

Liberty

The Two Watchmen

June 2009

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by Thomas Szasz

Government as God

by James L. Payne

The Real Threat to America's Infrastructure

by Randal O'Toole

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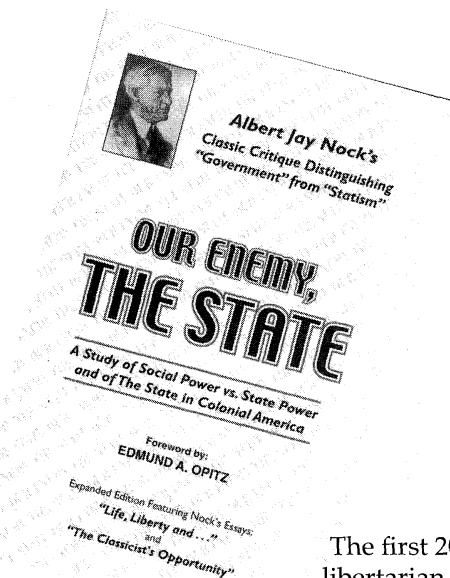
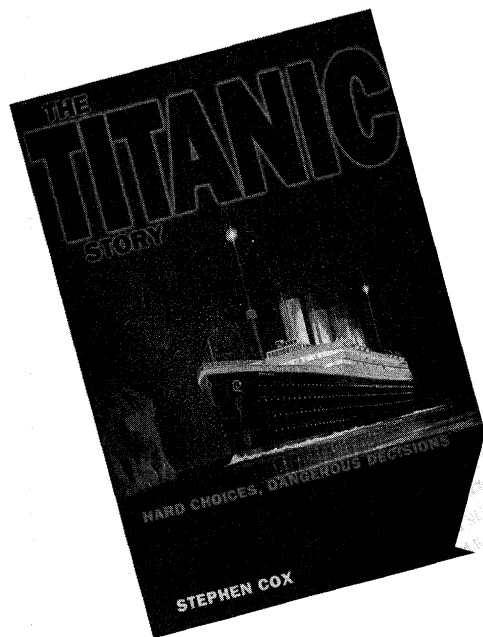
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Letters

Lose the Labels

Must we perpetuate the stale old "left-right" slogans ("What's Left of the American Left" by Jacques Delacroix, April)? When you start labeling people, thinking stops and prejudice begins. I can appreciate good vs. bad, or right vs. wrong, but left vs. right? Please. As Ronald Reagan once said, "There's no left or right, only up or down."

Mark Skousen
Irvington, NY

Delacroix responds: "Left" and "right" labels have lost none of their force even if they denote imprecise distinctions. "Left" means "collectivist." That's what it has always meant since the early days of the French Revolution, ever since people began to realize regretfully that they must leave behind the "idiocy of village life," to crib Karl Marx. We are witnessing, right in this country, one of the most ambitious collectivist upsurges since October 1917. This is not a good time to abandon useful simplifications for the benefit of one-sided openmindedness. I realize that, historically, there are threats to individual liberties that come from other quarters. So, when the forces of monarchism raise their ugly heads in the country of my choice, I may use different language.

Fair's Fair?

I agree with Charles Barr, and avidly support his concern about this seemingly unbridgeable gap between liberty lovers and their "fairness" minded opponents; it's certainly the

most fundamental political issue facing us, whether we're Libertarian Party members, or not.

As Barr correctly notes, however, people these days have "a loosely defined sense" about what "fairness" means to them. Consequently, his suggestion of fighting fire with fire by promoting a wider interpretation of the term, while of immediate practical use in some areas, would ultimately only make things worse unless it is clearly defined first.

Well, there's metaphysical unfairness — I can't sing like Caruso and my girlfriend ain't no fashion model. Then, there's fairness under the law, i.e., everybody playing by the same rules, the true "level playing field" we supposedly learned about in the schoolyard. Because the two are incompatible (and one is achieved only at the other's expense), I don't see how you'd go about it unless some major compromises were made along the way.

Frank Barr
New York, NY

Barr replies: I'm not proposing that we expand the definition of fairness, or promote a wider interpretation of the term. I'm saying that libertarians in general, and the Libertarian Party in particular, must raise the issue of fairness more forcefully when promoting our positions and goals.

Even if their definition of fairness is somewhat fuzzy, voters take the issue of fairness seriously when determining their political priorities. Mainstream

Letters to the editor

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politicians recognize this fact, and seek to advance their statist agendas by convincing voters that their proposals are "fair." Libertarians often ignore this important component of voter sentiment when framing their responses.

This needs to change. To compete effectively in the political arena, we must be prepared to counter government activists' fairness arguments with fairness arguments of our own. We can easily defend most of our policy proposals using a fairness perspective, without compromising our commitment to freedom.

Both freedom and fairness are important influences on voter behavior. Addressing both of these issues, rather than freedom alone, will make us more effective in inspiring people to join our cause.

Carry That Weight

In the April issue, Ross Levatter asked whether Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged" still carried weight with young readers (Reflections). As a 22-year-old reader who attempted to read this book last year (I eventually gave up 700 pages in), I can say that it wasn't able to with me.

"Atlas Shrugged" is a deeply flawed book, in my view. The book is filled with multiple-page-long paragraphs that get progressively more incoherent. While

the plot of "Atlas Shrugged" is one that is potentially very captivating and the characters of Hank Rearden and Dagny Taggart are unique and interesting, the story is betrayed by Ayn Rand's angry, absolutist rants.

Another book, about ten years older than Rand's novel, effectively makes the case for libertarianism. That book is "1984" by George Orwell. While Orwell described himself as a socialist, "1984" portrayed a totalitarian state that is far more horrifying than Ayn Rand's vision of statist market intervention. (It should be noted that Rand did come close to achieving what Orwell did in "1984" in her excellent dystopian novel "Anthem.") "1984" is an excellent example of a book that remains timeless. While it was written as a harsh critique of Stalinism and portrays a dystopia in a year that is more than two decades past, it remains fresh and poignant.

Michael Powell
Shelton, CT

Talk Back

Stephen Cox has hit on one of my pet peeves, as he does frequently, with his essay on loud talking. It is increasingly difficult to find quiet with TVs to entertain us in line, advertisements in elevators, and so on. As he indicates, the perpetrators all-too-often seem to believe that it is their right to impose

From the Editor

In one of her poems, Emily Dickinson mentions "a certain slant of light" that has a particular meaning for her. My neighborhood has a certain slant of streets, a slant that seems meaningful to me.

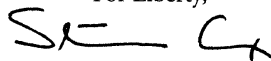
The place was laid out by a number of different people, all of whom evidently had their own, very individual ideas. So there are several intersecting plans. You're rambling down a street of cheap, depression-era bungalows and suddenly, whoa! a cliff of modern masonry rises up before you, with a hundred expensive condos nesting inside. Or you're wandering along a boulevard as wide as the Champs-Élysées, and at its climax you see nothing but a line of punky little restaurants and tatty used-book stores, each with its own colorful clientele.

I like it. I think it's exciting. And it reminds me of the journal you're reading.

This journal, *Liberty*, runs at a slant to contemporary American culture. We're in the same neighborhood, that's for sure — and we're not moving out — but *Liberty* opens vistas you'd never see if your walk were confined to the ordinary grid. Here you always get a different view from the one you might expect.

I'm not expounding subjectivism or relativism. I'm not saying that truth is just a matter of perspective. I'm saying that you see things in *Liberty* that you won't see anywhere else. And that's because of a certain slant of light.

For *Liberty*,


Stephen Cox

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their noise on the rest of mankind

My answer, when stares, politeness, and sarcasm fail to elicit the appropriate response, is to join in the conversation. If someone screams into a phone, "The train has stopped at Philadelphia; I'll be two minutes late," I hold my index and little fingers to my ear in mock phone, and announce loudly, "Well, I'm not sure if I can wait that long." You get the idea. Even if it doesn't have the desired effect, I can at least amuse myself, and other passengers seem to enjoy it. But sometimes, albeit with annoyance, the loud conversation is ended.

Adrian Day
Annapolis, MD

That Wagnerian Manner

In Jo Ann Skousen's "Cruising Hitler," her review of the movie "Valkyrie" (March), she writes that she is pondering the remark made by the actor portraying Hitler, "One cannot understand national socialism, if one does not understand Wagner." She asks for readers' opinions, and I am happy to comply.

My explanation of this is the following: it's bunk. Pure idiocy.

Allow me to elaborate. The Führer liked Wagner, it's a fact. He also liked American movies, dogs, and vegetarian cooking. For some reason, Hollywood (which unfortunately infects popular culture with its stupidity) decided to focus on Hitler's love of Wagner and decided to paint Wagner as a proto-Nazi. Curiously, moviegoers, dog lovers, and vegetarians escaped this fate.

Hitler certainly wanted people to believe that Wagner would have been a supporter, but why do so many Americans swallow this particular piece of Nazi propaganda?

Wagner was a romantic, and he embraced the new ideas that were agitating Europe — and particularly Germany — at the time. His idealism consistently led him to support the principled but losing sides, and he had to leave his country to escape the consequences of his vocal support for the underdogs. It is quite a stretch to imply that this bohemian artist would have supported Nazism if he had been born 70 years later. Wagner's track record with the authoritarian regimes of the time does not support this view.

Next, you write that Wagner believed in the superiority of the Aryan

race. On this, I take exception. I have read "My works" and "My life" by Wagner, and I have yet to see anything supporting this assertion.

Wagner was accused of anti-Semitism because of his disputes with his Jewish publisher. But an insult written in anger does not constitute a political vision. To the contrary, you might recall that Nietzsche, an on-again, off-again friend of Wagner, created scandal in the bourgeoisie when he not only refused to look down upon the Jewish immigrants flocking to Germany from Central Europe, but even rejoiced about this "influx of new blood that will refresh the fossilized Germans" (I am quoting his maxims from a French translation.) To the best of my knowledge, Wagner did not write anything to let one suppose he was put off by Nietzsche's Judeophilia. Note as well that some of the greatest interpreters of Wagner are Jewish (Lorin Maazel, for example).

The actor's sentiment is not founded on hard evidence, but merely hearsay. Feel free to prove me wrong.

Fred Mora
Shelton, CT

Skousen responds: I have no desire to "prove you wrong." In fact, I very much appreciate your thoughtful and intelligent remarks. I knew I could count on Liberty's readers when I wrote, "I welcome [our readers'] reflections on what [Hitler] meant." Thank you for writing.

How Little Indeed

Mark Skousen "was amazed to find a bright side to the gloomy '30s" ("Brother, Can You Spare a Decade?", May). Here's a bright side that Will Rogers found: "It's almost worth the Great Depression to learn how little our big men know."

Roger Knights
Seattle, WA

Howard Roark Lives!

To answer Richard Kostelanetz's question (Reflections, May), indeed there are architects who have been greatly influenced by reading Rand. Myself for one, John Gillis for another (see, respectively, www.millikenarchitecture.com and www.architetto.com).

Both live in the same city Richard does. There must be others.

Barry Milliken
New York, NY

Tilting at Windmills

I thoroughly enjoyed Don Crawford's "Teaching to the Lowest Common Denominator" (April). It is the sort of article that I have enjoyed and expected from Liberty over the years. As a flight instructor since 1969, and an amateur psychologist, I know that what he says is too true. His observations should be required reading for every member of Congress and the Department of Education.

And it is with some measure of sadness and disappointment that I write this letter, for I also received notice that April was my last issue of Liberty. I will not renew my subscription.

Not renewing is my only option of meaningful protest to the Liberty organization over its failure, indeed, apparent refusal, to address the events of September 11, 2001. Not even eight years after the fact. It took me four years to realize the fraud, and a group of well educated and clear-thinking journalists appears unable, or perhaps unwilling.

Today even the most orthodox of the mainstream media is finally publicizing a few of the many crimes of Bush, Cheney, Yoo, Addington, Rice, etc. Many of the more perceptive amongst us knew of those crimes, or the extremely high probability of those crimes, some years back.

All of those crimes, abuses, and usurpations and assaults upon the U.S. Constitution were based upon the events of September 11, or rather The Official Conspiracy Theory of the events of September 11.

There is a veritable alphabet soup of groups today who have proven various elements of the Official Conspiracy Theory to be a lie. From Pilots for Truth to Architects and Engineers for Truth to lately Medical Professionals for Truth, groups of citizens, including many members from around the world, ordinary citizens with the ability to examine evidence and judge for themselves have come out calling for another investigation.

I am not naive enough to think for one second that the government will conduct another investigation, but it is good to see common sense making a fairly strong appearance.

And Liberty sits in denial.

Richard Sinnott
Fort Pierce, FL

Reflections

Maybe so — Stephen Chapman, the excellent syndicated columnist for the Chicago Tribune, said of Congress' effort to tax away the bonus money of AIG employees: "Maybe the people in Congress are smart enough to figure out a way to sneak this act of targeted revenge past the courts. Maybe, in other words, they have more brains than scruples."

To be fair, Congress could be filled with anencephalics and still have more brains than scruples. — Ross Levatter

Generous to a fault — In February the White House announced that it planned to put the United States on a path to double the dollars it sends abroad in foreign aid. A month later, The New York Times ran an article on the disturbing growth of shanty towns, or as the Times called them, "modern-day Hoovervilles," across the land.

Now, I am not one of those people who believe that the United States should eschew all foreign aid (a little money spent is occasionally cheaper in the long run). Nor am I arguing for government anti-poverty programs here at home. But in a time of economic crisis and shrinking household wealth, should our government really be seeking to send more money abroad? Shouldn't Americans have first call on their own money?

In the immortal words of Dr. Henry Lee (of O.J. murder trial fame): "something wrong here." — Jon Harrison

Medium and message — The death of the Rocky Mountain News and the print version of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer have led to lots of hand-wringing about the future of newspapers and an open society. "If newspapers go bust there will be nobody covering city hall," says The New York Times. "Corruption will rise, legislation will more easily be captured by vested interests and voter turnout will fall."

Hogwash! In most American cities, newspapers have been the biggest proponents of wild schemes promoted by the often-corrupt denizens of city halls and the various special interests that will benefit from those schemes. Want to build a convention center, light-rail line, or stadium at taxpayers' expense? Your major newspapers are far more likely to back you than oppose you.

The notion that bloggers and other internet media can't replace newspapers is similarly absurd. The two most reliable reporters on Iraq, Michael Yon and Michael Totten, are bloggers. Jack Bogdanski, a law professor-blogger in Portland, has done more to uncover the shady finances behind the city's rail transit and real estate deals than any reporter with the Oregonian. Squandered Heritage, Humid City, and simi-

lar blogs have kept the pressure on the screw-up politicians who have mismanaged New Orleans since Katrina. And Autoextremist.com is a much better source of information on the auto industry than the Detroit News or any other paper.

Both the Rocky and the P-I have published my op-eds and I was sorry to see them go. But personally, I find I get better, more balanced information from blogs, thinktanks, and other web sources than a single newspaper that is most likely biased in favor of big government. — Randal O'Toole

Stuffing the box — As the Democrats continue their long march through our institutions, aiming to turn this country irreversibly Left, more news comes out. In a story that was buried in a busy news cycle, it was quietly reported that Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Rep. John Larson (D-CT) will soon introduce legislation aimed at castrating corporations when it comes to campaign contributions.

Under this sly attempt to socialize elections, congressional candidates who agree to tight limitations on corporate contributions will get campaign money from a public fund. This fund in turn will be filled with money obtained by taxing businesses that are recipients of government contracts. Cute, no? These crafty leftists want to tax corporations and use the money to choke off the ability of corporations to "lobby" — a.k.a. to petition the government for redress of grievances.

Bob Edgar, the head of Common Cause, an organization that purports to be a nonpartisan reform organization but is in reality little more than a front group for the Democrats (Edgar, for instance, is a former Democratic member of Congress), is out in front supporting the bill, bemoaning the "corrosive influence" of money in Washington. Of course, the lobbying that Common Cause does is good lobbying, unlike the bad lobbying done by businesses.

But the intent is clear: to tilt the playing field decisively in favor of the Democrats in elections. What is the name of this bill? Durbin and Larson have the brass to call it the "Fair Elections Now Act." Such duplicity is breathtaking.

— Gary Jason

Angel and the badmen — February 6, 1788; James Madison publishes "The Federalist" No. 51: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control



"Oh, I'm not a guru — I'm just up here on the advice of my tax accountant."

on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.”

March 30, 2009; Barack Obama removes the CEO of General Motors and announces that the federal government will stand behind all GM warranties.

No doubt to some Obama supporters this merely reinforces their belief in his angelic nature. — Ross Levatter

Pandering — Former New York governor Eliot Spitzer has begun an attempt at reputational rehabilitation. His main device has been a series of columns spewing conventional wisdom across the virtual pages of the internet magazine Slate. One such discharge focused on the fat AIG executive bonuses. Spitzer argued that public outrage was misdirected. Fair point. He botched things, though, when he argued that the real outrage was that the Treasury Department cash infusion was being used to fund payments to the counterparties (mostly big banks) to AIG’s dubious insurance contracts.

Strapping on some unconvincing populism, Spitzer wrote: “Workers around the country are being asked to take pay cuts and accept short work weeks so that colleagues won’t be laid off. Why can’t Wall Street royalty shoulder some of the burden?”

Close, but no cigar. There isn’t much royalty on Wall Street. The financial services market is dominated by fast-buck artists who have a lot in common with the professional hookers that Client Number 9 patronized. Always has been.

The *real* real outrage is that the Treasury Department structured its subsidy of AIG to involve equity ownership. The federal government effectively bought the troubled insurance giant. So, the government has become proprietor of a house with the illest repute on the Street. The term “moral hazard” doesn’t do justice to the bad precedent this sets.

Spitzer isn’t ready for a return to prime time yet. Maybe he was never really ready. Once you grow accustomed to paying people for their enthusiasms, it can be difficult to see things clearly for what they are. — Jim Walsh

Bandwagoning — Sometimes I wonder about the mentality of those who choose politics as their career. What childhood trauma, what formative experience of powerlessness led them to actively seek the control over others’ lives wielded by those in this most disreputable of professions? By the time they achieve a national stage, most pols are too well coached to let anything slip; all content has long since been replaced by platitudes.

Fortunately, there is Joe Biden, whose career as a centrist Democrat has somehow not been affected much by his habit of speaking with a Sperry Top-Sider lodged halfway down his throat. And true to form, the vice president revealed more than he intended when guesting in the commentator’s booth for an Opening Day baseball game between the Yankees and the Orioles. As a Delaware senator, he might be expected to pull for the Orioles; as a native of Scranton, PA, he might have turned out a Phillies fan. (Hell, as VP of the nation he might be expected to pull for the dreadful Washington Nationals, in their indefensible near-billion dollar taxpayer-funded stadium.) But no, he said, he grew up a Yankees fan, which in a neighborhood evenly split between the Phils and the Orioles, made him “hated” by all the other kids.

Now, he’s already stretching the truth a little, since he

would’ve become aware of baseball in the late ‘40s and the Orioles weren’t a major league team until 1954, when the Browns moved from St. Louis to Baltimore and changed names. But spurning the Phillies for the Yankees would have been obscene, especially in 1950 when the routinely-awful Phils made their first World Series for 35 years, only to be swept by that same team of Bronx heavyweights. Now, perhaps Biden got caught up in granddad’s excitement over series wins in 1947 and ‘49, or perhaps he switched over in 1950 amid the crushing childhood disappointment of watching his local team make it almost, but not quite, to the top. But either way, the effect was for him to side with entrenched, centrally-concentrated power against the innovative upstarts — and to turn a deaf ear to the criticism and scorn, however legitimate, of his peers and neighbors. If all of that doesn’t indicate a mind destined to grub for power in DC, what does?

— Andrew Ferguson

The audacity of a dope — As the stock market plummeted below the 7,000 mark, reporters asked President Obama what he thought of the way the market was responding to his budget plans. He had the audacity to reply with a dismissive air, “watching the market is like tracking an opinion poll in politics.” An opinion poll! As though the stock market doesn’t represent the real savings, investment, and retirement hopes of millions of Americans. As though businesses don’t matter. As though jobs can be created and protected by companies that are closing. What have we done to America?

The only true stimulus plan is one in which tax credits are given to companies that hire and train new workers. The government needs to stop taking money away from business, and let businesspeople keep their money to use in hiring, producing, and expanding. Only then will the economy start moving again.

— Jo Ann Skousen

Intensifier — Use of “incredible” or “incredibly” as a vogue word to mean “extreme” or “very” or even nothing at all is rampant. Much less familiar is use of the word in its core sense, and on purpose. And occasionally the word is appropriate in its core sense, though contrary to the user’s intention. Christina Romer, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, provided an example in a TV interview on March 22. Reacting to congressional Republican warnings of doomsday if President Obama’s massive spending plan should be enacted, Mrs. Romer said that she was “incredibly confident” of economic recovery within a year.

— Leland B. Yeager

Soo-ey — Congressman Barney Frank, President Barack Obama, and other government officials are suddenly stunned, shocked, even outraged that AIG is spending millions of dollars on executive bonuses.

Few would argue that the entitled aristocracy running AIG aren’t pigs, but had those pigs been left alone, they would have perished or moved on, once they had trampled and devoured all their resources. You cannot teach a pig to sing or to be anything other than a pig.

To hand out billions of dollars of free money with no strings attached, then to feign shock and outrage when that money disappears, is the lowest, slimiest form of deception. What the hell did they think would happen? Am I angry at the

CAPITALISM DIDN'T CAUSE THE CRISIS ...

GOVERNMENT DID.

The conventional wisdom holds that deregulated or unregulated capitalism caused the financial crisis. As usual, the conventional wisdom is wrong.

In the first comprehensive scholarly look at the crisis, 12 economists and political scientists from all parts of the political spectrum agree: government policies caused the financial crisis.

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- monetary policy
- tax policy
- the Community Reinvestment Act
- Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac
- state real-estate regulations
- U.S. and international banking regulations
- deposit insurance
- the doctrine of "Too Big to Fail"
- mark-to-market accounting

In short: this crisis was the "perfect storm" of modern, Progressive regulatory government.

In his introduction to the issue, all of the contributory regulations are drawn together by *Critical Review* editor Jeffrey Friedman, who shows that the two deeper problems were "Hayekian": first, the complexity of capitalism; second, the complexity

of the web of regulations that governments have enacted to control capitalism. While the perverse effects of some of these regulations were predicted, nobody—not even the "experts"—could have known how disastrously the regulations would interact with each other. This is why the crisis surprised virtually everyone.

Among the other contributors: Nobel laureate Vernon Smith, with a new theory of the parallels between 2008 and 1929; and John B. Taylor, father of the "Taylor rule" of monetary policy, with a now-famous paper attributing the crisis to Fed policy under Alan Greenspan.

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CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

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pigs at AIG? No, actually. I'll reserve my outrage for the people who raided my garden and tossed all my fresh vegetables into the trough.

— Doug Gallob

Magyar meltdown — Being the son of an immigrant from Hungary, I can't help but notice stories about that charming country with the notoriously difficult language. As it happens, Hungary has made the news for an unfortunate reason: it is near an Iceland-style economic collapse (Wall Street Journal, March 25). And its plight has a lesson for us.

Central Europe has generally been hit hard by this recession, since its nations had, to begin with, smaller and more fragile economies than the other European countries. This, in turn, was the result of having two generations of economic growth stolen from them by Soviet-imposed socialism. But Hungary is in far worse shape than the other Eastern European lands, and it is begging for help from the EU and the IMF. Its currency has plummeted in value, and although it was able to float bonds to cover its burgeoning deficit, investors stopped buying them late last year.

The cause of Hungary's financial crisis is its runaway pension system. The numbers are astonishing: there are 3 million people receiving government pensions — in a nation of only 10 million! That's right: 30% of the country is on government support. Pension outlays are now 10% of the entire GDP.

Why? To begin with, Hungary has a wide variety of categories of people eligible for state pensions. It gives pensions not only to retirees and the disabled, but to ordinary accident victims, military veterans, police veterans, widows, farmers,

and miners. And the criteria for receiving a pension in any category are loose.

For example, the average age of people on retirement pensions is only 58. By comparison, more than 50% of Americans between 60 and 64 are working, but only 14% of Hungarians in that age range are.

The Socialist Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsany, has just resigned. Whoever replaces him faces a tough challenge: cutting back the pension system is absolutely essential, but such a huge percentage of the population is on the dole that getting reforms through the legislature will be difficult. As Peter Holtzer (chairman of the panel of experts appointed by the government to study the pension crisis) put it, the ultimate problem the nation faces is that 40 years of communism have left a legacy of dependence on the state.

Our country is headed in the same direction. We, too, have retirement, disability, and healthcare obligations that are exploding at all levels of government, and 70 years of the New Deal have left us also with a mentality of dependence on the state. Our president wants to increase that dependence.

— Gary Jason

Generous assessment — The flamboyant professor Ward Churchill, who taught at the University of Colorado at Boulder until he was fired in 2007, was the victor on April 2 in his wrongful termination suit. But the jury, after deliberating a day and a half, awarded him just one dollar.

Although he was notorious for an essay calling the victims of 9/11 "little Eichmanns," Churchill had been terminated

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

The subject for this month is linguistic mysteries — the things you hear or read that make you wonder, sometimes with amusement, sometimes with disgust, "*Why?*"

Some mysteries are purely psychological. Why would anyone say "utilize," when "use" means precisely the same thing and is three times faster? Why would anyone say "facility," when "building" is so readily available? The obvious answer is, "They're choosing the most pretentious phrase they can find," but that doesn't solve the problem. Why should anyone want to sound pretentious? The obvious answer to *that* question is that many people simply don't know that they're being pretentious. But . . . *why* don't they know? They're just as smart as everyone else. But it never occurs to them. They even go out of their way to say, "We need to optimize our utilization of this facility." So I give up. It's a mystery.

Now consider the San Diego Union-Tribune, reporting on an enormous war protest (150 people!) featuring "activist mom Cindy Sheehan." That peculiarly cloying phrase, "activist mom," is no mystery; it's what you call a crazed political fanatic when you want to make her look like something other than a crazed political fanatic. Whenever you see the word "mom," you should make sure you keep track of your brains, your political theory, and your wallet, too; because "mom" is out to get them.

But here's the mysterious language in the U-T's report: "One person held a sign that echoed her thought. It said: 'Stop throw-

ing away lives and money on occupations and wars in the Middle East.'" Memorable phrasing! After those pungent words, I'm surprised that wars still go on. And ponder the journalistic insight revealed in "One person held a sign that echoed her thought." Stop the presses! There's a woman *holding a sign!* And wait! What do I see? I think . . . yes, I think the sign she's holding actually *echoes her thought!*

Now, why would human creatures write things like that? Nobody knows; nobody can even guess. It's as mysterious as the Oak Island treasure, or the slaying of Andrew Borden and his wife. It's as mysterious as the origin of "the whole nine yards," an expression that no one has yet been able to explain — a cliché, wrapped in a riddle, and tucked, for good measure, inside an enigma.

