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Letters

Mayor Disagreement

While researching information concerning my father, Nicolas Castellanos, the last constitutional mayor of Havana, Cuba, I came across an article by Robert H. Miller ("Waiting for Fidel," April 2007). While I welcome and respect everyone's opinion, the malicious lies contained in Mr. Miller's article amount to defamation of character.

Miller writes: "Second in power only to the president, the mayor of Havana was also one of Cuba's richest men. Nicolás Castellanos controlled the most lucrative sources of illegal income on the island." Anyone who knew my father could tell you that he was far from being one of the richest men in Havana, and certainly one of the few honest politicians of the era. Even if disregarding public opinion, Miller should be aware that good journalism relies on solid research.

He should have made certain that his opinion, most likely based on hearsay due to the fact that he was only a child at the time of his narrative, was backed by some basic measure of research. Members of my family have conducted extensive research on my father and this is the first time we've come across anything as ludicrous as this. Miller should keep his false and incorrect opinions to himself.

On behalf of my family, and of my father's good name, I respectfully request a retraction from your publication, and a removal of this flawed article from the website.

Maria V. Castellanos Flores
Miami, FL

Miller responds: First of all let me profoundly apologize to the Castellanos for any inaccuracies in my article, "Waiting for Fidel." My allegations, as Maria Castellanos Flores correctly infers, were not based on personal recollections as I was too young to evaluate such weighty matters; but neither were they based on hearsay. Mine and my family's relations with the Castellanos, our next-door neighbors, were excellent as far as I can recollect and I have nothing but affection and respect for the ex-mayor and his family. I'll now try to put into context the statement in the article.

I used many sources for the article but the relevant source, "Fidel Castro," by Robert E. Quirk, asserts, "As the year [1950] began, leaders of the four largest parties negotiated with the cagy Castellanos, who had become an instant millionaire when he took over city government . . . After the president, the mayor of Havana controlled the most lucrative sources of illegal income in Cuba . . . Building contracts would provide an ever-flowing wellspring for the private fortune of Castellanos" (pp. 34–5, W.W. Norton, 1993).

Although Robert E. Quirk is a respected scholar with no visible reason to disparage the ex-mayor of Havana, I have no idea what his politics are. It is well to remember that one person's freedom fighter might be another's terrorist. For the purposes of my article, those were minor details. However, for a member of the Castellanos family, they can understandably strike a sensitive nerve. Nevertheless, exactly what Quirk meant by his characterization of the mayor of Havana's power is open to interpretation. After all, from a certain political perspective, even my father might be categorized as corrupt, as evidenced by the extant warrant for his arrest on his return to the island in 1962. But if someone alleged he was corrupt, I too would bristle defiantly.

Modern political systems that evolved from Roman tradition — a tradition based more on personal loyalty, patronage, and nepotism than ideology — are often perceived as cor-

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rupt by those wholly nurtured within Enlightenment political tradition. The Roman tax collection system is particularly instructive. The government collected taxes by selling the position of Tax Collector to the highest bidder. The price was determined by an estimate of the possible taxes that could be collected. The revenue agent then pocketed whatever he could garner from taxpayers — that was the return on his investment.

The Empire Strikes Back

History is important. Therefore, Jamie McEwan's so-called "review" of Adrian Goldsworthy's "How Rome Fell" ("Does Empire Work?", December 2009) compels me to comment.

McEwan doesn't talk much about the book, seemingly unable to get beyond Goldsworthy's (accurate) description of the empire in the mid-2nd century as a fairly decent place in which to live (in the context of its times) and the use of the word "unfortunately" somewhere in the text which he inexplicably takes as damning evidence that Goldsworthy is a lover of empire who desires to make the Roman Empire the "hero" of the narrative. After that, McEwan simply rants against the empire and Roman Christians, and never bothers to mention, let alone analyze, Goldsworthy's actual thesis.

"In many areas," McEwan writes, in

From the Editor

Recently, President Obama took responsibility for the governmental failings that almost caused a disaster in the air on Christmas day. Of course, that doesn't mean he's going to resign, or that he won't demand to be reelected.

But I wonder: shouldn't he, or one of the other people who have shown themselves so ambitious to control the world, take at least formal responsibility for some other things as well?

I'd like to hear it.

"The buck stops here. We are responsible for the most asinine piece of legislation ever created in America." — Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid

"My vision's bad. I thought I saw the Iraqis attacking us." — George Bush

"It's my responsibility. I thought I was Midas Mulligan, but all I turned out to be was Wesley Mouch." — Alan Greenspan

"I'm ashamed of myself. Alan and I almost wrecked the economy." — Barney Frank

"It's a funny thing — nothing we say turns out to be true. Now we understand why we're going broke." — The New York Times

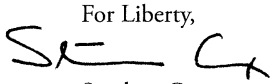
Unfortunately, we won't see any of those remarks. What we'll see is continued denunciations of "irresponsible critics" of the political class.

Well, that makes sense. The political class *is* responsible. It's responsible for a stupendous and accelerating deficit; a war that never ends; a vast system of government regulation, devoted to suppressing all individuality of thought and action; a security state that makes no one secure; and a collection of intellectually bankrupt media, devoted to maintaining a bankrupt system of ideas.

And what are the critics responsible for? Nothing.

But to be more specific: what is Liberty responsible for? Only for continuing to do the best we can, in support of individual freedom.

For Liberty,



Stephen Cox

Letters to the editor

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apparent seriousness, "Roman culture seems to have had little lasting effect." In particular, he points to Britain. That would have been a surprise to the generations of educated Englishmen inculcated in Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and St. Augustine, and anyone who studied law, based directly on Roman theories of jurisprudence. Students of government recognize the stamp of Roman thought and institutions (largely initially derived during the republic but disseminated through the empire). Despite large-scale evacuation of the island in the early 5th century, the Roman cultural legacy, including Christianity, was reintroduced to Britain, flowered anew, and was an indispensable part of the foundation of the Enlightenment in Britain as well as throughout continental Europe.

"The Romans added very little to the Greek cultural legacy," McEwan continues, "the Roman Empire was an impediment to progress . . . The institution of slavery in itself guaranteed that there would never be a Roman Industrial Revolution." Well, let's be fair. There wasn't any Industrial Revolution in the ancient world, and there wouldn't be one until 13 centuries after Rome's fall. Western Europe initially digressed culturally and economically after Rome's fall, and took several centuries before it started to demonstrate meaningful progress on any front. Most civilizations prior to Rome (including classical Greece), and most that succeeded it, had slavery. The fact is, despite its faults, Rome added quite a bit to the Greek cultural legacy in art, literature, philosophy, and religion. And though it did not produce an industrial revolution, it did make great advances in engineering, invented concrete, and harnessed water power for use in the first ancient "factories."

McEwan does not consider that the Roman Empire was a much different place in the 1st and 2nd centuries than it was in the 4th and 5th. For the better part of two centuries, Rome amazingly administered a multi-ethnic empire, much of it previously attained through war, in relative peace, prosperity, and, yes, even relative freedom. Many communities in the provinces such as Spain and Gaul had significant autonomy, retained local traditions, and rarely saw a legionnaire. And through the second century the populace, for the most part, did benefit from being part of an integrated empire, consisting of peoples who were quite content (for the most part) to be a part of that empire. Peace, prosperity, and justice were, of course, subject to the whim of government authorities, as is always the case with authoritarian regimes. Roman rule degenerated, became increasingly oppressive, and diseased with corruption — which is the story of Rome's decline and fall.

Yes, the Roman Empire had to fall for modern Europe to evolve. But we should not deny the Romans their achievements, just as we should strive to learn from their failures. If the Roman Empire had been extinguished by pillaging Germanic tribes in the 1st century rather than the 5th, the result would not have been the accelerated advancement of European culture, science, and industry that McEwan claims, but rather a catastrophic stunting of human progress.

Brandon Crocker
San Diego, CA

McEwan responds: Mr. Crocker seems to be under the impression I was seriously promoting the theory that, if the Roman Empire had fallen 400 years sooner, human progress would have been accelerated such that we might be colonizing the solar system today. I thought that by leading off this section by saying "let us go ahead and play the fascinating, if artificial, game of dealing with history in broad strokes," and finishing by including this, my conceit, in what I called the "wild speculations" engendered by "How Rome Fell," I was making it clear enough that I was, well, wildly speculating. I should have been more careful to distinguish wild speculation, with ironic intent, from serious claims. I apologize for any confusion this may have caused Mr. Crocker or any other reader.

Crocker improves upon the book by saying rather more in support of Adrian Goldsworthy's assumptions than does Goldsworthy himself. But in so doing, he makes explicit the underlying absurdity of sweeping historical judgments. Crocker's claim, given without equivocation or irony: that the fall of Rome in the 1st century, rather than the 5th, would have resulted in "a catastrophic stunting of human progress." His confidence in his own ability to predict the result of the interactions of millions of human beings over a period of well over a thousand years is astonishing — or should be astonishing, if we had not become jaded through having encountered such presumed omniscience many times before. It is convenient of Crocker to provide a concise example of the hubris I was attempting to criticize in Goldsworthy.

Yes, I think we'd be terraforming Venus about now . . .

Philosophizing IP

Thanks to Stephan Kinsella for questioning the justice of intellectual property ("Intellectual Property and Libertarianism," December 2009). Like many libertarians, he posits property rights as the foundation of libertarian political theory, and suggests that because it is a derivative concept, we stop calling the nonaggression principle an "axiom." So far so good. But Anthony de Jasay suggests that the concept of "property" itself should in turn be considered derivative, from the still more fundamental principle of liberty of contract. De Jasay also defines "rights" and "liberties" more carefully and usefully than most libertarians, who use these loaded words all too loosely — Kinsella included. (See de Jasay's "Choice, Contract, Consent," or "Before Resorting to Politics," reprinted in "Against Politics.")

Kinsella's attempt to show that no well-formulated property rights can apply to pure information seems dubious. Yes, information can escape physical confines and reproduce in ways that physical objects can't, but so what? Perhaps the real question is not whether IP should be classified ontologically with other forms of "property," but whether voluntary agreements can be reached (without the help of legislatures) that would make revelation, or publication, or mishandling of information a tort. Clearly some can; what of contracts to protect trade secrets, and other nondisclosure agreements?

Never mind that the concept of "self-ownership" has philosophical problems that Kinsella does need to take more seriously. I've been suspicious of "property rights reductionism" ever since I noticed that it led Rothbard to believe in his own IP rights as an

author of copyrighted writings, even as he disparaged the IP rights of professional inventors. At least Kinsella avoids this inconsistency (if that's what it is).

Kinsella is right to seek the philosophical foundations of the IP question; let's hope he keeps digging.

Lew Randall
Freeland, WA

What Would Edison Do?

It was a pleasure reading Stephan Kinsella's piece "Intellectual Property and Libertarianism." I'm in agreement with its content as regards the nature and source of property rights. What I find impossible to accept is the view that there is no good utilitarian argument in support of legislated patent and copyright law. Would Thomas Edison and his financial backers have invested so much time, effort, and money just for the pleasure of exercising intellectual creativity? I certainly wouldn't, and I suspect I'm not alone. Having said this, in a free society, would it be a legitimate government function to establish rights where none "naturally" exist, even if the consequence of such legislation would foster an improvement in the quality of human existence? By establishing such rights, or should I say "privileges," wouldn't the freedom of action of others be curtailed? Formulated this way I opt for principle over utility, as the slippery slope comes to mind.

Howard Shafran
Shelter Island, NY

The Property of the Mind

Before finally getting around to the topic of his article on intellectual property, Stephan Kinsella trumpets the proposition that each person "owns" his own body; he "inhabits" it; he is its "occupant" — and Kinsella uses those very words. He dismisses as "silly wordplay" the objection that each person just is himself or his body. But who is perpetrating wordplay? Who is tainting sound political philosophy with dubious metaphysics?

Kinsella echoes the old mind-body dichotomy, the notion of the self as "the ghost in the machine" (Gilbert Ryle's derogatory description of Descartes' dualism). On the contrary, each person's mind and consciousness are functions, remarkable functions, of his body and specifically his brain. Does Kinsella really mean that the self is distinct from the body? Does the one survive dissolution of the other? (Does the self exist even before its body is born?) Does Kinsella believe in ghosts or angels? What evidence, beyond very dubious evidence, can he cite? If Kinsella does not really mean what he says, he should use more exact words.

The self-ownership slogan finds some resonance in libertarian circles. But libertarians should go beyond displaying their authenticity to each other; they should try to persuade nonlibertarians. They should avoid irrelevant metaphysics. They should put their best foot forward, not their worst. I do not mean that they should dilute their libertarianism; rather, they should present it attractively.

Perhaps Kinsella could find some (feeble) excuse for his metaphysics, but he would still be putting a worst foot forward.

Leland Yeager
Auburn, AL

Copy Shop

Stephan Kinsella's argument against IP is seriously flawed. For instance, he states that copyright is "received automatically, whether you want it or not, and is hard to get rid of." Copyright, that is, the right to make copies of your work, is inherent in the creation of the work. It is not "received" by law. You can waive your copyright easily by simply making copies and distributing them without the required copyright notice. Copyright law recognizes, defines, and controls to some extent your rights to control the copying and dissemination of your work.

He also states that "We libertarians already realize that . . . the right to a reputation protected by defamation law" is illegitimate. This libertarian does not realize such illegitimacy. The libertarian principle is that no person has the right to initiate aggression against another. Spreading lies or untruths to destroy the reputation of another person is clearly within the definition of aggression.

Kinsella makes a number of references to "homesteaders," mainly, I believe, to emphasize the difference between property that you can hold in your hand, i.e., the soil from your farmland, and the more ephemeral IP which is snatched out of thin air and dissipates in the wind, i.e., the sound of a melody. However, this comparison overlooks the intellectual content of real estate (property) improvement. A farmer who homesteads a parcel of land must decide what crop will be successful on that land. A pineapple ranch in North Dakota will not succeed. Once the crop is chosen, the farmer must implement a plan for the planting and harvesting of the crop. In the case of, say, music, running a melody over in your head or tinkering on a piano is just the beginning of the creative process. It must be transcribed and carefully inspected to make sure that each note is properly chosen and placed. Then you can make your copies, register the copyright and begin selling copies of your work. With a little luck, someone may make a successful recording.

Patents are similar. You come up with the idea, develop it into a saleable product, manufacture copies and sell them. When a buyer buys a copy of your work, either invention or literary work, what does he buy? Under the law, he buys that one copy of your invention. Defining what is embodied in that one copy can get messy because the human mind is messy, but the buyer does not buy anything other than that one copy. He cannot make copies and distribute them.

So what can you do with your copy of the work or invention? You can write a critique of the song or story, quoting reasonably from the work itself to illustrate your points of argument. You can read the story or sing the song to your friends for their enjoyment. You can take your copy of an invention and modify it to suit your needs. You can strip it of unnecessary decoration that does not make it work better. You can take it apart to see how it works, or to repair it or to improve the design so much that you feel justified in applying for a patent on your improvement. You can sell it to someone else. You cannot, however, begin manufacturing the item and selling it. That is true whether the item is a widget, a book, a sheet of music, or a recording.

David Kirkpatrick
Klamath Falls, OR

Body of Work

Although Stephan Kinsella's article on intellectual property moves smoothly enough from premises to conclusions,

those conclusions are (to me at least) so counterintuitive that the argument acts as a reductio ad absurdum, undercutting his premises rather than proving his conclusions.

Let us say that a given work exists only in the memory of the author's computer. At this time the work could not be more obviously the author's; in a keystroke he can change it in any way, or abolish it forever. Overnight a hacker invades the machine, copies the work, and reproduces it. This is theft, is it not? If so, then the author retains ownership of the work even after it has left his hard drive. Why, then, would his ownership suddenly be reduced to naught at the instant that he sends it off to a prospective publisher? Reportedly, a British firm offered to publish "Lolita" if Nabokov would consent to the removal of four sentences. Nabokov refused, and the book was not released in Britain until a year later, by a different publisher. Surely this was right.

Kinsella takes it as axiomatic that one's property rights begins with one's own body. I think that many authors would consider their ownership of their works as more intimate, and more obvious, than their ownership of their bodies.

Jamie McEwan
Lakeville, CT

Kinsella responds: Mr. Randall asks whether trade secret and nondisclosure agreements could be used to construct a form of IP. I do not believe they can, because such agreements cannot bind third parties. Only by assuming that knowledge is a form of property can you bind third parties, but this assumes there is IP. I address this in further detail in the "Contract vs. Reserved Rights" section of "Against Intellectual Property," available at StephanKinsella.com. As for philosophical problems with the notion of "self-ownership" — self-ownership just means that you have the right to decide who touches or uses your body, not some other person. What could be more libertarian, or less controversial or problematic?

Mr. Shafran is no doubt right that Edison or other patentees may have benefitted from the patent monopolies granted to them by the state. But the utilitarian case requires a benefit to the economy as a whole, not merely to particular beneficiaries of wealth redistribution. Studies almost universally conclude that there is no such gain — that patents actually restrict innovation. See the post at tinyurl.com/pat-innov for more information on these studies.

Professor Yeager misunderstands my comments. I am, like him, nonreligious. Viewing the mind as distinct from (though not unrelated to or independent of) the brain, and the self as distinct from the body, does not imply a soul or ghosts or angels. It does not imply that there can be a self without the body, or a mind without the brain. It merely implies a distinction. One may think of the mind as an epiphenomenon of the brain, but it is not the brain itself. Likewise I can run and remember with my body but running and remembering are not the same as my body. The "silly wordplay" I referred to is the use of the trite observation that we "are" our bodies (in some real sense) to object to the idea of self-ownership. But atheism is not contrary to self-ownership. Self-ownership is the libertarian idea that you have the say-so over who uses your body — that others need your permission. Self-ownership is the rejection of slavery and aggression. It is perfectly compatible with the idea that there is no soul; that you die when your body dies. In any event, Yeager's atheism does not prove there are intellectual property rights, or that we are not self-owners.

Mr. Kirkpatrick upbraids me for stating that copyright is received automatically. He asserts that copyright may be waived "by simply making copies and distributing them without the required copyright notice." Wrong. Copyright notice is not required at all, nor is copyright registration. See Sections 102 and 401 of the Copyright Act, or the "Copyright Basics" brochure at copyright.gov. Copyright notice has not been needed since 1989, when the law was amended per the Berne Convention.

As for reputation rights, Murray Rothbard explained in "The Ethics of Liberty" why there can be no reputation rights: your reputation is merely what third parties believe about you. You do not own their brains or what they think about you; they are entitled to change their minds about you. Kirkpatrick writes, "If I grow a potato in my back yard, it is my potato. If I write a song in my kitchen, it is my song. They are both my property." By such reasoning one could argue that you own your wife, your parents, and your country (note the possessive pronoun!); if you discover that the earth is round then "it is my discovery" and you could own that fact. The mistake here is in failing to realize that not every "thing" that one can conceptually identify is an ownable type of thing. Scarce resources are capable of being owned because of the possibility of conflict over use of such things. Other things, such as "songs," information, and patterns are not ownable things at all. In acting, humans select scarce means to achieve desired ends. Their choice of ends, and means, is guided by information. To successfully act, the scarce resources employed as means need to be owned, because by their nature as scarce resources only one person may use them; but the actor need not "own" the information that guides his choice of means, since he can use this information even if thousands of other people also use this information to guide their own actions.

Mr. McEwan is correct that the hacker is a thief, since he is using the author's property (his computer) without his permission. But this does not mean that the information he gains access to is property. If the author revealed some private fact — say, that he had a glass eye — and the hacker discovered this and revealed it to the world, the author would have no right to demand that everyone forget this fact or not act on it. Likewise if the information was a novel, musical composition, recipe for a nice soup, or schematic for an improved mousetrap.

The Good Book

The article by David Puller on whether the Hebrew and Christian scriptures support redistributionist policies ("Mr. Obama, Lay Down That Bible!", Jan.–Feb.) was excellent. I would offer some additional scholarly material that supports the author's points.

Jesus' destructive actions in the temple were not a "cleansing" that called for separating religion from the profanation of commerce and trade. His overthrowing of tables and chairs was instead a parable acted out in life and intended to prophesy the destruction of the temple by Rome. On this,

continued on page 54

Reflections

IQ test — The Copenhagen Summit ended without any substantial progress, for which I was as thankful as Tiger Woods at an IHOP. The president's plan was to cut our energy use by 17%, while China, the world's largest producer of CO2, wasn't going to do anything. Meanwhile, we promised to give away $100 billion to developing nations — money we don't have, and would have to borrow from China. And to think people called George W. Bush stupid. — Tim Slagle

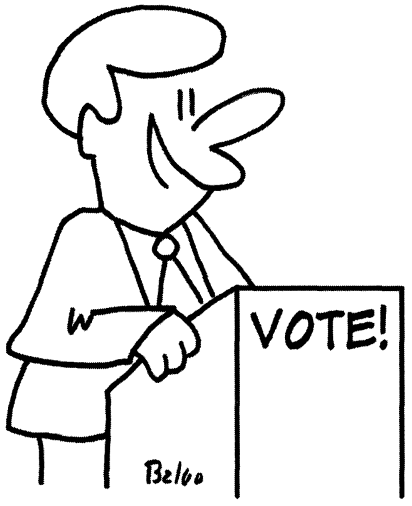
Cancer of the committee — Everyone is in an uproar because the United States Preventive Services Task Force — an "independent" committee of medical experts (with no breast surgeons and no breast imagers and no cancer specialists on it), paid by HHS — has decided that women would be better off if screening mammography began ten years later and occurred only half as often (every other year rather than every year). The decision had nothing to do with the rationing of care, we are told. And the committee's decisions are not binding on the government, or on private insurers, we are told.

Coming up: Obama proposes an expert panel of independent political scientists to determine whom it would be best to vote for in the 2012 presidential elections . . . as of this time, the determinations of the panel will not be binding. — Ted Levy

Green eugenics — The December 3 headline in the Guardian (UK) should have read, "Rich white people pay blacks not to have children." Instead it declared, "Rich nations to offset emissions with birth control."

The subhead explained, "Radical plan to cut CO2 argues that paying for family planning in the developing world is the best bet." The article stated, "Consumers in the developed world are to be offered a radical method of offsetting their carbon emissions in an ambitious attempt to tackle climate change — by paying for contraception measures in poorer countries to curb the rapidly growing global population. . . . Calculations . . . show the 10 tonnes emitted by a return flight from London to Sydney would be offset by enabling the avoidance of one unwanted birth in a country such as Kenya."

In other words, rich white folk want to eliminate black babies so they can continue to globe-trot. The Guardian does not so much as whisper a criticism; the word "racism" does not appear. I guess you can say anything and be taken seriously by the mainstream media as long as you wrap it in a banner of "global warming concern." — Wendy McElroy



"I'm here today to tell you what you want to hear . . ."

Clinton casualties — In the vicious terrorist attack at Fort Hood by an Islamist traitor, we see the natural consequence of one of Bill Clinton's bad policies.

Indeed, people's common response when they heard that the self-styled Soldier of Allah, Nidal Hasan, had killed a dozen of his fellow soldiers and wounded many others was, How in the hell could this snake kill so many soldiers on a military base? Why wasn't he cut down by return fire immediately?

The answer is that in early 1993, President Clinton issued orders that effectively disarmed soldiers on their bases. The regulations he imposed made it virtually impossible for officers to issue sidearms to soldiers or even carry sidearms themselves. The very people most trained in the use of weapons and tasked with using those weapons to defend the country were (and are) forced to be sitting ducks on their own bases. How absurd is that?

Now, even after the nation has had time to reflect on the implications of Fort Hood, what are the chances that Obama, who was recorded mocking gun owners during his campaign, will restore the right of self-defense to American soldiers? Between slim and none, and Slim just got capped by a jihadist. — Gary Jason

Story time — I've heard people say that the only way to achieve a truly free society is to let things get so bad that they finally get better. If we hit rock bottom and live in a fully socialist world people will see how bad it is and realize how much better a free economy would be. They will not have to struggle to understand the unseen because they will be living in the world that free-market advocates warned against. People will embrace liberty only after learning the hard way.

I wish to dispel that idea. This strategy would be disastrous, for two reasons.

First, there is no guarantee we *will* hit rock bottom. The city of Detroit has been in an economic freefall for 50 years. I've heard many times that the city can fall no farther and its bloated government will have to loosen its grip. As far as I can tell, the city is still in freefall.

There are countries that have been mired in socialist mediocrity or worse for decades and show few signs of a free-market revolution. Apparently they haven't hit bottom either.

Second, if things actually did bottom out, there is no guarantee that people would understand why. After the stock

and housing markets tanked in 2008, was there a general awareness of the failures of central banking and interventionism? Was the response a swift move toward a freer market? Government created the crisis, yet there was little agreement among Americans about whom to blame and what to do next.

Few see a cause-effect relationship between government activity and the Great Depression. When they do see such a relationship, it's often that of reverse causality; they believe intervention cured rather than caused the depression.

Waiting to hit rock bottom is not the key to a classical-liberal resurgence. What is?

Narrative.

Whether you think the future is bright or dim, no favorable long-term change will occur unless we tell the right story.

Most narratives place the blame for crises on free markets. The story during the Great Depression was that capitalism had failed. With a few notable exceptions, it was only many years after the histories had been written that alternative explanations entered the discussion. How many bad policies were (and still are) enacted because of false narratives of the Depression?

Shaping narrative is more important than winning policy battles. A good policy in which the public has no faith will be charged with crimes it did not commit. A bad policy which the public loves will be credited with successes it did not achieve. Policy follows paths blazed by belief.

I do not believe we are headed for rock bottom. Market liberals have been in the limelight with the right story about the financial crisis. They may not have the loudest voices, but they have discredited simplistic antimarket explanations and forced further discussion.

But even if we are on a death spiral toward socialism, the only way back is clear and continuous communication of the causal connection between intervention and economic stagnation. Only if people hear the correct narrative on the way down will they know why they hit bottom and how to climb out.

In my weaker moments I think I'd love to see socialists live in the world their policies would create. But as long as I have to share that world, I don't want to let it happen. Neither should you. Tell the right story. — Isaac Morehouse

How low can you go? — On December 25 tragedy was averted when a gang of passengers took down the underwear bomber before their plane landed at Detroit Metro Airport. While I like to think that angry passengers have

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

"What this country needs," wrote Isabel Paterson in 1932, "is a lot less of all sorts of things." She was thinking about laws — laws regulating "vice," laws regulating the economy, laws regulating anything and everything in American life. As she said on another occasion, "There is practically nothing you can't be put in jail for now."

Her idea about America's need for *less* applies to words as well as laws. What this country needs is a lot less of all sorts of words. Right off the bat, I can think of ten expressions we could stand to hear less often — never, in fact.

Here, then, are this year's leading contestants for the Pat Award: the Isabel Paterson Prize for Phrases that Should Be Quashed. (Yes, "quashed," not "squashed," as the politicians and the media would have it. So that makes eleven expressions we don't need.)

I present, first, the seven semi-finalists:

Failure is not an option. This has been kicking around for a long time in Rambo circles, but in 2009 it migrated to the Left. It was the phrase that the U.S. Attorney General used (twice, in the same breath) to assert his seriousness about the prosecution of the 9/11 defendants, thus ensuring that nothing the courts manage to do with them will be seen as fair or just. Even when the phrase is used in regard to people who are notoriously guilty, it evokes memories, not of Solomon, but of Torquemada. And one can hardly think of a better example of arrant subjectivism than "failure is not an option." All it means is "you can't fail because I don't want you to." Try to imagine a cosmos in which that statement would be appropriate. You can't? Then you're fired — failure is not an option.

Advocate for, as in "he advocates for the uninsured." Yeah, okay, all right already — so exactly what does this guy advocate? "Advocate" used to be a transitive verb.

