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Friday, October 19, 2001, at 6:39 PM ET

art
Industrial-Strength Art
The photographers who found beauty in the factory.
By Christopher Benfey
Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 7:00 AM ET

Click here to read a slide-show essay about Bernd and Hilla Becher.

chatterbox
Bill Clinton Lucks Out
Why Hillary's loss is Bill's gain.
By Timothy Noah
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:55 PM ET

It's often been said that Bill Clinton is one lucky bastard. Indeed, Lucky Bastard was the title of a satirical roman à clef about Clinton that Charles McCarry published in 1998. According to the lucky-bastard theory, no ordinary candidate could recover from Gennifer Flowers' revelation of an adulterous affair just before the New Hampshire primary. Clinton did. No ordinary candidate could expect to win a general-election contest against a commander in chief who'd just led the nation to swift victory in a war in which fewer than 400 American soldiers were killed. Clinton did. No ordinary incumbent could win re-election against a politically moderate war hero after suffering midterm congressional losses of historic proportions and seeing his No. 1 legislative priority (health care reform) go down in flames. Clinton did. No ordinary incumbent could survive impeachment over a sex scandal in which he lied under oath and, to all appearances, obstructed justice. Clinton did. No former president could amass a record like this and yet be respected for his policy achievements. Clinton is. These examples all testify in part to Clinton's remarkable political skills—two Clinton biographies were titled The Natural and The Survivor—but being blessed with remarkable skills is a matter of luck, too.

At the moment, the general feeling is that Clinton's luck has run out. Where once Clinton seemed a master of political communication, he's come off on the campaign trail for his wife as blustery and undisciplined. Where once he was viewed as a genius at political strategy, he's now a key architect—how much of an architect we don't know, but his role can't have been small—of a primary race that in retrospect seems laughably inept. In the July Vanity Fair, Todd Purdum, a former White House correspondent for the New York Times, criticizes Clinton for keeping sleazy company and quotes unnamed Clinton friends suggesting the man has been angry and weird ever since his heart surgery in 2004. Clinton's response to this allegation—he called Purdum a "scumbag" and issued a tendentious 2,500-word rebuttal—was … angry and weird. On top of all that, even Hillary Clinton seems finally to realize that she has lost the nomination to Barack Obama. She may even have blown her chances of becoming Obama's running mate. The husband-wife world-domination plan lies in tatters. Has the comeback kid's luck finally run out?

Actually, no. The brutal truth is that a Hillary Clinton presidency was never going to be pleasant for Bill Clinton. He's dodged the bullet yet again.

Judging from his behavior, it's doubtful the former president sees it that way. It's widely reported that Bill is campaigning energetically for Hillary to get the vice-presidential nod, and in the June 5 Wall Street Journal, Jackie Calmes suggests Bill may even be urging Hillary not to quit the race, Obama's ownership of the required delegate count be damned. In her 2007 book, For Love of Politics: Inside the Clinton White House, Sally Bedell Smith argues that since 1974 Bill and Hillary "have been united in a common quest to win—and keep winning—political office." Here is how her narrative ends in January 2001:

They were more battle hardened than ever, ready for the long march back to Pennsylvania Avenue. Fortified by the acquisition of vast wealth to augment their high profiles and political connections, they had become a new and more powerful entity, Clinton, Incorporated. Their mission remained the same: high political office, a Democratic agenda, the accumulation of power, and the pursuit of the Clinton legacy for the history books. To be sure, the principals had swapped positions. Bill had become chairman, giving up day-to-day control of the enterprise, and Hillary had taken over as CEO. But they continued to operate as force multipliers—through it all, they were still two for the price of one.
I don't doubt this was, and remains, the reality of Bill and Hillary's ongoing joint enterprise. I don't even necessarily quarrel with the idea that it embodies a legitimate— if unusual, bond of marital love. But I don't really believe that the big prize sought by Clinton Inc.—a Hillary Clinton presidency—would benefit Chairman Bill. For starters, if Hillary were president, Bill's own activities would become severely restricted. Bill has already pledged that if his wife received the nomination, he would terminate his lucrative business relationships with Ron Burkle and others. But there's no evidence that he's thought through the future of the William J. Clinton Foundation, which Bill rightly regards as the most vital endeavor of his post-presidency. (Full disclosure: Slate holds an annual philanthropy conference in conjunction with the Clinton Foundation. I do not participate and know little about it.) The Clinton Foundation raised $113 million in 2006, the last year for which data are available. Legalities aside, I seriously doubt as a practical matter that Bill or even other representatives of the Clinton Foundation could continue raising money for the foundation if Hillary were president; such solicitations would look too much like a shakedown on President Hillary's behalf. The same logic applies to the Clinton Library. A Hillary presidency would also surely mean that Bill would have to disclose every past contribution to the Clinton Foundation and Library. (For a partial list, click here.) Bill's reluctance to do that has reportedly emerged as an obstacle to Hillary's vice-presidential aspirations.

Hillary would have difficulty appointing Bill to any meaningful post, because a 1967 anti-nepotism law (passed partly in response to John F. Kennedy appointing his brother Robert attorney general) prohibits the president from appointing any relative to a job over which he or she has authority. A "roving diplomat" role, which has been discussed, seems unlikely to pass muster. Indeed, what job is there in the executive branch over which the president doesn't have authority? Even the civil service isn't totally immune to presidential control.

Finally, a Hillary presidency would inhibit Bill's penchant for fun and games. Granted, he found a way to indulge when he occupied the Oval Office. (A 1996 article by Slate's David Plotz demonstrated the virtual impossibility of Bill's having an affair while president. The piece, though wrong, remains extremely persuasive.) I withhold any opinion as to whether Bill is on the prowl these days; apparently there's no real evidence he is. But Purdum's Vanity Fair piece demonstrates that Bill, at the very least, likes hanging out with guys who are on the prowl. He couldn't get away with such Rat Packery as first man. Unfair? Most certainly. It's nobody's business who the spouse of any politician hangs out with. Laura Bush can bar-hop with Amy Winehouse till 4 a.m. as far as I care. (Granted, it seems unlikely.) But the press would be watching, and the public would punish Hillary for letting her man run wild.

Bill has said he wouldn't mind running the White House Easter-egg roll, and I don't doubt his sincerity. In truth, though, he might not be permitted to do anything else. For a guy who likes to be the center of attention, it would be hell on earth. But with Obama's emergence as de facto nominee, it's not going to happen (not in 2009, anyway). Bill's off the hook. What a lucky bastard.

chatterbox

Hillary and the City
Is Sex and the City our culture's consolation prize to Hillary Clinton's supporters?
By Timothy Noah
Monday, June 2, 2008, at 7:40 PM ET

Does the movie version of Sex and the City owe its success to the failure of Hillary Clinton's campaign?

I haven't seen the movie. That's probably because I'm a man, according to the demographic breakdown of Sex and the City's opening weekend. Writing in the Los Angeles Times, Josh Friedman reports that Friday's opening-day crowd was 85 percent female, dropping to 75 percent female on Saturday and Sunday. But despite this dearth of Y chromosomes, Sex and the City drew an opening-weekend gross of $55.7 million, which is the highest opening-weekend gross ever for a romantic comedy. (The previous record of $45.1 million is from Fifty First Dates in 2004.) Remember Thelma & Louise back in 1991? That was the last phenomenally successful girl-power movie; Time magazine ran a chin-pulling cover story wondering "Why Thelma & Louise Strikes a Nerve." The total domestic gross for Thelma & Louise, calculated in 2008 dollars, was $71.61 million. Sex and the City earned more than two-thirds as much in just its first weekend. Variety is calling Sex and the City's opening weekend gross "an unprecedented takeover of the box office by women."