And why do people say things, and persist in saying things, that they must know make their audience gnash their teeth and tear their hair? Much political speech is of that kind; it's a ritual enacted by Satanic priests, pontiffs who realize that their formulas are detested by everyone, even by themselves, but who nevertheless feel a duty to keep saying them. "We will balance the budget by 2012"; "Our program will create 5 million new jobs"; "I have complete confidence in my associate John Smith" — these are all ritual phrases that anyone can penetrate, and everyone knows that everyone else can penetrate. So what makes politicians report to the Conclave of Lucifer and continue to chant this stuff?

for plagiarism, fabrication, and similar academic misconduct. During the trial, the evidence of shoddy and fraudulent research was powerful, but the jury apparently concluded that his political views were a factor in his dismissal; without those views, he would not have been fired. Thus, legal precedents for protection under academic freedom prevailed.

I don't criticize this Solomonic decision — granting him a win but holding back compensation. It will be a shame, though, if he gets back his job as ethnic studies professor (for which, it appears, he was poorly qualified in the first place).

The jury probably did what it had to do. But the trial showcases a dysfunctional higher education system. Churchill came to public attention only because he was invited to speak at a small college in New York state, Hamilton. Some faculty there objected to the invitation because of Churchill's leftist and anti-American views (which, until then, hadn't attracted much notice). They publicized his writings, including the "Little Eichmanns" essay, creating a firestorm of outrage, especially in Colorado, and forcing the university to examine his record. The discovery of plagiarism was the result.

A professor copies the work of others, makes up information, and fails to meet accepted academic standards. And nobody notices? How many other tenured faculty are getting away with such conduct because our universities are looking the other way?

— Jane S. Shaw

Got some 'splaining to do — Pundits are now sitting around concocting elaborate explanations for the poor performance of their beloved capital markets. I remember

watching Wall Street Week, listening to Louis Rukeyser's clever, acerbic monologue. He rambled on about the bond market and the transportation sector, blah, blah, blah. Then, they'd interview some CEO, and finally the "elves," the technical analysts, made their picks. It was the '70s, the market was flat, we had one fairly major recession, rampant stagflation, (coming soon in the current debacle), an oil crisis, and a big, fat war debt. The economic woes of the '70s were arguably less severe than today's crisis, but they were spread out over a decade, and the cumulative effect and enduring damage to the economy may rival this "depression."

Oh, and we ain't any kind of done with this one, yet. But somehow banks and hedge funds being a half a trillion dollars overleveraged is much more interesting than the U.S. government being more than \$10 trillion overleveraged. Maybe there isn't an obvious, direct correlation between the War on Terror expense and the housing bubble or credit default swaps, but any engineer should recognize that the world economy is an insanely complex feedback system. Stress on one part of that system may have profound repercussions in a seemingly unrelated remote component. Take an already inefficient, bloated, deficit-spending government that piles on a half trillion dollar additional debt, with an already overstressed financial system teetering on the brink. Now tell me the effect is insignificant. What if that "tiny" stress was the trigger that caused cascade failure? In the end, I suppose we'll never know, but I'll bet the "experts" will be inventing reasons for years to come.

— Dave Ruigh

Well, what makes the president recite the word "responsibility" on every public occasion? One incident out of many: On March 19, commenting on all the "finger pointing" about who authorized the AIG bonuses, he said, "Listen, I'll take responsibility. I'm the president." Formerly, and within living memory, when a public figure said "I'll take responsibility," the next phrase was always "I therefore resign my office," or at least "I therefore promise to change my way of doing thus and so." It wasn't a cultic incantation; it was simple logic — cause and effect. It's my responsibility; I resign, or I will change. But since the Clinton administration, when everyone was always taking responsibility for everything but nobody ever considered changing his way of doing anything, much less resigning from any office he might happen to hold, the word "responsibility" has been a public joke. President Obama is smart enough to know that. So why doesn't he act, and speak, accordingly? I have no idea. Probably he doesn't either.

For that matter, what permits the president to say a lot of the things he says? He's an author. He went to school. He has the capacity to understand the rules of English grammar. So why does he constantly make errors of case ("for you and I")? Why does he talk, as he did in his March 24 press conference, about the importance of people looking after their "fellow co-workers" — as opposed, I guess, to looking after co-workers who are not fellow workers?

Why, on March 29, did he say, "We think we can have a successful U.S. auto industry. But it's got to be one that's realistically designed to weather this storm and to emerge — at the other end — much more lean, mean and competitive than it currently

is." I pass over the "weather this storm" cliché. A *brilliant author*, such as our president is purported to be, is surely entitled to give *new life* to other people's unbearably hackneyed expressions. Yet the president apparently believes that the comparative of "lean" is "more lean," and the comparative of "mean" is "more mean," as in, "Tom was a more mean man than Jason." And the president apparently believes that "lean and mean" is fresh, young, and presidential. Also "competitive." So — to take the discussion to a deeper level — why is it, exactly, that anyone thinks this man is a master of the English language?

Let's go from the ridiculous to the sublime. Sometimes bad writers or thinkers come out with inexplicably good words. So far, Obama hasn't, but it remains a possibility. Henry James, the novelist, specialized in long, lumbering, sadistically dull, and pointlessly complicated sentences. He was said by T. S. Eliot to have had "a mind too fine to be violated by an idea." Hmm. With or without irony, I doubt that there was anything particularly *fine* about James's *mind*, and I know that his sentences are very far from fine. But somehow, when it came to the titles of his works, he was a different man. "The Turn of the Screw," "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Jolly Corner," "The Golden Bowl," "The Spoils of Poynton," "What Maisie Knew" — what titles could be better? But where did those titles come from? Could they possibly have come from Henry James? Impossible! Yet that appears to be the case. But *how*?

There are other mysteries. Why do certain expressions flock like starlings around a trash can, then disappear for decades, only to migrate back again? Reflect, if you can stand to do so, on the word *dude*. It existed before the 1960s, usually as a synonym for

The half-a-percent solution — On March 20, The Wall Street Journal reported, in respect to the AIG bonuses: “The Obama administration said that it was pursuing all avenues for recouping the money. It said that it would seek to deduct the \$165 million from its most recent \$30 billion infusion to the company.”

Great! Now if only we could do something about getting the other 99.45% back. — Ross Levatter

Down Mexico way — The drug wars in Mexico are devastating that country. Thousands are dying, the tourist economy is affected, and fear and intimidation have become facts of daily life.

The United States is entirely responsible for these problems. It is the U.S. appetite for drugs that fuels the Mexican trade. It is weapons from the United States that cause the deaths.

We could, of course, solve the problem by simply legalizing drugs. But our government and law enforcement honchos are utterly opposed. They prefer to let chaos and death reign over the border.

Under the Bush doctrine, Mexico would be completely justified in initiating military operations against us. Our territory is where Mexico’s problem originates. Just as we went to Afghanistan to avenge 9/11, the Mexicans could legitimately come here to avenge the ongoing tragedy in their country.

It has in fact come to this: we in the United States are no better than the Taliban. We should be thankful that Mexico’s military is far too weak to threaten us. — Jon Harrison

Deductive reasoning — A March 17, 2009 MarketWatch report out of San Francisco announced that the IRS will grant a break to victims of Bernard Madoff’s \$64 billion Ponzi scheme, allowing Madoff investors to take a “theft

loss” deduction on their 2008 tax returns.

Does this also allow us to deduct from our federal income tax the 12% or so we pay into Social Security, the greatest Ponzi scheme of all? — Ross Levatter

Floating to the top — I don’t feel I’ve said enough about professional American corporate executives in the past, partly because it’s impossible to say enough about this generally despicable class of empty suits. Once upon a time, most large companies were run by the men who founded them, and those men were almost always the controlling shareholders. Their interests were aligned with those of the other shareholders.

Few, if any, of today’s execs in big corporations have major share positions (and if they do, it’s strictly because they were granted cheap options), and few, if any, have actual technical expertise with the products their companies produce. Take Rick Wagoner, the ex-CEO of GM. This suit basically has zero interest in cars; he’s expert mainly in the infighting and bootlicking it takes to climb a corporate ladder. He’s a political hack, like all the managers that preceded him for the last 40 years. And he’s typical of top management in most large public companies.

Why is this? It’s worthy of at least a long essay. My guess is that nobody has an interest in seeing things done well the way a founder does, and the further you get from the source, the more diluted things become. As a company that’s become rich gets older, it naturally, like an animal in the wild, picks up more parasites. The bigger the corporation, and the further from the production lines the management, the more important backslapping and backstabbing becomes, as opposed to any kind of technical competence. So the worst people, not the best, rise to the top like scum.

“tenderfoot” or “effete and wealthy person,” as in *dude ranch*. There were many variants. Remember Fred Astaire, singing about “dudin’ up my shirt front, / Puttin’ in the shirt studs, / Polishin’ my nails.” And here’s a book called “The Men Behind the Bars,” written in 1903 by the chaplain of the Indiana State Prison. It contains a poem by Will Carleton (the author of “Over the Hill to the Poor House”), describing a convict traveling to prison on a railroad train:

I’d rather sit here, Mr. Sheriff — up near to the end of the car;
We won’t do so much advertising if we stay in the seat where we are.
That sweet little dude saw the bracelets that you on my wrists have bestowed,
And tells the new passengers promptly you’re “taking me over the road.”

Now “dude” means “young person.”

In 1919, the Michigan legislature passed a law requiring all public schools to teach Will Carleton’s poetry. That’s another mystery. Anyway, in the 1960s “dude,” after long absence from almost everyone’s vocabulary, suddenly became the universal and sufficient label *bestowed* by young males upon themselves. It was a compliment, of course, but what did it mean? It didn’t mean you thought of yourself as a Park Avenue swell or a sweet little

kid in a railway coach. But beyond that, who knew? And then *dude* went away, replaced by the formerly omnipresent but much less intrusive *guy*. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Celebrations were held in many homes.

Yet just when we thought we were seeing progress . . . *dude* returned. And it was worse than ever. Today, *dude* isn’t simply the young male’s generic term for “young male”; it’s the nation’s most common interjection and invocation, as predictable as “hwaet!” in Anglo-Saxon poetry. “Dude! If you’re gonna, like, say stuff like *dude*, dude, you’re, like, maybe you’re gonna get in trouble with some other dude, know what I mean, dude?” But why this word, rather than any other word? And when will this word go away again?

Again, no one knows. *Dude* should be classified as a social mystery, like the mysteries of social behavior that Lord Keynes tried to identify when he was asked about the reasons for the crash of 1929. According to the common story, Keynes answered, “Sometimes you see the fish all swimming one way, but then they turn around and start swimming the other way.” As you can see, that doesn’t explain anything, so I’ll proceed to the mystery of middle names and initials.

Just why is it that William Howard Taft is never, ever, called simply “William Taft”? Why is it that Julia Ward Howe is never, ever, just “Julia Howe”? Are we trying to distinguish William Howard Taft from some other president named William Taft?

The current system of corporate governance, guarded by the SEC, cements them at the top. Management, not shareholders, appoints the board of directors — who in turn, instead of acting as watchdogs for shareholders, become lapdogs for management. Management shouldn't even have a seat on the boards of public companies, much less the chairmanship, which is usually the case these days.

With current laws, it's almost impossible for shareholders to dethrone management — even if they grant themselves huge salaries, giant options, and insane bonuses. That's because shareholders would have to mount proxy battles at a huge expense, while management defends itself with the shareholders' treasury. Have you ever noticed on a proxy that you as a shareholder can only vote "For" or "Abstain" for a director nominated by management, while it's impossible for shareholders to put forward a new slate?

Some of this is likely attributable to the simple fact that most shareholders don't directly own shares anymore. Rather, their investments are held through pension funds and mutual funds, which rarely get involved in trying to correct management; if they don't like it, they just sell the shares and management goes on its merry way.

Even so, my basic contention stands — that the people who rise to the top in large corporations are exactly the same types that rise in government. As a case in point, I offer Edward Liddy, the CEO of AIG, the ex-director of Goldman appointed by his crony Hank Paulson to run the company last year. He impresses me as a particularly duplicitous and smarmy bastard, trying to hide misfeasance and malfeasance behind a glib smile and honey-coated words.

Get a load of this: "The marketplace is a pretty crummy place to be right now. When the world catches pneumonia, we get it too." As if it was the fault of the market that manage-

ment turned an insurer into a hedge fund. He went on to say AIG was being "consumed by the same issues that are driving house prices down and 401K statements down and Warren Buffett's investment portfolio down."

Only a sociopath on the ragged edge of insanity would try to disguise the fact that the giant, bankrupt company is still sucking down hundreds of billions of taxpayer bailout money by comparing himself to Warren Buffett. It's almost as if he was trying to model himself on one of Rand's antiheroes in "Atlas Shrugged" or "The Fountainhead." But society has become so corrupt, I haven't seen any outrage about his words in the media. No surprise there.

By the time this period of history comes to an end, the whole financial, economic, and political landscape will have changed. I just hope it won't look like it's been painted by Hieronymus Bosch.

— Doug Casey

Guarding the asylum — Says Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao: "We have made a huge amount of loans to the United States. Of course, we are concerned about the safety of our assets. To be honest, I'm a little bit worried. I would like to call on the United States to honor its words, stay a credible nation and ensure the safety of Chinese assets."

Deadbeat lectures from communist apparatchiks, followed by nervous assurances from their U.S. counterparts. Forget Dave Ramsey's folksy bromides; *this* is what happens when we live beyond our means. In a world gone mad, only the lunatics are sane.

— Jim Walsh

Capital idea — Our government is turning us all into guilt-ridden idiots. Can anyone truly believe that the way we are going to come out of this recession is by the government borrowing massive amounts of money and throwing it around? The government says they are injecting capital but

Was there some other Julia Howe who wrote a "Battle Hymn of the Republic"? And why is it that President Kennedy turns up so often as "John F. Kennedy" or even "John Fitzgerald Kennedy," while Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan do very well without their middle monikers?

Some people think that these things happen because the people involved wanted them to happen. But what's the evidence that JFK insisted on his middle initial? What's the evidence that Rose Wilder Lane refused to be called "Rose Lane" (a poetic name, if ever there was one)? Actually, people called her "Rose Lane" all the time, and Kennedy was commonly known as "Jack." So why all the *F's* and *Fitzgeralds* and *Wilders* and so on?

And, let's face it, middle names and middle initials aren't necessarily honorific. In that terrific film "Advise and Consent" (1962), Charles Laughton, playing a gloriously "flannel-mouthed" old Southern senator, keeps making fun of the president's nominee for secretary of state, a man named Leffingwell, by insisting on this man's middle initial: "Was there no other man than this, this, *Robert A. Leffin'well*? Is our storehouse of brainpower so impoverished that for this office, which can affect the destiny of our nation and of the world, there is no other man but *Robert A. Leffin'well*?"

But this introduces another mystery — why is that speech funny? Probably the answer is that laughter is our response to the sudden revelation that we shouldn't be intimidated by the

things that normally do intimidate us, such as people with pompous names. So that's one mystery solved. But it reminds me of another mystery of nomenclature.

Several years ago, Mehmet Karayel was trying to convince me that I should watch the TV series "Family Guy." He mentioned several amusing things about it. Then he said that it featured a talking dog. "What's his name?" I asked. "*Brian*," Mehmet answered, with great satisfaction, and we both cracked up. That was *one funny name* for a talking dog. But why was it funny?

I've discussed this with several people. The usual answer is that it's funny because it gives hominid characteristics to a canine. Yes, it does. But I'm not satisfied. "Tony" is an equally hominid name, but it's not funny. It's just nothing. (And, for all those Tonys out there who want to be as funny as talking dogs, I admit it: "Stephen" isn't funny either, all right?) Calling a giant ape "King Kong," thus assigning him the political characteristics of a human being, doesn't make him funny. And "Brian" isn't funny at all, except in this single context. But *why is it funny there*? Surely it's not because Americans are intimidated by Irish people, or by little dogs with Irish names. And it's not because the name "Brian" is incongruous. A lot of incongruous things aren't funny.

If you figure any of these mysteries out, please write to Liberty. I want all of them to be solved. Then we can go on to the other linguistic mysteries. All ten million of them.

capital is the same as savings. Capital is supposed to be what you have left over after producing all that you need to consume. But our government is broke. Therefore, they have no capital to invest. What they are investing is debt, no matter what they might choose to call it. Do reasonable people believe this makes sense, especially when it was excessive debt that got us into the problem? Of course not!

Why then do so many people seem to support the Barack Obama plan? We seem to go along even though we feel guilty and stupid. Why? Because we all want stuff and, if the government is willing to steal stuff from someone else (via borrowing and taxation) and give it to us and our friends, then we go along.

We are routinely encouraged to do so when we look around and see that everyone else is going along with these ideas. We are, thereby, encouraged to do the same thing. We know in our hearts that this “rob Peter to pay Paul” philosophy is wrong but, nevertheless, we go along. Meanwhile, our own government is telling us that this is the only way to prosperity. We are reminded of that comment by Ronald Reagan in the presidential campaign against Jimmy Carter, following a Carter remark that he loved a cold shower every morning. Reagan’s response was that “anyone who will tell you that he likes a cold shower in the morning will lie about other things too.” Our government is lying to us about the solution to the crisis and they will lie about other things too.

Feeling guilty for accepting the stolen property and feeling like idiots for going along with the ridiculous concepts that justify such actions today seems insufficient to jolt us back to reality. This is tragic all by itself but its real harm is that it deadens our minds from being on the lookout for other similarly incredible things that our government preaches. Such actions on our part will inevitably lead to an even more tragic outcome, for example, the one predicted by Alexis de Tocqueville when he reminded us that “The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.”

— Roy Miller

Uprooted — I can’t remember where I picked up this metaphor, though I’m quite sure I didn’t invent it: the free market as a natural ecology, totalitarian economies as machines.

I would add that today’s mixed, national economy attempts to be a walled garden, fertilized with the artificial nutrient of state-controlled money. And every time I read today’s headlines, I get the image of President Obama cruising around the garden in an enormous bulldozer, pruning its fruit trees with awkward swipes of the machine’s gaping bucket, weeding the just-budding perennials by gouging up great chunks of earth.

— Jamie McEwan

Give ‘til it hurts — At his March 25 press conference, President Obama answered questions about his plan to drop the charitable deduction of the top 5% of income earners from 39% to 28%. Some people, it seems, have been concerned that this might retard charitable giving. Obama’s response: “Now, if it’s really a charitable contribution, I’m assuming that that

shouldn’t be the determining factor as to whether you’re giving that \$100 to the homeless shelter down the street.”

Let’s see, I wish to donate \$61 of my post-tax wealth to the homeless shelter down the street. Because of my deduction bracket, I give the shelter \$100. This costs me \$61. With the Obama plan, I still wish to donate \$61 of my post-tax wealth to the homeless shelter down the street. But because of my new deduction bracket, I give the shelter only \$84.72, so that the gift will still cost me \$61.

The change in tax brackets was not “the determining factor” in the amount of my giving. I gave the shelter exactly as much of my wealth, post-tax, as I had done before. I was not, therefore, giving to get the deduction. Yet the shelter is in fact \$15.28 less well funded, because of the Obama-induced bracket changes.

Obama is an intelligent man. Surely he can understand arguments as basic as this. Are we really to think that when he says that his tax proposals “shouldn’t be a determining factor” in charitable giving, we should interpret his statement to mean that you should be willing to give even more to compensate for the fact that the government is taxing you more?

No. We should more reasonably assume that, like all other politicians, Obama is disingenuous and rationalizing. Despite pre-election promises, he provides less than hope, and leaves charities with less change than they had before.

— Ross Levatter

Cold, hard cash — Recently, the Chinese have urged the “world community” — read, countries like theirs — to adopt a new currency as a counterbalance against the U.S. dollar, and as a competing reserve currency. The Chinese, it would appear, are very nervous about the value of all those greenbacks they have accumulated by selling us stuff for all those years. Quite honestly, I don’t blame them — I’m just as nervous about the value of our currency as they are, and I live here!

But what was interesting is who hopped on board with the program. Virtually every other authoritarian regime in the world backs China’s hand. Putin in Russia, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and the Mullahs in Iran, not to mention the Saudis, have all called for a new currency to rid the world of the vile dollar. Why, even our own Treasury Secretary Geithner, representing the authoritarian regime currently in possession of the White House, has come out in favor of an alternative to the dollar.

Since I share the concern of the Chinese, I am moved by the spirit of globalist solidarity to give them some suggestions about this new currency.

First, it will need a name. Since it will not be tied to a single nation, it needs a broad name. For example, the common currency adopted by the European nations is appropriately called the “euro.” Since the nations clamoring most loudly for a new currency aren’t all on one continent, but instead share only an authoritarian or dictatorial political system, may I suggest we call their new currency the “authoro”?

Having settled upon a plausible name, we need to design this currency. In my admittedly limited acquaintance with currencies, America’s is (alas) unique in its ugliness. Dull green, dead presidents — *tres* tacky! No, the authoro needs to be aesthetically stimulating, as befits the elegance of its origins.

So, on the front side of the authoro I suggest that we put the mugs of dead dictators. I realize this may be a tad controversial — living dictators such as Putin, Chavez, and Fidel may be appalled at the thought that they won't be honored, but we must insist on standards.

Yet even here, questions remain. By what criteria should we select dead dictators' portraits? I confess this is a knotty issue, but I would humbly suggest that we do it approximately in accordance with the number of people they killed.

So, for example, the one authoro note ("A1") might feature Ur-fascist Benito Mussolini, who strutted a lot but in fact killed relatively few people, compared to his followers Hitler and Stalin. The A5 note should bear Lenin's visage, since he also killed relatively few, not for want of desire or effort, but because he was felled by a stroke before he could kill the millions he certainly would have, had he lived to old age.

The A10 note might well feature the Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian Islamo-fascist so admired by Jimmy Carter. Khomeini killed hundreds of thousands of "undesirables." The A20 might display Pol Pot, who managed to kill about 2 million Cambodians. For the A50 note, surely Hitler would be appropriate. His death camps killed 11 million.

Now, I know what you Pol Pot supporters will argue. You will say that while your guy only killed a couple of million innocent people, far fewer than Adolf, he killed a higher percentage of the population. I will not gainsay you. I am open to all suggestions.

Still, can we not all amicably agree on Josef Stalin for the A100 note? I mean, come on folks, even the most niggardly

reckoning would put his killing total at 20 million. Why, his trick of starving the nation of Ukraine would, by itself, have to give him a score of 6 million.

And I simply will not brook contradiction regarding the A500. It has to feature Mao, who exterminated 60 million — no piker he.

But what of the reverse side of the authoro? Its symbolism must capture the flavor of tyrannies as disparate as those of Russia, Iran, China, and Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam. That immediately rules out (say) Lubyanka prison, since it looks nothing like (say) the killing fields of Cambodia.

This calls for some creativity. Being only an American, the best I can do is suggest George Orwell's image of a boot stomping on a human face. Add a catchy title, such as "In Secret Police We Trust," and you have a world-class currency.

— Gary Jason

Kick the ball, Charlie Brown . . . — One of the running jokes in the much-missed television sitcom "Arrested Development" involves the characters, in their extremely rare moments of self-reflection, pondering the choices that have led them into an awkward situation and saying, "I've made a terrible mistake." Now certain writers on civil liberties and watchdog groups — foremost among them Glenn Greenwald of Salon, and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) — are evaluating Obama's performance in office, and beginning to have the same epiphany.

It would be naive, of course, to suggest that any of the presidential candidates would have dismantled the audacious structure of state secrecy and executive privilege built

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up by the Bush Department of Justice. Of course, there were many naive enough to suggest just that; most of those naifs, blinkered by partisan allegiance, refuse to see that Obama is not merely *preserving* the Bush doctrine, but actually *extending* it. During the peak of the debate over granting immunity to telecom corporations who cooperated with the Bush administration's program of illegal domestic wiretapping, a refrain arose: wait till Obama's in office, then he can sort all this out. So, the EFF waited, and filed suit, and gave Obama's folks time to think it over. And once they had, they declared that not only had that other guy been right about everything, but also that the government would be right to break its own laws and eavesdrop on whoever, provided they didn't publicly disclose the information and claimed it was on grounds of national security. Oh, and the case would have to be dismissed because, you know, national security.

As Greenwald notes, "It is difficult to overstate how extremist is [this] argument." The only comparison that will suffice is to the president's economic policy so far, which (as reported by Andrew Napolitano) extends to forcing banks to accept bailout money, and then refusing to allow them to repay the loans. This is a takeover more hostile than any Wall Street has ever devised, because it is backed by an entity that claims the full might of the American people. And we have given control of this leviathan to a man who has already at one time or another disquieted absolutely everyone, regardless of political conviction, all in the interest of aggregating more power to himself.

We've made a terrible mistake.

— Andrew Ferguson

Less light — The World Wildlife Fund urged people around the world to help save the planet by switching outdoor lighting off during Earth Hour on the evening of Saturday, March 28. That project is one more example of sermons and pressures from demonstrators and miscellaneous celebrities (and the Nobel Peace Prize committee) to proselytize their position on global warming. That is no way to illuminate complicated and largely technical issues.

I am no authority on those issues, but the economic principle of general interdependence leaves me ready to believe in *some* connection between human activity and climate change. Questions remain. How steep is the uptrend in global temperature, if any continues? What factors account for such a trend, and how important, relatively, is the human factor? By how much would a doubling (to about 0.08), say, of the CO₂ percentage of the atmosphere raise global temperature? What would be the benefits as well as the costs, estimated in dollar terms, of a specific rise? If the costs should exceed the benefits, what remedies or adaptations are available? By how much would each remedy impair the growth of wealthy countries and the development of poor ones? By how much would non-participation by populous countries such as China and India dissipate expected net benefits? How might enforcement of proposed remedies impair personal and economic freedom? What problems other than climate change might have a better claim on financial and material resources? Is scientific controversy over such questions really settled, as often alleged?

Natural selection endowed human beings with a propensity to run and think with the herd, as was advantageous before and during the age of hunter-gatherer bands; and some

of that propensity persists. Politicians, journalists, researchers seeking grants, corporate executives seeking subsidies and favorable publicity, and ordinary citizens counting themselves as informed and public-spirited have reason nowadays to climb aboard the bandwagon of opinion. In Hans Christian Andersen's fable, persons unable to see and admire the emperor's new clothes were stigmatized as intellectually and morally deficient. Wariness of such a stigma, as well as what Ayn Rand called the "argument from intimidation," may be at work.