Activist, as a professional title. This goes with the last one. The same people who say, incessantly, that their existence is justified because they are "advocating for" something — always something that restricts the freedom of other people — are identified as "activists," as if "activist" were a title like "judge," "priest," or "homemaker." All they are, in fact, is busybodies and loudmouths, so why not identify them as such? I read an obit in our local paper the other day, about a wealthy woman who had done nothing, throughout her life, but try to horn in on other people's business. She was lauded as one of our community's great "activists." Well, may she rest in *peace*.

Due diligence. This has some kind of technical legal meaning, and that's fine. But if you use it to describe what you do when you shovel your sidewalk, or make sure that your kids eat their oatmeal, or take that one last shit before you board the plane, you're committing an offense against mental health and safety.

Grow, as in "grow the economy." There's nothing wrong with "growth," I suppose, as long as you're not talking about cancer or the government. But there is something wrong about discussing money, jobs, careers, family happiness, or other desirable things as if they were crops that can be *grown*. They may grow, but you can't grow 'em. I call for the banishment of all politicians, preachers, and "inspirational speakers" who talk about "our commitment to grow the economy," "your opportunity to grow your family values," or even "the best way to grow your personal wellbeing." Life is different from Mr. McGregor's farm.

Kill any more trees, as in "let's do that by phone, so we don't kill any more trees." Now, I like trees (so long as they're not throwing apples at me), and I don't like waste, but I can't see why wasting my time is any better than wasting a bunch of wood

proven themselves once again to be a much greater deterrent to terrorism than the entire alphabet of National Security departments, I suspect something else happened.

After the shoe bomber failed to do anything other than embarrass himself, it became standard practice for all passengers to remove their shoes upon entering a metal detector prior to a flight. Now, I'm no expert on Middle Eastern culture, but I'm fairly certain that holds some kind of significance, since hurling a shoe is an incredible insult.

I suspect that al Qaeda didn't want the underwear bomb to go off. If the plane actually had crashed, it would have taken *years* to reconstruct what happened, and it's highly doubtful that we would have ever learned where the bomb was hidden. Now that we do know, TSA is preparing for its most invasive and embarrassing searches to date. I think this is intentional; al Qaeda wants to see how far we'll let the government intrude on us before we put our bare feet down.

Personally, I would rather just chuck it all and take the risk. September 11 was perpetrated with common items that were allowed aboard U.S. flights. And the underwear bomb happened despite all the background checks, no-fly lists, wiretaps, and 3 oz. limits on shampoo. Ordinary Americans have thwarted every terrorist attempt since Flight 93. I think we can trust free men to defend themselves better than any government agency. In fact, I'd stake my life on it. — Tim Slagle

Upright and locked position — To me, one of the most disgusting things about the American media is their cheerful refusal to wonder about the human costs of government policies, even when the policies are self-evidently harmful and stupid.

Watching media reactions to the hysteria over the Christmas Day terrorism aboard a jet bound for Detroit, I could find nothing implying the faintest skepticism or even curiosity about the government's initial plan to force airline passengers to remain in their seats with nothing in their laps during the final hour of flight. No one asked why the last hour was any more important, in this respect, than any other hour. No one made the relevant observation that the government's agents had failed to prevent the terrorist from boarding the plane, but the passengers on the plane had foiled his scheme — by leaping from their seats and attacking him. And no one wondered about the harm that the government's new idea would do to normal passengers — until a Fox News broadcast took up the issue on the afternoon of December 28.

"Aha!" I thought, "finally!" as the presiding journalist, Greg Jarrett, did what no one else was doing — interviewing

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pulp. Speaking of growth — trees will grow again. I won't.

If we can save just one . . . something, as in, "These laws will be justified if we can save just one life," or, "These emissions standards will be justified if we can save just one polar bear from over-heating." Really? Why? Let me put it this way: "Your being forced to drive at 10 mph for the rest of your life will be justified if it guarantees that you will never run down a pedestrian." Do you think so? Try another: "Your refusal never to tell the truth about anybody else's flaws will be justified if it saves just one person from a loss of self-esteem." But how about this: "Your refusal to employ moronic cliches will be justified if it keeps just one sensible person from going off the edge"? That last example sounds good to me.

Join now in congratulating our seven Honorable Mentions! May they enjoy a well merited and permanent retirement.

We turn, then, to the Second Runner-Up for the Paterson Prize of 2010. And it goes to . . .

Give back! What? No applause? Well, admittedly, this one's a sleeper. Few could have predicted its sudden rise to prominence. I didn't. Yet during 2009 it sneaked into everybody's mouth — and with what amazing effects! There's a woman running for public office in Los Angeles whose ads actually maintain that she "went into business, as a way of giving back to the community." Really! I suppose that's why Tiger Woods first got involved with golf; he just wanted to *give back*. And now he's trying to keep the community at bay. That's happened before . . . But to return. Please, everybody, give it up for "give back!"

Thank you. We now proceed to First Runner Up. In the event of the winner's inability to serve, this contestant will take its place at all presidential press conferences. On such occasions, there can never be enough cliches. So, at this time, I am happy to honor a contestant who has been plugging away for many years — *They!* — yes, they, the ever-popular, politically correct substitute for the singular pronoun. If any syllable deserved a pleasant and obscure retirement, it is "they." As Pogo almost said, "We have met the enemy, and *they* is us." The users of "they" go so far as to say things like this about Tiger Woods (yes, him again): "Any woman can come out and say that they are his lover" (guest, Greta Van Susteren show, Fox News, December 4). Notice the aplomb with which "they" shoves even "she" aside. Some people, including the president, can hardly get through a sentence without the use of "they." Nevertheless, as my old boss used to say, "No one is indispensable."

Thank you, "they," for all you've done to eliminate sexism in the English-speaking world. Thank you, and fare you well. For now the magic hour has come; it is time to announce this year's highest honoree, the Winner of the Pat. And the prize goes to . . .

Green. (Cheers, tears, and a standing ovation.) Here is a word — yes, please take a last bow, Green!, for you are truly the idol of the people — that has heroically met all challenges posed by history, science, and common sense, and has made itself an adjective fit to be united with any conceivable noun. "Green" has become the first truly universal modifier. It takes a lot of courage — it takes a lot of gall — to achieve a role like that. "Nice" tried it, but it didn't have the range. As early as the 1920s (witness its ironic treatment by Hemingway in "The Sun Also Rises"), "nice" revealed its limitations. People saw how silly it was to use a word like that as a substitute for "everything that's good and true." And it never managed to mate with certain words. No one was willing to discuss "nice science," "the nice revolution," or "the pressing need to create nice jobs." Maybe "nice" was just too . . . nice. But "green" has no decorum. It is immune to taste or reason. It will go anywhere, do anything, so long as there's a dollar or a vote to be had.

But there's a strange thing about words: when they're *everywhere*, they'll soon be *nowhere*. At least it's pretty to think so. And now, to "green," and the other Honored Ten, Word Watch says thank you, thank you, thank you, and good-bye. *It's time*, as they say, *that we move on with our lives.*

a representative from an airline travelers' group. She pointed out that being required to sit in your seat for a solid hour represented a serious hardship for everyone, but especially people with health problems — blood clots, prostate difficulties, you can think of more. But you know what Jarrett's comment was? "Well, maybe they shouldn't fly."

I ask you, if there was a law against scathing exposes of the cruelties of government, would there be enough evidence to convict Fox News? — Stephen Cox

Awareness in "abundence" — Andrew Stern is the president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). He's a big supporter of Barack Obama.

In early December, something was published at The Huffington Post under Stern's name. Here's some of it:

> President Obama's awareness of the breadth, depth and complexity of the choices facing this country can be described as nothing short of impressive. From weighing the options of long term investment versus short term stimulus to assessing the merits of structural deficits compared to short term job creation, his thoughtful analysis made one thing abundently [sic] clear: President Obama is the right leader for this moment of unprecedented challenges.

What crap. Aside from highlighting The Huffington Post's need for better spellchecking software, this press release shows something we've previously discussed in these pages: modern American statists focus on the existential qualities of political leaders. The president doesn't have to do anything. He's to be judged (and, in this case, praised) for merely being aware.

This is a ridiculous scheme for measuring public office holders. And it's ultimately damaging to public offices. If public figures are measured only by what they are, existentially, their actions don't matter.

To someone like Andrew Stern, that may be the goal.
— Jim Walsh

Post no bills — The U.S. Postal Service, the model for our future National Health Care System, continues to make news. For the fiscal year ending September 30, the USPS reported a net loss of $3.8 billion. It estimates that its losses for the year 2010 will be double that. This, after it cut back work hours by 115 million and instituted other cost-cutting measures.

The immediate cause of the massive losses was a continuing drop in the amount of mail. In the year just ended, mail volume dropped by 13% compared to the year before — 26 billion fewer pieces in all. Of course, the cause of that massive decline was the increasing ease of use of email and instant messaging, and the perennial difficulty of use of the average post office.

Now, the USPS cannot be given tax dollars in direct support, nor can it go bankrupt unless the feds decide to let it. It can ask Congress to allow it to raise postage rates, but that risks driving away users and further driving down the volume of mail — and Congress increased those rates just recently anyhow.

That leaves borrowing. The USPS can borrow up to $3 billion a year, up to a cap of $15 billion. Its current debt is $10.2 billion. So with the $3 billion it will have to borrow to cover last year's deficit, it will be near the limit. And it will be unable to meet next year's obligations, absent an increase in the cap, or the discovery of another fix.

The USPS has suggested one: it wants the government to lift its mandate to supply its pension fund with $5 billion a year. (This past year, the feds waived the mandate.) Of course, if the USPS is allowed to underfund its pension plan, then taxpayers will have to pay the pensions if the USPS defaults.

So the "solutions" to the USPS nose dive take the form of sticking it to the taxpayer, directly or indirectly, now or later.

But there is a more obvious solution. Simply end the monopoly the USPS has on the delivery of first-class mail, immediately end all its direct or indirect government support, let it charge whatever the hell it wants for whatever services it wants to offer, and let it sink or swim. But that seems to be beyond anything the swell-heads in government can imagine. — Gary Jason

Trick, or "trick"? — There has been much heat shed on the references in the East Anglia Climate Research Unit emails to "tricks" used in massaging temperature data, but little or no light.

Critics and skeptics have seized on the word "tricks" to suggest that this means fudging of the data to force an appearance of warming where none exists, or at least an exaggeration of the extent of actual warming.

Apologists for the scientists who used the word have claimed that it was all very innocent, merely a reference to clever techniques that were found to clarify the data or resolve uncertainties by normalizing data from different sources to make them consistent.

Many media commentators have been quick to accept this convenient, defensive explanation as a way of avoiding the unfavorable interpretation of the critics, and to deflect any further scrutiny of the question of whether the "tricks" were legitimate scientific methodology or actually *dirty* tricks.

This softball treatment of a critical issue is in keeping with the historic treatment of all things global warming: advocates can do no wrong, and are always on the side of true science; skeptics are always sinister, looking for ways to subvert science.

But where is the traditional journalistic questioning, designed to get at the truth? These same journalists wouldn't have gone to former Vice President Cheney to find out whether the Guantanamo detainees were mistreated, and they certainly wouldn't have taken his word for it if they had. Why do they meekly accept the possibly culpable scientists' word?

The reporters should have taken a more objective approach to the issue. They should have attempted to pin the scientists down as to whether their tricks were scientifically justified, and why. They should have asked them to spell out in detail what their tricks consisted of, explain how the tricks affected the data, show examples of the before and after data, and show why the manipulations didn't adversely affect the validity of the data. Other scientists could then be asked to evaluate the "tricks" — in the way real science is done. In doing so, journalists would, for once, have performed a service to the scientific community, and upheld the integrity of both science and journalism. — John Kannarr

Sane and sound — "The hallmark of sanity is to remain firmly tethered to reality," said the federal judge to

the parties of a patent infringement litigation between a large Canadian computer company and a small, patent holding company (a.k.a. "patent troll") after a jury had found the computer company liable for infringement. The computer company in question? Research In Motion, makers of the Blackberry. The case finally settled for $612.5 million.

That was March 2006. In May 2006 there followed the Supreme Court's announcement of its decision in the case of *eBay* v. *MercExchange*. In *eBay*, the Supreme Court overturned the Federal Circuit rule that permanent injunctions should issue against patent infringers "absent exceptional circumstances." Many large companies in the software industry, which tend to be defendants, have hoped that *eBay* would put an end to "patent trolls" and their own patent infringement liability. Indeed, since *eBay* only a handful of injunctions have issued to patent owners who do not practice their invention.

"But," wrote the Supreme Court in *eBay*, "traditional equitable principles do not permit such broad classifications." And thus, just over three years later, on Dec. 22, 2009, the Federal Circuit upheld an injunction and award of $290 million in damages for patent infringement — this time to a small Canadian startup, i4i Inc. The defendant was Microsoft Corporation, maker of Microsoft Word, which had incorporated into its software an XML editor patented by the startup.

The difference between the cases? Unlike the "patent trolls" in the earlier cases against RIM and eBay, one of the inventors behind the i4i patents, Michael Vulpe, was also an entrepreneur, who *had* started a business to commercialize the patented concepts.

Although Vulpe's apparent victory should be an occasion for rejoicing by libertarians (most of them, anyway) and other believers in strong property rights, one wonders what reality is faced by inventors without the desire or skill to become entrepreneurs.

Some might say the law has, at least for the moment, achieved a delicate balance between the exclusivity needed to encourage investment in new technology and the access needed to spread that new technology around. Others might say that a better way to determine what "reality" is most "sane" is to rely on private negotiations based on the principle of strong property rights. The *eBay* decision discouraged negotiation; the recent decision may lead to more negotiation and less litigation. — Michael F. Martin

Will blog for subsidy — Near the end of 2009, the Chronicle Review, the leftwing sidekick to the Chronicle of Higher Education, published a special issue, "Journalism in Crisis."

Such focus on journalism seems like overkill, especially since journalism schools represent a small segment of academia. But both scholars and mainstream journalists are left of center, and both believe themselves to be in the avant-garde of intellectual thought. Both have, shall we say, a touch of arrogance. Without traditional newspapers, academics will have a harder time keeping up their elevated positions in the professional pecking order, and journalists are looking for any port in a storm. Thus, the special issue.

It was kind of fun to see what self-aggrandizing, high-minded nonsense this subject can arouse when these buddies get together.

Carlin Romano, a writer for Chronicle Review, wants to see "Philosophy of Journalism" courses at universities. "We need philosophers who understand how epistemology and the establishment of truth claims function in the real world outside seminars and journals," he writes, while journalists need to "scrutinize and question . . . their own preconceptions about every aspect of their business . . . how many examples are required to assert a generalization . . . how the boundaries of words are fixed or indeterminate in Wittgensteinian ways. . . . "

Then there is the more down-to-earth idea that journalism schools can "fill the gap." Student journalists will fill in the blank spaces left by retired or laid-off reporters, suggest Michael Schudson and Leonard Downie, Jr. In fact, Nicholas Lemann, dean of Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, says that journalism schools should become like "teaching hospitals," covering the news of "city halls, school systems, statehouses," which is going unreported because news organizations are going broke. Journalism schools can do newspapers one better — because they are housed within research universities, they can "raise the level of sophistication in the practice of journalism," says Lemann. Well, certainly that is needed.

There is much more philosophizing, predicting, and talking. The Review got 18 scholars to give brief (well, brief for academics) commentaries on "how the decline of those news media will affect higher education." The idea that universities will save journalism again raises its head.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center, sees universities as the antidote to what she fears most — "partisan outlets" with "faux news." (I write for one of these "outlets," but, actually, I do my best to write true news.) University websites will come to the rescue, as, "uncluttered by advertising and unbeholden to a commercial model," they will provide "accessible insight and argument about topics of national and international concern."

There's stuff like this on every page. Neal Henry, dean of the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, says grandiloquently that journalism schools "have become vital keepers of a flame for professional values and high-quality journalism in an age of tremendous industry struggle and transformation." What does it all add up to? Mourning, I guess. — Jane S. Shaw

Indisposed — The Bureau of Economic Analysis website defines "disposable income" as "total personal income minus personal current taxes." As of this writing, both the Senate and the House versions of healthcare reform include the "individual mandate," which will almost certainly be included in the bill signed by the president. The Bureau will then have to change its definition of "disposable income" to "total personal income minus: (1) personal current taxes and (2) federally mandated health insurance premiums paid to private, for-profit corporations." And should the federal government impose more unfunded mandates on the after-tax income of private citizens, the Bureau of Economic Analysis can look to this journal for a timely heads-up. — S.H. Chambers

Pants down — One of the reasons you should read foreign news sources is to track what American politicians say and do when they feel somewhat shielded from the intense

scrutiny of their own domestic media. Like tourists who get drunk and wake up on a beach, politicians often make "naked" statements.

Consider President Obama's recent candor about America's recession (IMO, depression) during his nine-day trip to Asia. While in Beijing he warned that spending too much tax money to stimulate the economy "could actually lead to a double-dip recession." And, to underscore how differently Obama behaves abroad, it is interesting to note that the remark was made during an interview with Fox News Beijing. Yep. That's the same Fox that is almost completely shut out by the administration in the United States. — Wendy McElroy

Tempest in a teapot — It was synchronicity that, weeks before UN Global Climate Summit in Copenhagen, news broke that scientists influential in the "climate change" (formerly the "global warming") movement had been rigging data and manipulating the peer-review process.

The statist elites gathering in Copenhagen seemed gloomy; some self-righteous wind had been taken from their sails. The procession of *bien pensant* nitwits went as scheduled. Photo ops and empty rhetoric were many and much. But the assembled bureaucrats failed to ratify the more ambitious multilateral claptrap that anthropogenic global warming alarmists had been advocating. And, as usual, these disappointed would-be tyrants blamed America for their shortcomings.

Now, even as the Copenhagen onanism got under way, statists at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency took actions that their global brethren failed to achieve. The EPA announced that the group of chemical compounds known as "greenhouse gases" poses a threat to public health and the environment.

Lisa Jackson, the EPA's chief rentseeker, read from prepared notes that "the scientific evidence" surrounding climate change "clearly shows" that greenhouse gases "threaten the public health and welfare of the American people" and that the gases — mainly carbon dioxide resulting from burning fossil fuel — should be regulated under the federal Clean Air Act.

It wasn't clear from Jackson's comments whether she was aware of the data-manipulation scandal. However, in a striking example of bureaucratic arrogance, EPA apparatchiks admitted that their actions were designed to "send a message" to Copenhagen that the United States was "serious" about global warming — and to push Congress to approve "climate legislation" (referring, one assumes, to the cap-and-trade stuff struggling through Congress).

So, bureaucrats lost deep in the bowels of the executive branch now see it as their role to "push" legislation.

Charles T. Drevna, president of the National Petrochemical & Refiners Association, responded to Jackson's scripted remarks with some of his own: "It is hardly the time to risk the remainder of the U.S. industrial sector in an attempt to achieve a short-term international public relations victory."

The EPA's greenhouse gas pronouncement wasn't *merely* PR. According to an equivocating 2007 Supreme Court decision, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases could be considered "pollutants" under the Clean Air Act — but the EPA had to determine that the gases posed a danger to public health and welfare before it began regulating them. The recent pronouncement was a first step toward that regulation.

Green tyrants look forward to a new system of EPA-administered carbon permits that must be sought by power plants, factories, and perhaps even automobile owners. This is part of a longstanding agenda. In a December opinion column published by the Washington Post, Chesapeake Climate Project employee Mike Tidwell ranted:

> Surveys show that very few people are willing to make significant voluntary changes, and those of us who do create the false impression of mass progress as the media hypes our actions. . . . Instead, most people want carbon reductions to be mandated by laws that will allow us to share both the responsibilities and the benefits of change. . . . After years of delay and denial and green half-measures, we must legislate a stop to the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas.

The specious logic of that passage is plain to see: generalization ("very few") plus generalization ("most") equals specific conclusion ("must legislate"). But would-be tyrants like Jackson and Tidwell overestimate the primacy of laws. As generations of libertarians have noted, the power of law is ultimately the threat of violence. The speciousness and triviality of environmentalist orthodoxy won't support such a heavy undertone. — Jim Walsh

Shell game — The human brain, they tell us, evolved over millions of years of beings living in small, hunter-gatherer bands. Groups of individuals who learned to share the spoils of the hunt or the fruits of the gathering had more surviving offspring than bands that allowed some of their group to starve. Groups in which individual creativity found new sources of nourishment and shared its knowledge with the whole band had more survivors than bands in which such knowledge was not shared.

So they tell us that this is why we evolved the innate sense that we ought to share — as well as a gut that tells us this is a zero-sum game. Libertarians, who want to float capitalist, invisible-hand policies are forever running aground on the shoals of our primitive hunter-gatherer brains.

But perhaps we can use those same sensibilities to defeat Keynesian economic nonsense. Archeological evidence tells us that hunter-gatherers traded with one another. Inland groups used relatively rare objects such as seashells as a medium of exchange. Burial sites far inland have such shells. We can all imagine living in such a hunter-gatherer band. And we can ask ourselves whether monetary or fiscal stimulus would make us better off. Would a sudden influx of seashells within one band make the band richer? Absolutely not! Clearly what is needed to become richer are more goods and services — not more objects of exchange.

Can you imagine an early Keynesian in an isolated, hungry band of hunter-gatherers suggesting that if everyone just passed their shells around faster, they'd all be better off? Or how about the taxes idea? "Listen, guys. Everyone gives me some shells. Then I give most of those shells back to everyone, so we'll all be better off." Like that's gonna sell? Everyone should be able to understand, even with our primitive brains, that what makes us wealthier is producing more goods and services, not monkeying around with the medium of exchange, or redistributing it. And goods and services are produced in the private sector, not the sector that taxes and redistributes. — Don Crawford

The wise seek rent? — The sage saying has it that only the fool learns from experience — the wise man learns from the experience of others. While Congress tries to make us learn about cap-and-trade in the hard, personal way, a new and frightening report from Britain tells us what we are in for.

The report, "The Expensive Failure of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme," is by eminent economist Matthew Sinclair, Research Director at the Taxpayer's Alliance (TPA), a British thinktank. It is available on the TPA website. In it, Sinclair details the myriad ways in which the EU's cap-and-trade scheme, called the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), enacted in January 2005, has failed to live up to the promises that were made for it.

The ETS is the largest such scheme in the world, covering 11,500 company sites in the European Union countries. Like the cap-and-trade proposal passed by our own House of Representatives (and at this writing, awaiting passage in the Senate), the ETS is based on a deceptively simple theory: if government puts a limit on the total amount of carbon dioxide that businesses collectively emit, but lets individual companies trade emissions permits, then the result will be the most efficient reductions possible.

The huge cap-and-trade scheme has now been in place four years, and allows Sinclair (and us) to make some observations.

The first should have surprised nobody: the ETS increased the cost of energy to all consumers — households as well as businesses and other organizations. So European households have been hit with a double whammy: their energy bills went up, but prices on everything else went up as well, because businesses had to pay higher energy costs. Sinclair calculates that the ETS costs the average British family around $200 yearly. Over the first four years of the ETS, he estimates that it cost the average European — individually! — over $277.

This tax is highly regressive; it hits the poor and those on fixed income (such as the elderly and the disabled) hardest.

And Sinclair notes that these costs far exceed the estimates that pro-cap-and-tax economists made of the social costs of carbon dioxide emissions — the costs that emissions of carbon dioxide impose on society over time. For example, William Nordhaus, the so-called "father of climate change economics," estimates the social cost of carbon dioxide at $7.40 per ton. Economist Richard Tol did a meta-analysis of 211 estimates and came up with an average of $6.82 per ton. But so far, the costs of the ETS are the equivalent of $21 per ton, obviously far higher than the supposed social costs.

Several other bad effects were not anticipated. For instance, there has been a large increase in "windfall profits" for the energy companies, which is no doubt why energy companies here are pushing for our own cap-and-trade bill. The ETS has perversely transferred wealth from poor consumers to wealthy energy companies. Legislation like this is a rent-seekers' dream.

Another unanticipated consequence is that there has been a lot of volatility in the emissions price, so that now an unholy alliance of environmentalists and energy companies is demanding that some floor price be set by the EU bureaucracy. This raises the spectre of even higher prices set by a government-sanctioned monopoly. And this price unpredictability has made it hard for businesses to plan their operations rationally.

In sum, the experience of others with cap-and-trade makes it clear that similar legislation here will be a disaster. Let's see whether we're wise enough to profit from this knowledge.

— Gary Jason

Cheezed off — Over the holidays I visited my Aunt Ann, who is 90 years old. Ever since I was little, I've enjoyed her stories, insights, and advice.

This time, I had a story to share with her. I told her that a recent experience I had reminded me of one of her sage observations. It was a little over ten years ago when she and I were talking about unwelcome changes at the grocery store. She told me that when she picked up her regular can of coffee, she saw that it was the same price it was on previous shopping trips, but the weight was 13 ounces, not the usual 16. Being very refined and not given to griping, Aunt Ann said she was unhappy at this unexpected change, but she did buy the coffee.

The real problem, she said — and she admitted her guilt with buying that can of coffee — is that Americans are settling, settling for less, all around.

Late last year, I went shopping for a box of Cheez-its. The price was the usual $2.50 per box. But the box was different. This one was 13.7 ounces, not the usual 16. I checked several of the other boxes and saw that they were identical. I was being charged the same price for less Cheez-its!

Like a congressman in the night, Cheez-its' manufacturer slipped onto the shelves these boxes with less product, but for the same cost, and expected consumers to purchase the boxes as if nothing had happened. I felt betrayed. As much as I love Cheez-its — really love Cheez-its — I won't buy them anymore. I will not settle for this.

Aunt Ann agreed. She, too, would not buy any more Cheez-its.

I understand that when it comes to snack crackers, not everyone will share my sense of betrayal. And my libertarian colleagues may wish to remind me that marketplace changes in inputs affect the price of end-products like Cheez-its, or that the dollar's depreciation will be reflected in price changes. I understand those concepts, but economics is not my point.

This past year has been a series of betrayals. Our politicians have foisted waves of unwanted change on us, culminating with the Senate's passing a health bill, estimated to cost over $800 billion, on Christmas Eve, when most of the citizenry was distracted with holiday plans and festivities. Every American should feel betrayed and outraged by this kind of thing. The Senate healthcare bill should be the last straw for every citizen, no matter what his or her ideological or political persuasion may be.

As the new year unfolds, and warm holiday feelings inevitably fade, we must face a somber reality. The current administration and its flunkies in the House and Senate have shown us how very little they think of the American citizenry and its wishes. On the few occasions when we the people have been consulted, we have been ignored or insulted. The Democrats do not care what we want. The Republicans are ineffective. That leaves us. We are supposed to have a government by the people, for the people. It is our responsibility as free citizens

to say no to more spending, say no to more statism. We must do whatever it takes to roll back this "historic" change.

This year must be the year in which we do not settle.

— Marlaine White

She blinded me with science — In July 2009, out of the black, a large object hit Jupiter, catching professional astronomers with their elevations down and their azimuths askance. In spite of the billions we spend on government programs to gaze at the heavens, the event was discovered by an amateur astronomer in Australia using his homemade telescope. When he alerted the professionals, they quickly pointed a few of our large taxpayer-funded telescopes at Jupiter, getting some fine (if late) images, and letting us know that our money was being well spent.

As one of those taxpayers, I find it bothersome that the most justifiable use of public money for telescopes — trying to give us early warning of astronomical objects that might destroy us — is one use those telescopes rarely get. Instead, astronomers book telescope time months or years in advance, the vast majority of the time to look at narrow sectors of faraway corners of the universe.

