The gun supremacists' folly

E.J. Dionne Jr., April 28, 2014, Opinion, *The Washington Post*

Have we gone stark raving mad?

The question is brought to mind by the gun law signed last week in Georgia by Gov. Nathan Deal. You might have thought that since the United States couldn't possibly have more permissive firearms laws than it does now, nothing more could be done to coddle the gun lobby and tip the balance of our statutes away from law enforcement. Alas, you would be wrong.

The creativity of the National Rifle Association and other organizations devoted to establishing conditions in which every man, woman and child in our nation will have to be armed is awe-inspiring. Where imagination is concerned, the best absurdist artists and writers have nothing on the NRA. No wonder Stephen Colbert has decided to move on from the realm of satire. When parody becomes reality, the challenges facing even a comedian of his talents can become insurmountable.

You might not have thought that the inability of people to pack while praying was a big problem. Georgia's political leaders think otherwise, so the new law allows people to carry guns in their houses of worship. True, congregations can set their own rules, but some pastors wonder about the confusion this provision will create, and those who would keep their sanctuaries gun-free may worry about being branded as liberal elitists. Maybe the Georgia legislature will help them by requiring a rewrite of the Scriptures. "Blessed are the peacemakers" can become "Blessed are the gun owners."

You will also be able to tote weapons into bars and their parking facilities if the bar grants you permission. I can't wait to see the next beer ad depicting a gunfight over who pays for the next round.

Georgia thinks you should be able to take guns into government buildings that don't have screening devices or security guards. Second Amendment enthusiasts tend not to like tax increases, but as the Associated Press reported, the city of Vienna, Ga., (pop. 3,841) would have to shell out about $60,000 a year to increase security at city buildings. "Do we raise taxes to provide the police protection or do we take the risk of potential injury to our public?" asked Mayor Pro Tem Beth English, who also is president of the Georgia Municipal Association. Too bad if this gun lobby subsidy comes out of the school budget.

Oh yes, and while conservatives claim to hate the centralization of power, this law wipes out a series of local gun regulations. The gun supremacists just don't trust those pesky local elected officials.

People with a gun license who try to carry a weapon onto an airplane get a nice break under this bill. If they're caught with a gun at a security checkpoint, nothing happens as long as they leave the area. Try, try again. Watch out if you connect through Atlanta.

And law and order goes out the window. As Niraj Chokshi noted in *The Post*, this statute gets rid of state requirements that firearms dealers maintain records of sales and purchases. Databases on license holders that span multiple jurisdictions are banned. Those who commit gun crimes must be chuckling, "Can you find me now?"

Nothing better reveals the utter irrationality of our politics for the whole world to see than this madness about guns — and no issue better demonstrates how deeply divided our nation is by region, ideology and party.

The New York Times reported that in the 12 months after the Sandy Hook shootings, 39 laws were enacted tightening gun restrictions; 25 were passed by state governments under full Democratic control. Seventy laws were passed loosening gun restrictions, 49 of them in Republican-controlled states. *The Wall Street Journal* cited data showing that 21 states strengthened firearms restrictions in 2013 and 20 weakened them.

Nowhere else in the world do the laws on firearms become the playthings of politicians and lobbyists intent on manufacturing cultural conflict. Nowhere else do elected officials turn the matter of taking a gun to church into a searing ideological question. But then, guns are not a religion in most countries.

The program for the NRA's annual convention, held over the weekend in Indianapolis, listed sessions on "Survival Mindset: Are You Prepared?"; "Creating a Constitutionally Centered Estate Plan"; and "Refuse to be a Victim."

Party on, guys. I can't wait for you to figure out the ways in which even Georgia's law is too restrictive. In the meantime, the nation's unarmed majority might ponder how badly we have failed in asserting our own rights.

Baker forced to make gay wedding cakes, undergo sensitivity training, after losing lawsuit
Todd Starnes, June 03, 2014, Opinion, FoxNews.com

A family owned bakery has been ordered to make wedding cakes for gay couples and guarantee that its staff be given comprehensive training on Colorado's anti-discrimination laws after the state's Civil Rights Commission determined the Christian baker violated the law by refusing to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple.

Jack Phillips, the owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop, in Lakewood, Colorado was directed to change his store policies immediately and force his staff to attend the training sessions. For the next two years, Phillips will also be required to submit quarterly reports to the commission to confirm that he has not turned away customers based on their sexual orientation.

Think of it as reverse conversion therapy (or straight man's rehab) so that the state can mandate diversity through conformity.

The plight of Jack Phillips and his family is something I write about in my new book, "God Less America." His story of religious persecution is one of many that I document. Nicolle Martin, an attorney with Alliance Defending Freedom, called the ruling Orwellian and said they are considering an appeal. "They are turning people of faith into religious refugees," Martin told me. "Is this the society that we want to live in – where people of faith are driven out of business?" Martin said it was "truly frightening" that Phillips will be forced to submit quarterly reports to the government disclosing whether he turned away any wedding cake business. "There will be some reporting requirements so that Jack can demonstrate that he doesn't exercise his belief system anymore – that he has divested himself of his beliefs," she said. He will also be required to create new policies and procedures for his staff. "We consider this reporting to be aimed at rehabilitating Jack so that he has the right thoughts," Martin said. "That's offensive to everything America stands for."

Phillips, who is celebrating his 40th year in business this week, told me he's not going to create any new policies. "My old ones are pretty adequate as far as I'm concerned," he said. "I don't plan on giving up my faith and changing because of that."

The controversy started in 2012 when a gay couple asked Phillips to make their wedding cake. Phillips politely declined, saying he could not make a cake promoting a same-sex ceremony because of his faith. He offered to make them any other baked item they wanted.

Charlie Craig and David Mullins filed a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Commission alleging they were discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. For the record, same-sex marriage is against the law in Colorado. The commission affirmed a civil court's ruling that the bakery cannot discriminate against persons in a public place based on sexual orientation. "You can have your beliefs, but you can't hurt other people at the same time," Commission Chairwoman Katina Banks told The Denver Channel.

ACLU attorney Amanda Goad, who heads up the organization's LBGT group, heralded the ruling. "Religious freedom is undoubtedly an important American value, but so is the right to be treated equally under the law free from discrimination," she said in a statement.

No, my dear. Religious freedom is a CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT.

"Everyone is free to believe what they want, but businesses like Masterpiece Cakeshop cannot treat some customers differently than others based on who they are as people," Goad added.

David Mullins, one of the two men who brought the lawsuit against Phillips, was thrilled with the ruling. "What should have been a happy day for us turned into a humiliating and dehumanizing experience because of the way we were treated," he said in an ACLU statement. Who knew butter cream frosting could cause such angst? "No one should ever have to walk into a store and wonder if they will be turned away just because of who they are," Mullins added. But that's not what Phillips did. He was more than willing to make them a cupcake. "Jack doesn't turn people away," Martin told me. "There are just some events that he won't lend his artistry to."

The ACLU accused Masterpiece Cakeshop of considering itself above the law. "Everyone who shops in our stores and conducts business in our state should be treated with equality and dignity," attorney Paula Greisen said in an ACLU of Colorado statement. "That's what this ruling was about."

No ma'am, it was not. That ruling was about bullying – bullying Christians. "There's a collision between religious liberty and the gay rights movement," Martin told me. "This collision is coming to the forefront almost every day. Somebody is losing their liberty, their job or both." But thank goodness for someone like Jack Phillips, who refused to capitulate to the government's demands. "My God is bigger than any bullies they've got," he said. "I don't worry about it. I honor my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and be true to what He wants me to do." And the Civil Rights Commission is going to have a mighty hard time trying to "rehabilitate" Phillips and his staff. "My 87-year-old mom works here and she says she's not being rehabilitated," he said. [...]

What to Expect When a Clinton Is Expecting

Jodi Kantor, April 18, 2014, *New York Times* (nytimes.com)

In some alternate universe, a distant political galaxy unlike our own, Chelsea Clinton might be able to have her first child quietly. No one would care about the size of her baby bump. If and when Hillary Rodham Clinton announces a presidential run, her status as a grandparent would receive exactly the same scrutiny as her male predecessors who were grandfathers.

That is not the country we live in. Here is what to expect now that Chelsea Clinton is expecting: Her child, due in the fall, will arrive just months before Hillary Clinton may announce her next run for president. Even nonfamous women find that when they are pregnant, "your body becomes a public object," as Julia Cheiffetz, a book editor and new mother in Brooklyn, put it. So imagine what could happen to Ms. Clinton, whose entry into motherhood could coincide with her family's kickoff of a billion-dollar campaign in which biography and family are central strategic assets. Most pregnant women make a birth plan for when they go into labor: what to pack, how to get to the hospital. Chelsea Clinton's arrangements might involve disguises, private security consultants and public relations strategy.

Ms. Clinton has been in the public eye for so long that she may be prepared for this kind of pregnancy. In 1992, at age 12, Ms. Clinton was featured in the "Man from Hope" video broadcast at the Democratic convention, assuring voters about her father's character in the face of accusations of marital misconduct. Her graduation party at Stanford included two receiving lines, one for those who wanted to meet her father, another for meeting her mother, a fellow student recalled. Her 2010 wedding drew so much attention that her parents had to turn it into a covert operation, barring cameras and keeping the location secret.

To share her family news, Ms. Clinton could have issued a quiet written statement. Instead she made a surprise announcement at an event on Thursday for her mother's proto-campaign, a question-and-answer session with teenage girls. "Marc and I are very excited that we have our first child arriving later this year," she said of her husband, Marc Mezvinsky, beaming as her mother sat beside her. "And I certainly feel all the better that she or he will grow up in a world full of so many strong young female leaders," she continued, wrapping her personal news in a larger message about putting women in charge.

How will the public view the prospect of a grandmother presidential candidate, a commander in chief who bounces a toddler one day and orders drone strikes the next? Does the word "grandmother" connote authority, durability and wisdom, or a less-flattering set of associations? Older candidates — Bob Dole, John McCain — have found their age an issue in recent presidential contests, and Republicans have already been trying to portray Mrs. Clinton, now 66, as too old for the job.

Women past 50 or 60 often say they feel invisible in their workplaces, but they are not Hillary Clinton, whose entry into national public life was marked by far less favorable news about her family. In 1992, she faced interview questions about her husband's liaisons with other women. If she runs for the 2016 Democratic nomination, she could be asked far easier questions about having a toddler crawl under her desk, and keeping Cheerios in the small kitchen she once installed in the private presidential residence: a happy denouement to what was once a rocky family saga.

Being a grandmother also may lend reassuring maternal warmth to a politician who often struggled in 2008 over what gender messages to send. "Just by running for president you're violating a lot of cultural assumptions about what women are like, so you have to work to shore up your compliance with female stereotypes," said Marianne Cooper, a sociologist at Stanford University.

Perhaps for that reason, mothers can be especially potent on the political stage. Kissing a stranger's baby is one thing; cradling your own bundle of innocence and authenticity is another. Before Sarah Palin's vice-presidential candidacy flamed out, she dazzled audiences by campaigning with her baby in her arms. (The pregnancy of her daughter Bristol Palin turned into a messier drama.)

On Wednesday night at a Fortune magazine event in New York, Samantha Power, the American ambassador to the United Nations, charmed female executives by contrasting the toughness of her day job — negotiating with China and Russia on matters like Syria — with tenderness of her other job, raising her two young children.

She occasionally misses a call from President Obama while bathing her children, she said, and she tries to tell her 5-year-old the truth about her work. "One of [my son's] very dear friends was trying to take the toys he was playing with and my son said — and I never guessed he would be capable of this — 'You're just like Putin!' " she said, taking a whack at the Russian leader from an unexpected angle. The audience howled in appreciation.

But in presidential politics, candidates who are grandmothers are still novel figures. In the end, Chelsea Clinton's pregnancy could say very little new about babies and a lot about being a woman who is decades and decades older.

Obama has no hope to fix fractured America

Michael Goodwin, November 24, 2013 *New York Post* (nypost.com)

As he climbed the political heap, a young Barack Obama roused audiences with promises to unite the nation. He was a Senate candidate in 2004 when he told the Democratic national convention, "There is not a liberal America and a conservative America. There is a United States of America."

In 2007, he declared early in his presidential run that "I don't want to pit red America against blue America. I want to be the president of the United States of America."

A year later, after he won the Iowa caucus, he promised, "We are not a collection of red states and blue states. We are the United States of America."

And on the November night in 2008 when he was elected president, he insisted his victory proved "we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states. We are, and always will be, the United States of America."

Oh, well, that was then. Reading those "yes we can" speeches now is like gawking at museum relics. Obama's promise to heal a polarized nation has proven to be as big a lie as his promise that you can keep your health insurance.

America is now so divided and demoralized that there is no hope Obama can fix it. As last week proved, he doesn't even pretend to try any more.

On the same day that he supported his party's move to neuter Republican power in the Senate by restricting the filibuster, 37 news organizations complained that the White House was acting like the Soviet Union in manipulating public opinion.

Journalists argued that Obama aides block news photographers from official events, then use government workers to take pictures and videos of him for social-media sites.

"This is just like Tass," a New York Times photographer told his paper, referring to the Soviet propaganda arm. "It's like government-controlled use of the public image of the president."

Meanwhile, Obama met with a gaggle of far-left pundits to drum up support as he battles record-low polls.

The developments are snapshots in the collapse of a presidency.

More and more people are realizing that Obama's idea of unity is that everybody must agree with him, and that he has no tolerance for those who don't. Yet he responds to this awakening by digging himself deeper into a partisan hole. Step away from the shovel, Mr. President.

Historians, I believe, will conclude that his refusal to roll up his sleeves and honestly engage critics was a character flaw that morphed into a political strategy. Despite the flowery promises to unite the country, or maybe because of them, he boxed himself into a pose of being above politics. His aggrandizing self-regard and contempt for others leaves him incapable of routine compromise.

Confronted with problems, he defaults to one of two options: total domination or total surrender. The result is that he is a Caesar wannabe at home and a Chamberlain abroad. As he stiff-arms Republicans and most of the media, he seems ready to accept a nuclear-armed Iran.

Even as his support falls below 40 percent and a majority say they don't trust him, he paints himself as the victim.

He defended his party's decision to end the long Senate tradition of requiring 60 votes for most appointments by saying Republicans are determined to "obstruct everything ... Just to refight the results of an election."

See, it's all about him. Never mind that other presidents struggled with the same rules. Never mind that opponents, including some Democrats, have legitimate differences with him and want him to work harder to build a consensus for the good of the country.

And never mind his obvious hypocrisy on changing the rules. In his first year in the Senate, with the GOP holding the majority, he warned that one-party rule would mean "the bitterness and the gridlock will only get worse."

That Barack Obama was a man to admire. He made history by promising to restore Americans' trust in each other and their government.

"I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree," he vowed on election night in 2008.

Five years later, Americans finally are being honest with themselves.

They now realize that Barack Obama doesn't exist anymore, if he ever did.

SERIE S. HUMAINES

ANALYSE LV

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

Creationists on Texas Panel for Biology Textbooks

Mokoto Rich, September 28, 2013, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com

AUSTIN, Tex. — One is a nutritionist who believes "creation science" based on biblical principles should be taught in the classroom. Another is a chemical engineer who is listed as a "Darwin Skeptic" on the Web site of the Creation Science Hall of Fame. A third is a trained biologist who also happens to be a fellow of the Discovery Institute, the Seattle-based center of the intelligent-design movement and a vice president at an evangelical ministry in Plano, Tex.

As Texas gears up to select biology textbooks for use by high school students over the next decade, the panel responsible for reviewing submissions from publishers has stirred controversy because a number of its members do not accept evolution and climate change as scientific truth.

In the state whose governor, Rick Perry, boasted as a candidate for president that his schools taught both creationism and evolution, the State Board of Education, which includes members who hold creationist views, helped nominate several members of the textbook review panel. Others were named by parents and educators. Prospective candidates could also nominate themselves. The state's education commissioner, Michael L. Williams, a Perry appointee and a conservative Republican, made the final appointments to the 28-member panel. Six of them are known to reject evolution.

Some Texans worry that ideologically driven review panel members and state school board members are slowly eroding science education in the state.

"Utterly unqualified partisan politicians will look at what utterly unqualified citizens have said about a textbook and decide whether it meets the requirements of a textbook," lamented Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, which monitors the activities of far-right organizations. The group filed a request for documents that yielded the identities of the textbook review panelists as well as reports containing their reviews.

Publishers including well-known companies like Pearson, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and McGraw-Hill submitted 14 biology textbooks for consideration this year. Reports from the review panels have been sent to publishers, who can now make changes. Mr. Williams will review the changes and recommend books to the state board. Through a spokeswoman, Mr. Williams repeatedly declined requests for an interview. The state board will vote on a final approved list of textbooks in November.

The reports contained comments from Karen Beathard, a senior lecturer in the department of nutrition and food science at Texas A&M University, who wrote in a review of a textbook submitted by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt that "Students should have the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to weigh the evidence between evolution and 'creation science.' "

In reviews of other textbooks, panel members disputed the scientific evidence, questioning, for example, whether the fossil record actually demonstrates a process of mutation and natural selection over billions of years. "The fossil record can be interpreted in other ways than evolutionary with equal justification," one reviewer wrote. Among the anti-evolution panelists are Ide Trotter, a chemical engineer, and Raymond G. Bohlin, a biologist and fellow of the Discovery Institute.

By questioning the science — often getting down to very technical details — the evolution challengers in Texas are following a strategy increasingly deployed by others around the country.

There is little open talk of creationism. Instead they borrow buzzwords common in education, "critical thinking," saying there is simply not enough evidence to prove evolution.

If textbooks do not present alternative viewpoints or explain what they describe as "the controversy," they say students will be deprived of a core concept of education — learning how to make up their own minds.

Historically, given the state's size, Texas' textbook selections have had an outsize impact on what ended up in classrooms throughout the country. That influence is waning somewhat because publishers can customize digital editions and many states are moving to adopt new science standards with evolution firmly at their center.

Even in Texas, districts can make their own decisions, but many will simply choose books from the state's approved list. "It's a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," said David Anderson, a former official in the Texas Education Agency, as the department of education is known, and now a consultant who works with textbook publishers.

Four years ago, a conservative bloc on the state school board pushed through amendments to science standards that call for students to "analyze and evaluate" some of the basic principles of evolution. Science educators and advocates worry that this language can be used as a back door for teaching creationism.

"It is like lipstick on a Trojan horse," said Ms. Miller of the Texas Freedom Network. [...]

Bloomberg leaves rich public health legacy in NYC

Associated Press, December 21, 2013, *The Wall Street Journal* (online.wsj.com)

NEW YORK — Michael Bloomberg steered New York City through economic recession, a catastrophic hurricane and the aftermath of 9/11, but he may always be remembered, accurately or not, as the mayor who wanted to ban the Big Gulp. After 12 years, Bloomberg leaves office Dec. 31 with a unique record as a public health crusader who attacked cigarettes, artery-clogging fats and big sugary drinks with as much zeal as most mayors go after crack dens and graffiti.

And while Bloomberg's audacious initiatives weren't uniformly successful, often leading to court challenges and criticisms he was turning New York into a "nanny state," experts say they helped reshape just how far a city government can go to protect people from an unhealthy lifestyle. "He has been a transformative leader," said Dr. Linda Fried, dean of Columbia University's school of public health. "He has created a model for how to improve a city's health." Coming into office as a billionaire businessman who made his fortune selling data to Wall Street, Bloomberg was accustomed to using hard, cold research to drive decisions, and it was an approach he used effectively on matters of public health.

Bloomberg pushed to ban smoking in indoor public spaces and prohibit cigarette sales to anyone under 21. He got artificial trans-fat banned from restaurant food — an action that led fast food giants like McDonald's and Dunkin Donuts to change their recipes rather than lose access to the New York market. He got restaurant chains to start posting calorie counts on their menus, lobbied food processors to add less salt to their products and got city schools to start serving healthier meals. The city distributed millions of free condoms, emblazoned with an "NYC" logo, in an attempt to cut down on teen pregnancy and HIV transmission. One of his pet initiatives essentially created a new public transportation system built around bicycles.

Bloomberg also put new data collection and analytical tools in place to track all the new policies.

Among the results: The adult smoking rate has declined from 21.5 percent in 2002 to 15.5 percent today. Childhood obesity rates inched down among schoolchildren. Life expectancy has increased in the city by three years since Bloomberg took office, compared to 1.8 years in the rest of the country.

"We've shown that local government can take on the biggest public health problems of our time, and win," said the city's health commissioner, Dr. Thomas Farley.

Along the way, he influenced national policy. The Affordable Care Act contained a provision, modeled after the one in New York, that will require chain restaurants nationwide to post calorie counts on their menus. The Food and Drug Administration said last month that it was adopting its own trans-fat ban, and would phase the substance out of the food supply for good.

Bloomberg launched his career as a health policymaker almost immediately on taking office in 2002.

At the time, the municipal cigarette tax was 8 cents a pack. Bloomberg got it increased to $1.50, saying he wanted to make cigarettes so expensive people would be forced to quit. Subsequent increases in the state tax have since raised the per-pack tax to $5.85 within city limits.

Then he went after smoking in public places. New York wasn't the first place to ban smoking in bars and restaurants. California had done it in 1998. But the cultural impact of New York's ban seemed to resonate further. "The question before us is straightforward," Bloomberg told City Council members at a 2002 hearing. "Does your desire to smoke anywhere at any time trump the right of others to breathe clean air in the workplace?" As recently as last month, the mayor was still punching away, signing a new law that raised the legal purchase age for cigarettes and set a minimum price of $10.50 per pack. He pushed for, but ultimately abandoned, rules that would have prohibited merchants from even displaying cigarettes for sale. They would have had to hide them in cabinets or under the counter.

Bloomberg's first health commissioner, Dr. Thomas Frieden, who now leads the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said one of the underpinnings of the city's strategy is a belief that many public health agencies are still rooted too deeply in their historic mission of fighting infectious disease, even though chronic lifestyle diseases such as obesity and smoking are the leading causes of preventable death in the U.S. today. Attacking those illnesses, though, takes willpower to stand up to the natural resistance people have to government telling them how to eat or what to drink. "I love that he's shoving his idea of good health down my throat," New York University student Brendan Sullivan, 19, said sarcastically last month after the latest smoking law passed.

That disdain for outside considerations may have finally done in a Bloomberg health policy this summer, when a court blocked the administration's attempt to restrict sugary drink sizes at restaurants. The judges, in a strongly worded opinion, said city health officials had exceeded their authority and created restrictions that were arbitrary. Among other things, the portion rules applied only to restaurants, not convenience stores, meaning (much to the dismay of comedians and commentators) it didn't actually apply to 7-Eleven's 30-ounce Big Gulp. That court decision is now on appeal. [...]

Racism and Cruelty: What's Behind the GOP's Healthcare Agenda?
Republicans replay their Southern Strategy in an attempt to undermine the Affordable Care Act.
Robert Scheer October 8, 2013, *The Nation*

Before he was disgraced into resigning his presidency over the Watergate burglary scandal, Richard Nixon had successfully engineered an even more odious plot known as his Southern Strategy. The trick was devilishly simple: Appeal to the persistent racist inclination of Southern whites by abandoning the Republican Party's historic association with civil rights and demonizing the black victims of the South's history of segregation.

That same divisive strategy is at work in the Republican rejection of the Affordable Care Act. GOP governors are largely in control of the 26 states, including all but Arkansas in the South, that have refused to implement the act's provision for an expansion of Medicaid to cover the millions of American working poor who earn too much to qualify for the program now. A *New York Times* analysis of census data concludes that as a result of the Republican governors' resistance, "A sweeping national effort to extend health coverage to millions of Americans will leave out two-thirds of the poor blacks and single mothers and more than half of the low-wage workers who do not have insurance, the very kinds of people that the program was intended to help. ..."

Why anyone who claims to be pro-life would want to deny health care to single mothers is an enduring mystery in the morally mischievous ethos of the Republican Party. But the exclusion of a working poor population that skews disproportionately black in the South is simply a continuation of the divide-and-conquer politics that have informed Republican strategy since Nixon.

The game plan of gutting the Affordable Care Act despite its passage into law and before its positive outcomes are demonstrated can be traced to a "blueprint to defunding Obamacare" initialed by the GOP conservative leadership under the aegis of Heritage Action for America. Ironically that is the political front of the Heritage Foundation, the leading GOP think tank that is credited by some architects of Obamacare as the initial inspiration of their health care program. The difference is that whereas the Heritage Foundation was pushing a mild health care reform based on increased profit for private insurers, as in the plan Mitt Romney introduced in Massachusetts, the Republicans object to the provisions in this president's program that broaden access for the needy.

They were abetted in this decision by a Supreme Court ruling last year granting the states the option of not expanding Medicaid to cover the uninsured under the new act. As a consequence, 8 million of our fellow Americans with annual incomes of less than $19,530 for a family of three have been prevented from obtaining the health care coverage that we as a nation decided to grant them.

It might seem odd for governors to reject a program to help those living in their state that is fully funded by the federal government for the first few years and then 90 percent covered by the feds thereafter. But turning down a federal program to aid your own state's population makes perfect sense when connected with the racist appeal initiated by Nixon that has turned the once Democratic South into a rock solid Republican bastion. There are certainly many whites among the 435,000 cashiers, 341,000 cooks and 253,000 nurses aides who the *Times* estimated will be denied needed health care in the states controlled by Republican governors who have decided to veto the most important provision of the Affordable Care Act.

In the end, this is a replay of the civil rights drama that gripped the nation more than half a century ago, but back then the Republican Party, following the enlightened leadership of Dwight Eisenhower, was on the humanitarian side of the equation. Now the elected leaders of a party that has been on the side of emancipation since the presidency of Abraham Lincoln acts to deny the basic human right to life-sustaining health care to the Southern progeny of slaves. As the *Times* study noted: "In all, 6 out of 10 blacks live in the states not expanding Medicaid. In Mississippi, 56 percent of all poor and uninsured adults are black, though they account for just 38 percent of the population."

But that also means that almost 44 percent of the poor and uninsured in Mississippi are white, and the gutting of this program that hurts them is evidence of the false consciousness that informs racist appeals. As the *Times* points out, someone, black or white, making $11,000 a year frying chicken in a convenience store falls into the gap of making too much to qualify for the state's existing Medicaid program but not enough to be subsidized under the new health care plan as the state defines it. For those who lose out, there's what the Republican die-hards call tough love. That's not love. It's hate.

Don't Let Abortion Cloud Free-Speech Issue

Trevor Burrus, January 15, 2014, *The Huffington Post* (huffingtonpost.com)

Eleanor McCullen is a 76-year-old grandmother who believes women who have abortions are often not informed about the options available to them. The state of Massachusetts, however, made it illegal for her to stand within 35 feet of an abortion clinic when she calmly talks to women about other options. The Supreme Court will hear Mrs. McCullen's case this week and hopefully see through the divisive rhetoric that surrounds abortion. The Court should decide that the Massachusetts law is both an unconstitutional abridgement of free speech and an infringement on the right to peacefully be in a public place.

Mrs. McCullen is not an offensive, in-your-face abortion protester. She and her husband have spent over $50,000 of their own money to provide women options other than abortion, paying for such things as living quarters, clothing, electricity, and baby formula. Twice a week she offers help and counseling to women outside of a Boston abortion clinic, usually walking up to them and asking, "May I help you this morning?" She then lets them know that she is available if the women have any questions.

Massachusetts, in a clear effort to diminish the effectiveness of pro-life speech, passed the 35-feet law in 2007. It only applies to places where abortions are "offered or performed." Of course, the vast majority of people who stand outside of clinics to voice their constitutionally protected opinions are pro-lifers.

One of the cornerstones of the First Amendment is that the government cannot regulate speech based on its content. In a 1972 case the Court said, "above all else, the First Amendment means that the government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content." It is hard to believe that this isn't precisely what Massachusetts was doing with the 35-feet law.

Despite the controversial subject matter, this case is not about abortion. It's about the First Amendment. Both pro-lifers and pro-choicers must see past the polarizing issue of abortion and focus instead on the freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful public presence issues underneath. Pro-choicers should stand against this law in the spirit of the maxim, usually attributed to Voltaire: "I may disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." After all, the law is so broad that if a pro-choicer wanted to stand within 35 feet of a Massachusetts abortion clinic and repeat that maxim, they would be breaking the law.

Unfortunately, a 2000 Supreme Court opinion, *Hill v. Colorado*, makes the arguments for declaring the Massachusetts law unconstitutional more difficult. In that case, the Court upheld a Colorado statute that created an eight-foot "bubble" around those entering abortion clinics. The statute prohibited entering that bubble to distribute handbills, protest, educate, or counsel those going into clinics.

In a spirited and constitutionally correct dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia chided the Court for being unable to see past the abortion issue in order to invalidate a clear attempt to stifle pro-life speech. Scalia wrote that he had no doubt the Court would invalidate such a law if it "involved antiwar protesters, or union members seeking to 'educate' the public about the reasons for their strike." On this, he is certainly correct.

Regrettably, even the ACLU, the most persistent and reliable defender of free speech, now has difficulty seeing past the abortion issue. In 2000, the ACLU agreed with Justice Scalia that the law was unconstitutional. Now, the ACLU has changed its position and argues that Massachusetts's law is constitutional.

That is surprising not only because the ACLU broke its reliable track record of dogged free speech advocacy, but because the 35-feet law is an even bigger constitutional violation than the law in *Hill*. Rather than creating a bubble that more narrowly addresses the problem of people obstructing women with in-your-face shouting, Massachusetts makes it illegal for anyone to even enter the 35-feet zone (except for those entering the clinic, people using it as a right of way, and state officials like police and EMTs). Not only is it illegal to set up a non-obstructing information table or to politely talk to the women, it is even illegal to sit and play checkers or to stand and gaze around absentmindedly.

Hopefully a different Supreme Court will see the error they made 14 years ago and overrule *Hill v. Colorado*'s bizarre "right to be protected from unwanted information." The abortion issue should not obscure a clear First Amendment violation.

SERIE S. HUMAINES

ANALYSE LV

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

No One Cares If You Never Apologize for Your White Male Privilege

Mychal Denzel Smith on May 5, 2014, *The Nation*

A 20-year-old college freshman who wrote an essay for one of his college publications has been interviewed on Fox News, written about in *The New York Times* and had his essay republished by *Time* magazine. Yet he doesn't understand why anyone thinks he benefits from white male privilege.

Tal Fortgang of Princeton University wrote the piece, "Why I'll Never Apologize for My White Male Privilege," as a response to the (according to him) many people on his campus who tell him to "check [his] privilege" when engaging in debates. But Fortgang doesn't want to check his privilege. He doesn't want to acknowledge that his privilege exists. He would like to keep going through life believing that everything he and other white men like him have achieved is the result of their own hard work.

Or, if not the result of their own hard work, then that of their ancestors. Fortgang's rebuttal to the idea that he is privileged as a white man in America was to tell the story of his grandfather who escaped Poland after the Nazi invasion, as well as his grandmother who survived a concentration camp, then made it to the United States and started a "humble wicker basket business." Fortgang's father "worked hard enough in City College to earn a spot at a top graduate school, got a good job, and for 25 years got up well before the crack of dawn, sacrificing precious time he wanted to spend with those he valued most—his wife and kids—to earn that living." He challenges us, after telling these stories, "Now would you say that we've been really privileged?"

Fortgang's essay is part of the reason you can count me among the camp that believes we should spend less time discussing privilege. It's not that it's not a useful concept. There are clear and present advantages to being born and continuing to be recognized as a (cisgender heterosexual) white man in America. But the discussion has its limitations.

This paragraph from Fortgang is a prime example:

> I do not accuse those who "check" me and my perspective of overt racism, although the phrase, which assumes that simply because I belong to a certain ethnic group I should be judged collectively with it, toes that line. But I do condemn them for diminishing everything I have personally accomplished, all the hard work I have done in my life, and for ascribing all the fruit I reap not to the seeds I sow but to some invisible patron saint of white maleness who places it out for me before I even arrive. Furthermore, I condemn them for casting the equal protection clause, indeed the very idea of a meritocracy, as a myth, and for declaring that we are all governed by invisible forces (some would call them "stigmas" or "societal norms"), that our nation runs on racist and sexist conspiracies. Forget "you didn't build that;" check your privilege and realize that nothing you have accomplished is real.

When people with privilege hear that they have privilege, what they hear is not, "Our society is structured so that your life is more valued than others." They hear, "Everything, no matter what, will be handed to you. You have done nothing to achieve what you have." That's not strictly true, and hardly anyone who points out another's privilege is making that accusation. There are privileged people who work very hard. The privilege they experience is the absence of barriers that exist for other people.

In Fortgang's telling of his family's history, he fails to recognize that it is his grandfather's proximity to whiteness that afforded him his opportunities here in America. It made his story possible. It doesn't mean there has never been any discrimination or hatred of Jewish people, but that Jewish identity doesn't present the same obstacles to whiteness, and therefore power and privilege, as, say, if Fortgang's grandparents had been fleeing German occupation in Namibia.

There are no American institutions of power that are, whether by law or by custom, founded on wholesale discrimination against white men. That's not the case for the rest of us. For white men born in or welcomed into this system, it is an unearned privilege.

Fortgang can go through his years at Princeton—or better, the rest of his life—and never have to acknowledge that, let alone apologize for it. But no one is asking him to. An apology would be useless. If a discussion about privilege serves any purpose, it is so that the privileged recognize their own and are then compelled to work to dismantle the structures that have bestowed privilege upon them. In order to do so, one would have to recognize the call to "check your privilege" as less of a personal attack, because it is not. It's a wake-up call to action.

Wealth gap is widest in some affluent US cities, including San Francisco

The Associated Press,* February 21, 2014, *San Francisco Examiner

The gap between the wealthy and the poor is most extreme in several of the United States' most prosperous and largest cities.

The economic divides in Atlanta, San Francisco, Washington, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles are significantly greater than the national average, according to a study released Thursday by the Brookings Institution, the Washington-based think tank. It suggests that many sources of both economic growth and income inequality have co-existed near each other for the past 35 years.

These cities may struggle in the future to provide adequate public schooling, basic municipal services because of a narrow tax base and "may fail to produce housing and neighborhoods accessible to middle-class workers and families," the study said.

"There's something of a relationship between economic success and inequality," said Alan Berube, a senior fellow at Brookings. "These cities are home to some of the highest paying industries and jobs in the country."

At the same time, Berube noted, many of these cities may inadvertently widen the gap between rich and poor because they have public housing and basic services that make them attractive to low-wage workers.

The findings come at a delicate moment for the country, still slogging through a weak recovery from the Great Recession. Much of the nation's job growth has been concentrated in lower-wage careers. Few Americans have enjoyed pay raises. President Barack Obama is pushing for a higher minimum wage.

Protesters in San Francisco have tried to block a private bus that shuttles Google employees from gentrifying neighborhoods to their offices in Silicon Valley.

Many wealthy Americans, from venture capitalist Tom Perkins to real estate billionaire Sam Zell, argue that the nation has tipped toward class warfare.

Incomes for the top 5 percent of earners in Atlanta averaged $279,827 in 2012. That's almost 19 times more than what the bottom 20 percent of that city's population earned. This ratio is more than double the nationwide average for this measure of income inequality. The top 5 percent of earners across the country have incomes 9.1 times greater than the bottom quintile.

Major chasms also appeared in the tech hub of San Francisco, the financial center of New York, the seat of the federal government in Washington and the home of the entertainment industry in Los Angeles.

"In San Francisco, skyrocketing housing costs may increasingly preclude low-income residents from living in the city altogether," the study said.

San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee said in an editorial published Thursday that "working families cannot support themselves on the (city's) current minimum wage of $10.74 per hour" — already $3.49 above the federal minimum and 64 cents more than Obama's proposed increase. Lee has also announced plans to build and restore 10,000 homes for low and moderate-income families by 2020.

Not all tech hubs have witnessed rising inequality.

Seattle, where Amazon and Microsoft are based, saw its income disparity decline since 2007. So did Denver. Austin, Texas, experienced a mild uptick.

"Both the tech boom and energy boom are inequality-reducing," said Michael Mandel, chief economic strategist at the Progressive Policy Institute in Washington. "Tech introduces a path to good jobs."

The Brookings study also found that inequality increased across cities even though incomes often fell for wealthy households between the start of the recession in 2007 and 2012.

During that five-year period, average incomes for the top 5 percent in Jacksonville, Fla., tumbled $18,999 to $152,329. But the bottom 20 percent living in Jacksonville lost a greater share of their incomes over that period, so the level of inequality increased.

Significant gaps also exist in Miami and Baltimore. But that's largely because their poorest residents there earn so little. The lowest quintile of Miami residents earned just $10,348 in 2012, about half the national average for that group.

Of the nation's 50 biggest cities, just 18 experienced greater income inequality since the recession that was statistically significant. That was due primarily to falling incomes for the poorest residents. This occurred in places that suffered from the burst of the housing bubble — such as Tucson, Ariz., and Albuquerque — and Midwestern cities still reeling from the collapse of manufacturing such as Cleveland, Indianapolis and Milwaukee.

Not all the 50 largest cities are bastions of inequality. Some Western and Sun Belt cities with smaller downtowns had a noticeably smaller divide than the national average. These cities such as Mesa, Ariz., and Arlington, Texas, are essentially "overgrown suburbs," the study said. They tend to attract neither the highest-paying jobs nor the extreme poverty of the older cities.

Staying Focused

Rev. Al Sharpton, President, National Action Network, April 14, 2014 huffingtonpost.com

Distraction is nothing new. On the road to progress and justice, obstruction is expected. Throughout history, when people push for change, they are routinely attacked, ridiculed and criticized. Not even the President of the United States is exempt from distractors, nor is the attorney general. Last week at National Action Network's (NAN) 16th annual convention -- where both President Obama and AG Holder addressed folks from around the nation -- Holder made a very similar argument. He asked what other attorney general or president had to deal with the sort of vitriol and disrespect that they have had to deal with? The answer is none. But if there's any conclusion that was reached during our convention -- which brought together civil rights leaders, clergy members, elected officials, families of victims of gun violence, community advocates and more -- it's that we cannot cease our efforts. We can't stop and won't stop. Though the dynamics may be different, our work is as vital today as it ever was. And to those who attempt to take attention away from the cause of justice, I have news for you: nice try, but we're as energized as we ever were.

Every year, folks gather for NAN's convention to assess our state of affairs: the progress we've made and the work that remains ahead. Following our 16th convention last week, we've outlined three key items that we must address immediately -- protecting and preserving our right to vote, tackling unemployment and inequality, and dealing with state nullification laws like stand-your-ground.

"Voting is a time when we all have an equal say -- black or white, rich or poor, man or woman," said President Obama as he addressed a packed audience at the convention on Friday afternoon. "In the eyes of the law and in the eyes of our democracy, we're all supposed to have that equal right to cast our ballot to help determine the direction of our society ... But the stark, simple truth is this: The right to vote is threatened today in a way that it has not been since the Voting Rights Act became law nearly five decades ago."

The president is 100 percent correct. In dozens of states around the country, there are laws that now severely limit and/or disenfranchise the votes of people of color, the poor and other groups. From strict new voter ID laws to a reduction in early voting days and more, these regulations have been popping up over the last few years with the clear intent of keeping people from participating in the election process. Because so many Americans voted in the '08 and '12 elections, many so-called leaders in states from coast-to-coast pushed for these laws. They know that people have the power and the numbers to elect who they deem appropriate -- and that scares many who would like to maintain the status quo. During a year when so much is on the line, we must reverse and repeal these egregious laws.

As we continue down the road to justice, we must not ignore the plight of those who are less fortunate among us. While the economy has vastly improved since the Great Recession of '08, unemployment and under-employment remains far too high -- especially among Blacks and Latinos. Numbers simply don't lie, and the unemployment rate within certain communities is nearly double that of other segments of the population. That is just inexcusable. Economic inequality translates to educational inequality, housing inequality, health inequality and the list goes on. Taking concrete measures like raising the minimum wage, passing a jobs bill, extending unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed and electing leaders that will put the needs of the people before their own is the only way we will witness a step forward.

During last week's convention, I was joined by the parents of Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis. There are no words that could ever fully articulate their pain, their anguish and their continuing grief. Losing a child senselessly because someone perceived him/her as some sort of threat, is a scenario that no parent should ever have to endure. We must continue to push back against troubling laws like stand-your-ground so that no child has to walk the street in fear. States cannot prop up their own rules and ideas that make it unsafe for people to exist. That is the reason why we have a federal government, and that is the reason why there are federal laws to protect us -- bottom line.

NAN's convention may be over, but our work has just begun. The obstructionists will try to distract us without a doubt, that's to be expected. Whether it's Benghazi, the Affordable Care Act website, President Obama's birth certificate, the alleged IRS scandal, Fast & Furious, or a 31-year-old story about me that simply isn't true, they will try. That's, in fact, the reason why we saw these ridiculous accusations and smear tactics against me resurface conveniently during the week of my convention. But again, that's to be expected; our job is to rise above the noise and continue pushing forward. [...]

SERIE S. HUMAINES

ANALYSE LV

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

The Tactics Change, but the Police State Stays the Same
Mychal Denzel Smith on May 13, 2014, *The Nation*

A few weeks ago, I wrote about how the stop-and-frisk numbers in New York City, as of March, had dramatically declined, but the NYPD was arresting increasing numbers of subway dancers, panhandlers and those caught on minor violations such as drinking beer in public. The long fight against the unconstitutional stopping, questioning and frisking of black and brown youth had yielded results, but the NYPD simply shifted strategies to ensure their continued criminalization.

The week before that, Anna Lekas Miller wrote here at *The Nation* about the disbanding of the NYPD's Zone Assessment Unit—the outfit responsible for spying on Muslim communities. Again, the work of activists and grassroots organizers resulted in what appeared to be progress. But Lekas Miller wrote at the time:

> Yet, as much as the demise of the Zone Assessment Unit signals a step in the right direction, many Muslim community members question how significant the move really is. They worry that the change is more cosmetic than actual, a splashy declaration that obscures the way surveillance continues by other names. And after more than a decade under the NYPD's watchful eye, who can blame them for the suspicion?

And, as luck would have it, this weekend we learned about the Citywide Debriefing Team, described by *The New York Times* as "a squad of detectives [that] has combed the city's jails for immigrants—predominantly Muslims—who might be persuaded to become police informants." Here's more:

> Last month, the Police Department announced it had disbanded a controversial surveillance unit that had sent plainclothes detectives into Muslim communities to listen in on conversations and build detailed files on where people ate, prayed and shopped. But the continuing work of the debriefing team shows that the department has not backed away from other counterterrorism initiatives that it created in the years after the Sept. 11 attacks.

These informants differ from traditional police informants, who are often asked to provide police with information about criminal activity. The Citywide Debriefing Team recruited people solely on the basis of their Muslim identity, with no prior knowledge of any crimes necessary. So while the NYPD has ended its practice of mapping and spying on Muslims using plain clothes police officers, it's producing the same results with a different tactic. Not much different from what has happened with stop-and-frisk.

And this keeps happening because we, as American citizens, refuse to question the fundamental goals of policing.

We often find ourselves caught in a debate about the particularities of certain egregious police tactics. And while it's important to protect communities and people in the here and now, what we miss is a larger discussion about the role police should have in law enforcement. Right now, we seem to have conceded that the police ought to play a preventive role, pre-empting crime by aggressively seeking out potential lawbreakers. That means that the police are granted discretion to determine who constitutes a potential lawbreaker. In a country built on suspicion of the "other," that more often than not means black and Latino youth, and in a post-9/11 world, Muslims of Middle Eastern descent. As such, police are given tools (stop-and-frisk, surveillance) that abuse the rights of the already marginalized, under the auspices of serving and protecting the greater good.

Then those communities fight back. They take to the streets and to the courtrooms in a fight to be treated like human beings and not presumed to be thugs or terrorists, under whatever definition of those terms that is being used to justify police overreach. And sometimes they win. But the wins are fleeting because the police adopt new, some may say more refined, approaches to doing the same job of terrorizing these communities.

The cosmetic changes to the police state give us the false impression that the nature of policing has changed, that somehow it isn't about monitoring, arresting and locking away the "other" as a way of "protecting" the true citizenry. We honestly believe that if we do away with the most blatantly destructive, racist, xenophobic, sexist etc. police practices then we do away with the problems of police abuse. Not if the philosophy doesn't change.

Yesterday, it was reported that the "New York Police Department will significantly limit the practice of seizing condoms for use as evidence in prostitution-related cases, ending a procedure that health officials had long criticized as undermining their efforts to protect [sex workers] from disease." Now, how long before the police find a way around this, too?

The Tea Party Republicans' Biggest Mistake: Confusing Government With Our System of Government

Robert Reich, October 10, 2013, huffingtonpost.com

Representative Mo Brooks, Republican of Alabama and a fierce critic of the Affordable Care Act, has just changed his tune. He now says: "My primary focus is on minimizing risk of insolvency and bankruptcy. There are many paths you can take to get there. Socialized medicine is just one of the component parts of our debt and deficits that put us at financial risk."

Translated: House Republicans are under intense pressure. A new Gallup poll shows the Republican Party now viewed favorably by only 28 percent of Americans, down from 38 percent in September. That's the lowest favorable rating measured for either party since Gallup began asking this question in 1992. The Democratic Party is viewed favorably by 43 percent, down four percentage points from last month.

So Republicans are desperately looking for a way of getting out of the hold they've dug for themselves -- and the president has given them one. He told them that if they agree to temporarily fund the government and raise the debt ceiling without holding as ransom the Affordable Care Act or anything else, negotiations can begin on reducing the overall budget deficit.

What's the lesson here? The radicals who tried to hijack America didn't understand one very basic thing. While most Americans don't like big government, Americans revere our system of government. That's why even though a majority disapprove of the Affordable Care Act, a majority also disapprove of Republican tactics for repealing or delaying it.

Government itself has never been popular in America except during palpable crises such as war or deep depression. The nation was founded in a revolution against an abusive government -- that was what the original Tea Party was all about -- and that distrust is in our genes. The Constitution reflects it. That's why it's hard for government to do anything very easily. I've never been as frustrated as when I was secretary of labor -- continuously running into the realities of separation of power, checks and balances, and the endless complications of federal, state, and local levels of authority. But frustration goes with the job.

No one likes big government. If you're on the left, you worry about the military-industrial-congressional complex that's spending zillions of dollars creating new weapons of mass destruction, spying on Americans, and killing innocents abroad. And you don't like government interfering in your sex life, telling you how and when you can have an abortion, whom you can marry. If you're on the right, you worry about taxes and regulations stifling innovation, out-of-control bureaucrats infringing on your freedom, and government deficits as far as the eye can see.

So when Tea Party Republicans, bankrolled by a handful of billionaires, began calling the Affordable Care Act a "wholesale takeover of American health care," many Americans were inclined to believe them. Health care is such a huge and complicated system, affecting us and our families so intimately, that our inherent distrust of government makes us instinctively wary. It's no accident we're still the only advanced nation not to have universal health care. FDR decided against adding it to his plan for Social Security because he didn't want to jeopardize the rest of the program; subsequent presidents never got close, at least until Obama.

The best argument for the Affordable Care Act is that our current health care system is so dysfunctional -- the most expensive in the world with the least healthy outcomes (highest infant mortality, shortest life spans, worst rates of chronic disease) of any advanced nation -- that we had no choice but to try to fix it. Even so, it's a typical American fix: We're still basing it on private health providers and private insurers. All government does is subsidize the poor, require insurers to take in people with pre-existing health problems, and pay for it by requiring everyone to be insured.

The Tea Party Republicans' mistake was to assume that Americans' distrust of big government, and, by extension, the Affordable Care Act, would allow them to ride roughshod over the process we have for making laws.

Their double-barreled threats to shut down the government and cause the United States to default on its obligations if the Affordable Care Act wasn't repealed or at least delayed was a direct assault on our system of government: If even unpopular laws can be gutted by a majority in one house of Congress holding the rest of government hostage, there's no end to it. No law on the books would be safe. (Their retort that Congress holds the "purse strings" and can therefore decide to de-fund what it dislikes is bunk; appropriation bills have to be agreed to by both houses and signed into law by the president, like any other legislation.)

While most of us distrust government, we're indelibly proud of our system of government. We like to think it's just about the best system in the world. We don't much like politicians but we canonize the Founding Fathers, the Framers of the Constitution. And we revere the fading parchment on which the Constitution is written. When we pledge allegiance to the United States we bind ourselves to that system of government. Anyone who seeks to overthrow or undermine that system is deemed a traitor. [...]

Bossy Pants?

Charles M. Blow, March 12, 2014, The Opinion Pages, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com

The same week that Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer, helped start a campaign to ban the word "bossy," so as not to discourage women from being assertive, the "Princeton Mom," Susan Patton, who penned a widely condemned letter about why young women should focus on marriage in The Daily Princetonian, went on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" to flog her new book. This is what she told a group of young women working in the studio's newsroom:

"You're going to start looking for a husband in your mid-30's? You're going to be competing with girls who are 10 years younger than you. And not only can you not compete for men with women 10 years younger than you, because they are 10 years younger than you: they're dewy-eyed, they're fresh, they're adorable."

Dewy-eyed, fresh and adorable? What an anachronistic message to send to young working women — that desirable men, who presumably have their druthers, are so superficial and libido-driven that professional women can't hold a candle to perky ones, that a woman who wishes to marry must submit herself to being chosen by the most superficial of men before the wick of her beauty burns low. This, according to Patton, apparently happens in her 30s, which could be only the first third of a woman's life. This reinforces the most destructive gender stereotype.

Undoubtedly there's some evolutionary-biological drive among many men and women to choose mates who are fertile and capable of protecting and caring for children, but those are only base instincts. Much of the youth-fetishizing, particularly as it relates to women, is culturally constructed and reinforced. We hyper-sexualize little girls and juvenilize grown women. Both genuine youth and seasoned maturity are sacrificed to that altar. This is a societal disease.

And it's no better for little boys, who are constantly admonished to suck it up, toughen up, don't cry, be a man, and don't run, hit or kick like a girl. We plant seeds of misogyny, often without being aware of it, while our boys are still sprouts. And then we wonder why so many men are emotionally suppressed and stunted. It's because we've been telling them all their lives that emotions were effeminate and femininity was a curse. We build zombie men and lament the dearth of "real" ones. Yet some still bemoan our current atmosphere as "feminized"— a rhetorical construction that in and of itself is misogynistic because it establishes femininity as a lesser, undesirable expression — rather than understanding that femininity and masculinity aren't strictly gendered and their expressions not rigidly conveyed.

Our current turn toward tolerance for sexual identities and gender expressions isn't about more people being less of a man or woman, but about more people feeling safe to be more wholly human. And it's about freedom — freedom of expression, freedom of self-determination and freedom of fluidity.

And still some see any acknowledgment of and respect for sexual and gender differences as an attack on nature and culture at the expense of procreative couples and traditional families. Let's be very clear about something: There is no shortage of hetero-normative behavior in this country, or heterosexual pairings and heterosexual sex, or pregnancies or births.

If there is an issue on which we can mostly agree it is that there are too many children born to single mothers. But there is a smart way to address this problem: increase comprehensive sex education, teach young people to better value their bodies and protect their futures, hold male behavior more fully accountable, make contraception readily available and easily affordable and make sure that all women have a full range of reproduction options, including access to abortion.

But on some of these we are just treading water and on others we're backpedaling. As the Guttmacher Institute has pointed out, "more abortion restrictions were enacted in 2011-2013 than in the entire previous decade." Instead of seriously addressing this issue from a policy perspective, people like Fox News's Bill O'Reilly would rather harp on pop culture and blame Beyoncé. O'Reilly, slammed her for her song "Partition," in which she sings about having sex with her husband, and father of her child, calling it "exploitive garbage" that did harm to the teenage girls, "particularly girls of color," when she knows "the devastation" of unwanted pregnancies and fractured families.

First, some facts: the phenomenon of single motherhood is becoming much more an adult issue than a teen one. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teenage pregnancy rates have declined to historic lows, and the rate of decline in birthrates for women age 15 to 19 since 1990 was even greater among blacks than among whites and Hispanics. The numbers are still too high among teenagers, but the dimensions of the problem are contracting, not growing.

That said, whether one likes or agrees with the message of a music video is irrelevant here. Condemning artists for being provocative when politicians have proven either impotent or regressive is a tired sleight of hand. Instead of protesting a song in which Beyoncé asks her driver to close the partition, O'Reilly would be better served protesting the Republican laws forcing the closings of abortion clinics. [...]

NFL players asked to support Redskins name change

Theresa Vargas, Mark Maske & Dan Steinberg, May 27, 2014, *The Washington Post* (washingtonpost.com)

In an effort to mount pressure on the Washington Redskins to change their name, two Native American groups are turning to a population that has been mostly silent on the issue but could wield the most powerful voice yet: the NFL players.

The National Congress of American Indians and the Oneida Indian Nation sent letters Wednesday to more than 2,700 players, asking them to speak out against a name that "does not honor people of color, instead it seeks to conceal a horrible segment of American history and the countless atrocities suffered by Native Americans."

They also sent the letter to the Twitter accounts of the players, with the hashtag #rightsideofhistory.

"Because you are in the NFL, you command a level of respect and credibility when speaking out about the league's behavior," the letter said. "Indeed, players are the most publicly identifiable representatives of the league, which means your support is critical to ending this injustice."

The letter cites recent comments from Richard Sherman, the cornerback for the Super Bowl champion Seattle Seahawks. Earlier this month, Sherman referred to the Redskins when explaining why he doesn't believe NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell would act as decisively as NBA Commissioner Adam Silver if a league owner were caught making racist comments. Silver recently issued a lifetime ban against Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling for disparaging comments about African Americans.

"No, I don't," Sherman said in the interview with Time. "Because we have an NFL team called the Redskins. I don't think the NFL really is as concerned as they show. The NFL is more of a bottom-line league. If it doesn't affect their bottom line, they're not as concerned."

Goodell and Washington team officials have consistently said they don't believe the name is disparaging to Native Americans and have cited polls that show that the majority of people share that sentiment.

"Our use of 'Redskins' as the name of our football team for more than 81 years has always been respectful of and shown reverence toward the proud legacy and traditions of Native Americans," Redskins executive Bruce Allen wrote last week in a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.).

Allen's letter was sent a day after Reid and 49 other Democratic senators wrote letters to Goodell urging him to endorse a name change. Five of the team's biggest stars then tweeted a link to Allen's letter.

In Wednesday's letter, signed by more than 75 Native American, religious and civil rights groups, Sherman is described as a potential leader on the issue.

"We are hopeful that other players in the league will follow his strong example and take a public stance against the Washington R*dskins," the letter reads.

Several former NFL standouts have taken a stance against the name, but with rare exceptions, current players have been silent. In a sport with relatively short playing careers and comparatively little job security, experts say many players regard voicing an opinion publicly on a controversial topic as unnecessarily risky.

"There might be a few players willing to speak out," said one agent who represents NFL players, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he must deal with the Redskins. "But for the most part, that will be very difficult to get players to engage on a topic like that. You're asking players to take a stand against their employer, essentially. The NFL has taken the Redskins' side on this. That's a lot to ask."

In January, Redskins cornerback DeAngelo Hall told Fox Sports that he thought the name "probably should" change, before clarifying his stance that week. "For me to say what's right or wrong or what should be changed is out of my pay grade," Hall said then. " That burden falls on Dan Snyder and the rest of the ownership committee." Snyder has repeatedly defended the name, calling it a "badge of honor" in a letter to fans. In March, the team also launched the Washington Redskins Original Americans Foundation, aimed at addressing the needs of Native Americans.

Wednesday's letter was sent to 2,483 players listed on team rosters, along with 257 players that have been drafted this year.

Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter said in a statement Tuesday that the players were in a unique position to stop the league from promoting a name that was created by George Preston Marshall, the team's first owner and anti-integrationist. Marshall famously resisted integrating the team until 1961 under threat from the federal government, making the Redskins the last team with an all-white roster.

"NFL players, many of whom are people of color, should not be forced by the league to promote this racial slur on their uniforms," Halbritter said.

NFL Players Association officials were not immediately available to comment about the letter. But in January, DeMaurice Smith, the player's association executive director, said in an interview with The Washington Post that a "broad discussion" about the Redskins name is justified. [...]

Are we abandoning public education 60 years after historic Brown ruling?
Barbara Miner, May 16, 2014, *The Washington Post* (washingtonpost.com)

In Milwaukee, one of the country's most segregated metropolitan regions, the May 17 anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* will be particularly bitter. Like other urban areas, this city has long ignored *Brown's* proclamation 60 years ago that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." We live comfortably with rampant school segregation. But Milwaukee, where more students receive vouchers than in any U.S. city, has taken the abandonment of *Brown* to a new level. We are abandoning the very institution of public education.

I am often involved in national discussions on education reform. When I tell people I'm from Milwaukee, I frequently notice a vague look in their eye as they try to remember something about Milwaukee beyond beer, bratwurst and reruns of "Happy Days." If they follow policy debates they might say, "Don't you have that school choice movement?" And I cringe, because I refuse to use the term "school choice."

As a woman, I understand the power and importance of choice. In education, used appropriately, choice can help ensure that public schools are sensitive to the varying needs of students, families and communities. But that is not how the term "school choice" is used today.

In the 1960s, the term "state's rights" became code for opposing *Brown* and federal civil rights legislation. Today, "school choice" has to many people become code for initiatives that funnel public dollars into private voucher schools or privately run charters. It is code for reforms based on individual decisions by consumers and entrepreneurs rather than the collective, democratic decisions of a community.

In Milwaukee, it is code that rationalizes three separate and unequal systems, all funded by taxpayers: private voucher schools, public schools and charter schools, which operate in a grey market between public and private.

Interestingly, the first use of vouchers post-*Brown* was by whites hoping to escape desegregation. For five years, until federal courts intervened, officials closed the public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia, rather than comply with orders to desegregate. White parents took advantage of vouchers to attend a private, whites-only academy.

In 1990, with proponents arguing for more "choices" for African-American students, Milwaukee became home to a voucher program under which public tax dollars pay the tuition at private schools. Today, some 25,000 students in Milwaukee receive such vouchers, most of them to attend religious schools.

But here's the catch. Even if every single student attending a given school is paying tuition with a publicly funded voucher, the school is still defined as private. Voucher schools are thus able to circumvent any number of democratic safeguards, from adhering to open meetings and records requirements, to providing needed levels of special education services, to respecting constitutional rights of due process and freedom of speech.

Today, Milwaukee arguably has more educational choices than any other major city. In addition to vouchers we have "open enrollment" across districts. We have district charters, schools chartered by the city, schools chartered by the local university. We have union and non-union charters, community-based charters, virtual charters, and national "McFranchise" charter chains.

When it comes to curricular choices, we have Montessori schools, art specialty schools, Waldorf schools, language immersion schools, schools that focus on science, schools that teach creationism. We seem to have it all.

What we don't have is progress in fulfilling the constitutional guarantee of equal educational opportunity. In recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress— sometimes dubbed the nation's report card—the achievement gap between black and white students in Wisconsin was the widest among states in the nation in every test category. (Roughly three-quarters of the state's African Americans live in Milwaukee.)

Equally disturbing, a new report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation cites Wisconsin as the worst state in the country in protecting equal opportunity for African-American children. The study is based on 12 key indicators, from birth weight, to children living in poverty, to educational achievement.

Which brings me back to *Brown*.

In laying the groundwork for its unanimous decision against segregated public schools, the Court noted that "education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments." The justices went on to recognize "the importance of education to our democratic society," calling education "the very foundation of good citizenship."

Milwaukee, perhaps more than any other city, forces the question: If education is such an essential governmental function, why are we abandoning our public schools?

In Wisconsin, there is deep concern about our democratic structures, in particular attacks on the right to vote. In 2011, the Republican-dominated state legislature passed one of the strictest Voter ID bills in the country, with the issue still before state and federal courts. This spring, the legislature drastically curtailed early voting.

But undermining the right to vote is not the only way to weaken our democracy. Another way? Remove entire institutions, such as public education, from meaningful public oversight.

On this 60th anniversary of *Brown*, it's essential to go beyond well-deserved concern about the separate and unequal realities shaping our public schools. We must also reaffirm our commitment to public schools as an essential democratic institution—of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Beyond Uber and Airbnb: The future of the 'sharing economy'

Alex Stephany, Guest Blogger, May 19, 2014, Opinion, LAtimes.com

I was watching from inside my shiny tower in London's financial district the day that Lehman Bros. collapsed. Bankers were walking out the revolving doors clutching files and family photos, economic refugees in well-cut suits. The party was over. Of course, it had to end *some* time — we all knew that deep down. And though some people said that it was a free bar — *get your order in before it ends!* — we could have guessed a big bill was coming our way. More than five years later, we're still living with the hangover.

Yet for many, these have been years of unprecedented opportunity. The boom time left us with too much of everything, from cars to second homes to power drills. Now that it's over, we've never had a greater financial need to make use of these assets. An alternative economic and social model has risen from the wreckage of the credit crunch. Termed "collaborative consumption" by sharing innovator Rachel Botsman, this economy is based not on ownership but on the sharing of goods and services.

The hip, San Franciscan poster boy of this new "sharing economy" is the property rental site Airbnb. Instead of staying at the nearest Marriott, more than 11 million guests have booked strangers' spare rooms and apartments since 2008. That's just one example. Got a few spare hours? Run some errands on Taskrabbit. Some empty seats on your car journey? Sell them on BlaBlaCar.

As these companies have taken off, so too has the hype. But what does the future hold for them and the sharing economy as a whole?

To begin with, this is a sector that is just getting started. Its participants are typically marketplace businesses and benefit from network effects that can lead to sharply increasing growth rates.ParkatmyHouse.com, the London-based startup for which I am CEO, is one such marketplace gaining thousands of new users a week. Whenever a new user lists or books a parking space, the service becomes more useful, setting the conditions for ever more rapid growth.

Network effects make it likely a clear winner will emerge in each vertical, hoovering up the mass market of consumers. This process is being catalyzed by the rush of venture capital into the sharing economy and consolidation, such as car-sharing company Relay Rides' acquisition of Wheelz. As these businesses grow, some will piggyback on the very largest ones. In August 2013, Waze, a navigation app that crowd-sources traffic information, was acquired by Google for $1.3 billion.

Indeed, transportation is set to become the sharing economy's next vertical to blow up. Uber, SideCar and Lyft let people enroll as taxi drivers, undercutting and outperforming taxi companies. After that? Education. With student debt in the U.S. at more than $1 trillion, startups like Skillshare provide access to top-class tutors for less than the price of a Harvard hoodie. Online lending might be the biggest of all. Zopa and Prosper are hoping to make even more bankers redundant.

Meanwhile, these companies are collecting data from user behavior and third-party sites. In addition to helping their marketplaces become more transparent, this data will become useful for other companies. Consider a world in which a lender or employer could assess your risk profile or professionalism by analyzing your activity within an online community. Trust is valuable; it loosens purse strings. Unsurprisingly, there are startups like Trust Cloud and Connect.me working on measuring and monetizing these pools of trustworthiness.

Significant challenges remain. Sharing economy businesses often operate within challenging regulatory environments and can expect fierce counter-lobbying from those whose market share is threatened. However, the biggest obstacle they face is the 20th century expectation of a consistent consumer experience. Some collaborative consumption companies are able to turn the variability of their products into a strength. For example, every luxury property on OneFineStay is unique.

Raising standards will also help collaborative consumption companies navigate this obstacle. Behind most of these businesses are individual sellers or renters with their own personal brands, marketing and reviews. Competition with professional sellers that can provide a more consistent product and more efficient customer service will drive up standards. As Airbnb has shown, professional yield-hungry sellers will enter lucrative marketplaces, operating a "buy to share" model.

But overwhelmingly, collaborative consumption businesses are utilizing existing capacity. That's good news for everyone. If we buy fewer houses and cars — our largest, most highly financed investments — it will help in the deleveraging of the global economy. Fewer mortgages mean less debt for bankers to collateralize; and, according to Zipcar, every shared car takes several others off the road.

So the next time the music stops and the global economy implodes, we might wake up with a little less of a hangover.

Racism can be subtle, institutionalized, Holder says

Sari Horwitz, May 17, 2014, *The Washington Post*

In a pointed and at times personal speech, Attorney General Eric Holder on Saturday morning argued that America's struggle for racial equality has become defined less by expressions of outright bigotry than by policies that subtly but systematically impede equal opportunity.

Speaking during the commencement ceremony at Morgan State University, a historically black college in Baltimore, Holder referred obliquely to a series of racially charged episodes that have ''received substantial media coverage'' in recent weeks — an apparent reference to the controversial comments made by Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling and Nevada cattle rancher Cliven Bundy. But Holder also said that the ''outlandish statements that capture national attention'' obscure a more troubling reality.

''These outbursts of bigotry, while deplorable, are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged, or the work that still needs to be done,'' he said, according a copy of his prepared remarks.

''The greatest threats,'' he said, ''are more subtle. They cut deeper. And their terrible impact endures long after the headlines have faded and obvious, ignorant expressions of hatred have been marginalized.''

The comments were Holder's most extensive on the subject of race since early 2009, when he gave a speech during Black History Month that generated controversy and reportedly infuriated President Barack Obama's chief of staff at the time, Rahm Emanuel. In that speech, Holder, the nation's first African-American attorney general, referred to the country as ''essentially a nation of cowards,'' arguing that Americans were not comfortable enough with one another to discuss the issue of race candidly.

Saturday's speech — which aides said was vetted by the White House and which was delivered on the 60th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark school desegregation decision — was centered more squarely on the issues that have animated Holder in the twilight of his tenure, particularly criminal sentencing policies and voter identification laws.

In the case of the criminal justice system, Holder pointed to ''systemic and unwarranted racial disparities,'' noting that a study last year by the US Sentencing Commission found that in recent years African-American men have received sentences that are nearly 20 percent longer than those imposed on white males convicted of similar crimes. Another report showed that American Indians are often sentenced even more harshly, he said. ''Disparate outcomes are not only shameful and unacceptable, they impede our ability to see that justice is done,'' Holder said. Similarly, Holder said that voter identification laws that have been enacted in a number of states across the country threaten to make it harder for minorities to exercise their rights at the polls. Proponents of the measures say they are intended to combat voter fraud, a problem that Holder has dismissed as virtually nonexistent.

''Rather than addressing a supposedly widespread problem, these policies disproportionately disenfranchise African-Americans, Hispanics and other communities of color,'' he said.

Holder also expressed concern about ''zero-tolerance'' disciplinary practices at schools, saying that they are ''well-intentioned'' but that they affect black males at three times the rate they affect their white peers.

Beyond policy issues, Holder spoke broadly about the struggle for racial equality and what he suggested was the failure of some to fully grasp the degree to which minority groups can be marginalized. He took direct aim at the chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Roberts, who famously wrote in a 2007 opinion that ''the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.''

''This presupposes that racial discrimination is at a sufficiently low ebb that it doesn't need to be actively confronted,'' Holder countered. ''In its most obvious forms, it might be. But discrimination does not always come in the form of a hateful epithet or a Jim Crow-like statute. And so we must continue to take account of racial inequality, especially in its less obvious forms, and actively discuss ways to combat it.''

Civil rights have been a central tenet of Holder's tenure. He spoke out strongly against ''stand your ground'' laws after the 2012 shooting in Florida of 17-year-old unarmed Trayvon Martin. His Justice Department sued Texas and North Carolina to try and overturn their voter-identification laws.

In his address to the Morgan State graduates, however, he also made clear that his passion for civil rights issues is rooted in his own history. He recalled his father, an immigrant who enlisted in the Army during World War II, being denied service at a lunch counter at one time and being told to leave a whites-only train car at another, ''even though he was wearing the uniform of his country.''

''When I think of the duties, the rights and the weighty responsibilities of American citizenship, responsibilities that are now entrusted to each of you, I think of that man, my father . . . who never lost faith in the greatness of his country even when it did not reciprocate his devotion,'' Holder said. ''A man who never stopped believing in the promise of this nation, even when that promise was obscured by injustice.''

Media shades the truth when it comes to colorism

By Naeemah Clark, guest columnist, Apr. 06, 2014, *The Herald Sun*, heraldsun.com

Nude pantyhose don't look good on me. That's because they are not made for me.

Every woman of color knows that she has to dig through the department store shelf in the hopes of finding hosiery that matches her skin shade. And by doing so, we accept that we are not the norm, not the default.

This form of colorism happens all the time, so I should be used to it. But I'm not. Instead, it's death by 1,000 cuts, and colorism is magnified when we see media representations of African-American women.

I was reminded of the hurt colorism can cause when one of my students, through tears in her eyes, looked at a magazine cover featuring Academy Award-winner Lupita Nyong'o. Nyong'o has rich chocolate brown skin and a closely cropped natural hair. And she is fabulous.

My student also is fabulous with her chocolate brown complexion and short hair. For her, Nyong'o's cover served as a reminder of how rare it is to see a dark-skinned actress celebrated as a beauty on the big screen.

Cinematographers and photographers explain (in what may be cut 1,001) that it is easier to light a set when the models have fairer complexions and are similar in skin tone. We have grown accustomed to viewing African-American women with light brown skin and facial features associated with the standards of white beauty.

Hollywood has long considered lighter-skinned women from Lena Horne to Halle Berry to be commercially acceptable images of African-American beauty. Nyong'o recently admitted earlier shame about her skin tone as a child. She wished at times that she would wake up with lighter skin and mourned when she saw she remained the same in the morning.

These feelings can be deep and powerful. It is a poorly kept secret that some prominent African-American stars use damaging or even carcinogenic pills, creams and soaps to lighten their skin.

The emotional drive to be lighter has a heartbreaking past. Lighter-skinned slaves -- those born of a slave and her master -- generally received better treatment on the plantation. This notion of light privilege was extended within members of the same race.

Post-slavery, some African-American society events would only allow entrance if the guest were lighter than the pale brown shade of a paper bag.

And it is here where the cuts are the deepest. Colorism from media controlled by African-Americans allows the white standards of beauty to dictate how we feel about ourselves.

For instance, African-American director Lee Daniels was criticized for casting lighter-skinned Mariah Carey and Lenny Kravitz as being the saviors in the 2009 movie "Precious" while darker characters portrayed by Gabourey Sidibe and Monique were put upon and damaged.

Recently, popular radio host Tom Joyner promoted a water gun fight between lighter-skinned and darker-skinned passengers on a cruise he sponsors. Incidentally, the annual cruise serves as a fundraiser to send African-Americans kids to college.

This real battle represents the pain that colorism has created in the African-American community, and the divide can be bridged in two ways.

First, the media can do better. People of different hues must be hired as models, romantic leads and heroes. And magazines must stop using computerized editing to lighten skin color.

Nyong'o looks sublime on the cover of Vanity Fair magazine's Hollywood issue that celebrates the Academy Awards, but it is clear her skin tone has been brightened through the magic of the fashion industry.

We already know Photoshop is used to shave off weight or smooth out a wrinkle, but when it is used to alter the rich differences in a racial group it must be critiqued as supporting a systematic racial chasm.

Second, and more importantly, African Americans must dismiss notions of "good hair" and "light is right." We must acknowledge that our American lineage is made up a range of ethnicities that have produced a multi-hued race.

For evidence, flip open family photo albums.

I love looking through snapshots to see the wide ranges of shades that contributed to the beautiful deep walnut color of my father, the golden tones of my mother and the shades of my sisters and me somewhere in between.

In Mississippi, a love-hate relationship with federal spending

E.J. Dionne Jr., Opinion Writer, June 5, 2014, *The Washington Post* (washingtonpost.com)

JACKSON, Miss. - Can you hate the federal government but love the money it spends on you?

The electoral earthquake that was Mississippi's Republican Senate primary has pushed this question to the forefront of U.S. politics.

In conventional terms, the success of state Sen. Chris McDaniel in oupolling Thad Cochran, a 34-year Senate veteran, on Tuesday and forcing him into a June 24 runoff was a triumph for the tea party movement. Outside conservative groups such as FreedomWorks and the Club for Growth spent millions trying to oust a gracious and civil incumbent they saw as far too cozy with Washington's big spenders.

If Cochran went to Washington to bring back what Mississippi needs — most crucially after Hurricane Katrina — McDaniel vowed he would fight D.C.'sexpansive government and named Sens.Ted Cruz and Mike Lee as his role models. McDaniel takes delight in the word "fight."

Cochran had the support of the entire Mississippi Republican establishment, from the governor on down. These practical politicians understand how important Cochran's senior role on the Appropriations Committee is for their state and relish the idea that Cochran would become chairman again if the GOP wins the majority in the Senate.

"By God's grace, he was chair of Appropriations for two years during Katrina and it made all the difference in the world," former governor Haley Barbour said in an interview last month. Cochran was pondering retirement, but "a lot of people" told him, "Thad, don't put yourself first. Put Mississippi first."

Barbour and his allies did all they could for their friend, but there was that nagging contradiction at the heart of their argument: Cochran said he was as stoutly conservative and penny-pinching as McDaniel, but also the agent for many good things that come this state's way courtesy of the despised national capital. Mississippi taxpayers get $3.07 back for every $1 they send to Washington, according to Wallet Hub, a personal finance Web site. The Tax Foundation ranks Mississippi No. 1 among the states in federal aid as a percentage of state revenue.

Strange numbers, you'd think, for a Beltway-hating state, but Marty Wiseman, the former director of the Stennis Institute at Mississippi State University, explained the apparent inconsistency. "Our anti-Washington politics has been to make sure that we got as much of it here as we could," he said. "You've got the tea party excited that they've corralled a big spender, but he was bringing it back to Mississippi. That's the paradox of all paradoxes."

Indeed. "If Mississippi did what the tea party claims they want ... we would become a Third World country, quickly," said Rickey Cole, the state Democratic chairman. "We depend on the federal government to help us build our highways. We depend on the federal government to fund our hospitals, our health-care system. We depend on the federal government to help us educate our students on every level."

Cole noted that the hospital he was born in "wasn't built by the taxpayers of Mississippi, it was built with federal money that was collected from taxpayers in New York and Chicago and L.A. and San Francisco."

To survive a runoff, Cochran may now have to face up to the incongruity of trying to be an anti-spending spender by challenging the core of the McDaniel case. As it became clear late Tuesday night that Cochran would fall short, Stuart Stevens, one of the GOP's top political consultants and a Cochran loyalist, previewed for reporters a line of inquiry that will be familiar to liberals.

McDaniel, Stevens said, "is always talking about cutting spending. No one has ever asked Chris McDaniel what he's going to cut." Stevens added: "Is he going to cut community colleges in his district? Is he going to cut highway funds to his district?"

These queries will certainly appeal to Democrat Travis Childers, the rather conservative former member of Congress who handily won his party's Senate nomination on Tuesday. Cochran supporters believe that a McDaniel nomination could lead to the unthinkable. "The concern is that this would open the door for a potential Democratic senator," Philip Gunn, the Republican speaker of the Mississippi House, told me the night before the primary. Childers's "chances against McDaniel are better than his chances against Cochran."

