Bogus and misdirected, yes. But the Tea Party has a lot to teach the left

The radical right has an authenticity the left lacks – it is angry and ready to translate that anger into action. We talk, they act

The Guardian, Monday 14 June 2010, George Monbiot

In the Netherlands a movement based on paranoia and the fleecing of the poor looks set to join the government. In the United States one of the biggest exercises in false consciousness the world has ever seen – people gathering in their millions to lobby unwittingly for a smaller share of the nation's wealth – has become the playmaker in Republican primaries. The radical right is seizing its chance. But where is the radical left? Both the Freedom party in the Netherlands and the Tea Party movement in the US base their political programmes on misinformation and denial. But as political forces they are devastatingly effective. The contrast to the leftwing meetings I've attended over the past two years couldn't be starker. They are cerebral, cogent, realistic – and little of substance has emerged from them. The rightwing movements thrive on their contradictions, the leftwing movements drown in them. Tea Party members who proclaim their rugged individualism will follow a bucket on a broomstick if it has the right label, and engage in the herd behaviour they claim to deplore. The left, by contrast, talks of collective action but indulges instead in possessive individualism. Instead of coming together to fight common causes, leftwing meetings today consist of dozens of people promoting their own ideas, and proposing that everyone else should adopt them. It would be wrong to characterise the Tea Party movement as being mostly working class. The polls suggest that its followers have an income and college education rate slightly above the national mean. But it is the only rising political movement in the US which enjoys major working-class support. It voices the resentments of those who sense that they have been shut out of American life. Yet it campaigns for policies that threaten to exclude them further. The Contract from America for which Tea Party members voted demands that the US adopt a single-rate tax system, repeal Obama's healthcare legislation and sustain George Bush's reductions in income tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax. The beneficiaries of these policies are corporations and the ultra-wealthy. Those who will be hurt by them are angrily converging on state capitals to demand that they are implemented.

The Tea Party protests began after the business journalist Rick Santelli broadcast an attack from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on the government's plan to help impoverished people whose mortgages had fallen into arrears. To cheers from the traders at the exchange, he proposed that they should hold a tea party to dump derivative securities in Lake Michigan in protest at Obama's intention – in Santelli's words – to "subsidise the losers". The protests that claim to defend the interests of the working class began, in other words, with a call for a bankers' revolt against the undeserving poor. They have been promoted by Fox News – owned by that champion of the underdog Rupert Murdoch – and lavishly funded by other billionaires. Its corporate backers wrap themselves in the complaints of the downtrodden: they are 21st-century Marie-Antoinettes, who dress up as dairymaids and propose that the poor subsist upon a diet of laissez-faire.

Before this movement had a name, its contradictions were explored in Thomas Frank's seminal book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* The genius of the new conservatism, Frank argues, is its "systematic erasure of the economic". It blames the troubles of the poor not on economic forces – corporate and class power, wage cuts, tax cuts, outsourcing – but on cultural forces. The movement depends on people never making the connection between, for example, "mass culture, most of which conservatives hate, and laissez-faire capitalism, which they adore" or "the small towns they profess to love and the market forces that are slowly grinding those small towns back into the red-state dust". The anger of the excluded is aimed instead at gay marriage, abortion, swearing on television and latte-drinking, French-speaking liberals. The working-class American right votes for candidates who rail against cultural degradation, but what it gets when they take power is a transfer of wealth from the

poor to the rich. Though most of what they claim is false, one of the accusations levelled by both the Freedom party and the Tea Party rings true: the left is effete. This highlights another contradiction in their philosophy: liberals are weak and spineless; liberals are ruthless and all-powerful. But never mind that – the left on both sides of the Atlantic has proved to be embarrassed, unable to name and confront the powers that oppress the working class. It has left the field wide open to rightwing demagogues.

The great progressive cringe is only part of the problem; we have also abandoned movement-building in favour of Facebook politics. We don't want to pursue a common purpose any more, instead we want our own ideas and identity applauded. Where are the mass mobilisations in this country against the cuts, against the banks, BP, unemployment, the lack of social housing, the endless war in Afghanistan? In the US the radical right is swiftly acquiring ownership of the Republican party. In the UK the left is scarcely attempting a reclamation of the Labour party, even as opportunity knocks. Bogus and misdirected as the Tea Party movement is, in one respect it has an authenticity that the left lacks: it is angry and it's prepared to translate that anger into action. It is marching, recruiting, unseating, replacing. We talk, they act.

The Tea Party: lofty ideals, grubby facts

Boston's was brewed up by wealthy merchants. Now corporate interests wind up the people with spurious talk of freedom

Tristram Hunt, *The Guardian*, Monday 15 March 2010

Disguised as Indians, they poured out of the Old South Meeting House and headed down Hutchinson Street for Griffin's Wharf. At a packed meeting to condemn the Tea Act, Samuel Adams declared "they had now done all that they could for the salvation of their country". And this was the excuse the patriots needed as they smashed their way through the East India Company chests, dumping some 90,000lb of tea worth nearly £10,000 into Boston harbour. Today, the Tea Party patriots come dressed in George Washington outfits and Joker masks, with posters accusing President Obama of socialism, communism, even nazism. This remarkable political insurgency, which mushrooms by the month and has both Democrats and Republicans terrified for their congressional seats, regards itself as the true heir to the republic's ideals. Thomas Jefferson's adage, that "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of tyrants", is a favoured banner. And, to be fair to the Tea Party ideologues, they are being faithful to the principles of 1773: both as tax-dodgers and demagogues. For behind all the lofty talk of no taxation without representation, the Boston tea party hid some grubby material truths.

Few in the early 1770s regarded a split from Britain as either possible or preferable. In fact, the American colonies – and New England in particular – had done well out of the British Empire on the back of shipbuilding, whaling and war. Chief among the new merchant class was John Hancock, whose family firm had been built on provisioning the British army and Royal Navy. The capture of Canada – the campaigns against the French and the Spanish – ensured huge military profits for Boston businesses. But it was when – in the aftermath of the seven years war – the government asked America to start paying its way, that trouble began. By the 1760s the British Treasury was massively in debt, with the costs of empire falling disproportionately on English taxpayers. Not unreasonably George Grenville, the prime minister, wanted the prosperous colonies to accept more of the financial burden. New taxes on foreign imports were introduced together with a professionalised customs administration.Unfortunately these levies hit Boston hard as it faced a postwar slump. What was more, the big merchants relied extensively on tax-dodging and smuggling for their riches. Cargo ships laden with molasses from the West Indies, wines from Madeira, coffee from the East Indies, textiles and indigo – all slipped into Boston harbour in the dead of night with no duties paid. Even as the New England colonists urged London to hammer Louis XV and protect them from French encirclement, they refused to face up to their fiscal responsibilities. Time and again, Britain indulged their wants. The Townshend Duties on foreign imports were reversed, the Stamp Act taxing newspaper and pamphlets was dropped, but it would not give in on the 1773 Tea Act. The legislation was designed to shore up the finances of the East India Company, carve out the Boston harbour crooks, and deliver cheap tea to the colonies. All of which posed an unacceptable threat to the Boston Brahmins. Far from being a spontaneous outpouring of liberty, the "tea party" was brewed up by wealthy merchants worried their secret deals on tea imports were about to be exposed.

And so today, once more, wealthy corporate interests are winding up an angry populace – amid an economic slump – with spurious talk of freedom. Having enjoyed the benefits of their own empire for the last 50 years and pocketed tax cuts during the Iraq war, the 21st-century Tea Party movement is now grumbling about paying for power. Of course, there are some differences. Today the Tea Party is a suburban, rather than urban, phenomenon; its Fox News philosophers lack something of the depth of Hancock, Adams and Benjamin Franklin. But the parallels are noteworthy: in its use of marches and street theatre it echoes the tarring-and-feathering mob politics that once governed Boston harbour. So, too, its impressive use of new media. The pamphlets and cartoons of 18th-century New England are now replaced by blogs, cable television and internet radio. Also its religiosity: out of the Boston tea party emerged a "solemn league and covenant", drawing on America's Protestant pre-history and

committing its members to collective action against the British. In vogue among modern Tea Party members is the line from the Declaration of Independence: "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

What turned the Boston tea party into the American Revolution was the British response – with the Coercive Acts radicalising opinion across the 13 colonies. Wisely, President Obama has not antagonised his Tea Party opponents; he has chosen instead to give them enough rope to hang themselves. But with disillusion growing and the November mid-terms looming, his prospects don't look promising. What Obama needs to know is that if he is being set up for the role of Thomas Hutchinson – the last British governor of Massachusetts – in this historical morality play, what remains of the British empire is ready to offer him asylum.

Willetts plans 'degrees on the cheap' to cut costs

By Richard Garner, Education Editor, *The Guardian*

Friday, 11 June 2010

A radical plan for cut-price degrees was outlined by Universities Secretary David Willetts as a means of solving higher education's economic woes. In his first keynote speech since taking office he outlined a scheme in which students could attend lectures at their local university while living at home, but sit exams to gain a degree from another, more prestigious, institution. The move, however, was given a lukewarm reception by academics ,who said it risked creating a new "two-tier" system of those who could afford to go away to study at university and those who could not.

In what was at first billed as the first clear sign from the coalition Government that student fees were set to rise, Mr Willetts actually cautioned against relying on a fees hike to raise much-needed money for universities. "If fees were to go up, the Government would have to lend people the money to pay for them and that would push up public spending," he told an audience at Oxford Brookes University. "It's not just that students don't want to pay higher fees: the Treasury can't afford them." He added: "It's very hard asking students to pay higher fees in order to prop up final salary pension schemes for universities when their own parents have lost theirs."

He went on to outline a plan to separate teaching from learning – advocating that students could be taught in one institution near their home but study for an "external" degree at one of Britain's top universities. "Studying near one's home isn't always the best choice at the moment but if local providers opted for teaching existing highly-regarded degrees, it could improve students' employability," he said. "I do think it's possible to provide good-quality higher education in an institution that doesn't award its own degrees and institutions may find it is cheaper and more efficient as well." Mr Willetts made it clear that universities – already facing cuts of £1.3bn this year – were facing a bleaker financial future. "There are universities struggling to make ends meet," he said. "Some have been prudent but others have planned on the assumption of ever-rising budgets."

He also questioned the idea – advocated in a speech by Richard Lambert, director general of the CBI – that the UK could reduce the number of students studying at university. "I know of no Western country which has reversed such a trend (of rising student participation)," he said. "It is partly that education is one of those goods which we want to consume more of as we grow more affluent: it is partly that we need more education in order to become more affluent." In response to Mr Lambert's remarks, he added: "I wonder how many of the CBI's larger members conduct graduate-only recruitment policies and, if so, whether they intend to change their approach. "When people worry that too many youngsters are going into higher education, they imagine that we are forcing non-academic youngsters to sit in a seminar room for three years. But nowadays, university is a broad term which covers many types of learning – from computer games technology at Derby to physics in Exeter, from classics in Newcastle to yacht design at Southampton Solent – and this broad understanding of the university is a feature in many advanced countries."

Professor Les Ebdon, chairman of the university think-tank million+ and vice-chancellor of Bedford University, said learning at further education colleges and taking an external degree was "no substitute for students having the right to progress to and study at university". He added: "The proposals are a complete distraction from the real problems facing the many thousands of students who want to start courses at university in 2010 but who are at risk of not getting places." Wendy Piatt, director general of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities, said: "An increase in graduate contributions to the cost of higher education is the fairest and only viable option for solving the funding shortfall in the system." She warned that new ways of providing degree courses "must be carefully analysed" to ensure high-quality teaching was preserved.

P 1 | 2

Why the coalition's plan to raise VAT is wrong

A VAT hike before the recovery is secured is a recipe for slower growth, higher unemployment and a rising deficit

Ed Balls, *The Guardian*, Thursday 17 June, 2010

Next Monday – the day before the budget – George Osborne must come clean to parliament about the impact of his budget plan to raise the standard rate of VAT on the poorest households, pensioners and families with children. I believe it would be economic madness for Osborne to go ahead with deflationary spending cuts and the VAT hike that his advisers have been whispering about to the newspapers. I fear this "unemployment budget" will set back the economic recovery and put jobs at risk. But I also believe that raising VAT is hugely unfair. That's why next Monday, Osborne must answer the parliamentary questions my team has submitted and set out the distributional impact of a VAT rise. In my old papers at home, I found the analysis produced by the Treasury in 2001 when we looked at the distributional impact of raising VAT compared to the impact of raising national insurance to fund our increased investment in the NHS. As I wrote earlier this week, it was this analysis that persuaded me that raising VAT would always be the least fair option for raising tax – and while the figures will have changed in recent years, I'm sure the relative impact on pensioners, low-income households and ordinary families has not.

Recent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms that view. But it is worth looking back at these 2001 papers because they represent the Treasury's own estimates. They show that – in pounds per week – the group hardest hit if VAT was increased to 20% would be married couples with children, and not far behind them married pensioners. As a percentage of their net income, both groups would be similarly hard hit. Looking at VAT as a proportion of net household income, which the Treasury called "the most meaningful way of examining the impact on different income groups and household types", they found that the poorest 20% of households would be much harder hit by a VAT rise than the richest 20%. These were exactly the groups that benefited when Labour cut VAT to 15% for the whole of 2009 to help people through the worst of the recession. David Cameron and George Osborne responded contemptuously that nobody would notice a 2.5% difference in their household bills. We know they will say exactly the same if they increase the rate to 20%. Remember also how hard these groups will be hit by the £6bn cuts in public spending announced for this year – and that millions of lower and middle-income families will be hit again by David Cameron's plans to slash child benefit and tax credits and make it harder for families other than the poorest to access Sure Start children's centres. Like the plan to raise VAT, these policies are not just economically reckless when the recovery is so fragile, but hugely unfair under any circumstances.

Some people wonder why VAT is so regressive and hits ordinary families, pensioners and poorer people so hard. There is a great myth – left over from the introduction of VAT in 1973 – that it only applies to luxury goods. Walk around your house or flat and you'll see that's not true. All your household goods, kitchen appliances, snacks, soft drinks, furniture, clothes, electronic equipment, bathroom products and over-the-counter medicines have VAT on them. When your car, roof, boiler or sink needs repairing, your bills for repair and maintenance carry VAT as well. Essentials of modern life like mobile phones, DVDs and computers all carry VAT, as well as all the toys and games we buy for our children. And almost every paying leisure activity bears VAT, from going to the cinema and the football to eating out in a restaurant. When you fill up your car, buy a drink in the pub or light up a cigarette, you are not only paying excise duty but VAT. The fact is that – because it hits every aspect of ordinary life – VAT is the only tax that everyone pays, whether they are unemployed, a student, a pensioner or a single mum. That is why it does not matter if George Osborne simultaneously raises the income tax personal allowance or reaffirms the Tory commitment not to increase national insurance next year, because that will do nothing to help the millions of poor people and pensioners who do not pay any income tax or national insurance.

If they have any principles left, when they see the answers to those parliamentary questions, Nick Clegg and Vince Cable must urge their Tory partners not to press ahead with this plan next Tuesday. If they do not, then I hope every member of the Labour party and all my parliamentary colleagues will join me in fighting this plan tooth and nail.

In 1993, the Labour opposition – led by John Smith and Gordon Brown – succeeded in voting down the budget over the plans drawn up by Norman Lamont and David Cameron to impose the maximum rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power. Now the stakes are even higher, and our opposition must be equally robust. We know that the deficit must be reduced – just as it had to be in 1993. However, cutting spending and announcing a VAT hike before the recovery is secured is a recipe for slower growth, higher unemployment and a rising deficit. This risk to jobs is the first reason to oppose this VAT plan. The second is that – despite the coalition rhetoric that "we are all in this together" and "everyone must pay the price" – the Labour party must draw the line at a VAT rise that will hit the poorest households harder than the richest, and which will hit pensioner couples and ordinary families hardest of all. It is simply not right.

If you agree with me, please sign my petition today to Stop the VAT Bombshell. Let's show ordinary people across the country that it is only Labour that is standing up for jobs, fair taxes and social justice.

American newspapers: Not dead yet

Newspapers have cut their way out of crisis. More radical surgery will be needed

The Economist, June 10th 2010

WHATEVER happened to the death of newspapers? A year ago the end seemed near. The recession threatened to remove the advertising and readers that had not already fled to the internet. Newspapers like the *San Francisco Chronicle* were chronicling their own doom. America's Federal Trade Commission launched a round of talks about how to save newspapers. Should they become charitable corporations? Should the state subsidise them? It will hold another meeting on June 15th. But the discussions now seem out of date. In much of the world there is little sign of crisis. German and Brazilian papers shrugged off the recession. Even American newspapers, which inhabit the most troubled corner of the global industry, have not only survived but often returned to profit. Not the 20% profit margins that were routine a few years ago, but profit all the same. It has not been much fun. Many papers stayed afloat by pushing journalists overboard. The American Society of News Editors reckons that 13,500 newsroom jobs have gone since 2007. Readers are paying more for slimmer products. Some papers even had the nerve to refuse delivery to distant suburbs. Yet these desperate measures have proved the right ones and, sadly for many journalists, they can be pushed further.

Demolishing the house that Otis built

Newspapers are becoming more balanced businesses, with a healthier mix of revenues from readers and advertisers. American papers have long been highly unusual in their reliance on ads. Fully 87% of their revenues came from advertising in 2008, according to the OECD. In Japan the proportion is 35%. Not surprisingly, Japanese newspapers are much more stable. The whirlwind that swept through newsrooms harmed everybody, but much of the damage has been concentrated in areas where newspapers are least distinctive. Car and film reviewers have gone. So have science and general business reporters. Foreign bureaus have been savagely pruned. Newspapers are less complete as a result. But completeness is no longer a virtue in the newspaper business. Just look at the fate of Otis Chandler's creation. Thanks to family connections, Chandler ended up in control of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1960. The paper he inherited was parochial and conservative, reflecting the city it served. Chandler jettisoned the anti-union dogma and set about building a west-coast rival to the *New York Times*. His paper was heavy on foreign news and serious, objective reporting. The result was hugely impressive—but not, as it turned out, suited to the internet era. In the past few years the paper has suffered repeated staff cuts. In 2007 it was acquired by a property magnate and in 2008 filed for bankruptcy protection. The problem with such newspapers is that, although they do much that is excellent, they do little that is distinctive enough for people to pay for it. The *Los Angeles Times*'s foreign reporting is extremely good. But it is hard to argue that it is better than the stuff supplied by the *New York Times* or foreign papers—sources to which the residents of Los Angeles now have unfettered, largely free access via their laptops and iPhones. Similarly, it has never been clear why each major newspaper needs its own car reviewer: a Corolla is a Corolla, whether it is driven in Albuquerque or Atlanta. And by extension, it is not clear why presidential candidates or sport teams require huge journalistic entourages. Papers should concentrate on what they do best, which means, in many cases, local news and sport. If the rest is bought in from wire services or national outfits, readers are unlikely to complain—as long as there is enough competition between those larger providers to keep up standards (and thanks to the internet there probably is now). Specialisation generally means higher quality. It is grim to forecast still more writers losing their jobs. But whether newspapers are thrown onto doorsteps or distributed digitally, they need to deliver something that is distinctive. New technologies like Apple's iPad only make this more true. The mere acquisition of a smooth block of metal and glass does not magically persuade people that they should start paying for news. They will pay for news if they think it has value. Newspapers need to focus relentlessly on that.

The legacy of the Bloody Sunday killings: Bloody Sunday killings increased IRA recruitment, paramilitary violence and led to huge rise in deaths in subsequent years

The Guardian, Tuesday 15 June 2010, Owen Bowcott

In the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday, the British embassy in Dublin was petrol-bombed by infuriated protesters and the Mid Ulster MP Bernadette McAliskey punched the home secretary, Reginald Maudling, accusing him of lying to the Commons over what happened. The legacy of the killings, however, was the boost to IRA recruitment and the outrage that fuelled paramilitary violence through subsequent decades. Lord Widgery's inquiry and official exoneration of the soldiers – dismissed by nationalists as a state "cover up" – aggravated the sense of injustice. During the three previous years, the Troubles had claimed around 200 lives. In 1972, the year in which Bloody Sunday occurred, a total of 479 people died; it was Northern Ireland's worst year of carnage. The annual death rate did not fall below 200 again until 1977. Without Bloody Sunday the province's history might have been very different. Young men queued up after the shootings to recount their eyewitness testimony to the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) – which organised the anti-internment march – and to sign up for IRA membership. Edward Heath, prime minister at the time, acknowledged the catastrophic consequences, telling Lord Saville's inquiry: "The tragic deaths in Londonderry on 30 January 1972 outraged the Catholic community, increased support for the IRA and destroyed the prospect of a political initiative." Ivan Cooper, who organised the NICRA march towards the centre of Derry that day, has said that the killings undermined the non-violent creed of the civil rights movement. "Before Bloody Sunday, I believe there were no more than 30 to 40 IRA volunteers in Derry," the former nationalist Mid Londonderry MP has explained. "They had a very small base, small amounts of hardware and, most importantly, very little support. The support was with [the Social Democratic and Labour party leader]. We were still reasonably integrated in the city. The IRA's campaign of violence that followed in the wake of Bloody Sunday [and internment] changed all that." Cooper, who is a Protestant, believes the shootings constitute a "watershed" in Northern Ireland's history. "Bloody Sunday has been a running sore – everyone in Derry believes a vast injustice was done that day."

John Kelly, whose brother Michael was killed by the paras, believes Bloody Sunday poisoned the ensuing years. "There were queues to join the IRA after that day," he recalled in 2005 when the Provisional IRA finally decommissioned its weapons. "The paras were responsible for countless deaths that day, including soldiers, policemen and everyone who died during the Troubles. "Many young people in Derry and across the North lost their lives through ending up in prison. The paras not only murdered people that day, but they carry the responsibility of the blood that was spilled since." Edward Daly was the priest whose role in Bloody Sunday – waving a blood-stained handkerchief as he attempted to escort a dying victim past excited paratroopers – is commemorated to this day in Derry's murals. In his memoirs, *Mister, Are You a Priest?*, Daly, now a retired bishop, said what he described as the "murders" cast a lingering shadow. "Countless young people were motivated by the events of that day to become actively involved in armed struggle and, as a direct result, joined the Provisional IRA," he wrote. "Many former paramilitary members have gone on record stating that they first became actively involved in the wake of that Sunday. I am not at all sure about how I would have reacted, had I been a teenager and witnessed those same events." Those he later visited in prison often explained that their involvement in republican violence was a response to Bloody Sunday.

Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin, agrees that Bloody Sunday was a turning point in the Troubles. "Money, guns and recruits flooded into the IRA [afterwards]," he wrote in his memoirs. Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's key Downing Street adviser in the peace process, told the *Guardian* in 2008: "So great was the place of Bloody Sunday in the memories of republicans and nationalists alike that one of their key demands as soon as we came into government was that there should be a full and independent inquiry into it." For decades, the Bloody Sunday commemoration has been a major occasion in the republican calendar. It was a time to remember the fallen and, for Sinn Féin, an opportunity to parade its community's status as the victim of a murderously, oppressive state. After 12

years' evidence and protracted legal proceedings, some fear that sense of keen anticipation has curdled. Whether Lord Saville's report will help unravel entangled resentments and feuds should become apparent today.

No Money ? Then Make your Own

Short on cash? Then why not make your own. There's no law against it, so long as you don't try to pass it off as sterling. And you can use whatever you please to make your money, whether cigarettes, rabbit skins or paper notes.

By Marie Jackson
BBC News, December 2009

That's what's happening in Brixton, a south London neighbourhood where shoppers, from Thursday, will be able to hand over 10 Brixton Pounds (B£s) in return for their groceries. Proponents of local currencies say they boost the community's economy by keeping money in the area, but critics dismiss them as fashionable gimmicks, tantamount to protectionism. They may sound experimental but have in fact been used since the Middle Ages when local currencies were all there was - it was not until the 1700s that every European country had its own currency, says Tim Leunig, an economist at the LSE. Research suggests that when the wider economy slumps, communities turn to barter systems. In other words, when there's little money around, people think about making their own. The Great Depression of the 1930s saw a wide take-up in the US and much later, the Global Barter Club was born after the Argentine economy hit rock-bottom in 2001. At its height, the system was supporting three million people.

And today's straitened times may well renew interest in complementary currencies but, as one unconvinced Brixton shopper, asks: "What's the point?" "A local economy is like a leaky bucket. Wealth is generated then spent in chain stores and businesses. It disappears leaving an impoverished local economy," explains Ben Brangwyn, part of the team behind the Totnes Pound, launched in south Devon in 2007. "Local money prevents that from happening and keeps the money bouncing around the bucket, building wealth and prosperity." Currently, 6,000 Totnes pounds are in circulation from an estimated local economy of £60m. It is, stresses Mr Brangwyn, a radical experiment, still in its very early stages, but he can see a day when England has 2,000 local currencies. Other towns joining the experiment, started by environmental group Transition Network, are Lewes in East Sussex and Stroud in Gloucestershire which introduced the Stroud Pound this week. Brixton, with its reputation for bustling streets, a lively nightlife and a notoriety for street crime, is the first urban area to have its own currency. Volunteers behind the project say it has not been an easy sell. Some shopkeepers are concerned about counterfeiting and the build-up of Brixton pounds in their till. Others see it as a novel advertising tool that could become gift vouchers, or even a collector's item.

So far, £10,000 has been pledged by businesses and local people to be converted into B£s, but on the streets there is still some convincing to be done. Project manager Tim Nichols hopes people will be drawn by the notion of a kind of "secret club" for holders of the special notes and expects Brixton's antiestablishment spirit to work to its advantage. "We are in London, the financial hub of the world, and are trying to do something that goes against the grain of the big banking system that we are living on the edge of." He is also optimistic the recession can work in its favour. That's the view of Susan Witts who co-founded the BerkShare, a local currency launched in 2006 in Berkshire, Massachusetts. She puts the growth of BerkShares (from 1 million to 2.5 million in three years) down, in part, to the recession and a lot of hard work. "Introducing a new currency means more work. You have to train staff to use it, adapt accounting processes. When things are going well, it seems an unnecessary extra step. "But in difficult times, businesses are looking at ways to make their business work. It relies on people's sense of wanting to shape their own economic future."

But David Boyle, of the New Economics Foundation think-tank and a supporter of alternative currencies, believes efforts in Britain are hampered by its banking system. Whereas the US has a major network of local banks willing to handle other kinds of money, banks in the UK are less willing to do that. He suggests the answer could lie with local authorities playing a more controlling role. The vital factor though, says Mr Boyle, is belief. "If you can maintain that belief in the community, it can work," he says. Other economists dismiss the whole concept as a gimmick. The only use they can see for it is as a tax dodge, but the taxman says this is a red herring. All businesses have to report all

turnover and as every local currency is tacked to sterling, every sale, whether paid for in cream cakes, polar bears or carrots must be reported to its sterling value, the HM Revenue and Customs says. And if you are not running a business, the HMRC has no interest because where there's no profit motive, there's no taxation consequence. The Treasury, meanwhile, views them as little more than gift vouchers. So, with the government unperturbed, perhaps we could yet see Mr Brangwyn's vision of 2,000 separate local currencies realised. But would that be a brave leap into the future or a return to the Middle Ages?

Barack Obama's rant against technology
Don't shoot the messenger. America's president joins a long (but wrong) tradition of technophobia

May 13th 2010, *The Economist*, Leader

"WITH iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations—none of which I know how to work—information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment." In a speech to students at Hampton University on May 9th, Mr Obama did not just name-check some big brands; he also joined a long tradition of grumbling about new technologies and new forms of media. Socrates's bugbear was the spread of the biggest-ever innovation in communications—writing. He feared that relying on written texts, rather than the oral tradition, would "create forgetfulness in the learners' souls...they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves." Enos Hitchcock voiced a widespread concern about the latest publishing fad in 1790. "The free access which many young people have to romances, novels and plays has poisoned the mind and corrupted the morals of many a promising youth." (There was a related worry that sofas, introduced at the same time, encouraged young people to drift off into fantasy worlds.) Cinema was denounced as "an evil pure and simple" in 1910; comic books were said to lead children into delinquency in 1954; rock'n'roll was accused of turning the young into "devil worshippers" in 1956; Hillary Clinton attacked video games for "stealing the innocence of our children" in 2005.

Mr Obama is, at least, bang up to date with his reference to the iPad, which now joins the illustrious list of technologies to have been denounced by politicians, and with his grumbling about the crazy theories circulated by the combination of blogs and talk radio. But such Luddism is particularly curious in Mr Obama's case, given that he is surgically attached to his BlackBerry, his presidential campaign made exemplary use of the internet, and he has used YouTube to great effect to deliver his message directly to viewers, circumventing the mainstream media in the process. Presumably all those are examples of good information (the empowering sort) rather than bad (the distracting or misleading sort). This distinction, of course, is bogus. Anybody who has ever taken a meeting knows that trying to hold the attention of people with BlackBerrys is like trying to teach Latin to delinquent teenagers. And the devices Mr Obama denounces have many constructive uses. Lectures, language lessons and course materials are among more than 250,000 educational audio and video files available on iTunes. iPads and their ilk may yet turn into a practical alternative to textbooks. Video games are widely used as educational tools, not just for pilots, soldiers and surgeons, but also in schools and businesses. And Larry Katz, a Harvard economist, suspects that video games and websites may have kept the young and idle busy during this recession, thus explaining the surprising lack of an uptick in crime.

Devices and desires

Mr Obama complained that technology was putting "new pressures on our country and on our democracy". But iPods, iPads and suchlike are not to blame for the crazy theories—about, for instance, politicians' birth certificates—that circulate in the blogosphere. People have always traded gossip: the internet just makes it easier and quicker. The culprit is human nature, not technology. And new communications technologies tend to strengthen democracy, not weaken it, as revolutionaries have known ever since Thomas Paine and others used the printing press to argue for American independence. At least Mr Obama got one thing right: the idea that educating people is the best way to enable them to adapt to technological change, and use it for good. But technology is not an alternative to education and empowerment; it can, in fact, help deliver them. America's first web-savvy president should understand that.

What's wrong with America's right. Too much anger and too few ideas. America needs a better alternative to Barack Obama

The Independent, June 10th, 2010

HAPPY days are here again for the Republicans, or so you might think. Barack Obama's popularity rating is sagging well below 50%. Passing health-care reform has done nothing to help him; most Americans believe he has wasted their money—and their view of how he is dealing with the economy is no less jaded. Although growth has returned, the latest jobs figures are dismal and house repossessions continue to rise. And now his perceived failure to get a grip on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is hurting him; some critics call it his Hurricane Katrina; others recall Jimmy Carter's long, enervating hostage crisis in Iran. Sixty per cent of Americans think the country is on the wrong track. All 435 seats in the House are up for grabs in November. The polls portend heavy losses for the Democrats, who currently enjoy a 39-seat majority there. Quite possibly, they will lose control of it. The Republicans stand less chance of winning the Senate, where a third of the seats are contested this year, but they should win enough to make it almost impossible for the Democrats to break a filibuster there by picking off a Republican or two. The second two years of Mr Obama's presidency look like being a lot tougher than the first.