After the Shoemaker-Levy comet hit Jupiter in 1994, more people started wondering about the likelihood of an impact on earth. So astronomers sat down at their government-funded computers and started figuring. Estimates had to be made about the size and number of roaming space objects that might do serious damage. "Let's see, if we overestimate the amount, people will think that we're crying wolf. On the other hand, if we underestimate, our funding won't be viewed as critical." Their answer: Jupiter will be hit an average of once every few hundred years. Some said every few thousand. The earth, being much smaller than Jupiter, has significantly less chance of being hit. Obviously, with an answer that vague, there was a lot of guessing involved. And now it seems likely that the guesses were low.

I'm sure we're about to hear warnings that the risk of impact to us is much greater than originally predicted and that we should spend even more tax money on even more telescopes. But the evidence suggests to me that if we let people keep their own money to spend on the leisure activities of their own choosing — like say, backyard astronomy — that we can get much more useful information for free.

— Jeff Wrobel

Twice the fool — I'm not a fan of Richard Cohen of the Washington Post, but in January he got something very right. He was addressing one of the dominant cliches of American institutional life — the weird idea that if all sorts of people criticize you, you must be doing well.

We hear this every time a teacher, school administrator, or school board member does something so stupid that everyone turns out to denounce him. We hear this every time a bureaucrat or politician shows himself so incompetent that everyone with any guts or civic spirit turns out to yell at him. "Oh," the "victim" says, "the radicals on both sides are against me. I must be doing something right." There follows a modest, self-righteous smile, and a wink toward the established media, such as the Washington Post, which are almost certain to agree. They know a fool when they see him.

I remember when The New York Times published a lead editorial endorsing Edmund Muskie, one of the many insane persons who have run for president. It said he was "a man of principle who has always had the courage to compromise." Sure, he was detested by both the Left and Right, but that just showed he was on the right track.

Cohen sees through all of this. In January he opined as follows, discussing the bad year suffered by the feckless Mr. Obama, now being criticized by everyone who has a brain: "Journalists like to believe that if they are getting criticism from both sides of the story, they must be doing something right. This is not true for journalists — they may actually have gotten the story doubly wrong — and it is certainly not true for political figures."

"Doubly wrong." Yes, that's it. That's it, all right.

— Stephen Cox

Where they have burned books — According to the Metro, senior citizens in the UK have found a way around the environmental carbon tax that has put winter warmth beyond the budget of many elderly. Turns out that since the internet has made encyclopedias relatively worthless, seniors have taken to burning them in their coal stoves as a cheap way to heat their homes — and, as nobody thought to regulate CO2 emissions from books, it's tax-free.

If nothing else, the Kyoto Treaty has succeeded in starting the largest European book burning since the Nazis.

— Tim Slagle

In the dark — One of the great medical breakthroughs of the last couple of decades is the diagnosis and treatment of sleep apnea. For some people, like me, snoring actually blocks off the airway during sleep. After some time without being able to breathe, they tell me, I awaken just enough to reopen the airway. This obstruction can happen many times during the night, turning sleep into a form of debilitation.

Sleep apnea is treated quite successfully by a CPAP machine. I wear a mask like a pilot's, and all night long the machine maintains just enough air pressure to keep my airways open. Periodically, however, I need to replace the mask and tubing. Formerly, with standard medical insurance, this was "free" — I didn't have to pay for the replacement. So when I recently contacted the company about replacing the mask and tubing there was no discussion of the price. There was also no discussion of the fact that the company was planning to send a whole new headgear unit, when all I needed was the mask and tubing. Again, why discuss something that is normally "free" to the patient?

Nevertheless, there's no such thing as a free lunch. As I told President Obama in my open letter (November 2009), I've recently changed to a relatively high deductible plan ($1,200 is all that's allowed in Maryland) with an HSA (health savings account). This made me vitally interested in reading the four-page bill for the mask and tubing, a.k.a. "explanation of benefits."

Granted, it was shipped FedEx, and had very nice brochures, but I was still unprepared for the size of the bill. It showed a whopping $868. Mysteriously, a bunch of the bill was "not allowed" (sounds like they're trying to get away with something, doesn't it?), but the part I needed to pay out of my HSA was still $325.

Now, there is nothing technically complicated about this

plastic and cloth apparatus. I'd expect to buy something this low-tech for under $30 in the real world — if it weren't covered by insurance, and people had to pay for it themselves. But now that I do have to pay for these things myself, it seems obvious that the medical system is hugely out of whack. (Sorry I don't know the correct economics jargon.) We patients have been making no effort whatever to contain costs. Why should we care if the price of everything is ridiculous? We care only about the part that we have to pay.

That's what's wrong with the system. And our politicians offer us everything but attempts to restore some consumer interest in price discipline. — Don Crawford

Snake oil — A story in The Wall Street Journal (Jan. 6) reveals yet another lie by President Obama, a.k.a. "Tricky Barry." During the campaign, when oil prices were astronomically high, McCain was scoring points with voters by saying that we should open more of our own country to drilling, even in offshore areas. Obama at first just kept pushing windmills, but then, after seeing his lead dwindle to almost nothing, started saying that he, too, would be willing to expand domestic drilling.

But, just like his promise to have the proceedings of the debate for health care reform broadcast on C-SPAN, so to ensure transparency, this promise is now down the crapper. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced that, even as oil prices are moving back up again, even more regulatory hurdles will be put in front of oil and natural gas companies before they can drill on federal lands. The administration is going to make it tougher for the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) to put requests from oil and gas companies on the fast track for approval. It is the clear intention of these lying weasels in the White House to make it harder for energy companies to access resources on federal land.

That is a huge roadblock to energy independence, considering that the BLM has control over 260 million acres of land.

And this action is only part of Obama's green jihad against fossil fuel, a campaign that includes attempts by the administration to jack up taxes on energy companies, and especially to pass cap-and-trade legislation.

So much for energy independence. Obama's actions will put us at the mercy of countries such as Iran, Russia, and Venezuela. Maybe that is why Ahmadinejad, Putin, and Chavez are treating Obama as their patsy. — Gary Jason

Reading terminal — The Associated Press has reported that Laredo, Texas, "home to nearly a quarter-million people as well as high rates of illiteracy . . . will become the largest U.S. city without a bookstore. After the local B. Dalton closes, the nearest bookseller will be 150 miles away in San Antonio."

Curiously, brick-and-mortar bookstores are showing surprisingly little interest in an area with "high rates of illiteracy."

And, of course, even on the cold, clay streets of Laredo, FedEx and Amazon will deliver to your home virtually any book — infinitely more books than were ever found in the local B. Dalton's — within 24 hours, if you use a few clicks on your computer.

Yet one more example of market failure. — Ted Levy

The Left's playbook — Late last year, The New Republic published a pep talk for progressives. It was by John B. Judis and was called "Anti-Statism in America." Its aim was to explain why President Obama was having such a hard time getting his good and progressive measures through Congress — such warm blankets of progressivism as a mandatory medical-coverage bill, a cap-and-trade bill, and a Consumer Financial Protection Agency bill.

Obama had come into power hoping to do all these things, Rooseveltlike, in one huzzah springtime. Eleven months later, all he'd got done was the "stimulus" bill, which was basically a grand bolt of deficit spending on all the usual Democratic stuff. His society-changing reforms were being resisted.

Why was that? There is a tree-versus-the-forest problem in American's political beliefs, Judis said. If you ask Americans whether insurance companies should be forbidden to reject an applicant because of bad health, they will say sure, let's forbid that. Should everyone have health insurance? Sure. Feed them the thing in parts, and they'll swallow it. But show them the thing as a whole, and they'll balk: they don't want a government takeover of all medical insurance, which implies an effective takeover of medicine.

Another writer might conclude that if the people rejected a thing as a whole, their final thought was rejection. Not Judis. He is not worried about the big picture. To him, those worries are like junk DNA, remnants of an old "Lockean liberal" ideology that has produced "today's free-market conservative or libertarian."

And *these people*, Judis says, seem to be slowing down, even blocking, the progressive Obama program.

Judis reminds his readers that this blockage of government goodness has happened before — and that in the past century only a few times has the Left been able to push through big, society-changing reforms. One time (the income tax, the Federal Reserve) was under Wilson; another (Social Security, the National Labor Relations Act) was under Roosevelt; another (Medicare, Medicaid) was under Johnson; and another (the EPA) was early in the term of Nixon.

These cases have several things in common. An important one is ideological strength on the Left: the socialists in Wilson's time, Huey Long and the Coughlinites in Roosevelt's, the New Left in Johnson's and Nixon's.

Another commonality is political skill. Statist measures were sold in a way so as not to "raise anti-statist hackles." Wilson claimed that his Federal Trade Commission would improve market competition. Roosevelt labeled Social Security "insurance." Obama has followed this path by calling his proposed government medical insurance a "public option" — labeling it "an expansion rather than a constriction of free-market choice" in order "to avoid the impression that they are advocating a federal takeover of the health care system."

Nowhere does Judis argue that the Right is *inaccurate* in labeling these measures statist. He is advising the Left to make sure they are not labeled that way.

Obama has done this. And Wall Street has been discredited to a degree beyond what any leftist could have hoped. Obama has majorities in both houses of Congress. But several things block him still. The majorities are not as large as they were under Roosevelt and Johnson. The crisis of capitalism is not dire enough; the economy has stopped falling, the stock

market is up, and people are not scared enough. Further, there is a surprisingly "vibrant and unsettling ideological conservatism" as expressed in the tea parties. Finally, there hasn't been a strong enough push from the Left to "intimidate Democratic fence-sitters" into supporting the president.

"Obama and the Democrats need active, unruly, and independent pressure from the left," he writes.

All of this is, in fact, very good advice to the Left. For the Right it is valuable as well. It is an affirmation that the tea-party demonstrations and other means of stirring public support — and intimidating *Republican* fence-sitters — do work.

— Bruce Ramsey

Hot tip — Those who want to criminalize "insider trading" are looking at the market as a big lottery, where everybody should have the same chance to become a winner or a loser. They want to ensure that everybody has the same random chance of picking a lucky number. In short, they believe that no one should have the right to cash in on superior knowledge about the real underlying value of a financial asset.

If they succeed in criminalizing such actions, and somehow eliminating such knowledgeable people from trading, they will indeed have turned the market into a lottery, rather than a chance to profit from evaluating situations and information and then making better evidence-based decisions. This is just another case of egalitarian thinking that attempts to deny that some people make more efficient use of their minds, work harder and smarter to develop useful information, and understand the world better than others.

The intent is to make that illegal. If the effort succeeds, the egalitarians will achieve what they already think is true — that some people are better off than others through no worth or earned effort of their own. Then financial leveling will be fully justified: tax the rich to bring them down to the level of the poor, since the rich didn't do anything to justify their being more successful anyway.

Meanwhile, there is a new federal law — passed in 2008 and signed by President Bush — that establishes another kind of privilege, in another kind of "insider" relationship. This one relates to insider information, information that may have a critical bearing on the equity of a transaction, but that only one side of the transaction is now allowed to have or use.

The data in question are the results of genetic testing and family medical histories. Under the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, employers are not allowed to ask for such information, and health insurers are barred from using it in deciding whether to cover someone or in setting anyone's insurance rates.

In the long run, of course, insurers will compensate by raising rates on all people who have insurance. Those with more fortunate genetic histories will pay the bill for those with less beneficial genes. Employers, stockholders, and, indirectly, all workers will pay the price when companies hire people who turn out not to be able to perform the jobs they were hired to do.

Remember this the next time you hear the argument about insider information being unconscionable — unconscionable except when it's required by law. — John Kannarr

Up with this we cannot put — Holiday time off from work and academic study gave me a chance to put a dent in my non-law, non-dissertation book pile. One book I finished — "The Plungers and the Peacocks," by Dana Thomas — is a history of some of the major personalities of Wall Street from its beginning through the late 1960s. The book ends with a quotation that got me thinking about the idea of risk in our society. It's from a long-ago Wall Street Journal editor, writing about market speculators: "If ever prohibition extends to the taking of a chance involving the risk of whole or partial loss, the result may be 'good Americans,' but of a merely negative side of goodness."

The speculators and gamblers chronicled in the book knew they could lose great fortunes just as easily as they could gain great fortunes, but they went for it anyway. They assumed the risk.

In the legal realm, assuming the risk meant that a plaintiff bringing a case for negligence could not recover (with a few exceptions) for any damage caused by a defendant's acts if the plaintiff knew of the risk and voluntarily (expressly or impliedly) proceeded in the face of the risk. This is the legal embodiment of the commonsense notion: it's a shame about your loss, but you knew what you were getting into.

Today, in most jurisdictions, the concept has been folded into the comparative negligence doctrine: a plaintiff is not fully barred from recovery but can only recover the percentage of the damages that was not his fault. Still, common sense is supposed to prevail. It's a shame about your loss, but you knew what you were getting into. If my best friend decides to go skydiving, he assumes the risk that he could be injured or die. Other than sadness at the loss of my friend if his skydiving adventure goes awry, I do not assume any consequence of his risk.

I have an unlimited tolerance for risks that others assume — if they bear the consequences for their actions. That goes for friends, enemies, and financial institutions.

The idea of risk seems to have gotten twisted in our society. I know I've mentioned this before, but taxpaying citizens are increasingly bound by legal tethers permitting us less and less control in our own lives. We're permitted less and less risk, and we are compelled by the state to assume the risks of others. The state's favored financial institutions — you know, the ones that are "too big to fail" — are permitted to engage in highly risky acts without serious consequence. Bailouts require taxpaying citizens (present and future) to assume the consequences of these institutions' risks. I can't assume the risk of ingesting foods with transfat or enjoying a relaxing cigarette in New York City, but now my hard earned money (and that of my heirs) is diverted to pay for the consequences of unconscionable risks assumed by certain financial institutions that mostly reside in and around that city. The state's insulation of financial institutions — its coercion of taxpayers to bear the losses of those institutions' risks — comports neither with legal principles nor with common sense.

Risk should not be legislated out of what is supposed to be a free society. Neither should the government shift consequences of risks from the responsible parties onto those taking no part in the original venture. Within the bounds of their fiduciary duties, financial institutions (particularly those of which I am not a client) should be able to engage in high risk investments in the hope of large rewards. I can tolerate such risk, but only if I do not have to bear to the consequences.

Bearing favorable or unfavorable consequences from my own risks — this I can tolerate. A relative asking for a little help after losing out on a risky venture — this I can tolerate. Some Humphrey Bogart-like character coming up to me on the street and asking, "Can you help a fellow American down on his luck?" — this I can tolerate. But all citizens, corporate and individual, have the right to assume the risk of their actions — bearing the benefit of success and the consequence of failure.

The way things seem to be going, however, the state's pet financial institutions are free to engage in whatever risk they wish, buoyed by the taxpayers' forced support, while those same taxpaying citizens aren't permitted to risk the choice of beverage with a meal. This we cannot tolerate.

— Marlaine White

Mayor's little helpers — The great surprise in the recent New York City mayoral election was that Michael Bloomberg, the incumbent, nearly lost to himself. This wasn't expected, as he had spent tens of millions of dollars of his own money, hiring the smartest campaign advisers available, and had even established a second line (officially called the Independence Party) for those Democrats congenitally unable to push the Republican lever, which he already owned.

For two terms Bloomberg had been a strong mayor, instituting changes that might have stymied a weaker leader, such as establishing a telephone help line ("311"), changing the public school system, building outdoor cafes in city streets, and banning smoking from nearly all public spaces (including some outdoors, such as baseball stadia). So swathed in his own success had he become that most New Yorkers hardly noticed that he screwed up the building department and gave sweetheart deals to developers who didn't need public charity, such as the New York Yankees. Nonetheless, no one ever accused the city's richest man of taking a bribe he didn't need.

Most New Yorkers approved of Bloomberg until, nearing the end of his second term in office, he changed a recently established statute forbidding a third term — changing it not for the future, but wholly to benefit his own immediate ambitions. This mad desire to continue as our mayor changed him into a more typical politician, pandering to certain interests, making deals to get more votes, etc.

It did not matter that the Democrats chose a veteran factotum, an amiable African-American named Bill Thompson, who was incidentally too reminiscent for comfort of David Dinkins, by common consent a weak and lousy mayor from two decades ago. Whenever Dinkins appeared on local television to support Thompson, he reminded voters of their common insufficiencies. Worse for Thompson, President Obama didn't come to New York, though he twice campaigned in nearby New Jersey for Jon Corzine, an incumbent (who nonetheless lost). Nor did the current New York governor, David Patterson, likewise African-American mostly, campaign for Thompson. Instead of his name, the election machine might have read "No Bloomberg," which is just as comprehensible in Spanish as English.

Though early polls had Bloomberg winning by as much as 20%, the final results were 51% for Bloomberg, 48% for Thompson. The sum was nearly 200,000 fewer than Bloomberg got four years ago. Voters turned against him not only because of his chutzpah in overturning term limits, but because of campaign overkill — advertisements knocking poor Thompson (whom few cared about anyway), oversized glossy fliers in the mail, robot telephone calls, and so forth. On the afternoon of election day, when my doorbell rang I heard a young female voice asking if I'd already voted for Bloomberg. Enough already.

Those of us who went to public high schools in New York state some decades ago remember in Thomas Hardy's "The Mayor of Casterbridge" a character named Henchard who was undone by his excessive ambition, the implication being that his unfortunate fate illustrated a universal truth. Since Michael Bloomberg grew up in Boston, he might not have learned that yet.

Some libertarians have made term limits into an issue worthy of legislation, as indeed it probably is. Critical historians have also noted that, even for successful mayors, third terms are rarely as good as their first or second. In the anti-Bloomberg vote was an expression of general critical sentiment. Can anyone think of any earlier election in which an incumbent nearly lost to himself?

Myself, I voted Libertarian, for a candidate less visible than Bill Thompson.

— Richard Kostelanetz

Topping the charts — As Obama finishes his first year in office, we ought to pause and acknowledge his success as a big spender. Indeed, he is the all-time champion.

For a meaningful comparison, let's put the figures in Year 2000 dollars. In his first year, Obama spent $2.8 trillion, thus completely eclipsing the record set for first year spending by George W. Bush. Bush spent $1.8 trillion, which only modestly broke Bill Clinton's record of $1.6 trillion.

You have to go back to Gerald Ford to find a president who spent less than a trillion bucks during his first year in office. He spent $982 billion in 1975 (again, in Year 2000 dollars). And the last president actually to spend less than his predecessor during the first year was Dwight Eisenhower, who spent a miserly $556 billion.

— Gary Jason

Gesture language — I watched Obama's much-anticipated speech at the West Point Military Academy with great interest. It was not the content that fascinated me; most of the new U.S. strategy of surge and withdraw in Afghanistan had been leaked already. It was his delivery that captivated me.

First, I noted the venue. Obama pulled Bush's old trick of delivering an iffy speech before an audience guaranteed to be polite if not supportive. The audience lived up to the minimum expectation — politeness. The applause was scant and tepid. Like Bush, who staged his "Mission Accomplished" speech on a battleship, Obama's venue screamed "patriotism." He was hedging his bet, big time.

Second, the man known as a consummate orator looked nervous, jerky, and off his game. A large part of the jerkiness came from his constantly shifting focus from a teleprompter on the left to a teleprompter on the right. The frequent, rapid back-and-forth made him appear literally shifty and mechanical. Not looking into the camera meant that he rarely looked the TV audience in the eye, and this made him appear either disingenuous or uncertain.

Third, the very tone of his voice was different. Known for

inspirational rhetoric, Obama was somber and matter-of-fact in delivery. He rarely tapped into his great strength — the ability to suck in an audience emotionally, so that the content becomes secondary.

This speech did not captivate. Instead of listening to him, I started counting the number of times his posture shifted, now to the left, now to the right. No wonder the online edition of the Daily Telegraph (UK) ran the headline "Barack Obama is no Churchill."

If this was Obama's most important speech as president (and I believe it was), then he failed miserably in both content and delivery. I wonder if cracks are appearing in his confidence. — Wendy McElroy

Eccentric orbit — Recent comments by Anatoly Perminov, head of Russia's space agency, show the high intellectual level on which government science is conducted over there (and maybe here, too, although reports from Washington are not always as revealing as those from Moscow).

On Dec. 30, Perminov announced that Russia is considering sending a spaceship to knock an asteroid, Apophis, out of orbit so that it won't hit the earth on one of its revolutions about the sun. American scientists, who once raised a hue and cry about a 1 in 37 chance that the 900-foot object would strike our planet in 2029, eventually concluded that there was no chance of a collision that year. NASA now says that there's about one chance in 300,000 that the thing will collide with earth in 2036 or 2068.

Yet while inviting America to join the search-and-remove mission, Perminov seemed unaware of the American findings. In fact, he seemed unaware of much of anything. As the Associated Press reported, "Perminov said that he heard from a scientist that Apophis is getting closer and may hit the planet. 'I don't remember exactly, but it seems to me it could hit the Earth by 2032,' Perminov said. 'People's lives are at stake. We should pay several hundred million dollars and build a system that would allow to prevent a collision, rather than sit and wait for it to happen and kill hundreds of thousands of people.'"

I just hope that if the scientists manage to hit Apophis, they don't send it *toward* the earth. — Stephen Cox

Going, going, gone — I enjoy auctions. Charity, art, real estate, foreclosure — you name it, I'm interested in the bidding for it. To me, auctions are refreshingly candid assessments of the value of things. Internet auction sites like eBay serve this purpose, too. But there's something more vivid about a live auction.

Recently, the cash-strapped county in which I live announced a larger-than-usual surplus vehicle auction. Since the county had just downsized the number of sheriff's deputies and other positions in its employ, more new, or relatively new, cars and trucks were available, and a ready source of extra cash for the government. Good for it, for acting (in this narrow context) like a rational economic entity.

Aside from my general enjoyment of these things, I had a practical reason to be at this auction: I have a son who's getting close to 16 years old. I thought that a late model, decommissioned police car would be a safe rig for him to drive for his first year or two on the road. But the auction went unexpectedly.

The crowd was a strange mix. About half of it looked like a bunch of financial sharpies taking some hours out of their Friday morning to chase bargains. The other half had the look of desperate rural poverty. Ragged, stained clothes. Unshaven faces. Crooked or missing teeth. Downward gazes. Overweight. Lots of wasted, anxious movement. Quite a few of them completed a wretched stereotype by bringing their entire families — including children during class hours on a school day — to the County Facilities Garage.

The first vehicle up for auction was a mid '90s Ford Taurus sedan. The low Kelley Blue Book value of this car was less than $1,000. (I checked later.) Bidding was spirited, moving up in increments of $25. A very tall, lean fellow standing next to me bid up to about $600, then stopped. The bidding thinned out notably at that point. Quickly, two of raggedy rural types were left alone to bid against each other. They kept pushing up until they stopped at $1,100.

That process repeated for just about every car and truck that came up for bid. The tall, lean guy next to me bid on just about everything. Turned out he was from a used car dealership in the state capital, looking for inventory.

I joined the bidding when they got to the Sheriff's Department's former Crown Vics. The county was offering about a dozen for sale — most from the 2002–2004 model years. There's a divergence of opinion about the wisdom of buying former law enforcement cars. Some people think they're bargains because they're usually well maintained; others think they aren't because they're used hard while in service.

The low Blue Book value for these cars was between $2,750 and $3,300, depending on the year and miles in question. (This I'd checked ahead of time.) My rule of thumb about value in a used car is that, assuming decent quality, 25% below low Kelley Blue Book is a good deal. That meant my bids would top out between $2,050 and $2,450. And, given the "rode hard" factor of the former cop cars, I'd stay on the low end of that range.

It didn't much matter. The crowd set the prices far above my limits. I managed to bark in a few early bids, but was quickly elbowed out by people willing to pay more than a "value" price for the cars. And, almost every time, the final action came down to a couple of the dentally-challenged types.

One, in particular, was buying the Crown Vics. An older man (he looked to be in his mid-60s, and ridden as hard as any of the cars), he pressed the prices up over the limits that anyone planning to resell the cars at a profit would pay. And he bought five or six vehicles.

His most frequent rival bidder was a sullen-looking younger man — late 20s, maybe younger — with his heavy-set wife and two kids in tow. He paced around nervously, bidding quickly until he suddenly stopped. He was oblivious to the normal protocol of auctions — slower bids as bids approach market prices. Still, he managed to bull his way to a couple of winning bids. When it came time to fill out the purchase paperwork, the overweight wife did the writing.

The tall guy standing next to me hissed, exasperated: "There's no way they're making any money on these cars. With taxes and title? No way." We talked a little between items, and he blamed the illogical bids on late-night infomercials that tell people about fortunes to be made in government

auctions. He suggested that, if I were really interested in a cop car, I could wait until some of them showed up on craigslist. After a few weeks, he predicted, they'd end sell for less than what the winning bidders were paying.

The tall guy from Olympia dashed off before bidding finished on the last vehicle. I heard him saying into his cell phone, "Nothing here." But there was *something* here. A market inefficiency created by late-night infomercials and the desperate, possibly meth-fueled, desire to make some quick money.

— Jim Walsh

American as GDP pie — Economist Mark J. Perry has reported some fascinating data on world GDP growth, taken from the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They are figures President Obama ought to consider.

It turns out that despite Democrat moans about America losing all its jobs to sweatshop dictatorships abroad, America's share of world GDP has remained essentially constant over the past four decades, at about 26%. Latin America has also held constant, at about 6% of world GDP. Despite all the oil money, the Middle East together with Africa shows a flat 5% of world GDP, year over year, over this period.

The two blocks that show significant change are the EU15 countries and the Asian ones. The EU15 block has declined linearly from 36% of world GDP in 1969 to only 27% in 2009. The Asian block, on the other hand, has seen a near-linear rise in share from 15% in 1969 to about 25% in 2009.

So the first thing that should strike Obama (not that it will — he appears to be remarkably dense) is that the block of countries whose economies have, in general, become more statist has dropped dramatically in relative standing, while those that appear to be growing away from statist economics have seen their relative share rise remarkably. Those that never had free market economies have stayed on the bottom, and the country that has never (yet) adopted statist economics still rides high.

The second point is that the whole pie has grown. World GDP has increased nearly threefold in this 40-year period. So there is little evidence to support the notion that countries such as China and India have hurt America's prosperity: our 5% of the world's population still enjoys more than a 25% slice of a global pie that has (I repeat) tripled in size over 40 years. No doubt Obama is working to change all that. — Gary Jason

Helping hand — The great December 2009 snowstorm dumped 21 inches of snow on us in about 24 hours. When I looked outside in the morning, I could barely see the cars parked on our street; the snow covered everything.

I recently moved to this short, narrow back street, connected downslope to a major Baltimore thoroughfare. To get out of our street, I have to drive steeply uphill and stop at the top, wait for an opening, then dash out into the traffic flow. When I moved there, during the summer, I clearly lacked foresight. Getting out of the street couldn't be done over snow and ice, so I figured I would be stuck until the snow melted.

Mid-morning I heard voices and looked out to see my neighbors, snow shovels in hand. It wasn't just the men, either. Everyone was out there, working away. I wasn't inclined to shovel snow; I preferred to let it melt; but my neighbors appeared to be aiming toward my portion of the sidewalk, so I was forced by social pressure, to put on my boots and join the work party in progress. My plan was to clear the sidewalk immediately in front of my house and go back inside.

As I began shoveling, I could see that not only were these crazy people digging out the sidewalks; they were also digging out their cars and the entire street! This seemed excessive to me; in my mind, the city is supposed to clear the streets. When I suggested we ought to wait for a snow plow, one of the long-time residents explained, "Don't count on the plows ever coming down this street." The cars, sidewalk, and street in front of all the row houses up the hill, from me to the corner, had been completely shoveled out. But instead of going back inside, the young woman next door and the gray-haired woman from two doors up were working their way downhill to the part of the street in front of my house. I couldn't stop them, so I really had no choice but to keep shoveling.

Meanwhile, some people in a pickup tried to see if they could get out of our street. They were fine until they hit the unshoveled section at the very top of the street, the section that wasn't in front of anyone's house. The pickup didn't make it; it just slid over to the curb. The occupants got out, walked back past us, and returned with a half dozen volunteers to clear that last section at the top of our street.

