late Bill Bradford and this magazine played in exposing the Browne campaigns as illusions that spent next to nothing on real politics. As some of you recall, I was Bill's primary researcher, because I had accumulated the huge amount of paperwork that revealed the truth about Harry Browne.

The Bob Barr 2008 campaign makes Harry Browne's efforts look like miracles of fiscal efficiency. Out of \$1.5 million, the Barr campaign spent a hundred grand on real estate and 30 grand more for furniture and office equipment. It spent around a third of a million dollars on staff, not to mention \$100,000 on consultants. Barr also demonstrated Republican conservative money management: his campaign

From the Editor

"I don't understand," she said. "What's this healthcare thing supposed to do?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "You mean the healthcare 'reform' plans?" I put a lot of sarcasm into "reform," but I don't think she noticed. She was angry.

"I mean, I *have* health insurance. My husband has health insurance. My son has health insurance. We work to pay for it. So now they want to make me work even harder, to take care of people who aren't working? Why?"

You've heard it, too. These comments are getting louder and louder, and they are coming from people who — well, in this case, from someone who I thought was a determined supporter of the party in power. Last year at this time, there was no question about that. But now . . .

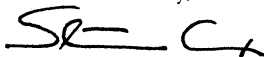
"I wouldn't call myself a libertarian," she continued. "Not yet. But I really hate the other two sides. The Republicans want to tell me what to do with my body, and the Democrats want to take everything else away from me. What I want to know is, when are any of these people going to do something for *me*?"

Ah! I thought. So that's it. You'd be happy if the government just subsidized you, in the way it subsidizes other people. I wasn't looking forward to her response, but I asked the obligatory question: "Do something, like what?"

She paused for a moment. Then she said, "Like leave me to hell alone!"

If I'm hearing unsolicited remarks like this, maybe you are, too. I have a feeling that 2010 will be a very good year for the cause of freedom.

For Liberty,


Stephen Cox

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ended nearly \$200,000 in debt. Based on campaign FEC reports, it appears that at best 4% of Barr's \$1.5 million raised went for public outreach or advertising of any sort. It seems to have spent nothing on TV ads.

Barr's performance was, of course, the exact opposite of Redpath's claim that Barr had made a totally solid effort. Most notably, unlike almost every other past presidential candidate, Barr has refused to share his donor and volunteer lists with the national Libertarian Party.

Barr illustrates the continued failure of two currents in libertarian politics, namely the superstitious belief in celebrity candidates, and the equally false notion that southern white social-intolerant bigots are plausible recruits as Libertarian activists.

Having said that, Ferguson reaches precisely the right destination: "the onus is on Redpath and others at the national level to make the case for their continued employment. The Reason interview does precisely the opposite."

There is no case to be made. It is long past time for good Libertarians to appear at the next Libertarian national convention and send Mr. Redpath and his LNC cronies packing, lock, stock, and barrel.

George Phillies
Worcester, MA

Still Significant

In the December *Liberty*, Andrew Ferguson belittles Bob Barr's showing in the 2008 presidential race. He starts by mentioning "the failure of the LP to make any sort of dent whatsoever on the 2008 presidential election."

In reality, Barr's candidacy altered the Electoral College results, by possibly tipping Indiana, and almost certainly tipping North Carolina, from McCain to Obama. The vote in Indiana was Obama 1,374,039, McCain 1,345,648 (a margin of 28,391), and Barr received 29,257. The vote in North Carolina was Obama 2,142,651, McCain 2,128,474 (a margin of 14,177), and Barr received 25,722.

The Reflection also implies that Michael Badnarik's 2004 showing of 397,265 votes is really more impressive than Bob Barr's 2008 showing of 523,686 votes, because the ratio between Nader and Badnarik in 2004 was closer than the ratio between Nader and Barr in

2008. Nader got 465,650 in 2004 and 738,475 in 2008. But Ferguson fails to mention that in 2004, Nader was only on the ballot before 50.1% of the voters, whereas in 2008 he was in a far better position, and appeared before 85.2% of the voters.

Furthermore, when Ferguson finds it relevant to compare Nader's showing to LP showings, he undercuts his other argument that it is of no significance that the LP in 2008 vastly outpolled the Green and Constitution Parties. The Green Party in 2008 ran a former Georgia member of Congress who had been defeated for reelection in a primary, just as the LP did in 2008. But Cynthia McKinney only polled 161,603 votes. The Green Party has now been outpolled by the Libertarian Party in each of the last two presidential elections by a margin of more than three to one. This is meaningful, especially since the big media in the United States once considered the Green Party to be more significant than the Libertarian Party.

Richard Winger
San Francisco, CA

Owning Up

There is plenty of room for reform in every professional endeavor, including the legal profession, but when Gary Jason (*Reflections*, December 2009) and others call for "tort reform" as a means to curb rising healthcare costs, what they really are advocating is "tort immunity" for healthcare professionals, pure and simple. These critics are quick to cite examples of frivolous lawsuits, unnecessary medical tests, and high insurance premiums, but they never care to discuss the subject of exactly what to do about the alarming frequency of medical mistakes that so often cause enormous damage to patients. It's easy to blame the lawyers, but the obvious fact is that lawyers don't make medical mistakes. If the healthcare professionals would simply own up to their mistakes, medical malpractice lawsuits would not be necessary.

Timothy J. Taylor
Jomtien Beach, Chonburi, Thailand

Jason replies: I normally thank letter writers for reading what I write, but Mr. Taylor clearly hasn't read what I have written on tort reform and medicine. He might want to look at the lengthy piece I wrote on the topic ("The Ethics

of Tort Reform," June 2008).

Specifically, I have never advocated tort immunity for healthcare professionals or anybody else. I have only advocated that we adopt the system that all other advanced nations have, namely, loser-pay. If you feel a doctor has harmed you (and yes, Mr. Taylor, I realize sometimes doctors are incompetent or even negligent), go ahead and sue him. But if you can't convince a jury you are correct to even the low "preponderance of evidence" standard that applies in civil trials, then you should be made to pay for the expenses of the other party, the one whom you forced to defend himself. This would be simple reform, and it is the norm in other advanced democracies.

What people like Taylor and Obama never do is specify what tort reform they would agree on. The president and his Myrmidons control the government — completely! — and the Democrats are now in their third year of control of Congress. So what tort reform have their ilk produced? Nothing. *Nothing*. Not one damn thing. In the case of the decaying fetus of a healthcare bill produced by Pelosi and her pals, there is one clause that would permit some "trial" programs in the states, but it doesn't specify any such trials, and it will not permit those trials in any state that caps awards for punitive damages!

As to why doctors don't own up to their mistakes, why, it is the same reason why lawyers never own up to theirs, or anyone else owns up to theirs. It is precisely because, in this litigious lawyers' paradise, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law!

Family Matters

In *Reflections* (November 2009), Jon Harrison asked, "I would like to know what other libertarians think" about a government agency blocking a 13-year-old from attempting to sail around the world alone.

Short answer: Gray areas that involve the safety of a child should be the parent's decision.

Longer answer: In an authoritarian society, you are the property of the state, which does with your body as it chooses. In a libertarian society, adults own their bodies. In this imaginary society, two entities have authority over a

child — the parents and the child. Only when the actions of a parent or child present a clear danger to the child does the state have a right to get involved, and only then through due process. That is, only their peers, a jury, can take away the rights of a parent or child to make their own decisions.

In a libertarian society, a majority of people would be very resistant to doing preemptive strikes, especially so when it comes to taking away rights from parents on the grounds of protecting their children from possible harm. The presumption would be that parents are responsible adults until proven otherwise. Letting a child sail around the world alone would be a parent's decision. If harm comes to the child, only then would the state or anyone else have grounds for bringing charges against the child's parents.

Clyde Garland
Bryan, TX

On Palestine, Continued

Bill Merritt's reply to my letter (October 2009) demonstrates that he is sorely in need of someone to actually connect the dots for him. I feel compelled to do so.

Merritt describes himself variously as "a singing member of the [libertarian] choir," and also as someone "who subscribe(s) to the more generally accepted moral codes of the world." It was truly hard to discern either from his response to my letter. Merritt apparently believes that any country that possesses military superiority relative to its adversary is therefore morally wrong to use that power in furtherance of its own interests, regardless of circumstances. This conclusion is inevitable given Merritt's steadfast refusal even to consider the actual moral context for the country's actions. (Perhaps he thinks this moral sanction somehow applies only to Israel, but the point is the same in either case.)

All he sees, or chooses to see, is that Israel has taken the Palestinians' land away from them, and then brutalized them when they protested. He ignores the fact that this territory is not, and has never been, "their land." The morality of Israel's actions (and those of the Palestinians, as well) cannot be divorced from this fact, no matter how hard Merritt tries to do so. While there have certainly been injustices commit-

ted — by both sides — with respect to individuals' ownership of specific parcels of land, the fact remains that the overall question of statehood remains unresolved to this day, and that is entirely due to the perpetual intransigence of the Arabs, not Israel.

Merritt wonders how my moral code can allow Israel to inflict "wanton, pointless destruction" on the people in Gaza. Leaving aside that Israel's actions in Gaza were neither wanton nor pointless, the answer, long obvious to most "singing members" of our choir, is that most basic of moral principles — the right of self-defense. I truly cannot imagine that anyone claiming to be a libertarian cannot see that, or would deny that. What government would or could possibly accept rockets being lobbed into its country, or suicide bombers blowing up its citizens? In Merritt's distorted view of morality, apparently Israel should.

Merritt laughably suggests that Israel's better option is to "make peace." I say "laughably" because this seems to assume both that Israel has never considered this option and that it might actually be possible under current conditions. Any knowledgeable observer of the region over the years knows that both assumptions are false. (This may just be another of those acknowledged "gaps" in Merritt's historical knowledge.) Perhaps Merritt is unaware of the Camp David Summit in 2000, during which Israel offered the Palestinians virtually everything they required, and which offer was summarily rejected by Yasser Arafat. This is but one example of Israel's many attempts over the years to make peace, and of Palestinian unwillingness to do so. The truth, also apparently unknown to Merritt, is that, while Israel has offered many compromises over the years in its pursuit of peace, the Palestinian position (i.e., the total destruction of Israel) has remained essentially unchanged since 1948. It is therefore beyond ludicrous to suggest, as Merritt does, that the Israelis have failed to exercise this option, and that it is the Palestinians who have no alternative to violence. The truth is clearly the reverse.

Merritt also disingenuously suggests that it is somehow anti-Semitic to support Israel's current position, because it will lead to "Israel's being run

into the sea." Fortunately for Israel's true supporters, Israel, with the continued support of other right-thinking countries such as ours, runs no such risk today. The actual truth is that Israel would be committing national suicide if it made the kind of "peace" that the Palestinians, and apparently Merritt, demand.

How would Merritt suggest that Israel go about making peace? With whom should it negotiate this peace? What form would such a peace take? Neither the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank nor Hamas in Gaza could come close to guaranteeing Israel's security, which is the most basic moral prerequisite for any peace, even if Israel were willing and able to meet Palestinian terms. The Palestinians claim that "all" they want is a return to the pre-1967 war status quo, despite the fact that, prior to 1967, before Israel conquered any of the disputed lands, before the occupation, before it undertook to "starve and bomb" the Palestinians, the Arabs were unalterably opposed to that status quo, and used violence against Israel in furtherance of that end. The aggressive, immoral behavior of the Arabs in the period from 1948 through 1967 alone justifies Israel's unwillingness to return completely to the 1967 borders. I can only conclude that the "peace" Merritt desires is an unconditional Israeli surrender, leading forthwith to its destruction. With friends like Merritt, Israel has no need of enemies.

Merritt says that what he really wants to know is "why we should allow our great and honorable nation to be cynically drawn into a fight that is neither of our making, nor in our interest." I am pleased to inform him. Firstly, I am not aware that we have actually been drawn into this fight, cynically or otherwise. We do have legitimate national interests in the region, and these interests merit a certain concern for U.S. foreign policy. The issue of U.S. military aid to Israel is a fair subject for debate, but I am confident that the modern state of Israel is fully capable of defending itself even without our help, and would do so. The United States supplies weapons to countries far more despicable than even Merritt's distorted version of Israel, so unless he proposes to eliminate all U.S. military aid to any country he deems impure, he doesn't

have much of a moral leg to stand on there either. As to the question of why it is in the interest of the United States to help Israel defend itself, the same questions were raised in 1940 about America's aiding Great Britain, and the same answers apply.

Merritt is entitled to his shuttered view of national interest and defense and his ignorance of history, but he is not entitled thereby to claim that his moral code is somehow superior to mine, however "widely held" he thinks it is. It clearly is not.

Michael L. Carp
Montclair, NJ

Merritt replies: Because I recognize you from our previous correspondence, I know you to be scholarly and thoughtful — which raises concerns about the provenance of the above letter. In fact, a close reading suggests it was not written by you at all. Not to put too fine a point on it, something is fishy, Mr. Carp.

Reasonable man that you are, you agree that national suicide is not in the best interests of the state of Israel — that, in fact, she would be better off working toward a peaceful Middle East rather than throwing her long-term survival into question by continuing to steal Palestinian land.

But the person using your name seems to feel that Israel's endless land-grab isn't really an issue because the land is "disputed." What, exactly the nature of this dispute might be, Imposter Carp neglects to tell us but, apparently, it arises from the fact that some marginal folks in Israel really, really want the land for themselves.

You would agree with all decent and honorable people that a family who has lived on a piece of property for, say, a thousand years, has a legitimate claim to that property. You would never take the position that ownership of that family's land is "disputed" just because somebody else wants it. But Imposter Carp doesn't see it that way. He just chalks up any attempt by the legitimate owners to defend their property as "aggressive, immoral behavior."

You would never claim that field-testing experimental explosives on schoolchildren in Gaza was forced upon Israel in the name of morality. "That most basic of moral principles," as Imposter Carp put it, "the right of

self-defense." Those kindergartners with fingerpaints, you can almost hear Imposter Carp saying: good thing Israel put a stop to them while it had the chance. No telling what they would have done next.

You know full well that shredding 5-year-olds from the air not only has no military value, but puts Jews all over the planet in danger. As the *Jewish World*, published in Jerusalem, puts it: "... through its actions, Israel has more than once endangered and shamed the Diaspora. Ask the Jews of the world what their neighbors said after Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. Ask them when they last felt pride in Israel's actions." Imposter Carp can find this at www.haaretz.com, if he cares to see what people who really love Israel believe.

Imposter Carp doesn't see a connection between America's mindless backing of Israel and the harm that is being visited on the Palestinian people, but I know you do. Perhaps you saw the signs in the September 13 Rallies in Support of the Palestinians. Most of the rest of the world did: "It Is America That Enables Israel." Pretty specific, wouldn't you say?

You know as well as I do that America's knee-jerk support of Israel's ongoing death wish has led to a lot more than just demonstrators waving signs in front of TV cameras. Eight years ago, 3,000 of our countrymen were murdered on our soil.

I wouldn't hazard a guess as to the religious beliefs of Imposter Carp. Perhaps he was in an ashram on 9/11. Perhaps he missed the fact that the person who set those murders in motion specifically gave America's support for Israel as one of his reasons.

I can tell from your letter of a few months ago that you are much more aware of recent history than Imposter Carp seems to be. You know why our country was attacked, and you agree that America has been drawn into a fight that is neither of our making nor in our interest. But the person writing in your name claims not even to be "aware that we have actually been drawn into this fight."

You are in an awkward position here, Mr. Carp, and it's not my place to advise you how to proceed. No miscreant has ever written this sort of letter

over my name. But if one did, I'd clear the air before people started imputing his ideas to me. I can't speak for the editors on this, but I imagine Liberty would be pleased to accommodate you if you wish to disavow this claptrap.

It Lives!

Many thanks for Doug Gallob's review of "The Creature From Jekyll Island" (November 2009). It is a must-read for every serious libertarian and certainly recommended for the average citizen. It is an eye-opener, probably as important as Milton Friedman's "Free to Choose."

After reading "Creature" for the first time, I reread Jim Powell's "FDR's Follies" and then went through "Creature" again immediately afterward. Placing it all in the context of Mr. Obama's administration, history seems to be repeating itself.

Len Gay
Onset, MA

Send Money, Guns, and Writers

I fell with relish on the November issue as soon as I saw its cheery blue and white cover in my mailbox, and flipped straight to Reflections, as always. Ted Roberts' "Overinflated fears" was heartening and optimistic. I make a hobby of collecting Weimar Reichmarks and what with the latest antics of America's first metrosexual president, my prime anxiety has been how soon the dollar will take its place in the ashcan of history alongside my collectibles.

Let me state that I'm no economist, just a working-class schmo with a love of liberty. I've tried to read some economic theory over the years and I can certainly see why they call it "the dismal science." A question arose in my mind, however, as to how we will ever escape the specter of hyperinflation and economic collapse as long as our money system is based on conning everyone possible, including the federal government, the respective states, counties, and cities, along with all the residents thereof, to carry a lifetime of debt?

I hope someone at Liberty will have the time and inclination to address my concerns. In the meantime, I'll anxiously await the next issue while I split my disposable income between silver quarters and .22 cartridges.

David W. Roberts
Tacoma, WA

Reflections

Leap of faith — The proposed “public option” for health insurance has raised fears about how it might crowd out private insurance and so worsen the options open to consumers. Proponents have offered compromises.

One would activate the government program only when performance by private companies was judged inadequate. Another would allow individual states to opt out of the national plan. That compromise is particularly meaningless, even ridiculous — one reason being the mobility of people across state lines.

The whole discussion, reflected in the 1,500-page-or-so bill pending in Congress, illustrates the incoherence of ambitious government programs. Political horse-trading displaces informed analysis of how a program’s components might fit together.

Many years ago I kept Professor Wassily Leontief company for a couple of hours before he gave a speech. Leontief was famous for his input-output tables supposedly showing how the many sectors of an economy fit together and for his advocacy of “national economic planning.” Citing examples in farm policy, trade policy, price controls, subsidies, and the like, I tried to counter with “public-choice” explanations of why coherent planning was hardly to be expected from politics-driven government. Acknowledging the examples, Leontief said that they only underlined the need for his “planning.” In short, planning would overcome the inconsistencies of ambitious democratic government. This vain hope invites Ayn Rand’s favorite dismissive word: “somehow.” Similarly, the mishmash of healthcare proposals might work well — somehow.

— Leland B. Yeager

False profits — A popular rationalization for the Republican and Democratic bailouts was that any losses to the taxpayers will probably be temporary and that the “government might actually make money.”

On October 21, the independent watchdog of the Treasury Department’s TARP program, Neil Barofsky, poured a bucket of cold water on this dubious claim. He found it “extremely unlikely” that the taxpayers will recoup their losses, much less make a “profit.”

— David Beito

Not so noble — A few Norwegians on the Nobel Prize for Peace committee decided to give President Obama

an award, the nominations for which concluded when he had spent just 12 days in office. Since he hadn’t accomplished anything in that time (or since), presumably he received the prize wholly for not being Bush. Okay, not being Bush is good, but I thought the award was about something more substantial, you know, like actually doing something. Even then those wise and good Norwegians were wide of the mark; if the award was for a president who was not Bush, it should have been given to the American people who elected that president.

It’s clear that Obama should have declined the honor. Whether the American people deserve the prize remains to be seen. We may live to remember the old adage, “Be careful what you ask for.”

— Bob Marcus

When satire fails — I have enjoyed offering Liberty my sardonic Reflections over the years, lampooning our country’s political and cultural descent into the maelstrom.

Sadly, over the last week, two events have complicated matters. First, CNN felt it necessary to present a fact check on Saturday Night Live for the accuracy of jokes told about President Obama. Then, just a few days later, President Obama was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Clearly, one cannot satirize our world any longer. I thus regretfully withdraw my services.

— Ross Levatter

Political gauge — As reported by recent polls, the number of people scared by the global-warming alarmists continues to drop. The latest complaint of those trying to scare us into more government control over all economic and everyday activities is that people just don’t understand the difference between weather and climate.

Apparently it’s very simple: any observed cooling is weather; any observed warming is climate change.

— John Kannarr

Union label — Under the egregiously unjust Obama bankruptcy-takeover of Chrysler and GM, secured creditors got stiffed, and the UAW along with the federal government took virtually all the stock in the new, reorganized companies. Of course, since the UAW virtually owns Obama and Congress, having purchased them with millions in union dues poured into Democratic campaign coffers, this means that the UAW now virtually owns two of the three domestic auto companies.

The most obvious injustice is that the very union that did

A LOTTERY WINNER'S EPIPHANY



SHCHAMBERS

so much to destroy those companies was rewarded for its longstanding irresponsible demands by being given control of the successor companies, reorganized at the taxpayer (not union) cost of many tens of billions of dollars. It is as if (as I have said elsewhere) the court forced a rape victim to marry the rapist. But it is also unjust because, in giving his supporters what they demanded, Obama grossly violated — indeed, urinated upon — the rights of the secured debt holders, formerly established by a century of bankruptcy law.

He set the stage for many undesirable consequences. One of these is that the UAW now has both the motive and the power to target Ford. After all, since the union controls the other two car companies, why shouldn't it pick up Ford as well? Why not complete its monopoly over the domestic auto industry?

The UAW has obviously set its sights on doing precisely that. In its most recent contract with Ford, the union abandoned its longstanding "principal of parity." Up until now, the UAW would put the same provisions in its negotiated contracts with all three auto makers. But now Ford is being hammered. For example, the new contract with Ford doesn't include the cuts to retiree benefits that the UAW conceded to Chrysler and GM. Ford is stuck with more expenses, hence is at a competitive disadvantage.

So, under the new deal, preference is clearly given to the companies that the unions and government own over the one they don't. How very convenient.

This, in my view, is yet another reason why Americans

should boycott Chrysler and GM, until those firms are once again in private hands.

— Gary Jason

The price of silence — We are all familiar with the saying "nothing in life is free." Yet many American citizens forget this bit of common sense when it comes to government spending. Most of us have, no doubt, seen the recent video clips of Detroit locals lined up for "some of that Obama money." When asked where Obama gets this money, one of the people in line replied "from his stash." But Obama's and Congress' "stash" is not free money. It's made up of money they took from productive citizens.

Even the most educated among us, on either side of the political aisle, are not immune from the thoughtlessness of the Detroit resident in the face of "free" money from the government. In fact, the government is usually returning something that was originally yours — for example, the first stimulus checks (ranging from \$300 to \$1,200) doled out during the Bush administration. That pittance was a meager return of the vast amounts of money confiscated by the government. With the exception of deceased recipients (there were a few of them), most folks receiving the checks regarded them as if they were found money, not money that had previously been taken from them.

Few of us would accept or be fooled by a friend, family member, or stranger taking a portion of our money or possessions and then magnanimously "giving" it to us as if we had never seen it before. Why should this be any different when the government does it? We'd all be much more "stimulated"

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

As you've noticed, this column has some of the attributes of a column of troops: it's loud and destructive, its course is generally unpredictable, and sometimes it's hard to see to the end of it. The column's one purpose is to find the enemy army and get off a few shots.

But often the enemy is just too scattered and numerous to be attacked in one body. It's dangerous, yes, but it appears to be all over the landscape. Its formations have to be taken out one by one — a difficult if not impossible task. And that's the situation today. The foes of rational speech and writing lurk behind every tree, and they have to be attacked sequentially.

So let's do it. Start with the enemy's grenade throwers.

These are the people who try to soften up our forces by hurling deadly clichés at us. They claim that everyone who disagrees with them is an "extremist," a "Kool-Aid drinker," an "angry white male," and so on, and they claim that they themselves are "outraged," "dismayed," and simply thrown for a loop by these weird exponents of civil irrationality.

Recently, enough grenades were launched at Congressman Joe Wilson to empty a whole arsenal of clichéd insults and viewings-with-alarm. But, to be accurate, most of these missiles were aimed exclusively, and crudely, at a person and a party, not at the English language. Attacks on the language are generally conducted in a less obvious but more effective way.

Think about President Obama's choice as the Nobel Laureate for *Peace*. He might as well have received the prize for Chemistry.

Let's see . . . what did "peace" mean, according to Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Prizes? According to his will, the prize for Peace was to go to "the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

The president's accomplishments fit this definition as well as his hate-crimes bill fitted the military spending bill to which it was appended. In the world of the smug and powerful, any words fit any context, but always to the detriment of rational language.

The Nobel awards in non-science fields have been disgracing the language (every language, English, Swedish, Norwegian, whatever) for many years. Look up, for instance, Rigoberta Menchú, Nobel Laureate, Peace (1992). Or review the list of Nobel Peaceniks and ask yourself how many of the prizes had anything to do with Nobel's intentions. Both the literature and the peace awards are dispensed as frequently for social activism or ethnic representation as for anything remotely to do with fraternity among nations, the reduction of standing armies, or the promotion of peace conferences. If Al Gore's science meant anything, he would have received a Nobel Prize for science. But it doesn't, so he got one for Peace, thus debasing the very name of peace.

But let's turn to a humbler theater of words. Consider the word "grow." This is the weapon of choice for a force of young zouaves, untrained and naive, but very flashy. Their goal is to

if the state kept its hands off our money in the first place.

You're probably thinking that libertarians don't need this lecture. We, of all people, should know these things. I agree, but that's not why I raise the issue. Many American citizens are unhappy with the government's economic meddling, and many of them are looking for an ideology or party that articulates their hands-off view of the economy. Libertarians tend not to be "evangelical"; and I am not recommending that we become a bunch of "Road to Serfdom" or "Atlas Shrugged" thumpers, as other people are Bible thumpers. But in this highly unsettled time, when so many people are questioning the current administration's policies and motives, we can take each complaint from our fellow citizens as an opportunity to remind them that nothing in life is free. We can let them know that when the government gives you something, not only is that something not free, it comes at a steep cost — most often to our liberty.

— Marlaire White

Governmental Domestic Product — The New York Times' front page story on October 30, 2009, was headlined, "Economy Grew 3.5%." It contained this surprise definition of Gross Domestic Product (GDP): "the broadest measure of the government's total goods and services produced."

I count three errors in that one sentence.

First, GDP does not measure "total" goods and services produced in a year, but only the value of "final" output. It deliberately nets out all intermediate production.

Second, it is not the "broadest" measure of national out-

put. The Bureau of Economic Analysis at the U.S. Commerce Department also releases annual Gross Output figures, which measure output at all stages of production. Gross Output is almost twice the size of GDP.

Third, The New York Times may well like "the government" to produce the entire GDP, but it doesn't — yet. Current government spending represents approximately 20% of GDP. Thank heaven, the remaining 80% is privately produced.

Maybe this is the point at which New York Times reporters should take a refresher course in Econ 101. — Mark Skousen

Lazarus syndrome — Americans have been conditioned to value medical care more than it is worth. Medicine has become the new religion.

People believe that doctors can prolong lives, delay the normal aging processes, and make life better throughout. They have been sold on these superstitions by media hyping high-tech advances in medicine that may help only a tiny percentage of the general public. Americans ascribe the general prolonging of life spans to medical care, whereas the real reasons include public health measures against infectious diseases, better diets, and lessening of physical stress. Doctors thump the pulpit by talking gullible families into doing "what we can do" to keep Granny alive, when in actuality they officiously prolong Granny's dying.

Europeans don't read American catechisms. It may be that Europeans got "free medical care" at a time when medical care could do little to alter the course of illnesses. Comforting the dying and their relatives was what they expected from

create a buzz, to energize old words, or, in a phrase, to confuse the dead with the living. We all know that corn, being alive, will *grow*. So will kids, if they stay away from government schools. But that's not enough for the young volunteers. They want to find the spirit of life and growth in things that are not alive and cannot be grown. They want to "grow a business," "grow the economy," even "grow the future of our country."

Our president frequently marches with these recruits. And some of them could teach him a few maneuvers. Yesterday I heard one of them talking on the government radio network. This young man referred to the importance of "growing the size of the economy." He reminded me of the grizzled journalists who keep saying things like "larger in size" and "fewer in number" (as opposed, I guess, to larger in time and fewer in space). But he outdid them in spunk. Picture a "size," planted in a field. Now "grow" it. That's what he said: "growing the size."

"Grizzled," however, recalls another kind of enemy: those soldiers of the word wars who devoutly believe that any two words that *sound* alike must also *be* alike — in fact, identical. These are incompetent warriors, soldiers whose enemies (and friends, if they have any) can only laugh at them. Still, they're dangerous, because blunderers with words are always dangerous to the language, if there are enough of them; and these guys have been multiplying ever since the authorship of internet news was placed in the hands of teenagers. (Wait: you'll find out what "grizzled" has to do with this.)

You don't believe me? Look here — it's a Reuters story, dated September 7, and it has the folksy title, "Milky Way Expected to Survive a Beating." This time, picture Rocky Balboa, prepared to

give someone a beating. Now picture our galaxy. Close enough, eh? The story, if it deserves to be called that, was about . . . all right, here's the nub:

"Circling around the Milky Way are between 20 and 25 known satellite dwarf galaxies, which are smaller clumps of stars bound in orbit around the Milky Way by gravitational attraction. Some pessimists predicted the Milky Way was doomed to a grisly death by dismemberment if enough of these galaxies collide with it. In fact, scientists think many satellite galaxies have already rammed into the Milky Way, though so far it has endured."

You noticed "grizzly." If it isn't teenagers who are writing this . . . abandon all hope. "Dwarf galaxies," we find, and it is much to our edification, are "smaller" than the galaxy around which they revolve. Also newsworthy is the fact that these dwarves, or dwarfs, not only "circle" but also "orbit," doing so by means of "gravitational attraction." But thank God, there's good news: "so far" our galaxy "has endured" all this. We wouldn't know that if it weren't for Reuters, as well as the "scientists," as opposed to "pessimists," whose stuff the Reutersitter have been reading. (Some people get degrees in physics; others get degrees in pessimism.)

But why was I bringing this up? Oh, I remember. It's because our authorities on the fate of the universe don't even know the difference between a grisly death and a death by grizzlies. I confess that I like the image of an enraged sow grizzly chomping up the galaxy. It's almost as good as Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods, when the Midgard Serpent poisons the sky. But this pleasant effect is obviously unintended.

The teenage news writers, however, are only foot soldiers,

doctors a hundred years ago when many of these schemes were introduced. The modest accomplishments of their medical systems have not led Europeans to alter their creed.