By weird coincidence, during the same weekend when Sex and the City demonstrated women's unprecedented consumer clout at the multiplex, Hillary Clinton's campaign developed its death rattle. Clinton's campaign has enjoyed strong support among older white women. Sex and the City's audience, meanwhile, in addition to skewing heavily female, skewed old (at least by moviegoing standards): 80 percent of the opening-weekend audience was over 25. (I have no idea how white this audience is, but Helena Andrews noted in The Root that the movie's only black character is the lead character's amanuensis—the sort, it's been noted, played in bygone days by Hattie McDaniel.) Hillary's white-female shock troops are probably older than Sex and the City's white-female shock troops, but remember that Clinton's support among white women of all ages is quite substantial; a recent Gallup poll indicated that white female voters of all ages favor Clinton in a Clinton-John McCain
matchup but McCain in an Obama-McCain matchup. Put all these numbers together and one gets the feeling that a Venn diagram would yield a good-sized proportion of white women who were both Sex and the City fans and Clinton voters.

The Clinton campaign has gotten a lot of white women jazzed up at the prospect of electing the first female president, and a good number stayed jazzed up even after it become apparent that Clinton almost certainly wouldn't get the nomination. By this past weekend, however, it was becoming clear to all but the most delusional Hillary supporters that the game was up. Sisterhood was powerful, but in this case it wouldn't prevail. That realization left a lot of white women all dolled up with nowhere to go. And so … they went to the movies. The connection, I'll grant you, is somewhat glib, but considerably less so than the widely accepted chestnut (disputed persuasively here by Slate's Fred Kaplan) that America embraced the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show because they needed their spirits raised after the Kennedy assassination a few months earlier.

Sex and the City and the presidential candidacy of Hillary Clinton will, at the very least, be perceived in the distant future as twin manifestations of a weirdly conflicted feminism. As the first serious female candidate for president, Clinton broke a glass ceiling. But it's problematic that this symbol of women's progress achieved prominence as the wife of a successful male politician—one whose flagrant affair with a White House intern nearly destroyed his own presidency but not his marriage. And indeed, a fair number of prominent feminists, including Barbara Ehrenreich, Katha Pollitt, Susan Sarandon, and Mary Gordon, cast their lot with Obama. Sex and the City, meanwhile, is a narrative that on the one hand celebrates female independence, sexual fulfillment, and career success—all important feminist goals—but on the other hand portrays women as clothes-obsessed, money-obsessed, status-obsessed, and hell-bent on catching a rich husband. (Or so I've gleaned from watching a few episodes of the TV show and reading reviews of the film.)

Clinton and Sex and the City both represent a somewhat compromised female dream of power. Hillary Clinton nearly won the Democratic nomination only after marrying Mr. Big. Sex and the City celebrates camaraderie among strong women, but don't ask these ladies to sacrifice their Jean Paul Gaultier pajamas to pay for government-guaranteed, quality universal child care.

corrections

Corrections
Friday, June 6, 2008, at 7:16 AM ET

In the June 4 "Today's Blogs," Michael Weiss misidentified the author of a post from the Freedom Eden blog.

In the June 2 "Family," David Plotz and Hanna Rosin described a Buddhist couple as claustrophobes. They meant to use the term clausrophiles.

In the June 2 "Press Box," Jack Shafer misspelled Kathleen Willey's last name.

In the May 22 "DVD Extras," David Zax incorrectly stated that The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles aired on ABC on Mondays after Monday Night Football. It aired after Monday Night Football only on the West Coast.

In the April 21 "Ad Report Card" about a jingle for Subway's $5 footlong sandwiches, Seth Stevenson quoted composer Jimmy Harned stating that the jingle's chord structure "goes down from a C to an A-flat." Harned clarifies that while the guitar part does go to an A-flat, the more prominent vocals are voicing an F minor.

If you believe you have found an inaccuracy in a Slate story, please send an e-mail to corrections@slate.com, and we will investigate. General comments should be posted in "The Fray," our reader discussion forum.

culture gabfest
The Culture Gabfest, Grown-Up Edition
Listen to Slate's show about the week in culture.
By Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner
Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 11:13 AM ET

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 9 with Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program here, or you can subscribe to the weekly Culture Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking here.

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics discuss Vanity Fair's sprawling, dishy takedown of President Clinton, Sex and the
City's boffo success in movie theaters, and the earsplitting arrival of mixed martial artist Kimbo Slice on CBS.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:

*Vanity Fair* profiles Bill Clinton, paying particular attention to his post-presidential rat pack and his id. Clinton responds, officially, in a press release. Clinton responds, harshly, off the cuff. *Slate*'s Jack Shafer offers Clinton a lesson in press criticism. Dana Stevens reviews *Sex and the City*. Julia Turner considers the sartorial deficit between the *Sex and the City* movie and the television show. CBS' *Elite XC* mixed martial arts page. ESPN introduces Kimbo Slice. David Plotz defends Ultimate Fighting.

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:

Julia's pick: Josh Levin's coverage of the bizarre, sad, and hilarious *R. Kelly* trial.
Stephen's pick: Bo Diddley, *The Chess Box*.

Posted by Matt Leiber on June 4 at 11:14 a.m.

May 21, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 8 with Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program here, or you can subscribe to the weekly Culture Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking here.

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics discuss a *New York* magazine critique of monogamy, the aesthetically promiscuous—and recently departed—artist Robert Rauschenberg, and Barack Obama's affinity for the work of novelist Philip Roth, the great bard of infidelity.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:

*New York* magazine's skeptical inquiry into the sanctity of monogamy in American culture

Jim Lewis' fond remembrance of Robert Rauschenberg in *Slate*.

Also in *Slate*, Jack Shafer's takedown of the overly generous eulogizing of Rauschenberg in the press

The *New Republic*'s Jed Perl's dislike of Rauschenberg's work

Barack Obama's revelation of his affinity for Philip Roth to the *Atlantic*'s Jeffrey Goldberg

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:


Stephen's Pick: John Seymour's great achievement in garden writing, *The Guide to Self-Sufficiency*

Julia's picks: *This American Life*'s explanation of the housing crisis; the season finale of NBC's *The Office*.

Posted by Matt Leiber on May 21 at 6:31 p.m.

May 7, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 7 by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program here, or you can subscribe to the weekly Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking here.

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner discuss the rollout of the summer movie season, including the superhero movie *Iron Man*, Robert Downey Jr.'s nimble performance in it, and which of this summer's blockbusters look most promising.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:

*Entertainment Weekly*'s summer movie release calendar *Iron Man*, reviewed by Dana Stevens
*You Don't Mess With the Zohan* official site
*Indiana Jones* official site
A 2006 *New York Times* profile of Mike Myers and his hiatus from films
Mike Myers and Deepak Chopra, together at last

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:

Dana's pick: *Carrier* on PBS
Julia's pick: *Project Runway*
Stephen's pick: Jimi Hendrix's live performance of Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone"

Posted by Matthew Lieber on May 7 at 11:00 a.m.

April 23, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 6 with critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program here, or you can subscribe to the new, dedicated Culture Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking here.