While we were digging, a large black man arrived with three short Hispanic men in tow, all of them carrying shovels. After discussions with some of the neighbors down the street, these four men set to work on the 100-foot stretch of street just below me, where there were no houses. They worked harder and faster than any of the rest of us, quickly creating a path just a little wider than the pickup truck's tire tracks.

By the time my two female neighbors and I finished digging out my car and the portion of the street in front of my house, I was tired and wanted to go back inside. But the next car downhill from me belonged to the girl next door, who had just helped me dig out my car. So I was forced, again by social pressure, to help dig out her car. A little after noon, we were all done. Our entire street was clear of snow and drying in the sun.

It was at that point that the government forces arrived, in the form of a snow plow that drove slowly down our bare street, the driver apparently admiring our work and accomplishing nothing. Even the part of the truck that was supposed to be spreading salt wasn't working. But our little street was clear, and all of us could drive in and out that afternoon, five days before the schools reopened and the city got back to normal.

Not only does social pressure work just as effectively as mandatory taxes, but civil society is far more efficient than the government.

— Don Crawford

Land of wonders — A friend and I are going out to dinner. I pick him up at his apartment house. On entering, I can't help noticing a large sign, announcing at considerable length that state law requires people to know that the structure may conceivably contain substances that may conceivably cause cancer and other ailments. I notice it every time I go there, though I take no heed of its silly warning, nor does anyone else. There are signs like that all over town. I wonder how many are produced and installed each year, and how much they cost, and how many people may possibly be injured in producing, installing, and maintaining them.

Pulling into the parking lot next to the restaurant, we are gratified to see several parking spaces unoccupied. Closer inspection reveals that most of them are spaces reserved for handicapped persons. The rest are spaces reserved next to the spaces reserved for handicapped persons, in case said persons require extra room to be unloaded from their vehicles. My friend and I drive around the neighborhood for 30 minutes before finding another place to park. I wonder how much gas we consume and how many unhealthy emissions we make during that period. I wonder how many traffic accidents occur during such tours of the crowded streets. I wonder how much the handicapped spaces cost to maintain.

Finally we are seated in the restaurant, deciding what we want to order, when we notice that large parts of the menu are occupied with warnings about undercooked food and the dangers of alcohol to pregnant women. I wonder how many life-hours are wasted, every year, on making sure these warnings are properly worded and properly posted, and how much cardboard and plastic are consumed in posting them.

After dinner, we stop at the 7-11 to pick up some coffee. While pouring, we observe the large plastic warning signs affixed to the plastic counter extension that discourages us from dropping coffee on our feet and suing the store. The signs say, "California Law Provides that Disposable Paper Receptacles May Not Be Refilled." I wonder how many Disposable Paper Receptacles end up in landfills every year, because of that law.

It's now midnight, and we're stopped, for the tenth time, at an intersection with a stoplight but no traffic. I wonder how much gas is consumed, and what quantity of fumes is emitted, every hour of every night, as people sit and wait for lights like this. People tell me that in Ireland, late at night, the stoplights turn to caution lights. I guess that can never happen here. We're too concerned with health and safety.

— Stephen Cox

Never the Twain — One of the myriad things I dislike about the crusade against global warming is that it ruins my favorite Mark Twain quotation: "Everyone talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it."

— Wendy McElroy

Terror in his pants — The failed attempt of a Nigerian wannabe jihaddist to detonate a bomb aboard an airplane brings many questions. Since none of them were even asked, much less answered, in the mainstream media, allow me to bring some of them up.

First, the perp was the son of an important banker. This is not the first time that spoiled brats have turned to extremism. Witness Patty Hearst or, more recently, John Walker Lindh, the son of an affluent Marin County family, captured while fighting with the Taliban. Hence the question: will this new occurrence of a terrorist from a rich family put to rest the notion that poverty breeds terrorism? Yes, I understand the logic flaw: just because some Muslims born with a silver spoon in their mouths turn violent does not imply that poverty is not linked to terrorism. But several studies have shown that there is indeed no provable link between poverty and terrorism.

The most read is probably a study by Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova published in the Journal of Economic Perspectives in 2003. It shows that the middle class is overrepresented in various samples of terrorists. Yet the cliche "poverty breeds terrorism" is still going around, and not just in liberal circles. President Bush declared "We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror" during his 2002 visit in Mexico. It is vain to hope that the media will pay attention to studies and logic, but they do remember anecdotes, and so let's hope the "rich Nigerian terrorist" will help put this myth to rest.

Second, since when does the lack of competition improve performance? After 9/11, Bush reorganized the U.S. intelligence services, created the Department of Homeland Security, and consolidated intelligence agencies. As a result, intelligence departments that were previously overlapping and serving different needs were forcibly regrouped.

In many cases, this resulted in a "one size fits all" approach to intelligence collection, analysis, and distribution. In the pre-DHS days, a certain emulation — if not competition — was commonly seen between different intelligence bureaus. These parallel organizations have been replaced by a centralized behemoth that serves a captive audience. The different services are now deprived of even the limited flexibility they previously had for acquiring intelligence. In other words, U.S. intelligence now works with more centralization and less competition. And the media wonder: how could the Flight 253 terrorist not be on the TSA's vaunted no-fly list, when his own father had warned the US embassy about his son's radicalization? Oh, and he was barred from entering the UK, bought his ticket with cash, and had no luggage. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano asserted that "the system worked" — which is true if the "system" consists of sheer luck, bad bomb-making skills, and an infuriated Dutch passenger dragging off the terrorist before handcuffing him to a seat while an attendant douses the bomber's flaming pants with an extinguisher.

Third, has Abdulmutallab really failed? Even if he had detonated his 80 grams of high explosive near a window, the plane would likely have survived. Nevertheless, the damage he did is more pervasive and more destructive than even the 300 lives he failed to take. Consider that the TSA's security theater in airports (and maybe other places) already forces us to walk through detectors barefoot in an ironic homage to Richard Reid, the Shoe Bomber, who failed to detonate his heel. Thanks to Umar the Undies Bomber, security measures now include patting down passengers in ways that used to warrant dinner and a movie. Soon, full-body scanners will allow security voyeurs to conveniently see through our clothes.

This incremental loss of freedom and privacy paves the way to the next abuse level. Indeed, the TSA has heard about the novel technique used by Abdullah al-Asiri, the Arse Bomber, who splatted himself when he detonated a small bomb hidden in his rectum in a failed attempt to kill a Saudi prince, and they wonder what to do to detect such threats. Fortunately, the upcoming Obamacare might very well create an army of unemployed doctors, among them proctologists who would happily take a government job and, er, put the finger on similar attempts. And even if we are spared such indignities, the

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Our Forefathers' Failure

by Edmund Contoski

Everything old is new again. Obama's lofty rhetoric rehashes the failed plans that suffered the tragedy of the commons.

President Obama has failed to learn the simple basic lesson that the Pilgrims, who established the tradition of Thanksgiving Day in 1623 (not 1621, as often claimed), learned the hard way. The bounteous harvest they were gratefully celebrating on that day was preceded by years of starvation. They arrived in mid-December 1620, and half of them died the first year. Though the Indians helped them survive, the colonists were chronically short of food, and their numbers continued to dwindle.

Under the Mayflower Compact, which governed the colony, "all profits and benefits that are got by trade, working, fishing or any other means" were community property in the "common stock" of the colony. And "all such persons as are of this colony are to have their meat, drink, apparel and all provisions out of this common stock." People were required to put in everything they could — they were forbidden from growing their own food — and to take out only what they needed. It was a policy of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," centuries before Karl Marx seduced millions of people with those words.

The communal system was such a failure that in the spring of 1623 the Pilgrims feared they would not survive another poor harvest. "So they began to think," wrote the colony's governor William Bradford,

> how they might raise as much corn as they could, and obtain a better crop than they had done, that they might not still thus languish in misery. At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest among them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves. . . . And so assigned to every family a parcel of land. . . . This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted then otherwise would have been by any other means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content.

Far from making the people "happy and flourishing," the communal system, wrote Bradford, "was found to breed confusion and discontent, and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort." Not surprisingly,

> young men that were able and fit did repine [complain] that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children, without recompense. The strong, or men of parts, had no more division of food, clothes, etc. than he that was weak and not able to do a quarter the other could; this was thought injustice. The aged and graver men to be ranked and equalized in labor, and food, clothes, etc. with the meaner and younger sort, thought it some indignity and disrespect unto them.

Under the circumstances, there was little incentive to produce food. Severe whippings were tried to induce greater production, but they did little more than increase discontent.

The social disharmony, along with the food shortages, disappeared once the concept of private property was introduced and people could keep whatever they produced, or trade it away as they saw fit. In 1647 Bradford was able to write "any general want or famine hath not been amongst them since to this day." Such was the success of the new system that in 1624 the colonists began to export corn, trading it for beaver pelts, other furs, and meat.

In 1624 the Pilgrims took a further step in property rights. The system of assigning land "to every man for his own particular" had certainly increased the production of corn, but the assignment was drawn by lot yearly. Thus there was not much incentive for making improvements to one's tillage when someone else might draw that land next year. The men requested of the Governor "to have some portion of the land given them for continuance, and not by yearly lot. . . . Which being well considered, their request was granted."

Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in America, established in Virginia in 1607, had an experience similar to the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Early years of starvation were followed by converting to a system of property rights and a free market, which brought abundance. Under collectivism, less than half of every shipload of settlers survived the first 12 months at Jamestown. Most of the work was done by only one-fifth of the men, to whom the socialist system gave the same rations as to the others. During the winter of 1609–10, called "The Starving Time," the population fell from 500 to 60.

But when Jamestown converted to a free market, there was "plenty of food, which every man by his own industry may easily and doth procure," wrote the colony secretary Ralph Hamor in 1614. Under the previous system, he said, "we reaped not so much corn from the labors of thirty men as three men have done for themselves now."

Jamestown had an experience similar to that of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Early years of starvation were followed by converting to a system of property rights and a free market, which brought abundance.

We should not underestimate the significance of the experiences at Plymouth and Jamestown. Property rights and free markets were truly revolutionary and fundamental to capitalism. Without them, all the wealth, progress, and human betterment that followed could not have occurred. According to Sartell Prentice, "In England, meanwhile, farming 'in common' continued to be the general practice for another hundred years. Not until the second decade of the seventeen hundreds did 'setting crops for their particular' begin to be slowly accepted in England — and decades were to pass before the new practice became sufficiently widespread to provide an adequate food supply for the population."

There is no shortage of people who want a political system that gives them the fruits of other men's labors, and there is an abundance of politicians willing to accommodate them.

Even today, centuries later, there is still inadequate understanding of the importance of property rights and free markets. A recent BBC poll of 29,000 people worldwide found only 11% think free-market capitalism is a good thing. One-quarter of those polled said capitalism is "fatally flawed."

There is no shortage of people who want a political system that gives them the fruits of other men's labors, as at Plymouth and Jamestown. And there is an abundance of politicians willing to accommodate them at the expense of other men's property. The result is repetition of the collectivist systems (socialism, fascism) that have failed in the past, and no end to the discontent and resentment they engender. But people can be seduced to try them again and again by lofty idealistic statements, eloquent messages of hope, and promises that can never be kept. All of which allow the covetousness of other people's property — whether for personal gain or altruistic, collectivist aims — to masquerade under noble-sounding phrases.

When Barack Obama was campaigning for the presidency, he promised to redistribute other people's wealth for the collective good. In a short but spirited dialog with a small businessman, "Joe the Plumber," Obama argued that society would be better off if Joe's taxes were increased and the money distributed more widely to those less well-off. What is this but a denial of Joe's right to his own property and a repetition of the socialist distribution schemes that were so disastrous at Plymouth and Jamestown?

Once he was president, Obama came up with a health plan that would require everyone to buy health insurance — as though people's money was not theirs by right but, rather, was part of the "common stock" of community property, to be allocated by the leader for the collective good! And, just as at Plymouth, people who did not cooperate would be punished — not by severe whippings as was done there, but by the more civilized penalty of seizing their property through fines.

Contrast the government inflicting pain and penalty to force compliance compared to the benefit and satisfaction —

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Freedom From What?!

by S. H. Chambers

For decades, politicians have been trying
to free us from something they won't define.

A memorable phrase in an historic speech sometimes becomes the name by which the speech is remembered: *I have a dream. Ich bin ein Berliner. Tear down this wall.* President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech may one day be deemed historic. If it is, a fitting title can be found in the 20th paragraph: *War is sometimes necessary.* When the president said those words, I blinked back a tear.

But it was another phrase used in the Oslo speech that will be mulled over here: *freedom from want.*

It is an unfocused phrase, but of excellent provenance, first decanted in FDR's "Four Freedoms" speech, in which he foresaw a world founded on those freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Here's part of what he said: "The third is freedom from want — which, translated into universal terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its ihabitants — everywhere in the world.... That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation." He was speaking in 1941.

In 1948, the phrase was reused in the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want." Eleanor Roosevelt helped craft the document.

This brings us back to President Obama's "War is sometimes necessary" speech, in which he said, "If human rights are not protected, peace is a hollow promise," and, later, "a just peace includes not only civil and political rights — it must encompass economic security and opportunity. For true peace is not just freedom from fear, but freedom from want."

The phrase seems off, and I think I know why. The word "want" has so many different meanings that "freedom from want," when inspected closely, turns out to be more of a Rorschach test than a right. Let's consider.

As a noun, "want" might mean: (1) "the state or feeling of desire," as in, "Flipping through the catalogue of huge television sets, Taylor was consumed by *want*," (2) "destitution or privation," as in, "Many Biharis live in *want*," or, (3) "anything that is desired or needed, but lacking," as in, "The hotel

staff scrambled to fulfill the diva's every *want*." Did FDR and company have one of these meanings in mind?

Let's try out definition (1), the state of desiring. "True peace is . . . freedom from want." This sounds an awful lot like the Lord Buddha talking, doesn't it? It was he, after all, who taught that suffering comes from desire, and that the key to happiness is to stop wanting. Buddhists call it the Third Noble Truth: to end suffering, one must achieve freedom from want.

If that's the idea, the president could ask the Secretary of Education to launch an initiative in our public schools to complement the "Just Say No" and abstinence-only programs. Funds could be earmarked for begging bowls and saffron robes for the students in mandatory "Stop the Want" classes.

I'm not serious. It's a pretty sure bet that neither Roosevelt nor Obama had the teachings of the Buddha in mind. But how about the Old Testament?

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Now, if I were a sheep, the 23rd Psalm would be comforting only if my shepherd were a committed vegan. Setting aside the shepherd and sheep analogy, which has no place in Buddhism, and setting aside the fact that here "want" is a verb, doesn't the psalmist's counsel seem similar to the Buddha's: to find true peace, free yourself from want? In the psalm's final line, the author even expresses confidence that he "will dwell in the House of the Lord forever," a result that's a bit like the one taught in Buddhism, except that, in nirvana — absence, non-returning, "blowing out" — there's no one home.

But Roosevelt's idea of the Third Freedom has nothing to do with an afterlife, with or without sheep or a shepherd. No otherworldly glow surrounds the "economic understandings" of the Third Freedom. What FDR had in mind was more mundane than that. So definition (1) is definitely out.

Maybe it's my fault. Instead of wasting my time in Industrial Arts, I could have signed up for Liberation Theology. Maybe then I would have grasped instantly just which "economic understandings" are equivalent to, or productive of, "freedom from want," without consulting my dictionary of Newspeak. But let's try the next definition of "want" (2), "destitution."

In daily speech, "want" is most often used as a verb, not a noun. It isn't a particularly grand verb, and it is generally used for trivial things, as in, "I want a puppy." This alone suggests that it would be out of its depth in "freedom from want," if it were being asked to serve as a grand and tragic synonym for "destitution or privation." (A related problem can occur when a grand word is used to describe insignificant things, as in, "This yogurt is awesome," although, to be fair, that construction still allows room for the Taj Mahal to be totally awesome.) Yet there trembles little "want," shoved out onto the stage amongst these rhetorical Valkyries and asked to sing basso profundo.

Surely, "freedom from destitution" would have been better than "want." Ending abject poverty would be a good thing. With "destitution," there would be no need to resort to an arcane definition or a usage rarely heard, and no puppies would be whining in the connotations. Yes, "destitution" had the pipes for the role, and "privation" would have made a suitable understudy, clearly a better choice than "want." So, if the two presidents were trying to say "destitution," why did they say "want"? That is, of course, unless they weren't trying to say "destitution."

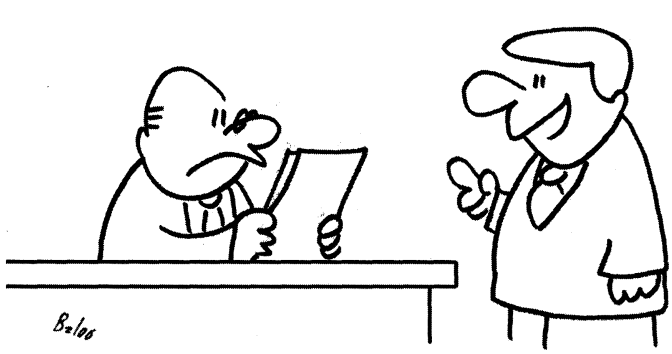
If only the Founding Fathers had included "freedom from want" in the Constitution, all this speculation might be unnecessary. The meaning of those words would be laid out in the Federalist papers, and one could assume that this was the meaning that a president intended to convey when he used the phrase. I guess the Founders just didn't get around to it. But let's try our luck with definition (3), "anything that is desired, but lacking."

A casual viewer, watching TV at home without a thesaurus handy, and listening to a politician talking about "freedom from want," might think, "What was that? Did he say I can have anything I want? For free? Whoa. I want to get rid of my old clunker and get a new car. Can he help out with that? And I want another stimulus check. Can he get me one of those? And get that credit card company off my back. And keep cranking out my brother's unemployment checks. While he's at it, could he please forgive my kid's college loans? And, hey, I want free healthcare. Oh, yeah, and force the bank to cut my mortgage payments. Better yet, fork over some money for a new house. If that's what this guy's talking about, count me in. He's got my vote."

When considered in this way, the contrast between the Third Noble Truth and the Third Freedom is stark. While the Buddha advised extinguishing the desire that motivates *want*, thereby ending suffering and, in some versions, the need for rebirth, Roosevelt and his successors could be understood as suggesting that the way to end suffering and bring "true peace" is to satisfy every want right here on earth. Don't starve it; feed it, so to speak.

This reading is made possible by the double negative created by definition (3). "Freedom from want" in this sense can be distilled to the *absence of a lack*. Only on rare occasions do double negatives not have the effect of rendering less clear that which is already unclear. For example, "freedom of speech" could have been written as "the right to the absence of limitations on speech," but it wasn't. The phrase is clouded by the paired negatives. In Algebra I, we learn that two negatives cancel out, leaving a simple positive statement. Mathematically, then, a fair reduction of "the absence of lacking anything that is desired" would be "having everything that is desired."

While it would be wrong to hold a politician responsible for bizarre interpretations that others assign to his words, and



"Yes, it's a stupid speech, Senator, but you've got to court the stupid *vote*."

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The Obama Regime: Year One

by Bruce Ramsey

The first year of the Obama regime was a year of hope and change, but not exactly in the ways Obama intended.

What of Barack Obama, one year on? I argued a year ago in these pages ("Same as the Old Boss?", March 2009), that he was not a revolutionary but an ordinary, government-wielding Democrat — a species that, from a libertarian point of view, was dangerous enough. I wrote, "Among long-term political changes, health insurance is probably the big thing to worry about." And it does seem so.

As I write, the U.S. Senate has taken a vote that seems to augur victory for Obama's effort on "healthcare reform." I hear notes of official hurrah. But the Senate did it with not a vote to spare, entirely on the names of Democrats, after an exercise in vote-buying so gross that the jeering of the pundits was nearly as loud as the trumpets proclaiming "universal healthcare."

The Senate bill didn't quite live up to that, as the hard Left glumly noted. The Congressional Budget Office said the Senate's bill would increase the covered share of Americans outside Medicare by 11 percentage points, from 81 to 92% Much of this would happen by enrolling millions more Americans in Medicaid, the government program for the poor, and by providing subsidies for non-poor to buy insurance from insurance companies. For the archetypal four-member family, subsidies would be offered to those with incomes, in 2009 dollars, up to $88,000 a year — four times the federal government's poverty line.

All those receiving subsidies would, it was assumed, be thankful at election time to the political party whose name was on the bill. Many might be. But there will be long faces, too, most clearly among the young adults whom the bill would require to buy insurance. They might recall that in 2008, candidate Obama opposed the "individual mandate," while Hillary Clinton supported it. She was being more honest. If insurers are obliged to cover everyone who applies, without "discrimination" against those who have diabetes, AIDS, etc., then the healthy have to be forced to sign up. The product being created here is not from the market, but the government; it is social insurance, and it requires compulsion to work.

Many of the young will admit they should have bought catastrophic coverage anyway, and note that it's cheap at their

age. But they will discover that under Obama law, insurance for them will no longer be so cheap. The catastrophic-only policy they were thinking about buying will no longer be offered. It will be forbidden as too thin. The word I heard from a large private insurer was that of all of his company's individual health insurance policies, thin to fat, the average now covers 48% of an insured's medical expenses. His staff had calculated that under the Senate's bill the average would rise to 65% and so his company would have to charge more. The young will be squeezed in another way: they will subsidize the old under "community rating." The idea is to keep the difference in rates between the 20-somethings and the 60-somethings down, to the benefit of the older customers. This is already required in some states, notably Massachusetts and New York, which have some of the highest premiums for young adults.

Most of these things will happen in the market for individual insurance, which covers about 9% of Americans. If a new law takes effect, the individual market will presumably cover more of them, perhaps 15%. Most Americans will still be covered in the large group market, which is already federally regulated under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), or by Medicaid, Medicare, or a government employee program.

Such is the analysis now available from people who have read the 2,000-plus-page Senate bill and profess to understand it. I'm assuming the final bill out of the House-Senate conference will be more like the Senate's, because the vote was closer there, and that the final bill will pass. As I write, the details are still changeable, but the essence is clearly not "universal healthcare." It is not universal — thank goodness — and it is not health *care*. It is federal regulation of a certain type of private-sector insurance and a mandate for certain people to buy it.

By describing the bill in this way, I'm not trying to justify or support it. I don't like it, and if I were in Congress I'd vote against it. But many of the people arguing against it, including libertarians, who tend to argue from first principles, are attacking an idea of full socialism, and it is not that. It is a slice only, onto a plate already containing other, thicker slices. Furthermore, it is a slice that was difficult for its proponents to include, and has been done in a way that makes further slices even more difficult, for several reasons.

It turns out that Obama is not an antiwar president. The bottom line: same wars, different management.

First, we come to the point at which there will be fewer beneficiaries, particularly those who vote. Consider that the most commonly cited motive for people's reluctance to embrace "Obamacare" is that more than 80% of Americans already have health insurance and are worried about losing what they have. Those who have Medicare Advantage plans — private plans paid with Medicare money — *will* lose part of what they have, under the Senate bill. Many Medicare Advantage clients will be voting Republican in 2010 and 2012. More young voters will, too, when they see what Obamacare costs them.

Second, the Senate bill failed to create the new government program, brother to Medicare and Medicaid, that the Left wanted and had marketed as the "public option." Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT), aborted this little monster because the insurance companies hated it and a bunch of them (the Hartford, Travelers, Aetna, et al.) are his constituents. The other last-minute footdragger was Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NE), who talked about his concern for the unborn and demanded a slice of pork in order for that concern to dismiss itself, but who also represents a state with insurance companies (Mutual of Omaha, et al.). The Senate bill does make the insurance companies more like public utilities, as Richard Epstein has pointed out, but the insurers are still in the private sector, and they will continue to think, contribute, and lobby largely as private units. Under the Senate bill they will have more revenue with which to defend their industry. They will use it, and that will make it *more* difficult to arrive at the British and Canadian nirvana of Single Payer.

Third, there is the matter of cost. The believers imagine Obamacare to be so rational, with its vaccinations, mammograms, and colonoscopies, its cost-spreading and policing of physician greed, that in the long run it *won't cost anything*. Yet they are thinking not of Obamacare, but of single-payer, a system that could be both cheaper and universal, by systematically denying care to those deemed not to "need" it. Obamacare is not single-payer. The Congressional Budget Office says it will cost more, not less, than the current system, and even the Democratic politicians admit it. But yellow-dog Democrats believe that in the long run it will cost nothing. I know them; that's what they think, and they will be disappointed. No doubt they will blame the failings of the new system on the private-sector elements. Independent voters, however, are more likely to blame the government, particularly if they hear a good case that the coming problems are the government's fault.

Apart from Universal Healthcare, two other big changes were going to happen with Obama: a cap-and-trade program and an exit from Iraq. Neither happened in 2009.

During the 2008 campaign, few noticed that Obama kept saying he favored an intensified war in Afghanistan. People were thinking more about Iraq. In 2009 he did what he said he would in Afghanistan.

It turns out that Obama is not an antiwar president. His policy on the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan is different in detail from Bush and Cheney's, but not fundamentally different in respect to the way in which libertarians think about it. Obama believes America is in a War on Terror. Like Bush, he says our soldiers are killing people over there so that our cops don't have to chase them here. The supporters of the war say that if we don't continue to do *this*, Pakistan will do *that*, and we have a responsibility, blah, blah, blah. The bottom line: same wars, different management — and not even entirely that, as Bush's final Secretary of Defense is now Obama's.

The other promised change coming with Obama was cap-and-trade. In 2009 there was not a big push to get this through Congress. At year's end Obama went to a save-the-world

conference in Copenhagen and failed to save it. Blame for failure of the conference was shoveled onto the Chinese, but most of the rest of the world's leaders were not in a mood to be stampeded on this matter by the young American president. Obama's EPA chief, Lisa Jackson, promised to regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant, but also sounded as if she would not be too radical about it, particularly with the official rate of unemployment at 10%.

In 2008, a particular fear of libertarians and conservatives was organized labor's card-check bill, the fetchingly named "Employee Free Choice Act." The bill, which would create a way to organize an employee group through non-secret ballot, had passed the Democrat-controlled House in Bush's final year. Under Obama's Democrat-majority Congress it was going to slide right through. Except that in 2009 it didn't. It was shelved. Business hates card-check, and the Democrats want to be the party of labor *and* business, particularly during an economic slump. And anyway, there is no popular demand for card-check. Nobody likes it except labor organizers and the hard Left.

Another fear of libertarians and conservatives was that Bush's bailout of the banks and Obama's bailout of General Motors were permanent measures of socialism. This was never likely to be so, and at the end of 2009, it was clear that it would not be the case in banking. The banks were aggressively paying back the Treasury's money — and good for them! With GM it was early to say, but there was little support in the country, or in the Democratic Party, for making America's largest car company a permanent federal pet.

Apart from the health insurance bill, the one really big thing Obama did in 2009 was to spend tubfuls of money. Here is where, if I look back on the predictions I made in these pages a year ago, I confess embarrassment. Yes, I knew they were going to spend money. But so *much*?!

It was the year in which many Americans first began talking about trillions, with billions the fractional currency.

The "stimulus" was the greater part of a trillion, finely targeted at the programs Democrats favor. In my state, where the government budget came up one-quarter short, much of the stimulus went to backfill this deficit, paying teachers who otherwise would have been laid off, etc. How much this helped the economy is debatable, but it helped some. Libertarians didn't like to admit it, but the downturn was made shallower by the bailout and stimulus both. The downside, though, was the likelihood of loss of vigor in the ensuing recovery, and the near certainty that Ben Bernanke's almost-zero interest rates would create inflation, and perhaps a new speculative bubble. At the beginning of 2010, the amount of that cost was not yet clear, except that the dollar had already plunged on the foreign exchange market, and gold was well above $1,000 an ounce.