Yes, Childers could run as a Thad Cochran Democrat — except he wouldn't be saddled with the need to appease an ideology that has to pretend federal spending doesn't benefit anybody, least of all the people of Mississippi.

SERIE S. HUMAINES

ANALYSE LV

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

The EU is not working and we will change it

Only the Conservatives will give voters a real choice over Britain's future in Europe, says Prime Minister David Cameron

By David Cameron, *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 Mar 2014

The British people now have a very clear choice: if you want a referendum on whether Britain should stay in the EU or leave, only the Conservative Party will guarantee to hold one. If I am Prime Minister after the election, I will negotiate a new settlement for Britain in Europe, and then ask the British people: do you wish to stay in the EU on this basis, or leave? I will hold that referendum before the end of 2017, and respect the decision.

A year ago, in a speech at Bloomberg, I set out my plan to reform the European Union and change Britain's relationship with it. Britain is not alone in our view that change is needed. No one has argued harder than Angela Merkel that the European Union needs to reform if it is to compete in the modern world. My Dutch counterpart has coined the phrase "Europe if necessary, national when possible". We share a view that the status quo is not working, and we intend to change it.

I completely understand and share people's concerns about the European Union. Our businesses value the single market. But they find the degree of European interference in our everyday life excessive. People are worried that Britain is being sucked into a United States of Europe; that may be what some others want, but it is not for us. They see decisions being taken far away, rather than by their elected representatives in Parliament. And they worry that European rules have allowed people to claim benefits without ever working here. As a result, democratic consent for Britain's membership has worn wafer thin.

And although it would not be a very smart negotiating tactic to lay all Britain's cards on the table at the outset, I know people want more detail about the specific changes we will seek. So I can confirm today that tackling these concerns will be at the heart of our approach.

Let me set out some of the key ones. Powers flowing away from Brussels, not always to it. National parliaments able to work together to block unwanted European legislation. Businesses liberated from red tape and benefiting from the strength of the EU's own market – the biggest and wealthiest on the planet – to open up greater free trade with North America and Asia. Our police forces and justice systems able to protect British citizens, unencumbered by unnecessary interference from the European institutions, including the ECHR. Free movement to take up work, not free benefits. Support for the continued enlargement of the EU to new members but with new mechanisms in place to prevent vast migrations across the Continent. And dealing properly with the concept of "ever closer union", enshrined in the treaty, to which every EU country now has to sign up. It may appeal to some countries. But it is not right for Britain, and we must ensure we are no longer subject to it.

So, yes to the single market. Yes to turbo-charging free trade. Yes to working together where we are stronger together than alone, as we are doing right now on Ukraine. Yes to a family of nations, all part of a European Union – but whose interests are guaranteed, inside the euro or out. No to ever-closer union. No to a constant flow of power to Brussels. No to unnecessary interference. And no, it goes without saying, to the euro, to participation in eurozone bailouts or notions such as a European Army.

This is an ambitious agenda for a new European Union. Delivering it will take time and patience, as well as strong relationships with our key allies and goodwill – not shouting from the sidelines. It will require a negotiation with our European partners. Some changes will best be achieved by alterations to the European treaties – others can be achieved by different means. But when we achieve it, we will have transformed the European Union and Britain's relationship with it. I would then campaign for Britain to remain in this reformed EU in 2017.

Of course, there are many defeatists who say this is impossible. They include Ukip, who offer no serious plan and simply can't deliver on anything they promise; and Labour and the Liberal Democrats who won't stand up for Britain and refuse to give people a choice in a referendum. Neither course is in our national interest.

None of those parties can – or even want to - deliver the change Britain and Europe need. Only Conservative candidates will campaign for this agenda in the European elections in May; we need a strong team elected who will fight Britain's corner. [...]

Comment is free- Conservative conference

Why 'hardworking people' are at the heart of Conservative mythmaking

'Hardworking' distils the Protestant work ethic, the super-employee, skivers v strivers, into a rightwing anti-welfare policy agenda

Richard Seymour, *The Guardian*, 3 October 2013

In and of itself, there is no virtue in working, much less working hard. Tory ministers appear to disagree. The Conservative party conference was plastered with the phrase "hardworking" – "For Hardworking People", the legend boasted from the platform – and a host of frontbench speakers milked the term for every last residue of rhetorical worth. This began a few months ago when George Osborne started his – God help us – #hardworkingpeople tweets. And it's all been downhill from there.

Of course, "hardworking" – whether it is a predicate of "families" or "people" – is one of those glittering generalities that features regularly in political communications. And perhaps it doesn't do to read too much into a public relations strategy but, if Valentin Voloshinov was correct that the word is the most sensitive index of social change, the sudden overkill of this sememe might suggest something significant is afoot.

The reason the term is reached for by politicians is that it has so many layers of meaning. In one sense, it evokes the "dignity of labour", a thematic that owes itself as much to craft unionism and the productivist ideology of a historical layer of skilled workers as it does to the so-called "Protestant work ethic". This remains resonant in parts of British culture, despite the fact that most labour is hardly dignified or dignifying. Osborne's decision to visit factories and skilled manual workers in particular suggests he was aiming to evoke this sense.

But "hardworking" also connotes something else: the virtue of the dedicated employee, who is ever available, an asset to company and country, never shirking, never clock-watching. This is linked to the neoliberal conception of the entrepreneurial self, the effortlessly protean, constantly busy wheeler and dealer with many projects on the go – for example, the super-mum with career, family, investments, charity events, and socials, all on the go. This self *never* stops working; even leisure is work, an opportunity for networking, utility maximising, and smiley pictures for Facebook and other online CVs.

In another sense, the term is linked to respectability. It is not the dignity of craft that matters so much as the status earned by being in work – thereby joining the morally exalted "salt of the earth". To not be in work, we have seen, is to be a "skiver": a burden on society, and morally dubious. The Tories are for "our people", the "strivers". This is a strongly resonant notion: the idea that work and social desert are inextricably bound. But it is also, in this articulation, a very Thatcherite thematic, far from the one-nation ideology that Cameron espoused in opposition. It deliberately draws a line of antagonism right across the working class, and thus right through Labour's base. The Tories are fortunate enough in that Labour has helped them to do this.

Finally, all this tends to be linked to an old notion of second world war pluck. Given the perceived necessity for tightening our belts and knuckling down and applying the old elbow grease in order to dig Blighty out of its current malaise, it is the hardworking people who must be cherished and condescended to. Where would we be without all the hardworking boiler-makers and ditch-diggers? Give them a tiny tax cut to show our appreciation.

Notably, the term "hardworking", and the status and patronising genuflection that goes with it, is something that is handed down from above in most of these senses. It is like being given a prefect's badge. You might believe yourself to be "hardworking", but to really know for sure you'd have to be told it by a rich person.

So, what social change might be referred to here? First of all, there is the policy. Osborne promises, quite disingenuously, to take the UK budget into a surplus for the first time since the war. This is disingenuous because there are too many variables – growth being the most obvious one – to be sure that one can achieve a budget surplus. It is also disingenuous because, once again, it is based on the pretence that a state budget is a like a household budget. But this phoney goal provides the pretext and justification for a sustained assault on welfare lasting at least until 2020. The "skivers" will really be made to suffer for their sins.

Second, there is the end-goal: an attempt to extract more work out of people, through a series of measures designed to increase people's dependency on the labour market, weaken the bargaining power of labour, and reduce remuneration relative to hours worked. Welfare cuts, and various types of workfare, are all useful to this end. By forcing people to be more dependent on employers, it ensures they are in a weaker position to demand better pay or more holidays: this is what it means to "make work pay". The "hardworking" thematic is thus a populist-right appeal which encodes a series of policies designed to profoundly transform British society. And the worst mugs are those "hardworking" enough to fall for it.

Comment is Free

Britain joins the anti-EU tune played across the continent

The votes in Britain and the rest of the EU offer an unprecedented challenge to mainstream politics

Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*, 26 May 2014

Britain likes to think that it marches to a different political drum from the rest of Europe. Yet the 2014 European parliament election has generated a great political paradox. In these elections, British voters flocked in record numbers to the anti-Europe flagship party Ukip. And yet, as they voted against Europe, British voters have never seemed more part of the European mainstream than they do this morning. Across Europe, in one way or another, voters in most countries did very much the same thing.

The European Union has never confronted a crisis of legitimacy like the one that erupted in the polling booths of Europe this weekend. From Aberdeen to Athens and from Lisbon to Leipzig, and irrespective of whether the nation is in or out of the eurozone, the 2014 European elections were an uncoordinated but common revolt against national governments and a revolt against the post-crash priorities of the European project. This election wasn't a revolt of Britain against the EU. It was a revolt of European voters against the EU and against national governing parties. And British voters were simply one part of it.

That's not to say that the popular uprising at the ballot box swept the board. It didn't, and it is extremely important not to exaggerate it. In most EU member states, even in traditionally Eurosceptic Britain, the majority of voters in another pitiful turnout voted for parties that support the EU and that want to see the European project survive, whether reformed or unreformed. Even today, and even in Britain, voters believe Europe is better off together. That will not be much consolation to the Liberal Democrats as they survey the wreckage. But the anti-EU forces, even if you add the anti-EU left and the anti-EU right, remain dwarfed by those who support the project.

But not by as much as they did in the past. This was in no meaningful or moral sense a victory for the pro-European parties or for the European project that they cherish and drive. These parties have no sure mandate now. The momentum is all against them. The revolt against the system may not have won the majority, but it has surely changed the political realities of Europe. The European establishment's reflexive belief that the answer to every crisis is "more Europe" has never been more fundamentally challenged than it was in these elections. To ignore or defy that revolt would be suicidal.

Last night, the leader of the European People's party, the centre right grouping in the European parliament supported by Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU, claimed victory in the polls, a prelude to a push to install Jean-Claude Juncker as the new head of the European Commission in succession to José Manuel Barroso, also from the centre-right. But projections suggested the EPP, headed by Juncker, will have only 211 of the new European parliament's 751 seats, compared with 263 out of 736 in the outgoing parliament. By any standards, that is a defeat not a victory. To impose Juncker now would be a catastrophic error.

Even if you add the strengthened support for the other big EU grouping, the European Socialists, to the EPP's total, this election is still a setback for the main parties. The socialists – who include Labour, who did well here compared with their 2009 disaster, again in keeping with the general shift to the left in the centre ground – now have 193 seats compared with 163 last time. But the two big parties together have still lost out to the parties on the margins – a familiar pattern in British politics over the last half century and now firmly the pattern elsewhere too.

In every country, parties that oppose the system made gains in these elections. In each country, the revolt took a different form, reflecting local conditions. In Greece, the leftwing anti-austerity party Syriza came top of the poll, with 26.7% of the vote. In Ireland Sinn Féin, was the lightning rod against Fine Gael. In Belgium the separatist Flemish independence party played the same role. In increasingly Eurosceptic France, the rightwing anti-austerity and anti-immigrant Front National was the big winner, with 25%. In Denmark, exit polls gave the Eurosceptic Danish People's party 23.1%.

In every case, just as with Ukip in Britain – this time including Scotland and Wales as well as England, please note – the revolt against governing parties was large but not a majority.

Just as the established British parties are all struggling to understand the message of the revolt, and to find ways of re-engaging with those who voted for the protest, so their EU counterparts also face the same task at both national and European level. Even Merkel needs to watch the quiet revolt in Germany. To act as though nothing has happened would be folly, but not unprecented. The great test of the European political class after these elections is whether they can summon the imagination to replace "more Europe" with "reformed Europe." On that, all our futures depend, to one degree or another. And that's true in Britain as well.

Comment is free

Whatever Gerry Adams' past, peace takes precedence over justice

His arrest in the Jean McConville case could mean a return to violence. As in South Africa, the answer is a painful compromise

Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2014

The faces of both Michael McConville and his older sister Helen are haunting because they are haunted. They are in middle age now. He is 53 and she is 57, and yet to see them interviewed about the 1972 abduction and murder of their mother Jean is to glimpse the children they were. Etched on Michael's face is the fear he must have felt as an 11-year-old boy when he witnessed an IRA gang, most wearing masks, barge into their home in the Divis flats in west Belfast and take away their mother. The masked men had to pull the woman from the arms of her 10 children, who were "crying and squealing". As McConville told the BBC, the fear has not left him; it's what prevents him naming his mother's killers now, even though he is convinced he knows who they are.

You only have to hear that story to know that it cries out for justice. Who can gaze at the eyes of Helen McKendry – who, unlike her brother, is now willing to name names – and not agree with her when she says, "Everybody has that right to know what happened to the person they loved. They need the truth and they need justice"? Who can argue with the advocate of the McConville family and other who have also suffered, victims' commissioner Kathryn Stone, when she says, "There can be no sustainable peace in Northern Ireland until every victim has true peace of mind"? These are surely matters of basic morality, ethical common sense.

And yet, when war and peace intrude, suddenly even the clearest, most transparent moral truth becomes murky. So it is in Northern Ireland, where the leader of the republican movement, Gerry Adams, has spent consecutive nights in a police cell, being questioned about what Helen McKendry believes was his role in ordering the disappearance of her mother.

The drama of this is hard to exaggerate. Adams leads the party that jointly governs Northern Ireland. He was one of the key brokers of the accord that ended what had been a bloody and vicious 30 year war. Yet now he is detained as part of a murder inquiry, asked to account for what part he played (if any) in one of the most notorious crimes of that conflict.

Our first moral intuition surely says that's fine: no one should be above the law. Some make practical objections to such delayed prosecutions, reinforced by specific objections to the Adams case. They note that the evidence is, inevitably, unreliable because it is 42 years old. The testimony of former IRA volunteers, given in taped interviews to a Boston academic project, might not be admissible given that Adams' accusers are now dead and cannot be cross-examined. Moreover, as political enemies of the Sinn Féin leader, those accusers had an obvious motive to attack him.

The people deploying such arguments are making excuses, avoiding the real reason they tremble at the thought of Adams in the dock. The heart of the matter is much harder to say out loud. If confronted with one of the McConville children few would dare say it to their face.

It is this. In places torn by war, there is all too often a choice to be made between justice and peace. We may want both; we may cry out for both. But the bleak truth is, we cannot have both.

Though we have been wary of admitting it, Northern Ireland has been a classic case. One price of the Good Friday agreement was the early release of men of violence who had committed heinous crimes. Justice demanded they stayed behind bars. Peace demanded they be set free. Peace won.

The McConville case poses that tension between justice and peace in even starker terms. Elemental justice suggests there has to be a reckoning for that crime, even if that reckoning goes all the way to the top. But peace makes different demands. As Peter Hain, the former Northern Ireland secretary, put it to me, "Adams and [Martin McGuinness] have been indispensable in moving Northern Ireland from the evil and horror of the past to the relative tranquillity and stability of today."

To pursue Adams now for whatever role he played in that past horror is to jeopardise the current tranquillity. Those far away have become complacent about Northern Ireland, forgetful of the bloody havoc the Troubles wrought, taking today's peace for granted. But those close to it believe it is not irreversible. There is no guarantee that republicans will calmly accept seeing their leader in a cell, while, say, British soldiers who killed civilians in Derry or Ballymurphy walk free. Just because a war ended does not mean it cannot start again. (...)

Boris Johnson invokes Thatcher spirit with greed is good speech

London mayor calls for return of selective schools in bid for Tory right's support

Nicholas Watt, chief political correspondent, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 27 November 2013

Boris Johnson has launched a bold bid to claim the mantle of Margaret Thatcher by declaring that inequality is essential to fostering "the spirit of envy" and hailed greed as a "valuable spur to economic activity". In an attempt to shore up his support on the Tory right, as he positions himself as the natural successor to David Cameron, the London mayor called for the "Gordon Gekkos of London" to display their greed to promote economic growth. Delivering the annual Margaret Thatcher lecture, Johnson also called for the return of a form of grammar schools.

He qualified his unabashed admiration for the "hedge fund kings" by saying they should do more to help poorer people who have suffered a real fall in income in recent years. But he moved to forge his own brand of Conservatism, which contrasts with the early modernising of the prime minister, by claiming that it was "futile" to try to end inequality. In highly provocative remarks, Johnson mocked the 16% "of our species" with an IQ below 85 as he called for more to be done to help the 2% of the population who have an IQ above 130. "Whatever you may think of the value of IQ tests it is surely relevant to a conversation about equality that as many as 16% of our species have an IQ below 85 while about 2% ..." he said as he departed from the text of his speech to ask whether anyone in his City audience had a low IQ. To muted laughter he asked: "Over 16% anyone? Put up your hands." He then resumed his speech to talk about the 2% who have an IQ above 130.

Johnson then told the Centre for Policy Studies think tank, which helped lay the basis for Thatcherism in the 1970s: "The harder you shake the pack the easier it will be for some cornflakes to get to the top." Johnson moved to associate himself with what were seen as the excesses of 1980s Thatcherism as he said: "I stress – I don't believe that economic equality is possible; indeed some measure of inequality is essential for the spirit of envy and keeping up with the Joneses that is, like greed, a valuable spur to economic activity."

He made clear, however, that Thatcherism needed to be updated for the 21st century. "I hope there is no return to the spirit of loads-a-money heartlessness – figuratively riffling banknotes under the noses of the homeless – and I hope that this time the Gordon Gekkos of London are conspicuous not just for their greed, valid motivator though greed may be for economic progress, as for what they give and do for the rest of the population, many of whom have experienced real falls in their incomes over the last five years."

Johnson, who is assessing when to return to Westminster to ensure he is in a strong place to challenge for the Conservative leadership when the prime minister stands down, also reached out to the Tory right by:

- Calling for a form of grammar school to be revived as he spoke of the need for academic selection, which he renamed as "academic competition". He also called for the return of the assisted places scheme, abolished by Labour in 1997, in which the state paid private school fees for gifted children from less affluent backgrounds.
- Warning that the accession of Romania to the EU means that London can do nothing to stop the "entire population of Transylvania" from pitching their tents in Marble Arch.
- Calling for his pet project, a new airport in the Thames Estuary, to be named the Margaret Thatcher International Airport.

On the politically sensitive issue of inequality Johnson warned that the growing competition Britain faced in a globalised economy meant that inequality would deepen. He said: "No one can ignore the harshness of that competition, or the inequality that it inevitably accentuates, and I am afraid that violent economic centrifuge is operating on human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth."

Johnson called for the rich to be hailed for their contribution to paying for public services as he said that the top 1% of earners contribute 30% of income tax. "That is an awful lot of schools and roads and hospitals that are being paid for by the super-rich. So why, I asked innocently, are they so despicable in the eyes of all decent British people? Surely they should be hailed like the Stakhanovites of Stalin's Russia, who half-killed themselves, in the name of the people, by mining record tonnages of coal?"

A divorce from Scotland would be stupid, wretched and painful

Like a bickering couple, our countries need a counsellor to step in and make us see sense

By Boris Johnson, *Daily Telegraph*, 24 November 2013

(...) I find it positively heart breaking to find that serious people are now worried that the union between England and Scotland – a gigantic political fact for 306 years – is under threat. Never mind the sentiment, the fuzzy warm feelings I have about the place. Whatever happens, tourism will continue, after all. We are on the verge of losing something even more precious – to both Scotland and England – and I don't think people have woken up to the full lunacy of what is afoot. In its desultory complacency, the conversation reminds me of some middle-aged couple deciding to get divorced. All they can think about is the liberation – the new beginnings, the excitement. So more and more English people are thinking, what the hell: if the Scots want to walk out, why don't we just let them? We won't have to subsidise them any more via the Barnett formula, people think; and there are plenty of Tories who secretly agree with John Major, and reckon that getting rid of all those Scottish Labour MPs would be a fine thing for England and the Conservative Party. As for the Scots — well, I can see the attraction: your own nation, your own government, and the chance to join the ranks of those small and dynamic countries that seem to be happiest and most prosperous.

What both sides are forgetting – and they have this in common with divorcing couples – is that it may look OK on day one, but on day two the lawyers come in. There is the division of property to work out, the rights of access to be determined. The longer the marriage has lasted, the more there is to unpick, and the more hellish and self-flayingly painful the whole process becomes. England and Scotland are not just woven together by sentiment, but by a cat's cradle of intricate legal and political ties. Fibre by fibre that would have to be sliced apart, and the result will be agony and endless recrimination.

On Tuesday, the Scottish government will publish a vast White Paper explaining how on earth it is supposed to work. So here are some of the questions I hope that document will be able to settle. We are told that the proposal is that Scotland would keep the Queen as head of state and the pound as the national currency – though presumably both of these commitments could be varied by a future Scottish parliament. But on what basis does Scotland get to keep the pound? Will they use sterling informally, just as some Latin American countries rely on the dollar? And why should the Bank of England take any notice of Scotland in setting monetary policy? Why should the governor travel to Edinburgh and be interrogated by Scottish MPs? After independence, after all, he will owe his appointment entirely to an English-Welsh-Northern Irish government. Or will Alec Salmond come south, and sit in an ante-room in Threadneedle Street, hoping for an audience?

Then there is the basic question of what this independent state of Scotland is supposed to be, and how it is meant to relate to the rest of the world. We are talking about a secession from the Union of the United Kingdom, and many EU diplomats have now made it clear to Salmond that this is exactly the same as seceding from the EU. If the Scots wanted to remain in the EU (and they seem, for some reason, to think this is necessary) Scotland would have to seek an immediate accession – and the question is: who would conduct the negotiations?

Why should this be done by UKrep, the UK office in Brussels, when Scotland has voted to leave the UK? The Scots would have to equip themselves instantly with a new cadre of diplomats. There would have to be a Scottish foreign office around the world – wouldn't there? And if not, why not? What about Britain's nuclear missiles, and the need to use submarine bases in Scotland? What about Scottish regiments in the British Army?

There are endless opportunities for confusion and bickering. Then there is one final point that no one seems to have grasped: that this is not just the end of the United Kingdom. It is the end of Britain. Yes, of course, there will still be an island called Great Britain, the largest in the British Isles. But Britain as a political entity will be annihilated. This very name of our nation only gained currency after the Act of Union, and makes no sense with the top section lopped off and "independent". And then what? What happens to British sporting teams? What happens, for goodness' sake, to the "British" Broadcasting Corporation? Nobody has the faintest idea. I am appalled that the pro-independence vote is up at 38 per cent. We need someone — the Americans? — to step in as a kind of marriage guidance counsellor and tell us to stop being so damn stupid. Divorce will diminish us both. It will be unutterably wretched and painful, and it will eliminate the most successful political union in history.

Meritocracy is a myth

A disadvantaged child will nearly always and everywhere become a disadvantaged adult

James Bloodworth, *The Independent*, Wednesday 4 June 2014

What do you want to be when you grow up? I remember a careers advisor asking me just that question shortly before my sixteenth birthday. Like most of my peers I had very little idea as to what I wanted to do with my life when the seemingly endless horizon of school came to an end. Drink beer, smoke cigarettes and chase girls was about the sum of it.

Looking back, though, the question was a strange one. We insist on asking children what they want to do with their lives when most of the time it's set in stone when they pull on their first school uniform. If they are born poor they will almost certainly stay poor; if their parents have money then it's likely that they will too. The more unequal a society is the truer this statement becomes.

Yes we insist on telling children that they can be 'whatever they want to be', knowing full well that crushing disappointment lies further in their future. Every nation relies to some extent on fairy tales. In Britain we cling to the idea that you can be or do anything in life so long as you put your mind to it. In the process we hand our politicians the one thing they can use to justify the obscene privileges at the top and the revolting squalor at the bottom: the indomitable myth of meritocracy.

Meritocracy is what's politely called a dead duck. A child from a 'modest' background can only go from rags to riches in the sense that a human being can take off if they flap their arms around wildly enough. A disadvantaged child will nearly always and everywhere become a disadvantaged adult, and if you ignore the right-wing rhetoric and look at the data you might be a little less keen on hearing the 'M' word in future. The children of wealthier parents are more likely to go to the best schools (houses in desirable catchment areas cost on average 42% more), eat the best food, have access to 'high culture' and have a quiet place to do homework when they get home from school. As a result, poor but bright children get overtaken by their less intelligent classmates from wealthier backgrounds in the very first years of schooling, according to a 2007 study.

As children become teenagers these inequalities are entrenched further. Around 10 per cent of young people at the bottom rung of the social ladder go to university compared with over 80 per cent of those from professional or managerial backgrounds. A student from a private school is 55 times more likely to go to Oxford or Cambridge University than a state school student on free school meals. And as universities minister David Willetts likes to point out, graduates will earn around £100,000 more over a lifetime than non-graduates.

Thomas Piketty's ground-breaking book Capital in the 21st Century looks at how wealth concentrates when the returns on capital are higher than economic growth. Or in plain English, how it's easier for a person who already has lots of money to make more of it. But it isn't only wealth that concentrates; opportunity does too. Or as Picketty's predecessor Karl Marx put it, "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they make it…under circumstances…given and transmitted from the past".

Take a look at political life in Britain today and the truth of that statement becomes self-evident. When Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 around 40 per cent of Labour MPs had done some form of manual or clerical work before they entered parliament. By 2010 that figure had plummeted to just 9 per cent. The shape of the labour market undoubtedly accounts for some of the change, but the extent to which parliament is rapidly becoming the talking shop of the middle classes is evident in other ways too. An astonishing 91 per cent of the 2010 intake of MPs were university graduates and 35 per cent were privately-educated. This is a rise on previous elections and, in the case of the latter, compares to just 7 per cent of the school age population as a whole.

If nothing else, the fact that a tweed-suited former stockbroker can pose as just an ordinary bloke when contrasted with other politicians should set the alarm bells ringing. The ossification of politics is made worse by a media which increasingly resembles the establishment talking to itself.

The unpalatable truth that no politician will dare acknowledge is this: meritocracy can only exist if the rich have a little less and the poor a little more. Countless studies show that social mobility improves in more equal societies. Norway has the greatest level of social mobility, followed by Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Britain and the US are the most unequal western societies on earth in terms of income distribution and, surprise surprise, have much lower rates of social mobility than their more equal Scandinavian counterparts.

Despite the well-intentioned rhetoric of Ed Miliband, we are not 'one nation', and the first step in creating a genuine meritocracy would be an admission that the interests of the banker are not the same as those of the nurse or the refuse collector. […]

David Cameron and Angela Merkel: a trap of his own devising

Reopening the Lisbon treaty to suit Britain would be a phenomenal diplomatic challenge in the time David Cameron has allowed

Editorial, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 26 February 2014

David Cameron will roll out the most vermilion of red carpets for the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. Mrs Merkel, who is not a head of state, will be accorded almost every privilege on her visit to London: she will take tea with the Queen, lunch at No 10 and address both houses of parliament. This is in stark contrast to the reception awarded to the president of France, François Hollande, who was taken to a pub after a summit on a windy Oxfordshire airfield. If she didn't already know it, the German chancellor might suspect she was being buttered up. Why?

As the newly re-elected leader of Germany and the woman who has steered the EU through its worst-ever crisis, Mrs Merkel is Europe's reigning empress and a potentially powerful ally. There is much for the two centre-right leaders to discuss: the crisis in Ukraine, the forthcoming European elections, appointments to the three soon-to-be-vacant presidencies – of Europe's commission, its parliament and its council.

But Mr Cameron's real reasons for paying such heavy court to the German chancellor lie closer to home. Mrs Merkel is crucial to his plan to escape from a European trap of his own devising. It is just over a year since the prime minister gave what may have been the most significant speech so far. At Bloomberg's headquarters in London, Mr Cameron pledged that after the 2015 election he would renegotiate the terms of the UK's relationship with Europe and then – within two years – put the result to the electorate in an "in-out" referendum.

It was a bold gambit designed to silence the gallery of Eurosceptic backbenchers, Ukippers and rightwing media outlets that have dogged him, and for a short while it worked: he was even cheered for it in the Commons. As time goes by, however, it looks increasingly foolhardy. There are manifest reasons for this, among them the fact that, far from being sated, the Brussels-bashing right has come back for more, even as businesspeople have recoiled at the prospect of a British exit from the EU. Then there is the serious question of what exactly Mr Cameron's negotiations can deliver: any major change in Britain's relationship with Europe would require a redrafting of the Lisbon treaty and the consent of the 27 other member states, several of whom – including France – may then have to put the deal to a referendum. Reopening Lisbon to suit Britain would be a phenomenal diplomatic challenge in the time Mr Cameron has allowed, and one that is probably beyond a government whose European partners are increasingly chary of British vetoes, cherrypicking and opt-outs. The more he and George Osborne hector the EU, the weaker their negotiating position becomes.

Hedged about by rabid anti-European sentiment, Mr Cameron must nevertheless deliver the semblance of victory, and this is where Mrs Merkel is key. There is little doubt that the CDU leader would rather Britain stay in the EU than leave it. As one of the big-four European countries, Germany finds the free-marketeering UK a useful counterweight to the "Club Med" economies of France, Spain and Italy. The question, then, is how far Mr Cameron will be able to stretch Britain's north European soulmate.

Mr Cameron makes much of his desire to reform so-called benefits tourism in Europe, a position for which Germany has expressed sympathy. In fact, given that Mr Cameron's law would apply only to new member states and that no new countries are likely to join for a decade, it adds up to little in the short term. There is no doubt a project of European reform to which the Germans would subscribe, though their vision will be one of closer fiscal integration rather than repatriation of powers. And then there is rhetoric.

Mrs Merkel may well pose for many fine photographs and say many fine words. She may stress the centrality of Britain. She may even offer some crumbs of apparent commitment which can be spun as a Cameronian victories over Europe. Those apparent victories should be examined carefully, however. They are likely to ring very hollow.

Ukip success in Scotland does not fit SNP script

Catherine MacLeod, columnist, *The Herald*, 29 May 2014

The European elections altered the UK's political landscape. Ukip are a force in the land and voters will support them, as they did the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, if they continue the trend of loosening their ties with the Labour and Conservative parties.

However, there is a need to put Ukip's success in perspective. They may fly the flag in Brussels, if they turn up, but they are not on the march in England's council chambers. In the council elections, they won fewer seats than the beleaguered LibDems and, indeed, their vote fell from 22% to 17%. They did not gain control of any councils and will only be in positions of influence if they enter into a coalition.

Ukip are unpleasant and divisive, and elements are racist, but many of the people who voted for the party (and I suspect the great majority) are not ideological, right wing or left wing, and not racist. Rather, they are dissatisfied with the alternatives. The anti-European rhetoric of Nigel Farage, Ukip's beer drinking charismatic leader, struck a chord, and the Ukip operation, though deeply flawed, was sufficiently populist to occupy the space vacated by the main parties.

In Scotland, there was a different story as the SNP leadership inexplicably cast the election as a choice between its party and Ukip for the sixth Scottish member of the European Parliament. For some, it was a bleak but easy choice: vote SNP to send a hostile message to our nearest neighbours, or vote Ukip to fire a shot across the bows of EU bureaucrats and, at the same time, burst the Nationalist balloon.

The result proved that the Scots are marching in time to the rest of Europe, most of which sent a fairly trenchant message to Brussels. Like many in England, they resile at the reach of the EU and, though they may not be acquainted fully with the details, they want it to change and to have less influence on their lives.

And until the political leadership in Britain begins seriously to make the case for the EU, anti-European sentiment will continue to grow. The result in Scotland changes the tenor of the Nationalist campaign in the run-up to the referendum. Ukip's success in Scotland does not fit the script.

No longer can it written off as an England-only problem, as if Scotland was safely secure on some political high ground, potentially a left-of-centre paradise if only it was left to flourish on its own.

And this begs the question: Is Scotland so "different" from the rest of the UK, and in particular England? In fact, it may not be different at all.

It is worth pointing out that Manchester, Liverpool and Preston did not elect one Ukip councillor. In the north-east of England, in Newcastle, Sunderland and Gateshead, 219 seats were contested. Ukip did not win one. In the Midlands, out of 224 council seats in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton, Ukip won one seat and, out of 242 seats in Leeds, Sheffield and Hull, Ukip won only four seats, and three of them were in Sheffield. The Ukip vote in London was a mere 7%. Try telling these millions of people living in England that they are more right-wing than Scots.

Since neither Scotland nor England is a homogenous bloc vote, it might be better if we stopped ever considering them as such. It is shameful to write off the aspirations and political hopes of millions of people in England to play to a Scottish gallery.

The SNP and the LibDems, once receptacles for the anti-politics vote, the protest vote, the anyone-but-the-others vote, have proved that they can become the parties of Government.

And if the ideological differences amongst the parties fail to become clear and fire the imaginations of the electorate, it is likely that the space for smaller parties, including Ukip, will continue to grow.

Ukip is well financed. Its MEPs have access to the airwaves and for the moment be the UK's social barometer on Europe. The electorate may be very happy with that. Nigel Farage tapped into a mood. Perhaps that's the secret of political success.

Come on, atheists: we must show some faith in ourselves

It's not just refugee law. The low status accorded to unbelievers has now become a matter of systematic civic exclusion

Zoe Williams, *The Guardian*, 15 January 2014

This week a 23-year-old Afghan man became the first person to be granted asylum in this country on the basis of his atheism – which, his lawyers argued, would have made life impossible in his country of birth, where religion permeates every aspect of life. The Home Office declined to comment, beyond a statement that is both bland and inaccurate by omission: "The UK has a proud history of granting asylum to those who need it and we consider every application on a case by case basis." (It should have read "a proud history that we've abandoned …", but never mind.)

Theresa May probably feared an onslaught of xenophobic remarks – "What could be more specious than a belief that is really the absence of belief, a luxury belief for cynics and intellectuals? What next? Asylum for French people who prefer Derrida to Foucault?" – but the critical comment barely came.

Instead, there was a generalised, muted acceptance, which makes perfect sense. If you accept the place of religious belief on the human rights agenda, then you have to allow atheism equal weight. It is as much a traducement of religious people to dismiss atheism as it is a denigration of atheists.

However, there's a lot of shifting sand around this principle – it is telling that this man is the first atheist to be offered asylum here, when he can't be the first ever to face persecution. Australia accepts the principle of atheism as a belief to be protected, while the United States doesn't. It's one of those things nations can cherry-pick from the fruit bowl of international law without feeling that their "civilised" status is compromised. It may be the only belief of that kind right there in the 1951 refugee convention, but with no back-up institution vulgar enough to insist upon it. That is part of our problem, us atheists: we don't organise.

But I don't think that failure of organisation justifies the habitually low status of atheism: not just in refugee law, but also across civic life. Now, more intensely than ever – as we see our state education system carved up among whatever faith groups shout the loudest, and whichever crooks pretend a faith – the voice of the active unbeliever is not only unsought but also treated as an irrelevance. Schools are required to take a proportion of children from "other faiths"; atheism doesn't count. Or, if you think it does, try filling in the form where you describe your "other faith" – "I am raising my child to believe you people are mad. Will that do?"

Community groups – whose opinions are so slavishly sought, for about five minutes, after anything blows up in a community, are almost always predicated on faith, meeting in religious buildings, around religious timetables. Babies are said to be "born Muslim" – this asylum seeker, for instance, was described as having been born a Muslim, and losing his faith as a teenager. But as Richard Dawkins pointed out in a letter to the Times this week, there is no such thing as a Muslim baby – babies and toddlers being "too young to know what they think about origins, moral philosophy or the meaning of life". Atheism would never be accorded that status.

Of course, faith is often used as a proxy for race: a euphemism for "that baby may have been born here, but it doesn't look very English". At other times religion is used as an open marker for cultural identity, so that Jewish atheists are still described first as Jewish, the atheism being a quirk rather than the Judaism – even though the latter is surely quirkier, a religious identification that conveys no belief.

Atheists are very often lumped in with secularists, although these concepts are nothing like the same. But perhaps most vexingly, while the fine distinctions among the religious are pored over in every survey (are you this kind of Christian or that; are you practising, or do you simply tell people you have a spiritual side?), the most important and exhaustive survey we have on British belief doesn't even ask the question "Are you an atheist?". In last year's British Social Attitudes survey 48% of respondents said they had no religious affiliation. A category that accounted for a third of people in 1983 is now nearly half the population. And nobody thought to ask: "Why not? Did you fall out with organised worship and decide to just ad lib at home? Or do you profoundly believe that you can wring more meaning and beauty from the world accepting it as it is, rather than concocting deities?"

These differences seem important, but even if they're not – even if an on-again-off-again agnostic manifests pretty much the same behaviour as an atheist – they should be distinguished as a matter of courtesy, just as I would accept that there's a difference between Greek Orthodox and Coptic.(…)

George Osborne lectures the EU on reform

Chancellor says Europe must halt decline by backing business and curbing welfare spending if UK is to remain part of it

James Kirkup, political editor, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 January 2014

The European Union must halt the continent's "continuing decline" by backing business and cutting welfare spending if Britain is to remain a part of it, George Osborne is to warn in a speech on Wednesday. Europe's current economic performance is unacceptable and only a significant improvement will persuade Britain to continue as a member of the EU, the Chancellor will suggest.

"Make no mistake, our continent is falling behind," he will say. "We can't go on like this." Facing growing competition from global economic powers including China, India and the US, the EU now faces a simple choice, Mr Osborne will say: "Reform or decline."

The Chancellor's remarks, to a London conference held by Open Europe, a think tank, come as Conservative MPs put pressure on David Cameron over his pledge to recast Britain's EU membership. The Prime Minister has promised to renegotiate the country's membership agreement, then put the new deal to the electorate in a referendum by 2017. So far, he has given few details of his aims and Conservative MPs are growing impatient over Europe amid a growing challenge from the UK Independence Party. Many Conservative MPs are backing demands for a new parliamentary veto on rules written in Brussels and additional curbs on EU migrants' employment rights, demands that ministers say are unrealistic.

Mr Cameron on Tuesday night slapped down the 95 Tory MPs who signed a letter calling for a veto. He said Tories could lose marginal seats in the next election if MPs continue to go "off message".

He and Mr Osborne have said they want Britain to remain part of a reformed EU, but the Chancellor will today make it clear that only significant changes will be enough to persuade British voters.

The EU must do much more to support business and create jobs, and spend less on welfare, Mr Osborne will tell an audience of Conservative MPs and European politicians. Europe's recent economic and financial crisis has only hastened a long-term decline that means it is falling behind emerging economic powers, the Chancellor will argue. "We knew there was a competitiveness problem in Europe before the crisis. But the crisis has dramatically accelerated the shifts in the tectonic economic plates that see power moving eastwards and southwards on our planet," he will say.

Over the last six years, the European economy has "stalled", Mr Osborne will say. In the same time, India has grown by a third and China by half. Over the next 15 years Europe's share of the global economy will halve, the Chancellor will predict. He will produce statistics that he will say prove the continent is underperforming its rivals:

-- Welfare spending is too high: Europe accounts for just over 7 per cent of the world's population, 25 per cent of its economy, and 50 per cent of social welfare spending;

-- Job creation is too low: across the EU, a quarter of young people looking for work cannot find a job;

-- Companies are not free to innovate: Europe's share of world patent applications nearly halved in the past decade.

Echoing a Conservative slogan from the 2010 general election campaign, Mr Osborne will argue that those problems demand radical change, making his "we can't go on like this," remark.

Some critics of the Conservative approach to Europe say that it is risking the UK's economic stability by raising doubt over EU membership. Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, has referred to the strategy of his Coalition partners as "economic suicide". Business leaders are divided on the issue. Some have backed Mr Cameron's renegotiation, but others worry that it will create uncertainty about Britain's future. Fiona Woolf, the Lord Mayor of London, told Bloomberg News yesterday that the threat to leave the EU had left a "sword of Damocles" suspended over the City of London and the British financial industry.

Mr Osborne will reject such fears, insisting that seeking economic reform in Europe is in the best interests of Britain and its EU partners. "The biggest economic risk facing Europe doesn't come from those who want reform and renegotiation – it comes from a failure to reform and renegotiate," he will say. "It is the status quo which condemns the people of Europe to an ongoing economic crisis and continuing decline. And so there is a simple choice for Europe: reform or decline. Our determination is clear: to deliver the reform, and then let the people decide."

The Chancellor's comments will come hard on the heels of the Treasury's own economic forecasters saying that immigration has "beneficial" economic effects and that cutting the number of foreign workers in Britain will make it harder for the Government to clear its deficit. (…)

Alex Salmond: how an iScotland could stop pandering to fears of immigration

By Alex Salmond, First Minister of Scotland

The Herald, 3 June 2014

Scotland is one of the wealthiest countries in the developed world with extraordinary natural resources and advantages other countries can only dream of. We have more top universities, per head, than any other nation, we are a hotbed of life sciences, we have a world-class food and drink industry and we have strengths in key growth sectors such as creative industries, renewable energy and tourism. But the greatest source of our wealth is our people. It is the people of this country who drive the case for independence. We will be better off if decisions about Scotland are taken by the people who care most about Scotland and not by Westminster politicians whose focus is elsewhere.

In recent years we have seen Scotland's population move from stagnation to growth with people from Europe, from further afield but mostly from elsewhere in the UK - adding to the economic wealth and social vibrancy of our country. It marks the reversal of what has been the greatest indictment of the failure of Westminster economic governance of Scotland - the historic relative decline in our population. In the 100 years to 2001 the number of people living in Scotland increased by just over 10 per cent. In England in the same period time the population rose by over 60 per cent. Between 1971 and 2001 Scotland's population fell by 171,000 so that, even with the renewed growth of recent years, our share of the UK population is much less than it was 40 years ago.

Since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament the situation has improved. But there is no guarantee that this progress will be maintained. Those campaigning against independence cite forecasts that predict that, if we stay within the Westminster system, the working population of Scotland is going to fall. The No campaign wants our future to be in the hands of a Westminster establishment that foresees more jobs and opportunities crowded into one corner of these islands. They have embarked upon a process of dismantling the post-war welfare state and privatising public services.

The Yes side in this debate has a vision of a better future for the people of Scotland. Our vision is of a Scotland in which we use the vast wealth of our country to work much better for the people who live here. By transferring political power from Westminster to Scotland we can tailor economic policy so that it is aimed at creating jobs in Scotland. Each year around 70,000 people leave Scotland, including more than 30,000 young people. Of course, some want to travel but no-one should be denied opportunities at home. With the powers of independence we can do much more to help people find work in Scotland.

We can do that by designing tax and economic policy to attract and maintain HQ functions to Scotland; by implementing an industrial strategy for Scotland, by working together in a social partnership to improve wages and by tailoring policy to make the most of the huge comparative advantages we have in key growth industries.

By contrast, the main Westminster parties have decided to deploy immigration as a weapon in their increasingly tawdry self-styled 'Project Fear' campaign. The UK Government and Labour Party are using an estimate that net annual migration needs to rise to 24,000 to match or exceed the same ratio of working people to pensioners in the UK as if it were something to be frightened of - a reason to vote No. But in the 10 years to 2011/12 net migration to Scotland averaged around 22,000 a year. That means we need just 2000 more people a year.

As well as practical policies we can jettison the aggressive language of the mainstream Westminster parties, who instead of standing up to the likes of Ukip have decided to pander to them, and in this referendum to copy their tactics of engendering fear of "immigration". Historian Tom Devine said "the nation that became Scotland" evolved from a mix of ethnic groups. The greatest Scottish heroes Robert de Brus and William Wallace came from immigrant families.

In modern Scotland we should aspire to be a beacon of hope, diversity and humanity. And in less than four months' time we can build a better, fairer, more prosperous country by taking Scotland's future into Scotland's hands.

We need to talk about immigration, just not in this way

David Cameron is tilting at windmills. Freedom of movement exists across Europe but a rational debate about earned entitlement is needed

By David Blunkett, *The Guardian*, 28 November 2013

David Cameron is seeking to outflank Ukip with the announcement of restrictions of benefits for European Union migrant workers. He presented a highly misleading portrait of the entitlements available to new arrivals to Britain, which was then repeated uncritically by some sections of the media. This came as no surprise. My own experiences this month have left me shaken by the utter irrationality of both reporting and public debate on immigration.

Throughout my political life, I've not been a stranger to controversy. I have from time to time deployed the old chestnut of having been "taken out of context". But rarely have I found myself quoted when the words - in this case "riots"- attributed to me have not actually been said.

Not taken out of context, but not used. So it was on 11 November, when BBC Radio Sheffield put out a tweet that said: "MP David Blunkett fears race riots could hit Sheffield if some people living in the Page Hall area don't change their attitudes." Extraordinarily, not only was this not a quote from me but it went out before 7am, prior to my interview with the station, after 8am. (Radio Sheffield have since expressed their regret at the error.) And so, while I do not resile from anything I said, I certainly reject criticism for words that I didn't use.

For those who are unfamiliar with the situation in my constituency, let me explain. Over the last three or four years there has been an influx of Slovak Roma families into a tight-knit and highly deprived community in Sheffield. The neighbourhood is already a melting pot from around the world: there are longstanding residents of Pakistani origin, of Yemeni descent and, more recently, from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Tensions have arisen in the past, as they often do with rapid change, but Sheffield has a proud history as a City of Sanctuary.

Which brings me to the question of how a 20-minute walkabout in the area concerned with a Radio Sheffield journalist could lead to a media flurry about the danger of riots. I talked about the need to avoid outsiders visiting an area with the express intention of inciting conflict, as happened in Bradford. I should know, because I had to deal with the aftermath of those riots as incoming home secretary.

How many of those who commented on this story did so without accessing what was really said in that walkabout interview, or in the subsequent eight-minute live interview on the Monday morning? I did the walkabout to put the record straight; to get across the message that someone, somewhere, did understand that there were real challenges but that hate, short-term fixes, and culture clashes would solve nothing. My mistake was believing that being on the record would lead to an honest and rational debate. Far from it. Headlines like "Fear, loathing and prejudice in Blunkett's back yard", "Smirking Roma migrants boast: We get FIVE TIMES more cash in Benefits Britain", and "Roma in Sheffield: 'When it goes off, it will be like an atom bomb here'". Even this respected newspaper fell into the trap. Not of the hysteria of the rightwing media, but the very opposite. The presumption that any honest appraisal is somehow, in the words of one of your columnists, tantamount to "racism", and by another, comparable with Enoch Powell. Readers with some grasp of history might understand the offence this causes. Powell talked about stopping people coming to our country and about "pickanninies". The idea that anything in my interviews offers a political or moral equivalent is dangerous, childish and unworthy of high editorial standards. The subsequent furore has been risible but also distracting. The real question is how – not if – we deal with genuine challenges of helping locals through difficult times while working with new arrivals who want to learn how best to fit in without losing the best of their cultural heritage.

Contrary to David Cameron's tilting at windmills on the issue of benefits this week, there is no change in his pronouncements from what has existed since 2004. The issue then – and the issue from January in relation to Bulgaria and Romania – was not entitlement to benefits (we had already tightened the habitual residence test), but whether people were allowed to work legally. This whole area is now so muddled and bedevilled by myth and misunderstanding that it's hard to get across what some of us have been arguing, as I did in my interview: that we'd rather people work than draw down benefits!

Given that freedom of movement exists across Europe, a rational debate about tough conditionality and earned entitlement is needed to avoid further myths arising. On 24 October, in a parliamentary answer to me, the government confessed it had no idea how many eastern Europeans were drawing benefits. (...)

Shock four-country poll reveals widening gulf between Britain and EU

Poll of France, Germany, Poland and the UK shows British hostile to EU, and other nations hostile to Britain

Toby Helm, political editor, *The Observer*, Sunday 1 December 2013

A powerful cross-party alliance including former Tory foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg is calling for an urgent fightback against spiralling anti-European sentiment as a new four-nation poll suggests the UK could be heading out of the EU. The landmark survey of more than 5,000 voters in the UK, Germany, France and Poland finds British people far more hostile to the EU and its policies than those in the other EU states, and strikingly low support for British membership among people on the continent. At the same time, the total numbers of people in Germany and France who support giving Britain a special deal on membership to satisfy British opinion are heavily outnumbered by those who oppose doing so, which suggests that David Cameron may struggle to achieve his hoped-for tailor-made arrangement for the UK.

Testing cultural opinions, the poll finds very few British people choose to describe themselves as European. In other EU nations, enthusiasm for the concept of Europeanism is far higher. Opinium found that just 26% of British voters regard the EU as, overall, a "good thing" compared with 42% who say it is a "bad thing". In Poland 62% say it is a good thing and 13% bad; in Germany 55% good and 17% bad, and in France 36% good and 34% bad.

When asked about the UK's contribution to the EU, there is little enthusiasm among our partners, and little to suggest they will go out of their way to keep us in. Just 9% of Germans and 15% of French people think the UK is a positive influence on the EU, with more Poles, 33%, taking that view. Only 16% of Germans and 26% of French people back the idea of a special deal being struck for the UK. Cameron has said he intends to renegotiate the UK terms of entry and hold an in/out referendum if he wins a majority at the next election, offering the new arrangement to the British people in a referendum. The idea of Britain leaving the EU does not appear to worry our European partners unduly. Just 24% of French voters said a UK exit would have a negative effect, compared with 36% of Germans and 51% of Poles.

Rifkind said: "There needs to be a serious debate about the real benefits of – as well as the real problems about – British membership of the EU. Without it we could do serious damage to Britain's interests."

Clegg said next year's European elections represented a key test and attacked those intent on taking Britain out of the EU. He said: "Everybody knows the EU needs reform. But simply carping from the sidelines and flirting with exit undermines British leadership in the EU, fails to deliver reform and leaves Britain increasingly isolated. The debate about Europe is no longer about who is for or against reform – everybody agrees on that – it is between those who believe we can lead in the EU and those who want to head for the exit. That's why next year's elections will be so important: the Liberal Democrats will be the leading party of 'in'. It's time we challenged Ukip and large swaths of the Conservative party who want to betray Britain's vital national interest by pulling us out of the world's largest borderless single market, on which millions of jobs depend."

Labour MP and former Europe minister Peter Hain urged pro-Europeans to stand up and fight: "This is a wake-up call for British pro-Europeans that Britain – especially if the Tories win the next election – is heading for an exit from the EU which would be an utter disaster for British jobs, prosperity and influence in the world. But it is equally a wake-up call for the Brussels Bubble, which is totally out of touch with Europe's citizens."

The poll shows concern about immigration to be almost as high in France as in the UK. In Britain, 64% of voters think the EU's immigration policies have a negative effect; 59% say the same in France. It also reveals that more UK voters feel an affinity with the US than with their European neighbours, whereas our EU partners tend to choose other EU nations. When asked who they would generally support on occasions when there was a disagreement between the US and EU countries, 37% of UK respondent said they would tend to support America; just 10% would generally side with Europe. British people are not negative about everything the EU does: 54% think free movement rules are good for tourism against 6% who think the reverse. There is also strong endorsement for free-trade benefits. Nearly half of those polled say the absence of customs controls and tariffs on goods and services is an advantage. Only 10% see free trade as a disadvantage. Ukip leader Nigel Farage said: "This is a fascinating and comprehensive study into the relative relationships between countries within and about the EU. We, on these islands feel, due to our history as a globally trading nation, much more at home with our cousins in the Anglosphere than we do with our friends on the continent."

Tories face coming third behind Ukip in Euro poll

Senior Conservatives are convinced Ukip will beat them at next month's European elections and fear Nigel Farage's party will damage their chances of a Commons majority in 2015

Tim Ross, Political Correspondent, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 2014

Downing Street is braced for a "disastrous" European election in the wake of the Maria Miller expenses scandal as a new summary of the opinion polls suggest the Tories will fall to third place. Conservative sources privately concede that David Cameron has all but given up hope of beating the UK Independence Party when voters go to the polls next month to elect Members of the European Parliament.

Political parties often attempt to downplay their election chances as part of an 'expectation management' strategy that enables them to claim a kind of victory when the result is not as bad as feared. However, even allowing for this, as analysis of the latest opinion polls puts the Tories in third place, on just 23 per cent, behind Labour and Ukip, despite the Prime Minister's radical promise to hold a referendum on Britain's EU membership.

Privately, Tory sources are resigned to the fact that the May 22 elections will be "very tough" for the party. One Downing St source confided: "It's going to be a disaster. Ukip will probably win." Senior figures fear the Prime Minister's handling of the furore over Mrs Miller's expenses, which led her to resign as culture secretary last week, has been "damaging" the party. They believe the controversy will make the task for next month's election even harder. "Miller should have gone straight away," one figure close to Number 10 said.

While Ukip is almost certain to beat the Tories in the European elections, Conservatives fear the gravest threat the party poses is to their hopes of winning a Westminster majority at next year's General Election. Tory strategists regard Ukip as the biggest hurdle to winning a Commons majority in 2015 and are attempting to win back voters with a series of hardline policies on EU reform and immigration.

Polls indicate that the high levels of support for Nigel Farage, the Ukip leader, among disaffected former Tory voters will be enough to deny the Conservatives victory in many critical marginal constituencies next year, with Labour the chief beneficiary.

Seventy-three MEPs will be elected for the 12 regions of the UK on May 22. There are also elections taking place in 161 local authorities in England on the same day.

Professor John Curtice, from the University of Strathclyde, analysed the five most recent opinion polls to gauge voters' intentions for the European elections in May. His "poll of polls" makes bleak reading for both Coalition parties, with the Conservatives on 23 per cent of the vote, in third place, and the Liberal Democrats on nine per cent. However, Ukip are on 28 per cent on average, in second place, just three points behind Labour on 31 per cent of the vote. Professor Curtice said there was still time for Ukip to top the poll, if Mr Farage has "a good month" of campaigning and Labour continues to be "uninspiring". But regardless of the European election results, the prognosis for Tory hopes of winning a Commons majority at next year's general election is grim. Prof Curtice said the rise of Ukip would make their task "desperately tough". "There is no doubt that David Cameron's most immediate problem is Ukip," he said. "Ukip does take votes from everybody but it is taking disproportionately from the Tories." Part of Mr Farage's appeal is as an anti-establishment party, he said, giving voters the chance to say "a plague on all your houses" to the main Westminster parties. "It's a little but unfortunate that a revival of the expenses scandal should occur just before the start of the European election campaign," Prof Curtice added. "If the polls are to be believed, Ukip have got a pretty good chance of beating the Tories. For the Tories, the thing to worry about is not that Ukip are going to win seats in next year's Westminster election. But if Ukip are still running at six, seven or eight per cent for the Westminster election, which seems to me to be quite conceivable, it is going to come disproportionately from people who certainly were Tory in the past. It is not going to make the task of winning an overall majority - which in truth is incredibly difficult for the Tories anyway - any easier."

One Conservative official claimed that the European election result would not matter because a poor showing was already "factored into the share price". "What matters is how we react," the official said.

(...)

Charles at 65: a new kind of heir

After six decades of waiting, the man of strong opinions and contradictions may have to change his behaviour as he increasingly takes on his mother's role

Esther Addley and Rob Evans, *The Guardian*, 13 November 2013

He is the heir to the grandest and most glittering monarchy on the planet, the recipient of a personal income of £19m last year from the Duchy of Cornwall, but on 22 November, Prince Charles will find himself even better off, if briefly. Thirty-seven years after retiring from the Royal Navy, the prince will at last see the benefit of national insurance contributions made during his short military career (along with voluntary contributions paid subsequently), when he claims his state pension.

Having decided several weeks ago to exercise his rights like any ordinary pensioner, the first weekly payment of up to £110.15 will drop into the princely bank account at the end of his first full week as a 65-year-old. (It will then be donated to a charity for the elderly.)

Charles becomes a pensioner on Thursday, attaining retirement age after six and a half decades performing one deeply strange job – that of full-time heir apparent – and with no immediate prospect of promotion to the role for which he has spent his life preparing.

It has been a role without job description, peers or any real predecessors. Edward VII, who waited a similar period to inherit the crown from Queen Victoria, passed much of his time as Prince of Wales as a glutton, gambler and playboy. His well-aired indiscretions aside, by contrast, Charles at 65 can look back on a lifetime of dogged dedication – to the many charities he has founded, the deeply held opinions he has voiced without pause, and the relentless round of ribbon-cuttings and ward-openings that are the curse of the modern royal, and which see him undertake as many as five official engagements every day.

This week, on the very day he becomes eligible for his bus pass (something a man who does not use public transport has no intention of claiming, according to aides), the prince will take a small but highly significant step towards becoming a new kind of heir. On Thursday, Charles and Camilla will travel to Sri Lanka, where the prince will chair the biennial Commonwealth heads of government meeting on behalf of the Queen.

Though he has stood in for her at lower profile events, this will be the first time the prince has deputised for the monarch in an official state capacity. It will not be the last. The 87-year-old Queen remains in good health, but there is now an open acknowledgement in royal circles that the Prince of Wales will increasingly take on more of her duties, in what some constitutional experts can even foresee becoming an unofficial co-regency. On the day another man would retire to his greenhouse, Charles, who has spent decades with his plants, may finally be beginning the job of his life.

It may come as a relief to a prince who has frequently seemed uncomfortable in his position; in part thanks to the paradox of his role, in part the contradictions of the man. As Prince of Wales, Charles occupies a position both immensely influential and broadly irrelevant, and commands deference and scathing criticism, even ridicule. He has a well-aired love of luxury and a personal staff of more than 120, but also a lifetime ambition, he told a recent interviewer, to "heal" the problems of the country. He is a passionate environmentalist who chartered a private jet to tour South America warning of the threat to the rainforest. He sits at the heart of the establishment but according to an aide considers himself a "dissident" challenging the consensus.

And in the absence of a defined job to perform while he waits for the throne, he has been obliged to carve out one for himself. Many of those who have worked with the prince or observed him at close quarters remark on his energy, a relentless and often impatient determination to get things done, that if anything has increased with age.

Since founding the Prince's Trust in 1976, Charles has established a network of more than 25 of his own charities – in addition to more than 400 of which he is patron – which together amount to the largest multi-cause charitable enterprise in the country. From architecture to youth unemployment, business responsibility to traditional arts, the charities reflect the prince's genuine passions, though they may also be seen as benign expressions of his compulsion to intervene. (...)

Class, Cost and College

Frank Bruni **The Opinion Pages, *The New York Times*, May 17, 2014**

Scheduled for theatrical release next month, "Ivory Tower", a compelling new documentary about the state of higher education in America, does an astonishingly thorough tour of the university landscape.

[...] How does our current system of higher education square with our concerns about social mobility? What place do the nation's universities have in our intensifying debate about income inequality? What promise do they hold for lessening it?

The answers in "Ivory Tower" and beyond it aren't reassuring. Indeed, the greatest crisis may be that while college supposedly represents one of the surest ladders to, and up through, the middle class, it's not functioning that way, at least not very well.

I followed up with a few of the people in the movie, including Delbanco, who is the author of a 2012 book titled "College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be." I asked him how well colleges were abetting social mobility.

"They are falling down," he said, adding that in the days of the G.I. Bill, they did a much better job of it.

Anthony Carnevale, another contributor to "Ivory Tower," gave me a similar assessment.

"The good news is that more and more kids are going to college," said Carnevale, the director of Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. "The bad news is that higher education is becoming more and more stratified."

In 2011, the most recent year for which figures are available, roughly 75 percent of the students at the 200 most highly rated colleges came from families in the top quartile of income, he said. Only 5 percent came from families in the bottom quartile, and while that's up from 3 percent in 1994, it's no huge advance or cause to rejoice.

Carnevale told me that since 1994, 80 percent of the white young men and women in this country who have headed off to college have gone to schools ranked in the top 500 by Barron's. But 75 percent of the black and Latino young men and women who have entered college over the same period have gone to two-year or open-admissions schools outside the top 500.

"We're sorting students by class," he said. The most prestigious colleges are crowded with the richest kids.

There are poor kids around, too. "Ivory Tower" showcases one, David Boone, a young black man from Cleveland who is attending Harvard with the kind of robust financial aid that it and similarly well-endowed universities — Columbia, Stanford, Yale — can use to diversify their student bodies.

But those student bodies aren't all *that* diverse. Harvard's main student newspaper did a survey of the freshman class this academic year and found that 29 percent of respondents reported family incomes of at least $250,000, while only 20 percent reported family incomes of under $65,000.

It's wealthier kids who more easily stud their résumés with the extracurricular baubles that catch an admissions officer's eye. It's wealthier kids who are more likely to get extensive test preparation. Delbanco noted that superior SAT results correlate closely with high family incomes, so when colleges decide to care and crow about the altitude of their student body's median SAT score, they're privileging economically advantaged young people over disadvantaged ones.

And more than half of the poor kids who score in the top 10 percent on the SAT or the ACT don't apply to the most selective colleges, said David Coleman, the president of the College Board, which administers the SAT. He and the College Board have joined a growing push to make sure those students have the necessary information and encouragement to do so. "We as a country must do everything we can to make sure these hard-working, high-achieving students claim their futures," he said.

Harvard and its ilk are just a small part of the story, though. Many more young people turn to public universities, where tuitions have gone up much faster than Americans' incomes have.

Those schools have simultaneously become more invested in admitting students from affluent families. In a 2011 survey of college admissions officers, more than half of those at public research universities said that they had recently ratcheted up their efforts to recruit students who could pay full freight.

A story by Paul Tough in The Times Magazine this Sunday illuminates another troubling way in which college favors the rich. "Whether a student graduates or not seems to depend today almost entirely on just one factor — how much money his or her parents make," Tough writes, adding, "About a quarter of college freshmen born into the bottom half of the income distribution will manage to collect a bachelor's degree by age 24, while almost 90 percent of freshmen born into families in the top income quartile will go on to finish their degree."

We need to address that disparity. Andrew Rossi, the producer and director of "Ivory Tower," says we also need to pump more public money back into higher education to keep tuition down and college affordable. He additionally advocates caps on tuition at public schools.

Watching "Ivory Tower," which visits Harvard and Columbia and Wesleyan, I was reminded anew of the greatness of America's universities, which remain the envy of the world.

But as the movie looked at the climbing walls and other gleaming perks that today's hypercompetitive schools make sure to have, and as it mentioned the stratospheric salaries of university presidents who keep the donations rolling in, I was also reminded of a luxury product. The top colleges, shinier than ever, are Porsches. They can take you far and fast, but it's a lucky few who get behind the wheel.

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LITERATURE AND LIFE

BY REBECCA MEAD

The New Yorker, JUNE 9, 2014

Unless you spend much time sitting in a college classroom or browsing through certain precincts of the Internet, it's possible that you had not heard of trigger warnings until a few weeks ago, when they made an appearance in the *Times*. The newspaper explained that the term refers to preëmptive alerts, issued by a professor or an institution at the request of students, indicating that material presented in class might be sufficiently graphic to spark symptoms of post-traumatic-stress disorder.

The term seems to have originated in online feminist forums, where trigger warnings have for some years been used to flag discussions of rape or other sexual violence. The *Times* piece, which was skeptically titled "Warning: The Literary Canon Could Make Students Squirm," suggested that trigger warnings are moving from the online fringes to the classroom, and might be more broadly applied to highlight in advance the distress or offense that a work of literature might cause. "Huckleberry Finn" would come with a warning for those who have experienced racism; "The Merchant of Venice" would have an anti-Semitism warning attached. The call from students for trigger warnings was spreading on campuses such as Oberlin, where a proposal was drafted that would advise professors to "be aware of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism, and other issues of privilege and oppression" in devising their syllabi; and Rutgers, where a student argued in the campus newspaper that trigger warnings would contribute to preserving the classroom as a "safe space" for students.

Online discussion of trigger warnings has sometimes been guardedly sympathetic, sometimes critical. Jessica Valenti has noted on *The Nation's* Web site that potential triggers for trauma are so manifold as to be beyond the possibility of cataloguing: "There is no trigger warning for living your life." Some have suggested that a professor's ability to teach would be compromised should it become commonplace for "The Great Gatsby" to bear a trigger warning alerting readers to misogyny and gore within its pages. Others have worried that trigger-warning advocates, in seeking to protect the vulnerable, run the risk of disempowering them instead. "Bending the world to accommodate our personal frailties does not help us overcome them," Jenny Jarvie wrote on *The New Republic's* online site.

Jarvie's piece, like many others on the subject, cited the University of California, Santa Barbara, as a campus where champions of trigger warnings have made significant progress. Earlier this year, students at U.C.S.B. agreed upon a resolution recommending that such warnings be issued in instances where classroom materials might touch upon "rape, sexual assault, abuse, self-injurious behavior, suicide, graphic violence, pornography, kidnapping, and graphic descriptions of gore." The resolution was brought by a literature student who said that, as a past victim of sexual violence, she had been shocked when a teacher showed a movie in class which depicted rape, without giving advance notice of the content. The student hoped to spare others the possibility of experiencing a post-traumatic-stress reaction.

Over the Memorial Day weekend, the University of California, Santa Barbara, was back in the headlines, in an unfolding story that grotesquely echoed the language of that resolution. Six members of its undergraduate body—two women and four men—were slaughtered by Elliot Rodger, aged twenty-two, who then reportedly turned one of his weapons, a semi-automatic handgun, on himself. He had warned of his impending rampage in a video, which he posted on YouTube. In it, he coolly announced his motives for what he termed a "Day of Retribution." He wanted to exact revenge upon every "spoiled, stuck up, blonde slut" who had rejected him, and the men they had embraced instead. He had also written what he referred to as a manifesto, more than a hundred thousand words long, which outlined an intention to commit atrocities far beyond those he actually accomplished.

Rodger's free-floating loathing was not limited to women—racist hatred also runs through the manifesto—and his utterances make it clear that he had lost all grip on reality. Nonetheless, it quickly emerged that many women recognized his words as only more extreme versions of everyday violations. On Twitter, the hashtag #YesAllWomen was embraced as a vehicle for drawing attention to the pervasiveness of sexualized violence against women, through rape, harassment, or other forms of misogyny. "Why do I have to alter the way I dress, when you can alter the way you behave?" one wrote. Another added, "Because what men fear most about going to prison is what women fear most about walking down the sidewalk." A third offered, "Because my little sister is no longer allowed to wear tank tops to school. It's hot outside. Stop sexualizing 11 year old girls." Within days of the killings, there were more than a million such contributions.

If U.C.S.B. found itself, a few weeks ago, cast in the popular consciousness as a center of dubious cultural progress—a convenient representative of the latest frontier in sociopolitical activism, just as Antioch College, with its sexual-consent code, was twenty years ago—the university, in the aftermath of its own violent trauma, now holds the unsought honor of being the origin site of what is indubitably a powerful act of consciousness-raising. [...]

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Mommy-Daddy Time

Zoë Heller, **London Review of Books**, Vol. 36 No. 11 · 5 June 2014

All Joy and No Fun: The Paradox of Modern Parenthood by Jennifer Senior

[...] [Senior's] first recommendation is that mothers and fathers – particularly mothers – learn to relax and do less. (The most persuasive piece of data she cites in support of this advice comes from a 1999 survey of children of working parents conducted by the Families and Work Institute: 10 per cent of the surveyed children wanted more time with their mothers, 16 per cent wanted more time with their fathers, and a full 34 per cent said they wished their mothers were 'less stressed'.) Senior cites approvingly Pamela Druckerman's recent book, *Bringing up Bébé*, in which American mothers are encouraged to emulate the less slavish child-rearing customs of French women, but she also suggests that another, equally helpful model for American mothers may be found closer to home – in American fathers:

> unencumbered by outsized cultural expectations about what does or doesn't constitute good parenting, and free from cultural judgments over their participation in the workforce, good fathers tend to judge themselves less harshly, bring less anguished perfectionism to parenting their children ... and – at least while their kids are young – more aggressively protect their free time.

A more hands-off approach is only one part of her proposed remedy, however. In addition to lowering parents' expectations of what they have to give their children, Senior also wants to lower, or at least adjust, their expectations of what children can give them. If, as she believes, part of what modern parents are suffering from is a fretful nostalgia for the fun of their old, childless lives, they must be encouraged to make peace with their lost freedoms. They don't have to spend as much time building Lego with their kids as they think they do, but when they are on Lego duty, they need to stop thinking wistfully about the better times they might be having at yoga, or in bed with a lover. She quotes Adam Phillips on the value of learning to live 'somewhere between the lives we have and the lives we would like'. Parenthood curtails the pursuit of certain kinds of pleasure, she observes, but it also puts those pleasures in perspective, by revealing the deeper, more meaningful satisfactions of connection, attachment and service to others:

> Indeed, one could argue that the whole experience of parenthood exposes the superficiality of our preoccupation with happiness, which usually takes the form of pursuing pleasure or finding our bliss. Raising children makes us reassess this obsession and perhaps redefine (or at least broaden) our fundamental ideas about what happiness *is*. The very things Americans are told almost daily to aspire to may in fact be misguided.

This is a troubling paragraph. It seems reasonable enough for Senior to want to correct some of her fellow Americans' more callow, entitled attitudes. And she is not to be faulted for pointing out that fun is more usefully regarded as an occasional by-product of experience than as an end in itself. (British readers, who tend to have more modest expectations of life's fun quotient, may be forgiven for finding her progress towards this revelation a little ponderous.) But there's something grim about asking parents to resign themselves to the end of paltry bliss-seeking in order to concentrate their energies on the higher satisfactions of duty, service and sacrifice. Let's by all means concede that parenthood isn't a trip to the funfair, but does it have to put the funfair off-limits? And can it only be appreciated if the funfair is dismissed as having been a rather childish and squalid diversion? Here and throughout her final chapter, entitled 'Joy', Senior sounds suspiciously like a prison guard trying to convince inmates of the superior value of incarceration. Freedom has its cheap kicks, sure, but life behind bars feeds your soul:

> 'Joy is very different from the kind of pleasure one gets from pursuing excitement or satisfying a drive. Those pleasures tend to be intense and ephemeral ... They're *fun*. But also solitary ... Joy is almost impossible to experience alone' ... Joy is about being warm, not hot. In *Spiritual Evolution*, [George Vaillant] offers this lovely maxim. 'Excitement, sexual ecstasy and happiness all speed up the heart; joy and cuddling slow the heart.'

Even readers who agree with Senior about the loveliness of this maxim may wonder why warm cuddles and hot sex are being pitched as an either/or proposition. This is a place where Senior's cursory treatment of single parents is particularly keenly felt. Single parents, as she repeatedly points out, have all sorts of problems, but they do tend to date, fall in love and have unmarried sex more frequently than their married peers. In fact, freed from having to 'work on their marriages' in the same cuddly, anaphrodisiac setting in which they are nurturing their children, they are quite likely to conclude that nuclear family life, not parenthood, is the true enemy of heat.

Senior's paeans to parental self-abnegation and her sour grapes attitude to the lower, animal pleasures of excitement and fun provide a disappointing conclusion to a book that elsewhere seemed keen to challenge the dotty child-centricity of modern family life. 'The most productive, generative adults,' she writes, 'see their children as their superegos ... Their kids hover over them and guide all of their moral choices ... They are exquisitely aware of themselves as role models ... They know they are being watched.' It's hard to conceive of a creepier vision of parenthood. Children have many selling points, but their capacity to act as their parents' moral panopticons isn't one of them.

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Why do Americans love Downton Abbey so much?

New Statesman - LAURA MILLER, PUBLISHED 5 SEPTEMBER, 2013

Sean "P Diddy" Combs claims to be an "Abbey-head". Michelle Obama requested advanced copies of the most recent series, and invited Hugh Bonneville and Elizabeth McGovern to the White House - what do the yanks see in it that so many Brits don't?

[...] Americans have always found British manners and formality amusing, especially from a distance, where it is a lot less intimidating. There are few distances more unassailable than a century. The geographic, historical and cultural gulf between modern America and Edwardian Britain gives the milieu of *Downton Abbey* an exotic, theme-park quality. Even if Americans might daydream about what it would be like to work as a housemaid at the abbey or swan around in Lady Grantham's spectacular dresses while being waited on hand and foot, neither scenario is even remotely an option for us.

For all its unfamiliarity, however, *Downton Abbey* wouldn't speak to American audiences at all if they didn't find much to identify with in the travails and intrigues that go on upstairs and down in the scullery. "I think most of the stories are about emotional situations that everyone can understand," Julian Fellowes, the series creator and writer, platitudinously told the *New York Times*.

Downton Abbey as a dramatic setting has the advantage of being both a household and a workplace, two sites that have always proven fertile ground for conflict and pathos. But there is another parallel that American viewers often bring into play when engaging with this and other stories about the British class system: high school.

American popular culture has been reimagining 19th-century British society as a version of American high school for decades, just not in genres where it's likely to attract the interest of critics. Romance novels have taught American readers to understand the British class system in this way. Anyone who has read a decent amount of 19th-century British fiction or social histories of the period would likely be perplexed upon dipping into one of the thousands of "Regency" and "Victorian" romances published here every year.

The characters in these historical romances don't behave anything like the British aristocrats of the 1800s – or like any other 19thcentury Brits, for that matter. But if you're looking for the "blizzards of anachronisms", "absurd soap-operatics" and "Oprah-style oversharing" to which Hertzberg objects in *Downton Abbey*, well, pick up a paperback and pull up a chair.

In place of the captain of the football team, the Regency romance has a duke, and instead of a shy bespectacled girl, the heroine is likely to be a young lady of ordinary looks and no fortune whose inner merits the hero, alone of all others, readily perceives. Instead of a catty cheerleader as the heroine's romantic rival, there is a society beauty, complete with a mean-girl clique that might as well have been lifted right out of a John Hughes film. The sexual mores of the characters' social circle, instead of being founded in the Christian morality, male supremacism and class pre - judices of 19th-century England, is merely a matter of prudish scandalmongering and mean-spirited, small-town gossip. The intricate, exclusionary subtlety of centuries of upper-class manners gets translated into the bratty snootiness of American adolescence.

Downton Abbey may not fit as exactly on to the familiar stock figures of the American high school but the rigid, claustrophobic social hierarchies of the high-school experience remain the easiest point of reference for US viewers. Lord Grantham resembles the highminded yet out-of-touch principal and his daughters the student body's most popular belles, girls whose social and romantic lives serve as universal topics of conversation. Matthew Crawley is the new transfer student, who turns out to be a catch despite his modest background. The conniving O'Brien and Thomas are recognisable as the bullies who afflict so many sensitive adolescents, Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes function as the wise and seasoned teachers who can be counted on to intervene before things get too bad, and Daisy, with her string of hopeless crushes, speaks to many a formerly dreamy mouse.

All this probably explains why [British-born historian] Simon Schama, who has experienced the real thing, finds the setting of *Downton Abbey* oppressive while Americans see it as a great-looking venue, ripe with dishy spats, romantic triangles and overwrought drama. It's not that Americans don't grasp the injustice in the social hierarchy of Edwardian Britain; they just don't take it seriously. It is part of the (dubious) mythos of American life that some day the tables will be turned: the ugly duckling could become a swan and the nerd a master of the universe.

For Americans, high school is rife with cruelty and unfairness, with an elite that benefits from the arbitrary blessings of birth (money, good looks, athletic prowess), but it doesn't necessarily define you for life. High school is formative, but not conclusive. This is why you will never see an equivalent series set in, say, an antebellum plantation in the American South. Not only is that hierarchy way too close to home but (whether we admit it or not) we all know we haven't yet escaped it.