In this week's Culture Gabfest, critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner discuss whether personal virtue can solve global warming, the possible failure of personal virtue in the travel writing business, and the utter failure of personal virtue inside Abu Ghraib.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:

- Michael Pollan's New York Times Magazine article "Why Bother?"
- Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan's Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia
- Thomas Kohnstamm's book Do Travel Writers Go to Hell?
- Lonely Planet responds to the Kohnstamm scandal
- Errol Morris' Standard Operating Procedure
- "Photo Finish: How the Abu Ghraib photos morphed from scandal to law," by Dahlia Lithwick
- Julia's pick: Hot Chip
- 100 best novels from Random House
- Dana's pick: Elizabeth Bowen's The Death of the Heart
- Stephen's pick: The Bachelor

Posted by Andy Bowers on April 23 at 11:37 a.m.

March 26, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 4 with critics Stephen Metcalf, Meghan O'Rourke, and John Swansburg by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program here, or you can subscribe to the weekly Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking here.

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics discuss whether Barack Obama was channeling Walt Whitman, whether the head of JPMorgan was channeling Gordon Gekko, and whether English professors should be channeling Wal-Mart associates.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:

- Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech
- Walt Whitman's Song of Myself
- New York magazine's profile of Jamie Dimon
- Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko in Wall Street
- Joseph Schumpeter's "Creative Destruction"
- The New York Times' "You Say Recession, I Say 'Reservations!'"
- NOBU restaurant in New York City
- Gerald Graff's Professing Literature: An Institutional History
- Meghan's pick: The Hakawati by Rabih Alameddine

Posted by Amanda Aronczyk on April 9 at 11:12 a.m.

March 9, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 5, with critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program here, or you can subscribe to the weekly Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking here.

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics discuss whether the latest Vogue cover is racist (or just the subject of misplaced outrage in the blogosphere), whether Hillary's tax return explodes the Clintons' middle-class image, and whether the new online sitcom The Guild is for nerds only.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:

- Vogue's "King Kong" cover
- Slate's take on the Vogue cover
- John Lennon and Yoko Ono on the cover of Rolling Stone, photographed by Annie Leibovitz
- Hillary Clinton's 2007 tax return (as disclosed by Hillary)
- The Guild: official show site, YouTube channel
- World of Warcraft
- Quarterlife (no longer) on NBC
- AC/DC
- Am I That Name? by Denise Riley
- BBC Radio 4's Start the Week

Posted by Megan Garber on March 9 at 12:01 a.m.
John's pick: *Dispatches* by Michael Herr
Stephen's pick: *Boys and Girls in America* from the Hold Steady

Posted by Andy Bowers on March 26 at 8:16 p.m.

March 12, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 3 with critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and John Swansburg by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program [here](#), or you can subscribe to the weekly Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking [here](#).

Our newest podcast, the Culture Gabfest, is back just in time to take on the Eliot Spitzer meltdown and how it's echoing through the media. Critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and John Swansburg also discuss the recent rash of fake memoirs and a breakout blog that claims to shed light on stuff white people like.

Here are links to some of the items mentioned in this week's episode:

"The Fake Memoirist's Survival Guide" on [Slate](#)
*A Fan's Notes* by Frederick Exley
*The Stuff White People Like* blog
*The Stuff White People Like* on NPR's *Talk of the Nation*
Dana Stevens' pick: *Chop Shop*
John Swansburg's pick: *Amazons: An Intimate Memoir by the First Women To Play in the National Hockey League* by Cleo Birdwell (aka Don DeLillo)
Stephen Metcalf's pick: *Top Gear* from BBC America

Posted by Andy Bowers on March 12 at 11:55 a.m.

Feb. 28, 2008

*Here's the sophomore outing of our newest audio program, the Culture Gabfest, with critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner. To listen, click the arrow on the audio player below:*

You can also download the program [here](#), or you can subscribe to the weekly Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking [here](#).

In this edition, the panelists discuss the aftermath of the Oscars, the challenge Barack Obama poses for comedians, and Lindsay Lohan's Marilyn Monroe impression. Here are some of the links for items mentioned in the show:

Daniel Day-Lewis' [Oscar acceptance speech](#)
*Saturday Night Live's* Obama/Clinton debate sketch
Lindsay Lohan's [New York magazine photo shoot](#)

Julia Turner's [Oscar fashion dialogue](#) with Amanda Fortini
*The Encyclopedia Baracktannica*

Posted by Andy Bowers on Feb. 28 at 3:07 p.m.

Feb. 14, 2008

To play the first Culture Gabfest, click the arrow on the player below.

culturebox
**Being John Cusack**
The latest phase in the *War Inc.* star's career.
By Dana Stevens
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 11:17 AM ET

With the near-simultaneous theatrical premiere of *War Inc.* (First Look Studios)—a strange, scruffy, black-as-pitch little comedy about the occupation of “Turaqistan”—and the DVD release of *Grace Is Gone* (the Weinstein Co.)—last year's critically praised but scarcely seen drama about a military widower—John Cusack has entered a curious new phase in his long and unpredictable career: the actor as activist. His is not a Tim Robbins-style activism, clomping solemnly through big-budget issue pictures and dampening the mood at awards ceremonies. Cusack's mode of protest is both subtler and more savage than that. In interviews, he's called the shoestring-budget, shot-in-Bulgaria *War Inc.* a "punk-rock" anti-war movie. *Grace Is Gone*, with its minimalist 84-minute running time and exquisitely restrained performances, might be thought of as an emo variation on the same theme.

For most of his 25 years as a movie star (the son of actor Dick Cusack, he was 17 when he appeared in his first film, *Class*, and had been performing in Chicago's Piven Theatre Workshop for years before that), Cusack's output has tended to fall into one of two categories: romantic comedies that showcase his appeal as a thinking girl's dreamboat (*The Sure Thing*, *Say Anything*, *High Fidelity*) and weird, dark flights of fancy that allow him to serve as the poker-faced traveler in a thoroughly insane world (*Tapeheads*, *Being John Malkovich*, *The Ice Harvest*). His best roles, like Martin Q. Blank, the self-described "morally flexible" hit-man hero of *Grosse Pointe Blank*, bring these two threads together: Cusack is believable both as the bemused wanderer in a universe of Kafka-esque absurdity and as a total catch for Minnie Driver (one of the few female leads since Ione Skye who's seemed smart enough to be his match).

As an action hero, Cusack is risibly out of place, which is why the scene at the end of *Con Air*, in which he and Nic Cage chase...
a fire truck through Las Vegas on hijacked motorcycles, makes for such a good joke. His presence can elevate a clunker to moderate watchability (Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil) or single-handedly turn a standard-issue horror movie into a deeply satisfying chair-clutcher (last year's 1408). Cusack has more than earned his chops as Hollywood's go-to intelligent outsider. But for his loyalists, it was hard not to get worried during the early part of the millennium. What was he doing in Must Love Dogs, a rom-com about Internet romance so edge-free it could have starred Freddie Prinze Jr.? Why was he pining after the terminally boring Kate Beckinsale in the heinous Serendipity? Taking on the title role of Max (2003), a historical fantasy about a one-armed Jewish art dealer who befriends a young painter named Adolf Hitler, was a brave-sounding choice on paper, but neither the movie nor Cusack's role really gelled onscreen. As he entered his late 30s (Cusack will be 42 this year), the erstwhile Lloyd Dobler (or, as I prefer to think of his teen self, Walter Gibson) seemed adrift, ready to focus on something besides getting the girl but unsure what that might be. His description of the inspiration for War Inc. vindicates this impression: "At least I could say, besides voting and being politically active, that I didn't just sit around making romantic comedies."