Al Gore and his disciples, including the celebrities and demonstrators, may conceivably be right. Like Marxians and Freudians, they can always claim evidence supporting their favorite doctrine. (Some ice is always melting somewhere, or unusual weather or coastal flooding occurring, or species disappearing from particular habitats.) Their posing of virtue against vice, their stigmatizing of questioners, sheds some light on the tactics of the alarmists but none on the substance of the issues.

— Leland B. Yeager

Value-less — For years Warren Buffett was, by most reckonings, the richest man in the United States. And for years, as if to confound his fans and followers, he advocated a larger government and higher taxes. He endorsed statist proposals for government-run healthcare; he supported Barack Obama for president.

Now Buffett is no longer the richest man in the land. According to Forbes magazine, that title reverts to its previous holder: Microsoft Corp. founder Bill Gates. Buffett's estimated net worth has fallen from over \$60 billion to about \$37 billion in the past 18 months.

Is there a connection between Buffett's support of big government schemes and his humbler financial standing? Markets don't punish billionaires for their politics. A truer take might be that Buffett saw trouble on his horizon and supported policies and politicians that would help his portfolio. There's pragmatism in that; but also some hypocrisy.

Buffett runs Berkshire Hathaway, Inc. The man and the company have become virtually synonymous. Berkshire Hathaway owns various businesses and makes investments in other large corporations. It's a kind of mutual fund, with a heavy concentration in insurance companies and other financial services firms. Why insurance companies? Because Buffett believes Wall Street doesn't value them fully.

Buffett has long espoused the investment principles of Benjamin Graham, an investor and writer who championed so-called "value investing." This involves detailed analyses of the financial reports of publicly traded companies and then broader analyses of the marketplaces in which those companies operate. It's a labor-intensive process.

But Buffett's bets on insurance have never matched up well with Graham's model. Insurance is a heavily-regulated industry; success in the field is often based on close relations with regulators. For decades, insurance has been a quiet channel for statist influence on the larger economy. From this angle, Buffett's support of state-run healthcare isn't surprising. Many insurance executives consider health insurance a money-loser that they'd just as soon be rid of to concentrate on more profitable lines such as auto, homeowners', and exotic life coverages.

Berkshire Hathaway owns the auto insurance giant GEICO and specialty insurers General Re, Central States Indemnity, United States Liability, and others. Through the specialty firms, Buffett has been a player in the market for various types of derivative investments. Not good. The investment rating agency the Fitch Group says that it “views [Berkshire Hathaway]’s potential earnings and capital volatility derived from its large, unhedged market exposures as inconsistent with the stability required at the ‘AAA’ level.” Those “exposures” include Berkshire Hathaway’s equity holdings in insurance companies as well as its investment in derivative contracts tied to equity and credit markets. Fitch lowered Buffett’s credit rating to AA+.

What would Benjamin Graham say? Would a value investor have gotten involved in derivatives? Buffett argues unconvincingly that investors should distinguish between his use of derivatives and those that made banks “almost impossible for investors to understand.” His use of derivatives hedged his insurance companies against economic volatility. Of course, that’s what the guys at Bear Stearns said.

In September of last year, Berkshire Hathaway started boosting its investment in banks, which include holdings in Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and US Bancorp. It also bought \$5 billion worth of preferred shares in the investment bank Goldman Sachs. Preferred shares, as Buffett uses them, are really something like a payday loan for companies that are in trouble. They’re good business, but they’re not value investing.

In the wake of his Goldman Sachs investment, Buffett told CNBC: “If I didn’t think the government was going to act, I would not be doing anything this week. I am, to some extent, betting on the fact that the government will do the rational thing here and act promptly.”

That’s *definitely* not value investing.

Berkshire Hathaway has been a major beneficiary of federal bailout money. By some reckoning, it’s among the top five recipients of TARP assistance; Buffett has had a direct interest in the government actions he’s advocated over the past nine months. So, next time you read that the Sage of Omaha favors single-payer health coverage, don’t mistake that for altruism. Or anything other than corporate statism. — Jim Walsh

Ecce Obama — I have up until now been stunned at the adulation that many people on the Right have given to Obama. They swoon at his intellect, his commitment to a new politics, and his — well, OMG! — sexiness. Witness Peggy Noonan, who talks about the guy in the way Patricia O’Neal talked about Paul Newman in “Hud” — with a breathless “when I see you with your shirt off why I just drop my dish-towel” kind of mushiness.

But I, too, am beginning to be seduced by the president’s soaring Kennedyesque oratory, brilliant Jeffersonian intellect, and Lincolnesque honesty. Indeed, I have come to see that he isn’t just a one in a million; he’s a one in a trillion kind of guy.

Two recent stories have brought me to this fever pitch of admiration. The first is a Tom LoBianco piece in The Washington Times (March 18), reporting that one of Obama’s chief staffers admitted in testimony before the Senate that Obama’s cap-and-trade proposal to “solve” global warming

will cost industry \$2 trillion over eight years. An earlier “estimate” of the cap-and-trade bill that Obama co-sponsored in the Senate said it would cost \$366 billion over eight years. Then, once he became president, his advisers estimated it would cost maybe \$646 billion over that period. Now his own lapdog advisor Jason Furman says a truer figure is \$2 trillion. Of course, this represents only business taxes.

Yeah, right. First, business doesn’t pay taxes; taxes are passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. And when you count the direct costs, along with costs from unintended consequences and lost opportunities — as business dies in America and surges ahead abroad — the true costs could well be \$2 trillion a year.

Then there is a report from AP News (March 20) that Obama’s proposed new budget will create deficits of about \$1 trillion a year for the next ten years! Now, brother, there’s some brave spending. Forget Bush’s deficits — Obama will increase the national debt more in 20 months than Bush (the miserable piker) did in eight years.

The estimate comes from the Congressional Budget Office, hardly a right-wing organization. Its estimate is that under Obama’s policies, the deficit will total \$9.3 trillion from 2010 to 2019. It will constitute at least 4% of GDP every year, until, by 2019, it hits 5%. Though White House budget chief Peter Orszag disputes the CBO estimate, he does admit that budget deficits in the 4–5% range would be “unsustainable.” Gee, ya think?

Brian Riedl of the Heritage Foundation estimates that Obama will double the publicly held national debt to \$15 trillion. Hell, the deficit this year is already projected to be something like \$1.7 trillion, roughly the GDP of Italy or Canada.

The likely result will be massive new taxes, even beyond what Obama has proposed. Riedl estimates that the tax increase will be at least \$1.4 trillion over the next decade.

The scales have fallen from my eyes, and the dish towel from my hands. I now understand the full majesty of our new president.

— Gary Jason

Accidental honesty — On March 16, former President George W. Bush announced in Calgary that he is planning to write a memoir “so when the history of this administration is written at least there’s an authoritarian voice saying exactly what happened.”

I’m glad to see that his well-known garbling of words has resolved itself, now that he has left office. — Ross Levatter

The price is right — A newscaster just informed me that “the market” was up yesterday. This man was quite chipper, presumably because “the market” has been plummeting for months. Nevertheless, I am skeptical. What does it mean for “the market” to go up or down? If you tell me that the price of corn has gone up, I can understand what that means. If you tell me that the price of flat-screen TVs has gone up, or the price of gold, or even the price of stock in a service company, I can understand that. I can even understand clearly and painfully that the average price of all the stock in my retirement portfolio has dropped precipitously.

But when almost every item being exchanged in the market rises or drops by a similar percentage, what does that mean? Did all these items suddenly become less valuable because the price dropped? Obviously, they are not less valuable in

relation to one another, since they all dropped by a similar percentage. I find this true in my own life. The relative value I place on my home vs. my groceries vs. my entertainment vs. my car repair is really about the same as it's ever been. I haven't suddenly decided that my groceries are less valuable than my car repair. Have you?

In relation to what, then, are all these things worth less? Perhaps one of Adam Smith's Big Three? Labor, rent, interest? I'm not an economist. I don't know. Actually, I'm not sure the economists know either, at least not the ones quoted by government administrators and newscasters.

When the relationship between two items changes radically — for example the relationship between U.S. dollars and goods and services exchanged in the market — it is good to look at both sides to see what's really happening. U.S. dollars are money, and money is, by definition, the receptacle of pricing information. In this particular case it seems obvious to me that "the market" is not really changing so drastically. Rather, pricing information is being distorted drastically.

That may seem merely semantic, but the language we use to describe a problem affects our ability to solve it. If you imagine the problem from the perspective of "the market," you will see it plummeting or bouncing like a yo yo. You will imagine, as Congress and newscasters and presidential administrations have, that the only way to stop it is to prescribe more and more drastic price distortions. Only when you imagine the problem from the perspective of pricing information do you realize that "the market" is not going anywhere. Rather, pricing distortions are wreaking havoc on our ability to trade.

Why are we so enamored of the wrong semantics?

Alexis de Tocqueville noticed that historians in aristocracies worked to identify the individual action of an individual man as the cause of a given historical event. They would go out of their way to find this individual attribution, ignoring most other, external causes. He noticed that historians in democracies tend to do just the opposite — to attribute grand, abstract, external causes to even the most trivial events, ignoring the individual actions of individual men. Because men in democracies tend toward equality, and hence mediocrity, an individual in a democracy is obviously not interesting enough or powerful enough to be the sole cause of any event. De Toqueville also noticed our love of the abstract over the specific, and traces that love to similar characteristics of democracies.

News gatherers, journalists, and commentators combine as our modern-day, de facto historians. They collude with us, their audience, to give us the historical explanations we want. And they follow de Toqueville's recipe to the letter. Although they haven't identified it yet, our journalists see some vague, abstract force out there affecting "the market." And we (yes, that is the collective "we") should be able to counteract that vague abstract force if we can just apply enough hope and tinkering.

It is this same love of abstract sloppiness that causes us to wage our wars against abstract concepts and inanimate objects, be they poverty, drugs, or terror. Our journalists slop out these vague words because we lap them up. It is much more difficult and complex to think about the more semantically accurate "war against marijuana users" or the "war against

the citizens of Iraq" or the "war against the homeless."

Unfortunately, because of our inability to think about our world in a semantically accurate manner, I have no doubt the tinkers will have the same amount of success in affecting "the market" as they have on poverty, drugs, and terror.

— Doug Gallob

Hot air, cool heads — The Cato Institute, fresh from its excellent ad telling President Obama that he was, with all due respect, not telling the truth about the uniformity of opinion among professional economists regarding the solution to our economic crisis, now has a second full-page ad that does the same thing regarding climate change.

The ad begins: "Few challenges facing America and the world are more urgent than combating climate change. The science is beyond dispute and the facts are clear." President-Elect Barack Obama, November 19, 2008. With all due respect Mr. President, that is not true."

The ad is an open letter, signed by 116 scientists. The signatories are of interest. Ninety-three Ph.Ds are listed, with 27 labeled as retired or emeritus. At least 39 of the signatories are from outside the United States (not all have affiliations that easily allow determination).

I think the last two bits of data are of particular interest. The final one suggests that domestic politics (grant applications, for example) may be playing a significant role in limiting American scientists' comfort in speaking freely. The former suggests that people feel more comfortable speaking freely once they have retired (though in the alternative it could be said that acceptance of climate change represents a Kuhnian paradigm shift).

By the way, among the 116 signatories the amazing intellectual savant Freeman Dyson is unfortunately not listed, despite the recent, widely publicized article in *The New York Times* that stressed his opposition to Gore's view of climate change. That review came out just days before the Cato ad, so I doubt that his absence from the list indicates his disagreement with the ad.

In any case, congratulations to Cato. I'm sure I'm not the only one who hopes that full-page ads with bold headlines saying "With all due respect, Mr. President, that is not true" are part of a continuing campaign.

— Ross Levatter

Line break — In the March edition of *Liberty*, I compared the Republican margin in the Senate, the one that denied the Democrats a supermajority, to the 18th-century British military formation — the famous Thin Red Line. Unfortunately, the Republican line fell at its first test, the badly named Stimulus Bill. The rout was as complete as it was inglorious.

The Democratic strategy came right from Rahm Emanuel's playbook. He preached that an economic crisis was "an opportunity to do things you could not do before . . . You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." Led by Obama and Pelosi, the Democratic hordes took up the war cry of "Catastrophe," the Republican line wavered and fell, and the conquerors rode roughshod over the American people. A pork-ridden, ideologically suspect, and economically flawed bill was foisted on us. We and our children will pay with a longer than necessary recession, higher taxes, and quite possibly a lower standard of living for a long time. Such is the price of defeat.

After the Bush administration's malfeasance and the McCain campaign's ineptitude, it was clear enough that there wasn't much left of the Grand Old Party. I don't want to get overly nostalgic here; I'm not a Republican. But what happened to the party of Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and dare I say it, even Newt Gingrich? At least the GOP was once a champion of small government and a bulwark against the worst excesses of the Democratic Party. Now, even that is gone. Sic transit gloria. — Bob Marcus

Fire at will — I find myself in no-man's land defending (almost) the unimaginable action of a government official firing the CEO of a publicly owned company. Stormed at with shot and shell, liberals to the left of me, conservatives to the right of me, I hunker down in my foxhole and remind you of what Cal Coolidge said when the Brits whined about their World War I debt: "They hired the money, didn't they?"

If the bondholders had "taken a haircut" (the current Wall Street jargon), it might not have happened. Certainly if the rapacious UAW had shown some mercy — maybe not even on bread and butter wages but only on healthcare — Richard Wagoner would still be screwing up and building 300,000 battlefield-size SUVs a year. But screw up he did.

Of course, his culpability is not the question. He works for the board of GM and ultimately a million or so shareholders, not for Obama and his minions. (Hmm, but as ol' Cal said, they did take the money — and for money you always get power.) And I wonder if reptile-green Obama let his bigotry over those monstrous fuming SUVs get out of hand . . .

Further, GM belongs to the shareholders, and the Head SUV Builder works for them — not for the Man of a Thousand Faces.

But trouble is, their acceptance of the government money in a sense represented the sale of their prerogatives. At any time during the ride through Hell, the company could have reasonably chosen bankruptcy and dumped the taint of governmental interference for the rule of law. Obama-UAW would have hated that, though it still may happen. But it might have been better sooner than later. — Ted Roberts

Cui bono — Obama and his lackeys Christopher Dodd and Barney Frank continue their orgy of populist bashing of AIG for daring to honor pre-existing contracts awarding executive bonuses. But three articles in *The Wall Street Journal* on the same day (March 19) indicate the staggering hypocrisy of the whole campaign.

The first, by Brody Muller and T.W. Farnum, pointed out the amusing fact that while Obama and Dodd are conducting their Orwellian Two Minutes' Hate against AIG — greasing the skids for their plan to start setting limits to compensation in private industry generally — they were themselves the top recipients of AIG campaign donations in 2008. Sen. Obama was number one, receiving \$104,332, and the odious Dodd came in second, receiving \$103,900 — both way above all other recipients' donations. (Another major recipient of AIG contributions was Sen. Charles Schumer [D-NY] who has also spoken out against the bonuses).

The second story, by Jonathan Weisman, points out that the crucial amendment to the stimulus bill that allowed the payment of those bonuses was authored by — Christopher Dodd! Dodd originally denied knowledge of this, but then

said his "staff" changed his original language at the behest of the White House, specifically that of Treasury Secretary Geithner (who had earlier professed ignorance about the AIG bonuses). But then why did Dodd leave his name on it?

Finally, the third article, by James Hagerly and Aaron Lucchetti, reports the interesting fact that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, both bailed out at massive cost to the U.S. taxpayers and both the key enablers of the mortgage mess (though not tax cheats like Geithner!), have announced that they are paying bonuses to *their* executives. These bonuses are being given, even though the Treasury has promised to pony up \$200 billion to keep the corrupt agencies alive.

And the bonuses aren't chump change, either. Fannie says she will be handing out bonuses between \$470,000 and \$611,000 each. (Freddie has yet to announce the size of its bonuses.) Between the two, they will be giving \$210 million in "retention" bonuses. Eighty percent of Freddie's employees, and 61% of Fannie's, will receive bonuses.

Why have Obama, Dodd, Schumer, Barney Frank, and other prominent Dems not criticized the Freddie or Fannie bonuses? Because those are government-sanctioned entities, and government is never to be criticized. The metanarrative they are propagating is that it is wicked private enterprise that is to blame for all our ills. — Gary Jason

Slack jawing — The administration's response to the current economic recession and the mainstream media's coverage of the resulting statist schemes has degraded political rhetoric. During W. Bush's two terms, vitriolic attacks on the president and lame defenses of him (often made through mouths stuffed with pork rinds) got really boring. The fiftieth or hundredth angry rant against the war in Iraq and W's simian stupidity drew little interest; but at least the vitriol gave the boring subject an edge.

But now, mainstream political discussion involves a boring substance, combined with lazy rhetoric. The president, despite his reputation for eloquence, is part of this degradation. His world view seems confined by a hacky, local party pol's descriptive powers. On his first trip to Europe, he posed for the cameras more often than he spoke. And maybe that was for the best.

Listen to him talk. Jobs are always for "teachers and cops." Commerce always involves public works projects. The man has no sense of the private sector. Yet he presumes to repair the woes of capital markets.

How can this man have fallen, rhetorically, so fast? Maybe he never stood so tall in the first place. Or maybe sanctimonious statists are sharp in opposition, dull in power.

Think back to the popular 1970s sitcom "All in the Family" and Archie Bunker's leftwing son-in-law, whom he called Meathead. The son-in-law was memorable when he was living in Archie's basement and serving as his foil. As the show progressed and the son-in-law became the head of his own household, he lost his comedic edge. Maybe Barack Obama is the 21st century's Meathead. — Jim Walsh

Jet set — President Obama appeared on the "Tonight Show" with Jay Leno on March 19, during the AIG bonus imbroglio.

He said, per FoxNews.com, that "he was stunned when he learned of the bonuses that bailed-out insurance giant AIG

was paying its employees, and the payments raise moral and ethical problems. 'The administration's going to do everything it can to get them back,' he said. But Obama added the bigger problem is the culture that allowed traders to claim them. He says that's got to change if the economy is to recover."

He says this of retention bonuses that AIG gave to people with relatively low salaries, to entice them to stay the entire year, when a majority of their compensation would be paid as year-end bonuses. These bonuses were as much as \$3 million for a small handful of people.

President Obama, who had just flown cross country on his personal military jet to appear on an entertainment show at a cost to the taxpayer of several million dollars, concluded, "The larger problem is we have to get back to an attitude where people know enough is enough."

He says this to Jay Leno, a man who in 2002–2003 reportedly made \$20 million for his work on the "Tonight Show." I didn't watch his March 19 show, but I've always thought Leno was a smart guy, so I'm sure he didn't bring up his own financial rewards.

We live in an asylum called America. — Ross Levatter

Augean stables — Yet more scandals have surfaced about Democrats in Congress — you remember, the ones who ran on the solemn pledge to clean up corruption? And since most of the mainstream news media consist of people ideologically predisposed to cover up for those politicians, the stories were not widely reported.

First is yet another questionable real estate deal by Sen. Chris Dodd (D-CT). Dodd, who is already under investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee for sweetheart deals he got from Countrywide Mortgage while he was on the Senate Banking Committee pushing Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae to buy all those NINJA (No Income, No Job or Assets) loans. Dodd, along with Barney Frank in the House of Representatives, are the two people most responsible for the toxic mortgage bubble.

Well, in Dodd's latest caper, it turns out that he purchased an estate in Ireland in partnership with one Mr. Edward Downe. This Downe pleaded guilty to securities fraud in the early 1990s and had to pay \$11 million in civil penalties, along with taking a felony rap. (Downe was pardoned by President Clinton at the behest of Dodd in 2001.) In 1994, Downe's business partner, William Kessinger, bought two-thirds of the estate (then valued at \$160,000) with Dodd, Downe signing the deed as witness.

Kessinger sold his majority share to Dodd in 2002 for \$122,3512, meaning that his gain was only slightly more than 2% per year for the time he held onto his share, at a time when Irish property was quadrupling in value. A cottage similar to the one Dodd now fully owns is now on sale at a price four times higher than Dodd's highest declared appraisal (in his Senate financial disclosure documents). All very cozy indeed.

Turning next to the House of Representatives, we find that Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), who serves on the House Financial Services Committee, has had extensive ties to a bank in her district, OneUnited Bank, while also doing favors for it. The ties include her direct ownership of a quarter to a half million dollars of its stock, and her husband (Sidney Williams) owning a similar amount as well as serving on its board of

directors (also receiving cash payments from the bank in the same range). Meanwhile, executives at the bank have donated over \$12,000 to Waters' election campaigns.

Waters has used her position to work on behalf of OneUnited, which through various acquisitions has grown to be (it claims) the largest African-American-owned bank in the country. She pushed regulators to prevent minority-owned banks from being taken over by "white-owned" banks, and pushed the FDIC to do the same. The particular focus of her ire was the fact that a "major white bank" based in Illinois (FBOP Bank) was trying to take over African-American-owned Independent Bank of Washington, DC, and another such bank, apparently Family Savings Bank of Los Angeles. It turns out that OneUnited had tried to take over both banks at various times. In 2002, after her intervention, FBOP Bank backed out of the acquisition and let OneUnited take over Family Savings Bank.

More recently, Waters made a call to the Treasury Department, urging it to provide capital for OneUnited, which lost most of its own capital when its investments in Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae evaporated, when they were taken over by the Feds. The Treasury Department did indeed wind up bailing out the bank with TARP money. All very cozy as well.

Neither of these stories made any news. After all, they don't fit the mainstream-media metanarrative of altruistic, nay, noble leftist solons trying to combat the greed of Wall Street.

— Gary Jason

Making sense of the census — The Obama administration's talk of transferring oversight of the U.S. Census Bureau from the Department of Commerce to the White House staff turned over a rock that sent all kinds of dazed, statist bugs scurrying.

Case in point: Angelo Falcon, president of the National Institute for Latino Policy (NILP) and a member of the "National Steering Committee of the Census Information Centers Program of the Census Bureau" (that acronym would be NSCCICPCB) was a vocal critic of once Commerce Secretary-designate Judd Gregg. Falcon fretted that Gregg might politicize the census process by not budgeting enough money to produce accurate counts of hard-to-poll communities. So, Falcon supported the planned move of the census from Commerce to the West Wing. Here's an excerpt from his defense of the power grab:

It is also not possible by the White House or anyone else to easily manipulate the 2010 population count to rig reapportionment or redistricting in favor of one party or the other. The Census Bureau has a well developed set of protocols and procedures to assure as objective a population count as possible. No one, whether it is a powerful figure like Emanuel or even the president, can manipulate this process. . . . Finally, influencing broader policy issues on the use of Census data, such as with the issue of the use of sampling to adjust the population counts, is most definitely a political process beyond the purview of the Census Bureau. This would not be affected by who the Census Bureau reports to, since whether it is the White House or the Commerce Secretary, this is an issue that would be framed by whoever is President. The use of sampling for adjusting the Census numbers was something that is ultimately under the jurisdiction of the federal courts. In addition, the political redistricting process is something that

is overseen by the Department of Justice in its administration of the Voting Rights Act. And as we have seen with the Bush Administration, the Justice Department has certainly not been kept “independent” of politics.

The arguments against the move were more coherent. But Falcon’s rambling betrays characteristics of the contemporary nitwit statist. Specifically:

- intense partisanship limited to establishment political parties (“one party or the other,” as if there were just two);
- endemic relativism (“as objective . . . as possible” — objectivity is an absolute value);
- supplication to dubious characters (“a powerful figure like [White House chief of staff Rahm] Emanuel”);
- apparently unwitting acceptance of cynical politics (“an issue that would be framed by whoever is president,” oblivious to the fact that “framing” is a tool of political manipulation);
- blind faith in judges (“was something that is ultimately under the jurisdiction of the federal courts”);
- reflexive hatred of the White House’s previous occupant (“as we have seen with the Bush administration . . .” blah, blah, blah).

The grammar and syntax aren’t too strong, either. It’s rare to see such a banquet of errors — disagreement of tense, failure of parallelism, subject-object case confusion, twisted referents, verbal blockades of every kind — in just a couple of hundred words.

And pay attention to a process that this nitwit described: “the use of sampling for adjusting the Census numbers.” There’s the rub. The statist who bow worshipfully before Barack Obama intend to manipulate the results of the census with statisticians’ tricks. And, to deconstruct Falcon’s mangled sentences, it doesn’t matter whether Commerce or the West Wing is nominally in charge; they’re still determined to game the results.

— Jim Walsh

Hara kiri, American-style — On March 15, Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) suggested that executives of AIG should consider suicide. You may recall that on that date the furor erupted over the awarding of \$165 million in bonuses to people who had run the company into the ground. Grassley told an Iowa radio station that the execs should “follow the Japanese example and come before the American people and take that deep bow and say, I’m sorry, and then either do one of two things: resign or go commit suicide.”

Bravo, Chuck! At last, a politician cutting through the BS and telling it like it is — or rather, should be. I thought Grassley’s remarks were the best thing I’d heard since Ron Paul talked about abolishing the IRS and the CIA. It was especially delightful to hear such sentiments voiced by the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee.

Of course, Grassley’s office later issued a statement saying that the senator didn’t really want the execs to kill themselves. But for one day at least, a public figure had actually said something profound about consequences and honor. If such a code obtained among our ruling class, the credit crisis — and much more besides — might well have been avoided.

— Jon Harrison

Not fit to print — In this post-9/11 world, the takeover of a United States embassy by foreign nationals is the kind of thing you’d think you’d hear about — even the take-

over of a not-very-important embassy in a minor African country. You’d think.

So, why haven’t you heard that on April 22, 2004, the security guards at the American embassy in Liberia mutinied and held hostage the embassy staff, including the ambassador, until Pakistani soldiers showed up to free them? Nothing, as far as Google can tell, ever appeared about it in any place where you would have seen it. Not a single article in a magazine or newspaper. Not a word on CNN or Fox or ABC or any of the others. Nothing on the radio. Nary a rant by Limbaugh, or Sharpton, or Coulter, or Hannity, or Huffington.

In fact, the only mention I could find that anything unusual happened at all came from two short pieces on a website called *The Perspective*, which is devoted to goings-on in Liberia. The first, dated April 23, 2004, was by one Josephus Moses Gray (someone for whom, evidently, English is not the mother tongue). The second was a press release put out the next day by Christina Porche, the Public Information Officer at our embassy in Monrovia — who, presumably, uses English quite clearly, at least in private. Clarity, however, does not appear to be the point of her press release.

Gray’s article is entitled “Inter-Con Security Guards Stage Mutiny at U.S. Embassy In Liberia,” and is notably short on the sort of details an American reader would like to know. It does tell us that the mutiny started in the morning hours when “aggrieved” security guards besieged the embassy compound and blocked the main entrances “in protest for job benefits reportedly due them.”