But I agree with the Europeans. There are a few surgical procedures, such as appendectomy, that save lives. Many orthopedic procedures can make life more enjoyable. Occasionally an antibiotic or an antihypertensive helps. But frying the brains of Ted Kennedy and Robert Novak stretched their lives from 6 months to a year as steroidal zombies.

The Democratic proposals don't do anything to make Americans reject salvation, so I suppose that the special interests will continue to prosper, and medical costs will climb. The Republicans ripped off some libertarian ideas that would force individuals to confront the cost-benefit calculus, but few of their politicians understand consumer-driven health care, and most would reject it if they did.

I don't see anything in my lifetime curbing the American appetite for the marvelous. — Erwin Haas

Presidential hopeful — Second only to Ron Paul, Gary Johnson, former governor of New Mexico (1995–2003), is the most pro-liberty politician of any prominence. It looks as if he may be considering a presidential run.

On the face of it, Johnson comes right out of libertarian central casting. He has fought tenaciously for the 2nd Amendment and for marijuana legalization. He slashed taxes and spending, and he opposed the Iraq War from the beginning. He also supported Ron Paul for president in the primaries last year.

Johnson's photogenic demeanor and extracurricular activities are grist for the media mill (in a good way). Among his accomplishments was the scaling of Mount Everest with a broken leg.

compared to such generals as Sean Hannity, who specializes in spreading dismay among his natural allies. On his August 18 TV show, Hannity had to be told by the pollster, Frank Luntz, that there's a serious difference in meaning between a real "public option" in insurance and a "government option." Luntz pointed out that President Obama's scheme is actually the latter. He added that when people are polled on the issue, most support a "public" option, but even more oppose a "government" one. You'd expect that Hannity would already have grasped the distinction between those two expressions, since it was in his ideological interest to do so, but no, he hadn't.

The leftwing equivalent is Paul Begala, once the Clintons' leading skirmisher, now one of the numerous ghosts haunting the TV interview shows. This summer, he characterized Sarah Palin as "not a serious person." Well, he should talk. But he went on to say that she was "half a whack job." Only half? But seriously, folks, a *whack job* is a gangland killing, as in "The Sopranos." A *wacko*, *wacky person*, or *wack job* is different. Teenagers, and aging White House spokesmen, now routinely confuse "whack" with "wack." And if they can't get that right . . . what else are they good for?

Recently the president's press secretary, Robert Gibbs, praised his boss' enthusiasm for political schmoozing and gladhanding by saying, "I think the president would orbit the moon if he thought it would help." The idea of Obama, sealed in one of NASA's tin cans, endlessly circling a dead planet, is perhaps appropriate to

Sounds too good to be true? Let's hope not. If Johnson stands by his dovish foreign policy views, he might be the only candidate to appeal to Americans in both parties who are sick and tired of the Afghan and Iraq quagmires.

— David Beito

Flyaway — The Obama White House stumbled this fall when it issued an ill-advised press release claiming that the \$787 billion federal economic stimulus plan had "created or saved 650,000 jobs." This resulted in media criticism over the simple-math conclusion that each of those jobs cost \$1.2 million.

Then the White House clarified its position. Those jobs were really affected by only one part of the stimulus package — the \$150 billion that had been transferred through . . . about September. That meant that each of the jobs "created or saved" (itself an obfuscatory phrase) actually *only* cost \$230,000.

After that, White House economist Christina Romer stood in front of cameras and hedged away from any jobs claim, mumbling some nonsense about how "it's very hard to say exactly because you don't know what the baseline is, right, because you don't know what the economy would have done without" the stimulus billions.

As the Washington Examiner pointed out, it would have been more efficient to open a special unemployment office that issued checks for \$230K to the first 650,000 unemployed people who could fog a mirror.

The lesson: statisticians have no bloody idea how to connect their boondoggles with practical outcomes. Their first assumption is that people are too stupid to divide expenditures by claimed results. Their response is to debase all data with confused spin.

In the meantime, markets speak with clarity. In late

his political performance, but it is hardly appropriate to the image that Gibbs wanted to project.

In this context, I should mention the recent and continuing funeral games for Sen. Edward Moore Kennedy. According to USA Today, Kennedy's son, Junior, talked about his father's enjoyment of the fulsome tributes he received when other politicians realized he was dying. "He was really able to soak it in," the son said, implying some enormous satisfaction. Imagine Kennedy in a bathtub, soaking up praise. What a hero! And apparently this genius of American politics never noticed that political compliments are, on occasion, hypocritical. The proverb is right: you can't cheat an *honest* man.

Kennedy was a marshal in the army of word abusers; nothing he ever said had any particular meaning, except that he was saying it, and he was a Kennedy. So it's not surprising that his subalterns should refuse any attention to the meanings of words. Yet meaning-repellent, though a standard part of military equipment, lasts only so long. Eventually it runs out. The great Napoleon said a lot of things that didn't make any sense, but people still applauded, as if they had. His nephew, Napoleon III, also said things like that, and some people acquiesced in them. Then he too was gone — and where is the Grande Armée now? When the queen dies, the hive disperses. You see the application.

The continuing danger comes from the soldiers who owe allegiance neither to man nor God but to their militant "professions." They are social workers, bureaucrats, "educators," members of the

October, the Boeing Corp. gave the state of Washington a nasty Halloween present. CEO Jim McNerney announced that the company was locating its new plant (designed for building the oft-delayed 787 Dreamliner jet) in South Carolina.

The addled twits who run Washington politics — embodied, in this case, by inexplicable Gov. Christine Gregoire and halfwits-need-representation-too Sen. Patty Murray — claimed “shock, dismay and outrage” at Boeing’s move.

In 2002, Alan Mulally (who was at the time executive VP at Boeing and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes) told the Washington State House Labor Committee that “the state of Washington is not competitive. . . . meaning it costs us more to operate [here].” Specifically, he mentioned the state’s inefficient unemployment insurance and workers’ comp systems. He didn’t mention the screwed-up labor union situation, but he was probably thinking it.

Boeing’s Everett, Washington factory has had to weather strikes by its machinists’ union four times since 1990. The most recent strike — a 57-day shutdown in 2008 — cost Boeing over \$5 billion in deferred revenue and (additional) delays in production of the 787. The union eventually caved on its absurd demands for higher wages and richer perks. But the damage was done.

In the pretend world of Beltway policy, billions of dollars can be explained away by inarticulate economists. In the real world of building airplanes, a \$5 billion opportunity cost means that things change. Production lines move to right-to-work states.

And more than one Boeing analyst predicted that, when demand for the 787 softens, the Everett plant will be the first to be shut down.

Statist union agitators can try such threadbare tricks as “card check,” vote-counting manipulation, and shop floor

intimidation. But these are a loser’s tactics. They lead to desperate nonsense about jobs “created or saved” and mumbled evasions about how the numbers don’t really mean anything. In the meantime, the featherbedding collectivists of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO, District 751, have fewer stooges from whom to steal.

— Jim Walsh

Title tattle — Once again it’s almost that magical time of year — that’s right, time for the convention catalog of the Modern Language Association to thud into faculty mailboxes all over the country. And that means it’s also time for that annual squabble in which some journalist or another rattles off the most ludicrous paper titles he can find, and some self-appointed white knight of academia issues a retort that pretends those papers aren’t ludicrous.

As I am both an aspiring academic, and a journalist all too inclined to the easy joke, I have a foot in both camps — indeed, judging from my own paper title, “Scandalous Searches: Rhizomatic Authorship in America Online’s Unintentional Narratives,” I am uniquely positioned to mock my own pretensions. But to engage in such pointless (and schizophrenic) squabbling would be to continue the content-free back-and-forth that passes for “cultural debate” in much of our national media — and, worse, to miss the really ripe targets that such events have on offer. Why take time to scour the list in search of some poor jargoneer’s overcomplicated last-minute cobbling, when there’s such low-hanging fruit as the social-event list, with entries like Monday night’s “Cash Bar Arranged by the Marxist Literary Group”?

At conferences, as in life, the simple pleasures are the most savory.

— Andrew Ferguson

Summary judgment — I have occasionally used

“helping professions.” They are at work, day and night, debasing the English language. That is what they were trained to do; that is what they do.

Even the medical corps gets into the act. As soon as they hear something they dislike on professional grounds, they mount a sneak attack on it. A typical episode took place in October. Some new empirical studies reported what empirical studies have been reporting for a long time, that drinking wine can have beneficial effects on health. St. Paul said that in plain words in the 1st century; now science says the same, in words equally plain. But neither science nor the Bible is good enough for the paid guardians of the nation’s health, or their helpful allies in the media.

Instead of trumpeting the scientific findings, the media trumpeted the unscientific evasions. They were quick to report that “experts with the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association say that though these studies do show some benefits to moderate drinking, the health risks from alcohol consumption far outweigh the potential rewards.”

Notice that the sentence is set up so that the downside (risk) is real, while the upside (reward) is only “potential.” So what are these risks? Well, said a Cancer Society officer, by drinking you might get “cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon/rectum and breast.” Um, let’s see. In plain English, what does this mean? It means that if you think you can lower your “bad” cholesterol by taking a glass or so of wine, you are wrong — utterly and grotesquely wrong. That glass is more likely

to give you every cancer you can think of, and plenty more.

You doubt that this is what it means? Consider the preface to the words just quoted: “Drinking any alcohol at all is known to increase your risk for contracting a number of types of cancer.” Indeed! Is that *known*? Is it *known* that every drop of alcohol increases the risk of cancer? Is a nice young Baptist who got drunk at his high-school prom at more risk of cancer than a nice young Baptist who didn’t? Shall I cut back on my daily thimbleful of pinot noir, because every single drink increases my danger of getting cancer of the pharynx? This is like saying that because someone may have an accident while walking to the store to replenish his supply of soy milk, no one should ever leave the house, much less crave health food.

But speaking of accidents, think of all the things that *could* happen to you if you actually went so far as to *drink alcoholic beverages*. That’s what a medical spokeswoman for the American Heart Association hastened to say. The “health risks from moderate drinking,” she announced, include “liver damage and accidents caused by impaired reflexes.” Excuse me . . . is this a doctor talking? Who gets liver damage from moderate drinking? Who runs into trees (“impaired reflexes”) because he had a single drink of wine? But this is supposed to be why you should never take that fatal drink.

I’m sorry: that reminds me. I need to retire to the rear. I understand there’s a thimbleful of wine somewhere . . .

Reflections to inform readers about free-market publications and thinktanks with which they might have been unacquainted. I would like to do this again, pointing to the estimable American Enterprise Institute and its web-based journal, *The American*. And as it happens, four pieces recently published in that journal have to do with topics I've written about in these pages.

Consider first Michael Barone's excellent piece, "An Immigration Tipping Point?" (Sept. 29). Barone points out something interesting: the percentage of foreign-born Americans (FBAs) has declined this past year for the first time since 1970. Not a huge amount, to be sure — from 12.6% in mid-2007 to 12.5% in mid-2008 — but a definite decline, one that represents 40,000 fewer foreign-born people in the country.

Barone notes that in the second half of the 19th century, the percentage of FBAs rose from 9.7 (in 1850) to 14.7 (in 1890), then — after dropping a bit — again hit 14.7 in 1910. After anti-immigration laws were passed in 1921 and 1924, the percentage of FBAs started dropping, hitting a low of 4.7 in 1970. With the passage of the 1965 immigration act (and along with the amnesty program of 1986, I would add), the percentage nearly tripled in less than two generations. Barone says that this was contrary to the intentions of the framers of the 1965 act, but I am not so sure: the act gave preference to immigration applicants with family already in this country, so it set the stage for ever-increasing numbers of immigrants.

Barone attributes the recent drop to the recession and to tighter enforcement of immigration laws. Indeed, his data go only to mid-2008, before the explosion of unemployment; he thinks the census for mid-2009 will show an even steeper drop. I think he's right.

Barone raises the interesting question of whether immigration will increase when the recession ends. He notes that the tighter enforcement will probably continue, and that birth rates in Mexico and Latin America have been dropping over the past two decades. I would add that in Asia, there has been another major change: the embrace of market economic systems in large countries that had formerly eschewed them (such as China, Vietnam, and to some extent India). Economic improvement tends to keep potential immigrants home, and even attract some immigrants back.

The second piece I want to mention is "Making Bush Look Like a Piker," by Veronique de Rugy (Sept. 30). De Rugy makes the simple point that Bush ran high deficits, but Obama's deficits will dwarf them. She has some credibility here, since she was a vocal critic of Bush's spending. And the Congressional Budget Office figures show that for each of Obama's years in office, his projected deficit will vastly exceed any of Bush's years.

In fact, de Rugy notes that these deficits are apt to be even worse, because Obama keeps increasing his spending, while the budget figures are based on the assumption that the stimulus spending will have stopped by 2011. The budget estimates are also based on the assumption of a rapid and robust recovery from the recession, something that seems increasingly doubtful.

The third article, "Our Uncrowded Planet" (Oct. 1), by Ronald Bailey, takes on a Malthusian prophet, Paul Farrell. Farrell, following neo-Malthusian biologist Jared Diamond,

cites 12 factors that supposedly forecast our doom. The factors include overpopulation, food shortages, water shortages, farmland shortages, deforestation, chemical pollution, and ozone layer depletion; there is even an "alien species" factor. Bailey neatly debunks each source of concern.

He observes, for example, that both Farrell and Diamond fail to note that during the past century, crop yields grew at about 2% per year, double the current rate of population growth. Bailey doesn't mention the pivotal role played by the Green Revolution, the dramatic increase in crop yields pioneered by the late Norman Borlaug, but he does quote the agronomist Paul Waggoner, who calculates that if the average world farmer achieved the productivity of the average American corn farmer, the world could feed 10 billion people at the current caloric level of the American consumer — on one-half the farmland used today. Bailey's rejoinders to the other eleven points are equally thought provoking.

Finally, there is Charles Johnson's informative article, "Blood Money" (Oct. 2). Johnson writes about the history and prospects of the private market for blood. Before the 1940s, he says, private blood banks were common in America, with people selling their blood on the open market. But during World War II, many people began to worry about blood being donated by victims of hepatitis and jaundice. In 1947, the Journal of the American Medical Association set out guidelines to help blood banks screen donors (such as not taking blood from anyone with a history of hepatitis, or anyone who had received blood or had been hospitalized during the past year).

Then two dubious studies appeared. In 1959 an American doctor purported to show that hepatitis rates were dramatically higher among recipients of paid than of unpaid donor blood. In 1971 a British social scientist argued that paid blood donation would crowd out volunteer (unpaid) donation. Johnson refutes each study in detail. Nevertheless, the studies started a chain of federal and state regulations, leading to an effective ban on paid donor blood in 1978.

Never mind that these studies were dubious. Never mind that the science of screening blood was improving year after year. The logic of regulation took over: to prevent harm, pass a regulation, then another, then another, until you arrive at the "safest" approach: prohibition. Of course, the "safest" approach — the one with the fewest bad consequences — is different from the "best" — the one with the most favorable balance of bad and good consequences. Johnson concludes by offering some valuable suggestions for how a free market in blood might be reinstated safely.

The American is a useful source of ideas and information. Check it out.

— Gary Jason

Short-run society — Economists understand (or should) the distinction between what often is true or desirable in the short run and what is true or desirable in the long run. Examples are how an expansive monetary policy affects interest rates and employment, how currency depreciation affects a country's balance of payments, and how a tax change affects government revenues. Even many laymen understand "moral hazard," especially how government rescues of "too big to fail" firms encourage excessive risk-taking and cause the apparent need for further and bigger bailouts later on.

Too often, though, the short vs. long distinction escapes pundits and policymakers, including politicians seeking reelection. So-called Keynesian policies to boost spending may alleviate recession in the short run, but at longer-run cost. The “stimulus” of government deficit spending, if it works, wastes resources on projects not worth the cost in other public and private activities crowded out. The “cash for clunkers” program and the subsidy to first-time homebuyers shift demand forward in time (while incidentally redistributing wealth not to really poor people but to people well enough off to afford cars or houses). If an increased government deficit is a (short-run) good idea, sending a \$250 check to old people is not as good a way of increasing it as cutting marginal tax rates to improve incentives. (But perverse though the program is, I won’t send my own check back.)

Appraising measures to promote business recovery should take account of what a recession is. When Vice President Biden and other spokesmen claim that their “stimulus” program has created millions of jobs — or, rather, has saved many jobs that would otherwise have been lost — they are making a claim rendered empty by its built-in protection against being proved wrong. Commentators show impatience when they report the failure of the Federal Reserve’s currently very easy monetary policy, forgetting Milton Friedman’s explanation of why monetary policy typically works with long and variable lags. The task of reversing the Federal Reserve’s vast creation of bank reserves in time to prevent severe inflation, or even a panicky flight from the dollar, is another example of short-run vs. long-run contrast.

A recession is a disruption of the intricately coordinated nationwide, even worldwide, web of buying and selling, employing and working, and lending and borrowing that links business firms to one another and to workers and consumers. Time, not government, brings recovery as firms and people grope for a new market-clearing pattern of prices and wages and as they restore or replace disrupted business relations — all on condition that a perverse monetary policy does not impede this mending of contacts. Regrettably, employment is usually one of the last signs of business recovery.

Capricious experimentation with measures to restore prosperity threatens to impair business confidence in the longer run and so the investment that would bring greater production and employment. New Deal measures, for example, prolonged the Great Depression of the 1930s until the start of World War II.

The viewing and reading public provides another example of short-run orientation when it demands and seems to take seriously the many mutually contradictory stock-market predictions supplied every day on TV and in the newspapers. Their unreliability is encapsulated in the old maxim (attributed to various skeptics): “If you must predict, predict often.”

— Leland B. Yeager

Media blackout — As part of the brouhaha over the failed bid by radio personality Rush Limbaugh to become part owner of an NFL team, Howard Kurtz, hosting CNN’s “Reliable Sources,” interviewed Washington Post columnist Michael Wilbon, who is black. Wilbon was one of several journalists who attributed unconfirmed racist statements to Limbaugh, statements that Limbaugh has denied he ever

made and for which no proof exists that he ever said them. Wilbon is one of the few journalists who, at the time of this Reflection, claims to have apologized to Limbaugh, though as of yet the apology (unlike the slur) is not in print.

On “Reliable Sources,” Wilbon explained that while the particular remarks he’d attributed to Limbaugh may have been incorrect, Limbaugh is “universally reviled” by blacks. He made that claim more than once. Yet he also indicated that he had an ongoing acquaintance with Limbaugh, such that the radio show host contacted him directly to assure him that the alleged comments were false.

This did not strike Kurtz as sufficiently strange — a black man having an ongoing acquaintance with a person whom all black people revile — to require follow-up questioning on that point. Neither did the fact that two common substitute hosts for Limbaugh when he is on vacation are economists Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams, both of whom are black. Presumably, Kurtz isn’t knowledgeable enough about Limbaugh’s show to ask follow-up questions of this sort: “Why would Sowell and Williams, who must revile Limbaugh because blacks ‘universally revile’ him, be willing to sub for, and speak highly of Limbaugh? Why have Justice Clarence Thomas and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice appeared as guests on Limbaugh’s show if they, as blacks, revile him?”

I love learning about media errors from someone as well informed as Howard Kurtz.

— Ross Levatter

Two wolves and a lamb — I have heard that a large number of our citizens don’t have to pay income tax. In fact the poorest 43% of the populace pays no federal income tax, and many get payments from the government in addition. Polls have shown that these folks are not worried about the cost of a government-run healthcare system. It is the 57% who do pay taxes that are worried about the cost of things like Medicare, Social Security, and now government-sponsored healthcare. Because of their fears, the great reforms that President Obama wants to give us all are being blocked.

When you look at it in this way — 43% pay nothing and 57% pay everything — the solution is obvious. There are too many people being taxed. Let’s just adjust the tax rates so that only 43% will pay income tax. This would make a lot of people happy and reduce the number of people who are worried about tax rates.

There would be solid majorities in favor of healthcare benefits, universal preschool, fixed-rail mass transit, fixes for global warming, and the like. There would also be solid majorities in favor of passing taxes to pay for these things. That would be helpful, because the income-tax rates on the wealthy would probably have to go back up to 70%. Michael Moore has shown us why that is just. After all, the wealthy have more money, so asking them to pay a higher percentage of their income is only fair.

And certainly there would be much less bickering in Washington. There wouldn’t be so much partisan politics, and much good could be done in a short time.

Some naysayers might argue that there is a conflict of interest for people who don’t pay any taxes, yet vote in favor of programs to benefit themselves. Actually, there is no conflict; there is a confluence of interests — people voting in favor

of things they want and need. Don't we usually ask our loved ones, just before Christmas or birthdays, what things they'd most like to receive as gifts? How is this any different?

If you took the "conflict of interest" argument to its logical end, you would end up arguing that people who don't pay any taxes shouldn't be able to vote. But how un-American is that?

— Don Crawford

Choicing literacy — Denver's recent municipal election included a two-way race for an at-large school board seat. Neither candidate would win a "Libertarian of the Year" contest, but surprisingly, each expressed a tinge of libertarian thought. Mary Seawell is open to charter schools. While not exactly embracing them, she seems to show an understanding of the need for them as part of school system reform. Christopher Scott does not embrace charter schools, but believes that educational decision-making is too centralized and should be driven back down to the neighborhood level.

So which of these candidates should be in charge of our children's education? The following comment from Seawell settled my vote: "Somewhere between 40–50% of students in the North designated area are choicing into a school other than their assigned high school." Excuse me? They are what?

If I still had children of school age in this district, I would be happy if they learned how to choose a school. It wouldn't bother me to find that they had eventually chosen a school. But I certainly would not want to risk the possibility that they might end up "choicing into" anything.

My wife, a wonderful teacher, retired after 30 years of service (hate the system, not the teacher!), assures me that this type of language and much worse is simply standard education jargon. It could well be that the people who communicate through incoherent babbling really don't mean any harm by it, but it still makes me queasy.

I voted for Seawell's opponent. Seawell won in a landslide.

— Doug Gallob

There goes the neighborhood — You know those small, almost subliminal details, the things that you may not consciously notice when you walk through your neighborhood, but that you may later recall as portents of doom? A broken window, a lawn that isn't mowed much anymore, a roof that slopes where it didn't use to slope . . . They're unimportant in themselves. You'd be a fool to worry about them. Nevertheless . . . is this when the slide begins?

I've begun to notice one of these possible portents in our common neighborhood, America. It may not mean anything, but still . . . Have you observed that the letter "T" is now appearing where it didn't appear before? I mean "T" as an abbreviation for "trillion."

We're used to expressions like "5K" for 5,000, and "5M" for 5,000,000, and even "5B" for 5,000,000,000. But "trillion" was formerly so unusual that it was always written out as a whole word. Now, more and more, one sees "5T," or "8.6T," or even larger, less imaginable T's. And they don't appear in news releases about astronomy; they appear in news releases about the United States' so-called budget.

This can't be good. Heaven forbid that we ever see that letter "T" printed on what used to be a dollar bill.

— Stephen Cox

Liberal discretion — Ever since George McGovern took on Richard Nixon in the 1972 election, Republicans have tried to smear Democratic candidates as "card-carrying ACLU liberals." While the charge wasn't true for most, it did apply to a few members of that party.

Unfortunately, Obama is not one of them. In the Democratic tradition of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, he too will sacrifice civil liberties on the altar of "social justice."

Most recently, Obama has endorsed a UN resolution that calls on governments to criminalize "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence."

Aside from the question of whether it's any of the UN's business to advocate criminalizing things, the resolution constitutes a hunting license for governments to jail anyone who doesn't like anyone else, and says so — thus, perhaps, inciting "hostility" in someone. I am sure that governments already have laws on hand that are sufficient to indict genuine perpetrators of "violence." The resolution is simply agitprop, and should be denounced, not sponsored.

— David Beito

Fresh blood and ideas — This year's crop of Nobel Prizes in the sciences gives rise to some interesting thoughts.

A comforting thought is that out of the nine winners, eight were Americans. Once again, America maintains its lead in science and technology.

Worrisome thoughts start when you notice that most of these eight American Nobelists are immigrants. Five moved here from abroad (one each from Australia, Britain, Canada, China, and India). This is nothing new — since 1901, one fourth of all American Nobel Prize winners have been immigrants. Today, over 40% of all Ph.D.-level scientists working in America are foreign-born, as are one-third of the engineers and scientists in Silicon Valley. A quarter of all international patents filed from our country in 2006 had a noncitizen listed as inventor or co-inventor.

The worry about these stats is twofold. First, they raise the suspicion that the American educational system is weakening when it comes to producing home-grown scientists. Second, they raise questions about our immigration policy.

Under existing law, we are nationalizing fewer than a million new citizens a year, turning away millions of highly educated people. And of those who do get naturalized, preference is given to relatives of existing citizens. We give out visas for highly trained knowledge workers (such as non-university-employed engineers) to only a fraction of the tens of thousands who apply.

We need to increase the number of legal immigrants dramatically, and do so in the way many other countries do: admit immigrants under a points system. Anyone with a degree in engineering, science, or medicine gets points — the higher the degree, the more the points. Speaking English well would also get the candidate points, as would objective indicators of success (such as possession of patents, capital, or business ownership). Take the top two million applicants each year, after doing background checks.

Far from increasing unemployment, this would help get America out of the doldrums. A recent study by the National Foundation for American Policy found that each H-1B visa (that's the one for high-tech foreign workers) granted by the

government increases employment in American firms by five employees.

— Gary Jason

Requiem for 2009 — It was a rotten year, politically speaking. It didn't start out so badly; I was not unhappy about Obama's election. The Republicans had abandoned all principle, and I could feel, and share, the excitement of African-Americans as Obama's victory neared. But then, I didn't think his policies would be as awful as they have been — one reckless government takeover program after another, aided by his minions, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid.

Economically, it was a rotten year too, and the rottenness is conjoint. It will only get worse if the magicians in Washington pull off more rabbit tricks, with their "stimulus," bailouts, card-check, healthcare revamps, cap-and-trade, and more.

The modest rise in the stock market reminds me of the market's rebound 80 years ago. In August 1930, the Dow Jones average came close to what it had been in early 1929. But then the economy was battered by New Deal programs, from killing piglets to forcing the "public option" of electric power. (The piglets were killed to prop up farm prices; today's \$8,000 tax credit for supposedly first-time homebuyers is a taxpayer-funded way of propping up housing prices.)

Superficially, things today are different from the 1930s, because Ben Bernanke "learned the lesson" that the Federal Reserve created the Great Depression through lack of liquidity. Now he is pouring money into the system to "restore" liquidity. But who in his right mind will invest in an economy being strangled by inflation and high taxes?

We haven't seen the inflation yet, and we can keep hoping that somehow it won't materialize — that, for some reason, the vast rivers of printing-press money won't flood the currency. But the price of gold keeps going up. In mediaspeak (here's a passage from the Associated Press), that's because "hopes for an improving economy fed a broader rally in commodities." Gold is just another commodity? No. Even my stock adviser, who brilliantly invested in blue chips for more than 40 years, is recommending "some" gold. And he's a Democrat.

— Jane S. Shaw

Candy Keynes — British economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) is all the rage these days. Time magazine rated him the number 1 economist of the 20th century, and he seems to be number 1 in the 21st century too. A few years ago, I gave a lecture at West Point and asked my free-market host why they used the William Baumol-Alan Blinder textbook, which is strongly pro-Keynesian. His answer: "We need to use the economic model that is most popular in Washington DC."

Recently I had dinner with Keynes' biographer, Lord Robert Skidelsky, who until a few months ago lived in Keynes' country estate, Tilton House. It was a magical night at Delmonico's (Wall Street's oldest restaurant) with Jeremy Siegel, the Wizard of Wharton, and my wife Jo Ann. We spent the entire night in high theory. Keynes would have been pleased, although Jo Ann was a bit bored by it all.

The biggest debate was over Keynes, and the Fed's application of the Keynesian ZIRP (zero interest rate policy). Siegel was surprisingly favorable about Keynes' contributions to macroeconomic theory, but was shocked to learn that Keynes advocated a "permanent cheap credit policy," and in fact,

wanted central banks to keep rates close to zero as a sign of the good life. Skidelsky confirmed that this was Keynes' view.

Skidelsky has written a new book, "Keynes: The Return of the Master." Unlike his three-volume biography, it is quite hagiographic. Skidelsky stated that "Keynes was not an inflationist," but later wrote that Keynes advocated a "permanent cheap credit" policy and zero-percent interest rates. Clearly you can't have it both ways.

The whole idea of eliminating interest rates is heretical, and just plain bad, economics. Hayek's major criticism of Keynes was that he didn't understand the complexity of capital theory, and this naive view of zero-interest rates and permanent cheap money proves it.

Keynes would be pleased to learn that the Fed has adopted a zero-interest rate policy for the near future. It's crazy to keep rates far below the natural rate, a policy that will lead again to asset bubbles and structural imbalances. It's like giving candy to kids, getting them high but eventually sick.

Siegel and I also lambasted Keynes and his followers for adopting the antisaving mentality that continues to plague Keynesians today. His "paradox of thrift" — the idea that by reducing consumption, saving can slow the economy and reduce further saving — denies an understanding of how savings and investment work to encourage entrepreneurship and economic growth. University of Virginia economist Ken Elzinga made this point to me: Keynes failed to appreciate the value of entrepreneurial creativity and the capitalist process of "creative destruction" that Joseph Schumpeter discussed.

— Mark Skousen

Modern husbandry — I have several pets — dogs, cats, horses. Some of my pets are fat, but they are all, I believe, happy. They rely on me for their food, care, and shelter. I am a benevolent provider; my pets want for nothing. But all these animals are conceivably capable of taking care of themselves. If they had been born free they would not look to me for any need — although it's unlikely they would lead such pampered lives. These animals, however, weren't offered a choice between freedom and domestication.

As human beings capable of reason, *we* have the mental and physical capacity to choose between liberty and captivity. When the choice is between two such stark alternatives, I am fairly certain that many people would find the decision for liberty an easy one to make.

But there is a considerable gray area between those two alternatives. The gray area between a free society and a captive society might aptly be termed a domesticated society. A domesticated society accepts a large degree of state presence in, and control over, each citizen's life in exchange for the state's providing, or at least guaranteeing, some minimum level of shelter, food, and so on. Those who populate such a society are conceivably capable of providing for their own needs and wants, but the drive to do so wanes in the face of government largesse. One can take a trip to Western Europe and experience domesticated societies of varying degrees.