In his latest incarnation as Brand Hauser, a hit man for a Halliburton-esque military contractor who drinks hot sauce straight to stave off his pangs of conscience, Cusack finds a role he both believes in and inhabits completely. Storywise, War Inc. is a virtual remake of Grosse Pointe Blank set in Iraq, right down to the casting of Cusack's sister Joan as his character's secretary. (Ah, Joan Cusack. So funny, so rubber-faced, so blessedly free of vanity … but that's a whole other assessment.) Tonally, it's a mess, careening between wickedly apt political satire (the embedded journalists in the Emerald City, Turaquistan's fortified zone, get their daily updates by riding a Disneyland-like simulator called "the Implanted Journalist Experience") and maudlin psychologizing (Hauser has become a killer because—cue blurred flashback—Something Awful befell his beloved years ago). But amid the incoherence, the movie keeps trotting out surprises, including a surprisingly sharp turn by Hilary Duff as a sexually precocious Turaqi pop singer named Yonica Babyeah. The script, co-written by Cusack, Jeremy Pikser, and novelist Mark Leyner, is a surreal hodgepodge of Orwellian newspeak and unironic political rage. With any other star, War Inc. might have come off as an earnest but laudable failure, but Cusack's commitment to the project's very weirdness makes its tossed-off, DIY quality feel inspirational.

Writing about Grace Is Gone in the New York Times, Stephen Holden called Cusack "Hollywood's second most reliable nice guy, after Tom Hanks," and while it's indisputable that sheer likeability is essential to both actors' personae, there's something about the comparison that seems off. Maybe it's that Hanks seems so solid, a bastion of family values and Hollywood bona fides, while the never-married, Chicago-based Cusack has a mercurial, off-kilter quality; fast-talking and fidgety, he always appears to be halfway out the door but eager to get in one last point before he goes. I wouldn't be surprised to see Cusack emerge as a writer, and not only of his own screenplays, over the next decade: Look at his astute dissection of George W. Bush as "the young John Wayne … Ethan from The Searchers" in a discussion with Naomi Klein on the Huffington Post (to which he is an occasional contributor). As part of the promotion for War Inc., Cusack was the respondent to this month's back-page "Proust Questionnaire" in Vanity Fair (a difficult-to-navigate exercise in calculated self-disclosure that seems designed to make even the wittiest respondent sound like a fatuous dullard). Asked for his personal motto, Cusack cites a Yugoslavian proverb that might serve as an emblem for his whole career: "Tell the truth and run."

culturebox

How To Win the New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest

A champion reveals the recipe for victory.

By Patrick House

Monday, June 2, 2008, at 5:02 PM ET

Today I can finally update my résumé to include "Writer, The New Yorker." Yes, I won The New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest, and I'm going to tell you how I did it. These observations have been culled from months of research and are guaranteed to help you win, too. (Note from Slate's lawyers: Observations not guaranteed to help you win.)

Most people who look at the winners of the caption contest say, "I could've done better than that." You're right. You could have. But that doesn't mean you could've won the caption contest—it just means you could've done better. And if your goal is not to win the caption contest, why bother entering? There is one mantra to take from this article, worth its own line break:

You are not trying to submit the funniest caption; you are trying to win The New Yorker's caption contest.

Humor and victory are different matters entirely. To understand what makes the perfect caption, you must start with the readership. Paging through The New Yorker is a lonesome withdrawal, not a group activity. The reader is isolated and introspective, probably on the train commuting to work. He suffers from urban ennui. He does not make eye contact. Laughing out loud is, in this context, an unseemly act sure to draw unwanted attention. To avoid this, your caption should elicit, at best, a mild chuckle. The first filter for your caption

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should be: Is it too funny? Will it make anyone laugh out loud? If so, throw it out and work on a less funny one.

Next you need to know the selection process. The first line of defense at *The New Yorker* is the cartoon editor’s assistant, a twentysomething from Texas named Farley Katz. The cartoon assistant reads every single caption—at least 6,000 per week—and passes his favorite 50 or so to the editors, who narrow the list down to three. If you don’t make it past Farley, you will never get your name in print. Knowing how he thinks is crucial. The astute captioneer will note that he used to be a rollercoaster operator at Six Flags and a telemarketer. He is an outsider who has never trod in the cemented garden he protects. He had to look up "urban ennui" when he arrived in New York—he didn’t learn it riding the subway for 25 years. Exploit the fact that Farley is working off the same stereotypes of *The New Yorker* readership as you are.

Now that you know your gatekeeper, it’s time for some advanced joke theory. Should you make a pun or, perhaps, create a visual gag about a cat surreptitiously reading its owner’s e-mail? Neither. You must aim for what is called a "theory of mind" caption, which requires the reader to project intents or beliefs into the minds of the cartoon’s characters. An exemplary *New Yorker* theory of mind caption (accompanying a cartoon of a police officer ticketing a caveman with a large wheel): "Yeah, yeah—and I invented the ticket." The humor here requires inference about the caveman’s beliefs and intentions as he (presumably) explains to the cop that he invented the wheel. A non-theory-of-mind caption (accompanying a cartoon of a bird wearing a thong), however, requires no such projection: "It’s a thongbird." Theory of mind captions make for higher-order jokes easily distinguished from the simian puns and visual gags that litter the likes of *MAD Magazine*. To date, 136 out of the 145 caption contest winners (94 percent) fall into the "theory of mind" category.

People read *The New Yorker* to stay on top of the cultural world if they happen to be smart or—if they’re just faking it—in the hope of receiving some sort of osmotic transfer of IQ if they hold the magazine tight enough. Nobody wants to feel that *The New Yorker* is above them, and the last thing they need is to have a cartoon joke go over their heads, lest they write a whole *Seinfeld* episode about it. Everyone must get your joke. Use common, simple, monosyllabic words. Steer clear of proper nouns that could potentially alienate. If you must use proper nouns, make them universally recognizable to urban Americans. Excepting first names, only nine proper nouns have ever appeared in a winning caption: *Batmobile, Comanche, Roswell, Hell, Surrealism, Tylenol, Bud Light, Frankenstein, Kansas Board of Education*. You get the idea. Keep it lowercase, keep it simple.

If you heed these instructions, maybe one day you will get a call from Farley and find yourself a finalist. Now what do you do?

First, I Googled my fellow finalists: a legislative director in New York and a public-affairs director in Seattle. Clearly 9-to-5 types, at a loss for time, who would be unable to take advantage of the fact that the contest is decided by an online vote. You can and must do better, preferably by launching a full-scale viral marketing campaign. E-mail everyone you know. Create a Facebook group. Call in longstanding debts. It helps if, like me, you have no shame. I had musicians pitching me at their shows, professors pitching me in their lecture halls, and old ladies at cafes pitching me to their grandnieces. Kiss babies, shake hands, and play to win.

It also helps, of course, if you have the best entry. And I did.

My winning caption: "O.K. I’m at the window. To the right? Your right or my right?"

Mildly amusing at best? Check. Theory of mind? Check. Proper nouns? Nope. And what better archetype of urban ennui could there be than a man in a cardigan holding a drink, yapping on his cell phone while blissfully unaware of looming dangers? A very similar cartoon by Jack Kirby from 1962—similar enough to lead the *New York Post* to shout plagiarism—has the person inside the window frightened and cowering, sans drink, glasses, or phone. But that was 50 years ago, and drudge and complacency have settled on the urban landscape sometime between now and then. You must look for these themes in your cartoon and pounce.

I will stop analyzing now, in deference to *Seinfeld’s New Yorker* gospel: "Cartoons are like gossamer, and one doesn’t dissect gossamer." But what does Jerry know, really? He may have a hit show, millions of dollars, and a beautiful wife, but he has never won *The New Yorker* caption contest. But I have. I have dissected gossamer. And now you can, too. Good luck.