While most of us, sooner or later, graduate from high school, to escape the British class system you have to get out of Britain entirely (like Daniel Day-Lewis). Americans look at the confining roles imposed on the characters in their beloved *Downton Abbey* and tell themselves that if worse comes to worst, they can always emigrate.

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Covered California enrolls nearly 1 million in health plans

Health exchange officials expect consumer interest to jump as the March 31 healthcare enrollment deadline approaches.

By Chad Terhune and Soumya Karlamangla *March 13, 2014*

Los Angeles Times

California is nearing 1 million people enrolled in Obamacare coverage, but the state's insurance exchange is still running behind in signing up Latinos and young people.

In figures released Thursday, the state said 923,832 people had picked a health plan through March 9, and about 1.5 million people have enrolled or been deemed eligible for an expansion of Medi-Cal, the state's Medicaid program for the poor. But the overall rate of health plan sign-ups slowed during February, partly hurt by a five-day outage of the state's enrollment website. About 165,000 people enrolled in private health plans through the Covered California exchange last month, down from about 220,000 in January and 400,000 in December. Exchange officials said they expect consumer interest to jump in the next two weeks as the March 31 enrollment deadline approaches. The pace of enrollment "is slowing," said Peter Lee, executive director of Covered California. "But we know these numbers will rise as we get closer to the deadline."

The Obama administration is counting on California to deliver a final surge of enrollment to help compensate for an uneven rollout nationwide for the Affordable Care Act. To spread the word, the state exchange has launched new ad campaigns in English and Spanish as part of its $80-million marketing budget. More than 600 enrollment events are planned in the next two weeks at libraries, schools and churches. The exchange is urging people not to wait until the last minute to enroll. In late December, Covered California and health insurers struggled to handle an influx of applicants wanting coverage for Jan. 1. Many of the people signing up then were losing existing policies that didn't comply with new requirements of the health law. "Even with infinite resources, you can't fit everyone in the pipeline if they wait until the last day," Lee said. "I anticipate the last weekend will be pretty crazy."

Customer service has been a nagging problem for the state. The average wait time for exchange callers was 47 minutes at the end of February. Lee said the addition of about 300 call-center employees has helped cut hold times to about 30 minutes. "It's not what we want, but the demand is incredibly strong," Lee said. Sheila Kern of West Los Angeles has run into numerous obstacles trying to get coverage. First, she was thwarted by the website problem last month. Then she booked an appointment with an enrollment counselor listed on the state website. But no one at a Santa Monica clinic was able to see her when she showed up. Kern said she called the exchange last weekend to apply by phone but got disconnected twice. "The system is broken and it's beyond repair," she said.

Covered California said 22% of health plan enrollees through February described themselves as Latino on their application. That percentage was virtually unchanged from January results. Statewide, about 1.2 million, or 46%, of the 2.6 million Californians eligible for federal premium subsidies under the healthcare law are Latino.

Some members of Congress and state lawmakers have faulted Covered California for poor outreach to Latinos, who represent about 60% of the state's uninsured. They have cited a shortage of enrollment counselors, boring ads and the absence of a paper application in Spanish until late December. Supporters of the healthcare law worry that missing out on this relatively young and healthy population could undermine the viability of the exchange. The turnout among young people ages 18 to 34 was up just slightly to 26.5% of total enrollment through February. That age group represents 36% of the people eligible for subsidies. Persuading young, uninsured people to get health coverage remains a tough task. Los Angeles college student Jade Moreno, 21, had seen ads for Covered California, but she assumed health insurance would be out of reach for her financially.

But when Moreno stopped by a clinic in downtown L.A. last month she discovered she qualified for Medi-Cal. "I didn't realize it was free," she said. "I didn't want to end up paying for anything."

Most Americans must have health insurance or face a tax penalty this year of $95 per adult or 1% of their household income, whichever is greater. The penalties rise in future years.

Lee said California still doesn't have data on how many enrollees were previously uninsured. A key goal of the healthcare overhaul is to get coverage for uninsured people. Thus far, health insurers said, about 85% of customers have paid their first month's premium, ensuring that coverage takes effect.

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Changing Blacks' Atttitudes on Green Living

The Tennessee Tribune

Jazelle Hunt — 24 May 2014 — NNPA Washington Correspondent

A record-high 356 temperatures were tied or broken across the contiguous United States in 2012, marking the warmest year ever in American history. Over that same peiod, widespread droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, snowstorms, and superstorms put a nearly $110 billion dent in the economy.

And according to environmental activists, that's something Blacks should be concerned about.

"If natural disasters happen, or heat waves, or prices go up for food and gas, then African-Americans get the short end of the stick in those situations," explained Bruce Strouele, director of operations for Citizens for a Sustainable Future, a think-tank dedicated to improving quality of life for African-Americans through sustainable development and environmental justice. "When you look at research on sustainable development, before it can even take place you have to be economically situated to make those improvements. For a lot of our people it seems out of reach, or like it's something that's not for us."

But it is.

Studies have shown that poor people and people of color are most vulnerable to pollution and its climate-altering effects. For example, research from the University of Minnesota released last month found that people of color are exposed to 38 percent more polluted air than Whites, with the most stark disparities in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, and New Jersey. But despite being disproportionately affected, experts say many African-Americans are uninformed about or uninterested in sustainability, let alone climate change. However, Strouele thinks that climate change and sustainability become more relevant when framed as economic issues. "Sustainability may look different for our community. When we talk about Black sustainability we have to talk about issues that are more practical... some may be focused on high-speed rail, but for us it might be as simple as getting fresh food to people in the community," Strouele says. "So we focus on aspects that do relate, like food deserts, breastfeeding, and other little things that not only lessen your carbon footprint but also improve your health."

Last week, President Obama turned his "pen-and-phone" power toward the deepening climate change crisis with a new climate change plan. The goals include maximizing sustainable, affordable and low-income housing, and reducing energy costs for ordinary Americans. The plan directs the Department of Interior to approve permits for 100 megawatts of renewable energy capacity across federally-subsidized housing by 2020. Federally subsidized housing includes public housing, multi-family buildings using Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, apartments and homes that accept Section 8, housing choice vouchers, etc. This is enough energy to power 10 such households for an entire year, without ever using costly fossil fuels. (In the United States, a majority of utility companies generate electricity and heat by burning coal). Today's upgraded homes usually use renewables as a supplement for traditional energy, instead of a replacement. Additionally, the plan sets aside a $23 million Multifamily Energy Innovation Fund, which offers grants to rental developers, universities, and organizations to test out new ways to make cost-effective, clean energy more commonplace. A separate $250 million fund program will offer loans and grants to help rural utility companies upgrade the homes and businesses they serve. On a more privatized level, the administration is expanding its Better Building Challenge to include multi-family housing developers. With this initiative, developers are challenged to build more affordable and low-income housing with a commitment to sustainable and green living. The developers must publicly commit to a 20-percent reduction in energy use across their properties by 2020. Improving sustainability standards in affordable residential development also improves their quality, according to Bryan Howard, legislative director for the U.S. Green Building Council. Howard advocates for clean energy and sustainability among the nation's lawmakers. "In states that have taken an aggressive approach to adding sustainability, it enhances the quality of housing in those states. It's not only sustainability, but walkability, healthiness—like making sure there are air filters, because there's a high level of asthma and respiratory problems in public housing—making sure public housing isn't situated in discarded areas of town," he says. "I think the issue of sustainability has been a gateway conversation to start permeating discussions around public housing...and starting to address some of these issues. It provides an opportunity for developers...to talk to the communities about their needs and what they want out of new development projects."

Further, the president's plan strengthens federal efficiency standards for household appliances. In short, these efforts not only cut national pollution, but also cut energy bills for all Americans. The Obama administration says it has already upgraded 1 million homes for energy efficiency, saving families more than $400 on their heating and cooling bills per year. [...]

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A Memorial to Personal Memory

Recalling Sept. 11 by Inverting a Museum's Usual Role

The New York Times

By Edward Rothstein — May 22, 2014

Why do we memorialize Sept. 11?

As you descend into the immense subterranean spaces and through the winding, trauma-saturated displays of the National September 11 Memorial Museum, that question will hardly seem as urgent as it does when you leave, feeling peculiarly uncertain about the answer. But at first, there is nothing to ask: You are submerged in an eerie underworld, haunted by ghostly memories and the murmur of gibbering voices.

Ordinary artifacts are relics of ruin and death here: a Metro Card used by one victim, a lacrosse stick owned by another, shards of World Trade Center window glass, a tattered seatbelt from Flight 77 torn off its mooring. The sounds are television broadcasts and taped messages, secret phone calls from hijacked planes and rescuers on radios wrestling with apocalypse. The voices are those of the unknowing, thinking themselves spared as the first tower is hit; and those of the doomed, knowing they had just seconds for farewells. No wonder the galleries include stands with tissue dispensers.

The power of these exhibits, which chronologically conduct visitors through the day, is unsurpassed in contemporary history museums. And in darkened screening rooms, eyewitness accounts are heard, while locations are pointed out on schematic video sketches of the towers, the Pentagon, or United Airlines Flight 93, the multiple voices masterfully woven into seamless narratives.

So out of remnants and recollections emerges a kind of coherence: the memorial as story. Maybe that is the point. Museums, once repositories of a culture's sacral visions — temples erected to pay homage to a civilization's beliefs, collections and creations — have taken on other functions. The approach here almost inverts the traditional model with its timeless aspirations: It creates a museum of experience. It is devoted not to history but to something much more personal and immediate: memory. And in keeping with its devotion to experience, it tries to become an experience itself.

But this emphasis is also strange, because the museum clearly has grand public ambitions. It proclaims its own monumentality. Its scale is so immense that in its cavernous spaces a half-incinerated fire truck looks like a toy. Those ambitions are evident, too, in an epigram from Virgil, its block letters formed from pitted metal salvaged from the ruins: "No Day Shall Erase You From the Memory of Time."

In this desire for monumental memorialization — and, yes, its failure to achieve it — the museum is not alone. In an interview on its website, the Civil War historian David Blight refers to a "rage in our culture to memorialize," one unmatched, he suggests, in modern times. One recent book, "Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America," by Erika Doss, points out some of the memorials of the last two decades — a Salem Village Witchcraft Victims' Memorial in Danvers, Mass.; the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum; the Astronaut Memorial in Merritt Island, Fla. — memorials to matters great and small, proliferating like identity museums, each staking a claim on public attention.

Add to them memorials mounted around the National Mall in Washington since 1993: the Vietnam Women's Memorial (1993), the Korean War Memorial (1995), the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial (1997), the World War II Memorial (2004), the Martin Luther King Jr., Memorial (2011), and a proposed memorial for President Dwight D. Eisenhower that was rejected and sent back for revisions after years of planning. Five memorials were completed in the last 20 years; during the preceding 60 years, according to the National Park Service literature, there were three.

This memorial proliferation is also accompanied by flaws, and on the National Mall, they run deep. These memorials can elevate the trivial and undercut the significant; their styles often embrace kitsch, sentimentality or banality. Few suggest what a national or public memorial might be. Most seem designed for current constituencies rather than future citizenry. A more profound approach emerged from the battlefields of Gettysburg: Despite the freshness of the graves, Lincoln was able to articulate a purpose and meaning that determined the future of a national memorial. Or more recently, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall: It brilliantly honors more than 58,000 dead while refraining from glorifying the war itself; it memorializes both with elegant restraint, seeming to speak for the nation as a whole. But the Sept. 11 museum may be breaking new ground both in its ambition's scale and the ways it falls short. It is as if by enshrining memory and individual experience, it left little room for more elaborate and public considerations; it doesn't even try to offer a rough first draft of history. [...]

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The economics of book festivals

By Carl Wilkinson, May 30, 2014

The Financial Times

There is a particular sound that for many, along with the cry of the cuckoo, the thwack of willow on leather and the hum of a distant lawnmower, now signifies the approach of summer. It is, of course, the amplified tones of an author trying to be heard as rain drums on the roof of a marquee.

With its mushrooming tents, ranks of deckchairs and orderly queues of readers waiting to have their books signed, the literary festival is now an established feature of British cultural life. Yet just over 30 years ago, in 1983, when the Edinburgh International Book Festival was launched, it was one of only three. Today, according to literaryfestivals.co.uk, a website that tries to keep up with them all, there are more than 350 in Britain alone and a further 100 in Australia and New Zealand. Not to mention others in Gibraltar, Colombia, India, Spain, Kenya□.□.□.

The four largest festivals in Britain are Oxford in March (now sponsored by FT Weekend); Hay, which comes to a close on Sunday; Edinburgh in August; and Cheltenham in October. Between them, they put on more than 2,000 talks and sell more than half a million tickets. This year's Hay festival further extended its reach by teaming up with the BBC in a new global partnership to broadcast programmes, talks and debates from the giant marquees that spring up each year just outside the centre of the Welsh farming town.

Simon Prosser, publisher of the Penguin imprint Hamish Hamilton as well as a co-founder of the Port Eliot Festival in Cornwall (July), is emphatic about the importance of these events to publishers and authors. "I think they're now an essential part of the ecology of publishing and writing," he says. "These days, how else do you meet readers?"

An appearance at one of the big four can make a difference to book sales. "The largest tent at Hay might [hold] more than 600," explains Prosser, "and so for a certain author who has a book just out, there could be a signing queue of hundreds of people, each of whom will buy that book." In 2013, the Hay festival bookshop sold 35,000 books and the Edinburgh festival shifted 60,000. If the sales go through Nielsen BookScan, the point-of-sale software used by booksellers, they also count towards chart position.

Internationally, too, book festivals have become an important part of the marketing strategy. "I've been to the Jaipur festival twice," says Prosser. "There were tens of thousands of people on site, and events regularly with what looked like 1,000 people. It's really extraordinary. If you're launching an author in India, a gig at Jaipur is considered very important."

Indeed, authors could, if they were so minded, spend more time on the road and at festivals than at their writing desks. Yet they can often be found in festival green rooms grumbling into their warm white wine about how little they themselves are making. While audiences now routinely pay £8 to £15 per talk, authors are rarely paid more than an average fee of £150 for speaking at a festival. And that's if they're paid in cash at all: according to authors I spoke to who had recently done the rounds, a handful of festivals pay in kind: a rather delicious local cheese (Bridport); fizzy wine (Oxford) or inexpensive plonk (Hay).

Last year the historian Guy Walters wrote a piece for the Literary Review grumbling about the economics of a talk he gave at the Hay festival on his latest book *The Real Great Escape* (2013). "As I drove home, I did some maths," he wrote. "Those 800 people had each paid £7, earning Hay a tidy £5,600. Compared to Hay's turnover of £4m and gross profit of £1m, that's not a huge sum but it is certainly greater than a homeopathic ratio. Hay had probably made around £1,400 from me and I had got, er, six bottles of wine. I googled the wine to see what it cost and found it for as little as £8 per bottle. So 48 quid all in, and I bet Hay paid a lot less for it than that."

Walters concluded that: "It's time we authors were paid not in promises of better sales and high profiles but in money. Yes, actual cash. Is that too much to ask?"

It's tempting to agree. An author can spend the best part of a day travelling to an event and another getting home. Accommodation and travel costs are often covered by the publisher. If the author succeeds in selling books at the end of a talk, he or she will get about £1.50 in royalties for each hardback sold. That £150 fee (or box of wine) looks pretty miserly. [...]

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The 'booze Britain' stereotype is flagging – now let's finish it off

Alcohol consumption is down, as are its associated harms, but it seems the industry wants to see this decline stemmed

James Nicholls, Friday 30 May 2014 **theguardian.com**

This week the Health and Social Care Information Centre released its latest update on alcohol consumption and harm in the UK. It showed that alcohol consumption in Britain was continuing to fall, as it has been for a number of years, but also that the harms caused by alcohol were starting to show signs of dropping as well. These encouraging trends suggest we may be seeing a change in some aspects of British drinking culture, but how likely are they to be sustained?

To read much of the news reporting on alcohol, you might be forgiven for thinking the British are an incorrigible nation of boozers – and that most of those drinkers are young women who end up lying on benches or kerbs, such is the ubiquity of stock photographs in reporting today. The reality is much more complex.

For most of the 20th century, Britons drank moderately in comparison to our Victorian forebears and our continental neighbours. British drinking always involved more of the quick binge than the long soak familiar in parts of the continent, but our overall consumption was relatively low. Then, in the last two decades of the 20th century, there was a transformation. Between 1980 and 2004, per capita consumption in Britain increased by around 30%, a large proportion of which was due to a huge increase in wine drinking among both men and women. Wine sales rose more than 150% in that period, while beer consumption fell. We started drinking more at home than ever before, which meant more corks popping at dinner parties but also more pub closures. Supermarkets led the way in promoting the notion that alcohol was an indispensable part of the weekly shop. All this added up to a cultural shift within a generation. However, since 2005 average consumption has fallen to levels close to those in 1992, a trend that seems most pronounced among the often vilified 16-24 age group. The recession has been one factor in reducing consumption – people simply have less money to spend on booze – but it is by no means the only one. For reasons that are not entirely clear, there has been a downswing in drinking among the younger age group.

Alcohol-related deaths have also dropped slightly, down 4% since 2011. To put that fall in context, though, alcohol-related mortality is still 19% higher than in 2001. That is not something any society can be complacent about. Furthermore, there are numerous regional and social variations: consumption and harm level are lowest in London, and much higher in Scotland, the north-west and the north-east. Another factor is inequality. Those in the poorest communities are many times more likely to suffer alcohol-related health problems – despite consumption being somewhat higher, on average, among the more affluent – and in a number of deprived areas harm rates continue to rise. There are many plausible explanations for this – poor housing and diet, stress, limited access to healthcare, different patterns of consumption, higher rates of dependency – but the truth is that we don't fully understand why. Alcohol Research UK, with Liverpool John Moores University, is funding research into this "alcohol harm paradox" which will, hopefully, provide some answers. We are also supporting a study of the most severely dependent drinkers in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The role of cheap white cider and discount vodka in maintaining the habit of these desperately addicted individuals (many of whom have died in the course of the research) is an indictment of the companies that continue to make and supply such products.

The dynamics of drinking culture are complex, but the political question is whether reducing associated harms is a job for government, civil society or the alcohol industry. This government, having initially made great play of its commitment to intervention, has opted for industry self-regulation. Minimum unit pricing has been abandoned, and the much-vaunted early-morning restriction orders and late-night levies have been left to wither on the vine as trade bodies challenge local authorities across the country when they try to get them introduced. We have also been told that the alcohol industry's "responsibility deal" is working. Some 253m units – a quarter of the 1bn the industry pledged to remove from the market between 2012 and 2016 – were cut in 2012-13. However, while a billion units sounds like a lot, our consumption annually is closer to 50 billion. Furthermore, the vast majority of that fall resulted from international brewers cutting the strength of their leading lagers from 5% alcohol to 4.8% by volume to reduce the amount of duty paid to the exchequer. [...]

Nom : *Prénom :* *Signature :*

Hippies to yuppies: the Brits Who Built the Modern World

Foster, Rogers and co began their careers with radical and idealistic values. So why did they end up building flats for oligarchs?

BY TOM DYCKHOFF PUBLISHED 6 MARCH, 2014 **New Statesman**

The Brits Who Built the Modern World
BBC4; Architecture Gallery at the RIBA, London W1

There is a gripping tale to be told about Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, Terry Farrell, Nicholas Grimshaw and Michael Hopkins – "the most successful generation of architects Britain has ever produced", as BBC4's three-part *The Brits Who Built the Modern World* said as it began on 13 February, with what turned out to be depressingly characteristic hyperbole. But this was not that tale.

The other tale goes like this. How did a generation from the 1960s, once all bushy-tailed and idealistic, fired up with that decade's progressive ideas about social change, end up famed not for affordable housing, schools and hospitals, but headquarters for financial multinationals, glistening airports for booming China and the most expensive apartment-block-for-oligarchs in super-gentrified London? How did a generation that fell in love with the technology and "can-do" freedoms of postwar America help import its economics and ideology to Britain? When the geopolitical wind changed direction in the 1980s, this crafty lot turned on a sixpence and transformed the architect from servant of the state to entrepreneur. How did the hippies become yuppies? We never quite found out.

Radical. We kept hearing that word throughout the series: *we were very radical.* Look how we thumb our noses at Prince Charles! At one point, the architects were even referred to as "punks". There are few things less punk than an architect: they usually end up where the money is, sod politics. There is no question that their "non-monumental" engineering and design were adventurous – but there *was* a time when Rogers, Foster, Grimshaw, Hopkins and Farrell were socially and politically progressive, too: when they might have built another kind of Britain altogether.

Back in the late 1960s, when they dressed in *Sergeant Pepper* velvets, Farrell and Grimshaw built a co-operative housing block in north London, 125 Park Road, made from aluminium (and so nicknamed "the sardine can"), with an open-plan interior that could be reconfigured wherever you wanted to throw your beanbag. Just afterwards, Foster built an insurance firm's office – complete with roof gardens and indoor swimming pools for all, bosses and proles together in the same open-plan space ("the workplace as one great commune, with typewriters") – which dropped a bit of California acid right in the middle of Ipswich. Rogers, always the one most interested in politics, even wrote a revolutionary manifesto, all hot under the collar after Paris 1968.

So, what happened? The Pompidou Centre. Rogers recounts the argument he had with his then partner, Renzo Piano (who went on to build that other monument to the revolution, the Shard in London), about whether or not they should enter the competition to design it. Rogers didn't want to build monuments to presidents, especially for a regime that had so forcefully crushed the *soixante-huitards*. "I lost," he says. A decade later, after experiencing the lows of the late-1970s recession, he was building the headquarters for Lloyds in the City. Foster, Grimshaw, Hopkins and Farrell, always more pragmatic than political, followed suit. They saw which way the wind was blowing: they built HQs for IT firms, art galleries, research centres for oil companies, flexible spaces for the new service economy's flexible workforce. Turned out they bet on the most successful horse.

"In the 1930s," the series began, "five children were born who grew up with dreams of building a better world . . . and that's exactly what they did." The trouble is, the show, like this generation of architects, never questioned just what this better world might be. There was no critical voice. They talked of Dan Dare and hoped that we'd all hop off into the sunset through their piazzas and open plans, happy families. Yet neither the architects nor the series ever seemed to ask how architecture gets built, for whom, and why – it was as though it was created in a vacuum. How I wish the series had been made by Adam Curtis, a side order to *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace*, his story of how Silicon Valley tech-hippies ended up as lackeys for neoliberal capitalism.

The accompanying exhibition at RIBA's new gallery, though small, is far more nuanced. We get a glimpse of that other tale, if you read between the lines. Its collection of models, drawings and photographs at least connects the quintet to what was happening, you know, in the rest of the world and all that. It shows they weren't heroic lone wolves but part of a huge impetus exporting international modernism from postwar America, first around the fragmenting British empire, and then around the ballooning US empire. [...]

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Nom : *Prénom :* *Signature :*

Charles III: Do theatre audiences have the right to laugh at the Royal Family?

Mike Bartlett's new play *King Charles III* raises the question of whether the Royal Family are a legitimate target for humour, says Dominic Cavendish

By Dominic Cavendish 12 Apr 2014 **The Telegraph**

A few summers ago I was sitting outside an Oxfordshire village pub when Prince Harry walked by. He was barely 15 feet away as he ambled towards a waiting car, minders in tow, having stopped off to change for some nearby posh do. A strange hush descended on the drinkers clustered at the various tables. You couldn't ignore his presence, yet it felt strangely invasive to watch him sidle past. Such was the tension that I almost felt tempted to call out "hip-hip-hooray!" – something that might induce a quick smile while allowing due scope for deference. In the event, like everyone else, I pretended to study my pint, while keeping Harry in eye-shot and marvelling that this was probably as close to royalty as I was ever going to get. What struck me was that while I felt intensely constrained – and could do little more than gawp in the presence of his celebrity and the strange fairy-tale magic of his being a living part of our history – Harry was equally so, perhaps doubly so. He couldn't mingle, stop for a natter. If I had yelled something, what would his comeback have been? Zilch? Something gracious or mock down-to-earth? He could have hardly told me to 'eff off.

Newly opened at the Almeida, where it has been swiftly and rightly crowned the hottest ticket in town, Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III* goes to the heart of the issue of royal constraint. On one level, in its sub-plot – following a Shakespearean model with brilliant bravura and cat-can-look-at-a-king presumption – it explores Prince Harry's predicament, sketching out feelings of anguish about his royal function and lack of freedom (for all his playboy antics) that we can only guess at. Some of the evening's biggest laughs are at his expense – as he cavorts with his muckers at Boujis night-club – but some of its most touching moments are his too: this shy-boy is effectively saved from the "Mob", the clan that runs the country, by a ballsy St Martin's College art student called Jess, who urges him to cut free. Above and beyond that, of course, the play deals with the constraints facing Charles at his ascension. Bartlett's hypothesis works brilliantly on the back of his pseudo history-play conceit: we are listening to blank verse, the language is an approximation of the heightened style (albeit less poetic) that we get in the Histories. And this enhances the question the play asks – would Charles be no more than a pastiche king? Does he have any authentic power or is he merely required to rubber-stamp whatever the government of the day gets through?

Shakespeare trades on the distinction between the private man and the public office – the way that kingship can be a particular kind of curse, a recipe for a crisis of identity, but at least in the age he describes power went with the job. A deposed Richard II can mourn the loss of something. Here, Charles III is forced to confront the possibility that his position as guardian of the nation is an illusion. What drives him, as he forces the country to the brink of civil war with his obstinate refusal to give his assent to a bill restricting press freedom, may have shades of Macbeth-like ambition, or hints of Lear-like madness but Bartlett makes us see a gleam of the purest integrity to it too – a necessary reckoning. Cometh the hour, cometh the King, would be this Charles's way of justifying his autocratic behaviour. He cannot live with himself if he's not truly alive. Or as he puts it: "I'm Charles no more The human being, but transformed into a Spitting Image puppet, lying prone Upon the table waiting for some man To come and then in inserting his own hand, Do operate the image of the King Pretending life."

The Spitting Image reference might sound glib but it serves to make a subtle point about the kind of play this could have been. There are plenty of jokes on offer and there's the satirical satisfaction of seeing the famous well impersonated – Tim Pigott-Smith's Charles has the stiff, hands-behind-back gait and side-of-the-mouth delivery down pat without it veering into Rory Bremner territory. Yet the underlying seriousness of intent counters the inevitable charge: is this fair? As one critic has pointed out: "Traditionally, royals don't sue but if a theatre tried to portray any other living person in such a light, it might well find itself on the sharp end of a defamation action." With certain of the characterisations – a Duchess of Cambridge to whom is attributed all manner of wily scheming potential – that accusation might hold good. But so far as Charles is concerned, he has rarely looked so noble. [...]

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Junot Díaz condemns creative writing courses for 'unbearable too-whiteness'

Alison Flood *The Guardian*, Monday 19 May 2014 14.19 BST

Pulitzer-prize winning author's comments that 'the default position of reading and writing ... was white, straight and male' are backed by writers including Aminatta Forna and Daljit Nagra

Pulitzer prize winner Junot Díaz's blistering attack on the "unbearable too-whiteness" of creative writing courses in the US has been echoed by experts in the UK, with author and professor Aminatta Forna pointing to a "backlash" as the "centre in literature begins to shift away from the Anglo-American writer towards writers with different backgrounds".

The award-winning poet Daljit Nagra, meanwhile, has issued a similarly damning indictment of British poetry, saying that "too often editors use a euphemism such as 'taste' as an excuse for rejecting black authors because they actually mean 'I am not interested in minority writing'", and that "when 'race' is written about by black or Asian poets it is too often dismissed as something that has been 'done before', a criticism which is not generally targeted at those writing about 'love' or 'snow'".

"I believe this to be the case because unoriginal and cliched white poetry finds publishers with dreadful ease whilst unconventional black writing does not," Nagra told the Guardian.

In an introduction to a new anthology, Dismantle, Díaz writes of how, when undertaking his MFA (master of fine arts) in creative writing at Cornell University, New York, his experiences as a "person of colour" – Díaz was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New Jersey – were almost entirely overlooked. "That shit was too white," writes Díaz in the introduction, which was published by the New Yorker. "Too white as in Cornell had almost no POC – no people of colour – in it. Too white as in the MFA had no faculty of colour in the fiction programme – like none – and neither the faculty nor the administration saw that lack of colour as a big problem. (At least the students are diverse, they told us.) Too white as in my workshop reproduced exactly the dominant culture's blind spots and assumptions around race and racism (and sexism and heteronormativity, etc)."

Díaz said his workshop never explored racial identities or how they impacted on writing, that students never talked about race at all, other than to argue that "race discussions" were inappropriate for "a serious writer". "In my workshop the default subject position of reading and writing – of Literature with a capital L – was white, straight and male," writes the author of the Pulitzer-winning novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. "In my workshop what was defended was not the writing of people of colour but the right of the white writer to write about people of colour without considering the critiques of people of colour. Oh, yes: too white indeed. I could write pages on the unbearable too-whiteness of my workshop – I could write folio, octavo and duodecimo on its terrible whiteness – but you get the idea."

He stuck it out – others didn't. And Díaz says things haven't changed today, 20 years on. "I can't tell you how often students of colour seek me out during my visits or approach me after readings in order to share with me the racist nonsense they're facing in their programmes, from both their peers and their professors. In the last 17 years I must have had at least 300 of these conversations, minimum," he writes.

Forna, who is professor of creative writing at Bath Spa University, said that what Díaz had "put his finger on isn't so much a blind spot, it's worse, it's actually protectionism", and that "as the centre in literature begins to shift away from the Anglo-American writer towards writers with different backgrounds we are witnessing a backlash".

"The response on the part of those writers and critics who can no longer take the centre ground for granted is to deny the validity of other, alternative voices," said Forna. "By saying race doesn't matter and cultural perspective is irrelevant, you're asserting that those writers have nothing to say and nothing to add. The attacks on the so-called 'global' novel are part of the same protectionism. It means the jobs stay with those who already have them."

Nagra said he felt that Britain "lacks language for talking about issues to do with race", and that "whereas Americans confidently articulate a language involving terms such as POC, we have BME [black and minority ethnic], which seems to hover between catch-all and don't-know-who-you-are-but-I-know-you-are-there".

The writer, who is a course director on Faber Academy's Becoming A Poet course, said that he had "always been in the company of racially inappropriate comments either about my work or those of other black and Asian poets".

"We are often described as performance poets and our work is 'lively' or 'vibrant'," said Nagra. "I feel frustrated that we are rarely appreciated beyond the content of our poetry, which is viewed as an exotic curiosity. It is rare for our work to be viewed in the context of a serious engagement with forms and traditions of the British canon as we are not fully accepted as part of it."

Nagra felt that "certain black and Asian poets" were "partially responsible for perpetuating the situation by happily imitating the dominant white style without finding a way to challenge it; we sometimes bleach ourselves to fit in".

Forna, meanwhile, said that her own university includes a "pretty diverse group" of teachers, including Naomi Alderman, Nicholas Jose and Kate Pullinger, and headed by Bambo Soyinka. "My international teaching experience (from west Africa to Western Massachusetts) was evidently of interest to those who appointed me," said Forna, adding that as a teacher, she makes space for those kind of discussions. [...]

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The Queen has just reminded Britain why we don't need her to abdicate

The Spectator 4 June 2014

It would be easy to look at the alluring photographs of Prince Felipe of Spain and his young family stretched over their garden sofa and wonder whether the United Kingdom should join the current fad for abdication among European royals. In stepping aside in favour of his son, Juan Carlos joins Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and Albert II of Belgium in having given up the throne over the past year, while Pope Benedict XVI became the first pope in 600 years to resign his post.

With a little nudge from her advisers in grey suits might our own Queen bow out to a graceful retirement and make way for her son, or better still her grandson, and the monarchy become the living embodiment of what Tony Blair used to like to call - when he was still in his early 40s a 'young country'?

It is something strongly to be resisted. For all the skill of Prince Felipe's PR agents and photographers, the best advert for monarchy this week is the sight of Elizabeth II doing as she has done countless times during her long reign: making the short journey from Buckingham Palace to the House of Lords to speak at the state opening of Parliament. Here, in one dignified octogenarian and the sense of duty which she exudes, is encapsulated the advantage of monarchy over republic.

Anyone tempted to giggle at the pageantry misses the point. The country has been led by 12 prime ministers since the Queen began her annual - or mostly annual - visit to Westminster. The Commons has been cleared-out by 15 general elections, many of them angry and divisive affairs. Yet the head of state to whom has fallen the duty of reading out forthcoming government bills, has remained constant throughout. She is a humble reminder to our here-today, gone tomorrow politicians that they are not bigger than the British state, that popularity in an election does not turn Britain into their personal fiefdom, nor the British constitution into their plaything.

It is a tribute to the Queen's personal conduct, as well as to the robustness of parliamentary procedure, that while she must have announced many government bills over the past 62 years through gritted teeth few of us have any idea which ones. It is sometimes asserted that the Queen must by inclination be a Conservative, to judge by her love of country sports and waxed outdoor wear. But are we any the wiser what she really thinks on free schools, regulation of markets, the poll tax, nationalisation and privatisation? If there is a footman somewhere who has heard her expound on such issues he has kept it to himself.

The same, of course, cannot be said of her son, who at various times has appointed himself as the people's spokesman on architecture, the environment and of late even dabbled in foreign affairs. We cannot know how Prince Charles would have behaved had he become king at an early age. We would like to think that he would have exhibited the same impartiality of his mother. But there is at least some probability that he would have shown less self-restraint.

To bring the second Elizabethan age to a premature close would be a folly, and not just because it would bring to the throne a man who seems less temperamentally suited to the role as monarch. British history has always tended to viewed in periods relating to the monarch.

Georgian, Victorian, Edwardian; all mean something in our collective consciousness. The reign of Elizabeth II - which, health-willing, will become the longest in history in little more than a year's time - will arguably be remembered as the greatest of them all. Unlike Queen Victoria's it has not of course been an era of world domination, but as a period of peace and prosperity it is unsurpassed.

The monarchy, which might seem on the face of it to be an anachronism at odds with the spirit of democracy and meritocracy, can hardly have been higher. It is hopeless trying to compare the current minor clamour for republicanism with the suppressed urge for it during ages when to express it might have cost you your head, but no poll has ever put it at a level which would even remotely provide a platform to win a referendum on the subject. The monarchy is, at a time when our parliament, courts, churches, banks and many others have had their reputations battered, just about the most popular institution we have.

The ultimate test of our political system, however, comes not from inside but from the outside. The multitudes of wealthy foreigners who have made London the most sought-after city on the planet in which to live are not coming for our weather, our landscape or our architecture, pleasing though each of those things may be in parts. They come to live here because Britain is just about the last country on Earth where you can imagine tanks rolling up outside the parliament building, where you can imagine citizens being jailed for their beliefs or being slaughtered for their wealth.

The stability of our political system brings with it a huge dividend which no-one has yet thought to calculate. It attracts money and talented individuals in large measures. Queen Elizabeth II is a large part of that stability and, though old age of course brings it frailties, we hope that her reign will last a long while yet.

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HORS PROGRAMME

Scottish independence: You can't reduce a 300-year-old union to a mushy peas analogy

Fraser Nelson, 06 Jun 2014, *The Telegraph*

Unionists can win in Scotland if they stop patronising and find some poetry

[...] A similar artists' bus party was convened before the 1997 devolution referendum – and, back then, I was sold. The argument, then, was simple: countries are best governed by people living in the country, not those living in another country. Alex Salmond is making the same, calm, common-sense proposition now – but with one big difference. It is demonstrably untrue.

If home rule was the means of solving Scottish problems, then yesterday's Radio Scotland morning call-in programme would not be asking, "Is Scotland's NHS at breaking point?" NHS Scotland has been run from Edinburgh for 15 years and health spending has doubled: if it's at breaking point, it's hard to blame Westminster. Last week, the Yes campaign published a newspaper article lamenting the attainment gap between rich and poor in Scottish schools. A scandal, indeed, but how can independence be the answer? Schools have also been devolved to Holyrood for 15 years.

The great mistake, before devolution, was to think that a Scottish national genius would take political form in an Edinburgh parliament. My own nationalistic dreams were shattered when I returned to Scotland to report on this parliament, and saw it using its powers to opt out of tough reforms – mainly Tony Blair's agenda of choice in schools and hospitals. The new politicians ended up hoarding the power devolved to them; in this way, devolution has meant less power to the people. With inevitable results.

When I went back to my old school, Nairn Academy, last week, I found the council had has dubbed it "Acadamaidh Inbhir Narainn" for the benefit of its non-existent Gaelic pupils. Such signs have multiplied under Alex Salmond, even in places where Gaelic has never been spoken – but this does not seem to have had any nationalistic effect on the young people inside the schools. The 16- and 17-year olds will have the vote in September, and have ended up taking it very seriously, holding proper debates and mock referenda. For its part, Nairn Academy has voted to stay with the UK by 71 per cent to 28 per cent.

Where Nairn goes, so goes Scotland – or at least her youth. Polls show a similar story nationwide: those with their future ahead of them see an advantage to being plugged in to the UK network. One pupil at Nairn told me she was worried that English employers may be less likely to employ Scots, if they hail from a country that proclaims itself foreign. Another said that his ambition was to go to London: he didn't specify a career. This fits a trend. Scots are famously itinerant; a fifth of those born in Scotland now live outside its borders, one of the highest émigré ratios of any country.

But the polls don't show what has driven equally globally minded Scots to back independence. A farmer friend, whose business depends on global markets, is considering voting Yes because he is appalled by the lack of effort made by Better Together. His wife is voting Yes in protest at what she sees as never-ending eruption of negativity from the No campaign. She loathes the idea that Scotland is too poor, dumb or small to be independent. Threats to deprive Scotland of sterling and EU membership strike her as laughable. Will the redcoats really come marching up to prise pounds from Scottish wallets?

And consider, earlier this week, the Treasury deciding to publicise the dividend of staying in the union: £1,400 per person. But this needed translating into Scottish. Voters could "share a meal of fish and chips with your family every day for around 10 weeks" runs HM Government's official advice, "with a couple of portions of mushy peas thrown in". If the SNP were to run a pastiche of a Bullingdon boy negotiating with what he assumed to be a nation of Rab C Nesbitt halfwits, this would read no differently. It is as if the Chancellor half-expects Scots to negotiate for a deep-fried Mars bar to be thrown in.

The Unionists can win the referendum, and decisively enough to end the question for a generation. But not if they talk about a 300-year-old union which forged the modern world and won two world wars as something that can be valued in terms of mushy peas. The point of being British is not banging on about being British; understatement is a national trait. But when faced with nationalists talking about nationhood, poetry and destiny, the UK Government seems to have no vocabulary. It is reduced to talking about being worth "280 hotdogs at the Edinburgh Festival". Using such examples is the way to destroy a country, rather than save it.

The Union does not, yet, look in mortal danger. Barack Obama's hopes for a "united" Britain are likely to be answered; the Yes campaign, which was level pegging seven weeks ago, is now 18 points behind. But Salmond has recovered from worse situations. His army of activists behave like evangelists, who have waited all their adult lives for this vote. Salmond talks about dreams because he knows the reality of Scottish devolution is no advert for independence. But this may yet work. Elections are often won by those who best capture the imagination. The unionists have won the battle for Scotland's head. They now have just over 100 days to win the battle for her heart.

Fraser Nelson is editor of 'The Spectator'

9/11 Memorial Museum: an emotional underworld beneath Ground Zero

Oliver Wainwright, The Guardian, Wednesday 14 May 2014 12.08 BST

In the middle of the World Trade Center site in New York, tourists squeeze their bodies against the faceted mirror-glass planes of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, eager to sneak a peek at what lies within. Rising up like an apparition behind the reflective glazing, beyond the greasy smears left by noses and sticky fingers, stand two rusted, fire-charred columns, relics salvaged from the wreckage of the twin towers.

"It's proving a popular place for selfies," says the architect Craig Dykers, watching visitors capture their reflected faces melding with the scorched structures inside. "If we can get someone to smile or have a giggle at a place of such sorrow," he adds, "we've done our job."

Almost 13 years since the atrocities of 9/11, when nearly 3,000 people were killed in a horrific moment of televised terrorism, the hallowed site of Ground Zero remains as much a place of spectacle as ever. More than 12 million people have visited since the memorial plaza opened in September 2011, to gawp into the voids of the towers' footprints, where endless sheets of water now spill in magisterial cascades into sunken reflecting pools.

Surrounded by a grove of 400 oak trees, interspersed with little slivers of lawn, these cubic waterfalls are breathtaking in their vastness, compressing the power of Niagara into stately dark squares. They have a silencing effect, which is just as well given the surrounding din of construction, where a ring of office towers is slowly rising to replace the 10m sq ft of commercial space that once stood on the site.

Finally opening to the public on 21 May, the museum completes the $700m (£415m) undertaking of the 9/11 memorial project, leading visitors on an Orphean descent to the very bedrock below this most charged of sites. With its faceted flanks shimmering above the trees, the portal to this emotional underworld – designed by Dykers' practice, the Norwegian firm Snøhetta – stands as an angular wedge, thrust into the north-east corner of the plaza. A folded shell of metal and glass, inscribed with horizontal pinstripes along its length, the building has ghostly echoes of a tumbling twin tower, a fallen silvery shaft lying kinked and twisted between the pools.

With its angular form looming imposingly into view, it is one of the few remnants of the visual language conjured by Daniel Libeskind in his original masterplan for the site in 2003, which imagined a circle of fragmented towers rising in a spiral up to a great fractured spire. His proposals were drenched with symbolism, from the spire's summit of 1,776 ft, in honour of the year of American independence, to a chink of light that would fall across the site at the same time on September 11 every year. His pitch won the nation's hearts, but not that of the site's leaseholder, Larry Silverstein, who had already hired his own architects and had other plans.

Since then, commercial realities have seen Libeskind's crystalline rock formation, which looked like something from the planet Krypton, translated into a more corporate affair of office blocks by a handful of Pritzker-prize winning architects, including Lords Foster and Rogers. Now half-finished, it might have been designed as a vertical exhibition of different curtain wall cladding systems. Libeskind's own jagged spear of a tower, meanwhile, has become a stumpy obelisk by the global giant SOM.

As if to make up for these generic, if well-detailed, slabs of commerce, the terrain below has been given over to a competing frenzy of form-making, with a series of enthusiastically sculpted structures scattered across the site, all trying to embody hope and anguish, optimism and loss, hurt and healing. There are the soaring vertebrae of Santiago Calatrava's $4bn transit hub, still under construction, channelling the wings of a dove and a dinosaur's rib cage; there are the solemn cascading voids; there might one day be a Frank Gehry-designed performing arts centre; and then, nestling among all this, there is the museum pavilion – along with a motley debris of security sheds and ventilation shafts.

In the hands of Snøhetta, the museum building has become Libeskind-lite, his trademark aesthetic of trauma and tragedy filtered though a benign Scandinavian lens. "We wanted to stay true to the feeling of the masterplan," says Dykers, "but the building shouldn't feel too shocking." Within, it is all blond wood and warm, natural tones "to engender a sense of calm, a moment of relaxation before you have to be challenged". Housing an auditorium and a small room for families of the victims, it is well crafted, but has the neutral, rather placid feeling of an airport lounge.

A victim of the legal and political wranglings that have plagued this 16-acre swath of lower Manhattan since 2001, Snøhetta's building has been slashed to a tenth of its planned size, when it was once to hold a museum of human rights and a visual arts centre. It is now essentially a glorified entrance lobby and mechanical service shed for what lies deep below, the memorial museum proper by the businesslike US firm Davis Brody Bond. "A traditional museum is an icon containing exhibits," says partner Steven Davis, as we process down a snaking staircase from Snøhetta's light-flooded crystal into the ethereal gloom, passing the gnarled base of the two towering columns. "But here the exhibits themselves are the icons." [...]

Who Are Women's Colleges For? KIERA FELDMAN, *The New York Times*, MAY 24, 2014

FOR hundreds of years, universities excluded women. Denied access to these institutions, they created their own. "Attempt great things," the founder of Mount Holyoke, Mary Lyon, told her students. "Accomplish great things." These schools, including the elite Seven Sisters — Mount Holyoke, Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar and Wellesley — were where the nation's most promising young women went to do just that.

But today, women's colleges are at a crossroads their founders could never have foreseen, struggling to reconcile their mission with a growing societal shift on how gender itself is defined. A handful of applications from transgender women have rattled school administrators over the past year, giving rise to anxious meetings and campus demonstrations. On April 29, the Department of Education issued new guidance: Transgender students are protected from discrimination under Title IX.

"We are all concerned about Title IX issues," said Mount Holyoke President Lynn Pasquerella in a telephone interview. "At a women's college, we have to have some criterion for admission," she said. "In addition to academic excellence, it's being a woman."

Administrators fear that admitting students who aren't "legally female" will cause them to lose Title IX funding. But where the leaders of these schools were once in the vanguard, championing the equal rights of women, they are now in the reactionary position of arguing that biology is destiny. This is a losing battle.

Before the recent Title IX ruling, they were already addressing the issue of transgender students on campus. But the accommodations they have made in housing and bathrooms are for a small but growing number, perhaps a hundred or so, of transgender *men* — students who enrolled as women and then transitioned in college. This has put the schools in the untenable position of essentially discriminating against women in favor of men.

Enacted by Congress in 1972, Title IX prohibits all discrimination "on the basis of sex" in any educational institution that receives federal funding. But when Congress was deliberating the legislation, elite schools like Harvard, Dartmouth and Smith lobbied for and won a private-school exemption for single-sex undergraduate admissions. So as Title IX is written, private women's colleges can accept or reject anyone based on gender.

In March 2013, a high school senior and transgender woman named Calliope Wong, who had applied to Smith College, received a letter in return. "Smith is a women's college, which means that undergraduate applicants to Smith must be female at the time of admission," it read. "Your FAFSA" — Free Application for Federal Student Aid — "indicates your gender as male. Therefore, Smith cannot process your application."

The school's vice president for enrollment, Audrey Smith, wrote to me in an email: "Smith was founded for a specific purpose — to educate and create opportunity for women. We don't define what constitutes a woman — we leave that to other entities or agencies to affirm." She added: "But we do require that it BE affirmed, at the point of admission." Smith has made a small policy change since last year: "Note that we exclude from consideration any documents not directly relating to admission (e.g., financial aid documents, disability forms, etc.)," Ms. Smith wrote. Everything else an applicant submits, from transcripts to letters of recommendation, must "reflect her status as a woman." Yet high schools often simply refuse to change gender identifications on documents.

"I want Smith to be a place not just for women as we define them now," said Elli Palmer, a sophomore who is a member of Q&A, a student group that opposes the school's admissions policy. Students recall a meeting at which Ms. Smith said, "I don't want to get to a point where we have a row of guys in the back of the class with baseball caps on." Of course, that's exactly what these schools already do have — in the form of transgender men who were admitted as women.

The rules for changing gender on government-issued documents vary wildly from one agency to the next and state by state. To change gender on a birth certificate, most states except California, Vermont and Washington require documentation that sex-reassignment surgery has been performed — but most doctors won't perform such surgery on anyone under 18. Tennessee law forbids changing gender on a birth certificate under any circumstances. On United States passports, gender can be changed with proof of clinical treatment, which is broadly defined — downgraded from a surgery requirement in 2010. As for driver's licenses, policies are all over the map: In New York, all you need is a doctor's note, while about half the states require proof of surgery.

One of the women's schools, Mills College in Oakland, Calif., relies on self-identification for gender. This is clearly the direction in which our society is moving, jurisdiction by jurisdiction and agency by agency. But Ms. Pasquerella of Mount Holyoke said she had concerns about a policy like the one at Mills. She asked: "What would prevent the male child of a faculty member who gets a tuition break for getting admitted from saying, 'Well, I identify as female, so I want to go here and get a free education'?" But does anyone really believe that high school boys would pretend to be transgender for the sake of a tuition break? [...]

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Moocs: Learning becomes a joy again

By Barney Thompson — March 9, 2014 **The Financial Times**

Some people finish work and go to the gym, or hit the sofa and watch TV, or compose symphonies, paint portraits, create apps, write poetry. Me, I Mooc. Since I discovered Moocs – massive open online courses – six months ago, I have become a Mooc-aholic.

Scrolling down Mooc providers' course lists gives me that child-in-a-sweet-shop feeling – a giddiness that explains in part the somewhat scattered nature of my selections.

I have taken Coursera's The Power of Macroeconomics, a 12-week course provided in conjunction with the University of California Irvine, and Central Challenges of American National Security, Strategy and the Press: An Introduction, an eight-week course from the Harvard branch of edX.

I am currently in the middle of the more lugubriously entitled ChinaX, a series of modules spread over 15 months – a commitment I completely failed to notice when I signed up. And I'm about to start The Analytics Edge, an edX/MITx 11-week course in handling big data.

But I'm tempted by dozens more – Shakespeare and his World, Networks, Crowds and Markets, Applied Cryptography, The Greatest Unsolved Mysteries of the Universe, although I draw the line at An Introduction to Aeronautical Engineering or Discover Dentistry.

Given this reckless, wide-eyed attitude, I try to apply two rules: any Mooc I study must be relevant to my employment – actual or desired – and I am allowed to take no more than two at a time. But, even then, it has been hard to keep up.

Central Challenges of American National Security called for two 600-word memos to the US secretary of state outlining what American policy should be on Iran and Syria, and one to the editor of a fictional newspaper recommending what to do with a WikiLeaks-style dump of secret documents on North Korea.

Each had to be done in three days and each was accompanied by about 70-80 pages worth of reading material, plus video lectures and online discussions. It is not easy fitting all that in around your job when you have a professor from the University of California Irvine coming at you from another direction with his lectures on the components of the Keynesian Expenditure Function or the factors shifting the aggregate supply curve.

I have had to adjust the pattern of my day to fit it all in. Choosing the longest possible commute, for example, to win more time to read, watch and listen to all the material I download on to my tablet. Using my lunch breaks and a few late nights have helped me keep up with the work, but not without some nasty grinding of mental gears. And, as with any new material, one needs to find the time to revise if it is to stick.

If Moocs had not evolved, I would have given up: The Power of Macroeconomics, for instance, was basically a weekly hour-long lecture split into five or six chunks accompanied by some PowerPoint slides and rounded off with a short test. Given these constraints, the amount of information it packed in was both overwhelming and unappealing. (To make matters worse, I was trying and failing to learn shorthand at the same time, with the result that my notes are incomprehensible where they are not indecipherable.)

But ChinaX is an entirely different animal. It uses video lectures, readings, interviews, footage from Harvard's classrooms, multiple choice quizzes and discussion forums, annotated texts, songs, drawings, artefacts and maps over which you can lay kingdoms, populations, trade routes, rivers and so on. It is hugely imaginative and innovative, and when one week's work is done, I find myself impatient for the next.

What started as a mission to plug a gaping hole in my knowledge of the world has become learning for the sheer joy of it; the next two weeks' topics, the poetry and calligraphy of the Tang Dynasty, are unlikely ever to be of any practical use, but I do not care. ChinaX beats any component of my formal education hands down.

I suspect this is why dropout rates for Moocs are so high: some are little more than infodumps; others stimulate, provoke and encourage, and you cannot know how it will be until you try them out. But when you find one that works, you gain access to knowledge and skills that a few years ago would have required a trip to night school – which might have been halfway across town – or a lonely wrestle with a pile of textbooks.

The naysayers are wrong. Whatever your motive – life-long learning or upgrading the CV – for those who are hungry to learn, Moocs are where the feast is.

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Church's General Assembly begins, Queen urges people to work together no matter indy outcome

heraldscotland
The Herald | sunday herald

Saturday 17 May 2014

The Queen has called on people of faith and goodwill to work together for the social good of Scotland whatever the outcome of the independence referendum.

The Queen recognised the roll of the kirk in "holding the people of Scotland together" and "healing divisions" in a letter to the Church of Scotland general assembly. The letter was presented to the opening session of the assembly in Edinburgh this morning, in the presence of Prince Edward and First Minister Alex Salmond. Prince Edward gave an address on the theme of community, and The First Minister welcomed The Queen's "typically gracious and considered remarks" in a published statement.

The Queen said: "Throughout the history of Scotland, the Church of Scotland has played a key part in shaping the governance of Scotland and Scottish society. We recognise that contained within the articles declaratory of the Church of Scotland, church and state hold mutual duties towards one another. So in this important year of referendum we pray that whatever the outcome, people of faith and people of goodwill will work together for the social good of Scotland. We recognise too the important role that the church can play in holding the people of Scotland together, in healing divisions and in safeguarding the interests of the most vulnerable. In this year in which Scotland will host the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, we commend to you those who will come from around the world as competitors and spectators. We are confident that the church will play its full part in welcoming, supporting and extending the hand of friendship to the diverse peoples of the Commonwealth. This year the First World War will be remembered, when people around the world are called to commemorate the valour, courage and sacrifice of so many who gave their lives in the many battles that scarred Europe from 1914 to 1918. As well as being a time of commemoration, we believe that it is a time to pray for the peacemakers of the world, and for a day when nations shall live at peace with one another."

Mr Salmond said: "These are typically gracious and considered remarks from Her Majesty the Queen in which she extends a warm welcome to people from around the world to come and enjoy the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

"Her Majesty is also right to highlight the importance of everyone working together for the social good of Scotland, regardless of the outcome of the referendum, which is something I heartily endorse and should be welcomed across the political spectrum. Her remarks on the First World War commemoration as a time for rededication to peace were well chosen, as indeed was her praise of the interfaith initiative on credit unions — a practical initiative in which the Church of Scotland is fulfilling its mission to the vulnerable in society."

Prince Edward said: "Community is about looking out for each other, but how can we do this as many of our communities become larger and less personal. The state has developed all sorts of ways and means and we have devised ever more sophisticated legal systems and processes, but in doing so are we creating a more harmonious society? In my mind there is a significant difference between the assertion of legalistic rights versus the Christian teaching of responsibility. For instance, I could argue that it's my right to play my music as loudly as I please. However, this is bound to infringe someone else's right to peace and quiet. There is no clear answer to this, so we could come to blows or it requires going to court and engaging two lawyers going to court and arguing the case. One of us will be happy and the other unhappy. We will both probably have had our characters besmirched and our lawyers will be, well, better off. However, as a Christian I am taught to consider others and in this case the likely impact of playing my music too loudly. Maybe this was just the way I was brought up, but I can't help questioning which creates a more harmonious society - the individual demanding their right which will ultimately lead to conflict or the individual being aware of their responsibility and acting accordingly?"

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Dallas City Council to vote on bag ban issue Wednesday

ROBERT WILONSKY, Staff Writer

The Dallas Morning News

Published: 23 March 2014 11:12 PM /Updated: 24 March 2014 08:16 AM

If a single-use bag ban is approved, retailers would have to register with the city and charge customers an "environmental fee" of 10 cents a bag or $1 per transaction.

The Dallas City Council is expected to vote on a single-use bag ban Wednesday, a year after council member Dwaine Caraway revived the issue.

How far the ordinance might go remains to be seen, but Caraway expects at least a partial ban to win approval. Several options are on the table, from an outright ban to tabling the issue until further studies are done. Somewhere in the middle is an "environmental fee ordinance," which Caraway says he has the votes to pass. It would ban single-use carryout bags at all city facilities and events but allow retailers to use plastic and paper bags. Retailers would have to register with the city and charge customers an "environmental fee" of 10 cents a bag or $1 per transaction. Retailers would have to turn over at least half of the money to the city. They could keep up to half depending on several factors, including whether a store gives customers rebates for bringing reusable bags.

Caraway said the "amount of the fee could be a point of conversation" Wednesday, and could change. "I haven't been messing with this for a year and a half for nothing," he said. "A ban with a fee is no different than a ban. It's working toward a ban or an elimination of those plastic bags, and that results in a cleaner community and a cleaner environment."

Council member Lee Kleinman supports the fee-based ordinance as a "reasonable" solution. "From the citizens, the biggest resistance we hear to an outright ban is it creates an inconvenient situation if you don't have a bag, if you're in from out of town, if you forgot one," he said. "And it's low enough that if they don't remember, they pay a dime or whatever."

But some council members oppose any sort of ban, among them Sheffie Kadane, Vonciel Jones Hill and Rick Callahan. "It's anti-business," Callahan said. "If we ban bags, then next we'll have to ban water bottles, milk jugs. In my district the biggest issue is cigarette butts, gum trash. Where do you stop?"

City Attorney Warren Ernst sent the council two alternatives to the fee proposal Friday. One is a citywide ban, while the other — the so-called "responsible retailer" option — would allow business owners to give customers all the bags they want as long as they pay an annual fee of $55 per location. They would also have to comply with several requirements, including reporting to the city the number of bags dispensed each year and participating in neighborhood clean-up programs.

Some council members, including Caraway, say the responsible retailer option doesn't stand a chance. "That calls for too much additional enforcement, as far as I'm concerned," he said.

The proposed ordinances weren't greeted with much enthusiasm from either side of the debate.

Bag makers and retailers say they're too prohibitive, and at least one environmental group thinks they're far too lenient.

The Texas Retailers Association issued a brief statement Friday saying it "continues to oppose a ban on paper and plastic bags in Dallas."

Lee Califf, executive director of the American Progressive Bag Alliance, said in a written statement that the proposed ordinances "would be terrible for consumers, small businesses and the environment alike." He called for the council to do a litter study. "Wouldn't Dallas lawmakers want to know what the real litter problem is before imposing such a draconian law with no way to measure its effectiveness?"

Zac Trahan, statewide program director for the Texas Campaign for the Environment, said the fee-based ordinance is the opposite of a ban. He said it "would give retailers a profit motive to keep distributing as many single-use bags as possible, since they would be pocketing 50 percent of the fees generated. No other city with a bag fee has ever allowed retailers to keep such a huge portion of the revenue, because the entire reason to pass an ordinance is to reduce single-use bag distribution."

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Facebook spreads rainy-day blues to sunny places, study says

By Monte Morin *March 12, 2014* **The Baltimore Sun**

Ever feel the rainy-day blues on a bright and sunny afternoon? If so, your Facebook account may be to blame, according to new research.

In a paper published Wednesday in the journal PLOS ONE, scientists argued that the hugely popular social networking site exerts an emotional "spillover" effect that may carry significant consequences for an increasingly interconnected world. By analyzing more than a billion Facebook status updates, authors concluded that emotionally positive posts gave rise to more positive posts by friends, while negative posts spawned more negative posts. "It was actually a very large effect. Every message that you post causes your friends to post an additional one to two messages that have the same emotional content," said lead study author James Fowler, a professor of medical genetics and political science at the UC San Diego School of Medicine.

How do Fowler and his colleagues know this?

Researchers said they used weather records to determine which updates were posted in cities experiencing rain. Then they used text analysis software to determine if posts expressed positive or negative emotions, and compared the rainy-day posts with non-rainy-day posts. What they found, they said, was that rain increased the number of negative posts by 1.16%, and reduced the number of positive posts by 1.19%.

But it didn't end there. Authors claimed that those negative posts influenced Facebook friends in cities with dry weather. According to researchers, negative posts in general prompted 1.29 more negative posts by friends, while positive posts promoted an additional 1.75 positive posts. "What people feel and say in one place may spread to many parts of the globe on the very same day," authors wrote.

Though Fowler and his colleagues noted that positive posts were slightly more influential than negative posts, they said their findings raised concerns. "These results imply that emotions themselves might ripple through social networks to generate large-scale synchrony that gives rise to clusters of happy and unhappy individuals," Fowler and his colleagues wrote. "As a result, we may see greater spikes in global emotion that could generate increased volatility in everything from political systems to financial markets."

Fowler and study coauthor Dr. Nicholas Christakis, a physician and sociologist at Yale University, have written numerous papers on the topic of contagion, suggesting even that obesity is spread through "social ties." Though their work has generated numerous headlines, it's also been criticized by outside experts. "I have found it difficult to assess the credibility of their results," said Charles Manski, a professor of economics at Northwestern University.Russell Lyons, a professor of mathematics at Indiana University, criticized the statistical analysis in the authors' 2007 obesity paper, calling it "deeply flawed." Although Lyons said he hasn't had the time or supplemental information necessary to scrutinize the statistical methods of the current paper, he remained skeptical. "I don't think I've seen any particularly convincing and interesting recent research on social contagion, though such research may exist," he said by email. "The information presented in this paper is certainly not convincing," he wrote.

In the Facebook study, Fowler and his colleagues said they examined status updates from users in 100 U.S. cities from January 2009 to March 2012. To ensure posters' anonymity, researchers said they did not view any of their names or actually read the posts. The text analysis was conducted on servers where Facebook currently keeps user data, they wrote. Fowler and his colleagues say that much research has been done on the spread of emotions among humans and its evolutionary basis.

This prior research has argued that emotions play a special role in bonding, and that humans are naturally inclined toward expressing their emotions rather than concealing them. "Human laughter, for example, is believed to have evolved from the "play face" expression seen in other primates in relaxed, social situations," authors wrote. "Such facial expressions and positive emotions enhance social relations by producing analogous pleasurable feelings in others, by rewarding the efforts of others, and by encouraging ongoing social contact."

Fowler said that based on the study's findings, scientists and policymakers should consider using social networks as a tool to improve mental and physical health.

"We should be doing everything we can to measure the effects of social networks and to learn how to magnify them so that we can create an epidemic of wellbeing," he said.

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Millennial generation less religious, more liberal than older ones

By David Lauter, *March 7, 2014*

Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON -- Members of the huge millennial generation are less religious, less likely to call themselves "patriotic" and significantly more liberal than older generations, new research shows.

Although adults aged 18-33 are much more likely to call themselves political independents than their elders are, they are also far more likely to vote Democratic. Their views favoring activist government, as well as their stands on social issues such as gay rights, reinforce that voting behavior, an extensive study by the Pew Research Center shows.

The youngest generation of adults, born after 1980, has the most optimism about the country. That comes despite the economic difficulties that a large share of them have experienced since entering the workforce. And it stands in contrast with some previous generations: Baby boomers, for example, born between 1946 and 1964, were less optimistic than their elders at this stage of their lives.

The millennials are also the only generation of adults with more people who identify themselves as liberals than as conservatives. Just less than one-third of millennials call themselves liberals while about one-quarter identify as conservative. And nearly half say they have become more liberal as they have aged, with 57% saying their views on social issues have become more liberal over time.

By contrast, among members of the baby boom generation, 41% call themselves conservative and only 21% identify as liberals. And baby boomers are more likely to say that growing older has made them more conservative. On this and most other issues, the views of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) fall between those of the baby boom and millennial generations, and the views of those born before the baby boom are more conservative.

The liberal views of the youngest adult generation show up on a range of issues. Nearly seven in 10 say they support same-sex marriage, for example, just more than half identify themselves as "supporters of gay rights" and they are twice as likely to see gay and lesbian couples raising children as a good thing for the country than as a negative, which puts them at odds with older generations. They are also far more likely to favor legalization of marijuana. Opinions on abortion and gun control, by contrast, show little generational difference. Just more than half of millennials say they favor a "bigger government providing more services" rather than a smaller government – a polling question used for years as an index of people's attitudes toward government's role. On the question of the role of government, the much greater racial diversity of the millennial generation plays a key role. About four-in-10 members of the millennial generation are non-white – a much larger percentage than in older age groups. Their generally liberal views shape the generation's outlook although whites in the millennial generation also hold somewhat more liberal views on government than white members of older generations.

Racial diversity may play a role in another distinctive feature of the generation's members: Although they are optimistic about the country, they are significantly less likely than older generations to say that "most people can be trusted." Sociologists who have looked at other studies over the years have suggested that people who see themselves as part of a vulnerable minority group are less likely to feel trust toward other members of society.

A significantly smaller share of millennials have married than among older generations at this stage of their lives. Only about one in four millennials have wed, compared with more than one-third of Generation X when they were in their 20s and 30s, and nearly half of the baby boomers. That decline in marriage rates may reflect the lessened attachment that members of the generation have to other institutions, such as organized religion or nationalism. Almost three in 10 say they are religiously unaffiliated, nearly twice the share among baby boomers. Just less than half of millennials say that "patriotic" describes them well, in comparison with two-thirds to three-quarters of older generations.

But the reluctance to marry also reflects the tough economic circumstances that millennials have faced. Members of the generation are the best educated in U.S. history, but also have the most student-loan debt. Their unemployment rate, 13% as of January, is significantly higher than that of older workers. And an overwhelming majority of them believe that young adults today face more economic challenges than did previous generations – a view with which older generations concur.

Yet despite those economic difficulties, millennials have a positive view about their economic futures, the survey showed. A majority believe that they eventually will have "enough to lead the kind of life I want." [...]

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The real reasons gentlemen don't want women to join their men-only clubs

As the Travellers Club, an historic private gentlemen's club endorsed by the Duke of Edinburgh, votes against permitting women to join its ranks, Radhika Sanghani talks to its members about their real fears of a female invasion: dolly birds and crèches

By Radhika Sanghani 10 Apr 2014 **The Telegraph**

Private gentlemen's clubs are known for being exactly that: private and full of gentlemen. The whole concept is very 19th century – which is when most of them were founded of course – but two centuries and several suffragettes later, it looks like nothing much in that world is going to change.

Especially at the Travellers Club, in Pall Mall. Its members were asked to finally put the 'women's issue' to rest by voting on whether they wanted to permit female members to the club. A surprisingly large 40 per cent said yes, but they failed to win a majority, with the remaining 60 per cent voting no. Us pesky women will still only be allowed to attend the club as guests of male members.

The reasons for women's continued exclusion that crop up in the whopping 8,000 word report on the matter, commissioned by chairman Anthony Layden (just so you get an idea of the clientele, he is the former British ambassador to Morocco and Libya), are nothing if not mind-blowing.

One member wrote of his avid fear of letting women in: "The male congeniality of the bar and [smoking room] would be destroyed. Hen parties would appear and shrill voices be heard."

Good god – shrill voices? I say, shall we ban women from the entire capital?!

Stick to the status quo

Another concerned member said: "My experience of the club table at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, where one does unfortunately encounter lady members, is that their presence leads to very different and far less enjoyable themes of conversation."

Raising the children perhaps? Gender inequality and sexism? Oh, I'm sure this gentleman wouldn't know about anything of the sort. He's probably just frightened the ladies will spend all night discussing periods and lipstick. But, apart from shrill voices, hen dos and girl talk, why is it that these gentlemen don't want women to join their ranks? Is it because of old-fashioned, unfounded and sexist fears – or do they have some legitimate reasons for wanting their single-sex space?

I decided to track a few members down and ask them. One man, who'll I refer to as Mr X because the first rule of the Travellers Club seems to be that you do not talk about the Travellers Club (a funny paradox for such garrulous men), tells me the main reason is: "If it ain't broke don't fix it."

Mr X didn't vote on the motion, because he wasn't actually aware it was happening ("we can't all read those long emails"), but when he found out about it, he was "rather amused". To him, letting female members in isn't really much of an issue.

After all, he tells me: "It works perfectly – why change this? Keep the status quo." I can almost hear his white male companions nodding 'hear hear' behind him. But to Mr X, who joined the Travellers around 30 years ago, it just doesn't make sense to have female members.

He doesn't know what the exact problem would be – he "can't put [his] finger on what would change" – but he does know that something would. He eventually clarifies: "It's about congeniality. It wouldn't be acutely different but a bit different."

Ladies' etiquette

For example, he tells me that not everyone "minds their Ps and Qs and doesn't swear" at the club, and if there were "ladies present", that would have to change. A quote in the report backs this up, as a member says he likes not "having to bother with the etiquette that one inevitably must adhere to in female company (whether it be offering her drinks, waiting for her to eat, or standing when she arrives or leaves)".

It doesn't occur to either gentlemen that said lady might be too busy buying her own drinks to even notice if they're standing or not. But, another member who I'll label Mr Z, tells me that there are far deeper fears than having to be permanently polite. Even though he would have been one of the few men to vote in favour of female members had he seen the email, he explains to me his fellow members' real fears. What if, he says, the Travellers followed in the footsteps of the In & Out (Naval and Military Club) in St. James' Park? The latter club allowed women to join as members, and after a while, found itself creating a *crèche* for the mini members.

"It's a slippery slope," Mr Z tells me darkly. [...]

Books

Women's fiction is a sign of a sexist book industry

Alison Flood, *The Guardian*, Friday 16 May 2014 11.37

Joanne Harris says the book industry is sexist. Why else are there categories for 'women writers' and no equivalents for writers who happen to be men?

This is the year of reading women, people, remember? We're all reading female writers and helping address the literary gender imbalance which is highlighted annually and disturbingly by VIDA.[1] So everything's good, right? We're slowly rebalancing the world, book by book, as we tackle our teetering piles of Mantels and Atwoods and Cattons.

Sadly, no. The excellent Joanne Harris (have you read her latest, The Gospel of Loki? You should, it's a cracker) has explained in detail why it isn't in a blistering new blog post sparked by what she calls "another lazy assumption" from a reader who said the novel is "capitalising on the fandom of Tom Hiddleston".

Apart from the fact that Harris first wrote about Loki way before the Marvel films starring Hiddleston came out, she believes the comment is the tip of an iceberg. "A great big iceberg of sexism within the whole book industry, which stealthily perpetuates the belief that no woman writer can ever really be successful without having somehow copied from, used or otherwise capitalised upon the popularity of a man."

"Imagine someone accusing Salman Rushdie of 'capitalising' on the folk tales of the Middle East. Imagine someone accusing Neil Gaiman of 'capitalising' on the popularity of: Norse myths; Doctor Who; Claire Danes; milk. Imagine someone accusing Lee Child of 'capitalising' on the popularity of Tom Cruise," she writes, before detailing the various assumptions which have been made about her throughout her career.

The situation isn't helped by the likes of TLS editor Peter Stothard or VS Naipaul, Harris says; by the use of terms such as "chick lit", or by male academics' dismissal of female authors. All true, but what really caught my attention was her claim that "'Women's fiction' is still considered a sub-category. (Amazon; Goodreads; Wikipedia; take note)".

I knew it was - or had been - on Wikipedia. There was a controversy about that last year. But Amazon? Really? I checked it out; she's right. There's a category for "Women writers and fiction" on the site, and within that for "Women's literary fiction" – hi Rachel Joyce, Charlotte Mendelson, Maeve Binchy, Kate Morton and Virginia Woolf – and "Women's popular fiction". I'm bewildered by how titles make it into these categories. The mix of books is so broad as to be meaningless, united only by the authors' gender. But the fact remains the categories are there, and there are no equivalent "Men's writers and fiction", "Men's literary fiction", and "Men's popular fiction" sections. They are just "fiction", I guess.

Goodreads, meanwhile, has a hugely diverse list of genres to pick from (wizards or Spider-Man fiction, anyone?). "Womens" and "Women's fiction" both feature, but no equivalent men's labeling.

I asked Amazon to explain their reasoning; I didn't hear back. I asked Harris why she thinks it is an issue and this is what she told me: "It's an issue because effectively the gendering of books excludes certain readers from an area they don't need to be excluded from ... Women aren't a sub-category ... When you say literature it seems to me there is a definite implication it is written by a man. That is absurd and ludicrous but it is everywhere. It is a general and very broad strand of prejudice."

If there is women's literature, points out Harris, why not men's literature? "Why does fiction need to be gendered? ... How good does a woman writer have to be before she is referred to as a writer?" (Hilary Mantel has got there, she says, and so has Margaret Atwood.)

Perhaps there's something in the air, because Harris isn't the only author enraged by this. Randy Susan Meyers blogged earlier this week for the Huffington Post about how "if you want to publish on Amazon, you must pick a category from a wide-ranging list of possibilities that includes 10 subgenres of women's fiction and zero that are labeled 'men's fiction'".

It's clearly a marketing decision, I thought, so I asked Cathy Rentzenbrink, the associate editor of the Bookseller, if she could explain. "As a person, a feminist and a reader, I completely understand and feel the frustration, but practically, I also know there are vast amounts of real people who want guidance towards the sort of book they will enjoy, and that is what publishers and retailers are trying to provide," she told me. "Even the dreaded 'chick lit' term is useful in that the reader who wants that type of book knows what they are getting. It's a bit similar to the genre debate. I always enjoy lofty cries of 'There should be no genre, there should only be books', but those of us who understand the coalface of bookselling know that a large building with no categorisation other than 'Books A-Z' would be very difficult to navigate."

That's true, but do we really want to give out what Meyers says is a clear message: "Men are the norm. Women are a sub-category". Meyers points out that "we don't need firemen and firewomen – they're all fire fighters. And all those writers we love? We don't need to call them writer-men and writer-women. We can call them writers. And we can call the novels they write, just that. Novels." [...]

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[1] **VIDA: Women in Literary Arts** is an organization based in the United States that "seeks to explore critical and cultural perceptions of writing by women through meaningful conversation and the exchange of ideas among existing and emerging literary communities."

SERIE LETTRES ET ARTS

ANALYSE LV1

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

Solo: A James Bond Novel review – Has William Boyd outdone Ian Fleming?
Nicholas Lezard
The Guardian, Tuesday 6 May 2014

It's a curious phenomenon, the rise of the semi-canonical sequel. It's a return to the nursery, a kind of fan-fiction, and a reluctance to accept that the final page of the book is the end of the story. Particularly prone to this is James Bond's audience, appropriately enough, given that the Bond books are basically adolescent in appeal (which is not to say this is a bad thing). Those written by Ian Fleming are now hugely outnumbered by those that aren't. The exercise was given an immediate pseudo-legitimacy by Kingsley Amis, who published the first post-Fleming Bond story, *Colonel Sun*, in 1968; more recently, Sebastian Faulks gave the franchise further respectability with *Devil May Care*.

William Boyd is, with Amis, and pace Faulks, perhaps the most serious, or most respected author to take up the Bond baton. One does wonder why? He can hardly need the money, or the potential risk to his reputation. Amis put his finger on it, perhaps, when he said we want to be Bond: and the "we" here also means "writers". We have long gone past the point when Bond stories were taken seriously, if they ever were; as the films have, for most of the last 40 years, been travesties of the original concept, Bond is a barrel whose bottom has been scraped right through, and now represents only a kind of Ukip masturbation fantasy in this country (remember that union jack parachute in *The Spy Who Loved Me*?) and formulaic high jinks elsewhere.

That said, I have to admit that I found *Solo* at least as fun as everyone said it was, and at times I found myself wondering if Boyd had outdone Fleming – that is, constructed a plausible look behind the curtains of British post-imperial intelligence, with the adventure, sadism and sex ramped up. Bond – aged 45 now, in 1969 – is sent to a civil-war-torn imaginary African state ("Zanzarim") to get close to the brilliant general whose tactics are making the government's job difficult. The British interest resides in the fact that the country is sitting on an enormous amount of untapped oil. Bond's job is to make the general "a less efficient soldier", in M's words.