Thinking about American political and social condition and how they have changed over time, it is not hard to discern a gradual taming of our free society. How did this come about? Many factors contributed: technological progress, increased leisure time, greater pressures in the workplace, the

general complexity of life. A major factor, however, was that as a population, American citizens accepted the Rule of Law — the imposition of more and more state control over, and legal presence within, their lives.

Over the course of the past century, statutes, ordinances, laws, and regulations expanded and multiplied exponentially. Such an overwhelming legal morass — backed by the coercive power of the state (federal or local) through fines and other measures — produces the specter of fear: fear of litigation, fear of criminal penalties for previously unregulated behavior, fear of civil fines, fear of increased insurance costs. Fear, as our politicians know, is a very compelling tool.

For that reason, politicians and other government-employed elites traffic in fear. A free society is unruly, not submissive. A fearful population is tame. A tame society conforms to rule quite easily. Politicians' and other elites' reactions to recent popular protests over the government's proposed healthcare measures demonstrate their preference for a domesticated society. Politicians, like many pet owners, wish their domesticated charges to see them as benevolent providers doing what's best for their chattels. The recent Massachusetts "health emergency" house bill is one example.

Whatever the degree of social domestication, it jeopardizes citizens' liberty. It is within the gray area of domesticity that politicians are most adept at whittling away our freedoms. As a libertarian, I have no faith in the benevolence of the state, especially as currently controlled by the Democrats.

This past year of hopey-dopey, government-forced, largely unwanted change has demonstrated our governing elites' preference for a domesticated, easily ruled society. Yet, as the growing prevalence of the "Don't Tread On Me" flag shows, people who believe in this still-free society are not willing to be tamed. We must keep up the fight. As I write this reflection, I am reminded of a pretentious mid-'90s song (go figure!), featuring the chorus "we'll make great pets." Let's build on this past year's reawakening to liberty, and in 2010 show that we will not make great pets.

— Marlane White

Market correction — The mess hall on the Army base where I live has a reputation for poor-quality food, which is what you might expect for a government-contracted monopoly. The company that operates the mess hall has long charged \$5 for breakfast and \$7.50 for lunch and dinner. Rumor has it that recently-visiting high-ranking officers, using standard military colloquialisms, made disparaging remarks about the ratio of quality to price. This was apparently an embarrassment to our commander, who told the company to correct the ratio. The company complied. We now pay \$4 for our poor-quality breakfasts and \$6.50 for our poor-quality lunches and dinners.

— Jeff Wrobel

Searching for Pyrrhus — On the morning after the election of November 2009, the one that put Republicans in charge of Virginia (by a landslide of 18 points) and of New Jersey (of all places), Democratic speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi gleefully proclaimed a Democratic Party victory.

Huh? How?

Well, according to her, it was because the Democrats (narrowly) won a congressional district in a remote area of New York, where, in a series of freak events, the Republican candidate withdrew and endorsed the Democrat.

Presidential kingmaker David Axelrod came up with the same happy spin, although he, unlike Pelosi, wasn't smiling.

There used to be an idea that modern liberals were smart. I believe we've outlived that idea. I don't think that Pelosi, even Pelosi, is dumb enough to believe that the Democrats won. But she's dumb enough to believe that she can get other people to buy the idea. And so is the president's bosom buddy, Mr. Axelrod. It doesn't look good for the Democrats.

— Stephen Cox

Channeling Sir Gresham — The Swiss franc has recently been quoted on the foreign-exchange markets at within a cent or two of one U.S. dollar. In the heyday of the gold standard, the mint par was 5.2 francs per dollar, 19.3 cents per franc. Since then the dollar has lost four-fifths of its value against the franc, even though the franc itself has been devalued against gold.

Like all other countries, Switzerland has suffered price inflation since World War II. Episodes of imported inflation have resulted from efforts to keep the exchange rate fixed in the face of inflation abroad. But Swiss inflation has been less extreme than elsewhere, even in the United States, where inflation has been low by international standards but where consumer prices are now *twelve* times as high as at the end of the war.

Have the monetary policies that caused this inflation supported output and employment here? Would the United States be economically worse off without it? Of course not. Exchange rates and price levels provide a striking example of the short-run outlook and the irresponsibility of policymakers driven by politics.

— Leland B. Yeager

The pension tetralemma — A tetralemma is a situation in which one must choose among four options, each having drawbacks. That's the situation faced by workers contemplating their retirement prospects.

Historically, workers had four choices about who would collect and protect their retirement savings: the government, the company, the union, and themselves. None of them was exactly problem-free.

We have all heard of cases of workers mismanaging their 401ks by investing in a ditty way — investing in bull semen, say, or putting all their money in just one stock. And we have seen any number of companies fail, leaving their workers with no pensions at all.

But the idea that unions or governments are better at handling retirement money than individuals or companies is risible. Consider a report by Kevin Mooney in the *Washington Examiner* (June 7). Since the Pension Protection Act of 2006, unions have had to file forms revealing the financial shape of their funds, and Mooney was able to review the 2007 documents. He reveals that nearly half of the 20 largest unions have grossly underfunded pension funds.

In fact, the unions with underfunded pension plans are among the very biggest: the International Association of Machinists, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the International Union of Operating Engineers, the Laborers International Union of Northern America, the National Plumbers Union, the Service Employees International Union, and the United Food and Commercial Workers. The Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation estimates that the

average union pension fund has only 62% of the assets needed to cover promised benefits.

And these reports are based upon the filings through 2007, before the major market correction and jump in unemployment!

Mooney notes that the desperate, fanatical push for card-check legislation by organized labor may be an outgrowth of the union pension crisis. Unions are looking to empower arbitrators to force companies and nonunion workers into the underfunded union pension plans. I would add that by increasing their membership and consequently their political clout, they can elect more Obama types, who will step in and rescue the underfunded pension plans by shoveling taxpayer cash at them.

Consider now a report by David Cho in the Washington Post (Oct. 11) on the crisis facing public employee pension funds. The financial downturn has resulted in state and municipal employee pension funds losing \$1 trillion in the value of their assets. A recent analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that within 15 years, public employee pensions will have less than half the assets needed to pay the benefits that they are on the hook for.

In many cases this is because the pension fund managers gambled on risky investments, such as outré hedge funds or arcane mortgage-backed securities. This is ironic, no? — considering that the first objection that statisticians offer to any proposal to privatize pensions is that ordinary workers are not wise enough to pick sound investments.

Even more ironic is that some of these pension funds are now tempted to make still riskier investments to cover the gap. In other words, they want to go back to dicey ways of chasing a high return. Bull semen, anyone?

But even if these funds managed to average an 8% annual return, Kim Nicholl of PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that they would still have less than half of what is required to cover pensions by 2025.

It is overwhelmingly likely that taxpayers will be stuck with paying for those pension benefits from increased taxes. To put this bluntly, the retirement of the many will be ruined to pay for the entitlements of the privileged few.

Meanwhile, Chile has gone through three decades with a privatized pension system, in which each citizen owns his or her own retirement account, but investments are limited to broad index funds. It has averaged something like 10% on the up side per year, and it is so popular that even the left-of-center governments that have been in power since its enactment have left it alone.

— Gary Jason

A blind pig finds an acorn — Lou Dobbs has an atrocious track record on issues related to immigration and economics, but now he has done something courageously sensible on a defining issue of our time. As pundits from Fox and CNN settle into a non-debate about how just how many additional troops to send to Afghanistan, Dobbs has broken from Punditry Central by promoting a petition on his website calling for the United States to bring home all troops from overseas.

Could it be that some elements on the right are beginning to question Obama's wars? I've never thought I would say it, but thank you, Lou Dobbs.

— David Beito

Joke's on us — The morning it was announced that President Obama had won the Nobel Prize for Peace, I thought it was a joke. When I saw it on the internet I thought I'd stumbled onto The Onion's site. Everyone I mentioned it to thought it was a joke. And it is a joke.

A few years ago I heard Walter Williams, the economist, make a joke like that. The difference is that Walter Williams is a lot more intelligent than the Nobel Prize committee. He knows when he's making a joke. He was talking about how busy he was those days, visiting his mailbox, looking for his check. He'd discovered that the government sent money to farmers because they were *not* raising pigs. So he started watching his mail, waiting for his own money to come. "After all," he said, with his inimitable down-home drawl, "I'm not raisin' pigs, either."

And that's how I feel about President Obama's prize. I don't see why I didn't get a prize, too. After all, I've done as little for peace as he has.

It's certain, of course, that he should have refused the thing. If I got a prize for, say, carpet weaving or belly dancing, I would turn it down. It would be too embarrassing to show up at the belly dancers' convention and say how grateful I was — for what? For the stupidity of the prize committee?

But presidents aren't that way. At least they haven't been that way for quite some time. Bill Bradford used to say that he still believed in the old idea of the job seeking the man, instead of the man seeking the job. He was old-fashioned enough to think that there was something unseemly about people running around yelling, "I want to be president." If a lot of people wanted you to be president, then maybe it would be polite for you to think about running — but not until then.

He divided presidents and presidential candidates into two categories. You could call them psychological categories. In one category were people whom many other people actually liked. Politically, it was a varied list: Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Robert LaFollette, Adlai Stevenson, Barry Goldwater; and, among winning candidates, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Ulysses Grant, Dwight Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan. The other list was composed of people who were virtually nobody's first choice for president, outside of their own. Some of the winners in this group were Woodrow Wilson, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, George Bush, Bill Clinton, and the other George Bush. I think you see a pattern: lately, the List B's have been greatly in evidence.

Of course, you need to think for a while before deciding which list some people should be on. The two Roosevelts started off on List B. They were pushy people whom few others really liked. Then, in the White House, they capitalized on the opportunities that the presidency affords for ingratiating oneself with the electorate, and they soon landed themselves on the A list. John Kennedy spent much of his political career as a denizen of B; the only people who really wanted him to be president were his family, their paid assistants, other fanatical Irish Catholics, and (sometimes) himself. While running for president against the archetypically list-B Nixon, however, he became, by contrast, an exemplary resident of List A, beloved of crowds.

What of Obama? Did I say that Nixon was the king of the list B folk? He was — but make way for Obama. Nobody wanted Obama to be president — nobody except Obama, who

probably wanted it from about the age of six. Yes, many people wanted an African-American president. Many people wanted a left-liberal president. Many people wanted anyone but Bush as president. But nobody really wanted Obama, except Oprah Winfrey. And why should they want him, just him? He had no political accomplishments, no special political ideas, no special political insight, no special political significance. He was intelligent, but so was Nixon. And like Nixon — like Bush, like the miserable Carter, like even the much more interesting Kennedy — he had something inside him that needed to call itself president.

Now, how do you think a person like that will react to an award, any award? He'll grab it, of course.

It's said that John Kennedy — who had a moderate and equable temperament, not at all given to tantrums — angrily refused to tolerate disagreement on one point: his authorship of "Profiles in Courage," a book that he did not write, but for which he collected the Pulitzer Prize.

In the same vein, imagine trying to persuade the emotionally needy Barack Obama that the Nobel Prize was misplaced, that he clearly had done nothing to earn it, that he could derive enormous political benefits by modestly declining it . . . All those statements are beyond obvious. But imagine him agreeing with that logic. No, never in a million years! That award is *his*. He wants it. He needs it. He would never be able to see it as something like a prize for not raising pigs. — Stephen Cox

In praise of the stick — Much has been said lately about hope, some of it quite inspiring. The best passages give one the heady feeling that all things are possible, even the things that clearly aren't. But I'm not here to quibble, at least not about that. For the moment, I'm willing to grant that hope is a good thing, most of the time anyway. But what about fear?

Not much has been said lately about fear, and what has been said hasn't been very nice. One is left with the impression that fear is a sordid little emotion conjured up by nasty people who want to use it to block out sweet reason and thwart progress. We are given to believe that fear has nothing good to offer. What follows is an attempt to balance the ledger.

In a nutshell, hope is the feeling that things will turn out well and fear is the feeling that they won't. What a fitting twist, then, that fear can, and often does, nudge people to behave in ways that help things turn out well. To be fair, it is rare for extreme forms of fear to help in this way. Terror and paranoid delusions contribute little to happy endings. But a measured, homeopathic dose of fear, whether of death, pain, suffering, or even inconvenience, can render us cautious and help us avoid tragic outcomes. Fear of this sort fosters both prudence and diligence. It is the small voice that asks the pertinent questions on the eve of ventures great and small.

"Did you fill the tank?" Yes. "Check the oil?" Yes. "Check the weather forecast?" Looks good. "Did you turn off the hot water heater?" Yes. "Set the security system?" I did. "Are the bars in the windows?" Yup. "Does Michael know he has to move the garbage cans?" Uh-huh. "Is all the gear here?" Yes. "Did you restock the first-aid kit?" Er. "Oh, hell." (Funny, that small voice sounded a lot like my wife's.)

Or consider the fears that a young couple may face when they set out to buy a home. Is the price too high? Foundation

cracked? Market falling? Termites? What's the current rate on a 30-year adjustable? Is the neighborhood going downhill? Graffiti? Is the HOA payment reasonable? What's that smell? The list is endless.

Things may, in fact, *not* turn out well. Just think: foreclosure, bankruptcy, having to move back in with the parents. What should a young couple do? Listen closely to the small voice. Look for a good deal. Check out the house and neighborhood thoroughly and then, when the little voice mumbles, "Oh, okay," buy the house. And yes, they should probably pass on the adjustable rate mortgage. Those things can bite.

Let's broaden the scope. Is it possible that an inoculation of fear could benefit a larger group of prospective homeowners?

In the run-up to the bursting of the latest housing bubble, millions of new homeowners were filled with hope. They felt that things would turn out well. Home prices were going crazy, fancy mortgages fitted out with booby traps were being touted on every street corner, and the air was thick with risk. But giddy optimism prevailed. (Alan Greenspan, referring to an earlier bubble, called the feeling "irrational exuberance.") Now, hope is a good thing, most of the time, but in this case, for millions of new homeowners, things did not turn out well at all. Even Treasury Secretary Geithner rented out his house in June after failing to sell it for less than he had paid.

Did it have to happen? No, not if people heeded the little voice. Here is what it was saying: "Look out below." Had people listened, there probably wouldn't have been a bubble to burst.

But let's broaden the scope again. Besides safer road trips, successful home hunting, and more stable housing markets, how else might fear contribute to a healthy economy?

At the most fundamental level, fear and hope make the wheels of prosperity turn. Among the fears are hunger, bankruptcy, homelessness, and unemployment. People work very hard to see to it that fears such as these never materialize. Among the hopes are a round-the-world cruise, a 10,000-square-foot mansion, a 700-series BMW, rhinoplasty, and a key to the executive washroom. People will go to incredible lengths to see to it that hopes like these are realized. This is very old stuff, really. It's straight out of "Poor Richard's Almanack."

Of course, things are not as simple as that. People differ. Their hopes and fears differ. While some crave shiny and sparkling things, others long to cure swine flu. Some don't really like to work at all. Others want a hot car. Some are keen on salvation. Many harbor the fear that they will be thought uncool. Then there are those who want to remake the world as it should be. Because of this diversity, generalizing about human motivation and behavior is difficult. But not impossible.

Here is a fairly safe generalization: if hope were removed from the economic equation, many people just wouldn't work very hard. But what would happen if fear were removed? Here the consensus breaks down.

There are those who think that fear does nothing good for the economy, that what we really have to do is get rid of all the impediments to things working out well. They feel sure that

continued on page 36

A Libertarian and a Comedian Walk Into a Bar . . .

by Tim Slagle

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you"?
It's a lot harder than it sounds.

So I'm in the chair at a Fox News studio on Friday night, getting my makeup put on. It's funny that I can almost predict where the cover stick is going to be applied. After many long years of staring at myself in the mirror, I seem to know where all the major flaws are. I'm sure if I were a woman, this would almost be a second nature, but I don't often get makeup put on.

I have been a stand-up comic for three-fifths of my life. July 4, 2009 will be the 30th anniversary of my first time on stage. It's not been an easy road, and I swear I can see every cocktail, every 24-hour drive, and a couple of kited checks in the lines on my face right now.

I am a comic. It's what I do, and until Liberty asked me to do this article, I never really considered that unusual or unique. Occasionally I'm reminded that it is.

"You should come to *my* job." That's the most common refrain a comic hears as the audience leaves the room. Everybody thinks there is something or someone at work that has the potential for comedic greatness, "We crack up all the time — there's this guy . . ." Sometimes an audience is a little less forgiving. "I could do what you do" one guy tells me. You probably could. It's fairly easy. Standing in front of people and getting them to laugh isn't that hard. In fact, it's kind of fun. The hardest part is finding someone to pay you for it.

I got into comedy in the late '70s. I remember reading an article about a guy who painted chewing tobacco ads on the sides of barns. I think he was probably the last person on earth still doing that job, even way back then. But he said something that has stuck with me through all the awful gigs I've ever done. He said, "First find something you really enjoy doing; then all you have to do is find someone fool enough to pay you for it."

"Your makeup's done," the girl said. I'm going on "Red Eye," a late-night Fox News comedy show with Greg Gutfeld. Greg, his co-host Bill Graham, a talking newspaper puppet named "Pinch," and a couple of guests, at least one of whom is always a beautiful woman, skewer the stories of the day. I really get a kick out of Greg. He claims to be a conservative, for the sake of contrarianism, but there is a thick libertarian streak down his back.

As I sit on the barstool in front of the camera, I'm informed that the monitor isn't working. It realized my biggest fear — not being able to watch the show I'm appearing on. When I agreed to do this, friends who have worked the 24-hour news format before told me that quite often there is no monitor. It might be easy when it's a one-on-one interview, but in a mad-house like "Red Eye" with five people and a puppet trying to wedge in jokes, following the action over an earphone is going to be rough.

I do my best to be funny, and make it look like I'm not struggling. The topic finally works around to Janeane Garafalo, who had claimed the day before that the only reason anyone could oppose the president is because they don't

It seems that no matter how early I fly, by the time I get into the hotel there is little time left for anything other than taking a nap before the show.

like a black man in the White House. She claimed that tax protestors are nothing more than "tea-bagging rednecks." I have a great rebuttal rant worked out:

"Janeane Garafalo is as familiar with right-wingers as she is with a razor . . . If it were not for the right-wing producers of '24,' right now she would be opening for Marc Maron at Bananas Chucklehut in Ottumwa, Iowa. She wouldn't talk like this if there were a chance at a second season, so you know her character on '24' is only going to live about 23 hours, which is about two hours longer than her talk-radio career. . . ."

Gutfeld cuts me off after "razor." Dang. I thought I had botched the interview, but later people who watched it told me it went quite well. Not much time to dwell on the show, since I'm working in Minnesota the next week. I shouldn't even have been doing the show, since I was scheduled to be in Fargo, North Dakota that weekend.

Unfortunately, as it does every spring, rain came to North Dakota about the same time the ice and snow were melting, and the place where I was supposed to be telling jokes that evening was submerged. The adage is, the show must go on; but, strangely, quite often it doesn't. So when I got the call for "Red Eye," I was more than available.

But I love doing stand-up. My life sometimes seems just an uncomfortable nuisance that goes on between those short minutes when I'm under the lights and have a mike in my hand.

Comedy is closer to an addiction than a career. The comics I've known all suffer some of the same symptoms as other addicts: voluntary poverty, broken homes, and codependency. You'll often find them living in dumpy apartments with several other addicts, or driving to a questionable neighborhood in the middle of the night just to get a gig.

There is also cross-addiction. Almost every comic I know has another habit that is probably just as severe. When I think of the fattest people I have ever met, they were all comedians. Ditto for drunks, junkies, nymphomaniacs, and gamblers.

I got into comedy because I had always been fascinated by the art form. The idea of just getting up and talking is part beatnik poet, part rock 'n' roll. Why wouldn't such an idea appeal to a kid like me, who spent his youth bouncing between jobs and schools, never really finding a place that could hold his attention for more than a month at a time.

Tuesday I'm running late to the first show of the week in Minneapolis. I am headlining all this week at Acme Comedy Company. Opening nights are always tough. It's a travel day, and I'm always jetlagged. It seems that no matter how early I fly, by the time I get into the hotel there is little time left for anything other than taking a nap before the show. The pre-show nap is something almost every comic does. It's considered a perk. The reasoning is, you want to be up and excited for the audience. If you don't seem happy, it's really hard to make the crowd happy. You want to present the same freshness that people normally have when they arrive at work, showered and shaved and ready to go.

So if a comic doesn't intend to sleep right up until showtime (some actually do — I've met a couple guys who stay up till late morning before they go to bed), for those of us who enjoy regular hours taking a nap is usually the only way we can get any normal daylight. We are like vampires among the living.

Sometimes we even have the same anonymity as vampires. I think comedians guard their professional identification as tightly as sewer workers and hedge-fund managers. When the inevitable small talk circles around to jobs, I stammer and stutter, trying to avoid the question. "I work in a bar" is usually the best response.

Everybody loves to hear a good joke. Once your profession is revealed, people expect you to launch into a routine for them. In the realm of "people who are expected to provide free services for strangers," I think we nose out even doctors and lawyers. I guess I should approach it more as they would,

In the realm of "people who are expected to provide free services for strangers," I think comedians nose out even doctors and lawyers.

handing out a card and saying "call my office and make an appointment." Despite my love for the craft, I'm not always ready to punch the time clock and go to work in the middle of an airport. People don't realize that. Telling jokes may be fun, but it is still my job.

That is probably the fault of comedians. The illusion of comedy is that you're having a really good time on stage, and life is just a big party. I doubt many people recognize the effort it takes to do a routine with all that enthusiasm, acting as if you had just thought of all these wonderfully clever things you spout on stage.

The club audience has been up all day, and their energy is usually winding down. On weekdays, it's even worse. Some of these people have been up since 5 a.m. It's the reason why mostly youngsters populate the weeknight audiences. Once

you get much older than 30, staying up late and dragging the whole next day becomes a burden. Bert Haas, the GM of the Zanies comedy chain in Chicago, once put it in words for me. He said that at his age, somebody has to be a very interesting conversationalist to keep him up till three in the morning. He speculated that there were probably only a dozen people in the whole world that could be interesting enough to lose that much sleep over. When he was in his 20s *everybody* was that interesting.

Up early Wednesday morning for radio. I do an hour for the “Chris Baker Show” on KTLK-FM. Morning radio is normally the bane of comics. It’s a great way to get the crowd out to the show, because if people are laughing on the way to work, they might enjoy coming into the club afterwards. A comic who can do good radio will always be rewarded with a great turnout at the door. There is something special about actually seeing someone live that you’ve just heard on the radio.

Unfortunately the times for these morning shows do not work on a comic’s schedule. Comics can’t go to bed right after a show. Usually after a show you’re completely pumped, and there is no way you can just turn it off and go to sleep. I know that a lot of guys don’t eat until after a show, so it’s usually dinner and probably drinks, and a little gabbing till the wee hours. I find it very hard to get to bed before two, and sometimes they want you in the studio as early as six. Most morning radio hosts get up about the same time comics are coming to bed, so the synergy is always off kilter.

This week was an exception. Chris Baker and I hit it off really well. It was Earth Day, and we had a really good time making fun of Al Gore and all the horrible predictions and threats to our economy. The middle act was from Seattle, so naturally he bought into the whole warming scenario. He said this is the first extinction in world history that was caused by a species.

“So what’s the big deal?” I asked him. “Why is an extinction by a meteor acceptable, but one caused by humans is not?”

“Well, the volcano is a natural extinction.”

“So are you saying humans are not part of nature?”

Wednesday evening, Dan Schlissel awakens me from my nap. Dan is my distributor. He produced my CD, “Europa,” and handles its distribution on Amazon, iTunes, and other outlets. He has some renown in the industry, and actually won a Grammy for producing “Lewis Black, The Carnegie Hall Performance.” He takes me out to a place where they serve coal-fired pizza. Apparently this is the latest fad in pizza, where the ovens are heated with coal. Dan explains that the original pizza ovens in New York all worked that way, and because of grandfathering, only the older pizza joints are still allowed to use it. It is the extremely high temperature that gives New York pizza its trademark crust.

But the ovens in New York are vented. Only the heat is transferred to the pizza in New York (theoretically). In this restaurant, the coal is burned right alongside the pizza, so the pizza acquires a bit of the coal flavor. It also probably acquires the mercury, the sulfur, and a thousand other toxins that make coal the bane of clean energy advocates. But here are Minneapolis residents happily gnawing on vegan pizzas full of blight, beside locally grown organic salads, served by tat-

toed hippie waitresses. Dan advises me to keep my amusement to myself, lest I chase off all the customers, and the city close his new favorite restaurant as a hazardous waste site.

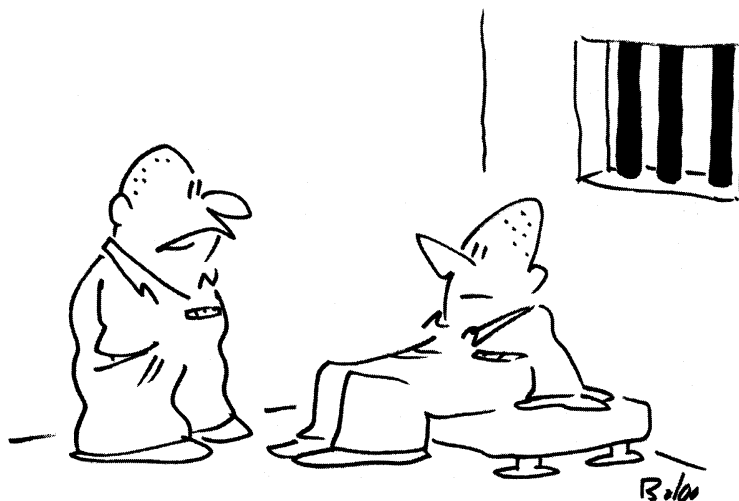
Dan loves vintage recordings and has an extensive record collection. Not only does he release comedy albums on CD and online as MP3s; he does limited releases of his favorite acts on vinyl. He owns the vinyl rights to Lewis Black, David Cross, and Patton Oswalt. “A classic comedy album isn’t really a classic unless it’s on vinyl,” he says. “I feel that certain records belong in that category.” Right now he is working on a dream he’s had for years and might finally be coming to fruition: releasing a comedy album on eight-track. His next project will be releasing a four-minute comedy track on an Edison cylinder. (Really.)

The week is going by really fast. Almost before I realize it, it’s Friday night again, and I’m preparing for my weekend shows.

The standard show format is three comics: emcee, middle (or feature), and headliner. The emcee is usually the guy starting out, and most probably a local. Emcee is the entry-level position. The second guy, the feature, is the one who has the material, but he’s still up and coming. He’s expected to do between 20 minutes and a half hour, and it is the easiest job in the lineup. He doesn’t have to warm up the crowd, and he isn’t expected to knock them out and get a standing ovation. Unfortunately, the money isn’t much better than what the emcee makes — maybe enough to pay for a hotel room (if he’s from out of town) and a couple trips to the China Buffet.

Friday evening I take the other two comics out for lunch. It’s a tradition that has been handed down from the early days of the business. The headliner is expected to take the opening acts out for lunch at one point during the week. The only thing expected of the opening act is a promise to buy lunch for his opening acts when he starts headlining. It’s a really neat custom, and even though money has been tight of late, I am happy to pass it on down, and grateful to be closing the show.

I loved stand-up from the first time I tried it. (In fact, I probably liked it a whole lot more than the people who saw me perform that first pathetic show.) It seemed like it took



“I tried to turn my life around, and apparently I made an illegal U-turn.”

forever for me to write my first ten minutes, which back then could get you a job as an emcee. Sometimes they would even pay you gas money. The ultimate goal of all us young kids was the headline slot. When I started out, there was actually a handful of comics touring the country, making a *living*.

In those days, before there were clubs devoted entirely to the craft, stand-up comedy was a rare treat on TV (shows like “Mike Douglas” or “Merv Griffin”). But the success of New York Clubs (such as the Improv) and the Comedy Store in Los Angeles was imitated in large cities around the country — Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and so on. In the ’80s, comedy started becoming the fashionable entertainment thing to do, and eventually it was possible to make a living as a feature. Surprisingly, even the emcees were making subsistence.

I got into the business at exactly the right time. It was my Ringo Starr moment. Around 1982 I hit the road as a professional comic. There were so many rooms opening up around the country that you could work seven nights a week and live

It was Earth Day, and we had a really good time making fun of Al Gore. The middle act was from Seattle, so naturally he bought into the whole global warming scenario.

on the road. No need to pay rent; you just needed an answering machine plugged in on a private line somewhere so the agents could get hold of you. We were all a flock of gypsies traveling from one town to the next. In the early days of the stand-up circuit, comedy was like rock ’n’ roll in the ’50s: hopping town-to-town, working with Elvis and Little Richard and Johnny Cash. Any week in comedy, you might be working with a future star: Tim Allen, Jeff Foxworthy, Jay Leno all did the same crummy gigs in the same Holiday Inn lounges that I did. One year, I spent almost 50 weeks straight on the road, before I decided to stop being subhuman.

That’s why I moved to Chicago in 1986. At one time, there were close to 30 weeks of work all within a two-hour drive of the city. I could actually park my car and eat a few meals at a kitchen table, rather than off the passenger seat of the vehicle. Chicago not only brought steady local work, it also brought my first taste of fame. As its reputation as a comedy town grew, cable networks were attracted to the city to film some of the up and coming talent. I was lucky to catch the eye of Showtime and MTV talent coordinators.

But tonight, as I said, I’m in Minneapolis, and the other acts and I are sitting outside the restaurant, and I note that before the smoking ban went into effect, Minneapolis didn’t have a lot of sidewalk cafes. Naturally. In a town where the mercury doesn’t rise above zero for months at a time, spending money on patio furniture seems like an unnecessary expense. Well, now that smokers, who are the bars’ best customers, have been forced outside, patio furniture (and outdoor propane heaters) have become a necessary expense for anyone who still wants to run a dram shop.

It is kind of pleasant to dine al fresco in Minneapolis. But now there’s a move underway to ban smoking on outdoor patios. The antismokers are such children. First they wanted to go into bars where people smoked, so they banned smoking. Everybody else had to step outside to smoke. So now that they’re all alone in the bars, the antismokers want to go outside themselves. Minnesota politics are strange. I had a line I used to do there a lot: “They had a professional wrestler for governor; now it looks like they may have a comedian in the Senate — or Al Franken might win.” It was a great line, and it always worked here. But that’s the problem with political comedy: it has an expiration date. I think it was George Carlin who said the trouble with doing political comedy is that you have to keep throwing out your favorite children.