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**dear prudence**

**I Just Called To Say ... Never Mind**

Broken promises threaten to create a disconnect between mother and son.

**Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:01 AM ET**

Get "Dear Prudence" delivered to your inbox each week; click [here](mailto:prudence@slate.com) to sign up. Please send your questions for publication to prudence@slate.com. (Questions may be edited.)

**Dear Prudence:**

I’m engaged to a wonderful man with two boys. The mother lives in another state and rarely sees the children. The oldest will
Dear Prudence Video: Harassed at the Gym

Dear Prudence,

I am dating a good, kind man who treats me well, but one small issue has come up. We typically split the check when we go out to dinner (at his suggestion, but this is fine with me), although occasionally he will pay (once every four weeks, say). However we have fallen into a habit where he visits me at home two or three nights per week, and I cook nice dinners and serve beer, wine, chocolates, etc. I enjoy being generous with my loved ones, and it normally wouldn't cross my mind to expect anything in return. However, this weekend brought the inequity of the situation to my attention, as I made a lovely dinner and we drank a couple of bottles of wine. This probably cost me about $70 to $80. When we went out to lunch the next day, the bill was $42, and he said, "I'll put in $20." I certainly don't mind paying my share, but I've realized it is probably cheaper for me to go out, as I pay for both of us at home! He is employed, and I am a stay-at-home single parent, so this can't really go on. How can I raise this issue without being critical or demanding?

—Not a Believer

Dear Prudence,

—Stiffed

Dear Stiffed,

I had a good, kind, successful boyfriend just like yours. We always split the check (even when he ordered a bottle of wine, I had a single glass, and he polished off the rest). He did treat me to a well-reviewed restaurant for my birthday, but when he saw the prices on the menu, he declined to order dinner and spent the whole evening with his fork poised over my food, begging for a bite. Pathological cheapness can be intractable, and you have to decide if it's going to be a deal-breaker for you. But before you get angrier and angrier at this "small issue," you need to bring it up with him. Explain that you're on a tight budget and that, while you love to cook nice meals for him in your home, between that and meals out where you pick up at least half the check, you're going broke. You can say you recognize he is cheap—ah, I mean frugal—but you need more equity in your spending. Don't allow him to establish a running tab on your expenditures so he can show that things are even—another gambit of the tightwad. Explain that a calculator kills the sense of generosity with each other that's needed in a healthy relationship.

—Prudie

Dear Prudie,

I have been an atheist for the last several years, ever since losing my (Christian) faith following a close friend's untimely death. Recently, my boss's mother told me about a serious and risky surgery that her other child would soon have. After I said to her, "I'll keep him in my thoughts," she responded, "Oh, would you please pray for him?" I said yes, and she began talking about her belief in the power of prayer, a belief I once would have shared. So I felt very uncomfortable with the fact that I'd lied and acted as if I shared her beliefs. Is this kind of thing a no-win situation?

—Stiffed

Dear Stiffed,

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—Not a Believer
Dear Prudence,
I am a junior in college and am getting closer to entering the work force. This summer, I have been offered a good job that starts immediately after school finishes. The problem is that my good friend is planning a big birthday trip to the mountains the same day my job starts. I have already told her I was going on the trip, but I really do not want to make the wrong impression at my new job by asking to start a few days later. If it were any other friend, I would politely tell her I could not make it, but this friend in particular goes to pieces when anyone cannot rearrange their lives to fit hers (even if it is because of a new job). I will be attending her mini-birthday celebration, which is on her actual birthday. (The trip is a month afterward.) Also, the guest list for the trip includes about 20 people, so I do not feel like I will be missed, but that is not how she will see it. What is worse is that she is kind of the "leader of the pack," so if she is not happy with me, I am going to be cut off socially. Help! Is there a polite way to get out of this trip and still keep my social calendar for the summer?

—A Friend Stuck in the Middle

Dear Prudence,

Perhaps there would be no problem starting work a few days later because of a previously planned event. And, of course, no one wants to cancel a social engagement. However, in this case, you should explain to your friend that the job came up after you knew about her trip, and you need to be at work on the day they designate. You recognize you are getting closer to starting your adult life, and one step you need to take is to stop being controlled by manipulative people. If your friend has a fit and threatens to cut you off from the group because you have a work obligation, then it's time to realize the wide world you're about to enter will be full of friendly people who don't take their orders from the resident drama queen.

—Prudie

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**Deathwatch**

**The Hillary Deathwatch**

Clinton sinks beneath the waves.

By Christopher Beam

Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 12:20 PM ET

Hillary Clinton has finally announced that she will drop out—but not till Saturday. Thus Clinton departs as she campaigned, dragging it out to the last possible moment. After more than two months of daily odds-making, we sink Clinton to her final resting place of 0 percent. So it goes.

The last 36 hours felt like something out of the DSM-IV. Faced with defeat Tuesday night, Clinton gave a defiant speech with no recognition that Obama had locked up the nomination. Fans encouraged her to fight on. Late Tuesday, Clinton staffers were still spinning against the wind. Hillaryland went from professional campaign operation to alternate reality in which conventions are contested, skeletons emerge from closets, and superdelegates experience group epiphanies based on vague electability arguments.

But after Clinton held a conference call with top supporters Wednesday afternoon, things wrapped up quickly. That evening, Clinton announced she would "express her support for Barack Obama and party unity" this weekend. John McCain called Obama to congratulate him. The spin machine rested.

"What does Hillary want?" speculation still persists, even after Clinton addressed the question in her speech on Tuesday. Guesses include a vice-presidential slot, campaign-debt relief, and respect for her historic achievement. (It's unclear what this last one means. Is Obama supposed to throw her a party?) Our guess, for what it's worth: She wants to be able to say what Al Gore says—that she won the popular vote and deserved the nomination as much as Obama did. Many Americans wonder what the country would be like if Gore had won. If Obama loses in November, they'll think, what if Hillary had won? Not a bad setup for 2012.

Expect to hear lots about unity in the coming weeks. But Clinton's handling of the past two days has all but closed off the possibility of an Obama-Clinton ticket. And that's just one of the 78 reasons Clinton won't be veep. Obama could never run as anti-Washington yet pick the personification thereof as his second. Clinton would never be able to cede the spotlight, as VPs must. And Bill's presidential library would pose its own set of headaches, the Wall Street Journal reports today. If there were a Hillary Veepwatch, it would be hovering around 0 percent, too.
How Clinton declared the race over

0.4 percent

she is asymptotically dead.

So today is less about what than how. How Obama is going to roll out the necessary delegates to reach the "magic number" of 2,118. How (and when) Clinton is officially going to concede. How she is going to transition into the "healing" phase of the general election.

Still, the day's news has been an ongoing game of "will she or won't she?" This morning, the Associated Press reported that Clinton campaign officials said she would concede Tuesday night that Obama has the delegates to secure the Democratic nomination. The Clinton camp quickly denied the report. (Disagreement in Hillaryland? Never!) So the AP took a different tack, declaring the race over based on a tally of public commitments and "more than a dozen private commitments." But seeing as the superdelegate metric has always been about public commitments, it's unclear why that's news.

Talk of a superdelegate "flood" has bubbled up before just about every primary, but today's surge looks like the real deal. Obama continues to trot out superdelegates after reports that he spent Monday lining up endorsements. Debbie Dingell of Michigan and South Carolina Rep. James Clyburn declared their support today, Jimmy Carter is endorsing Obama tonight, and proverbial fat lady Nancy Pelosi is expected to sing soon after. That makes 10 supers (and counting) for the day, putting Obama 30.5 delegates away from the nomination. If Obama snaps up half of Montana's and South Dakota's combined 31 pledged delegates today, he'll need only another 15 or so endorsements to give him the nomination.