Malice in Wonderland Mr Obama deserves to be pegged back. This newspaper supported him in 2008 and backed his disappointing-but-necessary health-care plan. But he has done little to fix the deficit, shown a zeal for big government and all too often given the impression that capitalism is something unpleasant he found on the sole of his sneaker. America desperately needs a strong opposition. So it is sad to report that the American right is in a mess: fratricidal, increasingly extreme on many issues and woefully short of ideas, let alone solutions. This matters far beyond America's shores. For most of the past half-century, conservative America has been a wellspring of new ideas—especially about slimming government. At a time when redesigning the state is a priority around the world, the right's dysfunctionality is especially unfortunate. The Republicans at the moment are less a party than an ongoing civil war (with, from a centrist point of view, the wrong side usually winning). There is a dwindling band of moderate Republicans who understand that they have to work with the Democrats in the interests of America. There is the old intolerant, gun-toting, immigrant-bashing, mainly southern right which sees any form of co-operation as treachery, even blasphemy. And muddying the whole picture is the tea-party movement, a tax revolt whose activists (some clever, some dotty, all angry) seem to loathe Bush-era free-spending Republicans as much as they hate Democrats. Egged on by a hysterical blogosphere and the ravings of Fox News blowhards, the Republican Party has turned upon itself. Optimists say this is no more than the vigorous debate that defines the American primary system. They rightly point out that American conservatism has always been a broad church and the battle is not all one way. This week California's Republicans chose two relatively moderate former chief executives, Meg Whitman and Carly Fiorina, to run for governor and the Senate. But both had to dive to the right to win, which will not help them in November. And in neighbouring Nevada the Republicans chose a tea-partier so extreme that she may yet allow Harry Reid, the unloved Democratic Senate leader, to hang on to his seat. Many of the battles are indeed nastier than normal: witness the squabble in Florida, where the popular governor, Charlie Crist, has left the party; Senator Lindsey Graham walking away from climate-change legislation for fear of vile personal attacks; and even John McCain, who has battled with the southern-fried crazies in his party for decades, joining the chorus against Mexican "illegals" to keep his seat. As for ideas, the Republicans seem to be reducing themselves into exactly what the Democrats say they are: the nasty party of No. They may well lambast Mr Obama for expanding the federal deficit; but it is less impressive when they are unable to suggest alternatives. Paul Ryan, a bright young congressman from Wisconsin, has a plan to restore the budget to balance; it has sunk without a trace. During the row over health care, the right demanded smaller deficits but refused to countenance any cuts in medical spending on the elderly. Cutting back military spending is denounced as surrender to the enemy. Tax rises of any kind (even allowing the unaffordable Bush tax cuts to expire as scheduled) are evil. This lack of coherence extends beyond the deficit. Do Republicans favour state bail-outs for banks or not?

If they are against them, as they protest, why are they doing everything they can to sabotage a financial-reform bill that will make them less likely? Is the party of "drill, baby, drill" in favour of tighter regulation of oil companies or not? If not, why is it berating Mr Obama for events a mile beneath the ocean? Many of America's most prominent business leaders are privately as disappointed by the right as they are by the statist Mr Obama.

Down the rabbit hole and beyond the Palin Out of power, a party can get away with such negative ambiguity; the business of an opposition is to oppose. The real problem for the political right may well come if it wins in November. Just as the party found after it seized Congress in 1994, voters expect solutions, not just rage. The electorate jumped back into Bill Clinton's arms in 1996. Business conservatives are scouting desperately for an efficient centrist governor (or perhaps general) to run against Mr Obama in 2012. But tea-party-driven success in the mid-terms could foster the illusion that the Republicans lost the White House because Mr McCain was insufficiently close to their base. That logic is more likely to lead to Palin-Huckabee in 2012 than, say, Petraeus-Daniels. Britain's Conservatives, cast out of power after 18 years in 1997, made that mistake, trying a succession of right-wingers. Only with the accession of the centrist David Cameron in 2005 did the party begin to recover as he set about changing its rhetoric. There may be a lesson in that for the Republicans—and it is not too late to take it.

My once-in-a-generation cut? The armed forces. All of them: We are safer than at any time since the Norman conquest. Yet £45bn is spent defending Britain against fantasy enemies

The Guardian, Tuesday 8 June 2010, Simon Jenkins

I say cut defence. I don't mean nibble at it or slice it. I mean cut it, all £45bn of in. George Osborne yesterday asked the nation "for once in a generation" to think the unthinkable, to offer not just percentage cuts but "whether government needs to provide certain public services at all". What do we really get from the army, the navy and the air force beyond soldiers dying in distant wars and a tingle when the band marches by? Is the tingle worth £45bn, more than the total spent on schools? Why does Osborne "ringfence" defence when everyone knows its budget is a bankruptcy waiting to happen, when Labour ministers bought the wrong kit for wars that they insisted it fight? Osborne cannot believe the armed forces are so vital or so efficient as to be excused the star chamber's "fundamental re-evaluation of their role". He knows their management and procurement have long been an insult to the taxpayer. The reason for his timidity must be that, like David Cameron, he is a young man scared of old generals. I was content to be expensively defended against the threat of global communism. With the end of the cold war in the 1990s that threat vanished. In its place was a fantasy proposition, that some unspecified but potent "enemy" lurked in the seas and skies around Britain. Where is it? Each incoming government since 1990 has held so-called defence reviews "to match capabilities to policy objectives". I helped with one in 1997, and it was rubbish from start to finish, a cosmetic attempt to justify the colossal procurements then in train, and in such a way that any cut would present Labour as "soft" on defence. Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and George Robertson, the then defence secretary were terrified into submission. They agreed to a parody of generals fighting the last war but one. They bought new destroyers to defeat the U-boat menace. They bought new carriers to save the British empire. They bought Eurofighters to duel with Russian air aces. Trident submarines with nuclear warheads went on cruising the deep, deterring no one, just so Blair could walk tall at conferences. Each weekend, the tranquillity of the Welsh countryside is shattered by inane jets screaming through the mountain valleys playing at Lord of the Rings. With modern bombs, no plane need fly that low, and the jets are said to burn more fuel in half an hour than a school in a year. Any other service wasting so much money would be laughed out of court. Yet the Treasury grovels before the exotic virility of it all. Labour lacked the guts to admit that it was crazy to plan for another Falklands war. It dared not admit that the procurement executive was fit for nothing but appeasing weapons manufacturers. No armies were massing on the continent poised to attack. No navies were plotting to throttle our islands and starve us into submission. No missiles were fizzing in bunkers across Asia with Birmingham or Leeds in their sights. As for the colonies, if it costs £45bn to protect the Falklands, Gibraltar and the Caymans, it must be the most ridiculous empire in history. It would be cheaper to give each colony independence and a billion a year. Lobbyists reply that all defence expenditure is precautionary. You cannot predict every threat and it takes time to rearm should one emerge. That argument might have held during the cold war and, strictly up to a point, today. But at the present scale it is wholly implausible. For the past 20 years, Britain's armed forces have encouraged foreign policy into one war after another, none of them remotely to do with the nation's security. Asked why he was standing in an Afghan desert earlier this year, Brown had to claim absurdly that he was "making London's streets safer". Some wars, as in Iraq, have been a sickening waste of money and young lives. Others in Kosovo and Afghanistan honour a Nato commitment that had nothing to do with collective security. Like many armies in history, Nato has become an alliance in search of a purpose. Coalition ministers are citing Canada as a shining example of how to cut. Canada is wasting no more money in Afghanistan. Despite Blair's politics of fear, Britain entered the 21st century safer than at any time since the Norman conquest. I am defended already, by the police, the security services and a myriad regulators and inspectors. Defence spending does not add to this. It is like winning the Olympics – a magnificent, extravagant national boast, so embedded in the British psyche that politicians (and newspapers) dare not question it. Yet Osborne asked that every public service should "once in a generation" go back to basics and ask what it really delivers for its money. Why not defence?

Plucky Belgium is leading the way. Today Flanders, tomorrow Scotland

Simon Jenkins, *The Guardian*, Thursday 17 June, 2010

All hail Belgium. Plucky little Belgium is now showing the way against the corporatist cardinals of Europe's mother church. On Monday this week the separatist New Flemish Alliance secured most seats in the Belgian assembly. The party leader, Bart de Wever, favours "evolutionary evaporation" of the Belgian state and the emergence of Flanders as a freestanding member of the European Union. Sooner or later, he will get his way. In 1992 (but on 1 April) the *Times* published a front-page story pegged to a Belgian public service strike reporting a secret plan for Flanders to rejoin the Netherlands. French-speaking Wallonia would go to France and Brussels become the independent capital of Europe. An editorial remarked that "the dissolution of Belgium comes as a shock", especially as a radio shutdown meant Belgians were "unable to check the date". The paper was inundated by enraged Belgians who, despite producing Magritte and Tintin, lacked a sense of humour. However much Euro-enthusiasts wish it were otherwise, the craving for lower tier self-government refuses to die. Indeed, it is booming. In Scandinavia, Italy, Spain, even the UK, concession after concession is made to devolutionary sentiment. It is made with a patronising nod at the parish-pump quaintness of separatist leaders, dubbed populist, extremist or right-wing, never just democratic.

To the *Economist*, de Wever is a "populist bruiser". To the Times, his success has "potentially disastrous implications" for Europe. Similar language is used of the Italians' Northern League, Scotland's nationalists and Spain's Catalans. No one says why. To modern Eurocrats, localists are merely below the salt. Countries dissolve when the political logic that held them together dissolves. There is no reason why an independent Flanders should not be as resilient as Slovakia, Slovenia, Ireland or the Baltic states. Bigness is no guarantee of prosperity, usually the opposite. Big statism is a hangover from 20th-century imperialism and the needs of perpetual war. It is now claimed for globalisation, but as that draws power away from democratic institutions, so the self-governing urge claws it back. The crisis in the euro was the widely predicted result of the EU's leaders running faster economically than they could ever walk politically. At first they thought they could even out the performance of nations by transferring huge sums from rich to poor. This infuriated the rich and enslaved the poor in dependency. The move from what was a free-trade union to what is touted as a "fiscal-transfer union" has gone beyond what is tolerable to the disparate European electorates who must foot the bill. The euro saga is Belgium times 10.

The European movement now mimics the Roman Catholic church in the 16th century. Its popes and cardinals, in perpetual conclave, fear Protestant dissent on all sides yet do nothing but reassert the dogma of ever-closer union and demand that everyone works for a "better Europe". Rebellious provinces must be suppressed. Any move to democratic referendum, such as in 2005, must be ignored. Top-down edicts pour forth and cash is lavished on subordinate governments. Should a Verdian Don Carlos emerge "to defend the glorious cause of Flanders", he must be wiped out by the Inquisition or ridiculed by the press. The best analysis of this phenomenon remains Larry Siedentop's Democracy in Europe, which argued, in 2000, that the union was doomed without a legitimacy beyond the synthetic nonsense of the European parliament. Language, geography, history, kinship and customs of consent had to be recognised as the building blocks of a new democracy. Siedentop called for English as the common European language, the evolution of a collective political class, more respect for localism and a European senate. It was not enough to consign national and sub-national identities to a department of minority languages, funny clothes, country dancing and cheese.

The one thing Siedentop did not contemplate, writing still in the 20th century, was that the major premise of his analysis might simply be rejected by Europe's peoples. They might no longer regard it as essential to their security and prosperity to enter a union to finance the spendthrift welfare of Greece and Spain. A new generation might not see the corruption of Brussels as "a price worth paying" to avoid a third world war. Flanders might simply want to rule itself.

Since the debacle of the Lisbon referendums, Euro-pluralism has emerged as proof against ever closer union. The Single European Act of 1986 appears to have been a sort of psychological boundary, beyond which political unity should not have strayed. Go too far, as did the Lisbon treaty, and the threads would snap. Europe would lose touch with its component countries, and they would lose touch with their subnational identities. In extremis, they would face break-up, as have Spain, Austria and now Belgium. The history of enforced European union has, after all, been a long parade of catastrophic dictatorship.

When a country – let alone a continent – lacks the bonds of a collective nationhood it is no longer a country, merely a state. Nations forged in war do not necessarily survive peace. Belgium may retain the trappings of sovereignty, a monarch, an army, a customs union and (perhaps) a football team. But taxes and cross-subsidies will only be acceptable within self-governing communities with a shared sense of co-responsibility, not across whole continents.

Ignoring this maxim is what is sorely testing the eurozone and is breaking Belgium. Nor should the UK think itself immune. Devolution everywhere is a political one-way ticket. After Flanders, Scotland.

Private schools accused of being preserve of super-rich

Private school fee increases far outstrip rise in average income, study shows

Jessica Shepherd, education correspondent, *The Guardian*, Thursday 17 June 2010

Private schools were today accused of catering only for the super-rich after it emerged that their fees had risen almost three times faster than average income has over the past two decades. A study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an economic thinktank, revealed that fees increased by 83%, after inflation, between 1992 and 2008, while the average income for a family with children rose by only 30% in the same period.

It costs parents £10,100 on average to send their child to a private school each year, the report – Private Schooling in the UK and Australia – shows. Fee rises outstripped average income from the year 2000 in particular, the researchers found. But what determines whether a child goes to a private school is whether their parents attended one, not how much the fees are, the study reveals. It found that children who had a privately-educated parent were three times more likely to go to private school than those whose parents attended state schools. The researchers had controlled for other factors, such as household income, when making the calculation.

The cost of a private education and the quality of state schools had very little effect on whether parents chose to send their children to private school. A £1,300 rise in annual fees only reduced the proportion of pupils attending private schools by 0.3 percentage points, the study found. If the proportion of pupils in state schools achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE rises by 5%, the proportion of pupils attending private school falls by only 0.3 percentage points. Labour voters were between two and three percentage points less likely to send their children to private school than floating voters, while Tory voters were between 2.5 and five percentage points more likely to privately educate their children than floating voters.

The study found that just 6.5% of UK pupils attended private schools. In England, the figure was slightly higher – 7.2%. The proportion of children at private school has hardly changed since 1964, when 8% were privately educated. In the late 1970s, just 5.6% received a private education. Luke Sibieta, one of the report's authors, said increases in private school fees reduced the proportion of pupils attending them, but "at a relatively low rate".

Michael Pyke, a spokesman for the Campaign for State Education, a lobby group, said private schools had shown they were intent on maintaining their exclusivity by raising their fees at almost three times the rate of average income. "They have chosen to more than double their fees and maintain their exclusivity, rather than expand and give more children the benefit of their facilities," he said. "This is a way of maintaining the privileges of the elite."

Rudolf Eliott Lockhart, head of research and intelligence at the Independent Schools Council said private schools had increased fees to cover their costs. He said: "Fee increases have been driven by the significant rise in the cost of providing the high quality education that parents demand. It's no surprise to see that parents who've experienced independent education themselves are more likely to choose to send their children to independent schools. It illustrates the high levels of satisfaction that independent schools provide." He said most private schools re-invested all their fee income into the education of their pupils. Private schools give more than £540m a year to families who cannot afford their fees, he said.

Can Sarah Palin style herself as Thatcher's second coming?

Both attractive women from Nowhere Fancy exploited their femininity. But only one could command an interview

Claire Berlinski, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 15 June 2010

Visiting Margaret Thatcher is a traditional rite among Republican presidential aspirants – Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson and Mitt Romney all pitched up on her doorstep in 2008. But Sarah Palin, who announced on her Facebook site this week that she hopes to secure a meeting with "one of my political heroines, the 'Iron Lady'," has a more obvious claim to be Thatcher's heir. She's an attractive woman from Nowhere Fancy, just as Thatcher was, and snobs deplore her for it, just as they deplored Thatcher. That said, if Palin hopes to style herself as the second coming she has a few things to learn. She might wish to study Thatcher's disciplined command of arguments, facts and statistics, for instance. By the time Thatcher was elected, she'd enjoyed a 20-year parliamentary career. Her clearly expressed views – clearly expressed, I stress – about every crisis, problem and debate of concern to Britain were a matter of public record. Palin has neither said nor written a line so far that would allow anyone reasonably to conclude that her opinions about economic and foreign policy are as cogent and informed as Thatcher's. No one (not me, anyway) can argue with her conservative instincts, but to compare her ability to express them with Thatcher's would be ludicrous.

This ability allowed Thatcher to dominate in unscripted interviews. When interrogated by hostile journalists she left them speechless and stuttering. She regularly ate Neil Kinnock for lunch during prime minister's questions. Her eidetic command of inflation statistics verged on the weird, suggesting the obsessive aspect of men who routinely memorise train schedules. Above all, she was always prepared. You will never find an example of Thatcher caught short in the way Palin was by CBS anchor Katie Couric, talking about Republican presidential runner John McCain's stance on regulation.

Couric: "Can you give me any other examples in his 26 years of John McCain truly taking a stand on this?" Palin: "I can give you examples of things that John McCain has done that has shown his foresight, his pragmatism, and his leadership abilities. And that is what America needs today." Couric: "I'm just going to ask you one more time – not to belabour the point. Specific examples in his 26 years of pushing for more regulation." Palin: "I'll try to find you some and I'll bring them to you."

Thatcher did not wing it. She studied incessantly. But in the end, she had a knack for knowing stuff and for whipping out what she knew when she needed it. If Palin does, she's kept it well under wraps so far. If she can't manage to reveal that talent, however, she may well emulate Thatcher's gift for exploiting the public's aversion to men who attack women. In fact it's not clear that she needs any lessons in this. The outraged reaction to the news that Barack Obama had called Palin a pig in lipstick – yes, of course he meant Palin – put me in mind of a conversation I had with Neil Kinnock. He couldn't attack her the way he would a male opponent. "It would have bloody demeaned me to have done that," he said. "If you're doing it, you know, toe-to-toe, with a fellow about your age, or even if he'd been a bit older than myself, that would have been … " [Me:] "So, you're basically saying, 'I couldn't hit a girl'." "Well, I know I couldn't hit a girl." Like Obama, he couldn't work out how to attack a certain kind of woman without losing the public's sympathy. Obama was able to acquit himself against a different kind of female opponent. Were this not so, Hillary Clinton would have led the Democratic ticket. But the electorate did not, deep down, view Clinton as a woman. Nothing about her inspired chivalrous feelings. Not so Thatcher, and not so Palin. Thatcher, like Palin, knew how to exploit her femininity – how to engender the desire not only to obey her but to protect her. Two days after her election, in 1979, she arrived to address the 1922 Committee. "She was flanked only by the all-male officers of the committee," recalls her former chancellor Geoffrey Howe. "Suddenly she looked very beautiful – and very frail, as the half-dozen knights of the shires towered over her. It was a moving, almost feudal occasion. Tears came to my eyes."

Palin is a mother of five, ripe, fertile, and beautiful. Standing on the podium at the Republican convention, swaying slightly on her heels, blinking in the bright lights, her glasses hinting at vulnerability under all that exuberant energy, she inspired in observers a sympathetic tenderness, like an adolescent gymnast attempting a particularly difficult landing after a daring vault. When Palin is bullied, it is every normal man's instinct to protect her and every normal woman's instinct to identify with her. If she hits back, everyone will find her plucky and adorable. If her opponent returns the punches in kind, he or she will look like a jerk. If Palin can't learn from Thatcher to master the statistics, she'd better concentrate on mastering that. It won't be hard: she's well on her way as it is.

Communication Gulf

The president, consumed with cleaning up after his predecessors, can't just strip emotion from the public parts of his job.

President Obama, flanked by state and local officials, speaks in Grand Isle, La., on May 28 about oil-spill recovery efforts

The BP oil spill is the perfect metaphor for Barack Obama's presidency so far. His first 500 days in office have been—with the significant exception of health-care reform—consumed in cleaning up the messes left by his predecessors in the financial sector, the auto business, Afghanistan, and now the oil and gas industry, where "regulators" in the Denver office of the Minerals Management Service under President Bush were literally sleeping with the industry reps they were supposed to be licensing. Obama's fate is to head up what Donald Regan (Ronald Reagan's chief of staff) called "the shovel brigade"—the crew cleaning up the dung when the elephants leave the circus.

Obama's response has been to shovel diligently at the Wall Street–GM-Kandahar-Gulf Coast cleanup sites. But having properly stripped all emotion out of his behind-closed-doors decision making, he has neglected to add it back in for the public parts of the job. He forgets that being a great professor isn't the same as being a great communicator. The inspirational figure of the campaign is under the delusion that he will be cheapening himself and the office if he uses memorable soundbites in the theater of the presidency. For all his study of history, Obama somehow has failed to notice that Lincoln's "house divided" and FDR's "fear itself" were, well, soundbites.

The result was that his May 27 news conference left no imprint. He even failed to drive home the point that BP, not taxpayers, would foot the entire bill for the cleanup. It's understandable that Obama likes to operate on his own timetable, not the media's. But just as he told single-payer liberals during the health-care debate that they have to deal with the world as it is, not as they would like it to be, so he must deal with the superficial media world as it is, not as he wants. The president's slow political reflexes are beginning to wreck his game.

Obama's reaction to all the easy Katrina-Carter comparisons has been characteristically philosophical. I'm told by a senior White House official that he figures it's "our time in the barrel," and the accusations that he's an incompetent cold fish are "something to be aware of but not panic about." The easiest way to become Jimmy Carter, Obama rightly figures, is to drop everything else and focus solely on the crisis at hand, as Carter did in 1979–80 when Americans were held hostage in Iran for 444 days. So Obama postponed his trip to Asia and not much else. Among other issues he would have to ignore if he let the spill hijack his administration is, ironically, sanctions against Iran. Financial regulation, immigration, and Elena Kagan's nomination to the Supreme Court would also get swallowed by the gulf region. Focus groups run by Democrats show the public doesn't want Obama to stop multitasking.

Even so, some optical adjustment is essential. The White House political team is furious with James Carville for calling out the president in public as insufficiently forceful. But Carville was right to do so—it helped dent the imperviousness. Obama is planning an address to the nation, his first prime-time speech in a place (still undetermined) other than Congress. According to reports, he'll draw a bright line between the spill, which BP owns, and the restoration and recovery, which he owns. And he'll use the speech and several scheduled visits to the gulf to point out the need for comprehensive energy reform. The White House's new legislative strategy is to apparently attach a landmark change in energy policy—namely, a price on carbon—to the bill bringing aid to the region. Just as the 1969 oil spill that soiled the coast near Santa Barbara, Calif., helped lead to Earth Day and the establishment of the Clean Air Act, perhaps this spill will generate the nation's first true clean-energy program.

But for that to happen, Obama must be seen as an emotive and creative leader. He has to not just "feel our pain," but mobilize an army of the unemployed to clean up the tar balls that, after hurricane season hits, could spread across a swath of the South. No one expects Barack Obama to be Aquaman, diving a mile beneath the surface of the ocean to cap an oil well with his bare hands. But we do demand that he show us he's leading, not just tell us that he has.

Jonathan Alter (*Newsweek*, June 06, 2010°.

Alter is the author of the newly published book The Promise: President Obama, Year One.

What Happened to Obama's Armageddon?

Here is a wild proposition, one that many who obsessively follow politics did not expect to entertain before Memorial Day. What if Barack Obama is not a tone-deaf big spender who misread the public on large-scale government reform such as health care, but is, instead, what he has always been: a smart, steady, and unobtrusively savvy politician whose long-term bets (his first being winning the presidency itself) are well--considered? Only a few months ago it was, as Republican House leader John Boehner put it, Armageddon on the Potomac, and Obama and the Democrats were to be the chief victims of the furies. I am mixing Christian and pagan imagery, but you get the point.

Gallup's daily tracking numbers put the president's job--approval rating at 52 percent, which ranks him ahead of both Reagan and Clinton at similar points in their first terms. The generic congressional ballot is now even, with 46 percent saying they will vote for a Democrat and 46 a Republican. Incumbents are falling from power in states ranging from Utah to West Virginia, but the common denominator is their incumbency, not their party. Despite worries about the Greek crisis and the wildly fluctuating Dow Jones industrial average, Gallup finds that "economic confidence remains at its best level of the year in early May, matching April. Americans' expectations about the economy going forward also remain at their highest since the recession began, with 41 percent of Americans saying U.S. economic conditions are getting better."

How much of the good, or at least better, economic news is directly attributable to the administration is, as ever, uncertain. But we do know this: if Americans were feeling worse about things, Obama would be paying the political price. And so he benefits from the bounce—and he knows that he will suffer from a fall.

The president's stoic acceptance of the cycles of politics is less appreciated than it might be. I think this is because his once frequent talk of changing Washington helped create the impression that Obama was a goo-goo, a dreamer, when he is in fact more of a realist than a radical.

The young president we meet in the pages of my colleague Jonathan Alter's wonderful new book, *The Promise: President Obama, Year One,* is a man of both ideas and action, a big thinker who intuitively understands the limits and the possibilities of politics. "Early on, Obama tried to lay out an operating principle for his administration," Alter writes. "It was, not surprisingly, a character trait rather than an ideological idea: 'That whole philosophy of persistence is one that I'm going to be emphasizing again and again as long as I'm in office. I'm a big believer in persistence.'?"

Around Thanksgiving 2009, a low point for the president, Alter reports that Obama asked an old friend, "Who would really want this job for more than one term?" Then he added: "But I have to run now, otherwise it'll mean letting someone like Mitt Romney step in and get credit for the good stuff that happens after we've been through all this crap." Of course he will run. Alter quotes an Obama friend saying: "He knows he will have to spend a lot of his life after age 54 living with what he accomplished or failed to accomplish as president. It's unimaginable to him to have to live in his 50s, 60s, and 70s without having made the most of it."

There is more than a whiff of pridefulness in the president's account of his own foreign policy. To Alter he characterizes his record abroad as "a pretty flawless execution of what our strategy was at the beginning of [2009]... We said very early on that we had to get all the nations of the world to cooperate around the financial crisis—and to a remarkable degree, they have...We said we wanted to take an engagement approach with Iran and North Korea [so that] we could guarantee international consensus if they reacted badly—and we have."

Obama knows what history has dealt him. "This is not a normal presidential situation that I find myself in," the president told Alter at the end of 2009. "I mean, we have the most difficult set of challenges facing the country since the Great Depression. And that's not hyperbole—it's subject to objective proof." They were sitting in the Oval Office, and the president, Alter writes, chuckled slightly. "When an [H1N1] pandemic ranks fourth or fifth on my list of things to do—you know you've got a lot of stuff on your plate."

And so one suspects the president cannot help but be pleased by the suddenly favorable numbers he is no doubt reading. And one knows that he knows how quickly they can tumble again.

John Meacham
Newsweek, May 15, 2010.

Lexington

The open society and its discontents

In his last column, our current Lexington urges Barack Obama to defend the free flow of goods, people and ideas

A LONG time ago, the rising seas turned Tasmania into an island. A few thousand inhabitants were cut off from contact with the Australian mainland. Their technology regressed. They forgot how to make bone tools, catch fish and sew skins into clothes. It was not that they grew less intelligent. Their problem was that they no longer had many people to trade with. It took a lot of effort to learn how to carve needles out of bone. So long as there were plenty of people with whom to swap needles for food, it made sense to acquire such skills. But in a tiny, isolated society, there may have been room only for one or two needle-makers. If they both fell off cliffs, the technology died with them. When the first Europeans reached Tasmania, they found natives whose only shields against the winter chill were seal-fat smeared on their skin and wallaby pelts over their shoulders.

America, at its best, is the opposite of ancient Tasmania: a vast open society through which goods, ideas and people flow freely. "The success of human beings depends crucially, but precariously, on numbers and connections," argues Matt Ridley, author of "The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves" and a former writer for *The Economist*. Trade allows specialisation. In narrower and narrower fields, people acquire deeper and deeper skills. Through trade, they share them. The fewer barriers there are to the free movement of goods and people, the more opportunities there are for ideas to meet and "have sex", as Mr Ridley puts it.

How open does Barack Obama want America to be? The evidence so far is mixed. Last week he ordered another 1,200 national guards to the Mexican border. Was this a shrewd sop to nativists before Mr Obama pushes for a more welcoming immigration law? Or a cynical ploy to woo isolationist votes? Congressional Republicans are in such an obstructive mood that no immigration bill is likely to pass before the mid-term election. Mr Obama has often said he favours reform, but no one knows how much political capital he will invest in its pursuit.

Immigration policy is a mess. The process for getting a work visa is so arduous that many bright would-be immigrants give up. The government subsidises foreigners to acquire PhDs at American universities and then kicks them out of the country. The World Economic Forum talks of a "talent crisis", and predicts that America will have to add 26m workers to its talent pool by 2030 to sustain the economic growth rates of the past two decades. Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York, describes America's immigration policy as "national suicide". In theory, one could lower the barriers to highly skilled workers without tackling the more controversial issue of unskilled migration. But

politically, you have to do both together, says Bart Gordon, a Democratic congressman from Tennessee. Hispanic voters want a path to citizenship for their undocumented cousins. An immigration bill needs a broad coalition of supporters to pass, so it will need to offer something for everyone.

America has not raised barriers to trade much on Mr Obama's watch, but it has not lowered them either. [...] Mr Obama says he favours open trade, but he has taken some steps backwards, such as slapping tariffs on Chinese tyres. The White House sometimes gives the impression that it sees trade policy as a way to advance environmental and social goals, rather than trade itself, frets Sallie James of the Cato Institute.

The number of temporary visitors to America (tourists, businesspeople and so on) fell sharply after September 11th 2001, recovered strongly and then briefly fell again when the recession struck. America is a wonderful place to visit, but its border bureaucracy is arguably the worst in the rich world. This is a shame: Simon Anholt, a consultant on national image, finds that foreigners who visit a country in person gain a much more positive view of it, especially if they make friends there.

Mr Obama, lift your lamp

Openness has strategic advantages, too. America's military dominance cannot last for ever. China is catching up fast. North Korea has the bomb and Iran may soon follow suit. In future America's global sway will depend less on the threat of force and more on soft power. Fortunately, its charms are more potent than its arms. Foreigners devour American cultural exports, from "Desperate Housewives" to the *Harvard Business Review*. Young people from traditional societies watch "Friends" and see the possibility of greater independence, of living without parents and uncles breathing down their necks, reckons Martha Bayles of Boston College. Foreign leaders are disproportionately educated at American universities, where they cannot help but notice that political freedom need not spell chaos. If and when China eventually embraces democracy, this will surely be part of the reason.