What, exactly, these missing job benefits were is difficult to winkle out, but it had something to do with the mutineers’ not receiving “their ‘just’ benefits from their employer despite of their commitment to duty.” According to the guards: “family members of their colleagues who died on duty during the last rebel war on Monrovia received benefits while they have been left out. They stated that they work for eight hours standing on their legs daily without a break, adding: ‘we have not received our medical and transportation benefits’ ”

You can read the entire text at *The Perspective*, if you wish. But what, exactly, happened at the embassy, or why, isn’t going to become much clearer.

To give Gray his due, initial dispatches from conflict zones are often pretty confused. It’s the follow-up reports you look to when you want to know what really went on — which is where Porche’s press release should come in. But embassy press releases are government documents, and searching for truth in government documents can be like looking for a dropped contact lens by the glow of a black hole. What you hoped might illuminate the situation sucks light away.

Her press release informs us that:

. . . some employees of Inter-Con Security Services, Ltd., performed a work stoppage at the U.S. Embassy Compound at Mamba Point near Monrovia. They temporarily impeded access to and from the compound by Embassy employees and visitors. . . .

The vast majority of Inter-Con employees have served the Embassy faithfully, including during the assaults on Monrovia last summer, providing the critical security necessary to keep our Embassy open. We are grateful to them for this and therefore attempted to mediate. However, we were unsuccessful in alleviating their concerns. Their grievances appeared to be about bonuses that they felt they were owed. . . .

When it became obvious that a resolution was impossible, the Embassy requested assistance from the Liberian National Police (LNP) and UNMIL security in order to reestablish control over its entryways and remove all protesting Inter-Con guards from the compound.

And that, friend of Liberty, is that. The written information available in America for civilian consumption about the day the security guards mutinied at one of our embassies contains nothing more of any substance. If you want to know more, you are going to have to rely on word on mouth.

One of the joys of living overseas is that you hear plenty of words from a lot of mouths. Here in Gaborone, Botswana, almost every American in an official capacity knows other Americans in similar official capacities in other countries. The Regional Security Officer has counterparts at all our embassies around the world. They talk on the phone, they email one another, they get in touch by secure transmission to exchange secret messages that the rest of us aren't supposed to know about, and sometimes they meet in person and discuss security matters and whatever gossip pops into their heads. Ditto the Chief of Mission at the Centers for Disease Control, the Post Commandant for the Marines, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the embassy, and whatever it is they call the lady who runs USAID. Sometimes, some of them even talk to unofficial me. Here, as close as I can make out, is what happened in Liberia:

As part of the great American legerdemain of pretending that our government really isn't as big as it really is, routine security duties at our embassies are regularly contracted out to private firms. In Monrovia they were handled by an outfit called Inter-Con, which used Liberian nationals to do the actual guarding.

Embassy staff reporting to work at about 7:30 on the morning of April 22, 2004 were intercepted by Inter-Con's security guards, told that the embassy had been taken over, and herded into the chancellery. The guards were armed, but only in the sense that Fred Flintstone was armed. They carried clubs. The few embassy employees who allowed that, no, they had better ways to spend their day than locked in the chancellery were clubbed for their temerity, but not very hard. This lockup is, apparently, what Porche was referring to when she mentioned that the guards "temporarily impeded access to and from the compound by Embassy employees and visitors."

One interesting part of all this is that the embassy folks liked the guards. They had worked with them, sometimes for years, and had developed some real friendships. During the Liberian civil wars, the guards had lived in squalid conditions in a camp across the street, just so they could get to the embassy and protect Americans lives. The Marines more than liked the guards. They admired and respected them. Guards had died fighting beside Marines when the embassy was attacked by one or the other of the ragtag armies roaming around Monrovia. This is what Porche refers to as "services during last summer." The Marines weren't about to turn their M-16's on the guards after service like that. They went into lockup along with the other Americans.

Another interesting part is that there was nothing political about the mutiny. The whole thing was a job action, albeit the kind of job action that Old Joe Hill could have only dreamed

of. As a job action, it was aimed at Inter-Con, not at the United States. And plenty of Americans at the embassy thought that Inter-Con had it coming. Now I don't pretend to know what Inter-Con's true personnel policies were in Monrovia in April of 2004, but I have heard some pretty Dickensian stories. In fact, it was stories like Inter-Con's that caused mill owners in Charles Dickens' time to pull handfuls of gold from velvet pouches to send to the downtrodden in Africa.

I have heard that Inter-Con security guards worked 365 days a year. None of this frou-frou business of vacations or holidays, or time off to attend the birth of your first child, or your wife's funeral; or, certainly, time off to be sick. You miss a day at work, you are fired. "Oh, just a touch of malaria," was a reply an embassy staffer was likely to hear when he asked a guard why he was shivering so violently in the 105-degree heat. Security guards who'd put their lives on the line to defend Americans when the embassy came under siege a few months earlier couldn't even get the day off to stay home and die. So whatever the embassy staff were thinking as the guards herded them into captivity, it wasn't the same thoughts that would have been running through their heads if they had been carried off by a mob of Iranian students chanting "God Is Great."

The ambassador tried to talk the guards down, couldn't, and called for help. By 4:00 in the afternoon, the embassy was filled with Pakistani troops armed a lot better than Fred Flintstone, the security guards decided they had made their point, the siege ended, and the staff were let out in time to tell their families over supper, "You won't believe what happened at work today." That eight-and-a-half hours of foreign occupation of our embassy appears to be what Porche meant by a "work stoppage."

The next day, as far as I can tell, the guards were back on the job, staff members greeted them cordially, bygones were bygones, Christina Porche began to consider how she was going to frame her press release, and no hard feelings all around.

As takeovers of embassies go, Americans have seen worse. In fact, the most damaging thing to come out of the whole affair was the embarrassment suffered by the Security Officer who saw his embassy occupied by guards from the very guard-service he'd contracted to do the securing. Or perhaps it was the embarrassment felt by the American government, which didn't want it getting around — at least not back home — that in this day and age, our embassies are still so easy.

It's hard to know what to make of all this. In a world in which our government seems to have a talent for overreacting, it's a relief to learn that sometimes it doesn't. At a time when the news media seem to be in a constant bay of hysteria, the relief comes doubled. Still, a forcible takeover of a U.S. embassy by foreign nationals, and you don't read one word about it until nearly five years later? And even then, only in a journal of opinion?

Whatever . . . it mainlines directly into my libertarian fantasies about how the government, the press, and plenty of big-wigs I don't even know about work hand in glove in glove to make sure the rest of us hear only what they want us to hear. Make of it what you want, but the way this bit of news went nowhere for so long might be the most suggestive part of the entire episode.

— Bill Merritt

The Real Threat to America's Infrastructure

by Randal O'Toole

For years, Americans have been told that much of our country's infrastructure is obsolete, dangerous, and underfunded. The problem is not lack of funds, but misappropriation.

The 2007 collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis led to a great hue and cry about the need to repair the nation's infrastructure. Within days of the bridge's failure, groups such as the American Society of Civil Engineers presented their lists of trillions of dollars worth of projects that are supposedly needed to bring infrastructure up to modern standards.

The nation's media dutifully generated a crisis atmosphere by showing videos and photos of crumbling concrete and rusty steel bridges. "Nearly 30% of bridges in the United States are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete," CBS News breathlessly reported. "You heard that right: one-third of the bridges in the United States should have a sign that says, 'Use at your own risk.'"

Many politicians were quick to jump on this bandwagon. Minnesota Congressman James Oberstar quickly offered proposals to raise gas taxes anywhere from 5–40 cents per gallon in order to replace and repair bridges. As chair of the House Transportation Committee, he promised a gathering of steel company lobbyists that the next federal transportation bill would spend \$550 billion over six years (the previous bill was only \$285 billion). "We're talking about a lot of steel," he emphasized.

Barack Obama latched onto this issue in his presidential campaign, promising to spend \$60 billion to rebuild national

transportation infrastructure. When the economy tanked in September, Obama and various members of Congress started talking up an infrastructure bill aimed at stimulating the economy. With great fanfare, Congress passed this stimulus bill in February.

All this publicity and debate no doubt led most Americans to believe we are suffering some sort of infrastructure crisis and that the stimulus bill went far towards solving that crisis. Both these ideas are flat-out wrong. The crisis was entirely fabricated by special-interest groups seeking to attract more pork. Fully aware of that, Congress dedicated less than 20% of the \$787 billion stimulus bill to infrastructure — and much if not most of that will go to new construction, not repair or replacement of existing infrastructure.

The first clue that the infrastructure crisis was phony is the report of the National Transportation Safety Board on the Minneapolis bridge collapse. The bridge failed, the report found, because of a design or construction flaw: certain parts

were one-half inch thinner than they should have been. The board was unable to determine whether the designers had specified the wrong parts or the builders had substituted cheaper parts to save money, but it was clear about one thing: no amount of bridge maintenance would have detected or fixed the problem.

What about the “one-third of the bridges in the United States” that are risky to drive upon? That’s based on Department of Transportation reports that 12.1% of roadway bridges are structurally deficient and 13.3% are functionally obsolete. Note that CBS News rounded up the total — less than 26% — to “almost 30%,” which it immediately inflated to “one third” (which, of course, is 33.3%).

At most, however, the real number was 12.1%. “Functionally obsolete” bridges are not in any danger of falling down; they merely have narrow lanes, inadequate overhead clearances, overly sharp on- and off-ramps, or other outdated design features. These bridges pose no risk to auto drivers unless the drivers themselves drive recklessly.

The 12.1% “structurally deficient” bridges have suffered enough deterioration or damage that their load-carrying abilities are lower than when they were built. But that still doesn’t mean they are about to fall down; though they may be closed to heavy loads, the most serious problem is that they cost more to maintain than other bridges.

A close look at the data reveals that more than 90% of structurally deficient bridges have local, not state or federal, ownership; and more than 80% are rural. The average structurally deficient bridge is also less than three-fourths the size of the average bridge in good condition. In other words, we are not talking about the George Washington Bridge; the vast majority are small rural bridges that receive little use. Moreover, far from being a growing crisis, the number of structurally deficient bridges has declined by nearly 50% since 1990.

Bridge collapses because of poor maintenance are rare, and none has taken place in the United States in the past 20 years. Of 20 notable bridge collapses in the past 50 years, nearly half were caused by collisions with ships or barges, motor vehicles that caught fire, or — in one case — an airplane. Three

Most Americans believe we are suffering some sort of infrastructure crisis and that the stimulus bill went far towards solving that crisis. Both these ideas are flat-out wrong.

resulted from earthquakes or a tornado, two — including the Minneapolis bridge — failed because of design or construction flaws, and one was overloaded when someone drove a 90-ton vehicle onto a bridge rated to hold 17.5 tons.

Between 1960 and 1990, four bridge collapses were blamed partly on maintenance issues. The 1967 collapse of the Silver Bridge across the Ohio River at Point Pleasant, West Virginia, led to radical changes in bridge maintenance and inspection procedures. Yet the collapse itself was caused more by design

flaws than by lack of maintenance. The 1928 bridge was an unusual design, known as a chain suspension bridge. A notable flaw in the design was that a failure of any component would lead to a catastrophic failure of the entire bridge.

The bridge had been inspected and found structurally safe just two years before the collapse. After the accident, the National Transportation Safety Board found that corrosion had led to a minute crack in one of the thousands of pieces holding the bridge up. The corrosion, the board concluded, was inaccessible to visual inspection and could not have been detected by then-state-of-the-art inspection methods, unless

Legislators prefer “ribbons over brooms,” that is, they prefer to fund capital projects over maintenance.

the part had been disassembled. The collapse, which killed 46 people, led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of bridge inspections. But, perhaps more important, it led to the closure of the only other chain-suspension bridges in existence and to requirements that future bridges be designed with built-in redundancies so that, if one part fails, other parts will still bear the load.

Despite stepped-up inspections, three more bridge collapses in the 1980s were blamed on maintenance failures. Connecticut’s Mianus River Bridge failed in 1983, killing three people. Analysis showed that openings for draining water had been paved over a few years before. Collected water led to corrosion that should have been detected by bridge inspectors. But Connecticut had only 12 inspectors, responsible for 3,425 bridges. Better maintenance procedures and inspections could have prevented the collapse.

The collapse of a New York Thruway (I-90) bridge over Schoharie Creek, which killed ten people, was also blamed on poor maintenance. A 1955 flood had removed rip-rap protecting the bridge supports, and that rip-rap was never replaced. When the creek flooded again in 1987, the unprotected supports were undermined. Finally, in 1989 a U.S. 51 highway bridge in Tennessee killed eight when it collapsed into the Hatchie River. Investigators determined that the bridge’s timber supports, which had been dug into dry ground in 1936, had rotted after the river changed course and flooded the area. They blamed the state for failing to follow the recommendations of its own inspectors to correct the problem.

All these accidents led the National Transportation Safety Board to order more intensive inspections and maintenance. The United States has more than 600,000 highway bridges, and the fact that no more than four failed because of maintenance problems in the last 50 years — and none in the last 20 years — suggests that there is no evidence of an infrastructure crisis.

Mary Peters, the Secretary of Transportation under George Bush, tried to introduce some calm into the debate by pointing out that transportation infrastructure problems, to the

extent that they exist, are largely a matter of misplaced priorities. Legislators, she noted, prefer “ribbons over brooms,” that is, they prefer to fund capital projects over maintenance. Moreover, the increasing trend has been to spend gas taxes and other highway user fees on transit and other non-highway projects. No new taxes are needed to repair structurally deficient bridges, Peters argued; instead, the existing funds should simply be spent more responsibly.

For example, the Sellwood Bridge, which crosses the Willamette River in my former hometown of Portland, Oregon, is structurally deficient and has been closed to trucks and buses. Rather than replace it, the city is hell-bent on building a new light-rail bridge, which will cost more and carry a tiny fraction of the traffic of the Sellwood Bridge. Virtually all the spare cash that the region can find for transportation is being funneled into light-rail and streetcar expansions.

As Peters’ voice was overwhelmed by a cacophony of demands for increased infrastructure spending, it became clear that supporters of higher gas taxes have a hidden agenda. Neither Oberstar nor Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-OR), who chairs the House transportation subcommittee on highways and transit, supports new roads. Instead, they want to spend more money on transit, particularly rail transit.

The federal gas tax “sunsets” every six years, meaning that Congress must reauthorize it to keep federal transportation funds flowing. Since 1993, Congress has dedicated about 15% of those taxes to transit. Another 15% is “flexible,” which means that states can spend it either on highways or on transit. The result is that 20% of the federal gas taxes you pay go to transit, not highways.

For the stimulus bill, however, Oberstar proposed to spend 30% of surface transportation funds on transit and only 70% on highways. Many thought such a precedent would lead Congress to increase transit’s share of funding in the next reauthorization. Oberstar, DeFazio, and others are using the manufactured infrastructure crisis to boost funding for their pet transit projects.

Historically, gas taxes and other user fees have funded nearly all our highways and most local roads and streets. This has encouraged state and local transportation planners to be efficient, since they know that if they build bridges to nowhere, they won’t generate any user fees to pay for them.

In contrast, 75% of funds spent on transit come from taxes, a situation that has turned transit agencies into tax addicts always seeking their next big fix. The fact

that over half of federal transit funds (which come, remember, from highway users) are dedicated to the 7% of urban areas that have rail transit has contributed to a rail construction boom: cities deliberately choose high-cost transit systems in order to get a larger share of federal dollars.

The credit crisis revealed one example of transit agencies’ addiction to tax subsidies. Many agencies reported that because of the AIG meltdown many banks were demanding immediate repayment of loans. The agencies portrayed themselves as innocent victims of circumstances, especially since they had never missed a loan payment.

The truth was somewhat darker. In the early 1990s, the Federal Transit Administration began encouraging agencies to take advantage of a loophole in tax law. If a private company makes capital purchases, it can depreciate those

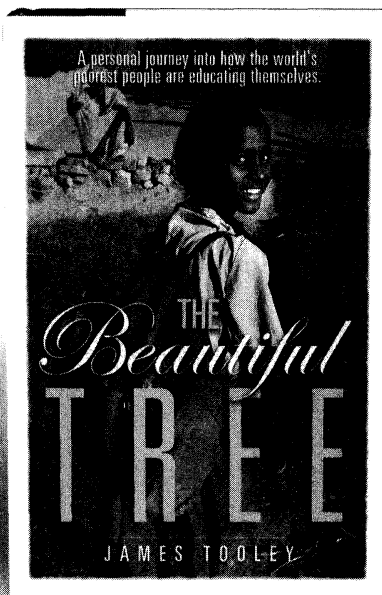
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purchases and save money on its taxes. Since public transit agencies are not taxpayers, they can't do this. So they started selling their buses, rail cars, and other assets to banks. The banks would depreciate the assets and lease back the equipment to the transit agencies.

For every \$100 million in capital assets, the banks saved about \$6 million on taxes, which they split with the transit agencies. In other words, these leaseback arrangements allowed transit agencies to turn \$100 million into \$103 million — but taxpayers lost \$6 million for every \$3 million gained by the agencies. Fortunately, the IRS closed this loophole in 2004. The dozens of lucky transit agencies that arranged leasebacks before 2004 often insured their leases through AIG, and when AIG's credit rating fell, the banks were entitled to demand immediate repayment, which led to demands for another federal bailout.

Although the final stimulus bill passed by Congress and signed by the president in February totaled \$787 billion, the vast majority of that money had nothing at all to do with infrastructure. Most of the bill goes for tax breaks or tax credits (\$376 billion), health care (\$154 billion, including aid to state Medicaid programs), state "fiscal stabilization" (\$56 billion), and education (\$51 billion).

Deducting these and a few minor programs from the package leaves about \$142 billion, or 18%, for infrastructure — although even some of this isn't really for that purpose. The Forest Service, for example, gets a half-billion dollars to "reduce fire hazards" by thinning forests. I'm not sure how this qualifies as infrastructure.

It is likely that most of the real infrastructure money will go for new projects, not repair or replacement of existing obsolete or deteriorating infrastructure. Nearly \$51 billion is for windfarms and other "green" energy projects. Another \$7.2 billion is for broadband telecommunications. Some \$25 billion goes to various federal agencies for things like new buildings and making existing buildings more energy efficient.

After all the hullabaloo about crumbling bridges, Congress did not specifically allocate a single dime to bridge repair. Instead, it dedicated \$27.5 billion to highways. Most of this will go to metropolitan areas and cash-strapped states that are not likely to share much with the rural counties that own most of the nation's structurally deficient bridges. However, it is likely that most of this money will go for repaving and

other maintenance needs rather than new construction, partly because of intense opposition to new highways.

Another \$8.4 billion is for transit, most of which will be spent on new construction, not maintenance. Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Portland, Washington, and other cities have announced their plans to dedicate a large share of their funds to new streetcars or light-rail construction. Even if these rail

Rather than replace the existing bridge, the city of Portland is hell-bent on building a new light-rail bridge, which will cost more and carry a tiny fraction of the traffic.

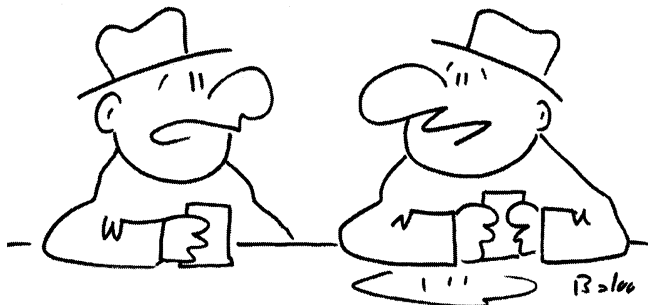
lines are completely funded by federal stimulus funds, all they will do is obligate cities to divert funds from other worthwhile programs to pay for operations and maintenance.

This brings up a curious contradiction. When it comes to highways, the mantra of the anti-mobility crowd is "fix it first," meaning don't expand highway capacities until all maintenance needs are met. When it comes to transit, however, the same people want to spend money building new rail lines even when existing lines are in desperate need of repair.

Were it not for diversions to transit and resistance to toll roads (which is particularly strong from people who want no new roads at all), highway user fees would be more than sufficient to pay both for new roads and for the maintenance of existing ones. So there should be no reason to adopt a fix-it-first policy for roads.

Transit, particularly rail transit, is different. Like highways, rail transit lines must be completely rebuilt about every 30 years, but unlike highways, few transit agencies have the funding to do such reconstruction. Most rail transit agencies are in desperate financial straights: New York City has only \$13 billion of the \$30 billion it needs to maintain its subways and commuter lines. Washington DC's subway riders have to deal with frequent breakdowns because the agency has none of the \$12 billion it needs for rehabilitation. San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) has about half of the \$12 billion it needs for reconstruction.

Given these dire conditions, you would think the agencies would adopt a fix-it-first policy. Instead, New York has started construction on the 8-mile Second Avenue subway line that will cost \$16.8 billion — \$2.1 billion per mile. Virginia twisted arms in the Bush administration to get approval for a \$6 billion rail line from Washington DC to Dulles Airport. BART is building another \$6 billion line to San Jose, a line which — the agency's environmental impact report predicts — will not save a single traveler a single minute of time during rush hours. At least in the latter two cases, buses running on high-occupancy vehicle lanes would have worked as well as rail, and at a tiny fraction of the cost.



"You're a grown man and you're still afraid of clowns?"

"Just the ones in Congress."

continued on page 38

Beheading on a Bus

by Thomas Szasz, M.D.

How do we explain the mentality of a killer?

In August 2008, Canadians were shocked to learn that Edmonton resident Vincent Li had stabbed to death and decapitated a stranger on a bus. On March 4, 2009, Li was declared “not criminally responsible,” that is, not guilty by reason of insanity.

Why did Li commit this crime? Queen’s Bench Justice John Scurfield answered: “These grotesque acts are appalling. However, the acts themselves and the context in which they were committed are strongly suggestive of a mental disorder. He did not appreciate the actions he committed were morally wrong.”

That interpretation was contradicted by Li’s behavior when he was arrested, immediately after the killing. Li apologized, asking police to kill him — evidence that he knew what he had done and that he knew it was wrong. The authorities, however, wanted to treat him as a madman. Defense and prosecution alike called for a finding of NCR, “not criminally responsible.” In his closing argument, Li’s lawyer, Alan Libman, told Justice Scurfield that there was “no contradictory evidence” to NCR, and other people apparently had no trouble agreeing. They were acting on the widely shared cultural premise that only mentally ill persons commit heinous crimes in broad daylight. So prevalent is this idea that anyone who believes otherwise invites being dismissed as a loony or a vengeful sadist. How, then, could other “evidence” have been presented?

The history of modern law and psychiatry suggests that we do not want to understand the murderer’s mental state, which requires us to identify with him, lest he seem more human to us than we imagine him to be. Understanding a deed such as Li’s requires paying attention to the defendant’s behavior, verbal and nonverbal, and, if necessary, asking him to explain the reasons for his lawlessness in his own words. But we do the opposite: we do not let the defendant speak at all. Instead, we ask fake experts, called “psychiatrists,” to explain the culprit’s crime. They tell us what we want to hear, illustrating the adage, “He who pays the piper calls the tune.” They reflexively “discover” that, at the precise moment when the accused committed the crime, he was “insane.” Thus, the crime was not an act; it was an event, the “product of mental illness.”

Timing is all-important in this fable. The defendant must be found to have been insane during the commission of the crime; subsequently, he must be found “mentally fit” to stand trial. Yet, though fit to stand trial, he cannot confess to his crime and plead guilty. He must plead innocent, so that we can declare him “not criminally responsible” (“not guilty by

reason of insanity"). Such are the rules of the game by which he must play, and by which we must (mis)understand him. Not surprisingly, his crime "makes no sense to us."

Returning to the beheading, what kind of explanation do we look for? The Jacobins beheaded people because they believed that those beheaded deserved to be guillotined for their crimes against the French people and state. But if Li said

Only we — ourselves — can be the agents of our actions. Therein lies the problem of the relationship between law and psychiatry.

that his victim deserved to be beheaded, we would interpret his statement as a symptom of his own madness, not as an explanation for the beheading of his victim. Hence, we must ask: what kinds of statements do we accept, or not accept, as "explanations"? What kinds of people are entitled to offer, or not entitled to offer, (credible) explanations?

Different people often have different views about what counts as an explanation. In attempting to explain the development of the human race, some people prefer naturalistic explanations (evolution); others opt for supernatural ones (creationism). Similar principles are often invoked to explain good or bad behaviors. It is remarkable, however, that while in the natural sciences we use the same principles to explain why airplanes fly and crash, or why drugs heal and harm, in the "(mis)behavioral sciences" we use one set of principles to explain ordinary behaviors, and another set to explain extraordinary misbehaviors. We attribute the former to free will, the latter to lack of free will, a feature intrinsic to (severe) mental illness. In other words, we explain the ordinary behavior by attributing it to the actor's reason for it, and extraordinary misbehavior by attributing (nonexistent) mental illness as its cause.

The truth is, there are reasons for murder, but not for melanoma. There are causes for melanoma, but not for murder. However, the idea of insanity — and especially the insanity defense — is a matter of law, not logic. "The life of the law," Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. reminded us, "has not been logic; it has been experience."

For more than a half century I have maintained that "mental illness" is a metaphor and that it is absurd to attribute horrifying crimes to "it." Gods, devils, and mental illnesses do not cause murder or anything else. Under all circumstances and at all times only we — ourselves — can be the agents of our actions. Therein precisely lies the problem of the relationship between law and psychiatry.

We attribute bad actions to possession by demons or disturbed minds in order to relieve ourselves, and our fellow humans, of the relentless responsibility we must bear for how we live. Because mental illness performs this essential service, we cling to it as we do to life itself. Declaring a defendant NCR masquerades as a "determination" or "finding" by psychiatrists and judges. In fact, it is a collective societal

decision about how we — the agents and agencies who control the culprit — ought to deal with him. Saying that we will "treat" him makes us feel better than acknowledging that we are punishing him. American government psychiatrists have been "treating" John Hinckley, Jr., President Reagan's "hospitalized" would-be assassin, for 25 years. They are still trying to cure him. And Santa Claus still brings Christmas gifts.

Mental illness is often said to be mysterious. It is not. "There is method in madness," Shakespeare told us. But of course we can't see the method if we don't want to see it. Li and the press told us enough to understand what happened. A Chinese immigrant, Vincent Li could not make a go of his life in Canada, or in China. Years before the murder, hopeless, homeless, penniless, Li left Toronto on foot, supposedly to walk back to Manitoba. Picked up by the police and committed to a mental hospital, he was given room and board, which he wanted, and treatment, which he did not want. Although deemed psychotic and dangerous, he promptly escaped. The authorities made no attempt to find him. Managing a person like Li as if he were a medical patient is a pretense, and everyone knows it is. However, in the Age of Folly, psychiatry defines social reality, just as in the Age of Faith the Church defined it.