And, as romps go, it romps. Bond still drinks and smokes too much; indeed, Boyd seems to have decided that Bond's Morlands are a bit lightweight has him smoking African cigarettes instead, which, if my experience is any guide, feel like grenades going off in your chest. (There is another joke that has Bond reading Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* as part of his preparation. Bond is famously unliterary.) The tone is just right; on the qui vive for solecisms or anachronisms, I found none. Even the baddy is perfectly judged: with a disfigured face, and one eye that cannot stop weeping; a brilliant touch. This is a powerful and smoothly running entertainment machine.

But, but. I would strongly recommend not reading this if you have recently read a Fleming Bond. It was Martin Amis who said of novels that each of them displays, pinned and wriggling, the novelist's soul for all to see. This applies across genres, and part of the savour of Fleming's work is the way we get to peer behind his curtains, too. For Fleming, sadism was not assumed, it was part of his being. There is none of Bond's – how best to put this? – reprehensible attitude to women here, or homosexuals, or anything else (bar a little drink-driving) that might jar with contemporary standards. A tacit clean-up job has been done on the seamier aspects of the spy's character, which is a failure of nerve, if an understandable one; although at least when he somewhat implausibly acts the valiant knight, defending a woman's honour, he does so with satisfying violence. Also, Boyd has chosen to ignore the events of Fleming's final, exhausted Bond novels – as well as his fondness for the exclamation mark. There is, besides, the nagging sense that Bond is a little too decent here. He was never a bounder in the Fleming books – only his smile was cruel – but after the scene where he tries to rescue some starving children, I couldn't quite get the title of Boyd's first novel out of my head: *A Good Man in Africa*.

SERIE LETTRES ET ARTS

ANALYSE LV1

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

Half of Britain to be offered for shale gas drilling as fracking areas face 50 trucks passing each day

By Emily Gosden, Energy Editor The Telegraph, 17 Dec 2013

Ministers "stepping up the search for shale" with new exploration rights to be offered to fracking firms next summer

Fracking could take place across more than half of Britain under plans announced by the Government to "step up the search" for shale gas and oil. Ministers said they would offer energy companies the chance for rights to drill across more than 37,000 square miles, stretching from central Scotland to the south coast. Every county in England except Cornwall could have shale gas exploration, according to a map showing areas the Government plans to offer to energy companies.

A Government-commissioned report released on Tuesday said as many as 2,880 wells could be drilled, generating up to a fifth of the country's annual gas demand at peak and creating as many as 32,000 jobs.

Michael Fallon, the energy minister, said that shale was "an exciting prospect, which could bring growth, jobs and energy security". However, the report warned that communities near sites where drilling took place could see a large increase in traffic. Residents could face as many as 51 lorry journeys each day for three years, the Government-commissioned study by consultancy Amec said.

It also warned of potential strain on facilities for handling the waste water generated by hydraulic fracturing, the process known as fracking which involves pumping water, sand and chemicals into rocks at high pressure to extract gas.

There were also concerns over the the potential environmental impact on the countryside.

The areas to be offered to companies for fracking include several National Parks, numerous Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and sites deemed of "international importance" for conservation and wildlife.

So far companies have rights to drill in 176 "licence" areas across 7,300 square miles of Britain, mostly concentrated in and around Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire and Sussex.

The addition of the areas mapped out on Tuesday means more than half of Britain, and about two-thirds of England, will be open to fracking.

Oil and gas companies will be invited to apply for access in a "licensing round" next summer. Companies will then need a series of planning and environmental permits before they are allowed to drill.

Mr Fallon said it was unlikely that companies would apply for licences in every area, but admitted that the area in which licences are taken up could roughly double. The report suggests up to 150 licences could be granted.

Communities where fracking takes place have been promised £100,000 in benefits by shale gas companies during initial exploration, and then a one per cent share of the revenues if fracking succeeds and gas is produced. Amec said this could be worth up to £4.8m per drilling site over the lifetime of the well. Total community benefits from fracking across 150 new licences could reach £600m.

Ministers are keen to encourage exploration for shale, which they believe could help to bring down energy prices. A report earlier this year by the British Geological Survey suggested there could be enough gas in the north of England alone to supply the UK for more than 40 years.

"We have seen the enormous impact that shale gas extraction in the States has had on its economy, both on household bills and industrial prices. It has had a strong impact there and it has the potential to have an impact here," Mr Fallon said. "It will reduce our dependence on liquid natural gas. We import over half our gas at the moment and we face the prospect of having to import 70 per cent of our gas by 2030 if we haven't found any shale by then. If we do find shale that will obviously reduce our dependence on those imports and reduce our dependence on wholesale gas prices. That in turn will be good for the economy".

However the scale of shale production is highly uncertain. Amec's report shows that in a "low" scenario there could be as few as 180 wells drilled in the new areas, creating as few as 2,500 jobs.

The report said that fracking could "have an adverse impact on traffic congestion, noise or air quality" . There could be between 14 and 36 lorries a day for up to 13 weeks of exploratory drilling, and then between 17 and 51 a day for a production period of up to 145 weeks.

Mr Fallon said lorry movements were "matters for each individual site". He added: "Planning authorities have the power to impose conditions so the impact on the local quality of life will not be unacceptable."

Peak annual gas production from the new licence areas could be as much as 706 billion cubic feet a year. Britain's current annual gas demand is 3.52 trillion cubic feet, and the total amount of gas produced from 150 new licences through the 2020s and into the 2030s could reach about 8.6 trillion cubic feet, Amec said.

A similar volume could be expected from the existing areas, Government officials said.

More than 650,000 cubic feet of waste water could be produced by each well, which could "place a substantial burden on existing waste water treatment infrastructure capacity", Amec warned, although co-operation with water companies and local planning authorities could address this problem.

The report also warned there could be a "significant negative effect on climate change" at a local level.

The RSPB criticised the Government for failing to exclude environmentally-sensitive areas. [...]

SERIE LETTRES ET ARTS

ANALYSE LV1

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

Nom : *Prénom :* *Signature :*

The exquisite craftsmanship and healthy ridiculousness of Jean Paul Gaultier

A major new retrospective does justice to the shocking elements of Gaultier's work, yet also celebrates his embrace of bad taste.

BY HELEN LEWIS PUBLISHED 12 MAY, 2014 — **New Statesman**

The first time Jean Paul Gaultier showed a collection that included men's skirts, the staff of *Vogue* walked out, swiftly followed by those of *Marie Claire* and French *Elle*. In his notes for the Barbican's retrospective, Gaultier archly observes: "I was slated by the French press for designing clothes for hairdressers and homosexuals! It took them two years to accept my statement that Prince Charles is not the only real man to wear a skirt!"

That was 1984, three decades ago. And yet the idea that a bloke might wander around wearing an ankle-length garment that is not bifurcated to the crotch would still make many people feel vaguely uneasy; this even though men are clearly gagging to wear skirts. (Have you ever been to a wedding attended by Scottish people or to an undergraduate fancy-dress party? Or watched *Mrs Brown's Boys*?) Because Jean Paul Gaultier likes teasing at exactly these kinds of cultural taboos, it's easy to regard him simply as fashion's court jester. He seems to encourage it, hamming up his Frenchness at every possible opportunity. (Exhibit A: a collection entitled "Ze Parisienne". Exhibit B: a T-shirt in the gift shop with a huge picture of his grinning mug, accompanied by the words "Froggy designer".) It has long been my suspicion that he can speak English with a perfect, cut-glass RP accent; he just knows the marketing value of cooing about "un adventure marvellous" to the fashion press.

This retrospective, developed in Canada and midway through a global tour, certainly does justice to the shocking elements of Gaultier's work. There's a section dedicated to his corsets, with an eerily animated mannequin of him breathlessly recounting how he first made one for his teddy bear. Some pieces are outrageous – Madonna's pointy effort is here and an even more exaggerated version on a male model – but all are united by an innate sense of proportion (what should be exaggerated – and how – to create the right effect) and exquisite construction. Although Gaultier never had formal training, the designer Pierre Cardin hired him as an assistant when he was aged just 18, after the young JP bombarded him with sketches.

Tucked away in red-light-district-style windows are his S&M-themed clothes: all lace masks, riding crops and peephole cut-outs. Around the corner (and probably more upsetting to an impeccable liberal like you, dear *New Statesman* reader) are his riffs on the clothes of cultures around the world. There's a couture wedding dress from 2003 with an alabaster-white-feather Native American headdress and an Inuit-style hooded coat, lined with embroidery and fur. Most astonishingly – I still struggle to believe that this happened – there are pieces from his 1993-94 women's ready-to-wear collection "Chic Rabbis". Its inspiration was a group of Hasidic Jews he saw outside the New York Public Library, "with their hats and their huge coats flapping in the wind". The collection featured jewelled yarmulkes and furry sidelocks. The fashion press, which had thought men in skirts were an abomination a few years earlier, loved it.

There is no other designer today who is quite so gleeful about embracing bad taste. Think how dull, how correct, how orderly a retrospective of, say, Prada's clothes would be. Even Chanel couldn't compete – although its current head designer, Karl Lagerfeld, knows a thing or two about hamming up the *Zoolander* elements of his personality, given that he employs a "soda serf" to follow him around at parties with a Pepsi Max on a silver platter and recently said he would like to marry his cat, a white Siamese called Choupette. Gaultier's mischief is infectious. "*Oui*, ze fashion industry ees bonkers, but 'ow wonderfully so," these clothes scream. Very few people are rich and thin enough to buy and wear couture, so these designs exist for two reasons: as works of art and as marketing for the designer's perfume collections. Under these circumstances, spending a hundred hours making a sheer bodysuit with integral beaded merkin begins to make a certain sort of sense.

I have no hesitation in describing these clothes as works of art. Gaultier's atelier spends up to a thousand hours on a couture piece; if you appreciate the brushwork of a Monet, you should have as much respect for the craftsmanship needed to embroider hundreds upon hundreds of semi-circles of overlapping chiffon to make it look like glittering fish scales. Many of his signatures – Breton stripes, equestrian themes, punk tartan and denim, a particular combination of blush pink and black denoting "sexy" – have trickled down to the high street.

SERIE LETTRES ET ARTS

ANALYSE LV1

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

Nom : *Prénom :* *Signature :*

More men pushing carts down supermarket aisles

By James Sullivan — May 20, 2014

The Boston Globe

Friday nights were sacred in young Evan Weymouth's family home in Maine. His father attended the high school football games, and Evan went to the grocery store with his mother.

"My mom, I remember, would take me every Friday, like religion," says Weymouth. "Then I'd come home and watch T.G.I.F." — ABC's family-oriented, Friday evening lineup. It's a dusky Tuesday evening, and Weymouth, 29, has just finished a quick spin through a Market Basket in Seabrook, N.H., with his 3-year-old daughter. As he loads the half-full plastic bags in the car, Adelynn dances around the shopping cart, the lights in the soles of her pink sneakers flashing. Weymouth's own father would never have offered to do the supermarket errands, he says flatly. His parents are "a bit old-fashioned. That's just how it was." But Weymouth, who restores classic cars for Paul Russell and Co. in Essex, represents a growing percentage of men who are more than willing to shop and prepare meals for their families. According to a recent report from Midan Marketing, a Chicago marketing company, nearly half of 900 men surveyed said they do at least half of their family's grocery shopping. Of that group, more than half said they do all of it. Most grocery industry experts agree that women still do most of the shopping. While the numbers vary somewhat, the Midan survey is just the latest in a series of reports in recent years that have found that men are taking a greater role in buying groceries. That represents a revolution of sorts from the old "Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" days when the man of the house was the breadwinner and the woman baked the bread, says Paco Underhill, author of "Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping."

For a long list of reasons, including the growing ranks of stay-at-home dads, the weak economy, the increasing tendency for shared responsibilities in couplehood, and men's burgeoning interest in cooking, supermarket aisles are filling up with men. And the industry is looking at their buying habits and how to keep them coming back. "With each passing month, the number of families across the country where the woman is the dominant bread-earner goes up," says Underhill, a New York-based research consultant who attended Milton Academy. "If you're a working female under the age of 30, your chances are excellent, in a major city such as Boston, New York, or San Francisco, that you out-earn your male counterpart by somewhere between 15 and 20 percent."

That explains some of the drift toward more stay-at-home fathers, who naturally assume many of the chores and errands their mothers might have handled. Amid the nation's economic woes, many men also lost their jobs and found themselves among the ranks of the unemployed or underemployed.

But there are plenty of men in double-income households, who earn as much or more than their wives, who volunteer to do at least some of the grocery shopping simply because they enjoy it.

"I'm happy to do it," said David Harris, a Berklee professor, as he pulled a plastic bag from the spindle in the produce section of his local Whole Foods in Arlington. "I home-cook 90 percent of our meals. And my wife" — violinist Mimi Rabson, also a Berklee professor — "hates shopping in general." Harris, 56, said he takes pride in providing good nutrition for his two children, who are 11 and 17. They've never eaten at Burger King, he said, and they don't feel deprived: "I cook great burgers for them, with organic beef." During the week, he said, he gets periodic texts from his wife and kids with suggestions to add to the grocery list. Doing the shopping himself, he also gets to make plenty of choices of his own. "I'm picky," he said, smiling. "I get to pick things I love."

That seems to be a recurring theme among men who shop. According to a recent Consumer Reports study, more women said their husbands are prone to making impulse buys when they shop (44 percent) than men said of their wives (33 percent). "Women are less likely to be fascinated by something new," explains Underhill. Historically, he says, women tend to shop with the family in mind more than men, who tend to follow their own urges. Conversely, while men seem more susceptible to spur-of-the-moment purchases, Underhill says men are more likely to arrive at a store with a plan and stick with it. Men often decline to take a shopping cart, for instance, preferring to grab the half-dozen items they came in for. There seems to be some disagreement on whether men or women are the more focused shoppers. But Bryan Falchuk said that in his household he is the most efficient. "My wife will walk through the store and see what inspires her," said Falchuk, who was shopping with his 5-year-old son at the Whole Foods. "I tend to be much more businesslike about it. I enjoy getting things done."

Retailers and manufacturers have taken notice of the trend and are looking for ways to appeal to men. Some stores have tried "man aisles," stocked with items such as barbecue goods, hot sauces, beer, soda, and chips. [...]

Facebook will lose 80% of users by 2017, say Princeton researchers

Forecast of social network's impending doom comes from comparing its growth curve to that of an infectious disease

Juliette Garside Wednesday 22 January 2014 The Guardian

Facebook has spread like an infectious disease but we are slowly becoming immune to its attractions, and the platform will be largely abandoned by 2017, say researchers at Princeton University (pdf).

The forecast of Facebook's impending doom was made by comparing the growth curve of epidemics to those of online social networks. Scientists argue that, like bubonic plague, Facebook will eventually die out.

The social network, which celebrates its 10th birthday on 4 February, has survived longer than rivals such as Myspace and Bebo, but the Princeton forecast says it will lose 80% of its peak user base within the next three years.

John Cannarella and Joshua Spechler, from the US university's mechanical and aerospace engineering department, have based their prediction on the number of times Facebook is typed into Google as a search term. The charts produced by the Google Trends service show Facebook searches peaked in December 2012 and have since begun to trail off.

"Ideas, like diseases, have been shown to spread infectiously between people before eventually dying out, and have been successfully described with epidemiological models," the authors claim in a paper entitled Epidemiological modelling of online social network dynamics.

"Ideas are spread through communicative contact between different people who share ideas with each other. Idea manifesters ultimately lose interest with the idea and no longer manifest the idea, which can be thought of as the gain of 'immunity' to the idea."

Facebook reported nearly 1.2 billion monthly active users in October, and is due to update investors on its traffic numbers at the end of the month. While desktop traffic to its websites has indeed been falling, this is at least in part due to the fact that many people now only access the network via their mobile phones.

For their study, Cannarella and Spechler used what is known as the SIR (susceptible, infected, recovered) model of disease, which creates equations to map the spread and recovery of epidemics.

They tested various equations against the lifespan of Myspace, before applying them to Facebook. Myspace was founded in 2003 and reached its peak in 2007 with 300 million registered users, before falling out of use by 2011. Purchased by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp for $580m, Myspace signed a $900m deal with Google in 2006 to sell its advertising space and was at one point valued at $12bn. It was eventually sold by News Corp for just $35m.

The 870 million people using Facebook via their smartphones each month could explain the drop in Google searches – those looking to log on are no longer doing so by typing the word Facebook into Google.

But Facebook's chief financial officer David Ebersman admitted on an earnings call with analysts that during the previous three months: "We did see a decrease in daily users, specifically among younger teens."

Investors do not appear to be heading for the exit just yet. Facebook's share price reached record highs this month, valuing founder Mark Zuckerberg's company at $142bn.

Facebook billionaire

When Facebook shares hit their peak in New York this week, it meant Sheryl Sandberg's personal fortune ticked over $1bn (£600m), making her one of the youngest female billionaires in the world.

According to Bloomberg, the 44-year-old chief operating officer of the social network owns about 12.3m shares in the company, which closed at $58.51 (£35) on Tuesday in New York, although they fell back below $58 on Wednesday. Her stake is valued at about $750m.

Her fortune has risen rapidly since last August, when she sold $91m of shares and was estimated to be worth $400m.

Sandberg has collected more than $300m from selling shares since the company's 2012 initial public offering, and owns about 4.7m stock options that began vesting last May.

"She was brought in to figure out how to make money," David Kirkpatrick, author of The Facebook Effect, a history of the company, told Bloomberg. "It's proving to be one of the greatest stories in business history."

Sandberg's rise in wealth mirrors her broadening role on the global stage. The Harvard University graduate and one-time chief of staff for former Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers is a donor to President Barack Obama, sits on the board of Walt Disney Co, and wrote the book Lean In. She will be discussing gender issues with IMF boss Christine Lagarde at Davos on Saturday.

Kennedy's Legacy of Inspiration

Robert Dallek, *The New York Times*, November 21, 2013

WASHINGTON — Fifty years after John F. Kennedy's assassination, he remains an object of almost universal admiration. And yet, particularly this year, his legacy has aroused the ire of debunkers who complain that Kennedy is unworthy of all this adulation.

"John F. Kennedy probably was the worst American president of the previous century," wrote the journalist Thomas E. Ricks. "He spent his 35 months in the White House stumbling from crisis to fiasco."

He was, they say, all image and no substance, a shallow playboy whose foreign policy mistakes and paltry legislative record undermine any claim to greatness. His assassination, personal attributes of good looks and charm, joined to Jacqueline Kennedy's promotion of a Camelot myth, have gone far to explain his popularity.

Such criticism not only gives short shrift to Kennedy's real achievements as a domestic and foreign policy leader, but it also fails to appreciate the presidency's central role: to inspire and encourage the country to move forward, a role that Kennedy performed better than any president in modern memory.

The litany of complaints against Kennedy is a long one. Critics scoff at his image as a devoted family man: They complain that he was, as Timothy Noah wrote in The New Republic, "a compulsive, even pathological adulterer," whose reckless self-indulgence threatened to destroy his presidency.

Critics also point to his hidden health problems: Would voters have elected him over Richard M. Nixon if they had full knowledge of his Addison's disease or other potentially disabling ailments? And what does it say about his character that he concealed his condition?

As for his presidency, critics find it difficult to understand why anyone would consider him more than an average chief executive, if even that.

They are especially critical of his civil rights record. His delay in signing an executive order ending segregation in public housing, which he had promised during the 1960 campaign; his appointment of segregationist federal judges; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s complaint that Kennedy lacked the "moral passion" to fight for equal treatment of blacks — all of this has convinced some historians that Kennedy's later decision to ask for a civil rights law was pure political expediency.

Kennedy's critics also find fault with his foreign policies, especially on Cuba and Vietnam. The Bay of Pigs failure and Operation Mongoose, the plan to assassinate or at least depose Fidel Castro, supposedly opened the way to the missile crisis and demonstrated his inexperience and the poor judgment of an overzealous cold warrior.

And Kennedy's decision to increase the number of military advisers in Vietnam, combined with his alleged support for the coup that killed South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem, are said to be preludes to Lyndon B. Johnson's disastrous war.

All of this has merit. But Kennedy's thousand-day presidency is more impressive for its gains than its shortcomings.

Most notably, he saved the world from a nuclear war with his astute diplomacy during the October 1962 confrontation with the Soviet Union over Cuba. As he privately said at the time, the military leadership wanted to bomb and invade, but no one alive then would survive to tell them they were wrong.

And while critics focus on the minutiae of those 13 days, Kennedy's real success was what came after.

Eager to avoid a replay of Soviet-American tensions over Cuba, he followed the crisis with private expressions of interest in a rapprochement with Mr. Castro. More important, he reached an agreement with the Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev for a nuclear test ban treaty that eliminated radiation fallout in the atmosphere.

As for Vietnam, what matters is that Kennedy successfully resisted pressure to send anything more than military advisers, a stance that was a likely prelude to complete withdrawal from the conflict. There is solid evidence of his eagerness to end America's military role in that country's civil war.

And while Kennedy did not achieve as much in terms of legislation as he wanted, his record has to be seen in context.

His legislative agenda was held hostage to a conservative Congress dominated by Southern lawmakers who saw his reforms as a threat to racial segregation. In response, he established a formal system for communicating with every allied member in Congress and kept a systematic accounting of various bills and their weekly progress. His decision to put a civil rights bill before Congress in June 1963 was a shining moment of political courage; it jeopardized his hold on Southern voters who had given him a slim margin of victory in 1960.

Moreover, had he lived to run against Barry M. Goldwater in 1964, Kennedy would have undoubtedly won a large victory and been in a position to pass his major bills. It would have won him acclaim as an impressive reformer in a league with Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and even Franklin D. Roosevelt. His health problems and womanizing cannot be ignored, but they were neither unique to him nor proved to be a problem in office. But Kennedy's greatest success was the very thing that critics often cast as a shortcoming: his charisma, his feel for the importance of inspirational leadership and his willingness to use it to great ends. [...]

How privacy became an American value

The Fourth Amendment grew from a showdown in Boston's North End

By Ted Widmer, *The Boston Globe*, May 18, 2014

"I become a transparent eye-ball," Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, in the most famous sentence of "Nature." In an age of constant surveillance, that image has taken on a sinister new meaning. Transparent eyeballs regard us everywhere we go—from cameras perched above intersections, in building lobbies, and from our phones and laptops, which watch us as much as we watch them.

For those who worry about this oppressively bright light on our activities, the Fourth Amendment offers some shade, with its clear language against "unreasonable searches and seizures," and its promise that Americans have the right "to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects." Lately, judges and attorneys have been scrutinizing those words, seeking to establish just how much privacy they grant us. On April 29, two cases reached the Supreme Court, asking whether the Fourth Amendment limits the right of the police to seize a cellphone from a suspect. As our lives become ever more visible to the transparent eyeballs of the future (including—yikes—drones disguised as birds and insects), the Fourth Amendment will stand at the center of the controversy.

The Fourth Amendment hasn't always been on the cutting edge of the American conversation: In the 19th century, only five cases touching upon the Fourth were heard by the Supreme Court. It is not as famous as the First Amendment, or as frequently invoked as the Fifth. But its recent prominence revives an important debate that began in the 18th century, one with roots in the courtrooms and streets of Boston, and which ultimately helped lead to the creation of the United States itself. A look at the amendment's origins suggests that the right it protects is more than a casual privilege—it's a core freedom upon which the entire national epic depends.

Appropriately, the Fourth Amendment can be traced to a neighborhood that has long regarded outsiders with skepticism. It was in the North End that simmering public resentment against searches found a test case in 1766, when an imperious British official squared off against a proud homeowner who insisted that his modest dwelling was, indeed, his castle.

Beginning in the late 1750s, Bostonians had been on edge against a vague form of warrant called a "writ of assistance" that empowered British officials to enter and search homes with impunity. Unlike specific warrants that identified how, when, and why a search would take place, this was open-ended and gave an inspector the power to search for anything at all.

Passions on the subject ran high for many reasons. Those with long memories remembered that the original Puritans had fled England at a time when royal officers searched their dwellings for Puritan Bibles and other signs of independent thinking. They knew the phrase "a man's home is his castle," linked to an English lawyer, Sir Edward Coke, who had inspired the first generation of New Englanders—and whose own home had been ransacked by English authorities near the end of his life.

The English, tightening the clamps on their vast empire, were stepping up their systems of enforcement in the 1750s and 1760s. The British were certain that they had the right to enter houses to enforce the law— how else could they run an empire? All known governments asserted this power, and much precedent supported it.

In a celebrated court case in 1761, an up-and-coming lawyer, James Otis, attacked the Writs of Assistance in a speech that soon became famous. In a small chamber inside the Old State House, he held his audience spellbound, speaking for hours as he drew on ancient English law to skewer the English. In insisting on "the freedom of one's house," he was inventing an argument as much as he was citing precedent—the Magna Carta, designed by 13th-century barons, was a long way from the problems of a Boston homeowner in 1761, and the law was vaguer on these points that Otis cared to admit. But as he hammered away at British arrogance, he expressed an idea about the importance of privacy with deep roots in New England's rocky soil. [...]

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Why Liberals Love a Bad Economy

By Tom Trinko, *American Thinker*, August 24, 2013

Liberals are not only comfortable with the unending economic malaise under Obama; they positively welcome it because it helps them cement their control of society.

At the core of modern liberalism exists an amazing level of pride and a heartfelt belief that liberals know far more than the rest of us which, in their minds, entitles them to run Americans lives -- witness the HHS attack on religious liberty and Bloomberg's attack on 32-ounce sodas. These efforts put liberals in line with medieval royalty who believed they were intrinsically superior to the *hoi polloi*. This attitude of superiority creates a lust for power at any cost and rationalizes that lust by pretending it's for the good of those poor besotted fools who cling to their guns and religion.

Conservatives, on the other hand, are motivated by a desire to improve the lot of all Americans and to free Americans to be all they can be, not by a desire to determine how Americans live.

The difference can also be seen in the way conservatives and liberals look at political discourse. Many conservatives are bothered when Ann Coulter speaks in an acerbic way. Liberals on the other hand have no problem when Democrats lie about a "war on women" supposedly being waged by Republicans or when liberals compare conservatives to Nazis. Given that liberals think of themselves as superior people and their general lack of traditional religious beliefs -- there's nothing like a belief in God to induce humility -- it's hardly surprising that they can easily demonize their opponents and thereby justify any means to achieve success.

That's why liberals are perfectly comfortable with Obama's unending recession. While conservatives are appalled at the human cost of long-term high unemployment and the lack of opportunity for Americans, liberals view the country's economic distress as key to solidifying liberal control of society which, in their minds, is equivalent with the good of all. That control will ensure that enlightened liberals will be able to force all to conform to liberal "truth"-- no 32-ounce sodas for you.

In some ways, the situation in America is similar to that in the recent Egyptian election. Most Egyptians were trying to figure out what the best policy was for Egypt and as such, given the short time they had to ponder the matter, they were fragmented. The Muslim Brotherhood believing itself on a mission from god and having decades of experience at terrorism and ideological control, was able to approach the election as a unified bloc. The will to power is a stronger unifier than the will to do what's best for society.

The Great Depression was a seminal event in modern liberalism in that it taught them that when people are scared and think that their only hope is the government they will trade freedom for perceived security -- just as many in Egypt voted for the Muslim Brotherhood because they believed the Brotherhood would end corruption without imposing Sharia law.

Even though Franklin Delano Roosevelt's programs did nothing to turn the U.S. economy around, people kept voting for him because in their minds he essentially ensured their lives by having the government provide for them.

Of course, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's programs were nothing like those Lyndon B. Johnson launched, but for the time they represented an extraordinary change in American society. Instead of depending on each other-- family and private charity-- Americans were told to depend on the government.

Liberals realize that with the country nearly evenly split on many issues, ensuring that a significant fraction of the electorate is dependent on the government, and hence likely to vote for whomever is for more government, is the key to electoral victories.

Conservatives wonder why areas suffering most from the Obama economy vote Democrat. The answer is that if you're out of a job and dependent on the government there is a strong incentive to vote for the politicians whom you believe are going to keep paying your bills -- which is why we won't see a Republic mayor in Detroit in the near future.

Conservatives also keep wondering why there is an apparent acceptance of the ongoing economic stagnation under Obama. The answer is that by using taxpayer money liberals have found a way to temporarily mitigate the economic pain caused by years of failed economic policies. So long as liberals can mitigate that pain, people will still believe in Democrat snake oil policies -- like raising tax rates in a recession -- and hence will keep voting for Santa... err, the Democrat party. [...]

Liberals, Killers and Gun Fetishes

By Jonathan Keiler, *The American Thinker*, May 30, 2014

[...] America's "gun culture" is just American culture. It is part and parcel of the culture that produced this great nation, which the founders of the country saw important enough to protect, along with our other societal freedoms, in the Bill of Rights. American culture doesn't produce killers, but perversions of American culture do.

For a collector, shooting enthusiast, hunter, or homeowner seeking protection, a gun might be an item of aesthetic or financial value, a tool, a precision instrument, or all of the above. It is not an item of worship, or something that its owners invest with magical powers. Nor do America's gun owners fear these objects, any more than they would fear their own cars, boats, or power drills.

But ask a liberal gun control advocate about guns, and you are likely to get a stream of invective, followed by incantations of the evil things guns do and a lot of irrational fear. Leftist propaganda invests guns with inchoate evils, magic and death dealing powers. It makes for just plain stupid laws, like those (in my home state Maryland) that ban such terrifying firearm accessories like flash hiders and pistol grips -- not because they make the guns more or less dangerous, but because they look scary. This is the realm of fetish, something that does not exist in the field hunting or at the shooting range.

The other part of the fetish equation is the often absurd glorification of guns found in film, television, and video games, areas dominated by financers, producers, directors, actors, and designers of liberal bent. Actors shoot guns while falling through the air, swinging on ropes, or like the Santa Barbara killer, speeding down the road in high performance cars. Hollywood guns rarely run out of ammo (the Santa Barbara killer had 40 magazines for his three pistols, but fortunately they did not magically migrate into the weapons.) Video games are worse. Not only do the guns go on and on, killing hundreds or thousands of realistically rendered digital victims, but so do the shooters, surviving multiple gunshot wounds and even when finally expiring, always coming back. To make sure he killed himself (and I guess not regenerate) the Santa Barbara killer believed he needed two pistols with which he intended to shoot himself in the head simultaneously.

Partner the left's fear-mongering about guns, with their glorification of the same weapons in entertainments popular with young men, and especially mentally troubled young men, and you have the recipe for repeated disasters. It's likely no accident that the killers in Santa Barbara, Aurora, Newtown, and Virginia Tech all used Glock pistols, which are television and movie favorites. The Santa Barbara killer also bought Sig-Sauer pistols, a more expensive "Hollywood popular" pistol, which in his manifesto he absurdly describes as "more efficient" than a Glock, the kind of gun-stupid line a movie character might utter.

Glocks and Sigs are fine pistols, but like a lot of fellow gun owners, collectors and enthusiasts, I don't own any. Like a person who chooses to buy any tool or implement -- ignoring its scary magic -- I balanced price, performance, availability, and a couple other boring pedestrian factors, and decided I could live with a Ruger instead of a Glock. Some people decide otherwise for many other good reasons, but it is highly unlikely that all of these killers got Glocks because they ran through the same mental calculations. Rather, they appear to have seen the pistols as a kind of talisman to help them do their evil deeds, a fetishistic prop, made that way by the very people who would throw the F-word at all gun owners.

Although there have always been shootings and killings in America, as in any country, and probably always will be, these kinds of killings, involving disturbed, violence-obsessed young men, did not occur as frequently when a normalized gun culture dominated this country. Many people of middle age can recall when fellow high school students drove to school with guns hanging from the racks of their trucks, or schools had shooting teams. Amid all that firepower, violence was rare.

In recent decades, politicians and media personalities, stoking fear among the public and nurturing the idea that inanimate objects themselves are strange and malevolent, have helped produce a class of disturbed killers, who see guns as a way to gratify other deep psychological needs -- the very definition of a fetish.

You don't have to be a psychiatrist to see that one of the best ways to attract a disturbed obsessive violent individual to an object is to glorify it, and then tell that person that they should not have it, that nobody should have it, because it is too dangerous and too powerful. Homicidal, gun-toting maniacs have emerged because America's culture, including its gun culture, is in decline, not because it is prospering. And as that culture is ruined, it is being replaced by a something much uglier and more dangerous.

A Crisis to Address: Why the Senate's Discussing a Democracy Amendment

John Nichols, *The Nation*, June 5, 2014

The political crisis of confidence created by an activist Supreme Court's decisions in cases such as *Citizens United v. FEC* and *McCutcheon v. FCC* is beginning—finally—to garner appropriate consideration from the US Senate. That's important. What's even more important is that it is focused on the proper response to the crisis: amending the US Constitution in order to restore the right of citizens and their elected representatives to organize elections where the vote matters more than the dollar.

On Tuesday, Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, the chamber's assistant majority leader, chaired what Public Citizen identifies as "the first-ever hearing by the Senate Judiciary Committee on the need to amend the Constitution to overturn egregious US Supreme Court rulings like *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon*, which gave corporations and the ultra-wealthy the green light to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections."

Durbin was an engaged chair of the hearing by the Constitution Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, having already declared, "It's increasingly clear that the only way to really reform our system is to pass a constitutional amendment to regulate how we finance our elections."

The senator is right. And the American people are supportive of his position; sixteen states and more than 500 communities have formally asked Congress to back an amendment to clarify that, despite what the Supreme Court might imagine, corporations are not people and money is not speech. Still, the significance of this hearing, which comes as Senate Democratic leaders are talking about scheduling an amendment vote, ought not be underestimated. Nor should the fact that the number of senators supporting a constitiutional amendment is rapidly approaching a majority.

The grassroots movement for an amendment can no longer be marginalized. It has forced Senate leaders to get serious about a crisis that can no longer be neglected.

Polling shows that the clear majority of Americans believe that our elected officials do not serve the interest of the great mass of citizens who actually elect them, which ought to be the basic premise of governance in a democratic republic. Rather, by a two-to-one margin, Americans believe government officials are inclined to promote policies that favor the wealthy rather than the working poor.

Why? More than three-quarters of Americans now tell pollsters that politicians are "corrupted" by campaign donations and lobbyists. They recognize that American University professor Jamie Raskin (who also serves as a Maryland state senator) is right when he tells the Judiciary Committee members that "within the governmental process and electoral process there are right reasons for those who hold public office to make decisions and there are wrong reasons—and a wrong reason is the money you are either going to put into your pocket or huge amounts of money that you're going to put into your campaign."

There is ample evidence of what happens when fundraising trumps common sense. At a time when Americans say government can and should do more to address poverty, Congress votes to cut Food Stamps for those who are hungry—claiming that programs that provide nutrition to the needy are unaffordable even as special tax breaks for the very wealthy are kept in place.

The disconnect between the popular will and public policy is so radical that it fosters cynicism and disengagement. Against the reality of big-budget campaigns that flood the airwaves with attack ads—the most effective tools for voter suppression—voters give up. Survey research tells us what we already knew from anecdotal evidence: voters are turning off to a process that does not respond to them, and that overwhelms them with commercials that tell them Democrats and Republicans, liberal and conservatives, should all be viewed negatively.

Turnout for US elections is dismal—far below that for comparable countries. National elections in Europe regularly draw turnouts that are as much as 20 percent (Germany), even 30 percent (Norway), greater than US elections. India's recent parliamentary elections drew a turnout of over 66 percent, while this year's congressional elections in the United States may not draw 40 percent to the polls.

It should come as no shock that the decay in democratic processes has caused a decay in enthusiasm: a May Gallup poll found that 53 percent of Americans surveyed were less excited about voting in this year's mid-term elections—despite the fact that control of the US Senate is up for grabs, as are most statehouses—than in previous elections. The overall decline in enthusiasm is so dramatic that analysts have begun to predict that the 2014 election will see a record low turnout. And primary election results from states such as Illinois and Texas confirm the concern—despite the fact that those states held competitive elections for important and experienced skyrocketing campaign spending.

Far from fostering engagement and excitement, big money creates a constrained and dysfunctional politics. The national circumstance is bad, and it will get worse. That's why citizens have been demanding dramatic change: a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's activism on behalf of a high-spending, low-turnout politics that shifts more and more power to economic and electoral elites. [...]

'I, Too, Am Harvard' Rocks the Ivory Tower

Patricia J. Williams , *The Nation,* March 12, 2014

[...] so many decades after the civil rights movement, many white students still seem never to have truly engaged with a black person till they get to college. More discouraging still, they then seem to turn interrogation of that void upon their black classmates' right to be there, rather than upon the constrained and blinkered circumstances of their own upbringing.

The toll of that social gap is the subject of a new play, *I, Too, Am Harvard*, written by sophomore Kimiko Matsuda-Lawrence with a broad coalition of classmates, which premiered on March 7. The play is presented in two acts, the first of which looks at the wide diversity of Harvard's black students: descendants of American slaves, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, students who could (and are told they should!) pass for white, recent immigrants, mathematicians, musicians, poets, linguists, engineering students, children of all sorts of "mixed" marriages, poor kids and the children of Ivy League grads.

The second act looks at what those varied individuals have in common: this batch of young people is indisputably brilliant, thoughtful, humane and funny. A more pressing commonality, however, is that they are all routinely greeted as... otherwise.

They are treated with open disdain, the champagne flutes snatched from their hands at cocktail parties as they are mistaken for waiters. They are figured as criminals when they walk across campus. Their sexual prowess is interrogated, their beauty denigrated. They hesitate before asking questions in class—for a dumb question from a white person isn't heard as a reflection on all white people, but any question from a black person tends to be scrutinized for inherent inferiority, "proof" that the student's lonely little voice is the evil marker of where a "more qualified white person" ought to be sitting.

Only about 10 percent of the students at Harvard are black: yet that small, diverse population is hyper-visible. One young man described sitting down for dinner in the cafeteria, joined by four black friends. Later that evening, he was accused, by some white dorm mates, of "self-segregating." Yet every other table in the cafeteria was all-white. He wondered aloud if his dorm mates even realized that their world is much more segregated than his. They didn't seem to see that "they're living all the time in a white world" and that most other people on the planet "live in multiple worlds."

As another young man put it: "We are always so concerned about making everyone comfortable with our presence when we are made uncomfortable every single day."

In addition to the play, these students put together a gallery of photographs of themselves on Tumblr (#ITooAmHarvard), holding signs with actual comments made by friends and classmates ("You're really articulate for a black girl"; "Are you all so fast because you spend so much time running from the cops?"), as well as responses to those comments ("No, I will not teach you how to 'twerk'"; "Please don't pet my hair, I am not an animal"). They're evocative images, filled with gravity and grace, humor and sadness.

This project lends voice to unusually gifted, hard-working young people—by any human standard—who nevertheless spend much of their lives hidden behind the projections of others. Along with the eloquent students at Northwestern University who are unionizing to press their case against financial exploitation of poor and often minority "amateur" athletes by the NCAA, #ITooAmHarvard is part of an emerging nationwide student movement led by—but not exclusive to—students of color of all sorts. Oh, and joined by feminists, poor whites, those identified as gay/lesbian/transgender, and anyone else who has a clue of what it's like to be bullied. Together, they have begun a new kind of dialogue about belonging and worth. And they are turning a mirror on the very bad manners, shall we call it, of a society that buries them beneath the history-deprived in-your-face-ness of tone-deaf provocateurs who, much like Paula Deen, never really mean to hurt your feelings—and yet who feel "crucified" when someone points out that they have.

This mix of insult and innocence is what some social psychologists call "microaggression"—the small, often unintentional expressions of ignorance and offense. It is a blindness that is as much the product of segregation as disparate stop-and-frisk policies. It's not always as deadly as George Zimmerman's constructed fears. But it represents a significant part of the unexpressed and unaccounted-for tensions within our polity.

An actor's clear young voice lingers long after the performance: "Blackness to me is faith...having faith in what you don't see. We as a people often don't see validation. So for me, it's having faith that I am significant, valid, valuable, even though everything else is telling me I'm not."

Most conversations about race in American higher education focus on the endless, unwinnable effort to defensively prove "merit." With gentility, restraint and admirable integrity, #ITooAmHarvard shifts the frame of this contentious landscape and asks instead: What institutional *Weltanschauung* is it that indulges such brutal, breezy presumptions regarding those about whom we are basically so miserably ill-informed? Whence does the entitlement come that allows such profoundly ignorant encounters within any community, never mind Harvard's? Harvard! That ultimate self-promoting paragon of what the "civilized" world exalts as our best and brightest hope for peaceful human co-existence—yet here so persistently revealed as... otherwise.

Eric Cantor Defeated by David Brat, Tea Party Challenger, in G.O.P. Primary Upset

By Jonathan Martin, *The New York Times*, June 10, 2014

WASHINGTON — In one of the most stunning primary election upsets in congressional history, the House majority leader, Eric Cantor, was soundly defeated on Tuesday by a Tea Party-backed economics professor who had hammered him for being insufficiently conservative.

The result delivered a major jolt to the Republican Party — Mr. Cantor had widely been considered the top candidate to succeed Speaker John A. Boehner — and it has the potential to change both the debate in Washington on immigration and, possibly, the midterm elections.

With just over $200,000, David Brat, a professor at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va., toppled Mr. Cantor, repeatedly criticizing him for being soft on immigration and contending that he supported what critics call amnesty for immigrants in the country illegally.

During a short concession speech late Tuesday, Mr. Cantor did not try to analyze his defeat or cast blame, saying only that he knew he had disappointed his supporters.

In victory, Mr. Brat said that his candidacy had resonated with voters who believed that politics had been dumbed down by partisan infighting.

"The American people want to pay attention to serious ideas again," Mr. Brat said, speaking on Fox News. "Our founding was built by people who were political philosophers, and we need to get back to that, away from this kind of cheap political rhetoric of right and left." He will face Jack Trammell, a Democrat who is also a professor at Randolph-Macon, this fall in the heavily Republican district.

Republicans were so sure that Mr. Cantor would win that most party leaders had been watching for how broad his victory would be. His defeat will reverberate in the capital and could have major implications for any chance of an immigration overhaul.

Mr. Cantor, 51, who is in his seventh term, had sought to counter Mr. Brat's accusations that he was too willing to compromise on immigration. The majority leader, who had raised $5.4 million for the campaign, blanketed Virginia's Seventh Congressional District with fliers and television advertisements in which he emphasized that he opposed an "amnesty" policy.

But with significant help from conservative talk radio hosts like Laura Ingraham, Mr. Brat was able to galvanize opposition to Mr. Cantor in one of Virginia's most conservative congressional districts.

Ms. Ingraham, one of the few high-profile conservatives to put her muscle behind Mr. Brat, said on Fox News on Tuesday night that the primary results were "an absolute repudiation of establishment politics" and that Republican leaders should take note.

"He really just didn't have very much money, but what he did have was a lot of heart," she said of Mr. Brat. "I think there will be a lot of people out there saying this could be the beginning of something really big for the Republican Party."

Mr. Cantor's loss recalled the defeat of former Speaker Thomas S. Foley, a Democrat who lost to a little-known Republican, George Nethercutt, in the 1994 general elections that delivered control of Congress to the Republicans. It is much rarer for a member of the congressional leadership to lose a primary.

Mr. Brat had little help from national groups that have funded other Tea Party challengers. Instead, he relied mostly on state and local activists.

Larry Nordvig, executive director of the Richmond Tea Party, said the national groups were not aware of "how much activity was going on underneath the surface down here and how large the ABC — Anybody But Cantor — mentality was."

In a February interview, Mr. Brat spoke of the difficulty he had in rounding up conservative support despite meeting with powerful groups and donors to try to convince them that he was worth the investment. "I met with all of them," he said. "But it's tough. Everybody just wants to see the polls, how much money you've raised. But they do not know what's going on on the ground."

Mr. Cantor had won primaries in his district, which stretches from Richmond to the Washington suburbs, with as much as 79 percent of the vote, and he won the general election race for a seventh term in 2012 with 58 percent.

Within the Republican Party, he was seen as a star, with the ability to tap into the energy of the House's more conservative members while at the same time not alienating the party's establishment wing.

In the House, his relationship with Mr. Boehner reflected some of the larger tensions within the party. Mr. Cantor was strongly opposed, for instance, to the so-called grand bargain negotiations on the budget between the speaker and President Obama.[...]

Eric Cantor defeat by tea party shakes Republican politics to its core

By Lisa Mascaro, Michael A. Memoli, Mark Z. Barabak
Los Angeles Times, June 10, 2014

In a shocking political defeat guaranteed to upend Republican Party politics, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia lost his primary election Tuesday to a tea party newcomer who hammered the No. 2 leader for backing aspects of immigration reform.

Establishment Washington reeled from the moment the polls closed as Cantor, the ambitious leader with his sights on becoming the next House speaker, trailed Dave Brat, a local college professor who rustled for tea party support at a time when GOP leaders elsewhere have succeeded in halting the outsiders' ascent.

In the end, Brat claimed an easy victory over the seven-term incumbent in the Richmond-area district. The new nominee appeared as shocked as Cantor at the outcome.

"Can you believe it?" Brat said to his daughter, Sophia, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch. "Unbelievable."

This stunning news could be the first shot in an all-out war between the establishment and tea party over leadership control.

Cantor spoke with his wife, Diana, at his side at what was meant to be a victory party.

"Serving as the 7th District congressman and having the privilege to be the majority leader has been one of the highest honors of my life," he said.

The outcome was certain to not only ignite a leadership battle among the Republican majority in the House, but also to send a shudder though rank-and-file lawmakers who may become less willing to stray from tea party orthodoxy, particularly in the continuing debate over immigration reform.

"This stunning news could be the first shot in an all-out war between the establishment and tea party over leadership control," said GOP political strategist Ron Bonjean, a former top aide to Republican leaders.

The defeat of a congressional leader, especially one as prolific a fundraiser as Cantor, is almost unheard of. The loss — the first for a House majority leader — was the biggest electoral shock to the lower chamber since 1994, when Speaker Thomas Foley of Washington, a Democrat, was swept out of office in the GOP tidal wave that ushered in Republican control. More recently, Democratic Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota was ousted as Senate minority leader in 2004.

"This is the political version of the San Francisco earthquake," said Stuart Rothenberg, who publishes the Rothenberg Political Report, a nonpartisan analysis of elections. "It came out of nowhere."

But in retrospect, the signs were evident. Cantor's team had become increasingly concerned about the primary challenge from Brat, in part because the district had recently been redrawn and leaned further to the right.

A raucous political meeting earlier in the campaign season made headlines as voters expressed their discontent over Cantor's leadership in the House, even after the majority leader had worked to curry favor with tea party lawmakers.

The willingness of GOP leaders to negotiate an end to the government shutdown last fall, rather than hold out for a long-shot repeal of President Obama's healthcare program, turned off the most conservative of Republicans both in Washington and at home.

Even more, Cantor's support for providing citizenship for young immigrants — he had promised but never delivered on a bill that would accomplish that goal — became a rallying cry of opposition from those who called it "amnesty."

Cantor, part of a new generation of Republican leaders who called themselves Young Guns, reacted in full force in recent weeks. He pummeled the airwaves, spending more than $5 million on the race, including a direct-mail piece that took a harder line against immigration reform than he previously had.

In many ways, however, the show of force gave more oxygen to Brat, an economics professor at Randolph-Macon College who had few resources and almost no outside cash to aid his underdog effort. To Cantor's millions, Brat raised only $200,000, and spent even less, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Cantor's loss excised the top-ranking Republican official in Virginia, a perennial battleground in presidential years that presently has no statewide GOP officeholders. But the national import will probably be on the immigration issue. Among advocates for changing the law, the defeat is likely to quash any remaining hope for House action on legislation to provide a citizenship path for some immigrants.

Many had expected that the chamber might turn to the issue once primary season ended and lawmakers no longer had to worry about protecting their right flank.

Still, some suggested that opportunities remain for Republicans to move forward on immigration, and they took heart in Tuesday's primary success of South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a GOP architect of immigration reform.[...]

Health Caring

by Jeffrey Toobin, *The New Yorker,* April 7, 2014

The Affordable Care Act, President Obama's perpetually beleaguered health-care initiative, received a jolt of good news last week. As the first deadline for coverage in 2014 drew near, the Administration announced that the number of people who signed up had passed six million. That's short of the original goal of seven million, owing largely to the disastrous launch of the federal Web site last fall. The methods for tallying beneficiaries, like everything else about the law, are being disputed, and regional disparities remain severe. Still, it's clear that the law is helping a lot of Americans. Three million young people remain on their parents' health-care plans; more than eight million uninsured people are eligible for Medicaid; and, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than a hundred million people have received preventive-care services, like mammograms and flu shots, at no cost.

Those gains have been achieved amid a political controversy that has at times seemed almost unprecedented but which in many ways replicates the example of two of the law's forerunners, Medicare and Medicaid. Those programs were born together in the summer of 1965, but their paths quickly diverged. Medicare, providing health insurance for all Americans over the age of sixty-five, proved popular almost immediately: after the rollout, about nineteen million people signed up, more than ninety per cent of those eligible. Medicaid, covering the poor of all ages, is financed jointly by the federal government and the states. The first year, only twenty-six states agreed to participate, and the program didn't include all fifty until 1982, when Arizona, the final holdout, joined.

The broad outlines of the debate over the A.C.A. have also been clear from the beginning. Republicans have mostly tolerated the portions of the law that benefit the middle class, including the guarantee that young people can remain on their parents' policies until they turn twenty-six; the prohibition on denying coverage to people with preexisting conditions; and the elimination of lifetime limits on the amount of coverage an individual can receive. The real controversy, as with Medicaid five decades ago, centers on health care for the poor. Ideas such as the requirement that everyone obtain insurance, with subsidies for people who can't afford it; the mandate that insurance companies offer coverage to all comers; and the incentives for states to expand the number of people covered by Medicaid have meant political war. And the partisan divisions have been much more entrenched on these issues. As of a few weeks ago, the Republican-controlled House had voted fifty times to overturn all or parts of the law—though the votes were largely symbolic.

The legal attacks, while less noisy than those in Congress, have been more effective. Two years ago, in the epic case of National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius, the Supreme Court upheld the heart of the law. But seven Justices (all except Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor) also rewrote it to say that states could opt out of the Medicaid expansion. Twenty-four states have done so, the same number that originally resisted Medicaid. As before, many of them will eventually opt in. But, in the meantime, the denial of health insurance to more than five million citizens represents a clear casualty of the legal assault.

That assault continued last week, when the Hobby Lobby company asked the Supreme Court for an exemption from another critical part of the law—the requirement that insurers cover contraception, at no out-of-pocket cost to women. A chain of stores with more than thirteen thousand employees, Hobby Lobby is privately owned by individuals who oppose abortion. They decided that the company would not provide coverage for certain forms of contraception, such as the I.U.D., which, in their view, were tantamount to abortion.

The political nature of the case was an open secret during the argument at the Court. Sotomayor told Paul Clement, the lawyer for Hobby Lobby, who was a solicitor general under George W. Bush, "You picked great plaintiffs." (Customarily, of course, it is the plaintiffs who pick the lawyers.) Elena Kagan pointed out to Clement that he was really attacking the entire law. "Isn't that just a way of saying that you think that this isn't a good statute, because it asks one person to subsidize another person?" she asked. "But Congress has made a judgment and Congress has given a statutory entitlement and that entitlement is to women and includes contraceptive coverage. And when the employer says, no, I don't want to give that, that woman is quite directly, quite tangibly harmed." [...]

Hillary the Progressive?

How she plans to run to Obama's left on the economy.

By Michael Hirsh, *Politico*, June 10, 2014

Bet on it: She won't be trying the Cinderella Woman thing again. It's fair to say that no talking point in Hillary Clinton's hyper-organized book rollout this week fell quite as flat as her rags-to-riches tale of starting out on the wrong side of the tracks … at the White House. How she and poor Bill, "dead broke," had to labor for *days* (or was it hours?) at a meager $200,000 a speech before they could afford those multi-million-dollar homes.

It was a very bad start to a critical piece of Clinton profile-building for 2016—does anyone doubt any longer that's what she's up to?—because nowhere is Hillary less defined as a candidate than on economic policy. There is good cause for that lacuna: Upon being named President Obama's secretary of state in late 2008, Clinton quite properly kept herself out of domestic-policy issues. She had a free pass from the biggest economic debates of the era, whether on the bank bailouts, the president's nearly $800 billion stimulus package, the Dodd-Frank financial regulation law, Obamacare or the sluggish housing recovery. And yet it is on economic policy—not on foreign policy, on Benghazi, her broader record as secretary of state or even her now-ancient votes as the senator from New York—that she is most likely to build her case for the Oval Office in an era of runaway inequality and a chronically wayward recovery.

To make that case, according to some people familiar with Clinton's thinking, she is likely to argue that she was often well ahead on those issues the last time she ran for president in 2007—that in fact she was often to the left of the more centrist Obama, who as president has regularly upset his own liberal base for what is perceived as a moderate, Wall Street-friendly response to the financial crisis. "She was talking about inequality before inequality was in vogue," says Neera Tanden, president of the Center for American Progress and a longtime close aide and adviser to Clinton.

There is something to that case. In a speech in late May 2007, Clinton declared herself a "modern progressive" who sought to "curb the excesses of the marketplace" and reduce what was even then an alarming increase in income inequality. She noted early trends in what has become a jarring trend in productivity gains going to dividends and CEO compensation rather to wage increases. In another speech in March 2007—a time when then-Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke was still playing down the dangers of failing subprime mortgages—Clinton warned about a bigger crisis in the market. She also spoke out about the dangers of over-the-counter derivatives and the need for new stimulus spending before Obama did.

Supporters point to her recent speech at the New America Foundation as a "continuation" of those earlier positions, re-establishing her bona fides as a progressive. Clinton spoke bluntly—considering that what she said was at least partly an implicit criticism of her former boss—about the failures of policy that have made "the dream of upward mobility … further and further out of reach. … Forget about getting rich. I'm just talking about getting into the middle class and staying there."

In that speech last month, Clinton also appeared to lay claim to prescience by noting "how, as secretary of state, I saw the way extreme inequality has corrupted other societies, hobbled growth and left entire generations alienated and unmoored, and how she "pressed governments to invest in their people." (She has a track record behind her here as well: In a January 2011 speech in Doha, Qatar, just days before protests toppled the first Arab dictator, Clinton warned Arab regimes that their "foundations [were] sinking into the sand" because they had failed "to build a future that your young people will believe in.") Ending her New America Foundation speech, Clinton also pointedly reminded listeners of her earlier incarnation as the Hillarycare-spawning liberal bugaboo of the right who became best known for one stock phrase during her years as first lady: "It won't surprise you to hear me say," she concluded, that finding answers to America's problems "really does take a village."

Still, once you get beyond the years-old generalities, it's hard to say where Clinton comes down very differently than Obama. If she runs, that could be as much of a problem for her on economics as it is on foreign policy, given the president's low popularity ratings. "If you asked me to describe Hillarynomics, I wouldn't know what that was," a former Obama aide remarked. Indeed, when it came to specific policy prescriptions during the 2008 campaign—apart from a few exceptions like the mortgage foreclosure moratorium that Clinton championed and the Obama camp at first mocked, only to adopt it soon after—the two candidates did not take a dramatically different approach to the waning middle class. Both candidates, for example, called for "leveling the playing field and reducing special breaks for big corporations," as Clinton's campaign literature put it,and eliminating incentives for American companies to ship jobs and profits overseas, initiatives that Obama has often invoked as a goal as president. […]

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES

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Yes, Being a Woman Makes You Poorer

Why the failure of the Paycheck Fairness Act this week can't be ignored.

Monica Potts

The American Prospect, April 10, 2014

Senate Republicans blocked the Paycheck Fairness Act yesterday, a bill that would make it illegal for employers to punish workers for discussing wages and would require them to share pay information with the Employment Opportunity Commission. President Barack Obama has already signed an executive order prohibiting federal contractors from punishing employees who talk about their pay. These two actions were pegged to the somewhat made up holiday called "Equal Pay Day" celebrated Tuesday, and were discussed by many in Washington in merely political terms: evidence of attempts by Democrats to woo women voters and a continuing sign of Republicans' "difficulties" with them.

Elsewhere, pundits and writers wanted to discuss whether the pay gap really existed. A few years ago, some conservatives and a few liberals began to attack the much-talked-about fact that women make 77 cents to every man's dollar as untrue, based largely on the idea that the gap itself was mostly accounted for by women's "choices." (The 77-cents-to-every-dollar gap describes the average difference between men and women's salaries and has been stuck there for a decade.) It is largely true that much of the gap can be explained by what sociologists have started to call the motherhood penalty: women with children make less than women without children, and the latter have nearly achieved parity with men in the same jobs. Yet when career choice and other factors are controlled for, women start out the first year after college making less than comparable men do, and their salaries grow less over time. Some argue that the motherhood penalty can be explained by the fact that women are choosing to have children, and are often taking some amount of time off work to take care of them when they're young. The question of why there's no fatherhood gap, or why men rarely choose to take time off to care for young children, remains unexplained.

The other component is that women dominate in college majors leading to fields with relatively low salaries, like early childhood education, while men dominate in the high-paying ones, like engineering. All of these things, however, ignore the fact that choices aren't made in a vacuum, and pretend as though the only real gender discrimination happens when a manager sits in his dark office poring over ledgers, dutifully subtracting 23 cents per dollar from every worker in the female column. Discrimination is more complicated and often internalized, in everything from little girls picking up subtle cues they're bad at math or building things, to pregnant women seeing their hours cut at work even when they haven't asked for such a change or don't want it. It also doesn't account for an odd distinction made between "women's" and "men's" fields. Call yourself a janitor, and you make about $3,000 more dollars a year than if you are a maid or a housekeeper.

As for stay-at-home mothers, the picture is more mixed. About two-thirds of the nation's stay-at-home mothers are married and their husbands are working, and most of them say they are home primarily to take care of their children. A small but growing share, 6 percent, say they are home because they can't find a job. (That's up from 1 percent in 2000.) Most mothers say they would like to work, at least part-time. The seven-point growth of stay-at-home mothers during the recession hints that at least some of it is because those women aren't finding the jobs they like. The childcare picture likely contributes to the push for women, especially single women, to stay at home to care for children, too. The cost of childcare is increasingly too expensive for middle- and upper-income families, and states don't have enough money for the vouchers meant to help lower-income women. Women are much more likely to have minimum-wage jobs than men, and female-headed households are more likely to be poor, so the costs far outpace their ability to pay.

Which brings me to another point: the gender wage gap contributes to poverty or near poverty. Added up over a year, the 23-cent pay-gap means women lose $11,000. They never make it up, and it just accumulates over their lives. I spoke to a woman last week named Christoria Hughes, a 57-year-old who works in the cafeteria of a hospital in Pittsburgh. She and others are trying to unionize for better pay and working conditions while their employer, UMPC, keeps fighting it. Hughes makes $12.85 an hour, so she's not exactly making minimum wage. She hasn't made the case that she's being discriminated against compared to the male workers in her unit. But her life captures the challenges many women face in the workforce. [...]

Supreme Court Rejects James Risen's Bid To Protect His Source

By MARK SHERMAN

The Huffington Post US, June 2, 2014

WASHINGTON (AP) — A reporter who has been ordered to divulge the identity of the source of classified information lost his bid Monday to get the Supreme Court to clarify whether journalists have a right to protect their confidential sources.

Without comment, the justices rejected an appeal from New York Times reporter James Risen to revisit the court's 42-year-old ruling that has raised questions about journalists' ability to shield from public view the names of people who tell them government secrets.

Risen detailed a botched CIA effort during the Clinton administration to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions. His reporting is at the center of criminal charges against former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling of disclosing government secrets.

Federal prosecutors want to force Risen to testify about his sources at Sterling's trial, but Attorney General Eric Holder has suggested that the Justice Department could find a way to defuse the situation and not subject Risen to time in jail should he refuse to testify as ordered.

Notes from a meeting with journalists last week taken by Associated Press General Counsel Karen Kaiser show that Holder said, "as long as I'm the attorney general, no reporter who is doing his or her job will go to jail. As long as I'm attorney general, someone who is doing their job will not get prosecuted." Department officials later added that Holder wasn't referring to any specific case.

Risen argued that he has a right to protect his sources' identities, either under the Constitution or rules governing criminal trials. The federal appeals court in Richmond, Virginia, had rejected Risen's bid to avoid being forced to testify.

His Supreme Court appeal came amid a debate over where to draw the line between national security and press freedoms. The Obama administration has been more aggressive than its predecessors in pursuing leaks of government secrets, including reviewing journalists' phone and email records and seeking to compel reporters to testify. The Associated Press was the target of one such records effort.

Joel Kurtzberg, an attorney for Risen, said Monday that prosecutors must now decide whether they will force the issue.

"The ball is now in the government's court. It can elect to proceed in the Sterling trial without Jim's testimony if it wants to. If they insist on his testimony and Jim refuses to testify, the court will need to have a hearing to determine if Jim is in contempt and, if so, what the consequence of that will be," Kurtzberg said.

"We are considering the next steps in this case," Justice Department spokesman Brian Fallon said after the court's action.

Disclosures of subpoenas for the records and testimony prompted Congress to revive a proposal for a national media shield law, similar to laws in place in most states, which would afford a measure of protection to reporters and news media organizations from being required to reveal the identities of confidential sources. But it would not grant an absolute privilege to journalists.

The last time the Supreme Court weighed in on reporters and confidential sources was in 1972, when the court held 5-4 in Branzburg v. Hayes that that nothing in the First Amendment protects reporters from being called to testify before grand juries.

But one of the justices in that majority, Lewis Powell, wrote a concurring opinion suggesting that maybe the court's holding was not as absolute as it sounded. Powell said courts would consider the competing claims of prosecutors and journalists case by case, and called judges to strike "a proper balance between freedom of the press and the obligation of all citizens to give relevant testimony with respect to criminal conduct."

The Richmond appeals court majority relied on the 1972 decision to side with prosecutors against Risen. It ruled 2-1 last year that Risen could be ordered to testify because he "can provide the only first-hand account of the commission of a most serious crime indicted by the grand jury — the illegal disclosure of classified, national security information by one who was entrusted by our government to protect national security, but who is charged with having endangered it instead."

The dissenting judge also invoked Powell's opinion to conclude that the case is "about as clear as mud."

Earlier, a judge had said Risen could be questioned about the accuracy of his journalism but could not be forced to divulge any confidential sources.

Risen has refused to speak with government attorneys about his sources, and he didn't testify before the federal grand jury that indicted Sterling in 2010 on charges of unauthorized retention and communication of national defense information, unauthorized conveyance of government property, mail fraud and obstruction of justice.

[...]

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Standardized ethnic-studies curriculum for high schools to be studied

By Stephen Caesar
Los Angeles Times, June 2, 2014

Sudents in Santa Monica High School's ethnic-studies class took on a touchy subject recently when they analyzed enrollment in Advanced Placement courses. Despite the school's diversity, most of those taking the college-level classes were predominantly white and from affluent backgrounds, the students found.

Their findings didn't come as a complete surprise. The students had studied racism in education and housing, and they suspected that all ethnicities wouldn't be equally represented. The next step was to find a way to change it.

The AP survey was a real-life lesson in ethnic studies, an approach that teacher Kitaro Webb said exemplifies the goal of the program. That is, to create bridges between people and spur students to become active participants in the world around them, Webb said.

What ethnic studies is really about is creating opportunity for young people to learn about themselves and the world around them and make the world a better place. - Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, ethnic studies professor at San Francisco State

"The whole point of ethnic studies is American at its core," he said. "It's about civic engagement, responsibility and fighting for what you believe in."

It's exactly this kind of course that California lawmakers are hoping to replicate throughout the state. A bill approved last week by the state Assembly requires the Education Department to form a task force to study how best to implement a standardized ethnic-studies curriculum in high schools statewide. The legislation now is in the Senate.

It is a deliberately modest first step to give experts time to analyze the most effective curriculum, said Assemblyman Luis Alejo (D-Watsonville), who sponsored the measure.

The effort has so far avoided the clashes over mandatory ethnic-studies classes seen elsewhere. In 2011, Arizona outlawed a popular Mexican American studies program in Tucson public schools. The law bans classes primarily designed for a particular ethnic group or those that "promote resentment toward a race or class of people."

And a movement to require Mexican American courses in Texas recently failed.

"California is moving in a different direction, one that recognizes and values the history of the people who make up our state," Alejo said. "This will put California on the cutting edge — while other states are trying to abolish ethnic studies, we can standardize and incorporate it into high school curriculum."

Opponents of ethnic-studies classes say they are divisive and foster resentment among students.

Supporters say the classes teach students about long-neglected slices of America's cultural heritage by exploring different perspectives in literature, history and social justice.

About three-quarters of the 6.2 million public school students in California are nonwhite. Latinos make up 53% of state enrollment.

"We're trying to incorporate the histories and knowledge of different communities that make up our state — not limited to communities of color," Alejo said. "Ethnic studies should be seen not just as Latino — but Irish, Jewish, Filipino — there is no limitation."

Alejo envisions lessons tailored to different communities, similar to the classes he took at a community college near his hometown of Watsonville, Calif. There, he studied the plight of his relatives, migrant workers who picked grapes and worked in the orchards outside Fresno. He also studied the struggle of Filipino workers.

"I learned that many of our histories are interwoven," said Alejo, who has a bachelor's degree in Chicano studies from UC Berkeley.

A revision of California academic standards, which must be approved by the state Board of Education or directed by the Legislature, could cost school districts millions of dollars because it would probably require new courses, staff and materials, according to an analysis by the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Alejo said the task force would make recommendations on how to infuse multicultural material into existing high school courses.

Still, lawmakers believe the governor would support the legislation. (A similar bill was vetoed in 2002 by then-Gov. Gray Davis.)

In recent years, ethnic-studies programs on California college campuses have been hit by budget cuts; professor positions have been unfilled, class offerings and majors reduced, eliminated or folded into other programs. Most UC campuses and other universities, however, require undergraduates to take a class in racial, cultural, gender or religious diversity.

Many voluntary classes exist in school systems across the state. In 2013, about 100 schools offered 435 ethnic-studies courses, and about 4,380 students enrolled in them, according to the Education Department.

San Francisco Unified offers five ethnic-studies courses, including Defining Racism and Reconstruction to Jim Crow, at four high schools.

"What ethnic studies is really about is creating opportunity for young people to learn about themselves and the world around them and make the world a better place," said Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, an ethnic studies professor at San Francisco State who helped develop the courses. "That sounds hokey, but ultimately that's what it's about." [...]

Why Polling Fails
Republicans Couldn't Predict Eric Cantor's Loss

By FRANK LUNTZ
The New York Times, JUNE 11, 2014

ERIC CANTOR wasn't the only person at a loss for words on Tuesday night.
His pollster, McLaughlin & Associates, found itself trying to explain the impossible — how a projected 34 percent lead for the House majority leader 12 days before the election could end up an 11-point loss on Election Day to David Brat of the Tea Party in the Virginia Republican primary.
We've all been there. There isn't a pollster alive — me included — who hasn't had to take the walk of shame, hat in hand, to explain to an angry client why a predicted outcome simply didn't happen.
Make no mistake: This was a whopper for the ages. McLaughlin didn't merely get it wrong; this was quantitative malpractice — a mind-blowing modern-day "Dewey Beats Truman" moment.
That said, polls can't predict elections. They are essential tools, windows into the minds of a particular audience — but they cannot and should not be used as infallible crystal balls.
Trouble is, pollsters are under ever increasing pressure to feed a voracious media beast and provide the answer to that perennial question, "Who's gonna win?" And therein lies the problem with polls, pollsters and consumers of both.
Yes, a poll is a useful tool for gaining insight and information, but it is only one arrow in the quiver. Without qualitative insight — talking with voters face to face to judge their mood, emotion, intensity and opinion — polls can be inconsequential, and occasionally wrong.
The Cantor campaign's catastrophe is not without modern precedent, even if the size and scope were extreme. Anyone remember Al Gore winning Florida, John Kerry winning Ohio and, of course, President Mitt Romney?
The simple truth remains that one in 20 polls — by the simple rules of math — misses the mark. That's why there is that small but seemingly invisible "health warning" at the end of every poll, about the 95 percent confidence level. Even if every scientific approach is applied perfectly, 5 percent of all polls will end up outside the margin of error. They are electoral exercises in Russian roulette. Live by the poll; die by the poll.
Yet that is no excuse. Our job is to get it right. When we fail, we should be held accountable. What is worse, if it's true, is the suggestion that the Cantor poll was leaked in order to sabotage the other side by suggesting that the majority leader's lead was insurmountable. In this case, not only was the poll inaccurate, the tactic was inept. It may have created momentum for the other side rather than crushing it, and lends legitimacy to the public skepticism aimed at our craft of late.
For better or worse, pollsters have either asked or offered to do too much. They position themselves as scions not merely of statistics, but as strategy and public relations gurus and prognosticators. We are no longer just focus group facilitators; we are supposed to be forecasters of the future.
We need to be clear about what we are and what we are not. The new digital age offers us new ways of listening, particularly online, to what the public is telling us. We can ask more questions, in more depth and spend more time with poll participants, in their homes and workplaces. But that demands that we pay ever closer attention to what they are saying.
Polling is both art and science. You cannot merely ask a voter a series of benign "yes" or "no" questions, compile a huge spreadsheet of numbers and declare the next president or primary winner. The body of American public opinion is far too sophisticated and subtle a beast to be prodded in this way. And as if to prove it, on Tuesday, the beast bit back.
Ask yourself: How can today's prototypical five-minute phone poll, laden with emotionless multiple-choice queries, give anyone a real sense of voters' genuine hopes and fears for the future? What anxiety keeps them up at night? What will be weighing on their conscience when they pull the electoral lever?
Ironically enough in this wired-up age, the face to face remains a fundamental component of exploring voter mind-set. It is only by being in a room with voters that you can truly get the answer you need. It is about asking the right questions of the right people, and demanding honest answers.
It may not always render what candidates want to hear, but it always tells you what they need to hear.
The simple truth is, pollsters have an obligation to give their clients a comprehensive understanding of voters. There are no shortcuts, no CliffsNotes for today's complicated voters. Had Eric Cantor's team understood this, it might have saved his political skin.
Now, as Republicans recover from the shock of his defeat and set about moving forward on a positive path, pollsters need to rethink how to reduce the risks of their craft by doing a better job of understanding voter attitudes rather than merely measuring them.

The Feminine Leadership Mystique

Naomi Wolf

Project Syndicate, May 28, 2014

NEW YORK – In a single week earlier this month, Jill Abramson, the first woman to serve as Executive Editor of the *New York Times*, resigned under duress, and Natalie Nougayrède resigned as Editor-in-Chief of France's leading newspaper, *Le Monde*, complaining in an open letter of having been undermined. What, if anything, do these high-profile dismissals tell us about women in senior workplace positions?

The *Times* announced Abramson's departure in a front-page story filled with barbs and swipes, the kind of piece that even the most ineffectual senior male editor never sees in print upon his dismissal from a job. Abramson fought back assertively in a brief battle for public perception, with someone having leaked details of an $80,000-plus gap between her salary and that of her male predecessor in the same role.

On both sides of the Atlantic, observers mused predictably over the women's "management style." Abramson was described as "pushy," while Nougayrède was "authoritarian" and "Putin-like." No one, incidentally, friend or foe, made the case that either woman failed in their business objectives during their tenures. Their style was the substance of the coverage – and thus of the backlash to that coverage.

It was bizarre to see Abramson, a top investigative reporter whose task was to help reporters get the story against many obstacles, be castigated as "peremptory," aggressive, tough, and "sharp"-tempered. How was she to do her job without those attributes? Had she been otherwise, she would have been castigated as a weak, indecisive leader.

One would think that by now we had moved beyond a double standard in how men's and women's leadership styles are perceived. Unfortunately, for women in charge, a "management myth" – akin to the "beauty myth" or to Betty Friedan's "problem that has no name" – persists. And, as long as there is a perceived problem with women's leadership styles, no woman can lead a major organization so soothingly, diplomatically, and charmingly that epithets like "pushy," "bossy," and "Putin-like" will not follow her the minute someone wants to shove her out the door. The question is not about women's leadership styles at all; it is simply about moving the goalposts.

So let us speak frankly, facing a taboo, about what it means to be a senior woman leading effectively: it means that one will occasionally contradict a man, however politely; overrule a man, however courteously; disregard a man's strategic advice, no matter how gently the decision is put; and tell a junior man, however tactfully, that he is not performing well enough. *These* are the intolerable moments, the social red lines that female leaders must cross. And *this* is the problem with women's leadership style: By definition, doing one's job means angering certain kinds of men.

The truth is that there are not two kinds of women who lead in different ways, one magically soothing and impeccably feminine, and the other dictatorial and insufferable. Rather, there are two kinds of men: those who can handle the moments described above, and who can, through their own maturity, personal evolution, or fortunate family upbringing, manage to process those moments in a purely professional context, and those who, for whatever reason, simply cannot.

The problem with senior women's management style lies with the second category of men at work. This is the untold secret of women's struggle in the workplace: if you ask any senior woman off the record, she is likely to agree that most of her male colleagues have no problem with women's authority, but that some simply cannot abide it, no matter how it is wielded.

So we should stop analyzing women's management style as if there were some foolproof way to cross the minefield of power. Instead, we should start to analyze why most men have evolved to the point that they accept women's authority, while others – like whoever commissioned that front-page annihilation of Abramson at a time when smearing her served no professional purpose – still cannot.

Interestingly, in fields where women hold many senior positions, like book publishing, it is rare to see analyses of women's management styles. The same is true of academic administrators, whether they are presidents of women's colleges or mixed-gender colleges and universities. Women lead on the micro level as well, as development projects like Grameen Bank have shown, and outperform men in comparable roles.

These publishers, presidents, and micro-entrepreneurs all have track records of accomplishment. Could their matter-of-fact achievement be due in part to the fact that their presence is taken for granted and that they are often allowed simply to get on with being effective?

What if all workplaces were like that? What if we dropped once and for all the impossible mirror that always distorts female leadership into something monstrous? Part of strong leadership is to trust your gut instincts. The cultural second-guessing surrounding the dismissal of Abramson and Nougayrède ensures that women leaders cannot do that without having their leadership instincts held up to constant inspection.

America's Broken Dream

Carol Graham
Project Syndicate, September 5, 2013

WASHINGTON, DC – The United States has long been viewed as the "land of opportunity," where those who work hard get ahead. Belief in this fundamental feature of America's national identity has persisted, even though inequality has been gradually rising for decades. But, in recent years, the trend toward extremes of income and wealth has accelerated significantly, owing to demographic shifts, the economy's skills bias, and fiscal policy. Is the collapse of the American dream at hand?

From 1997 to 2007, the share of income accruing to the top 1% of US households increased by 13.5 percentage points. This is equivalent to shifting $1.1 trillion of Americans' total annual income to these families – more than the total income of the bottom 40% of US households.