Back at the hotel, I get an email from a girl named Chloe, a Scottish comic now living in New York. She’s passing through the Twin Cities and was hoping I might help her get on stage to do a couple minutes. Since I’m a big sucker for girls with accents, I happily comply. She’s green, but captivating. (I find it hilarious that a 25-year-old from Scotland is also what I’ve been drinking all week). Most of her stuff is okay, but her last joke has a punch line so vulgar I don’t think I can even come close to translating it into a sentence that could be printed in a family magazine like *Liberty*. Hearing such profanity from an adorable girl makes me double over, laughing.

Personally, I have a couple new pieces that I’ve been working on. One is a warning against the whole environmental concern about saving the earth for our grandchildren. I mean, come on, does anyone really believe that if we make all these sacrifices, those kids aren’t going to sell all our things and put us in nursing homes? (My grandfather fought in World War II. He *really* saved the earth, from Nazis and fascists, and the Empire of the Rising Sun. What did he get for his sacrifice? A Filipino nurse who gives him flashbacks of Iwo Jima . . .) The bit develops to a huge crescendo, with a pleading old man telling his grandson how he washed and sorted all his garbage into 12 recycling bins for this generation, and all his grandson cares about is getting a vintage Prius with just 15,000 miles on it. I can’t get that bit to work. It just lies there. Maybe it’s too dark, or maybe there isn’t even a joke in it. I can’t tell, because it’s really funny to me. That happens sometimes. Sometimes it’s impossible to find a closing line that wraps up a bit succinctly and generates some applause. No matter how many times I reword it, or change the perspective or the voice of the grandson, it just won’t come out the way I want it to.

I’m also working on another bit. It was inspired by a good friend and longtime libertarian activist, Barb Goushaw. In a bar conversation she once revealed to me that she wanted to pay slavery reparations. It’s an interesting idea, because if we did, the debt of the white man would be paid in full: “no more affirmative action, no more set-asides, and if I want to tell a joke about a black guy going into a bar with a parrot on his shoulder, I won’t have to look both ways before I hit the punchline.” I’m really having a hard time wording that joke so that people don’t get uptight about it. In this modern world, it seems that joking about something as serious as slavery is completely wrong.

But I’ve never been one to shy away from controversy. To me it is the jokes that make people uncomfortable that are the funniest. At a *Liberty* magazine conference a couple

years back, I was teasing David Friedman. He had once told Liberty founder Bill Bradford that he didn't find anything funny about me. Bill, being one who liked stirring things up from time to time, just had to tell me about it. So I spent the rest of the conference arguing with David over whether I was funny or not. His conclusion was no, that I was more shocking than funny, that I use political incorrectness in the same way that other, lesser comics use profanity, getting laughter out of the crowd's discomfort. But I certainly wasn't getting laughter out of it now. I bombed big on the first show Friday. It seemed that slavery jokes are not edgy in Minneapolis; they're completely off the cliff.

A friend of mine recently speculated why comedy is getting so big: political correctness has taken over America. You can no longer speak your mind in the classroom or at work, for fear of offending another person and possibly facing a lawsuit. The comedy clubs are the last bastion of free speech in America. In 1988, in a case called *Hustler Magazine, Inc. v. Falwell*, 485 U.S. 46, the Supreme Court decided that the authors of parody could not be held for libel. This set the ground for the current popularity of comedy clubs. As the workplace and schools began cracking down on "hate speech" throughout the '90s, the comedy club emerged as the one place where people could say what they thought.

The worst show of the week is always the dreaded Second Show on Friday. It usually starts around 10:30 p.m. Most people in the audience have been up for 15 hours or more, and many have been drinking for the last five. They might be young, but they are also tired, and half in the bag. And they are a little ignorant. Perhaps I'm generalizing, but it isn't always the Phi Beta Kappas who are out at the bar at 10:30 on a Friday. Usually these people are the same demographic that is courted by 24-hour laundromats. Strangely, tonight the second show seems to appreciate my humor more than the first. Maybe the reparations stuff only appeals to rednecks.

This leads me to wonder, not for the first time: what is the nature of comedy? I remember one of my theater teachers telling me that clowns all have characters based on one of the seven deadly sins. I think the same is true for comedians. Some of the greatest comedians have manifested several sins. Jack Benny was pride *and* avarice.

There is a theory, which you can find on the internet, that claims that all the characters on "Gilligan's Island" were manifestations of the deadly sins. But I believe the producer of the show, Sherwood Schwartz, based each of the characters on a classic comedian. Since classic comics all followed the "manifestation of sin" formula, it was inevitable that all the sins would be represented. (A source close to Sherwood confirms that this is the greater likelihood.)

Gilligan and the Skipper seem to be based on Laurel and Hardy, but they also represent Gluttony and Anger. Thurston Howell was a ringer for Jack Benny, but he also represented Avarice. Ginger Grant did a great Marilyn Monroe, but the sin was Lust.

A comic I worked with once, a guy named Uncle Dirty (real name: Robert Altman), was talking backstage about the nature of laughter. He mentioned that laughter isn't necessarily a good thing. He believed it was similar to the sound a cat makes when it's angry, and notes that when a chimpanzee, our closest animal relative, makes a face that we suppose is

laughter, it is actually the chimpanzee face of terror.

The legend is, Uncle Dirty killed his career on an episode of the "Mike Douglas Show." He was sitting on the panel with Billy Graham. He leaned over, grabbed Billy's lapel, and started stroking it with his thumb, checking out the material. "Dr. Graham," he asked, "did Jesus buy you that \$800 suit?"

Perhaps his own confrontational nature led him to think of the audience as adversarial. Dana Gould, who for six years wrote for "The Simpsons," used to do stand-up, and is recognized as one of the most brilliant artists ever to hold onto a microphone. He said in an article for *Gothamist*, "When I was a younger comic, [Kevin Rooney] said something to me that really changed my perspective the instant I heard it. It was, 'The audience wants to like you, but they want to know that you like them.' I wish I knew the date he told me, 'cause that changed everything."

As I've matured as a performer, and a businessman, I've learned that Dana's perspective is probably correct. Sure there is a potential for an aggressive comic to make it out there, but he will only be marketable to people who are in on the joke.

I really don't know where I'm going with all this, other than to give you an idea of what a comic thinks of humor. For some reason, because I tell jokes for a living, it's expected that I am an expert on what is and isn't funny. I'm not. If I had any idea of what is funny, I would be a household name by now.

I do know what I find funny. The second hardest task in comedy (and probably the most important) is finding other people who laugh at the same things you do. Lenny Bruce said that he wasn't looking to be a big star. He knew full well that he would never appeal to everybody. What he was looking for was 100,000 fans that loved him so much they would each give him ten dollars a year. That is what I've been trying to do.

Finding libertarians was a really good start. David Friedman notwithstanding, I've found that many libertarians really get a kick out of my stuff — perhaps too big a kick. Some

First the antismokers wanted to go into bars where people smoked, so they banned indoor smoking. Everybody had to step outside to smoke. Now that they're all alone in the bars, the antismokers want to go outside themselves.

of the stuff I was doing in the mid-'90s was so over the top that *only* libertarians found me funny. It is important to remember, in marketing, that even though you might be a niche product, you still want that niche to be as large as possible.

Louis Lee, the owner of the Acme Comedy Company, is my patron. He gives me at least a couple of weeks a year at his club, and I cherish them. It is an incredible place to work on material, because he has trained his audience to pay attention and appreciate the art. Because of Louis, Minneapolis stand-up audiences hold respect for comedy; they hold it in the reverence normally accorded to operas and theater productions.

He gives me the freedom to explore bits and concepts, and I exploit his good nature. A week at Acme is the best place to try stuff.

Today, Acme is one of the top comedy clubs in the nation, and some of the biggest names in the industry have graced its stage. Robin Williams, Lewis Black, and Frank Caliendo are just a few of the big ones. But in 1991, when Louis bought it, the Acme Comedy Company was closed, because the bottom had fallen out of the industry. Comedy had become oversaturated. There were far more shows than audiences. What was once novel had become routine.

In an effort to remain solvent, a lot of clubs resorted to “paper” to keep the doors open. This is the practice of holding a fake contest and telling somebody he “won” ten free passes to the comedy show. By jacking up the drink prices and making it a two-drink minimum, the clubs were able to recoup the cost.

The “prize” of free passes was sometimes awarded to a business card dropped into a fishbowl. Sometimes it went to whoever picked up the phone when a telemarketer called. Some clubs even resorted to automatic dialing machines, going through the entire phonebook sequentially. The cleverest way of handing out tickets that I remember from those days was on a radio show. We’d promise to give away tickets to the tenth caller and the phones would light up. The DJ would hit the calls one by one and say, “Hi, you’re the tenth caller!”

As you can imagine, tactics like this wouldn’t work forever. Eventually the listeners would say to themselves, hey, how come I’m always the tenth caller? Fishbowl “contests” became so routine that the fishbowls got known as the place where you drop your card to get free tickets. Eventually comedy became devalued, and people no longer appreciated it. The crowd became drunker and rowdier as the clubs catered to the lowest common denominator. With revenue streams being heavily dependent on drink sales, of course the crowds started getting drunker.

There got to be a game of chicken between the club owners. Nobody was making any money, but all the clubs knew that at least one club would survive in each market. So they

Uncle Dirty started stroking Billy’s lapel, checking out the material. “Dr. Graham,” he asked, “did Jesus buy you that \$800 suit?”

held on to their losing hands way too long, each hoping that the other guys would fold first. In many cases, all of them went bankrupt and were boarded up.

The recession of 1991 caused a cascade of failing clubs. Probably close to 90% of all full-time rooms closed that year. The ones that stayed open became weekend rooms. The face of the industry changed. Fortunately, the style of comedy I was doing by then fit really nicely with college and corporate events, so I was able to shift almost seamlessly between a club act and an after-dinner speaker performance. I still do the clubs as often as I can, because there is an energy in those

rooms that’s just hard to match anywhere else. Some might say I have to, because I’m hopelessly addicted.

I’ve been working for Louis Lee almost since day one, and we always hang late after the show. These evenings are always full of scotch and politics, economics and the latest scoop on what’s going on in the comedy industry. Since Louis has the most sought-after venue for comics, he maintains contact with some of the biggest agents and managers, and I’m always fascinated to learn the latest buzz.

Comedy is a huge business today. Stand-up was once relegated to the guys who would go on during a burlesque show in between the girls, while one was picking up her feathers and popped balloons and the next one was getting into a giant champagne glass. From the ‘60s through the ‘80s, it became a steppingstone to television comedy. But today the art of stand-up is more sophisticated and varied than ever before. Louis suggests that comedy in the 2000s is like music in the ‘70s, when rock ‘n’ roll splintered into punk and new wave and hair metal and at least a hundred other varieties. Comedy is doing the same thing today. There are also at least two dozen full-time theater comedians who pull in a quarter million or more a year just headlining 2,000-seat theaters. Whereas in the 1980s comics had to go on situation comedies to make it big, today comics like Ron White are actually too big for television.

Kids who were too young to remember the saturation of the ‘80s are discovering comedy for the very first time. Shows like “Last Comic Standing” have revitalized public interest in the art form, and outlets like YouTube, iTunes, and satellite radio are exposing a new generation of people to my addiction.

Saturday morning I sleep in late. The Scotch was flowing the night before, and I probably had one or two too many. I don’t remember much, but I do know the birds were chirping when Louis dropped me off in front of the hotel. I get up and decide to take a walk to clear my head. That’s when it comes to me, a way into the bit that I’ve been trying to square out. Minneapolis is home to the largest Somali immigrant population in America. I think to myself: “Oh that explains it. I *thought* it was a little early for ‘Dress Like a Pirate Day.’”

It’s hilarious to me, and I can’t wait to try it onstage. I plan to use the bit to start talking about President Obama’s failing to apprehend the pirates, and then segue from Obama jokes into living in a post-racial America, and paying off the debt of slavery. It may work.

And the first show Saturday, it does. It kills, as a matter of fact. It works so well that I’m able to improvise a little and actually script a portion of the bit onstage. It’s magical when this happens. The audience loves me.

Second show, not so much. No sooner have I made the Somali joke than a heckler starts shouting things about turning the trailer over on my white cracker ass, and I bail on the bit long before I even get to talk about slavery reparations. Fortunately Louis isn’t around to witness my failure. Apparently, he is at that age where I’m interesting enough to get him to listen to me past 3 a.m. only once in a while. I hate to leave after a week like this. But there’ve been only a couple of down days, and soon I’ll be on the road again, with a new chance to work the bit.

I think that’s called a relapse. □

Skirting the Surveillance State

by Andrew Ferguson

A libertarian's walk through contemporary
London, with some historical observations
and a dash of anarchic dissent.

Despite the iconic status of the double-decker bus, the black cab, and the tube, London is a city best seen on foot. The speed of modernized transportation — yes, even of public transit — reduces the city to an architectural blur: a greatest-hits list for tourist photographers, matching the tableau on the vinyl Harrod's bags they've invariably bought. The city as LondonLand: monuments severed from their centuries and contexts, off the bus and back on again; speeding away, reaching whatever velocity is deemed sufficient to escape the gravitational tug of history. It's the Stations of the Cross with Christ in a Corvette, mugging for the camera while the Cyrene tries to figure out the flash.

No one wants to see pictures of their buddies standing in front of landmarks, shots which serve only to emphasize how unimpressive are their friends, and their own lives, in contrast. Better to create one's own meaning, engaging in the alternative to one-tour-fits-all: the unruly discipline of psychogeography. It is unavoidably subjective, necessarily irreproducible, and exactly as immersive as one wishes it to be. There's one iron rule: pay attention. (This is both methodological *and* practical: the first thing most visitors to England experience is nearly getting run over while looking the wrong way

crossing the street outside the station.)

In his useful primer "Psychogeography," Melvin Coverley suggests that novices like me begin by drawing a line around the rim of a coffee mug laid on a street-level map, and then follow that circumference as closely as possible. Take note of buildings, street names, shops, graffiti, and the detritus of city life; anything that impresses itself on the mind. Upon reflection, the journey will be shaped by these considerations, and a narrative will emerge. The best writers in the field — Iain Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd, Alan Moore — often plot complex routes for their walks, with themes in mind ahead of time. But they do so with full knowledge of the difficulty involved; Sinclair in particular chronicles failure as often as he does fulfillment.

Still, Coverley's strategy — which I have found helpful exploring other cities, most recently my present academic

haven in Liverpool — was far from my thoughts when I first emerged from Holborn Station into the blinding light of an unseasonably beautiful day. One of the main reasons for the popularity of the tour buses, of course, is how demanding London is to navigate, and before running rings around anything I needed to establish a beachhead. Which can be difficult, as London is (and barring another Plague, Fire, or Blitz, always will be) one of the most expensive cities in the world: a practical concern that, until lunch was acquired, pushed out of my mind any more prosaic notions.

What did not occur to me until later was that Holborn is as good a starting point as any. After all, High Holborn St, the main thoroughfare, runs largely the same course it has since the Romans built a road there, so it serves well historically. And Holborn is by tradition a bastion of journalists — and, it must be said, many, many lawyers, thanks to the proximity of both the Royal Courts of Justice and the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey).

No, what occurred to me instead, as I ate at an unremarkable cafe of the sort that mocks up historical markers saying “On this spot in 1692, nothing happened,” was the explanation for an odd behavior I had noted on the long escalator ride up from the tube. Several of my fellow detrainers boarded the escalator, and then turned around to face where they’d come from — not to talk to anyone below them, just to ride. What they were doing, I realized, was turning their backs to the security cameras that monitor everyone leaving (and, from a different vantage point, entering) the terminal. It was a small, silent protest against the encroaching British surveillance state, reducing by one the number of times their face will appear on a CCTV screen that day.

The sheer ubiquity of security cameras here is numbing: an Evening Standard article from a couple years back (<http://j.mp/3ju2iV>) reported that the average Englishman is monitored 300 times a day, and the number can only have gone up since then. In a clever twist, the piece also printed a map showing the location of George Orwell’s house, in relation to the 32 CCTV cameras within a 200-yard radius. An early image in Moore’s “V for Vendetta” shows a camera with a sign: “For Your Protection.” Real-life Britain has dropped that

pretense; the signs either say “CCTV Camera In Operation” or, more often, there is no sign at all. Some of my hatred for the double-decker buses, I realized, derives from my hatred of these cameras: thanks to onboard models and trophy shots, tour groups do not see nearly as much as they are seen. I took heart from the quiet rebellion of those who turned away — and just as quickly saw the futility of such gestures, when a succession of mobile CCTV police vans trundled down High Holborn.

It was the next morning when I continued my expedition, heading east on that same street toward the city of London proper. The early omens were good: at the first major exchange, Holborn Circus, I found a church of my namesake. Dating back a millennium or more, St. Andrew’s is one of

An early image in “V for Vendetta” shows a camera with a sign: “For Your Protection.” Real-life Britain has dropped that pretense.

many churches rebuilt by the great Christopher Wren — not because it went up in the Great Fire, but simply because it was falling apart and he was on an absolute tear. Three centuries later, the Germans gutted it in the Blitz; it was rebuilt stone for stone to Wren’s design. This resilience to adversity and tyranny found another appropriate icon on Holborn Viaduct just beyond: a statue of a proud, crowned woman emblazoned “Commerce.” The juxtaposition spoke of the heroism of everyday people, oft beaten down but never quite broken, going about their business the best they can despite the intrusions and depredations of the state.

Of course, just down the street is one building that has at many times embodied state intrusion and depredation: Old Bailey, the monumental criminal court built on the site of Newgate Gaol. (For the horrors of Newgate, see Ackroyd’s essay in his “London: A Biography” or just about any Dickens novel.) Old Bailey, too, features a statue, a golden Lady Justice sitting atop the courthouse; significantly, she is not blindfolded. Appropriately for the Britain of today, this Justice sees (or attempts to see) all. Alan Moore seized on this identification of Justice with surveillance state, when his V climbs Old Bailey to explain to the statue that he is leaving her for his new love, Anarchy — immediately before blowing up the place.

Another alarming note is sounded — until the destruction of the prison, literally — by the church opposite the court, St. Sepulchre-without-Newgate. There hung the “bells of Old Bailey” from the nursery rhyme “Oranges and Lemons,” which throughout “1984” runs through Winston Smith’s head as a reminder of a “lost London that still existed somewhere or other, disguised and forgotten.” But those bells rang to signify the execution of a prisoner; as shown in the closing couplet that Julia supplies: “Here comes a candle to light you to bed / Here comes a chopper to chop off your head!” Though his forecast of a televisual surveillance state was prescient, if a bit premature, Orwell knew all too well that even in Winston’s lost London, the people were subject to the gaze of the state.



Photo 1

Old Bailey is overshadowed by another cathedral; in one of the happy coincidences that mark a walk gone well, this one takes its name from a saint famous for an episode of blindness, and a miraculous recovery of sight. St. Paul's is the preeminent cathedral in England, and one of the finest in the world: Wren's crowning achievement, the building is itself crowned by a dome bigger than any but the Basilica in Rome — a dome, remarkably, that can be scaled all the way up, 570 steps to the Golden Gallery at its peak. As they go, the staircases get vertiginously steep; it is no mean accomplishment to attain the summit. But at that height, one can reclaim the vision commandeered at ground level by Lady Justice and her CCTV armada.

The cathedral's Baroque design drew complaints at its unveiling that it smacked of "popery" — or worse, heathenism. In Moore's "From Hell," St. Paul's sits at the center of Jack the Ripper's psychogeographic pentagram cut across the city, culmination of a Masonic ritual reactivating the prison that chains the gods of the pagan past to England present. The mark of the Ripper's bloody success is the vision he receives, not only of London lost, but also of London yet to come. For good and ill, St. Paul's represents the unfettering of the imagination: human creativity at its peak.

The descent from that pinnacle is horrifying, both physically and metaphorically. Directly south of St. Paul's, on the far bank of the Thames, is the counterweight balancing that mad mystic mound: the concrete-bunker power station in which the Tate Modern art gallery has taken up residence (squatted, really) following an amiable split from its more elegant partner, Tate Britain. The stretch of the river separating the two is spanned by the Millennium Bridge (see photo 1), one of a half-baked batch of projects London cooked up in the chiliastic fervor leading up to Y2K. The Bridge was open for precisely two days in 2000 before it had to be shut down for two years of renovations; however, unlike its ill-starred sister project, the Millennium Dome (for which Sinclair reserved some of his choicest bile), the Bridge is still standing a decade later.

Still, classical engineering it is *not*, and as such it is an appropriate introduction to Tate Modern. The museum devotes itself to art since 1900, and holds at least a work or two of almost every major international artist of the past century. Yet these galleries are always subordinated to one major installation in the massive Turbine Hall, a three-dimensional cement canvas given over to a new artist each year. An exhibit on this scale cannot but set the mood for the rest of the museum; in past years it's ranged from neurotic (Doris Salcedo's "Shibboleth," a slowly-widening crack stretching the length of the building") to giddy (Carsten Höller's "Test Area," a series of twisty slides connecting the other floors to the Hall). This year the Turbine Hall is hosting Miroslaw Balka's "How It Is," which, conveniently for my theme, depends for its effect on the utter denial of vision. The work is a two-story-high metal cube lifted up on steel girders for supports. The cube is open on one side (facing away from any direct light source), and there is a ramp leading up to the inside, which Balka lined in black velvet to deepen the darkness.

In short, the installation is an anti-St. Paul's. The climb is gentle and graded rather than hard and rugged; at the end, instead of the best views in London, one finds an abyss. From the outside, perched on its girders, the cube appears unsteady,

unlike St. Paul's which famously repelled direct hits from German bombers during the Blitz. Balka has said that the exhibit is meant to evoke the feeling of those Jews packed into train cars and sent off to concentration camps; it fails at this, partly because everyone who goes in knows they're coming out, and partly because the ambient light, even on a typically grey British day, cannot entirely be eliminated. But the

The exhibit is meant to evoke the feeling of those Jews packed into train cars and sent off to concentration camps.

first moment inside is genuinely unsettling: almost everyone approaching the exhibit hesitates at the top of the ramp before stepping into the blackness, as if reminding themselves that even Tate Modern wouldn't allow an artist to lead patrons to the slaughter. In its ideal conception, at least, "How It Is" represents the most extreme form of the surveillance state, when surveillance is no longer necessary because there is nothing left to survey.

Southwest of Tate Modern I picked up a sandwich and a few of the day's threads near Waterloo Station, the enormous railway junction which has for decades served as a rendezvous point for south Londoners. I had thoughts of striking northwest, across Waterloo Bridge (which unlike the Millennium had held up for a century before getting closed down and rebuilt). From the Bridge one can see the entire bend of the Thames; it is the one place ground-level where the view isn't constricted — though it is, of course, monitored. But somehow that path felt incomplete, *off*. In consulting my map, I saw I'd thus far described a semicircular arc; taking the Waterloo Bridge would draw a sharp diameter across the enquiry. There were elements that could not be resolved going north. It was the wrong shape.

Every psychogeographic expedition runs into the doldrums eventually, and I had hit mine. (Even writing about it now, recreating the journey in full awareness of how it will finish, I find it a struggle to get the words on paper.) Backtracking mentally, I recognized that upon leaving Tate, I'd stopped paying attention — I'd drifted aimlessly down a succession of unremarkable streets, vaguely wanting food but not much else. The unease had not settled in, though, until I'd turned up Waterloo Road toward the station; retracing my steps, I continued on Westminster Bridge Road instead; something was pulling me west.

Partly it was that damned cube. By Balka's own admission, he had simulated me being railroaded off to my death. Allowing the symbolic rebirth of walking back out was all well and good, but the bit of me meant to die in there needed burial before I could cross back over the river, and by turning up Waterloo Road I'd missed the place for it: the London Necropolis Railway. Established to get corpses and mourners out of Victorian London and into the country where there was actually room for them, it ran at least intermittently until 1941, when all but the entrance was demolished by bombs.

This combination of trains, cemeteries, and German aggression seemed sufficient to lay to rest the specter Balka raised; leaving two pennies by the gate to pay for passage, I made for Westminster Bridge.

My renewed focus came not a moment too soon. For it is from Westminster, and specifically the Palace of that name, that the surveillance state emanates. Between the CCTV cameras and the round-the-clock tourist throng, the Westminster complex may be the most photographed place on earth (see photo 2). And yet, it is a place that inspires complacency: four centuries later the failure of the Gunpowder Plot lingers over it. In Moore's graphic novel, *V* begins his vendetta by finishing the job Guy Fawkes and crew started — but the building *V* blows up is an empty shell, less an embodiment of the fascist state than a relic of a London disguised and forgotten. The movie adaptation foolishly makes this the final act: Big Ben blowing up to the "1812 Overture" some-

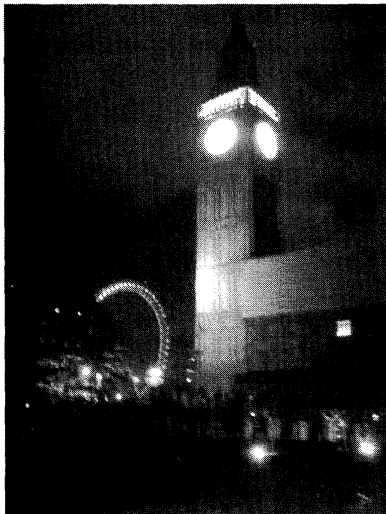


Photo 2

how manages to come off as anticlimactic — nearly as big a letdown as the original Plot itself. (For more about "*V*," see the reviews by Jo Ann Skousen and Ross Levatter, June 2006.)

But as I looked over the Palace, and especially the Abbey just opposite, I found the Westminster complex sadly lacking as a symbol of modern-day tyranny. For the tyrants of earlier ages, sure, this palace upon the Thames lived up to its reputation as the "heart of darkness" for many a subject people, in the days when English oppressors were magnificent, and ambitious, and creative in their cruelty. Today's tyrants, though, are unworthy of such a grand structure: creatures of such limited intellectual horizons that they must rely on others' technologies to claim any sort of vision whatsoever; so lacking in discernment that to see anything, they must see it all. The emblem for this style of governance is not the elegant, imposing Palace; much less is it Westminster Abbey, burial ground of kings and poets.

No, the British surveillance state is best represented by an edifice — meant, appropriately enough, as a short-term attraction, but now held over indefinitely — installed just on the far bank of the Thames: the giant Ferris wheel called the London Eye. Towering over even Big Ben, it offers to anyone willing to wait in line for the better part of a day a panoptical view of the city. From such a height, there is no separation between places (and thus no connections between them, either), only one vast whole. Unlike the vistas available from St. Paul's Golden Gallery, experienced only after a Dantesque climb through successively rarefied genius, the London Eye offers a slow plod through thin air. Riders in glassed-in pods take identical panoramas, paying for the privilege of becoming part of the surveillance apparatus.

It was this structure, I realized, that I'd been skirting round all day; first peeking over buildings at the Millennium Bridge onward, then close up on the edge of Waterloo Station (see photo 3). But as with many monstrous things, it did not reveal its true form till nightfall, when the rim lights up bright red, evoking, of all things, Tolkien's description of Sauron: "a great Eye, lidless, wreathed in flame" (see picture 4, the color of course will have to be imagined). I stood on the edge of the Victoria Embankment, staring back at it, challenging it, but it is relentless — its pace never more than a creep, so that its interchangeable passengers can be processed as it continues to turn.

My day's final steps became clear: I needed to complete my loop, matching the Eye's circuit with one of my own — encircling it in the history its views obliterate. For the truest arc, I would have to cut back down to Westminster and make my way up Whitehall, but marching up a street with governmental departments looking down on me from both sides seemed a bit incongruous with my aim; instead I walked further up the Embankment to pay my respects to Cleopatra's Needle, touchstone of many a psycho-geographic ramble, including that of Moore's Ripper in "From Hell" — nothing reasserts a sense of historical awareness like a 3,400-year-old Egyptian obelisk. From there I turned toward Trafalgar Square and another obelisk, this one native in origin: Nelson's Column. In between runs Northumberland Avenue, itself a product of historical disappearance, the name being all that remains of Northumberland House and the other great manors that once lined the banks of the Thames.



Photo 3



Photo 4

Trafalgar Square obviously is one of the great tourist parks of the world, and a powerful symbol of all things English; had Hitler's invasion plan succeeded, he had settled on Nelson's Column as the trophy he wished to carry back with him to Berlin. Standing at the base of the pillar, one can see among other sights the National Gallery, St. Martin-of-the-Fields, the

The greatest tragedy of "1984" is not the totalitarian state, it's the complicity, the outright eagerness of people in perpetuating it.

Strand, and the Mall leading down to Buckingham Palace. But I had eyes only for completing my circuit; with the darkness closing in there was increasingly little to pay attention to without attracting the gaze of others. Heading north of the Square, up narrow St. Martin's Lane and past a series of posh West End theaters, I began to feel that I might yet escape the Eye. But it wasn't till I crossed back over High Holborn and closed my loop that I saw the proof of it: the beaming portico of the British Museum, repository of over 12,000 years of human history.

When I arrived, the museum proper had closed, but the renovated Great Court wasn't open. Once an open courtyard, the Great Court held the famed round Reading Room whose patron list was a who's-who of the 19th-century literary world (most often noted in this context is Marx, who assembled the basics of communist theory from a desk in this library while steadfastly refusing Engels' invitations to tour the factories he owned). Today, with the Library having moved on, the Reading Room hosts major exhibitions; the Great Court, meanwhile, has been completely transformed. Now ingeniously roofed over with computer-designed panes of glass, each one different, the aim of the new floor design is that with every step, the view will change and new objects be revealed to the eye. The courtyard functions as a microcosm of the city



Photo 5

itself, demanding to be explored psychogeographically — and since hundreds of tour buses drop off thousands of tourists at the British Museum every day, there is guaranteed to be one spot on the itinerary where they will *have* to engage with their environment; they will not be able just to wait, rooted to one spot, and have it flash before them.

For it's that complacency, that passivity, which is the most dangerous aspect of the modern surveillance state. The greatest tragedy of "1984" is not the totalitarian state established in Britain, it's the complicity, even the outright eagerness, of the people in perpetuating it. In America as well as Britain there is a swelling conflict over the right of everyday people to document the day-to-day dealings of those in power. The authorities, of course, wish to have total access to our lives while working in complete secrecy: every camera they take, every video they erase, every website they force offline through the application of money and lawyers is a bluff on their part, a gamble that we'll settle for seeing only what they wish to show us — that we'll be content to stand with the government line, paying them to see through their Eye.