Li's liver or lungs did not fail him. His life did, and he knew it. There is no medical treatment for failed lives. Beheading a stranger on a bus, like "walking" from Ontario to Manitoba in an emaciated state, was a message. What was Li saying? Let us listen to him.

"Since his arrest," reported the press, "Li has declined to speak to prosecutors and his court-appointed attorney. When asked again by the judge after the recess [in the proceedings] if he wanted a lawyer, Li shook his head and then quietly said 'please kill me.' Li's remark was heard by reporters and confirmed by court clerks, but was not acknowledged by the judge." It was also not acknowledged by the doctors who "examined" Li. Prosecution psychiatrist Dr. Stanley Yaren told the court that "Li has a very strong chance to recover and was an otherwise 'decent person' who was clearly out of his mind when he believed he was acting on God's commands."

Hopeless as his situation was before the murder, it is worse than hopeless after it, and Li knows that too. Perhaps he hoped to die on his failed death-march to Winnipeg. Perhaps

In the Age of Folly, psychiatry defines social reality, just as in the Age of Faith the Church defined it.

he lacked the courage to kill himself. In any case, he wants to die now and does not say that God tells him that death is the proper punishment for his deed.

Nothing and no one can bring back the dead. Nor can a deed like Li's be expiated or "treated." In the past, people understood tragedy. Today we choose to misunderstand it as a malady — manifested by "meaningless" deeds. □

At the Death of a Newspaper

by Bruce Ramsey

Across the country, the news is no longer considered fit to print. But are we better off without newspapers?

I sense little grief from libertarians at the possible extinction of newspapers. It's the market — and anyway, except for the Orange County Register, newspapers have not been notably libertarian. A thought arises: "Then to hell with newspapers."

I'm a newspaperman, and I don't feel that way. The daily paper where I worked for 16 years, Hearst's Seattle Post-Intelligencer, has stopped printing. It was not a great paper; it didn't have enough people, and only some of them were really good at what they did. I knew many of them. Now, apart from a handful still at the P-I's web page, they are gone, and the city is the poorer for it.

Since 1983 the Post-Intelligencer had shared printing plants, delivery trucks, advertising, and revenues with the larger Seattle Times and split the pot under a "joint operating agreement." In the '80s this had been a way to save the P-I and make money for both owners. It changed after 2000, when the Times switched from afternoon delivery to mornings in order to avoid daytime traffic congestion. The result of the two papers' sharing the same time slot, and of all the other things going on, was a slide in P-I daily circulation from 195,000 to 114,000. Revenue sharing spread the pain to both of them, and in the past year it has threatened to sink them both.

Struggling to stay alive, the Seattle Times had two rounds of buyouts and layoffs in 2008. Until January 2009 there had been no cutbacks at the P-I. In January a Hearst executive flew out from New York and announced that the paper had lost \$14 million in 2008 (which works out to \$80,000 per employee) and that unless a buyer stepped forward, the paper would stop printing in March. On March 18 the P-I's red coin boxes stood empty.

Of the five publications I've worked for in my career, three have stopped printing, one is for sale, and the fifth, where I work now, has shrunk its staff in an effort to survive.

The major cause of all this is not the *bête noire* of libertarian and conservative critics, liberal bias. That malady does exist. But what is one to say when Bill Anderson claims (at LewRockwell.com) that "there is no entity in this country that is more statist than the typical newspaper," or when Walter Block proclaims that the typical newspaper business page

says "that taxes and welfare payments must always and ever be increased." I've worked on newspapers for 30 years — and I had to be a hell of a lot more careful with what I said than these guys are.

Steven Greenhut of the Orange County Register is more accurate when he says the typical chain newspaper is imbued with a "bland left-of-centerism" — with the emphasis on "bland." The Seattle P-I was like that. Its editorial columns were left-liberal but not stridently so, and left-liberal assumptions might be found in some of its feature stories and columns. But the P-I's core market, the city of Seattle, is at least as lefty as it was; the city voted more than 80% for Barack Obama and elects the leftwing Jim McDermott to Congress. The P-I's reputation as a liberal paper did hurt it with part of its market, but that was the smaller part.

There are stronger reasons than bias for the decline of newspapers. One is the decline of reading; video has lowered Americans' attention spans. Another is the rise of a new kind of reading, on screens. In the 1990s newspaper management decided to provide content on the internet for free. The salaries of reporters and editors were already covered by the newspaper's advertisers. The internet paper required no pressmen or truck drivers, and though there was some fixed cost, the incremental cost of a new reader was nearly zero. "Free" fit the internet ethos, and it was good marketing.

But that was a fateful decision. Newspapers' internet sites have inexorably gained readers, while their dead-tree product has lost them. Yet the dead-tree product had paid for the reporters and editors. Now the printed newspaper has weakened, and it can carry fewer employees. News executives thought that by and by the internet would carry the weight, but it hasn't. Google has taken the great share of internet advertising, because it tailors ads to match search requests, and newspapers can't do that. Google brings users to newspaper sites, but (from the newspapers' viewpoint), it collects too much of the ad revenue.



An even more important result of the internet has been the newspapers' loss of classified ads. The metro daily I work for used to have pages and pages of ads for jobs, houses, cars, and garage-sale goods. We charged a steep price for those ads, and they accounted for 40% of our ad revenue. In today's paper, as I write, the classifieds have shrunk to one page, plus four columns of public notices. The classifieds have shrunk to the same space as the paid death notices.

Much of the classified business has gone to craigslist. I met the famous Craig at a dinner once. His business card did not identify him as a corporate CEO but simply as "Craig

Craigslist is killing the newspapers by offering a classified-ad service that works better than theirs and costs most of its customers nothing. Better product, price of zero; what can the newspapers do?

Newmark, customer service rep. & founder." He is a short, soft-spoken man who writes his company name and job title in lowercase letters. He denied to me in a tone of innocence that he is the carnivore eating my industry's lunch, but he was trying to be nice. He's killing us by offering a classified-ad service that works better than ours and that costs most of his customers nothing.

Better product, price of zero: what are you to do?

Maybe you do something else.

Maybe you go out of business. The printed Seattle P-I folded in March. Denver's number two paper, the Rocky Mountain News, closed on February 27. In Michigan, the Ann Arbor News said that it will go internet-only in July. Time printed a list of the other U.S. newspapers most likely to implode, and the list's major failing was that it left out too many names.

Every year newspapers shrink — in the width of pages, the number of pages, and what's in them. The sports section stops covering high-school games. The business section drops the stock tables and second-tier public companies. Book reviews are discontinued. The rock 'n' roll critic retires. The consumer-complaint columnist dies and is not replaced. The political cartoonist is laid off. The letters editor goes on medical leave. The travel editor takes a buyout.

This is the world I live in.

Well, so what?

Think of what a good newspaper is: a group of people paid to write about the world around them. Government especially. A good paper will have at least one person at the state legislature, and a really good paper will have several there and one in Washington, D.C. It will have a reporter at the county government and another at city hall. It will staff cops and courts. There are also regional governments, suburban governments, special-purpose governments, and school boards. As libertarians know, all these agencies have power, and they need to be watched.

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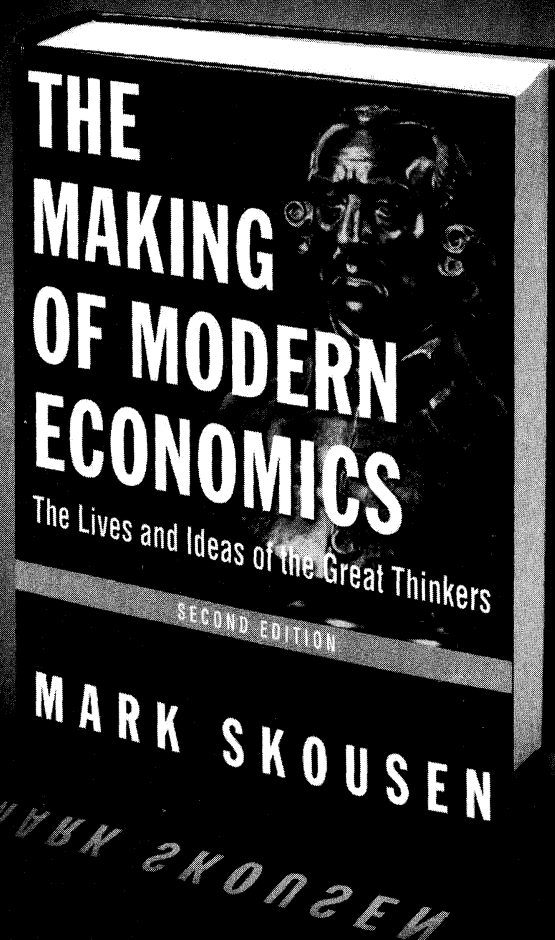
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I worked at the P-I in the business section. We covered mergers, strikes, proxy fights, and initial public stock offerings. Those were the big things. The grunt work was the stockholder meetings and the earnings of every local public company, with comments on the company's stock and on its business plans. All these are important.

A good paper also covers cultural things: art, music, plays, dance, movies, novels, restaurants. Without newspapers, some of these things would be covered anyway. Seattle has the subscription-only Puget Sound Business Journal, and for entertainment, the ad-supported Seattle Weekly and The Stranger. But they are weeklies. They can't cover breaking news.

Some will say, "Breaking news? Forget newspapers. I get my news from the internet." And where does the internet get it? From newspapers. That's where radio gets its stories — from newspapers and from the wire, and the wire gets them from newspapers. TV also gets stories from newspapers.

There are internet sites such as RealClearPolitics, which carry lists of newspaper stories; these are *aggregators*. They are like Google: they provide a shelf for other people's work. That's fine, but someone has to create the stuff *on* the shelf.

What, then? At Reason.com, Jesse Walker suggests that local people will spontaneously fill the vacuums left by departed news reporters. What sort of people? One is the gadfly, the "character who sits through those council meetings, or the school board meetings," because that's the most interesting thing in the world to him. Another is the activist, who follows public policy for a cause. Another is the insider, who works for an institution and wants to get a story out.

These people do exist. But, being unpaid, they are subject to only such reliability as they impose on themselves. Sometimes they don't show up. They are often partisans with narrow interests. A big-city school board may attract activists for one ethnic group only, gifted students only, or one neighborhood only.

And most of these folks don't write. They *talk*.

Without newspapers, there would still be information — mountains of it. Already government puts bills, laws, budgets, and court rulings on line. Public companies put quarterly earnings, annual reports, and Securities and Exchange

A good paper will have people in Washington, D.C., at the state legislature, at the county government, at city hall, and at school boards. As libertarians know, all these agencies have power, and they need to be watched.

Commission filings on line. But these things are boring, and most people won't read them. For years, my job was to read them and tell the stories in them, for a daily newspaper.

Without newspapers, organized business, labor, and political groups would cover the things their members cared about, such as the state legislature. Some do this now, and offer their

work on the internet for free. But they care about only some things, and they take a partisan view about them.

Real internet newspapers — that is, sites that report their own news — may arise if someone can figure out how to make them pay. Hearst is trying it with seattlepi.com, but the site is a

Admittedly, some reporters have a political bias. Still, if newspapers go away, big, powerful institutions will be left to cover themselves.

shadow of the old Post-Intelligencer. As I write, two groups of former P-I journalists are said to be organizing their own web papers as nonprofit ventures, which is an admission that they expect to be subsidized. In Seattle the private wealth exists to do that; the question is whether Bill Gates, Paul Allen, or any of the other rich folks around here would want to shrink his hoard for such a purpose. I am not optimistic. A report in the Seattle Times said that one ex-P-I group had raised \$4,000 and that some journalists wanted to get to work right away. God bless them, it sounds like people I know. I wish them luck, but I fear that web curmudgeon Fred Reed was right when he said, "The crucial fact about web journalism is that there is no money in it."

It boils down to this: newspaper reporters are the largest group of people *paid to gather information for the public*. They are trained in reporting and writing; they are not intellectually trained about the institutions they cover, and they get the story wrong sometimes. Some of what they write is fluff. Much of it is handed to them by people who are paid to influence information, and sometimes the reporters are influenced. Some of them become shills for the people they cover. Some have a political bias. Admit all this. Still, if newspapers go away, big, powerful institutions will be left largely to cover themselves.

Do you want that? I don't.

You may say, "If there's a market for news, someone will provide it." If there is a paying market, yes. If the market expects it for free, maybe not.

News has typically not been sold. It has been sponsored. One of two classes of the newspapers' sponsors — classified ads — is gone. The other is display ads, and they are still there, which is why newspapers are still there. If display ads go, newspapers go.

Walker ends his piece for Reason.com with the anarchistic thought that if newspapers disappear, the thing to do "is to tap the information already flowing from citizen to citizen without any journalist's intervention." For some things that idea may be the best there is, but think of what it consists of: trained, managed, and paid workers are to be replaced by untrained and unmanaged volunteers, volunteers of undependable knowledge, undependable literacy, and all too dependable partisanship.

To me, that is not progress — but then, I am a newspaperman. □

Bringing Sunshine to the Nanny State

by Vince Vasquez

Urban progressives are infecting
our cities with totalitarianism. A little
sunshine is the best disinfectant.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton declared that “the era of big government is over.” In America’s cities, however, it has only just begun. City officials are making ever more ambitious grabs at power. Their goal is to protect their constituents from themselves. Their means are regulations, bans, and moratoriums on common goods and practices. The results? More Jay Leno jokes about the daily wackiness of American politics — and something more serious, too: economic harm and curtailment of freedom. When Belmont, CA, recently banned all smoking except inside the doors of owner-occupied houses, it was going a long way toward assuming the power to tell people what they could do about everything.

It remains to be seen how far this will go, but the omens are, well, ominous. Try this one:

In June 2007, the town council of tiny Delcambre, LA, unanimously passed an ordinance banning low-hanging “sagging” pants within city limits. Those found committing the fashion faux pas could face a \$500 fine or a sentence of up to six months in jail. In a community devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and still in the process of recovering, it would seem that local leaders would have more pressing priorities. But, despite the avalanche of criticism that Delcambre’s official class received for its abuse of the legislative process, more than a dozen municipalities across the country followed suit, passing or considering similar ordinances.

Lamenting the success and popularity of fast-food restaurants in low-income areas, Los Angeles Councilwoman Jan Perry has asked her colleagues to consider a “health zoning law” that would impose a one- to two-year moratorium on new fast-food establishments in her inner-city district, giving time for government planners to attract restaurants “with broader and more healthful food offerings.”

Perry suggested still more limits, arguing that “fast food is primarily the only[!] option for those who live and work here. It’s become a public health issue that residents be given healthier choices.” In Perry’s view, government action is “primarily the only” solution for her poor, undereducated — but, apparently overfed — constituents.

Of course, many of the businesses that Perry wants to get rid of have spent millions of dollars crafting healthier menu options, as well as providing nutritional information to enable their customers to make more informed decisions. And Perry’s constituents, like all other Americans, vote with their feet. If

they don't feel like a cheeseburger and fries on Friday, they don't have to order them, or even step into a restaurant that sells them. If they make that choice, the food industry — managed to maintain profits — will respond to changing forces or file for bankruptcy. Wonder Bread, a longstanding staple in American pantries, has in recent years closed up shop in Oregon and Washington. In August 2007, its corporate parent announced that it would stop baking and selling its famous white loaves in Southern California. Industry experts agreed that Wonder Bread had failed to respond to shifting West Coast trends toward more healthful diets.

While news like this might mean something to sensible people, it makes no impression on the advocates of the nanny state. And it isn't just "health" that's at stake for them. It's morality, or what they define as "social policy." They need laws to make people good.

In addition to policing consumer health, a key goal of nanny-state intervention is the raising of "sin taxes" on goods and services that don't comply with social policy goals. This tactic has been employed in many municipalities — most notoriously, perhaps, in New York City.

In both 2006 and 2007, Mayor Michael Bloomberg pleaded with New York lawmakers to raise the city's cigarette tax — already the highest in the nation — by 50 cents a pack. He declared the higher tax "would save the lives of thousands," especially children. Quoting the mayor's February 2007 remarks: "experience demonstrates that raising the price of smoking is the surest means of discouraging teenagers from becoming addicted to tobacco." Fifty cents may not seem like much money — and one doubts that it will mean much to teenagers carrying both a pack of cigs and a thousand dollars worth of electronic equipment — yet it would provide about \$20 million dollars for local pork-barrel projects.

But I digress. Bloomberg's proposal was merely the latest assault on New York City smokers. Launching a number of new antismoker initiatives in 2002, Bloomberg convinced lawmakers to raise the city's cigarette tax from eight cents to \$1.50, a 1,775% tax increase, which he claimed wasn't nearly high enough. As he said at the time: "if it were totally up to me, I would raise the cigarette tax so high the revenues from it would go to zero." Did I hear "prohibition"?

Despite Bloomberg's pieties, it's clear that, with city and state tobacco taxes raising the price of a pack of cigarettes to more than \$7, smokers have become the love-hate interest of politicians who are unable to balance their budgets. After the

2002 tax hike, NYC cigarette tax revenue soared from less than \$30 million to nearly \$160 million a year. Yet the nanny retains her piety. Bloomberg is trying to take his cigarette tax global, with the help of the United Nations. The UN's World Health Organization announced in 2006 that Bloomberg had pledged \$125 million of his own money for a Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) designed to end "the global tobacco epidemic." The special target is 15 nations (including Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India), upon which an international cadre of nanny-state activists, funded by Bloomberg, is preparing to descend. Their lofty social-policy purpose is to levy high cigarette taxes, to restrict tobacco advertising, to ban smoking in public places, and otherwise, by nagging and restricting, to "help make the world tobacco-free."

Bloomberg discussed his passion for the cause in an op-ed published by the British medical journal *Lancet* (May 19, 2007). He touted the accomplishments of his antismoker campaign in New York City and noted with pride that "tax increases raised the legal retail price of cigarettes by 32% . . . virtually all indoor workplaces, including bars and restaurants, were made smoke-free, despite vocal opposition. Hard-hitting print and broadcast antitobacco advertising campaigns were initiated . . . smokers were provided with free courses of nicotine-replacement treatment to help them quit; nearly 20% of smokers were reached over 3 years. Rigorous surveillance was established."

Few government officials in the Western Hemisphere have tried to institute the sudden and radical nanny-statism of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, who in the fall of 2007 announced new and higher taxes on tobacco products, alcohol, luxury cars, and even artwork. It was a puritanical attempt to mold Venezuelans into his conception of the socialist "New Man." Said Chavez: "There are people who spend what is necessary, but then there are some who spend and spend. I am looking to put a tax on this." Whether we are supposed to understand that the New Man is modeled on Chavez's own personal choices is unclear, although news agencies quoted the leftist leader as confessing to have enjoyed a drag and a sip from time to time. His aim, however, is to make such activities unaffordable by others.

It's worth noting that the recent wave of sin taxes followed an earlier Chavez decree to ban alcohol sales nationwide during Holy Week — a move that observers suspected had less to do with appealing to Christians at home than with appeasing the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which prohibits the sale and consumption of alcohol *carte blanche*. Chavez has sought stronger diplomatic ties with them.

Whatever their specific motivation, these nanny-state policies are easy to ridicule for their elitist "humanitarianism" and boutique authoritarianism. But their effects are more pernicious than denying Marlboros or Big Macs to hoi polloi. There's a damaging economic effect as well.

Peripheral government regulations introduce inefficiencies that cause suboptimal asset allocation by businesses and consumers, impairing their ability to respond to market forces efficiently. Optimally, a firm would seek to maximize profits by setting its marginal revenue equal to its marginal costs. However, when an economic disincentive is imposed, a "wedge" is driven between the price paid by the consumer and the price charged by the producer.



"Talk about tough — he uses the Surgeon General's warning labels to roll his own."

The costs to society that are created by artificial marketplace inefficiencies are known as “deadweight losses,” as they are foregone economic outputs that could have yielded greater productivity, greater revenue for businesses, and lower prices for consumers. Such disincentives arise from the imposition of taxes or government mandates that yield fewer incentives for markets to produce greater outputs and control higher costs.

Despite the popular perception that new nanny-state taxes and red tape will be somehow absorbed by commerce, their costs get passed onto the consumer, who in turn pays them through higher prices and limited choice. To suggest that

Despite the popular perception that nanny-state taxes and red tape will be absorbed by commerce, their costs get passed to the consumers.

business taxes are simply absorbed by private industry is cynically misleading. A June 2005 study of San Francisco’s myriad local business fees and taxes found that excessive municipal government surcharges inevitably seep into the costs of consumer goods and services; it was estimated that a \$2 cup of coffee from an outdoor cafe in San Francisco includes 64 cents, or 32%, in fees and taxes (and that figure excludes state and federal income and payroll taxes).

Anyone who knows that he has to work through a maze of local, state, and federal regulations and tax codes before launching a new business may well just give up, especially if the business plan lies on the uncertain edge of innovation. It’s impossible to measure all the costs of niggling, nanny-state regulations. But some of the compliance costs of new and higher taxes (record keeping, education, shipping, form preparation, etc.) are measurable, and they have been proven to reduce economic output significantly. In 2001, the Tax Foundation estimated that for the hours that businesses and individual taxpayers take each year simply to comply with the federal tax code, the overall compliance cost was almost 12 cents for every dollar collected in federal taxes — a gargantuan amount.

Nanny-state laws don’t just take money from the taxpayers and consumers; they also increase the size of government by raising higher collection costs for new taxes and fees, as they require additional municipal manpower and resources for implementation and operations. Treasury or tax collector staff may need to be augmented, or existing staff may be assigned these new responsibilities, requiring costly overtime hours. Physical costs — such as postage and mailing, purchasing industry computer software and hardware and other implements — add to the overhead. None of this, mind you, has anything to do with the real functions of government — preventing force and fraud.

Strangely — and, from the standpoint of the municipal nannies, quite unexpectedly — people react to this interference.

Faced with rising red tape and government fees, businesses pick up and move to less-regulated jurisdictions.

Consumers who are able to live or shop in other jurisdictions do so. Among those who stay, some will seek out a black market to purchase cheaper stolen or smuggled goods. Since Sept. 11, 2001, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives has noted a spike in illicit cigarette trafficking, as people reap profits from buying mass quantities of cigarettes in low-tax states and selling them on the black market in high-tax states. The profit in these activities can be rich. And deadly. As the Washington Post reported in 2004, federal authorities have uncovered numerous schemes to exploit nanny-state policies for the benefit of al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

Using the state to enforce the social standards and moral agenda of a few results in a loss of personal freedom for all. The rapid rise of the nanny state in America’s cities speaks to the pervasive political incentive to overreact and overregulate in the face of crises and calamities that are sensationalized — or created — by the 24-hour news media cycle. It also speaks to the breakdown of true community. Neighborly relationships foster communication, cooperation, and friendship — a factor that is vital in such cities as Los Angeles, where the assimilation of newcomers is particularly important. In a real community, most differences can be resolved privately. In the nanny state, by contrast, people are encouraged to depend on the state when there is any dispute about noise or land use, or even plants or toys in people’s front yards. Few circumstances could be worse for the sense of individual responsibility and thoughtful consideration of other people on which community depends.

The nanny state also harms the core social unit, the family. Not allowing parents to educate their children on the importance of personal responsibility and the consequences of their actions inhibits the growth of self-reliant adults. Of course, statist *want* citizens to be immature and malleable. As economics professor Glen Whitman suggests, “when individuals

As Michael Bloomberg said at the time: “if it were totally up to me, I would raise the cigarette tax so high the revenues from it would go to zero.” Did I hear “prohibition”?

bear the full costs and receive the full benefits of their own actions, the justification for government involvement is much weaker.” There’s no place for a nanny once the children have grown up.

Many nanny-state laws attempt to wrestle individuals away from their desire for modern material goods — video games, automobiles, the internet, fast food, cigarettes — that the nannies don’t like. But the freedom to choose how one spends his income, time, and other resources is meaningless if it is limited to a handful of options approved by the city council.

Ceding even piecemeal losses of personal freedom can have adire effect down the road. UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh made a study of how the “slippery slope” phenomenon relates to government regulations (“Mechanisms of the

Slippery Slope," Harvard Law Review 116 [Feb. 2003]). Volokh concluded that taking small steps to control the use of something can facilitate later steps to ban it completely; for instance, mandatory gun registration makes firearm confiscation more feasible. Using the example of local legislation in New Jersey to outlaw cigarette machines in 1993, Volokh noted the progression from regulation to prohibition. According to a 1993 New York Times article:

Sandra Starr, vice chairwoman of the Princeton Regional Health Commission . . . said there is no "slippery slope" toward a total ban on smoking in public places. "The commission's overriding concern," she said, "is access to the machines by minors."

In June 2000, the Record (the major newspaper in Bergen County, N.J.) noted that

the Princeton Regional Health Commission took a bold step to protect its citizens by enacting a ban on smoking in all public places of accommodation, including restaurants and taverns. . . . In doing so, Princeton has paved the way for other municipalities to institute similar bans.

So, when it comes to cigarettes in New Jersey, the slippery slope of the nanny state is approximately seven years long.

With all the threats nanny-state laws pose to economic and other personal freedoms, it's clear that champions of liberty must move beyond merely mocking the nannies. Ground zero in the fight against oppressive government will be America's cities. As David Harsanyi, author of the book "Nanny State," remarked in a 2007 interview, "most nanny state initiatives begin on a local level." As the success of nanny-state ordinances continues, free-market forces should consider a collaborative effort to end the erosion of individual liberties. It's already begun, in fact. Some free-market advocates have published quantifiable comparative analyses or "indexes" to raise awareness of encroaching laws. The Cato Institute, along with more than 70 thinktanks across the globe, publishes the "Economic Freedom of the World," an annual index that assesses the state of sovereign laws affecting businesses, consumers, and entrepreneurship. The Heritage Foundation releases an annual Index of Economic Freedom,

The rise of the nanny state in America's cities speaks to the incentive to overreact and over-regulate in the face of crises and calamities.

which examines the regulatory treatment of ten specific freedoms in 161 countries. Other thinktanks effectively examine narrower regulatory issues. The San Francisco-based Pacific Research Institute publishes an impressive array of indexes of regulatory environments across the 50 states, including an "Economic Freedom Index," "Tort Liability Index," and "Health Ownership Index."

This should go farther. Advocates and researchers should weigh the merits of an urban "citizen's freedom index" that measures the strength of nanny-state regulations in at least the

20 largest U.S. cities. This index would examine the comparative strength and activity of nanny-state ordinances in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Phoenix, Philadelphia, San Antonio, San Diego, Dallas, San Jose, Detroit, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, San Francisco, Columbus, Austin, Memphis,

When it comes to cigarettes in New Jersey, the slippery slope of the nanny state is approximately seven years long.