Inequality's precise impact on individual well-being remains controversial, partly because of the complex nature of the metrics needed to gauge it accurately. But, while objective indicators do not provide a complete picture of the relationship between income inequality and human well-being, how they are interpreted sends important signals to people within and across societies.

If inequality is perceived to be the result of just reward for individual effort, it can be a constructive signal of future opportunities. But if it is perceived to be the result of an unfair system that rewards a privileged few, inequality can undermine individuals' motivation to work hard and invest in the future.

In this sense, current US trends have been largely destructive. Economic mobility, for example, has declined in recent decades, and is now lower than in many other industrialized countries as well, including Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, and New Zealand. An American worker's initial position in the income distribution is highly predictive of his or her future earnings.

Moreover, there is a strong intergenerational income correlation (about 0.5) in the US, with the children of parents who earn, say, 50% more than the average likely to earn 25% above their generation's average. Indeed, the US now lies near the middle of the World Bank's ranking of economic opportunity, well below countries like Norway, Italy, Poland, and Hungary.

Some argue that, as long as the US maintains its economic dynamism, leadership in technological innovation, and attractiveness to immigrants, income inequality is irrelevant. But other pertinent trends – such as failing public schools, crumbling infrastructure, rising crime rates, and ongoing racial disparities in access to opportunities – seem to refute such claims. After all, having some of the world's top universities means little if access to them is largely a function of family income.

This does not matter only to Americans. In a world in which individuals' fates are increasingly linked, and effective governance depends on some consensus on norms of social and distributive justice, growing income differentials in one country – especially one that has long served as a beacon of economic opportunity – can shape behavior elsewhere. Without the belief that hard work begets opportunity, people are less likely to invest in education, undermining labor-market development; they may even be driven to protest.

More generally, declining economic mobility in the US could undermine confidence in the principles of a market economy and democratic governance that America has espoused for decades – principles that are fundamental to many countries' development strategies. As Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz has pointed out: "[T]he extent to which the global economy and polity can be shaped in accord with our values and interests will depend, to a large extent, on how well our economic and political system is performing *for most citizens*." Given increasing evidence that the system is performing much better for wealthier citizens than for poorer ones, America's soft power seems bound to erode substantially.

Reducing inequality will require long-term, comprehensive solutions, such as fiscal-policy reforms that reward public investment in health and education without adding disincentives to an already cumbersome tax code. But pursuing such measures requires significant political will, which the US seems to be lacking.

Indeed, given political paralysis at the national level, initiating a constructive debate about an issue as divisive and consequential as inequality will depend largely on the American public. If more people recognized the constraints that inequality places on their future prospects, they would be likely to press policymakers to confront it. This would not only benefit the US; it would have a positive impact on global governance.

Americans have long prided themselves on their country's status as the land of opportunity, a destination that people have endured immeasurable adversity to reach. A public-education campaign aimed at highlighting the challenges that inequality poses to the very foundation of this reputation is a low-risk first step toward reviving America's promise.

A Definitive History of Media Bias

By Ben Voth
American Thinker, December 14, 2013

In many respects, the current cultural crisis of the United States is rooted not in our political institutions, but in the epistemic organs of our larger civic body. For America, basically four organs pump the life-giving civic blood of public discourse so that an "informed public" can make political decisions within our democratic republic. Those four organs -- journalism, storytellers (Hollywood), academia, and the Church -- have shriveled or failed to such an extent that our politics suffers as the public is deprived of the healthy civic blood needed for democracy.

These organs tell us the truth. If they color it, twist it, spin it, or distort it, the citizens and the republic are all the lesser for it. This principle makes the work of Professor Jim Kuyper so compelling and timely.

As a communication professor at Virginia Tech, Kuypers has the academic standing and expertise to clinically diagnose the current problem of partisan journalism. This latest book is part of a longstanding series of solid scholarly work by Kuypers that seeks to clarify and strengthen our public sphere of arguments by highlighting how those charged with fulfilling our epistemic functions fall short. In his latest work, Partisan Journalism, Kuypers synthesizes from an academic standpoint key research offered by sources such as Tim Groseclose's Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind and Bernard Goldberg's Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News. Kuypers improves upon these books by providing the most current, and a more comprehensive, view of partisan journalism. His latest arms readers with the depth of analysis that allows for better clarifications to friends and associates as to how the media currently miscommunicates, with his expertise as a communication professor shining through in a way that leaves readers better understanding how these distortions happen and how to think critically beyond the limitations inherent in our current press.

Kuypers provides an important historical backdrop that is encouraging. Our nation, in fact, has a tradition of partisan press that dates back to our founding. It was in the early twentieth century that norms and ethical practices of objective journalism were attempted. This knowledge suggests that we can certainly survive and even overcome our present limitations on public information, as we have in the past. In fact, it is doubtful that news today is as biased and distorted as it was in the early 19th century or earlier.

As a debate professional myself, I usually lament the clever but plainly one-sided view of content provided in academic books. Regardless of political viewpoint, Partisan Journalism informs while challenging readers. I particularly enjoyed chapter four, "Three Presidents and a War," that examines how JFK, LBJ, and Nixon were treated by journalists in the conduct of the Vietnam War. I have read many treatments of such questions and never encountered the depth and value of information provided by Kuypers.

This book provides profoundly important documentation as to how the press came to be so decisively against the use of American military force. The transition from World War II-style Ernie Pyles to Vietnam-style Walter Cronkites is documented with such narrative precision that readers will see clearly how we arrived at our present frustration.

The American military finds itself paired not with an empathetic friend in today's journalism, but rather with an intensely skeptical adversary. As Kuypers lays out, Vietnam played a pivotal role in how this relationship changed.

Over the course of 12 chapters, Kuypers takes readers swiftly and competently through the nation's history with journalism and politics. Chapter 12 examines elections in 2010 and 2012. Kuyper's specific expertise on media distortions surrounding President Bush also shines through. His previous work on the Iraq War helps him clarify explicitly how Bush's claim that Iraq might have WMD was clearly distorted by media outlets to create a competing narrative of how Bush lied to justify an immoral war.

Throughout the book, Kuyper employs compelling academic study and research techniques to bolster his explanations of media narratives. This lifts the book higher in utility above compelling insider reports like the one provided by Goldberg. Kuyper uses powerful media databases such as LEXIS/NEXIS to document statistical data on reporting that makes his conclusions difficult if not impossible to resist.

Kuyper's work fits well into academic books produced by professor and editor Robert Denton in his political communication series at Rowman and Littlefield. It is encouraging to see an academic press bucking the trend of reactionary treatments aimed at excluding or minimizing conservative voices in the American public sphere. This work is empowering to a public that wants a more critical thinking about government power. It is not a partisan tome, and it stands well as a scholarly work that will help any student of politics and journalism see what has happened in these areas while imagining better possibilities for both.

Partisan Journalism is not, in fact, an attack on journalism. It is an excellent piece of communication scholarship that clinically examines how journalism influences the American political process. By seeing more clearly this relationship through Kuypers's excellent work, all readers can envision a better practice of journalism, a better critical thinking stance in processing such journalism, and ultimately a better political process illuminated by such shared commitments. I strongly recommend getting a copy of this book if you are interested in questions of media and politics.

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES

ANALYSE LV1

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

The Snowden era of journalism

By Darren Samuelsohn and Dylan Byers
Politico, February 7, 2014

Welcome to the Edward Snowden-era of national security journalism — a time when no scoop is too small, no detail too minor, and revelations about government surveillance pour forth on an almost daily basis.

It's a significant departure from the way things used to be.

After Sept. 11, reporters and editors often heeded tremendous pressure from government officials, including the president and/or national security adviser, to hold blockbuster articles concerning classified U.S. spy operations — accepting the warnings that publishing the information could put national security in danger or even lead to another catastrophe.

But just as Watergate changed the ethos of political journalism, the Snowden leaks appear to have upended the way many journalists approach national security reporting. While substantial portions of Snowden's massive cache of information has been withheld, Americans have been treated to a seemingly endless wave of articles since the first stories landed in June — leaving Obama administration officials and members of Congress fuming and even some veteran journalists concerned that the bar to publish has fallen too low.

Snowden has prompted a free-for-all among journalists itching to tell America's surveillance secrets, an important generational shift as the nation faces years of growing debate about privacy in an increasingly wired world. The litany of stories come not just from the handful of reporters with access to the former NSA contractor's treasure-trove of documents but also from competitors eagerly searching for scoops to move the dial on what has become one of the biggest stories of the decade.

"For years … it was like the number of articles to come out on NSA you could count on the fingers on one hand," said James Bamford, who has written four books on government surveillance. "Now it's almost impossible to keep up."

"What we've seen with the Snowden revelations is the impact that putting documents out there really has," added Siobhan Gorman, a national security reporter for The Wall Street Journal, during a recent panel discussion hosted by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and the Reporter's Committee for Freedom of the Press.

She recalled her own work in 2008 about the George W. Bush administration gathering internet meta-data — a story that upset the intelligence community but didn't have anywhere near the public resonance of the Snowden-inspired articles that have run in The Guardian and The Washington Post.

While Snowden made off with an estimated 1.7 million documents — that number comes courtesy of National Security Agency officials — only a couple dozen have been released in public. They've made up the backbone for about 200 original stories, including blockbusters that described the government sweeping up of billions of phone records and surveillance on some of the closest U.S. allies.

James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, repeated his call Tuesday during a hearing of the House Intelligence Committee for Snowden and his "accomplices" — he hasn't been specific, but most believe he's referring to journalists who have access to the material — to return documents that haven't been reported on "to prevent even more damage to U.S. security."

But there has been an evolution of how government officials try to prevent publication of stories on intelligence secrets as well. Obama administration heavyweights have also shown a willingness to engage with reporters digging on the surveillance story. The NSA itself has gone on a charm offensive, opening up its Fort Meade headquarters just outside the Washington Beltway to print reporters and for an unusual on-site television interview with "60 Minutes."

Clapper has also released reams of once-classified materials, including opinions from the federal court that has approved the surveillance programs but also criticized NSA for poor management.

"The presumption I think that the government has had in some cases prior to Snowden, that they could get you to just not at all publish a story, or hold it for some extensive period of time, there are fewer of those conversations and more of the kind of conversation about, 'Do you really need this detail to tell your story?'" Gorman said. "It's less of a wholesale pushback, and it tends to be a little more focused."

Barton Gellman, a Washington Post reporter who has worked with Snowden, said during the Medill-RCFP sponsored panel discussion that he's been following many of the same procedures he's long used on the national security beat, checking with editors and also giving government sources an opportunity to explain why something touchy shouldn't be published.

The Post met last spring with administration officials before running its first story based off the Snowden documents about the PRISM program that allows U.S. officials to tap directly into the servers of nine major Internet companies, including Microsoft, Yahoo, Google and Facebook.

At first, the government urged the Post to not publish the company names. Asked for a reason, Gellman said the government argued that it was concerned about losing out on future cooperation with private industry.

"In my view, and it was shared by the editor, was that if the harm you're worried about consists of the public disliking what you're doing and responding either politically or in terms of the marketplace to that, then that's why we publish it," Gellman said. "That's the nature of accountability."

America risks becoming a Downton Abbey economy

By Lawrence Summers
Financial Times US, February 16, 2014

Inequality must be addressed, with free markets playing a pivotal role

Inequality has emerged as a major issue in the US and beyond. A generation ago it could reasonably have been asserted that the overall growth rate of the economy was the main influence on the growth in middle-class incomes and progress in reducing poverty. This is no longer a plausible claim.

The share of income going to the top 1 per cent of earners has increased sharply. A rising share of output is going to profits. Real wages are stagnant. Family incomes have not risen as fast as productivity. The cumulative effect of all these developments is that the US may well be on the way to becoming a Downton Abbey economy. It is very likely that these issues will be with us long after the cyclical conditions have normalised and budget deficits have at last been addressed.

President Barack Obama is right to be concerned. Those who condemn him for "tearing down the wealthy" and engaging in un-American populism are, to put it politely, lacking in historical perspective. Presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Harry Truman railed against the excesses of a privileged few in finance and business. Some have gone beyond rhetoric. Confronted with rising steel prices, John Kennedy sent the FBI storming into corporate offices and is widely thought to have ordered the authorities to audit executives' personal tax returns. Richard Nixon used the same weapon in 1973, announcing tax investigations "of the books of companies which raised their prices more than 1.5 per cent above the January ceiling". All were reacting in their own way to a phenomenon that Bill Clinton has described best: "Although America's rich got richer ... the country did not ... the stock market tripled but wages went down."

Given the widespread frustration with stagnant incomes, and an increasing body of evidence suggesting that the worst-off have few opportunities to improve their lot, demands for action are hardly unreasonable. The challenge is knowing what to do.

If income could be redistributed without damping economic growth, there would be a compelling case for reducing incomes at the top and transferring the proceeds to those in the middle and at the bottom. Unfortunately this is not the case. It is easy to think of policies that would have reduced the earning power of Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg by making it more difficult to start and profit from a business. But it is much harder to see how such policies would raise the incomes of the rest of the population. Such policies would surely hurt them as consumers by depriving them of the fruits of technological progress.

It is certainly true that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of highly paid people in finance over the last generation. Recent studies reveal that most of the increase has resulted from an increase in the value of assets under management. (The percentage of assets that financiers take in fees has remained roughly constant.) Perhaps some policy could be found that would reduce these fees but the beneficiaries would be the owners of financial assets – a group that consists mainly of very wealthy people.

It is not enough to identify policies that reduce inequality. To be effective they must also raise the incomes of the middle class and the poor. Tax reform has a major role to play. The current tax code is so badly designed that it is very likely to be having the effect of reducing economic growth. It also allows the rich to shield a far greater proportion of their income from taxation than the poor. For example, last year's increase in the stock market represented an increase in wealth of about $6tn, of which the lion's share went to the very wealthy.

It is unlikely that the government will collect as much as 10 per cent of this figure. That is because of a host of policies that favour the rich, such as the capital gains exemption, the ability to defer tax on unrealised capital gains, and the fact that gains on assets passed on at death are not taxed at all. Similarly, the corporate tax system allows value to flow through it like a sieve. The ratio of corporate tax collections to the market value of US corporations is near a record low. The estate tax can be more or less avoided with sophisticated planning.

Closing loopholes that only the wealthy can enjoy would enable taxes to be cut elsewhere. Measures such as the earned income tax credit can raise the incomes of the poor and middle class by more than they cost the Treasury, because they give people incentives to work and save.

It is ironic that those who profess the most enthusiasm for market forces are least enthusiastic about curbing tax benefits for the wealthy. Sooner or later inequality will have to be addressed. Much better that it be done by letting free markets operate and then working to improve the result. Policies that aim instead to thwart market forces rarely work, and usually fall victim to the law of unintended consequences.

The Founding Fathers' Fiscal Crisis

By Peter Singer
Project Syndicate, October 2, 2013

PRINCETON – Americans are fond of speaking in reverential tones about "the wisdom of the Founding Fathers" – that is, the men who wrote the United States Constitution. But the manner in which the House of Representatives has been able to bring the government – or, at least, its non-essential services – to a halt is making the Founding Fathers look rather foolish.

The fundamental cause of the fiscal crisis lies in the Founding Fathers' belief in the doctrine of the separation of powers. That doctrine has always been philosophically controversial.

Thomas Hobbes, writing during the English Civil War, opposed the separation of powers, believing that only a strong and unified central government could ensure peace. John Locke, for his part, was more concerned with curbing monarchical power and regarded the separation of legislative and executive powers as one way to do that.

Having fought against what they regarded as the tyranny of George III, the American revolutionaries wanted to ensure that no such tyranny could arise in the new nation that they were establishing. To do so, they wrote the doctrine of the separation of powers into its constitution.

As a result, neither the US president nor cabinet officials are members of the legislature, and they cannot be removed from office by a legislative majority. At the same time, the legislature controls the budget and the government's ability to borrow. The potential for impasse is obvious.

We might think that the Founding Fathers deserve the credit for the fact that the US government has never devolved into tyranny. But the same can be said of Britain's government, despite the absence of a constitutional separation of powers between the legislature and the executive – indeed, despite the absence of a written constitution altogether.

Nor have former British colonies like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada become tyrannies. In contrast to the US, however, the prime minister and cabinet officials in all of these countries are members of the legislature, and governments hold office only so long as they retain the confidence of a majority of the parliament's lower house (or, in New Zealand, of its only house). If the legislature denies the executive the money that it needs to run the government, the government falls and is replaced by a new government, perhaps on a caretaker basis pending an early election.

Given the US Constitution's fundamental flaw, what seems improbable is not the current crisis, but the fact that such impasses between the legislature and the executive have not caused chaos more often. That is testimony to most US legislators' common sense and to their willingness to compromise in order to avoid doing serious harm to the country they serve – until now, that is.

Constitutional amendments in the US must be ratified by three-quarters of the states, which means that at present there is no realistic prospect of changing the constitution sufficiently to overcome the flaw that has made the current crisis possible. But a different factor that contributes to the hyper-partisan nature of US politics today could be changed without amending the constitution. We can best grasp this problem by asking why many members of the Republican Party who have voted in the House of Representatives to force the government to shut down are not worried that their tactics – which will undoubtedly harm many of their constituents – will fuel an electoral backlash.

The answer is that the districts from which House members are elected are gerrymandered to an extent that citizens of most other democracies would consider preposterous. This happens because responsibility for drawing the districts' boundaries generally falls to state legislatures, where the party in control is free to draw them to its own advantage. Nowadays, the Republicans control most state legislatures, enabling them to win a majority of House seats despite lacking the support of a majority of the American public; in the 2012 congressional election, Democratic Party candidates countrywide received 1.4% more votes than Republicans.

The gerrymandering of US electoral districts means more than that the House of Representatives is not representative of the population as a whole; it also means that many incumbents are in no danger of losing their seat in an election. The real danger – especially in the Republican Party – comes largely from those who are further to the right than the incumbent. To be seen as a moderate is to risk defeat, not at the hands of voters as a whole, but in the Republican Party's nomination contests, in which high turnout among the party's most fervently committed members gives them disproportionate influence over outcomes.

One could imagine cool heads in both parties cutting a deal based on an understanding that it is in America's interest to establish an impartial commission to draw fair boundaries for all House electoral districts. There is no constitutional barrier to such an arrangement. In America's current environment of extreme political polarization, however, such an outcome is almost as unlikely as a constitutional amendment preventing the House of Representatives from denying the government the funds that it needs to govern.

Technology and Oppression, 30 Years Ago and Today

Paul Waldman
The American Prospect, January 23, 2014

Could there be a protest movement brewing against the likes of Google and Facebook?

Thirty years ago this week, the Super Bowl featured an ad (directed by Ridley Scott, no less) for the soon-to-be-released Macintosh computer, in which Apple implicitly compared the dominance of Microsoft operating systems and IBM computers to the oppressive dictatorship of George Orwell's *1984*. Apple's Board of Directors apparently hated the ad, but Steve Jobs insisted that it air, probably because he understood how critical it was to building Apple into not just an identifiable brand but a statement of personal identity. If you use a PC, Jobs was saying, you're a drone, a cog in the wheel, someone who has been stripped of your individuality as you labor for the Man. Whereas if you use a Mac, you're a creative, youthful individual forging your own way in the world and subverting the dominant paradigm.

Part of the reason Apple has managed to sustain that brand identity for so long is that there was always some truth to their argument. Nobody really loved Windows, but you had to use it because everybody else used it. On the other hand, Windows in its many incarnations has usually been good enough, and even its occasional frustrations aren't exactly comparable to life in East Germany circa 1957. These days, we hear a lot about technology as a force of liberation, but not so much about technology as a force of oppression. But that may be starting to change.

A couple of days ago, a group of protesters showed up at the Berkeley home of a Google engineer who works on self-driving cars, distributing flyers saying that the engineer "is building an unconscionable world of surveillance, control, and automation." I suspect we're going to start seeing more of this kind of anti-technology protest in the coming months and years. Without knowing anything about the people who participated in this, I'm guessing that it's a group of young people whose fervent desire to be part of a revolution is being channeled in this direction, whereas if it had been a few years ago it would have found its expression in anti-globalization activism.

That isn't to say there aren't legitimate concerns about privacy and technology that we should all be thinking about—I write about them frequently. But shouting at one engineer at his house isn't how you produce change; it's the kind of thing you do when your real goal is to *feel* like you're taking on the powers that be, without actually accomplishing anything. The missing piece is *persuasion*, which skilled activists understand is central to any effective protest. I wouldn't be surprised if Code Pink got into the technology protest act before long, since highly visible and utterly useless grunts of protest is their specialty.

It's interesting that after going to the engineer's house, the protesters headed over to a bus stop where Google buses pick up employees to take them to the company's headquarters, and protested that for a while. You may have heard about the Google buses (other tech companies like Facebook have them as well), which have become controversial in recent months. Depending on your perspective, the buses are an efficient way to get employees from their homes in and around San Francisco to their workplaces in Silicon Valley, allowing them to work on the way and keeping some cars off the road; or they're a symbol of a two-tiered society in which tech overlords ride around in air-conditioned, wifi-enabled splendor while the rest of the proles shuffle to their badly-paying jobs in a city they can no longer afford to live in.

The thing is, the Google bus issue has really nothing to do with the question of the surveillance society. One concerns all of us, and the other concerns only those who live in the Bay Area. There's no question that San Francisco has indeed been besieged by a bunch of callow, prematurely rich tech douches whose pernicious influence has begun to rot the city. For instance, the Mission used to be a somewhat gritty neighborhood where recent immigrants could find cheap rent and excellent taquerias, and rub shoulders with dudes who had tattoos back when that meant you were a dangerous character. Today, the neighborhood has been taken over by the digital plutocracy, and a one-bedroom apartment there averages $2,600 a month.

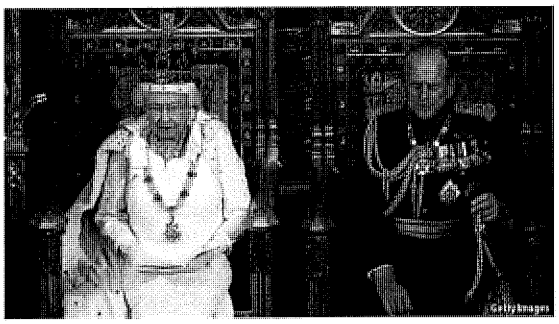
This is a problem for San Francisco, but it isn't a problem for America, and certainly not for humanity. Nobody in Boston or Houston cares, or should care, about the price of an apartment in San Francisco. Inequality is a critical problem, but San Francisco's particular variety of inequality doesn't tell us much about how to address inequality in America, most of which has no Google buses.

In any case, we now have a situation where it isn't the hidebound, boring tech companies that are supposed to be the agents of oppression, but newer, more innovative companies like Google and Facebook. We're probably going to be seeing more political action aimed at them.

THE ECONOMIST | BLIGHTY
The Queen's Speech

Pointless ceremony

Jun 5th 2014, 10:56 by J.C.



THE most-discussed aspect of the Queen's Speech in Parliament yesterday was the fainting of an over-dressed 12-year-old viscount. Treat that as indicative. Of all the moth-eaten bits of pseudo-constitutional nonsense that pass for landmarks of the parliamentary calendar, the monarch's address at the start of a new legislative session is the biggest waste of time.

Every year (or almost every year; the 2010 session mercifully lasted for two) the Queen travels from Buckingham Palace to Westminster in a spectacularly naff golden coach. Helicopters whirr above Whitehall, irritating journalists in the nearby Economist offices but affording television viewers the obligatory (albeit shaky and not terribly informative) 30-second shot of the roof of the prime ministerial car. The Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, a ceremonial parliamentary clerk, marches from the House of Lords to the House of Commons, thrice knocks on the door before summoning MPs. By only slightly younger tradition, he is heckled by Dennis Skinner, a gnarled republican and Labour MP. Led by party leaders, who awkwardly feign polite conversation with one another, they duly process into the upper house.

The Queen then reads out a spin-doctored account of what her government plans to achieve in the coming session. The contents have usually been leaked to the morning newspapers, so everyone knows what they will be before she begins to speak. Then MPs troop back into the Commons for a vigorous bout of pre-scripted point scoring.

This year's display was even more vacuous than usual. The coalition parties have implemented much of their 2010 programme. The other bits have been kicked into the long grass for lack of agreement. Other governments would have called an election by now, but the Conservatives and Lib Dems tied their own hands by fixing the parliamentary term at five years. The outcome, as we noted in April, is lethargy and a long election campaign. So the monarch's comments were unusually light on prospective legislative detail. Indeed, had it not been for the unfortunate page-boy's collapse in the middle of a passage about relations with Iran (queenly eyes barely flickering from the page), the event would have been entirely overshadowed by the ongoing briefing war between Theresa May and Michael Gove, two ambitious cabinet ministers, and today's by-election in Newark, where the UK Independence Party is expected to give the Tories a run for their money.

The pointlessly traditional artifice, the gaudy distractions, the lack of substance—why do Britons put up with it all? Why, for that matter, should they be surprised if foreigners see the country as a quaintly Downton Abbey-fied backwater rather than the dynamic, modern society that it would prefer to be treated as? Not only is the Queen's Speech an international embarrassment, it is not even useful to the government of the day: it forces ministers to come up with things to announce regardless of whether they want or need to do so (a much-heralded new regulation on plastic bags in yesterday's speech indicates the depths that must be plumbed). It is a total waste of time and resources, grumbles one senior adviser.

The Queen's Speech may be especially silly, but it is not uniquely so. Sessions of Prime Minister's Questions are another example. These weekly half-hour bouts embody everything that puts voters off politics: obsequious platitudes from the ambitious, brayed slogans and juvenile attempts to wrong-foot opponents from others. None has a right of reply to the prime minister (apart from the leader of the opposition, and he only gets six questions).

The twice-yearly financial statements—the Budget speech in spring and the Autumn Statement—are further cases in point. There is no good reason why the government's big tax, spending and regulatory announcements should all be bundled into a single package. Here, too, the result is policy made for the sake of policy, not necessity. A penny off this, a freeze to that, a new quango for the other thing—far from unifying economic policy, the spectre of Budget Day forces the Treasury to think in terms of bullet points in a speech at the expense of a holistic, steadily developing policy strategy reflecting the long-term picture. As chancellor from 1997 to 2007 Gordon Brown issued budget after budget that added up to less than the sum of their parts; annual tsunamis of micro-announcements drawn from a spreadsheet of ideas curated by Eds Balls and Miliband. The rest (debatably) was credit-crunch-tastic history.

Any sane political system would require its main finance minister only to announce policies according to a pragmatic, flexible timetable. It would enable legislators to scrutinise them one-by-one, rather than in a big lump at pre-ordained times of year. It would also grant MPs several questions at PMQs, and thus the chance to properly debate a matter with the prime minister. It would enable him to refer them to his cabinet colleagues, ditching the fusty pretence of prime ministerial omniscience. And it would unveil the government's overall programme for a new legislative session in an accessible fashion, perhaps with a national road-show giving voters the chance to question members of the government, or an American-style State of the Nation speech followed by a televised debate. Yet there are few signs of any of this happening. "The alternatives would only be worse," caution many, unthinkingly. And people wonder why trust in politics is so low. [...]

Sexual harassment in the workplace is endemic

Workplace harassment is rife – and it is affecting men as well as women, according to a shocking new report by the Everyday Sexism Project

Laura Bates / The Guardian / 22 October 2013

"Was asked to join in threesome with boss and his deputy" ... "Told to sit on my boss's lap if I wanted my Christmas bonus"... "Heard partners assessing female candidates according to their attractiveness"... "Told to get an abortion or resign as two pregnant workers was unfair" ...

Workplace harassment is one of the most common issues reported to the Everyday Sexism Project – in fact, we have collected nearly 10,000 entries on this topic alone.

So it is no surprise today that a new study by law firm Slater & Gordon has revealed that one in six women have had colleagues look down their blouse, almost half have experienced comments about their breasts in the workplace and one in eight have left jobs because workplace harassment has made them feel so uncomfortable. The study suggests that sexual harassment in the workplace is rife among both men and women, with almost 40% of men also reporting experiences. But 60% of those surveyed say they have kept a possible harassment incident to themselves, making this an invisible, yet enormously common problem. Indeed, the experiences quoted throughout this article have all been reported to the Everyday Sexism Project in the past 18 months alone.

Workplace sexual harassment is one of the most difficult and insidious issues to tackle, because victims are so often in a position of vulnerability, afraid of damaging their careers or even losing their jobs altogether if they dare to rock the boat.

"When I was 23 my arse was regularly pinched at work. I was too afraid of losing my job to report it." "I work in a bar and face constant, ongoing, never ending abuse from men ordering drinks... I know if I complained I'd have to leave my job."

Perpetrators are often much older and more experienced than their victims, and in many cases are even in a position of responsibility over them, making it near-impossible for those being harassed to complain ...

"Had a manager that said he would 'totally rape me.'"

"A guy at my work told me he'd get me fired if I didn't have sex with him. His brother was the boss."

What's worse is that even when victims do find the courage to come forward, they frequently report being dismissed, as the problem is belittled and normalised: "A male boss said he'd 'love to bend me over' and more, I reported it to female supervisor who said I was being 'sensitive.'"

"Saw my hours cut every time I complained to a manager about the co-worker who sexually harassed me and then threatened me."

Part of the problem is that the sort of issues reported in the Slater & Gordon study, including having your bottom pinched, are widely considered "just a bit of fun", making it hard for workers to feel able to speak out against them.

"When a customer at work tried to reach his hand down my shirt, I wasn't taken seriously by any of my co-workers"

Often, there is a sense that everybody is "in on the joke", so victims feel unable to speak up for fear of being branded humourless, or a troublemaker: "While I was bending over to pick up stock, male colleague grabbed my hips & simulated sex. Everyone else laughed."

The irony is that while such experiences are tolerated and brushed under the carpet due to normalisation and a culture of acceptance, in fact everybody is legally protected from sexual harassment in the UK workplace, including protection against the violation of a person's dignity, or the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Almost every one of the thousands of incidents reported to us would fall under these categories, yet again and again victims say they feel unable to speak up for fear of not being taken seriously, or of losing their jobs.

Part of the reason for this, just as with so many other forms of harassment and assault, is victim blaming. When workplace harassment hits the headlines, people often react by asking why victims don't simply stand up for themselves – why didn't they make a fuss, or firmly put their harasser in his or her place? This attitude completely fails to take into account the power dynamics of many workplace harassment scenarios; the vulnerability of many victims and the fear of losing one's job, particularly at a time when employment is scarce and public attitudes towards victims are unsympathetic. Even if some people are able to stand up for themselves in such a scenario, the point is that nobody should have to – these are serious offences, protected against by law, and they should be treated as such.

The entries we are receiving day in, day out, clearly indicate that the problem has reached endemic proportions. It's time to start taking workplace harassment seriously, listening to victims, and, above all, placing blame firmly where it belongs: with the perpetrator.

David Cameron makes leaner state a permanent goal

Nicholas Watt, chief political correspondent
THE GUARDIAN Tuesday 12 November 2013

David Cameron delivers a speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet at Guildhall in London. Photograph: Tal Cohen/EPA

The government is to forge a "leaner, more efficient state" on a permanent basis, David Cameron has said as he signalled he had no intention of resuming spending once the structural deficit has been eliminated, a clear change to claims made after the last general election.

In a change of tack from saying in 2010 that he was imposing cuts out of necessity, rather than from "some ideological zeal", the prime minister told the Lord Mayor's banquet that the government has shown in the last three years that better services can be delivered with lower spending.

Cameron said that the government would press ahead with tackling the deficit after cutting it by a third. But he made clear that his party intended to go further.

"We are sticking to the task. But that doesn't just mean making difficult decisions on public spending. It also means something more profound. It means building a leaner, more efficient state. We need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently."

The PM cited Michael Gove's work in cutting administrative staff at the education department by 40% while 3,000 free schools and academies have been established. He also said the government has cut 23,000 administrative posts from the NHS while employing 5,000 more doctors. He said: "So you can have a leaner, more efficient, more affordable state that actually delivers better results for the taxpayer."

The remarks by the PM contrasted with his claim after the 2010 election. In his New Year's message for 2011, issued on 31 December 2010, he said: "I didn't come into politics to make cuts. Neither did Nick Clegg. But in the end politics is about national interest, not personal political agendas. We're tackling the deficit because we have to – not out of some ideological zeal. This is a government led by people with a practical desire to sort out this country's problems, not by ideology."

A few months earlier that year, in his first Tory conference speech as PM, Cameron said he would have preferred to tackle the deficit in ways other than public spending cuts. He said: "Everyone knows that this government is undertaking a programme of spending cuts. I know how anxious people are. 'Yes', they say. 'Of course we need to cut spending. But do we have to cut now, and by this much? Isn't there another way?' I wish there was another way. I wish there was an easier way. But I tell you: there is no other responsible way. Back in May, we inherited public finances that can only be described as catastrophic."

In a sign the PM believes that he needs to make a more aggressive defence of spending cuts, Cameron also rebuked the Archbishop of Canterbury, who warned earlier this year that children would "pay the price" for the government's decision to cap benefits at 1% a year until 2016. In remarks endorsing a letter by 43 Anglican bishops, issued a few weeks before his enthronement, Welby said in March of the benefits up-rating bill: "These changes will mean it is children and families who will pay the price for high inflation, rather than the government."

Cameron said: "There are some people who seem to think that the way you reduce the cost of living in this country is for the state to spend more and more taxpayers' money. It's as if somehow you measure the compassion of the government by the amount of other people's money it can spend. At a time when family budgets are tight, it is really worth remembering that this spending comes out of the pockets of the same taxpayers whose living standards we want to see improve. I hope the Archbishop of Canterbury will forgive me for saying – it's not robbing Peter to pay Paul – but rather robbing Peter to pay Peter. Let's be clear. The single biggest threat to the cost of living in this country is if our budget deficit and debts get out of control again."

Cameron's remarks were also aimed at Ed Miliband, who has dominated the political agenda since the conference season with his focus on the costs of living.

The prime minister also used his speech to announce that he would lead a trade mission to China in December. He had to postpone a visit earlier this year after China, which was irritated with Cameron after he met the Dalai Lama, made clear that he would not meet the main Communist leadership. He said: "This is a relationship that is for the long term, that matters for Britain and China, and which I look forward to continuing to strengthen in the months and years to come."

What Does Ukip Actually Have To Do To Be Called Racist?

JESSICA ELGOT THE HUFFINGTON POST UK Posted: 19/05/2014

"It bothers me a lot that you're associating with black people."

Those are the now infamous words uttered by US basketball team owner Donald Stirling in a video sting barracking his girlfriend for taking pictures with NBA legend Magic Johnson (who just happens to be black). "I'm not a racist", multi-millionaire Sterling, who has owned the LA Clippers since 1981, told CNN's Anderson Cooper after the fallout, insisting he had never discriminated against anyone.

While the story has not made the same rolling national news in the UK as across the pond, there's a similar question plaguing the country's newspaper editors and political advisors as yet another day brings another Ukip racism row - is it possible to use 'a racial slur' but not *be* a racist?

All three major party leaders believe Nigel Farage's comment on LBC, that he would be worried if a group of Romanians moved in next door, sailed close to the wind. Ed Miliband told the BBC it was a "racial slur" but stopped short of calling him racist. Nick Clegg said that "behind the beer-swilling bonhomie [of Farage] is a really nasty view of the world" but he didn't say it was a racist one. David Cameron has come the closest, saying the party was full of "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists", a phrase he has since hinted he regrets. "He [Cameron] was speaking in general terms, not about an individual," John Lehal, the managing director of political communications agency Insight Public Affairs.

"Farage is feared, and only the brave would challenge him. We rarely see direct accusations of racism being levelled at Ukip by fellow politicians. They want to get Ukip voters to come back to them and that means being cautious about how they label Ukip," Professor Aeron Davis, an expert in political PR, told HuffPost UK. "Gordon Brown made this mistake in 2010 when dismissing a Labour voter's views on the door-step. So, the main party politicians are trying to find a way of saying 'we hear you on immigration, you have valid views, but you are not racist. It's a difficult tightrope to keep on."

The exception has been Tottenham MP David Lammy, who called Farage racist on Monday's Daily Politics. "What Nigel Farage said over the weekend was racist. So I'm clear, he's a racist."

Political communications expert Paul Blanchard, of Right Angles, said he thought it was "a PR disaster for a politician to call another party racist, even if there was a shocking interview or hidden camera footage. After all by saying they're racist, any other party is tarring a good proportion of their own former voters as racist."

Ukip defines itself as "non-racist" in its official description on its website. For all Ukip's protestations that all the other major parties suffer from embarrassing local candidates, which is true, it is the only party to have to make that much clear on its own website.

Yet a recent poll revealed more than half its supporters believe immigrants, and their children born in Britain, should be "encouraged to leave the country". And members of the eurosceptic party seem to have been doing their darnedest to prove the party slogan otherwise. There is Enfield candidate William Henwood who said Lenny Henry should 'emigrate to a black country'. There is Andre Lampitt, star of Ukip's election broadcast who said Ed Miliband was Polish. Brent's Heino Vockrodt wrote in a private email that Muslims have "a totalitarian ideology" and are forcing out locals.

It is not just the grassroots where such views are being unearthed. MEP Gerard Batten, the party's immigration spokesman, believes British Muslims should sign a special code of conduct. Marine Le Pen, leader of the French Front National, was startled when Farage rejected a partnership with her party - whose founder has convictions for hate speech. She had thought their world views were closely aligned.

"There are idiots in every political party. There are thieves, crooks and racists in every party," Blanchard added. "But will the mud stick with the general population? In my view no, not at the moment. The general public want to give the establishment a kicking and in this case there is absolutely nothing the parties can do about it. The gaffes themselves at the moment are not of great interest to the vast majority of normal voters - most people aren't on Twitter and very many, possibly most, people are more right wing even than Ukip."

Lehal believes that although this election cycle is unlikely to see more politicians come out to openly accuse the party of racism, the media's descriptions could become more overt. "The Sun had a very critical editorial headlined 'Racism and Ukip ' on Nigel Farage's comments on Romanians, and that's despite the fact that Rupert Murdoch would be happy to see Britain out of the EU. Although The Sun too stopped short of directly levelling an accusation of racism at Farage, I feel the greater platform and visibility for Ukip will mean we continue to see greater scrutiny of his words and actions."

Whatever voters now think of Ukip, they despise the liberal elite even more

Tim Stanley May 21st, 2014 TELEGRAPH

(Photo: GUZELIAN)

Ukip, it would seem, has invented a whole new racial slur. Before now, Brits haven't had much of an opinion about Romanians – except, perhaps, as good looking vampires. But in the last two weeks, Ukip (without much prompting) has launched a character assassination of an entire nation. It's been inaccurate and nasty, and reconfigured a basically libertarian Right-wing party into a populist nationalist one. But will this descent into xenophobia push it into third place on Thursday? Probably not. After all, about 40 per cent of the votes have probably already been cast by mail – and popped into the letterbox long before Nigel Farage declared war on the "communist people smugglers" of eastern Europe. And many voters have already cast their vote on a more existential level, too. Ignore all the clever-clever psephology. This election is about kicking the establishment, pure and simple, and no amount of national chauvinism will change people's minds about that.

The establishment finds this state of affairs very confusing. Normally, elections are won on policy and advertising and lost on gaffes – so Ukip ought to be doing badly. Very badly. But what the establishment doesn't realise is that many voters are actually tired of consensus and slickness. They don't regard the European elections as particularly significant to their lives (ironic, considering how "all powerful" Ukip insists that the EU is), so they're seizing upon this electoral round as a low-risk chance to reject the mainstream parties, their multiple failures and the spin that they've used to disguise them. They are probably voting not for Ukip but against the powers-that-be – and the more that the establishment expresses its surprise and contempt for this fact, the stronger the rebellion grows. Yes, all the "Farage is a fascist" stuff might even help him in the short-term.

This was crystallised for me in a conversation I had with a journalist friend. He said, "Can you believe that people are even *thinking* of voting Ukip?" I replied, entirely as a joke, "I'm on the fence." He then looked at me with a mix of anger and confusion and said, "But I thought you were intelligent?"

London liberals believe that a) their liberalism is self-evidently smart and b) anyone who rejects it is a bigoted moron. For years, those who do not subscribe to London's fashionable politics have had to put up with being told not only that they are wrong but also mentally deficient and prejudiced. Hence, the attacks on Farage as a racist fool inspire, if not sympathy, a recognition that this slight is daily inflicted upon almost everyone who lives outside the M25. By treating so many of their fellow Britons with contempt, the London establishment has built up a tide of bitterness against it. And, on Thursday, that tide will probably break against the shore.

As a Ukipper might put it, a vote for Ukip is to vote against "those high taxing, crazy spending, wind farm building, country-side demolishing, latte drinking, yoga practising, Taliban tolerating, bearded lady loving, over regulating, cigarette banning, French speaking, politically correctifying, Christian bashing, Dawkins reading, border opening, Daily Mail burning, unpatriotic, suit wearing London snobs who tell the rest of the country that they need to be more egalitarian while sending their own kids to independent schools and jetting off to India to rediscover themselves every six months." Polly Toynbee, for short.

A vote for Ukip is also a reassertion of a small-c conservatism of the heart that the Tories and Labour have rejected. While neo-liberalism and the cult of the new dominate in Westminster, many folks adhere to a conservatism that is a protection of tradition, economic self-interest, the nation state, the way that things have been because it sort of worked. Of community, cricket, patriotic poetry, white weddings, Anglican Christenings, the Vicar of Dibley, holidays in Wales, politeness, modesty, chivalry and so on into the golden nostalgia of a better yesterday. The stuff of Britishness that is romantic, spiritual and which the voters look for longingly in the mainstream parties and no longer find (no wonder that the Scottish independence campaign, with his hymn to national values, is doing so well). The voters look at Ukip and see a parody of these things that borders on the prejudiced – but that distaste can be set aside during something as inconsequential as a European election. "Vote Ukip," they might think, "and reject the post-modernity of the London elite. Vote Ukip and assert that there is a different, older definition of what it means to be British that – *damn it* – still counts for something in some parts of this country."

The good news for the establishment is that however Ukip do on Thursday, they'll do much worse afterwards. The party has become defined now as nationalist and the British actually hold it as part of their national identity to reject nationalism. But we can probably still expect a significant protest vote this week, one that will perplex the tiny elite who run our country and try to dictate its tastes and beliefs. And isn't it a good thing occasionally to give the establishment a good, sharp slap in the face? By most narrow Ukip definitions, I'm probably a London liberal – but I'd be the first to say that we've got it coming and that it's richly deserved.

Top Stories > Scottish Independence

SNP and Labour deal 'ends bedroom tax in Scotland'

• THE SCOTSMAN Published 05/02/2014 09:42 *by SCOTT MACNAB*

The controversial bedroom tax was effectively brought to an end in Scotland yesterday after the SNP and Labour struck a historic deal at Holyrood last night.

The Scottish Government's annual Budget was passed with £35 million set aside to fully mitigate against the impact of the welfare reform which affects almost 80,000 Scottish households. It means no Scot can now face eviction from their home over the "tax", which sees cuts in housing benefits for those considered to have a spare bedroom.

Holyrood's two biggest parties have previously been at loggerheads over the best way to deal with the bedroom tax, but came together to neutralise its impact last night as finance secretary John Swinney agreed to a proposal by Labour for a last-minute change to the Budget.

"By voting for this Budget today, we will effectively bring an end to the bedroom tax in Scotland," said Labour's Jackie Baillie.

The breakout of goodwill was praised by civic Scotland, including Jackie Brock, chief executive of Children in Scotland.

"We are particularly pleased that joint working between Scottish Labour and the Scottish Government appears to have resulted in extra provisions to off-set the under-occupancy charge, or bedroom tax, in Scotland," she said.

About £50m is needed to fully offset the impact of the most controversial of the current welfare reforms in Scotland.

Emergency funding for hard-up tenants has already reached the £38m limit allowed under Westminster rules, a mixture of Scottish (£23m) and UK (£15m) cash.

But the SNP wants this cap lifted by the UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). If this is agreed, Mr Swinney announced yesterday he will provide the additional £12m needed to meet the £50m required, bringing the Scottish total to £35m.

The only previous occasion Labour has backed an SNP Budget was in 2009 – only after the then minority Nationalist administration had seen its spending plans rejected at the key final stage and Holyrood was facing the prospect of an election to break the impasse.

Mr Swinney, to applause from Labour and SNP benches, said yesterday: "I give parliament the assurance today that if the DWP says no, the Scottish Government will put in place a scheme to make this additional £12m available to social landlords so that we need not see any evictions in Scotland this year as a result solely of the bedroom tax." He added: "The bedroom tax is an iniquitous and damaging policy."

The UK government decision to withdraw the spare room subsidy for council tenants has been the most controversial of the coalition's welfare reforms. It means working-age people renting from councils or housing associations lose up to a quarter of their housing benefit if officials decide they have more bedrooms than they need. About £15.4m was claimed by struggling tenants in emergency housing benefits between April and November last year – a fourfold increase on all of 2012.

The extra cash announced yesterday was secured through £10m in leftover cash for Network Rail, as well as £3m in additional Scottish cash from Westminster and other budget exchange flexibilities. The Scottish Government will spend more than £244m alleviating the impact between 2013-14 and 2015-16, at the expense of spending in other areas.

Alternative visions

The SNP government wants to offset the impact of the bedroom tax – and is offering two alternatives.

The first is through discretionary housing payments (DHP) to those affected, with about £50 million needed to fully offset its impact on 77,000 households affected. But the level of emergency funding has already reached the £38m limit allowed under Westminster rules, through a mixture of Scottish (£23m) and UK (£15m) cash.

The SNP wants this cap lifted by the UK Department of Work and Pensions. If this is agreed, Mr Swinney announced yesterday he will provide the additional £12m needed.

If this is refused, the Scottish Government will fund an alternative Labour-backed scheme which effectively allows councils and housing associations to "write off" the cost of bedroom tax to tenants facing eviction.

This is already in operation in East Lothian and Renfrewshire and Labour say it is a "workable alternative" to DHPs.

Labour finance spokesman Iain Gray was behind the proposal which will effectively see councils and housing associations "write-off" the extra cash owed by tenants as a result of the bedroom tax. He told MSPs: "If we pass my amendment we will have turned it into a 'sink the bedroom tax boat to the bottom of the sea' Budget."

Mr Swinney's Budget was passed by 108 votes to 15 with only the Tories voting against. It also confirms another year of the council tax freeze, support for free university tuition, free prescriptions and free personal care. [...]

Independent Scotland would keep sterling, says Alex Salmond

THE GUARDIAN Nicholas Watt and Severin Carrell Tuesday 26 November 2013

David Cameron would be in breach of undertakings to the Scottish people if the UK refused to allow an independent Scotland to join a sterling currency union, Alex Salmond has said. As he launched the SNP's 670-page white paper on independence in Glasgow, the first minister said the prime minister had agreed in last year's Edinburgh agreement to respect the result of the referendum and to work constructively with the Scottish government.

Salmond announced that the Scottish government would follow the launch of the white paper by embarking on a diplomatic charm offensive to promote an independent Scotland's membership of the EU and Nato. The Scottish first minister urged Scotland's 4 million voters to seize a "once-in-a-generation" chance to create a fairer, more prosperous country by voting to leave the UK and taking control of their own destiny. He promised to cut corporation tax, extend free childcare and increase the minimum wage.

The first minister said Scotland would continue "constructive working together" with the rest of the UK, sharing the pound and the Queen, take 90% of North Sea oil, but without Trident nuclear weapons and the BBC. He argued that independence would free Scotland from having policies such as the bedroom tax imposed by Westminster governments "rejected at the ballot box in Scotland", which inflicted pain on the most vulnerable in society.

The pro-UK Better Together campaign has highlighted the Scottish government's demand to form a sterling currency union with the rest of the UK as one of the SNP's central weaknesses. Gordon Brown has described it as "self-imposed colonialism".

But Salmond said Cameron would be in breach of the Edinburgh agreement if the UK rejected a currency union. The two governments have agreed to respect the referendum result and to work constructively "in the best interests of the people of Scotland and of the rest of the United Kingdom". Salmond said: "The Bank of England and sterling are as much Scotland's assets as London's assets. They are certainly not George Osborne's assets. We put forward in this paper our willingness to accept liabilities. We are also entitled to the share of assets."

The first minister dismissed suggestions that an independent Scotland would struggle to join Nato if it abandoned the UK's Trident nuclear deterrent, and would be obliged to join the euro as part of EU membership terms. "There have been lots of discussions," he said. "We have put forward a proposition believing there will be enthusiasm for Scotland's membership of the EU. We certainly haven't heard anything to the contrary. The international affairs secretary will be conducting discussions with a range of representatives from consulates tomorrow."

Alistair Darling, the leader of the Better Together campaign, said: "Nothing has changed as a result of this white paper. The nationalists have ducked the opportunity to answer the big questions about Scotland's future. It is a fantasy to say we can leave the UK but still keep all the benefits of UK membership. The white paper is a work of fiction. It is thick with false promises and meaningless assertions."

The white paper also says the SNP would ask the UK government to immediately cancel the rollout of universal credit in Scotland if there were a yes vote next September. It also adds that it wants Trident to be removed from the Clyde by 2020 - the end of the first independent Scottish parliament.

In his foreword to Scotland's Future – Your guide to an independent Scotland, Salmond said: "That is the real democratic value of independence – the people of Scotland are in charge. It will no longer be possible for governments to be elected and pursue policies against the wishes of the Scottish people … Independence will put the people of Scotland in charge of our destiny." The white paper states: "If we vote no, Scotland stands still. A once-in-a-generation opportunity to follow a different path, and choose a new and better direction for our nation, is lost. Decisions about Scotland would remain in the hands of others."

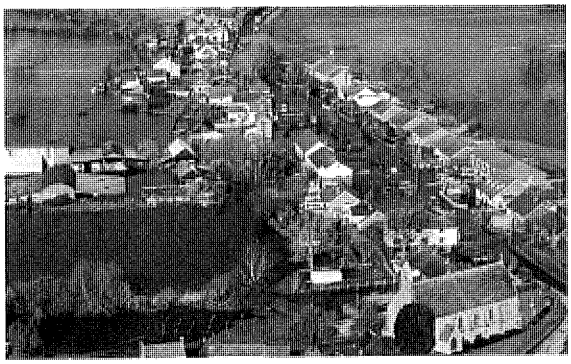
Stating too that the union flag would no longer fly in Scotland, the document confirms a series of Scottish government and Scottish National party pledges for independence, including:

- Retain the pound as Scotland's currency and would take on a fair share of the UK's debt.
- Take a full geographic share of North Sea oil and gas reserves, with more than 90% of the UK reserves in Scottish waters.
- No rise in general taxation to fund public spending, while increasing tax allowances in line with inflation.
- A new written constitution with the Queen as head of state.
- The renationalisation of the Royal Mail.
- A new Scottish defence force of 15,000 regular personnel and a new intelligence and security agency.
- A guarantee that the minimum wage will rise by inflation: if that had been policy already since 2008, the lowest paid would be £675 better off.
- A network of 70 to 90 embassies and consulates costing up to £120m.
- Cutting corporation tax by 3% and cutting air passenger duty by 50%.
- Extending free childcare to one-year-olds, creating 35,000 new jobs.
- A new Scottish Broadcasting Service to replace the BBC.
- An "early agreement on the speediest safe removal of [Trident] nuclear weapons a priority".

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH 8 February 2014
Christopher Booker

Flooding: Somerset Levels disaster is being driven by EU policy

EU directives actually require certain plains to become flooded



Aerial view of the flooded village of Moorland in Somerset Photo: JAMES DADZITIS/SWNS.com

It was obviously somewhat reckless of Lord (Chris) Smith to visit the Somerset Levels on the very day that the floodwaters had risen a further three feet, whole villages were having to be abandoned and the residents had rather more on their minds than talking to the man whose agency they see as the prime cause of the disaster that has engulfed them. If there is one very large penny that has dropped since I first reported on this crisis five weeks ago, it is that this desperate mess has come about as a direct consequence of policies pursued by the Environment Agency (EA) for more than a decade, beginning with its refusal to dredge the rivers that could allow the floodwaters to escape to the sea.

But what has been emerging in recent days is another hugely important factor in bringing this disaster about: the extent to which the agency's policy has been shaped and driven by the European Union. My co-author Dr Richard North, an expert researcher who writes the EU Referendum blog, has been combing through dozens of official documents to unravel just how it was that the agency came to adopt a strategy deliberately designed to allow flooding not just in Somerset but elsewhere in the country, all in the name of putting the interests of "biodiversity", "sustainability" and wildlife habitats above those of farming and people.

These have included the EU's Natura 2000 strategy along with a sheaf of directives on "habitats", "birds", "water", and not least the "floods" directive of 2007, which specifically requires certain "floodplains" to be allowed to flood. In 2008, when the EA was run by Baroness Young, this was reflected in a policy document which classified areas at risk of flooding under six categories, ranging from those in "Policy Option 1", where flood defences were a priority, down to "Policy 6" where, to promote "biodiversity", the strategy should be to "increase flooding". The Somerset Levels were covered by Policy 6.

It was in that year that Baroness Young explained in an interview that creating wildlife habitats could be very expensive, but that by far the cheapest way was simply to allow natural flooding. As she gaily put it: "Just add water." Around this time she was heard to say of the Somerset Levels that she would like to see "a limpet mine attached to every pumping station".

The EA's strategy has been driven at every point by its wish to conform with the laws and ideology of the EU – right down to the thickets of bureaucracy that make it virtually impossible, under EU waste rules, to dispose sensibly of the silt dug by locally managed drainage boards from the 1,000 miles of ditches designed to keep the Levels dry.

By far the most positive political intervention in this disaster to date, woefully misreported by the media, has been made recently by the Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson. After talking behind closed doors to an array of local experts, he announced that by next month he wants to see a detailed action plan to prevent any repetition of a disaster that has now hit the Levels three years in a row. This must begin with the agency dredging those silted-up rivers. But the responsibility for keeping the Levels properly drained must be handed over to local bodies, with the EA taken off their backs.

It is all very well David Cameron stepping in to take "overall charge" of sorting out this shambles. But if and when Paterson's plan is agreed, they will both be told that it is contrary to EU rules. For this policy reversal to be given the go-ahead, the British Government will first have to ask permission from Brussels. There are, alas, too many senior officials in Lord Smith's Environment Agency who will be only too pleased if Brussels says "No".

Quango queens are still not up to the job

Many people may have been startled to learn that around two thirds of all those political hacks and "quango queens" who run government agencies and other public bodies are supporters of the Labour Party. But the real problem is not just the ideological bias of all these political nominees: it is that so many are blatantly not up to the job for which they receive such inflated salaries. The former Labour culture secretary Lord Smith, given £100,000 for a three-day week mismanaging the Environment Agency, is only the latest example to hit the headlines. One of many equally glaring examples, as I noted in 2010, is that celebrated quango queen Dame Deirdre Hutton. After moving on from running the Foods Standards Agency and the National Consumer Council to head the Civil Aviation Authority, she presided over the shambles that resulted from the CAA's closure of European air space, at a cost of billions of pounds, thanks to its hopeless misreading of the threat posed to aircraft by that erupting Icelandic volcano. But when it comes to quango queens, has any been more successful than Baroness Ashton, promoted by Gordon Brown from running a local NHS health trust to become "Europe's foreign minister" on £240,000 a year?

THE INDEPENDENT
News > UK > UK Politics

UK weather: U-turn may see David Cameron reluctantly tap EU flood assistance fund

Conservative ministers ruled out asking Brussels for help and were accused of putting politics before communities

Nigel Morris Thursday 13 February 2014

Conservative ministers are set to make an embarrassing U-turn and ask the European Union to pick up some of the bill for the flooding crisis following Coalition clashes over whether to approach Brussels for help.

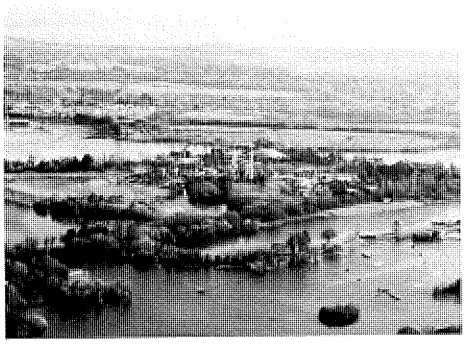
Just two weeks ago they were ruling out the move, provoking Liberal Democrat accusations they were allowing the party's antipathy to the EU to supersede the needs of flood-stricken communities. However, Downing Street confirmed the Government was "actively looking" at submitting an application to an EU emergency fund.

The move emerged after Brussels officials expressed surprise they had not heard from the UK Government when torrential rain and winds forced hundreds of people out of their homes and devastated rail links to the South-west of England.

The possibility of requesting help from Brussels was discussed at a meeting of Cobra, Whitehall's civil contingencies committee, which is chaired by David Cameron. Ministers and officials are now examining whether the UK fits the strict criteria for applying to the fund. If an application is successful, Britain could be in line for a payout of more than £100m.

One Whitehall source told *The Independent*: "My sense is we will apply for it if we can, although that is still quite a big if." The move would be politically hazardous for the Conservatives, considering the sensitivity of the EU as an issue within party ranks.

Whether to apply to the EU's solidarity fund provoked a Cabinet split, with Liberal Democrats Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander accusing Chancellor George Osborne and Owen Paterson, the Environment Secretary, of allowing ideology to stand in the way of practical help. The Treasury also raised objections as some of the cash would be clawed back at a later stage by Brussels.



Early last month, Liberal Democrat Euro MPs appealed to Mr Paterson to apply to the EU's solidarity fund, set up to help governments react to natural disasters. In a reply on 29 January, before stretches of the Thames Valley were inundated, Brandon Lewis, the minister responsible for flood recovery, said the situation could not yet be "categorised as a major natural disaster" and said Britain should not be "hasty" in turning to the fund. He said: "While we are still assessing the scale of the damage, it looks very unlikely that the UK will either need, or qualify for, support under the scheme."

In the Commons, the Tory former Cabinet minister Cheryl Gillan pointed out that Britain received £127m from the fund after widespread flooding in 2007 which left a repair bill of more than £3bn. Patrick McLoughlin, the Transport Secretary, told her: "I can reassure you this was a matter which was discussed last night in the Cobra meeting and the Cabinet Office Minister [Francis Maude] is looking at all the avenues for collecting any money that might be available." Asked about the prospect of applying for EU assistance, the Prime Minister's official spokesman said: "We want to provide the maximum support to communities. We will very actively look at every way in which that can be done."

Sir Graham Watson, the leader of the EU-wide Liberal group in the European Parliament, said: "British taxpayers pay into this fund. We should be able to draw down from that – Germany and the Czech Republic did last year when they had terrible flooding on the River Elbe."

Mr Cameron has promised the Government will spend "whatever it takes" to ensure life returns to normal in communities battered by extreme weather. The Government has pledged £130m to tackle the emergency and Mr Cameron this week announced grants of up to £5,000 for homeowners to install flood defences, a fund of £10m to help farmers clear up devastated land and moves to waive for three months the business rates and taxes faced by affected companies. The cash will come from a mixture of departmental budgets and central contingency funds held by the Treasury.

Under the EU solidarity fund, a proportion of any money paid out would be trimmed later from the UK budget rebate from Brussels. Britain has 10 weeks from when floods first hit to request aid. Since its establishment in 2002, the EU fund has distributed around £2.9bn to 23 EU members.

Politics

Call for Cable to quit after Enoch Powell gibe

Francis Elliott, Political Editor
23 December 2013 *thetimes.co.uk*

Vince Cable's comparison of Enoch Powell with Conservative rhetoric around the arrival of Bulgarians and Romanians was today dismissed as "ridiculous".

Nigel Mills, a Tory MP who led efforts to keep the ban on jobseekers from the two newest members of the EU in place called on Mr Cable to resign.

"This is unacceptable," said the Amber Valley MP of Mr Cable's forthright attack on Conservative "panic" over the threat of UKIP and their "populist" response.

"These comments, coming on the back of I would say some completely sensible policy announcements by the Prime Minister to restrict welfare to people who are newly arrived here, can't claim until they've paid in, I mean it just looks completely out of touch with the sentiments of most British people.

"I thought Mr Cable should have gone over his ridiculous remarks a couple of years ago, so I'm not going to change my mind now."

He added that comparing his Tory colleagues to Enoch Powell was "a ridiculous thing to have done".

Behind the scenes, however, Tory strategists are unlikely to be too unhappy at the row if it helps to convince voters they are more in tune with popular sentiment than their Lib Dem partners.

Writing on Twitter the former Tory MP Louise Mench said: "I love it. Vince Cable and the LibDems stand against the Tories and the voters on Bulgarian/Romanian migration. Great."

Proposals for a cap on migration from EU countries drawn up by the Home Office have been floated, as Conservative ministers seek to address voters' concerns before visa restrictions for workers from the newest member states are lifted. The changes take effect on January 1.

Mr Cameron threatened last week to use Britain's veto to stop any further expansion unless rights that allow EU citizens to live and work in other member states were curbed.

That came after new limits on eligibility for benefits claimed by foreign jobseekers, which ministers say make the UK a less attractive destination for "welfare tourists".

However, Dr Cable and Nick Clegg accused the Prime Minister of putting Britain's economic health and social cohesion at risk in his search for a "populist" response.

In an article for The Sunday Times, Mr Clegg wrote: "Sticking a big 'no entry' sign on the cliffs of Dover may be politically popular, but at a huge economic cost. What would happen if tonight every European living in the UK boarded a ship or plane and went home?

"Are we really that keen to see the back of German lawyers, Dutch accountants or Finnish engineers? Do we want the NHS to fall over and the City of London to grind to a halt?"

The Deputy Prime Minister said that the issue was "the biggest dividing line in politics today" and branded plans for a cap as arbitrary, pointless and distracting.

He added: "Britain would be one step closer to the exit, even though walking away from Europe would cripple the economic recovery that's been so hard won."

Dr Cable went further, telling the Andrew Marr Show on BBC One: "We periodically get these immigration panics in the UK.

"I remember going back to Enoch Powell and rivers of blood and all that. If you go back a century it was panics over Jewish immigrants coming from Eastern Europe.

"The responsibility of politicians in this situation, when people are getting anxious, is to try to reassure them and give the facts, not panic and resort to populist measures that do harm."

Dr Cable added: "The 75,000 cap is illegal, and impossible to implement in any event. I think what's happening here, the Conservatives are in a bit of a panic because of UKIP reacting in the way they are.

"It's not going to help them, I think, politically, but it's doing a great deal of damage. The responsibility of politicians in this situation is to look at the facts and the simple point is that there is very little evidence of benefit tourism for people coming from Eastern Europe. All the evidence suggests that they put far more into the economy in terms of tax than they take out in benefits."

Asked if there was a crisis within the coalition on the issue, the Business Secretary said: "There is quite a lot of tension around this issue, I don't pretend that it isn't.

President Plevneliev of Bulgaria told The Observer that the migrants could improve Britain's economy. He said: "In the past 20 years immigrants in Great Britain contributed heavily to its prosperity, and that is a fact. The only thing that is important is not to listen to populist politicians who play on people's fears but to listen to the wise men in Great Britain."

News; Front Page

Cameron refuses to bar EU workers

James Kirkup; Steven Swinford
12 May 2014 The Daily Telegraph

BRITAIN will not "put up the barriers" to stop migrants from other European Union countries coming here to work, David Cameron has said.

The Prime Minister said that EU rules allowing people to move freely between countries are "important" and will remain in place, despite controversy over the immigration they allow.

Mr Cameron said that he rejected calls from the UK Independence Party to pull out of the EU and abandon European rules that allow citizens of member states to work in other EU countries without restriction.

Those rules have allowed more than one million EU nationals to come to Britain in recent years, with more than 150,000 arriving last year.

Official figures this week are expected to show that at least another 30,000 Bulgarians and Romanians have come to Britain since restrictions on their entry lapsed in January.

Mr Cameron has promised to renegotiate Britain's EU membership deal and put the results to the people in a referendum. That promise is "cast iron", he said.

Britain is seeking tougher rules to restrict welfare payments to EU migrants as part of that renegotiation process, Mr Cameron said.

However, he said their freedom to work in the UK will not be changed.

The Prime Minister said: "We need to make sure that the freedom to move to work is about that – it's to go and get a job, not to claim."

EU free movement rights should be used mainly to allow people to move to work, Mr Cameron suggested, pointing out that British people also take advantage of the rules."I think free movement within the European Union is important, but it needs to be returned to the original concept, which was the freedom to be able to go and work in another country," he told the BBC.

"Now many British citizens go and work in other European countries. Other European citizens come to work here. Freedom to apply for a job to go and work in another country, that is one thing, but I think what we've seen recently is something else."

Ukip has made opposition to EU migration a central part of its campaign for the European elections this month. Polls suggest the party could win the elections, with the Conservatives in third place.

The Ukip approach would be harmful to Britain, Mr Cameron said. "Ukip are saying put up the barriers, we can't succeed and compete in the modern world, let's give up on Europe altogether," he said. Asked if he would offer a "cast iron" guarantee on a referendum, Mr Cameron said: "Absolutely. We will hold that referendum by the end of 2017, it will be a referendum on an in–out basis."

Mr Cameron made a similar "cast iron" guarantee that he would hold a referendum on the EU's Lisbon Treaty in 2006. He later dropped his commitment when the treaty was incorporated into EU law, arguing that a referendum was now legally impossible.

Nigel Farage, the Ukip leader, dismissed Mr Cameron's promises, insisting voters will struggle to believe the Tory leader's claims because he "didn't deliver" on a previous pledge to hold an EU referendum. Mr Farage added: "He is desperately trying to pretend to be a Eurosceptic whilst at the same time saying whatever the results of all of this he will campaign for Britain to remain in."

Mr Cameron said that very different levels of income between EU countries have led to "massive moves" of workers to Britain, including the arrival of many Polish people after 2004.

People from any future EU members should face limits on their movements until their home countries reach a certain economic standard, Mr Cameron said. "You could have transitional controls that say, for instance, that you don't have the freedom to move and get a job in another country until, say, your income per capita is at a certain level. That would be a way of avoiding some of the difficulties in the past."

Mr Cameron insisted he was so serious about his commitment to an EU referendum that he would rather cease to be prime minister at the general election next year than lead a government that does not deliver a vote.

Holding a referendum would be one of the Conservatives' non–negotiable demands for entering any second coalition or power–sharing deal with a smaller party after the next election, he said. "I've said very clearly that whatever the outcome of the next general election – and, of course, I want an overall majority and I'm hoping and believing I can win an overall majority – but people should be in no doubt that I will not become prime minister unless I can guarantee that we can hold that referendum."

Plans for a referendum have raised the prospect of a Conservative split over Europe. But Mr Cameron insisted his party is united in support of his policy.

FT.com

Zero-hours work in Britain's zero-hours economy

By John McDermott

6 August 2013
Financial Times

The debate over zero-hours contracts has a touch of the final scene in Spartacus. "I'm zero-hours," admits Buckingham Palace. "I'm zero-hours," follows Sports Direct, McDonald's, Subway, the NHS, Cineworld, JD Wetherspoon and smaller employers of every collar colour - "We're all zero-hours!"

Of course, this would be an exaggeration. But the agreements, which do not oblige an employer to offer guaranteed hours of work, are almost certainly much more widespread than is estimated by the Office for National Statistics. Officially, there are 250,000 people on zero-hours deals. Other surveys and evidence from various companies suggest the figure could be about 1m, or 3 per cent of the workforce.

Critics of the contracts call them exploitative, an exertion of power by employers upon a vulnerable workforce that causes uncertainty and stress. Defenders of the arrangements say that such flexibility can be valued by employees, some of whom are in high-paid jobs, and that it allows the UK to keep unemployment in check.

The problem for Vince Cable, whose Department for Business is reviewing the practice, is that both sides of the argument are right. For the main reason we have zero-hour contracts is because we have an economy with zero-hours sorts of jobs.

In the nearer past, the growth of zero-hours contracts has two immediate causes, as suggested by the Resolution Foundation, a think-tank. First, in 2010, the UK implemented an EU directive granting agency workers - employees hired through a temp agency - equal status with other employees after 12 weeks of employment. This may have led employers to use zero-hours contracts as an alternative way of hiring people without offering a full suite of benefits.

Second, the downturn meant employers had to cut costs and Britain's flexible labour market allowed them to do so without creating the mass unemployment seen in mainland Europe. The employment rate has remained resilient. However, since the financial crisis we have seen the rise of "underemployment" - where people have jobs but not for as many hours as they would like. Zero-hours contracts probably played a role in encouraging this trend.

If zero-hours contracts were just a response to the downturn, though, we would expect them to decline as the economy recovers and employers start to compete more for workers. This may happen but I suspect that they are here to stay.

This is because the contracts' rise has a deeper cause. From what we know, most of the zero-hours contracts are in the part of the UK economy that has plagued policy makers looking at how to revive average living standards. Social care, retail, hotels and restaurants - which account for hundreds of thousands of zero-hours contracts - are generally sectors that are low skilled, not subject to international competition and where employers compete primarily on cost. Productivity is low, and so are wages. Unions are either absent or weak. For many companies, zero-hours contracts are a logical extension of the business model.

Low-cost goods and flexible labour markets are the result. For some, that is enough. But many people on zero-hours contracts do not want flexibility. They want a proper job, with training and progression. And our economy can't give it to them.

This may have broader consequences, and not just for the stressed-out employees wondering whether they will work next week, as the case of social care shows. About six in 10 of the sector's total workforce are on zero-hours contracts. This is an understandable response to the pressures it faces - funding cuts from local government and an industry where technological change can only do so much. (Those Japanese care robots have yet to take off.)

So we have a situation where about 300,000 workers looking after some of the country's most vulnerable people are on vulnerable contracts. Are we willing to risk that care quality will suffer?

Ultimately these are political, if not ethical, choices. But they run deeper than the rather superficial issue of zero-hours contracts, which are a symptom of life at the lower end of the labour market, rather than a cause.

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Freedom is something to use or lose – we must fight the antisocial behaviour bill

Consumerism's petty liberties have made us inhumanly passive. We've forgotten what freedom is, and how easily it is lost

George Monbiot, The Guardian, Monday 20 January 2014

The question has changed a little since Rousseau's day, but the mystery remains. Why, when most of us now possess greater freedom than almost any preceding generation has enjoyed – freedom from tyranny, freedom from slavery, freedom from hunger – do we act as if we don't?

I'm prompted to ask by the discovery that the most illiberal and oppressive instrument proposed by any recent government – injunctions to prevent nuisance and annoyance in the antisocial behaviour bill – has been attacked by Labour not because it is draconian but because it is not draconian enough. The measure was decisively rejected by the Lords last week. But if the government tries to restore this monstrous proposal in the Commons next month, Labour is likely to insist only that it is too timid.

Why do we tolerate a politics that offers no effective choice? That operates largely at the behest of millionaire funders, corporate power and a bullying media? Why, in an age in which people are no longer tortured and executed for criticising those in power, have we failed to create viable alternatives?

In the US Congress this year, for the first time a majority of members are millionaires. As the representatives become richer, the laws they pass ensure that they exercise ever less power over the rich and ever more power over the poor. Yet, as the Center for Responsive Politics notes, "there's been no change in our appetite to elect affluent politicians to represent our concerns in Washington".

We appear to possess an almost limitless ability to sit back and watch as political life is seized by plutocrats; as the biosphere is trashed; as public services are killed or given to corporations; as workers are dragooned into zero-hours contracts. Though there are a few wonderful exceptions, on the whole protest is muted and alternatives are shrugged away without examination. How did we acquire this superhuman passivity?

The question is not confined to politics. Almost universally we now seem content to lead a proxy life, a counter-life, of vicarious, illusory relationships, of secondhand pleasures, of atomisation without individuation. Those who possess some disposable income are extraordinarily free, by comparison to almost all our great-grandparents, but we tend to act as if we have been placed under house arrest. With the amount most of us spend on home entertainment, we could probably buy a horse and play buzkashi every weekend. But we would rather stare at an illuminated box, watching other people jumping up and down and screaming. Our political constraint is one aspect of a wider inhibition, a wider failure to be free.

I'm not talking about thinktank freedoms here: the freedom of billionaires not to pay their taxes, of corporations to pollute the atmosphere or induce children to smoke, of landlords to exploit their tenants. We should respect the prohibitive decencies we owe to others. But there are plenty of freedoms we can exercise without diminishing other people's.

Had our ancestors been asked to predict what would happen in an age of widespread prosperity in which most religious and cultural proscriptions had lost their power, how many would have guessed that our favourite activities would not be fiery political meetings, masked orgies, philosophical debates, hunting wild boar or surfing monstrous waves, but shopping and watching other people pretending to enjoy themselves? How many would have foreseen a national conversation – in public and in private – that revolves around the three Rs: renovation, recipes and resorts? How many would have guessed that people possessed of unimaginable wealth and leisure and liberty would spend their time shopping for onion goggles and wheatgrass juicers? Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chainstores.

De Tocqueville made a point about democracy: it threatens to enclose each of us "entirely in the solitude of his own heart". The freedoms it grants us destroy the desire to combine and to organise. To judge by our reluctance to create sustained alternatives, we wish neither to belong nor to deviate.

It is not hard to see how our elective impotence leads before long to tyranny. Without coherent popular movements, which are required to prevent opposition parties from falling into the clutches of millionaires and corporate lobbyists, almost any government would be tempted to engineer a nominally democratic police state. Freedom of all kinds is something we must use or lose. But we seem to have forgotten what it means.

Woman who took her own life over bedroom tax would have been exempt

Stephanie Bottrill, from Solihull, West Midlands, left note blaming government for financial stress before her death in May 2013

Stephanie Bottrill, of Solihull, West Midlands who died last May.

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES

ANALYSE LV1

TEXTE

HORS PROGRAMME

Alastair Sloan and Patrick Butler

THE GUARDIAN Friday 10 January 2014 23.45 GMT

A woman who killed herself last year, leaving a note in which she blamed her death on financial stress exacerbated by the bedroom tax, would have been exempt and eligible for a housing benefit refund were she still alive, it has emerged. Stephanie Bottrill, of Solihull, West Midlands who died last May, would have been exempt from the bedroom tax and liable for a refund of hundreds of pounds under a loophole in the legislation, according to Solihull council sources.

In a note left for her son and daughter before she killed herself, Bottrill explained how having to pay the bedroom tax had made her life impossible, writing: "Don't blame yourself for me ending my life. The only people to blame are the government."

It was revealed this week that a drafting error in the legislation means thousands of working age tenants in social housing are for the time being exempt from the tax if they have lived in the same house since before 1996 and have been claiming housing benefit continuously since then.

A spokesperson for Solihull council said that they had examined Bottrill's files to see if she would have been considered exempt, but were not prepared to comment on an individual case. However, sources within the council said she had been in the same house since 1995 and she was in continuous receipt of housing benefit until her death in 2013, meaning that Bottrill would have been exempt as she fulfilled both conditions. The Guardian understands the council believes Bottrill would have been exempt from the bedroom tax.