Rebelling against this doesn't mean donning Guy Fawkes masks and blowing up landmarks (though I do get a kick out of the story each month or so when some fed-up motorist takes a bat to a traffic-camera array), but we can emulate V in one way: our insistence on *seeing* rather than *being seen*.

It is vital that we keep our eyes open and, whenever possible, turn the oppressive tools of government back against it. In 1997, visual artist Gillian Wearing won the Turner Prize

When the hour is up, one policeman utters a sound somewhere between a gasp and a scream, so great is his relief at being freed from the burden of surveillance.

(arguably the most prestigious English arts award, administered by Tate Britain) for her work "60 minutes of Silence," an hour-long videotape of a group of police officers whom she'd asked to remain completely motionless during the shoot. It looks at first like a still photo, but as the hour wears on, the shufflings, scratchings, and throat-clearings become more and more evident; when Wearing finally announces the hour is up, one policeman utters a sound somewhere between a gasp and a scream, so great is his relief at being freed from the burden of surveillance.

Yet that is the same burden that we as citizens are asked to bear hour upon hour, day after day, without a hope of anyone telling us our time is up. Enough! In an age where nearly everyone carries around a device equipped for multi-megapixel image capture, there is no reason that we should not be able to document the presence of a bank of traffic cameras, or a mobile CCTV van idling on the side of a calm street for no apparent reason (see photo 5). And in the meantime, there are other small, symbolic acts of rebellion available to us.

On my way back from London, I boarded the escalators backward. □

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Crash and Burn

by Edmund Contoski

From start to finish, the cash for clunkers program was a lemon.

The government program that gave people up to \$4,500 for trading in an old car for a new energy-efficient model has been widely proclaimed a huge success, as measured by the popularity of the program. That certainly made it successful for the politicians who, in effect, were buying future votes for themselves. Of course, they didn't say so; instead they claimed they were pursuing the noble benefits of stimulating the economy, promoting energy efficiency, and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Absent from the discussion was whether there was any moral or constitutional basis for taking money from some people (taxpayers) and redistributing it to others for purchasing automobiles.

Government is supposed to protect people's rights, but its violation of people's right to their own money has become so widespread for so long it has become generally accepted. According to economist Walter Williams, "Two-thirds of the federal budget consists of taking property from one American and giving it to another. Were a private person to do the same thing, we'd call it theft. When government does it, we euphemistically call it income redistribution, but that's exactly what thieves do — redistribute income." The "cash for clunkers" program (Car Allowance Rebate System, or CARS) is sim-

ply another scheme for doing the same, disguised by claims of collective economic, environmental, and energy benefits. These claims are not only false but distract attention from the moral and constitutional issue of property rights and government theft.

The Founding Fathers were very familiar with the English philosopher John Locke's ideas about the rights to life, liberty, and property. Jefferson was actually accused by some, most notably his fellow Virginian Richard Henry Lee, of simply copying Locke's work in writing the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson replied that he did not consult other literature while he was writing but "did not consider it as any part of my charge to invent new ideas altogether." Rather, he said he intended simply to make "an expression of the American mind."

In 1772, four years before Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, Sam Adams created a “committee of correspondence,” the first organized opposition to British policies. It composed a document that provided a framework for the Declaration of Independence. It enumerated the rights of the colonists: “First. A right to Life; secondly to Liberty; thirdly to Property.”

Jefferson, however, substituted the words “pursuit of happiness” for the word “property” in Locke’s triad of rights. The change was in no way intended to downgrade property

Instead of stimulating the economy, the “cash for clunkers” program left the United States \$1.4 billion poorer.

rights. Jefferson and his contemporaries envisioned property rights as the principal means for the pursuit and attainment of happiness. The new phrase was inclusive not only of property rights but of the purpose they were to serve, and that of human actions in general.

The Declaration of Independence referred to the rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” as “unalienable” because they were derived from the nature of man and inseparable from it. Man’s rights are not given to him by government but by his own existence. Government can only recognize them or violate them. “Unalienable” means “not transferable to another or capable of being repudiated.” One’s right to property is not to be transferred to another by government. Nor is it to be repudiated by laws that deprive him of using that right for the pursuit of his own happiness rather than for what the politicians may claim is better for society. The Declaration states that it was “to secure” — Locke’s phrase — the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that governments are instituted. When government engages in redistributing property rather than securing it for its rightful owners, it is an instrument for violating rights and plundering wealth instead of securing it.

Madison wrote: “Government is instituted to protect property of every sort; as well that which lies in the various rights of individuals, as that which the term particularly expresses. This being the end of government, that alone is a just government, which impartially secures to every man whatever is his own.”

So the cash for clunkers program was off to a bad start in the most fundamental sense. The alleged collective benefits from the program fare no better. Burton Abrams and George Parsons of the University of Delaware added up the total benefits to buyers and auto companies, the environment, and from reduced gas consumption, minus the overall cost of the program. They found that instead of stimulating the economy, the \$3 billion program that sold 700,000 vehicles made the nation \$1.4 billion poorer.

What about the increased auto sales from the program? An analysis published by Edmunds.com showed that in any given month 60,000 to 70,000 “clunker-like” deals happen with no government program. Jeremy Anwyl, CEO of Edmunds.com,

says the 200,000-plus deals the government originally anticipated from the program were about the “natural” clunker trade-in rate. He notes, too, that 100,000 buyers put their purchases on hold waiting for the program to launch, thus exaggerating the effect of the program once it began. Furthermore, when it became apparent the program was underfunded, consumers rushed to take advantage before the funding ran out. Anwyl also says “car prices are usually slashed in August and September to make room for the next year’s models arriving in September. In anticipation, buyers have been putting off purchases all year.”

All those factors contributed to peak sales during the CARS program. But to the extent they caused buyers to move their purchases forward, they reduced demand for vehicles after the program expired. It should not be surprising that in September 2009, the first month following the clunkers program, U.S. sales of cars and light trucks fell 41% from August. GM’s sales fell 45% Chrysler’s, 41% and Ford’s, 5%. Similarly, Volkswagen said Germany’s cash-for-clunkers program might boost sales to 3.7 million units, up from 2.8 million, but that sales would likely revert to 2.8 million in 2010.

In the same way that the CARS program demonstrates an ignorance of human rights that is more than two centuries behind the times — predating the wisdom of our Founding Fathers and our nation’s history of progress — it demonstrates a similarly primitive ignorance of economics. The wizards of Washington who devised CARS, and those who defend it, are apparently ignorant of an elementary principle explained more than a century and a half ago by the French economist Frederic Bastiat. In his famous “broken window” essay, a man’s son breaks a windowpane, which costs six francs to replace. Against the argument that such accidents stimulate the economy by supporting glaziers and the manufacturers of glass, Bastiat explained economic effects that are not seen. If the man didn’t need to replace the windowpane, he could have, for example, replaced his worn-out shoes, or added another book to his library. If the accident did not happen, the man would have both the window and the shoes (or book). Instead he has only the new window. The shoes or book are

Even with the CARS rebates, many people still couldn’t afford a new car. A used car would meet their needs, but the program destroyed 700,000 used cars.

never seen because they aren’t purchased, but they represent a loss not only for the man but to society from the destruction of the window. In Bastiat’s words: “Society loses the value of objects unnecessarily destroyed,” and “to break, to destroy, to dissipate does not encourage national employment.” Or as the great economist Henry Hazlitt wrote a century later, referring to the same essay: “You can’t raise living standards by breaking windows so some people can get jobs repairing them.” But that is the principle behind the CARS requirement that perfectly serviceable vehicles traded in under the

program be destroyed. Auto dealers were required to destroy the engines by injecting sodium silicate, then crush the cars for scrap, eliminating the possibility that even parts that might be usable could be salvaged.

Even with the CARS rebates, many people still either couldn't afford a new car or couldn't meet the requirements of the program. These include the working poor, teenagers, and charities that depend on donated junkers to carry out their work. A used car would meet such needs just fine, but the program eliminated 700,000 used cars from the market. So, many people who really needed a car ended up buying a new one and paying more than they felt they could really afford. As a result, they then couldn't afford new shoes or books — or such things as health insurance, dental care, better housing, more nutritious food, or a night class. Furthermore, since they paid more for a car than they intended, they went further in debt with larger monthly car payments that cause a long-term reduction in their ability buy shoes, books, etc. And depleting the supply of used cars reduces business for repair shops, employment for automobile mechanics, and auto dealer business for used cars.

When we turn to the issue of newer cars reducing gasoline consumption because of greater fuel efficiency, we see that ignorance once again prevails. As the English economist Stanley Jevons explained way back in 1865, "It is wholly a confusion of ideas to suppose that the economical use of fuel is equivalent to diminished consumption. The very contrary is the truth . . . It is the very economy of use which leads to extensive consumption. It has been so in the past and will be so in the future."

There is plenty of evidence that Jevons was right. When James Watt's steam engine was more efficient than its predecessor, the Newcomen engine, demand soared. People found all sorts of new uses for steam power. The same thing happened with electricity. And when automobiles became smaller and more energy efficient because of the Arab oil embargo in 1973, people drove *more* — not less — because they could go further on the same amount of gasoline. Gasoline consumption rose for two decades as energy-efficient cars flooded the roads.

In April 2009, Boston Globe columnist Jeff Jacoby wrote:

Improvements in fuel economy effectively make fuel less expensive, and when costs fall, demand tends to rise. As driving has grown cheaper in recent decades, people have done more of it — choosing to drive to work instead of taking a bus, for example, or buying a second car, or moving to a house with a longer commute, or sending the kids to college with cars of their own. Between 1983 and 2001, data from the Energy Information Administration show, the number of annual vehicle-miles driven by the average American household rose from 16,800 vehicle-miles to more than 23,000.

During the period of which Jacoby speaks, fuel efficiency increased by 20.4% from 14.2 mpg to 17.1 mpg, and vehicle-miles traveled per household increased 37%.

The proponents of the CARS program talk only about the energy efficiency of new cars compared to clunkers. They don't compare it to the energy required to manufacture them. Paul Driessen, a senior fellow with the Atlas Economic Research Foundation and a former Sierra Club member, calls

attention to the energy required "to extract metallic ores, hydrocarbons, and other raw materials from the earth, process and refine them, create alloys and plastics, and turn them into engines, chassis, windows, tires, and interiors." He says there is "no way" these energy costs "will ever be recouped by any savings the replacement cars might conceivably generate." Daniel J. Stern writes: "It quickly becomes clear to all but the most strident Prius-preacher that driving an old car a half a million miles is really less taxing to the greater environment than making even just a single new one."

Finally, we come to the issue of global warming and the carbon dioxide emissions of older cars. Again, the pro-CARS argument is based on ignorance — plus plenty of misinforma-

Even based on Department of Transportation numbers, the total carbon savings from cash for clunkers amounts to only about 57 minutes of America's annual carbon emissions.

tion and even outright fraud. Climate change is *not* caused by changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide or by human activity. (See my "Global Warming, Global Myth," September 2008.) For a more detailed explanation, see the massive report issued earlier this year by the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change. It is an 880-page book by many scientists that comprehensively refutes the global warming claims of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This is a work of enormous scholarship backed by over 4,000 peer-reviewed scientific studies that were ignored by the IPCC.

But, for the sake of argument, let's assume it is desirable to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and look at the effect of CARS. "As a carbon dioxide policy, this [program] is a terribly wasteful thing to do," says Henry Jacoby, a professor of management and codirector of the Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Climate Change at MIT. "The amount of carbon you are saving per federal expenditure is very, very small." Bruce Yandle, Distinguished Professor of Economics Emeritus, Clemson University, says "the reduction costs are at least ten times higher than alternate ways of removing carbon."

Based on Department of Transportation numbers, the total carbon savings from cash for clunkers amounts to only about 57 minutes of America's annual carbon dioxide emissions. But that is based on a static analysis, i.e., that there will be no change in driving behavior when fuel efficiency improves. Since we have already shown that greater fuel efficiency leads to more miles being driven, the actual reduction in carbon dioxide emissions will be even less than 57 minutes per year — and it could even be more than from the traded-in vehicles if the new vehicles are driven enough additional miles per year. Now consider that 6.7 tons of carbon are emitted in building a new car, and it becomes obvious that CARS results in a manifold increase in carbon dioxide. Paul Driessen says there is absolutely no way that the emissions of carbon

dioxide, other greenhouse gases and “real pollutants” from manufacturing replacement vehicles will ever be recouped by any savings from driving them.

President Obama said cash for clunkers was an “overwhelming success . . . [which] provided the American auto industry an important boost, and is achieving environmental benefits well beyond what was originally anticipated . . . while reducing greenhouse gas emissions . . . and has proven to be a successful part of our economic recovery.” Is he as ignorant of what has been happening during his own administration as he is of the past? Has his collectivist ideology left him totally disconnected from the realities of history, property rights, economics, and science?

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said “this is one stimulus program that seems to be working better than just about any other program.” That must mean those other programs are even bigger failures.

The CARS program is just one more demonstration that collectivism cannot trump reality. Collective good cannot be achieved by benefiting some people at the expense of other people’s rights — including their property rights. The situation is not unlike that in Bastiat’s “broken window” example: the property rights that are destroyed are like the pair of shoes or book that is never purchased. They remain unseen

and unconsidered while the benefits to others (or the environment) are extolled. Yet, not only are property rights themselves a value to people; if some people are deprived of them, the economy and society lose as well. For if people were not deprived of their property rights, they would exercise them in buying goods and services that would benefit employment and industries. And these would be of *greater* value than what is obtained under CARS or similar programs, as demonstrated by market prices and preferences. Government intervention in the market simply diverts resources in society to things of lesser value at greater cost. Thus society is better off when people are free to exercise their property rights than when the government violates those rights to stimulate other purchases. And the more a government substitutes its preferences for the choices of the people in the marketplace, the more the economy goes downhill, as history abundantly demonstrates.

Collectivism has failed wherever it has been tried. In contrast, America showed the greatest advancement of society in history because the Founding Fathers based their government on individual rights, not collectivism. Individual rights are essential to human progress. That is an inescapable reality. It will not be overcome by ignorance, lies, and smooth talk in the cause of collectivism. □

Reflections, from page 20

if only good clothes, good food, a good home, a good education, and good medical care were provided to everyone, then fear itself would disappear. Franklin Roosevelt included these things in what he called the Second Bill of Rights. The strategy proposed is, very cleverly, to fine-tune the tax rates and entitlement programs in such a way that everything is guaranteed to turn out well for everyone. Sounds simple enough, right?

Before the merits of this strategy are weighed, please note that it is not the goal of easing human suffering that is under scrutiny, but the strategy proposed for achieving it. Moreover, it should not be assumed that certain methods — say, the threat of starvation — should be endorsed even if they were judged likely to achieve the goal. Having said that, and accepting for the moment the premise that fear can be excised from the beating human heart, a few questions arise.

If fear were eliminated, would its benefits disappear as well? With little or nothing to fear, would people be less prudent, less diligent? Would the people who worked so hard to ensure that their fears did not materialize put their shoulders to the wheel with a tad less oomph when those fears were gone? People differ, but it’s probably safe to say that a good chunk of humanity would experience a detectable slackening of resolve. They’d lose their edge. If you did not know it already, let me assure you, there are many here among us who do not wish to do much more than they absolutely must. The passage of the Second Bill of Rights would, for them, be party time. Others, of course, might press the wheel harder, if their absent fears were replaced by hope.

But if the good clothes, food, home, education, and medical care were paid for with money taken from people who already had these things, wouldn’t those same people be less able to realize their own hopes? Sure, not all hopes come with a visible price tag, but those that do would suddenly become

less affordable. To be blunt about it, if you were one of those people, unless your fondest hope was to give back to the community, it would be less likely that your fondest hope could be realized, if it cost much. There is no free lunch and no free Second Bill of Rights.

Whether by raising taxes, adding to the public debt, or debasing the currency, the bill for the goods would have to be paid. As a result (here’s the kicker), the path to prosperity, even for the newly hopeful, would be precisely that much steeper. In other words, any reduction of fear would cause a roughly proportional reduction of hope. When combined with the lost diligence, it devolves into a less-than-zero-sum game. Economics is not called the dismal science for nothing.

A sustainable, comfortable standard of living is the product of thrift, forethought, industry, and perseverance, not of government largesse. It would be nice if these virtues could be bought with a government check, but, sadly, such a check is more likely to erode them than to build them up. And when these virtues erode, eventually, the checks stop coming.

Fear and hope together turn the wheels of prosperity. Take away fear and its benefits go with it, slowing the wheels. Try to bury the fear in cash and what you get is less hope, not more. Take away hope *and* fear? The wheels of prosperity grind to a halt, and then fall off. The strategy is sure to backfire. Ask the Chinese; they know. Hope is a good thing, most of the time anyway, and fear is not all bad.

— Scott Chambers

A place of my own — British Sea Captain John Marshall sailed into my region of the world in 1788 and, despite the fact that there were thousands of people living

continued on page 62

Man and Groom

by Bruce Ramsey

After a strange course of events in Washington,
gay marriage was legalized in all but name.

On November 3, in a close vote, the voters of Washington state appear to have approved Referendum 71, creating civil unions for same-sex couples with all the legal rights and responsibilities of marriage. The name “marriage” was left off only for purposes of reassuring the timid. Proponents wanted, desperately and insistently, to win a statewide vote on gay marriage after losing 31 statewide votes across the United States, and as Liberty goes to press it seems they have done it.

The vote is a milestone. Five other states have instituted gay marriage, but never by a vote of the people. Before 2009 it was always done by a court; the earliest ruling that still stands is that of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 2003. But for a republic to decide a question as deeply cultural as same-sex marriage by a vote of nine citizens is a kind of cheating. The public resents judges making the decision, and in states with the right of initiative and referendum — the Western states and a handful in the Midwest and Northeast — voters have tended to take the matter into their own hands. The other votes were constitutional amendments referred to the people by legislatures.

Thus the justices of the California Supreme Court proclaimed gay marriage in May 2008 and were overruled by vot-

ers that November. In 2009, same-sex marriage was approved by the legislatures of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Maine’s voters, the only ones of the three with the right of referendum, repealed the law on November 3.

Maine, I think, will revisit its decision. Washington state will not. The voters’ approval will not be contradicted by the legislature or the state’s supreme court. Except for the label “marriage,” the thing is done.

Eventually same-sex marriage will come to all 50 states. Two things make it inevitable. The first is the social acceptance of openly gay couples. The second is their adoption of children. Marriage follows. It is taking time because of older people’s discomfort with homosexuality, but younger people are much more accepting of it. They see the question as one of fairness and tolerance, and also as a practical matter of

specific legal rights that adults and their dependent children need. Over time, their views will prevail, in liberal places first and conservative places later.

On matters like this, Washington is one of the liberal places. In 1970, three years before *Roe v. Wade*, its voters legalized abortion. In 2008 they legalized assisted suicide of the terminally ill, becoming the second state to do so, after Oregon.

Always, these things occasion a fight. As in California, the earlier fight in Washington was in the courts. Same-sex couples in King County, which includes the state's largest gay neighborhood, in Seattle, brought suit to overturn the state's Defense of Marriage Act, passed in the late 1990s. In *Andersen v. King County* (2005), the gay couples lost in a 5–4 decision.

The five “no” votes on the court included that of the court's libertarian, Justice Richard Sanders. He signed the concurring opinion of the court's populist conservative, Justice Jim Johnson, arguing that the law defined marriage as one man, one woman, and that a court had no business changing that. Legally, I think, they were right; and politically I know they were. The issue is one of social acceptance, and that is a thing best done by the people.

To say so was to be labeled as a homophobe and a hater by gay radicals who saw themselves under permanent oppression. The fact was, though, that public attitudes *were* changing. In 2000, California voted 61% against gay marriage; in 2008, it voted only 52% against. The arithmetic suggested that proponents were losing 1% of the electorate per year.

In Washington, the loss in *Andersen v. King County* led to a push in the legislature, which is controlled by Democrats. Following the strategy of a gay state senator from Seattle, the legislature tackled the issue piecemeal. In 2007 it created gay civil unions with rights of hospital visitation and inheritance. In 2008 came rights over probate and trusts, community property and guardianship; in 2009 the rest of marriage — adoption, child support, pensions, business succession, etc. — all except that lightning-rod name, “marriage.”

The radicals denounced that senator, but he won by doing it his way.

The new law was supposed to go into effect on July 26, but opponents filed a referendum to put it on the ballot so the people could vote against it. Something similar happened

in California and Maine. Public sentiment, however, was different in Washington. One of the state's prominent anti-gay-marriage pastors sensed it. He publicly advised his fellows against the referendum, arguing that they could succeed in reaching the ballot and lose the vote, and that if they did, their goose would be cooked.

They ignored him, and began collecting signatures for Referendum 71.

The gay activists felt rooked. They had won in the legislature, the governor had signed their bill, and now these Neanderthals were trying to take away their rights. A fellow at WhoSigned.org got his name in the news by threatening to file a public-records request with the state, get the names and addresses of the petition signers on a CD, and post them on the internet. That way, you could look up your neighbors and coworkers and see whether they were homophobes. The damned Neanderthals would be *outed*! This was taken by the evangelicals as a threat, which it was. Columnist George Will called it “thuggish liberalism.”

The anti-gay-marriage group sued to block disclosure of the names. Within a few weeks the question went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where Justice Anthony Kennedy signed an order keeping the names private.

There ensued an argument about these names. Each side made an analogy. One side said that citizens who signed petitions were acting as legislators. Would we allow legislators to hide behind a curtain? No. The other side said that the ones acting like legislators were the referendum sponsors, and everyone knew who they were. The petition signers were like voters, and voters have a secret ballot.

With Justice Kennedy's order, that side won.

The proponents of R-71 needed 120,577 valid signatures. They turned in 137,689 — a thin cushion, given the number of people who sign without being registered to vote. The secretary of state's staff, who usually estimate the valid signatures by sampling, had to check every one. There were enough, barely, and R-71 was put on the ballot.

The gay-rights people sued, claiming that 35,000 signatures that had been accepted should have been rejected, for various reasons. They lost. R-71 stayed on the ballot.

R-71 was, simply, the legislature's law on same-sex unions. The people who had filed the referendum, collected the signatures for it, and fought in court to get it on the ballot did all this to give voters the chance to vote against it. The people who had condemned R-71, tried to dissuade voters from signing, and sued to disqualify signatures, did all this to defend the same-sex marriage law from a public vote. Having lost that struggle, they had to switch gears and convince people to vote for it.

On the ballot, the choices for R-71 were “approve” and “reject.” There was some confusion about that; the people who had denounced and vilified the measure for three months were suddenly urging approval in soft and caring tones, and the people who had pushed R-71 through all that opposition were urging its rejection. That is the way Washington referendums work. A law had been passed. Absent the referendum, the law would go into effect. The people who put it on the ballot were trying to kill the law, not approve it.



“Well, what if I were the last *heterosexual* man on earth?”

continued on page 42

How the Greens Went Red

by Randal O'Toole

Despite the leftward shift in the movement,
there's still plenty of room for a free-market
environmentalism.

As many supporters of the free market have observed, the mainstream environmental movement firmly supports big government. Yet this wasn't always true, and it is conceivable that it won't always be true in the future.

I worked as a free-market environmentalist within the environmental movement for many years, and I still have many friends within the movement who support free-market ideas. I've found that the environmental movement is really many different movements, although they mostly fall into two categories. My friend John Baden likes to call them "romance and sludge." I worked mostly in the romance area — forests, parks, wilderness, and wildlife — and only peripherally in the sludge area — air and water pollution, solid waste, and toxic chemicals. So my view may be a bit skewed, but my experiences should still be useful to those who want to promote free-market solutions to environmental problems.

"In wildness is the preservation of the world," wrote Henry David Thoreau in 1862. But he also wrote, "that government is best that governs not at all." Unlike many environmentalists today, Thoreau did not view government as the best, or even an appropriate, way to preserve the wildness that he valued so highly.

Since Thoreau's time, conservationists and environmentalists have had a love-hate relationship with government. Some have pursued preservation using entirely private means. Others have focused on government programs — but almost invariably have been disappointed with the results. Only in recent years have environmentalists tied themselves almost exclusively to big-government programs.

In 1890, less than 30 years after Thoreau's death, conservationists in Massachusetts followed his teachings by forming the Trustees of Reservations, the world's first private land trust. The group has since purchased 25,000 acres of land that it preserves as parks and wildlife refuges.

But the 1890s also saw the growth of big-government conservation. This resulted from several quirks in American history.

First, American common law, which normally was based on British common law, departed from the English precedent when it came to wildlife. In England, wildlife was owned by

the owners of the land on which the wildlife resided. If a bird flew from my land to your land, the ownership transferred as soon as it crossed the property line. If I wanted to hunt birds or other wildlife, I had an incentive to manage my property in a way that would attract the wildlife.

Most land in 18th-century England was owned by comparatively few people, and much of the land in colonial America was also in a few hands. Early American courts decided that it was unfair that wildlife should be owned by a few private landowners; they therefore changed the common law so that wildlife would be owned by everyone. In many colonies (and this remains true in some states today) if I hunt on my own land, I cannot legally stop you from also hunting on my land. This removed the incentive to protect wildlife or wildlife habitat.

The ultimate result of these changes in the law was that, by the 1880s, populations of elk, bison, and birds such as the passenger pigeon were being hunted to extinction by people who sold the carcasses for meat. In 1887, future president Theodore Roosevelt founded the Boone & Crockett Club to lobby for regulation of hunting. Under state laws promoted by the club, people could hunt only for their own personal use, and not sell the meat to shops or restaurants; even personal hunting was severely restricted. Since state wildlife agencies charged fees to hunt, and got to keep those fees, the states effectively became owners of the wildlife and had an incentive to recover huntable species.

There remained little incentive to protect the habitat of wildlife that were not huntable, and this eventually led to passage of the federal Endangered Species Act. Yet if it had not been for American common law, private measures to protect wildlife and their habitat might have been sufficient to keep most species from going extinct.

A second quirk led to the creation of the world's first national park. When early Californians recognized the scenic beauty in Yosemite Valley, which was mostly in federal ownership, they persuaded Congress to turn it into a park in 1864. But Congress simply handed the park over to the state of California to manage as a state park.

An 1870 expedition to the Yellowstone country led to a proposal that the geyser areas also be made into a park. But Wyoming would not become a state until 1890, so in 1872

Early American courts decided that wildlife was owned by everyone. The result was that by the 1880s, populations of elk and bison were being hunted to extinction.

Congress turned Yellowstone into the world's first national park. Up to that point, Congress had a policy of disposing of all federal land as rapidly as possible. Yellowstone set a precedent that the federal government could and should retain land for conservation.

In 1890, John Muir successfully lobbied Congress to take Yosemite back from California and make it into a national park

as well. In 1891, Congress passed a law allowing the president to reserve forest lands in federal ownership, thus preventing their transfer to settlers or timber companies. Soon, the federal government was managing more than 100 million acres of land for conservation purposes.

The third quirk was that concern about conservation grew at about the same time as the Progressive movement, America's version of socialism. The two fed off each other. On one hand, Progressives cited conservation issues as examples of private failure and the need for government action. On the other hand, conservationists used the growing power of the Progressives to achieve their goals of land and wildlife conservation.

Most environmental histories of the era focus on the debate between preservationists such as Muir, who wanted to stop dams, timber cutting, and overgrazing on public lands, and conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot, who believed in using resources "wisely." The two sides clashed in the famous debate about proposals to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. Pinchot's support of the dam (which was completed in 1923) had a hidden agenda: he wanted dams and power stations to be owned by the public, not by private electrical companies. Yet in their desire for public ownership, Pinchot and Muir were in agreement. Muir, in fact, disdainfully called Henry David Thoreau "that huckleberry picker" because he realized Thoreau would not have supported government conservation programs.

The preservation-conservation debate resumed in the 1960s. In the early 1900s, however, it was much less important than a debate over who should practice conservation: the federal government or states and private landowners. This debate is largely forgotten today.

Pinchot — the first chief of the Forest Service and a member of Theodore Roosevelt's "kitchen cabinet" — strongly believed that the federal government should control all conservation programs. This view was challenged by those who still believed in limited government. Many westerners in particular felt threatened by Pinchot's aggressive campaigns to keep half or more of the land area of their states in federal ownership. When Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, appointed former Seattle Mayor Richard Ballinger as head of the Department of the Interior, Pinchot decided to demonize Ballinger as someone willing to sacrifice conservation principles by allowing the transfer of federal resources to private owners.

Ballinger had done nothing legally or ethically wrong. But to keep the subject in the press, the independently wealthy Pinchot maneuvered Taft into firing him from his job as Forest Service chief. This made Pinchot into a martyr for the conservation cause, and helped him to attract 10,000 people to a National Conservation Congress in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1910.

Most of the delegates at the congress were handpicked for their support of federal conservation. As a courtesy, Pinchot invited St. Paul resident and railroad baron James J. Hill, who had spoken many times before on the need for soil conservation, to speak at the convention. Hill was a strong conservationist, who practiced what he preached. Among other things, he created the Great Northern Railway Extension Service, which taught farmers about soil conservation, paid them to

engage in demonstration projects, and donated money to land reclamation programs. But he was skeptical about federal involvement in conservation.

So, rather than talk about soil conservation, Hill used his hour at the Conservation Congress to tear into the idea of federal conservation. Conservation “has come into that peril from which no great truth escapes,” Hill told the convention. “It has been used to forward that serious error of policy, the extension of the powers and activities of the national government at the expense of those of the states.” He proceeded to give example after example of how the states and private landowners were better than federal agencies at conserving resources, emphasizing “the extravagant financial tendency of every federal department and bureau.” “It might be said of certain administrators,” he added, in a clear swipe at Pinchot’s efforts to claim as much of the West as possible for the Forest Service, that “they make a desert and call it conservation.”

Hill’s speech shook up the convention. One of Pinchot’s supporters responded by accusing Hill of hypocrisy because his railroad had accepted federal land grants — although the Great Northern was built without land grants and the only federal land grants Hill ever owned were those belonging to bankrupt railroads that he had purchased at fair market value. Angry western governors led a walkout of opponents of federal conservation to a conference of their own in Salt Lake City.