The financial crisis has shown that cross-border flows of money need tighter regulation. It has not undermined the case for the free movement of goods and ideas and people, but many Americans think it has. Openness is unsettling. It provokes fierce opposition. It can be reversed. Ruinous tariffs are easy to impose, as was discovered during the Depression. Foreigners can be mistreated without electoral consequence, since they cannot vote. Yet this would be a colossal mistake. These days it is not only the world's tired, poor huddled masses who yearn to breathe free. More often, it is the energetic and upwardly mobile. A fifth of China's graduates say they want to emigrate; few peasants do. The open society needs defenders. So it would be nice if Mr Obama spoke up more often for the ideals etched on a certain statue.

The Economist, Jun 3rd 2010

British politics

Britain's accidental revolution

David Cameron's new coalition government is a gamble. But it could yet prove a surprisingly successful one

THE youngest prime minister in almost two centuries; the first coalition government in 65 years; the first-ever Conservative-Liberal Democrat government: by accident, British history was made in all sorts of ways this week. This newspaper had hoped that the election on May 6th would return a single party—the Conservatives—with a strong mandate. But after five days of deal-making and denunciation during which it seemed that a multi-party ratatouille based on a losing Labour Party might take power or a minority Tory government be forced to beg its bread at every vote, the best possible outcome given the ropy electoral numbers has emerged: a formal coalition to implement an agreed agenda containing much of the best in each party's manifesto. We welcome it.

Rolling up shirtsleeves

There are two broad challenges for the new government led by David Cameron, the Tory leader, and Nick Clegg, his Lib Dem deputy. The first is fiscal. Within two weeks a joint legislative programme must be presented to Parliament. Within less than two months a new emergency budget is due.

The broad policy outlines are clear—and pretty good. Supply-side education reform, the strongest policy in the Tory manifesto, is to go ahead, with the desirable addition of the Lib Dem commitment to put quite a lot of extra money into teaching poor children. Moving benefit recipients from welfare to work, a sound Tory (and indeed Labour) policy, will also be pursued. Labour's beloved ID cards are to be scrapped, thank heavens, as is the third runway for Heathrow airport. Britain's independent nuclear deterrent is preserved. Policies on immigration and Europe show signs of struggle and fudge, but the Tory annual cap on non-European migrants survives and the Lib Dems' amnesty for those already in Britain does not.

The fiscal trade-offs also make sense. Both parties want to put the burden of deficit cutting on lower spending rather than higher taxes. The Lib Dems, however, were disposed to wait until economic recovery was more assured. They have agreed to make a start this year, cutting £6 billion ($9 billion). [...]

This government will be Mr Cameron's—and the calm way he has pushed this deal through will have reassured doubters (during the negotiations he made it ever harder for Mr Clegg to opt for Labour). The Lib Dems will have five people in the cabinet, but the great offices of state remain firmly Tory. Vince Cable, the Lib Dems' Treasury spokesman, becomes business secretary, in which role his anti-bank and anti-business rhetoric may give rise to some unhappiness. But all in all the division of the spoils seems a good one, and surprisingly free of acrimony.

More divisive will be the new government's second challenge: political reform. Among the novelties this election has thrown up, thanks to the non-aggression pact between the two parties, is Britain's first fixed-term parliament. It will run for five years unless enough MPs vote for dissolution. A more important, and contentious, issue is the first-past-the-post electoral system, which regularly denies the Lib Dems and smaller parties a share of parliamentary seats commensurate with their share of the vote. Mr Cameron, over the shrieks of most of his party, has promised a referendum on introducing an alternative-vote (AV) system allowing voters to rank candidates by preference. It was the price of coalition.

This change in itself falls far short of the proportional representation that Lib Dems would like. But it signals a necessary willingness to debate broader reform. The electoral system is straining to reflect an electorate with increasingly diverse views: the two biggest parties' share of the vote has dropped from 81% in 1979 to 65% in 2010, yet Tory and Labour MPs will still probably account for 565 of the 650 total. In the coming weeks *The Economist* will set out its own views on how to reform not just the electoral system but also the House of Lords, party funding and other bits of the political structure. Though they will not themselves advocate change, the Conservatives have opened the door to a fundamental overhaul.

Dave of the thousand days?

Some suggest that the new coalition represents a realignment of politics towards the centre-right. That's not obviously so: Labour was not wiped out, and many Lib Dems still long for a "progressive alliance" of the left. The coalition could break down before the five years expire. Though all 57 Lib Dem MPs approved it, many will oppose the government on individual issues or abstain from voting, and a few may walk altogether. On the Tory side, right-wingers will resist each compromise. A cabinet containing disgruntled folk from both parties will be a nightmare to run. Mr Cameron and Mr Clegg may get on well together, but their man-management skills will be sorely tested by their own party members.

Still, there is much going for this arrangement. The parties will share responsibility for unpopular fiscal decisions, which should make them easier to take. The fact that, together, they have 59% of the vote will help persuade the electorate to accept painful cuts. Mr Cameron and Mr Clegg have struggled to marginalise their parties' loonier fringes, and their alliance may assist them in that task. They are both sensible, pragmatic types; if anybody can make this deal work, they can.

After 13 years in power, Labour has gone, and not before time. Its replacement looks far sounder that anybody dared hope: a coalition of ideas and people that, on the whole, brings out the best in both parties. For the Tories, for the Lib Dems and for Britain, it's a good deal.

The Economist, May 13th 2010

The British election

But can he govern?

David Cameron seems set to become prime minister, but not in the way that he hoped

BRITAIN has not had a general election quite like this one in living memory. There were shameful scenes at a number of polling stations, as voters tried—and in some cases failed—to vote. The results, when they arrived, seemed to follow few discernible patterns. And, as *The Economist* went to press at breakfast-time on May 7th, the country seemed set to return its first hung parliament since 1974, albeit one in which David Cameron's Conservatives had accumulated considerably more votes and seats than Gordon Brown's Labour Party.

Since counting was not due to begin in 22 seats until later in the morning, the final result will not be known until the evening of the 7th. But the Tories, although they were heading for a higher percentage of the vote than that which put Labour comfortably in government in 2005, seemed destined to fall short of the 326 parliamentary seats required for an overall majority in the House of Commons. Labour may have polled its lowest share of the popular vote since 1983. But the quirks of the electoral system, and regional variations in the party's support—much stronger in Scotland and the north of England than the south—mean that its seat tally has not collapsed to the extent that once seemed possible. The biggest surprise of the night was the performance of the Liberal Democrats. After a strong showing by their leader, Nick Clegg, in the television debates that dominated the campaign, a big boost to the Lib Dem seat tally was expected. They held on to some the Tories had hoped to snatch, but lost more than they gained.

Yet while the new parliament will be hung, in a moral and practical sense the result is plain enough. The election has produced a clear loser: Mr Brown and Labour, who have lost their mandate and many of the votes that put and kept them in power for 13 years. The parliamentary arithmetic seems likely to make it hard for Mr Brown to cobble together a majority with other parties, should he be minded to try.

Britain also has a clear enough winner: Mr Cameron. Speaking at the count in his Witney constituency, he was circumspect, stopping short of claiming victory. But his party, more than any other, has earned the right to govern. The outstanding question is to what extent he will require the support of the Liberal Democrats or, conceivably, another party, such as the Democratic Unionists. That would probably consist of a loose parliamentary pact rather than a formal coalition.

To the victor, the spoiled

The instinctive response of many Britons—and the likely first reaction of financial markets—will be anxiety and confusion. Britain has only a limited experience of hung parliaments; of the wrangling and protracted period of transition that may now ensue; and of minority government, the probable outcome. The unfamiliar is always disconcerting; the prospect of a weak government is especially alarming now, because of the challenges that will confront the next prime minister.

The biggest of those, which received scandalously little attention during the campaign, is the need to shrink the perilous fiscal deficit. [...]

One option would be a formal coalition with the Lib Dems, with, say, Mr Clegg in the cabinet. Given the arithmetic, Mr Cameron is more likely to try to run a minority government. International experience suggests that this need be neither brief nor toothless. Canada has been run by a minority administration for several years. Sweden was governed by one in the mid-1990s, when it implemented a bold fiscal consolidation. That is partly because, while minority rule is difficult for incumbents, it will also pose problems for the opposition.

If all of Mr Cameron's opponents were to unite against him over, say, his finance measures or in a confidence motion, they could force another general election. But they would then have to answer to the electorate for their recalcitrance. That is one reason why an arrangement in which the Lib Dems back Mr Cameron over key votes could be in their interests, as well as Mr Cameron's and the country's. Mr Clegg has previously intimated that, in the event of a hung parliament, a party which secured the most votes and seats would be entitled to try to form a government. Mr Cameron's has earned that right.

In other respects, governing as a large minority party might not be much trickier than governing with a small majority, which leaves prime ministers perpetually vulnerable to backbench rebellions. It will require Mr Cameron to cut deals and make compromises. As a natural pragmatist, he may be well suited to this task. A resounding victory eluded him in part because he never quite defined precisely

what sort of Conservatism, and what sort of Britain, he was peddling. But, just as revolutionaries often make poor administrators, Mr Cameron's flexibility may prove helpful to him in government. Many of his policies—reforming education, for example, or scrapping ID cards—overlap with the Lib Dems'.

Just get on with it

The Lib Dems may well try to extract a concession from Mr Cameron over electoral reform, which they favour. The existing electoral system's main recommendation has been its tendency to produce strong governments with clear mandates. This time, it hasn't. Mr Cameron and his party have traditionally been hostile to most forms of reform. It may be both wise and politic for them to reconsider.

For now, however, neither Britain nor Mr Cameron has much choice. This is not the mandate he had hoped for: the Tories were once expected to stroll to victory and a comfortable majority. But it is the mandate he has got. With wisdom and a sparing use of legislation, he can still govern effectively if he is canny enough, and his opponents behave responsibly.

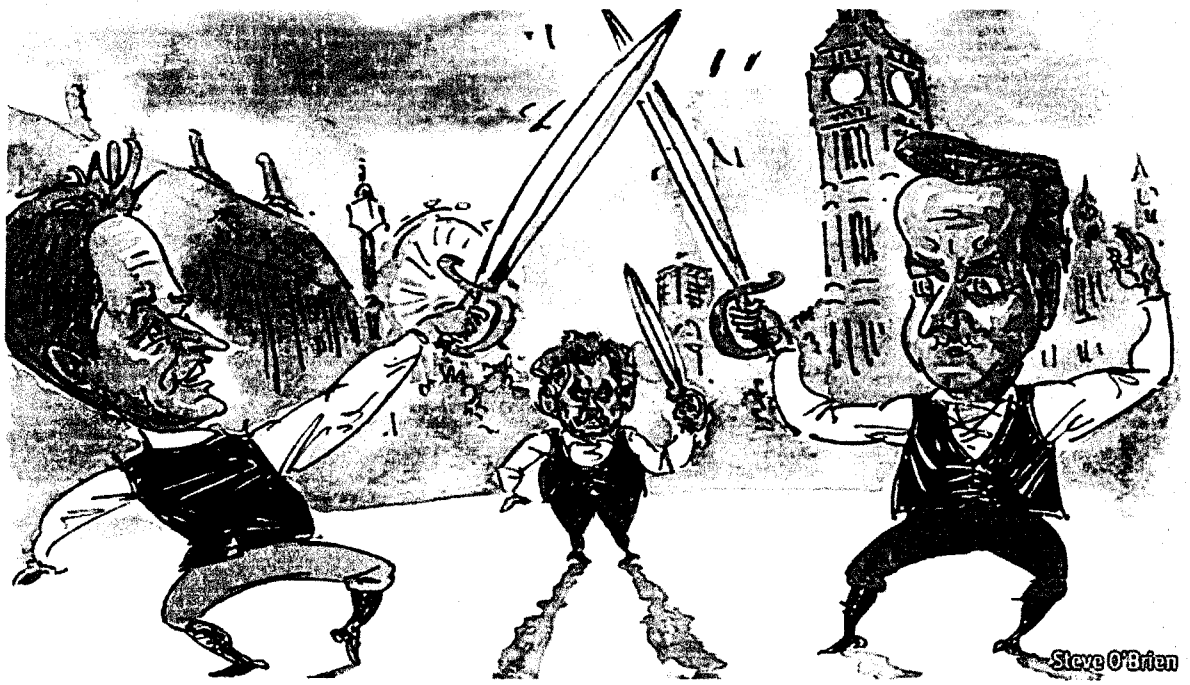
The Economist, May 7th 2010

Bagehot

p1/2

The last days of Gordon Brown

Uncomfortable as they seem, they may turn out to be the prime minister's happiest for a while



IT HAS been commonplace, for much of Gordon Brown's premiership, to compare him to Hamlet: a man discomforted by action, beset by crippling indecision. For much of the election campaign—at least until his fateful visit to Rochdale on April 28th—he resembled Hamlet in another guise: the protagonist who keeps being ousted from his own drama, forced to look on unnoticed as younger, thrusting men commandeer the stage. Hamlet has Laertes and Fortinbras. Mr Brown has Nick Clegg.

This ought to have been his fight: his great struggle to secure a gravity-defying fourth term for Labour and an unprecedented mandate for himself. But Mr Brown has often seemed to be relegated to the action's margin, more Rosencrantz than a hero. The apparent thwarting of David Cameron's push for a Tory majority; the amazing rise of Mr Clegg's Liberal Democrats: these have been the dominant narratives. The incumbent's battle for survival has often struggled to get a look in.

As soon as "change" became the big theme, attention naturally tended to wander from Mr Brown. But his marginalisation is also a result of Labour strategy. When he launched the campaign, standing in Downing Street with his cabinet, it seemed sensible for him to play up the strength, or at least recognisability, of his team, in implicit contrast to the lack of talent on the Tory front bench. In practice, his plan of making low-key visits to tame supporters, while Lord Mandelson and others minded the shop in London, has left a void where the photo ops should have been.

Then came Rochdale. This week Labour decided to change its tactics, and expose Mr Brown to the slings and arrows of outraged voters. In Rochdale he was caught by a stray microphone calling one of them "bigoted" in the apparent safety of his car, a remark preceded, on the tape, by the distinct thud of something hitting something else. His reputation for aloofness and covert intolerance was devastatingly, if somewhat unfairly (most of us are rude about other people in private), confirmed. That the voter was a widow and hitherto a Labour supporter only made it worse. Truth be told, this calamitous slip was the first time Mr Brown has made much of an impact on the campaign.

That includes his performances in the televised debates. More than anyone anticipated, the election has been shaped by them. Some people—mostly Tories who expected Mr Cameron to dominate them—now argue that they are a flighty basis for voting decisions. Bagehot's view is that they are at least as good a motive as many others, such as whim and inherited prejudice. But they do reward fluency and

charm. Mr Brown lost the first two, the post-match analysis mostly focusing on the contest between his rivals (the third is on April 29th, after *The Economist* goes to press).

Not long ago it seemed that Labour might almost manage a majority on May 6th. Now, for reasons both within Mr Brown's control and beyond them, words such as "implosion" and "annihilation" are again being murmured about its prospects. Polls suggest that Mr Brown could lead Labour to its first third-place finish in the popular vote since 1910. [...] And then, for poor Mr Brown himself, things could get worse.

Get it while you can

What happens in the event of a hung parliament depends, of course, on the precise arithmetic of the result. But it is still more likely than not that Mr Cameron will be the next prime minister. It is conceivable that, if he falls well short of a majority, he will co-operate, one way or another, with the Lib Dems. Mr Cameron's opposition to electoral reform, shared by the bulk of his party, may look like a deal-breaker. [...]

For his part, Mr Clegg has got himself into a bit of a muddle over what his bottom and red lines would be in post-election negotiations—first suggesting that he wouldn't help to keep Mr Brown in office (at least if Labour comes third in the popular vote), then seeming more equivocal. The muddle is understandable, deriving as it does from two competing imperatives. The first is Mr Clegg's desire not to compromise his bargaining power by limiting his options in advance; the second his need to distance himself from Mr Brown. Mr Clegg knows that, for a tribune of "change", propping up the old king, or seeming ready to, could be devastating. Thus there has been a last-gasp resurgence of Labour chatter about replacing Mr Brown with a more palatable, less tribal leader, if that would keep the party in office in a coalition—wildly undemocratic though such a switch would look.

So, at the moment, the safest-looking bet for PM may be on "anyone but Gordon". And if he goes, rejected by the voters, his party, Mr Clegg, or all three, the suppressed animosities and grudges he has incited will begin to be aired. Before long, his former ministers will produce their hastily cobbled together memoirs. Then shall we, like the denizens of Elsinore, hear of unnatural acts, accidental judgments, casual political slaughters and purposes mistook, which fell on the inventors' heads.

This, as some close to him note, was Mr Brown's chance to cast off the complexes accumulated during his long wait to become prime minister, and the ones added by humiliations since. That now looks improbable. All the same, Mr Brown's last, overshadowed days in power may be his sunniest for a while.

The Economist, Apr 29th 2010

Why Rand Paul Is Right ... and Wrong
The new GOP Senate candidate in Kentucky would be wrong to oppose the 1964 civil-rights law, but his underlying concern was legitimate.

You'd expect a man who'd just won his party's primary in Kentucky's race for the U.S. Senate to be beaming. But on Rachel Maddow's MSNBC program Wednesday evening, Rand Paul looked like someone had slipped sour milk in his tea, as the progressive host slow-roasted him over his numerous statements supporting the right of private businesses to discriminate, and expressing qualms about the provision of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that bars segregation in privately owned places of "public accommodation."

Paul took pains to stress his personal revulsion for racism and his support for a ban on institutional, government-supported segregation. But in a scene from a campaign adviser's nightmare, he queasily stuck to the view that due respect for the rights of property—whether that property is a home or a business—means letting bigoted owners exclude whom they please. He would soon tell conservative talker Laura Ingraham what he conspicuously avoided saying during that long, uncomfortable Maddow interview: that he would in fact have voted for the '64 Civil Rights Act, and had no wish to change it now.

Still, it's worth considering what's right and wrong with version 1.0 of Paul's view, which John Stossel endorsed on Fox News on Thursday. Is it racist, as intimated by so many of the bloggers and Twitterati who've made the Maddow clip viral? Is it wrong? And if it's wrong, what's wrong with it?

There's no doubt the libertarian argument, springing from the sanctity of private property, was adopted by bigots looking for respectable cover—and the line between them has not always been as sharp as this libertarian writer would like. Rand's father, libertarian icon Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), caught his share of flak over racially incendiary statements that appeared for years in his newsletter. Ron Paul didn't pen such gems as the suggestion that a group of black protesters hold their demonstration "at a food stamp bureau or a crack house" rather than the Statue of Liberty. But he had unwisely lent his name to a clique of libertarian writers whose misbegotten strategy was to rally the white working class against "big government" by exploiting resentment of the "parasitic Underclass."

Yet there's nothing intrinsically racist in the argument in favor of property rights—and indeed, any real liberal ought to at least have some sympathy for it. Strong property rights have often been the friend of unpopular minorities:[...]

Anyone who values freedom of association should also recognize the real tradeoff that antidiscrimination law involves. In a free society, Americans have long believed, even people with repulsive views have a right to express them, and to join with like-minded bigots in private clubs and informal gatherings. It is not crazy to imagine that in a more just world, an ideally just world, respect for that freedom would lead us to countenance—legally, if not personally—the few cranks who sought to congregate in their monochrome cafés and diners.

Yet that's precisely why Paul's 1.0 argument breaks down on its own terms: at the scene of a four-century crime against humanity—the kidnap, torture, enslavement, and legal oppression of African-Americans—ideal theory fails. We libertarians, never burdened with an excess of governing power, have always had a utopian streak, a penchant for imagining what rich organic order would bubble up from the choices of free and equal citizens governed by a lean state enforcing a few simple rules. We tend to envision societies that, if not perfect, are at least consistently libertarian.

Unfortunately, history happened. Rules for utopia can deal with individual crimes—the mugger and the killer and the vandal—but they stumble in the face of societywide injustice. They tell us the state shouldn't sanction the brutal enslavement or humiliating legal subordination of a people; they have less to say about what to do once we have. They tell us to respect the sanctity of the property rights that would arise as free people tamed the wilderness in John Locke's state of nature. They have less to say about the sanctity of property built on generations of slave sweat and blood.

Libertarians need to think harder about how our principles should degrade elegantly, how they can guide us through a fallen world where the live political options seldom afford a full escape from injustice. Rand Paul's 2.0 view (which came out during his interview with Ingraham) suggests a shift toward just this sort of approach. How far it could be extended to other forms of discrimination—against the disabled, the elderly, women, gays—should be determined not by a blanket assumption that government can always restrict associational rights in the name of equality, but by a fact-intensive, case-by-case inquiry that factors in both the state's past complicity in depriving groups of their rights and the extent to which those groups would in practice be systematically denied equal

participation in society absent state correction. And in each case, the ultimate goal of regulation should be to render itself unnecessary. [...]

The value of free association, in commercial as well as private life, is and ought to be a liberal value. The call for justice from victims of a criminal state should ring in libertarian ears. Both should hope to see a better world, where bigots' desire to gather together in their own sterile haunts could be not only tolerated but positively welcomed as a favor to the rest of us.

Newsweek, May 21, 2010
Julian Sanchez.

Sanchez is a research fellow at the Cato Institute and a contributing editor for Reason *magazine.*

Blood in the Water
To some Christian fundamentalists, the oil plume in the Gulf of Mexico heralds the apocalypse.

A growing conversation among Christian fundamentalists asks the question that may have been inevitable: is the oil spill in the gulf a sign of the coming apocalypse?
About 60 million white evangelicals live in America, and about one third of them believe that the world will end in their lifetime, according to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Broadly speaking, these Christians subscribe to a theology called "premillennial dispensationalism." In this world view, they are warriors on the side of God: a cosmic battle—culminating in apocalypse, judgment, and, finally, the reign of Jesus in "a new heaven and a new earth"—will come soon. The most determined of these believers mine the Book of Revelation for signs that the end is near. A text of terrifying and mysterious prophesy, Revelation forecasts the apocalypse in coded language; Christians have spent lifetimes trying to break that code by correlating its verses to current events. (A New York minister named William Miller used Revelation and other sources to predict that the world would end on Oct. 22, 1844. He had previously predicted—wrongly, obviously—that the date would be March 21, 1843. The Millerites, once a powerful and fast-growing sect, quickly became extinct.)
Now blogs on the Christian fringe are abuzz with possibility that the oil spill is the realization of Revelation 8:8–11. "The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed ... A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter." According to Revelation, in other words, something terrible happens to the world's water, a punishment to those of insufficient faith. The foul water, according to the New Oxford Annotated Bible, mirrors one of the plagues God called upon Egypt on behalf of his people Israel. Though maybe it's Revelation 16:3: "The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died."
Some interpreters are very sure: The oil spill matches biblical prophesy and is another predictor of the end. One commenter at Godlike Productions argues that the redness of the oil seen in pictures can be interpreted as blood. "The water is tinted red from the oil...it ACTUALLY looks like blood. coincidence? NOT!" On Facebook, at least two discussion groups are devoted to mining the parallels between events in the gulf and those predicted in the bible; and in a heart-rending interview with CBS, a Louisiana minister named Theodore Turner, whose congregation is one third fishermen, said he knew it to be so. "The Bible prophesized hardships," he said. "If we believe the word of God is true—and we do—we also know that in addition to prophesying hardships he promised to take care of us."
But there's a problem. In the place where American religion and politics intersect, signs of the end times have traditionally been interpreted by members of the right as punishment for ungodly behavior by those on the left. And because the values of the religious right have mirrored those of the Republican Party—at least before the last presidential election—the "good guys" in the cosmic battle have tended to look like Republicans on the far-right fringe and the "bad guys" like liberal Democrats. Thus Hurricane Katrina was brought down upon New Orleans because it was, in the words of Christian minister John Hagee, a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah: the city had a gay-pride march planned for the day the storm struck.
And, according to such fringe commentators as this one, President Barack Obama embodies many of qualities of the Antichrist, as described in Revelation 13:5–7: "The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God ... It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it."
Yet through a biblical lens, it's hard to see the oil spill as anything but God's punishment for greed and a disrespect of Creation—and both of those sins fall mostly on the shoulders of the Republicans, who have been aggressively lobbying for more offshore drilling, without, obviously, ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place. (Remember "Drill, baby, drill"? According to OpenSecrets.org, Republicans in the last decade have far outstripped Democrats in donations from big oil, sometimes by a factor of four.) So the question for biblical literalists becomes one of political alliances. Does God wreak apocalyptic wrath on members of one's own party—or only on the opposition?

Lisa Miller
Newsweek, June 4, 2010

Does Killing Terrorists Actually Prevent Terrorism?
The U.S. has killed another terrorist, but there are more terrorist plots than ever.

Reports surfaced Monday night that a missile strike in Pakistan had successfully killed Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, also known as Sheik Saeed al-Masri, who was serving as Al Qaeda's third in charge. This is just the most recent operation to have targeted terrorist leaders in the Middle East and Central Asia. As Mark Hosenball reports on DECLASSIFIED, "Al-Yazid is the latest in a string of alleged Al Qaeda No. 3s either to have been captured or killed." In addition to the strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the U.S. has recently sent cruise missiles after Al Qaeda's Yemeni affiliate Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

And that's in addition to the more conventional military operations carried out by the tens of thousands of troops each in Afghanistan and Iraq fighting counterinsurgency against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and various affiliates and other violent organizations. But, as NEWSWEEK recently reported, U.S. law-enforcement officials have seen a recent surge in terrorism plots inside the U.S. In September 2009 three men were arrested for an alleged plot to bomb the New York City subway system. Army Psychiatrist Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan is accused of killing 13 fellow soldiers in a shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas, last November. On Christmas Day, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to ignite a bomb in his underpants on an airplane bound for the U.S. And in May, a car bomb was discovered smoking on the street in Times Square. All of these actors claimed affiliation or inspiration with Al Qaeda or an affiliate such as AQAP or the Taliban.

These terrorist plots suggest that our recent efforts, and even successes, in pursuing the military or ideological leaders of these groups has not stopped, or even reduced, their followers desire to attack American civilians. But perhaps the fact that the overwhelming majority of these plots have been foiled, or failed on their own, should give us comfort, and not just in the sense that we've been lucky. Chasing terrorists in Waziristan with missiles clearly is not going to end, or definitively win, the "War on Terrorism," and whether we should think about a diplomatic rapprochement with these groups instead of fighting an endless war with them is a legitimate question. If the U.S. could avoid war with the Soviet Union, a.k.a. the "Evil Empire," why not Al Qaeda or the Taliban? But that does not mean we have nothing to show for our efforts in the Middle East since September 11.

More than eight years after the U.S. successfully invaded Afghanistan, and six months to the day after President Obama announced a troop surge to pacify the country, it doesn't appear that selectively killing militants eliminates, or even necessarily reduces, the number of people seeking to do us harm. And that should come as no surprise. The logical fallacy underlying the Global War on Terror bears a striking resemblance to the misbegotten logic of the Iraq invasion: neither nuclear proliferation nor terrorism can be eradicated militarily. Sure, invading Iraq stopped Saddam Hussein from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, but it did not stop Iran and North Korea from pursuing them. The premise that, in former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton's words, other rogue states would "draw the appropriate lesson" from Iraq's fate and duly withdraw from pursuing weapons of mass destruction and threatening their neighbors has been disproved. If anything, the opposite has come to pass, as demonstrated by North Korea's recent sinking of a South Korean vessel and Monday's announcement that international nuclear inspectors found Iran has a stockpile of nuclear fuel sufficient to make two nuclear weapons. No matter how strong our military is, we cannot invade every hostile country that might seek nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, and suggesting that we pick off some just encourages the others to protect themselves by acquiring them.

Likewise, terrorists can be lurking in any country, including our own, and striking them with missiles is not a feasible approach to eliminating them entirely. Destroying terrorist compounds with heavy artillery tends not to frighten younger generations from joining terrorist movements, but rather inspires them to. Just ask Israel.

So, should the U.S. radically rethink its approach to pursuing terrorists in the AfPak region? Not necessarily. As Hosenball writes, the pursuit of terrorist leaders in Pakistan, initiated by President Bush two years ago and ramped up by President Obama, "has significantly degraded the ability of the Qaeda central command to organize operations like 9/11 or elaborate European plots." That might explain why so many of the recent terrorist attempts have been so inept. Intelligence gathering has helped break up plots, but some plots have been so poorly executed that even when the government failed to catch them no lives have been lost. Indeed, the Times Square car bomb was so unimpressive

that some experts and government officials were initially skeptical of the Pakistani Taliban's claim that it sent Faisal Shahzad, who has been charged with planting it. But when you are constantly on the run and being hunted, it is considerably more difficult to train and direct an efficient terrorist operation halfway around the world.

So successful strikes like the one on al-Yazid are indeed victories, but unlike, say, the D-Day invasion you cannot draw a line from them to any realistic point of total victory.

Ben Adler
Newsweek, June 01, 2010

Is Rand Paul Good or Bad for Republicans?
By **JAY NEWTON-SMALL / COLUMBIA, KY.**

Rand Paul is either the Republican Party's best hope to keep a Senate seat in Kentucky or its worst nightmare.

Here's a little window into why:

"There are Tea Party–like candidates running across the country," notes Paul, who is running for the seat soon to be vacated by Jim Bunning. "Some people say I chastise the Republican Party too much. But I think it'll take an outsider. This is the year to do it. You need someone who will just say no. We could destroy our country with all these deficits. A lot of Republicans have been the problem. It's not all on [President] Obama, though he did make it a lot worse."

Paul, the Bowling Green ophthalmologist whose chief claim to fame is that his father Ron is the world's most famous libertarian, now leads a race he was never supposed to enter. And he leads it by as much as 20 points. In doing so, he is upsetting not only expectations in Kentucky but also overturning the local power structure: he has outraised Kentucky secretary of state Trey Grayson, the handpicked favorite son of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell.

And he has done so running nearly as much against the GOP as he has against the Democrats and Obama. Not surprisingly, his campaign is being watched closely by Republicans who worry about the size and strength of the Tea Party movement — and the drain insurgencies like Paul's could have on their coffers.

"The biggest crowds I've been to in Kentucky have been Tea Party crowds. They're two to three times bigger than any Republican crowds," Paul says.

Paul, 47, is not a terribly charismatic speaker, and his political experience consists of filling in for his father on the 2008 campaign trail. If elected, Paul says, he'd work to reduce the deficit, lower taxes, strip the regulatory code and introduce legislation to limit members of Congress and Senators to 12 years in office — a move that would take a constitutional amendment to enforce, but the suggestion is always one of Paul's biggest applause lines. Sarah Palin and Steve Forbes have endorsed him.