Bottrill's family were unavailable for comment. David Jamieson, a Solihull Labour councillor, who knows the family, said in a statement: "Last year, the family and friends of Stephanie were devastated at her suicide. Having spoken to her son today, I know he is extremely upset to learn that she should have been exempt. The community are now outraged to find that she was exempt. She was being needlessly forced from her home"

A spokesman for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) said it would not comment on an individual case. Speaking more widely about the loophole, which the DWP intends to close, the spokesman said that it believed fewer than 5,000 people would be found exempt: "We are looking at this issue carefully and working with local authorities, and we will take any action in due course. We expect very few people to be affected."

But housing experts estimate up to 40,000 households could be affected and the cost of refunds could run into the millions of pounds, along with associated legal costs and compensation for families who had to pay removal companies to move out of their homes. All could be eligible for refunds worth on average at least £640 per claimant, credited to their rent account.

The bedroom tax affects an estimated 660,000 housing benefit claimants living in social housing in the UK. The policy imposes a penalty of between £14 and £22 a week on working-age tenants deemed to have more bedrooms than they need. Council tenants with spare bedrooms are asked to move to smaller properties or pay additional rent.

Bottrill had the auto-immune system deficiency Myasthenia Gravis, an illness that weakens the muscles. The bedroom tax meant she had to meet a shortfall in her housing benefit £80 per month to remain in her three-bed home, because her son Steven and his younger sister Laura had moved out. At the time, her son Steven, 27, told reporters: "She never asked for help. Mum kept wrapped up in hot water bottles rather than put the heating on and we didn't know. She was fine before the bedroom tax. It was dreamt up in London, by people in offices and big houses. They have no idea the effect it has on people like my mum. Going through all her things in the house we grew up in was heartbreaking."

Council housing benefit departments across the country reacted with dismay after the DWP bungle was revealed. Few have been able to find out yet exactly how many households are affected, especially as they are only legally required to keep housing records for seven years. But anecdotally councils are reporting that as many as 15% of tenants affected by the bedroom tax could be exempt and some may have already moved house or face eviction.

Peter Delamothe, a housing benefit consultant at HBinfo, said one council had identified 250 tenants wrongly ruled liable for the bedroom tax: "This is a shambles caused by the DWP failing to understand the significance of their own legislation". David Orr, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, said: "The discovery of this loophole nine months in will cause more confusion for tenants, some of whom will have had their housing benefit reduced in error. It also means more work for over-burdened local authorities."

Benefits Street or Wall Street – which is worse?

Allison Pearson
30 January 2014
The Daily Telegraph

This is a tale of two streets. At the bottom, there is James Turner Street in Birmingham, newly notorious as Channel 4's Benefits Street. Only five per cent of its residents are in work. Many, such as Fungi (pronounced Funguy), have made their career in crime, stealing and scrounging to feed a voracious drug habit. "Fungi, do you see yourself as a clever criminal or a s—— one?" asks White Dee, the self–styled matriarch of the street.

"A s—— one," says Fungi, ruefully. He explains that his first offence was holding up a McDonald's with a "sawn–off". Dee explodes into a nicotine–coated cackle at such idiocy. Fungi must be 40, but he looks 65, his scrawny face crosshatched with every bad choice he ever made.

At the other end of the food chain is The Wolf of Wall Street. Martin Scorsese's Oscar–nominated film is based on the memoirs of Jordan Belfort, a stockbroking scoundrel who cheated his clients, mainly poor, credulous people, out of millions of dollars and was eventually jailed. Belfort's epic debauchery – hordes of women, Swiss Alps of cocaine, monster yachts, recreational dwarf–tossing – is made to stand for the rottenness of a whole financial culture. As played by Leonardo DiCaprio, Belfort has enough charm to light up Manhattan, but that beautiful face cannot hide the ugliness of his calculations: "I sell garbage to garbage men. They want to get something for nothing."

Superficially, James Turner and Wall Street are worlds apart. Look closer and some troubling similarities start to reveal themselves. Is Danny, one of Birmingham's premier shoplifters, really all that different from Jordan Belfort? Clearly bright, Danny has taken the decision that legitimate work is for mugs. He can lift a few hundred quids' worth of casual trousers in an afternoon, remove the security tags with a safecracker's twist, and convert the proceeds into drugs faster than you can say housing benefit. Society's rules do not concern Danny any more than they trouble Jordan Belfort. Both James Turner and Wall Street have their own moral codes that run in parallel to – but do not overlap – the world most of us inhabit. Looking wistfully across the street at her Polish neighbour's wedding dress, a teenage girl in Brum sighs: "It's luvvlay. I'm gonna rob that for me prom." The notion of working and saving up for a dress has no currency in James Turner Street. I mean, why would you?

Mark, who looks like an inflatable Adrian Chiles doll, visited a food bank. "It's like I'm scavenging for food. It shouldn't be like that in society," he whined.

What Mark didn't mention is that he and his partner Becky were penalised for fraudulently claiming benefits they weren't entitled to; benefits funded by people who work for a living. The fact Mark and Becky now have to manage on jobseeker's allowance and the child benefit of their two poor infants is their own fault, not the state's. "I moost be the unlookiest guy on the planet," muses Mark. "Noofink good happens to me."

Jordan Belfort would have Mark spit–roasted and served up with an apple in his gob. For Wall Street's Masters of the Universe, poverty is a moral failing. "I've been poor and I've been rich. I choose rich!" bellows DiCaprio, the greed–is good evangelist before his congregation of ecstatic brokers. What Belfort doesn't admit is that it's the poor who pay for his piggish lifestyle. There have to be enough poor, stupid people to make him rich.

On both streets, self–deception is the air that they breathe. White Dee used to be employed by the local council until she stole £13,000 to finance her partner's crack habit. Dee never mentions this. It would tarnish her heart of gold. Recently, Dee had her disability benefit for depression cut. The only depressing thing is that she ever had the gall to claim it when so many are genuinely in need.

Contemplating the drug–addled wreck on her doorstep, Fungi's lovely and shrewd first wife, Donna, says: "I don't think he could live the normal life. Sitting there, being normal? No."

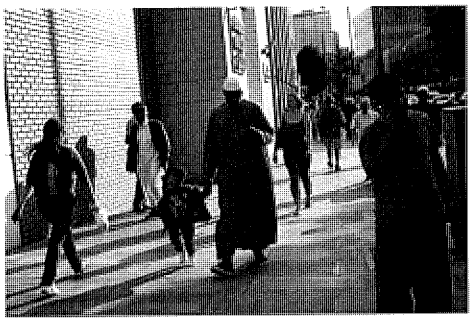
Confronted by his accountant father with a receipt for $26,000 for a single dinner, the drug–addled Jordan Belfort concedes: "It was crazy – in the normal world. But who wants to live there?"

Indeed. Who wants to live in the sober world of dull duty and a fair day's pay for a fair day's work? Not Fungi and not Jordan Belfort, each of them happy to be funded by decent, ordinary wage slaves. Still, there is one crucial difference between the Brummie on benefits (and methadone) and the billiondollar American broker: Fungi is bad at being bad. Belfort was really good at being bad. [...]

This is Britain: a crackdown on Islamic extremism will not cause attacks on Muslims

THE SPECTATOR 5 December 2013 Douglas Murray

Contrary to what some self-interested parties would have you believe, Britain is a tolerant place where hate crimes are, thankfully, uncommon.



Hallelujah, vaguely. The Prime Minister's extremism task force set up in the wake of the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby has just reported and its findings, 'Tackling Extremism in the UK' include the following admission: *'We have been too reticent about challenging extreme Islamist ideologies in the past, in part because of a misplaced concern that attacking Islamist extremism equates to an attack on Islam itself. This reticence, and the failure to confront extremists, has led to an environment conducive to radicalisation in some mosques and Islamic centres, universities and prisons.'*

Who could possibly remain opposed to such prevailing common sense? Well here are the people who caused yesterday's *Independent* to headline its piece on the report: 'Government crackdown on radicals "will lead to attacks on Muslims".'

'Chris Allen, an expert on Islamophobia at Birmingham University, said: "The more the lens is turned on the Muslim community, the more society begins to think, 'There's no smoke without fire'." Chris is a nice guy, and has made a nice career out of 'Islamophobia'. The problem he keeps coming up against is that the British public did not imagine the 7/7 attacks, nor the slaughter of Drummer Rigby. Nor did we conjure up from the depths of our imaginations the Haymarket car-bomb, Madrid, Bali, 9/11 and so on.

Meanwhile Isabella Sankey, the director of policy at Liberty, said: *'Driving those who despise diversity further underground does nothing to expose their beliefs and only acts as another recruitment tool. You cannot protect our democracy by shutting down the very freedoms that sustain it.'* 'Liberty' once again suggesting that there's nothing quite so British as a bit of jihadism.

But it is the response of Fiyaz Mughal – the centrepiece of the Independent story – that is most revealing: *'Last night Fiyaz Mughal, the director of Tell Mama, which records anti-Muslim incidents, said he feared Mr Cameron's announcements would reinforce negative perceptions of Muslims. Mr Mughal said he had asked extra staff to be on standby because of an anticipated surge in hate attacks.'*

Lest we forget, this is the same Fiyaz Mughal and 'Tell Mama' who sucked press attention away from the actual murder of Drummer Lee Rigby by claiming that Britain was, as a result of that attack, suffering an anti-Muslim tsunami. At that delicate time Mughal claimed: *'The scale of the backlash is astounding ... there has been a massive spike in anti-Muslim prejudice. A sense of endemic fear has gripped Muslim communities. I do not see an end to this cycle of violence. There is an underlying Islamophobia in our society and the horrendous events in Woolwich have brought this to the fore. The [Government's] Prevent [anti-extremism] agenda, the extremist agenda, have not been good for building confidence – the sense of fear just alienates and isolates communities.'*

It was Mughal's group that claimed that there had been 212 "anti-Muslim incidents" in the immediate aftermath of Woolwich. Unfortunately for 'Tell Mama' these claims were clinically exposed in the Sunday Telegraph. As the Sunday Telegraph reported:

'Tell Mama confirmed to The Sunday Telegraph that about 120 of its 212 "anti-Muslim incidents" – 57 per cent – took place only online. They were offensive postings on Twitter or Facebook, or comments on blogs: nasty and undesirable, certainly, but some way from violence or physical harm and often, indeed, legal.

...Although the service says its caseworkers "carefully handle each report as it comes in, to determine whether it can be verified and justified as an anti-Muslim incident", Mr Mughal admitted that a further 35 of the 212 post-Woolwich incidents, or 16 per cent, had yet to be verified. He justified publishing the figure, however, saying he expected that all but a handful of incidents would be verified.

Fewer than one in 12 of the 212 "incidents" reported to Tell Mama since Woolwich – 17 cases (8 per cent) – involved individuals being physically targeted. Six people had things thrown at them, said Mr Mughal, and most of the other 11 cases were attempts to pull off the hijab or other items of Islamic dress. Offences of common and racially aggravated assault are typically used where there has been no injury, such as hijab snatching, or minor injury not drawing blood or requiring medical treatment, such as the throwing incidents reported by Tell Mama. The Met said there were no cases reported to it where any more serious injury resulted.

Asking other police forces and trawling local media reports, The Telegraph has been unable to find a single confirmed case since Drummer Rigby's death where any individual Muslim has received an injury requiring medical treatment.'

Supporters of Tell Mama responded to this Telegraph analysis by describing it as 'better suited to the days of 1930s Germany'. So even criticising the hype and shoddiness of Mughal's work on hate crime constitutes a hate-crime, which is one way to try to force people to fawn over you.

And fawn, for a while, people did. It transpired that in one year alone Mughal's organisation had received £375,000 from the UK's Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Sadly for him, Fiyaz Mughal lost his government funding shortly after the damning Sunday Telegraph report. [...]

Gregor Gall: North-South divide not so divisive
THE SCOTSMAN 25 DECEMBER 2013

The large part of the Scottish left that supports independence for Scotland does so for the primary reason that independence will allow the greater expression in the body politic of the left-of-centre of political gravity presently found in Scotland. Currently, the belief is that conservative institutions of Westminster politics constitute a road block to this expression. Amongst many SNP supporters, the impasse is often formulated as the outcome of "London-dominated" or 'London-controlled' political parties.

But an analysis of the annual British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey data shows the biggest political gulf is not between Scotland and England, or Scotland and London, but between the north of Britain and the south of Britain.

It has long been believed that London and the south-east of England are economically, politically and culturally different in substantive ways from the rest of Britain. In the more measured views of this perspective, it is not to suggest that "down there" they are all Tory-supporting, rich and middle class. But it is to suggest that the centre of political gravity is quite far to the right and that is underpinned by different economic dynamics. In other words, relative wealth allows, if not produces, support for free market individualism and "I'm alright, Jack" attitudes. It is most easily typified in an overheated property market, massive City bonuses and considerable support for UKIP.

The BSA survey began in 1983 and has been carried out each year, with some 3,500 adults interviewed each time. Many of the most important questions are included each year so that robust analysis is possible.

Selecting a number of these questions and viewing the data by the standard ten regions (Scotland, North East England, North West England, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands, East Midlands, Eastern England, South West England, South East England, London and Wales but excluding Northern Ireland) shows a number of marked trends and phenomena.

The most obvious questions concern attitudes to the poor and unemployed, public ownership, public services, individual responsibility and the gap between the rich and poor, as well as whether big business benefits at the expense of workers, whether the government should have responsibility for income distribution and living standards in society, and if one law exists for the rich and another for the poor.

The first marked phenomenon is that the regions of the north of England are – in broad measure – every bit as left wing as those found in Scotland and Wales and that these responses are consistently to the left of the regions from the Midlands southwards. Surprisingly, London is not quite the bastion of reaction that may have been anticipated. Rather, it is often on a par with its northern neighbours on both sides of the Border.

The second marked phenomenon is the trend that, despite the difference between the north of Britain (including Wales) and the south of Britain, all social values have become more right wing as a whole since the BSA surveys began. So the north of Britain is not as left wing as it once was and the south of Britain is more right wing than it used to be. This is no great surprise as the move of the Tories to the right of their previous "one nation" politics to those of Thatcherism and then the apeing of this by Labour in becoming "New" Labour was unlikely to not have an effect.

Maybe the surprise is that social values in the north of Britain have remained quite as resilient to the charms of neo-liberalism – the ideology that the free market should determine how society operates and that "greed is good". The third marked phenomenon, however, is that while support in the north of Britain for redistributive policies has declined, as has sympathy for those on benefits, the sense of social injustice has increased. When asked if ordinary people "get a fair share" of the fruits of society, agreement stayed almost static, but at the same the views that "big business has too much power" and that "unions are too weak" have gained support.

What seems to be going on is that most citizens in the north of Britain have lost some considerable faith in the ability of the existing political system – through the state – to be capable of delivering fair outcomes for themselves and for society. Yet at the same time, they have not positively endorsed the market, its processes and outcomes, for they dislike that business is stronger and unions are weaker.

The dynamics of politics in Britain now and in the foreseeable future do not allow for a referendum on having a republic of northern Britain or of the north of England where either's progressive social values can freely flower. The referendum on 18 September 2014 is, however, a certainty. Maybe a radical form of Scottish independence will spur "our friends in the north" on to stop themselves being dominated by the neo-liberal hegemony based in Westminster.

The call for a parliament of the regions in England is apposite here. Meantime, the limited further extension of devolution to the Welsh Assembly might now seem insufficient if Scotland charts its own course. Solidarity with "our friends in the north" could take the form of leading by example and the cross-border cooperation.

• Gregor Gall is professor of industrial relations at the University of Bradford

Intervention in Syria

Britain will not fight

Aug 30th 2013, 13:05 by Bagehot

THE ECONOMIST

THE most talked-upon point was, for once in British politics, also the main one. Expressing the composite of fear, resentment, suspicion and fury bequeathed by the fiasco of Britain's military involvement in Iraq, Parliament voted on August 29th against possible missile strikes against Syria. This was a big moment in the history of British military power.

David Cameron, the Conservative prime minister, had asked Parliament to support a motion which condemned the Syrian government for using chemical weapons in a Damascus suburb on August 21st and gave in-principle support for an attack on it. This was in fact much less than Mr Cameron, the most forceful advocate of intervention in Syria among Western leaders, would have liked.

At the insistence of Ed Miliband, leader of the main opposition Labour Party, whose backing Mr Cameron had taken some pains to secure, the motion had been watered down on the eve of the debate. It therefore included a crucial proviso: a promise that, after attempting "as far as possible" to secure support from the UN Security Council for a possible reprisal, Mr Cameron would return to Parliament to seek its blessing for such an action. Still dissatisfied—either because Labour MPs would not wear Mr Cameron's motion, or because he sensed an opportunity to embarrass the prime minister—Mr Miliband then introduced his own rival motion, which was even weaker. It condemned the massacre in Damascus, but refrained from blaming Syria's government for it.

But the difference hardly mattered. After six hours of intense and sometimes emotional debate, both motions were defeated; the government's proposal was rebuffed by a margin of 285 votes to 272. Having failed to secure Labour's support, Mr Cameron was in effect scuppered by his own side, with 30 Tory MPs rebelling against the government, as well as nine Liberal Democrats, his coalition's junior partners. Though Mr Cameron could technically still authorise British military action in Syria—by a fiat known as Royal prerogative—this is almost unthinkable. "It is clear to me that the British Parliament, reflecting the views of the British people, does not want to see British military action," the prime minister conceded. "I get that and the government will act accordingly."

It was a humiliation. But Mr Cameron should have at least half-expected it. Even as he has lobbied his Western friends and allies to get tough on Bashar Assad, it was clear that the weight of British public and political feeling was against him. Recent polls suggest Britons oppose launching strikes on Syria by 2-1, with only a quarter in favour. Moreover, opinion has hardly shifted since the gassing of hundreds of innocents in Damascus. Most Britons simply do not want this fight—a view shared by the country's top brass, senior spies and, it now turns out, a majority in parliament.

Mr Cameron tried manfully to address this reluctance. He was not advocating regime change, backing for Mr Assad's rebel enemies or any other form of long-term British engagement in the crisis, he protested. He claimed to recognise that British public opinion would not allow that. The intervention he envisaged was more modest: in effect, a sharp rap over the knuckles for Mr Assad, in the form of a brief salvo of air strikes, to deter him from using chemical weapons and perhaps degrade his supply of them.

Much of the ensuing debate picked out the frailties in that argument. It is not certain, even if probable, that Mr Assad's regime was responsible for the attack. It also seemed unwise to speak of downgrading its chemical arms: to attempt that would be dangerous and require a much bigger and longer attack than Mr Cameron claimed to be arguing for. Many suspected that this would inevitably ensue. "It's very easy to get into military action," said Jack Straw, a former Labour foreign secretary, "very hard to extract oneself from it". Some, on both sides of the house, suspected this was in fact Mr Cameron's true intent. It was, after all, what happened over Libya, in 2011, when the bombing campaign he ordered to prevent a massacre in Benghazi ended up creating the conditions for regime change.

But the subtext for all this debate was Iraq. With frequent reference to the specious political arguments and dodgy intelligence wielded by Tony Blair in the run-up to the 2003 invasion, and to the calamity it produced, Britain's parliamentarians suggested Syria was too similar a case. Reflecting the view of their constituents, they doubted the veracity of the intelligence Mr Cameron cited and, anyway, the efficacy of projecting British military power in the Middle-East. Mr Cameron acknowledged the problem. "The well of public opinion was well and truly poisoned by the Iraq episode," he said. But he could not alter it.

For a minority of staunch neoconservatives and Atlanticists in Mr Cameron's party, this was catastrophic. "You're a disgrace!" Michael Gove, an unrepentent neo-conservative and Mr Cameron's education secretary, snarled at the Tory rebels. [...]

News; Front Page

SNP denies cover–up over cost of separation

Simon Johnson 30 May 2014 The Daily Telegraph

SNP urged to release study on independence costs

ALEX SALMOND was last night at the centre of a row over whether he is covering up the costs of setting up an independent Scotland after a leaked report suggested his officials have calculated the total bill taxpayers will face.

He was repeatedly challenged over a briefing by John Swinney, the Scottish finance minister, which said work was under way in 2012 to provide "a comprehensive overview of the institutions, costs and staff numbers" needed for a separate state.

Mr Swinney said the results would be collated and presented to the Scottish Cabinet in June that year but Mr Salmond yesterday refused to answer opposition party leaders' questions over what had happened to the calculations.

The First Minister's official spokesman later said that civil servants had never been asked to produce a set–up cost and they would not publish a figure before September's independence referendum. He insisted the work referred to by Mr Swinney had influenced the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence, published last November. However, the 670–page document included only one page of figures and no estimates of the costs required to set up a separate Scottish state, such as creating a new defence ministry and foreign office.

The UK Government has said the cost will be around £1.5billion, the equivalent of £600 for every Scot, but Mr Salmond's spokesman insisted no credible figure could be provided until divorce negotiations were completed.

The mystery over the information held by the Scottish Government emerged the day after a "car–crash" radio interview for Mr Swinney, in which he refused 13 times to say what the set–up costs would be for creating a new state.

Barely two hours later, Mr Salmond told a press conference that the Scottish Government had done no detailed work on the issue but estimated the set–up cost would be £250 million.

But yesterday the First Minister reduced that figure further to £200million. He said it came from a newspaper article quoting an academic from the London School of Economics.

Willie Rennie, the Scottish Liberal Democrat leader, and Ruth Davidson, his Tory counterpart, both challenged him yesterday over what had happened to Mr Swinney's "comprehensive overview" of costs. Mr Salmond refused to answer their questions, instead focusing on a controversial £2.7billion estimate included in a Treasury report that was attacked as misleading by the LSE academic on whose research it was based.

But Mr Rennie later warned that it would be "no good" for Scots to discover the First Minister was wrong about an independent Scotland's price tag after a Yes vote. "If the work has been done, show it to us, so we can see it. If the work has not been done, why on earth has it not been?" Mr Rennie asked him. "I think the people of Scotland deserve to see your government's estimate of the transition costs."

Ms Davidson said: "By John Swinney's own hand we know civil servants were working on preparing start–up costs for an independent Scotland. It is astonishing the Scottish Government now claims this work never existed. The Scottish Government is either deceiving the Scottish public, or it is in dereliction of its duty."

Blair McDougall, campaign director of the pro–Union Better Together campaign, added: "Someone somewhere isn't telling the truth. If they won't tell us what they know about the costs of setting up a separate state then voters will conclude Alex Salmond is hiding the true cost of independence."

The controversy centred on a secret report, written in spring 2012 and leaked about a year later, in which Mr Swinney set out for his cabinet colleagues what he saw as the main financial challenges a separate Scotland would face. "Undoubtedly there will be a cost in setting up and running the necessary institutions and in some cases these are likely to be significant," he warned, estimating that tax collection would cost between £575million and £625million annually. "Work is currently under way in Finance and OCEA (the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser) to build a comprehensive overview of the institutions, costs and staff numbers which I will draw together and provide an update to Cabinet on in June."

The White Paper stated that Scotland was currently served by around 300 UK public bodies, around 180 of which would transfer their functions to a new or existing Scottish organisation after separation. Among the new responsibilities it said Scotland would become responsible for were the administration of taxation, the state pension and benefits, immigration and defence. It insisted that the "one–off investment in systems and processes" Scotland would require would be a "small proportion" of its budget, with the final figure depending on the division of the UK's assets and liabilities. The document made no attempt to estimate what the price tag might be. [...]

News > UK > UK Politics
THE INDEPENDENT 6 March 2014

Exclusive: Impact of immigrants on British workers 'negligible'

Andrew Grice, Nigel Morris

'Very little evidence' of overseas workers taking jobs from Britons, says suppressed report as Government accused of 'misleading' public and stoking fears by overstating severity of problem

An unpublished government-wide review has rebuffed repeated claims by Theresa May, the Home Secretary, that immigration has consigned large numbers of British workers to the dole queue. The potentially explosive report concludes that there is "very little evidence" of such job displacement when the economy is growing. One Whitehall source told *The Independent* the review found immigration had a "negligible" impact on British workers.

The overview of all previous research on the highly sensitive issue since 2003 was conducted jointly by the Home Office, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department of Work and Pensions. It refutes the statistic cited by Mrs May from a 2012 study by the Government's Migration Advisory Committee, which showed that "for every additional 100 immigrants... 23 British workers would not be employed".

Whitehall insiders said Mrs May had been advised by her officials not to rely too heavily on the statistic because it was not robust enough. One source said the Home Office now looked "pretty isolated", with other departments including the Treasury and Foreign Office also sceptical that immigration costs British people jobs. But Home Office officials claim other departments are "institutionally biased" towards immigration.

The latest review will now be published shortly after Labour accused Downing Street of suppressing it to spare Mrs May's blushes. The move will fuel a heated debate inside the Coalition. Liberal Democrat ministers, led by Vince Cable, the Business Secretary, have talked up the economic benefits of immigration and refused to sign up to the Conservatives' target to cut net migration to less than 100,000 annually by next year's general election. Meanwhile, political leaders are being urged to abandon their obsession with cutting immigration levels and concentrate instead on building a fairer system that commands widespread public support.

In a report seen by *The Independent* and to be published shortly, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) think-tank said that commitments to drive down numbers at all costs are a policy "dead end" because they undermine prospects of economic growth and ignore the growing ease of international travel.

It accused the Conservatives of trying to "turn the clock back" with their pledge to reduce net migration, while Labour risks a policy "cul-de-sac" by "aligning itself fairly closely with the Coalition's harder-line stance".

The report called on leading politicians to be honest with the public over their ability to cut immigration. It said: "There are no signs that we will see a return to the low levels of migration of the mid-1990s. Rather, the relatively low levels of the last 20 years are likely to be the norm for the foreseeable future."

The IPPR acknowledged that the parties are in tune with the voters, but warns they are storing up trouble for themselves by "framing migration very largely around numbers". Any attempt to pull up the drawbridge would damage Britain's economy and international reputation, it said.

Tonight Mr Cable will renew his battle with the Tories. Echoing Peter Mandelson's statement that New Labour was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes", Mr Cable will declare: "I am intensely relaxed about people coming to work and study here and bringing necessary skills to Britain – provided they pay their taxes and pay their way." Speaking at the Mansion House in London, the Business Secretary will admit that immigration is "politically toxic" and "deeply unpopular" on the doorstep. Attacking "scare stories" in tabloid newspapers, he will insist that only 3 per cent of migrants claim Jobseeker's Allowance. "There are a host of reasons to be a tourist to the UK, but its benefits system is not one of them.... We just have to stop treating people coming to work here as if they are a problem." He will say that Britain will not fully exploit its advantages if it puts up a sign saying "closed for business."

In his first speech as Immigration minister, the Conservative James Brokenshire will hit back today at Mr Cable's claim that last week's rise in net migration was "good news". He will say: "In the past year net migration from the EU has doubled, and this figure is, frankly, too high. Some have tried to claim this rapid increase is somehow 'good' for the country. Well, just like the Home Secretary, I disagree." Mr Brokenshire will also say, regarding the Tories' immigration target: "As part of our long-term economic plan, the Government wants to reduce net migration to sustainable levels so our economy delivers for people who want to work hard and play by the rules. It remains our aim to reduce it to the tens of thousands." [...]

The Royal Mail underselling shows this was privatisation through ideology not pragmatism

If ministers had held out for a better price, they could have raised an extra £750m.

JONN ELLEDGE PUBLISHED 1 APRIL, 2014 - 18:19

NEW STATESMAN

Rogue Mail: a demo by the Communication Workers Union against Royal Mail privatisation, October 2013

Money is still a bit tight down at the Treasury – so any deal under which the taxpayer loses out to the tune of three quarters of a billion quid might be considered just a tad embarrassing.

That's certainly what the National Audit Office (NAO) thinks. Last October the government sold 70 per cent of the Royal Mail at a price of 330p a share. By the end of that day, those shares were already trading at 455p, and in January they hit a peak of 615p (they've since fallen back a bit). In other words, if ministers had held out for a better price, the sale could have fetched an extra £750m.

The watchdog's boss, Amyas Morse, doesn't really go in for fiery language but his comment was quietly damning nonetheless. The business department's approach was "marked by deep caution," he said, "the price of which was borne by the taxpayer".

Anyone expecting ministers to don sackcloth and ashes about all this, though, will have been sorely disappointed, and on this morning's *Today* programme, the business minister Michael Fallon was utterly unrepentant. "The audit office report actually recognises that we achieved our objectives," he explained to an increasingly exasperated Jim Naughtie. "It was the biggest privatisation for 20 years, we had to be careful about it to make sure that we got it away [and] we did get it away."

In other words, the government was so frightened that the deal wouldn't come off at all that it cheerfully underpriced it to make sure that it did. Fallon was basically admitting to exactly what the NAO had accused him of: privatisation was an end in itself, and we should consider ourselves lucky that the government succeeded in flogging off the family silver at all.

There are a number of reasons why a minister might favour privatisation. To raise money for other things. To outsource risk. To duck responsibility, by giving them someone else to blame.

For many on the right, though, it's a matter of genuine faith. Services will always do better under private sector leadership, they think, because business types are clever and public servants suck. Hulking government bureaucracies are always less efficient and responsive than equally hulking corporate ones.

Never mind that most of the privatised railways are drowning in public subsidy, while the East Coast Main Line has started turning a profit since being taken back into public ownership: the latter needs to be re-privatised as quickly as possible because, well, it just does. Private good; public bad.

(There's another view, common in some parts of the left, which states that business is inherently evil, the state inherently great, and that any move from the latter to the former will inevitably lead to the collapse of civilisation as we know it. This is, indeed, equally silly. It's just not what I'm writing about right now, so there.)

The thing is, some privatisations were probably no bad thing. Yes, the shareholders are only interested in profits, and most corporate execs these days demand the kinds of salaries that'd enable them to turn their basement into the Batcave for a laugh. Get things right, though, and the government can use all that to its advantage, to encourage innovation, or investment, or difficult decisions for which ministers lack the guts. To go back to the railways, the lines into Marylebone station are run *vastly* better these days than they ever were run under British Rail. Sometimes, it can work.

But sometimes, it doesn't. Sometimes government mucks up the way it structures its contracts. And sometimes a service is just so unprofitable that the only way of ensuring it exists at all is for the taxpayer to suck it up and pay for the bloody thing.

Which side of this divide the Royal Mail privatisation will come down on is not exactly clear: cleverer people than I don't seem to agree. But I'd be more confident about it if Michael Fallon hadn't just suggested that the government's goal was privatisation at any cost. Getting these things right requires careful thought and lengthy negotiation. If ministers couldn't hold out for a better share price, then how can we believe they held out for any of that?

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)
Nom : Prénom : Signature

The perfect epitaph for establishment journalism

'If MI5 warns that this is not in the public interest who am I to disbelieve them?', says the former editor of The Independent

Glenn Greenwald, *The Guardian*, Monday 14 October 2013

Like many people, I've spent years writing and speaking about the lethal power-subservient pathologies plaguing establishment journalism in the west. But this morning, I feel a bit like all of that was wasted time and energy, because this new column by career British journalist Chris Blackhurst - an executive with and, until a few months ago, the editor of the UK daily calling itself "The Independent" - contains a headline that says everything that needs to be said about the sickly state of establishment journalism:

In other words, if the government tells me I shouldn't publish something, who am I as a journalist to disobey? Put that on the tombstone of western establishment journalism. It perfectly encapsulates the death spiral of large journalistic outlets.

Lest you think that the headline does not fairly represent the content of the column, Blackhurst, in explaining why he would never have allowed his newspaper to publish any of the documents from NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, actually wrote:

If the security services insist something is contrary to the public interest, and might harm their operations, who am I (despite my grounding from Watergate onwards) to disbelieve them?"

Most people, let alone journalists, would be far too embarrassed to admit they harbor such subservient, obsequious sentiments. It's one thing to accord some deference or presumption of good will to political officials, but the desire to demonstrate some minimal human dignity, by itself, would preclude most people from publicly confessing that they have willingly sacrificed all of their independent judgment and autonomy to the superior, secret decrees of those who wield the greatest power. Chris Blackhurst has obviously liberated himself from these inhibitions, though not entirely, as he infuses insincere caveats like this into his paean to the virtues of obedience: "I'm cynical about officialdom, having seen too many cover-ups and appalling injustices carried out in our name." One would think that most journalists (particularly those who edit a newspaper called "The Independent") would want to maintain at least a pretense of independent thought and thus refrain from acknowledging such cringe-inducing things about themselves.

Still, what Blackhurst is revealing here is indeed a predominant mindset among many in the media class. Journalists should not disobey the dictates of those in power. Once national security state officials decree that what they are doing should be kept concealed from the public - once they pound their mighty "SECRET" stamp onto their behavior - it is the supreme duty of all citizens, including journalists, to honor that and never utter in public what they have done. Indeed, it is not only morally wrong, but criminal, to defy these dictates. After all, "who am I to disbelieve them?"

That this mentality condemns - and would render outlawed - most of the worthwhile investigative journalism over the last several decades never seems to occur to good journalistic servants like Blackhurst. National security state officials also decreed that it would "not be in the public interest" to report on the Pentagon Papers, or the My Lai massacre, or the network of CIA black sites in which detainees were tortured, or the NSA warrantless eavesdropping program, or the documents negating claims of Iraqi WMDs, or a whole litany of waste, corruption and illegality that once bore the "top secret" label. Indeed, one of the best reporters in the UK, Duncan Campbell, works for Blackhurst's newspaper, and he was arrested and prosecuted by the UK government in the 1970s for the "crime" of disclosing the existence of the GCHQ. When Blackhurst sees Campbell in the hallways, does he ask him: "who are you to have decided on your own to disclose that which UK officials had told you should remain concealed?"

The NSA reporting enabled by Snowden's whistleblowing has triggered a worldwide debate over internet freedom and privacy, reform movements in numerous national legislatures, multiple whistleblowing prizes for Snowden, and the first-ever recognition of just how pervasive and invasive is the system of suspicionless surveillance being built by the US and the UK. It does not surprise me that authoritarian factions, including (especially) establishment journalists, prefer that none of this reporting and debate happened and that we all instead remained blissfully ignorant about it. But it does still surprise me when people calling themselves "journalists" openly admit to thinking this way. But when they do so, they do us a service, as it lays so vividly bare just how wide the gap is between the claimed function of establishment journalists and the actual role they fulfill.

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)
Nom : Prénom : Signature

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
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TEXTE
HORS PROGRAMME

Democrats' revolting equal-pay demagoguery

By Ruth Marcus, April 10, 2014 *Washington Post*

Here's a radical notion: It is simultaneously possible to believe that women are entitled to equal pay and to not support the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Not that you'd know it from the rhetoric President Obama and fellow Democrats are happily flinging at Republicans who dare to oppose the measure.

Ruth Marcus

An editorial writer specializing in politics, the budget and other domestic issues, she also writes a weekly column and contributes to the PostPartisan blog.

"I don't know why you would resist the idea that women should be paid the same as men and then deny that that's not always happening out there," Obama said Tuesday. "If Republicans in Congress . . . want to show that they, in fact, do care about women being paid the same as men, then show me. . . . They can join us in this, the 21st century, and vote yes on the Paycheck Fairness Act."

On Wednesday, as Senate Republicans blocked the measure from moving forward on the floor, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) issued a similar blast. "If Senate Republicans are ideologically opposed to ensuring equal pay for equal work, they are free to vote against passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act," he offered.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) went even further. "It is outrageous that in 2014 some in Congress apparently still think that women don't deserve to earn the same amount as a man for doing the same job," she said in a statement.

Oh come on.

Before you start checking the byline at the top of this piece and e-mailing the editor that there's been a terrible mistake, let me be clear: I support ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work — I have a bit of a vested stake in that issue myself. Unequal pay remains a problem, although not at the women-earn-77-cents-on-the-dollar level of Democrats' sloganeering. Most relevantly, I'd vote for the Paycheck Fairness Act in the unlikely event that someone elected me to Congress.

But the level of hyperbole — actually, of demagoguery — that Democrats have engaged in here is revolting. It's entirely understandable, of course: The Senate is up for grabs. Women account for a majority of voters. They tend to favor Democrats. To the extent that women — and in particular, single women — can be motivated to turn out in a midterm election, waving the bloody shirt of unequal pay is smart politics.

Fairness is another matter. Since President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act in 1963, it has been illegal for employers to pay women less than men for the same work. Of course, that wasn't the end of the legislative story. As the case of Lilly Ledbetter demonstrated, numerous tweaks and improvements to the law have been required along the way. Ledbetter, for example, was stymied by the fact that — in part because of company policy banning the sharing of salary information — she did not know she was being paid less than male counterparts; by the time she realized and filed suit, according to the Supreme Court, the statute of limitations was up. Congress fixed that situation for future plaintiffs, which seems like a matter of simple logic and equity.

The Paycheck Fairness Act presents more complicated questions about proof and damages. In brief, the bill would make it harder for employers to rebut claims of gender-based pay discrimination. Currently, employers facing an equal pay claim can defend the differential by showing that it is "based on any other factor other than sex." The Paycheck Fairness Act would tighten that gaping exception to require that it relate to "bona fide factors, such as education, training, or experience."

Likewise, the measure would make it easier for plaintiffs to collect not only back pay but also compensatory and punitive damages, including in class-action lawsuits. A third change would protect employees who discuss their compensation from being punished by their employer — a no-brainer in the aftermath of Ledbetter's experience.

As I said, I'd vote "yes" on the bill. But I can understand the concerns of those who worry about floods of litigation and business decisions second-guessed by federal judges. There is a difference between opposing the Paycheck Fairness Act and opposing paycheck fairness. Politicians who choose to confuse the two may score a cheap political point, but it's not a fair one.

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)
Nom : Prénom : Signature

Global Warming Policy Foundation campaigning move is deeply cynical

Move by Lord Lawson's climate sceptic thinktank to set up campaigning arm shows it's not about education

Bob Ward, theguardian.com, Friday 9 May, 2014

The Global Warming Policy Foundation has admitted defeat in the battle over its controversial status as an educational charity on Friday, with the announcement that it is to launch a new campaign arm in July.
The new arm, called the Global Warming Policy Forum, will not be subject to Charity Commission rules specifying that charities must not have political campaigning as their main aim, and must ensure that campaign materials are accurate.
The foundation's move follows several complaints about its activities to the Charity Commission.
Last June, I raised concerns with the Commission about inaccurate and misleading information that the foundation has disseminated, including articles on its websites and pamphlets by climate change sceptics, such as the Conservative MP Peter Lilley and Viscount Ridley.
I pointed out that the foundation frequently breaches the Charity Commission's guidance, which states: A charity can campaign using emotive or controversial material, where this is lawful and justifiable in the context of the campaign. Such material must be factually accurate and have a legitimate evidence base.
I also highlighted the fact that Lord Lawson, the chairman of the foundation's trustees, frequently makes inaccurate and misleading statements about climate change in speeches and newspaper articles.
Lawson, who launched the foundation in November 2009 to exploit the controversy surrounding the so-called 'Climategate' e-mails that were hacked from the University of East Anglia, has made vigorous efforts to dispute the science of climate change.
In February, he appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today programme to argue about the science of climate change with Sir Brian Hoskins, the chairman of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change at Imperial College London.
And Standpoint magazine this month published an extended article by the former chancellor of the exchequer in which he attacks mainstream climate science as "irrational" and "wicked".
In the article, Lawson also defends the secrecy around the identities of donors who have given more than £1m to the foundation since its launch, claiming that he wants to protect them from "vilification and abuse".
However, he also indicates that the foundation does not "solicit nor accept any money from anyone with a significant interest in the energy industry".
It is not clear whether the new campaign arm will be open and transparent about its sources of funding.
I understand that the foundation's website will be divided into two parts, with its campaign materials separated out from information relating the remnant charity. I hope the website will also provide a clear warning that its campaign propaganda is not required to be accurate.
Nevertheless, this is a deeply cynical move by the foundation, which clearly does not want to be restricted by rules on accuracy. It has had a damaging impact on the UK public and policy debate about climate change over the past four and a half years. It has successfully marshalled into a single campaign unit what was a rather disparate band of mostly old, white and male contrarians, successfully lobbying government departments and organisations such as the BBC Trust.
Most of the harm has been inflicted through the foundation's cosy relationship with a handful of cheerleaders in the UK media who have promoted its views heavily, particularly in the Mail, Telegraph and Express newspapers.
The foundation has also exploited woolly thinking among editors and managers at the BBC which has sought to balance scientific facts with 'sceptic' fictions in some of its news and current affairs programmes.
But Friday's announcement should make it clearer that the foundation is more interested in inculcation rather than education.
It also raises the prospect of aligning itself with Ukip, which has embraced climate change denial, in the run-up to the general election next May.
Roger Helmer, Ukip's energy and climate change spokesperson, will be contesting the Newark by-election in June.
Helmer is known to be a big fan of the foundation and frequently promotes its campaign materials on his blog and on Twitter.
Benny Peiser, the director of the foundation, has previously spoken out against the 2008 Climate Change Act, which commits the UK to reduce its annual emissions of greenhouse gases by at least 80% by 2050 compared with 1990.

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)
Nom : Prénom : Signature

These Lawmakers Have a Plan to Rein In NSA Spying

And it's a bipartisan effort.
Robert Scheer, November 19, 2013, *The Nation*

On Monday the Supreme Court, ruling on an emergency petition, declined to do the right thing and hear a case challenging the massive government surveillance of Americans, revealed by the leaks from Edward Snowden. For the time being, the court acceded to the Obama administration's argument that it has the legal right to continue its unprecedented bulk collection of American phone records without any restraint. That throws the ball back to Congress, where a historic battle, crossing party lines, is already underway.
On one starkly polarizing side is the dark figure of Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat and reigning chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee. One of the first to denounce Snowden for treason for letting the public know the ugly truths about government spying she had long concealed, Feinstein already has pushed a bill though her committee that provides the NSA's spying with additional legal cover.
It validates the "backdoor search provision" that the government, including domestic organizations such as the FBI, has misused to justify sifting through material ostensibly collected for foreign intelligence investigations to conduct warrantless surveillance on Americans in clear violation of the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution.
"For the first time, the statue would explicitly allow the government to proactively search through the NSA data troves of information without a warrant," the ACLU's Michelle Richardson told *The Guardian* on Friday. She added, "This Fourth Amendment back door needs to be closed, not written into stone."
Senator Ron Wyden, D-Ore., one of the dissenting members of Feinstein's committee, blasted the "backdoor search provision" at the heart of her bill and said in a statement that it "would give intelligence agencies wide latitude to conduct warrantless searches for American phone calls and emails...."
As opposed to the Feinstein bill, one offered by another Democratic senator, Patrick Leahy of Vermont, and supported by Wyden would require a specific warrant to search the NSA database for information on US nationals. Leahy, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has co-sponsored that bill with his House counterpart, F. James Sensenbrenner, the Wisconsin Republican who chairs that chamber's judiciary committee.
A decade ago, Leahy and Sensenbrenner helped draft the USA Patriot Act, which they now believe has been abused by the executive branch and underscore the point by labeling their new legislation the USA Freedom Act. Sensenbrenner has been at pains to present his bill as contrary to the Feinstein measure, which he assailed as an effort "for the first time in our country's history to allow unrestrained spying on the American people."
Leahy, in a November 4 interview with MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell, defended his legislation's effort to rein in the NSA's bulk collection: "The NSA says because we can collect every one of your phone calls and imprints and everything else, we need to be able to do it in case someday we need it. Well, you can imagine if the local police department said, 'We're just going to break into your house, steal everything out of your files, everything out of your records, because someday we may need it,' everybody would be in an uproar. But if they can do the same thing electronically, we ought to say wait a minute. Also, I get the response when I criticize them, they say, 'we're going to be very careful, we're going to protect these records.' Baloney. This is the same NSA that couldn't protect their greatest secret from a 29-year-old subcontractor who stole them all...."
But what if Snowden had not revealed that shocking information on the vast government surveillance system that was hidden from the American public but known to Feinstein and other members of the Senate Intelligence Committee? In announcing their own sweeping surveillance reform bill in September, the four senators on Feinstein's committee who dissented—Democrats Wyden, Mark Udall of Colorado and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky—expressed frustration in having to keep the dimensions of the surveillance program from the American public before Snowden's leaks.
"The significant reforms in this bill," Senator Udall said at the time, "are especially important in light of declassified reports that show what Senator Wyden and I have known for years. The National Security Agency has been unable to properly manage existing surveillance programs. This has led to the abuse of Americans' privacy and misleading statements made to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, and we've only seen the tip of the iceberg."
There you have it, legislators from both sides of the congressional aisle have risen in response to the Snowden leaks with serious demands for reform to protect the privacy of Americans from public officials, including President Obama and Senator Feinstein, who are craven iceberg deniers.

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)
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George Osborne warns of more cuts and austerity in 'year of hard truths'

Chancellor targets £25bn of savings in welfare budget, and says he will start with housing benefit for under-25s
theguardian.com, Monday 6 January 2014, Rowena Mason

George Osborne has warned of another £25bn of cuts after the next election, targeting council housing for the better-off and housing benefit for under-25s.
In a grim message to start the new year, the chancellor said Britain was facing a year of hard truths in 2014 as there were more cuts to make and the economy still had big underlying problems. He said he expected the biggest chunk of the savings – around £12bn – to come from welfare in the two years after the election, as it would be an odd choice to leave this "enormous budget … untouched".
Benefits for the young and people of working age would be considered before any cuts to pensioner benefits such as free bus passes and television licences, the chancellor said.
The move forms part of Osborne's pledge to run a budget surplus by 2019 if the Conservatives are returned to power at the next election.
But Labour said the best way of reducing the welfare bill is to build more homes and get more people into employment. It also called for cuts to the winter fuel allowance benefit for wealthier pensioners.
The Treasury currently spends £1.9bn on housing benefit for 350,000 people under the age of 25 currently, of whom around half have dependent children.
Osborne told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "If you were going to be looking for savings in welfare, pensioner benefits is not the place that I would first turn to. I would look at housing benefit for the under-25s, when there are many people listening to this programme who can't afford to move out of their home but if you're on benefits you can get housing benefit under the age of 25. There are people, for example, on incomes of £60,000 or £70,000 living in council homes – I'd look at that."
Justifying his choice to target welfare again after around £83bn of previous cuts, the chancellor said: "When you see people on the telly who say that welfare can't be cut anymore – or, even worse, promising they will reverse the changes we've already made and increase housing benefit – ask yourself this: what public services would they would cut instead?
"What taxes they would put up in their place? Or would they borrow and spend more, and risk our country's economic stability again? This is what I mean when I say Britain has a choice."
He said he did not know when people would start to feel the effects of recovery. "There's a hard truth, which is this country is much poorer because of the economic collapse six or seven years ago, and families feel that. What is the answer? I can't wave a magic wand and make the country richer. The way the country gets richer and families get richer is by being a competitive country that attracts jobs and investment."
In a speech in the Midlands on Monday morning, Osborne said there was still a long way to go before recovery as he set out a five-point plan to help the economy. "We've got to make more cuts – £17bn this coming year, £20bn next year, and over £25bn further across the two years after. That's more than £60bn in total."
Osborne built on previous warnings about the need to intensify austerity, on top of billions of pounds of existing cuts, even though the economy appears to be turning a corner. In the speech, he said the job of fixing the economy was "not even half done". "That's why 2014 is the year of hard truths," he said.
The chancellor's negative outlook forms part of his argument that people should vote Conservative to let the party "finish the job", rather than handing control back to Labour. However, Labour said more cuts were needed after 2015 because Osborne's "failure on growth and living standards since 2010 has led to his failure to balance the books".
Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, said the social security bill is rising under Osborne, but the best way to get it down for the long-term is to get people into work and build more homes.
"The Tories should back our compulsory jobs guarantee for young people and the long-term unemployed. And in tough times it cannot be a priority to continue paying the winter fuel allowance to the richest five per cent of pensioners," he said.
"What we need is Labour's plan to earn our way to higher living standards for all, tackle the cost-of-living crisis and get the deficit down in a fairer way." [...]

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Own the Death Penalty: 'Humane' Does Not Mean 'Inoffensive'

By Tim Cavanaugh, *National Review*, April 30, 2014

I'd like to make the case for public executions.
Several of my esteemed colleagues — including Eli Lehrer, Andrew C. McCarthy, and Jonah Goldberg — have already weighed in on last night's botched execution in Oklahoma. It seems to be the rule at this point that you have to disclose your own opinion on capital punishment, so here's mine: I oppose the death penalty, but not passionately. My opposition is based mainly on the principle that the state should use the minimum amount of violence necessary to promote civil order. My opposition is also not heartfelt: I can appreciate that putting an atrocious criminal to death delivers a sense of public justice served in a way that no other action could. And I'm even open to cost/benefit arguments. If the accounting suggested it would cost substantially less to execute Charles Warner (last night's second condemned man, whose date with the needle was postponed after the screwup in executing Clayton Lockett) than it would cost to feed, clothe and house him for decades, I don't see why Sooner State taxpayers should have to pay the larger sum.
That said, I think proponents of the death penalty should more fully embrace the central fact of capital punishment: Killing a person is a horrific and barbarous act. That does not change depending on whether the killing is justified. The more you try to make execution seem civilized and bloodless, the more you try to drain it of rage and terror, the more barbaric it becomes.
In fact, you could make a pretty strong case that horrors like last night's are the result of society's pretending there is a nice way to kill people. There have been botched executions for as long as there have been executions. But you can fix the problem quickly, and without unnecessary suffering, if somebody in the firing squad misses or there's a problem with the guillotine (which was itself initially viewed as a more humane means of execution — it was even named for a physician who considered it an improvement on the axe). Supposedly merciful refinements like lethal injection don't ease the suffering of the condemned nearly so much as they allow the government to kid itself about the awful responsibility it's taking on.
Closeted execution also allows the government to skate on the question of the symbolic aspects of killing a prisoner. The drama of execution for most of us is probably bound up in the idea of town-square executions in which the condemned horse thief faces a jeering crowd and has the option of going out with dignity, defiance, self-pity, or some other response. I do not see how it makes us more sophisticated than our frontier forebears that the same act is now conducted in shameful secrecy, with audiences so strictly limited that rubberneckers sometimes compete in a ghastly competition for available seats, by authorities whose actions signal that they themselves feel they're doing something low and dishonest. (Reportedly Oklahoma officials bought some of the chemicals for last night's event in cash, so there would be no transaction record.)

One of the more famous executions in U.S. history was the hanging of Major John André, the British officer who facilitated Benedict Arnold's defection during the Revolutionary War. André was highly regarded by both sides, and his pre-death conduct, which included writing a religious poem and drawing a self-portrait, was honorable enough to lead Alexander Hamilton to say, "Never perhaps did any man suffer death with more justice, or deserve it less." While the fitness of André's punishment is not in much doubt (he was caught out of uniform and convicted of espionage in a seemingly fair trial), he had one strong objection: He wanted to be shot like a soldier rather than hung like a spy, leading to the famous last words, "I am reconciled to my death, but I detest the mode." That objection didn't come from any belief that being shot is nicer or less painful than being hanged. (It's certainly bloodier.)
I'm not comparing André to a monster like Charles Warner. (Follow the link to Jonah Goldberg's post for some details about his crime.) But if a word like mercy has any place in a discussion of execution, it should be in the idea that mercy stems from recognizing the essential dignity of a human life — even a life you're about to end. You put a sick animal to sleep because an animal has no powers of reason, so minimizing its pain is the only thing you need to worry about. The dignity of human beings is a more complex matter, and it involves more than reducing mess or public embarrassment. If we need to kill people in almost total darkness, maybe it's something we shouldn't be doing at all.

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Britain's upper class is now too snobbish to speak its name

The more unequal we get, the less we want to talk about it
25 January 2014 **Toby Young**, *The Spectator*

Last week, YouGov conducted a poll in which people were asked to judge how middle class the party leaders are. Ed Miliband was the winner, with 45 per cent deeming him 'middle class', compared with 39 per cent who thought him 'upper class'. David Cameron was the clear loser. Only 15 per cent judged him 'middle class', against 77 per cent who thought him 'upper class'. Cue much handwringing in the Conservative party about what the Prime Minister can do to appear less out of touch.

I don't use the terms 'winner' and 'loser' loosely. Being perceived as upper class in contemporary Britain is the kiss of death, and not just in politics. In the same poll, YouGov asked people the question, 'What class are you?' Forty-six per cent said 'working class', 49 per cent 'middle class' and just 1 per cent 'upper class'. I'm surprised the number was so high, frankly. I've been hobnobbing with society types for over 30 years — including dukes, billionaires and minor royals — and I've only ever heard one person describe themselves as upper class.

To complicate matters, the person in question was, in fact, middle class. It's become so unfashionable among the upper classes to be thought of as posh that anyone who identifies themselves as such is, almost by definition, not. These days, even calling yourself 'upper middle class' is taboo. George Orwell's description of himself as 'lower upper middle' would be condemned as unacceptably self-aggrandising today. In the hall of mirrors that is the English class system, identifying yourself as 'upper' anything has become Non-U, with the paradoxical result that genuinely posh people are too snobbish to call themselves upper class. They don't want to be thought of as 'middle class' in the pejorative, old-fashioned sense, so they call themselves 'middle class' in the new, deliberately vague sense. I've never asked David Cameron what class he is, but I'm sure he'd say middle class. Or, to use the correct phrase: 'I don't know, middle class I suppose. I've never really thought about it.'

What polls like this reveal is that we've become a nation of inverted snobs. To be precise, everyone dis-avows the class hierarchy that prevailed until about 25 years ago, but they do so partly because to admit you set any store by it is, in itself, a low-class indicator. So the English class system hasn't really gone away, it's just become more insidious. Officially, it's ceased to exist in the sense that no one cares whether you say 'serviette' or 'napkin'. But unofficially, it's still there, casting its ancient spell.

The metamorphoses of the class system from overt to covert, above ground to underground, must be connected to the massive increase in economic inequality in the past 25 years or so. According to Oxfam, the 85 richest people in the world now control as much wealth as the poorest half of the global population put together. 'Widening inequality is creating a vicious circle where wealth and power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, leaving the rest of us to fight over crumbs from the top table,' says the charity's executive director.

It's a little known fact that the Gini coefficient – the standard measure of income inequality – has *declined* in the UK since David Cameron became Prime Minister, but, clearly, the direction of travel has been towards a greater concentration of wealth. If these plutocrats are to hold on to their money — if they're to avoid a repeat of the redistributive taxes that crippled the British aristocracy in the aftermath of the second world war — it's essential to present themselves as meritocrats rather than the beneficiaries of class privilege. That way, their vast wealth is more palatable. It's earned, rather than inherited. The pretence that Britain has become less class-bound since 1979 is a noble lie. It's the illusion that prevents the masses from erupting in open revolt. What's so remarkable is that everyone in our society has bought into it, not just the richest 1 per cent.

I realise I'm beginning to sound like Owen Jones, so I'll caveat this by saying it's not an out-and-out deception. Some of the richest people in Britain have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. And there has been a convergence in habits and taste across the entire social spectrum. But the fact remains that Britain is as class-bound as it's ever been. We just won't admit it to ourselves.

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The politics of same-sex marriage are swiftly changing

By Dana Milbank, May 30, 2014, *Washington Post*

On a visit to New Mexico over Memorial Day weekend, I dropped in on a college friend who's running for state treasurer. I expected his campaign would be a sleepy affair, all about pension boards and rainy-day funds.

Instead, the race for the Democratic nomination was attracting front-page attention as the candidates traded allegations over same-sex marriage — an issue that has about as much relevance to being state treasurer of New Mexico as a candidate's position on North Korea.

Two weeks ago, my friend, Albuquerque lawyer John Wertheim, launched a barrage of TV ads saying his opponent, former state senator Tim Eichenberg, "sided with Republicans to prevent equality for gay couples."

The issue exploded, and Wertheim has become a minor celebrity in the gay and lesbian community. "Whoa, this is good," said gay-rights lobbyist Linda Siegle, who with her partner was one of the first same-sex couples to be married in New Mexico. Gay New Mexicans are abuzz, Siegle told me, even though "nobody really knows what the treasurer does, anyway."

Eichenberg says that he has always been for marriage equality and that Wertheim's accusation, based on a procedural vote in a legislative committee four years ago, is a mischaracterization. He has fought back, attending a Memorial Day dedication of a monument to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members. But he agrees that the issue has changed the race. "When your opponent continues to hammer this and misrepresent it the way he does, I think people do take notice," he told me. "I mean, he's on TV 20 times a day."

We'll know after Tuesday's primary whether the gambit worked, or whether Wertheim's negative campaigning (which has been criticized by newspapers and the state Democratic chairman) produced a backlash. But whatever the outcome, the race is another example of how dramatically the calculations on the issue have changed in just a couple of years.

Not long ago, supporting same-sex marriage was a principled but perilous position, even for Democrats, who stood to lose more moderate voters than they gained in the gay community. But rapidly shifting public opinion has turned that calculation upside down. Not only do virtually all Democratic (and a good number of Republican) office seekers now bless gay marriage, but many are taking the offensive on the issue as opponents beat a hasty retreat.

The Human Rights Campaign has been tracking the swing: In Colorado, embattled Republican Rep. Mike Coffman, who opposed the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," has announced his support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act; in New York, GOP Rep. Chris Gibson, being challenged by an openly gay Democrat, became a co-sponsor of ENDA; and in Illinois, former Republican Rep. Robert Dold, who in 2011 said he supported the Defense of Marriage Act, has embraced marriage equality in an effort to win back his seat.

Polls continue to show record levels of support for marriage equality -- 59 percent to 34 percent in a March Washington Post-ABC News survey, roughly the inverse of a decade earlier -- with a majority of young Republicans now in support.

Since last year's favorable Supreme Court rulings, bans on same-sex marriage have been struck down in 13 states, including Pennsylvania, where GOP Rep. Charlie Dent declared recently that "life is too short" to stand in the way of gay marriage. In Wisconsin, Gov. Scott Walker, a prospective Republican presidential candidate, softened his support for his state's marriage ban. Even Arkansas started issuing licenses for same-sex marriage.

The situation is similar in New Mexico, where the Republican governor, Susana Martinez, abandoned her opposition to gay marriage earlier this year, calling it "the law of the land." Amber Royster, executive director of Equality New Mexico, told me that she doesn't know of a single Democratic office seeker who opposes gay marriage, and "I don't think you'll find many Republicans."

By contrast, just five years ago, 10 of the 17 Democratic state senators joined with all 15 Republicans in voting down a bill giving legal rights to domestic partners. As it happens, treasurer candidate Eichenberg was one of those in support of the bill in 2009. But the next year, he cast a vote that effectively killed a similar bill in committee. Citing its possible costs, he joined Republicans in a 5-4 vote to send the bill to another committee, where it faced certain death.

At the time, the New Mexico affiliate of Howard Dean-founded Democracy for America called Eichenberg a "traitor to Democratic values." But it was a politically sound vote back then — before the politics of same-sex marriage changed with unimaginable speed.

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'Chaotic' free school likely to be closed by year end

Cameron says he is not afraid to shut Al-Madinah

Move devastating blow to Gove's policy, says Labour

Nicholas Watt
Helen Pidd

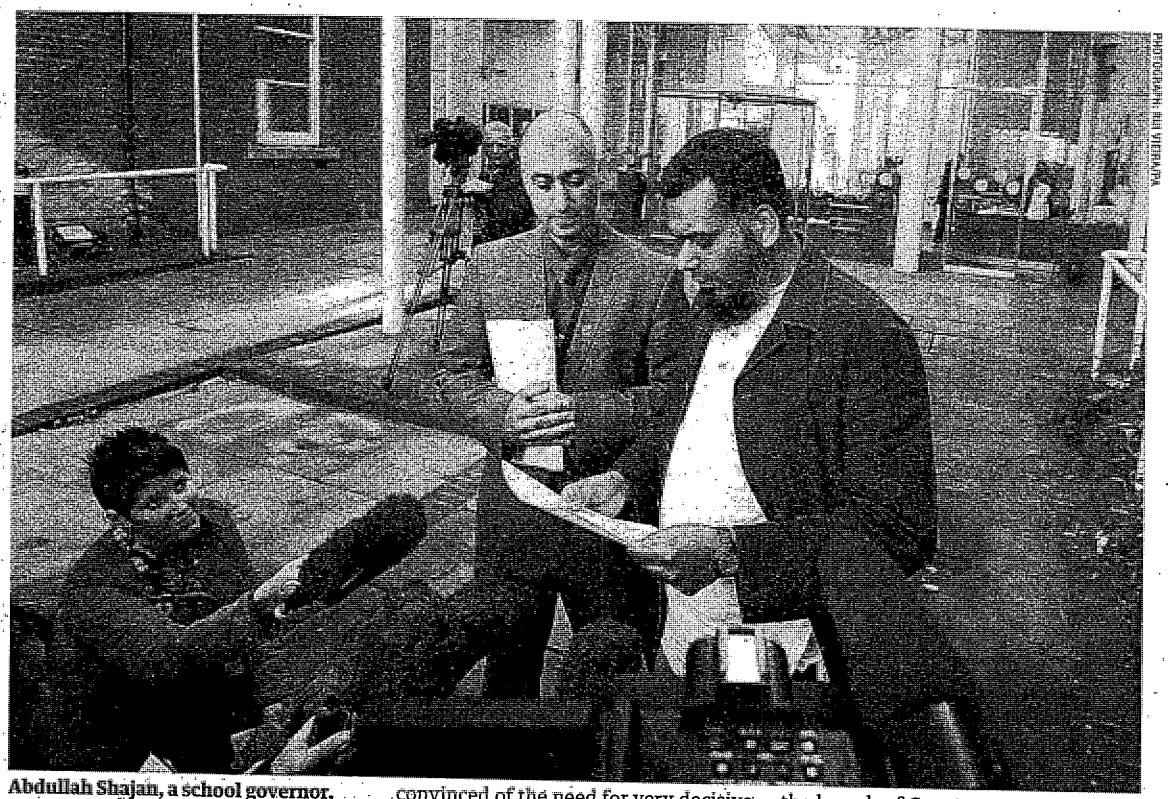
A controversial free school condemned in an official report as "dysfunctional" is expected to be closed by the government by the end of the year after ministers seemingly concluded that it is beyond rescue.

As Labour claimed that Michael Gove had suffered a devastating blow to his flagship free schools policy after the Al-Madinah school was labelled by Ofsted as chaotic, David Cameron said that he would not hesitate to close it.

The prime minister told the Derby Telegraph: "I am not afraid to shut the school. We are taking rapid corrective action towards it. We are taking a tougher approach and schools will be shut."

Cameron spoke out after the Guardian published a leaked copy of the Ofsted report, which gave the Islamic school in Derby the lowest "inadequate" mark in every area. The report, which said boys and girls eat lunch in separate sittings, concluded: "This school is dysfunctional. The school is in chaos and reliant on the goodwill of an interim principal to prevent it totally collapsing."

Lord Nash, the schools minister, indicated that the Al-Madinah school was facing closure when he warned the chair of governors that the Ofsted report had confirmed his "very serious concerns" which prompted him to order the inspectorate to bring forward its report by two months. "The report is further compelling evidence of the breaches of the funding agreement I have required you to address," he wrote. "I am even more convinced of the need for very decisive and urgent action on the part of the trust to comply with all your obligations and remedy the serious failings at the school."



PHOTOGRAPH: BEN WHITEMAN/PA

Abdullah Shajan, a school governor, speaks outside the institution, called 'dysfunctional' in a report by Ofsted

'An out-of-control ideological experiment that closed a school'

Tristram Hunt

The school, which has been placed in special measures, will face regular inspections over the next few weeks. The education department will decide on 1 November whether to terminate the school's funding agreement, effectively forcing it to close.

The education department declined to say whether the school would close. But Nash's letter has been seen in Whitehall as a clear signal the school is beyond hope.

The closure of the first free school since the launch of Gove's controversial new policy will mean that the 412 pupils at the school, aged between four and 16, would have to be sent to other schools in Derby.

The move will raise questions about the money that has been spent on the school that is likely to have run into the millions. The average school is given £3,500 per pupil a year plus around an extra £700 for pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Labour is expected to depict the closure as a serious blow to Gove's free schools programme. The party believes the Ofsted report has significance across England because it has highlighted key flaws in the system. They include the appointment of unqualified teachers and inadequate levels of supervision, because local education authorities have little role in monitoring schools.

Tristram Hunt, the shadow education secretary, told MPs in an urgent debate: "What today's Ofsted report exposes is that the government's free school programme has become a dangerous free-for-all – an out-of-control ideological experiment that has closed a school, leaving 400 children losing an entire week of learning. It is a devastating blow to the education secretary's flagship policy."

The government is likely to argue that the closure of the school shows the strength of the free schools system because it prompted the Ofsted inspection after concerns were raised about the school. Nash called for the inspection after allegations that female teachers were obliged to wear headscarves and pupils were segregated.

David Laws, the education minister who stood in for Gove, who is abroad, told MPs that the government had taken action and had requested the Ofsted report after concerns were raised about the school in the summer. The school opened in September last year.

A current teacher at Al-Madinah said the atmosphere in the school was tense on Thursday after it was surrounded by media asking for comment on the report.

The teacher said there was no surprise that the report was so scathing but that the media was wrong to focus on the Islamic practices at the school, such as alleged segregation of boys and girls and asking female teachers to cover their heads.

"This is not about Islam at all. The problem here is poor management, poor financial management, a lack of proper governance and a lack of focus on teaching and learning - not Islam," said the source.

Outside the school yesterday, Abdullah Shajan, one of the school's governors, gave a statement blaming the media for publishing the Ofsted report and suggesting the leak was politically motivated.

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The Economist March 29th 2014

Obamacare and religious freedom

The Hobby Lobby hubbub

WASHINGTON, DC

The Supreme Court ponders the contraceptive mandate

ON March 25th the Affordable Care Act, better known as "Obamacare", was back before the Supreme Court. Two years ago the justices upheld most of the law. This week they heard oral arguments in *Sebelius v Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* and *Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. v Sebelius*. These two consolidated cases concern Obamacare's "contraceptive mandate"—the requirement that businesses offering their employees health insurance must provide plans that cover all federally-approved contraception methods at no extra cost to their employees.

Hobby Lobby Stores and Conestoga Wood Specialties are both owned by Christians who believe that some of those contraceptive methods are tantamount to abortion, because they can prevent a fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus. The owners seek an exemption to the contraceptive mandate under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a statute that Congress passed almost unanimously in 1993. This says that "government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability", unless the law is the least restrictive way to further a compelling state interest. (Many states have similar rules—see map.)

The administration has already exempted "religious employers", such as churches, from the contraceptive mandate, and it has provided religiously-affiliated nonprofit corporations with an "accommodation" that directs payments for objectionable procedures through the insurance-issuer or administrator. The government argues that the religious beliefs of a for-profit corporation's owners do not justify an exemption.

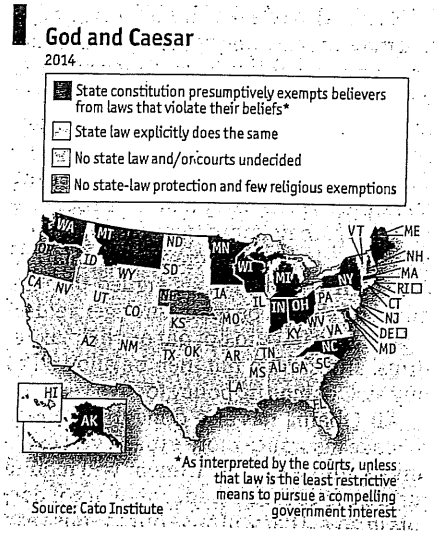
The case is hugely controversial. Outside the court, women's-rights supporters wore pink and purple; some waved signs that said "Birth Control. Not My Boss's Business". Religious-liberty campaigners prayed and held signs that said "Religious Freedom. Everyone's Business". Ted Cruz, a conservative senator, showed up to predict the mandate's demise.

The nine justices were similarly divided. The same two lawyers who argued the earlier Obamacare case faced off again this week: Donald Verrilli, the solicitor-general, for the government, and Paul Clement, a solicitor-general under President George W. Bush, for the corporations. Mr Clement, who argued first, was peppered with questions from the three women on the court: Elena Kagan, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor, all reliable liberals. When Mr Verrilli took the podium, he was grilled by John Roberts, Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito, three conservative (and Catholic) jurists. The court's fourth liberal, Stephen Breyer, asked nothing of much consequence, while the court's fourth doughty conservative, Clarence Thomas, was characteristically silent.

The two sides offered competing visions of horror. Ms Kagan worried that "religious objectors [would] come out of the woodwork" if the corporations prevailed, and that courts would have to grant presumptive exemptions to any aspect of federal law to which any owner expressed a sincere religious objection. Anthony Kennedy, another Catholic and the court's perpetual swing vote, worried that on Mr Verrilli's reasoning corporations "could be forced in principle to pay for abortions". His line of questioning hinted at sympathy for the corporations' position, as well as for Mr Clement's argument that the many exemptions already granted to the contraceptive mandate showed that it is not the least restrictive way to pursue a compelling state interest. Contraceptives are widely available; the government could presumably pay for them itself.

The question of whether a corporation can have a religion came up early. American law has recognised that corporations have some First-Amendment rights; in *Citizens United* in 2010, the court held that free-speech protections bar the government from curbing corporate political spending too tightly.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked: "How do we determine when a corporation has [a] belief? Who says it? The majority of shareholders?" Hobby Lobby and Conestoga are both closely-held family firms. Should the court decide in the owners' favour, it may do so narrowly—it is hard to imagine the law letting a listed firm with lots of owners claim to be religious.



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Addicted to the apocalypse

When it comes to the economy, why are fantasies of disaster and catastrophe taken so seriously?

Paul Krugman

Once upon a time, walking around shouting "The end is nigh" got you labeled a kook, someone not to be taken seriously. These days, however, all the best people go around warning of looming disaster. In fact, you more or less have to subscribe to fantasies of fiscal apocalypse to be considered respectable.

And I do mean fantasies. Washington has spent the past three-plus years in terror of a debt crisis that keeps not happening, and, in fact, can't happen to a country like the United States, which has its own currency and borrows in that currency. Yet the scaremongers can't bring themselves to let go.

Consider, for example, Stanley Druckenmiller, the billionaire investor, who has lately made a splash with warnings about the burden of our entitlement programs. (Gee, why hasn't anyone else thought of making that point?) He could talk about the problems we may face a decade or two down the road. But, no. He seems to feel that he must warn about the looming threat of a financial crisis worse than 2008.

Or consider the deficit-scold organization Fix the Debt, led by the omnipresent Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles. It was, I suppose, predictable that Fix the Debt would respond to the latest budget deal with a press release trying to shift the focus to its favorite subject. But the organization wasn't content with declaring that America's long-run budget issues remain unresolved, which is true. It had to warn that "continuing to delay confronting our debt is letting a fire burn that could get out of control at any moment."

As I've already suggested, there are two remarkable things about this kind of doomsaying. One is that the doomsayers haven't rethought their premises despite being wrong again and again — perhaps because the news media continue to treat them with immense respect. The other is that as far as I can tell nobody, and I mean nobody, in the looming-apocalypse camp has tried to explain exactly how the predicted disaster would actually work.

On the Chicken Little aspect: It's actually awesome, in a way, to realize how long cries of looming disaster have filled our airwaves and op-ed pages. For example, I just reread an op-ed article by Alan Greenspan in The Wall Street Journal, warning that our budget deficit will lead to soaring inflation and interest rates. What about the reality of low inflation and low rates? That, he declares in the article, is "regrettable, because it is fostering a sense of complacency."

It's curious how readily people who normally revere the wisdom of markets declare the markets all wrong when they fail to panic the way they're supposed to. But the really striking thing at this point is the date: Mr. Greenspan's article was published in June 2010, almost three and a half years ago — and both inflation and interest rates remain low.

So has the ex-Maestro reconsidered his views after having been so wrong for so long? Not a bit. His new (and pretty bad) book declares that "the bias toward unconstrained deficit spending is our top domestic economic problem."

Meanwhile, about that oft-prophesied, never-arriving debt crisis: In Senate testimony more than two and half years ago, Mr. Bowles warned that we were likely to face a fiscal crisis within around two years, and he urged his listeners to "just stop for a minute and think about what happens" if "our bankers in Asia" stop buying our debt. But has he, or anyone in his camp, actually tried to think through what would happen? No, not really. They just assume that it would cause soaring interest rates and economic collapse, when both theory and evidence suggest otherwise.

Don't believe me? Look at Japan, a country that, like America, has its own currency and borrows in that currency, and has much higher debt relative to G.D.P. than we do. Since taking office, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has, in effect, engineered exactly the kind of loss of confidence the debt worriers fear — that is, he has persuaded investors that deflation is over and inflation lies ahead, which reduces the attractiveness of Japanese bonds. And the effects on the Japanese economy have been entirely positive! Interest rates are still low, because people expect the Bank of Japan (the equivalent of our Federal Reserve) to keep them low; the yen has fallen, which is a good thing, because it make Japanese exports more competitive. And Japanese economic growth has actually accelerated.

Why, then, should we fear a debt apocalypse here? Surely, you may think, someone in the debt-apocalypse community has offered a clear explanation. But nobody has.

So the next time you see some serious-looking man in a suit declaring tha we're teetering on the precipice of fiscal doom, don't be afraid. He and his friends have been wrong about everything so far, and they literally have no idea what they're talking about.

New York Times, October 24, 2013

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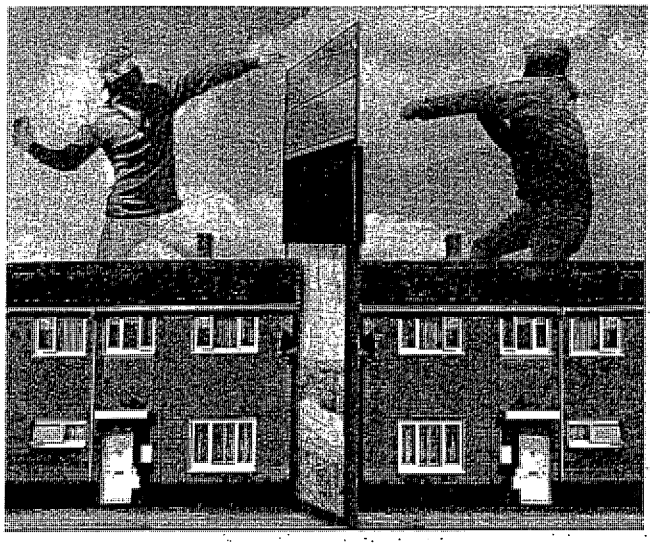
Bagehot | History trumps democracy

Northern Ireland's continuing troubles hold lessons for Britain about the rest of the world



[...] levels of violence are nothing like what they were at their height: some 500 people were killed in 1972 alone, and deaths averaged over 100 a year throughout the Troubles. But there are still a couple a year, and sectarianism continues to plague the society. That is in spite of efforts by Richard Haass, until recently the US Special Envoy for Northern Ireland, to forge agreements on the most neuralgic post-Troubles issues—including unionist (Protestant) marches, the status of the union flag and restitution, of some kind, for some 3,500 killings. His proposals have been flatly rejected by unionists. In Congressional testimony on March 11th, Mr Haass did not hide his fear over what this failure could mean: "Alienation will continue to fester and violence, I fear, could very well re-emerge as a characteristic of daily life."