Fort Worth, Baltimore, and Charlotte. These metropolises are ideal for greater regulatory scrutiny, since they all have pertinent data readily available to the public and mass media outlets that local elected officials respect.

What would such a study measure? Nanny-state laws seem to come in four areas:

1. The use and availability of federally-controlled goods, such as alcohol, tobacco, and firearms;
2. The use and availability of property, such as houses, food, and clothing;
3. The levy of new and higher excise taxes, fees, and surcharges on consumer goods and services;
4. The imposition of restrictions on advertising and other mass communication.

Results could be published in an easy-to-read format and publicized through localized press releases that would bring greater public awareness to the losses and gains of freedom in each city. Lawmakers in notoriously pro-nanny cities could be identified, and lawmakers who seek to expand freedom could receive an annual award of esteem. Such an index would thus be useful in increasing public accountability of lawmakers, while it gave incentives to local officials of all political stripes to expand consumer choice, encourage personal responsibility, and protect individual liberty.

Did I say "personal responsibility," yet again? I did. Some of the nanny state's pet causes — consumer safety, smoking, obesity, substance abuse, over-indebtedness — are serious problems; but they are problems that should be met by individuals. The internet can help; so can watchdog organizations such as the Consumers Union; so can private organizations devoted to education and encouragement of helpful action. But if you want to see the results of government social engineering, I would advise you to look at the wreckage of the Great Society programs of the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that they are now being replaced by an infinity of Little Society nanny programs does not mean that government interference is any likelier to achieve the results intended.

Ronald Reagan said, "Government exists to protect us from each other. Where government has gone beyond its limits is in deciding to protect us from ourselves." Pressuring individuals through law to make "better" decisions in their lives is contrary to the spirit of our Founding Fathers — and has no place in the town halls and city councils of America. □

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The Real Threat to Infrastructure, *from page 26*

In addition to increasing the ratio of funds going to transit, the stimulus bill also included a surprise: \$8 billion for high-speed rail. This was specifically inserted at the request of President Obama, who said he wanted to make high-speed rail his "signature issue" in the stimulus package.

Aside from the sheer waste of money, lovers of freedom should oppose rail transit because of what it means for property rights. While buses can go anywhere people want to go, rails are inflexible. To spur ridership, rail transit agencies

Seventy-five percent of funds spent on transit come from taxes, a situation that has turned transit agencies into tax addicts always seeking their next big fix.

become land-use czars, promoting minimum-density zoning codes that mandate high-density housing near rail stations. These codes are often paired with "anti-sprawl" zoning aimed at preventing owners of land outside of urban areas from developing their properties. Residents of California, Oregon, and Washington are familiar with these sorts of laws; rail proponents are actively seeking to expand them to other states.

High-speed rail will only exacerbate this trend. Rather than keeping his promise to "rebuild America," it seems likely that Obama's true goal is to "re-socially engineer America" by heavily subsidizing transit and discouraging auto driving.

Although all the high-speed rail money will effectively go for "new" construction, it remains to be seen how much will go for each of the two different kinds of high-speed rail. One type, which should be called "moderate-speed rail," consists of upgrading existing freight lines to allow passenger trains to run as fast as 110 miles per hour. The other, which is true high-speed rail, consists of building brand-new rail lines capable of running trains as fast as 220-miles per hour. Though the second type is only twice as fast, it costs at least ten times as much.

The Federal Railroad Administration has designed a national high-speed rail network that extends about 9,000 miles. Adding other active proposals brings the total to 11,000. Constructed to moderate-speed standards, this network will cost about \$50 billion; at true high-speed standards, it will cost more than \$500 billion. Even then, it will not allow coast-to-coast journeys: there are gaps between New York and Chicago, Houston and Dallas, Jacksonville and Orlando, and nothing at all between Kansas City and California, even though this area includes some of the fastest-growing cities and states in the nation. Completing the network by filling in these gaps would significantly increase the cost.

Rail advocates from the Midwest, where Obama is from, have proposed a network of moderate-speed rail lines connecting Chicago with Minneapolis, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. California wants true high-speed rail between its major cities. While the \$8 billion is more than enough to

fund the entire 3,150-mile Midwest rail plan, it is less than half the money that California wants from the federal government for just the first leg of its high-speed rail plan.

Given that the infrastructure crisis was entirely fabricated and that transportation and most other infrastructure should be able to pay for itself out of user fees, the stimulus bill was entirely unnecessary. If Congress really wanted to stimulate the economy, it should have offered state and local governments low-interest loans that would be repaid out of future user fees. This would have ensured that any infrastructure built from the loans was actually necessary.

Even though the stimulus bill is a one-time-only package, it set many ugly precedents. Of course, they create moral hazards because entities from banks to transit agencies have learned that they can engage in risky behavior and expect the federal government to bail them out when the risks explode in their faces.

Just as serious as the moral hazards are the effects of deficits and new construction on the nation's future economy. For me, the \$8 billion for high-speed rail, though only 1% of the bill, is the scariest part of the entire package. If we end up building a \$500-billion high-speed rail network, or even a \$50 billion moderate-speed rail network, every city of modest size on that network will want to build its own expensive rail transit lines. This will lead to intrusive zoning aimed at forcing more people to live in high-density projects along such lines rather than in the single-family homes that are the housing of choice for the vast majority of Americans. As years go by, it will also lead to continuing demands for tax increases to maintain, rebuild, and augment rail lines that never should have been built in the first place.

What is the likelihood that high-speed rail and urban rail transit can transform America, as Obama and his supporters hope? The best answer can be found by looking at other countries that have built high-speed rail. Japan has spent as much, and France has spent about half as much, per capita, on high-speed rail as we spent on the Interstate Highway System. The

San Francisco is building another \$6 billion line which, the agency's environmental impact report predicts, will not save a single traveler a single minute of time during rush hours.

average American travels 4,000 miles a year and ships 2,000 ton-miles a year on the interstates. By comparison, the average residents of France and Japan travel only 400 miles per year on high-speed trains, which carry virtually no freight. While almost every American regularly uses interstate highways, it is likely that a few French and Japanese use high-speed rail a lot and most rarely or not at all.

Interstates paid for themselves out of gas taxes, and most Americans use them almost every day. Moderate- or high-speed rail would require huge tax subsidies and would regularly serve only a small elite. Which is the better symbol for the America that President Obama wants to build? □

Reviews

"Against the State: An Introduction to Anarchist Political Theory," by Crispin Sartwell.
State University of New York Press, 2008, 135 pages.

Anarchy Again

William D. Curl

One doesn't usually think of a book on political philosophy as an entertaining read, but "Against the State" by Crispin Sartwell is the exception. It is a book about libertarian political philosophy, which the author calls anarchism. He defines anarchism as a social order characterized not by force but by voluntary association. The distinction between minimal-government libertarian philosophy and anarchism is not explained. Perhaps it does not need to be explained.

Those who are familiar with the works of such anarchists as William Godwin, Emma Goldman, Lysander Spooner, and the late Murray Rothbard (a founding editor of *Liberty*) will find interesting insights on anarchism itself. Sartwell's book is both interesting and entertaining, filled with perceptive insights and unusual comments. Sartwell has obviously been fighting in the ideological trenches and has, I assume, some scars derived from ad hominem attacks. "Everyone's political

philosophy," he says, "is the result of a personality disorder." It probably isn't true, but it makes for an interesting turn of phrase.

Sartwell believes the state is not a legitimate institution because it rests not on voluntary association but on coercion and violence. This is not new to anyone familiar with the 19th-century works of Spooner or with such contemporary authors as Rothbard and Hans-Hermann Hoppe, but Sartwell's logical exposition is an engaging discourse on difficult topics and authors. He takes aim at three political theories used to justify the existence of the state: contract theory, utilitarianism, and the theory he calls justicial justification.

Social contract is discussed, of course, with references to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes. Sartwell explains the role and importance of "the state of nature" — conceived by Hobbes as a state in which life was "nasty, brutish, and short" — in supporting the argument for the social contract. He characterizes Hobbes' state of nature as "a defense of European culture against an imagined critique by the savages of

America" (43). The social contract theory in its classical form, provides for a process of "transcendence," in which the state imparts a moral dimension to nature, by virtue of the fact that people have agreed — contracted — to erect a state. This, of course, is mythical nonsense. In reality, nature has not changed, and any theory based on such an idea is flawed from the very beginning.

In Sartwell's view, government is simply part of the chaotic violence of the state of nature. There is no moral dimension to an institution based on violence and coercion. The clarity, simplicity and deftness with which Sartwell disposes of Hobbes' assertions shows that he has been over this ground before.

An early critique of contract theory was provided by Edmund Burke, who offered another, essentially utilitarian, way of justifying the state, which it pictures as a means of constraining the viciousness of human nature. Sartwell asserts that this theory also fails to justify the state. It rests on a less theoretical, more practical basis than contract theory, but "in fact this argument in

its most general form is just another transformation of state power into an idol, into something that transcends the mere human beings who operate it. Otherwise its proponents would understand perfectly well that what they propose is no solution to the problem: to cure people of the selfishness and violence at our heart, we will heavily arm some of them and authorize them to restrain, imprison or execute others of them. If it is people you are authorizing this way you are liable to be exacerbating the problem of your own premise" (62).

Sartwell dismisses the currently fashionable rational choice theory, including that of libertarian Nobel laureate James Buchanan, "as a variety of contract theory" and "a hypothetical or idealized or utilitarian justification of state power: if there were no state, it would be Pareto-Optimal to invent one." He stipulates that one way in which this theory "is different from classical utilitarianism is that it legitimates the state as a result of individual utility-maximizing decisions rather than as a question of sheer greatest good for greatest number" (68). Nevertheless, it provides no security from the overwhelming force of the state. After quoting the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham at some length, Sartwell points out that his argument is more likely to "counsel resistance than obedience."

Turning now to the third theory with which he finds himself at odds, the justicial justification of state power, Sartwell takes as his exemplar John Rawls, perhaps the most famous of contemporary political philosophers. Here, I believe, Sartwell should have argued seriously against Rawls' proposition that state power can be justified by the state's unique ability to redistribute wealth in a "just" manner. He seems to accept this proposition, though with the caveat that a state that has the power to distribute wealth is a power that "can at any given moment be turned to unjust purposes." Instead he treats Rawls simply as an exemplar of modern utilitarian theory. "A Rawlsian just social system," he says, with heavy verbal irony, "is justified in virtue of its justice and not by anyone's actual consent to it" (76).

Ultimately, for Sartwell, all justifications for state power fail. We are left with the author's view of a political phi-

losophy based on anarchism by default. Sartwell does provide what he calls "a silhouette of anarchism" in which he explains "self-sovereignty." This idea is not new. Previous approaches, such as that of Hoppe, have proceeded to build a political philosophy from Locke's assertion of self ownership. This seems a logical beginning, but Sartwell states that the individualistic philosophy of Thoreau and Emerson is his beginning point. It may be the familiar argument, but now labeled "Thoreau" instead of "Locke."

The author does admit that there is one individualist political theory that may work without resort to anarchism, the theory embodied in Randy Barnett's

"Restoring the Lost Constitution." Barnett offers a libertarian interpretation of the Constitution as a document authorizing a very limited sphere of state activity. This, Sartwell indicates, might actually justify state power.

A serious flaw in this book is the author's decision to defer a full exposition of the anarchist political philosophy to a future volume. Obviously this is the usual academic practice of publishing the same work over and over again under different titles, with slightly changed content. Perhaps academic tenure and promotion require this, but a full exposition of the author's philosophy should have been included in this volume and not a future one.

Notes on Contributors

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Another flaw is that Sartwell fails to mention Walter Block, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, or Murray Rothbard, all of whom arrived at a political philosophy similar to his own by studying the work of Ludwig von Mises and the "Austrian" school of economics. I don't

know whether this omission results from choice or oversight. Nevertheless, political scientists, together with many libertarians who are not professionals in the field, will find this "introduction" to anarchism insightful and worthwhile. □

"A Government Ill Executed: The Decline of the Federal Service and How to Reverse It," by Paul C. Light. Harvard University Press, 2008, 278 pages.

Government as God

James L. Payne

We have seen quite a string of books recently by authors who severely criticize big government for waste, error, and corruption, yet who continue to have a passionate faith in it. Perhaps the first was Philip Howard's 1994 jeremiad, *"The Death of Common Sense."* Paul C. Light is the latest to join this genre. He begins his work pointing to 18 recent failures in federal administration, including security breaches at nuclear labs, Hurricane Katrina mis-cues, porous borders, and the subprime mortgage meltdown. He says the federal government is burdened with bloated upper management, cumbersome hiring systems, loss of accountability, and uninspired employees mainly interested in pay and benefits. "The federal service," he says, "is suffering its greatest crisis since it was founded."

This wouldn't surprise those familiar with the writings of von Mises and Hayek, who pointed out that a central coercive agency could never have the knowledge to wisely manage the millions of comings and goings in a large

society. Inefficiency and folly are inevitable, and, just as inevitable, the public scorn that mismanagement reaps. Alas, Light never glimpses this problem of complexity. He still believes big government can succeed. It just needs to be reformed — some more.

His 28 remedies are remarkably lame.

Aware that the federal government is somehow overloaded, he proposes that somebody develop and impose "a sorting methodology for determining the importance, difficulty, and success of the federal government's mission, and jettison missions that are no longer relevant." He fails to notice that we already have such a mechanism. It's the cumbersome maelstrom called politics, and the idea that senators, governors, mayors, employee unions, mass media, lobbyists, and Al Gore would sit quietly by while this commission jettisoned government missions is embarrassingly naive.

Another of Light's proposals is "a moratorium on reform." He's right to complain that decades of executive branch reforms, piled on by every Tom, Dick, and Harry, have multiplied con-

fusion and inconsistency. But where does that leave Paul, with his suitcase-full of 28 additional reforms?

One of his proposals would delight paleoconservatives. He wants to take a meat-ax to the higher bureaucracy. "Reduce the number of managers by half at all levels of government," he urges. Light is, understandably, vexed by the "thickening" of management layers in the federal government. Between the line employee carrying out policy and the top brass there are now between 25 and 60 layers of command: deputy undersecretaries, associate deputy undersecretaries, and so on. (Organization charts show there's even an "Associate principal deputy assistant secretary," I kid you not.) As Light points out, these many layers mean that commands going down are garbled or ignored, and information flowing up is distorted or blocked.

But Light fails to realize that all of these positions have responsibilities stemming from law, regulation, or presidential directive. You couldn't eliminate 3,000 federal executive positions without jettisoning thousands of programs that someone thinks are important. Indeed, even to attempt it, you would have to first create, in every agency, a deputy assistant secretary in charge of eliminating deputy assistant secretaries.

Light is concerned about low employee morale. To improve it, he proposes (this is his "reform" D7) that everyone "Talk incessantly about the important contributions federal employees make through their service." To protect sensitive souls in the bureaucracy, "Congress and the president can help by stopping their constant attacks on big government." Again, Light exempts himself from his advice: federal administrators will hardly be cheered by his book about "government ill-executed."

The solution to cumbersome, disgraceful big government is, of course, much smaller government, but this solution eludes Light. He does not suggest even one federal program that should be cut or abandoned, nor does he note any principles to limit federal involvement, such as the idea that Washington should not do what local government can do. He is convinced that the federal government could do everything well if people would heed his sugges-

tions (and ignore everyone else's), and if they would stop trying to "starve" it (yes, Light considers \$2,800,000,000,000 a starvation diet).

Light notes that he was a senior consultant for the first National Commission on the Public Service in 1989, and observes that all of the dysfunctional trends reported then "have worsened since." Yet 19 years later, he still believes that effective, efficient big government is possible.

The only explanation I can see for his steadfast loyalty is that the federal government is his church. Something of

his reverent attitude is revealed in his observations — entirely unexplained — that "the federal government accomplishes the impossible every day," and that federal employees "make miracles every day." This is the language of swooning faith, not empirical analysis.

Treating government as a metaphysical entity, as Light seems to do, puts it beyond rational evaluation. When one prays to a god for an end to floods or epidemics and the floods and epidemics get worse, one does not conclude there is no god. One prays some more. □

"Watchmen," by Alan Moore. DC Comics, 1986, 420 pages.

"Watchmen," directed by Zack Snyder. Warner Brothers, 2009, 163 minutes.

The Two Watchmen

Ross Levatter

"Watchmen" is a graphic novel written in the mid-1980s, a complex work combining text and images to create an alternative reality, a world where "superheroes" really exist. What would a world be like where masked vigilantes roam the streets, and where an apparently all-powerful super being — nigh unto a god — rises from the ashes of an American physicist, a "living H-bomb" ominously named Dr. Manhattan by the American military? How would their continued presence affect culture, science, and American foreign policy and military capacity?

How would police react? Would they get tired of competition and go on strike, telling American citizens they have to choose between "Badges and Masks"? If Congress passed a bill that outlawed masked vigilantism, would

the superheroes simply retire, or might one of them refuse to be told by authorities that he can no longer right wrongs and pursue injustice?

Moore's world is one of increasing military tension, as a superhero-backed America wins in Vietnam, repeals the 22nd Amendment, and allows Nixon — in his 5th term as the story begins — to outlast FDR. This is a world of military overreach (the United States rather than Russia invades Afghanistan in the 1980s) and a world without Watergate (rookie investigative journalists Woodward and Bernstein are found dead in a garage before breaking their story; some suspect a masked vigilante, the Comedian, who continues to work as a government operative).

As the story starts, in late 1985, with all apparently looking well for the American empire but with the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists advancing the

Doomsday Clock toward midnight, the Comedian is thrown through his 30th floor apartment window, dying in a pool of his own blood on the pavement below.

Thus begins a 420-page novel that has the literary texture and density of the works of Thomas Pynchon. An entire back history of masked adventurers is created, beginning in the late 1930s — the same time superheroes first appeared in comics in our world — some joining together to fight crime as a league, some assisting the Allies in fighting World War II.

As this group ages and dies, a new generation comes into existence, including the godlike Dr. Manhattan. Mixed in with the book's blending of background history and murder mystery, one finds references — some clear, others oblique — to Martin Scorsese's "Taxi Driver," Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane," and the "cut up" technique of William Burroughs' "Nova Express," as well as various Egyptian, Roman, and Greek deities; the Bible; and works of 20th-century science fiction and music, just to scratch the surface.

The graphic novel format — which combines the advantages of books (you can easily go back and reassess passages) and movies (you can make points visually, not just textually) — is fully exploited. Philosophic issues of determinism vs. free will are evoked, and a major conflict of the novel can be posed as the choice between deontologic and teleologic ethics. The psychological drives of people who would choose to become superheroes are explored in depth.

"Watchmen" contains a comic-within-a-comic — "Tales of the Black Freighter" — similar to Hamlet's play-within-a-play. "Black Freighter" tells the tale of a shipwrecked sailor, desperately trying to get off an island and reach his town prior to the arrival of a pirate death ship that will rape and pillage the community. It is a tale of moral ambiguity, the sailor pursuing what seems to be the right course throughout, but with a disastrous result. The pirate comic provides a subtext and allegory for the main story but is a fascinating read on its own.

With every indication of a deterioration in international political stability, with the Doomsday Clock ticking

inexorably closer to midnight, one former masked adventurer, Adrian Veidt, honed to physical and intellectual perfection, has decided that the only way to stop World War III and the death of billions in a nuclear holocaust is to trick the two world powers into uniting and cooperating. To achieve this accord, he designs a "big lie" to convince the world that it has been invaded by an alien species, teleporting what appears to be a single giant alien scout into central Manhattan, and causing the death of half the city of New York.

Here is the moral dilemma of the novel: is it moral to kill over 3 million people in an effort to save over 6 billion? If your answer is an immediate "No," ask yourself what you think of President Truman, who used this very justification to drop atomic weapons on the citizens of two peaceful Japanese cities in August 1945, in order to save lives.

Here is the political dilemma of the novel: how do you protect yourself from your protectors? Who watches the watchmen? Who guards the guardians? *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* How can you protect yourself when power tends to corrupt and superpowers corrupt absolutely?

The novel is a literary and artistic triumph. It is the only graphic novel to appear in Time's list of the 100 most influential novels of the 20th century. It is still widely sold, read, referenced, quoted, and adored two decades after its original publication.

And, until recently, it was considered unfilmable. The book has justly been described as having a crystalline structure, multifaceted and densely connected, with an internal lattice linking each part to all the others. There's simply too much to include in a movie, and yet nothing can be cut without a significant loss of integrity. A series of producers and directors has looked into the possibility of filming it, but all gave up. Until recently.

Director Zack Snyder, a "Watchmen" aficionado already familiar with transforming graphic novels to the silver screen from his work on "300," offered to try. It was a courageous effort. But did it work, or did it turn out like the Batman wannabes seen at the beginning of "Dark Knight": well-intentioned, wanting to imitate a noble

hero, but just getting into trouble in the end?

The movie captures well the moral bleakness of the novel:

- The implacability of Rorschach, the lone masked vigilante who refuses to stop fighting crime after passage of the Keene Act, outlawing masks: "We do not do this because it is permitted . . . We do this because we are compelled."
- The gradual distancing from human concerns by Dr. Manhattan, a god who more and more seeks to be free of people and their petty squabbles: "Don't you see the futility of asking me to save a world that I no longer have any stake in?"
- The railing impotence, physical and existential, of being unable to control events, a feeling that vanishes for Nite Owl once he puts on the mask: "No matter how black it got, when I looked through these goggles . . . everything was clear as day."

Snyder renders the scenes from the novel with devotional detail, recreating many scenes directly. The surface of the crystal looks amazingly realistic, capturing the novel as a glove does a hand, a mask does a face. But when we look more deeply, the lattice is incomplete, the connections less clear, the motivations underdeveloped. Questions remain unresolved:

- Why does the Comedian confide in Moloch, an arch-enemy? His motives are clear in the novel but not in the movie.
- Why does Dr. Manhattan agree to go along with Veidt? It is clear in the novel but less so in the movie.
- What is (and what is the point of) the New Frontiersman office at the movie's end, where Rorschach drops off his journal? It is a clever ending in the book but a confusing *deus ex machina* in the movie.

To pack so dense a novel into less than three hours, a few things had to go. Snyder modified the ending — no giant alien creature is transported into New York — though millions still die and the moral dilemma of killing millions to save billions remains; lost, also,

are the crystalline linkages of the novel. No fake giant alien means no island of scientists and writers creating a giant alien. The movie never explains how the Comedian comes across this information (chancing on the island is how the Comedian discovered Ozymandias' plot to kill half of New York), making the scene between him and Moloch unmoored, or should I say unMoored.

Other modifications are meant, I suspect, to satisfy Hollywood's concerns about morality. The movie mysteriously ages the original Silk Spectre two years (from 65 to 67) and ages Blake, the Comedian, six years (born in 1918 rather than 1924). Why? I can only imagine it's because Hollywood is more comfortable with a 22-year-old man attempting to rape a 22-year-old woman than a scene in which a 16-year-old boy tries to rape a 20-year-old woman.

The movie shines most when it adds touches not in the book but consistent with the mythos Moore created. This is most striking in the opening montage, which creates some clever vignettes not found in the novel. For example, while "The Times, They Are A-Changin'" plays in the background, there's a six-second scene of the 1930s, with the original Nite Owl in his prime stopping a gun-toting petty criminal in an alleyway. Behind Nite Owl, on a wall, are posters of Batman. These posters represent the cover of "Detective #27," which contained the first appearance of the Batman. Along the left side of the screen are two well-dressed men and a woman with a pearl necklace. No doubt most moviegoers fail to get it, but they represent Dr. Thomas Wayne; his wife, Martha; and their butler/driver Alfred. Nite Owl (a Batman archetype) is stopping the killing of Bruce Wayne's parents, preventing the very act that turns Wayne into Batman. It's a very clever riff for the comic geek crowd. The movie is full of stuff like this, suggesting good sales of the Blu-Ray DVD, which fans will study frame by frame.

The "Watchmen" movie closely adheres to the novel's theme and plot, much more than the movie "V for

Ross Levatter, Liberty Contributing Editor, has completed a 240-page book analyzing the popular novel "Watchmen." For more information on "The Watchmen Guide: A detailed reference to the mythology, ethics, philosophy, references, and hidden 'Easter Eggs' in Watchmen," contact him at dav_ross@me.com.

Vendetta" did to Moore's other famous graphic novel. A significant amount of Moore's felicitous prose is retained in the movie, a major plus. But the movie often feels hollow, like a shelled-out crystal, unable to hold the weight of the plot. It would have been better as a two-part movie, much like "Kill Bill," Volumes 1 and 2, with the second movie released a few months after the first.

Snyder has something similar in mind. Remember that comic-within-a-comic? "Tales of the Black Freighter" doesn't appear in this movie, but it will be coming out in late March as a DVD-iTunes download. It will be done in animation, and I expect it will be a fairly literal translation of Moore's pirate tale. Later in the year, an expanded DVD will be released with scenes cut from

the movie, adding and interweaving the pirate story.

Who watches the *Watchmen*? It's a question Hollywood and political philosophers have long asked. One week after its debut, the movie is doing very well among the initiated (a niche audience). It is doing less well with the general public. It is more cerebral than many want in a "superhero" movie, yet less thoughtful than it could have been. At 2 hours, 43 minutes, it is longer than most movie viewers prefer, yet shorter than true fans would have preferred. The desired political answer to the question of who watches the *Watchmen* — all of us — is sadly not going to be the response this well-intentioned attempt at the possibly impossible will receive. □

"Sunshine Cleaning," directed by Christine Jeffs. Backlot Pictures, 2008, 102 minutes.

Hurry Up and Own

Jo Ann Skousen

While President Obama tries to equalize Americans by taxing the rich and giving to the poor, along comes a dark little comedy that celebrates the business of business: making profits.

"Sunshine Cleaning" tells the story of a close-knit but somewhat dysfunctional family trying to get ahead. As the film opens, Norah (Emily Blunt) waits tables at a diner for minimum wage and hates it; her sister Rose (Amy Adams) cleans houses for minimum wage and hates that too.

When Rose's policeman boyfriend (Steve Zahn) covers a suicide and overhears a crime-scene clean-up crew bidding \$3,000 for the job, he immediately thinks of Rose. He offers to send some jobs her way, and "Sunshine Cleaning Company" is born. Rose hires her sister, buys an old van, and slaps on her

rubber gloves. Business is business, and this business can be lucrative if you can just hold your nose.

"Sunshine Cleaning" is a dark comedy that's just a little too dark to be hilarious. Yes, there are the expected humorous scenes of gore and smell as the two pretty and petite women scour crusty blood with tooth brushes and haul bloodstained mattresses to the dumpster (before they learn that this is not the accepted way to dispose of hazardous materials). But the film tries a little too hard and loses the frothiness of, say, "Little Miss Sunshine." Moreover, the undercurrent of sadness caused by the film's slowly revealed backstory is just too strong, pulling the actors under time and again. It's a good film, but not a great one.