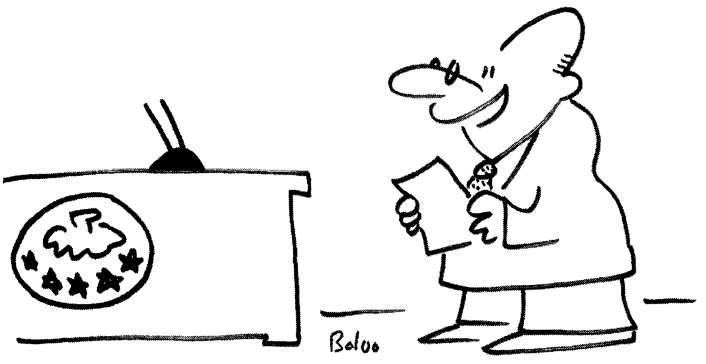
There was a tendency among libertarians to exaggerate the immediate import of this. In 1933, 1934, 1935, and 1936, the opponents of the New Deal, facing similar deficits, money creation, and rock-bottom short-term interest rates, made a noise about an inflation that didn't happen in the 1930s. There was a serious inflation in the late 1940s, after the war — and you could blame it on the war alone, or the war and the New Deal, as you liked. It's too early to ring the alarm for hyperinflation, as some on the Right want to do. But some inflation is coming, and it will not be good. Whatever the amplitude — and that will depend also on the taxes imposed — the incontinent spending of the Obama administration worries a broad spectrum of Americans, particularly conservatives. You see it in the rise of the Tea Party movement.

This movement is not universally welcomed among libertarians. Jeffrey Friedman, editor of Critical Review, writes:

> The faith that libertarians put in the populist opposition to Obama discourages me. I say this as someone who happens to be living in rural Texas: the tea partiers don't represent the future of America. Two-thirds of all Americans go to college, one-third graduate, and every year another half a million social science and similar degrees are awarded. These so-called elites find the flag-waving, Constitution-venerating, "socialist"-hating town-hallers and tea partiers mystifying or scary. We could be making great strides in the universities but we aren't, and I think the libertarian brand is being sullied beyond repair among the college educated by being linked to an intellectual spectrum ranging from Glenn Beck to Ayn Rand.

I see Jeff's point. The tea partiers are not theoreticians, and they offer a difficult brand to market on a university campus. But they *are* on our side. Their motivation is to protect and defend the constitutional republic, as they understand it. Libertarians should be trying to deepen their understanding of it. It wouldn't hurt also to listen to them, to hear what motivates them to go out and yell at members of Congress, and to take time off from work, travel to Washington, DC, and have a giant demonstration, as they did on Sept. 12, 2009. Academics don't do those things. Journalists like me usually don't do them. But they *do* have an effect. They inspire fear and loathing on one side and boldness on the other. They can change the balance of political will.

The tea partiers made an impact in 2009. They opposed Obama. The cheerleaders for government denounced them as racists, picking on a few anti-Obama signs that might be interpreted that way, but it was a slimy tactic and in the end it didn't work. Paul Krugman, The New York Times' Nobel-wielding tubthumper for inflation, called the Tea Party movement "AstroTurf" in order to discredit it, but the big Sept. 12 demo in DC, made the label hard to stick. By year-end, the tea partiers had also begun affecting the Republican Party, which was out of power and trying to shuck off the snakeskin



". . . Best of all, Mr. President, 83% of high school dropouts on welfare think you're doing an *excellent* job!"

of George W. Bush. Like the Ron Paul movement, the tea partiers really wanted to take over the party, which was probably not possible. But they *were* making themselves heard.

And public opinion was changing. Late in 2009, public approval of President Obama dropped below 50%. A majority of Americans turned against the health insurance bills even before they passed the House and Senate. By early December, the Gallup Poll reported that the idea of government guaranteeing all Americans health insurance was being rejected, 50% to 47% — the first time the "nos" had it since Gallup began asking the question. Said Time magazine, on December 9:

> In the latest NBC/Wall Street Journal poll, only 23% of respondents said they trust the government "always or most of the time" — the smallest proportion in 12 years. The percentage of voters who think government should "do more to solve problems and meet the needs of people" has dropped 5 points since Obama's first weeks in office, while that of those who think government should leave more things "to businesses" rose 8 points. The shift is especially noticeable among independent voters, a small plurality of whom wanted government to "do more" after Obama took office; now — by a margin of 17 — they think government does "too much."

Regarding foreign policy, the Pew Research Center reported that 49% of Americans agree that the federal government should "mind its own business internationally" and leave it to other countries to fend for themselves. Pew also reported that 44% agreed that the United States "should go our own way in international matters, not worrying about whether other countries agree with us or not." Both of these were the highest readings in 40 years.

It would be easy to say in a libertarian magazine that the country is becoming like us. But libertarianism is a political philosophy, and most Americans don't have one of those. They have feelings and attitudes only. The swing in the polls is much more of a gut-level thing, a reaction of political independents against the too-aggressive statism of the Obama agenda. The independents, who gave Obama his margin of victory, didn't elect him to put through the entire wish list of the left-liberal wing of the Democratic Party: card-check, cap-and-trade, and all the visions of another New Deal. They elected him because he was fresh and young, unlike Hillary Clinton; because he was black, unlike John Edwards, and it was a good time to have a black president; because he offered a classic American story, which grabbed the imagination more effectively than John McCain's old prisoner-of-war stuff; and because they were tired of the Republicans.

In 2009, Obama tried to play the hand he wanted to play — the left-liberal one — and he met resistance. He won some, and he made the state bigger. Libertarians are pained by that, and properly so. But recognize also that Obama lost more. His stature is reduced. He will have a harder time this year, and a still harder one after the new Congress takes power in January 2011.

Indeed, there are reasons for hope and change. ❑

Freedom From What?!, *from page 26*

while the ambiguity of "want" cannot be said to be entirely the fault of the speaker, it can, nonetheless, serve as a rhetorical device that musters needed votes from needy voters who, like all the rest of us, must engage in the exercise of trying to match up what is said with what is done.

So maybe our casual viewer is on to something. If the politician talking about "freedom from want" initiates programs that provide this voter with the things he wants, and at no apparent cost, who is to say that the voter's interpretation of the phrase is wrong? What if his take on the phrase is *pragmatically* accurate? What if the "economic security and opportunity" mentioned in the Oslo version of "freedom from want" were pragmatically interpreted as a promise to free people from the lack of anything that they desire, with the tab for the goodies going to someone else?

In our viewer's eyes, this politician is, let's face it, Santa Claus. Naturally, a solid majority of children, especially the nice ones, are pro-Santa. One wonders, though, how Santa polls amongst the elves, who must beaver away year-round to fulfill the children's want lists. But if the promise being heard is that all desires will be fulfilled, the message is simple: the life of humans here on earth can be made perfect.

Some will find this interpretation of "freedom from want" absurd. They will call it a stretch. Others will find the entire line of reasoning naive, or obvious. My apologies. But one other thing was said in Oslo that arched my left brow. In the 50th paragraph, President Obama said, "We do not have to think that human nature is perfect for us to still believe that the human condition can be perfected."

The statement is undeniably true. Strictly speaking, we don't have to think that human nature is perfect in order to believe that the human condition can be perfected. Regardless of what we or anyone thinks about human nature, people can, and do, believe just about anything. Much of it is, of course, nonsense, including the notion that the human condition can be perfected. Hypothetically, though, questions arise: is war sometimes necessary so that the human condition can be made perfect, or is it the imperfect nature of man that periodically necessitates war? If compelled to answer in the affirmative to only one of these, with great reluctance and some sadness, I would give the nod to the latter, with the footnote that a limited understanding of the human condition is a prerequisite for believing that it can be perfected. I mean, look around, for God's sake.

And now, the Rorschach test: "freedom from want." Take a small sip. Roll it around on your tongue. What comes to mind? A chicken in every pot? Eternity in the house of the Lord? The man with all the toys? Release from the wheel of life? Every man a king? The clear light of the void? A workers' paradise? Everything your little heart desires? The iron rice bowl? Opium for the people? The perfection of the human condition? Take your pick. Go ahead.

As a statement proposing a human right, "freedom from want" is a hopeless muddle. It is plonk. But as a rhetorical device for garnering votes, it has a deceptively complex structure and a short but zingy finish. A thrill may even go up your leg. Be forewarned, though, if you actually drink this Kool-Aid, the hangover will be a doozy. ❑

Passage to India

by Jayant Bhandari

Forget empty rhetoric about "change." India is undergoing real change. It's chaotic, messy, uneven . . . and ultimately good.

I am in India.

When I lived and worked here, few things were world-class. One was a private airline company, Jet Airways. Now it is just a normal second-rate airline. I used to stay at the Maurya Sheraton in Delhi. It was a very snobby, top-top-grade hotel. Returning to it now, after 12 years, I find it has been reduced to just a normal hotel. The towels could have been better.

Ironically, this is a good sign.

In the past, being an airline hostess was seen as a very glamorous job. The best and the most beautiful went to work for the airline industry. Other career options were limited. The fall in the quality of service has resulted from the fact that the best people now have a lot of better options in life. Accompanying the decline in service is a decline in what may be called the quality of average travelers. This has deteriorated quite sharply. It means that more Indians — the nouveau riche, or at least prosperous — are now traveling, an indication that prosperity is spreading.

At Mumbai airport, the runway was closed because of extreme air pollution (no rains). My flight for Bhopal was delayed for five hours for lack of visibility. People were shouting at the check-in staff, who were being very patient. I wished I could get into their minds. Maybe they are just super-patient people — maybe they just don't give a damn. Looking at their beautiful faces, I like to believe the former. My rational and cynical mind makes me believe the latter.

When I was on the Jet Airways flight from Bangkok to Delhi, the mostly Indian travelers were adamant about getting their money's worth for every penny they had spent. For four hours requests for drinks and other accommodations never stopped. The poor stewards worked like slaves, accepting every stupid demand. Conditions like these, which would take away the softness and niceness from most people and equipment, suggest that the world-class quality of anything in India will revert to the mean.

In Mumbai I stayed at the Trident, one of the two hotels taken over by terrorists in 2008. I stayed there a few months back, and paid a quarter of what it was worth — why should

I pay more, when, unlike many Indians, I am not afraid of the ghosts of those killed? Then, it was almost empty and had high security. On this trip, it was brimming with people. Security was still time consuming, but alas! it is very easy to fool the security guys, as I often did to save time. I am sure that the reason why terrorist attacks don't happen is that it is only a rare individual who is ready to die. The "virgins and free alcohol" theory has no value in reality.

The government and the company agreed to use eminent domain to confiscate land from poor farmers, at 5% of market value.

Now, as I travel through India's smaller towns and villages, I gather many impressions, both of change and of continuity.

I stay in rooms that cost me $2 a day, and purchase all-you-can-eat food for 50 cents. I pay my driver the princely sum of $7 a day. To Westerners, these prices will appear astonishingly low, but inflation of food prices in India is close to 20%. Food is very expensive for regular folks, and speculators are being blamed. I am constantly amazed that there is never any mention of the fact that the Indian government still runs one of the most efficient printing presses in the world — printing money, of course. The only thing that limits inflation is the high rate of real economic growth. Yet the Indian government is getting extremely addicted to increasing expenditures. The government's fiscal deficit is about 12% of GDP. To me this is like addiction to heroin. What will happen if the growth rate falters?

In an isolated place, a woman sells me a 15-kilogram bag of fruit for a total of 60 cents — fruit worth about $15 in Bhopal. Her companions think she's won a lottery. These wretched women chase me and beg me to buy some from them. I feel sorry for the little girl who had tears in her eyes. Yet I am repelled by the fact that so many Indians easily grovel and beg. The worst is when well-off people do this. A visit to a government office in India is essential if you want to understand the degradation that the Indian public accepts even today.

I meet the top management of a company constructing a major highway. The highway was deemed uneconomical, so the government and the company agreed that they would use eminent domain to confiscate a lot more land than was necessary from the farmers, at 5% of the market value. The extra land would be converted into condos or commercial space. The poor people would subsidize development. Why should they subsidize the development of the country? This is socialism in practice, although the farmers are branded communists when they rebel. Meanwhile people in the West believe there is something romantic about poverty — a view that is not only hypocritical but pathetically wrong.

The woman who cleans utensils at my parents' home earns $13 a month. Her husband, who tyrannizes over her, contributes 20 cents a day for household expenses. The wife of our security guard, who lives within my parents' property, has had her third daughter. She wanted this child to be a son. Between them, the couple earns $70 a month, but they give their girls a decent education. Not too long in the past, one or more of the girls would have died of something mysterious or would have just disappeared.

At my parents' home, the live-in maid is "buying" a wife for her son. The cost is $400. The maid earns only $12 per month (that's not a typo). The good thing is that if the son mistreats the wife, she will likely run away with someone else. By itself this is a huge change for the better.

Speaking of purchases, the woman who does laundry at my parents' house and also earns about $12 a month has got her daughter to stand for the local elections. The daughter's campaign cost will be $1,000, obviously a fortune for her; but she told my mom that if she wins the election, she hopes to "make" ten times more money each year.

In India there are all kinds of affirmative action policies. For example, half the local seats in elections in Bhopal are reserved for women. The mayoral post is also reserved for a woman. What kind of democracy is this?, I wonder.

My maternal grandmother died 15 years ago. She had a huge house. Since she was a widow, she rented sections of the house to about 15 people. Most of these people had grown up in front of her. She had helped many study or get married. She had let several of them live in her house without paying any rent. Before she died, she had all these people take an oath in a temple that they would vacate the house whenever my mother asked them to. When she did so, not one of them left. They all wanted money in lieu of leaving. To get them out was a herculean effort, involving cash payments worth about $30,000. After 15 years of efforts, the last tenant has just been kicked out.

I remember that when I was a kid, I used to wake up early in the morning to get the buffalo milked in front of me, to try to keep the milkman from adulterating the milk. So I would sit with flies hovering around me, observing the milkman milking. Before he started, I would quietly inspect his bucket. Then he would then place the bucketful of milk in front of me and go to wash his hands. He would return without wiping his hands, shake them over the bucket, and let a few drops of water fall into it. I once objected to this behavior. He said it was a ritual that must be followed: milk must be at least symbolically adulterated. I am not sure where the Indian culture of cheating comes from, but there is a saying in Hindi: "You cannot mix religion (implying ethics) with business." I don't know whether cheating in business transactions is a result of the recent socialist past or is a part of Hinduism. But this is the problem you face all the time in India. From what I hear, India is even more corrupt than it was before; now the public servants expect an even bigger slice of the pie.

The milkman said it was a ritual that must be followed: milk must be at least symbolically adulterated.

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Young Indians are becoming increasingly religious — atheism was more fashionable in my generation. They seem not to have a fanatic bent but a superstitious one. They go to the temple to worship the god, hoping it will help them become prosperous and successful. Popular religious are extremely materialistic and self-centered. I am sure that a lot of people, almost unaware of why they are doing it, have religious interests because it suggests to them an easy way to get laid, just as I think that behind a lot of the environmental movement in the West is the possibility of easy access to drugs and sex. On balance, this may be good. For many people, dependence on a higher authority is crucial, and I would rather see people believe in an impersonal god than make gods out of political leaders or film celebrities.

There is far more pollution everywhere than I have ever seen. Garbage is rotting everywhere. The lake in Bhopal looks like it's filled with ducks; a closer inspection shows that the ducks are actually debris floating on the surface.

But the great fact about India right now is that the economy continues to grow at 7% or more — an absolutely amazing rate. This is my third visit within 12 months, and I see changes on every journey.

Twenty years back, most roads were dirt. On this trip, I have not encountered a single dirt road. Even in the most backward places, I see children, including girls, going to school. When these kids enter the workforce, that will be the mother of all revolutions.

Twenty years back, life was one long forced and even self-inflicted course of suffering, even for the well-off, for that was the message of the collectivist system. Today, people are learning to take time off and enjoy themselves.

At least seven generations of my family grew up in the same place in Bhopal. When my parents left that place in 1984, we were the first family among all the descendants in those seven generations to leave the huge, but by then thoroughly partitioned, house. I was the first perhaps in that whole "family" to leave Bhopal. All marriages were arranged. Within the last 10 years, more than half of these people have moved to suburbs. Half of the new marriages have been with people from outside our religion and have of course not been arranged by the families. More than half, perhaps all, of the college-going kids have gone to another city to work and study. Girls are living by themselves in other cities and working there. Most of this has happened in the last four years or so.

There is a huge churning taking place in the society. It is as if everyone is now starting to move a step ahead. Bhopal today is full of student hostels, where kids from rural areas come to study. So far, growth has touched only some sectors of India, but there is a constant stream of poor people joining the middle class, while the middle class is getting richer. I wouldn't be surprised if this kind of growth continued for decades, constantly transforming the India I see around me. ❑

Our Forefathers' Failure, *from page 24*

even happiness — from market transactions, which people undertake without force or penalty in order to enhance their lives and are far more effective than socialistic distributions. Obama said, "We are fundamentally transforming the United States of America." He is indeed, wiping out the fundamental principles that allowed America to prosper.

Obama claimed, "This is our moment, this is our time to turn the page on the policies of the past, to offer a new direction." Yes, he is "turning the page on the policies" of property rights and free markets. But the direction he is offering is not new but old. It is the system of four centuries ago, before property rights, those basic rights which are still denied in varying degrees in many countries that have never discovered free-market capitalism, much less embraced it — and whose standard of living reflects that fact. And those countries comprise a large share of the 89% of the world's people who do not think capitalism is a good thing — but who look with envy on America's success and demand we redistribute a share of our wealth to them.

"Generations from now," Obama said, "we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was our time." Yes, and they will be the worse for it — and damn you for it! ❑

Reflections, *from page 22*

ever-growing discomforts of going through airports will deter more people from air travel, increasing the financial troubles of airlines, plane makers, hotels, and the myriad services that surround them. People will drive hours rather than fly.

Abdulmutallab can be proud. He caused billions of business losses every year with one inept try. — Frederic Mora

Those other terrorists — The Obama administration, especially its Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano, has adopted two major goals regarding the dangers of terrorism. First, they want us — the American people — to view terrorists merely as criminals, as opposed to warriors, i.e., soldiers fighting in a war. So they have made a concerted effort to replace the perfectly useful and clear phrase "act of terrorism" with the vague phrase "man-caused disaster."

Second, they have made it clear that they want to avoid talking about the ideological motivation of most actual terrorists, to wit, Islamism. The administration even tried to shift its focus from looking for jihadists to looking for other terrorists, especially those of white supremacist or anarchist ideology.

The mainstream media, in its self-appointed role as the propaganda arm of the Democratic National Committee, immediately fell into line. Every story of any violence by anti-government rightwing people, — especially veterans! — was to be played up, and any by people professing Islamist ideology was to be played down whenever possible. Even in the case of the Christmas Day terrorism aboard a Delta plane heading for the Detroit airport, the words "Muslim," "Islamic," and "religious fanatic" were difficult to find in the original news reports

But much use was originally made of the tragic story of a supposed hate crime perpetrated against Bill Sparkman, census worker. This hapless servant of the federal government was found asphyxiated, tied to a tree with a rope around his

continued on page 40

When a Computer Filled the Room

by Warren C. Gibson

The computer revolution would have been unthinkable without the power of the free market.

At 1:30 a.m. I hopped out of bed, got dressed, and headed out for my 2:00 a.m. date. I had set the alarm and tried to sleep, but I could only toss around in bed, rehearsing the adventure to come. The night was bitter cold, but my old Ford started on the first try. New snow sparkled under my lights as the tires crunched their way through the empty streets, but I paid no attention.

My mind was racing ahead to my rendezvous. Soon I was at my lady's front door, knocking the snow off my shoes and letting myself in. Yes, I knew her intimately enough to have my own key. And I found her wide awake as usual, winking her familiar come-hither wink. I took a quick glance at her console, then mounted my tape on an empty drive.

You see, the lady in question was a Univac 1107 Thin-Film Memory Computer — always a lady to me, never just a machine. Her "house" was the Jennings Computer Center on the campus of the Case Institute of Technology. It was 1966, and I was a young man in love, in love with Rosabeth, as I called her, though I never mentioned that name to anyone.

Was "love" too strong a word? Perhaps, but I was enthralled by the new technology. Computers in those days were all mainframes, ensconced behind glass walls. Anyplace else, a lowly user like me had to submit an input card deck at a window like a bank teller's, wait till the next day, and pick up the resulting printout at another window. Case was one of the rare educational institutions at that time, perhaps the only one, that practiced an "open shop" policy. This meant that students could actually touch the computer — not just touch her but, in carefully proscribed ways, actually operate her.

This was not without risk. My Rosabeth was a multi-million dollar machine, and college students are what they are. Yet in the category of things that could be blamed on students, I recall nothing more serious than occasional jams in the card reader. The problems that I most remember were the lady's frequent fainting spells, some of them lasting many hours. Although computers had changed from vacuum tubes to transistors some years earlier, thereby advancing significantly in reliability, they were still rather delicate creatures, prone to almost daily outages that, for all we students knew, might have been fits of the vapors.

I was lucky this winter night because the lady was wide awake and ready to go. I had reserved time from 2:00–4:00 a.m. because only at such times could a graduate student like me get the time needed to pursue his thesis work. Like all graduate students then and now, I felt it entirely natural to be up and about at such hours.

The 1107 worked strictly in what is called "batch mode." This meant that users prepared an input card deck and fed it into a card reader, a machine that sensed the holes in the cards and converted them into data that were recorded in a temporary staging area on a magnetic storage device. When your job's turn came, the console teletype machine rattled off an announcement of the start of your job; then you held your breath. If you heard it rattling again after a couple of seconds, announcing your job's completion, you knew there had been an error. If it kept silent for a decent amount of time, you could be pretty sure your job was running properly. At least it was doing something, though there was no guarantee of good results. Some time later, a half-ton line printer would bang out your results on 11½-by-14 inch fanfold paper, which you paged through to find the good or bad news.

Night sessions were stressful, because the stakes were high. If I heard the dreaded clatter that signaled failure, the pressure was on.

As I type this article, I go back and forth constantly, revising and fixing, revising and fixing. But imagine, if you will, using a computer to write an article in batch mode. Not that anybody ever did that. Word processors hadn't been invented yet, and if they had, they would have been a frightful waste of a multimillion dollar machine. But writing our programs was somewhat like writing an article. We wrote them with a "high level" language called Algol that used a lot of English words and had rudimentary but strict rules of syntax and semantics. As students, we bought boxes of 2,000 cards for $2 each and sat down at a keypunch machine, if one was available. These were ugly, noisy beasts that fed blank cards into a punching station. Every time you hit a character on the keyboard, it would punch a column of holes, then advance the card by one column. There was no eraser, no un-punching holes. If you made a mistake you had to copy your bad card onto a fresh one, up to the point of the mistake, and then continue typing. A lot of spoiled cards and a lot of fanfold paper went into the dumpster in those pre-recycling days.

Of course, you didn't really know if you had made a mistake until you tried to run your program. Any mistake — typo, syntax error, whatever — meant your job would fail and you would have to go find a keypunch, fix your mistake, get in line again, and have another go. Only later did I learn how much worse things were everywhere else, where under closed-shop rules users got maybe one or two turnarounds per day. The worst was Lockheed, Georgia, where I once visited. The keypunch operators belonged to a union. You were supposed to write what you wanted on paper forms and submit them to the operators, who in the fullness of time might get around to punching your job, perhaps accurately. Soon the local engineers showed me a hidden keypunch where we could get our work done in spite of the union.

The computer I'm using to write this article is a rather unremarkable desktop PC: dual AMD-64 processor, two gigabytes of memory, a few hundred gigs of disk space. In 1966, bytes hadn't been invented, but it's possible to estimate that my desktop machine has roughly four thousand times as much main memory as the 1107 and is a thousand times faster. Its Linux operating system is much more sophisticated than the 1107's batch system, and the free OpenOffice suite I use would have been unimaginable back then. As to non-volatile storage, I have several hundred gigabytes on disks, while the 1107 had no disks at all, only a magnetic drum that was to disks as Edison's cylinders were to phonograph records. I'm sure the capacity of that drum was well under a megabyte.

But wait — do you have any idea of how a computer disk works? Take one apart some time and study it. Then go to howstuffworks.com. In its precise tolerances, fast response, high storage density, long life, and low cost, the disk is an engineering triumph. You live in an age of miracles! So show some gratitude!

Forgive me. I get passionate at times. Back to my story.

The 1107's operating system had the entire drum to itself, so it wasn't available for user data. But faculty and grad students could have their own magnetic tapes for storing programs and data. A reel of magnetic tape could hold as much as several dozen boxes of cards, but it was tape, which meant sequential access. If you wanted a file near the end of the tape you had to wait while the drive wound it forward to the proper spot. It usually did this without breaking or tangling your tape. Usually. Oh, you want to replace the fourth file on a tape? No problem: get a fresh tape, copy the first three files from the old tape, write the new file, skip ahead one file on the old tape, then copy the rest. You have to punch all the commands on cards, of course.

Night sessions were stressful, not because the hours were late but because the stakes were high. My job, if it ran successfully, would take most of two hours to complete. But if I heard the dreaded clatter that signaled failure, the pressure was on. I would scan my printout frantically, looking for the error, while Rosabeth sat there winking. And if I had my wits about me, I would take another few moments to review the whole program, because the machine always stopped at the first error, leaving subsequent errors to be caught on the next run.

Those nights have faded into a dim but very fond memory. Hobbled as we were by operating conditions unimaginable to the engineering students I now teach, ours were happy times — frustrating, exhilarating, and like all of life at its best, lived to the fullest.

For me, the excitement wasn't just using the computer but seeing the methods we were developing to solve engineering problems. I was never what would later be called a "computer scientist," only a user. I had entered Case as a civil engineering major but switched my emphasis when I had the great good fortune to work under the tutelage of Prof. Lucien Schmit, one of the pioneers of something called the "finite

element method." This is now a standard part of the engineering repertoire, and I presently teach it to undergraduates at Santa Clara University. But in those days it was a new way of performing structural analysis — computing the deformation of an airplane wing, for example, in response to various loads. At the heart of the method is a lot of matrix algebra that can only be done with a computer. Finite element analysis was a huge advance over previous methods, which required laborious hours with a slide rule, yet produced only rough answers.

Fast forward to 1983. It's a sunny spring day outside a small building in Palo Alto, where a software firm had gone out of business. I'm trying to figure how best to load our new printer onto a rented truck. It's a whiffy, barely used, late-model Printronix that can print lower-case as well as upper-case characters and even produce rudimentary graphics. It's nowhere near as heavy as the monsters I grew up with back at Case, but I'm very concerned about loading it carefully. I've just written a $4,000 check to pay for it, keenly aware of how long it took to save that much money and how fast money goes when you're starting a new company. Our new three-man engineering consulting firm needed a computer, and with personal computers barely out of the hobbyist stage, our only practical choice was a minicomputer.

The minicomputer revolution began in the late 1960s, when an innovator by the name of Ken Olsen began building computers that were small enough and cheap enough to be affordable by an engineering division in a large corporation. But at that time computers were the jealously guarded domain of corporate headquarters, and in order to get to his customers in engineering, Olsen decided to avoid the word "computer," instead calling his machines "Programmable Data Processors." The bean-counters were none the wiser, and the PDP line of minicomputers — designed, built and sold by Olsen's Digital Equipment Corporation — began its wildly successful run.