It was too late. For the next 50 years, the federal government would be the nation’s conservation leader and anyone who challenged that leadership would be demonized as anticonservation.

Except for some debates over dams, this mindset would not be questioned until the 1960s, when the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management accelerated timber cutting, mining, and livestock grazing on federal lands, often with heavy subsidies from taxpayers. Hunters, hikers, anglers, water users, and others felt betrayed when they saw that agencies created to conserve resources had become the ones most responsible for their destruction or exploitation. To distinguish themselves from conservationists — now a tainted term — these people began calling themselves environmentalists.

When I joined the environmental movement in the early 1970s, it included people of all political persuasions, from conservative Republicans to liberal Democrats. It even included a few Marxists, who were treated by the rest with the same fondness that you might accord to a slightly crazy uncle. There was no litmus test for participation; nuclear engineers worked on antilogging campaigns while loggers worked on antinuclear campaigns and agreed that they wouldn’t have to agree on all issues.

No one questioned government ownership of national parks and national forests, but no one thought that the government was their friend; all their experience had shown exactly the opposite. The goal was to save the planet, and if capitalism would save it, they would endorse that as readily as anything else that might work.

The election of Ronald Reagan coincided with the “sagebrush rebellion,” a backlash of lumber, mining, and ranching interests against the environmental movement, and led to the first serious proposals to privatize federal lands in at least 70 years. Since the privatizers were identified with the sagebrush

rebels, most environmentalists automatically opposed privatization. But some recognized that the privatizers had a point: the federal government had not turned out to be the savior of natural resources that Gifford Pinchot had promised.

In the 1980s, I published a monthly magazine called “Forest Watch” that gave a fair hearing to the privatizers and challenged environmentalists who hated federal land management but couldn’t support privatization to come up with a better solution. The only alternative some could propose was to proscribe everything they personally didn’t want to do. “No logging, no mining, no grazing, and no off-road vehicles,” one wrote to me.

Others were more thoughtful. Sally Fairfax, a nominally left-wing professor of natural resources at the University of California at Berkeley, decided to look at how the states managed their land. She found that, in many ways, James J. Hill

In 1872 Congress turned Yellowstone into the world’s first national park. Up to that point, Congress had a policy of disposing of all federal land as rapidly as possible.

was right: the states were conservators at least as good as and in some respects better than the Forest Service and other federal agencies. The difference, she found, was that the states often treated their lands as fiduciary trusts, a practice that completely changed land managers’ legal obligations and scope of authority.

Starting with Ohio, the federal government granted lands to most states to sell or manage in order to provide revenues for schools. The courts interpreted these grants as trusts, and placed on the states the same obligations that would be placed on a trustee of the funds that someone might put in trust for their children or grandchildren. Fairfax found that court interpretations of trust law forced state land managers to be both more environmentally and more fiscally responsible than federal land managers.

Meanwhile, in 1988, Island Press published my book, “Reforming the Forest Service,” which proposed to “marketize” the national forests by allowing them to charge fair market value for recreation and other resources, funding them exclusively from receipts, and removing, not adding to, most of the regulations that managers worked under. Recreation would become the dominant source of revenue on most forests, I predicted, and this would lead managers to be more environmentally sensitive even as they produced whatever timber, minerals, and other resources could pay their way.

My proposal received cautious support from many environmentalists, including (at least briefly) the Wilderness Society and a few other major groups. For a time, the only significant opponent was the Sierra Club, which believed everyone should be charged to use the national forests, except for its own members and other wilderness users, who should all get in for free on the theory that they didn’t do any harm to

the land. The group's leaders were immune to my argument that basing user fees on the amount of harm users did would only give the agencies incentives to emphasize activities that did the most harm.

The fall of the Soviet Union persuaded many Americans that socialism didn't work. Ironically, however, it strengthened the strains of socialism in the environmental movement. In the early 1990s, polls showed that the vast majority of Americans believed that government screwed everything up, but polls also showed that most Americans still believed environmental protection was one of the few things the government could do. So American socialists joined the environmental movement as one of the few places where their big-government programs were still welcome.

"I remember the beginnings of this trend," says former Greenpeace leader Patrick Moore, "when young activists in army fatigues and red berets began to show up in Greenpeace offices as volunteers." My own recollection is that people who said they had previously worked as labor organizers showed up to volunteer for environmental groups. They quickly demonized anyone who disagreed with their extreme views and drummed them out of the environmental movement.

Ironically, the strongest resistance to the socialists came from the Washington DC staffs of the various environmental groups. Like any inside-the-beltway lobbyists, these people were essentially incrementalists who didn't want to lose their seats at the tables of power by proposing anything too radical. But when Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, the national groups that had based their funding strategies on the perceived threat of a Republican in the White House suddenly lost many of their more moderate members.

At about the same time, liberal foundations such as the Pew Charitable Trusts discovered environmental issues and began generously funding groups that had previously relied on members for support. Thus, the loss of members who did not agree with the extremists had little effect on environmental funding. A few of the foundations were overtly socialist, but I suspect that others simply jumped on the bandwagon because it became respectable within the foundation community to fund environmental causes.

Of course, for the big-government advocates, global warm-

ing became the ideal issue. On one hand it is such a complex problem that it is virtually impossible to prove whether or not it is actually happening or what its effects will be. On the other hand, if it is happening, it is difficult to imagine a cure that doesn't involve the heavy hand of government. So people working on all sorts of environmental problems quickly learned to tie their issues to climate. "To stop global warming, we have to save the forests/stop driving/end the use of plastic grocery bags/shut down any activity that happens to disturb my idea of utopia."

At the same time, I remain convinced that the environmental movement is not inextricably tied to big-government solutions. Most rank-and-file environmentalists are far from socialists, and even many of the leaders are willing to question government programs if they think they can do it without losing their funding. For many environmentalists, environmental protection remains the goal, and the means to achieve that goal is still open to debate.

Free-market advocates who work on environmental issues are sometimes frustrated with the big-government leanings of the movement and spend much of their time trying to discredit environmental leaders or claiming that environmental problems don't even exist. To the general public, such environmental bashing is not very persuasive.

A more effective approach is to identify real environmental problems and show how markets will solve those problems better than government regulation. For example, the Reason Foundation promotes road pricing as a solution to traffic congestion and the pollution that is associated with that congestion. The Property and Environment Research Center has shown how improved property rights can protect water for both fish and people. Some of my own recent work has combined the idea of marketizing public land agencies — that is, allowing the agencies to charge fair market value for all uses and funding the agencies exclusively out of those fees — with the idea of turning these agencies into fiduciary trusts that would be obligated to work in the marketplace while they protect wildlife, watersheds, and other resources. Such efforts can be used to build bridges to people who genuinely want to protect the environment and not just use environmental issues to promote a big-government agenda. □

Man and Groom, *from page 38*

Then the battle entered a new phase. In the war for donations the gay-marriage side vacuumed up five-sixths of the money, including checks of \$100,000 from Microsoft, with \$25,000 from its CEO, Steve Ballmer, \$25,000 from its patriarch, Bill Gates, and \$10,000 from Vulcan, a company headed by Gates' old partner, Paul Allen. There was money from the ACLU, the state's largest utility companies, and some of its largest unions.

The other side got money from Focus on the Family, and groups like that; and a bunch of \$50 contributions.

There were marches: for R-71 by gays and their friends, and against R-71 by evangelicals. Most notable were the immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia, who found the whole idea of gay marriage shocking and against God. There was an ad on the radio saying that if the measure passed,

schoolchildren would be reading stories about families with two daddies, even in kindergarten. In my neighborhood, an extremely liberal one, there were signs on church reader boards to vote for R-71.

People argued on and on about whether it was or was not gay marriage. It was.

Then election day. The news quickly came from Maine that gay marriage was defeated there. From Washington state there was nothing, because Washington votes by mail, and the ballots were not all in. It looks strongly, however, that when they are, the Evergreen State will disagree with its 31 brothers.

Why there? A lot of little reasons, but the big one was simply that it was time. Some state was going to be first. That state turned out to be Washington. □

How We Got Well

by John Goodman

Welcome to the healthcare of tomorrow.

Welcome to Future World, where the average income is \$100,000 a year and people need only a 20-hour work week to earn it. Since the present day, medical science has progressed even faster than income. There are bionic limbs; gene-specific therapies to cure cancer, heart disease and other ailments; cell regeneration; antiaging drugs; and all manner of other improvements that could — if fully used — extend life spans to 125 years.

The problem is that taking full advantage of all these technologies would exhaust the entire gross domestic product. Insuring against all contingencies would require a premium equal to 100% of average income.

So how does Future World deal with this problem?

Years earlier, the residents of Future World found a solution that works very well. It turns out that no one wanted to spend all of his or her income on healthcare. So no one did. But people differed in what health outcomes they most preferred. Some placed a high value on maximizing years of life. Others were willing to trade shorter life spans for superior health outcomes while they were alive. Some rejected the idea of bionic limbs. For religious reasons, some rejected organ transplants. So Future World began allowing people to purchase both directly and through insurance whatever health services they chose. As it turned out, almost everyone chose something different.

(Interestingly, very few people in Future World buy the type of insurance that pays for largely futile care at the end of life, the way Medicare does today; though some people pay large sums on such care out of their own pockets.)

There are basically two categories of third-party insurance in Future World. Based on a 20th-century proposal by John Cochrane, people initially buy a policy covering a set of risky events for a healthy person, and a second plan that covers changes in health status. If a person gets cancer, for example, the first plan pays for immediate treatment. The second plan allows the insured to pay the higher premiums that will be charged in future years to cancer survivors (preexisting condition premiums) if they shop for another insurance policy.

Unlike President Obama's early-21st-century vision of a market in which an individual's insurance premiums are *never* based on health status and expected costs, in Future World premiums are *always* based on health status and expected costs. And people insure in a way that allows them

to pay high premiums if their health conditions take a turn for the worse. In Obama's world, insurers have an incentive to attract the healthy and avoid the sick, prior to enrollment, and after enrollment to overprovide to the healthy (because they are profitable) and underprovide to the sick (because they are unprofitable). In Future World, by contrast, the unhealthy are just as attractive to health plans as the sick — if not more attractive.

People also self-insure in Future World by making deposits to Health Savings Accounts. Unlike today's HSAs, these are after-tax (Roth-type) accounts with no limit on contributions. Although the accounts are completely flexible (they can wrap around any third-party plan), people mainly use them for primary care, preventive care, diagnostic tests, palliative care, and chronic care.

Very early, Future World deregulated the market for health services, encouraging providers to compete for patients on the basis of price and quality. Such competition quickly led to price and quality transparency (posted prices and easily available data on quality). This means the prices people pay tend to reflect real resource costs — a big difference from the former system, in which no one ever faced a real price for anything in healthcare. The process was further aided by converting health insurance to the casualty model, similar to the kind of insurance most people have on their homes and automobiles. After a diagnosis of a condition, insurers make an appropriate sum of money available to the patient to cover the cost of care. But patients control the money and make buying decisions, even for very expensive procedures.

To prevent people from becoming complete free riders, consuming all their income and then relying on the generosity of their neighbors if they get sick, residents of Future World are encouraged to obtain a minimum amount of health insurance through the tax system. For the first \$10,000 of insurance they buy, they receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit — a system first proposed by John Goodman and Gerald Musgrave back in the 20th century. (The credit varies a bit by age, and there are lower amounts for young children covered by their taxpayer parents.) Everyone is still free to forego insurance; but if he does so, his tax bill will be higher. Since this is an offer one cannot afford to refuse, there are hardly any people

who are completely uninsured in Future World. The few who remain so are expected to pay their medical bills when they get sick. If they lack the ability to do so after exhausting their own resources, doctors and hospitals can draw on a fund that uses as its seed money the extra taxes paid by the uninsured. But this type of care is rationed care, and it is truly charity care, in the sense that the uninsured patient is not *entitled* to any particular kind of medical service.

Future World healthcare has three features that are often considered abhorrent in our own era:

1. Almost all rationing decisions are made by patients, based on their own preferences and their own financial resources.
2. Health insurers are completely free to price and manage risk in competition with one another.
3. The marketplace allocates healthcare resources almost everywhere.

One way to describe Future World is to say that it gets the economics right. People choose what they want. And they pay for what they get. So Future World satisfies the economists' desire to maximize utility, produce efficiently, avoid waste, and so forth. However, Future World faces a continuing moral dilemma.

Each day there are deaths in Future World that could have been prevented if only the appropriate technology had been applied. In a sense, there are also many unmet medical needs — needs that are considered too expensive to fulfill. Question: Is allowing this state of affairs morally permissible?

People in Future World have answered yes, for three reasons: (1) They cannot save every life or treat every need, because they don't have the resources to do so, (2) Those who failed to purchase life-saving technology or failed to insure for it, did so because they valued other uses of those dollars (other consumption) that had to be forgone by those who chose to purchase more insurance instead. Reversing those decisions after the fact for those who experienced bad luck seemed unfair. (3) Choosing to save some and not others also seemed arbitrary and unfair.

This state of affairs was comfortably accepted for many years. Then, one day, it was challenged by a Princeton University ethicist. "There is no social solidarity here," he said. "This is laissez-faire individualism and it produces unacceptable outcomes. These decisions should be made collectively, not individually. Everyone should have identical insurance covering identical services. Any two individuals with the same health condition should have the same outcome."

He didn't deny the fact that he was calling for the rationing of healthcare. Nor did he deny that, with his principles in place, there would be many preventable deaths and many unmet needs. But, he said, "Society as a whole should decide who lives and who dies and which needs are met and unmet."

Initially, some found this argument persuasive. But when they investigated how his idea would work with majority voting, they discovered that no matter what insurance plan was proposed, a majority always preferred something different. Even if a plan could be found to satisfy a majority,



"... Or, in layman's terms, *Ay caramba!*"

continued on page 62

How Liberty Helps the Poor

by Russell Hasan

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the poor should be the biggest supporters of small government.

As a libertarian I want the policies I prefer to actually become the law. But libertarian policies will never be enacted in a democratic society if poor and lower-middle-class voters stand against libertarian ideals. A significant number of Americans can be classified as the working poor. It is inherently difficult for laws to come into being that oppose their perceived interests.

The solution to this problem is not to rail against the poor. The solution is to convince the working poor that free-market capitalism does not oppose working-class interests and that the free market favors the working class just as much as it favors the rich. Libertarians must be able to make a persuasive argument that free-market capitalism benefits the poor, and that it is better for them than socialism or socialistic programs.

Here are four kinds of arguments that may be useful.

1. The Efficiency Argument

Socialists like to appeal to poor people by proposing a redistribution of wealth. The idea is that when a pie has been cut into pieces so that some people get big chunks and other people get crumbs, the fair thing is to reslice the pie into equal portions. But that is only one way to increase what people get. If you make the whole pie bigger, everyone's portion gets

bigger — and you don't have to mess up the pie by reslicing it. Everyone can understand this metaphor. What it means is that the economy is not a zero-sum game. When new wealth is created, everyone can win, without the inefficiency of social disruption.

Under capitalism the poor can buy products that are both good and cheap, because competition forces market efficiency. The standard of living for poor people in wealthy economies, economies operating by means of the profit motive, is visibly higher than that of poor people in poor economies. Capitalism is the most efficient producer of wealth. A poor person in America benefits from the productivity of the entire free-market system, which creates jobs paying wages that comparable workers in third-world countries can only dream of. If poor people in America compare themselves to rich people in America, it seems that they have little, but the comparison

that is relevant to the point at issue — capitalism or socialism — is with similar people in noncapitalist societies. Only that comparison reveals what capitalism offers to the working class — a larger and larger economic “pie.”

It is a classic libertarian observation that because consumers are the ones making choices in a free market, the market supplies what people want at the prices they are willing to pay; whereas in a socialist economy the choices are made by bureaucrats who, even if they are saints, will still lack the detailed information about each consumer’s wants that can enable goods and services to be distributed efficiently. True, some rich people splurge on yachts and some poor people splurge on ham sandwiches, but capitalism will get you your ham sandwich more efficiently than socialism.

Socialists like to argue that their policies help poor people whom the efficient market ignores — for example, by providing a minimum wage to make sure that everyone has enough money. But regulations that interfere with the market also interfere with people’s ability to get what they choose at the price they can pay for it. For example, if an employer is not free to offer a lower salary, then he will simply not be able to hire people, or will hire fewer people, whereas with an unregulated salary he would have been able to offer more jobs. This would be true even of a government-owned business. And when the minimum wage for the people who work in the grocery store goes up, the price of food goes up too, and the poor have to pay that price.

2. The Ambition Argument

Under socialism, the rich (if any) and the middle class are taxed according to how productive they are, whereas the poor are given goods and services in proportion to how much they need them. This tends to solidify the classes. The more successful a worker is and the more productive he becomes, the more he will be taxed and the harder it will be for him to rise from one class to the other.

An inability to profit from one’s efforts destroys all ties between the work one does and the reward one gets, rendering meaningless the concepts of personal responsibility and deserved rewards. When the fact that socialism diminishes your responsibility for your own life and severs rewards from

achievements becomes clear to people, they often become uneasy about it, in spite of all the free lunches that socialism promises.

It is, of course, unrealistic to think that every poor person can become a millionaire. But a diligent worker can realistically aspire to the middle class, and someone in the lower middle class can realistically aspire to the upper middle class. Capitalism does not have a rigid caste system. The American dream is rags to riches, and capitalism offers that hope to everyone.

3. The Freedom Argument

Socialists like to scare poor people into voting for them by tapping into the fear and misery that poor people feel. They make the argument that if we have less freedom we can have more safety. Poor people are naturally fearful that they will not have enough money to buy things, especially if they lose their jobs. They fear becoming destitute. Socialism promises to give them money taken from the rich, and to give them financial security in the form of jobs they cannot lose.

The libertarian reply is simple: if you give up freedom for the sake of safety, you get neither freedom nor safety. This argument can be made by merely pointing out the practical realities of socialist societies: in theory the poor may own the wealth, but they don’t have a way to voice their will except through the government officials who purport to represent them. There is no other way for the system to work besides the government’s taking control, and when it takes control, it takes control of them as well as everyone else.

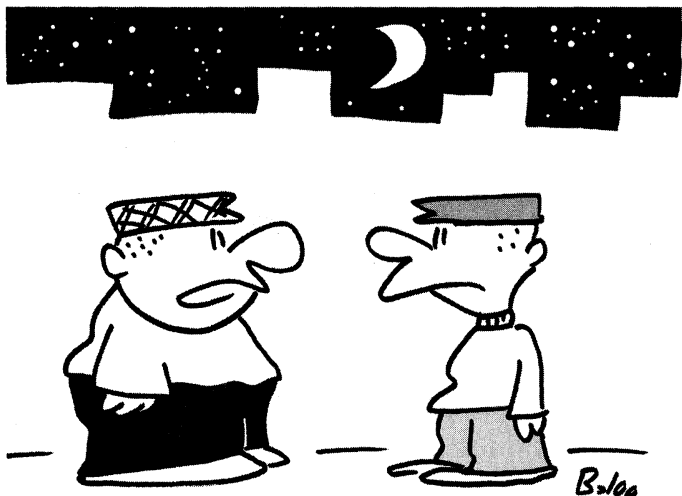
Under capitalism your boss can fire you, but if you do your job well you probably won’t be fired, your hard work will be rewarded with a decent salary or a promotion, and you continue to enjoy political freedom and rights as a citizen. Under socialism, instead of a job provided by a boss competing with other bosses, you have a job under the control of a government official. This is not freedom, and it is not safety either.

A system of economic redistribution takes wealth from the rich and gives it, in the first and sometimes the final instance, to government officials. The poor will be as poor under socialism as they are under capitalism, or poorer, but they will have lost their freedom in exchange for promises of safety. The failed “experiment” of the USSR proves this. You don’t have to be rich to like freedom; and libertarianism, which is basically the love of freedom, is as relevant to the poor as it is to the rich.

4. The Workers’ Rights Argument

Socialists argue that you need to be rich in order to enjoy individual rights or economic freedoms, such as the right to choose where you work or what you spend your money on. They also argue that workers can’t make meaningful economic choices because of their unequal bargaining power. The libertarian reply is twofold.

First, social freedoms such as free speech and freedom of religion are inseparable from economic freedom. A government with unrestricted power over the economy will waste no time in accumulating as many other powers as possible. There is no rational principle that distinguishes one kind of freedom from another.



“If the truth will set you free, what’s the deal with the 5th Amendment?”

continued on page 50

Is Scripture Statist?

by David Puller

Does the Good Book support the redistributionist policies our president claims it does? Not even close.

In a speech at Georgetown University on April 14, President Obama spoke in defense of his administration's massive expenditures. He cited the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, where he refers to the importance of building one's house on the rock instead of sand. The president took these words as a parable for America's economic woes and his own expensive solutions:

We cannot rebuild this economy on the same pile of sand. We must build our house upon a rock. We must lay a new foundation for growth and prosperity — a foundation that will move us from an era of borrow and spend to one where we save and invest; where we consume less at home and send more exports abroad.

Like most presidents, Barack Obama is fond of weaving biblical language into his rhetoric, obliquely suggesting that the Bible endorses his policies. His supporters — and Christian religious leaders — are often more direct in urging statist interpretations of the Bible.

Jim Wallis is a prominent Christian speaker and activist. He is the editor of the magazine *Sojourners* and author of the 2005 bestseller *"God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It."* This book, enormously influential among Christian leaders, argues for confiscatory taxation

in order to fund wealth redistribution programs. Basing his argument on Isaiah 65, Wallis writes:

The government's budgets are a disaster for the poor, a windfall for the wealthiest, and thus directly conflict with biblical priorities. Budgets are moral documents. It may be controversial, but it is not inappropriate to name the federal budgets being passed as 'unbiblical.' And it is time for religious people to clearly and prophetically respond. We need a 'faith-based initiative' against budget priorities that neglect poor people.

Leaving aside the highly dubious proposition that one's personal religious beliefs should be directly translated into public policy — including laws governing citizens who do not share those beliefs — the notion that the Bible supports government redistribution of wealth should be firmly challenged.

The fundamental question for those who consider the Bible authoritative is not whether it advocates charity or helping the poor. Obama, Wallis, and other statist Christians are not arguing for charity. They are arguing for government appropriation of property. The issue isn't charity, but property rights. If the Bible rejects the notion of a right to property, then these people may have a basis for their perspective. But if the Bible supports a right to own property, safe from government redistribution to others, then their policy proposals are unbiblical.

What follows is an analysis of what the Bible says, in both the New and the Old Testaments, on the subject of property rights. Whether the Bible, or parts thereof, should be considered authoritative or useful for Christians I will leave to theologians. My concern is with the text itself.

I would like to be able to report that the Bible argues firmly for an absolutist view of property rights. I would like to be able to write that the Bible is a strictly libertarian document. It is not. Yet in the balance and taken as a whole, the Bible support the individual's right to own property and hold onto it. Briefly summarized, the Bible's teachings are that humans are stewards of God's property in a rental relationship and are accountable to him, not to the state, for the disposition of that property. The Bible advocates charity for the poor and condemns the parsimonious, but it does not grant authority to the state to act on God's behalf to redistribute wealth. It is mostly a laissez-faire system of ideas, which libertarians should not forfeit to statist misinterpretations.

The Bible suggests three central principles regarding property rights. One is the prohibition against theft, enshrined in Exodus 20:15 "You shall not steal." The second is the idea that the world ultimately belongs to God (not to the state), as exemplified by Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it." The third is a corollary: humans are temporary tenants upon God's property, as King David said in 1 Chronicles 29:15: "For we are but sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were."

Let's examine these principles. The first, that theft is morally wrong, is stated in the Old Testament and repeated in the New, as in Matthew 19:17–19 and Romans 13:9–10. One particular form of theft that the Bible addresses specifically and at length is withholding wages from workers who have earned them. Leviticus 19:13 establishes that doing so constitutes robbery. Deuteronomy 24:15 and James 5:4 describe this act as one that infuriates God.

Of all the passages of the Mosaic Law, Exodus 22:1–15 most directly addresses proprietarian relationships. It describes violations of property rights and the legal remedies for them. For example, if a person steals an ox or a sheep and kills it, he must make restitution in the amount of four to five times the value of the stolen and destroyed property. If the thief is caught with the property alive, the compensation is only double. If a person holds the property of another in safekeeping, and it has been stolen from him, then he must make restitution; but if a court determines that the trustee has actually stolen the property, he must provide double the value. If the property was destroyed through natural causes, no restitution is necessary. The two variables determining penalties are the degree of criminal intent and the amount of harm absorbed by the victim.

Of particular note are the laws governing the right to defend one's property. One may kill an intruding thief in the confusion of the night, but to kill a thief in the clarity of the day is an act of murder; a thief has not necessarily forfeited his life as a result of his crime. The right to defend one's property is not absolute, but it is quite strong, much stronger than many contemporary Christians understand or desire.

If theft is a crime, then by logical necessity there must be a right to property. Where there is no property, there can be no theft. Before Christians endorse confiscatory economic policies, thinking that the Bible mandates them, they should consider what limitations the Bible places and does not place, on property rights.

The primary limitation comes from the idea that the whole world belongs to God. Although a secular libertarian view of property rights begins with self-ownership and personal ownership of both physical and intellectual property, a biblical view begins with God's ownership of the world. It is interesting that John Locke, the ultimate source for much libertarian property theory, began at the same place: see Locke's "Second Treatise," section 25. The idea is repeatedly established in Scripture. Psalm 24:1 and Exodus 19:5 quote God directly as making this assertion. In 1 Corinthians 10:26, Paul quotes the Psalms and argues that Christians shouldn't worry about whether or not the meat they purchase in the marketplace has been used to make idolatrous sacrifices because the whole world belongs to God, including the meat presented to idols. But the divine ownership premise cannot be taken as grounds for government seizure of property.

The preface to my argument is the third principle: humans are tenants on God's land or stewards of his property. But how can there be thievery against other people if God owns all the property? The answer is simultaneous ownership. The idea of tenancy establishes that there are two levels of property ownership: God at the higher level and humans at the lower, but both can possess the same property at the same time.

It is important to examine the nuances of this view of property rights, lest Christian statists misuse the notion of divine ownership of the world to justify their notion that there is no individual right to property. That interpretation assumes that human and divine ownership cannot coexist — yet it would be totally inconsistent with the Bible's many injunctions against theft and requirements for compensation for lost and stolen property. If there were no right to private property, these provisions would be pointless.



"Kings can get away with anything."

The Biblical view of property is something akin to leasing. All property is leased from God, the ultimate possessor, but the human lessees are the immediate owners. God may step in and lay claim to his property, but no humans besides the lessees have any such rights. Third parties have no legitimate

I would like to be able to write that the Bible is a strictly libertarian document. It is not.

claim of authority. A practical example: a person rents an apartment from someone else. The rental owner may reserve the right to enter it, as the ultimate holder of the property — but no one else has any right to do so, without the consent of the renter. This tenant relationship is a close parallel to God's claim on property and the lessee's simultaneous but non-contradictory claim.

To apply this idea to today's political scene, one might say that God may intervene in the property ownership of individuals, but other people may not. To seize the property of other people is to usurp the authority of God.

Christian statisticians are fond of justifying the state's usurpation of property rights on a complex sacred and legal event known as the Year of Jubilee, outlined in Leviticus 25. Wallis accurately refers to it as "a periodic economic redistribution in which slaves are set free, land is returned, and debts are forgiven." This would seem to give some grounds for a looser view of property rights than libertarians would countenance.

But a candid assessment of the biblical portrait of property rights should address the subject directly. At the end of 50 years, certain property transactions had to be reversed, but the reversal had to include compensation for the temporary owners of the land. It was like the modern practice of subletting real estate. Should complete compensation not be provided to the current resident within one year, then the property was permanently deeded to him. In the Year of Jubilee, the tenants switched roles, but God remained the ultimate property owner (Leviticus 25:23). A person could not sell real property permanently, any more than a person renting an apartment can sell it outright to a third party. Further, with the Jubilee cycle embedded in law, people who made loans or purchased property would have the opportunity to reduce any losses they feared at the end of the cycle, by charging a higher price up front. There was no capricious action by government.

Contrast the redistributionist plans of Obama and other statist Christians, who are intent on taking property from some people and giving it to others, who never owned it or invested in it, without a hint of compensation. This is not a return of lost property but a seizure of property that is legally owned. The Bible never authorizes such brazen theft.

In "God's Politics," Wallis argues for a Christian effort "to bring the Word of God to bear on the moral issues of the American economy." He asserts that the Bible advocates charity for the poor and offers condemnation to the ungenerous. That is correct. It is, however, an enormous leap of logic to assert that it is task of government to take the place of

Christians in giving to the poor, or to assume that Christians can use the force of government to compel others to "give" to the poor. This, really, is the central issue, the central area in which statist Christians have mistaken injunctions about what they should do for others for injunctions about what they should do to others.

One would think, listening to President Obama or reading statist Christians, that the Bible authorized a government regime of constant forced sharing. There is one passage in the Bible, Acts 4:32–35, that apparently depicts a communal sharing of property, in aid of the poor. The passage describes one particular episode of voluntary sharing in the life of the early Christian church — not a program of coercive taxation, set in stone by the Roman government. It should be read in the noncoercive context in which it was written. Jesus preached about living a holy, virtuous life, and unhesitatingly rebuked sinners. But at no point did he suggest that it was acceptable to use force to compel virtue. Christ commanded the rich young ruler to sell all he had and give to the poor (Luke 18:22). But he did not rob the rich man's house and redistribute his goods. Although he drove the moneychangers out of the Temple (Matthew 21:12–13), Christians may conclude that this was the act of the Son of God, disposing of his own property. For statisticians to do likewise, with other people's property, would be to usurp the power of God. And the teachings of Christ themselves provide no endorsement whatsoever for state redistribution. The earliest Christians understood this. The Apostolic-era church never forced people to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and nothing in the New Testament suggests that the church used force to take property from those unwilling to give. Certainly it did not suggest that the Roman state, its savage enemy, had the right to do so.

To the contrary, Jesus implicitly endorsed the right to property in his parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16), which symbolically represents God telling workers to "take what belongs to you" (verse 14). The parable would

To accept Romans 13:1–7 at face value requires that Paul contradict himself at every other point in his writings where he mentions persecution by local officials.

make no sense if there were no property rights. In another parable, Jesus used two investors of property as exemplars of morality, rather than thieves or reactionaries (Matthew 25:14–30). Jesus had plenty of opportunities to condemn property ownership, but he never did.