The burnt fool's bandaged finger

Reflecting on the end of the first world war, Winston Churchill wrote: "As the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world." Much the same could be said today, as Britain emerges from financial crisis, failed military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan and, in Northern Ireland, a historic process of peace-making and economic growth. The endurance of its conflict, between the descendants of 17th-century Scottish and English settlers and the indigenous Catholics they were sent to police, is a marvel of the Western world.

It is not that democracy and prosperity have failed to make progress in Northern Ireland in recent years. As part of the peace agreement, power was devolved from Westminster to Belfast. In Stormont, home of the devolved government, Sinn Fein—the old IRA in all but name—and the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party rule in coalition together. In the spring sunshine central Belfast gleams with glass and steel buildings, fruits of a best-of-luck splurge by the British government and the European Union. And almost everyone your columnist met, in Belfast and County Antrim, said, like Mary, that the fighting was over now. Yet of real reconciliation—meaning a blurring of the sectarian divide—there is almost no sign.

One side of Bombay Street is fringed by a 20-foot steel fence whose job is to separate Catholics from Protestants. These "peace lines"—in Troubles argot—are not merely still standing: some have been extended. Public housing and schools are similarly segregated: only 7% of children go to a "mixed" school and they, being of the province's small tribe of liberals, are perhaps in least need of such social re-engineering. There has been no significant increase in mixed marriages, even as church attendance, as across Britain and Ireland, declines. As in Bombay Street, there is plenty of non-fatal violence throughout the province—typically over ancient quarrels, such as one concerning the unionists' right to march by Catholic areas, with fifes peeping, drums beating and orange flags flying, on the anniversary of a 17th-century victory for a Protestant king.

If there is a resurgence of violence it will most likely be a result of the anger, disorientation and gloom increasingly evident among the province's dwindling and rudderless Protestant majority. Their Catholic rivals are united and ruthlessly led by a party tempered in the conflict. Unionists, by contrast, are divided by church and party, poorly led, plagued by gangsterism and quietly questioning, in some tough quarters, whether peace was worth the loss of ancient privileges it entailed.

Northern Ireland is not unique—Gerry Kelly, a former IRA jailbird and now Sinn Fein assembly member, says the sectarian vitriol he once heard at a Scottish football match was worse than anything the more polite Northern Irish would dare utter—yet the translation of bitterness into extreme violence is peculiar to the province. Britain should have learned from it, though. The main reason for the West's failures to reshape societies in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere was all along apparent in this corner of the United Kingdom: history and culture, orphans of neoconservative policymaking, almost invariably trump its darlings, democracy and prosperity.

As the tragic aftermath of the Arab spring shows, those two delicate flowers need to be tended with great care if they are to have a chance of survival—and even then, they may not make it. Northern Ireland's peace process has had money and attention lavished on it—not just by the British government but also by numberless foreigners. Yet the province's well-wishers are dispirited these days. Mr Haass, now immortalised in Shankill graffiti by the slogan "Up yer ass, Haass", has got it right. Mainland Britons think the conflict is over. But without urgent—and currently unlikely—progress, Northern Ireland could all too easily revert to blood-steeped type. ■

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)
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Even Bill de Blasio Won't Be Able to Fix Income Inequality As Mayor, He'd be Battling the One Percent—and History

By Edward Glaeser, *The New Republic*, September 5, 2013

New York Mayoral hopeful Bill de Blasio has surged in recent polls because of a strong campaign and a canny candidate, but also because this ardently liberal Democrat has captured the city's broader mood. During twenty years of Giuliani and Bloomberg, crime plummeted and the economy surged, but inequality also increased and the city's leadership rarely seemed to empathize with poorer New Yorkers. (Disclosure—until last May, I wrote a regular column for Bloomberg View.) New York may now hunger for social justice, but unless liberal activism is tempered with managerial competence and an appreciation of urban limits, we risk a repeat of the terrible path that many cities, including New York, traveled during the 1960s and 1970s.

Throughout much of its 20th century history, New York City's politics divided between organization Democrats, like high-stepping Jimmy Walker and earnest Abe Beame, and Liberal Republicans, like the charismatic John Lindsay and the leonine Fiorella LaGuardia. The Democratic organization never forgot its base in working class ethnic enclaves, but its long history and tolerance for Tammany Hall's corruption, gave it a hoary aura by the 1950s. The Liberal Republicans certainly included urban elites, but they gained a wider appeal with progressive, "good government" policies. Both groups would be significantly left-of-center in today's politics.

That political division ended in the economic distress and social chaos of the 1970s. The debacle of Lindsay's final years discredited the audacity of liberal Republican hope; near bankruptcy under Beame was the swan song of the Democratic organizations that dated back to Aaron Burr. In the summer of 1977, as the Bronx burned, the Son of Sam shot and a blackout engendered widespread looting, the city turned rightwards. Ed Koch, an erstwhile anti-Tammany reformer and once ardently liberal Democratic congressman, repositioned himself as the law-and-order candidate and bested Mayor Beame, Mario Cuomo and Bella Abzug, who like de Blasio today, represented the left wing of New York's Democratic party.

The city's humiliating bailout, during which financial control passed to non-elected officials, ushered in an era of diminished expectations. No one expected Koch to right every social wrong. It would be enough if he managed the city competently, balanced the books and brought crime under control. He won re-election twice as a capable, managerial mayor who still retained some obvious liberal passion, but during his third term, murder rates rose higher than they had been in 1977 and scandals scotched his administrative reputation. The city turned to another moderate Democrat, David Dinkins, who could hopefully heal the wounds in the city's "gorgeous mosaic." (Another disclosure: Dinkins serves on the advisory board of the Taubman Center, which I direct.)

The Dinkins years were tough. Murder rates remained high and unemployment rates remained above 10 percent for most of 1992 and 1993. The city had had enough and it elected a Republican, who could not possibly be called a liberal: Rudy Giuliani. For twenty years, Giuliani and his successor Michael Bloomberg have given the city competence and safety. Crime rates have plummeted, and public schools have improved. The searing experience of September 11, 2001, only heightened the sense that New York needs tough management more than liberal vision.

But ultimately, Bloomberg and Giuliani were so unlike the mass of New Yorkers that a backlash was inevitable. Other cities, including Chicago and Boston, faced similar problems in the 1970s and 1980s, and also turned to managerial mayors. But their leaders—Richard M. Daley, Thomas Menino—were passionate Democrats with roots in the neighborhoods. Their long tenures created no widespread longing for a missing liberal voice that would speak for the city's less fortunate.

I have no opinion on de Blasio's candidacy or the ideal outcome of New York's mayoral race. The examples of Daley and Menino remind us that it is quite possible to have competent, business-friendly mayors, who bond with the poor as well as the prosperous.

Still, as New York voters contemplate a return to the liberal hopes of Lindsay and Dinkins, they need to remember that the mayor is fundamentally a manager of a vast, complex entity charged with delivering crucial services to eight million New Yorkers. They need to be sure that the next mayor doesn't sacrifice the gains made over the past 20 years, in pursuit of objectives that no city, not even New York, can achieve at the local level. Urban resources are mobile—companies and wealthy individuals can readily relocate. That easy exit limits the ability of any liberal mayor to pursue dreams of using local taxes to fund generous programs that right social wrongs.

Despite that caveat, de Blasio could, in principle, create a mayoralty that is both competent and caring. He trumpets his experience helping immigrant entrepreneurs. Eliminating unnecessary regulations and ensuring a simpler permitting process is a great way to promote opportunity and economic diversity without threatening the city's biggest taxpayers. Promoting added workplace regulations, which is also part of his plan, however, will only deter those entrepreneurs who employ poorer New Yorkers. [...]

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The pro-EU camp is in crisis because no one in Westminster dares to argue for immigration

The deficit is in people who can make the case without sounding like they've got grenades stuffed in their mouths.

Rafael Behr 30, April 2014 *The New Statesman*

[...] The recent televised debates with Nigel Farage were meant to illuminate the Deputy Prime Minister's courage as he detonated a few Europhobe myths. Getting blasted in the face was not the plan.

Senior Lib Dems deny that is what happened. The goal, they say, was never to stop Farage in his tracks, only to begin the fightback against "the Eurosceptic establishment". – a cute inversion of Ukip's claim to be maverick insurgents. Inevitably it needs more than two hours of live TV to drill through Britain's anti-Brussels prejudice – "a Eurosceptic sediment that has built up over 20 years", in the words of one cabinet minister.

But allies of the Lib Dem leader also admit that they underestimated the likely impact of instant audience polls after the two debates. Both awarded victory to Farage. Any credit due for championing an unfashionable cause was lost in media portrayals of a hapless Clegg vanquished.

Labour and the Tories are happy for the Lib Dems to martyr themselves for Europe, albeit for different reasons. Ed Miliband's instincts on the subject are hardly distinguishable from Clegg's. However, the Labour leader wants to use the campaign in May to develop the themes that will be central to his bid for Downing Street next year – the cost of living; the unfair distribution of rewards in a lopsided economy. Labour's preferred method for countering Ukip incursions into its northern-English heartlands is to depict the party as a virulent new mutant strain of Thatcherism.

David Cameron is more at ease talking about Europe as long as the conversation is limited to Labour's reluctance to call a referendum and Farage's inability to deliver one. Things get difficult for the Prime Minister when the question arises of how he would vote in that putative poll. The logic of his position is more pro-EU than he admits. The intent to renegotiate British membership is based on the assumption that any deal would be so attractive that Cameron could sell it as the centrepiece of the "in" campaign. It is also supposed to involve reforms that other member states can embrace as general improvements to European governance. He cannot spell out a plan in detail because Conservative backbenchers would denounce it as insufficient and continental leaders would warn that it is unrealistic. The stability of the Conservative Party currently relies on the pretence that Cameron can broker something that looks simultaneously like a renewal of vows and a divorce to two different audiences.

Most Tory MPs are aware that the No 10 position is untenable but, with the exception of a hard core that enjoys tormenting the Prime Minister, they play along in the hope that brittle unity will last long enough to get them over the electoral finish line in 2015. None expects it to survive beyond that.

Lib Dem ministers are privately contemptuous of how Cameron buys security from his party by licensing loose talk of quitting the EU, although conspicuous displays of rampant Tory Europhobia help support Clegg's claim that his party performs a moderating function in government. The Prime Minister's counterclaim is to depict the Lib Dems as slavish devotees of a European status quo – as fanatical in Brussels idolatry as Ukip is in animus. Downing Street insists Cameron's reform-and-referendum combination is uniquely aligned with mainstream public preference.

That would help the Tories if the argument were about reforming European institutions but in reality the case for less "Europe" has dissolved in fear of more immigration. Farage exploits the way even mild pro-EU advocates have always internalised but never properly articulated a belief in the economic and cultural merits of a liberal migration policy.

The free movement of labour among member states is a non-negotiable part of the project. Yet politicians who believe the UK gains from the arrangement find the rhetorical muscles they need to make the case have atrophied from lack of use. Abstract arguments based on the aggregate increase in opportunity lack the emotional immediacy of Ukip's claim that foreign interlopers take UK jobs.

The pro-European cause is in crisis because British politics has for years encouraged the idea that an admirable government is one that stymies the roaming of workers across national borders, while tacitly accepting the condition of EU membership that makes such control impractical. The only honest pro-European argument is one that says it isn't even desirable.

Clegg has already found to his cost what a tough sell that can be. Labour flinches at the mention of immigration policy, unsure how to resist xenophobia while wooing back voters who abandoned the party because it was too kind to foreigners. The Tories are also split, though more discreetly, between economic liberals who see the benefits of immigration and Ukip-ish gate-slammers. It is a guarded Treasury secret that George Osborne tires of his party's anti-immigration monomania, since he recognises the relationship between openness to foreign skills and economic growth.

There isn't a shortage in Westminster of people who know the arguments, whether for Britain's EU membership or a liberal immigration regime. The deficit is in people who can make the case without sounding like they've got grenades stuffed in their mouths.

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES

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The Populist Imperative

Paul Krugman, January 23, 2014, *The New York Times*

"The outstanding faults of the economic society in which we live are its failure to provide for full employment and its arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and incomes."

John Maynard Keynes wrote that in 1936, but it applies to our own time, too. And, in a better world, our leaders would be doing all they could to address both faults.

Unfortunately, the world we actually live in falls far short of that ideal. In fact, we should count ourselves lucky when leaders confront even one of our two great economic failures. If, as has been widely reported, President Obama devotes much of his State of the Union address to inequality, everyone should be cheering him on.

They won't, of course. Instead, he will face two kinds of sniping. The usual suspects on the right will, as always when questions of income distribution come up, shriek "Class warfare!" But there will also be seemingly more sober voices arguing that he has picked the wrong target, that jobs, not inequality, should be at the top of his agenda.

Here's why they're wrong.

First of all, jobs and inequality are closely linked if not identical issues. There's a pretty good although not ironclad case that soaring inequality helped set the stage for our economic crisis, and that the highly unequal distribution of income since the crisis has perpetuated the slump, especially by making it hard for families in debt to work their way out.

Moreover, there's an even stronger case to be made that high unemployment — by destroying workers' bargaining power — has become a major source of rising inequality and stagnating incomes even for those lucky enough to have jobs.

Beyond that, as a political matter, inequality and macroeconomic policy are already inseparably linked. It has been obvious for a long time that the deficit obsession that has exerted such a destructive effect on policy these past few years isn't really driven by worries about the federal debt. It is, instead, mainly an effort to use debt fears to scare and bully the nation into slashing social programs — especially programs that help the poor. For example, two-thirds of the spending cuts proposed last year by Representative Paul Ryan, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, would have come at the expense of lower-income families.

The flip side of this attempt to use fiscal scare tactics to worsen inequality is that highlighting concerns about inequality can translate into pushback against job-destroying austerity, too.

But the most important reason for Mr. Obama to focus on inequality is political realism. Like it or not, the simple fact is that Americans "get" inequality; macroeconomics, not so much.

There's an enduring myth among the punditocracy that populism doesn't sell, that Americans don't care about the gap between the rich and everyone else. It's not true. Yes, we're a nation that admires rather than resents success, but most people are nonetheless disturbed by the extreme disparities of our Second Gilded Age. A new Pew poll finds an overwhelming majority of Americans — and 45 percent of Republicans! — supporting government action to reduce inequality, with a smaller but still substantial majority favoring taxing the rich to aid the poor. And this is true even though most Americans don't realize just how unequally wealth really is distributed.

By contrast, it's very hard to communicate even the most basic truths of macroeconomics, like the need to run deficits to support employment in bad times. You can argue that Mr. Obama should have tried harder to get these ideas across; many economists cringed when he began echoing Republican rhetoric about the need for the federal government to tighten its belt along with America's families. But, even if he had tried, it's doubtful that he would have succeeded.

Consider what happened in 1936. F.D.R. had just won a smashing re-election victory, largely because of the success of his deficit-spending policies. It's often forgotten now, but his first term was marked by rapid economic recovery and sharply falling unemployment. But the public remained wedded to economic orthodoxy: by a more than 2-to-1 majority, voters surveyed by Gallup just after the election called for a balanced budget. And F.D.R., unfortunately, listened; his attempt to balance the budget soon plunged America back into recession.

The point is that of the two great problems facing the U.S. economy, inequality is the one on which Mr. Obama is most likely to connect with voters. And he should seek that connection with a clear conscience: There's no shame in acknowledging political reality, as long as you're trying to do the right thing.

So I hope we'll hear something about jobs Tuesday night, and some pushback against deficit hysteria. But if we mainly hear about inequality and social justice, that's O.K.

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)

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Big society? Cutting welfare to 'aid recovery' is just a big lie

Heartless policies are merely adding to the plight of the needy. It is imperative that Labour does not follow the coalition's example

The Observer, William Keegan, Sunday 29 December 2013

It is a pity that the duties of the Most Rev Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, do not extend to running the country.

In a recent interview in the *Times*, the archbishop came out with some pertinent criticisms of the way the coalition is focusing the brunt of its austerity policy on the most vulnerable. Archbishop Nichols believes that too many people are being left behind in this so-called "recovery".

So much for the prime minister's "big society", which "hasn't helped". "Charity isn't an alternative to public service. At our last bishops' meeting, a number said that they never thought they would use the word 'destitute' again, but there are now families with nothing: that's shameful and shocking."

Nichols observes that the government's "welfare" policies are being applied without any degree of flexibility towards people's individual circumstances. I recall referring in this column more than a year ago to John Le Carré's powerful phrase about the coalition's welfare policies being tantamount to "planned penury".

The church sees the consequences of these heartless policies at first hand. The victims turn up on the doorstep. The churches see, in Nichols's words, that "there have been clumsily targeted cuts and the most vulnerable are suffering ... The way assistance is administered is very degrading and the language around benefits recipients has become much harsher."

Again, the chairman of the Trussell Trust reports that the number of food banks it administers has risen to the point where they are now feeding over half a million people, compared with 41,000 in 2010. According to Iain Duncan Smith, the most prominent perpetrator of these ill-conceived "welfare" policies, the charities that draw attention to the plight of the hungry and the dispossessed are merely scaremongering and have a "political agenda".

Well, so they should have a political agenda. This is the season of goodwill but this right-wing Conservative government, thinly disguised as a coalition, is emerging as a government of ill-will. And, as I pointed out o fortnight ago, it has a very political agenda, which is to reduce public spending not because it needs to be reduced, but because those people running the Conservative party have a religious belief in implementing tax cuts for the higher echelons of society at the expense of the social safety net that so many governments of both major parties supported for so many decades after the second world war.

David Cameron has at various times indicated his admiration for such past Tory stalwarts as Harold Macmillan and Ian Gilmour; both would be appalled by what is going on now. This government seems to be woefully bereft of any sense of humanity or fundamental decency when speaking about welfare – and, indeed, administering it.

The nature of its underlying strategy is forensically examined in a new paper by the veteran British economist Brian Henry (*The Coalition's Economic Strategy: Has It Made a Bad Thing Worse?*). In it, Henry gives the lie to the coalition's repeated claim that the austerity programme was necessary to clear up the "mess" it inherited.

Careful comparison of the so-called "structural" deficit leads him to the conclusion that this was no worse at the end of Labour's pre-crisis years than it had been under the Conservatives: by far the greatest reason for the deficit was the consequence of the collapse in economic activity induced by the financial crash.

It was a "demand shock" rather than the "supply shock" that took place after the oil crisis of 1973-74, when much capacity was made redundant by the huge change in relative costs of energy. The financial crisis required stimulation of demand, not further contraction.

Henry concludes: "The coalition has seized the opportunity at the moment of the UK's greatest economic crisis since the 1930s, and the widespread uncertainty about its causes, to impose a protracted fiscal contraction with the aim of reducing the tax burden."

However, Henry himself, while referring to "uncertainty", is in little doubt that financial engineering and lax regulation were at the root of the crisis. It is a mark of the success of the government's propaganda that so many people believe the "big lie" that it was all down to "Labour's mess". How long they can get away with the big lie remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, it is vitally important that Labour does not, out of timidity, try to ape the coalition in a "tough" welfare policy. Otherwise, what is the point of the Labour party?

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ANALYSE LV2

TEXTE

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Compromise: Not a 4-Letter Word

Thomas L. Friedman, *The New York Times*, January 4, 2014

FORMER SENATOR ALAN SIMPSON likes to say that if you can't learn to compromise on issues without compromising yourself, you should not be in Congress, be in business or get married. It is amazing how many people violate that rule, but especially in Congress and especially among the Tea Party types, where calling someone a "deal maker" is now the ultimate put down. What makes it crazier is that in American education, innovation and commerce today, "collaboration" is being taught and rewarded as the best way to do anything big, important and complex. Indeed, in Silicon Valley, a "collaborator" means someone with whom you're building something great. In D.C., it means someone committing political treason by working with the other party. And that is why Silicon Valley is now the turbo-engine of our economy and D.C. is the dead hand.

To be sure, in politics compromise is not a virtue in and of itself. There are questions of true principle — civil rights, for instance — where compromise might kill the principled choice. But there has been an inflation of "principles" lately that is inhibiting compromise. A certain tax rate or retirement age is not a principle. It's an interest that needs to be balanced against others. Today, we would be best served in meeting our biggest challenges by adopting a hybrid of the best ideas of left and right — and the fact that we can't is sapping our strength.

For instance, on the debt/spending issue, Congress should be borrowing money at these unusually low rates to invest in a 10-year upgrade of our crumbling infrastructure (roads, bridges, telecom, ports, airports and rail lines) and in a huge funding increase for our national laboratories, research universities and institutes of health, which are the gardens for so many start-ups. Together, such an investment would stimulate sustained employment, innovation and the wealth creation to pay for it. But this near-term investment should be paired with long-term entitlement reductions, defense cuts and tax reform that would be phased in gradually as the economy improves, so we do not add to the already heavy fiscal burden on our children, deprive them of future investment resources or leave our economy vulnerable to unforeseen shocks, future recessions or the stresses that are sure to come when all the baby boomers retire. President Obama has favored such a hybrid, but it was shot down by the Tea Party wing, before we could see if he could really sell it to his base.

We should exploit our new natural gas bounty, but only by pairing it with the highest environmental extraction rules and a national, steadily rising, renewable energy portfolio standard that would ensure that natural gas replaces coal — not solar, wind or other renewables. That way shale gas becomes a bridge to a cleaner energy future, not just an addiction to a less dirty, climate-destabilizing fossil fuel.

In some cities, teachers' unions really are holding up education reform. But we need to stop blaming teachers alone. We also have a parent problem: parents who do not take an interest in their children's schooling or set high standards. And we have a student problem: students who do not understand the connection between their skills and their life opportunities and are unwilling to work to today's global standards. Reform requires a hybrid of both teacher reform and a sustained — not just one speech — national campaign to challenge parents and create a culture of respect and excitement for learning. Obama has failed to use his unique bully pulpit to lead such a campaign.

Finally, the merger of globalization and the information-technology revolution has shrunk the basis of the old middle class — the high-wage, middle-skilled job. Increasingly, there are only high-wage, high-skilled jobs. This merger of globalization and I.T. has put capitalism — and its core engine of creative destruction — on steroids. That's why Republicans are wrong when they oppose raising minimum wages and expanding national health care. These kinds of social safety nets make the free market possible; otherwise people won't put up with creative destruction on steroids.

But it is capitalism, start-ups, risk-taking and entrepreneurship that make these safety nets affordable, which is why we need more tax incentives for start-ups, the substitutions of carbon taxes for payroll and corporate taxes, and more cuts to regulations that burden business. Unfortunately, promotion of risk-taking and risk-takers is disappearing from the Democratic Party agenda. Its energy and excitement is focused much more today on wealth redistribution than wealth creation. On immigration, Senate Democrats and Republicans forged a sensible hybrid solution, but Tea Partiers in the House are blocking it.

These hybrid solutions are not how to split the difference. They're how to make a difference. But they only get forged if Republican leaders take on the Tea Party — which transformed the G.O.P. into a far-right party, uninterested in governing — and remake the G.O.P. into a center-right party again. If that happened, I'm certain that a second-term Obama, who is much more center-left than the ridiculous G.O.P. caricatures, would meet them in the middle. Absent that, we're going to drift, unable to address effectively any of our biggest challenges or opportunities.

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FINANCIAL TIMES TUESDAY APRIL 1 2014

COMMENT

Bogus prophecies of doom will not fix the climate

Richard Tol

Humans are a tough and adaptable species. People live on the equator and in the Arctic, in the desert and in the rainforest. We survived the ice ages with primitive technologies. The idea that climate change poses an existential threat to humankind is laughable.

Climate change will have consequences, of course. Since different plants and animals thrive in different climates, it will affect natural ecosystems and agriculture. Warmer and wetter weather will advance the spread of tropical diseases. Seas will rise, putting pressure on all that lives on the coast. These impacts sound alarming but they need to be put in perspective before we draw conclusions about policy.

According to yesterday's report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a further warming of 2C could cause losses equivalent to 0.2-2 per cent of world gross domestic product. On current trends, that level of warming would happen some time in the second half of the 21st century. In other words, half a century of climate change is about as bad as losing one year of economic growth.

Since the start of the crisis in the eurozone, the income of the average Greek has fallen more than 20 per cent. Climate change is not, then, the biggest problem facing humankind. It is not even its biggest environmental problem. The World Health Organisation estimates that about 7m people are now dying each year as a result of air pollution. Even on the most pessimistic estimates, climate change is not expected to cause loss of life on that scale for another 100 years.

Rising temperatures may even be beneficial at first. Many more people die in unusually cold winters than in unusually hot summers. Carbon dioxide helps plants grow, and higher ambient concentrations make them less thirsty. These benefits are rapidly outweighed by the harm that occurs as warming becomes more pronounced, and are probably gone with a 2C rise. Incremental impacts turn negative once temperatures rise by about 1C – a level that seems unavoidable regardless of what we do with greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change is complex and its impacts more so. We have limited knowledge of the consequences of the modest change that has occurred in the past. There is even more uncertainty about the effects of the rapid change expected in the future.

Poorer countries – which are more dependent on agriculture and tend to be in hotter places – are much more vulnerable to climate change. If Britain's climate becomes more like Spain's, it can copy that country's regime of siestas, late dinners and houses that keep the heat out. But hotter places will need to invent new coping mechanisms from scratch. They are also likely to have fewer resources, and may not have access to the needed technologies.

We survived the ice ages with primitive tools. The idea that global warming is an existential threat to humankind is laughable

To protect London against the rising sea, the Thames Barrier will need to be replaced. This is expensive but it will be done. Bangladesh is also vulnerable to a rise in the sea level; it has a hard time coping even with current floods. However, it is about as poor as another low-lying, densely populated country was a century and a half ago when it started its first big flood-safety programme – the Netherlands. It did so because it had a strong government capable of decisive action. As long as that is lacking in Bangladesh, the country will be vulnerable to climate change. But its core problem is political.

Malaria is another example. It was once endemic in Europe and North America. But clouds of pesticide killed the mosquitoes, and draining of inland wetlands reduced their habitat. Today malaria is confined to poor countries. Climate change will make the disease worse. Economic growth will make it go away.

In the worst case, climate change could cut crop yields in Africa in half. Yet yields would increase tenfold – in the same climate, on the same soil – if subsistence farmers started using crops and techniques pioneered on experimental farms. Climate change may be a big issue in Africa. But it is not nearly as important as lack of tenure, poor roads, roving warlords and so on.

Cutting emissions is not the only way to reduce the impacts of climate change. Adaptation and development are alternatives. But these trade-offs are rarely discussed. More than 15 per cent of all development aid is now spent on attempts to prevent climate change. Is that the best way to help the intended beneficiaries? Or does it reflect the donors' priorities?

None of this is to say that climate change is not a problem that needs to be solved. We cannot let the planet grow warmer and warmer. It will take decades at least before carbon-neutral technologies saturate the market. We had better start now.

But emissions reduction is not the only way to keep the impacts of climate change in check. Yesterday's IPCC report – repeating its prophecies of doom if emissions are not curbed – missed an opportunity to advise policy makers on how to improve lives.

The writer is a professor at the University of Sussex and Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, and has served on the IPCC since 1994

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Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)

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RIP Obama's stimulus: funeral for a policy success

Edward Luce

Five years after Barack Obama helped to prevent a Great Depression, his $830bn stimulus is unloved and misunderstood. Republicans have had an almost clear run at a law they say squandered taxpayer dollars. Yet without it the Great Recession would have been far deeper in the US. As is often the case, Mr Obama chose the right policy and failed to win anyone over. Next time America needs to dig itself out of disaster – and that time will come – it will be a far tougher sell. The past is never dead, said William Faulkner, it's not even past.

Rarely has the gap between the public's perception and that of economists been greater. A plurality of Americans say the stimulus was a bad idea, according to the Pew Research Centre. Almost all economists say it was essential. Some believe it was too small. Others that it was too large. Some say it should have been skewed towards more direct spending, others towards larger tax cuts. But virtually no accredited scholar doubts a measure that saved 9m jobs, added between 2 and 3 percentage points to US gross domestic product and paid for itself in higher tax revenues. On economic grounds it is as close to an open and shut case as you get.

On political grounds, the largest fiscal stimulus in history is close to being toxic. Mr Obama failed to produce a "moonshot" which would live on in the public imagination. Under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, millions of Americans were directly employed the US federal government. They could also see and feel the Hoover Dam, New York's LaGuardia airport and San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. Mr Obama's stimulus left nothing anywhere near so tangible. There was money for rural broadband, cash to keep teachers in their jobs and resources to upgrade roads and highways. Mostly they will be remembered for traffic jams.

Even Mr Obama's "make work pay" tax cuts, which took up more than a third of the stimulus, passed by unnoticed. In contrast to George W Bush, who had passed his own mini-stimulus a year before leaving office, American taxpayers did not receive cheques in the post signed by the president. Economists advised Mr Obama that a one-off tax windfall would more likely be saved than spent, thus defeating its purpose. Instead they said it should be secreted into their fortnightly pay stubs.

Among Mr Obama's advisers, only Joe Biden, the vice-president, saw the futility in giving most Americans an invisible boost of roughly $40 a month in their take-home pay. "Are you totally kidding me?" Mr Biden asked – or words to that effect. Apparently not. Instead of seeing that Mr Obama had cut their taxes, most Americans believed they had gone up. They still do (quite wrongly). Mr Obama is seemingly powerless to convince them otherwise.

But the largest fallout from what was Mr Obama's biggest act as president – more so even than his healthcare reform – is bitter polarisation. It was Richard Nixon, a Republican president, who said: "We are all Keynesians now." That held true right up until February 2009. Mr Bush passed two stimulus bills – both of which pasted his name all over the tax rebate cheques. Even after Mr Obama was elected, Republicans drafted their own stimulus bill, which was only marginally smaller than the Democratic version. Everyone understood the need to revive a plummeting US economy. Only the means were disputed.

Rarely has the gap between the US public's perception and that of economists been greater

The Keynesian Humpty Dumpty was shattered the day Mr Obama's stimulus was enacted. It is very hard to see how it will be put back together again. Only three Republicans – all of the them in the US Senate – voted in its favour, having extracted big concessions in the form of larger tax cuts and less spending.

Every single Republican in the House of Representatives voted no. In place of Humpty Dumpty, Republicans have adopted Hamlet's Polonius as their mascot: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." Keynesianism has been supplanted by Austerianism. Technical expertise be damned. All that matters is perception.

Can Mr Obama do anything to change it? Probably not. Whether his successor is Hillary Clinton or a Republican, the US federal government is more distrusted than ever, according to the polls. Mr Obama inherited a historic low of public mistrust. It has since plumbed new depths.

Worse, the more that he argues for something, the less people seem to believe him. Some of the blame for this must go to the mishandling of the rollout of his "Obamacare" health reform, which continues to poll terribly for Democrats. Promising to fix your own law is never going to be an easy sell.

But Mr Obama's political failing began in his first 100 days with his mis-selling of the stimulus. It helped give rise to the Tea Party that put an end to a sensible debate on what fiscal policy can do for US growth. In the president's defence, it is hard to argue that "things could be so much worse!" – even if that was true of the stimulus. It is far easier to say: "See how rapidly things are getting better!"

The first was the case Mr Obama needed to make. He botched it. And thus we are left with a trademark Obama legacy. The US president assumed a good policy would make the case for itself. Republicans filled the vacuum with their own. Mr Obama won the policy and lost the politics. Now he is losing both.

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Financial Times, February 23, 2014

Série Langues vivantes - Analyse d'un texte hors programme (LV2)

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Better Together vs the truth

Who runs the No campaign and why are they trying to insult me?

BY JAMES MAXWELL PUBLISHED 28 MAY, 2014 - *THE NEWSTATESMAN*

Like thousands of other Scots over the weekend, I received an extra dose of referendum propaganda with my Sunday papers. It came in the form of a glossy little booklet containing, apparently, "the facts [I needed]" to fully appreciate both the "benefits of staying in the UK" and the "risks of independence". Bits of it were pretty convincing. A Yes vote may well put some Scottish defence jobs, particularly those dependent on UK government contracts, at risk. Without radical immigration or pensions reform, an independent Scotland could struggle to cope with burgeoning demographic pressures.

Yet, for some reason, the authors of the booklet - Better Together - decided to swamp sensible arguments such as these under a welter of misinformation. For instance, it's true that goods in Ireland are more expensive than they are in Britain. But Ireland's per capita GDP is 16 per cent higher than the UK's ($45,921 compared to $38,920) and the Irish minimum wage is ten per cent higher than the British (£7 per hour compared to £6.31 per hour). It is also true that 65 per cent of all Scottish exports go to the rest of the UK. But so what? Some 70 per cent of Canada's exports go to the US, yet Canadians seem to be handling their independence relatively well.

The further into the booklet I went, the more spurious the assertions became. Page eight stated: "This year we saw a collapse in the money coming from the North Sea. Had we been independent, this would have taken £4.4bn from our budget. This is equivalent to what we spend on schools in Scotland." But fluctuating oil revenues are not news. Oil revenues have always fluctuated. The point is that annual variations in North Sea tax returns tend to even out over a five or ten year stretch, as high revenues one year compensate for low revenues the next.

This is certainly how things have worked in the past and, if Alex Kemp's research is anything to go by, it's how they will continue to work in the future. Three years ago Kemp, a professor of petro-economics at Aberdeen University, said North Sea oil was likely to generate between £5bn and £10bn in tax every year for the next decade. This estimate has proved remarkably accurate so far. In 2010/11 revenues were £8.8bn, in '11/'12 they were £11.3bn, in '12/'13 they were £10bn and in '13/'14 they were £5.6bn. That amounts to an annual average, over four years, of £8.9bn, which is at the high end of Kemp's projections. The fact these revenues didn't arrive in a perfectly consistent annual stream does not, as Better Together seems to believe, present a devastating challenge to the economics of independence. It just means an independent Scottish government would have to manage Scotland's oil wealth carefully, saving a bit in the good years to cover shortfalls in the bad.

But the nonsense didn't stop there. Page ten provided a list of the world's "richest" countries according to GDP. The list ranked the UK sixth after France and Scotland 45th - *after Pakistan*. You don't need a degree in economics to realise how silly this is. There is no inherent relationship between the size of a country's economy and the wealth of its citizens. Denmark's economy is substantially smaller than China's but Danish people are, on average, substantially richer than Chinese people. This is something I assume - and certainly hope - Better Together is aware of.

The booklet was littered with other little contradictions and omissions. On page five it cited finance as one of the things "we are really good at in Scotland", but then went on to explain how UK taxpayers had to rescue "Scottish banks like RBS" during the financial crisis. On page three it boasted about the "strength" of the Pound, but then failed to mention how that "strength" had contributed to Britain's massive trade deficit and helped wreck Scottish manufacturing. On pages six, eight and ten it claimed Scotland gets "£1200 more per person in spending than the UK average", but then completely ignored the important caveat that, over the last five years, Scotland has generated 9.5 per cent of the UK's tax and received 9.3 per cent of its expenditure.

By the time I reached the end of the booklet I felt both angry and insulted: who on earth runs Better Together and why do they think so little of me as a voter? Which of them, specifically, thought it would be a good idea to dress up a series of ludicrous half-truths as incontrovertible "facts"? I'd like to know – the future of the Union could depend on it.

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Obama plans intelligence surveillance reforms, aides say

President Obama is expected to put a public advocate on the secret surveillance court and remove telephone records data from direct government control.

Christi Parsons, *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2014

WASHINGTON — President Obama is preparing a package of intelligence reforms that will probably put a public advocate for the first time in the secret court that approves surveillance practices and remove a controversial telephone records database from direct government control, aides said.

With plans to unveil the changes days before the State of the Union address on Jan. 28, key presidential advisors are looking skeptically at a separate proposal to require a federal judge to approve each use of a "national security letter" except in emergencies, however.

Law enforcement officials issue the letters, a little-known form of administrative subpoena that doesn't require a warrant, to secretly compel disclosure of otherwise private customer records by Internet providers, financial institutions, telephone and credit companies, and other services and organizations.

The FBI has issued more than 123,000 such letters for people in or from the U.S. since 2004, federal records show, including more than 15,000 in 2012, the last year for which data are available.

Obama has not made his own position clear, but the proposal to require judicial review each time the government seeks third-party records has sparked the most push-back from national security officials, including the FBI and some top White House advisors.

"There is concern that this proposal makes it more cumbersome to investigate a terrorist than it does a criminal," said a senior administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Last March, a federal judge ruled the program unconstitutional and ordered the FBI to stop issuing the letters because they contain a gag order that bars recipients from revealing the document's existence or its demands. Senior U.S. District Judge Susan Illston of the Northern District of California stayed her order pending government appeal.

Adding judicial review to the national security letters was among the 46 recommendations of a presidential task force that examined U.S. surveillance programs after former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden's torrent of leaks on domestic and foreign surveillance operations.

Obama, who vowed to study the panel's report during his two-week holiday in Hawaii, plans to meet with his national security team and outside experts to finalize his reforms after he returns to Washington on Sunday. Aides said he wants to boost public confidence that he is protecting Americans' privacy while safeguarding national security.

Obama already has put several of the panel's proposals in the "likely" category, aides said. They include creating a position for an independent lawyer to argue for privacy rights and civil liberties before the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

The court, which was created in 1978 and meets in secret, only hears from government lawyers seeking permission for additional surveillance — not from opponents. Records show the court grants nearly all of the government's requests.

The White House favors changing the procedure to ensure "that the government's position is challenged by an adversary," according to an administration official.

The chief justice of the Supreme Court appoints the 11 federal judges on the secret court. It's unclear whether Obama has embraced the panel's recommendation to let other Supreme Court judges also play a role, or other proposed changes to the court.

Obama apparently supports shifting the NSA's bulk collection and storage of domestic telephone calling records to private hands, a change he first signaled at a news conference the day he left for Hawaii. For Americans, the secret archiving of numbers and other data from virtually every U.S. phone call is arguably the most controversial of the surveillance operations revealed by Snowden.

Obama's top advisors are not considering stopping the program, as some critics insist, because they are convinced the data may be crucial in counter-terrorism investigations.

Instead, his advisors are trying to hash out how to ensure that telephone companies or other third-party groups will hold the data but make it available to the NSA or another agency when a judge orders it.

The secret surveillance court has approved the NSA program 36 times in the last seven years, most recently on Friday.

But in a clear sign of impending change, Shawn Turner, spokesman for the director of national intelligence, said in a statement announcing the declassified order that U.S. intelligence agencies were "open to modifications to this program that would provide additional privacy and civil liberty protections while still maintaining its operational benefits."

Exactly how that will work remains unclear. The presidential task force didn't suggest who should hold that vast cache of data or where, and telecommunications companies are wary of taking on the responsibility and acting as a surrogate government archive of trillions of calling records.

The data collection has infuriated some members of Congress. On Friday, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) sent a pointed letter to NSA Director Keith Alexander demanding to know whether the NSA had monitored phone calls, emails and Internet traffic of members of Congress and other elected officials.

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Telling the truth on achievement gaps improves education

By Arne Duncan, January 24, 2014, *Washington Post*

Arne Duncan is U.S. secretary of education.

In education, it sometimes takes courage to do what ought to be common sense.

That's a key lesson from several recent national and international assessments of U.S. education. These include the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the nation's report card; a new version of the NAEP focused on large, urban districts; and the international rankings in the tri-annual PISA test. Collectively, these assessments demonstrate extraordinary progress in the places where leaders have worked hardest and most consistently to bring change — but also a national failure to make nearly enough progress to keep up with our competitors.

Nationwide, students made modest progress in reading and math in 2013, with achievement edging up to record highs for fourth- and eighth-graders, the NAEP found.

Nearly every state has adopted higher academic standards, and most states have instituted new systems of teacher support and evaluation. It's a testament to hardworking educators that they are implementing these changes and raising student performance at the same time.

But as the international PISA results demonstrate, our progress isn't enough. Other countries are leapfrogging us at a time when education is vital to economic health in a global competition for jobs and innovation. Among the 65 countries and education systems that participate in PISA, the United States was surpassed by 27 in math and 14 in reading . That's unacceptable.

We can learn, however, from some of the standouts. In contrast to a national picture of gradual progress, Tennessee and the District of Columbia reported striking jumps — in both math and reading achievement and in both grades examined, fourth and eighth.

We don't know all the reasons why students did better in Tennessee and the District in 2013 than in 2011. But it is clear that they shared a similar approach to bettering education — taking common-sense, but politically hard, steps to help students. Both are places where vulnerable students predominate; 73 percent of District students and 55 percent of Tennessee students are sufficiently needy to qualify for reduced-price meals.

There are important lessons here. What these two places also had in common was a succession of leaders who told educators, parents and the public the truth about educational underperformance and who worked closely with educators to bring about real changes. They pushed hard to raise expectations for students, even though a lower bar would have made everyone look better. And they remained committed to doing the right thing for children, even when it meant crossing partisan lines or challenging ideological orthodoxy.

To meet those higher standards, these leaders invested in strengthening the quality of classroom instruction and revamping systems for teacher support and evaluation. They ensured that teachers could use good data from multiple sources to identify learning gaps and improve instruction. They also sought ongoing feedback from educators and others.

These concepts — developing and supporting the people who do the most important work, using data to inform improvement — are what strong organizations do.

Yet these common-sense steps took uncommon courage. Tennessee had previously set one of the lowest bars in the country for proficiency in reading and math. The resulting proficiency rates — 91 percent in math and 92 percent in reading — were a lie. By raising standards, Tennessee's leaders forced the public, parents and politicians to confront brutal facts.

When Tennessee raised its standards in 2010, the proportion of students rated proficient dropped to 34 percent in math and 45 percent in reading. But in a bipartisan act of courage, Republican Gov. Bill Haslam and state Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman stayed true to the reforms begun under Democrat Phil Bredesen. They refused to dumb down standards to try to make Tennessee students look better.

Were students actually doing worse? No. For the first time, the state was telling the truth.

Just as important, leaders in the District and Tennessee worked with educators to transform industrial-era systems of support and evaluation for teachers and principals that had little or no link to teachers' impact on student learning. That meant continuing the work of political predecessors, as Mayor Vincent C. Gray and Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson did in the District.

Building better systems that take account of educators' impact on learning is complex and controversial work. Yet in Tennessee and the District, leaders solicited input from their critics, stayed committed but flexible and delivered systems that help both successful and struggling teachers.

I'm cautious about drawing big conclusions from a two-year trend, and it's important to track a variety of educational outcomes, such as high school graduation and college enrollment rates.

Even so, the experiences of Tennessee and the District suggest that children win when leaders work closely with educators to do several vital things right, at the same time, and don't give up when the going gets tough.

As Henderson said: "When you concentrate on teacher quality, you get results. When you radically increase the level of academic rigor, you get results."

To be clear, no one in Tennessee or the District is declaring victory. Students in both places have a lot further to go to close achievement gaps and even to reach the level of top-performing states. But their progress shouldn't be treated as mysterious or miraculous. [...]

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Blame Socialism, Not Shinseki

That's the real VA problem.
By Larry Kudlow, *National Review*, May 23, 2014

The VA problem is not Shinseki, it's socialism. The Veterans Affairs health-care system is completely government run. It is a pure single-payer program. NATIONAL REVIEW editor Rich Lowry calls it "an island of socialism in American health care." He is right. I've been arguing this all week.

So perhaps Democrats and Republicans will get together to sack VA secretary Eric Shinseki. But that won't change a thing. In fact, it's a distraction.

The long waits for treatment, with excessive delays resulting in as many as 40 deaths, are a tragically predictable outcome. This is the result of bureaucratic rationing, price controls, inefficiencies, and the inevitable cover-ups. It was the late James Buchanan, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, who taught us all about bureaucratic incentives in his seminal work on public choice.

So if Congress thinks it can find somebody who can tame the VA bureaucracy, it should go right ahead. But the statist VA health-care system, which in so many ways mirrors the government-run health-care problems in Britain, Europe, and Canada, *must be completely changed.*

We owe it to our brave veterans. Think of it on the eve on the Memorial Day, when we honor all of our veterans who fought bravely for our freedom. Returning vets today deserve an efficient health-care system, not this slip-shod failure. And the only way to do that is to deliver choice and market competition.

Market competition will control costs and more efficiently distribute services. Profit motive, not run-amok bureaucrats, will discipline the system. Better doctors and health specialists will be attracted to this profit-based system. And our veterans at long last will get the medical care they deserve.

Don't tell me the problem is not enough government money. That is nonsense. Everyone should go read John Merline's article in *Investor's Business Daily* headlined "VA Health Spending Soars as Vets Decline." Here are some of his numbers: From 2000 to 2013, VA outlays nearly tripled while the population of veterans declined by 4.3 million. And Medicaid-care spending, which consumes about 40 percent of the VA's budget, has climbed 193 percent over those years, while the number of patients served by the VA each year went up only 68 percent.

In another informative article, John Fund, citing Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute, notes that 344,000 veterans' care claims are now backed up and waiting to be processed, that it takes an average of 160 days for health-benefit approval, and that according to VA figures for 2012, veteran appeals face an average wait time of 1,598 days, or more than four years.

Study after study from the CBO and various inspectors general has been consistently critical of the VA operation. And as a *Wall Street Journal* editorial points out, various VA centers fudge their data.

For years President Obama has been talking about fixing the VA. But he never stayed with it. And now he says he's angry and wants accountability. But he will never understand that the single-payer government-run system is the real problem.

Of course, the Paul Krugmans of the world and their leftist allies call VA health care a triumph of socialist medicine. But once again we find out that this triumph is a defeat and that socialism doesn't work. As others have suggested, a system of government vouchers which permits veterans to choose their own health-care plans, especially *private* health-care plans, would be one giant step towards solving this problem.

Avik Roy points out that Republicans have not stood up for private-sector competition. And the Veterans of Foreign Wars has always *opposed* market choice and competition. But perhaps this is changing. Senators John McCain, Tom Coburn, and Richard Burr are putting forth a reform plan that will give veterans health-care choice for the first time.

And there's another warning here. Contrary to the wishes of Senator Harry Reid and House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, Obamacare must not become a major step toward single-payer health insurance. Instead, Republicans should fight for thorough Obamacare reform. Get rid of the mandates. Institute real consumer choice. Stop the job-destroying tax and regulatory provisions. And let Americans keep their doctors and insurance plans.

This VA scandal is a reminder that government-run single-payer health care does not work. And it makes it clear that the *entire* system must be changed. We owe it to our veterans, and everyone else too.

Scottish independence

Alex Salmond's big problem

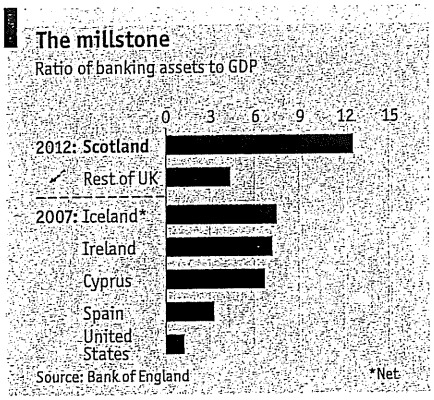
EDINBURGH

The battle for Scotland has come to turn on a dispute over currency—which unionists are winning

DEBATES about Scottish independence tend to start with national identity and end with dry economic facts. It only takes a brief chat with one of the Scots pounding the streets for a "yes" or a "no" vote in the referendum due on September 18th to establish that much. Within minutes he or she will be on to the details of oil prices and national debt, and whether they militate for or against leaving the United Kingdom.

The air war over independence is starting to conform to the same pattern. Alex Salmond, head of the separatist Scottish National Party (SNP), is most comfortable talking about self-determination and national character. He scheduled the referendum to take place close to the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn, a famous Scottish victory over the English. David Cameron, the prime minister, used a speech on February 7th to describe the "emotional, patriotic" case for the union. But, with the referendum approaching, political leaders south of the border are now posing the vexing economic questions that look certain to decide its outcome.

The toughest question of the lot concerns currency. Scots overwhelmingly want to keep the pound. Nationalists assure them that an independent Scotland could share it with the rest of Britain. But on February 13th George Osborne, the chancellor of the exchequer, delivered a speech in Edinburgh warning them that such a sterling zone would not work and would not have his support. His view is shared by the Treasury's top official, Sir Nicholas Macpherson, and both the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.



A sterling zone would resemble the euro zone in some ways, with integrated monetary and banking systems but separate fiscal and political ones. This asymmetry made the euro prone to crisis, so unionists fret about the parallels. Mr Osborne fears that just as Germany had to bail out Ireland, Cyprus and Greece to save the euro, Britain might have to rescue a stricken Scotland to protect the two countries' shared financial system.

Making matters worse, Scotland is home to two of Britain's largest banks in Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Lloyds, which is based there owing to a quirk of corporate history. If the country became independent it would have bank assets twelve times the size of its GDP. The equivalent multiple for the rest of Britain is below five; for Ireland on the eve of the financial crisis it was about seven (see chart).

In another meltdown, then, Scotland would struggle to rescue its banks. Indeed, although its present fiscal position appears at least as good as that of the rest of Britain, its longer-term prospects are poor. Scotland's dependence on oil production exposes it to external shocks, and the country is ageing. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, a think-tank, reckons the country will face a larger fiscal gap than Britain even if oil revenues remain strong: 1.9% of national income against 0.8% for the UK.

Mr Salmond was having none of this. In a speech on February 17th he pointed out that a ring fence separating retail from investment banking, due to be implemented by 2019, ought to reduce the chances of another banking crisis. He also said the chancellor had exaggerated the size of Scottish banking assets by including those based in London, such as RBS's investment-banking arm—implying that an independent Scotland would take little responsibility for them. And the SNP leader predicted that the rest of Britain would surely drop its opposition to a sterling union for fear of the transaction costs—estimated at £500m ($800m)—of separate currencies. He dubbed this a "George tax".

These reassurances are rose-tinted, to say the least. Splitting investment from retail banking will not abolish banking crises. Nor will it completely absolve sovereigns of liability. Even if the Scottish retail operations of Lloyds and RBS could be hived off during a crisis, someone would probably need to save the banks' remaining operations. They are globally systemic ▸▸

▸ and remain far too big to fail safely. Scotland would have neither the capacity nor—judging by Mr Salmond's words—the willingness to save them. The bill would fall to London. Presumably the British authorities would only be willing to shoulder those liabilities if RBS and Lloyds moved their headquarters to London in advance.

Mr Salmond also threatens that Scotland will not take on a population share of the national debt if London refuses to let it use the pound and the Bank of England. Yet such a move would make it harder to negotiate a good independence settlement with the rest of Britain, wreck Scotland's credibility in capital markets and send its borrowing costs skyward. On February 19th Danny Alexander, the chief secretary to the Treasury, pointed out that Scottish mortgages would become more costly.

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Colleges Seek New Paths to Diversity After Court Ruling

Tamar Lewin, *The New York Times,* April 22, 2014

Leaders in higher education, upset by Tuesday's Supreme Court decision upholding Michigan's ban on race-based preferences in college admissions, said the ruling would nudge them further along the path of finding alternative means to promote diversity in their student bodies.

Race remains a permissible element in admissions in states without such a ban, and many educators hailed the dissent by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, which emphasized the continuing significance of race. Still, they said affirmative action appeared to have a limited future.

"Most of us have already started to look at other variables than race, especially first-generation students, and low-income students," said Muriel Howard, president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. In debates taking place in various parts of the country, many educators have argued that such methods produce diversity but far less effectively.

The California Senate, seeking to increase minority representation at state university campuses, passed a bill this year that would have eliminated Proposition 209, that state's 1996 ban on racial preferences. The bill was backed by many Latinos, but opposed by many Asian groups. Last month, the State Assembly speaker sent it back to the Senate without taking any action.

This month, in what could become the next round of affirmative-action litigation, the Virginia-based Project on Fair Representation set up websites featuring photos of Asian students in an attempt to find plaintiffs for race-based discrimination suits against Harvard, the University of North Carolina and the University of Wisconsin.

Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, has argued that colleges can achieve diversity without considering race, through such measures as admitting the top students from each high school in the state, taking family income into account and ending preferences for legacy students.

"Colleges don't want to do it because they'd rather assemble a class of wealthy students of all colors," he said.

Some who support state bans on racial preferences said such prohibitions might spread as a result of the Supreme Court decision.

Roger Clegg, president of the conservative Center for Equal Opportunity, said he hoped to see the bans proliferate, whether through ballot initiatives or legislation.

"Not every state has ballot initiatives, but where ballot initiatives are not available, state legislatures should act," he said. "And where state legislatures won't act, then action should be taken at the local level."

But some of the prime movers behind the bans said they did not expect a flurry of new ones — in part because they believed their fight against racial preferences was mostly won.

"I think this issue is largely settled," said Ward Connerly, president of the American Civil Rights Institute. "Most Americans have made up their minds that the government should not treat people differently based on race, and they're kind of impatient that we continue to wrestle with the question."

Jennifer Gratz, a plaintiff in one of the cases against the University of Michigan and founder of the XIV Foundation, said that while she would support efforts for more bans, she was now interested in moving beyond such a fight. "At this point, I think there needs to be a process to start to talk with people who believe they need race preferences to succeed, and tell them why in this day and age, no one needs a government preference based on their skin color," she said.

Many who have backed the continued use of race in admissions criteria say the growing focus on social and economic factors is a matter of practical politics.

"The reason we're moving to income-based affirmative action is that it's politically viable, and allows a coalition we haven't seen since Bobby Kennedy, of working-class whites and minorities," said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University. "But it won't solve the problem, since our system of higher education now faithfully reproduces race and class differences across generations."

Since 1994, he said, higher education has become increasingly two tiered, with 85 percent of white students going to the top 500 four-year colleges, and 75 percent of black and Latino students going to open-admissions schools. "In the end, you can't avoid dealing with race," he said.

Kati Haycock, president of the liberal Education Trust, said she could not deny that most people who follow the Supreme Court believe the clock is running out on race-based admissions policies.

"I just keep wishing that the people who spend so much time trying to end racial preferences in higher ed would work to end the racial differences in the education we provide K-12, which is why we need the racial preferences," she said.

The Opinion Pages | CONTRIBUTING OP-ED WRITER

Cameron's Evangelical Turn

Matthew D'Ancona

April 30, 2014, *The International New York Times*.

LONDON — There are few, if any, ironclad laws in politics, but here is a principle that comes close: Any senior British politician who speaks out about religion will quickly wish he hadn't. Alastair Campbell, former Prime Minister Tony Blair's closest adviser, famously told reporters when they asked his boss religious questions, "We don't do God."

Prime Minister David Cameron may be regretting his recent failure to observe this rule. The trouble began at an Easter reception in Downing Street at which the prime minister claimed that his pet project for social reform had divine origins.

"Jesus invented the 'Big Society' 2,000 years ago," Mr. Cameron said. "I just want to see more of it."

He followed this up with an article in the Anglican newspaper *Church Times*, arguing that "we should be more confident about our status as a Christian country" and "frankly, more evangelical."

In response, 56 notables — including the authors Philip Pullman and Sir Terry Pratchett, leading philosophers and Nobel Prize-winning scientists — signed a joint letter to *The Daily Telegraph* accusing the prime minister of fostering "alienation and division."

The archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Justin Welby, rushed to Mr. Cameron's defense, declaring it historical fact "that our main systems of ethics, the way we do law and justice, the values of society, how we decide what is fair, the protection of the poor, and most of the way we look at society ... all have been shaped by and founded on Christianity."

Since Dr. Welby was installed in March 2013, he and Mr. Cameron, both products of Eton, Britain's most prestigious private school, have forged a close alliance. What the archbishop said about the historical debt of British culture to Christianity was commonplace to the point of banality, but there is a gap between acknowledging that debt and insisting, as Mr. Cameron had, that Britain is "a Christian country" and that Anglicans should be more "evangelical," proselytizing their faith and proclaiming its virtues.

It is one thing for a bishop to say this, and quite another when a secular politician declares himself on a religious mission. Mr. Cameron went out of his way to make clear that his clarion call did "not somehow involve doing down other faiths or passing judgment on those with no faith at all," but the word "evangelical" was a remarkable one for a prime minister to use when referring to his own faith.

Britain is not yet a fully secular society, but its overtly Christian character is fast diminishing. According to the 2011 census, 59.3 percent of people in England and Wales said they were Christian — compared to 71.7 percent 10 years previously.

The Church of England also enshrines a wonderfully British paradox. It is the established religion of the state: The queen is the church's supreme governor, responsible for appointing archbishops, bishops and deans on the advice of the prime minister; ludicrously, 26 bishops sit in the House of

Lords as lawmakers; officially, at least, every state school is required by law "to make provision for a daily act of collective worship."

So religion ought to be part of the warp and weft of politics, right?

Wrong. The strange origins of Anglicanism — Henry VIII's marital arrangements — and England's consequent embrace of a particular variant of Protestantism have spawned not zealotry but a centuries-long shrug. As a rule, Britons dislike talking about religion, and they especially hate talking about faith and politics.

This is a shame. I am all for politicians opening up about their convictions, philosophical and religious. It was impossible, for instance, to understand Mr. Blair's political career without reference to his deeply held Christian beliefs.

In 1996, I conducted an interview with Mr. Blair for *The Sunday Telegraph* that explored the connection between his faith and his politics, before Mr. Campbell ruled the subject off limits. Mr. Blair told me that Christianity led him "to oppose what I perceived to be a narrow view of self-interest that Conservatism — particularly its modern, more right-wing form — represents."

This was regrettable, because, to take two salient examples, his private response to 9/11 (meticulous reading of the Quran) and the case for the liberation of Iraq (exploration of the theology of the "just war") were inextricably connected to his spiritual life. But of this, we heard little in public.

Why has Mr. Cameron taken this risk? The political calculation is not difficult to identify. Many traditional Christians remain angry with the prime minister for supporting same-sex marriage. They are precisely the sort of voters who are defecting to the radical right-wing U.K. Independence Party, which expects to do well next month in the elections to the European Parliament.

Though Mr. Cameron is the opposite of a racist, the word "Christian," allied to "evangelical," has undoubtedly been interpreted by some as a coded message of support for those who feel overwhelmed by immigration and, in particular, resent the role of Islam in contemporary British culture.

This is emphatically not what the prime minister meant. But Mr. Cameron is surely sophisticated enough to know that his words might be misconstrued.

Private faith and its connection to public action are endlessly fascinating issues, and politicians should not be frightened of discussing those subtle threads. But cheerleading is another matter entirely. It is the task of a modern prime minister to negotiate the problems of a pluralist society and to find the common ground that is the home of civility in a multifaith, multiethnic world.

This is the real mission. To stand a chance of success, we need fewer "evangelicals," not more.

Matthew d'Ancona is a political columnist for *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Evening Standard*.

Michael Gove's monocultural version of the English literature curriculum

Removing 'seminal world literature' as a compulsory element only serves to promote a nationalistic, ossified vision of England

Lola Okolosie

The Guardian, Monday 19 August 2013

Michael Gove and his education department are at it again, this time playing lord and master over the new GCSE English literature curriculum. It would seem that the bruising battle and inevitable defeat sustained over his changes to the history curriculum did not, sadly, result in combat fatigue. In what can only be described as the policy equivalent of a dawn raid, the coalition government have removed "seminal world literature" as a compulsory element. In doing so, they have given English teachers a short two-month window in which to register their disapproval. It appears, however, that unlike the national outcry over the changes to the history curriculum, in English, protest against the move boils down to words of condemnation rather than a co-ordinated action. The consultation process closes on Tuesday, 20 August.

Perhaps we shouldn't judge too hastily and rather view the excision as a sign of Gove's burgeoning forward-looking vision of English literature. In this alternative reality, the secretary of state for education is following a progressive argument that has long raged within English teacher circles; it is that by the very label "world literature", we are viewing it as a separate and distinct entity from the accepted canon. In reality, it goes, we should impart to our students a sense of all literature enabling the understanding of our commonality of experience and desire. The truth, however, is that we have a draft proposal so utterly prescriptive in terms of content that it leaves no room for such lofty interpretation.

The programme of study published in February stated students should "increase the breadth of their reading through: at least one play by Shakespeare; a selection of representative Romantic poetry; at least one 19th-century novel; a selection of poetry since 1850; British fiction or drama since the first world war; seminal world literature written in English."

In the months that followed, the government seems to have scrapped its erstwhile syllabus and consulted key stakeholders on the content of GCSE English literature. Launched in June, this latest document quietly omits as compulsory the study of world literature. Many teachers could be forgiven for expecting a sense of continuity across the secondary syllabus, as 11- to 14-year-olds will be expected to study literature from other cultures. Here I suspect Gove's team are anticipating a round of applause for relegating texts by authors such as Anita Desai, Chinua Achebe, and Harper Lee to younger year groups.

Stephen Twigg MP, Labour's shadow education secretary, describes the move as "mind boggling" and "out of date" and I would have to agree. There is much here to perplex the English classroom

teacher. Where to begin? An arbitrary array of literature is given special dispensation from Gove et al, with three of the five areas of study centred on the 19th century. Why, as the NUT asks in the ongoing consultation, the Romantics in particular over and above all other poetic movements?

Why either postwar drama or fiction and not both, when it would seem that an overlap exists between the focus on Romantic poetry and a selection of poems from 1850 onwards? Why, oh why, the notion that "detailed study of a range of high quality, intellectually challenging, and substantial whole texts", cannot include literature in English from across the world? True literature, it would seem, was only really written during the 19th century by English people, for which read men. For Chris Keates, the general secretary of the NASUWT, the largest teachers' union, it demonstrates how Gove "has failed consistently to listen to the voices of teachers, parents, learners".

How best to take the document's laughable assertion that "through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, spiritually and socially"? Which culture in particular do we want students to develop? The many questions suggest a patent lack of sense behind these proposals. What we have in its place are a set of ideological convictions that view the study of English literature as a means through which a nationalistic and ossified vision of England can be propagated.

Perhaps the opening line of LP Hartley's racy novel *The Go-Between* can provide some kind of defence for the removal of world literature from the curriculum. In it we are told "the past is a foreign country". If that is indeed the case, much of the cultural and social development Gove's proposal hopes for would be achieved with the narrow and prescriptive content outlined above. Yet, the country reflected back at us isn't one that mirrors the diversity and complexity of the world we now inhabit. Surely there should be room for both the old and new?

The canon has always been an ideological entity. Enforcing a monocultural and traditional view of it serves to demonstrate a set of political ideals that are well past their sell-by date. We should all let Gove in on this little secret, before it's too late.

Lola Okolosie is an English teacher and writer. She has produced work for the *Observer*, *guardian.co.uk* and *Red Pepper*. She is a member of Go Feminist and Black Feminists. She writes in a personal capacity.

Captain Britannia: Nigel Farage is the Union's Useful Secret Weapon

The Spectator - http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/

Alex Massie, 27 May 2014

Your enemy's enemy is not necessarily your friend. That is something forgotten too easily. Nevertheless, though he may not be your friend he may, for a time at least, be your ally.

And so it came to pass that Nigel Farage is, for the time being, Labour's new best chum. In Scotland, that is. The Tories are quite pleased with him too and, if anyone could find them, perhaps the Liberal Democrats would be too.

Of course, officially, there is much tut-tutting and hand-wringing over Ukip's success in Scotland. We're all supposed to be simply appalled that these fruitcakes have won a seat in the European parliament. Terrible stuff.

Come off it. These are the lamentations of a crocodile. Secretly – and sometimes not so secretly – Unionists are delighted by Farage's success in Scotland. He was supposed to be Alex Salmond's useful nutter; instead he has become the Union's secret weapon.

It is hard to see how the euro results could have gone better for the Unionist parties. (Unless, granted, you're a Liberal Democrat.) The Tory share of the vote held up (17 per cent is these days a decent result), Labour's share increased by five points and the SNP was contained, held below 30 per cent of the vote. If this election was supposed to put a spring in nationalist steps it failed to do so. Yes, the Nats topped the poll (as everyone expected they would) but they had high hopes of a

third seat and those hopes were dashed. Only narrowly, it is true, but dashed all the same.

A third SNP seat would have put a very different spin on everything. The Nats would have 'momentum' on their side and destiny would be calling them to rally again in September. Scotland would be on the march, you see.

Instead, however, the SNP was checked. It won but it did not win decisively. Most importantly, as Adam Tomkins correctly observes, Ukip's success demolished a central part of the nationalist narrative justifying independence.

That story runs that Scotland is a couthy social democratic country but England is a vicious place populated by heartless neoliberals and it is crazy to think that places with such different — and diverging! — political cultures could ever be part of the same country.

Ukip were supposed to prove that. They were supposed to do very well in England but very badly in Scotland. That success south of the border would then be used – leveraged, if you like – by Salmond to substantiate his claim that Scotland and England should no longer share a country.

Well, Ukip did well enough in England. But they did just a little bit too well in Scotland. True, their level of Scottish support lags some way behind their support in England but you can no longer say their Caledonian support is entirely negligible or credibly maintain there's no place for UKIP in Scotland.

(There are many reasons why Ukip's support in Scotland lags behind their support elsewhere but one – among several – is that in Scotland there's already a nationalist party for people who think the Tories and Labour are just the same).

According to Salmond, however, it is all the fault of the beastly media. If the press hadn't paid so much attention to Ukip none of this would have happened. Blaming the press, of course, is a sure sign a politician has nothing sensible to say.

But, hey, perhaps this is why the SNP's campaign was in large part obsessed with Ukip. 'Vote SNP to keep Scotland Ukip-free' was pretty much all one heard from the nationalists in the campaign's latter days. So perhaps Mr Salmond should be blamed for Ukip's success too.

I don't suppose the glee with which Unionists have greeted Ukip's Scottish success is terribly edifying. But it is understandable. Unionists have been on the defensive for many months now and needed to catch a break. Nigel Farage has given them just that.

And, of course, in some respects Ukip's success should not be terribly surprising. A third of Scots say they wish to leave the European Union (though it is a less salient issue in Scotland than elsewhere) and two thirds favour restricting immigration much more sharply than is presently the case. In terms of policy preferences (as opposed to political identification) Scotland is not so very different to England. (...)

UK Conservatives face defeat unless they woo ethnic voters
By Elizabeth Rigby, *Financial Times*, February 16, 2014

David Cameron has an ethnic minority problem. With just 16 per cent of support among voters across these communities in 2010, his Conservative party is facing eventual defeat by demography.
One cabinet figure has described the schism between the governing Tories and British minority ethnic voters as the "biggest challenge" the party faces. Heavy cabinet hitters including Iain Duncan Smith, Ken Clarke and Eric Pickles want the prime minister to make rapprochement between the Tories and ethnic communities a priority, says one senior Tory.

Mr Cameron seemed to be taking the initiative early on in his leadership. He appointed Alok Sharma, the MP for Reading West and a vice-chairman of the party, as his ethnic communities champion in 2012. He has backed "community" guides to chivvy Tory MPs out of the golf club and into local mosques. He has also led from the front, visiting the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikh religion's holiest shrine, on a visit to India last year.
But tensions are surfacing as the prime minister's early enthusiasm for broadening his party's appeal gives way to retrenchment ahead of a tough election for the governing party.
"There's a change in tone," says one politician involved in election planning. "Lynton Crosby [the Conservative election chief] is running the campaign and his job is to maximise the number of people voting Tory with just 15 months to go. There is a difference between that demand and where we want to be by 2020."
Conservative insiders say Mr Crosby is concerned that trying to appeal to black and minority ethnic voters "muddies the message". "There are four or five key things we are being told to focus on: economy, jobs, welfare and immigration," said one. "He thinks if you layer this with other messages your core themes get lost."
The underlying row between the Home Office and Downing Street over watering down "stop and search" powers is emblematic of these tensions. Theresa May wants to change a policy that she considers both a waste of police resources – more than a million stops carried out each year translate into less than 10 per cent of arrests – and damaging to community relations, as young black men are seven times more likely to be stopped. No 10 is resisting reform, nervous that changes to "stop and search" will give the impression the Tories are soft on crime and play into the hands of the UK Independence Party.
Other initiatives are also being pushed aside. Mr Sharma proposed companies should be asked to set out the racial composition of their workforce in order to show these groups the Tories do have their interests at heart – but the idea has been shelved. The prime minister has also demurred from appointing a cabinet "multiculturalism" champion, much to the disappointment of those Tories looking to ape the Canadian Conservatives' success among BME groups.
"If you want people to support you, you have to develop a relationship with them," says Jason Kenney, the Canadian Conservatives' multiculturalism minister. "To be blunt with you, part of the problem of the Conservative Party, the failure of the Conservative party of Canada of the 70s, 80s and 90s, in this respect, was also part of the failure of the British Tory party, namely that there was a sense of culture gap between most Conservative parliamentarians and activists and immigrant communities."
The Tories' difficulties with ethnic communities are decades old. Political rivals evoke Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" immigration speech of 1968 when they want to allude to the party's "racist underbelly".
Polling by Lord Ashcroft, the former party chairman, found the majority of ethnic voters think the party is hostile to them – or at best apathetic. Seven out of 10 voters from ethnic minorities vote Labour regardless of income or class, says the Runnymede Trust, a race equality think-tank.
Repairing the faultline will be decisive in future victories or defeats. British Future, a think-tank that promotes integration, published a report last autumn showing Mr Cameron would have won outright in 2010 had he appealed to BME voters as much as he did across the UK as a whole.

Look to 2015: there are 50 Tory seats where Labour is second and the BME vote is larger than the Conservative majority. In nearly half of the party's 40 target seats, the BME vote is larger than the majority they are trying to overcome.

Priti Patel, MP for Witham, who was last year appointed as the prime minister's Indian diaspora champion, thinks inroads are being made.

"The prime minister is committed to deepening our relationships . . . Other parties have engaged in the past and we haven't been there. It is beginning to change. It will take time."

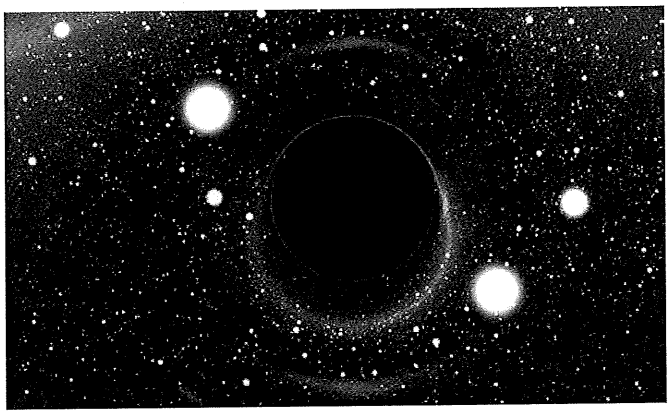
But with Britain's demographics rapidly shifting, time is not on Mr Cameron's side. For now, he seems content to tinker around the edges, encouraging engagement but not insisting upon it, resisting BME friendly policies.

"The Conservative party will become ever more electorally unviable if it doesn't take its problem with BME voters seriously," bemoans one senior Tory figure. "When a major part of the community believes they are excluded from [a Conservative] vision, purely because of their colour or ethnicity, addressing that problem is central."

Students are made to believe that 'university is all about them'

Student satisfaction does not say much about the quality of education, says Joanna Williams. Labour's manifesto needs to be more radical and push for intellectual challenge

Joanna Williams, *Guardian Professional*, Tuesday 1 April 2014



Intellectual void: debates over funding take place in the absence of any discussion as to the purpose of a university. Photograph: Image Asset Management Ltd. / Al/Alamy

It seems Ed Miliband is banking on a promised cut in university tuition fees to secure electoral success. Before we indulge in dewy-eyed nostalgia for the days before student loans, it's incumbent upon those who care about what happens in our universities to question the motives of the party that first introduced tuition fees, raised them to over £3000 per year, and commissioned the Browne Review that recommended the current £9000 annual fee.

An intellectual void

There's a black hole at the heart of English higher education and it's not where the 45% of currently written-off loans disappear to. It's an intellectual void evident in the interminable debates over funding that take place in the absence of any discussion as to the purpose of a university, what it means to be a student, and what a degree today represents. The advent of the student as consumer took place long before tuition fees reached their current peak, and the process cannot be reversed by the very people who introduced it.

Factors other than tuition fees contribute to students acting as customers purchasing a product. Successive governments, following the recommendation of the 1997 Dearing Report, have encouraged students to see themselves as investors in receipt of a service and to seek "value for money and a good return from the investment". This has led to an instrumental sense that a degree is a financial transaction: students expect a guaranteed return in the post-graduation labour market. The focus of education is upon securing a certificate that can most readily be cashed-in.

No room for risk-taking

There is little encouragement for students to demonstrate interest in a particular subject, still less to take intellectual risks; indeed this may prove a dangerous strategy and threaten the security of the investment. This attitude turns higher education into job training; taking delight in potentially transformative new knowledge is replaced by ticking off demonstrable employability skills. Yet the Labour party's latest proposals, which include suggestions that employers be encouraged to sponsor university places and that students should have the option of two-year intensive degrees, will only exacerbate these trends.

Satisfaction does not equal quality

When the purpose of going to university is linked so closely to the future world of work, for many students the most immediate aim is satisfaction in the "student experience". This focus on satisfaction is driven, from government down, through the relentless soliciting of the student voice and the push upon lecturers to respond to students' demands.

Back in 2010 Lord Browne proposed that student choice, often based upon crude measures of satisfaction, should be a key driver of the market in university places. However, there's nothing to suggest satisfaction says anything much about the quality of education, especially if quality is judged in terms of intellectual challenge. Indeed, the opposite may be the case; research from the US suggests students and lecturers may enter into a "disengagement pact" in which lecturers expect little effort and give good grades in return for students reporting high levels of satisfaction.

The coalition government's 2011 white paper, *Students at the heart of the system*, reinforced the narcissistic assumption that for students, university is all about them: they should feel satisfied, they should be able to dictate the terms of their education and they should expect a good job in return. Increasingly lecturers tend to interpret course content as also being all about the student: their experiences presented back to them, in a form that is relevant to them, to enhance their life projects. If university really is just a personal indulgence, then I struggle to find one good reason why anyone other than students themselves should pay for it.

Students deserve better

If Miliband really wants to be radical he needs to do more than a little creative accounting. Students deserve better; they've shown they are neither put off higher education by tuition fees nor swayed by price. Miliband could inspire students by arguing for a rigorously academic knowledge-based curriculum which offers intellectual challenge, stimulates interest and take students places they never dreamed possible. A focus on knowledge transcends the self and opens the mind to new ideas. This might not be immediately satisfying or lead directly into employment. But it might just be worth voting for.