Our PDP-11/34 required only two four-foot-high racks. We splurged, investing extra memory to get a total of 256k (yes, 256 kilobytes). The machine was certainly a "mini" in comparison to the mainframes; still, it ran on 220-volt power and required special air conditioning. Ah, but it was all ours, and it felt great to sit at our desks and do our work through our very own individual remote video terminals, which could display a full 24 lines of 80 characters each! The advanced time-sharing operating system, RSX/11-M, made it seem to each user that he had complete control of the machine. No more card decks!

Some of our work involved finite element analysis, which by then had found its way into commercial software. But that software still required a mainframe, so we got a modem to connect our PDP-11 to distant commercial data centers that made their facilities available on per-minute charges. (We actually owned the modem. Back in the '70s you could only lease them from Ma Bell, at about $100 per month for a 4k modem.) Since even a medium-size finite element analysis could consume an hour of mainframe time, we had to be very careful not to waste any of those expensive minutes.

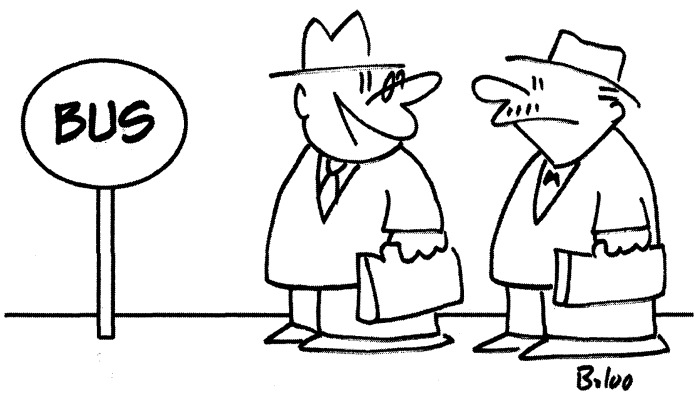
Later we got our very own VAX-11, Digital's successor to the PDP-11 line. It was a leap ahead to 32-bit addressing and virtual memory, and having a VAX quickly became *de rigueur* in engineering circles. Although all we could afford was a stripped-down VAX 11/750, we were at last able to run small finite element analyses in-house: no more commercial usage charges.

A memory that has stuck with me from the 1970s is a disk drive that was part of a VAX installation at a large institution. It was the size of a washing machine, cost about $30,000, and required monthly maintenance. It held roughly 30 megabytes. Today, for almost no money, you can buy a thumb drive at the drug store that holds 200 times as much. No wonder I sometimes get my kilos, megas, and gigas mixed up. And terabytes (a million million bytes) are coming, followed by petabytes.

The mainframes we had accessed (and occasionally still did, at customer facilities) were not made by Univac or even IBM, but rather by the upstart Control Data Corporation. A genius called Seymour Cray had developed a line of scientific computers for CDC that were geared for mathematical computations rather than business data processing. They left the mighty IBM in the dust. Thomas Watson, Jr., president of IBM, once wondered out loud how it was that Cray, with a team of just 32 people, "including the janitor," was able to flummox IBM's team of hundreds of engineers that had designed its ill-starred Stretch computer. Cray harrumphed in reply, "Mr. Watson has answered his own question."

Seymour Cray left CDC and founded Cray Research in his hometown of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Control Data never really recovered, as its founder William Norris began putting altruism ahead of profit-seeking. Norris built plants in inner-city neighborhoods and poured millions into a doomed information retrieval system called PLATO, meant for use in schools. Meanwhile Cray turned out ever-faster supercomputers from his modest digs in Chippewa Falls. I was privileged to use some of Cray's machines, but always in batch mode at large government facilities.

Jump ahead to 1989. We make a short trip to a nearby startup called Silicon Graphics for a look at one of their new graphics workstations. Silicon Graphics was following closely behind Sun Microsystems, which had pioneered Unix workstations. Graphic display can require intense computation, and SGI's innovation was to embed much of that processing in hardware rather than burdening the CPU with all the



"I never have to take Muriel out to dinner anymore — I got a remote tuner for the bathroom scales."

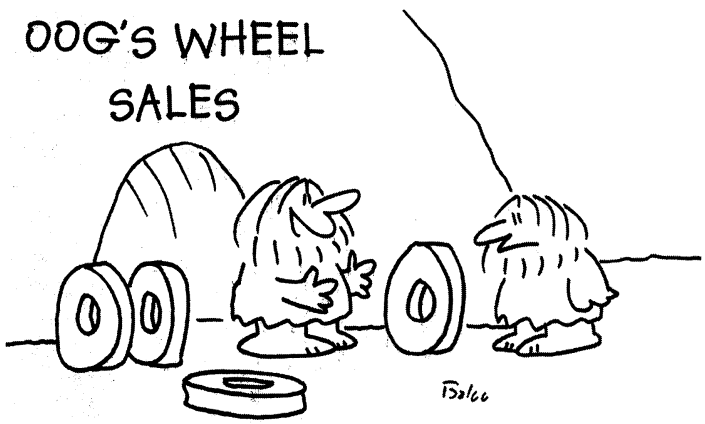
graphics software. These machines were ideally suited for finite element analysis because of the visual nature of that work, and we were hooked. We got one for a mere $40,000. It hadn't felt this good since Rosabeth!

SGI raced ahead with bigger and faster machines, and its stock soared. I recall visiting SGI headquarters around 1992, when the company was flying high — fancy digs, free food for employees, and plenty of hubris. I should have known it was riding for a fall. SGI would be outflanked by the likes of NVidia and ATI, outfits that put graphics hardware on relatively cheap cards that would fit on a PC bus. Now Google occupies some of the old SGI buildings and offers its employees free food. I suspect that Google management knows that story well and is determined not to let hubris lead them down the same slope that finished SGI.

I'm going to spare you any tales from the personal computer and internet revolutions, because I have nothing special to tell. We got Macs and PCs pretty much when everybody else did, and we got on the internet pretty much when everybody else did. But the computer revolution can reasonably be said to have started with the ENIAC in 1948. Having gotten on board in 1962, I was a firsthand witness to, and in a small way a participant in, most of that revolution. What a great privilege! It's as if a professor of English had been alive from Chaucer through Rand. As I look back over it all, I see five themes, all of which have a distinctly libertarian flavor.

First theme: innovators are usually rebels. They are often just as good at devising ways to get around bureaucracies as they are at devising technical breakthroughs. One of my heroes is the late Admiral Grace Hopper. I never met her and never used her COBOL programming language, yet she's still a hero to me. She made many contributions to computer science and led the way for women in industry and in the Navy, but what I value most about her is her attitude. "It's easier to ask forgiveness," she said, "than to ask permission." If you have an idea, just do it, and present the bosses with the finished results. If it works, what can they say? If not, you just forget to mention it. Google seems to understand this, since it allows its engineers to work one day a week on a project of their choice. One wonders how Google engineers might manage to rebel against such permissiveness.

Seymour Cray was poured from a similar mold. To the end (he died tragically, in a car accident), and even when he was heading Cray Research, Seymour personally designed and tested circuits for his computers. He hated bureaucracy and tried to suppress it in his company. The founders of Intel left the stifling bureaucracy of Fairchild Semiconductor to pursue development of integrated circuits. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak at Apple were rebels, as was Bill Gates in his early years. Back before 1960, some rebel at Case started the open-shop policy, probably without asking permission.



"... And for air conditioning, you just go *faster*."

The computer industry embodies "creative destruction" —the notion that in free markets those who fail are swept away or become fertilizer for those with better ideas. Failed firms must not be propped up.

Second theme: the computer industry embodies economist Joseph Schumpeter's famous "creative destruction" concept — the notion that in free markets those who fail are swept away or become fertilizer for those who follow with better ideas. Failed firms must not be propped up. (Will someone please clue Obama in?)

Remington-Rand's UNIVAC (an acronym for UNIVersal Automatic Computer) had gained nearly complete domination of the computer business by the time it gained fame in the 1952 presidential election. A young Walter Cronkite broadcast the returns on CBS television, aided by a UNIVAC I (an ancestor of Rosabeth) set up in the studio and programmed to predict the result from early returns. The miracle is not so much that the machine called it right — which, that year, wasn't hard to do — but that it didn't shut down with a vacuum tube failure, as it typically did every 20 minutes or so. The public had no concept of computers at that time, and the newspapers began to call them "electronic brains." UNIVAC's dominance was so complete that its trade name almost became a generic substitute for "computer," in the way in which Aspirin and Kleenex went from trade names to generics.

Remington-Rand had wiped out a competitor, Eckert-Mauchly, which was the first significant commercial computer company. Its two founders had the right technical background but were clueless as managers. Then IBM, whose Thomas Watson had not long before estimated the worldwide computer market at about half a dozen, woke up and leaped ahead of Remington-Rand. The latter firm, following a merger with Burroughs, lingered on as Unisys, which still exists, barely.

Honeywell, General Electric, and RCA got nowhere in competition with IBM; and though Control Data took the scientific market away, the dominance of IBM in business, where the real money was, became nearly complete by the 1970s. IBM was so prominent that it was attacked with expensive antitrust litigation. But Digital Equipment put its high-end minicomputers up against IBM mainframes, and by 1993 IBM was reeling from competition from DEC and others. It managed to pull out of its slump, but although it still makes

mainframes, it has given up on personal computers, laptops, disk drives, and printers.

By 1980, Digital had all the ingredients for the first personal computer but missed that boat when CEO Olsen wondered why anyone would ever want a computer at home. The remains of DEC were bought by Compaq, which was in turn swallowed by Hewlett-Packard. Cray Research faded soon after Seymour's death and was sold to SGI. SGI went bankrupt. Apple rose and fell and rose again. Microsoft surged, then stalled. Sun is being bought by Oracle. Google is flying high. Stay tuned. But don't ask to isolate anyone from competition, which is the road to progress.

Third theme: competition doesn't preclude cooperation, or learning from others. The term "software" didn't exist in Rosabeth's day. Each manufacturer supplied its own operating-system software with its mainframes, and users wrote whatever application programs they needed: the idea of selling software hadn't yet come up. Standardizing software across different vendors' machines was not a priority, just as standard time wasn't a priority across different towns in the Old West, before railroads.

But by 1962 standard programming languages were beginning to take hold. Writing programs that computers can interpret directly was and is a very tedious and error-prone undertaking. Computer pioneers had gotten the inspiration for a compiler, which is a computer program that translates user programs from a high-level language into a form the computer can run. Two languages were prominent in those days: ALGOL, which ran on UNIVAC and Burroughs machines, and Fortran (FORmula TRANslation), which ran on IBM computers. Grace Hopper's COBOL came later. Fortran was terse and ugly; COBOL (COmmon Business-Oriented Language) was verbose and ill-suited to scientific computations. ALGOL was a good compromise; sadly, it lost out to the other two. Yet all of them were swept aside by C, the language in which virtually all modern applications, such as Word and Excel, are written.

In the early days, there was no proprietary application software such as word processors or office suites. But by the 1970s there were software collections written in Fortran that passed from hand to hand and were used by many engineers and scientists in their own programs. One I remember was LINPACK, for matrix algebra, and another was EISPACK, for eigenvalue analysis. You could get these collections by mail, as card decks or magnetic tapes. Al Gore hadn't yet invented the internet. The people who were in the field found ways to cooperate and exchange.

Fourth theme: obstacles can be fun; hurdles can be opportunities. By the time I came upon the scene, running your application had become a two-step process. First the compiler read your ALGOL program from the first part of your card deck. If there were syntax errors, your job ended then and there; but if it compiled, the computer ran your translated program, which would usually read data from the second part of your card deck. If there were errors during this second stage, such as attempting to divide by zero, your job would end at that point. Otherwise you would get a printout of whatever results you called for in your program. Those results, of course, could be right or wrong. You presumably knew what you wanted, but the computer did exactly what you told it, which could be something quite different.

The main difficulty in writing Algol or Fortran programs was the limited memory available. If you were using matrices (arrays of numbers), as we did in finite element analysis, you could run out of memory very quickly. So we had to work hard to use memory judiciously. In fact, the vast majority of our effort was directed not to the engineering algorithm itself (the recipe) but to getting past the limitations and getting the darn machine to do what we wanted.

Well, did we feel deprived? Certainly not, because we were on the cutting edge, like the first automobile enthusiasts who spent most of their time and money getting their machines to start and run. Most of us weren't much bothered by the hurdles we faced in getting our programs to run.

But I'm actually a bit sorry about that. Hurdles are opportunities for entrepreneurs to find ways of easing such burdens — while, if they're lucky, making themselves rich. I now see the whopping big opportunity that was staring me in the face in the 1970s: to convert LINPACK and EISPACK into a commercial package that relieved users of most of the burden of writing Fortran programs. I was oblivious to that opportunity — but Cleve Moler wasn't.

CDC never really recovered from Cray's departure, as its founder William Norris began putting altruism ahead of profit-seeking.

Moler is a brilliant, innovative mathematician, specializing in numerical analysis. He was one of the authors of LINPACK and EISPACK. He and two colleagues started the MathWorks in 1984, offering a commercial software package called MATLAB which enabled users to use the capabilities of LINPACK and EISPACK without writing Fortran programs. Over the years MATLAB has grown enormously in power and flexibility. It now has its own programming language and a vast array of specialized applications, many written by users and shared freely. Like Bill Gates, though on a much smaller scale, Cleve and company have made thousands of mathematicians, engineers, and scientists enormously more productive, while (very likely) getting rich and having a lot of fun. The MathWorks remains privately owned, so its financials aren't available, but it now employs 2,200 people.

Fifth theme: free enterprise brings power — the power of the consumer. I have MATLAB open on my desktop as I write. The power it gives me exceeds the wildest dreams of anyone in Rosabeth's day. Last year I helped persuade the Santa Clara engineering school to offer a course in MATLAB programming to civil and mechanical engineers rather than teaching them C programming. I'm now preparing to teach that course for the second time. Whenever I teach, I try to convey some of the awe I feel at the power available to us. I suppose that's a little like listening to my grandfather telling of the days before telephones. You listen politely, and turn back to your computer. Its power is yours — but it is a gift of free enterprise. ❑

Reflections, *from page 34*

neck, in the wilds of rural Kentucky — the Deep South! The Heart of Darkness in the American Psyche! — with his hands and legs bound and the word "Fed" scrawled on his chest. Immediately this was presented as another case in which Tim McVeigh-like rednecks (presumably Southern white veterans who listen to talk radio) killed another innocent government worker.

Of course, the narrative has a self-serving message: people who oppose the government's neo-socialist agenda are motivated by racism and rightwing paranoia.

Unfortunately for this narrative, the police eventually released the results of the investigation of this supposed hate crime, and it turns out to be — a suicide.

Yes, the police determined that Sparkman taped his own legs and hands (very loosely), scrawled the word "Fed" on his own chest, taped his Census Bureau ID to his own head, and hanged himself. The motive? The police — who actually bothered to investigate, something investigative journalists don't do anymore, it would seem — found that Sparkman, who had two life insurance policies worth nearly a million dollars and a son who is unemployed and broke, had come to believe that he had a recurrence of the lymphoma for which he had once been treated.

What was the response of the mainstream media to this revelation? You guessed it: Put this on page 33. — Gary Jason

Paul Samuelson, R.I.P. — On December 13, 2009, top Keynesian economist Paul A. Samuelson died. He and his academic nemesis Milton Friedman, who died in 2006, had several things in common: they both attended the University of Chicago, won the John Bates Clark Award (given to the most promising economist under the age of 40) and the Nobel Prize in economics, and lived to the ripe old age of 94.

But there the similarities end. Samuelson was the MIT wunderkind who introduced millions to the follies of Keynesian economics (deficit spending, progressive taxation, the welfare state, antisaving mentality). Samuelson popularized Keynesian government policy in his famous textbook, which sold more copies than any other economics textbook, ever. Keynesian economics became all the vogue after World War II, when government officials were converted to the idea that deficit spending was an easy solution to an economic downturn.

Here are some of the more common fallacies that come out of Samuelson, John Maynard Keynes, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Paul Krugman (Samuelson's favorite student):

"Government spending is better than tax cuts in stimulating the economy." Free-market response: Recent studies by top economists show that tax cuts are far more effective than government programs in encouraging recovery.

"The private economy is like a machine without an effective steering wheel or governor." Free-market response: The private economy does just fine unless the government (including the Federal Reserve) drives it off the road.

"While savings may pave the road to riches for an individual, if the nation as a whole decides to save more, the result could be a recession and poverty for all." (This is the so-called paradox of thrift, popularized by Samuelson.) Free-market response: Study after study shows that the key to higher economic growth is *more* savings and investment. Even an increase in personal savings during a recession isn't necessarily bad. A report issued by the St. Louis Fed at the time Samuelson died concluded that statistically "a higher saving rate in the current quarter is associated with faster (not slower) economic growth in the current and next few quarters." In short, the paradox of thrift does not exist even in the short run. Consumption is the effect, not the cause, of prosperity (a corollary of Say's law).

"The ruthless pursuit of profits has resulted in growing inequality of incomes and wealth in a capitalist economy." Free-market response: People who have freed or started to free their economies (in, for instance, Hong Kong, China, and India) have seen poverty fall sharply and a higher standard of living for all. Adam Smith's "system of natural liberty" raises all economic boats.

"Socialist central planning can work," "the Soviet economy is proof that, contrary to what many skeptics had earlier believed, a socialist command economy can function and even thrive." Free-market response: The economic growth rates of the Soviet Union were manufactured. The Soviet model collapsed after years of fictitious growth. Even socialist Robert Heilbroner had to admit in the same year, 1989: "The long debate between capitalism and socialism is over: Capitalism has won."

Admittedly, Samuelson was not all bad as an economist. He was willing to engage his critics; he always wrote letters in response to my attacks, even after I published a picture of my tearing up his textbook for my expose, "Economics on Trial." His response: "I'll be sure to place your book on a high shelf so my dog Sadie won't tear it to pieces." He labeled Marx, Lenin, and Stalin "village idiots" when it came to economic logic. He wrote last year, "Let's try to forget about Castro in Cuba, Chavez in Venezuela, and whoever it was who reduced North Korea to starvation and stagnation."

Over its 19 editions, Samuelson's textbook (now coauthored by Yale's Bill Nordhaus) has gradually improved its view of free-market capitalism. Samuelson recently replaced the "paradox of thrift" section with a pro-saving article and criticized deficit spending under the Bush administration. He even had good things to say about Milton Friedman, at least until the financial crisis of 2008, which he blamed on "libertarian laissez-faire capitalism, permitted to run wild without regulation" — another Keynesian myth.

Fortunately, Samuelson's textbook is no longer number one. In fact, it's not even in the top ten any more, having been replaced by more free-market textbooks such as those by Greg Mankiw, Roger Leroy Miller, James Gwartney, and Glenn Hubbard — and my own "Economic Logic."

Yet Samuelson's Keynesian ideas live on in the current administration. Perhaps the best quotation from Samuelson: "It has sometimes been suggested that our most advanced students know everything except common sense."

— Mark Skousen

Reviews

"Black Maverick: T.R.M. Howard's Fight for Civil Rights and Economic Power," by David Beito and Linda Royster Beito. University of Illinois Press, 2009, 304 pages.

Mississippi Yearning

Jane S. Shaw

Time is short and I'm not a speed reader, so I choose serious books carefully. I was reluctant to read "Black Maverick" by David Beito and Linda Royster Beito because I knew both too much and too little about its setting.

"Black Maverick" is a biography of T.R.M. Howard, a figure in mid-20th-century Mississippi history who has until now been largely ignored. A physician and businessman, he was a leader of blacks as the civil rights movement began to take shape in Mississippi in the 1950s. He is not well known — for a couple of reasons. For one, he worked in Mississippi before the most active phase of civil rights in the state. For another, he was primarily a physician, businessman, and leader in the self-help movement represented by mutual aid societies. Specifically, he was active in the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. That society provided low-cost healthcare for its members and built its own hospital, where Howard practiced medicine.

I know something about civil rights in Mississippi. As a teenager, I went to Clarksdale as part of the "Freedom Summer" of 1964. That was a project of the Council of Federated Organizations (involving also SNCC and CORE), designed to shake up racial relations in the state by bringing in northern students to register voters and teach in freedom schools. That Mississippi summer is best known for the cold-blooded murder of three of the group's young men. The story is captured in the 1988 movie "Mississippi Burning."

Living in Clarksdale, I quickly learned the names of such people as Aaron Henry, the head of Mississippi's NAACP chapter; Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary who had been murdered the year before; and his brother, Charles Evers, who returned from Chicago after his brother's death. And it was impossible to spend much time in the black community of Coahoma County without hearing about the lynching of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago, even though it had happened nine years before.

But I did not hear of T.R.M. Howard until 2008, when David Beito mentioned him in a lecture he gave in North Carolina. Howard didn't sound like a hero to me, especially because there were some unsavory elements in his life. For one thing, he philandered, fathering a number of illegitimate children. In addition, he was an enthusiastic and well-paid abortionist long before abortion was legal. Although I support abortion (within limits), the businesslike acceptance of a career built on illegal abortions seemed to devalue his civil rights heroism.

Yet once I read "Black Maverick," I changed my mind about Howard, just as David Beito hoped I would (and, he says, others have too). In some ways, Theodore Roosevelt Mason Howard was a larger-than-life figure. Even while living in Mississippi in the Jim Crow era, he had "a zest for life," as the Beitos say. He "sped down the highway in his Cadillac, which was always the latest model," and later on became

a big-game hunter.

Even so, he was a sensitive doctor, who, according to Medgar Evers' widow, had "a friendly smile, and a hearty handshake, and there was about him an aura of security so lacking among the vast majority of Negroes in the Delta that he stood out as different wherever he went." The Beitos describe him as a restless man, "always in the process of starting a program." In addition, he seemed able to focus on his interests and goals without expressing much in the way of resentment or self-pity when they were challenged or frustrated.

Howard was born in 1908 in Murray, Kentucky. As a youth, he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A white doctor who was also an Adventist became his mentor, directing him to Union College, an Adventist school in Lincoln, Nebraska, and the College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda, California. While in California, Howard became a columnist for the California Eagle, a black newspaper in Los Angeles. After graduating from medical school, he worked as a physician in St. Louis and Nashville.

In 1941, Howard moved to Mound Bayou, an all-black town. The International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor had raised enough money to build a hospital. It hired him as its chief surgeon.

After establishing himself as a Taborian doctor, Howard engaged in other enterprises, from an insurance company to a restaurant with a beer garden. And he began organizing businessmen in the Mississippi Delta. In 1951 he helped to found the Regional Council for Negro Leadership (RCNL), an organization of black business leaders that countered the white-supremacist Delta Council. The RCNL became a vehicle for developing black leadership, convening giant meetings in Mound Bayou that brought in well-known figures from outside the South, such as William Dawson, a black congressman from Illinois, and gospel singer Mahalia Jackson.

Among the many things that Howard did, two actions stand out. In 1952, he led a successful boycott of gas stations that didn't provide restrooms for blacks. In 1955, he pressed for the prosecution of the accused murderers of Emmett Till. Without pressure from Howard, including his protection of a key witness, the trial might never have happened or would have been a complete travesty.

Yet even with Howard's help, the trial in Sumner, Mississippi, was not a fair one. Witnesses were intimidated, the prosecution was weak, and the jury had made up its mind (as its members later revealed) before the evidence appeared. It came as no surprise that the accused men were acquitted. Even so, it represented an advance over previous treatment of blacks in Mississippi: at least there was a trial, and it attracted national publicity.

In 1956, Howard moved to Chicago, where he continued to be an outspoken figure, a Republican who unsuccessfully challenged Richard J. Daley's political machine in the city's South Side. He also created a medical center, and, when abortions became legal in 1973, he championed them. His picture appeared on the cover of Jet magazine — conducting an abortion. He died in Chicago in 1976.

With this book, the Beitos fill in two important gaps in history. First, they

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rescue an important and fascinating figure from neglect. Second, they expand today's perception of the civil rights movement, making it clear that not all black civil rights heroes were preachers or elected politicians. As they write in their introduction, Howard's life is a "testament to the largely unsung role of the black middle class during the 20th century."

While making these contributions, the Beitos also reveal the unpredictable plasticity of history. In the early 1950s, before *Brown* v. *Board of Education* had been decided, Howard and other leaders struggled to bring Mississippi into the 20th century. Those were years of searching, of trying to find ways to improve the lot of blacks in the Deep South. While never bowing to the white power structure, Howard tried to sustain a relationship with it, an approach that sometimes put him at odds with the NAACP, which on a national level was developing the legal case for school integration. Indeed, Howard initially hoped that the RNCL and the Delta Council would be able to work together. As the Beitos write, "Howard could be fearless in waging war against inequality and disenfranchisement, but he was not a man to tilt at windmills."

At the time, of course, no one could predict the conflicts that lay ahead. It was impossible to know "the lengths to which [white] opponents would go in fighting to defend and expand their state's system of racial supremacy." The opponents probably didn't know, either, and perhaps, with luck, history might have developed differently. But by 1956, it was becoming clear that Mississippi would be a place of violence, and that even prominent figures such as Howard were not going to be exempt. That was probably one reason why Howard decided to move to Chicago, following the path of many blacks from the Mississippi Delta, to start a new life.

The Beitos have packed vivid stories into this 300-page biography, a lot more than I have mentioned here, so the book makes good reading. And their attention to historical detail seems almost perfect. They investigated a vast array of archival sources, they conducted interviews of people who knew Howard, and they located recordings of Howard's speeches.

The result is compelling. T.R.M. Howard should be recognized for his role in laying the foundation for the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Thanks to David and Linda Royster Beito, now he will be. ❑

"Capitalism at Work: Business, Government and Energy," by Robert L. Bradley, Jr. Scrivener, 2009, 500 pages.

The Business of Power

Burton W. Folsom, Jr. & James Nesbitt

On December 11, 2001, a little more than a week after Enron declared bankruptcy, a triumphant Paul Krugman proclaimed in the pages of The New York Times that the energy company had been an experiment

> testing the libertarian credo, that the great expansion in government's role between the two world wars was unwarranted. [It was] supposed to demonstrate that government activism is unnecessary, and that radical laissez-faire works. The Enron experiment was, in essence, about doing away with regulation — regulation of prices, regulation of financial trade . . . but the great economic lesson of the 20th century was that to work, a market system needs a little help from the government, regulations to prevent abuses, active monetary policy to fight recessions. The debacles in Houston demonstrate that this great lesson has not lost its relevance.

The popular literature that came out after the dust had settled often came to similar conclusions: the Enron fraud proved the failure of capitalism and deregulation; the free market system had faced its battle of Waterloo. Such conclusions have emerged even in detailed accounts that have since been published of Enron's legal misdeeds.

Some of Enron's executives were certainly engaged in fraudulent behavior and committed illegal actions. CFO Andrew Fastow craftily concealed Enron's substantial losses by creating shell companies to absorb them and leave Enron itself with an illusory paper profit, while CEO Ken Lay enticed investors with a series of misleading public statements predicting higher stock prices and offering lies about the company's health. But these facts hardly discredit the free market system. If Enron truly represented an experiment that could prove or disprove the value of free markets, it must first be established that free-market principles and practices led to fraud and eventually to bankruptcy. Krugman assumes this to be true and rushes on with his indictment, but *establishing* the connection between Enron and "the libertarian credo" is necessary before one can determine what broad economic lessons the Enron case should teach. This is much more complicated and time consuming than Krugman would wish.

Robert L. Bradley, Jr., understands the need for a thorough understanding of Enron's actions. (He is an expert on the economics of oil and natural gas development, a subject of obvious relevance to the issue.) He also understands the need for a thorough understanding of the theories and principles that undergird a free-market system. He has undertaken to provide both types of understanding in his projected trilogy,

"Political Capitalism." The first book of this ambitious study — and the only one published so far — "Capitalism at Work," lays out the philosophy, economic thought, and history that have contributed to the development of free-market ideology.