One response to calls for a more minimal state, one that cannot appropriate property at will for the "common good," is to cite Romans 13:1–7, perhaps the most statist passage in all of Scripture: "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Here Paul asserts that governments derive their authority from God and

resistance to government authority is rebellion against God, for “whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God.” This is because government “is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.” This would seem to burn a path for statist to begin government redistribution of wealth as a divinely-delegated authority. Wallis uses it for precisely that purpose, writing that “it suggests a clear role for the government in ensuring the common good.”

I gladly invite statist to make this argument, once they explain how the most oppressive regimes in world history can also claim divine authority, using exactly the same reasoning. Romans 13 is a far too complex passage to unpack in this article. I think the best explanation is that Paul was attempting to avoid accusations of sedition by the Roman government. He himself was persecuted by the Romans and other governments. He knew that government wasn’t empowered by

God to do anything it pleased. To accept Romans 13:1–7 at face value requires that Paul contradict himself at every other point in his writings where he mentions persecution by local officials. To use the passage as justification for any government activity whatever induces so many logical problems that Christian statist will never get through explaining themselves before proceeding with redistributionist plans.

The truth is that there is no biblical warrant for redistributionist economic policies. It simply is not there. The closest the Bible comes to supporting such policies is the Year of Jubilee, which proposes something entirely different from the programs advocated by Christian economic statist. A careful, rather than cursory, examination of the biblical text shows that confiscatory taxation and redistribution have no traction.

Quite the opposite: there are solid biblical grounds for the right to property — far stronger grounds than for President Obama’s call to “spread the wealth around.” Until Christian statist can persuasively argue to the contrary, their redistributionist plans must be pronounced unbiblical. □

How Liberty Helps the Poor, *from page 46*

Second, a worker’s choices are in reality not limited to one employer’s take-it-or-leave-it offer. Turning down one employer’s offer of a certain wage doesn’t mean starving to death. There are thousands of employers, and a worker in a capitalist society has the unconstrained ability to choose whichever employer he prefers out of all who may be willing to hire him. If no employer will give him the terms he wants, he is free to seek a loan from one of the hundreds of banks in existence and start his own business, or to learn a trade that will make him more valuable to employers. Everyone has the option of getting an education and learning some trade to put him in a better bargaining position.

To say that some people lack the intelligence necessary to do so is both patronizing and untrue. The qualities necessary to accomplish such a feat are discipline and the willingness to make tough choices. Neither of these qualities is a magical ability that some people are born with and some are not. In no industry is there a monopoly such that a worker must choose to accept one specific set of terms or starve. Even if there were, the worker would be free to start a company to compete with the monopoly, on at least one of its product lines — assuming, of course, that there was a free market. Lean start-up companies often compete very efficiently with bloated would-be monopolists.

It is misleading to say that working-class people cannot appreciate the right to choose a job or the right to use money. A worker who earns his money has earned the right to spend it on something he wants, and to enjoy any product or service that the other hardworking citizens of a capitalist country will sell to him. The worker’s enjoyment from spending money is not an illusion, even if he has comparatively less money than an upper-class person. The fact that rich people own yachts does not make a ham sandwich taste any less delicious.

Any libertarian candidate who runs for office on a platform of helping the rich and ignoring the poor will lose. But after all, libertarians are not in the business of using government to help any class of people. Their concern is with preventing government from hurting anyone’s legitimate interests. It may

seem counterintuitive to think that low-income people can be persuaded that economic freedom is in their best interest, but it only seems counterintuitive because of the pervasive influence of socialist propaganda. Fortunately, this propaganda has the weight of American history against it. Generations of low-income people arrived at Ellis Island and looked up at the Statue of Liberty, and they did not come here because they wanted to be exploited; they came because they wanted the American dream, the dream that hard work can earn you a decent wage and a good life. That dream, in the vast majority of cases, became reality. America has been called the land of opportunity, and it is capitalist society in which economic opportunities appear to people who make simple, honest, persevering efforts.

In spite of all the obstacles that may stand in the way of working-class people trying to support themselves and their families, it remains possible to say that the American dream is still alive and that economic freedom still has a place in the American way of life. Socialists tell workers that capitalists exploit the workers and steal their wealth. The libertarian reply is that capitalists create wealth, make the economy function, and thereby benefit workers, who are always free to make use of capitalism for their own dreams and ambitions.

There is no reason why libertarians should not be proselytizing to the poor as well as the rich. We cannot promise to provide free lunches to the poor — because, indeed, there is no such thing as a free lunch — but we can promise to give everyone an unfettered opportunity to earn lunch money.

Almost everyone on the political scene maintains that a political philosophy designed for America as a whole should be beneficial for all Americans, not just one class or special interest group. And free-market capitalism is the one economic system that truly benefits everyone. If a libertarian platform were able to draw support from high-income, middle-income, and low-income voters, if we were able to say persuasively that freedom benefits all Americans, then there would be virtually no limit to the realization of libertarian political goals. □

Reviews

"The Anti-Communist Manifestos: Four Books That Shaped the Cold War," by John V. Fleming. Norton, 2009, 352 pages.

When Communism Was Cool

Bruce Ramsey

The homage that Western intellectuals once paid to the Soviet Union is difficult to fathom. They had no praise for Hitler and Nazism, but Lenin and communism ensnared them.

Emma Goldman, the anarchist portrayed by Maureen Stapleton in the movie "Reds" (1981), had to go to Russia to see it clearly, and she was the only lefty in that gushing movie who did see it. Russian-born journalist Eugene Lyons, who wrote "Assignment in Utopia" (1937), didn't shake off his admiration for the communist system until he had been stationed in Moscow for several years. Most of the Left ignored Stalin's collectivization and the resultant famine of the early 1930s. A few awakened at the show trials of 1936–1938, and many left when Stalin became an ally of Hitler in 1939. Others went on believing until they were hammered into awareness by anticommunist books.

John Fleming's "The Anti-Communist Manifestos" is about

four of those books: Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" (1940), Jan Valtin's "Out of the Night" (1941), Victor Kravchenko's "I Chose Freedom" (1945), and Whittaker Chambers' "Witness" (1952). Each book is by a former communist. Each raised a stink, and each helped change the mind of some segment of the public.

Fleming, who for 40 years taught literature at Princeton University, was an expert on Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" before he started this project. "Darkness at Noon," he writes, is "a book with definite political consequences, of which there are but a few in any generation."

Like George Orwell's "Animal Farm," "Darkness at Noon" is an anti-communist novel written by a socialist. Orwell had turned against the communists after seeing their self-aggrandizing, treacherous, and lying behavior in the Spanish Civil War. So had Koestler. He had also been jailed by the Spanish Nationalists, under a sentence of death, an experience he used in writing "Darkness at Noon."

The book is about the last days of Nicholas Rubashov, a character modeled on the Bolshevik "rightist" Nikolai Bukharin. Rubashov helped give birth to the Soviet state, but now it wants to eat him. He was loyal to it; indeed, he surrendered his morality and judgment to it. Now it demands that he confess to "crimes" he didn't commit. And so he does.

Why did the victims of Stalin's show trials confess, often to stories that were easily proven untrue? Because they were tortured? Partly. But there was more. Fleming writes: "Koestler's suggestion, which was brilliantly original at the time he advanced it in 'Darkness at Noon,' was to look for an internal compulsion within the psychology of Bolshevism itself."

Communism wasn't like capitalism — a system created without central intention, whose theoreticians came after its birth, and were strictly self-appointed. As Fleming observes, "There is . . . no Capitalist International. Very few capitalists have read so much as a word of Adam Smith, Hayek, or Milton

Friedman. In fact, quite a few have never heard of them. . . . Capitalism itself has neither a central headquarters nor theoretical texts commanding wide obeisance."

In the 1930s and '40s, communism did. It was not just an existing political and social system, or mainly that. It was an ideal.

"Socialism was the baby, the Soviet Union the rather gray and scummy bathwater," Fleming says. "The greater the fear of losing the baby, the greater the tolerance of the dirty bathwater. Socialism was being 'built' in the Soviet Union. We were witnessing the difficult transition period toward real Communism." Stalin, the Great Helmsman, was only halfway there — so lighten up! The omelet is going to taste really, really good.

It's not that pro-Communist intellectuals were insincere, writes Fleming. "Instead, they were infected by a theory."

"Darkness at Noon" was published in Britain in 1940, and America in March 1941, during the two-year period when Stalin was allied with Hitler. This period of demoralization for Western communists was a window of opportunity to publish anticommunist books, without the strident objections of communists inside and outside government. "Darkness at Noon" didn't make waves then, but another book did: Jan Valtin's "Out of the Night."

Fleming's discovery of that book started the project that is the subject of this review. Fleming is a hobby book-binder; he buys used books for their boards. "Out of the Night" is still dirt-cheap on the used-book market; it was a bestseller in 1941, which means there are a lot of copies, but nobody reads it any more. One day Fleming picked up a copy, intending to rip off its cover. He began reading it instead.

It was not a book for intellectuals. There was no theory in it, but there was plenty of exciting practice. It was the autobiography of a communist agent, a man whom Fleming finds "selfish, sinister and cynical," "not very easy to like," but who was fascinating for Americans to read about. The author describes how he committed mayhem, attempted murder, espionage, smuggling, illegal border crossing, free sex, and other indiscretions, all as part of the

daily, shady life of a professional Red.

"Jan Valtin" is a false name, and some of the details of the story have been shown to be false. The book, Fleming writes, is "a strange celluloid suspension, in which little blobs of fact are captured in a viscous medium of fiction, or perhaps vice versa." It is, he says, "morally true." And it was an "anti-Communist blockbuster."

There is a story behind that story. In 1939 "Valtin" published an article, "Communist Agent," in *The American Mercury*, then edited by Eugene Lyons. "Valtin," whose real name was Richard

Krebs, was talked into making a book out of it by two of his Connecticut neighbors — the anticommunist Isaac Don Levine (whom Fleming calls "one of the most successful literary agents, entrepreneurs and productive busybodies in American history"), and Levine's good friend, the libertarian writer Rose Wilder Lane.

The book was a popular success. But its time of political shelter was short. The book came out in April 1941. On June 22, the German army rolled into Russia, and suddenly the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was one

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of the good guys fighting Hitler. Forget its former pact with Hitler, its invasion of Finland and seizure of one-third of Poland and all of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Carpathian Ruthenia, and what is now Moldova. Forget, too, that America was still officially neutral for the next six months. Culturally, America was at war, and the Soviet Union was an ally. "After 'Out of the Night,'" writes Fleming, "there would not be another popular 'anti-Soviet' book published in America until 1945."

"Out of the Night" was going to be made into a movie. After June 22, 1941, however, it was untouchable. Americans would be seeing such pro-Communist movies as "Mission to Moscow" (1943) and "North Star" (1943), but not any anticommunist movies. Fleming quotes screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, bragging that as a result of the influence of his fellow Communists, no movie of "Out of the Night" was ever made. Still, hundreds of thousands of people read it.

Four years after publication of "Out of the Night," the war ended, and the story of "Darkness at Noon" resumed. Called "Le Zéro et l'infini," it was published in France, and the French intellectuals went ballistic.

"It is no easy thing to reconstruct the mental world of the early Cold War," Fleming writes. "To appreciate the nature of the French debate about Koestler's novel requires the reconstruction of some modes of thought nearly vanished from the earth."

The French Left believed deeply that Russia had done the hard work of fighting Hitler and that Britain and the United States had rolled in when the going was easy (an exaggeration of a valid point about the Russians); that the communist underground in France had put up the best fight against the Nazis of any of the underground groups; that "the USSR was a shining beacon"; and that "the Western democracies were rotten to the core." The Soviet Union had its blemishes, but these were excusable. There had been a terrible war. At its end Jean-Paul Sartre could declare, "Every anti-Communist is a dog."

But Koestler's book was set *before* the war. Its message was that communism was rotten in 1937, rotten at the core, because it denied the individual's moral judgment and worth. All the rot

that followed flowed from that.

In 1946 Koestler's book was joined by an ally, "I Chose Freedom." Its author, the Ukrainian Victor Kravchenko, was a Red Army officer sent to America to order lend-lease supplies. He defected in 1944 and began writing a book to explain why he had done it. Fleming says that even in Russian Kravchenko "could not write his way out of a wet paper bag." The book was cowritten by Eugene Lyons, who spoke Russian. It portrayed life in the Soviet Union as one "of nearly universal social fear," including the fear of arrest, prison, and forced-labor camps.

By 1946 most Americans were ready to believe this, but the French Left was not. When a communist smear artist writing under the pseudonym of "Sim Thomas" charged in *Les Lettres Françaises* that the book had been concocted by American intelligence agencies, and that Kravchenko was a lying alcoholic, Kravchenko sued the publisher. He put up his own money, which he had earned from the American edition, to fight the communists. The result was a public trial of Soviet Russia. Kravchenko won the case.

Sixty years later, the amazing thing is that the defenders of the Socialist Homeland thought they were right. They were not going to let "I Chose Freedom" pass. They believed. For them, as Fleming says, "All the minor [!] tyrannies of which they disapproved — suppression of the freedoms of speech, of the press, of assembly, of religious practice, and so on — could be forgiven

or at least tolerated on account of the huge economic tyranny of which they approved."

The one thing they would not admit was the concentration camps and the attendant forced labor. Those were icons of Nazism. They were not to be associated with a workers' state. If Kravchenko could hang them around the neck of Soviet Russia, the Soviet Russia was guilty.

He did. And it was.

The last part of Fleming's book is about Whittaker Chambers' "Witness." Chambers, an American, had been a Soviet spy in the 1930s, had broken with the Party, and gone to a high official in 1940 with a list of Soviet agents in the U.S. government. The official had taken the message to President Roosevelt, who dismissed it. But after Roosevelt died and the war ended, Chambers made his accusations again. One of the men he named, former State Department official Alger Hiss, sued. The result was an epic battle over who was lying, and, more important, about whether the Roosevelt administration had been riddled with Soviet spies. We now know that it was. But at the time, Americans were divided, with the Left siding with Hiss.

"Witness" was the book that Chambers wrote after Hiss had been sent to prison. It is one of the classic American autobiographies, a gloomy, brooding book written on a loftier intellectual plane than "Out of the Night" or "I Chose Freedom."

All this has been forgotten by



"Not now, dear — some sexy Ukrainian girls want to meet me."

American popular culture. What remains is the left-liberals' story of "McCarthyism" and the "witch hunt" against suspected communists, which Arthur Miller compared to the Salem witch trials in his play *"The Crucible"* (1953). Fleming's chapter on "Witness" gives him the chance to point out that in spite of the indecencies of Sen. McCarthy, it is incorrect to call what happened a "witch hunt." "The problem is this," writes Fleming; "there never were any witches, but there were some Communists."

Fleming has sound moral judgment, but he leavens it with humor. Of French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, he writes that she "had a habit of reading and liking books, only later to discover that she was supposed *not* to like them." Fleming is also a specialist on medieval history, and makes reference to it

unexpectedly, starting with an allusion to Dante on the second page of the text. He is also fond, perhaps over-fond, of references to classics of all descriptions. Here is a sample in a paragraph about Victor Kravchenko and a woman he met:

The Communist and the capitalist heiress exchanged admiring glances. They then took refuge from the storm in a hotel, very much in the spirit and in the end with very similar results as in the fourth book of the *Aeneid* when Dido and Aeneas take refuge from the rainstorm in a cave.

From this you can see that "The Anti-Communist Manifestos" is not tightly organized. The author is attracted by stories that are interesting to tell, and he feels free to pursue them, wherever. But the book is a delight to read, and it does reconstruct "some modes of thought nearly vanished from the earth." □

"Woman on the Moon," by Alex Modzelewski. Humpback Publishing, 2009, 270 pages.

Liberty, Ahoy!

Jo Ann Skousen

More than 40 years ago, Harry Browne published an open Christmas letter to his 9-year-old daughter with the startling words, "No one owes you anything." That Christmas message to a little girl who was probably hoping for a doll or a bicycle may seem shockingly harsh, but Harry's intent was liberating: the sooner you realize that no one owes you anything, the sooner you will become self-reliant.

I was reminded of Harry's letter to his daughter when I read Alex Modzelewski's "Woman on the Moon."

The book is a dystopian novel set a few decades into the future, when government interventionism has completely taken over the United States. Somewhere out in the Pacific Ocean, there is an ersatz Galt's Gulch called Moon City made of container ships and other vessels. The community's motto is "We owe you nothing." Other ships are welcome to tie up in outlying areas of the floating island. Their passengers can buy and trade goods for gold (no paper currencies are accepted), and they can receive emergency assistance. But no one is *entitled* to a place in Moon City. Only those who are vetted and

invited can venture into its heart.

One of the Americans who still inhabit the continent is the protagonist, Pavel Bronski, a physician who is forced to cut costs, meet quotas, and participate in surgeries without essential drugs. (Anyone concerned about the healthcare debate should read this book.) As a physician, Bronski has access to fuel, extra food rations, and other luxuries, but ordinary Americans have to make do with constant shortages of these things. Government-run "Repose Centers," reminiscent of opium dens, keep the masses sedated and acquiescent. But early in the story Bronski decides to leave America on his sailboat, taking with him a mysterious new friend, named only Sarah, who has her own reason for setting sail. Eventually they end up at Moon City.

Like Ayn Rand, Modzelewski uses fiction to present and discuss libertarian ideas. His characters' conversations are intelligent, interesting, and philosophically sound; and they never become too long and drawn out. The story is suspenseful and exciting. Spies and bioweapons are involved, and Bronski, who has been involved in developing a drug for "Operation Remorse," a program that turns soldiers into fearless, remorseless killers, is chased across the ocean by government agents.

The book has two flaws, one odd and the other just annoying. First, midway through the novel, the military bioweapon plot suddenly mutates. The same government agents are still chasing Bronski, but (the poetically named) Operation Remorse has apparently ceased to exist. Suddenly the whole plot line is dropped. Now they are after him for an entirely different reason: they want to gain control of an advanced electronics plant in Panama. Fiction always requires a certain suspension of disbelief, but this plot twist is simply bizarre.

The second, annoying flaw is the backstory of the female protagonist, Grace (who also uses only her first name). She is the strong, intelligent founder and leader of Moon City. But before that, she was the 16-year-old bride of the leader of a church that is "headquartered in Salt Lake City." Early in the book "Brother Jeremiah," a leader of this church, forces her to watch pornographic videos, rapes her,

beats her, and eventually kidnaps her daughter. But it's more complicated than that. Grace's family starts out in a small community of fundamentalists with lots of "sisters and cousins," "like a litter of puppies." Then they are "called" by their "stake president" to move to Ogden, Utah, where the Jeremiah character presides. He is not described as a polygamist, but the communities he directs are so described. Then he is called to a new position in Salt Lake, and he forces 16-year-old Grace to marry him. Later he is called a "prophet."

Hmmmm. Salt Lake City, prophet, local churches called "stakes," presiding officers called "stake presidents." This is pretty specific. I wonder what the author might have in mind?

Undoubtedly the target is the Mormon church, and the weapons directed against it are those of popular mythology and prejudice. Modzelewski asks in a cover letter, "Why are Polish jokes so relentless, even though population studies place our average IQ as the third highest in Europe?" I could ask him a similar question: why should Mormons be portrayed in the bizarre way in which they are portrayed in his book?

Yes, there are polygamous communities in isolated areas of Utah, Arizona, and Colorado, where women and children are overpowered by abusive men. The difficulty is that they are not "well respected" internationally (as Brother Jeremiah reportedly is), they are not headquartered in Salt Lake City (as Jeremiah's church is), and they are not members of the Mormon church (as Modzelewski implies). The same kind of story line could be created about Episcopalians or Freemasons or Christian Scientists (or atheists, for that matter). The only requirement would be for myths and stereotypes to take the place of facts. But what's the point? Fiction should be a mirror of reality, not a headlong flight from it.

But to return. Despite these flaws, "Woman on the Moon" is worth reading, especially for those who enjoy novels with a libertarian bent. And the cover art, a gold sculpture of a woman reclining languidly on a crescent moon, is exquisite. The book is worth displaying on your coffee table for that picture alone. □

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"The Berbers," by Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress. Blackwell, 1996, 365 pages.

"Moorish Spain," by Richard Fletcher. Phoenix Press, 2001, 197 pages.

"Muhammed and the Origins of Islam," by F.E. Peters. State University of New York, 1994, 334 pages.

"Saladin," by Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz. State University of New York, 1972, 290 pages.

"What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East," by Bernard Lewis. Perennial, 2003, 186 pages.

The Muslim Myth

Stephen Cox

It was a typical libertarian conference. The hotel ballroom was packed with people eager to share ideas. The four-member panel was deftly fielding questions. But as I sat there, enjoying the discussion, I knew it was coming — the Question, the one that comes up at every libertarian conference. It makes no difference what the major topic of discussion may be; the Question is bound to be asked.

And it was. A pleasant, intelligent person rose to his feet and said, "Isn't it true that medieval Islam was practically an anarchist society? I mean, they really had no state, did they? That's what I've heard. Tell me — is it true?"

Sometimes, when this happens, one of the panelists confidently assures the questioner that he has been misled: Muslims had states, and laws to boot. Sometimes, one of the panelists says yes and another panelist says no.

And sometimes, no one on the panel is willing to vouchsafe an opinion. Just because you're an expert on the American Revolution or the European economy doesn't mean that you know, or should be expected to know, the history of everything in the world.

Yet these days, one would like to know as much as possible about the history of Islam. And libertarians are always curious about the degree and kind of individual freedom that existed at various times and places in the past. But how is it, you may wonder, that so many libertarians have acquired the impression that a thousand years ago, Islam was a paradise of freedom?

I'll tell you how. It's because of Rose Wilder Lane, the apostle of libertarianism who in 1943 published a theory of history and politics called "The Discovery of Freedom." This book has influenced many thousands of libertarians, firsthand or secondhand; and a very large proportion of it is devoted to

a lyrical description of the accomplishments of Islamic civilization during the period that Europeans came to call the middle ages.

By Lane's account, the founder of Islam was a deist and rationalist who was, for all intents and purposes, a libertarian. The civilization that he inspired was also essentially libertarian. It was as close to anarchy as a civilization could come: "There was no Authority. There was no State. There was no Church." It was a "scientific" civilization, "constantly increasing and using scientific knowledge." It was "tolerant." It was "humane." Its "essential function [was] not war, but production and distribution of goods." At every point it presented a healthy contrast to the ugly and intolerant civilization of its Christian neighbors:

During the stagnation of Europe that is called the Dark Ages, the world was actually bright with an energetic, brilliant civilization, more akin to American civilization and more fruitful today for everyone alive, than any other in the past. Millions upon millions of human beings, thirty generations, believing that all men are equal and free, created that civilization and kept on creating it for eight hundred years. To them the world owes modern science — mathematics, astronomy, navigation, modern medicine and surgery, scientific agriculture.

Rose Wilder Lane was a good writer. She loved a good story. But sometimes her stories weren't true. To see what's wrong with her story about Islam, and to get a basic idea of the real problems and accomplishments of Islamic civilization — no, Islamic civilizations,

By Rose Wilder Lane's account, the founder of Islam was, for all intents and purposes, a libertarian.

because a common religion doesn't automatically create a common culture or even common ways of interpreting the religion — you may want to look at some of the books listed above. They show, in general and in detail, that the

human interest of Islamic history is considerably greater than its interest as an ideological prop.

A place to start is Bernard Lewis' standard text, "The Arabs in History," a brief and elegantly written summary of medieval history from the Arab and Islamic point of view. A place to end is perhaps Lewis' more recent work, "What Went Wrong?" This is a much more polemical book, and one with some direct bearing on libertarian thought. It attempts to answer the question, Why did the Christian West modernize and liberalize itself, while, for the most part, the Islamic Middle East did not? Lewis is concerned not with the Middle East's adoption of automobiles and tennis shoes, but with its hesitancy about certain ideas that libertarians regard as fundamental to a free society — limited government, the separation of government from religion, and open and rational inquiry into all subjects, both civil and religious.

This hesitancy came from somewhere. It came as a heritage from the old civilizations of the Middle East, civilizations in which the state was never separated from religion, government was never effectively limited, and rational inquiry was often curtailed, either by religious and customary prohibitions or by simple lack of interest in philosophical investigation and dispute. For various reasons, similar conditions ceased to obtain in western Europe, but change didn't go far enough or fast enough in most parts of the Middle East.

The picture that Lewis paints is therefore fundamentally opposed to the picture that many libertarians have derived from Lane. There is a difference between improving mathematics and navigation, as medieval Muslims certainly did, and conducting philosophical inquiries into the nature of human freedom. Richard Fletcher's book on Islamic Spain — a very specialized book that is nevertheless clearly and attractively written — emphasizes a point that Lewis also mentions: when translating Greek texts into Arabic, Islamic scholars avoided the philosophical and "merely literary" ones, and went for the mathematical and medical works. They wanted practice, not theory; and thus scorned the kind of theories, or literary experiences, that can lead to a new and better practice of life.

When it came to understanding their Christian neighbors, they did exactly what the Christians did. To the greatest extent possible, they avoided informing themselves about what their neighbors believed. They had little or no interest in translating or reading Christian texts, just as the Christians had little or no interest in reading or translating the Quran or other Islamic religious works. On both sides, ignorance and bigotry were profound.

The composition of the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammed, who was simultaneously a civil, religious, and military leader, will always be of absorbing historical interest. A place to begin with the study of the Prophet is F.E. Peters' "Muhammed and the Origins of Islam." Peters is sympathetic to his protagonist, but his array of facts allows readers to make their own judgments, too — judgments that, pro or con, are not likely to coincide with Lane's. Whatever else he was, the Prophet was not a nice, 20th-century libertarian.

But what is really at issue is the degree of openness, the degree of scientific and progressive spirit, the degree of trust in rational judgment and respect for the rights of individuals, that may have prevailed in one Islamic culture or another, after Muhammed's creation of an Islamic community. On this subject, inquiries into origins can never be decisive, and generalizations can never be complete. Individual times and places must be inspected in detail. Here are the conclusions that Fletcher reaches as the result of his essentially generous, warm-hearted study of the culture of Islamic Spain, which has often been represented as a pinnacle of medieval civilization:

None other than Mr. Anthony Burgess wrote that after the fall of Granada [to Christians, in 1492], "the magnificent Emirate of Córdoba, where beauty, tolerance, learning and good order prevailed, was only a memory." Indeed it was. But had they ever prevailed? Beauty? Yes, a fair amount of it, here and there. Tolerance? Ask the Jews of Granada who were massacred in 1066, or the Christians who were deported by the Almoravids to Morocco in 1126 (like the Moriscos [Moorish families who lingered in Christian Spain] five centuries later). Learning? Outside the tiny circles of

the princely courts, not a great deal of it to be seen. Good order? Among the feuding Berber tribesmen? Or the turbulent muwallad rebels like Ibn Hafsun? Or the taifa statelets of the eleventh century? Or the Moroccan fundamentalists who succeeded them?

As a close study of another Islamic time and place, Andrew Ehrenkreutz's life of Saladin also repays attention. Not that the book is hard to understand; Ehrenkreutz is always brisk and lucid — although his performance in print is nothing compared to the performance I saw in person, when I took his class at the University of Michigan. He talked without any notes whatever, and when he referred to some event, he didn't cite it in a vague or general way, but as something that happened "on the beach near Damietta, on April 3, 1173." He used no tricks. He developed no rhetoric. He was never theatrical. He never tried to entertain. But he was the best teacher you could have. The subject of his book is the greatest Islamic leader of the 12th century, the soldier and statesman who united Egypt, Syria, and most of Mesopotamia under his rule and expelled the Crusaders from Jerusalem.

Ehrenkreutz admires Saladin's brilliant talents. Yet to him, Saladin's career is an example of constant, predatory, and ruthless ambition, similar in nature

opponents, he did not hesitate to behead them, crucify them, or just start hacking away at them with the first weapon that came to hand. They were pleased to do the same to their own opponents, when they got the drop on them. I don't need to tell you that the Christians did the same. There wasn't a dime's worth of difference between them.

Religious freedom? Saladin had no compunctions about executing Islamic mystics, once they became popular. Commercial freedom? Saladin experimented with lowering taxes and firming up the currency, but when he found that these expedients didn't bring in enough money to fund his military adventures, he came up with new ways of taxing and exploiting people. One of his associates, an intelligent man named al-Qadi al-Fadil, complained that

in the district of Damascus the abuses oppressing the farmers are so outrageous that one wonders whether the rain still waters their fields; oppression . . . exceeds all imagination. At Wadi Barada and at al-Zabadani disorder reigns permanently, the sword causes streams of blood, and nothing appears to stop the excesses. . . . It is further imperative to promote collection of taxes and to adjust expenditure accordingly, for expenses without revenue — as any enterprise without solid grounds — are nothing but absurdity.

Well, try another place and another Islamic culture. In their book on the Berbers, Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress follow the history of North African civilization from its beginning to the present day, using whatever resources — archeology, literary remains, contemporary interviews — can bring its many epochs to life. What are Brett and Fentress' conclusions about "the type of government which had grown up in North Africa under Islam" during the medieval period? Their summary is blunt. It was "dynastic and elitist in its constitution; populist in its appeal to the Muslim community; and Shakespearean in the instability of power." Whether at Fes, Granada, Tlemcen, or Tunis, Islam was "ceaselessly, and inconclusively, at war."

Islamic or Christian, the best of medieval politics was ugly and futile. Commenting on the difficulties of his own attempt to get the facts straight, and then find someone interested

enough to read them, Fletcher says, "Medieval Spain in a state of nature lacks wide appeal. Self-indulgent fantasies of glamour or guilt do wonders for sharpening up its image."

Yet Fletcher mentions something of greater interest than people's appetite for fantasies. He mentions the fact that we still don't know very much about the lives led by people like us during the Islamic middle ages. To put this in a libertarian way, we still don't know

As in Spain, so in the Middle East; they constantly fought, allied with, and betrayed one another.

enough about the spontaneous order of individual life that persisted beneath the burdens of official violence and intolerance. But there are clues. Studying the records of the time, Fletcher finds references to the scandal caused to the rulers of Spain by Muslim bands providing music at Christian vigils, and Christian monasteries serving wine to Muslim tipplers. It's too bad, he says, that history, so far, has had to be told from the viewpoint of the official classes:

The religious history of the Iberian peninsula in the Middle Ages may be summarized, from one point of view, as the persistent and wilful failure of two faiths and cultures to make any sustained attempt to understand one another. Human enough; pretty bleak. The trouble with such a judgement is that historians in making it have to rely on the testimony of those who could write. For most of the period discussed in this book that meant a small intellectual elite. Intellectuals are not renowned for their grasp of everyday reality, nor for cheerfulness and optimism. Judgements might have been rosier if one had found oneself spending the Easter vigil at a Mudejar pop concert in the local cathedral; or downing a few bottles of Valdepeñas with like-minded Muslim pals at one of Toledo's monastic wine-bars.