After growing up in Surfside, Texas, where his father has been a Congressman on and off for more than 30 years, Paul went to Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and ophthalmology school at Duke University in North Carolina, and moved to Kentucky in 1993 to be near his wife's parents. He's not charming or debonair, but there's something about his wonky passion for debt and trade imbalances that seems to inspire people. It's easy to find folks who've never attended a political rally at his events, tossing $5 or $10 in the buckets that are usually passed around like a church plate. "I like that he's earnest; I feel like he's being honest with me and not telling me what I want to hear," says Steve Strodtman, a lifelong Republican in the town of Columbia, where some 75 people gathered recently to hear him speak. "I was disappointed with George W. Bush. It's nice to see someone returning the party to its conservative roots."

His success so far has the GOP establishment fighting back. In his ads, Grayson is attempting to paint Paul as a kook whose beliefs are outside the mainstream. Which may explain why on several issues, Paul is edging toward the center: Pure libertarians, he says, believe the market should dictate policy on nearly everything from the environment to health care. Paul has lately said he would not leave abortion to the states, he doesn't believe in legalizing drugs like marijuana and cocaine, he'd support federal drug laws, he'd vote to support Kentucky's coal interests and he'd be tough on national security.

"They thought all along that they could call me a libertarian and hang that label around my neck like an albatross, but I'm not a libertarian," Paul says between Lasik surgeries at his medical office, where his campaign is headquartered, with a few desks crammed between treatment rooms. "Frankly, I'd rather be coming from the right than from the left like Grayson, who not too long ago was a Democrat and Bill Clinton supporter." (Grayson voted for Clinton in 1992 before switching parties and entering politics in the mid-1990s.)

Paul's adjustments may leave him vulnerable to a challenge from the right. Bill Johnson, a former naval officer and Tea Party candidate who has poured his life savings — more than $200,000 — into his bid, sees opportunity too. "Grayson's the moderate, establishment candidate, and Paul's got a lot of support from his father's list," Johnson says. "I am the true Tea Party candidate." As with the beverage they are named after, Tea Party Republicans are taking many forms and flavors this year — and could produce many outcomes, some unintended, in the 2010 elections.

Time, Wednesday, Mar. 17, 2010

Over the River, Ralliers Gun for Washington's Attention
By **KATY STEINMETZ / ARLINGTON, VA.** (***Time***, Tuesday, Apr. 20, 2010)

"Guns only have 2 enemies: Rust and Politicians." So read one of the many signs on Monday at a Second Amendment rally in front of the Washington Monument, where hundreds of people convened in the name of the right to bear arms. But while the gathering had all the high-profile works — official NRA presence, a dramatic backdrop, a fully equipped stage — it lacked the powerful feature of a much humbler rally that was held across the Potomac on the same day: openly carried weapons.

The 100 or so gun-rights advocates gathered at Gravelly Point Park in Arlington, Va., gave up the glitz of the Mall to take advantage of Virginia law, which, unlike that of Washington, allows people to carry loaded handguns and unloaded rifles. The spot was chosen by Daniel Almond, founder of Restore the Constitution, a five-month-old group that organized the event. Almond believes attention goes where guns go — even when that place is a park where speeches about constitutional rights are drowned out by planes leaving Reagan National Airport and speakers have to orate from the back of a pickup truck. "This is where you come to get ahold of the nation," said Andrew Graves, who works in ammunition manufacturing in Vermont, as he directed traffic for the event.

The strategy appeared to be working. Photographers and camera operators swarmed the ralliers, who wore yellow armbands, and journalists waited in line for interviews. Less successful was Almond's attempt to spread a unified message once his newly formed group had the media's attention. "The concept from the beginning has been that it have a simple message: restore the Constitution," Almond said. But interpreting that document rarely proves a simple matter. The ralliers, many clad in camo and NRA stickers, took varied lines in linking their grievances to guns rights, which have, if anything, been expanding under the Obama Administration. Bills repealing handgun limits and increasing concealed-carry areas have passed in several states in the past year. President Obama even signed a federal law allowing loaded guns in national parks, a freedom that the attendees exercised when gathering that morning in Fort Hunt, Va., before caravanning to Gravelly Point.

Nevertheless, as with the Tea Party supporters, those who were present generally agreed that the government had unconstitutionally overstepped what should be the limits of its power; health care reform and the bank bailouts took the worst oratorical beating. But other grievances varied from speaker to speaker. Eric Stinnett, an engineer from Alabama, lambasted everything from school lunches to PBS. Others called for a complete congressional revamping. "We're here to tell you something, guys: You're fired!" said Larry Pratt, executive director for Gun Owners of America, pointing across the river.

It's a sentiment reminiscent of Tea Party lines and the calls to overhaul health care in the days before the bill's passage. Although Almond said his organization has no official ties to the Tea Party, one attendee, Michael Rugh, called the rally part of "Tea Party: Phase II" — a more aggressive cousin to a movement he feels is now being laughed at by certain politicians. "We are serious. We are going to do whatever it takes," Rugh said, adding the caveat that he didn't mean anyone would get blown up or shot.

That aside may have seemed especially necessary given the date. Almond said the rally was set on April 19 as a nod to the battles of Lexington and Concord, the first skirmishes in the Revolutionary War. But it's also the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombings and the deadly FBI siege at Waco in 1993.

Justin Coleman, a computer programmer from South Carolina, said that weapons were there to serve as a symbol for all basic rights, while others viewed the guns as a more threatening sign of things to possibly come. "The types of laws and things that [Congress is] shoving down our throat, I'm not O.K. with that. It might come down to where the only way to stop that is to remove them, and they're not going to walk away peacefully," said Tim Hammond, a parking-garage manager from California who wore military gear and a colonial-era hat. A few attendees were more explicit in their predictions. "You know in these next two years, it's not gonna be like any other two years you've ever seen," said Pierotte Vassau, who came from New Jersey with the Oath Keepers, a far-right group of former military and police officers. "And I think there will be blood. They can have mine."

Almond, however, insisted that brandishing the guns in Virginia was simply meant to highlight what he sees as the great irony of not being able to fully exercise Second Amendment freedoms in the capital. "It's a celebration of what's left of our freedoms," he said. "It's also a message to the other side of the Potomac that we're not afraid to exercise our rights as far as we can."

Time, Tuesday, Apr. 20, 2010

Showdown in Arizona
Obama must pursue immigration reform.

If there's one number that should matter most to politicians right now—in Washington, in Arizona—it's 83. Thatis the percentage of young Hispanic voters who, according to a new Democracia USA survey, worry about being discriminated against. Why so crucial? It's impossible to overstate Hispanic political power: for each of the next 20 years (and in each of the last 10), a half million Latino citizens will turn 18—voting age. By midcentury, census data show, Hispanics will be the country's largest ethnic group. By the end of the century, they'll be the majority.

Geography, educational mores, and technology make this group different from earlier immigrant waves. The ideal of assimilation—Teddy Roosevelt's melting-pot standard—is outdated in a country where most new immigrants are from next door, urban public schools are not as diverse and rigorous as they once were, and satellites and the Internet keep people tethered to their home culture. Democracia's poll found that, while young Hispanics believe in the American Dream, they recoil at what they see as an obsession with money. They find refuge in an empathetic Latino ethos—and in speaking Spanish. Two thirds referred to themselves as bilingual or bicultural. "When I was growing up in New Jersey, we would run away from our Hispanic heritage," says Jorge Mursuli, a Cuban-American and the head of Democracia. "With these kids, it's entirely different. They want to—need to—embrace Hispanic culture. They feel fortunate to be able to live in two worlds.

That, however, makes them especially sensitive—and vulnerable—to an immigration law like Arizona's, which gives police wide latitude to stop anyone they have "reasonable cause" to think is in the country illegally. Not surprisingly, Latinos view the law as a license to harass. Still, that hasn't stopped Republican candidates nationwide from tripping over each other as they run to the right on the issue. That's what Sen. John McCain is doing—rather -unconvincingly—in Arizona to fend off a challenge from onetime congressman J. D. Hayworth. In California's GOP primary for governor, the formerly anodyne businesswoman Meg Whitman has a spot featuring former governor Pete Wilson calling her "tough as nails" on immigration—even though (or rather, *because*) Wilson is reviled in the Hispanic community for supporting a similarly draconian state law in 1994. And in Kentucky, the ineffable Rand Paul suggests denying citizenship to American-born children of illegal immigrants—which might sound vaguely reasonable until you realize that it violates the Constitution.

Arizona's law is due to go into effect July 29; between now and then, it will likely get a second wind on cable TV as it takes center stage in the courts and on the campaign trail. Polls show strong national support for the law among non-Hispanic voters, especially older ones, but even stronger opposition among Latinos, especially younger ones. These tectonic plates are headed toward one another. An earthquake is coming, perhaps this fall, and the guy on the fault line is President Obama. Most Democrats, especially in swing districts, want to steer clear of the issue; they're hunting for conservative votes in a bad year. But if Obama doesn't challenge the law, he risks losing a generation of Hispanic voters. Pollster Sergio Bendixen, who conducted the Democracia survey, says, "Hispanics want to see if he's an honest and true friend. It's not about the details of legislation or lawsuits, it's about feeling welcome here."

Obama, as is his wont, is mulling what to do. He could pledge not to cooperate, meaning he would direct the feds not to deport any illegals that Arizona rounds up. "That would, in effect, kill the law," says Thomas A. Saenz of the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund. (A coalition of civil-rights and Hispanic groups has filed suit against the law in a Phoenix federal court, and they were planning last week to ask for a preliminary injunction. The Justice Department is "considering" its options, say two White House officials who didn't want to be named discussing legal strategy.) Or Obama could push fellow Democrats in Congress to pass a comprehensive immigration-reform bill, which would include a path to citizenship for millions of un-documented aliens. In both the campaign and his first year in office, it's what he promised to do. "I want to believe in that person," says Democracia's Mursuli. And, it appears, there's no shortage of young Hispanic voters who do, too.

Howard Fineman
Newsweek, June 5, 2010.

SERIE LETTRES ET ARTS
ANGLAIS P1/2

Is the Supreme Court Too Packed With Ivy Leaguers?
By **TIM PADGETT**

For the past half century, Americans have done a lot of hand-wringing over the racial, religious and gender make-up of the U.S. Supreme Court. You can pontificate about the need for open legal minds or strict adherence to the Constitution. But most of us, conservatives as well as liberals, believe that a diversity of backgrounds — the broad range of "empathy" that President Obama likes to gush about — does matter on the top bench.

So it's all the more confounding that Obama, who on Monday nominated Solicitor General Elena Kagan to replace retiring Justice John Paul Stevens, follows one of the most elitist traditions there is when it comes to selecting Supreme Court judges: tapping only people who attended law school at Harvard or Yale. The President, who last year chose Yale law graduate Sonia Sotomayor, had a wealth of candidates this time around who could have broken the tiresome Cambridge-New Haven mold: federal appeals judges Ann Claire Williams (Notre Dame) and Diane Wood (Texas), former Georgia Supreme Court chief justice Leah Ward Sears (Emory), Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano (Virginia). Their law schools all rank in the nation's top 25. But Obama once again wrapped himself in Ivy and chose Kagan — a Harvard law grad just like himself.

Stevens, who got his J.D. at Northwestern University, is the only justice on the current court who doesn't bleed legal crimson or blue. (Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg graduated from Columbia after transferring from Harvard Law.) So it seems well past time to ask: if the U.S. put women and minorities on the Supreme Court in the 20th century, shouldn't we in the 21st be concerned — as some in Congress now are — that our Presidents keep drawing from the same, ultra-exclusive law school well? Does their apparent obsession with the Harvard-Yale pedigree also risk undermining our high court's intellectual diversity and encourage the kind of elitism that's anathema to a democracy?

Harvardites and Yalies, pointing to grads like Sotomayor, argue that their schools have long been meritocracies. True enough. Still, powerful alumni like Obama tend to brandish them the way English lords flaunt the Oxford-Cambridge Old Boy network. "It's a perfectly incestuous academic cartel," says Jonathan Turley, a legal scholar and professor at the George Washington University School of Law (another top 25 school) who teaches a course on the Supreme Court. Turley notes that after Kagan's White House presentation, most of the breathless buzz from cable TV pundits was "how plugged in she is to that exclusive Harvard-Yale club, that she knows the other justices because of their law school associations. It's a self-replicating system."

But does it have a potentially harmful effect, not so different from a court once packed with old Wasp men (though if Kagan is confirmed, the court would no longer have any Protestants at all)? Scholars like Turley — who feels Kagan's output of legal writings is "wafer-thin" compared to those of candidates like Wood — think so. "It's deleterious to the court," he argues, "because it artificially limits the pool of candidates and inevitably removes better qualified candidates." The U.S. has the world's best legal education system, yet we turn to an absurdly minute corner of it for our Supreme Court justices. The high court is a cloistered enough institution as it is — so why risk making it even more detached from the rest of us by turning it into a Harvard-Yale Law Review reunion? "A court that draws from outside those two institutions," adds Turley, a Northwestern law grad, "would be part of a less insular conversation" in its deliberations.

Richard Garnett, a Yale law grad, clerk to the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist and professor at the University of Notre Dame's law school, agrees that "you do have to worry about missing opportunities for as broad a range of talent as possible, and that definitely includes people who went to Notre Dame or Texas or Virginia. Their best law students are just as good as those at Harvard or Yale." But he says Presidents tend to have Harvard and Yale on their SCOTUS brains because "those schools are extremely good at rigorous, deep thinking about the kind of legal questions that confront the justices." When it comes time to issue case rulings, Garnett argues, law schools aren't "something to worry about that much compared to how expertly justices decide legal questions and how well they understand the judge's role in a democracy."

Still, University of Texas School of Law professor and Supreme Court scholar Lucas Powe fears the court risks "an ignorance of certain parts of the law." He notes, for example, that the country's Sunbelt growth in recent decades has made water rights a more important area of case law, one that many top schools "west of I-95" tend to teach more thoroughly than northeastern schools. It's a reminder, says Powe, that the court today has "less geographical diversity than it did even when Thomas Jefferson was President."

Indeed, the Harvard-Yale bias may also contribute to another lingering Supreme Court imbalance. A geographic skew still exists: if Kagan is confirmed, only two of the nine justices, Chief Justice John Roberts and Clarence Thomas, will hail from somewhere other than the two coasts. (Four will be from New York City, two from California and one from New Jersey.) Obama, a Chicagoan, should understand as well as anyone that regional perspective can enrich a court's "empathy" as deeply as race, religion or gender. Stevens, also a Chicagoan, certainly understood it — which is why he fought so diligently as a justice against the kind of social elitism the President displayed again this week.

Time, Wednesday, May. 12, 2010

Are Liberal Judges Really 'Judicial Activists'?
By **ADAM COHEN**

"Judicial activism" is the No. 1 conservative talking point on the law these days. Liberal judges, the argument goes, make law, while conservative judges simply apply the law as it is written.

It's a phony claim. Conservative jurists are every bit as activist as liberal ones. But the critique is also wrong as an approach to the law. In fact, judges always have to interpret vague clauses and apply them to current facts — it's what judging is all about.

That point was eloquently made by retired Supreme Court Justice David Souter during a speech at Harvard University's 359th commencement last month.

To hear conservatives tell it, America has long been under attack by liberal judges who use vague constitutional clauses to impose their views. This criticism took off in the 1950s and '60s, when federal judges were an important driving force in dismantling racial segregation.

Conservatives say that courts should defer to the decisions made by Congress, the President and state and local officials — the democratically elected parts of government. When they interpret the Constitution, they should apply the plain words and original intent of the framers. If they do, conservatives insist, the right result will be obvious.

In his address at Harvard, Souter explained why this cardboard account of the judge's role "has only a tenuous connection to reality."

It is rarely the case, Souter pointed out, that a constitutional claim can be resolved by mechanically applying a rule. It's not impossible: if a 21-year-old tried to run for the Senate, a judge could simply invoke the constitutional requirement that a Senator must be at least 30. But many constitutional guarantees, like the rights of due process and equal protection, were deliberately written to be open-ended and in need of interpretation.

Another problem with the mechanistic approach is that the Constitution contains many rights and duties that are in tension with one another. In 1971, the court considered the Pentagon Papers case, in which the government tried to block the New York *Times* and the Washington *Post* from printing classified documents about the Vietnam War. The court didn't have one principle to apply — it had two. The First Amendment argued for allowing publication, while national security weighed against it. The Supreme Court, rightly, came out on the side of the newspapers. But it struck many people as a difficult case to decide. As Souter noted, "a lot of hard cases are hard because the Constitution gives no simple rule of decision for cases in which one of the values is truly at odds with another."

Conservatives like to make judging sound easy and uncomplicated. At his confirmation hearings, Chief Justice John Roberts said he would act as an "umpire," applying the rules rather than making them, remembering that "it's my job to call balls and strikes and not to pitch or bat."

It was a promise that did not last long past the Senate's vote to confirm him. Roberts and the rest of the court's five-member conservative majority have overturned congressional laws and second-guessed local elected officials as aggressively as any liberal judges. And they have been just as quick to rely on vague constitutional clauses.

In a 2007 case, the conservative majority overturned voluntary racial integration programs in Seattle and Louisville, Ky. Good idea or bad, the programs were adopted by local officials who had to answer to voters. But the conservative Justices had no problem invoking the vague words of the Equal Protection Clause to strike them down.

Earlier this year, in the Citizens United campaign-finance case, the court's conservatives struck down a federal law that prohibited corporations from spending on federal elections. Once again, they relied on a vaguely worded constitutional guarantee.

In the process, they flouted the will of the people. After the ruling, a poll found that 80% of Americans opposed the ruling — 65% "strongly." The decision was as anti-democratic as any liberal ruling that conservatives have ever complained about.

A few years ago, a law professor at the University of Kentucky methodically examined the votes of the Justices, applying objective standards. She found that the court's conservatives were at least as activist as the liberals.

When Elena Kagan's confirmation hearings begin later this month, there are likely to be more charges that she would be a judicial activist. Souter's Harvard address was a timely reminder of how meaningless such accusations really are.

(***Time***, Wednesday, Jun. 09, 2010)

(*Cohen, a lawyer, is a former TIME writer and a former member of the New York* Times *editorial board.*)

Virginia Is for Lovers. But How About Gay Ones?
By **SOPHIA YAN / WASHINGTON**

It's been a turbulent few weeks for gay rights, the Virginia attorney general and college students across the Old Dominion.

First, Republican Governor Bob McDonnell issued an executive order last month that "specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, political affiliation, or against otherwise qualified persons with disabilities." Left off the list, notably, was a mention of sexual orientation.

Then five days ago, Republican Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli Jr. sent a letter to public colleges and universities advising them that state law prohibits "a college or university from including 'sexual orientation,' gender identity,' 'gender expression' ... as a protected class within it's non-discrimination policy."

Cuccinelli's notice sparked a remarkable outcry of gay-rights supporters on college campuses across the state. Administrators, professors and students organized panel discussions and rallies — both in person and online — complaining that Cuccinelli's edit would lead to a rise in hate crimes and a drop in diversity in admitting students and hiring faculty. "His radical actions are putting Virginia at risk of losing both top students and faculty, and discouraging prospective ones," says Jon Blair, CEO of the gay-rights group Equality Virginia.

Following the outcry, on Wednesday afternoon, McDonnell issued an executive directive that clarified his earlier executive order, contradicting Cuccinelli's previous statement and specifically prohibiting discrimination "based on factors such as one's sexual orientation."

The attorney general's response was noncommittal: "I applaud Governor McDonnell for the tone he is setting for the Commonwealth of Virginia. I will remain in contact with the Governor and continue to work with him on issues important to Virginians." Cuccinelli, in his earlier directive, had acted on his own accord, building on the governor's previous executive order, but went too far, says a state political analyst who preferred to remain anonymous. The governor's clarification amounted to "a public spanking of Cuccinelli," says the analyst.

The back and forth came after more than 1,500 students and supporters rallied Wednesday at Virginia Commonwealth University to protest Cuccinelli's letter. Waving rainbow flags, chanting "Down With Hate" and wielding signs that read "Jesus Had 2 Dads, Too" and "Homophobia Is A Sin," the animated band assembled near the student union, before 200 later broke away and marched down a main road within blocks of the Virginia State Capitol.

Thousands organized on Facebook to discuss the rulings. One Facebook group, "We Don't Want Discrimination In Our State Universities and Colleges," has more than 5,000 members. Frequent message blasts urged people to phone Cuccinelli's office, send e-mails and write on his Facebook wall. "It's just a huge slap in the face to treat schools that poorly, and lesbians and gays in general," says Seth Kaye, a sophomore computer science major and president of the Queer and Allied Activism group at the University of Virginia. "We are being singled out. People are upset. It's really frustrating." Specific wording protecting gays, he contends, is important to help remind the UVA community to exercise better judgment. "Virginia is supposed to be for lovers!" he exclaimed, referencing an ad campaign by the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

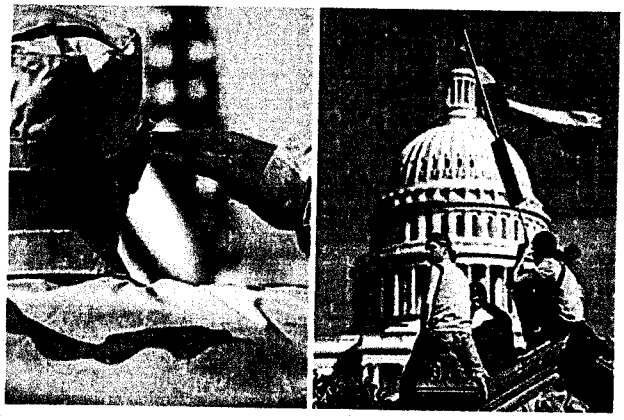
In an interview with TIME, Cuccinelli says his letter was meant to "issue blanket advice" to high-level college administrators, something he felt was needed after he received several inquiries from schools. The letter reaffirmed that "Virginia's public universities are, at all times, subject to the control of the General Assembly," and because wording adopted by General Assembly policies do not specifically name "sexual orientation" as a class protected in non-discrimination, "any college or university that has done so has acted without proper authority."

The letter was seen as a blow to the independence of the state's education institutions, which normally have "a great deal of autonomy," says Kirsten Nelson, spokeswoman for the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. "Changes must be made by the General Assembly. Without changes, historically it has been assumed that it is the will of the General Assembly that the institutions retain broad control of their governance." The Council will discuss this issue at their regularly planned meeting next week.

Time, Thursday, Mar. 11, 2010

P 1/2

A Final Fight over 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'
By **MARK THOMPSON / WASHINGTON**



When it first became law in 1993, "Don't ask, don't tell" was a congressional slap at the Clinton Administration's impertinent attempt to allow openly gay men and women to serve in uniform before lawmakers — or for that matter the armed forces — were ready for such a change. That was nearly a generation ago, however, and with public opinion shifting, "Don't ask, don't tell" has become a political football once again. In recent days Congressional Democrats — fearful that anticipated losses in November elections could scotch President Obama's pledge to overturn the policy — have launched a pre-emptive strike to end the ban before the Pentagon has given the idea a formal green light.

As much as Senator John McCain and others oppose rushing to allow gays to serve openly, there is now — to use an old military phrase — light at the end of the tunnel. The week of Memorial Day marked the opening of the final act in a play that began in February, when Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared "Don't ask, don't tell" obsolete. The second act occurred in March, when Defense Secretary Robert Gates eased enforcement of the policy, barring hearsay evidence against alleged gays and requiring senior officers to rule on such ousters. The grand finale — repealing the law — is now expected to come sometime this summer as part of the 2011 defense authorization bill. Last week, the House of Representatives voted 234-194 to end it, and the Senate Armed Services Committee voted 16-12 to do the same.

But things are moving too fast for the Joint Chiefs, who would prefer to wait for a Pentagon panel to complete its study of the repeal's impact on troops, slated to be delivered Dec. 1. Mullen, who first flipped the switch by declaring the policy obsolete three months ago, appeared on Sunday talk shows saying he wished Congress hadn't acted before the Pentagon had a chance to finish its assessment. "What I don't want to do is electrify the force at the time of two wars," he told Fox News. Gates, for his part, gave assurances to the troops via video on Friday that repeal wasn't likely for months, and even then would only follow a suitably lengthy review.

Gates has expressed his support for the Dec. 1 timeline before. "To legislate before this review is done would send a very negative signal to the men and women in uniform that their views on this don't matter," he said May 10. But after gay advocates proposed an early vote in a meeting with White House officials on May 24, Gates made clear he could live with the greased skids.

The dispute over the early vote has raised hackles on both sides. Opponents of "Don't ask, don't tell" maintain that the Pentagon study is merely to determine how to end the ban, not whether to end it. That has privately upset some troops, who now see the review process as a charade. McCain, the Arizona Republican and former Navy pilot, solicited letters from the heads of the four branches of service saying Congress should delay its vote until the Pentagon finishes its study — a move that has angered supporters of repeal. The service chiefs "appear to have forgotten that Congress is the policymaker here," said Aubrey Sarvis, an Army veteran and head of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a gay-advocacy group that has long sought to overturn the ban. "What is unprecedented about this sideshow is that the chiefs have volunteered to be drawn into a political distraction orchestrated by a few in the minority."

Still, just as they have among civilians, attitudes toward the ban itself within the military are undergoing a generational shift. General James Conway, the 62-year-old Marine Commandant, told

Congress that "Don't ask, don't tell" should stay on the books. "The current policy works," he said to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March. "My best military advice to this committee, to the secretary, to the President, would be to keep the law such as it is." But in the May issue of *Marine Corps Gazette*, there's a letter from Second Lieut. Matthew McCallum. "As a platoon commander, I would enforce an openly homosexual service member's right to equal opportunity the same as I would for my other Marines," the young officer writes. "The Marine Corps needs to keep its honor clean and allow declared homosexuals to serve with pride." McCallum could yet serve for decades as a Marine officer. Conway is slated to retire before summer's end.

Time, Monday, May. 31, 2010

February 28, 2010, New York Times
Op-Ed Columnist
Learning From the Sin of Sodom
By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

For most of the last century, save-the-worlders were primarily Democrats and liberals. In contrast, many Republicans and religious conservatives denounced government aid programs, with Senator Jesse Helms calling them "money down a rat hole."

Over the last decade, however, that divide has dissolved, in ways that many Americans haven't noticed or appreciated. Evangelicals have become the new internationalists, pushing successfully for new American programs against AIDS and malaria, and doing superb work on issues from human trafficking in India to mass rape in Congo.

A pop quiz: What's the largest U.S.-based international relief and development organization? It's not Save the Children, and it's not CARE — both terrific secular organizations. Rather, it's World Vision, a Seattle-based Christian organization (with strong evangelical roots) whose budget has roughly tripled over the last decade.

World Vision now has 40,000 staff members in nearly 100 countries. That's more staff members than CARE, Save the Children and the worldwide operations of the United States Agency for International Development — combined.

A growing number of conservative Christians are explicitly and self-critically acknowledging that to be "pro-life" must mean more than opposing abortion. The head of World Vision in the United States, Richard Stearns, begins his fascinating book, "The Hole in Our Gospel," with an account of a visit a decade ago to Uganda, where he met a 13-year-old AIDS orphan who was raising his younger brothers by himself.

"What sickened me most was this question: where was the Church?" he writes. "Where were the followers of Jesus Christ in the midst of perhaps the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time? Surely the Church should have been caring for these 'orphans and widows in their distress.' (James 1:27). Shouldn't the pulpits across America have flamed with exhortations to rush to the front lines of compassion?

"How have we missed it so tragically, when even rock stars and Hollywood actors seem to understand?"

Mr. Stearns argues that evangelicals were often so focused on sexual morality and a personal relationship with God that they ignored the needy. He writes laceratingly about "a Church that had the wealth to build great sanctuaries but lacked the will to build schools, hospitals, and clinics."

In one striking passage, Mr. Stearns quotes the prophet Ezekiel as saying that the great sin of the people of Sodom wasn't so much that they were promiscuous or gay as that they were "arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16:49.)

Hmm. Imagine if sodomy laws could be used to punish the stingy, unconcerned rich!

The American view of evangelicals is still shaped by preening television blowhards and hypocrites who seem obsessed with gays and fetuses. One study cited in the book found that even among churchgoers ages 16 to 29, the descriptions most associated with Christianity were "antihomosexual," "judgmental," "too involved in politics," and "hypocritical."

Some conservative Christians reinforced the worst view of themselves by inspiring Ugandan homophobes who backed a bill that would punish gays with life imprisonment or execution. Ditto for the Vatican, whose hostility to condoms contributes to the AIDS epidemic. But there's more to the picture: I've also seen many Catholic nuns and priests heroically caring for AIDS patients — even quietly handing out condoms. [....]

Some Americans assume that religious groups offer aid to entice converts. That's incorrect. Today, groups like World Vision ban the use of aid to lure anyone into a religious conversation. [...]

A root problem is a liberal snobbishness toward faith-based organizations. Those doing the sneering typically give away far less money than evangelicals. They're also less likely to spend vacations volunteering at, say, a school or a clinic in Rwanda.

If secular liberals can give up some of their snootiness, and if evangelicals can retire some of their sanctimony, then we all might succeed together in making greater progress against common enemies of humanity, like illiteracy, human trafficking and maternal mortality.

No Sex Please, We're Middle Class
By CAMILLE PAGLIA
June 25, 2010, New York Times

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

Philadelphia

WILL women soon have a Viagra of their own? Although a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel recently rejected an application to market the drug flibanserin in the United States for women with low libido, it endorsed the potential benefits and urged further research. Several pharmaceutical companies are reported to be well along in the search for such a drug.

The implication is that a new pill, despite its unforeseen side effects, is necessary to cure the sexual malaise that appears to have sunk over the country. But to what extent do these complaints about sexual apathy reflect a medical reality, and how much do they actually emanate from the anxious, overachieving, white upper middle class?

In the 1950s, female "frigidity" was attributed to social conformism and religious puritanism. But since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, American society has become increasingly secular, with a media environment drenched in sex.

The real culprit, originating in the 19th century, is bourgeois propriety. As respectability became the central middle-class value, censorship and repression became the norm. Victorian prudery ended the humorous sexual candor of both men and women during the agrarian era, a ribaldry chronicled from Shakespeare's plays to the 18th-century novel. The priggish 1950s, which erased the liberated flappers of the Jazz Age from cultural memory, were simply a return to the norm.