Bradley avoids the failure of Krugman and others to distinguish between the way in which an impartial market behaves and the way in which the partial actors within it are *supposed* to behave. In the first part of his book, he shows what the ethics of Adam Smith, Samuel Smiles, and Ayn Rand contribute to the discussion of free markets. He thus sets the stage for a discussion, later in the trilogy, of Enron's brilliant but amoral business practices. His intention is to expose the "pretense that genius trumps execution": the idea that assembling a room of the smartest men in the industry will provide long-term growth and success, even if those individuals cannot make principled and consistent decisions as well as imaginative and clever ones.

The next section of the book elaborates Bradley's key concept of "Political Capitalism" — "a socioeconomic system in which legislation and ensuing regulation are inspired and influenced primarily by organized business interests." Bradley reviews this nation's long record of flirtations with Political Capitalism, providing a context for understanding how Enron believed that it could succeed — and how it did succeed, for a time — by violating the rules of the marketplace. Besides duping its shareholders, Enron made money from government constrictions of the market. The state of California deregulated *part* of the energy market, in such a way as to give Enron a share of electricity sales at prices protected from sufficient competition. The sad results were blamed on deregulation, when it fact Enron was profiting from a marketplace distorted by the state.

In the third part of his book, Bradley examines the theories behind resource depletion, with a focus on Enron's economic sector, energy. Thomas Malthus, whose work earned economics the derisive nickname "the dismal science," first sparked the debate over resource depletion in the early 1800s; and Malthusianism, the view that the human population will outrun its resources, has been popular ever since. Bradley traces the debates of the past two centuries and unravels the myth of the "population bomb," helping the reader understand how poor economic theory has assisted government in increasing its authority over the energy market. Again, Bradley prepares a path he can follow in his later books, which promise to show how Enron operated within this intellectual and institutional framework to curry political favors.

Unfortunately, readers hoping that Bradley will convincingly and decisively sever the equation of Enron and "free markets" will have to wait for the rest of the trilogy. "Capitalism at Work" touches only tangentially on Enron, where it happens to relate to the theory, philosophy, and history that are the main focuses of the book. Little detail is offered on Enron itself. The details, Bradley assures us, will be forthcoming.

Few readers will be happy to be put off in this way. Nevertheless, by laying a solid groundwork for understanding the theory and ethics of a free market system, Bradley is correcting, slowly but thoroughly, a great many mistakes of other people. Without an understanding of free-market theory, it is foolish to use the Enron case either to indict or support the free market.

And certainly the history of "political capitalism" or "political entrepreneurship" is important to know. The state has a disastrous record at promoting economic development. Examples abound. President Washington supported a government-operated fur company — on the ground that it would be helpful in defending the United States against English encroachment in the Northwest Territory. Even with its government backing, however, that company lost out to John Jacob Astor's innovative American Fur Company, which captured the Indian trade and expanded its business to the shores of the Pacific and beyond.

When a steamship industry became possible in the 1840s, Congress gave a subsidy to Edward Collins to build four steamships and route them back and forth from New York to Liverpool. Supposedly, under Collins' leadership, passengers, freight, and mail would be delivered efficiently. But Collins was awkward and often incompetent. Two of his ships sank in the Atlantic Ocean. Yet Congress continued to fund him. Finally, Cornelius Vanderbilt started a competing company, using his own money for his own ships. He cut the costs of passenger traffic and never had an accident. Congress responded by increasing Collins' subsidy so as to compensate him for his lost business to Vanderbilt. Eventually the subsidies stopped, but not before $11 million (almost 20% of the U.S. national debt) had been awarded to inefficient steamship companies.

After the Civil War, the United States gave large loans (which turned into subsidies) and much acreage to three transcontinental railroad companies. With the cash in hand, these roads had no strong incentives to build their lines efficiently. Like Collins, they went bankrupt. Large sections of their lines had to be rebuilt and sometimes even relocated because of shoddy construction. But the privately funded Great Northern Railroad, which operated on a shoestring budget, succeeded.

A final noteworthy example is the airplane industry. The Wright Brothers built and flew the first successful airplane by using their own money. But before they did so, the federal government funded Samuel Langley, the head of the Smithsonian Institution, to build and launch the first aircraft. Nine days before the Wright Brothers flew their plane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Langley crashed his subsidized airplane into the Potomac River outside of Washington, DC.

Besides government subsidies, of course, the greatest source of interference with the market is government regulation; and the two often work together to corrupt business. The message of "Capitalism at Work" is that "complex rules for a complex world have proved less a cure than an enabler for corporate malfeasance. [Enron] is yet another case of unintended consequences from government intervention, a major theme of political economy." The chief lesson of Bradley's book is not that Enron showed "a market system needs a little help from the government [and] regulations to prevent abuses," as Krugman asserted upon Enron's fall, but rather that Enron shows how abusive that help from the government can be. ❑

"Going Rogue: An American Life," by Sarah Palin. HarperCollins, 2009, 413 pages.

Half-Baked Alaskan?

Gary Jason

I almost never read autobiographies by politicians, or anyone else, for that matter, self-hagiography being inherently repellent to me. But I decided to read Sarah Palin's book, "Going Rogue," because Palin intrigues me. During the last election, to my amazement, she became the focus of virtually the entire campaign, arousing among her supporters a reverential zeal, and among her detractors — the mainstream media and other elites — a furious, ferocious hatred.

She was the subject of the most withering political attack I have ever seen. The Democratic National Committee and the mainstream media sent dozens of investigators up to Alaska to look for whatever negatives they could find, a scrutiny never accorded Obama. She was derided as stupid, vain, corrupt, and alleged to have a dysfunctional family. Why, heavens, her daughter was pregnant out of wedlock, something unknown in contemporary America! Perhaps the all-time low in American politics was hit when a mock Planned Parenthood ad was run on the internet, showing Palin holding her Down's syndrome baby with a coat hanger in one corner and the tag line "Better Luck Next Time" in another corner. It takes a profound, soul-filling hatred to evolve this sort of sick attack.

So I decided to plow through the 400-plus pages of the autobiography. I went hoping to find the answers to four simple questions. First, were any of the attacks true, or largely true? Second, if not, why did so many elites and media despise her so profoundly? Third, does she plan to run for higher office? Fourth, if she does, should I support her? The book gave me answers, alas, only for the first three questions.

Palin's book has six chapters. In the first, she covers her youth in small towns in Alaska during the 1970s. It discusses the sports she played in high school, then at the University of Idaho. This is all covered in some detail, as is her romance with Todd, her husband, and the birth of her children.

Now, there was an anonymous story put out that Palin's book was ghostwritten. I find this unlikely. The prose sounds quite like her: fulsome, almost gushy, sentences, chock full of details about her life and times. And, after all, it isn't as if she couldn't write her own copy: she took a degree in journalism, then worked as a sports-writer, and has penned a number of columns for large newspapers. She didn't need a ghost.

But to return . . . in the second chapter she recounts (again in detail) her entry into politics. She says that the catalyst for her decision was witnessing the Exxon-Valdez disaster, in which an oil tanker ran aground, spilling a massive amount of oil that in turn destroyed much of the local ecosystem. She started by running for city council (in Wasilla, Alaska) in 1992, and then for mayor in 1996. In that office, she became known for cutting most taxes — as well as expanding some city services.

The third chapter covers her run for governor in 2006. She won against what initially seemed rather tall odds, defeating an entrenched Republican (Frank Murkowski) in the primary and a Democratic former governor (Tony Knowles) in the general election. She ran on a platform of cleaning up corruption. The state certainly needed cleaning up, particularly in respect to corrupt dealings between state officials and oil companies. Many were later exposed and indicted. She won the election in 2006.

Palin discusses in detail what she regards as her biggest accomplishments as governor. And they do seem large, given her brief tenure. She found a solution to the problem of building the long-stalled natural gas pipeline to the lower 48 states. She renegotiated a better deal with the oil companies. She cancelled most of the pork-barrel projects that had been obtained from Washington, DC. She passed a tough new ethics bill, which would later be used against her. And she forced Exxon to start drilling on land it had leased for decades.

In chapter 4, the longest in the book, she covers her surprise selection as McCain's VP choice in 2008, and the subsequent campaign. She discusses candidly — indeed, cheerfully — many features of the campaign that must have been highly unpleasant for her: the VP debate prep, the infamous TV interview with Katie Couric, and the emerging tensions between her camp of support staff and McCain's. She takes this opportunity to settle scores with some of McCain's advisers. She says, for example, that her suggestion that they go after certain details of Obama's background — such as his affiliations with leftwing radicals and his wacky racist church — was dismissed. If that is so, her instincts were sounder than those of McCain's handlers. But throughout, she shows nothing but respect and admiration for McCain and his family.

In chapter 5, she discusses her feelings about the loss and the aftermath. Here she has a chance to vent her no doubt deeply (and in my view, rightly) held resentment that while Obama's, Biden's, and McCain's children were considered off-limits to media attack, her children were deliberately and viciously targeted. And she talks about

her reasons for resigning the governor's office, a decision that engendered even more attacks, and was even opposed by her son Track (who was serving in Iraq at the time). Nevertheless, considering the enormous popular success of this book, and Palin's recent rise in popularity, her decision was probably wise.

Chapter 6 is the shortest one — only about a dozen pages — though it is here she sketches her basic political philosophy. She calls it "commonsense conservatism." She says it is a view influenced by her religious belief that man is not infinitely perfectible; government, therefore, must be limited in how much it tries to compel people to change, and should respect traditional structures that have helped people survive over the ages. She quotes Thomas Sowell on the "constrained" vision of governance. (The line of thought, however, goes back to Edmund Burke and before.) She expresses support for the free market and a strong defense, but again, only very sketchily. Completely absent is a discussion of how she would resolve the tensions between traditionalist conservatism, classical liberalism, and strong-defense conservatism. I will return to this.

Now let's look at the questions I had, going into the book. Regarding the first — were the attacks on Palin true? — the book's answer is clearly No. The picture that emerges from these pages is that of an intelligent, deeply centered, exceptionally articulate person. In Chapters 5 and 6, especially, she exhaustively answers the many charges that were leveled against her during the campaign. She explains, for example, that the ethics complaints suddenly filed against her in Alaska were partisan in origin and were later adjudicated to be without merit.

The book also answered my second question: why did she — why does she — arouse such passionate antipathy? The reason is twofold. To begin with, there were a number of things about her that offended cultural elites. She is a huntress, and speaks glowingly about hunting. (She says that there is room for all of Alaska's animals, right next to the mashed potatoes.) This naturally antagonized animal rights activists and those of eco-faith — you know, the people who think that "Bambi" was a documentary. As a lifetime member of the NRA, she offends antigun people. She has a large family, and this offends many feminists and neo-Malthusian ecologists. She is an evangelical Christian, which offends many non-Christians and some Christians of other persuasions. She is pro-life, though her position is rather nuanced — for example, in her discussion of her feelings when she discovered that her child had Down's syndrome, she expresses understanding of the reasons why many women are tempted to choose abortion.

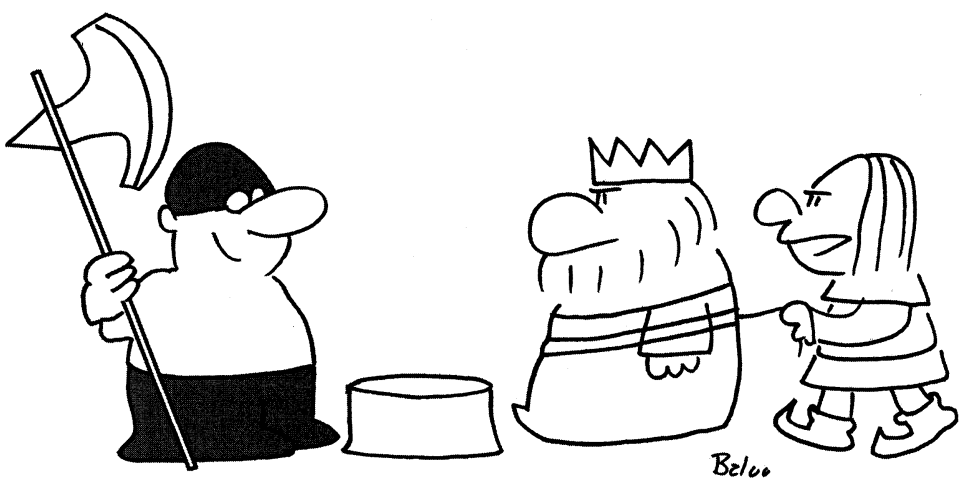
Then there are her social origins. She doesn't just feign working-class origins (all Democrats and many Republicans do that, even when — as with Obama and Biden — the effect is risible), but she really is working-class. This arouses the hatred of the cultural elites. Intellectuals typically have contempt for working people, especially when they make a fetish of wanting to "help" them. Oh, she went to college, but certainly not one of the Ivy League schools. Worse yet, she is from rural America — and hell, not even fly-over country, but fly-past country!

Add to this the fact that she is good-looking, and has what appears to be a loving family. That frankly just makes many people flat-out jealous. You can see this sort of petty envy when, for instance, unattractive columnists lambaste her as "Caribou Barbie," or aged feminist harpies deride her as a "bimbo."

Palin vents her resentment that while Obama's, Biden's, and McCain's children wer considered off-limits, her children were deliberately and viciously targeted.

But besides the features of her life and history that bug the elites, there has to be something else in play. Even after she lost, the attacks continued, indeed, escalated, with a concerted effort clearly being made to make sure she would never return. This leads me to believe that what is really driving the never-ending attack machine is a fear among her opponents that she has "it" — that intangible, indefinable quality that only a few politicians have. "Charisma" is the often used term, and sister, she does have charisma. She can connect with average folk in a way few politicians can. When you hear (as I often do from fellow professors) sneers about what a fool she is, you can really smell the fear that she may wind up like Reagan: sneered at all the way to the White House, and then into the history books as a successful president. It's enough to give Bambi a heart attack.

As to my third question — does she intend to run for higher office? — though she plays coy, I am now of the opinion that she wants to be America's



"Oh, quit whimpering! — Anybody would think that you're the only king in the world who ever got his head chopped off."

Margaret Thatcher. She certainly mentions Thatcher with great reverence. I think she is well aware of political history and realizes that both Reagan and Nixon came back from defeats to win the top prize. She already is taking a page out of both their books: after their defeats, each spent years tirelessly campaigning for other Republicans, and wound up with trunks full of IOUs that served them well.

My fourth question, however, has not been answered. Look, I can only speak for myself, but I care little for the cultural aspects of any candidate. I don't much care whether the person is female or male, hunts or is a complete freaking vegan, is religious or not (I draw the line at violent cults), has worked in blue-collar jobs or was born to wealth, has had a good marriage or divorces from hell. I care mainly about what candidates intend *to do*. And after the last election, in which people voted for an affirmative-action candidate without asking exactly what kind of "change" he was hoping to implement — and now (if the polls are to be believed) are coming to regret their choice — I don't think that voters will make the same mistake twice.

And here the book lets you down. The dozen sketchy pages don't help. Compare Reagan, a figure whom Palin mentions often in this regard. Twenty years of his talks, speeches, debates, and syndicated columns allowed him to set forth his positions in detail. When he ran for president, there was little doubt among either his supporters or his opponents about what he intended to do. Palin has yet to do that. How would she deal with the looming entitlement explosion? The war on terror? Immigration? Free trade? School choice? Union "card check" legislation? Really, she has only talked in detail about energy policy.

Take two cases in which her own book raises intriguing questions about her views. First, on page 29, she speaks well of Title IX, which mandated that colleges support women's athletics. She was able to go to college partly on sports scholarships. She even mentions her friend Jessica Gavora's book, "Tilting the Playing Field: Schools, Sports, Sex and Title IX" (Encounter Books, 2002). We can all agree that women should get equal opportunity. But Gavora argues in her book that because Title IX has been interpreted to call for affirmative action in sports, it has not produced more female athletes, but fewer male ones, with male athletic programs having to be shut down around the country. This prompts the question: where does Palin stand on affirmative action?

Second, consider Palin's discussion of abortion. As I've said, I give her credit for being nuanced in her thinking. And she says she wouldn't put women in jail for choosing abortion. Fair enough. But would she prohibit abortion, and, if so, how would she propose to enforce that ban?

In sum, Palin is articulate, determined, gritty, popular, young, and — after the success of her book — now fairly well-heeled. If (as I suspect) she intends to run again for high office, she has a lot going for her. But my advice to her would be to take this opportunity to put forward a coherent, detailed world view. I suggest she use her training as a journalist to start a weekly syndicated column, and tackle a wide range of specific issues. She should also go on frequent speaking tours, again spelling out her positions on a wide

variety of topics. She has said she admires Reagan. Perhaps she ought to emulate him in this regard.

She should also consider running for the U.S. Senate in Alaska next year. Even after the coordinated attack against her, she still has a high favorability rating. A term in the Senate would burnish her resume, one would think, as well as define her political positions. ❑

"Me and Orson Welles," directed by Richard Linklater. CinemaNX, 2009, 114 minutes.

Mercurial Theater

Gary Jason

The love I have for good cinema was mainly instilled in me by viewing the works of one remarkable man: Orson Welles (1915–85). Welles is now the subject of a splendid new comedy, "Me and Orson Welles." This film is delightfully good, both as a comedy and as a meditation on the magic of the stage.

If anyone ever deserved to be called "larger than life," Welles certainly did. He was a major force in America's golden age of radio, as well as in American theater and film. In his amazing career, he was highly successful as an actor (including voice actor), director, producer, and writer. Indeed, as recently as 2002 he was voted the greatest director of all time in the British Film Institute's poll of top ten directors.

Welles got his start in acting when he took a trip to Europe after graduating from high school. He talked his way into an acting job at the Gate Theater in Dublin in 1931, receiving great accolades when he was just 16. He returned to school the next year and wrote a series of educational books on Shakespeare. The following year he started on stage in New York. There he met director and producer John Houseman, and by the mid-1930s he was acting on stage and in radio, in which medium he rapidly became a star.

By age 20, Welles was viewed as quite the prodigy, having directed a highly successful adaption of "Macbeth" as well as other dramas. In 1936, he and Houseman formed their own acting company, the Mercury Theater, with a group of excellent actors, including Joseph Cotten, Ray Collins, George Coulouris, Delores del Rio, Agnes Moorehead, and Everett Sloane.

Welles began to work in Hollywood in 1939. By 1941, he had made a motion picture that is considered one of the greatest ever made, "Citizen Kane" (loosely based on the life of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst). The term "made" is especially apt, because Welles not only directed the film but cowrote the screenplay, produced the movie, and played the lead, with supporting help from several of his friends from the Mercury Theater. He went on to direct, produce, and star in a number of classics of American cinema, many of which are still shown in revival art houses — "The Magnificent Ambersons," "Journey into Fear," "The Stranger," "The Lady from Shanghai," "Macbeth," "The Third Man," "Othello," "A Touch of Evil," and "The Trial."

Now, the first production of the Mercury Theater had been an adaption of "Julius Caesar," timely set in Fascist Italy. The staging of this 1937 production is the subject of "Me and Orson Welles." The main character is a high school student named Richard Samuels (Zac Efron), who is visiting Manhattan with hopes of becoming an actor. The character and the story are based on a real-life actor, Arthur Anderson, who lives in New York to this day. Richard bumps into the Mercury actors outside a run-down theater and encounters Welles himself. He bluffs his way into a small role in the production of "Julius Caesar." Richard thus does what Welles himself had done when Welles was 16.

Richard finds himself caught up in an extraordinary circle: Houseman (Eddie Marsan), fidgeting and fussing as he tries to get the play ready; the actors, including Cotten (James Tupper) and Coulouris (Ben Chaplin), as they try to get their lines straight and figure out what Welles is after; and most of all Welles (Christian McKay), who is almost totally egotistical, vain, and narcissistic. And Richard is soon smitten by lovely Sonja Jones (Claire Danes), a young production assistant who turns out to be very ambitious, indeed.

As the company of actors grows increasingly concerned about whether the show will open (while Welles spends most of his time doing radio work and seducing young actresses), Richard finds himself fighting Welles for Sonja's favor. Welles, ever the egotist, fires Richard. (One of the great lines in the movie occurs when Cotten says to Richard, "I said fight for her, not fight *Orson* for her!") But then Welles tries to woo Richard back for the impending opening. The clash between the two men leads to an unpredictable opening night.

All this is sweetly and humorously portrayed. The idea of conveying the ambiance of a new entertainment medium during its most flourishing period by showing a young man caught up with its major players is not new. I'm thinking of a film that is similar in concept, called "My Favorite Year" (1982), a comic gem starring Peter O'Toole and Mark Linn-Baker. It gave the viewer an impression of what life was like during the classic period of television comedy. This movie is equally funny and charming.

The acting in the current film is marvelous. Zac Efron, a teen heartthrob

who starred in Disney's "High School Musical" series, rises to the occasion here, playing the naive but earnest Richard. Claire Danes plays a pretty, and pretty conniving, Sonja.

But especially striking are the actors who play Welles, Houseman, and Cotten. McKay is a natural choice for Welles: he resembles Welles, and he has already performed a one-man show based on Welles. Arthur Anderson, who has seen the movie, said McKay captured Welles very well, conveying his domineering, narcissistic, yet charming personality. James Tupper is excellent as Cotten; again, the physical resemblance is striking, and the acting is finely nuanced. Eddie Marsan convincingly portrays Houseman.

During the fictional play's opening night, a mysterious alchemy takes place, as the play comes to life and draws the audience into its spell.

I must commend the director, Richard Linklater, for doing something more than eliciting some amazing performances from some relatively unknown (though fine) actors. He is able to make us see, through the eyes of Richard, how the stage is strangely enticing and repelling at the same time. We see the arrogance and the backstabbing ambition of the players, and, through some interesting camera shots, we even see how the actors (especially Welles) spray spit in the air as they speak. All this conveys to us how ordinary, yet perhaps not as nice as ordinary, the actors are.

Despite it all, during the fictional play's opening night, a mysterious alchemy takes place, as the play comes to life and draws the audience into its spell. Richard gets to see this alchemy, and it moves him to declare that he wants to be a part of it. It's a magic that continues to draw audiences in, to the live stage as well as the movie theater. Film lovers will not want to miss this one. ❑

"Avatar," directed by James Cameron. Twentieth Century Fox, 2009, 160 minutes.

Spectabulous

Jo Ann Skousen

Many critics have called "Avatar" "'Dances with Wolves' in Space," but as a story the film is worse than that: "Avatar" is about as predictable as an ABC Afterschool Special.

When humans arrive on planet Pandora, local residents unite to protect their land from being destroyed by wealthy military-corporate industrialists looking for mineral deposits. The obligatory peace-loving anthropologist (Sigourney Weaver) tries to protect the natives while the renegade military hotshot (Sam Worthington) changes camps to join them. You can guess the rest of the story without shelling out ten bucks for a ticket ($15 if you choose the 3-D version) or spending a whopping three hours in the movie theater.

So why did "Avatar" gross over a billion dollars in box office receipts in its first two weekends? Despite the predictable storyline, the film is pretty spectacular. Computer generated imagery (CGI) technology has improved to the point where watching this film is as magical as watching Disney's first full-length animated movies must have been. The line between live action and animation has blurred so seamlessly that you simply forget it isn't real. Background scenes of the alien planet with its light-infused flora and colorful fauna are breathtakingly gorgeous, works of art worthy of their own exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (and likely to be displayed there one day in a retrospective of CGI).

An avatar is a computer-operated, biologically correct robotic suit that allows a human to walk around in the body of a Na'vi, the indigenous life form found on Pandora. Like the characters in last year's "Surrogates," humans are hooked up to an EEG that allows them to control these alien bodies while they sleep. The devices have been developed at great expense to help the invading humans ingratiate themselves with the local tribes and obtain what they came for — "unobtainium," the cartoonishly named mineral that sells for $20 million a kilo back on earth.

Jake Sully (Worthington) is an avatar whose job is to find out what the locals want and then persuade them to trade their home for it. (Did I mention that the mother lode of "unobtainium" is located directly beneath the Na'vis' Hometree? It wouldn't be much of an Afterschool Special if it were located anywhere else.) As he lives among the Na'vi and learns their ways, he becomes more and more a part of them. After a while, he says, "Everything is backwards now, like out there is the true world and in here [the human camp] is the dream."

One disturbing aspect of the film is the mythical choosing of the "banshee," a Pegasus-like bird that provides transportation for the Na'vi. In Celtic folklore, a banshee is a female spirit whose wailing foretells impending death. In "Avatar," the banshee, we are told, mates for life — not with other banshees, but with the Na'vi who becomes its rider. As Jake performs the rituals that will allow him to achieve Na'vi "manhood" and become a member of the tribe, he must choose a banshee — or rather, allow a banshee to choose him. "How will I choose the right one?" he asks Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), the woman who has been his guide. "The banshee will choose you," she replies. "But how will I know?" he asks again. "She will try to kill you."

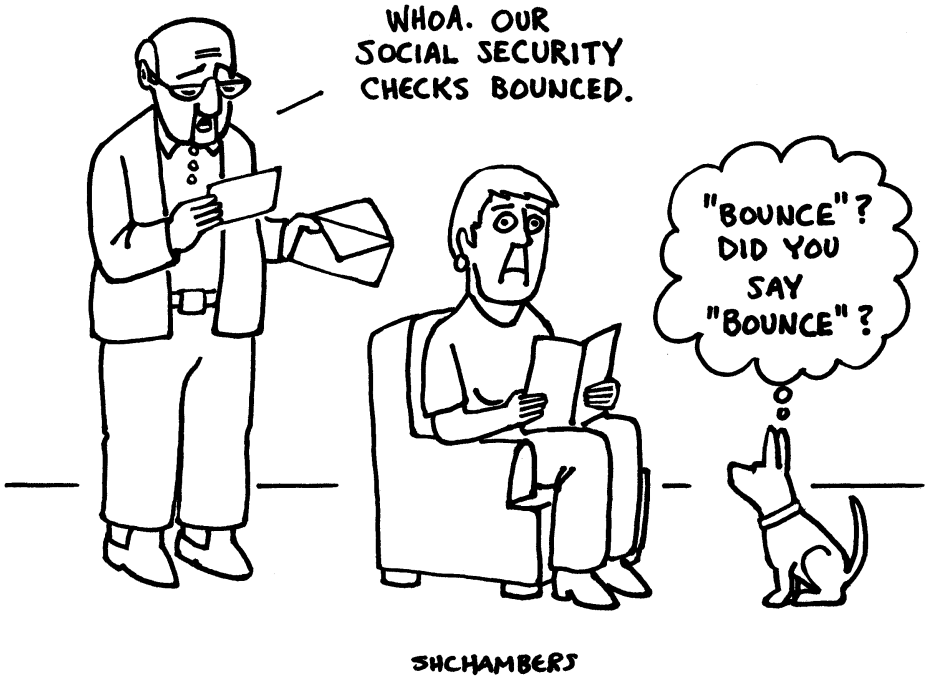
Sure enough, one of the banshees hisses menacingly at Jake, and he hisses back. He jumps on her neck and she tries to knock him off. Battling fiercely, he eventually subdues her by jabbing his penis-shaped braid into her vulva-shaped appendage, and after a startled snort and enlarging of her eyes she calms down.

"Quick!" Neytiri urges him. "The first flight must happen immediately for the bond to be complete!" And off they go, Jake upon the wailing banshee's back shouting, "Shut up and fly straight!" Eventually they establish a beautifully harmonious relationship, with the banshee doing all the work and the avatar having all the fun. Although I think the marriage metaphor might have been unintentional, it's one of the most troubling demonstrations of marriage that I have seen since the 1950s, when men gave their women a good slap to calm them down or kissed them stridently until their pounding fists melted into submission. Ugh.