Of course, there's a difference between winning the majority of delegates and winning the nomination—according to Clinton, at least. Tonight, Clinton is expected to acknowledge Obama's delegate win but stop short of suspending her campaign. That might sound like a distinction without a difference, but Clinton has said she "reserves the right" to challenge the DNC's Michigan decision in front of the Credentials Committee in June. No words make Howard Dean quake in fear quite like "brokered convention." But it's hard to imagine that scenario playing out when Democrats, the media, and even John McCain have united to declare Barack Obama the Democratic nominee.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Hillary Clinton scored a win and a loss this weekend. She claimed a 2-to-1 victory in Puerto Rico on Sunday but netted only 24 delegates from Florida and Michigan in the decision passed down by the DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee. Yet neither of these events changes the landscape of the race. Obama remains fewer than 45 delegates away from the new magic number of 2,118, which keeps Clinton's chances at a near-conclusive 0.4 percent.

Clinton won the Puerto Rico primary in just about every possible way. Women and men, young and old, rich and poor, educated and unschooled—all favored Clinton. (The only demographic that favored Obama was people who sympathized with indicted Gov. Anibal Acevedo Vila, who endorsed Obama.) An early estimate showed Clinton winning 35 delegates to Obama's 15, with five still unaccounted for. The Clinton campaign is spinning the results to suggest Obama has a problem attracting Hispanics.

But on Saturday, Clinton had problems of her own. The much-anticipated RBC meeting contained little suspense but much recrimination, as Clinton supporters denounced the committee's decision to split Michigan 69-59 and Florida 105-67, with each delegate given half a vote. All in all, she netted 24 delegates. Clinton said she "reserved the right" to challenge the decision before the Credentials Committee in late June but said she hadn't yet decided what to do.

The weekend's events helped Clinton close Obama's delegate lead but not enough to alter the eventual outcome. He still needs
about the same number of delegates to win the nomination as he needed Friday. Clinton needs 203. It's as tight as a Democratic race has ever gotten—but not tight enough for Tuesday's contests, with a combined total of 31 pledged delegates, to make a difference. (The few data points we have show Obama leading in both Montana and South Dakota.)

So, the Clinton campaign is embracing the one metric that, narrowly defined, favors Hillary: the popular vote. The Puerto Rico primary netted Clinton 141,000 votes, putting her ahead of Obama in the overall tally. But that's only if you count the votes from Michigan, where Obama wasn't on the ballot. (She's still winning if you give Obama Michigan's "uncommitted" votes, but then only if you don't count a handful of caucus states.) The Clinton camp released a new ad touting the "17 million" people who voted for Clinton, bragging that it's more than voted for any other primary candidate ever. Naturally, they skip the fine print.

In the superdelegate race, Obama netted two delegates on Sunday, plus another two Monday morning; Clinton got zero. Even if they split the delegates from Tuesday's contests 50/50, Obama will need fewer than 30 supers to seal the deal.

Meanwhile, Obama announced late Saturday that he was leaving his church, Trinity United Church of Christ, after weathering months of criticism for his associations with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. He cited "a cultural and a stylistic gap" between himself and the church. Obama severed ties with Wright in April after Wright reiterated several of his most inflammatory comments. This move suggests the Obama camp sees not just Wright but Trinity itself as a liability in the general election. However painful, it may be the right decision for Obama; and he can thank the church. Obama severed ties with Wright in April after Wright reiterated several of his most inflammatory comments. This move suggests the Obama camp sees not just Wright but Trinity itself as a liability in the general election. However painful, it may be the right decision for Obama; and he can thank

Clinton will reportedly be holding her Tuesday night "celebration" in New York City. Conclude what you will.

For a full list of our Deathwatches, click here. For a primer on Hillary's sinking ship, visit our first Deathwatch entry. Send your own prognostications to hillarydeathwatch@gmail.com.

dispatches

Dispatches From the R. Kelly Trial
Anyone know a good forensic hairstylist?
By Josh Levin
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 10:40 AM ET

From: Josh Levin
Subject: The Prosecution Doubles Up, Then Rests

Posted Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 10:26 AM ET

Since I left you a week ago, R. Kelly's Little Man defense faced its stiffest challenge yet. Grant Fredericks, the prosecution's forensic video analyst, testified last Thursday that to do a convincing job of morphing a 27-minute, 100,000-frame video—tweaking the shadows, matching the eye blinks—would take 44 years of steady work. Since Kelly is 41 years old, the architects of such a cut-and-paste job would have needed incredible foresight, or access to a flux capacitor. Fredericks also matched knots in the wood of Kelly's log cabin to those seen in the sex tape's log cabin. And despite the defense's contention that Kelly's distinctive mole could not be seen on the tape, the video analyst pointed out a quite comparable dark spot on Sex Tape Man's back. Unless Kelly's attorneys can conjure a forensic dermatologist, a forensic lumberjack, and a forensic Wayans brother, I'd say the tape is looking pretty unassailable.

But all is not lost for the defense. Mere hours before Kelly's former mistress Lisa Van Allen was set to testify that she had a threesome with the singer and the alleged victim, a surprise witness—Van Allen's ex-beau Damon Pryor—came forward and claimed he could discredit her. In court this morning, state's attorney Shauna Boliker argues that Pryor shouldn't be allowed to testify once the defense starts its case, as everything he would say is unreliable hearsay. In a deposition taken last week, Pryor said that Van Allen once told him that the alleged R. Kelly sex tape was actually created by two gentlemen from Kansas City named Chuck and Keith—heretofore unknown Wayans brothers—as a scheme to extort Kelly. Judge Vincent Gaughan denies the prosecution's motion to exclude Pryor's potential testimony; it's not hearsay, he says, if Pryor is impeaching Van Allen's testimony, and it's up to the jury to decide if he's credible.

Before the jury has a chance to formulate an opinion, defense attorney Sam Adam Sr. stipulates that his surprise witness is "a con man." As he cross-examines Van Allen, who did finally take the stand on Monday, Adam Sr. asks if she's aware of Pryor's many aliases: Omar Reeves, Michael Russell, Baasil Muhammad, "Tull," and Jamel Carolina (a handle that Pryor perhaps conjured with the help of the "Ron Mexico name generator"). Adam Sr. also inquires if Van Allen knew that Pryor had two Social Security numbers, that he had been convicted of federal bank fraud, and that he had previously pulled the surprise witness stunt in a case that sounds even weirder than this one—that of a black nationalist cult leader known as the Green One and/or Imperial Grand Potentate Noble: Rev. Dr. Malachi Z. York 33/720. (The Green One was eventually convicted of child molestation.)

Why is the defense trashing its own guy? In the hope that some of that trash sticks to Van Allen, who's shaping up to be the
state's star witness. Under direct examination, Van Allen—wearing a low-cut-for-criminal-court black baby-doll dress that billows over her four-months-pregnant belly—says she met Kelly in 1997 or 1998, when she was 17. During the shoot for his "Home Alone" video, Kelly's cousin "Blacky" sidled over and said that the singer wanted to meet her; a few moments later, they were having sex in his trailer. Within the year, Van Allen had found gainful employment as the woman who simulates intercourse with Kelly during his stage show.