Only the diffuse New Age movement, inspired by nature-keyed Asian practices, has preserved the radical vision of the modern sexual revolution. But concrete power resides in America's careerist technocracy, for which the elite schools, with their ideological view of gender as a social construct, are feeder cells.

In the discreet white-collar realm, men and women are interchangeable, doing the same, mind-based work. Physicality is suppressed; voices are lowered and gestures curtailed in sanitized office space. Men must neuter themselves, while ambitious women postpone procreation. Androgyny is bewitching in art, but in real life it can lead to stagnation and boredom, which no pill can cure.

Meanwhile, family life has put middle-class men in a bind; they are simply cogs in a domestic machine commanded by women. Contemporary moms have become virtuoso super-managers of a complex operation focused on the care and transport of children. But it's not so easy to snap over from Apollonian control to Dionysian delirium.

Nor are husbands offering much stimulation in the male display department: visually, American men remain perpetual boys, as shown by the bulky T-shirts, loose shorts and sneakers they wear from preschool through midlife. The sexes, which used to occupy intriguingly separate worlds, are suffering from over-familiarity, a curse of the mundane. There's no mystery left.

The elemental power of sexuality has also waned in American popular culture. Under the much-maligned studio production code, Hollywood made movies sizzling with flirtation and romance. But from the early '70s on, nudity was in, and steamy build-up was out. A generation of filmmakers lost the skill of sophisticated innuendo. The situation worsened in the '90s, when Hollywood pirated video games to turn women into cartoonishly pneumatic superheroines and sci-fi androids, fantasy figures without psychological complexity or the erotic needs of real women.

Furthermore, thanks to a bourgeois white culture that values efficient bodies over voluptuous ones, American actresses have desexualized themselves, confusing sterile athleticism with female power. Their current Pilates-honed look is taut and tense — a boy's thin limbs and narrow hips combined with amplified breasts. Contrast that with Latino and African-American taste, which runs toward the healthy silhouette of the bootylicious Beyoncé. [...]

Pharmaceutical companies will never find the holy grail of a female Viagra — not in this culture driven and drained by middle-class values. Inhibitions are stubbornly internal. And lust is too fiery to be left to the pharmacist.

Camille Paglia, a professor of humanities and media studies at the University of the Arts, is the author of "Sexual Personae."

Fiorina town hall reaches out to Latinos

The Republican launches a Spanish-language website, but her support for Arizona's anti-illegal immigrant law could pose a challenge.

By Shane Goldmacher, Los Angeles Times

June 27, 2010

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

Reporting from Sacramento

Reaching out to a key voting bloc, Republican Senate nominee Carly Fiorina held a Latino-themed town hall Saturday afternoon in Sacramento, heaping praise on California's Latino community for representing "the best of who this nation is."

"Bienvenidos," Fiorina beamed to the crowd of less than 20, who were nearly matched in size by her staff in a downtown Mexican eatery.

The event, paired with Fiorina's launch of a new Spanish-language website, Amigos de Carly, is part of an ethnic outreach tour for the former Hewlett-Packard chief executive in her bid to unseat incumbent Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer. Last weekend, Fiorina took a spin through a predominantly African American Juneteenth festival in South Los Angeles. The moves represent a sharp shift in rhetorical emphasis, though not policy positions, after a GOP primary in which Fiorina hewed to the political right.

On Saturday, she laced her stump speech with anecdotes that recount her ascent from secretary to chief executive – "the American dream," as she put it — with new references.

"The Latino community is a foundation for the American dream going forward," she said.

Fiorina's direct appeal to Latinos follows in the footsteps of her GOP counterpart in the governor's race, former EBay chief Meg Whitman, who began advertising on Spanish-language TV stations during the World Cup. Most political analysts believe that any statewide Republican must garner a substantial chunk, perhaps one-third, of the Latino vote to win in November.

"The Latino community is big, and therefore it's important," Fiorina said.

But Fiorina faces one barrier Whitman does not: her support for the new anti-illegal immigrant law in Arizona. She made no mention of it during the town hall, but told reporters afterward, "I do support the law, and I think it was a tragedy the law was necessary."

Riverside County Dist. Atty. Rod Pacheco, the chairman of Fiorina's Latino-outreach efforts who attended the town hall, seemed to acknowledge that the Arizona law could be an albatross. But, he said, "it's better to be firm on your position, know where you stand than be wishy-washy."

Boxer called the law "divisive" in Los Angeles on Friday. "In the Latino community there is tremendous opposition to it," she said.

State Sen. Gil Cedillo (D-Los Angeles), a leading Latino legislator, said the GOP overtures to Latino voters demonstrated their power. "What a dramatic change from the time period of Proposition 187, when you could simply openly attack the Latino community and there wouldn't be a political consequence to that," he said, referring to the 1994 initiative that sought to cut public services to illegal immigrants.

Cedillo, a liberal, said Latinos tend to be socially conservative and distrustful of government and, therefore, are "poised to be Republicans." But with Republicans' anti-immigrant rhetoric in the recent primary, he said, they "may have dug themselves in a hole that's too difficult to dig out of."

One issue Fiorina is seeking to exploit among Latinos is the fallout from environmental restrictions. Water deliveries have been severely cut to Central Valley farmlands by the federal Endangered Species Act, which protects the Delta smelt, a small fish. Fiorina wants to carve out an exemption to the landmark environmental law to increase the water flow; Boxer does not.

"Tens of thousands of Latinos lost their jobs," Fiorina said of the effect of the water cutbacks, one of several times she mentioned the issue. "Fish are not more important than families."

She pledged that working to overturn the limits would be the "first thing I will do," if elected.

The Fiorina event ended much the same way it began: in Spanish.

"Muchas gracias," she concluded, to applause.

Commentators

Johann Hari

Deniers - apologise for Climategate

The Independent, Thursday, 6 May 2010

At last! The controversy is over. Forget the general election for a moment; this is even more important. It turns out the "scientific" claims promoted for decades by whiny self-righteous liberals were a lie, a fraud, a con - and we don't need to change after all. The left is humiliated; the conservatives are triumphant and exultant.

The year is 1954, and the "science" that has been exposed as a "sham" by conservatives is the link between smoking and lung cancer. Welcome to Tobaccogate, as Fox News would call it. The conservatives are championing professor Clarence Cook Little, who says he has discovered insurmountable flaws in the use of statistics and clinical data by "anti-tobacco" (and quasi-commie) scientists. The press reports the "controversy," usually without mentioning that Cook Little is being paid by the tobacco industry. A relieved nation lights up - and so, over the next few decades, millions of them die.

It is happening again. The tide of global warming denial is now rising as fast as global sea levels - and with as much credibility as Cook Little. [...] Britain is now the chief fabricator and exporter of climate change denial to the world. Read denialist articles anywhere from California to Karachi, and you'll find British "thinkers" named as their authorities; the great environmentalist Bill McKibben says it's our single most damaging form of pollution. Well, it's time the world knew how these purveyors of British bull-science really are. Look, for example, at their doyen - a man named Christopher Monckton.

He has been lauded by the Wall Street Journal for exposing the truth about global warming and is used by the New York Times as a balancing voice against the claims of climate scientists. At every denialist conference, he is the star speaker they all defer to. In fact, Monckton is an English aristocrat with no scientific training. He studied ancient Greece and Rome, and worked as a policy adviser for Margaret Thatcher. Oh, and he claims he can cure HIV. Seriously. Monckton has stated in writing that he is "responsible for invention and development of a broad-spectrum cure for infectious diseases... including... HIV." He told an interviewer that he persuaded Thatcher to use biological weapons in the Falklands War. He has falsely claimed he is a member of the House of Lords and a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

So what's his alternative scientific theory? In a speech in Minnesota last year, he explained: "There is no problem with the climate," except that Greenpeace is "about to impose a communist world government on the world" and "you have a president who has very strong sympathies with that point of view." Warming is an excuse invented so that Obama can "sign your freedom, your democracy and your prosperity away forever," and give it all to "third world countries." That's the intellectual caliber of the most celebrated denialist.

Yet when it comes to coverage of global warming, we are trapped in the logic of a guerrilla insurgency. The climate scientists have to be right 100 per cent of the time, or their 0.01 per cent error becomes Glaciergate, and they are frauds. By contrast, the deniers only have to be right 0.01 per cent of the time for their narrative - See! The global warming story is falling apart! - to be reinforced by the media. It doesn't matter that their alternative theories are based on demonstrably false claims. Look at the Australian geologist Ian Plimer, whose denialism is built on the claim that volcanoes produce more CO2 than humans, even though the US Geological Survey has shown they produce 130 times less. Or Sunday Telegraph columnist Christopher Booker, who says the Arctic sea ice can't be retreating because each year it comes back a little... in winter.

[...]

And while we have been engaged in these fake rows, the world may have just crashed into one of the climate's tipping points.

Latino Leaders Use Churches in Census Bid
By JULIA PRESTON
December 23, 2009
New York Times

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

MIAMI — Fearing that millions of illegal immigrants may not be counted in the 2010 census, Latino leaders are mobilizing a nationwide drive to urge Hispanics to participate in the survey, including an intense push this week in evangelical Christian churches.

Latino groups contend that there was an undercount of nearly one million Latinos in the 2000 census, affecting the drawing of Congressional districts and the distribution of federal money. Hispanic organizations are far better organized for next year's census, but they say that if illegal immigrants — an estimated eight million of whom are Latino — are not included, the undercount could be much greater.

One study suggests that Congressional delegations in eight states with large Hispanic populations could grow if all Latinos — the nation's largest minority at some 47 million — are counted.

But the obstacles to an accurate count are significant. Many illegal immigrants are likely to be reluctant to fill out a government form that asks for their names, birthdates and telephone numbers. And the count comes three years into an immigration crackdown that was initiated by President George W. Bush but has continued apace, though less visibly, under President Obama.

Several of the nation's largest associations of Hispanic evangelical churches have agreed to join the census campaign. But it has caused dissension among others, with one evangelical pastor leading a call for a boycott of the census, saying it would put pressure on the Obama administration and on Congress to grant legal status to illegal immigrants.

Some Roman Catholic leaders, moreover, have said they are reluctant to urge Latino parishioners to participate without greater assurances from the administration that illegal immigrants will not be identified or detained through the census.

The Constitution calls for all residents to be counted, and last month the Senate rejected a measure by Senator David Vitter, Republican of Louisiana, that would have included only United States citizens in the official tally.

In October, census officials said they would not ask the Department of Homeland Security to suspend immigration raids during the census period, reversing a policy from 2000, when an immigration moratorium was observed. But census officials say there is no change in a longstanding policy that they do not share identity data with the Department of Homeland Security or any other agency.

Latino political leaders see full participation in the census as the culmination of heightened activism that began in the spring of 2006, when hundreds of thousands of Latinos marched in the streets to protest legislation then in Congress that would have toughened laws against illegal immigration. In 2007 they held a nationwide campaign to have Latino immigrants become United States citizens. That was followed last year with a huge voter registration drive.

"We want to tap into that same spirit," said Arturo Vargas, executive director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, known as Naleo, a bipartisan group that is a main organizer of the census drive. "We have to go back to everybody and say, 'Just as you marched, just as you naturalized, just as you voted, now you have to be counted.' "

One strategy is to encourage Latino immigrants to return the census forms by mail, rather than waiting for a census taker's knock on the door, which could frighten illegal immigrants wary of immigration agents. [...]

Among the evangelicals to embrace the effort is the Rev. Samuel Rodríguez Jr., a pastor from California who is president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, which includes more than 25,000 evangelical churches.

"I believe we pastors have a moral responsibility to educate our flock in an action that will help our communities move forward on the path of political empowerment," Mr. Rodríguez said. [...]

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change
By JAMES C. McKINLEY Jr.
The New York Times, March 12, 2010

AUSTIN, Tex. — After three days of turbulent meetings, the Texas Board of Education on Friday approved a social studies curriculum that will put a conservative stamp on history and economics textbooks, stressing the superiority of American capitalism, questioning the Founding Fathers' commitment to a purely secular government and presenting Republican political philosophies in a more positive light.

The vote was 10 to 5 along party lines, with all the Republicans on the board voting for it.

The board, whose members are elected, has influence beyond Texas because the state is one of the largest buyers of textbooks. In the digital age, however, that influence has diminished as technological advances have made it possible for publishers to tailor books to individual states.

In recent years, board members have been locked in an ideological battle between a bloc of conservatives who question Darwin's theory of evolution and believe the Founding Fathers were guided by Christian principles, and a handful of Democrats and moderate Republicans who have fought to preserve the teaching of Darwinism and the separation of church and state.

Since January, Republicans on the board have passed more than 100 amendments to the 120-page curriculum standards affecting history, sociology and economics courses from elementary to high school. The standards were proposed by a panel of teachers.

"We are adding balance," said Dr. Don McLeroy, the leader of the conservative faction on the board, after the vote. "History has already been skewed. Academia is skewed too far to the left."

Battles over what to put in science and history books have taken place for years in the 20 states where state boards must adopt textbooks, most notably in California and Texas. But rarely in recent history has a group of conservative board members left such a mark on a social studies curriculum.

Efforts by Hispanic board members to include more Latino figures as role models for the state's large Hispanic population were consistently defeated, prompting one member, Mary Helen Berlanga, to storm out of a meeting late Thursday night, saying, "They can just pretend this is a white America and Hispanics don't exist."

"They are going overboard, they are not experts, they are not historians," she said. "They are rewriting history, not only of Texas but of the United States and the world." [...]

There are seven members of the conservative bloc on the board, but they are often joined by one of the other three Republicans on crucial votes. There were no historians, sociologists or economists consulted at the meetings, though some members of the conservative bloc held themselves out as experts on certain topics.

The conservative members maintain that they are trying to correct what they see as a liberal bias among the teachers who proposed the curriculum. To that end, they made dozens of minor changes aimed at calling into question, among other things, concepts like the separation of church and state and the secular nature of the American Revolution.

"I reject the notion by the left of a constitutional separation of church and state," said David Bradley, a conservative from Beaumont who works in real estate. "I have $1,000 for the charity of your choice if you can find it in the Constitution."

They also included a plank to ensure that students learn about "the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, including Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract With America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority and the National Rifle Association." [...]

Cynthia Dunbar, a lawyer from Richmond who is a strict constitutionalist and thinks the nation was founded on Christian beliefs, managed to cut Thomas Jefferson from a list of figures whose writings inspired revolutions in the late 18th century and 19th century, replacing him with St. Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and William Blackstone. (Jefferson is not well liked among conservatives on the board because he coined the term "separation between church and state.")

"The Enlightenment was not the only philosophy on which these revolutions were based," Ms. Dunbar said. [...]

latimes.com
Shaping how Americans eat: the debate rages
The new dietary guidelines report recommends a plant-based diet and lowering salt intake. But it is just a starting point.
By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times
June 28, 2010

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

The U.S. government has just served up a heaping mouthful to people who eat — the Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010.
It not only squarely addresses the undeniable — that two-thirds of American adults are either overweight or obese and that our children are on a similar trajectory — it also recasts some advice we have heard before: urging Americans, for instance, to shift their diets away from meat and animal protein and fats — foods such as red meat, cheese and butter — toward a more "plant-based diet," a term that includes not just fresh fruits and vegetables but also foods such as nuts and lentils and olive or canola oil.
Then the report goes further. It recommends that we slash our salt intake by almost a third. It makes clear that people put their health at risk when they, on a weekly basis, do less than 21/2 hours of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of high-intensity exercise. And it discusses at length the social and economic forces at work that have made good diets and adequate exercise easy for Americans to achieve.
The report — 677 pages long and two years in the drafting — is the first step in the federal government's effort to (again) shape what, and how, Americans should eat to optimize their well-being. It has embarked on this effort every five years since 1980.
The bland title belies a history of controversy. In the last two decades, clinical nutrition researchers have generated tomes of maddeningly contradictory advice for healthful eating. At the same time, nutrition watchdogs have charged that the food and restaurant industries and American farmers — in short, sectors with powerful financial interests at stake — have effectively hijacked the dietary guidelines.
Meanwhile, Americans have grown fatter and sicker.
With its latest report, an advisory panel of 13 independent experts in health and nutrition has tried to (again) lay to rest these controversies and lay the groundwork for dietary guidelines based on research evidence.
Released June 15, the report (available online at http://www.cnpp.usda.gov) will be open for public comment until July 15. It's a joint product of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
As our roundup of expert opinion demonstrates, the debate is far from over.

Comments (4)

JoeSexPack at 11:18 PM June 26, 2010
The Feds want to tell me how & what to eat? Yeah, right, sure.
1) Get the heck out of my life.
2) Read the US Constitution again. Food rules are not in there, nor is gov't authority to write them. Big Mother go home.
3) Before Big Mother bureaucrats start this nonsense, get real. Stop gang violence in Detroit, Oakland, New Orleans or S Central LA. Stop the endless wars fought for no good reason.
Stop taxing native born Americans to pay for illegal aliens to replace us. Stop subsisdizing Wall Street thieves. Allow foreign medicines in to lower medical costs.
4) See #1
[...]

SmartAssProducts.com at 2:35 PM June 26, 2010
I'm so glad to see the USDA promoting a cruelty-free diet, even though that's not how it's being presented. It's fine with me if they're promoting it as a healthier diet than those containing dead animals, which, of course, it is. Be kind to animals: Don't eat them. http://www.cafepress.com/saproducts/788091

Obama, British leader discuss strain in nations' ties
By Scott Wilson and Michael W. Savage
The Washington Post
Sunday, June 27, 2010; A04

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

TORONTO -- President Obama and the new British prime minister, David Cameron, grabbed some time alone here Saturday on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit. It was their first private meeting since Cameron became prime minister last month, and they had a lot to talk about, not least a "special relationship" burdened by the BP oil spill and the war in Afghanistan.

The men do not know each other well. But each is facing intense public pressure at home over the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and a war in Afghanistan in which command of NATO forces has just undergone dramatic change.

In an unusual show of camaraderie before their official meeting, Obama invited Cameron to join him aboard Marine One for the ride from the Muskoka region, where the Group of Eight had concluded its session, to the G-20 summit in Toronto.

Obama then used remarks after their talk to set the tone for the latest incarnation of the relationship between the long-time allies and to challenge the contention by commentators on both sides of the Atlantic that it is not particularly special any more.

"On foreign policy issues, the United States and the United Kingdom are not only aligned in theory, but aligned in fact," Obama said. "We see the world in a similar way."

The positive review belied evidence of the leaders' differences heading over the U.S. response to the oil spill, the best way to sustain the global economic recovery and their shared commitment to the Afghan war.

On Friday, Cameron announced his intention to withdraw British troops from Afghanistan, where they make up the second-largest national contingent, within five years.

While that timeline does not necessarily conflict with Obama's, it magnified the perception that the mission is unraveling. It came just two days after Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal's abrupt dismissal for the disdainful comments he and his staff made in a magazine article about the civilian leadership.

Obama called Cameron hours after he relieved McChrystal of his command, and the two have spoken a number of times by phone in recent weeks as concerns have mounted over the oil spill.

After their discussions here, Obama said he and Cameron agree that "we have the right strategy to provide the time and the space for the Afghan government to build up capacity for the next several months and years."

"This period that we're in right now is going to be critical both on the political front and the military front," Obama said.

Before Saturday's meeting, the British news media had urged Cameron to take a sterner tone with Obama, whom they view as unfairly pillorying, for political purposes, a company important to millions of British pensioners.

In a recent column in the Daily Mail, Amanda Platell, a former aide to now-British Foreign Secretary William Hague, wrote that "the way Tony Hayward has been vilified is a joke," referring to the BP chief executive who infamously noted that no one wanted the spill to end sooner than he did because he "want[ed his] life back."

"If you don't recognize the special relationship is special to you, and if you don't know loyalty goes both ways and you've never had a better friend than Britain, then send our 10,000 troops home from Helmand immediately," Platell wrote, referring to a region of southern Afghanistan where British and American forces are fighting the Taliban.

But the strain between the governments started long before the oil spill. In supporting President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq, Britain's prime minister at the time, Tony Blair, created the perception that his country was America's "poodle." The ongoing British inquiry into the Iraq war has kept that perception alive, making it harder for Blair's successors to fully embrace American policy.

Obama, too, came into office with a foreign policy philosophy that sought to treat all countries equally under a shared set of international "rights and responsibilities." The approach has left not only the British among U.S. allies feeling less special than they once did. [...]

U.S. Census Uses Telenovela to Reach Hispanics
By BRIAN STELTER
September 23, 2009, New York Times

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

MIAMI — Perla Beltrán, a young woman from the wrong side of the tracks in New York, has suffered a great deal lately — her husband, a thief, has been murdered and she has been associating with lowlifes. But she thinks she has found a way out: as a recruiter for the United States Census Bureau.

Ms. Beltrán, a character in the popular Spanish-language soap opera "Más Sabe el Diablo," "The Devil Knows Best," represents only one element of the government's yearlong effort to garner trust among Hispanics, an ethnic group that has been historically wary of the decennial census process. In addition to the typical public service announcements and advertisements, the Census Bureau is helping to compose a remarkable story line featuring the Perla Beltrán character on the telenovela, amid the genre's usual tales of sex scandals, unspeakable illnesses and implausible villains. It may be the first plotline on a soap opera blessed by the United States government.

"It's the perfect vehicle for product placement," said Patricia Gaitan, a communications consultant for the bureau, as she watched the taping here last week. She swiftly gave the technique a new name: "people placement."

The coordination between the Census Bureau and the "Diablo" producers at the Telemundo network also strikes some as an unusual intrusion by the government. Although a bureau staff member met with the writer of "Diablo" and provided props for the production, the network's president, Don Browne, said it maintained "total creative independence."

Many Americans are unfamiliar with telenovelas like "Diablo," and most efforts to introduce them to English-speaking audiences have flopped. But among Spanish-speaking viewers, the five-nights-a-week dramas are enormously popular, making them a prime way to encourage Hispanics to be counted next year.

"We've been evangelizing," Mr. Browne told Ms. Gaitan and other visitors between takes on the set last week. "Hopefully, we'll get the message across without hitting viewers over the head."

The message is the same one Census Bureau officials are trying to emphasize at nearly every turn: Do not be afraid to be counted.

Next year's census is expected to show a substantial increase in the Hispanic population, which is already the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States. The government estimated in May that 46.9 million Hispanics lived in the Unites States last year, up from about 33 million during the last census in 2000. Census figures are analyzed to apportion Congressional districts and distribute about $400 billion in federal money each year.

But the census is a delicate subject for some minorities, including Hispanics. Language barriers and fear of filling out forms for the government limited participation in earlier counts.

Census officials contend that Hispanics were undercounted in 2000 by about 0.7 percent, or roughly a quarter of a million people. Other scientific studies assert that as many as 1.3 million Hispanics were not counted.

With the census story line, "we're trying to fight the fear," Aurelio Valcarcel, an executive producer at Telemundo Studios, said.

The campaign is not merely about civic participation. Next year's count is likely to mean more advertising revenue for Telemundo, a unit of NBC Universal, and other Spanish-language networks over time. Nielsen Ratings sample of television households is directly tied to the census results.

"It's very good for our business," Mr. Browne said in an interview, given that the census numbers should help substantiate audience growth.

With the enduring debates over immigration, some people are wary of giving their name, address and information about their household to the government. "In some cases they're trying to hide from the government," said Stacy Gimbel, a bureau spokeswoman who observed the taping. "We're trying to convince them that their information is safe." [...]

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

International Herald Tribune /
GLOBAL.NYTIMES.COM

BP debate heats up on both sides of Atlantic

LONDON

As share price plunges, Britons voice frustration at rising U.S. pressure

BY SARAH LYALL
AND JULIA WERDIGIER

With its spewing oil and its impolitic chief executive, BP may be Public Enemy No.1 in the United States. But in Britain, where the company's dividends provide income for millions of retirees, investors and politicians are becoming increasingly angry at what they see as unhelpful and inflammatory remarks coming across the Atlantic.

BP's share price rebounded in the U.S. on Thursday, but fell yet again in London, this time by 7 percent, fueled by furious condemnations from Washington and threats to force the company to cancel its next dividend.

The share price has fallen more than 40 percent, wiping more than $73 billion from the company's market value, since an oil rig exploded in April, killing 11 workers and touching off an environmental catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico.

Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, said he was worried about "anti-British rhetoric" and "name-calling" coming from the United States over BP, the former British Petroleum.

"When you consider the huge exposure of British pension funds to BP, it starts to become a matter of national concern if a great British company is being continually beaten up on the airwaves," Mr. Johnson told BBC radio. "It was an accident that took place, and BP is paying a very, very heavy price indeed."

British commentators have pointed out that in their denunciations of BP, American politicians, including President Barack Obama, seem determined to refer to the company as British Petroleum, even though it jettisoned that name years ago. In any case, they point out, it is truly a multinational company, listed on both the New York and London stock exchanges, with both British and American directors. About 40 percent of its shares are held by U.S. shareholders.

Under political pressure to abandon his cool demeanor and demonstrate some palpable anger, President Obama said earlier this week that he would fire Tony Hayward, BP's chief executive, if he were Mr. Hayward's boss. He also said he was looking for someone "whose ass to kick" in connection with the incident.

A Justice Department official said Wednesday that the administration planned to take action to force BP to withhold its next dividend. And on Tuesday, 49 members of Congress signed a statement circulated by Rep. Peter Welch, Democrat of Vermont, excoriating the company for saying that it planned to issue a dividend.

"BP's No.1 priority should be paying every nickel it owes to the people of the Gulf Coast, not handing out billions in shareholder dividends," Representative Ed Markey, the Massachusetts Democrat who is chairman of the Select Committee on Energy. Independence and Global Warming, said in a statement.

BP is a mainstay of British pension funds, which have long found it attractive because of its reliable and high dividend payments. [...]

A State Department spokesman said Thursday that the oil spill was a matter between the United States and a private company and would not hurt U.S. relations with the British government. "This is not about the relationship between the United States and its closest ally," the spokesman, P. J. Crowley, said.

John Hofmeister, former head of Shell in the United States, told the BBC that he thought the situation had been made worse by the U.S. view that somehow a foreign entity had "insulted the American landscape." [...]

Even as Mr. Obama has drawn political criticism at home for not taking a harsher stance, so has David Cameron, Britain's new prime minister, been criticized here for not standing up to the United States as BP's fortunes continue to plummet.

And Mr. Cameron himself, apparently eager not to offend Britain's ally, took a mollifying and sympathetic tone. He said he would discuss the situation with Mr. Obama when the two speak, in a scheduled telephone call this weekend.

"I completely understand the U.S. government's frustration, because it's catastrophic for the environment," he said during a trip to Afghanistan. [...]

University funding : Shape of cuts to come

Editorial

***The Guardian*, Thursday 24 December 2009**

When Lord Mandelson quietly announced cuts of 6.6% in the higher education budget for 2010-11 this week, he did two extremely important things simultaneously. The first was to throw more than 10 years of steady university expansion under Labour, one of the signature policies of the Blair-Brown era, into sudden reverse. The second was to point the way for a series of major cuts announcements over the coming weeks by every other department across Whitehall, with the exception of the favoured few – frontline NHS, schools and international development – which have had their budgets ringfenced by the prime minister and the chancellor. It is hard not to sense that we have seen the future, not just for universities but also for vast areas of the public services, from arts to transport.

Neither the scale nor the significance of the university cuts themselves should be underestimated. After an initial two-year spending freeze, Labour began spending serious new money in education, including in the universities, in 1999. Its aims were to repair the neglect of the previous 20 years, to put the knowledge economy at the heart of British growth, and to open up the educational opportunities of generations of British school-leavers, including in particular the most economically disadvantaged. The results have been a Labour success story. Spending has increased by 25% compared with 1997. The neglect of buildings and equipment which had marked the Conservative years was reversed. And, even though Labour has fallen far short of its target of 50% of school-leavers going to university, there are now more students than ever before in our history.

Lord Mandelson's announcement marks for this generation what Tony Crosland's "the party's over" marked for an earlier era of Labour government. Though the latest cuts of £135m in the higher education settlement, on top of the £180m already signalled in the chancellor's 2009 budget, are not as swingeing as some of the recent rumours have suggested, they will still go deep. The decision to protect research funding, maintaining a pledge which Gordon Brown gave in 2004, means the impact of the cuts will be concentrated on capital spending and on teaching. In plain English, it is teachers and students who will suffer most.

Capital spending has done well under Labour, as a visit to almost any university will show. Much of this spending, however, was needed to repair decades of neglect. Now that the tap is being turned off again, the threat of a return to the pre-1997 regime is grave, and will become more so as the likely long restraint of spending continues. The most immediate victims of Labour's stop-go policies, however, are young people. There will be fewer students in 2010 than in 2009 and they will each command fewer resources than their predecessors. Universities' overdependence on foreign students' fees means that UK undergraduates will bear the brunt. The Treasury, which has to pay undergraduate fees and loans upfront, has a powerful vested interest in keeping this number as low as possible.

Universities face a grim choice. They must either turn students away or look after their needs less well – perhaps both. That means larger classes and less tuition in a system already fraying at the edges. It may also, as Lord Mandelson suggests, mean shorter courses. Universities that want fees to rise after Lord Browne's review will now have another argument for such an increase. Universities with little research funding will be particularly squeezed. Courses and colleges are in danger. All these pressures mean participation will be narrowed, and that fairer access – another Labour success story – is put at further risk, while social mobility is suddenly a luxury for another day. The university cuts graphically illustrate the wider truth that waste savings only go so far. Real cuts hurt. These ones are real all right. And there are more to come

news.bbc.co.uk

Monday, 14 December 2009

p 1/2

Child safety vetting list will grow from initial 9m

The number of people to be vetted to work with children will increase beyond the estimated nine million, says the safeguarding authority head.

Sir Roger Singleton, speaking after the launch of revised child safety rules, accepted it was likely that the total of registrations would rise further. After pressure from head teachers' leaders the government has narrowed the range of the vetting scheme. Children's Secretary Ed Balls says he wants to find a "consensus" on safety.

Growing number

Although the revised rules have been announced as a reduction in the people who will need to be vetted, the registration list is set to increase each year - with more people being added than are likely to leave. As such this child protection database, already the biggest of its kind, will cover even more of the population. "We don't have a prediction for how many will be on it," said a Home Office spokesman.

The revised rules for England, Wales and Northern Ireland launched on Monday have been intended in part to reduce the number of people who will need to be vetted by the Independent Safeguarding Authority.

There had been plans for some 11.3 million adults to be vetted - but after criticism from school leaders and children's authors the rules on frequency of contact have been eased, reducing this to an estimated nine million.

The amount of contact needed with children before an adult needs to be vetted, in a workplace or voluntary setting, has been changed to at least once a week. And groups such as foreign exchange students are no longer covered by the vetting scheme. But Sir Roger accepted that in the longer term the database of registrations would increase rather than reduce.