Now, that's something that Rose Lane would like to hear. □

Why did the Christian West modernize and liberalize itself, while the Islamic Middle East did not?

though greater in stature than the ambitions of many other Islamic leaders of the time. Muslims didn't lack a government; they had hundreds of them, fiercely competing with one another, with hardly a hint of tolerance. As in Spain, so in the Middle East: they constantly fought one another, allied with one another, and betrayed one another. Saladin spent his whole life marching armies back and forth across the Middle East; and when he got the drop on his

"The Daughter of Time," by Josephine Tey. Touchstone, 1951, 208 pages.

I, That Am Rudely Stamp'd

Jo Ann Skousen

"Truth is the daughter of time, not of authority," wrote Francis Bacon. His saying provides the title of a book that was published a long time ago but has never lost its freshness and relevance.

If we have learned one lesson from recent politics it is this: Be the first to tell the story, and tell it your own way. Then don't back down. You can get away with just about anything.

Most people know the story of Richard III — the king who clumped around medieval England with a deformed back, lamenting the winter of his discontent and ending his life with the tragic cry, "My kingdom for a horse!" Many also remember him as the murderer of the princes in the tower, a man so evil that he killed his own young nephews to put himself on the throne. But who was the first to tell this story, and which way was it told?

Most of what "everyone knows" about Richard III comes from two sources: Thomas More's "The History of King Richard III," published in 1557, and Shakespeare's play of the same name, published in the 1590s and based on More's account. Both men wrote their tales nearly 100 years after Richard died. More to the point, both men were loyal subjects of the Tudors, descendants of Henry VII, who dethroned Richard and ended the reign of the Plantagenets. If anyone had a reason to darken Richard's reputation and brighten their own, the Tudors did.

Josephine Tey's novel "Daughter

of Time" provides a fascinating look at this period of English history through the eyes of a fictional detective. Though written in 1951, her story of political shenanigans and historical revision feels as timely as last month's election.

The story begins with Scotland Yard Inspector Alan Grant recuperating from a broken leg. Confined to bed, he is bored and cranky. Knowing that Grant is proud of his ability to "read" a person's guilt or innocence by looking at the person's face (heaven save us from that kind of jury — or cop!), a friend brings him some pictures of famous defendants to keep him busy, including a portrait of Richard III. Grant is puzzled by Richard's kind and noble face, which does not fit his expectation of a murderer. Engaging the help of a young researcher at the British Museum to do his library work, Grant begins to investigate the 500-year-old mysteries of Richard's life.

As much history as mystery, "Daughter of Time" delves into the background of the Plantagenets (though "delves" may not be quite the right word for a book with a lively style and witty dialogue). Like any good detective, Grant focuses on motive and opportunity as he sets out to prove that Richard could not have murdered his nephews, the young princes who disappeared from the White Tower sometime during or even after Richard's reign. He discovers that Richard's successor, Henry VII, had more motive and opportunity for their deaths; after all, Richard had solved his accession prob-

lem simply by proving that the princes were illegitimate.

The story has a surprising number of twists and turns for a mystery that has been out in the open for 500 years. But the most interesting thing about this book is the author's explanation of how rumors become history and how truth, "the daughter of time, not authority," becomes deliberately obscured. In Tey's story, men are sent to different parts of the country, and even to France, expressly to start rumors. Witnesses are paid off or silenced. Though essential evidence — such as any contemporary accusations that Richard did away with the princes — is nonexistent, the rumors develop a life of their own.

One of the most important ways of making sure that rumors propagate themselves is to mix them with truth. It's a means of lying that we see in today's politics, and that Tey finds in the politics of Henry VII. Here's what happened, according to Tey's book.

Richard's accession to the throne hinged on proving that the little princes were bastards. It seems that before marrying their mother, Elizabeth Woodville, King Edward IV had entered a marriage contract with another woman, Lady Eleanor Talbot. This made the princes illegitimate, and the throne went to Edward's brother Richard rather than to his sons. Our fictional detective, Alan Grant, uses this fact to prove that Richard had little motive for killing the boys. On the other hand, when Henry became king he needed to convince the masses that Richard had not been the legitimate heir after all, so they would willingly transfer their loyalty to him. Using the classic bait-and-switch method, Henry's supporters found another Eleanor who had sported with King Edward, but without benefit of marriage. She testified truthfully that she had slept with Edward, and just as truthfully that she had never contracted to marry him. Those inside the court knew it was two different Eleanors, but the masses heard only "Eleanor" and were satisfied that Richard's reign had never been legitimate. Elizabeth Woodville was the rightful queen, her sons (now conveniently missing) had been the rightful heirs, and voila! Long live King Henry.

Tey's novel is filled with similar examples of political enemies

deliberately manipulating public opinion — a process that continues today. Politicians still want to be the first to tell the story, they still aim at telling just enough truth to be convincing, and they still hope that their stories will stick if

they don't back down. And yes, if they are initially victorious, they do increase the chances that their stories will stick. It is said that history is written by the victors. It must also be said that truth is the daughter of time. □

“Capitalism: A Love Story,” directed by Michael Moore. Vantage Productions, 2009, 127 minutes.

Tainted Love

Jo Ann Skousen

Michael Moore has made a name for himself as the king of ambush journalism. He snags interviews with corporate bigwigs and policy makers by pretending to be interested in benign issues, then switches to hot-button topics once he's in the room. With aggressive questioning that catches interviewees off guard and skillful editing that twists their comments around, he paints an ugly picture of corporate and conservative America — a picture that is malevolently deceptive. Moore's disingenuous tactics are so blatant that even the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences refuses to list his films as documentaries.

In “Capitalism: A Love Story,” Moore is up to his old tricks. The film begins with what appears to be a hostage standoff. Four adults are locked inside a house, filming the arrival of several police cars and speaking to one another about the inevitability of what's about to happen. What is it? A suicide pact? The persecution of a religious cult? As police begin knocking down the doors, the householders call out, “We have no weapons. We will not resist. But we will not open the door.”

But what is the crisis? An eviction because of a mortgage foreclosure.

Don't get me wrong. I'm saddened by the number of people who have lost their homes in this financial crisis. I'm sorry if they were duped into borrowing more than they could afford to repay. But according to Moore's own film, it was Fed chairman Alan Greenspan who urged homeowners to “tap into your home equity” as a way of stimulating the economy, and it was Clinton-era lawmakers who passed the Community Reinvestment Act requiring banks to grant mortgages to low-income homebuyers. Don't blame capitalism for government policy.

In another segment, Moore presents the horrifying stories of several teenagers who were sent to a juvenile detention center for seemingly minor infractions. They were all sentenced by the same judge, who appears to have been receiving kickbacks from the owner of the facility. (I say “seemingly” and “appears to have” because I can never trust Moore to tell a true story.) The more children this judge sent to the facility, the more money he received. Many of these teens remained virtually incarcerated for months, according to the film.

Moore blames this travesty on capitalism because the community had turned to a privatized detention system rather than maintaining a government-run facility. But let's put the blame

where it belongs. If it happened, this was not a failure of capitalism; it was a failure of one particular judge to act honestly and appropriately.

Moore complains that capitalists are greedy, but greed is a condition of human nature, not of capitalism per se — or of socialism, for that matter. Most people try to be honest, but some steal from their own mothers. Greed can and often does lead to criminal behavior. But it's easier — much, much easier — to control, arrest, or simply avoid wicked capitalists than it is to get rid of wicked politicians and dictators.

To be fair, Moore doesn't limit his blame to Bush and the Republicans this time; Clinton, Chris Dodd, Greenspan, and even Obama appear to be in on the take as Moore reports on last year's financial meltdown. But Moore's target is capitalism — and these are politicians. If capitalists are buying them, it's because the politicians put themselves up for sale.

Moore decries the profit motive as “morally evil,” but what motivation would he prefer? Whips? Chains? How about pleasure? Moore interviews several pilots who love to fly airplanes, but they still aren't happy. They want more money.

This leads us to another of Moore's anecdotes: the plight of employees at Republic Windows and Doors who were all let go when the company went bankrupt. Would Moore insist that every company be kept in business, even when no one wants to buy its products? But in this case, the failure was caused by the union that represented the workers, who in essence priced themselves out of the market. Interestingly, Moore was right there on the spot, filming disgruntled employees as they broke into the factory and began a sit-in. Did he just happen to be passing by with a camera crew? Did he reenact the bolt-cutting? Or did he incite the sit-in? Quite a convenient coincidence.

At one point Moore asks one of the former employees why they didn't just form a cooperative and run the company themselves. One woman responds, “Because we don't have any money — we aren't capitalists.” There's the rub: it actually takes capital to start a business! But anyone can be a capitalist. All you have to do is spend less than you earn, and invest the difference.

Moore unwittingly demonstrates that possibility when he shows what happened at a bakery where employees bought the company and turned it into a cooperative. Today they all work harder and enjoy their jobs more. They feel empowered. They saved their money, invested it in a business, and now they're making a handy profit. Wait a minute — isn't that capitalism?

How would Moore fix the economy? As you might have predicted, he suggests raising taxes. That's a good way to prevent capital formation. But Moore believes that taxes are somehow a tonic for whatever ails you. "When the highest tax rates were 90%" he intones cheerily, "America enjoyed the greatest expansion in history, and families could get by on one income" — implying that a 90% tax rate today could solve our problems.

But the tax code was different in the '50s. Congress awarded liberal tax breaks and exemptions for "good behavior." High-income earners could

give 90% of their marginal income to the government in taxes, or they could invest 100% of it in a business and reap the profits. Which would you do? What started out as a tax loophole turned into one of the greatest infusions of investment capital our country has ever known. No wonder the economy thrived. Capitalism truly was a love story.

But Moore has no desire to inform his viewers, or enlighten them with a genuine explanation of how capitalism works. He's a carnival barker who merely loves to rake the muck at the end of the pony show, a technology-savvy magician who knows how to manipulate the smoke and mirrors. Unfortunately, this circus has been to town too many times, and it isn't very entertaining anymore. I kept looking at my watch, wondering when it was going to end. It was like listening to Andy Rooney for two straight hours.

Moore says this is his last movie. Let's hope he's telling the truth about that. □

"Law Abiding Citizen," directed by F. Gary Gray. Warp Film, 2009, 108 minutes.

Homeland Insecurity

Jo Ann Skousen

Clyde Shelton (Gerard Butler) is an ordinary, law-abiding citizen, enjoying a few minutes of hobby time with his daughter (Ksenia Hulyayev, in a brief but enchanting performance), when the nightmare we all fear happens: opening the front door to greet a deliveryman, he is greeted instead by two burly men who stab him, stab his wife, snatch their valuables, and grab their daughter on the way out. Mother and daughter die. Clyde survives. I'm not sure which

is the worse fate.

But the nightmare isn't over. Now he has to face the criminal justice system. Nick Rice (Jamie Foxx) is an up-and-coming prosecutor with a conviction rate of 96%. There are only three reasons a prosecutor gets that high a rate: either the police are close to 100% in arresting the perpetrator (fat chance), the DA's office is viciously aggressive (often the case), or the DA is offering sweet deals to save the court some money and ensure convictions. Deals are bad for two reasons: bad guys get the wrong sentences, and innocent

folks often confess to crimes they did not commit out of fear that they may lose in court. Rice is a dealmaker.

Usually when two or more people are arrested for a crime, the first one to sing gets the deal and the others spend years in prison. That's what happens in this story. Clarence Darby (Christian Stolte), is the one who wielded the knife and murdered the family. He cuts the deal, blaming his accomplice, Rupert Ames (Josh Stewart), who actually urged Darby to let the family go and just take the valuables. The accomplice gets the death penalty, while the murderer gets eight years.

The father gets angry.

The rest of the film is a tense, twisted dish of revenge. A brilliant inventor, Shelton spends ten years devising a plan to get back at everyone involved, including the judge, the police detectives, the DA, and of course the cocky prosecutor. And he continues his plans from an isolated prison cell, after being arrested for killing Darby. How does he do it? He must have an accomplice on the outside, but how do they communicate?

Villains are usually the most interesting characters in a play or movie, and when they are particularly smart or diabolical they are even more fun to watch. Add to that a righteous motive like avenging the death of a wife and daughter, and we can even like the guy — to a point. But Shelton's techniques are often shocking, sadistic, and brutal. Fortunately director F. Gary Gray uses more dread than horror to create suspense, letting us squirm at the anticipation of a torture scene without having to endure watching it. Yes, there is some blood, copious spurts of it in fact, but those scenes are well telegraphed and brief.

"Law Abiding Citizen" is not a great movie, but it's a good movie. After watching it, you'll end up talking about the weaknesses of the judicial system and the overreaching arm of Homeland Security. Rice excuses his dealmaking with a dismissive, "It's not what you know, it's what you can prove." The judge (Annie Corley) gloats at one critical moment, "I'm the judge — I can do pretty much whatever I want." At another critical point the DA shouts "Fuck his civil rights." And the head of Homeland Security shuts the entire city

down, ordering people to stay inside their houses even though one specific group of people has been targeted and

identified. Besides all this, you will see a fast-paced thriller with a kicking soundtrack. Break out the popcorn. □

“Bright Star,” directed by Jane Campion. BBC Films, 2009, 119 minutes.

Ode to an English Poet

Jo Ann Skousen

Like a comet that flashes across the sky and is gone, John Keats lived only 25 years. Panned by critics during his lifetime, his poems survived to become iconic of the Romantic period. With its emphasis on mythology, the beauty of

nature, and the primacy of pure emotion, Keats’ poetry evokes great truth and intense feelings. Yet often it accomplishes these large purposes by attending to the minute details of the life around us.

The essence of this poetic style is brought gorgeously to the screen by Jane Campion’s “Bright Star,” a film about

the passionate relationship of John Keats (Ben Whishaw) with his neighbor, Fanny Brawne (Abbie Cornish). Today’s movies ordinarily try to portray the wild abandon of love through the impatient ripping of clothes and the lusty merging of bodies. But Campion presents this love story by means of its small details — the urgent longing of locked eyes, the gentle entwining of fingers, the wafting of a breeze beneath a skirt, and in one surprisingly erotic scene, the pressing of a furtive finger against a wrist beneath an organza cuff. The characters’ romantic obsession transcends physicality; in fact, when Fanny says she will “do anything” for him, Keats turns her down, responding, “I have a conscience.”

Unable to earn a living through his poetry, Keats relies on the financial largesse of his patron and friend, Charles Armitage Brown (Paul Schneider). Charles is Engels to Keats’ Marx, praising him, pushing him, protecting him, and supporting him. Conflict arises between Fanny and Charles as they compete for Keats’ attention. Charles wants Keats to spend all his time writing; Fanny wants him to spend time teaching her about literature. Her love

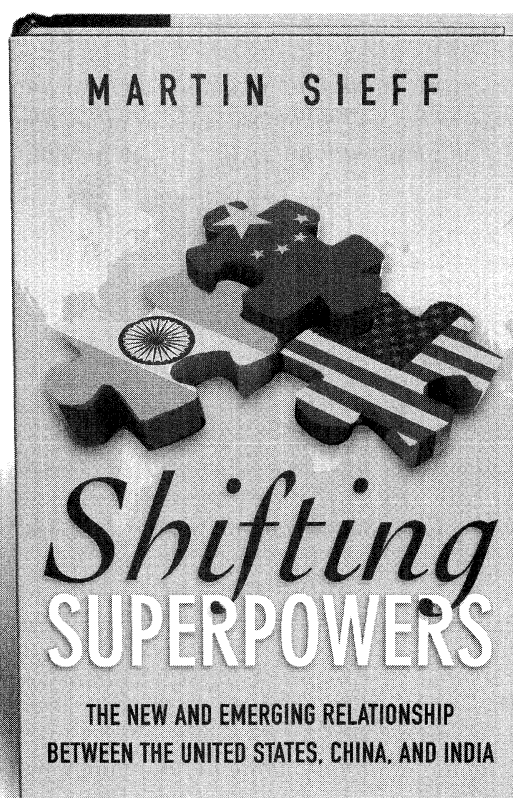
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for Keats is intellectual as well as emotional, and she is happy just to be in the room with him while he works.

Fanny, too, is an artist, although her craft is the homely kind that often goes unnoticed and unappreciated. She is an accomplished fashion designer, her page a bolt of cloth and her pen a needle making neat little stitches across a seam. Campion reminds us that women's arts were just as beautiful and creative as the more manly pursuits of letters, paint, and marble, though they were never given the same honor and

recognition.

In this film, both the costumes and the cinematography are splendid works of art. Each scene is composed with careful attention to lighting, background, and color. Windows open wide to invite nature inside, blossoms float in the spring air, the camera lingers on the two lovers as they share quiet moments together. Yet one of the most stunning scenes is a somber view of the Spanish Steps in Rome, where Keats went to convalesce after contracting tuberculosis, and where he at last succumbed to

that disease.

At one point a light from the sky beams down on Fanny's bosom, a subtle reminder of Keats's poem "Bright Star." The speaker of that poem longs to be like the star shining "stedfast" upon his "fair love's ripening breast." The poem ends with his desire "to hear her tender-taken breath,/ And so live ever — or else swoon to death." Keats did swoon in death, but his poetry lives on, "a thing of beauty [that] is a joy forever." The film is a fitting tribute to the poetry, and to the life that made it. □

Reflections, from page 36

here, claimed to have discovered it. As a result, this region is called the Marshall Islands. Likewise, there were thousands of people here when I "discovered" the region upon my arrival. But being much more modest than Captain Marshall, I've decided that I shall only rename my one tiny island as Jeffland.

— Jeff Wrobel

Norman Jay Levitt, R.I.P. — I want to take a moment to note with sadness the recent death of a remarkable man, Norman Jay Levitt (1943–2009).

Levitt was a brilliant mathematician. He received his doctorate from Princeton when he was 24, then stayed on there, doing first-rate work, especially in topology. Outside the world of mathematics he was known for his defense of science and its method against postmodernism and other trendy doctrines emanating from the academic world. He wrote for the New York Review of Books and especially for Skeptic magazine, a publication I never miss.

Now, people who defend science from the pseudoscientific and political attacks mounted by ordinary people are common enough. There is no end to exposes of such nonsense as ESP, flying saucers, creationism, numerology, and astrology. The Skeptic Society, of which I am a proud member, has done great work in this area.

But I am convinced that the silly beliefs held by ordinary

folk do nowhere near as much damage to society as the intellectual crap that is accepted by large numbers of academics, especially leftist ones. (And these days, there are hardly any other kinds of academics.) For example, outside of a few Latin American dystopias, where in the hell is Marxism still considered scientific economics? Only in certain departments of American universities.

This is where Levitt was so outstanding. An eminent academic and self-described leftist, he defended science from leftist academic attacks. This took unusual guts.

He wrote or co-wrote a number of books in this vein, such as "Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science" (co-authored with biologist Paul Gross in 1994), "The Flight from Science and Reason" (1997), and "Prometheus Bedeviled: Science and the Contradictions of Contemporary Culture" (1999). It was in "Higher Superstition," in particular, that he took on postmodernist critiques of science. That book in turn inspired physicist Alan Sokal to write his brilliant parody of po-mo nonsense, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" (1996) in the journal Social Text — a send-up that did much to discredit postmodernist pretense.

Levitt was a rare combination of brilliance and intellectual honesty. His death is a great loss.

— Gary Jason

How We Got Well, from page 44

large minorities would want something different, and no one could think of a good reason to deny the minorities what they wished. When pressed on whether there was any collective decision-making algorithm that could reliably improve on the system they already had, the ethicist couldn't produce one.

But the ethicist made another point, which was more troubling: "People who earn less than the average income are buying skimpier insurance packages and putting less into their health savings accounts because they cannot afford better."

"Wrong!" said a Stanford economist. "Poor people could spend more on healthcare, but they choose not to. We live in a prosperous society because people's incomes reflect their different contributions to national output. At different levels of income, people tend to place a different value on health services."

During the Obama administration, Congress had proposed

forcing individuals to purchase "middle-class" insurance, whether they wanted to or not. "That was a mistake," said the economist. "Someone earning \$25,000 in Future World (roughly the minimum wage) can earn \$50,000 by working 40 hours a week instead of 20 — in principle earning enough to insure for everything the healthcare system has to offer. At 60 hours a week he would have \$25,000 left over to buy all the consumption goods he currently buys."

He concluded by noting that in times past a 40-hour work week was considered normal, but many people worked 60 hours. If, today, people choose not to work additional hours to buy additional insurance, they are clearly revealing that they prefer leisure to insurance. "Who are we," he asked, "to tell them they are wrong and try to force them to make a different choice?" And having heard these arguments, the citizens of Future World decided to keep their system intact. □

Glencoe, Ky.

Lexicographic controversy in the Bluegrass State, reported by WLWT News 5:

A racially charged sign that takes aim at President Barack Obama is raising eyebrows in northern Kentucky.

The sign reads, "Obama complains Americans are fat, police act stupid, U.S.A. is a bully, the president is a nagger." However, at some point over the weekend, the last word was changed to be a racial slur.

The man who owns the sign, Bryan Roach, said that vandals changed the sign. "It was basically vandalized, and we didn't appreciate it," Roach said.

At the nearby general store, Joann Rickels said she had a feeling the sign would be trouble. "I commented to my husband when I first saw it days ago. I said, 'That looks just like an accident waiting to happen.' And I was right."

Washington, D.C.

Unexpected material support for globalization, noted by the *Washington Times*:

As part of a lobbying campaign for card-check legislation, the AFL-CIO sent representatives to Capitol Hill, charged with distributing to every office a plastic hard hat that represented the plight of the American worker. However, on the inside rim, each of the hats was emblazoned with the label, "Made in China."

Spokesman Eddie Vale commented, "Obviously our policy is to only use union vendors and it was a mistake [that] unfortunately wasn't caught before they went out."

Mobile, Ala.

Novel definition of "mentoring," noted by the *Birmingham News*:

A former judge is facing life in prison after being charged with sexually abusing male inmates in exchange for leniency.

Respected circuit judge Herman Thomas, who was once the Democratic Party's choice to be the first black federal judge in south Alabama, is accused of bringing inmates to his office and spanking them with a paddle. His trial for charges of sodomy, kidnapping, sex abuse, extortion, assault and ethics violations has been scheduled.

The 48-year-old insists he is innocent and claims he was trying to mentor the inmates.

Spokane, Wash.

The thin blue line separating society from chaos, from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*:

When Donald Ross' sister passed away, more than 100 people attended her funeral mass in Spokane. The burial was scheduled for a nearby cemetery, but Ross and his family only made it a quarter of a mile when flashing lights forced them to the side of the road.

The Rosses missed the interment while the deputy wrote up five citations because the driver and the passengers were not wearing a seat belts. And the sheriff's department says he had every right. "We're out here trying to prevent funerals, not disrupt them," said Dave Reagan of the Spokane County Sheriff's Office.

Darwin City, Australia

Oz's finest hard at work, from the *Queensland Courier-Mail*:

A dog has been booked for illegal parking. The blue heeler was tied to a fence outside Rapid Creek Market when it was approached by two Darwin City Council traffic wardens. One of the inspectors wrote out a ticket and taped it to the dog's leash.

Council spokesman Grant Fenton said a dog was considered to be "at large" if the owner was not there.

Wolfeboro, N.H.

Innovative pedagogic approach nipped in the bud, from the *Concord Monitor*:

An English teacher is being closely monitored at Kingswood Regional High School after administrators said she assigned an inappropriate essay topic to her students.

Jack Robertson, superintendent of the Governor Wentworth Regional School District, said the teacher asked students to respond to the question: "If you knocked your brother down, would you urinate in his mouth?"

School officials said the assignment didn't have to do with a book the students were reading.

Detroit

Potential legislative superpower, revealed in an interview with the *Detroit News*:

"Climate change is very real," said Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a recent appointment to the Senate Energy Committee who believes fighting the climate crisis should be top priority. "Global warming creates volatility. I feel it when I'm flying. The storms are more volatile. We are paying the price in more hurricanes and tornadoes."

United Kingdom

Urgent and long overdue finding, reported in the *Daily Telegraph*:

The custard cream was found to be the UK's most dangerous snack, on the basis of the Biscuit Injury Threat Evaluation.

This research was carried out by Mindlab International at the request of the chocolate biscuit bar Rocky. Mike Driver, Marketing Director for Rocky said: "We commissioned this study after learning how many biscuit related injuries are treated by doctors each year."

Accidents have included people poking themselves in the eye with a biscuit, falling off a chair while reaching for the tin, sustaining burns after dunking a biscuit in scalding tea, and being hit by fragments flying through the air.

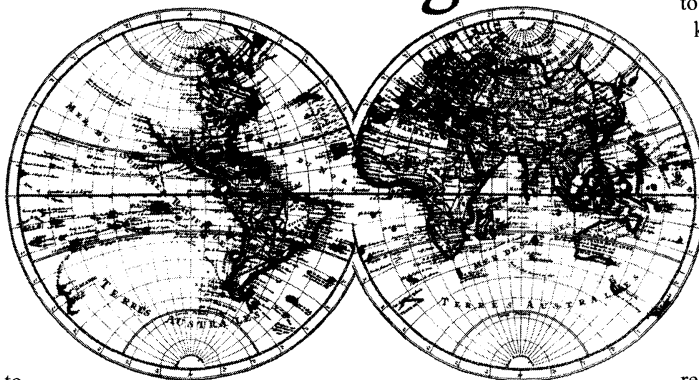
Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland

A South Park tribute gone too far, from the annals of the *Daily Mail*:

Dozens of alpine cows appear to be committing suicide by throwing themselves off a cliff near the small village in the Alps.

A police spokesman said: "We are investigating because cows growing up in the mountains normally can estimate dangers and do not plunge down cliffs."

Terra Incognita



Special thanks to Russell Garrard, Tom Isenberg, and William Wallace 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.)

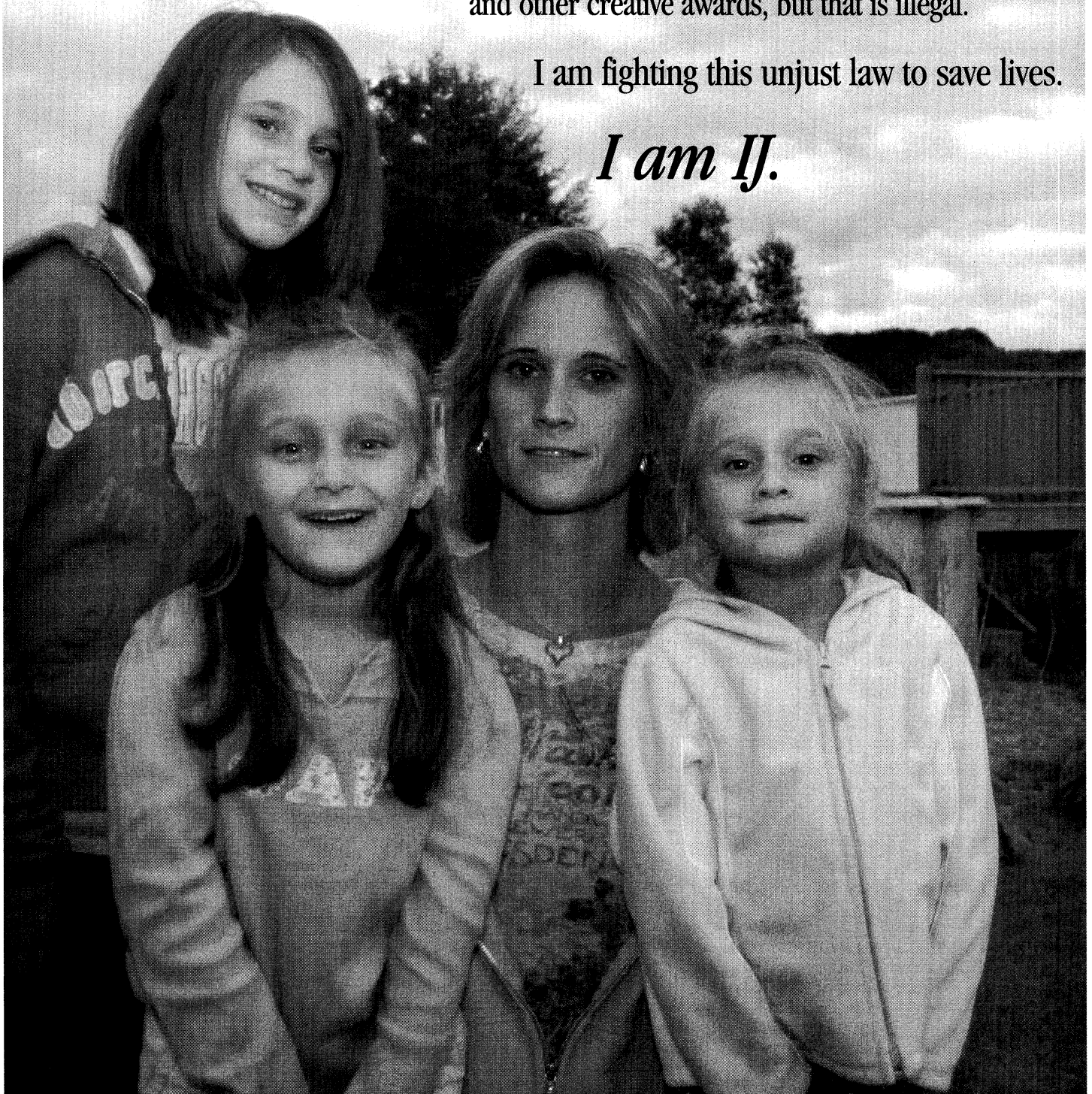
I have three young daughters fighting a deadly blood disease.

Like thousands of Americans, they need a bone marrow transplant to survive, but there are far too few donors.

I want to encourage more donations with scholarships and other creative awards, but that is illegal.

I am fighting this unjust law to save lives.

I am IJ.



Doreen Flynn
Lewiston, Maine

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