Around the end of 1998, Van Allen says, Kelly brought her to the log cabin to meet the alleged victim, a girl he claimed was 16. (If they did in fact meet in late 1998, the girl would have been 14.) Kelly placed his co-stars by the hot tub, set up his video camera, and filmed them all having sex. About a year later, they had another threesome, this time on a futon mattress propped on the floor of Kelly's Space Jam-themed basketball court. Van Allen claims that this time she started to cry. "I didn't want to do it," she says, choking out the words through evocative sobs. Kelly didn't take her crying jag well, she says: "He got upset and said that he couldn't watch that, that he couldn't do anything with that. He packed up everything and left." And there we have R. Kelly's first law of filming your sexual conquests: There's no crying in sex tapes. (A few minutes later, we learn R. Kelly's second law of filming your sexual conquests: Never leave your sex tapes unattended. According to Van Allen, Kelly carried a duffel bag of his sex videos "everywhere"—to the gym, to the studio, on music video shoots.)

Van Allen is a boon for the prosecution not just because of her firsthand account of a sexual dalliance between Kelly and the alleged underage victim. She's also the only witness who claims knowledge of the pair's faces and naked torsos—another blow to the Little Man defense. Van Allen says she recognizes the girl on the tape because of "her breasts—back then, I felt they were so much bigger than mine."

For all of this seemingly devastating testimony, I'm guessing the prosecution wishes they never called Lisa Van Allen. Adam Sr., who looks like Ed Asner, dresses like he's colorblind, and talks like a crusty old sea captain, doesn't bother to refute the alleged threesomes—a wise gambit when your client's latest album (Double Up) is an extended paean to the virtues of three-way sex. Just as Kelly's attorneys painted former Kelly protégé Stephanie "Sparkle" Edwards as a disillusioned extortioneer, the defense harps on Van Allen's motive and credibility. It's a winning strategy: By the end of the afternoon, her carnal knowledge of the alleged victim recedes from memory, replaced by a long list of accusations from Adam Sr. that seem less crazy the more you hear Van Allen talk—that she made herself cry on the stand, stole Kelly's $20,000 diamond-encrusted Rolex, conspired to extort money from the singer, offered to change her testimony for cash, and has a thing for men who've been convicted of federal fraud charges. And for what it's worth, Brown is wearing the most amazing outfit I've ever seen: an iridescent blue-green five-button suit that shifts color every time he takes a step, sort of like a hybrid between a Hypercolor T-shirt and a Magic Eye puzzle.)

Counter to Pryor's deposition, Van Allen denies that she ever said anything about "Chuck and Keith in Kansas City" making the sex tape at issue in this trial, or that her part of the scheme was to use her relationship with Kelly to extract "a few millions" from the R&B star. The Chuck-and-Keith theory might sound completely insane, except for the fact that Van Allen admits that she went to Kelly just last year with an offer to help him "recover" a different sex tape—one of the threesome videos featuring her, Kelly, and the alleged victim. She says that Kelly offered to pay $250,000 for the assistance of Lisa Van Allen Sex Tape Recovery Services Inc. Whom did she recover the tape from? One Keith Murrell of Kansas City. And how did he get the tape? Lisa Van Allen Sex Tape Thiery Services Inc. Van Allen admits that she's the one who originally swiped the threesome tape from Kelly—don't forget the second law of filming your sexual conquests!—though Adam Sr. strangely doesn't ask how the tape got to Kansas City. Murrell eventually came to Chicago with the tape, she says, and they watched it in a hotel room with a handful of "Robert's people." The singer's accountant then gave Van Allen and Kansas City Keith $20,000 apiece. The tape has never been seen again.

Of course, Adam Sr. is on somewhat thin ice here. He's establishing Van Allen's extortionate ways, but he's doing so by foregrounding another tape of Kelly having sex with the alleged victim, with only the word of an admitted con man to connect her to any sort of tomfoolery with the tape at issue here. Van Allen might be an extortioneer, a fake crier (her defiant tone under cross-examination and a regular habit of laughing at Adam Sr.'s questions suggests that she might not be so broken up about her past sexual liaisons), a thief (she admits to stealing that Rolex from Kelly's hotel room), and an opportunist who sees this trial as a get-out-of-jail-free card (she received immunity from the state's attorney and U.S. attorney for any crimes she might have committed). But though Van Allen—the state's last witness—didn't come close to sealing the deal for the prosecution, she has painted a portrait of Kelly as a prolific auteur of homemade pornography. As the defense gets set to make its case, members of the jury must ponder whether they think it's more likely that Kelly, the Wayans Brothers, Ray Harryhausen, or Keith from Kansas City made that video. Or perhaps it's the mysterious Chuck who will reveal the trial's biggest secret. He is, after all, the namesake of the pastor's secret gay lover in Trapped in the Closet. Could Chuck be having an affair with Keith? With R. Kelly? With Yul Brown and his Hypercolor suit? Tune in tomorrow.
With the jury getting a day of rest before the defense begins its case on Wednesday, today's star is the Chicago Sun-Times' Jim DeRogatis. The reporter and pop-music critic, along with his colleague Abdon M. Pallash, wrote the first story laying out R. Kelly's predilection for underage girls way back in 2000. In that piece and a multitude of later stories for the Sun-Times, DeRogatis and Pallash unearthed and exhaustively described the "Sex Planet" crooner's mating habits: wooing teenage girls at concerts, a local McDonald's, and his former high school; bedding them; and paying the occasional cash settlement when a lawsuit was threatened. DeRogatis also found details that fleshed out the man behind the log-cabin porn empire. He reported that the singer was functionally illiterate and that he rarely bathed and (in a feature for GQ) wrote that Kelly was allegedly molested as a child by a "trusted older man."

As DeRogatis became known around Chicago as the man on the R. Kelly ephelophilia beat, he received a pair of anonymous packages in the Sun-Times offices. Near the start of 2001, he got a tape "that appears to depict Kelly and a young light-skinned black girl having sexual relations in a wood-paneled sauna room." Police were never able to determine the girl's age or identity. Then, in February 2002, DeRogatis was sent the tape at issue in this case: a 27-minute video of a man resembling R. Kelly, again in a wood-paneled room, having sex with and urinating on a girl who appears to be underage. DeRogatis gave the tape to a Chicago police investigator, leading to Kelly's arrest on child pornography charges.

According to the defense, DeRogatis is no mere journalist. Rather, he's in the same category as Lisa Van Allen, Keith from Kansas City, and Stephanie "Sparkle" Edwards—a charter member of the League of Kelly Haters and a possible hub in a wide-ranging conspiracy against the singer. Defense attorney Marc Martin, who's arguing before Judge Vincent Gaughan today that DeRogatis should be compelled to testify this week, says the writer harbors an "extreme bias" against Kelly. In particular, Martin wants to question DeRogatis about a screening of the tape he held for Sparkle, the alleged victim's aunt. The defense contends that this viewing took place three days after the Sun-Times claims to have given the tape to the Chicago police; if DeRogatis kept a spare copy, he might have committed the crime of possessing child pornography.

Gaughan doesn't bother to hide his agreement with the defense's position nor his annoyance that, despite a court order, DeRogatis isn't here today. When the reporter's lawyer, Damon Dunn, tries to argue that everything DeRogatis might potentially be asked should be protected by the reporter's privilege, Gaughan snaps that he's "talking nonsense." Later, he scolds Dunn for "protecting something that nobody's after"—that the defense isn't interested in having DeRogatis identify the anonymous source who proffered the tape. (The judge gives some lip to the defense as well; when Sam Adam Sr. tries to bring a chair to the front of the bench for Edward Genson, who suffers from tremors on account of a neuromuscular disease, Gaughan snaps that "this ain't ADA here," demanding that Genson stand.) After threatening to issue a warrant for the reporter's arrest, Gaughan softens his position—he orders Dunn to produce his client at 10 tomorrow morning or else.