'Over-zealous'

Registration with the Independent Safeguarding Authority is for life - so when people cease to volunteer, change jobs or children grow up and parents end their involvement in clubs, they will remain on the vetting database, unless they actively ask to be removed. Each new intake of volunteers or people starting jobs that require vetting will then add cumulatively to the total - with no number set for an upper limit.

At a briefing to introduce the revised regulations, Mr Balls challenged the spreading of ungrounded fears about the vetting scheme and said there had been "wild allegations" about what would be required. He said it would be "ludicrous" for a school to expect all visitors to have undergone a criminal records check. Mr Balls stressed that the vetting plans were not about private arrangements between parents, but were about staff and volunteers organised by schools and clubs.

Sir Roger also criticised organisations which had been "over-zealous" in their interpretation of child protection rules. But he also said there was "continuing concern" over the lack of checks on people from overseas who were now working or volunteering in the UK.

35 The chair of the safeguarding body spoke of the need to find a balance between the need to protect children and to ensure that adults are not unjustly barred from working. [...] If there were doubts about the remit he emphasised that this was a scheme introduced by ministers and MPs - and the ISA was implementing these instructions.

[...] Responding to the changes in the scheme, the ATL teachers' union leader, Mary Bousted, said
40 these were "sensible recommendations". "However, we still have major concerns about the scheme, particularly the duplication of running a CRB and ISA scheme alongside one another," said Dr Bousted. "We are unhappy that there is still no right of appeal in person for anyone who is barred by the scheme - this seems to go against the laws of natural justice.

VETTING AND BARRING
People who have regular, frequent or intensive access to children have to register with the ISA
It costs £64 to register, but volunteers have their fees waived
The ISA is being phased in across England, Wales and Northern Ireland
Individuals will be able to apply to register from July 2010. It will be mandatory from November 2010
The scheme covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland
A separate but aligned scheme is to be introduced in Scotland

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

A load of greenwash

Dick Taverne
Prospect, 21st October 2009

The green movement has done much to warn us about climate change. But now that global warming is widely accepted, do green campaigners do more to hinder than help us tackle it? They stress the likelihood of catastrophe if we do not reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They urge governments to adopt demanding targets and they tell us what we must not do. Don't fly, don't drive unless you have to, don't build new power stations, whether fired by coal, gas or oil—let alone by nuclear reactions. Apply the precautionary principle just in case technological developments might damage the environment. Their song is: "Accentuate the negative."

But is this the best way to win support? The trouble with prohibitions and prophecies of doom is that they seldom motivate positive action. In their book *Breakthrough* (March 2009), Nordhaus and Shellenberger ask if Martin Luther King would have inspired the civil rights movement with the cry: "I have a nightmare." If you are told armageddon is inevitable unless you give up the things you care for, fatalism is the likely response. Yet sensational scare stories—like about "Frankenfoods!"—are the stock in trade of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. Scares recruit members.

Tirades against car use, for example, do not reduce car use, because most people depend on their car for shopping, taking children to school and other activities important to their lives. People also like cars because they increase choice. In fact it has been plausibly estimated that by 2050 there will be four times as many in the world as there are today, whatever we do. The best way to reduce carbon emissions from motorcars is therefore through technology: using a different source of power, like environmentally friendly biofuels or rechargable batteries.

Britain is faced with two problems: reduction of carbon emissions and security of power supply. Yet green campaigners tend to ignore the latter. Greenpeace's demonstration against the King's North coal-fired power station was, for them, a great success. (Plans for the plant have now been postponed or shelved, though the company blames a "lack of demand.") But what if we build no new coal-fired stations? Old ones will have to be closed because they will not meet the EU's environmental standards. Old nuclear power plants, which supply 16 per cent of our electricity, will soon be phased out too and new ones, bitterly opposed by greens, will only slowly come into use. Imported oil offers no security and will probably become unaffordably expensive when the recession ends. And renewables, now a tiny proportion of our sources of electricity, cannot possibly fill the gap. In practice, renewables mean mainly wind power, which has to be backed by fossil-fuelled stations for the days when the wind does not blow. To stop the lights going out, then, we will have to depend on gas from Russia—that is, on Putin's goodwill and the hope that Gazprom will undergo a miraculous conversion to efficiency. [...]

What matters more than targets, then, is progress with technology, and here the greens' approach generally suffers from a fundamental weakness: a mistrust of science. The precautionary principle is either so obvious it is otiose—"If there is significant evidence of risk, be careful"—or so vague as to be are virtually meaningless, or positively harmful. It tells us that even when there is no significant scientific evidence of harm, no product should be licensed unless first proved safe. This is impossible because science cannot prove certainties. It also concentrates entirely on risk, without weighing risk against benefit.

If, as I believe, the application of science and technology is the best hope for mitigating or adapting to global warming, the obvious conclusion is that green campaigners, for all their good intentions, ultimately do more harm than good.

Leader: The battle over poverty starts here

New Statesman 12 November 2009

Of all the claims made by the Conservatives, the most preposterous is David Cameron's, in his Hugo Young lecture on 10 November, that they are "best placed to fight poverty in our country". We know too little about current Tory policies to be sure of their effects, and Mr Cameron's lecture offers little detail on how to beat poverty beyond an appeal to "human kindness, generosity and imagination". We have, however, ample evidence of what to expect from 18 years of Tory government up to 1997.

In an era of unregulated global markets, any government that wishes to reduce inequality faces an uphill struggle. Only the most determined policies of redistribution can counter the tendency of modern economies to create yawning disparities of income and wealth. The UK's Gini coefficient (the standard measure of inequality) is now at its highest level on record. Labour promised to abolish child poverty within 20 years and halve it within ten. It made good early progress but, since 2004, has lost about half the ground gained. To meet the 2010 target, Alistair Darling needs to conjure an unlikely £4bn in his next budget.

Many critics warned that Labour's bold pledges were not matched by sufficiently bold policies. But poverty and inequality would be much higher if Labour had not increased benefits and tax credits faster than inflation. There lies the contrast with the Tories. In the name of strengthening "work incentives", they manipulated taxes and benefits throughout the 1980s in a way that inevitably increased poverty and inequality. They also weakened or dismantled institutions that protected working people's incomes - trade unions and industry wages councils, for example - and abandoned self-reliant communities that had earned a living from industries such as coal, shipbuilding and steel. There lies the origins of what the Tories call a "broken society". When Labour left office in 1979, Britain was more equal than at any time in its history. When the Conservatives left in 1997, inequality had returned almost to Victorian levels and the child poverty rate was among the highest in Europe. Inequality was integral to Margaret Thatcher's "economic miracle" whereby wealth created by liberated entrepreneurs was supposed to "trickle down" to the poor. It didn't. There lies the deficit in "human kindness, generosity and imagination".

Labour accepted Mrs Thatcher's formula for growth but tried to make a reality of "trickle down". It believed financial services would produce enough tax revenue for the government's social programme. Alas, too much money, inside and outside financial services, trickled away to tax havens or other devices invented by accountants to avoid payment. The tax collected was not enough and the jobs that were supposed to relieve poverty were not of the right type.

In the 1990s, surveys suggested wide public support for redistribution and sympathy for the poor. The mood now seems harsher, partly because ministers frequently lapse into the Tory habit of blaming the poor for their plight. But as more families experience the effects of unemployment, the mood may change again. Labour needs to recommit itself to the battle against poverty, and to rethink what it means. As Fran Abrams's report, the first of an *NS* series, suggests on page 34, the causes and effects of poverty are not well understood. But recently published work by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett argues that inequality underlies nearly all social ills, including crime, ill-health and educational failure. Forget improving education or health by reforming schools or the NHS: a reduction in poverty and inequality will do the job better and more cheaply, and this should form the centrepiece of any future Labour programme.

Leader : The Tories' peculiar bedfellows in Europe

New Statesman, 15 October 2009

Does William Hague believe that politics stops at the water's edge? He has demanded, in the interests of "our nation's good relations with our allies", that the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, cease his attacks on the Tories' toxic new grouping in Brussels, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), including an alliance of hard-right extremists from Poland, Latvia and the Czech Republic.

The idea is risible that we should keep silent as the shadow foreign secretary defends the party's strange bedfellows, including For Fatherland and Freedom, a Latvian party that participates in an annual event commemorating the Latvian Waffen-SS. Mr Hague has demanded that Mr Miliband apologise for suggesting the Tories were defending Nazis, claiming mainstream support for the parade across Latvia and arguing that the Latvian SS "stood apart" from the German SS.

He derided the Foreign Secretary for failing to "check the facts" on the Polish MEP Michal Kaminski, the leader of the Tories' new alliance in the European Parliament. Mr Kaminski, formerly of the far-right National Revival of Poland (NOP) party, has been accused of opposing a national apology for the massacre of 340 Jews at Jedwabne in Nazi-occupied Poland. Mr Hague dismissed such accusations as "smears", and described Mr Kaminski as a "good friend" of the Tories.

But Mr Hague's glib remarks have, one by one, turned out to be false. The Riga parade of Waffen-SS veterans is not a mainstream event, nor is it endorsed by Latvia's government or parliament. On the contrary, it has been banned, and volunteer members of the Latvian Waffen-SS have been accused of involvement in the wartime massacres of Riga's Jews.

Meanwhile, Mr Kaminski, in a recent interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, conceded that he had indeed opposed the apology issued by the Polish president in 2001, because he saw it as a one-sided admission of guilt and wanted a reciprocal apology from the Jews - something he had denied he ever said, in an earlier interview with the *Observer*.

Desperate to change the subject, the Tories have gone on the attack. Tory apologists have been trying to smear our political correspondent for reporting with scepticism on Mr Kaminski's activities. They are keen to dismiss criticisms of their controversial European grouping as "Labour" spin, based, as Mr Hague put it, on "Soviet propaganda". But this will not wash. The critics of the ECR, which the Tories co-created, include leading historians of eastern Europe and the Holocaust, such as Professor David Cesarani, the author Norman Davies and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Efraim Zuroff. Each has questioned the Tory alliance with the Polish and Latvian far right. Mr Zuroff has referred to the Conservative leadership's "sheer ignorance" on these issues. Is he, too, a Labour spin doctor?

Mr Hague has claimed that critical comments about Mr Kaminski made by the chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, first reported by James Macintyre in the *NS*, were "misrepresented". Others have claimed that they have since been withdrawn. They have not been withdrawn. For the record, Rabbi Schudrich said: "[It] is clear that Mr Kaminski was a member of [the] NOP, a group that is openly far right and neo-Nazi. Anyone who would want to align himself with a person who was an active member of [the] NOP and the Committee to Defend the Good Name of Jedwabne (which was established to deny historical facts of the massacre at Jedwabne) needs to understand with what and by whom he is being represented."

Mr Hague is intelligent. Why, then, will he not acknowledge the dubious past of the man who now leads the Tories in Europe? The answer is that this marriage of Eurosceptic convenience is a product of moral and intellectual laziness from a party that is expected to form the next government.

Labour must once more become the party of liberalism

The first Queen's Speech of this new government promises to light the bonfire of New Labour's authoritarian vanities. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's pledge to "restore freedoms and civil liberties through the abolition of identity cards and repeal of unnecessary laws" is not only to be welcomed, but sets a challenge to the half-dozen candidates who would be Labour's next leader.

The centrepiece of this attempt to repair some of the damage wreaked by the legislative mania of Labour in power is the Freedom (or "Great Repeal") Bill. This will begin to dismantle the "database state" that historians will judge the most disastrous legacy, other than the Iraq war, of the New Labour years. It is right to abandon the ID card scheme, the National Identity Register and the ContactPoint database. There is not, and never was (not even when the anti-terrorist emergency was at its most pressing), any plausible, principled argument for placing such constraints on individual liberty.

The proposals to extend the Freedom of Information Act, to protect trial by jury and to introduce "safeguards" against the misuse of anti-terror legislation and better regulation of CCTV are also welcome, as is the pledge to protect the right to non-violent protest. (However, this undertaking was, as Shami Chakrabarti of Liberty observed, somewhat undermined by the arrest, on the morning of the Queen's Speech, of the veteran anti-war protester Brian Haw. That Mr Haw's arrest was greeted with approval in some sections of the Tory press is a reminder to David Cameron that he will have to work hard to sell this liberal programme to the more lumpen elements in his own party.)

Despite some significant omissions – the speech made no mention of detention without trial or control orders, or the Tory plans to replace the Human Rights Act with an undefined Bill of Rights – all this poses a formidable test for Labour. The next leader will have no choice but to do battle with Mr Cameron and Nick Clegg on the liberal terrain that they are establishing, whatever the voices of unreconstructed authoritarianism inside the party might counsel (step forward, David Blunkett and John Reid).

Labour must recognise that the civil liberties agenda is no longer merely a fetish of those it once disparaged as "Hampstead liberals". Ordinary voters throughout the country can feel the deadweight of bureaucratic interference. On 24 May, for example, we learned that local councils are invoking the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act in order to spy on citizens they suspect of the most trivial offences.

The challenge facing Labour is not just a matter of practical politics, however; it is one of guiding philosophy. The illiberalism represented by Mr Blunkett and Mr Reid is written into the party's very DNA. But there are other dissident, decentralising strands in Labour thinking, and it is time these were rediscovered.

In short, Labour must not allow the coalition to claim liberalism as its own. This need not entail any compromising of its core commitment to social justice. After all, as the great social liberal L T Hobhouse, celebrated by the freethinking MP Jon Cruddas in his essay on page 31, argued a century ago: "The 'right to work' and the right to a 'living wage' are just as valid as the rights of person or property." ●

A betrayal of children's trust

There was much to commend about the approach to taxation in the Lib Dems' election manifesto. Plans to tax capital gains at the same rate as personal income and the promise to raise the tax threshold to £10,000 were broadly progressive. A pledge to end an idea first floated in these very pages, the Child Trust Fund – introduced by Labour in 2002 to encourage families to save for their children, with the incentive of a modest government contribution – was not. It is a great shame, therefore, that Mr Clegg has succeeded in persuading his Conservative allies to support it. The Tories, at least, would have maintained a means-tested version of the fund.

Explaining the decision, the Treasury Secretary, David Laws, made the nonsensical argument that "government payments into the scheme are essentially being funded by public borrowing". As the co-directors of IPPR, the think tank responsible for drawing up the original baby bond policy, pointed out on newstatesman.com on 25 May: "Public spending . . . is not hypothecated to particular taxes or borrowing. It would make just as little sense to say that the police force was being abolished because it was being funded by borrowing." And, as Peter Wilby writes on page ten, abolition is particularly distasteful, coming from a coalition cabinet featuring 18 millionaires, several of whom have benefited from inheritances and family trusts. ●

newstatesman.com/leader

Britain's "broken society"

Through a glass darkly

Crime, family break-up, drunks and drugs: the Conservatives—and apparently plenty of voters—think that Britain has a "broken society". Does the claim stand up?

The Economist February 6th 2010

IT IS hard to believe that such appalling crimes could have been committed by anyone so young. Two boys in the north of England were subjected to a sadistic attack that caused parents across the country to shudder. The anguish of the children was awful enough. But in a grotesque twist, their tormentor was also a child, not yet even a teenager. The attacks had been carried out "solely for the pleasure and excitement" of it, the judge in the case said. What has society come to when such evil is found in those so young?

That was in 1968. Mary Bell, the daughter of a Tyneside prostitute and supposedly the victim of repeated abuse herself, became Britain's most famous child-killer when, just 11 years old, she was convicted of strangling two young boys. Now, a similar case is causing people to wonder again whether society has gone to the dogs. Two brothers from the South Yorkshire village of Edlington, aged ten and 11, were convicted on January 22nd [...]

The case was highlighted by David Cameron, the leader of the opposition, who on the day the boys were sentenced launched a chapter of his Conservative Party's election manifesto dedicated to dealing with what he calls Britain's "broken society". The Edlington case was not "just some isolated incident of evil", Mr Cameron said. Connecting it to four other infamous examples of callous brutality, he declared that it raised "deep questions about what is going wrong in our society". Britain is experiencing a social recession to match the economic one, he reckons.

Those good old days in full

Was Mary Bell's Britain better than today's version? An increasing number of people seem to think so. [...]

When Labour came to power in 1997, 40% of the population thought the country was becoming a worse place to live in. By 2007 that had risen to 60%. A year on, and a year into Gordon Brown's spell as prime minister, the malcontents numbered 71%—and that was before the financial crash. There has been a "surge of nostalgia" for the good old days, says Ben Page, head of Ipsos-Mori, a polling firm.

Chief among people's worries is their security. Under Labour, fear of crime climbed until by 2007 it had become the issue that pollsters identified as the main complaint among voters. (Since then worries about the economy have eclipsed all else.) The heightened fears are a puzzle to criminologists, who point out that over the past 15 years Britain has experienced a steady, deep fall in crime. The statistics are notoriously hard to interpret, but according to the British Crime Survey, the Home Office's most reliable measure though still far from perfect, crime overall has dropped by 45% since its peak in 1995. A big chunk of that fall is owing to reductions in vehicle theft and domestic burglary, for which alarm manufacturers and increased householder vigilance probably deserve as much credit as the police. But violent crime has fallen too. It is now almost half what it was in 1995, and no higher than in 1981 (see chart 1).

Looking more carefully, the big fall in brutality has been in domestic violence, which has dropped by a staggering 70%. (No one is sure why; the best guess is that an improving economy has kept men out of the house and given women enough money to escape if they need to.) Violence at the hands of strangers—the prospect that probably drives fear of crime more than anything else—has fallen by far less, and in fact rose in the most recent reporting period. [...] Gun crime has in fact been pretty flat nationwide. [...] Indeed, the day before Mr Cameron made his "broken society" pitch it was announced that the total number of homicides recorded by the police was at its lowest in 19 years.

Children at risk

One of the clearest long-term trends relates directly to the Edlington question. Parents have probably never been more worried about their offspring, but the truth is that children seem to be less at risk now than in the past. The number of killings of under-15s has "collapsed" since the 1970s, according to Colin Pritchard of Bournemouth University. [...]

Children also seem to be committing fewer serious offences themselves.

The Guardian, Tuesday 15 December 2009

Comment & Debate

In Cedric's gilded universe, shame has another meaning

Jenni Russell

The last time the country was convulsed by indignation about the unjustified rewards of a small class of very wealthy people was the spring of 1995. It had just been revealed that the bosses of the newly privatised utility companies had seen their salaries rocket since their transfer out of the state sector. Their pay hadn't doubled, or trebled; in some cases it had increased almost tenfold. Yet the jobs they were doing were fundamentally the same. [...] Worse still we, the captive utility customers, were now the helpless funders of these huge salaries.

The focus of the fury was Cedric Brown, the boss of British Gas. The chief executive's salary had risen by 900% in the years since the industry was privatised, and he now earned five times more than the prime minister. He was labelled Cedric the Pig. What everyone wanted to know was how the pigs at the trough could be restrained.

Howard Davies, the departing director general of the CBI (who was about to move to the Bank of England), had an answer. He caused a sensation by agreeing publicly that the fat cats, including many other chief executives, were overpaid. He didn't, however, think cuts could or should be enforced: a combination of transparency and public embarrassment would provide the solution. New rules were being brought in to force boards to declare executive salaries. The remuneration committees which decided pay would be so conscious of the bad publicity excessive rewards might attract that it would act as an automatic constraint.

Essentially Davies expected shame to achieve something that the government couldn't work out how to impose. Unfortunately he was making the same mistake that Brown, Darling and Harman do when they attack bankers' bonuses as unacceptable, and appeal to a general sense of what is fair. Shame is felt only by those who share the same set of values. It has no effect on those who operate by a different set of rules. [...]

A senior City figure says that the mid-90s marked the moment when the concept of a reasonable salary disappeared, in an explosive competition for status. The disclosure regulations made things worse, as executives and financiers demanded to keep ahead of one another. The money cascading into the City as the global economy expanded was like petrol on a fire. With deals making millions and billions, suddenly there seemed no good reason for anyone to restrain their wage demands. [...]

The City's sense of self-justification was fuelled by the fact that in other sectors those at the very top were reaping extraordinary rewards. The power of global marketing turned talented

people like JK Rowling and David Beckham into multimillionaire superstars, in a way that had never been possible for CS Lewis or Stanley Matthews. [...]

The ratcheting-up of top pay dragged every sector along in its wake. Companies told one another that they couldn't have all the best people going into the City, and raised their rates accordingly. The BBC agreed that a news presenter was worth a million a year, and an entertainment presenter six million. Even in the public sector and the charity world, fat six-figure salaries for chief executives became the norm.

No one could escape the consequences of this explosion. Even if some strong-minded individuals managed not to feel diminished by their own fall in relative status, the practical effects, like the bidding-up of house prices, couldn't be ignored. And yet the message from the Labour government was that great wealth didn't matter; that the City must be courted and the rich given tax breaks; and that we were lucky to have such income generators in our midst.

That praise and that freedom has created a deep sense of entitlement and superiority among the privileged, and it's why the government's belated and abrupt conversion to the idea that this degree of inequality is wrong – and should be addressed – will have no purchase at all on that audience. They don't care what we think. [...] The corrosive consequences of that on all of us is not something that can be reversed with a couple of tax rises and a bit of banker-bashing. [...]

The Guardian, Thursday 17 June 2010

P1/2

Comment & Debate

For the Lib-Cons, this is an excuse to shrink the state

Seumas Milne

[...] Cuts mania has got Britain's coalition in its grip, and next week's emergency budget promises to be a field day for the deficit hawks. For weeks we have been softened up with the drumbeat of debt, orchestrated by a media – including the BBC – which endlessly repeats as fact the catechism that the deficit is a mortal threat and cuts the only way out.

[...] So now we're primed for higher taxes, weighted towards the poorest through increased VAT; a Liberal Democrat-led attack on "gold-plated" public pensions, which average £4,000 a year in local government and £6,000 in the health service; and the prospect of a scythe through public services that has already taken chunks out of free school meals and support for the young unemployed.

The problem isn't just that cuts risk tipping us back into recession and will hit the worst-off hardest. It's that by taking demand out of the economy and undermining a fragile recovery in the process they could actually increase the size of the deficit, as has happened in Greece and Ireland.

[...] What's become clearer is that for the Lib-Con leaders and their strongest supporters, the deficit is an ideal excuse to do something they were determined to do in any case: shrink the state. [...] What is driving the Tory thirst for cuts above all is classic small-state Thatcherism sailing under a phoney flag of necessity.

That's not of course to say there's no problem with the deficit, or that simply maintaining spending will deliver recovery. But cutting now will certainly make the situation worse. [...] Meanwhile, the government now has cover from the rise of the deficit hawks in the eurozone and the G20, where the US is one of the last voices opposing the lurch towards a lost decade. Cuts have become, like light-touch financial regulation before them, conventional wisdom. But as the Nobel prizewinning economist Paul Krugman argues, this is "utter folly posing as wisdom".

The only member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee to have called the crisis right, David Blanchflower, says he is now "100% certain" there will be a double-dip recession. That should be an open goal for Labour. But it's hamstrung by its record and commitment in government to make its own deep cuts from next year.

Four out of five Labour leadership candidates, barely a month out of office, are like recently released prisoners blinking in the daylight. Ed Miliband and Ed Balls inch away from New Labour orthodoxies, while David Miliband sticks almost unswervingly to the old script. In the early hustings Balls has attacked neoliberalism and distanced himself from Darling's deficit reduction plan, while Ed Miliband has made the case for stronger industrial intervention.

But on the economy, as in much else, their reinvention will need to go a lot further if Labour is to provide effective opposition and carve out a coherent alternative to the coalition's disastrous approach. That would include a recognition of the need to use the part nationalised banks to drive recovery, rather than fattening them up for privatisation, and a public investment programme in the industries of the future.

[...] As the Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang argues, Britain has no choice, in the face of a shrinking financial sector, industrial decline and falling North Sea oil revenues. Chang makes the case not just for industrial subsidy, but restrictions on takeovers, the promotion of "patient capital", the direction of lending by publicly owned banks and even, heretically, learning from other countries' success in picking industrial winners. "The problem", he says, "is that the City mentality permeates every aspect of public life in this country."

As Unison made clear this week, attacks on public services, pay and pensions will be resisted, and unions will aim to make alliances against cuts with communities and service users. But pressure for a change of direction will also need political leadership – and a new model to rebuild the economy.

p 1/2

The Independent, **Friday, 8 January 2010**

Commentators

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

Johann Hari

We don't need this culture of overwork

Britain now has the longest work hours in the developed world after the US

This year, we all need to become more like Utah, under its Republican governor – and then go further. No, dear reader, don't panic – I have not converted to Mormonism [...]. The people of one of the most conservative states in the US have stumbled across a simple policy that slashes greenhouse gas emissions by 13 percent, saves huge sums of money, improves public services, cuts traffic congestion, and makes 82 per cent of workers happier. [...]

It all began two years ago, when the state was facing a budget crisis. One night, the new Republican Governor Jon Huntsman was staring at the red ink and rough sums when he had an idea. Keeping the state's buildings lit and heated and manned cost a fortune. Could it be cut without cutting the service given to the public? Then it hit him. What if, instead of working 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, the state's employees only came in four days a week, but now from 8 to 6? The state would be getting the same forty hours a week out of its staff – but the costs of maintaining their offices would plummet. The employees would get a three-day weekend, and cut a whole day's worth of tiring, polluting commuting out of their week.

He took the step of requiring it by law for 80 per cent of the state's employees. (Obviously, some places - like the emergency services or prisons – had to be exempted.) At first, there was cautious support among the workforce but as the experiment has rolled on, it has gathered remarkable acclaim. [...]

A whole series of unexpected benefits started to emerge. The number of sick days claimed by workers fell by 9 per cent. Air pollution fell, since people were spending 20 per cent less time in their cars. Some 17,000 tonnes of warming gases were kept out of the atmosphere. [...]

But wouldn't people be irritated that they couldn't contact their state authorities on a Friday? Did the standard of service fall? It was a real worry when the programme started. But before, people had to take time off work to contact the authorities, since they were only open during work hours. Now they were open for an hour before work and an hour after it. It actually became easier to see them Monday to Thursday: waiting times for state services have fallen. [...] A queue of US cities and corporations like General Motors are following suit, and Britain's councils and companies should be sweeping in behind them. It's a win-win-win – good for employees, good for employers and good for the environment.

And once we started on this course, it could spur us to think in more radical ways about work. If this tiny little tinker with work routines leads to a big burst of human happiness and environmental sanity, what could bigger changes achieve?

p 212

Work is the activity that we spend most of our waking lives engaged in - yet it is too often trapped in an outdated routine. [...] Is this the best way to make us as productive and creative and happy as we can be? [...]

[...] Britain now has the longest work hours in the developed world after the US – and in a recession, those of us with jobs scamper ever faster in our hamster-wheels. Yes, we now make the Japanese look chilled. This is not how 2010 was meant to turn out. If you look at the economists and thinkers of, say, the 1930s, they assumed that once we had achieved abundance – once humans had all the food and clothes and heat and toys we could use – we would relax and work less. They thought that by now work would barely cover three days as we headed en masse for the beach and the concert-hall.

Instead, the treadmill is whirling ever-faster.

New York Times
October 8, 2009
In First Lady's Roots, a Complex Path From Slavery
By Rachel L. Swarns and Jodi Kantor

WASHINGTON — In 1850, the elderly master of a South Carolina estate took pen in hand and painstakingly divided up his possessions. Among the spinning wheels, scythes, tablecloths and cattle that he bequeathed to his far-flung heirs was a 6-year-old slave girl valued soon afterward at $475.

In his will, she is described simply as the "negro girl Melvinia." After his death, she was torn away from the people and places she knew and shipped to Georgia. While she was still a teenager, a white man would father her first-born son under circumstances lost in the passage of time.

In the annals of American slavery, this painful story would be utterly unremarkable, save for one reason: This union, consummated some two years before the Civil War, represents the origins of a family line that would extend from rural Georgia, to Birmingham, Ala., to Chicago and, finally, to the White House.

Melvinia Shields, the enslaved and illiterate young girl, and the unknown white man who impregnated her are the great-great-great-grandparents of Michelle Obama, the first lady.

Viewed by many as a powerful symbol of black advancement, Mrs. Obama grew up with only a vague sense of her ancestry, aides and relatives said. During the presidential campaign, the family learned about one paternal great-great-grandfather, a former slave from South Carolina, but the rest of Mrs. Obama's roots were a mystery.

Now the more complete map of Mrs. Obama's ancestors — including the slave mother, white father and their biracial son, Dolphus T. Shields — for the first time fully connects the first African-American first lady to the history of slavery, tracing their five-generation journey from bondage to a front-row seat to the presidency.

The findings — uncovered by Megan Smolenyak, a genealogist, and The New York Times — substantiate what Mrs. Obama has called longstanding family rumors about a white forebear.

While President Obama's biracial background has drawn considerable attention, his wife's pedigree, which includes American Indian strands, highlights the complicated history of racial intermingling, sometimes born of violence or coercion, that lingers in the bloodlines of many African-Americans. Mrs. Obama and her family declined to comment for this article, aides said, in part because of the personal nature of the subject.

"She is representative of how we have evolved and who we are," said Edward Ball, a historian who discovered that he had black relatives, the descendants of his white slave-owning ancestors, when he researched his memoir, "Slaves in the Family."

"We are not separate tribes of Latinos and whites and blacks in America," Mr. Ball said. "We've all mingled, and we have done so for generations." [...]

Of the dozens of relatives she identified, Ms. Smolenyak said, it was the slave girl who seemed to call out most clearly.

"Out of all Michelle's roots, it's Melvinia who is screaming to be found," she said.

When her owner, David Patterson, died in 1852, Melvinia soon found herself on a 200-acre farm with new masters, Mr. Patterson's daughter and son-in law, Christianne and Henry Shields. It was a strange and unfamiliar world.

In South Carolina, she had lived on an estate with 21 slaves. In Georgia, she was one of only three slaves on property that is now part of a neat subdivision in Rex, near Atlanta.

Whether Melvinia labored in the house or in the fields, there was no shortage of work: wheat, corn, sweet potatoes and cotton to plant and harvest, and 3 horses, 5 cows, 17 pigs and 20 sheep to care for, according to an 1860 agricultural survey.

It is difficult to say who might have impregnated Melvinia, who gave birth to Dolphus around 1859, when she was perhaps as young as 15. At the time, Henry Shields was in his late 40s and had four sons ages 19 to 24, but other men may have spent time on the farm.

[...]