What I really enjoyed about this film was the tenacity with which the family members pursue business opportuni-

ties. When she isn't cleaning up bodily fluids, Rose is enrolled in a real estate course. And she and Norah aren't the only entrepreneurs in the family; their father (Alan Arkin) and Rose's young son, Oscar (Jason Spevack), are hustling business too — first wholesaling fancy popcorn to candy stores and then supplying fresh-frozen shrimp to local restaurants.

When Oscar befriends Winston (Clifton Collins, Jr.), the man who owns the cleaning supply store that Rose uses, he immediately begins wondering aloud how Winston might turn his hobby, building model airplanes, into a money-making enterprise. They all seem to have learned two important truths: you don't get rich working for someone else, and no one is going to hand you a golden ticket. But entrepreneurship can be one of the surest and most satisfying ways out of poverty.

The students I teach in my night job have figured this out too. By day I teach English classes to traditional students at Mercy College, located on the Hudson River in Dobbs Ferry, New York. But two nights a week I head up the river to Sing Sing, a maximum security correctional facility where my husband and I teach in Mercy's degree-seeking program for inmates (privately funded, I am proud to add).

There we have met some of the best motivated, hardest working students of our teaching careers. They flock to Mark's classes on economics and eagerly sign up for his elective on entrepreneurship. One of his students recently told him with a sheepish grin, "Professor, you're turning me into a Republican!" "Libertarian, I hope!" Mark corrected him good naturedly. So far, not a single graduate of the prison's college program has returned to prison; the recidivism rate is an astounding zero. College has been their ticket to both self-respect and success. They also recognize that starting their own business is their surest road to independence.

What President Obama seems to lose sight of in his eagerness to level the playing field is that there is a reason some jobs pay more than others. Some people have sacrificed time and money to attend college. Others have risked their savings and sacrificed short-term pleasures to invest in a business. Still others are just born smarter or luckier.

And sometimes the reason a particular job pays more is simply that no one actually wants to do it, but if the price is high enough, someone will take it. Usually those jobs do not require higher education, smarts, or luck. They just require willingness. The free market in wages may not be perfectly fair, but it is preferable to the medieval way of getting undesirable jobs done: con-

quering a country and forcing the losers to become slaves.

Rose is embarrassed when a high-school friend sees her cleaning houses for someone else's company, but she is proud and invigorated by owning her own company, even though she is still cleaning up other people's messes. That's an important insight, and worth the price of a movie ticket. □

"Confessions of a Shopaholic," directed by P. J. Hogan.
Touchstone Pictures, 2009, 104 minutes.

Hurry Up and Waste

Jo Ann Skousen

"Confessions of a Shopaholic" is based on one of those ubiquitous "pink books" you see on bookstore display tables with whimsical sketches of modern young women on their pink and white dust jackets. Usually set in Manhattan, these pseudo-autobiographical stories reveal the joys and foibles of trying to find success in the tantalizing but shark-infested waters of publishing (usually for fashion magazines) or entertainment (usually as assistant producers).

In "Confessions," the protagonist, Rebecca Bloomwood (Isla Fisher), dreams of becoming a fashion writer for "Alette," a knock off of "Vogue." When her first interview doesn't work out, she applies for a job at the magazine's sister publication, "Successful Saving," hoping to be transferred to "Alette" from within the company. Ironically, lovable Becky knows nothing about saving, having maxed out all of her credit cards by purchasing closets full of high couture fashions and accessories.

In fact, Rebecca proudly defends her credit-card sprees by explaining, "I earn 1% back on everything I buy!" How's that for successful saving? Somehow it works and she lands the job, googling

her way through research projects to popular success.

The film is formulaic to a fault: boy-meets-girl under the obligatory false pretense; they break up when the pretense comes to light, just before she is going to confess it to him; they reunite as she rejects a financially lucrative but somehow morally reprehensible job offer from the company that has been her lifelong dream. (Being financially responsible doesn't seem popular in Hollywood right now.) Modern romantic comedies such as this one trace their lineage to the great madcap movies of the 1930s ("It Happened One Night" being the best), but the formula is beginning to wear thin.

Moreover, veteran actors John Goodman, Joan Cusack, Lynn Redgrave, and Kristen Scott Thomas are wasted in cartoonish performances that have to be blamed on P.J. Hogan's heavy-handed direction. The film is simply not very good.

Nevertheless, it is worth viewing — or at least discussing — as a parable for modern life, when easy credit and consumer spending have nearly bankrupted the nation. "They didn't need money. They had magic cards!" Rebecca gushes about her childhood discovery of credit. Her naivete is matched by our

modern Congress, which has discovered the "magic" of creating money by "selling bonds" — a clever euphemism for deficit spending, which is itself a euphemism for borrowing money.

Rebecca is able to continue her spending sprees in the way Congress finances its own sprees — by using other people's money. When she loses her first job before landing her new one, her roommate and best friend Suze (Krysten Ritter) generously tears up the rent check Rebecca has just given her. Then, lest we feel sorry for Suze, she adds, "It's my parents' apartment anyway." Like Congress, she sees nothing wrong with forcing those who have saved and invested to bail out those who have borrowed and consumed. Predictably, Rebecca responds to her friend's generosity by gushing, "I'm going to buy you the best gift!" Rebecca also turns to her parents for help. She does everything except stop spending.

The film highlights several tricks of those on the edge of solvency. For example, when her coworkers purchase a group gift for a retiring employee, Rebecca gathers all the cash and puts the purchase on her credit card. By the time her statement comes, of course, the money has been spent. In another scene, she buys a \$120 scarf by charging it in increments of \$10-\$30 to five different, nearly maxed-out cards and bumming the final \$20 from a complete stranger at a hot dog stand. She does this with the perky pride and feisty determination that are endemic to the genre.

Hounded by debt collectors, Rebecca decides to rid herself of "toxic assets" by selling all her clothes, shoes, and accessories. But unlike most garage sale impresarios, whose assets are sold at pennies on the dollar, Rebecca manages to rake in enough dough to pay off all her debts — a whopping "sixteen thousand, twelve hundred dollars, and change." (Why it isn't simply \$17,200 I'll never know — but that alone demonstrates how little the writers understand about money.)

Many compulsive shoppers suffer from depression; they use shopping to give them a short-lived lift. In one revealing scene, Rebecca exudes, "When I shop the world gets better." Then she adds seriously, "And then it's not anymore." One of my roommates in college was like that. Lonely and

depressed, she went shopping nearly every day. Periodically she would grow disgusted with her binge spending and initiate a purge, selling everything she owned at a fraction of its cost. Days later, depressed about school and realizing that she literally had “nothing to wear,” she would pull out daddy’s credit cards to go shopping again.

Rebecca has a similar attitude. By the end of the film she has used up all her credit with her banks, her parents, and her friends. But does that end her spending sprees? *Au contraire!* After turning down a lucrative job for ludicrous reasons, she hooks a wealthy sugar daddy (Hugh Dancy), who “speaks Prada” and returns to her first

passion: fabulous shoes. Like Obama, she has figured out how to buy what she wants and stick it to the wealthy. Watch out ants! The grasshoppers are now running the show.

All of this could have created a humorous, revealing, cautionary tale, if Rebecca actually sacrificed pleasures to get out of debt and eventually learned something from her experience. But although she does acknowledge that she has a problem, she never overcomes it. In fact, she revels in it, like a dog in poo. With millions of Americans losing their hard-earned savings while being forced to bail out those who took on too much debt, this simply is not the right time for a film that celebrates waste. □

“Gomorra,” directed by Matteo Garrone. Fandango, 2008, 137 minutes.

Hobbesian Hell

Gary Jason

The Camorra is a crime syndicate, based in Naples, that has been around since the 18th century — making it one of the oldest such organizations in Italy. Comprising about 150 “clans,” with perhaps 7,000 hardcore members and many times more people associated with it in varying degrees, the Camorra makes its money the old-fashioned way: through drugs, extortion, gambling, prostitution, “protection,” and general racketeering. It then uses the proceeds to gain control of legitimate enterprises. For example, it now controls the milk, fish, and coffee trade in the area, as well as thousands of bakeries. Recently it has discovered a new racket: the illicit disposal of toxic waste.

Directed by Matteo Garrone, “Gomorra” is a gritty, realistic movie about the Camorra’s effect upon

Neapolitan society, based on a book by Roberto Saviano. The title cleverly plays on the similarity of the organization’s name to that of the biblical Gomorrah, one of two cities (the other was Sodom) where corruption had become so pervasive that God removed the few good people and then utterly destroyed the rest.

For fans of American gangster flicks, this film will be jarring. In the “Godfather” series and a hundred clones thereof, gangsters are often portrayed as sympathetic family men, with the leads almost always played by handsome, charismatic actors. The mobsters in this film are portrayed as brutish, nasty mutts — which is altogether more realistic, in my view.

To cite one instance: in the opening scene, we see several gangsters in a tanning salon, laughing and strutting in their Speedos, shortly before being

assassinated by rival mobsters. The scene is portrayed convincingly, to say the least.

The movie weaves together five interacting stories of people affected by the Camorra. The first story is of two punks, Marco (Marco Macor) and Ciro (Ciro Petrone), who dream of making it big as gangsters. They can recite lines from “Scarface” by heart and act out scenes. When the boys spot some Camorra men stashing stolen guns, they steal some for themselves, eventually using them to hold up a casino. As the story develops we see how these enterprising young men are treated by the mob.

Then there is the story of Franco (Tony Servillo) and Roberto (Carmine Paternoster). Franco is teaching Roberto the toxic waste business. To cut costs and increase profits, the Camorra businessmen mix highly dangerous industrial waste with ordinary garbage, or surreptitiously bury it in abandoned mines. This pollutes the groundwater and poisons people. In one fascinating scene, a drum breaks open at one of the mines and the contents spill on a driver, who is severely burned. When Franco refuses to send for an ambulance, the other drivers refuse to drive the trucks, so he replaces them — with local boys! Roberto is ambivalent about this “trade,” and we learn how he deals with the conflict.

The third story tells of Toto (Salvatore Abruzzese), a 13-year-old delivery boy who worms his way into the good graces of a gang of dope dealers by returning a gun to them, and some drugs that they ditched. He is initiated into the gang by being shot while wearing a bulletproof vest, and there is a nice scene of him admiring the resulting welt as though it were a badge of courage. The eventual role he is called upon to play is something he never anticipates.

The fourth story is about a minor player in the organization, Don Ciro (Gianfelice Imparato), who gets caught up in a violent clan schism. His story is the least compelling, since it has no clear resolution. But the fifth story is fascinating. In it, a fashion-design tailor, Pasquale (Salvatore Cantalupo), decides to take the job of training Chinese immigrant garment workers at night. One problem, though: the Chinese are up

against clothing manufacturers who are controlled or protected by the Camorra. The outcome is melancholy.

Though I have never seen these actors before, I found them excellent across the board. Especially compelling were Salvatore Cantalupo as the hapless tailor and Carmine Paternoster as the conflicted Roberto.

The cinematography is extremely effective, conveying a bleak, urban underclass world of dreary poverty. This film is not likely to increase tourism to Naples. But it is refreshing that this film does not suggest, as so many do, that everyone in Italy is a member of the mob. Most Neapolitans try to live their lives productively in spite of the

Camorra, not because of it.

I recommend this movie especially to people of an anarchistic bent, who believe that a world without government would be a paradise. I view these folk as "mirror Marxists," since Marxists believe that a world totally controlled by government would be a paradise. Garrone's *Gomorra* suggests that an anarchistic setting, in which stable law enforcement doesn't exist, would result in a Hobbesian hell, with gangs fighting internecine mini-wars with rival gangs and making normal, productive life impossible for everyone else. Watching "*Gomorra*," you get the feeling that having a few Untouchables on hand wouldn't hurt. □

"Unsanctioned Voice: Garet Garrett, Journalist of the Old Right," by Bruce Ramsey. Caxton Publishers, 2008, 304 pages.

Garrett *the Unique*

Stephen Cox

Liberty senior editor Bruce Ramsey has written the first real biography of Garet Garrett (1878–1954), an important precursor of today's American libertarian movement. There was an earlier attempt at biography, Carl Ryan's "*Profit's Prophet*" (1989). That was a brief, primitive, naive effort. Ramsey is so far from naive as to stipulate that his book is only a "kind of a biography," because many of the documents on which a "fully fleshed-out" history of his subject would be based — letters, diaries, financial papers, and so on — have so far not been discovered (ix).

But Ramsey is too modest. True, he can't answer every biographical ques-

tion. He can't say, for instance, why Garrett turned up, at some period of his life, missing a few of his fingers — an odd fate for one of America's leading journalists. But Ramsey has done an extraordinary job of putting his story together — pursuing documentary evidence, contacting people who knew Garrett or who knew people who knew him, gathering and learning from Garrett's millions of words of fiction, history, and journalism. For several years, Ramsey has been bringing out edited volumes of Garrett's newspaper and magazine writing — "*Salvos Against the New Deal*" (2002), "*Defend America First*," (2003), and "*Insatiable Government*" (2005). Now, drawing on many years of research, he caps his achievement with the current volume.

But energy and devotion are only partial qualifications for a good biographer. Equally important are taste and judgment, and Ramsey shows both in abundance. He knows how to gather evidence, but he also knows how to weigh it, how to speculate beyond it, and how to keep speculation from going too far. He communicates the known facts (usually known because he has found them) and lets readers make their own informed judgments about debatable issues. Another qualification for biographical writing, one that is usually helpful but always dangerous, is a primordial sympathy with one's subject, the kind of sympathy that feels its way into motives and intentions that only people who share them may be able to identify and explain. Many biographers are conquered by their sympathies; they write not about their subjects but on behalf of them, as mere spokesmen and apologists. Ramsey never does this. He maintains the same objective distance from Garrett that Garrett tried to maintain in his own assessments of the world.

At the start of "*Unsanctioned Voice*," Ramsey discusses his puzzled first acquaintance, at age 16, with Garrett's "*The People's Pottage*." He discovered it in a rightwing bookstore; yet it appeared to be a work of the ideological left, criticizing America's transformation into an "empire." On second thought, however, it didn't seem to fit on the left side of the aisle: "the language was wrong." Much later, Ramsey knew why; he identified Garrett's positions as libertarian (1–3).

My first acquaintance with Garrett was puzzling too. I bought one of his books because R.W. Bradford, the founder of this journal, told me it was interesting. It was the same book, "*The People's Pottage*." What struck me was that the author had a peculiar name and wrote in a peculiar style. The essays that comprised the volume had titles like "*The Revolution Was*" and "*Ex America*." It was as if the author were slapping the English language to see whether it was still alive. Although the book was supposed to be about the intricacies of 20th-century American history, it began in a purely philosophical landscape, as naked as a desert: "A time came when the only people who had ever been free began to ask: What

is freedom? Who wrote its articles — the strong or the weak? Was it an absolute good? Could there be such a thing as unconditional freedom, short of anarchy? Given the answer to be no, then was freedom an eternal truth or a political formula?" I didn't know how I would respond to those questions. I didn't know which "people" had been asking them, or to what purpose. Garrett's approach put me off.

I did understand the title of his book. It was a biblical allusion, and a good one. In Genesis 25:29–34, Esau "despise[s] his birthright" and sells it to Jacob for a mess of pottage. In the same way, Garrett argues, Americans sold their birthright of liberty for the material benefits, the pottage, of the welfare state. But I was mystified by what the author said about himself in the packaging of the book. He said that he dwelt in "a cave on a riverbank at Tuckahoe, New Jersey" (4, 249). That was too biblical for me. I wasn't sure that I wanted anything to do with a prophet who lived in a cave, and bragged about it. I couldn't know, before Ramsey explained it, that the "cave" was what Garrett called his study.

The false impression was Garrett's fault, not mine. Or was it a fault? Garrett was a man who published what he thought, in the way he thought it. The price of that privilege might be an occasional misunderstanding in the mind of a teenage boy, or the minds of other inattentive people, and a consequent loss of audience. But Garrett must have thought it was worth it, and he may have been right. Few really attentive readers would want him to write in any other way. The price of my own inattention was many years without the enjoyment of Garrett's unique literary gifts.

More about them later. First, the man. Ramsey's writer was the scion of a midwestern farm family, among whom he was known by the generic name of Edward Peter Garrett. "Garet" was a pen name he gave himself at some point, and "waited too long to abandon" (21). At an early age he absconded from the humble home from which all good American writers are supposed to abscond, bummed around, then somehow landed a job with a newspaper. After that, he had many jobs with magazines and newspapers. By the time he reached early middle age, they had

become very good jobs — member of the editorial council of *The New York Times*, managing editor of the *New York Tribune*, manager of the editorial page of the *Saturday Evening Post*, the premier journal of the American middle class.

Garrett specialized in financial reporting, and for more than two decades was the confidential crony, unofficial adviser, and sometimes secret messenger of high-level politicians and financiers (AS 218–25). He wrote books about economics and technology; he also wrote novels with economic and technological themes. His interest, and besetting concern, was the economic flourishing of the United States, which he believed could happen only in the context of limited, and normally minimal, government. His fear of foreign involvements and the influence of European political systems made him an isolationist. He opposed America's entry into World War II and had to leave his last good job when the *Post* repented of its isolationism. He spent the final years of his life meditating on America's past and future, and sometimes writing about it. His final book, posthumously published, was a history of America, *"The American Story."* It is actually an anthology of essays summarizing his thoughts about economics and history.

In the 1950s and 1960s, what remained of Garrett's popularity crystallized in obscure parts of the conservative and anticommunist Right. That is where it stayed until Ramsey began introducing him to a wider intellectual audience. Ramsey's work is an important part of a larger project, the continuing work of many hands: the reconstruction, in detail, of the early history of libertarianism. After H.L. Mencken, Garrett was probably the most prolific American author with radical libertarian ideas. He was even more prolific than Isabel Paterson, whose newspaper columns alone came to about two million words. And in his good years, Garrett was probably the most prominent American of libertarian leanings — again, after Mencken. He was more prominent than Paterson, more prominent than Albert Jay Nock, and much more prominent than Rose Wilder Lane. When, on Jan. 18, 1930, Garrett was shot three times by a ban-

dit in an exclusive speakeasy in New York — he had contemptuously confronted the holdup man, exclaiming, "What's this? What's this all about?" — the affair was front-page news (139–43). The remarkably detailed reporting featured Garrett, "one of the best known authors in America on financial and economic themes," hospitalized and in "considerable pain, becom[ing] angry at some of the questions put by detectives" and "throwing a small porcelain cuspidor" at one of them ("Garet Garrett Shot in a Cafe Attack," *New York Times*, Jan. 19, 1930; "Hunt Bandit Suspect in Garrett Shooting," *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1930). When, later in that year, he went to Los Angeles and was hospitalized for indigestion, he again made national news: "Garet Garrett Is Ill"; "Garet Garrett Recovering" (*New York Times*, July 23, July 25, 1930).

Sinclair Lewis, who was by no means sympathetic to "rightist" or pro-capitalist ideas, nevertheless had good judgment about Garrett's character and stature. In *"It Can't Happen Here"* (1935), Lewis' novel about the coming of an American dictatorship, Garrett is one of 13 journalists who have the honor of being arrested because they refuse to become "little disciples" of fascism (Lewis 264). A few years later, according to *Time* magazine, Garrett's editorials were read like the Bible by American isolationists (196).

Of course, his writings have never been anything like the Bible to libertarians; libertarians have never had a Bible. Before Ramsey started writing about him, most late-20th-century libertarians had never heard of him. Further, as Ramsey observes, Garrett was far from "a doctrinaire libertarian" (3). He accepted the Federal Reserve System, conscription when "necessary," an ideal of national autarky, which he hoped would prevent war, and government direction of the economy in case war did break out. (It's poetic justice that, during World War II, one of his monographs, an attack on the New Deal, ran into problems because his publisher's supplies of paper were limited by the War Production Board [208].) Unlike many of today's libertarians, Garrett was alarmed by the possibility that immigration would destroy American institutions. He was afraid that "the copper woman," the

welcoming Statue of Liberty, would turn out to be an opponent of the freedom she symbolized (AS 396).

But it's time to admit the truth. Very few of the people to whom today's libertarians trace their origins — very few of the people who stood for individual liberty against the state, when the state was almost universally acclaimed and individualism was regarded by almost all thinking people as the wave of the past — were without some shocking divergence from 21st-century libertarian orthodoxy (or momentary opinion). Paterson and Lane came very close to orthodox positions, indeed contributed mightily toward creating them. Nock, however, was an advocate of the economic and political theories of Henry George, who wanted to limit the size of government but held that, ultimately, individuals have no right to own real property (see Cox, "Albert Jay Nock"). Friedrich Hayek, who had no substantial influence in America before his "Road to Serfdom" (1944), said in that book that "there is no incompatibility in principle" between individual liberty and "the state's helping to organize a comprehensive system of social insurance" (Hayek 121). He also failed to be politically correct on the immigration-and-welfare issue (Hayek 120).

It isn't clear to what extent Garrett considered himself a theorist of liberty, like the people just mentioned. If, as a chronicler and sometimes a practitioner of American politics, he fell short of today's ideals, he still understood, as few people have, the power of economic and psychological individualism, the dangers of state power, and the virtues of minimal government. His career as a financial journalist, and as an astute observer of human life, had taught him those things. And even when he wasn't being a libertarian, he had interesting reasons for the positions he took. For instance, he was not opposed, at first, to the federal income tax, because it "made the people conscious of how much government cost" — not a bad insight. (Another was the idea that the tax shouldn't just hit the highest earners, because any such policy "punished success" [31, 33].)

One of his unorthodox ideas is more important and interesting than the others. Unlike many doctrinaire libertarians, he declined to believe that

every significant issue presents a contrast between good and evil, black and white. Of the Covenant of the League of Nations — which from a pacifist point of view was actually a compelling document, one that might deserve admiration from libertarians who considered war "the health of the state" — Garrett said, "In an ideal world it would have been a perfect moral contract; only, in that kind of world it would have been perhaps unnecessary. In a world with right always on one side and wrong always on the other, a clear line between, it still would have been a grand commitment. But what did we know to be true of the real world?" (AS 218–19).

Garrett wasn't saying that we don't know anything, that we can't make any decisive judgments. Far from it. He didn't hesitate to use the word "wicked" when he found himself on firm moral ground (e.g., at AM 226). That word, in fact, grew frequent with him. It's refreshing to find a writer on economics and history using such words, instead of insinuating his ethical judgments as if they were written in a spirit of pure amorality. It is somewhat less refreshing to see modern libertarians exhausting their store of adjectives, once they've used up their supplies of "wicked" and "heroic." Every religion — even the pure cult of the Manichees — has honored moral ideals and the elect who are thought to attain them, but it has also acknowledged that most people cannot or, perhaps, should not try to do so. A powerful ideal is a powerful temptation, to all kinds of bad conduct. And some of our ideals may, just possibly, be mistaken.

What do we know to be true of the real world? It was Montaigne's question, long before it was Garrett's. We know some things, but we can't know everything, and in our lust for sainthood we may destroy our own cause. Garrett had seen many causes destroy themselves. Some of them he had endorsed, only to find out better. As he grew older, he became more vigorous in advocating unpopular notions, but also more inclined to identify purism as the enemy of justifiable ideals.

In "The American Story," he discusses America's "devastating" disappointment with World War I. He knew what he was talking about: he had fervently supported the war effort, once

America joined the war. He presents his own devastating history of our involvement (AS 195–213). Yet there is another point he wants to make. He is concerned that people like him — intellectual idealists, mostly — can go too far in criticizing patriotic fervor. There are genuine ideals that they may fail to discern, ideals that rise up behind the sordid facts of chauvinism and obscurantism and provide the only perspective from which such things can rightly be condemned. After the Great War, he wrote, "Intellectualism turned cynical and destructive. The foundations of belief began to erode; all the admirable myths with which the people had lived happily from the beginning of their national life were submitted to objective treatment, the question being not whether they were good or bad, but whether they were factually true. Heroes back to Washington, the motives of the Founding Fathers, the story of the Constitution, the legends of patriotism, were all alike, as the word was, debunked" (AS 227).

Garrett was not calling for a larger production of lies or a repudiation of objectivity; he was calling for the preservation of a national idealism that respects the "good," even when it expresses itself in "myths." The Apollonian myth was admirable; so was the myth of the Founders — although, as Garrett knew and said, that myth was mainly true.

One of Ramsey's canny observations is this: "Garrett would not follow an idea for the sake of consistency." This may not sound quite right. Consistency is akin to honesty. How can you embrace A and not reject not-A? But then Ramsey quotes a letter from Garrett to his friend Bernard Baruch: "Intelligence . . . wants to solve all the problems at once; it is wisdom that knows better" (188). That puts a brighter light on it. You may be faced with a fact; let's call it A. Another fact appears; call it not-A. You don't know how to reconcile the apparent contradiction. Should you pretend to do so, and call your work a theory or an ideology? Are you willing to attract followers on that basis? No, surely not. Wisdom waits. It may seem feckless, but it waits. That may be one reason why Garrett, unlike some other libertarian thinkers, didn't try to attract disciples. He didn't want them. He was

content with whatever facts he found, and whatever judgments he could make of them, subject to revision. (Disciples never want revisions.) Writing to Lane about certain problems of metaphysics, he says, "I am the measuring worm that comes to the top of the stalk, feels into space, then turns and goes down again — to its rational world" (244). The rational person knows that some questions may never be answered. He doesn't mind admitting it.

The "measuring worm" comment was about philosophy and perhaps religion. Politics and economics were something different. In those fields, his thought could more easily locate a "rational world," a world susceptible of understanding and improvement by individual, rational minds. The main objective of the armies of words he wrote was the documentation and defense of a social order in which individuals are allowed to climb whatever stalks they want. He portrays that order as the source of wealth unbounded. He also portrays it as a realm of excitement and imagination, a place where wonders of invention are always being wrought and problems of space and time are always being miraculously solved, as by an invisible hand.

Garrett never got over his admiration for "the wonders of America's physical achievement" (AS 227). He never lost his interest in finding out how things are made and done, and in talking to the people who make and do them. That, together with his superlative intelligence and his distinctive, self-assertive style, made him a great financial journalist. He was also, as I have noted, a novelist — not a very good one, in terms of novelistic technique, but an interesting one intellectually, because, in Ramsey's words, all his fiction "is about work, industry and making a living" (123). He showed how intellectually interesting these purportedly mundane things are. He also showed some of the conclusions that might be drawn from them. There are few finer tributes to minimal government than the chapter on *laissez faire* in "The American Story."