Joanna Williams is a senior lecturer in higher education and academic practice at the University of Kent and author of *Consuming higher education: why learning can't be bought*.

Little England or Great Britain?

The country faces a choice between comfortable isolation and bracing openness. Go for openness
Nov 9th 2013, *The Economist*

(...)In many ways Britain has a lot going for it right now. Whereas the euro zone's economy is stagnant, Britain is emerging strongly from its slump. The government has used the crisis to trim the state. Continental Europeans are coming round to the long-held British view that the EU should be smaller, less bureaucratic and lighter on business. There is even talk of deepening the single market in services, a huge boon for Britain.

London continues to suck in talent, capital and business. Per person, Britain attracts nearly twice as much foreign direct investment as the rich-country average. That is because of the country's history of openness to outsiders—a tradition that has mostly survived the economic crisis. Although the British are hostile to immigration, they excel at turning new arrivals into productive, integrated members of society. Britain is one of only two EU countries where fewer immigrants drop out of school than natives. (Its most worrying neighbourhoods are white, British and poor.)

But this could all fall apart in the next few years. The most straightforward way Britain could shrivel is through Scotland voting to leave the United Kingdom next September. At a stroke, the kingdom would become one-third smaller. Its influence in the world would be greatly reduced. A country that cannot hold itself together is scarcely in a position to lecture others on how to manage their affairs.

The referendum on the EU was promised last year by the prime minister, David Cameron, in a vain attempt to shut up the Little Englanders in the Tory party and ward off UKIP; Ed Miliband, Labour's leader, may well follow suit. If Britain left the EU, it would lose its power to shape the bloc that takes half its exports. And, since Britain has in the past used that power for good, pushing the EU in an open, expansive, free-trading direction, its loss would be Europe's too. To add to the carnage, the plebiscite could break up the Conservative Party—especially if Mr Cameron fails to get re-elected in 2015.

Britain could also become more isolated and insular simply by persisting with some unwise policies. As our special report this week shows, the government's attempts to bear down on immigrants and visitors are harming the economy. Students, particularly from India, are heading to more welcoming (and sunnier) countries. Firms find it too hard to bring in even skilled workers,

crimping the country's ability to export. Mr Cameron has made some concessions: it is now a bit easier to get a British visa in China, and he backed down on a mad plan to demand large bonds from visitors from six emerging markets, lest they abscond. But Britain's attitude to immigration is all wrong. It erects barriers by default and lowers them only when the disastrous consequences become obvious.

No Europe, no Scotland, split party—nice one, Dave

The shrinking of Britain is not preordained. In a more optimistic scenario, Britain sticks together and stays in Europe, where it fights for competitiveness and against unnecessary red tape. British pressure gradually cracks open services markets, both in the EU and elsewhere, creating a bonanza for the country's lawyers and accountants. Britain becomes more tolerant of immigration, if not in love with it. It even stops bashing its biggest export industry, financial services.

The difference between the Little England and Great Britain scenarios is leadership. Mr Cameron should start by changing the thing over which he has most control: immigration policy. A more liberal regime would boost business, help balance the nation's books and shrink the state, relative to the size of the economy. Immigrants, especially from eastern Europe, produce far more than they consume in public resources. Both Mr Cameron and Mr Miliband know this, but they are cowed by widespread hostility to the influx.

Europe is another issue where they should try to lead public opinion, not cravenly follow it. Mr Miliband's policy is unknown. Mr Cameron has lurched alarmingly, sometimes saying Britain is committed to reforming the EU for the good of all, at other times threatening to leave if unspecified demands are not met. The first course is the astute one—both less likely to lead to a calamitous British exit and more likely to succeed in making the union more liberal.

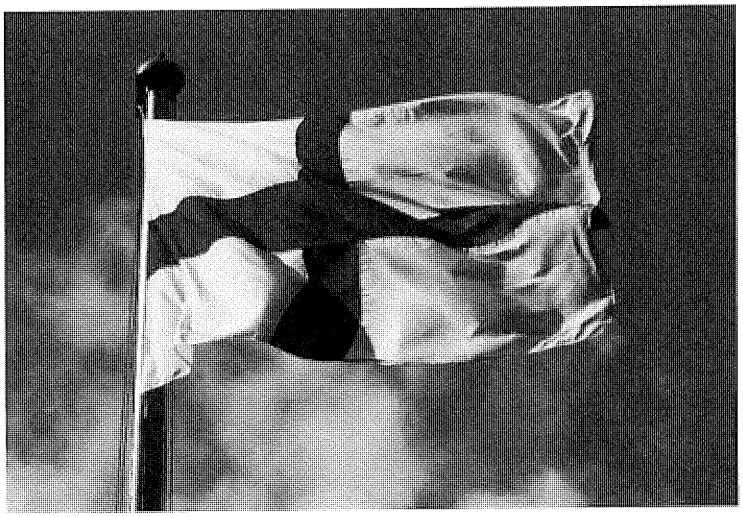
On Scotland, Mr Cameron and Mr Miliband are on the side of Great Britain. But it is a decision for Scots. Although a Caledonian state could more or less pay its way to begin with, assuming that it was able to hold on to most of the North Sea oil- and gas-fields, that resource is drying up. An independent Scotland would be too small to absorb shocks, whether to oil prices or to its banks. And the separatists cannot say how the country could run its affairs while keeping the pound. For their own sakes, Scottish voters should reject their political snake-oil.

Britain once ran the world. Since the collapse of its empire, it has occasionally wanted to curl up and hide. It can now do neither of those things. Its brightest future is as an open, liberal, trading nation, engaged with the world. Politicians know that and sometimes say it: now they must fight for it, too.

The parties must stop dithering and address the English question

The challenge for mainstream parties is to express and ground alternative ideas of the English nation and to connect these to a renewed case for the Union.

BY MICHAEL KENNY PUBLISHED 31 JANUARY, 2014, *NEW STATESMAN*



The English flag is seen flying above 10 Downing St on St George's Day. Photograph: Getty Images.

The development of a more compelling, contemporary case for Britain's Union requires not just a fine-grained understanding of Scottish sensibilities and arguments, but also a proper consideration of the nature and implications of developing forms of English identity. A growing body of social science research points to a gradual reassertion of English nationhood in the current period, a trend that is more deeply rooted and politically significant than is generally appreciated. Several different, contending versions of what it means to be English are quietly and inexorably leaving their imprint upon the agendas and assumptions of politics at Westminster.

All of the main parties have obvious, short-term incentives for averting their eyes from these issues, or for playing them tactically, given their own internal differences on Europe and the Union, and the difficulties they have in engaging with the public on such matters. And yet each is likely to find an evasive or purely tactical stance increasingly difficult to sustain. In part, this is a result of the dramatic coincidence of loud questions about Britain's role in Europe, the referendum on Scottish independence and the attendant debate about the Union, and the likelihood of further devolutionary developments in Scotland and Wales, even if Scottish independence does not come to pass.

More generally, national questions are necessarily difficult for politicians who are schooled in the dominant narrative in the UK of centralised and functional, rather than territorial, governance. And yet the blood has been seeping away from the Westminster model for some time, primarily because long-established ideas about what was special and unique about Britain and its evolving system of parliamentary government began to lose their appeal as the last century drew to a close.

The three main parties appear either uncomfortable or uncertain as they grapple with these national questions. For the Conservative party, David Cameron's deployment of familiar Unionist arguments in the debate over Scottish independence sits awkwardly with the reality that the Tories look increasingly like the party that represents the most affluent parts of southern and central England. Many voters within their electoral core are increasingly impatient with the Union and Scottish

demands upon it.

In Labour's case, Ed Miliband's "one nation" rhetoric is vulnerable to a pretty obvious rejoinder – "which nation?" Perhaps best known as a Tory phrase, it is heard in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as a decidedly English trope. Engaging with contemporary English sensibilities raises another pressing question for the Labour party: how can its rediscovery of an authentic, radical lineage of progressive patriotism – as proposed by figures such as the chair of its policy review, Jon Cruddas – be reconciled with the widespread perception that the party clings to the established order because of its heavy reliance upon the votes of Scottish MPs? If Labour does succeed in winning a majority in the general election of 2015 but lacks representatives in large swathes of southern, eastern and western England and the midlands, it could well find itself facing a crisis of territorial legitimacy, at the mercy of a potent English-focused backlash. (Indeed, one advantage of coalition with the Liberal Democrats is that this might help offset Labour's position in England, as it has done in relation to the Tories' situation in Scotland.)

At present, the one political party that appears to be in tune with some strands of the new English zeitgeist is the UK Independence Party (Ukip) (despite the anachronistic name with which it is saddled). Recent polling suggests a strong correlation between sympathy for Ukip and identification with English, rather than British, national identity. Yet transforming its retro-British nationalist outlook into an English nationalism presents a challenge for Ukip, as is clear from its significant internal divisions on such questions as whether to support an English parliament. And, more fundamentally still, the extent to which Englishness signals the kind of pessimistic, insular and conservative outlook that Ukip promotes is often exaggerated. My own research suggests that most people who are increasingly inclined to identify as "English" first and foremost are broadly liberal and/or conservative in disposition, and still feel a strong sense of affiliation for the Union, even if many are increasingly sceptical about the EU.

In the end, the most effective response to increasingly prominent populist-nationalist sentiments is not to disengage from the terrain of "the national-popular" in the name of universal liberal values, nor to try to recycle or appropriate the simplicities of nationalist-populist rhetoric on issues like immigration. The better, more enduring alternative is to work much harder and more imaginatively – in intellectual, cultural and policy terms – to express and ground alternative ideas of the English nation, and to connect these to a renewed case for Union. This is the major challenge linking the various national questions of British politics. It is time that the parties stopped dithering and embraced it.

The Queen's Speech

Pointless ceremony

Blighty, *The Economist*, Jun 5th 2014

THE most-discussed aspect of the Queen's Speech in Parliament yesterday was the fainting of an over-dressed 12-year-old viscount. Treat that as indicative. Of all the moth-eaten bits of pseudo-constitutional nonsense that pass for landmarks of the parliamentary calendar, the monarch's address at the start of a new legislative session is the biggest waste of time.

Every year (or almost every year; the 2010 session mercifully lasted for two) the Queen travels from Buckingham Palace to Westminster in a spectacularly naff golden coach. Helicopters whirr above Whitehall, irritating journalists in the nearby *Economist* offices but affording television viewers the obligatory (albeit shaky and not terribly informative) 30-second shot of the roof of the prime ministerial car. The Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, a ceremonial parliamentary clerk, marches from the House of Lords to the House of Commons, thrice knocks on the door before summoning MPs. By only slightly younger tradition, he is heckled by Dennis Skinner, a gnarled republican and Labour MP. Led by party leaders, who awkwardly feign polite conversation with one another, they duly process into the upper house.

The Queen then reads out a spin-doctored account of what her government plans to achieve in the coming session. The contents have usually been leaked to the morning newspapers, so everyone knows what they will be before she begins to speak. Then MPs troop back into the Commons for a vigorous bout of pre-scripted point scoring.

This year's display was even more vacuous than usual. The coalition parties have implemented much of their 2010 programme. The other bits have been kicked into the long grass for lack of agreement. Other governments would have called an election by now, but the Conservatives and Lib Dems tied their own hands by fixing the parliamentary term at five years. The outcome, as we noted in April, is lethargy and a long election campaign. So the monarch's comments were unusually light on prospective legislative detail. Indeed, had it not been for the unfortunate page-boy's collapse in the middle of a passage about relations with Iran (queenly eyes barely flickering from the page), the event would have been entirely overshadowed by the ongoing briefing war between Theresa May and Michael Gove, two ambitious cabinet ministers, and today's by-election in Newark, where the UK Independence Party is expected to give the Tories a run for their money.

The pointlessly traditional artifice, the gaudy distractions, the lack of substance—why do Britons put up with it all? Why, for that matter, should they be surprised if foreigners see the country as a quaintly Downton Abbey-fied backwater rather than the dynamic, modern society that it would prefer to be treated as? Not only is the Queen's Speech an international embarrassment, it is not even useful to the government of the day: it forces ministers to come up with things to announce regardless of whether they want or need to do so (a much-heralded new regulation on plastic bags in yesterday's speech indicates the depths that must be plumbed). It is a total waste of time and resources, grumbles one senior adviser.

The Queen's Speech may be especially silly, but it is not uniquely so. Sessions of Prime Minister's Questions are another example. These weekly half-hour bouts embody everything that puts voters off politics: obsequious platitudes from the ambitious, brayed slogans and juvenile attempts to wrong-foot opponents from others. None has a right of reply to the prime minister (apart from the leader of the opposition, and he only gets six questions).

The twice-yearly financial statements—the Budget speech in spring and the Autumn Statement—are further cases in point. There is no good reason why the government's big tax, spending and regulatory announcements should all be bundled into a single package. Here, too, the result is policy made for the sake of policy, not necessity. A penny off this, a freeze to that, a new quango for the other thing—far from unifying economic policy, the spectre of Budget Day forces the Treasury to think in terms of bullet points in a speech (and on the next day's front pages) at the expense of a holistic, steadily developing policy strategy reflecting the long-term picture. As chancellor from 1997 to 2007 Gordon Brown issued budget after budget that added up to less than the sum of their parts; annual tsunamis of micro-announcements drawn from a spreadsheet of ideas curated by Eds Balls and Miliband. The rest (debatably) was credit-crunch-tastic history.

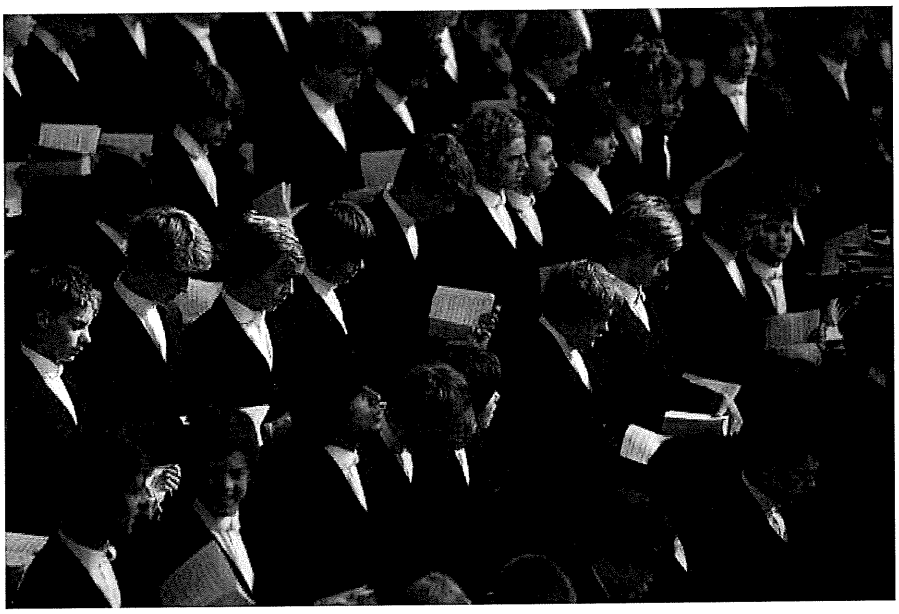
Any sane political system would require its main finance minister only to announce policies according to a pragmatic, flexible timetable. It would enable legislators to scrutinise them one-by-one, rather than in a big lump at pre-ordained times of year. It would also grant MPs several questions at PMQs, and thus the chance to properly debate a matter with the prime minister. It would enable him to refer them to his cabinet colleagues, ditching the fusty pretence of prime ministerial omniscience. And it would unveil the government's overall programme for a new legislative session in an accessible fashion, perhaps with a national road-show giving voters the chance to question members of the government, or an American-style State of the Nation speech followed by a televised debate.

Yet there are few signs of any of this happening. The cold, dead hand of tradition smothers new ways of running Westminster, making them unthinkable. "The alternatives would only be worse," caution many, unthinkingly. And people wonder why trust in politics is so low. (...)

State schools are as good as private schools, Mr Gove. Here's the proof

The real advantage of fee-paying institutions lies with the pupils they attract

ARCHIE BLAND, *The Independent,* Tuesday 4 February 2014



Two children run a race. They start in the same place, but one of the children has the inside lane, and as they circle the track, that advantage opens up a telling gap. Half way round, the child in the lead picks up a straw hat without breaking stride, and puts it on. He crosses the finishing line far ahead of his opponent. The next day's sports pages are full of analysis of the contest. The advice to the loser, the columnists opine, is obvious: for the next race, he should be sure to get hold of a boater.

You wouldn't get away with this shallow analysis in athletics. But in schools, it appears to be indestructible. So we can see from the thrust of Michael Gove's arguments as he attempts to reconfigure state education. He has agreed in the past that the "sheer scale, the breadth and the depth of private school dominance" are "morally indefensible". On Monday, he made some suggestions about how to upend it.

The problem, Mr Gove says, is that state schools are not learning enough from their private counterparts. There is a "Berlin Wall" between the two. Here are things he wants to transfer to bring it down: Latin and Greek. Common Entrance. Choir and cadets and debating. Writing lines. He didn't mention compulsory straw hats, but it would not be terribly surprising if the idea was floated before the end of the week. "We know England's private schools are the best independent schools in the world," Mr Gove said. "Why shouldn't our state schools be the best state schools in the world?"

The problem with this assumption, that our public schools are far better than state schools and that their traditions are to thank for it, is this: it is demonstrably false. You can begin to get a whiff of this from the argumentative strategies deployed in defence of the idea. Eton is the accepted shorthand for private education, as if the most rarefied private school in the country stands for all 2,600 of them; meanwhile, we symbolise state schools with the unloved Bog Standard Secondary, forgetting the bastions of excellence at the top of the sector that rival Eton on a fraction of the budget.

We see the results that these anomalous private schools get, and in the search for reasons why they do so well, we alight on their most visible distinguishing features: their traditions and methods. In doing so, we miss the real source of their advantage: the pupils they attract.

This isn't just a hunch. There is plenty of evidence that backs it up. Private schools seem to do better, but once you strip out the advantages conferred on them by having an intake that is largely made up of well-to-do children who live with their vigorously engaged parents in a house full of books, their advantage disappears. British performance in the PISA tests that compare schools internationally has shown this to be the case. Our domestic measures suggest the same thing. Of the two in five independent schools that are inspected by Ofsted, 74 per cent of them were rated outstanding or good; in the state sector, it was 78 per cent. If you sent the Etonians to Bog Standard Secondary, they would still thrive. If you sent the children from Bog Standard Secondary at Eton, the limits of line-writing would quickly become apparent.

I was amazed when I first read those statistics. But when you think about it, they make sense. We know that a rich child can be 18 months ahead on vocabulary by the age of five; we know that the strongest predictor of success in life is maternal education. And studies show that when affluent parents get over their fears and send their children to state schools, they still do extremely well. The remarkable thing is that the most powerful weapon in Michael Gove's crusade against the morally indefensible dominance of private schools would be a simple, repeated statement of a simple economic fact: instead of spending an average of £14,000 a year on private education, you can get something just as good for free.

So why do we resist the idea? Why isn't Mr Gove shouting this from the rooftops? Perhaps because the implications are, in one sense, even more depressing: it is much easier to "fix" state schools than to fix a society where a child's life chances are laid out when he is still a toddler. Perhaps, too, because it is uncomfortable to note that if private school parents aren't paying for a better education, they are paying for something rather more insidious: the connections, the social capital, the place of refuge from the state school kids who they groundlessly fear could contaminate their dear ones. And perhaps, above all, because it leads to the following, politically nightmarish conclusion: if Mr Gove really wants to transfer the things that make private schools so "good" into the state sector, he shouldn't be looking at activities, at punishments, at exams. He should be looking at the children.

Scrambling for Identity in Britain

By ALAN COWELL, May 2, 2014, *The International New York Times*

The Cornish have secured a long-sought status as a national minority of Celts entitled to the same rights of protection under European rules as the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish components of the United Kingdom. Credit Toby Melville/Press Association, via Associated Press

LONDON — In these times of conflict and change, the talk turns often to weighty matters of identity and land, nation and belonging, from Donetsk to Dundee, from Crimea to Catalonia to Cornwall.

Cornwall?

Just last week the 536,000 people of that far-flung county at Britain's south-western tip secured a long-sought status as a national minority of Celts entitled to the same rights of protection under European rules as the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish components of the United Kingdom.

By the most patronizing definition among other Britons, Cornwall is known for beaches, vacations, cream teas, pasties — a kind of pie — and great scenic beauty. In times past, it flourished on tin mining and fishing. Now there are famed restaurants and art galleries.

But, coming months before a referendum in Scotland, far to the north, on independence, the announcement of Cornwall's status deepened more ponderous concerns.

Less than two centuries after Europe devoted its energies to unification in Germany and Italy, and despite — or perhaps because of — the European Union's broadening embrace of sovereign nations, is it true to say that the trend toward oneness is in reverse? As the satirical writer Stuart Heritage remarked in *The Guardian*, "the peripheries have started to scatter."

"Whenever a 'national minority' is given special legal status," the columnist Charles Moore wrote in the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, "a small attack is made on our common citizenship. If you survey the whole scene in Britain today, you will see that, taken together, these small attacks add up

to a big one."

It is that gnawing sense of national uncertainty that runs like an inscrutable current below the debates that has flared and fizzled in the latest episodes.

Is the land, for instance, Christian or not? Prime Minister David Cameron said it was. The archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev. Justin Welby, predictably agreed. Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister and leader of the Liberal Democrat junior coalition partner, avowed that Britain was not "exclusively" Christian, while a former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said the country was in "post-Christian" mode.

At a time when the developments in Ukraine are confronting Europe with one of its biggest challenges since the end of the Cold War and the bloodletting in the Balkans, it is easy to dismiss concerns over Cornwall's place in the scheme of things as, at best, irrelevant, and that may be part of the debate.

Britain, Mr. Moore wrote, may be "approaching a point, like the Holy Roman Empire, when no one knows or cares what it is, and so everyone falls to quarrelling over the spoils."

The question would be less portentous if it did not come just weeks before European elections on May 22. The vote could well illustrate whether Britain's quest for identity will translate into victory for the insurgent United Kingdom Independence Party, or UKIP, which, its title notwithstanding, draws energy from a narrow, anti-immigrant, English euro-skepticism.

UKIP itself is frequently depicted as the product of a broader malaise rooted in rejection of the political elite in a post-ideological, post-imperial era defined more by uncertainties than by the clearer visions of earlier times. But, like other small rightist upstart parties in Europe, its surge to prominence exercises a disproportionate influence on the nation's mainstream politics.

For decades, Britain's national profile has been changing. The country is more diverse, less deferential. Scandals have eroded trust in institutions from the press to the police to the political elite. Even the timing of the announcement of Cornwall's new status was tinged with political cynicism since it was made by a Liberal Democrat minister seeking an electoral advantage for his party in the southwest.

"The Cornish threat to the U.K. appears minuscule," wrote the columnist Brian Groom in *The Financial Times*, "but it illustrates the way people are still groping for identity in a global economy where the British empire is a fading memory."

OPINION

The end of affirmative action

Chicago Tribune, May 01, 2014

Sometimes doctrines just vanish, once they appear as naked as the proverbial emperor in his new clothes.

Something like that seems now to be happening with affirmative action. Despite all the justifications for its continuance, polling shows the public still strongly disagrees with the idea of using racial criteria for admissions and hiring.

Its dwindling supporters typically include those who directly benefit from it, or who are not adversely affected by it. Arguments for the continuance of affirmative action are half-hearted and may explain why some supporters descend into name-calling directed at those who dare question its premises.

The Supreme Court, by a 6-2 majority, recently upheld the decision by Michigan voters that their state would neither favor nor discriminate against applicants to the state's public universities on the basis of race.

Recently, a group of liberal Asian-American state lawmakers in California -- a state that is over 60 percent non-white -- successfully blocked a proposed return to racial considerations in college admissions.

Asian-American students are now disproportionately represented in the flagship University of California system at nearly three times their percentages in the state's general population. If race were reintroduced as a consideration for admission, Asian-Americans would have had their numbers radically reduced in the California system at the expense of other ethnic-minority students, regardless of their impressive ethnically blind grades and test scores.

Expect more such pushback.

In the 1950s, when the country was largely biracial -- about 88 percent so-called white and 10 percent African-American -- and when the civil rights movement sought to erase historical institutionalized bias in the South against blacks, affirmative action seemed to be well intentioned and helpful.

But more than a half-century later, and in a vastly different multiracial America, affirmative action has been re-engineered as something perpetual and haphazardly applicable to a variety of ethnicities.

Class divisions are mostly ignored in admissions and hiring criteria, but in today's diverse society they often pose greater obstacles than race. The children of one-percenters such as Beyoncé and Jay-Z will have doors opened to them that are not open to those in Pennsylvania who, according to President Obama, "cling to guns or religion."

Race itself also is increasingly a problematic concept in 21st-century America. The more we talk about Latinos, blacks, Asians and others as if they were easily distinguishable groups, the less Americans fit into such neat rubrics. In an age of intermarriage, assimilation and global immigration, almost every American family has been redefined by members who are one half this or one quarter that.

Yet if verifiable hyphenation is to be our touchstone to career or academic identity, how do we certify minority status in an increasingly intermarried and multiracial society where there soon will be, as in California, no majority ethnic group? Are we to wear DNA badges to

certify the exact percentages of our racial pedigrees -- to prevent another Elizabeth Warren or Ward Churchill from gaming the system?

Affirmative action once was defended as redress for the odious sins of slavery and Jim Crow segregation. But almost 150 years after the end of slavery, and a half-century after the establishment of civil rights legislation, it is hard to calibrate the interplay between race, relative past oppression and the need for compensatory action.

In a zero-sum, multiracial society, how do we best appreciate past suffering? How do we compare the Jewish-American whose grandparents were wiped out in the Holocaust with the grandchildren of those Japanese who were interned during World War II?

If compensation is not historically based, what then are the criteria that calibrate ongoing victimization? Would a European-Argentinean immigrant with a Hispanic name better qualified for affirmative action than the Bosnian Muslim refugee?

Affirmative action was also predicated on America's history of discrimination. It was never intended to apply to those who had recently arrived in America without proof of past discrimination in this country.

Who among the newly arrived immigrants from South Korea, Oaxaca, the Punjab or Nigeria becomes eligible for affirmative action, and who does not -- and on what reasoning are their claims of hardship more valid than those of poor fourth-generation Americans of any ethnic background?

There is also not always consistency in the application of affirmation action. Late-night talk-show hosts are not proportionally racially diverse. Neither are Silicon Valley CEOs, the directorship of the Sierra Club, or employees of the U.S. Postal Service or the NBA.

The public is confused about why we might consider ethnic criteria in hiring in the college anthropology department, but not so much when selecting transatlantic airline pilots, neurosurgeons or nuclear plant designers.

Should gender considerations be used to encourage more males on campuses? Female bachelor degree recipients now far outnumber their male counterparts and are skewing notions of gender equality.

Given these complexities and contradictions, the public, the Supreme Court and state legislators increasingly believe that a multiracial United States is unique precisely because race and tribe -- unlike most other places in the world -- are incidental rather than essential to our American identities.

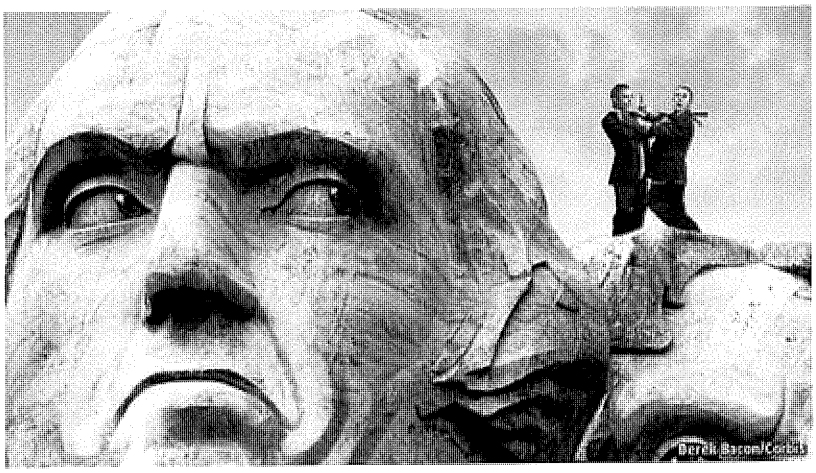
The advice of Martin Luther King -- judge Americans only by the content of their characters -- is not only the simplest but in the end the only moral standard.

(Victor Davis Hanson is a classicist and historian at the Hoover Institution and Stanford University, and the author, most recently, of "The Savior Generals: How Five Great Commanders Saved Wars That Were Lost -- From Ancient Greece to Iraq")

America's government shutdown: no way to run a country

The Land of the Free is starting to look ungovernable. Enough is enough.

The Economist, Oct 5th 2013



AS MIDNIGHT on September 30th approached, everybody on Capitol Hill blamed everybody else for the imminent shutdown of America's government. To a wondering world, the recriminations missed the point. When you are brawling on the edge of a cliff, the big question is not "Who is right?", but "What the hell are you doing on the edge of a cliff?"

The shutdown itself is tiresome but bearable. The security services will remain on duty, pensioners will still receive their cheques and the astronauts on the International Space Station will still be able to breathe. Some 800,000 non-essential staff at federal agencies (out of 2.8m) are being sent home, while another 1.3m are being asked to toil on without pay. Non-urgent tasks will be shelved until a deal is reached and the money starts to flow again. If that happens quickly, the economic damage will be modest: perhaps 0.1-0.2% off the fourth-quarter growth rate for every week the government is closed. The trouble is, the shutdown is a symptom of a deeper problem: the federal lawmaking process is so polarised that it has become paralysed. And if the two parties cannot bridge their differences by around October 17th, disaster looms.

Battles over spending are nothing unusual—indeed, Congress has not passed a proper budget on time since 1997. But this battle represents something new. House Republicans are blocking the budget not because they object to its contents, but because they object to something else entirely: Barack Obama's health-care reform, a big part of which started to operate this week. Their original demand was to strip all funding from Obamacare. In other words, they wanted Democrats to agree to kill their own president's biggest achievement. That was never going to happen. As the deadline for a budget deal approached, Republicans scaled back their demands. Instead of defunding Obamacare, they said that its mandate for individuals to buy health insurance (or pay a fine) should be delayed for a year.

The bane of budgetary brinkmanship

That may sound more reasonable, but it is not so, for two reasons. First, delaying the mandate could wreck the whole reform. Obamacare sits on two pillars. Everyone is obliged to have insurance, and insurance firms are barred from charging people more because they are already ill. If only the second rule applies, the sick will rush to buy insurance but the healthy will wait until they fall ill before doing so. Insurers will have to raise premiums or go bust, making coverage unaffordable without vast subsidies. Obamacare will enter a death spiral and possibly collapse. For some Republicans, that is the goal.

The second reason is that Republicans are setting a precedent which, if followed, would make America ungovernable. Voters have seen fit to give their party control of one arm of government—the House of Representatives—while handing the Democrats the White House and the Senate. If a party with such a modest electoral mandate threatens to shut down government unless the other side repeals a law it does not like, apparently settled legislation will always be vulnerable to repeal by the minority. Washington will be permanently paralysed and America condemned to chronic uncertainty.

It gets worse. Later this month the federal government will reach its legal borrowing limit, known as the "debt ceiling". Unless Congress raises that ceiling, Uncle Sam will soon be unable to pay all his bills. In other words, unless the two parties can work together, America will have to choose which of its obligations not to honour. It could slash spending so deeply that it causes a recession. Or it could default on its debts, which would be even worse, and unimaginably more harmful than a mere government shutdown. No one in Washington is that crazy, surely?

America enjoys the "exorbitant privilege" of printing the world's reserve currency. Its government debt is considered a safe haven, which is why Uncle Sam can borrow so much, so cheaply. America will not lose these advantages overnight. But anything that undermines its creditworthiness—as the farce in Washington surely does—risks causing untold damage in the future. It is not just that America would have to pay more to borrow. The repercussions of an American default would be both global and unpredictable.

It would threaten financial markets. Since American Treasuries are very liquid and safe, they are widely used as collateral. They are more than 30% of the collateral that financial institutions such as investment banks use to borrow in the $2 trillion "tri-party repo" market, a source of overnight funding. A default could trigger demands by lenders for more or different collateral; that might cause a financial heart attack like the one prompted by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. In short, even if Obamacare were as bad as tea-party types say it is, it would still be reckless to use the debt ceiling as a bargaining chip to repeal it, as some Republicans suggest.

What can be done? In the short term, House Republicans need to get their priorities straight. They should pass a clean budget resolution without trying to refight old battles over Obamacare. They should also vote to raise the debt ceiling (or better yet, abolish it). If Obamacare really does turn out to be a flop and Republicans win the presidency and the Senate in 2016, they can repeal it through the normal legislative process.

In the longer term, America needs to tackle polarisation [...]

From the print edition: Leaders

The 60th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education: Remembering When Parents Stood Up for Change

Huffington Post, 05/16/2014

It started as a whisper. But the injustice taking place in 1954 to African-American school children in Topeka, Kansas, didn't stay quiet for long. It took Oliver L. Brown, a welder for the Santa Fe Railroad, to stand up and call out an education system that wasn't integrated and wasn't fair. His request was simple: He wanted his 7-year-old daughter, Linda, to attend a nearby school designated as white-only instead of being bused across town to an all-black Monroe Elementary School. He instead created a movement that reverberated all the way to the Supreme Court and culminated with the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which declared "separate but equal" education unconstitutional.

PTA was there, immediately taking a stand supporting school integration, a move that cost the association some 3 million members. Unfazed, these courageous mothers put pressure on all states to integrate. They called it unification. They were ridiculed for their position, but knew that history would be on their side. A few years later, PTA merged with the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers Association (who had also taken a lead role in supporting *Brown* and others fighting across the country for school equality) to form what we now know as National PTA.

Today, 60 years later, as the first African-American male president of America's oldest and largest child advocacy association, I continue to look back in awe at the example set by PTA then and now.

The anniversary of the *Brown* decision is an important time to reflect on education today and redouble our nation's efforts to ensure equality for all students across the country. While progress has been achieved in the years following the ruling, inequalities continue to exist in American schools. It is critical that parents, teachers, administrators, elected officials and business and community leaders work together to make meaningful changes to ensure that all children have access to a high quality education and that every child has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

That means not diverting public funds currently spent on public K-12 education to private or sectarian schools. At the federal level and in states across the country, legislation is being considered that would do just that -- depriving students of rights and protections they are awarded in public schools. These desperately-needed resources should continue to be invested in public schools that serve all students regardless of economic status, gender, religion, prior academic achievement, disability and behavioral history.

Equality for all students means supporting state initiatives like the Common Core State Standards, which would raise the bar in all schools and will go far in helping every student receive a high quality education that prepares him or her for success upon graduation from high school. The Common Core State Standards increase rigor in every school and provide consistency across the country, no matter a student's zip code or socioeconomic status. With the standards, we have a tremendous opportunity to ensure that a high school senior in Alabama receives the same quality education as a senior in Colorado and that both students graduate prepared for college or the workforce and are able to compete in the global economy.

I have continued National PTA's legacy of speaking up to ensure that all students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that support their success. In the fall of 2013, National PTA launched a campaign, titled Every Child in Focus, to celebrate the achievements and identify the disparities within diverse populations. As the demographics of our nation's schools continue to shift, each month National PTA spotlights the educational challenges surrounding a particular group and provides resources and advocacy tools to help school communities embrace diversity and inclusion as well as understand and address the unique needs of every child. National PTA also works with our country's leaders to help tackle issues facing each highlighted group.

In the 1950s, PTA was at the forefront on questions of nationality, race, culture and group relations in all sections of the country and the adverse impact divisions between groups had on children and youth. Now, the association is standing up for investments in public education and higher, consistent academic standards, and it continues to champion the importance of equal opportunity for all children.

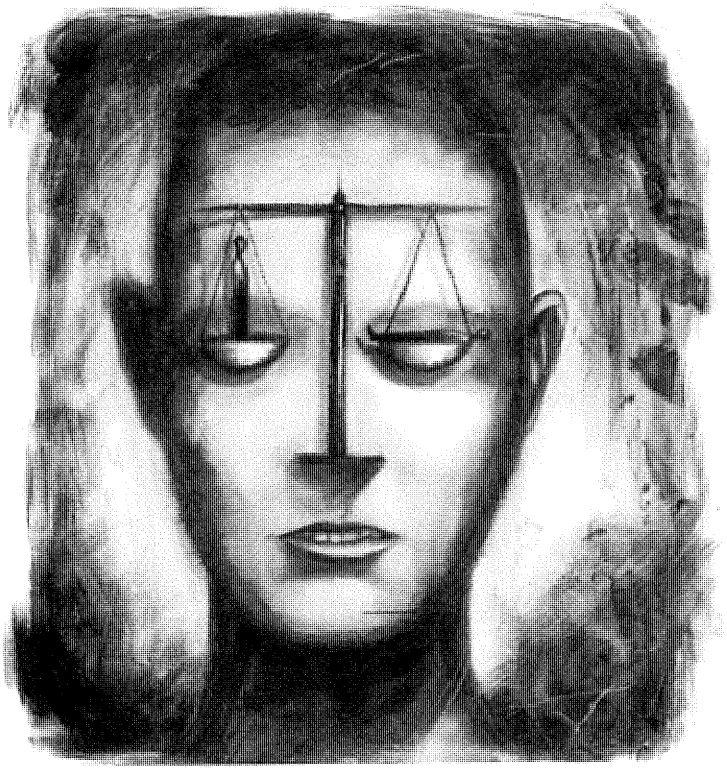
The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was a turning point in the history of our nation. And this turning point was the result of a parent who spoke up for a truly equal chance at quality education for all children, and associations like PTA that supported his fight.

Educational inequalities helped spur the civil rights movement, and it continues to be the civil rights issue of our time. With the 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, it is critical to reaffirm our commitment to speak up and take action to ensure that every student receives a world class education that enables him or her to reach his or her full potential.

Otha Thornton is president of National Parent-Teacher Association, a nonprofit association dedicated to being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities and a strong advocate for public education. In addition to leading National PTA, Thornton is a senior operations analyst with General Dynamics and a retired United States Army Lieutenant Colonel.

Op-Ed

How to kill the death penalty



Jon Krause / Tribune Media Services

Los Angeles Times, May 26, 2014, By Moshik Temkin

Will the death penalty ever be abolished in America? Executions, and the states that carry them out, are in decline. Public support for the death penalty, though still high, has been falling. Many abolitionists are hopeful that the end of the death penalty in the U.S. is nigh. The horribly botched execution of Clayton D. Lockett in Oklahoma in April even brought President Obama into the picture. He called the incident "deeply disturbing" and ordered a policy review.

But the president did not ask the Justice Department to look at the death penalty as a matter of principle. Rather, the department is to conduct a narrower review of how (rather than why) the death penalty is applied in the United States. The president was also careful to add: "There are certain circumstances in which a crime is so terrible that the application of the death penalty may be appropriate — mass killings, the killings of children."

The president's intervention, though cautious, is not insignificant. The last time the death penalty issue played a role in presidential politics was in 1988. Michael Dukakis' unemotional answer to a lurid question as to whether he'd support the death penalty if his wife were raped and murdered helped lead to his loss to George H.W. Bush. Since then, no presidential candidate has dared take an anti-death penalty position.

Some abolitionists believe that Lockett's sordid death will one day be remembered as the death blow — as it were — to capital punishment. I am more skeptical. As long as the debate

is about gruesome methods and individual cases, the death penalty as an institution may rise and decline but I fear it won't be definitively abolished. Activists have powerful arguments when they highlight the inhumane killing techniques, botched executions, the executions of people later believed to have been innocent, the egregious racial biases in the application of the death penalty, and the evidence that executions do not deter violent crime. But those arguments will not lead to abolition.

For that to happen, abolitionists and political leaders will have to speak about the death penalty in the clear language of moral principle. It is much more palatable to be against executions when the executed is innocent or had an unfair trial or is mentally unfit. It is more difficult to oppose the death penalty when the executed has committed heinous crimes and the method of execution seems painless.

Yet opposing the execution of even the cruelest murderers by methods that disturb us the least is the test we must pass if we are ever to become free of this peculiar institution.

The death penalty in America has a convoluted history. Its fortunes have always been linked to the prevailing political winds. Contrary to what many might think, it has not always been a national mainstay. In the 1950s and '60s, capital punishment sunk to unprecedentedly low levels of popularity. Between 1968 and 1976, not a single person was executed in the United States. In 1972, the Supreme Court even placed a moratorium on the death penalty, citing the 8th Amendment's language about "cruel and unusual punishment" and contending that the death penalty, as applied then, did not meet our "evolving standards of decency."

In so deciding, the court was following public opinion. Many abolitionists today cite the decline in public support for executions as grounds for their increased optimism that the court will again declare the death penalty unconstitutional. But the Constitution is an endlessly debated document, and public opinion is fickle. In 1976, after a rise in support for executions, the high court brought the death penalty back. In Utah in 1977, Gary Gilmore was the first American executed in a decade. In the subsequent 30 years, executions have made a stunning comeback in American life.

During this same period, the death penalty was abolished in many nations. One of the last Western countries to do so was France, in 1981. In France, as in the U.S. today, the death penalty enjoyed general support. What brought about the end of the death penalty in France was a top-down approach. Then-President Francois Mitterrand made abolition of capital punishment one of his priorities and persuaded legislators to pass a law to that effect. Such an approach seems almost inconceivable in today's America, yet it may be the only way for abolition to triumph here.

The issue in France, and later in the European Union, was framed as a moral concern for society as a whole. The death penalty was considered incompatible with the basic principles of human rights.

Oddly, in the United States, despite the prevalence of human rights talk and a heightened awareness of human rights abuses committed abroad, the death penalty has not been seen as a human rights issue. Rather, it has been treated primarily as a matter for the states, with the goal, for the most part, to reform the death penalty rather than abolish it. [...]

Moshik Temkin is a historian and an associate professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Bezos and the *Washington Post*: A Skeptical View

The New Yorker, August 6, 2013, by *John Cassidy*

The first and only time I've seen Jeff Bezos up close was in 2004, at the White House Correspondents' dinner. If I remember correctly, and I think I do, he was being led into the *Vanity Fair*-Bloomberg after-party by Roxanne Roberts, a longtime writer for the Washington *Post's* Style section. A skinny, balding, fidgety fellow, he seemed a bit out of place in a black tie and a tux, smiling awkwardly as he shook hands and chatted with the capital's power brokers and visiting celebrities.

Now, as the new owner of the *Post*, as well as the chief executive of Amazon, Bezos is Roberts's boss and a formidable power broker in his own right. Many journalists currently or formerly associated with the *Post* are saying nice things about him. Appearing on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on Tuesday, Bob Woodward said, "This isn't Rupert Murdoch buying the *Wall Street Journal*, this is somebody who believes in the values that the *Post* has been prominent in practicing, and so I don't see any downside." In a statement, Carl Bernstein, Woodward's former partner, described Bezos as "exactly the kind of inventive and innovative choice needed to bring about a recommitment to great journalism on the scale many of us have been hoping for." Fred Hiatt, the paper's editorial-page editor, said, "We've all been looking for a way to marry quality journalism with commercial success in the digital era, and it's hard to think of anyone better positioned to figure that out than Jeff Bezos." Ezra Klein, a columnist and the editor of Wonkblog, wrote, "For now, I'm hopeful."

It's all very well to be optimistic and hopeful that Bezos's purchase of the *Post* is an essentially philanthropic project, or even a vanity one, and that, after years of cuts at the paper, he will invest the resources needed to restore it to its erstwhile glory. Along with James Fallows, who wrote about the purchase yesterday at the *Atlantic*, I would like to think that this marks "the beginning of a phase in which this Gilded Age's major beneficiaries re-invest in the infrastructure of our public intelligence." But am I convinced that that's what's happening? I am not.

If Bezos's motives are essentially philanthropic, why isn't he purchasing the paper through his family foundation, which could probably afford it, especially if he kicked it some more of his estimated twenty-five billion dollars? At the moment, the family foundation, which is run by Bezos's parents, Jackie and Mike, focusses on preschool and K-12 education. But there's nothing to stop it from adding saving newspapers that educate the public to its list of aims. For years now, some knowledgeable media people have thought that the only long-term solution for America's serious newspapers, which do costly, serious journalism, is to have their ultimate owners be charitable trusts, which is how the *Guardian* was structured until recently.

Evidently, Bezos isn't taking this route, which leaves two possibilities, not mutually exclusive. The first is he intends to return the *Post* to its former role as a profitable business, a project with which I wish him good luck. It is surely fanciful to suggest that Bezos, simply because of his experience at Amazon, will immediately come up with a fresh digital strategy to save the *Post*. If such a wheeze were readily available, somebody at a newspaper company would have thought of it. To be sure, the *Post*, like most newspapers, was slow to realize the full scale of the threat that it faced from online competitors. In recent years, though, it has invested in the Web, developing some popular and high-quality online products, such as Wonkblog and The Fix. But, so far, this push hasn't much helped the paper's bottom line. In the first half of this year, the *Post* lost about fifty million dollars, after accounting for pension costs.

The second possibility is that Bezos is buying the *Post* for political reasons, a theory for which I have no evidence, except that it is neither outlandish nor ahistorical. It is a reason that people buy newspapers. On a personal level, Bezos is a socially progressive libertarian—a fairly common crossbreed in Silicon Valley and on Wall Street, the two arenas where he has spent his business career. Last year, he and his wife pledged $2.5 million to support gay marriage in a Washington State referendum, and the measure passed handily. Over the years, he has contributed modestly to candidates of both major parties, and, as David Remnick notes, to the nonprofit 501(c)(3) entity that owns the libertarian magazine *Reason*.

Is Bezos is buying the *Post* to push a liberal / libertarian agenda—one of the few things in the world that could simultaneously delight Nancy Pelosi and Rand Paul? Somehow, I doubt it. A bit of a recluse, he doesn't strike me as a political crusader or as someone who wants to be more of a public figure than he already is. If you own a big newspaper, you can't avoid getting a good deal of attention. If you own a big newspaper and you also have a clear political agenda—like Hearst or Murdoch—you quickly become a lightning rod, and all that furor can cause problems for your other businesses.

I'm pretty sure that's the last thing Bezos would want. Having spent the past twenty years building Amazon into an online behemoth, he wouldn't do anything that could harm it. Indeed, I have a nagging, if possibly unfounded, suspicion that his primary motivation in buying the *Post* is to protect Amazon's interests in the political battle, which is sure to come, over the company's monopolistic tendencies. [...]

Detroit Ethnic Media Tell Different Story -- Immigrants Key to Revival

New America Media, News Feature from Ethnic Media Network, by Anthony Advincula, August 21, 2013

NEW YORK -- Since Detroit filed for the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history last month, ethnic media publishers and editors have found a common thread among their communities: despite the dire economic challenges, ethnic communities remain resilient and hopeful, looking for opportunities amid the turmoil.

Detroit's bankruptcy has brought huge disruptions – a spike in unemployment in a city that already has a jobless rate that is more than double the national average of 7.6 percent; plummeting property values; cutbacks in city services such as dispatch system for fire, police and ambulance; and an uncertain business climate that could hamper future investments.

But, despite the woes, ethnic media journalists and publishers said that many immigrants see opportunities in the city, and that they are pursuing their American Dream, while helping to revitalize the city.

"Everyone could feel the pain," said Tack Yong Kim, publisher and executive editor of the Michigan Korean Weekly. "And yet if we flip the coin, we see an opportunity for investments."

Kim's newspaper has reported on the impact of bankruptcy on small- to medium-size Korean businesses in Detroit, looking at how they have found creative ways to survive. The paper, for example, ran a story on Korean-owned wig and beauty shops expanding their clientele to other ethnic groups, as African Americans, who make up their customer base, are leaving the city.

Most Korean business owners — about 300 of them in the Detroit metropolitan area — would like to stay and turn the crisis into new ventures, Kim said.

"They live here; they are not going anywhere," he added. "There are many abandoned areas, but that opens the door to create a business zone, with cheap land and labor. We definitely have room for improvement."

There are about 40,000 Koreans living in metro Detroit. In Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties alone, the combined Asian American population spiked about 37 percent, from 100,792 to 138,075 between 2000 and 2010, according to the latest U.S. Census.

Elias Gutierrez, president and editor of *Latino Press*, a bilingual weekly, believes that while many residents already left Detroit, Latino immigrants continue to come, replenishing the lost population.

Gutierrez said that Latinos, many of whom work in surrounding plants and factories, are part of "the solution" to the future of Detroit. And, with the growing Latino population, he noted, his community has a significant voting bloc to potentially change Detroit's political landscape.

While Detroit's population has gone down by about 26 percent, the Latino population, particularly in the southeast side of the city, known as the "Mexicantown," continues to rise, along with Latino-owned businesses.

Over the last two decades, according to census data, Detroit's Latino population nearly doubled to 50,000 in 2010. Latinos in the city are also fairly young, with a median age of 24. According to an *Associated Press* report, more than $200 million in the past 15 years has been invested in "Mexicantown," a few miles from downtown Detroit. This investment has attracted more restaurants, retail stores, and new residential buildings, including an $11 million condominium development.

Gutierrez regretted that Latinos, despite their growing population, still do not have a political voice in the city. "We don't even have a Hispanic representative in the council, and they [officials] don't even [see] that as an option."

He said Latinos in Detroit opposed the decision by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr to file for bankruptcy. The decision to file for bankruptcy, Gutierrez said, may have been different if the city had a Latino representative.

A boon in a time of bankruptcy

In the Arab-American community, some view the city's bankruptcy filing as the right time to acquire properties, as real estate prices have plummeted in recent years.

"I have seen Arab immigrants buying houses," said Rasheed Alnozili, publisher of the monthly *Yemeni American News*. "You can get a house for $10,000. I have friends and relatives who even bought four houses and lots."

Arab Americans make up at least 200,000 of metro Detroit's population, and produces almost $8 billion in salaries and earnings, according to a 2007 Wayne State University study.

Over the last decade, an influx of Arab immigrants into Detroit has boosted businesses such as gas stations, liquor stores, apparel and convenience shops. A 2010 report of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce found that more than 15,000 businesses in metro Detroit are owned by Arab Americans.

"Those kind of investments that immigrants are doing here would help Detroit's fast recovery," Alnozili added. "The abandoned lots could be turned into a more decent housing or commercial space."

Gina Steward, publisher and editor of *the Telegram*, a weekly publication that serves the African American community, said that in the black community, many are coming back to Detroit.

"Although bankruptcy seems so final, there are training opportunities out there, and African Americans are taking advantage of them," said Steward. "They are now taking classes to improve their chance of getting a job."

The Telegram has been covering "the reactions and thoughts in the black community and what can be done" in the time of bankruptcy. Many African Americans, according to Steward, do not agree that the last resort for the city was to file for Chapter 9.

"A lot [of people] in the [African American] community are not working because they just don't have the skill set that is required. Now they are taking classes," Steward said. "I just hope that companies here would stop bringing their own workers with them when they set up their business and would start offering it to local residents."

Opinion

A Selfie-Taking, Hashtagging Teenage Administration

The Obama crowd too often responds to critics and to world affairs like self-absorbed adolescents.

Wall Street Journal, May 12, 2014, by Eliot A. Cohen

As American foreign policy continues its long string of failures—not a series of singles and doubles, as President Obama asserted in a recent news conference, but rather season upon season of fouls and strikes—the question becomes: Why?

Why does *the Economist* magazine put a tethered eagle on its cover, with the plaintive question, "What would America fight for?" Why do *Washington Post* columnists sympathetic to the administration write pieces like one last week headlined, "Obama tends to create his own foreign policy headaches"?

The administration would respond with complaints, some legitimate, about the difficulties of an intractable world. Then there are claims, more difficult to support, of steadily accumulating of minor successes; and whinges about the legacy of the Bush administration, gone but never forgotten in the collective memory of the National Security Council staff.

More dispassionate observers might pick out misjudgments about opportunities (the bewitching chimera of an Israeli-Palestinian peace, or the risible Russian reset), excessively hopeful misunderstandings of threats (al Qaeda, we were once told, is on the verge of strategic defeat), and a constipated decision-making apparatus centered in a White House often at war with the State and Defense departments.

There is a further explanation. Clues may be found in the president's selfie with the attractive Danish prime minister at the memorial service for Nelson Mandela in December; in State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki in March cheerily holding up a sign with the Twitter hashtag #UnitedForUkraine while giving a thumbs up; or Michelle Obama looking glum last week, holding up another Twitter sign: #BringBackOurGirls. It can be found in the president's petulance in recently saying that if you do not support his (in)action in Ukraine you must want to go to war with Russia—when there are plenty of potentially effective steps available that stop well short of violence. It can be heard in the former NSC spokesman, Thomas Vietor, responding on May 1 to a question on Fox News about the deaths of an American ambassador and three other Americans with the line, "Dude, this was like two years ago."

Often, members of the Obama administration speak and, worse, think and act, like a bunch of teenagers. When officials roll their eyes at Vladimir Putin's seizure of Crimea with the line that this is "19th-century behavior," the tone is not that different from a disdainful remark about a hairstyle being "so 1980s." When administration members find themselves judged not on utopian aspirations or the purity of their motives—from offering "hope and change" to stopping global warming—but on their actual accomplishments, they turn sulky. As teenagers will, they throw a few taunts (the president last month said the GOP was offering economic policies that amount to a "stinkburger" or a "meanwich") and stomp off, refusing to exchange a civil word with those of opposing views.

In a searing memoir published in January, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates describes with disdain the trash talk about the Bush administration that characterized meetings in the Obama White House. Like self-obsessed teenagers, the staffers and their superiors seemed to forget that there were other people in the room who might take offense, or merely see the world differently. Teenagers expect to be judged by intentions and promise instead of by

accomplishment, and their style can be encouraged by irresponsible adults (see: the Nobel Prize committee) who give awards for perkiness and promise rather than achievement.

If the United States today looks weak, hesitant and in retreat, it is in part because its leaders and their staff do not carry themselves like adults. They may be charming, bright and attractive; they may have the best of intentions; but they do not look serious. They act as though Twitter and clenched teeth or a pout could stop invasions or rescue kidnapped children in Nigeria. They do not sound as if, when saying that some outrage is "unacceptable" or that a dictator "must go," that they represent a government capable of doing something substantial—and, if necessary, violent—if its expectations are not met. And when reality, as it so often does, gets in the way—when, for example, the Syrian regime begins dousing its opponents with chlorine gas, as it has in recent weeks, despite solemn deals and red lines—the administration ignores it, hoping, as teenagers often do, that if they do not acknowledge a screw-up no one else will notice.

The Obama administration is not alone. The teenage temperament infects our politics on both sides of the aisle, not to mention our great universities and leading corporations. The old, adult virtues—gravitas, sobriety, perseverance and constancy—are the virtues that enabled America to stabilize a shattered world in the 1940s, preserve a perilous order despite the Cold War and navigate the conclusion of that conflict. These and other stoic qualities are worth rediscovering, because their dearth among our leaders is leading them, and us and large parts of the globe, into real danger.

Mr. Cohen was counselor of the State Department from 2007-08.

No militia means more intrusive law enforcement: Column

USA Today, Glenn Harlan Reynolds, March 9, 2014

Our Framers didn't envision a free state with the current level of government control.

The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution reads, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

For a while, some argued that the so-called "prefatory clause" — "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State" — somehow limited the "right of the people" to something having to do with a militia. In its recent opinions of *District of Columbia v. Heller* and *McDonald v. Chicago*, the Supreme Court has made clear that the Second Amendment does recognize a right of individuals to own guns, and that that right is in no way dependent upon membership in a militia. That seems to me to be entirely correct.

But there is still that language. If a well-regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state, then where is ours? Because if a well-regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state, it follows that a state lacking such a militia is either insecure, or unfree, or possibly both.

In the time of the Framers, the militia was an armed body consisting of essentially the entire military-age male citizenry. Professional police not having been invented, the militia was the primary tool for enforcing the law in circumstances that went beyond the reach of the town constable, and it was also the primary source of defense against invasions and insurrection.

Calling out the militia thus meant calling out ordinary citizens, trained in military tactics (that's the "well-regulated" part), bearing their own arms. The Framers — who had a deep and abiding fear of professional standing armies because of abuses by the British Crown — thought this safer. A professional standing army could turn on the people, placing its loyalty with its paymasters rather than with those it was supposed to protect. The militia, on the other hand, couldn't betray the people because it *was* the people.

Even short of revolutions and coups, the militia had a different character in ordinary law enforcement than professionals possess. If called upon to enforce an unpopular law, or to enforce the law in an oppressive or unpopular way, the militia could drag its feet and fail to perform. (In this sense, the militia was like a jury, which is free to acquit even a guilty defendant if it thinks conviction would be unjust. In fact, Yale Law Professor Akhil Amar has likened the militia to jurors with guns because, like the jury, it was an institution made up of the people, through which the government must act, and one not susceptible to the kinds of corruption besetting professional institutions).

As Amar writes:

"Like the militia, the jury was a local body countering imperial power — summoned by the government but standing outside it, representing the people, collectively. Like jury service, militia participation was both a right and a duty of qualified voters who were regularly summoned to discharge their public obligations. Like the jury, the militia was composed of amateurs arrayed against, and designed to check, permanent and professional government officials (judges and prosecutors, in the case of the jury; a standing army in the case of the militia). Like the jury, the militia embodied collective political action rather than private pursuits".

But although the militia survives in vestigial form in the statute books, as a functional institution, it no longer exists. For law enforcement, the militia has been replaced by professional police, with SWAT teams, armored vehicles and Nomex coveralls; for military purposes, the militia has been replaced by the National Guard, which despite a thin patina of state control is fundamentally a federal military force.

This makes life easier for the federal government. In 1912, when the federal government tried to send militia units into Mexico, the militias balked, noting that the Constitution allowed them to be called out only to repel invasion, suppress insurrection, or enforce the law — not to invade other countries. Surprisingly, perhaps, Attorney General George Wickersham agreed, leading to a change in the law that produced the modern-day National Guard, a force that is not so limited. Since then, America has been far more active abroad.

But this departure from the system the Framers set up has encouraged more intrusive law enforcement at home, and more military action abroad. So I'll ask you: If a well-regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state, then are we insecure? Or unfree? Or both?

Glenn Harlan Reynolds, a University of Tennessee law professor, is the author of The New School: How the Information Age Will Save American Education from Itself.

To Fight Obesity, a Carrot, and a Stick

New York Times, November 16, 2013, *By TINA ROSENBERG*

Childhood obesity, at long last, may have peaked — even among the poor, where the problem is most prevalent. Between 2008 and 2011, according to a study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 19 states and territories saw a small but significant drop in obesity rates among low-income preschoolers.

This is a problem that many people assumed would only get worse. So how has this small bit of success been achieved?

One factor is certainly the massive behavior-change campaign being waged by everyone from Michelle Obama to the cooking teachers now training kindergarteners to cut up pears with plastic knives. Official America is now bribing, cheering, badgering and extorting us to eat fruit and vegetables, exercise, drink water instead of soda and cut down on time spent in front of a screen.

Cities are doing an array of creative things to bring healthier food to poor neighborhoods. In Philadelphia, for example, the nonprofit The Food Trust began the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, which provides bodegas that commit to selling fresh food with money for refrigeration and training on selling perishable items. So far 600 stores have participated. The Food Trust's Fresh Food Financing Initiative has brought 88 supermarkets and other produce outlets into Philadelphia neighborhoods that had none – the federal government is now copying the program. In many cities the streets of low-income neighborhoods are dotted with food carts selling red peppers for a quarter and oranges at three for a dollar.

These changes help. But there may be a more direct reason for the progress against child obesity.

The C.D.C. study focused on preschool-age children, from 2 to 4 years old, most of them enrolled in the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, known as WIC. WIC provides vouchers to pregnant and nursing women, and mothers of children under 5 to buy specific foods.

In 2009, WIC changed its rules. There are new vouchers specifically for produce, for example. Milk must be reduced-fat, and bread and rice must be whole-grain. And stores participating in WIC must carry these items. You can see that change in corner stores and bodegas across the country, including, for example, Luciano Espinal's Deli Grocery, on Lehigh Avenue in North Philadelphia.

Mr. Espinal's store has two aisles and a deli counter in the back. There are similar stores all over the neighborhood, their shelves filled with snack cakes, chips, soda, white bread. The only fresh foods are the iceberg lettuce and tomatoes needed by the deli counter, and maybe potatoes and onions.

But Mr. Espinal's store accepts WIC vouchers. So he carries things non-WIC stores do not: apples, oranges, green peppers and bananas. He also carries the WIC-required whole-grain bread, brown rice and 2 percent milk.

Of course, people could buy more of the unhealthy stuff with their own money. But the evidence says they don't. Yale's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity looked at purchases by WIC participants in Massachusetts and Connecticut, including what they bought

with their own cash. After the WIC changes, participants bought significantly more whole-grain bread and brown rice and reduced-fat milk, and far less white bread, whole milk, cheese and juice.

Attitudes are changing. Access to healthy food is increasing. But there's another change that's necessary, and it's probably the most important one. "Physical proximity is not the primary variable," said Amy Hillier, a professor of design at the University of Pennsylvania who studies food environments. That's cost. On a limited budget, people buy cheap and unhealthy food. Community groups and cities can't solve that problem — not for more than a handful of people at a time, anyway.

But the federal government can.

The success of the WIC reforms proves it. The program matters: half of all infants and a quarter of all children under 5 in the United States will be on it at some point. But with nine million participants, it is dwarfed by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP — commonly known as food stamps — which reaches more than 47 million people. Food stamps keep people from starving. But you cannot buy fresh produce on $1.40 per meal. (Let's contemplate the extra medical bills we'll be paying because of Congress's decision to let the Recovery Act's increases in food-stamps benefits expire.) SNAP needs some help.

One strategy is to provide financial incentives to buy fruits and vegetables. This is happening in many farmers' markets; Philly Food Bucks, for example, gives people a $2 coupon for every $5 in food stamps they spend on produce at participating markets. Food stamps sales at these markets have increased by nearly 400 percent. In some states, eligible produce must be locally grown, a change farmers appreciate.

The idea is spreading to supermarkets. This summer the Agriculture Department released results of its Healthy Incentives Pilot in Hampden County, Mass. Supermarket shoppers earned 30 cents for each food stamp dollar they spent on fruit and vegetables. Those in the program bought 25 percent more produce than the control group, at a cost of 15 cents per day.

These programs are lovely, but they reach relatively few people, and they are expensive. Another strategy is harsher: Copy WIC and limit the foods that food stamps can buy. Such a change could cover the whole country in one administrative stroke. And, of course, it is virtually free. With even more cuts in food stamps looming in the farm bill, that's important. [...]

Opinions

Social immobility erodes the American dream

Washington Post, August 15, 2013, By Fareed Zakaria

If there's one issue on which both the left and right agree, it is the crisis of declining mobility. The American dream at its core is that a person, no matter his or her background, can make it here. A few weeks ago, four economists at Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley released a path-breaking study of mobility within the United States. And last week the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* published a series of essays tackling the question from an international standpoint. The research is careful and nuanced, yet it does point in one clear direction. The question is, will Washington follow it?

For more than a decade, it has been documented that Northern European countries do better at moving poor people up the ladder than the United States does. Some have dismissed these findings, pointing out that the United States cannot be compared with places such as Denmark, an ethnically homogeneous country of 5.5 million people. But Miles Corak of the University of Ottawa points out in his contribution to the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* that Canada is a very useful point of comparison, being much like the United States. (The percentage of foreign-born Canadians is actually higher than the percentage of foreign-born Americans, for example.) And recent research finds that people in Canada and Australia have *twice* the economic mobility of Americans. (The British are about the same as Americans but much worse than Canadians and Australians).

What's intriguing is that many of the factors that seem to explain the variation across countries also help explain the variation across the United States. The most important correlation in the Harvard-Berkeley study appears to be social capital. Cities with strong families, civic support groups and a community-service orientation do well on social and economic mobility. That's why Salt Lake City — dominated by Mormons — has mobility levels that compare with Denmark's. This would also explain why America in general fares badly; the United States has many more broken families, single parents and dysfunctional domestic arrangements than do Canada and Europe.

The other notable feature in the Harvard-Berkeley study is the design of cities. Places that are segregated — where the poor live far from the middle class — do much worse than those that are more mixed. This probably has to do with geography; it's hard to get to jobs when they are far away. It also might mean that people in poor neighborhoods end up in a self-reinforcing cycle of under-funded schools, high crime and social breakdown. A related finding is that places with high African American populations show low mobility for the white population living there as well. The economist Jeffrey Sachs suggested to me that this could be explained by the fact that in areas where there are substantial minority populations, people often resist making large public investments, which might turn out to hurt everyone who lives in the area.

In any event, these factors, while important, might be difficult to change in any reasonable period of time. Social capital cannot be built in five years. Cities cannot be quickly redesigned to be integrated or create greater density. That leaves the last large factor in explaining the low mobility: public policy. And here, Corak explains, the United States is the great outlier. Simply put, the United States spends much less on the education and well-being of poor people, especially poor children, than any other rich country — and that retards their chances of escaping poverty.

A recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development points out that the United States is one of only three rich countries that spends less on disadvantaged students than on other students — largely because education funding for elementary and secondary schools in the United States is tied to local property taxes. By definition, poor neighborhoods end up with badly funded schools. In general, the United States spends lots of money on education, but most of it is on college education or is otherwise directed toward those already advantaged in various ways.

There is debate about the effectiveness of certain early education programs such as Head Start. It may be that providing help to "at-risk families" — treating drug-addicted mothers for example — has a bigger impact on children than a specific enrichment program. Though, clearly, most of us believe that these enrichment programs work. Corak points out that the well-off in the United States spend nearly $9,000 a year on books, computers, child care and summer camps — nearly seven times what families in the bottom fifth of earners spend. In fact, this is part of what makes mobility low.

In any event, what's apparent is that countries — and most parts of the United States — that invest heavily in all their children's health care, nutrition and education end up with a much stronger ladder of opportunity and access. And that's something we can change. So if we want to restore the American dream, we now have the beginnings of a path forward.

Is Controversial Christian Historian David Barton Mulling a Senate Bid?

Mother Jones, Mon Nov. 4, 2013, By Mariah Blake

In one of the starkest signs yet of the tea party's take-no-prisoners war on the Republican establishment, conservative activists are pressing controversial historian David Barton to challenge the Senate's No. 2 Republican, John Cornyn (R-Texas). Glenn Beck touted Barton's would-be candidacy and taunted Cornryn on his show last Thursday, saying, "You should quiver in your boots and hide, John."

One of Barton's closest advisors, Rick Green, recently told the *National Review Online* that more than 1,000 Republican and tea party leaders had asked the historian to enter the race. Green added that Barton would seriously consider running "if the people of Texas speak loud enough," and urged backers to show their support by liking the new "Draft David Barton for Senate" Facebook page. JoAnn Fleming, the executive director of Grassroots America We The People, a Texas tea party group, also weighed in, telling NRO that tea party activists were planning a conference call with Barton in the next week to discuss his possible candidacy. "We need a Constitutional conservative in that seat," she said. "We believe that Senator Cornyn has become part of the establishment and we don't believe that his priorities reflect the priorities of the people of Texas any longer."

Cornyn, a third-term Congressman, has solid conservative credentials; in 2012, the *National Journal* named him the second most conservative US Senator. But he has rankled tea party activists by refusing to back some of the economic brinksmanship advocated by Texas' junior senator Ted Cruz during the federal shutdown and debt-ceiling negotiations.

Many tea partiers believe Cornyn is ripe for a primary challenge. And Barton, the former vice chair of the Texas Republican Party, has some advantages over other insurgent candidates, including name recognition and deep political ties. As Michelle Goldberg explained on the *Daily Beast* last year:

"It's hard to overstate how important Barton has been in shaping the worldview of the Christian right, and of populist conservatives more generally. A self-taught historian with a degree in religious education from Oral Roberts University, he runs a Texas-based organization called WallBuilders, which specializes in books and videos meant to show that the founding fathers were overwhelmingly "orthodox, evangelical" believers who intended for the United States to be a Christian nation. Newt Gingrich has called his work "wonderful" and "most useful." George W. Bush's campaign hired him to do clergy outreach in 2004. In 2010, Glenn Beck called him called him "the most important man in America right now.""

Barton, who believes America should be governed by Biblical law, also helped write the 2008 Republican Party platform. And he has advised numerous political candidates, including former Arkansas governor and presidential contender Mike Huckabee, who has said that all Americans should be "forced at gunpoint" to "listen to every David Barton message."

But Barton's ideas wouldn't necessarily fare well on the campaign trail. This, after all, is a man who argues that Jesus would oppose the minimum wage and that the affair between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings was a liberal plot. Secular critics have long argued that Barton's scholarship is sloppy and littered with errors. The reaction to his 2012 book, *The Jefferson Lies,* which portrays Jefferson as a devout Christian who opposed church-state separation, was particularly scathing. The History News Network (a project of George Mason University) voted it the "Least Credible History Book in Print." Following its release, Barton also came under withering attack from Christian scholars; professors Michael Coulter and Warren Throckmorton of Pennsylvania's Grove City College, a mostly conservative

Christian school, wrote an entire book debunking Barton's claims. Barton's Christian publisher eventually dropped *The Jefferson Lies* entirely, saying it had "lost confidence in the book's details."

In light of these facts, some conservatives are skittish about the prospect of a Barton Senate run. "I heartily agree that Texas Sen. John Cornyn needs to be primaried," conservative radio host Janet Mefferd wrote on Facebook. "But not by David Barton. He has way too much baggage on his 'historian' credentials." Barton's critics, meanwhile, see his possible candidacy as an opportunity to expose his ideas to even greater scrutiny. "If he runs, I hope the press will shine a bright light on his claims about history and government," Throckmorton told *Mother Jones*.

Still, Barton's standing among supporters is as strong as ever. Today, he's coaching state lawmakers across the county on fighting the Common Core, a set of uniform academic standards, which are being rolled out in public schools nationwide. Over the summer, he headlined a conference for conservative pastors with Sens. Ted Cruz and Rand Paul (R-Ky). "I'm not in a position to opine on academic disputes between historians, but I can tell you that David Barton is a good man, a courageous leader and a friend," Cruz told *Politico* in September. "David's historical research has helped millions rediscover the founding principles of our nation and the incredible sacrifices that men and women of faith made to bequeath to us the freest and most prosperous nation in the world."

Never mind that many of those principles aren't rooted in fact.

Killing Jesus: *A History* by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard – Review

The Guardian, Wednesday 18 December 2013, by Selina O'Grady

Everyone creates God in their own image, so it's not surprising that Fox television's aggressively conservative down-home-let's-hear-it-for-the-ordinary-guy talk show host should have created a Tea Party son of God. Jesus, the little guy, is an enemy of the big corrupt tax-oppressing Roman empire, which is itself just a version of Washington, only even more venal and sexually depraved. This Jesus is a tax-liberating rebel who incurs the wrath of the Jewish and Roman powers by threatening their joint fleecing of the people. As a member of the populist right, he is not, of course, in favour of redistribution: Bill O'Reilly's *Jesus* does not tell the rich to give away their money to the poor.

To give them their due, O'Reilly and his co-author Martin Dugard, who one presumes did most of the research, are right that the taxation imposed by the Romans was indeed a major cause of resentment and rebellion across the empire. But the Jews had a uniquely tense relationship with Rome – not because of taxation but because of their monotheistic religion.

The authors acknowledge that Jesus was not put to death by the Romans because of his economic protests (though they do make him overturn the moneylenders' tables at the temple not once but twice). But they underplay the real reason: Jesus's name had become fatally associated with that of the Messiah, the Christ, a longed-for figure who had become increasingly politicised: he would be not just the anointed king but the ruler who would liberate the Jews from the Romans before ushering in God's rule. As far as the Romans were concerned, Jesus, one of many would-be Messiahs at the time, was therefore a seditious rebel whose crime was punishable by death.

It's easy to be snooty about this kind of bodice-ripping treatment of history, where a preoccupied Herod sighs and looks anxiously out of the window, where Mary and Joseph "gasp in shock" to see their young son holding his own among the temple elders, the son whose "destiny must be fulfilled, even if his worried parents have no idea how horrific that destiny might be" (actually, as the authors themselves make clear, crucifixion was the usual fate of traitors and criminals across the Roman empire). I stopped counting the number of chapters ending with the cliffhanger "the child with [xx] years to live is being hunted/is missing … Jesus of Nazareth has one year to live" – or perhaps my favourite: "For now he is a free man." New line: "For now" – the two words left dangling ominously on the page.

As a revved-up journalese version of the gospels, plumped up with historical detail – which though not always accurate gives the reader a good sense of what life was like at the end of the first century BC; how soldiers were trained, how taxation worked, what the temple looked like and, of course, how soldiers crucified a man – *Killing Jesus* is fine. Indeed the authors used the same stylistic formula for their two previous books *Killing Kennedy* and *Killing Lincoln*. Both were bestsellers, and *Killing Jesus* is already number three on the *New York Times* bestsellers list. Why? Because they are fabulously easy to read: because there are good guys and bad guys, with very little in between; because there is lots of journalistically juicy, salacious gossip; and because, as with some historical fiction, you learn quite a bit about a particular era without having to think too much.

But historical detail does not in itself make a history – that requires analysis. Despite the subtitle, *Killing Jesus* is not "A History". It is a breathy retelling of the gospel stories by two conservative Catholics, one of whom, O'Reilly, believes that he was inspired to write the book by the Holy Ghost. It might be unfair to expect too much in the way of nuance or new

material from *Killing Jesus*, but since it calls itself a history, one does expect accuracy. So when the authors claim that "the incredible story behind the lethal struggle between good and evil has never been told" – cue drumroll – "until now", the reader is entitled to feel a little misled.

Although the authors proclaim in their introduction that they have manfully succeeded in separating fact from legend and will alert the reader if the evidence is not set in stone, they signally fail to do so. *Killing Jesus* relies almost exclusively on the gospels, discounting two centuries of ongoing scholarly scepticism about their historical accuracy with a breezy footnote that there is "growing acceptance of their overall historicity".

Who are the goodies and baddies? The Romans are bad, corrupt and "unrelentingly cruel" – especially in their imposition of taxes, which in the eyes of our authors is a particularly nasty vice. The Jewish elite is bad, because it is hand in glove with the Romans in brutalising and fleecing the "good people of Galilee". Ordinary Jews are good. But the Pharisees are very bad. They are arrogant, self-righteous, self-interested and power-hungry.

O'Reilly and Dugard have swallowed hook, line and sinker the gospel writers' antipathy to the Pharisees. They seem unaware that in Jesus's time the Pharisees were in fact a newish, radicalising group, trying to wrest control of the Jewish religion from the stranglehold of the Sadducees, the aristocratic priestly caste who O'Reilly and Dugard unaccountably characterise as liberals. [...]