Plus-Size Revelation: Big Women Have Cash, Too
The New York Times
June 18, 2010

Corseted into a size 18 white denim dress, wearing heels that made her about 6-foot-2, Gwen DeVoe, a former model and fashion-show producer, stepped onto a runway in Manhattan this week and made a pitch to retailers for the plus-size woman.

Those stores that don't carry bigger sizes? "Shame on you, baby, shame on you," Ms. DeVoe said. "Every curvy girl that has a dollar is willing to spend that dollar."

So retailers are realizing.

That same day, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 28 percent of the adult population was obese last year, the highest percentage yet. Almost two-thirds of American women are either overweight or obese, according to the most recent CDC figures.

As doctors and public health officials encourage Americans to slim down, the fashion industry is embracing Americans as they are. Both mass-market stores like Forever 21 and Target and expensive designers like Elie Tahari are deciding the fattening of America is a big business opportunity, and are reinvigorating a market that had faltered during the recession.

The standard clothing that most stores have focused on in recent years fits fewer and fewer people. And as retailers search for ways to invigorate sales, plus size is one of the few categories where there is growth. The plus-size market increased 1.4 percent while overall women's apparel declined 0.8 percent in the 12 months leading up to April 2010 versus the same period a year earlier, the most recent figures available, according to NPD Group, a market research firm.

"It just makes business sense," said Ms. DeVoe, who founded "Full-Figured Fashion Week" last year to press mainstream retailers to embrace bigger sizes. "I've been told several times that no one fantasizes about being a plus-size woman, and that's probably true, but the fact remains that you have to work with what you have."

That is not always so easy for retailers venturing into the world of larger shoppers. Some bigger women do not like to try on clothes in the same fitting rooms as smaller women. Plus-size stocks take up valuable storage space, and not everyone is big in the same way, meaning stores cannot count on, say, a size 16 dress fitting most 180-pound women — one might have a larger torso, another big thighs and another wider hips.

"There are variations not only in the frame, but if you're looking at larger women, you're also looking at the way fat deposits are arranged around the body," said Susan Ashdown, a professor at Cornell who studies body shape and clothing fit by creating a three-dimensional scan of a person's almost-nude body.

Plus-size clothes, which now generally begin at size 14, have been around for at least 90 years, since a Lithuanian immigrant, Lena Bryant (her name was later misspelled as "Lane" on a business form), turned a maternity-wear business into a line for stout women in the 1920s. There have been several efforts to make plus-size clothes more available, but, as the name of the 1980s-era plus-size chain The Forgotten Woman suggested, larger women have usually been relegated to stand-alone boutiques stocked with shapeless purple caftans.

"One of the things that happens with plus-size women is, as a rule, they're pretty under-served," said Bill Bass, president of Sonsi, a social networking and retail site for heavier women. "The big companies forget about them or ignore them, or make them go online to buy their clothes since they won't have them in stores."

Although Americans have grown steadily heavier in the last decade, women's plus-size clothing still makes up only 17 percent of the women's apparel market today, according to NPD. There just is not much supply or variation in plus-size clothes for women to buy, said Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst at NPD. And the big retailers have mostly stayed away.

[...]

latimes.com
BELIEFS

Shaolin Temple's real kick is inner peace

Closely aligned with the temple in China, the shrine in Sherman Oaks focuses on philosophy and meditation.

June 19, 2010

By Ann M. Simmons, Los Angeles Times

China's world-famous Shaolin Temple gained prominence among many Americans with the release of the 1980s martial arts movie of the same name. An updated version of the film, loved by fans for the riveting kung fu stunts of the temple's legendary fighting monks, is in the works. And in recent weeks, Hollywood's remake of "The Karate Kid" has topped the box office, wowing audiences with its seemingly magical martial arts techniques.

But while kung fu continues to make a splash on the big screen, members of the Shaolin Buddhist Temple in Sherman Oaks are keen to spread a different message about the Shaolin culture and what their sanctuary has to offer.

"When people come here, it's not just about martial arts," said the temple's master, Italian-born Franco Testini, 43, whose Buddhist name, Shifu Shi Yan Fan, was given to him by the abbot of the Shaolin Temple in China.

"Hollywood has completely exaggerated the martial arts scene," added Cindy Truong, 32, a temple volunteer and event coordinator. "It's not all about Chinese people being thrown over chairs. The martial arts you see in the movies, that's Americanized. It's a very small part of Shaolin culture."

Situated on a busy stretch of Ventura Boulevard, the temple opened in 2008 and offers a tranquil escape from the world outside. Instruction focuses on Buddhist philosophy and meditation, the art of ancient Chinese tea ceremonies, a combination of stretching and breathing exercises known as chi gong, tai chi — and, of course, martial arts.

"But we don't train people to punch and kick," said Truong. "We train people to become strong internally, and that emanates externally. We try to educate people, that it's more than just fighting and fancy moves."

Testini stressed the link between breathing, listening and learning as a key to developing harmony between the mind and body.

Although there are several Shaolin schools in Los Angeles, only the Sherman Oaks shrine is listed on the official website of China's Shaolin Temple, where it is described as "the first official branch organization in North America."

What makes the Sherman Oaks temple even more unusual is Testini, its master.

In 2007, Testini became the first Westerner to be accepted into the elite of the 1,500-year-old Shaolin Temple in eastern central China, his supporters said. In an ancient ritual, he received the Buddhist brand marks that symbolize his high status in Shaolin culture, they added. [...]

Testini was 7 when he started taking martial arts lessons, he said. At 9, he began to compete. By his teens, he had won numerous competitions. And at age 21, he entered the monastery and eventually took vows to become a monk. His study at home was complemented by numerous trips to China's Shaolin Temple, to solidify his discipline and faith.

In 1994, Testini arrived in the United States. He didn't speak English and he was homeless for the first several months, sleeping on the beach or in abandoned cars. He traded martial arts instruction for food and soon developed a following of students and friends, who eventually found him permanent shelter. And in 2008, his students helped him lease a former furniture store that became the Sherman Oaks temple. [...]

"He can feel your aura and energy, your intensity and anxiety level," said Truong, as she observed what has become a familiar ritual. "Just by looking at a person's facial expression, he can see what kind of stress they have inside."

The breathing exercises and positive thinking Testini teaches help to relieve that stress, said Gene Cantamessa, who attends the temple five days a week.

Cantamessa, who said he is "pushing 70," is among the temple's longtime members, whose ages range from 2 to 80. Some are novices to the exercises and meditation; others have years of experience. Several work in the film industry and use the Sherman Oaks shrine to escape from the Hollywood hustle.

"I find the meditation very good," said Cantamessa, a retired production sound mixer. "I like the experience of concentrating ... the peace of mind. I feel like a different person when I'm in here."

[...]

Where Gulf Spill Might Place on the Roll of Disasters
June 18, 2010
The New York Times

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

From the Oval Office the other night, President Obama called the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico "the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced." Senior people in the government have echoed that language.

The motive seems clear. The words signal sympathy for the people of the Gulf Coast, an acknowledgment of the magnitude of their struggle. And if this is really the worst environmental disaster, the wording seems to suggest, maybe people need to cut the government some slack for failing to get it under control right away.

But is the description accurate?

Scholars of environmental history, while expressing sympathy for the people of the gulf, say the assertion is debatable. They offer an intimidating list of disasters to consider: floods caused by human negligence, the destruction of forests across the entire continent and the near-extermination of the American bison.

"The White House is ignoring all the shades and complexities here to make a dramatic point," said Donald E. Worster, an environmental historian at the University of Kansas and a visiting scholar at Yale.

The professors also note the impossibility of ranking such a varied list of catastrophes. Perhaps the worst disaster, they say, is always the one people are living through now.

Still, for sheer disruption to human lives, several of them could think of no environmental problem in American history quite equaling the calamity known as the Dust Bowl.

"The Dust Bowl is arguably one of the worst ecological blunders in world history," said Ted Steinberg, a historian at Case Western Reserve University.

Across the High Plains, stretching from the Texas Panhandle to the Dakotas, poor farming practices in the early part of the 20th century stripped away the native grasses that held moisture and soil in place. A drought that began in 1930 exposed the folly.

Boiling clouds of dust whipped up by harsh winds buried homes and cars, destroyed crops, choked farm animals to death and sent children to the hospital with pneumonia. At first the crisis was ignored in Washington, but then the apocalyptic clouds began to blow all the way to New York, Buffalo and Chicago. A hearing in Congress on the disaster was interrupted by the arrival of a dust storm.

By the mid-1930s, people started to give up on the region in droves. The Dust Bowl refugees joined a larger stream of migrants displaced by agricultural mechanization, and by 1940 more than two million people had left the Great Plains States.

However, the Dust Bowl lasted a decade, and that raises an issue. What exactly should be defined as an environmental disaster? How long should an event take to play out, and how many people have to be harmed before it deserves that epithet?

Among sudden events, the Johnstown Flood might be a candidate for worst environmental disaster. On May 31, 1889, heavy rains caused a poorly maintained dam to burst in southwestern Pennsylvania, sending a wall of water 14 miles downriver to the town of Johnstown. About 2,200 people were killed in one of the worst tolls in the nation's history.

At the time it happened, that event was understood as a failure of engineering and maintenance, and that is how it has come down in history. Perhaps a one-day flood is simply too short-term to count as an environmental disaster.

On the other hand, if events that played out over many decades are included, the field of candidates expands sharply.

Perhaps the destruction of the native forests of North America, which took hundreds of years, should be counted as the nation's largest environmental calamity. The slaughtering of millions of bison on the Great Plains might qualify.

[...]

However, those activities were not seen as disasters at the time, at least by the people who carried them out. They were viewed as desirable alterations of the landscape. It is only in retrospect that people have come to understand what was lost, so maybe those do not belong on a disaster list. [...]

The Washington Post
Are Obama and progressives on the outs?
By Katrina vanden Heuvel
Tuesday, June 15, 2010

There's a tension between the Obama administration and the progressive movement, but it's not the one mainstream media have been describing or that the White House seems to perceive.

Last week's America's Future Now conference in Washington prompted numerous stories about "demoralized activists" directing their anger at the president and Democratic Party leadership. Dana Milbank's June 9 column was among those that promoted the "liberals eat their own" storyline. He wrote: "For 17 months, anger at President Obama and congressional Democrats has been pooling on the left. On Tuesday morning, it spilled onto the floor of an Omni Shoreham ballroom and splashed all over House Speaker Nancy Pelosi."

Yet what's happening on the left isn't the equivalent of the anti-incumbent anger on the right. Most progressives support Obama and want his agenda to succeed. And although Pelosi may have been bushwacked by a disability-rights group last week, she was celebrated by most of the conference attendees for her ability to forge a majority for hard votes.

At the same time, progressives have come to a realization. What we see, some 500 days into the Obama administration, is a president obstructed by a partisan Republican opposition, powerful entrenched corporate interests, and a minority of corrupt or conservative Democrats. The thinking is that if progressives organize independently and forge smart coalitions, building a mass movement for reform with a moral compass that can transcend left-right divisions, we may be able to push Obama beyond the limits of his own politics, overcome the timid incrementalism of the establishment Democratic Party and counter the forces of money and power that are true obstacles to change. [...]

That's what key progressive groups -- Labor, netroots activists and others -- were trying to do in supporting a primary challenger to Democratic Arkansas Sen. Blanche Lincoln. But the Obama administration, which had endorsed Lincoln, apparently misinterpreted the progressive position as a threat from its base. The White House political operation turned prickly. And after Lincoln prevailed (with massive aid from establishment Democrats), anonymous White House operatives called reporters to trash organized labor for flushing "$10 million of their members' money down the toilet on a pointless exercise."

Actually, the point of the exercise was that those opposing Obama's reform agenda will not get a free pass. And there will be more efforts like it. To name a few: Labor will continue to devote resources to accountability primaries in several states this year, MoveOn will be campaigning to counter corporate influence, and the NAACP, SEIU and the Center for Community Change are organizing a march for jobs in October.

This agitating role isn't a new one for the progressive movement. Progressives organized a remarkable mass movement seeking to stop the Iraq war before it began. They built a counterweight in the blogosphere to challenge the mainstream media and the right. They created the coalition that beat Bush on Social Security. They gave Democrats their voice on Iraq, energy and health care that helped to take back Congress. And they inspired a junior senator from Illinois to think that something was moving with such strength that he might run and win the presidency.

Now, with resistance imperiling the Obama's change agenda, there is an understanding that it is time for progressives to mobilize independently once more. It doesn't matter whether you think Obama has done the best that he can or that he has compromised too easily. What's important is to alter the balance of power. And that means recruiting and mobilizing to unleash new energy into the debate. [...]

The tension between Obama and the progressive movement isn't a threat to the president. Rather, it may be needed to save him.

How cybercriminals invade social networks, companies

By Byron Acohido, USA TODAY
Updated 3/4/2010

SAN FRANCISCO — "Hey Alice, look at the pics I took of us last weekend at the picnic. Bob"

That Facebook message, sent last fall between co-workers at a large U.S. financial firm, rang true enough. Alice had, in fact, attended a picnic with Bob, who mentioned the outing on his Facebook profile page.

So Alice clicked on the accompanying Web link, expecting to see Bob's photos. But the message had come from thieves who had hijacked Bob's Facebook account. And the link carried an infection. With a click of her mouse, Alice let the attackers usurp control of her Facebook account and company laptop. Later, they used Alice's company logon to slip deep inside the financial firm's network, where they roamed for weeks. They had managed to grab control of two servers, and were probing deeper, when they were detected.

Intrusions like this one — investigated by network infrastructure provider Terremark — can expose a company to theft of its most sensitive data. Such attacks illustrate a dramatic shift underway in the Internet underground. Cybercriminals are moving aggressively to take advantage of an unanticipated chink in corporate defenses: the use of social networks in workplace settings. They are taking tricks honed in the spamming world and adapting them to what's driving the growth of social networks: speed and openness of individuals communicating on the Internet.

"Social networks provide a rich repository of information cybercriminals can use to refine their phishing attacks," says Chris Day, Terremark's chief security architect.

This shift is gathering steam, tech security analysts say. One sign: The volume of spam and phishing scams — like the "LOL is this you?" viral messages sweeping through Twitter— more than doubled in the fourth quarter of 2009 compared with the same period in 2008, according to IBM's X-Force security research team. Such "phishing" lures — designed to trick you into clicking on an infectious Web link — are flooding e-mail inboxes, as well as social-network messages and postings, at unprecedented levels.

An infected PC, referred to as a "bot," gets slotted into a network of thousands of other bots. These "botnets" then are directed to execute all forms of cybercrime, from petty scams to cyberespionage. On Tuesday, authorities in Spain announced the breakup of a massive botnet, called Mariposa, comprising more than 12 million infected PCs in 190 countries.

Three Spanish citizens with no prior criminal records were arrested. Panda Security, of Bilbao, Spain, helped track down the alleged ringleader, who authorities say has been spreading infected links for about a year, mainly via Microsoft's free MSN instant messenger service.

"It became too big and too noticeable," says Pedro Bustamante, senior researcher at Panda Security. "They would have been smarter to stay under the radar."

What happened to Bob and Alice, the picnickers at the financial firm, illustrates how social networks help facilitate targeted attacks. [...]

Investigators increasingly find large botnets running inside corporate networks, where they can be particularly difficult to root out or disable. "Social networks represent a vehicle to distribute malicious programs in ways that are not easily blocked," says Tom Cross, IBM X-Force Manager.

The attacks run the gamut. In just four weeks earlier this year, one band of low-level cyberthieves, known in security circles as the Kneber gang, pilfered 68,000 account logons from 2,411 companies, including user names and passwords for 3,644 Facebook accounts. Active since late 2008, the Kneber gang has probably cracked into "a much higher number" of companies, says Tim Belcher, CTO of security firm NetWitness, which rooted out one of the gang's storage computers.

"Every network we see today has a significant problem with some form of organized threat," Belcher says. [...]

The Associated Press
Student immigrants use civil rights-era strategies
Posted 6/2/2010
http://www.statesmanjournal.com/

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

BOSTON — They gather on statehouse steps with signs and bullhorns, risking arrest. They attend workshops on civil disobedience and personal storytelling, and they hold sit-ins and walk out of class in protest. They're being warned that they could even lose their lives.
Students fighting laws that target illegal immigrants are taking a page from the civil rights era, adopting tactics and gathering praise and momentum from the demonstrators who marched in the streets and sat at segregated lunch counters as they sought to turn the public tide against racial segregation.
"Their struggle then is ours now," said Deivid Ribeiro, 21, an illegal immigrant from Brazil and an aspiring physicist. "Like it was for them, this is about survival for us. We have no choice."
Undocumented students, many of whom consider themselves "culturally American" because they have lived in the U.S. most of their lives, don't qualify for federal financial aid and can't get in-state tuition rates in some places. They are drawing parallels between themselves and the 1950s segregation of black and Mexican-American students.
"I think it's genius," said Amilcar Shabazz, chairman of the W.E.B. DuBois Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts. "If you want to figure out how to get your story out and change the political mood in America, everybody knows the place to start your studies is the civil rights movement."
For two years, Renata Teodoro lived in fear of being deported to her native Brazil, like her mother, brother and sister. She reserved her social contact for close friends, was extra careful about signing her name anywhere, and fretted whenever anyone asked about her immigration status, because she been living illegally in the United States since she was 6.
Yet on a recent afternoon, Teodoro gathered with other illegal immigrants outside the Massachusetts Statehouse with signs, fliers and a bullhorn — then marched the streets of Boston, putting herself in danger of arrest by going public but hoping her new openness would prompt action on the DREAM Act, a federal bill to allow people like her a pathway to citizenship via college enrollment or military service.
"I don't care. I can't live like this anymore," said Teodoro, 22, a leader of the Student Immigration Movement and a part-time student at UMass-Boston. "I'm not afraid, and I have to take a stand."
The shift has been building, said Tom Shields, a doctoral student at Brandeis University in Waltham who is studying the new student movement.
"In recent months, there has been an interest in connecting the narrative of their struggle to the civil rights effort for education," Shields said.
The movement has gained attention of Congress. Sens. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Richard Lugar, R-Ind., sent a letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano in April, asking her to halt deportations of immigrant students who could earn legal status under DREAM, which stands for the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors act, and which they're sponsoring.
Last month, three illegal immigrant students demanding to meet with Arizona Sen. John McCain about DREAM were arrested and later detained for refusing to leave his Tucson office. High school and college students in Chicago and Denver walked out of class this year to protest Arizona's tough new law requiring immigrants to carry registration papers. In December, immigrant students staged a "Trail of Dreams" march from Miami's historic Freedom Tower to Washington, D.C., to raise support for DREAM.
Similar student immigrant groups have sprung up at the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Houston.
By attaching themselves to the civil rights movement, Shabazz said, the immigrant students can claim the moral high ground and underdog status of the debate.
"The question now is ... can they convince moderate, middle-of-the-road, independent voters to support them?" he said. [...]

The Washington Post

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 1 HP ANGLAIS

Today's women can have it all -- including a midlife crisis

By Pamela Paul
Sunday, June 20, 2010

It seemed like a familiar scenario: the stay-at-home mom with two young children. The Tribeca loft, the Wall Street husband. And, after less than a decade, the divorce. Those of us who knew her, if only casually, jumped to conclusions: "Typical finance jerk . . . up and leaves his wife."

But no, it turns out, she left him. She had an affair. And she's apparently much improved, complete with a new apartment, a new lover, even a new start-up company. At once exhilarating, gutsy and faintly embarrassing, the spectacle looked just like your classic midlife crisis.

Except your classic midlife crisis has always been male terrain. The fast car and the buxom secretary were the cathartic release -- snap! -- after years of mounting marital boredom and the pressure of providing for a family; the pivot when a man shifted from wanting what the guy 10 years older had to wanting what the guy 10 years younger had. It was Billy Crystal running off to become a cowboy in "City Slickers," Jack Nicholson cheating on his pregnant wife in "Heartburn," Kevin Spacey buying a vintage Firebird and lusting after a sexy cheerleader in "American Beauty." Not necessarily forgivable, but recognizable and therefore understandable.

Switch the pronouns, and the scenario seems preposterous. Yet what's really preposterous is the idea that Gen X women don't have the same financial responsibilities, the same stresses, the same professional disappointments that dogged the men of our father's generation. We do. So why wouldn't the daily slog of work and family commitments stir in us the same desire to chuck it all in favor of something new?

Having come such a long way, we may even have more cause than men for midlife breakdowns.

After all, the gray flannel suit has been long mothballed. The men I know, no longer their families' sole earners, seem to be chugging happily toward middle age, pleased with their post-millennial mix of shared breadwinning and gung-ho fatherhood. In survey after survey, today's Baby Bjorn-wearing dads say they're much more involved with and fulfilled by their children than their fathers were.

But though Gen X men spend more time with their kids, they're still less engaged than their wives in the hard work of parenting. They may devote more hours to household duties than husbands used to, but studies show that women, even those working full time, shoulder a far greater share: Working wives still spend nearly twice as much time on child care as their working husbands, and more than 50 percent more time on chores such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and home repairs.

Now consider that this particular work-life juggling act -- with its dueling parental and professional demands, carefully calibrated multitasking and relentless pressure -- is currently in rotation among late 30-something and 40-something women. According to a new report by Princeton and the Brookings Institution, women, particularly college-educated professionals, are delaying marriage and children as never before. Having put off kids for so long, we're now up all night breastfeeding and skipping out of sales meetings to attend our umpteenth parent-teacher conference, while at the same time helping to pay down the mortgage and sock money into our kids' 529s. All this precisely at the moment we're supposed to hit the pinnacle of our careers. We're tired.

It would be helpful, then, to acknowledge that women have just as much cause for meltdown as men. The recognition that all this is enough to tip someone over the edge might help women navigate the disappointments and confusions, the uncombed hair and forgotten dental checkups, of midlife. [...]

I'm certainly not recommending that women become chain-smoking, cheating narcissists or that we break George Clooney's heart. But I do believe it's time to get a little selfish. Approaching midlife, we've earned it.

Barack Obama and Guantánamo

Better safe than sorry

The Economist October 3rd 2009

pp. 59-60

WASHINGTON, DC

Civil-libertarians are falling out of love with the president

"WE REJECT as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." So Barack Obama declaimed in his presidential inaugural in January. On his second full day in the White House he said he would close the Guantánamo prison in Cuba within a year and stop any American from using torture or mistreatment to extract information from suspected terrorists. Civil-libertarians were thrilled. Eight months on, however, they are less so.

Michael Macleod-Ball of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) admits that Mr Obama started "with a bang". On torture, Mr Obama has been absolute: no American is now allowed to torture or mistreat a detainee. He has shut down America's secret detention centres overseas and allowed the Red Cross to visit the non-secret ones. He still intends to close Guantánamo, though the one-year deadline is in danger of slipping. The great disappointment for the liberties lobbyists is that when Mr Obama promised to close Guantánamo he did not mean that America would stop detaining and holding suspected terrorists without trial.

Of the 200 or so remaining Guantánamo inmates, the administration considers a few score too dangerous to release. It also thinks they are impossible to try successfully in regular federal courts, either because the evidence against them (sometimes extracted by torture) is unreliable or inadmissible, or because a trial could expose intelligence sources. Like George Bush, Mr Obama intends to keep such people locked up—just not in Guantánamo. In May, however, he said he would work with Congress to find an "appropriate" legal regime to hold suspected terrorists in ways "consistent with our values and our constitution".

It emerged last week with rather less fanfare that Mr Obama has now changed his mind. He will not ask Congress to write a new law after all. Instead, he will continue to detain suspects indefinitely by relying on the broad authorisation to use military force that Congress gave President Bush after the September 2001 attacks.

The latest flip-flop has divided the president's critics. On one side are the civil-liberties groups, such as the ACLU and Human Rights Watch (HRW), for whom no system of prolonged detention without trial could ever be consistent with America's values or constitution. They were aghast at the prospect of Congress enshrining such a system in law, and mildly relieved that Mr Obama has reversed himself. Kenneth Roth, HRW's executive director (and a former prosecutor), argues that many of the detainees in question could indeed be tried successfully in a proper court. As for the few that can't be, America's moral credibility and ultimate success against terrorism would be best served by letting them go.

To many experts on counter-terrorism law, however, this sounds like a counsel of impossible perfection. The difficult issue, they say, is not whether such detentions should continue—they should—but what the rules should be and what rights the detainees should enjoy. And these, argues Benjamin Wittes, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, are the sort of complex questions that the legislative branch has a duty to settle.

Mr Wittes believes that Mr Obama was right first time, when he invited Congress to help frame a clear law. Without one, the judges hearing these *habeas corpus* cases have had to make up the rules as they go along. In the end, says Mr Wittes, the Supreme Court will have to adjudicate, and the final say will in practice fall on one unelected individual—Anthony Kennedy, the court's swing judge.

But Congress itself has shown little appetite for serious lawmaking on this subject. Members who care mostly want to ensure that none of its inmates will be moved to their own district. That is one big reason why Mr Obama's plan to close the camp is running late. And now his guiding instinct, too, appears to be safety first. ■

Nom :
Prénom :
Signature :

LV2 ANGLAIS

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

Perfidious Albion again
May 20th 2010 From
The Economist print edition

The British are different, really. But they are stuck with Europe—and it with them

THE British are unfit to join the common market because they differ "profoundly" from continental Europeans, Charles de Gaulle declared in 1963. Britain is "insular, maritime, and linked by her exchanges, her markets and her supply routes to the most diverse and often the farthest-flung nations." Britain trades, it does not farm, the French president grumbled. Let them in, and the club will become a vast "Atlantic community", ripe for American domination. In short, Non.

After a good dinner, a surprising number of European Union officials and politicians will murmur that de Gaulle was right: Britain should never have joined. Many British Eurosceptics would endorse his description of their country. They have a point: Britain is different. As the new prime minister, David Cameron, holds his first meetings with France's Nicolas Sarkozy and Germany's Angela Merkel, it is worth pondering why.

When Britain joined the then EEC in 1973, it was a club designed to meet purely continental goals such as containing Germany's peaceful rise and modernising European farms. That template "poisoned the first years of British membership", says one senior figure—think of Margaret Thatcher's battle to get her money back. Britain emerged from economic misery in the 1970s via a brutal political adjustment, as the then Mrs (now Lady) Thatcher sought to curb militant trade unions and roll back the state. That felt like a British, not a European achievement. When other European leaders then began talking of a "social Europe" to protect workers, it sounded awfully like a return to pre-Thatcher days. In contrast, France's post-war boom was a time of central planning, which cemented in place a certain faith in the state. In lots of countries voters now link joining the European project to emergence from dictatorship and economic isolation.

Historians describe the English (more than the British) as unusually individualist and market-minded since medieval times, working for wages and trading property. England has had a central system of common law for centuries. It industrialised early. It has not been occupied in a long while. All this matters.

In much of Europe people look to the EU as a higher authority able to rescue them from dysfunctional local rulers, notes one ambassador. Britain, he says, is one of the few countries whose voters assume domestic administration is superior to the EU's.

De Gaulle was also right that the British have a different view of America. Take the arguments for building an expensive EU satellite navigation system, Galileo. Europe depends on America's GPS system, it is said, so the Americans could veto an EU military mission. In much of Europe heads nod in agreement at this point. But the British struggle ever to imagine backing an EU military venture opposed by the Americans.

The British debate on Europe is also affected by a raucous popular press that lazily presents the EU as a nefarious plot to do the country down. National newspapers on the continent are overwhelmingly pro-establishment and therefore pro-EU. British newspapers may reflect a more Eurosceptic public opinion. But the savage competitiveness of their market also leads them into adopting more extreme positions.

The euro crisis exposes new differences. Britain decided to stand aloof from the bulk of the recent €750 billion ($950 billion) euro-zone defence fund. But Sweden and Poland felt they had enough at stake to contribute. A disintegrating euro frightens all those with life savings in that currency, including officials and ministers at EU meetings. They found it humiliating when President Barack Obama publicly urged EU leaders to shore up the currency. Outside the euro, Britons are more detached.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

November 22, 2009 ***The Independent***
Oliver Miles: The key question - is Blair a war criminal?

The terms of reference for the new Iraq inquiry allow for the big unknowns to be tackled. And we might just get to the truth

The Iraq inquiry will start hearing evidence in open session on Tuesday, and it will almost certainly lead to fireworks. Let us hope the media cover it properly; five months ago, there was a sharp debate on Iraq in the Commons which the media ignored. "Anyone with information" has been invited to get in touch, which includes serving officials and military. Some officials resigned because they disagreed with the war, but most stayed on. But there is plenty of evidence, including leaked documents, to show there was strong opposition to the war, and for good reasons. As a retired diplomat myself, I hope my former colleagues will not be shy.

The situation in Iraq is still horrible. More than 400 people died in violent incidents last month; more than 1,400 were wounded. Millions of Iraqis are still displaced, inside Iraq or in Syria, Jordan or elsewhere, with little prospect of their returning home. Water and electricity are limping along, the vital oil industry will take years to rebuild. British troops sent to train the Iraqi security forces were in Kuwait through the summer marking time, while the Iraqi government quibbled about their legal status.

We've had umpteen Iraq inquiries already, but this one should be different. Its terms of reference are open. Previous inquiries concentrated on the non-existent weapons of mass destruction, the misuse of intelligence to make the case for war, the "dodgy dossier" and so on. But there are plenty of other questions, starting with the big one: was this a war of aggression and therefore a war crime? There were two views about its legality, and the then attorney general seems to have held both of them.

What about the alleged links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qa'ida? - it seems there were no such links. What happened to the civil planning for after the fighting? According to Clare Short, who was a member of the Cabinet, there "were preparations that were then all junked, because of the hubris and deceit that went into preparing for war". Were the arguments for and against war ever assessed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and was formal advice submitted to the then secretary of state, the Cabinet and the prime minister?

The Prime Minister's choice of the members of the committee has been criticised. None is a military man, Sir John Chilcot was a member of the Hutton inquiry and has been closely involved with the security services, Baroness Prashar has no relevant experience, Sir Roderic Lyne was a serving ambassador at the time of the war, and so on. Rather less attention has been paid to the curious appointment of two historians (which seems a lot, out of a total of five), both strong supporters of Tony Blair and/or the Iraq war. In December 2004 Sir Martin Gilbert, while pointing out that the "war on terror" was not a third world war, wrote that Bush and Blair "may well, with the passage of time and the opening of the archives, join the ranks of Roosevelt and Churchill". Sir Lawrence Freedman is the reputed architect of the "Blair doctrine" of humanitarian intervention, which was invoked in Kosovo and Afghanistan as well as Iraq. Both Gilbert and Freedman are Jewish, and Gilbert at least has a record of active support for Zionism.