If Garrett was an American nationalist, as Ramsey indicates, he was also a vigorous anti-imperialist, just as one would expect from his commitment to minimal government. Nationalism,

to him, would mean an advocacy of the American national values of self-respect, self-determination, and self-responsibility. When America, as he thought, stopped understanding these concepts, he wrote the republic's obituary, not its justification ("Ex America"). The nation, he wrote in one of his many elegies for a libertarian America, had surrendered its wildness: "Tame grass is sweet poison. From the eating of it the way of life on the plains is soon forgotten." Tame grazers are easily herded — but their "gentle," social-democratic "herders are rough with the few who try to start a stampede" (Garrett, "Pottage" 114).

About some issues — including his (pessimistic) assessment of America's future — Garrett was one-sided, or just plain wrong. Ramsey recognizes this (e.g., 210, 233), thereby confirming his own status as Garrett's ideal interpreter. The ability to admit the mistakes of one's favorite author — an ability that is in notably short supply among the disciples of Ayn Rand and Rose Lane — is crucial to making a plausible case for that author's virtues. I greatly respect Garrett, and now that I have some literary sense I greatly enjoy his work, but I think there are areas he would have done much better not to have visited.

One is religious history. Garrett had the curious idea — common among Eastern literary folk but very uncommon among the midwesterners with whom he originated — that Christianity was on its way out in the 1800s, the very age of America's great evangelical revivals. "Humanitarianism," he says, "was the new religion," as if the second faith had replaced, not supplemented, the first (AS 95).

He also makes serious mistakes about American political history. He claims that until the Missouri Compromise (1820), Congress outlawed slavery from the territories. No, not from the Old Southwest it didn't. He asserts that "Lincoln had never imagined" allowing black people to vote. No: read Lincoln's speech of April 11, 1865 (AS 171, 93, 117). Garrett is far from clearheaded about American territorial expansion. "The American Story" associates "manifest destiny" with the imperialism of the late 1890s, not with America's expansion to the Pacific during the 1840s. The term "manifest des-

tiny" originated in 1845, and it was good enough in its time: by 1846 it was manifest that America would expand to the Pacific. And when something is virtually unstoppable, it is destiny. But America's destiny to occupy the Philippines was anything but manifest.

Other mistakes resulted from Garrett's interest in autarky, or economic self-isolation. As Ramsey, with his gift for clear expression, summarizes the idea, Garrett thought that wars happen when industrial countries compete and "try to sell each other the same things" (90). Well, wars sometimes have happened in that way, but they have also happened when countries tried to isolate themselves economically. The solution, which most countries have now discovered, is simply to specialize in different things from those that other people specialize in. There is no reason, beyond nationalist reasons, why every industrial country should compete with every other in steel production; all that's needed is that at least one free nation should be making steel. There is no reason, beyond hysterical reasons, why every country should be its own rice bowl. And why should Cuba try to sell snow to the Eskimos, when it can sell them sugar instead? That this idea seems never to have occurred to Garrett, who was a very good economic journalist, is a tribute to the power of *idéés fixes*.

When, however, Garrett stops writing economic theory and starts writing economic history — whether the history developing around him or the history of the distant past — he is unsurpassed at evoking its events and situations. If you don't know anything about the fluctuations of American agricultural prices, or the depression of the 1890s, or even the depression of the 1930s, Garrett will tell you, and he will show you a world in every grain of sand.

Describing the run on gold at the New York Subtreasury office in 1895, he pictures a "writhing line" of people that, like a snake, "moved steadily forward by successive movements of contraction and elongation," thrusting "its insatiable head inside the doors" until "each day at three o'clock the Subtreasury, slamming its doors, cut off the monster's head. Each morning at ten o'clock there was a new and hungrier head . . ." The "integrating

principles" of the monster were "greed and fear . . . Human beings were the helpless cells . . . Its writhings were sickening. The police handled it as the zoo keepers handle a great serpent. If once it should begin to coil the panic would be uncontrollable" (18).

Garrett writes from a personal perspective. He maintains his distance, but he never loses his warmth of observation. And although the people he observes may look like "cells," he knows that, "helpless" or not, they're always much more than that. They are whole beings, and as warm as he is. But he knew their dismay and bewilderment, and he found the right words to evoke it, whether it was the bewilderment of farmers and small businessmen in America's Great Depression, or the malaise of the British in the years following World War I, when he described them as "totally absorbed in the act of taking [their] own pulse" (163). Among the bewildered were the rich and powerful as well as the poor and weak. Garrett understood the economic value of rich people, people who can concentrate capital and make capital investments. He met them, he lunched with them, he drank with them, he enticed their thoughts. He liked them. Yet he never succumbed to them. Mentioning one of their watering holes, the Detroit Athletic Club, he wrote that "it's fine for reasons it does not know" (187).

Its patrons were, perhaps, finer than the politicians. Garrett recorded the fact that he tried to give advice to Alf Landon, the Republican candidate for president in 1936, but, as he said, it was "like dropping it down a dry well. There is no splash." He told Lane that politics was "a parade of competitive masks and images. The people are not so much fooled; but they have to vote, wherefore they vote cynically, or as parasites, and the thing goes on" (177–78).

Some individuals appeared without a mask, and to them Garrett the writer gravitated, like a comet to the sun. Here is Henry Ford in 1914: "He is a wisp of withering nerves, no one of which lies amicably against another. He can not be still. He neither smokes nor drinks, nor eats very much, having found a man in a book who lived to be 104 on fourteen ounces of simple food a day. While talking he twists his watch chain, pinches his lips or his nose, and strokes

his face. His hands are always moving. They reflect the mind which can hardly wait for a question to be finished. Its decisions are nervous and sudden" (35). You can look a long way in books without finding a more perfect union of summary and fact, sympathy and ironic distance ("having found a man in a book").

Certainly Garrett knew human beings, and human life. And certainly he knew how to represent them in words that were common and colloquial, yet fully original in their use. He describes a representative specimen of American manhood as someone who is "always much tanned and about to be drunk" (43). He describes his boss, Adolph Ochs, publisher of *The New York Times*, as a person who opposes getting involved in World War I but doesn't understand his own motivation: "He wants to think he is for peace with honor, because honor is a word he likes, but really (there is no doubt of this) he is for peace at any price" (55).

Around Garrett's character sketches, as around his ruminations about historical fact, there is often a sheen of speculation. I don't know whether he ever read Plato's "Symposium," in which Aristophanes speculates that love is a desire for the other half of yourself, the half that the gods have violently rent away, but his own view of love is similar. What it lacks is the optimistic turn that Plato managed to give it, in his account of love's ascent from the partial to the final. Garrett's soul remains riven: "A man wants only one woman. Everything he has in the world he would give to find her — that one, the other part of himself. But she either does not exist or has been so widely scattered by the life accidents of a million years that he finds her in fragments, a glimpse of her here and a thought of her there and never enough in any one place to be satisfied with" (86).

More than Garrett's speculations, domestic or public, Ramsey emphasizes his style, and he is right to do so. If it weren't for that style, Garrett would not have won his place as a writer of distinction, or as a progenitor of the libertarian movement. As John Chamberlain observed, America's early libertarians weren't the people one would expect to found a political movement. They weren't, for the most part, economists

or businessmen. They weren't political office holders. Mainly, they were authors and critics (Chamberlain 136). Their influence depended on their style and approach. Nock led his readers through an adventure land of wry allusion and self-obscuring irony, until they reached a clearing where plain words were suddenly applied to plain, and often shocking, facts; the effect, sometimes, was unforgettable. Mencken was the scholar and master of what he called "the American language" — brisk, colloquial, freighted with ingenious terms of abuse, but genial in its marriages of adjectives and nouns. Somewhere he mentions a friend who came East for an ecclesiastical conference — "a Methodist orgy of some sort." Paterson joined her mastery of the colloquial language to an instinct for classical rhetoric — for exclamation and allusion, affirmation and interrogation, and all the ways of joining verbal pairs and triads until they mount to an insuperable intellectual climax.

Garrett, like Mencken, Paterson, and Nock, had a style that could not be mistaken for anyone else's. This is an unusual literary accomplishment — when the style is good. Even a fool can write differently from other people. Dr. Johnson, speaking of James Macpherson's absurdly popular poems, said that "a man might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it" (Johnson 183). A personal style is more than self-abandonment. It is not just being oneself; it is becoming oneself by becoming one's subject, by seeing it and communicating it so intensely that other people can also make it their own, even when it is evoked as no one but you could possibly have evoked it. The early libertarians weren't the equivalent of today's op-ed writers, telling readers what to think, in "styles" completely indistinguishable from one another. They were fighting for intellectual survival. They had to have a genuine style.

Garrett's was one of the most memorable — a style abounding in inversions, truncations, biblicisms, and, as Ramsey says, "familiar words in unfamiliar senses" (249–49). Then there were images, images, images. Francis Parkman took nine volumes of rotund sentences — each of them wonderful in its way, and an enduring manifestation

of Parkman's own sense of style — to depict the audacity and fragility of the French empire in the New World. Garrett simply says, "New France was pure adventure, an explorer's dream, a canoe empire, capsizable" (AS 7). He knew there was more to say on the subject, just as there is more to say about the "x" and the "y" in " $x + y = 10$." You can go to Parkman and find all the "x's" and "y's." But Garrett has already given you the capsizable canoe, and that is what you are most likely to remember.

Chamberlain was correct when he said that Garrett could "make a single image or metaphor do the work of a whole page of statistics" (38). He could also make a handful of statistics do the work of a whole page of metaphors. Garrett reports that "in the balance sheet of the Ford Motor Company there is no entry of the item, 'Henry Ford,'" although that "one man's mind" was the source of the company's 2,400% profit (42). Garrett's attention to luminous details, including some that are almost universally forgotten by professional historians, makes his accounts of America's entry into the Great War, of the vexed issue of the European war debts, and of Franklin Roosevelt's dealings with financial markets irreplaceably lucid introductions to these subjects (AS 195–213, 256–64; Garrett, "Bubble").

In its turn, "Unsanctioned Voice" provides a peculiarly lucid introduction to Garrett's way of thinking, seeing, and imaging the world. But if a book engages your attention, as Ramsey's does, you'll obviously find something about it that you want to quarrel with. My most important reservation has to do with "the Old Right." Ramsey uses the phrase very lightly in his text, giving it no particular emphasis, but it's also there in his subtitle, which says that Garrett was "of the Old Right." The phrase is worth talking about. What was the Old Right? When was it born? Who was in it? And why does it matter?

The Old Right is, as some people think, the genus of which early American libertarians were the species. The name was popularized by economist and historian Murray Rothbard (1926–1995), an editor of this journal and an esteemed libertarian activist. (I knew Murray, and at his best, which was frequent, there was no conver-

sationalist in the world like him, no writer of greater felicity, and no thinker of greater clarity and force.) The idea's best exposition is an article by Sheldon Richman (Richman, "New Deal"). In clear and persuasive prose, Richman argues for the significance of a group of public figures who in the 1930s dissented from the prevailing obeisance to state power. Richman lists about three dozen individuals: Garrett, naturally; H.L. Mencken, the culture critic; Herbert Hoover, the former president; Charles Beard, the historian; Louis Bromfield, the novelist; Isabel Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane, and Ayn Rand, novelists and theorists of individualism; and several members of Congress, such as William Borah and Robert Taft. So long a list makes the Old Right seem substantial indeed. It sounds yet more substantial when Richman refers to "a group" and "a distinctly identifiable political coalition" (2).

Yet few of these people were friends or associates. Some of them weren't even chance acquaintances. Many of them loathed most of the others, and had reason to do so. Paterson, for instance, never tired of attacking Hoover, claiming, as was true, that his administration had originated most of the key economic policies of the New Deal. She amused herself by writing vigorous political attacks in the margins of books by her former friend Louis Bromfield. She had put up with the disgust for capitalism that suffuses his novel "The Green Bay Tree" (1924; for the title's allusion see Psalm 37:35–36), but he finally became too much for her.

To take another core sample from Richman's list, consider Charles Beard. As Richman acknowledges (3), Beard was a social democrat, and that's a long, long way from libertarianism. Beard's intellectual biographer, Bernard Borning, shows that throughout his career he "fought the advocates of *laissez faire*." When Hayek published "The Road to Serfdom," Beard wasted no time in attacking it (Borning xvi, 33, 89, 99, 191–92). Writing as a sympathizer of the New Deal, he proclaimed that capitalism had been "rejected" by "history" (Beard 170). His own, very influential, contribution to history was "An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution" (1913), which argues that the Constitution should be regarded

largely as an attempt to safeguard the personal property of the men who wrote it and got it ratified through undemocratic means. A generation later, conscientious historians discovered that Beard's book was incompetently researched, grossly biased, and full of "outright misrepresentation of evidence" (Brown 111). Nevertheless, it was one of those books that had, as Garrett said, "debunked" the motives of the Founding Fathers, in the minds of millions of college-educated people. It continues to exert its influence.

In what sense can Charles Beard be considered a member of an Old Right grouping, genetically related to libertarianism? Only in the sense that he, like Garrett, Paterson, Lane, and Rand, opposed America's involvement in World War II. Indeed, the only thing that appears to unify the list of Old Rightists is their opposition to an interventionist foreign policy. This accounts for the omission, for example, of Lewis Douglas, Roosevelt's one-time budget director, who courageously broke with him and provided one of the era's most libertarian treatises on economics and public policy, "The Liberal Tradition" (1935). The problem with Douglas, presumably, is that he later became an architect of NATO and the Marshall Plan (Cox, "Woman" 207–9). Yet he has as much reason to be called a Rightist as most of the other people on the "Old Right" list.

The sad truth is that the Old Right was born, not in the 1930s, but in the 1980s, in the minds of libertarian intellectuals. But why does it matter?

In certain ways, it doesn't. Some libertarians will honor this affiliation with the Right, and some will resent it, but virtually no one will be either more or less attracted to ideas of liberty just because he thinks that Herbert Hoover or Senator Borah shared those ideas.

Yet in some respects the idea of the Old Right does matter. The first is that, literally, it's not true. Literally, there was no "Old Right." The second is that discussion of the idea can nevertheless have some good effects. By positing the existence of such a group, whose members, though diverse, had at least one connection with libertarian thought, Rothbard, Richman, and now Ramsey have drawn attention to the possibility that libertarians can make useful alli-

ances with people either to the Right or to the Left of them, on one issue or another. This is an important thing to keep in mind. Had such alliances actually been made in the 1930s, American politics might have assumed a different shape.

Another reason why the idea of the Old Right matters has to do with libertarianism as such. When today's libertarians feel isolated, when they feel that they are the sole living exemplars of America's tradition of limited government, they may be cheered by the realization that other people have felt that way too — and that these people have been active and influential, even if they were many fewer than advocates of the "Old Right" account of history suggest.

Very few people were involved in the origins of the modern libertarian movement. They tended to exist in small clusters. One cluster centered on the great emigré economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek. Another centered on Isabel Paterson, who had as her intellectual protégés John Chamberlain and Ayn Rand, with Rose Wilder Lane as a sometime friend and distant interpreter of Paterson's concept of creative "energy." A third paid its devotions to Albert Jay Nock, who mixed his anarchist libertarianism with uncritical devotion to the single-tax theories of Henry George. One of Nock's disciples was the brave journalist Frank Chodorov (one of whose own friends would turn out to be William F. Buckley, Jr., assembler of the modern conservative — not libertarian — movement [Judis 88, 118–19, 130]). Other clusters existed: associates of the du Pont family, illustrious forever because of their contributions to the repeal of Prohibition (Wolfskill, "Revolt"); Leonard Read's Foundation for Economic Education, with links to Paterson and most of the rest of them; R.C. Hoiles, the Orange County, California, newspaper publisher, a group in himself . . . But they were not many, and they knew it. None of them seems to have suspected that he or she was surrounded by an "Old Right."

These men and women weren't presidents or senators, or leading historians. Most of them suffered for their unpopular ideas, some of them greatly. If they lived long enough, as Hayek did, they could see a potent movement gathering around them. Most of them didn't live

that long. But they weren't mere historical precedents or examples of intellectual trends. They were nothing so dull as that. They were individual men and women whom one can admire for their independence of thought and their ability to continue learning and teaching in a hostile intellectual environment.

How does Garrett fit into this picture? He was a friend of Herbert Hoover. He read Mises and Hayek with respect. He had a love affair with Lane. He published an article by Paterson. Otherwise, he was just Garett Garrett, thinking his own thoughts and writing what he wanted to write. Even if the Old Right had actually existed, he wouldn't be interesting because he was a member of it. He would be interesting because he gave fascinating expression to important concepts and experiences.

I've dissented from Ramsey, and from prevailing libertarian opinion, about the Old Right. I want to emphasize another dissent from him: I don't regard his book as only a "kind of a biography," no matter what its author says. The book does what a biography should do: it tells us who its subject was, and it shows us how he was. With this book in hand, no one will be able to misunderstand Garrett, as I once misunderstood him; and no one will be able to forget him, either.

Ramsey complains that sources are missing for a full biography (ix), but I believe that "Unsanctioned Voice" will prove magnetic. It will draw new sources out. Somewhere, in libraries that don't index all their holdings, in attics that haven't yet been exposed to eBay, in the files of friend-descendants who haven't yet learned to place any value on Garrett's peculiar handwriting, important documents exist. Many of them. They will emerge. When that happens, aided no doubt by Ramsey's own inquiries, he will write the ultimate version of Garrett's story, and that will be even more interesting than this, the penultimate one. □

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Paris

The difficulties of entrepreneurship, from a profile in *The Wall Street Journal*:

When French foes of capitalism want to mount an effective protest, they phone Xavier Renou. As one of France's top protest consultants, Renou teaches activists how to chain themselves to trees, damage genetically modified crops and withstand police interrogations. These days, his phone is ringing off the hook, as the tumult in the global financial system has led to a boom in protests.

Despite a surge in demand for his services, Renou is struggling to capitalize on the travails of capitalism. He charges students as much as €50 (\$67), for which they learn key techniques, such as blocking roads by lying on the ground.

Still, he says, it's hard to make a living from protest. Renou has already widened his range of clients, particularly to growth areas such as "Free Tibet" activism. This week, Mr. Renou is teaching wheelchair-bound protesters how to demonstrate for more state aid.

New York

New frontier for labor activism, captured in the *New York Post*:

Already reeling from a series of local prostitution raids, New York's dominatrixes have also had to grapple with disobedient clients who can't afford to pay for their punishments. To address the double-whammy hitting their industry, many of them want to form a political-action committee and union to represent their interests.

The paperwork is underway to start DomPAC, which will lobby lawmakers to rewrite prostitution laws to protect BDSM practices. Dommies hope this will pave the way for them to unionize, so that one day, they can have 401(k)s, health insurance and unemployment benefits.

Moscow

Russian opinion poll, noted by *The Wall Street Journal*:

Putinka vodka piggybacked on the cult-like popularity of Vladimir Putin to become one of Russia's top-selling brands of spirits. For a new vodka named after Mr. Putin's presidential successor, Putinka is proving to be as tough an act to follow as Mr. Putin himself. Medvedeff vodka showed up in shops in December but has yet to show up in Russia's top 20 vodkas, unlike Putinka, which ranks as No. 2.

Stanislav Kaufman, the man who dreamt up Putinka, says he can't take Medvedeff seriously. "Mr. Medvedev is not a vodka personality," he says. "Mr. Putin is."

Springfield, Ill.

Victory for the little guy, from the *Cook County Daily Herald*:

State lawmakers are considering restoring little Pluto's planetary status, casting aside the scientific community's 2006 decision downgrading it.

The push for a state decree on Pluto comes from state Sen. Gary Dahl, a Republican whose downstate district includes the birthplace of Pluto discoverer Clyde Tombaugh. Dahl told colleagues Pluto is important to the local community, which considers the vote to downgrade Pluto to "dwarf" planet unfair.

Haverstraw, N.Y.

Pedagogical note, from the *Albany Times Union*:

A Rockland County teacher is under fire for binding the hands of black students and having them sit under a desk during a lesson on slavery.

In a social studies class at Haverstraw Middle School, teacher Eileen Bernstein chose two students for a demonstration of conditions on ships that carried slaves out of Africa. "She taped their hands together, taped their feet together, and she had them crawl under the desk as if they were on a slave ship," one mother said.

Principal Avis Shelby apologized, calling the slave ship demonstration a "bad decision."

London

Life imitating art, from the *Daily Standard*:

Buildings were evacuated, a street was cordoned off and a bomb disposal team called in after workmen spotted a suspicious object.

But the dangerous-looking weapon turned out to be the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch, made famous in the 1975 film "Monty Python And The Holy Grail."

Spokane, Wash.

A black market for everything, from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*:

The quest for squeaky-clean dishes has turned some law-abiding people in Spokane into dishwasher-detergent smugglers. They are bringing Cascade or Electrasol in from out of state because the eco-friendly varieties required under Washington state law don't work as well.

Supporters of the ban acknowledge it is not very popular. "I'm not hearing a lot of positive feedback," conceded Shannon Brattebo of the Washington Lake Protection Association, a prime mover of the ban. "I think people are driving to Idaho."

La Paz, Bolivia

Accomplishment in constitutional law, noted in *Transitions, serving the Prescott College Community*:

Environment Las Americas developed and successfully lobbied for five key changes in the new Bolivian Constitution, Adam R. Zemans, J.D., M.A., Ph.D. said. "This shows the effects a few committed environmentalists can have in countries like Bolivia and what they can go home feeling they accomplished."

The changes include broad rights to sue for groups who are not directly affected by environmental harm, and for potential future harm, without a statute of limitations.

Oklahoma City, Okla.

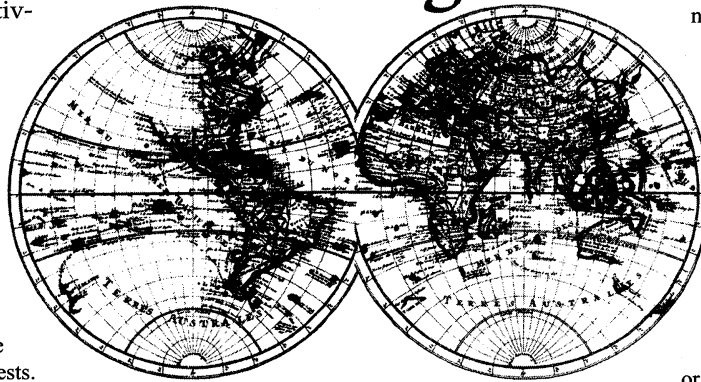
Exercise in rebranding, from the *Tulsa World*:

Rep. Shane Jett said one exclamation point has gotten him more attention than the rest of his work during his four years as a legislator combined.

Jett, as chairman of the House International Relations and Tourism Committee, introduced a bill this legislative session to italicize the word "Oklahoma" on the state flag and put an exclamation point at the end.

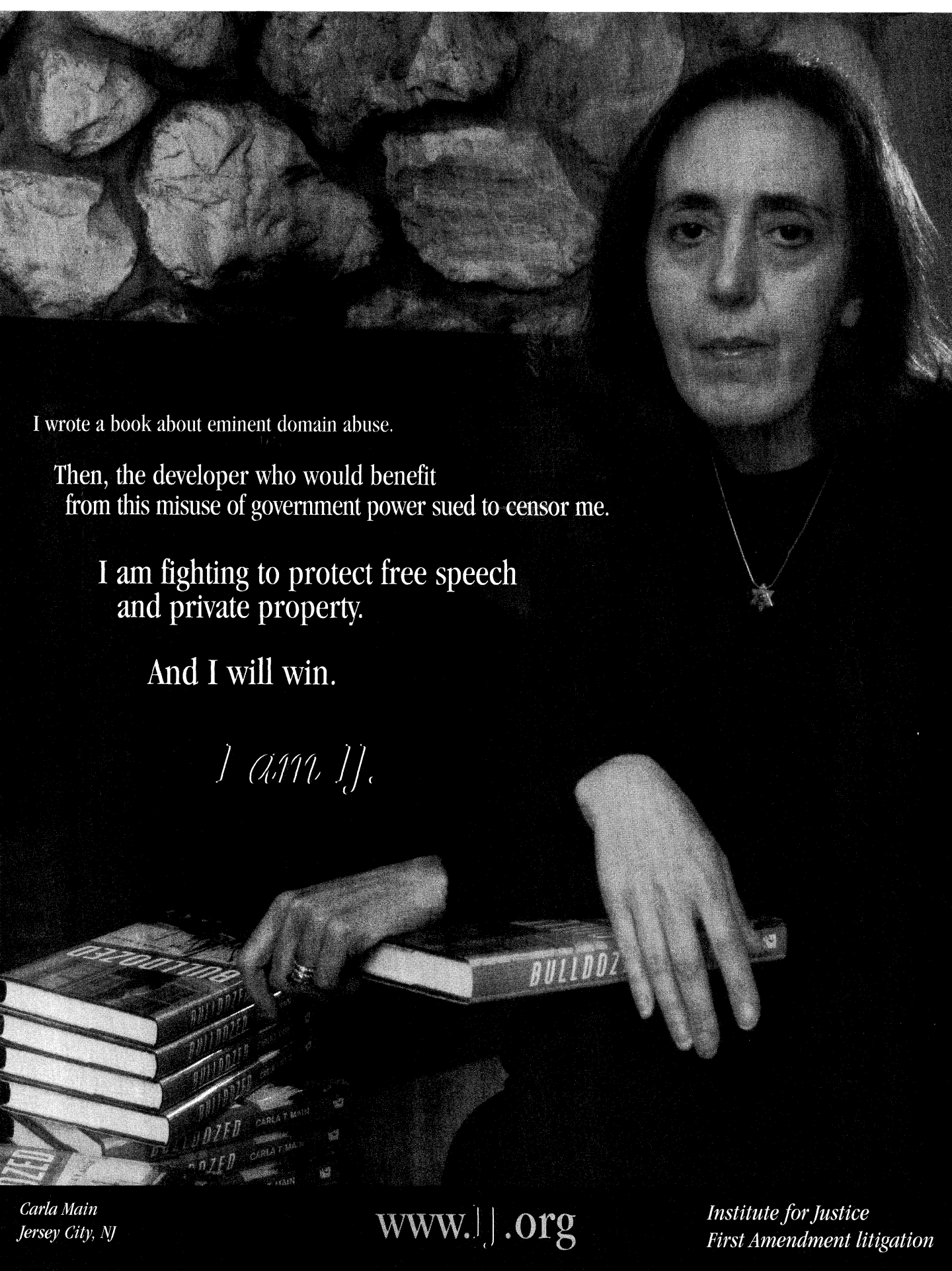
The bill also would create an official state abbreviation: OK!

Terra Incognita



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



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And I will win.

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