So, what makes this very simple, predictable (and long!) film resonate with viewers to the tune of a billion dollars and counting? I think it is the mythical quality of both the art work and the many literary allusions. We seem naturally drawn to battles between good and evil, nature and science, war and peace. The film alludes to many biblical and mythical stories besides the banshee — to name a few, Pegasus, David and Goliath, Trees of Life and Trees of Knowledge, a chosen Savior, rebirth, and the Garden of Eden.

In one striking scene, Jake and Neytiri choose each other as lifelong mates, after having spent several weeks together. They awake from their off-screen lovemaking in a Botticelli-like Garden, entwined in each other's arms and covered in vines. This Eden ends abruptly, however, with the sound of tractors and backhoes ripping up the foliage to make way for the engineers. Their mating leads to the end of Eden and the beginning of Armageddon.

To the filmmakers' credit, they do acknowledge the superiority of persuasion over force; the invading corporate bigwig (Giovanni Ribisi) tries to use diplomacy and trade before unleashing the military. But what happens when, as Jake discovers, "There isn't anything we have that they want"? Does the invading company just say "Thanks anyway" and go back home? Or do they resort to force? You haven't seen many movies (or read many history books) if you don't know the answer. ❑



"Up in the Air," directed by Jason Reitman. Cold Spring Pictures, 2009, 109 minutes.

Free at Last?

Jo Ann Skousen

Two films reviewed this month use a backpack as a metaphor for what really matters in life. In "The Road" a father and son make their way across postapocalyptic America carrying their survival equipment and a few sentimental items in a backpack; in "Up in the Air," a happily single man encourages people to empty their imaginary backpacks and live life unencumbered. It's the difference between life seen as substance and sustenance and life seen as weightlessness.

Ryan Bingham (George Clooney), the protagonist-antagonist of "Up in the Air," is a man with an unusual occupation: he gives people the news that they have been fired. Only he doesn't use the words "fired" or "let go"; he tells them simply, "Your job is no longer available." He is hired by companies across America for the anonymity he provides — it's easier to fire people if you don't know their background, haven't met their children, haven't swapped stories at the water cooler. It's also safer; he's out the door and on the next plane before the firee has a chance to go berserk and seek revenge.

Bingham remains upbeat and cheerful throughout the process, telling people, "This is the day you begin planning your future." And he seems to mean it. To him, working 9 to 5 in the same office and returning to the same house inhabited by the same family day after day would be a nightmare. He sets these people free.

When he isn't ushering individuals toward their new futures, Bingham gives speeches at motivational seminars. His topic: "What's in your backpack?" It's the age-old Thoreauvian question: how much of our lives do we spend supporting our "stuff"? Bingham encourages his audiences to imagine putting all their stuff into a pack and then lugging it around on their backs. He also tells them to imagine putting all the people in their lives into the backpack — family, friends, spouse, children, coworkers. Then he tells them to imagine lightening the load by eliminating all their stuff, and all those people. "What would you keep?" he asks. "Photographs? Keep memories instead."

Bingham practices what he preaches. He travels 318 days a year, "leaving 47 miserable days at home," he reports sarcastically. His own apartment, bereft of any ornamentation or personal memorabilia, stands in stark white contrast to the welcoming comfort of his hotel digs, with their richly colored wallpapers, thick bedspreads, gourmet dining rooms, per diem charge accounts, and warm cheerful greetings (triggered, he admits, by his VIP frequent traveler card). He lives "up in the air," both physically and metaphorically.

The film opens with a tightly edited montage of a smiling Bingham making his way through an airport — a twirl of the roller bag, off go the shoes, up goes the ticket, poof goes the security machine, on go the shoes, bim, bam, boom and he's sipping a cocktail in his upgraded business class seat. Jaunty music establishes the rhythm, ritual, and routine of air travel in a way that suggests the comfort rather than the tedium of familiarity. This is a man who loves his job. He loves the travel, loves his frequent traveler cards, loves the VIP lines. He loves picking up women at airport bars and not having to call them again. In short, he has found a way to empty his backpack and simplify his life.

But, like the title of another film that opened at the same time as "Up in the Air," Bingham soon learns that "it's complicated." Two women come into his life, setting the stage for self-reflection and a reassessment of his values. One is Alex Goran (Vera Farmiga), a woman Bingham meets in an airport bar. She also travels almost daily, carries dozens of fancy VIP cards, and wants quick, easy sex with no strings attached. In short, as she tells Bingham crudely, "I'm you, with a vagina." They share travel stories, brag about their sexcapades, and hook up in airport hotels. Before long, just as you'd expect in a film of this genre, Bingham isn't just hooking up; he's hooked.

Meanwhile, Natalie Keener (Anna Kendrick) is a young college grad who has been hired by Bingham's boss (Jason Bateman) with a plan to revolutionize the business. She wants them to forego travel costs and face-to-face terminations, and modernize the process through email interface — sort of like flying the friendly Skype rather than flying the friendly skies. Not only is Bingham's comfortable world up in the air about to be eliminated; he is assigned to take Natalie with him to show her the business so she can fine-tune her new electronic format.

Natalie is having romantic problems with her boyfriend, problems she discusses at length with Alex and Bingham in — where else? — a hotel lounge. Add to this a sister who is getting married and another sister who is getting divorced, and the film offers plenty of opportunities for Bingham to discuss the relative merits or demerits of longterm relationships.

"Up in the Air" rises above (no pun intended) the typical romantic comedy genre with its "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy regains girl after a good lesson" formula. Today, marriage is no longer the default position, and children can be the biggest burden in the backpack. Discussions about the value of longterm relationships and the

viability of marriage make this film very contemporary.

"What's the point?" Bingham asks the optimistic Natalie when she tries to explain her desire for marriage and children. "We're all on the way to death. All that matters is what you do along the way." He genuinely believes that his love 'em and leave 'em life is more satisfying than being tied down to the same woman, same children, same four walls and mortgage. Another character counters his argument with this challenge: "Think of the best memories you have — are you alone in them?" He makes a solid point: "Life is better with company."

Another theme that makes this film distinctly contemporary is the business of letting people go. Jason Reitman began writing this screenplay in 2002 but became sidetracked with "Thank You for Smoking" (2005) and "Juno" (2007). It was a fortunate delay, since "Up in the Air" is much more timely now, when unemployment figures stand in double digits, than it would have been in 2002, when the economy was booming. The people who are seen being fired in the film are not actors, but ordinary people who were recently terminated from their jobs. Reitman advertised in St. Louis and Detroit, posing as a documentarian making a film about the effects of the recession. These volunteers were told to imagine the camera as the person who gave them the news that they were fired, and to say what they wish they had said. The results are heartfelt, eloquent, and completely unscripted. Their spontaneous candor adds a great deal to the film.

As the movie ends, Bingham is still up in the air, literally and figuratively. He's in a plane, flying to his next termination assignment. His future is also up in the air — will he change? Or is it too late? Will he continue to carry an empty backpack the rest of his life?

I have a friend who was very much like the Ryan Bingham character: handsome, debonair, charming, and rich. He traveled the world looking for investment opportunities and attracting women the way a picnic attracts bees. Now he's close to 70. He's still rich, and he still travels. But his face is sagging, his hair is almost gone, and his stomach no longer resembles a washboard. Young sexy women are no longer falling all over him when he walks through an airport lounge. He never wanted to be bogged down with a wife and children or social obligations. Now he's simply alone. I wonder if he wishes there was a little more heft to his backpack. ❑

"Coco Before Chanel," directed by Anne Fontaine. Haut et Court, Warner Brothers, and France 2 Cinema, 2009, 105 minutes.

Style With Substance

Gary Jason

The world of high fashion, especially women's fashion, is across the galaxy from the world I inhabit. A glance at my standard attire will provide proof enough of that. But even a Dockers dude such as I can appreciate the fine little French bioflick "Coco Before Chanel," which tells the quite literally rags-to-riches tale of Gabrielle Bonheur "Coco" Chanel (1883–1971).

Chanel was born in a poorhouse in the small town of Saumur, France, one of six kids in the family of a traveling salesman who never bothered to marry their mother. When the mother died, 12-year-old Coco was sent to a Catholic orphanage, where she was trained as a seamstress. At age 18, she left the monastery school and started working for a tailor shop in town. There she met a man who would change her life: the very rich Etienne Balsan. Balsan — what? adopted her? — as his mistress, giving her access to the wealthy set, and she started designing hats for some of the tony ladies in his social circle.

During this period, Chanel met Balsan's friend, Arthur "Boy" Capel, and they fell in love. Capel later provided her with the funding necessary to open a shop in 1913 (actually, a second shop, the first having failed), and she was able to start building a fashion industry empire. This empire flourished between the two world wars, and, after she voluntarily closed her shops during World War II, flourished again after the war.

And quite a business it was. She was the first to sell women's sportswear and the first to come out with a line of perfumes to augment her line of clothes. She was the only figure from the fashion industry to make Time Magazine's list of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century. Not bad for a woman born poor and illegitimate, and raised in a small-town orphanage.

The movie focuses on Chanel's life before World War I, the years in which she struggled to find some self-identity. She is exceedingly well portrayed by the always charming Audrey Tautou, who, interestingly, is now the official spokesperson for the Chanel Corporation. Tautou, who usually plays upbeat, gorgeous characters, portrays the darker side of Chanel's ambition and drive. There is a hint of bisexuality or masculinity as well. The person we see has wit and appeal, but also a tendency to speak bluntly. This is all the more remarkable, considering that the turn of the 20th century was a time when women were not expected to be ambitious, outspoken, or self-directed.

The supporting cast is outstanding. Especially notable is Benoît Poelvoorde, whose Etienne Balsan is charmingly overwhelmed when his new conquest conquers him. Alessandro Nivola is also good as Boy, Chanel's great early love.

The cinematography is first rate. The

film is shot mainly in the French countryside, and it is beautifully depicted. More subtly, the film conveys Chanel's early eye for clothing patterns and fabrics, and her unusual idea of style. For example, in one scene, we see her join a party at Balsan's estate, where she is wearing an outfit with a slightly masculine look, of her own design. In another, she helps improve a woman's dress by removing the inner corset, wryly observing that corsets were designed by men.

This movie is well worth the while, even for people with little interest in fashion. It shows the triumph of talent and energy over circumstance, which is always a satisfying story. ❑

"Sherlock Holmes," directed by Guy Ritchie. Warner Brothers, 2009, 134 minutes.

Rebooting Sherlock

Jo Ann Skousen

The new, action-packed version of Sherlock Holmes, starring Robert Downey, Jr., as the genius detective and Jude Law as his faithful sidekick, Dr. Watson, opens with the normally sedate Mr. Holmes punching, jabbing, leaping, and crunching his way toward a Satanic villain who is about to sacrifice a beautiful maiden on a stone altar. Exciting? Yes. But Sherlock Holmes as an action hero? Never!

Holmesian purists objected vigorously to this new, young, rough-and-tumble version of the iconic armchair detective. Holmes is supposed to be calm, calculating, and cerebral, his Watson rotund, refined, and a little slow. Now we see Holmes boxing in a gambling den, wallowing in household clutter, drinking or drugging himself into a stupor, and battling hand-to-hand with grotesque villains straight out of a James Bond story. What gives?

In point of fact, director Guy Ritchie is not so far off the mark. Arthur Conan Doyle created a much more complex character than the pipe-smoking sleuth with superhuman powers of deduction. Though not one to exert unnecessary effort, Holmes actually does leave his comfortable armchair quite frequently in the four novels and 56 short stories in which he appears. Like the Holmes in this new film, he dons disguises, engages in boxing and swordplay, is adept at the Asian martial arts, conducts chemical experiments (often using his own blood), breaks the law when necessary to solve a case, and uses cocaine and morphine to stimulate his senses when he is not engaged in a fascinating puzzle. (Both drugs were legal in England in the 19th century.)

Those of us who grew up on reruns of the Basil Rathbone series of movies expect our Holmes to be impeccably dressed, upwardly cultured, and ensconced in tidy, well-appointed rooms — so it may be somewhat disconcerting to see this Holmes wallowing in seeming squalor, surrounded by piles of clutter, and minus his trademark houndstooth cape and deerstalker cap. But this isn't so out of character from the original Holmes. Watson complains in several stories about Holmes' almost slovenly rooms, his stacks of unopened correspondence and piles of reading material. Yet, like many geniuses, Holmes can reach into any one of these stacks and retrieve precisely the paper he is looking for.

Thus Ritchie remains faithful to the original source even as he seems to turn Holmes into a completely new character. True aficionados will have to admit, albeit grudgingly, that Ritchie did his homework. He simply chose to focus on character traits that modernize the famous sleuth, creating a Holmes that is accessible for a new generation. Fans will also recognize Irene Adler (Rachel McAdams) as the recurrent female character in the Holmes lexicon, and Holmes' archnemesis, Moriarty, who makes an appearance as well. Holmes' trademark pipe also plays a critical role in the film, although it isn't the bulbous, pelican-shaped Meerschaum we associate with him.

Like many Holmesian stories, (and Bond films, for that matter) "Sherlock Holmes" opens with the climax of a case, as Holmes and Watson fight fiercely to capture a ritualistic assassin who turns out to be a member of Parliament. The murderer is quickly tried, convicted, and executed. End of story, on to the next case. But the murderer seemingly returns from the dead to continue his murder spree, and Holmes is called back to re-solve the case. Meanwhile, Irene Adler shows up looking for a red-haired midget (bizarre characters being de rigueur in the Holmesian tradition), and the two capers, unsurprisingly, turn out to be connected.

The storyline seems a little muddled early on, but don't worry — it all comes together in the end. And, as in many good action films, the story itself doesn't really matter that much; it's the process that hooks us, and this process is pretty darn good. Holmes' legendary deductive reasoning is shown effectively through stop-action flash-forwards and flashbacks, with Holmes supplying his famous explanations in voiceover. The relationship between Holmes and Watson is well-developed. Only Irene Adler is badly portrayed by a too-modern Rachel McAdams.

Personally I prefer a mystery with a little more plot over an action movie. But I have to admit that Guy Ritchie has given us an exciting new Holmes for a new generation, without turning his back on old fans. ❑

"The Road," directed by John Hillcoat. Dimension Films, 2009, 110 minutes.

After Armageddon

Jo Ann Skousen

"The Road," based on Cormac McCarthy's book of the same name (see my review, Jan.–Feb. 2009), opens with a sunlit closeup of a beautiful garden. A radiant, smiling woman (Charlize Theron), sunlight and domesticity personified, clips a flower as the camera pans out to reveal a lovely, sun-drenched home. But the scene ends in the blink of an eye. A haggard, grizzled Man (Viggo Mortensen) awakes with a start from this delightful dream to the nightmare of his bleak, postapocalyptic existence. A permanent cloud of smog and ash now hides the sun. Trees are bare. Vegetation is gone. Nothing remains but bleak, gray, hardened men and women struggling to survive.

The Man and his young son (Kodi Smit-McPhee) sleep fitfully in caves and underbrush, always listening for marauding strangers who would rape the boy, then eat them both if given half a chance. Their gun is always at the ready, not just to kill the enemy but to turn it on themselves if they should be caught. Anarchy is not the road to prosperity and harmony, at least not according to this film.

The Man and the Boy are traveling along what is left of a highway, heading for the Atlantic coast. We don't know why they are heading for the ocean or what they expect to find there, only that they are indefatigable in their determination to reach the shore.

This film strips away all the nonessentials and explores what really matters in life: a place to sleep, food to eat, and most of all, a relationship to nurture. In many ways, "The Road" is a metaphor for the need to have a goal, a purpose in life, a reason to get up and keep moving. For the Man, that purpose is to protect his son from the evil around him and teach him what he needs to know in order to survive on his own some day. As he tells the Boy, "I will kill anyone who touches you. Because that's my job."

For the Boy, the goal is different. He doesn't merely want to survive; he wants to be "one of the good guys." For the man, being "one of the good guys" is simple: "We don't eat people. No matter what." For the boy, it requires more. Somehow, instinctively, despite being born into a world where no one is kind, he wants to share food, find a friend, be kind to strangers. His job is "to carry the fire" and bring hope to a hopeless condition.

If Anton Chigurh in McCarthy's "No Country for Old Men" is the personification of evil (see my review, May 2008), the Boy in "The Road" is the personification of goodness. No one has taught him to "play nice" or say "please" and "thank you." He has grown up in a system of kill or be killed, eat or be eaten, steal or be stolen from. Yet he is angry when his father refuses to give an old man (Robert Duvall) a can of food, and horrified when his father forces a man who has stolen their goods (Michael K. Williams) not only to return their property but to strip and give them his own clothes as well. In both cases, the Boy wins out.

Despite its bleak setting and sometimes horrifying scenes, "The Road" offers a powerful message of hope, love, goodness, and individual self-determination. It remains true to the novel (one of my all-time favorites) and translates surprisingly well to the screen. Mortensen and Smit-McPhee demonstrate a deep and believable bond as father and son, showing emotion that never turns treacly. Small roles — played by Duvall, Williams, and Guy Pearce as the Veteran — are made large by their deeply resonant performances. This film is a gem. ❑

Letters, *from page 8*

see the opening chapter in E.P. Sanders' pathbreaking "Jesus and Judaism" (1985). Jesus was endeavoring to create an alternative to the temple establishment. This is argued by the eminent biblical scholar N.T. Wright in "Jesus and the Victory of God" (1996). Wright argues further that when Jesus referred to "thieves" during the incident he was criticizing political nationalists.

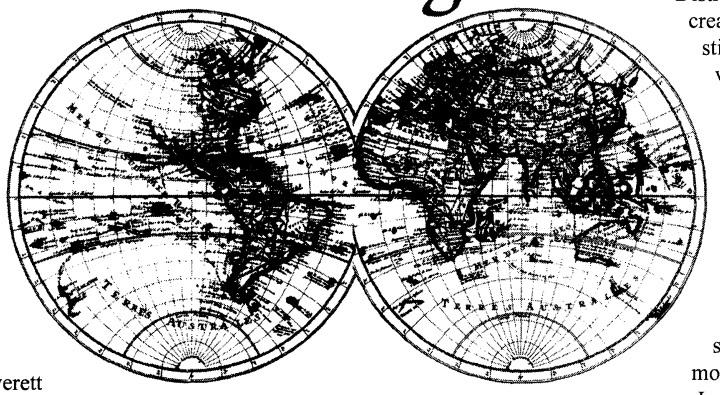
The best scholarly discussion of community of property in Acts may be found in two books by Luke Timothy Johnson: "The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts" (1977) and "Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith" (1981). In the latter, Johnson writes: "The scriptural basis for community of possessions as an ideal way for Christians to share goods is slender, superficial, selective, and suspect."

In essence, the description of sharing by early Christians is meant by the author of Acts to liken the Christians to the ancient Hebrews who shared during the exodus wanderings. A scholarly but accessible discussion of this topic can also be found in John R. Schneider's "The Good of Affluence" (2002).

Williamson M. Evers
Stanford, California

Puller responds: I thank Prof. Evers for his compliments. I would, however, caution against any reading which regards parsimony to the poor as biblically sustainable. Although the Gospels and Epistles do not support a mandatory, confiscatory redistribution of wealth, they clearly support a voluntary redistribution of wealth. And they state quite clearly that wealth is sinful (e.g. 1 John 3:17, James 2:15–16, Matt. 19:24, 25:31–46).

Terra Incognita



Goldsboro, N.C.

Educational initiatives in the era of stimulus spending, recorded in the *Raleigh News & Observer*:

Selling candy didn't raise much money last year, so a Goldsboro middle school tried selling grades.

Susie Shepherd, the principal, said a parent advisory council came up with the idea, and she endorsed it. She said the council was looking for a new way to raise money. "Last year they did chocolates, and it didn't generate anything," Shepherd said.

Rebecca Garland, the chief academic officer for the state Department of Public Instruction, said she understands that schools are struggling in the recession. But Garland said exchanging grades for money teaches children the wrong lessons. "If a student in college were to approach a professor to buy a grade, we would be frowning on that," Garland said.

Flintshire, Wales

Culinary note, from the Welsh bureau of the BBC:

The traditional suet pudding Spotted Dick has been renamed "Spotted Richard" at a council canteen — because customers keep making jokes.

Spotted Dick is a steamed suet pudding containing dried fruit, and is thought to have originated in the middle of the 19th Century. The "spotted" part of the name refers to the currants, which resemble spots, and "Dick" is believed to derive from the word dough.

Council spokesman Colin Everett said: "This was not a policy decision, canteen staff simply acted as they thought best to put an end to unwelcome and childish comments, albeit from a very small number of customers."

New York

A distinguished statesman descends on the Big Apple, as reported by *Foreign Policy*:

After 40 years in power, Libyan Leader Muammar al-Qaddafi spoke to the United Nations for the first time at this year's general assembly and certainly made up for lost time. In his 100-minute speech, Qaddafi listed half a century's worth of grievances and conspiracy theories including accusing the United States of developing swine flu and questioning the official record of the Kennedy assassination.

Most of Qaddafi's wrath was reserved for the UN Security Council, which he likened to al Qaeda. Qaddafi's accommodations provided another sideshow at this year's assembly, as the Libyan leader was rebuffed in his attempts to set up a Bedouin tent in several New York-area locations before finally making up camp in Donald Trump's backyard.

Sarasota, Fla.

Plausible deniability, from the *Sarasota Observer*:

Several concerned residents have called the city of Sarasota complaining about the "No Parking" signs that line the streets of their neighborhood. One resident was upset that a sign is located in front of his house. The city told residents there's nothing it can do about the signs because it has no record of the signs being placed there.

Allentown, Pa.

The secret scab history of the Boy Scouts, in the *Allentown Morning Call*:

In pursuit of an Eagle Scout badge, Kevin Anderson, 17, has toiled for more than 200 hours over several weeks to clear a walking path in an east Allentown park. Little did the do-gooder know that his altruistic act would put him in the crosshairs of the city's largest municipal union.

Nick Balzano, president of the local Service Employees International Union, told Allentown City Council that the union is considering filing a grievance against the city for allowing Anderson to clear a 1,000-foot walking and biking path at Kimmets Lock Park. "We'll be looking into the Cub Scout or Boy Scout who did the trails," Balzano said.

United States

Imaginative restructuring of the political map, from ABCNews.com:

In Arizona's 9th Congressional District, 30 jobs have been saved or created with just $761,420 in federal stimulus spending. At least that's what the website set up by the Obama Administration to track the $787 billion stimulus says. There's one problem, though: there is no 9th Congressional District in Arizona; the state has only eight.

There's no 86th Congressional District in Arizona either, but the government's website says $34 million in stimulus money has been spent there.

In fact, Recovery.gov lists hundreds of millions spent and hundreds of jobs created in congressional districts that don't exist.

Boston

Curious definition of "school reform," spotted by the *Boston Herald*:

Union bosses are blocking Boston's best teachers from pocketing bonuses for their classroom heroics in a move that gets a failing grade from education experts. The Boston Teachers Union staunchly opposes a performance-based bonus plan, insisting the dough be divvied up among all of a school's teachers, good and bad.

Union head Richard Stutman bristled at criticism he doesn't have his members' interest at heart. "We're not taking money away from teachers," Stutman claimed. He also objected to the suggestions his union is a foe of school reform, insisting he backs the incentive program — so long as the bonus goes to all teachers.

Siguenza, Spain

The thin blue line separating society from smooth jazz, from *El Pais*:

Spain's pistol-carrying Civil Guard police force descended on the Sigüenza Jazz festival to investigate allegations that Larry Ochs' music was not jazz. Police decided to investigate after an angry jazz buff complained that the Larry Ochs Sax and Drumming Core group was on the wrong side of a line dividing jazz from contemporary music.

The jazz purist claimed his doctor had warned it was "psychologically inadvisable" for him to listen to anything that could be mistaken for mere contemporary music.

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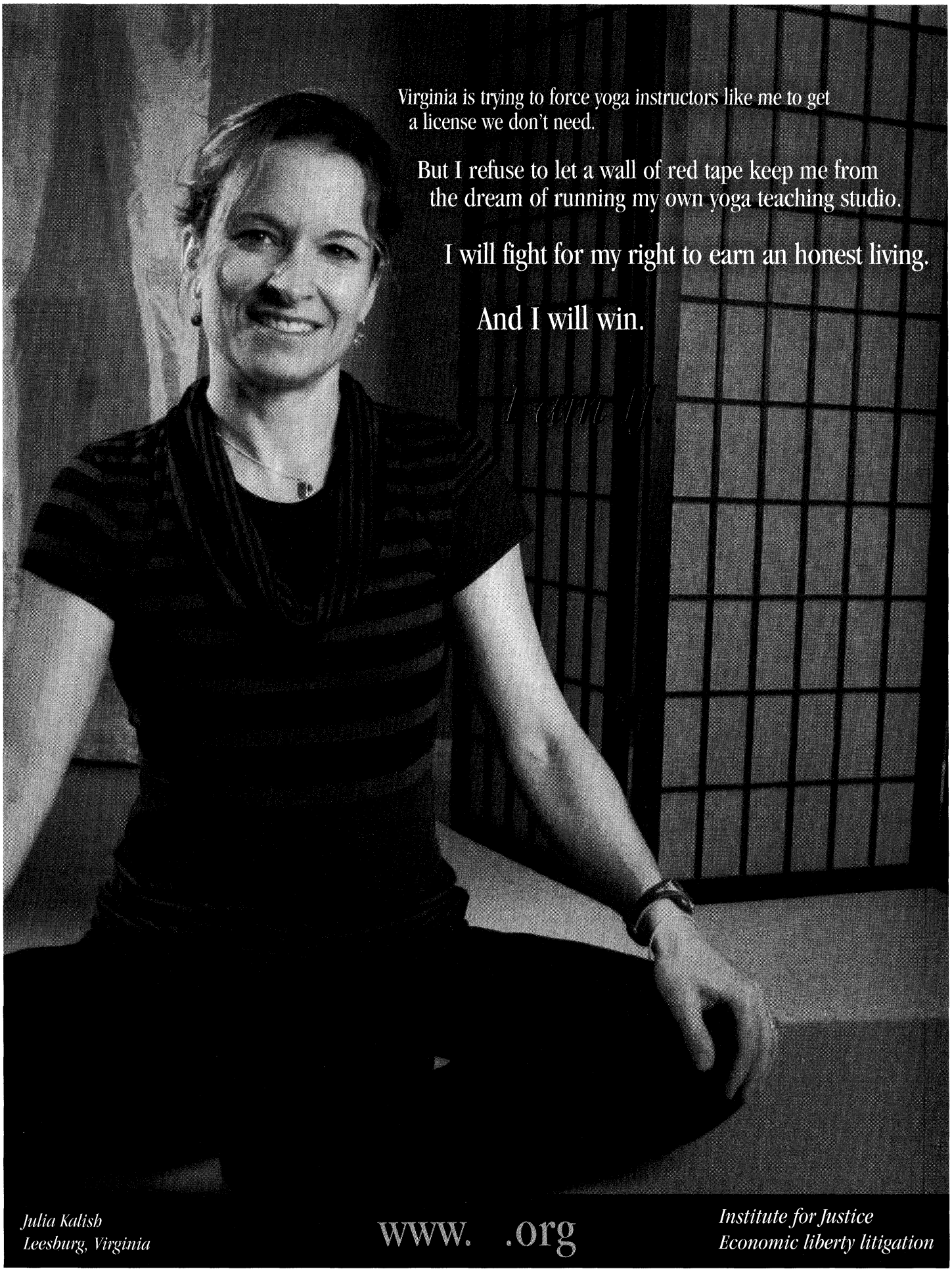
(Readers are invited to forward news clippings or other items for publication in Terra Incognita, or email to terraincognita@libertyunbound.com.)


Virginia is trying to force yoga instructors like me to get a license we don't need.
But I refuse to let a wall of red tape keep me from the dream of running my own yoga teaching studio.
I will fight for my right to earn an honest living.
And I will win.
I can do it.
Julia Kalish
Leesburg, Virginia
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Institute for Justice
Economic liberty litigation