Tony Blair's responsibility for the Iraq war was a strike against him as a candidate for the role of president of the European Council. Perhaps the launch of the inquiry helped to kill the idea off. No European democratic institution has entertained the idea of electing someone under the shadow of a war crime charge since Kurt Waldheim became President of Austria in 1986.

Oliver Miles is a former British ambassador to Lybia.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

March 5, 2010 ***The New York Times***

Risk and Opportunity for Women in 21st-Century
By KATRIN BENNHOLD

PARIS — Daniel Louvard does not believe in affirmative action. Time and again, the scientists in his Left Bank cancer laboratory have urged him to recruit with gender diversity in mind. But Mr. Louvard, research director at the Institut Curie and one of France's top biochemists, just keeps hiring more women. "I take the best candidates, period," Mr. Louvard said. There are 21 women and 4 men on his team.

The quiet revolution that has seen women across the developed world catch up with men in the work force and in education has also touched science, that most stubbornly male bastion. Last year, three women received Nobel prizes in the sciences, a record for any year. Women now earn 42 percent of the science degrees in the 30 countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; in the life sciences, such as biology and medicine, more than 6 out of 10 graduates are women. Younger women, too, are sticking more with science after graduating: In the European Union, the number of women researchers is growing at a rate nearly twice that of their male counterparts, giving rise to what some have dubbed a fledgling "old girls network." Even Barbie, the iconic doll who in 1992 was infamously made to say, "Math class is tough," has had a makeover as a computer engineer for her 2010 edition, complete with pink glasses and pink laptop.

But if progress has been dramatic since the two-time Nobel physicist Marie Curie was barred from France's science academy a century ago, it has been slower than in other parts of society — and much less uniform. In computer science, for example, the percentage of female graduates from American universities peaked in the mid-1980s at more than 40 percent and has since dropped to half that, said Sue Rosser, a scholar who has written extensively on women in science. In electrical and mechanical engineering, enrollment percentages remain in the single digits. The number of women who are full science professors at elite universities in the United States has been stuck at 10 percent for the past half century. Throughout the world, only a handful of women preside over a national science academy. Women have been awarded only 16 of the 540 Nobels in science.

The tug-of-war between encouraging numbers and depressing details is in many ways the story of the advancement of women overall. Women get more degrees and score higher grades than men in industrialized countries. But they are still paid less and are more likely to work part time. Only 18 percent of tenured professors in the 27 countries of the European Union are women. And the big money in science these days is in computers and engineering — the two fields with the fewest women.

In the 21st century, perhaps more than ever before, there will be a premium on scientific and technological knowledge. Science, in effect, will be the last frontier for the women's movement. With humanity poised to tackle pressing challenges — from climate change to complex illness to the fallout from the digital revolution — shortages of people with the right skill sets loom in many countries. Therein lie both opportunity and risk for women: In the years to come, the people who master the sciences will change the world — and most likely command the big paychecks.

Many obstacles women face in general are starkly crystallized in scientific and technological professions. Balancing a career with family is particularly tricky when the tenure clock competes with the biological clock or an engineering post requires long stints on an offshore oil rig. For couples, coordinating two careers is especially tough when both are in science. And 83 percent of women scientists in the United States have scientist partners, compared to 54 percent of male scientists.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

March 15, 2010 *The New York Times*
To Stop Crime, Share Your Genes

By MICHAEL SERINGHAUS

PERHAPS the only thing more surprising than President Obama's decision to give an interview for "America's Most Wanted" last weekend was his apparent agreement with the program's host, John Walsh, that there should be a national DNA database with profiles of every person arrested, whether convicted or not. Many Americans feel that this proposal flies in the face of our "innocent until proven guilty" ethos, and given that African-Americans are far more likely to be arrested than whites, critics refer to such genetic collection as creating "Jim Crow's database."

In truth, however, this is an issue where both sides are partly right. The president was correct in saying that we need a more robust DNA database, available to law enforcement in every state, to "continue to tighten the grip around folks who have perpetrated these crimes." But critics have a point that genetic police work, like the sampling of arrestees, is fraught with bias. A better solution: to keep every American's DNA profile on file. Your sensitive genetic information would be safe. A DNA profile distills a person's complex genomic information down to a set of 26 numerical values, each characterizing the length of a certain repeated sequence of "junk" DNA that differs from person to person. Although these genetic differences are biologically meaningless — they don't correlate with any observable characteristics — tabulating the number of repeats creates a unique identifier, a DNA "fingerprint." The genetic privacy risk from such profiling is virtually nil, because these records include none of the health and biological data present in one's genome as a whole. Aside from the ability in some cases to determine whether two individuals are closely related, DNA profiles have nothing sensitive to disclose.

There are several key problems with this approach to expanding the database. First, the national DNA database is racially skewed, as blacks and Hispanics are far more likely than whites to be convicted of crimes. Creating profiles of arrestees only adds to that imbalance. Second, several states, including California and Colorado, have embraced a controversial new technique called familial DNA search, which exploits the fact that close relatives share substantial fractions of their DNA. If efforts to find a DNA match come up empty — that is, if the perpetrator is not yet profiled in the database — the police in these states can search for partial matches between crime-scene samples and offenders in their record base. If they find a partial match, they can zero in on relatives of the profiled person as possible suspects.

A much fairer system would be to store DNA profiles for each and every one of us. This would eliminate any racial bias, negate the need for the questionable technique of familial search, and of course be a far stronger tool for law enforcement than even an arrestee database. This universal database is tenable from a privacy perspective because of the very limited information content of DNA profiles. A universal record would be a strong deterrent to first-time offenders — after all, any DNA sample left behind would be a smoking gun for the police — and would enable the police to more quickly apprehend repeat criminals. It would also help prevent wrongful convictions.

As a practical matter, universal DNA collection is fairly easy: it could be done alongside blood tests on newborns, or through painless cheek swabs as a prerequisite to obtaining a driver's license or Social Security card. Once a biological sample was obtained, its use must be limited to generating a DNA profile only, and afterward the sample would be destroyed. Access to the DNA database would remain limited to law enforcement officers investigating serious crimes.

Provided our privacy remains secure, there is no excuse not to use every bit of science we can in the fight against crime. The key is making sure that all Americans contribute their share.

Michael Seringhaus is a student at Yale Law School.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

February 26, 2010 *The New York Times*
When American and European Ideas of Privacy Collide

By ADAM LIPTAK

WASHINGTON — "On the Internet, the First Amendment is a local ordinance," said Fred H. Cate, a law professor at Indiana University. He was talking about last week's ruling from an Italian court that Google executives had violated Italian privacy law by allowing users to post a video on one of its services. In one sense, the ruling was a nice discussion starter about how much responsibility to place on services like Google for offensive content that they passively distribute. But in a deeper sense, it called attention to the profound European commitment to privacy, one that threatens the American conception of free expression and could restrict the flow of information on the Internet to everyone.

"Americans to this day don't fully appreciate how Europeans regard privacy," said Jane Kirtley, who teaches media ethics and law at the University of Minnesota. "The reality is that they consider privacy a fundamental human right." Google understands. "The framework in Europe is of privacy as a human-dignity right," said Nicole Wong, a lawyer with the company. "As enforced in the U.S., it's a consumer-protection right." But Ms. Wong said Google's policies on invasion of privacy, like its policies on hate speech, pornography and extreme violence, were best applied uniformly around the world. Trying to meet all the differing local standards "will make you tear your hair out and be paralyzed."

The three Google executives were sentenced to six months in prison for failing to block a video showing an autistic boy being bullied by other students. The video was on line for two months in 2006, and was promptly removed after Google received a formal complaint. The prison sentences were suspended. Still, Judge Oscar Magi's ruling, in effect, balanced privacy against free speech and ruled in favor of the former. And given the borderless quality of the Internet, that balance has the potential to affect nations that prefer to tilt toward the values protected by the First Amendment.

"For many purposes, the European Union is today the effective sovereign of global privacy law," Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu wrote in their book "Who Controls the Internet?" in 2006. This may sound odd in America, where the First Amendment has pride of place in the Bill of Rights. In Europe, privacy comes first. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights says, "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence." The First Amendment's distant cousin comes later, in Article 10.

Americans like privacy, too, but they think about it in a different way, as an aspect of liberty and a protection against government overreaching, particularly into the home. Continental privacy protections, by contrast, focus on protecting people from having their lives exposed to public view, especially in the mass media. The title of a Yale Law Journal article by James Q. Whitman captured the tension: "The Two Western Cultures of Privacy: Dignity Versus Liberty." And historical experience helps explain the differing priorities. "The privacy protections we see reflected in modern European law are a response to the Gestapo and the Stasi," Professor Cate said, referring to the reviled Nazi and East German secret police — totalitarian regimes that used informers, surveillance and blackmail to maintain their power, creating a web of anxiety and betrayal that permeated those societies. "We haven't really lived through that in the United States," he said.

American experience has been entirely different, said Lee Levine, a Washington lawyer who has taught media law in America and France. "So much of the revolution that created our legal system was a reaction to excesses of government in areas of press and speech," he said. It was not until 1890 that Samuel Warren and Louis D. Brandeis wrote "The Right to Privacy," their groundbreaking Harvard Law Review article. Influential though it was, it came awfully late in the life of the republic.

The word privacy does not appear in the Constitution, and, outside the context of government searches, the document has almost nothing to say about the concept.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

Thursday, May. 20, 2010 *Time*

How Facebook Is Redefining Privacy

By Dan Fletcher

Sometime in the next few weeks, Facebook will officially log its 500 millionth active citizen. If the website were granted terra firma, it would be the world's third largest country by population, two-thirds bigger than the U.S. More than 1 in 4 people who browse the Internet not only have a Facebook account but have returned to the site within the past 30 days.

Just six years after Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg helped found Facebook in his dorm room as a way for Ivy League students to keep tabs on one another, the company has joined the ranks of the Web's great superpowers. Microsoft made computers easy for everyone to use. Google helps us search out data. YouTube keeps us entertained. But Facebook has a huge advantage over those other sites: the emotional investment of its users. Facebook makes us smile, shudder, squeeze into photographs so we can see ourselves online later, fret when no one responds to our witty remarks, snicker over who got fat after high school, pause during weddings to update our relationship status to Married or codify a breakup by setting our status back to Single. (I'm glad we can still be friends, Elise.)

Getting to the point where so many of us are comfortable living so much of our life on Facebook represents a tremendous cultural shift, particularly since 28% of the site's users are older than 34, Facebook's fastest-growing demographic. Facebook has changed our social DNA, making us more accustomed to openness. But the site is premised on a contradiction: Facebook is rich in intimate opportunities — you can celebrate your niece's first steps there and mourn the death of a close friend — but the company is making money because you are, on some level, broadcasting those moments online. The feelings you experience on Facebook are heartfelt; the data you're providing feeds a bottom line.

The willingness of Facebook's users to share and overshare — from descriptions of our bouts of food poisoning (gross) to our uncensored feelings about our bosses (not advisable) — is critical to its success. Thus far, the company's m.o. has been to press users to share more, then let up if too many of them complain. Because of this, Facebook keeps finding itself in the crosshairs of intense debates about privacy. It happened in 2007, when the default settings in an initiative called Facebook Beacon sent all your Facebook friends updates about purchases you made on certain third-party sites. Beacon caused an uproar among users — who were automatically enrolled — and occasioned a public apology from Zuckerberg.

And it is happening again. To quell the latest concerns of users — and of elected officials in the U.S. and abroad — Facebook is getting ready to unveil enhanced privacy controls. The changes are coming on the heels of a complaint filed with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) on May 5 by the Electronic Privacy Information Center, which takes issue with Facebook's frequent policy changes and tendency to design privacy controls that are, if not deceptive, less than intuitive. (Even a company spokesman got tripped up trying to explain to me why my co-worker has a shorter privacy-controls menu than I do.) The 38-page complaint asks the FTC to compel Facebook to clarify the privacy settings attached to each piece of information we post as well as what happens to that data after we share it.

Facebook is readjusting its privacy policy at a time when its stake in mining our personal preferences has never been greater. In April, it launched a major initiative called Open Graph, which lets Facebook users weigh in on what they like on the Web, from a story on TIME.com to a pair of jeans from Levi's. The logic is that if my friends recommend something, I'll be more inclined to like it too. And because Facebook has so many users — and because so many companies want to attract those users' eyeballs — Facebook is well positioned to display its members' preferences on any website, anywhere. Less than a month after Open Graph's rollout, more than 100,000 sites had integrated the technology.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

Rompuying along
Feb 4th 2010
From The Economist print edition

Europe's voters are the biggest obstacle to ambitions to become more dynamic and successful

IN BRITISH Eurosceptic circles, a popular bumper sticker reads: "Love Europe, Hate the EU." Such opponents of integration must be pretty cheerful right now, as the EU has had a wretched start to the year. But they miss the point. Arguably, the problem is Europe itself: its querulous voters and its cowardly political leaders. The union's woes are a symptom of a bigger malaise.

Three headaches obsess Brussels at this moment. First comes the spectre of a euro-area crisis. Senior figures say it is a question of "when not if" external aid is sent to prevent cash-strapped Greece from defaulting on its debts.

Second, it emerged this week that the American president, Barack Obama, would not go to Madrid in May for a summit with EU leaders. American officials said the president was too busy with his domestic agenda to travel; then, more painfully, they complained of European squabbling over the summit format. Under the Lisbon treaty summits are meant to take place in Brussels, hosted by the new permanent president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. But Spain, which holds the rotating EU presidency until June 30th, insisted on inviting Mr Obama to Madrid. He has now made clear he is not coming.

A third headache is the "EU 2020 reform agenda", a ten-year plan to make Europe dynamic by administrative fiat. The 2020 agenda is to be discussed at an informal summit called by Mr Van Rompuy on February 11th. EU leaders hope to build on the rubble of the 2000 Lisbon agenda, whose stated aim was to make the EU "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion and respect for the environment." It failed.

As ever, the post-mortem on Lisbon among EU policymakers has focused on process. All agree that it had too many objectives (there are letters to Father Christmas that contain fewer wishes). Even before the economic crisis, the EU was on course to miss targets for employment rates and levels of research spending. Fewer than one in three Europeans aged 25-34 has completed higher education: the rate is over 40% in America, and over 50% in Japan or Canada. Less than 10% of EU industry is "high-tech".

It is common to hear that Lisbon failed because compliance was voluntary. In Spain, Portugal and Belgium political leaders dream about the 2020 agenda including a new system of incentives and sanctions. These might include issuing EU bonds to produce cheap credit for countries that reformed. The European Commission has talked of directing EU structural funds only to the virtuous. French officials say they are wary of sanctions, but can imagine the public "naming and shaming" of laggards. Yet in truth the Lisbon agenda did not fail for lack of sanctions, even if that is the near-universal consensus in Brussels. Governments already pay a high price for sticking to the status quo. No EU sanction could ever hurt as much as the premiums Greece must pay on its new debt, yet the Greek government is still hesitant over pushing through truly painful reforms. As ever, the real problems are political will and democratic preferences.

Lisbon failed because lots of Europeans do not want to live in the most dynamic and competitive economy in the world. They prefer to work fewer hours than Americans or Japanese (about 10% fewer, on average), to take long holidays, and to retire as soon as possible. Among EU leaders it is fashionable to predict that the financial crisis will lead to a revolution in "European economic governance". Yet that phrase hides a dearth of new ideas. European reactions to the cancelled Madrid summit were telling.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

The lingering of an absurd imperial reflex

Pankaj Mishra, *The Guardian*, Thursday 4 March 2010

There were chuckles and sniggers in Qatar last month when Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, warned that a military dictatorship was imminent in Iran. Threatening America's most intransigent adversary, Clinton seems to have been oblivious to her audience: educated Arabs in the Middle East where America's military presence has long propped up several dictators, including such stalwart allies in rendition and torture as Hosni Mubarak. An over-eager cheerleader of the Bush administration's serial bellicosity, Clinton exemplifies Barack Obama's essential continuity with previous US foreign policymakers – despite the president's many emollient words to the contrary. Clinton has also "warned" China with an officiousness redolent of the 1990s when her husband, with some encouragement from Tony Blair, tried to sort out the New World Order.

But the illusions of western power that proliferated in the 90s now lie shattered. No longer as introverted as before, China contemptuously dismissed Clinton's warnings. The Iranians did not fail to highlight American skulduggery in their oil-rich neighbourhood. But then Clinton is not alone among Anglo-American leaders in failing to recognise how absurdly hollow their quasi-imperial rhetoric sounds in the post-9/11 political climate.

Visiting India last year David Miliband decided to hector Indian politicians on the causes of terrorism, and was roundly rebuffed. Summing up the general outrage among Indian elites, a leading English language daily editorialised that the British foreign secretary had "yet to be house-trained". The US treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, provoked howls of laughter in his Chinese audience when he assured them that China's assets tied up in US dollars were safe. As foreign secretary of a nation complicit in two recent terrorist-recruiting wars, Miliband could have been a bit more modest. Resigned to financing America's massive deficits with Chinese-held dollars, Geithner could have been a bit less strident.

But no: old reflexes, born of the victories of 1945 and 1989, linger among Britain and America's political elites, which seem almost incapable of shaking off habits bred of the long Anglo-American imperium – what the American diplomat and writer George Kennan in his last years denounced as an "unthought-through, vainglorious and undesirable" tendency "to see ourselves as the centre of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world".

In Afghanistan, the Anglo-American alliance hopes to bomb the Taliban to the negotiating table, baffling Afghans who, like most people, believe that the end of war – not more war – is a necessary prelude to dialogue. Culturally blind, tough-guy tactics also tend to be strategically dumb. Western sanctions on Burma have pushed its despotic rulers into China's sphere of influence. Relentless threats against Iran's nuclear programme force the "dissident" Mir Hossein Moussavi to accuse Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of "selling out" to the west, hardening the bipartisan Iranian consensus on an issue of national prestige.

Decolonisation seems to have dented little the sense of superiority that since 1945 has made American leaders in particular consistently underestimate the intensity of nationalist feeling in Asia and Africa. In proposing cash bribes for the "moderate" Taliban, the Obama administration reminds one of FDR's bright idea about the original inhabitants of Palestine: "What about the Arabs?" he once asked the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann. "Can't that be settled with a little baksheesh?"

This was undoubtedly a more subtle approach to the Middle East than the one proposed by Winston Churchill, who once threatened to "set the Jews on them [Egyptians] and drive them into the gutter". But as the cold war intensified, the American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, assaulted new postcolonial leaders with you're-either-with-us-or-against-us ultimatums. "Dulles flies around," Thomas Mann noted in his diary, "soliciting clients for American irresponsibility." However, refusing to shake hands with Zhou Enlai, and denouncing Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of non-alignment as "immoral", Dulles alienated one major country after another in Asia and Africa.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

General McChrystal and the militarisation of US politics

America has settled into being a nation perpetually at war. In this climate it's no surprise generals sometimes get out of control

---

Simon Tisdall, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 23 June 2010

Barack Obama has a problem with America's generals that is unlikely to be solved quickly or easily, whatever the outcome of the Stanley McChrystal affair. The disrespectful behaviour of the US commander in Afghanistan and his aides was symptomatic of a more deeply rooted, potentially dangerous malaise, analysts suggest. This week's events might thus be termed a very American coup.

One reason for Obama's difficulty lies in his own inexperience. As a greenhorn commander-in-chief and a Democrat to boot, Washington watchers say Obama has had scant opportunity to win the military's respect, let alone its affection. His unease with his violent inheritance in Afghanistan and Iraq is evident. Another reason appears to be the willingness of American conservatives of all stripes, in an increasingly polarised society, to buy into the "wimps in the White House" narrative peddled by General McChrystal's army staffers. It echoed rightwing criticism that Obama, who has never served, is personally unfit to lead.

It is not a big step from there to outright accusations of cowardice. "The ugly truth is that no one in the Obama White House wanted this Afghan surge," wrote *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman on Tuesday. "The only reason they proceeded was because no one knew how to get out of it – or had the courage to pull the plug." But perhaps the main reason why Obama's problem with the generals is bigger than McChrystal is the continuing impact of the post-9/11 legacy. George Bush defined the US as a nation perpetually at war. The Pentagon produced a theory to suit: the Long War doctrine postulating unending conflict against ill-defined but ubiquitous enemies. Unquestioning patriotism became an official ideology to which all were expected to subscribe.

According Andrew Bacevich, an author, America's armed forces wield growing political and social influence in an increasingly militarised society. Defence spending now approaches a trillion dollars a year, dwarfing the money allocated to diplomacy and foreign aid. Public figures, such as Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the joint chiefs, carry enormous clout on Capitol Hill. General David Petraeus, an Iraq war hero who heads the Orwellian sounding Central Command, is tipped as a future Republican presidential nominee.

The US is nothing like Turkey where, until recently at least, civilian governments lived in constant fear of a military coup. Nor is Washington some west African capital, where presidents come and go at the flick of a Kalashnikov safety catch. But the speed with which American commentators, reacting to McChrystal's mutinous behaviour, moved to stress the need to control the generals indicated uneasiness about current trends. "The most important issues at hand in the furore [over McChrystal] is the central one in a democracy: civilian control over the military," said Jonathan Alter, of *Newsweek*. "As upset as certain military officers have been with the Obama White House, as much as they like McChrystal's can-do spirit, this was a seriously can't-do moment. No one can quite believe McChrystal would be so stupid ..." Author Eliot Cohen, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, also stressed military deference to civilian authority. "It is intolerable for officers to publicly criticise or mock senior political figures [and] allies ... It is the job of a commanding officer to set a tone that makes such behaviour unacceptable."

Whatever misgivings he may harbour about his uppity generals, Obama remains largely at their mercy while he perpetuates the idea of the US as a nation at war and pursues the war in Afghanistan. The Pentagon is already resisting this December's White House policy review and next July's "deadline" for the start of an Afghan troop withdrawal.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

And man made life
May 20th 2010
From The Economist print edition

Artificial life, the stuff of dreams and nightmares, has arrived

TO CREATE life is the prerogative of gods. Deep in the human psyche, whatever the rational pleadings of physics and chemistry, there exists a sense that biology is different, is more than just the sum of atoms moving about and reacting with one another, is somehow infused with a divine spark, a vital essence. It may come as a shock, then, that mere mortals have now made artificial life.

Craig Venter and Hamilton Smith, the two American biologists who unravelled the first DNA sequence of a living organism (a bacterium) in 1995, have made a bacterium that has an artificial genome—creating a living creature with no ancestor. Pedants may quibble that only the DNA of the new beast was actually manufactured in a laboratory; the researchers had to use the shell of an existing bug to get that DNA to do its stuff. Nevertheless, a Rubicon has been crossed. It is now possible to conceive of a world in which new bacteria (and eventually, new animals and plants) are designed on a computer and then grown to order.

That ability would prove mankind's mastery over nature in a way more profound than even the detonation of the first atomic bomb. The bomb, however justified in the context of the second world war, was purely destructive. Biology is about nurturing and growth. Synthetic biology, as the technology that this and myriad less eye-catching advances are ushering in has been dubbed, promises much. In the short term it promises better drugs, less thirsty crops, greener fuels and even a rejuvenated chemical industry. In the longer term who knows what marvels could be designed and grown?

On the face of it, then, artificial life looks like a wonderful thing. Yet that is not how many will view the announcement. For them, a better word than "creation" is "tampering". Have scientists got too big for their boots? Will their hubris bring Nemesis in due course? What horrors will come creeping out of the flask on the laboratory bench?

Such questions are not misplaced—and should give pause even to those, including this newspaper, who normally embrace advances in science with enthusiasm. The new biological science does have the potential to do great harm, as well as good. "Predator" and "disease" are just as much part of the biological vocabulary as "nurturing" and "growth". But for good or ill it is here. Creating life is no longer the prerogative of gods.

Children of a lesser god

It will be a while, yet, before lifeforms are routinely designed on a laptop. But this will come. The past decade, since the completion of the Human Genome Project, has seen two related developments that make it almost inevitable. One is an extraordinary rise in the speed, and fall in the cost, of analysing the DNA sequences that encode the natural "software" of life. What once took years and cost millions now takes days and costs thousands. Databases are filling up with the genomes of everything from the tiniest virus to the tallest tree.

These genomes are the raw material for synthetic biology. First, they will provide an understanding of how biology works right down to the atomic level. That can then be modelled in human-designed software so that synthetic biologists will be able to assemble new constellations of genes with a reasonable presumption that they will work in a predictable way. Second, the genome databases are a warehouse that can be raided for whatever part a synthetic biologist requires.

The other development is faster and cheaper DNA synthesis. This has lagged a few years behind DNA analysis, but seems to be heading in the same direction. That means it will soon be possible for almost anybody to make DNA to order, and dabble in synthetic biology.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

The New Segregation Debate

Can educating girls and boys separately fix our public schools, or does it reinforce outmoded gender stereotypes?

by Jesse Ellison, June 22, 2010, *Newsweek*

With male academic achievement declining by almost every measure, and their scores possibly dragging down national averages, administrators are taking a fresh look at same-sex classrooms and the concept that boys and girls might do better when they're apart. Why is it such a hot-button topic? Well, because it goes against 30 years of thinking, and smacks of "separate but equal" education.

The advocates of the single-sex approach are surprising, as are the foes. Among many liberal thinkers, gender segregation sounds like regressing to a time when girls were educated in finishing schools and had access to neither the number, nor caliber of schools available to boys. Plus, the notion that boys and girls learn differently—touted by some as the primary rational for gender separation—goes against one of feminism's (at least the 1970s version) main messages. To say that there is something inherently different between boys and girls is, for many, tantamount to saying that women are the weaker sex.

For these reasons, Democratic politicians spent decades fighting vehemently against loosening legislation to allow public schools to offer same-sex classes. But in 2001, Sen. Hillary Clinton linked the issue to class—citing an unfairness in the fact that single-sex education is available as a choice only to those who can afford private-school tuition. Clinton, a graduate of all-women's Wellesley College, joined forces with Republican Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison to successfully bring about legislative change. Since then, the number of public schools offering same-sex classes has grown from 11 to 540—still a relatively small figure in the big picture, but a jump of more than 4,000 percent nonetheless.

This number would be even bigger were it not for the ACLU, which has successfully convinced dozens of districts not to adopt single-gender classrooms. "Our concern is that once you separate boys and girls you are telling them that there is some inherent difference such that they need to be educated separately," says Lenora Lapidus, head of the women's-rights arm, which is spearheading the investigation. "When public schools do this, it's the government reinforcing gender stereotypes." Lapidus's division also has open cases against districts they believe are violating the admittedly loose terms of the ammended legislation—in those cases, their beef is that single-sex classes are being forced on children, and parents aren't being given a legitimate coed option. But Lapidus says that she believes public schools shouldn't offer single-sex classes under any circumstances—whether it's a choice or not.

The ACLU's opposition perplexes advocates of separate classrooms. "The ACLU has become increasingly deranged over the years," says Leonard Sax, the head of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education. "And by deranged I mean out of touch with reality." Sax also can't understand why the National Organization of Women (NOW), which advocates choice in reproductive rights, would be against giving parents more options when it comes to education. "We are the pro-choice movement in this debate—we don't believe that every child should be in same-sex classrooms, but every parent should have a choice."

But what are parents choosing exactly? In some cases they're getting not just separate rooms for girls and boys, they're getting a modified curriculum and even classroom structure based on what proponents see as gender differences in learning. And that's where things get thorny. According to Sax, some of the most successful all-boys classrooms have been those in which boys are allowed to move around. He cites one classroom that uses desks that can be raised or lowered, so boys can lie on the floor, sit, or stand up while they work. Girls' classrooms, meanwhile can encourage quiet study, which some say is intrinsic to female behavior and caters to girls' strengths. The question is whether this is catering to strengths or encouraging old-school stereotypes.

NOM :
PRÉNOM :
SIGNATURE :

SERIE LANGUES VIVANTES
LV 2 HP ANGLAIS

A world of connections
Jan 28th 2010 From The Economist print edition

Online social networks are changing the way people communicate, work and play, and mostly for the better, says Martin Giles

Facebook celebrates its sixth birthday next month and is now the second most popular site on the internet after Google. The globe's largest online social network boasts over 350m users—which, were it a nation, would make Facebook the world's third most populous after China and India. That is not the only striking statistic associated with the business. Its users now post over 55m updates a day on the site and share more than 3.5 billion pieces of content with one another every week. As it has grown like Topsy, the site has also expanded way beyond its American roots: today some 70% of its audience is outside the United States.

Although Facebook is the world's biggest social network, there are a number of other globetrotting sites, such as MySpace, which concentrates on music and entertainment; LinkedIn, which targets career-minded professionals; and Twitter, a networking service that lets members send out short, 140-character messages called "tweets". All of these appear in a ranking of the world's most popular networks by total monthly web visits, which also includes Orkut, a Google-owned service that is heavily used in India and Brazil, and QQ, which is big in China. On top of these there are other big national community sites such as Skyrock in France, VKontakte in Russia, and Cyworld in South Korea, as well as numerous smaller social networks that appeal to specific interests such as Muxlim, aimed at the world's Muslims, and ResearchGATE, which connects scientists and researchers.

Going public

All this shows just how far online communities have come. Until the mid-1990s they were largely ghettos for geeks who hid behind online aliases. Thanks to easy-to-use interfaces and fine-grained privacy controls, social networks have been transformed into vast public spaces where millions of people now feel comfortable using their real identities online. ComScore, a market-research firm, reckons that last October big social-networking sites received over 800m visitors. "The social networks' greatest achievement has been to bring humanity into a place that was once cold and technological," says Charlene Li of the Altimeter Group, a consulting firm.

Their other great achievement has been to turn themselves into superb tools for mass communication. Simply by updating a personal page on Facebook or sending out a tweet, users can let their network of friends—and sometimes the world—know what is happening in their lives. Moreover, they can send out videos, pictures and lots of other content with just a few clicks of a mouse. "This represents a dramatic and permanent upgrade in people's ability to communicate with one another," says Marc Andreessen, a Silicon Valley veteran who has invested in Facebook, Twitter and Ning, an American firm that hosts almost 2m social networks for clients.

And people are making copious use of that ability. Last October Americans spent just under six hours surfing social networks, almost three times as much as in the same month in 2007. And it isn't just youngsters who are friending and poking one another—Facebook-speak for making connections and saying hi to your pals. People of all ages are joining the networks in ever greater numbers.

Social-networking sites' impressive growth has attracted much attention because the sites have made people's personal relationships more visible and quantifiable than ever before. They have also become important vehicles for news and channels of influence. Twitter regularly scores headlines with its real-time updates on events like the Mumbai terrorist attacks and on the activities of its high-profile users, who include rap stars, writers and royalty. And both Twitter and Facebook played a starring role in the online campaign strategy that helped sweep Barack Obama to victory in the presidential race.