Whether or not DeRogatis shows his face on Wednesday, the defense should present its first witness. There's pretty much zero chance that Kelly himself will testify, though it is fun to imagine the cross-examination. Mr. Kelly, is it not true that Little Man is a substandard film, even by the standards of the midget-morphing genre? Mr. Kelly, can you please tell the ladies and gentlemen of the jury why you're so obsessed with logs? Mr. Kelly, in the song "Double Up," what exactly did you mean by: "Man, three's company, bitch, call me Jack Tripper." Remember that you are under oath.

It is possible, on the other hand, that Kelly's lawyers will call the alleged victim, who would declare that it's not her on the tape. This is a tough call for the defense. It's been as much as a decade since the tape was made. The young woman on the witness stand, who is now 23, would likely look significantly different than the girl on the tape, even if they are the same person. While a straight-up denial could help Kelly significantly, it would be a huge gamble—if the jury sees any resemblance between Sex Tape Girl and Sex Tape Denying Woman, all doubt about the defendant's guilt might melt away.

It seems more likely that the alleged victim's mother will get called to the stand. During cross-examinations of prosecution witnesses who claim to recognize the girl, the defense has hinted that an identification made by a friend or nonimmediate family member—say, aunts named Sparkle—shouldn't have the same weight as that of a parent. How would the jury react to—and how would the prosecution rebut—a woman who says, "That's not my daughter"?

The defense will also surely revisit the Shaggy defense and the Little Man defense. While the prosecution's forensic video guy made a convincing case that Kelly's Magic Marker-looking back mole is present on the tape, the defense will likely have experts of its own who will a) produce stills in which the mole cannot be seen, and b) argue that any rube with Final Cut Pro could paste R. Kelly into hard-core log-cabin porn. And Kelly's lawyers will continue to stress that there's a small band of disgruntled R&B singers, Kansas City residents, and Chicago newspaper reporters who had the motive to pull a Little Man.
As all of this is going through my head one afternoon early this week, I happen to walk past an Enterprise Rent-A-Car on the North Side of Chicago. Next door is a brick, ivy-covered building that I recognize from a sex tape I've seen recently. Yes, by sheer coincidence, I am staying two blocks away from R. Kelly's old place on West George Street—home of the infamous log-cabin-themed rec room. There's a padlock on the door and a sign promising a $500,000 fine to any trespassers. The log-cabin room is not visible through the reflective first-floor windows. The red bricks have turned orange in places, and there's paint peeling from the gray window frames. On the side of the building is a "For Sale" sign. "Spectacular Entertainment Home: pool, basketball court, theater, and more!" (And what an "and more" it is!) I call Sheldon Good & Co., auctions to set up a viewing, but the woman on the phone tells me there's been a mistake. The property sold a couple of years ago (for $3 million), but the new owner never bothered to take down the sign. Nor, apparently, to move in. I'm guessing that if the price is right, this spectacular entertainment home could still be yours.

From: Josh Levin
Subject: Anyone Know a Good Forensic Hairstylist?
Posted Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 10:39 AM ET

With the prosecution resting on Monday, the courtroom burbles in anticipation as R. Kelly's mole-denying, Little Man-analogizing, conspiracy-spotting defense wrests control of the trial this morning. The press and spectator rows are tightly packed, and Kelly himself seems to sense the occasion. Though not quite as distinctive as Yul Brown's Hypercolor number from Monday, the singer's outfit—a pinstriped honey-mustard suit, accessorized by a tie that appears to be decorated with exploding pastel sunflowers—is a refreshing break from the muted grays of the I'm Being Prosecuted for Heinous Sex Crimes Collection.

Once today's testimony begins, however, it's clear that the Kelly defense team is a lot more entertaining—and probably more effective—when it's in attack mode. Lead attorney Edward Genson starts things off by calling a cousin, an aunt, and an uncle of the alleged victim, all of whom declare unequivocally that their relative is not Sex-Tape Girl. (All three also acknowledge that they hadn't seen the video until this week—a reminder of the many prosecution witnesses who, the defense has argued, were certain that the alleged victim was on the tape before ever having seen it.) Charlotte Edwards, the girl's aunt, says that the young woman in the video has much larger breasts than the alleged victim. Genson, perhaps rusty when it comes to questioning nonhostile witnesses, follows up by asking Charlotte if she'd ever seen her niece naked—the same question he used to undermine witnesses who claimed they were 100 percent sure they could identify the girl. Charlotte, unperturbed or unaware of Genson's mistake, responds straight-facedly that she had indeed seen her relative's nude torso, "when I used to change her diapers."

In contrast to Genson, state's attorney Shauna Boliker performs flawlessly. After a few perfunctory questions to the day's first witness, the alleged victim's cousin Shonna Edwards, she begins the show-and-tell portion of the cross-examination. On a giant screen 10 feet from the jury box, the state displays a screenshot from a video put out by the alleged victim's music group. Shonna identifies her cousin and band mate immediately. A few seconds later, we see a still from the 27-minute sex tape—if memory serves, it's taken from the very beginning, as Sex-Tape Girl is about to receive a handful of bills from Sex-Tape Man. Shonna says that she doesn't recognize that person. Boliker then has the photos displayed side by side. Both are profile shots, showing the left side of the alleged victim's face, her mullet, and a slightly puffy cheek. They look the same. "Is it possible that it could be the same individual?" Boliker asks. "Not at all." Shonna says. Boliker doesn't accuse her of lying or covering for her kin. She asks no further questions, eager to get the next witness on the stand—another opportunity to put the pair of poster-sized photos in front of the jury.

For the defense, a new day means a new theory. Today, it's the hair defense. After the prosecution finishes its slideshow, Genson directs Shonna Edwards' attention to the girl's scalp, as seen in a series of publicity photos for her band. Shonna notes that her coif is parted in the middle. The part in the hair of "that lady" on the sex tape, she says, is on the left side. Unfortunately for the defense, there isn't unanimity on this point among their witnesses. Charlotte Edwards undermines the hair theory, saying she doesn't detect a left-side part in the sex tape photo. I also overhear a pair of women in the courtroom who are unimpressed by this attempt at exculpatory evidence—a part is more akin to a daily choice, they say, than a permanent condition. While they're out getting a forensic lumberjack, perhaps the defense should scour America's leading research salons for a forensic hairstylist.

Leaving the tonsorial testimony behind, the defense resumes its project to discredit threesome-haver Lisa Van Allen. Jason Wallace, a law clerk who went to Georgia last month to interview Van Allen along with defense attorney Sam Adam Jr., testifies that Van Allen and Yul "Hypercolor" Brown asked them for a bribe. Though it's Wallace who's on the stand, he's only a minor character this afternoon. For a half-hour, Sam Adam Sr. plays the role of Yul Brown, reciting what Van Allen's fiance supposedly said as Wallace occasionally pipes up to say that everything sounds about right. It's the role Adam Sr. was born to play. Not only do the two men share a taste in loud jackets—the lavender coat the 72-year-old attorney wore Tuesday would've suited the part nicely—but the lawyer, in his full-throated exuberance, makes Brown's alleged scheming sound nefarious and thrilling. "She is pregnant, and we have to look out for our family," says Adam Sr.-as-Brown. "Lisa doesn't have to testify if
things are made right," he continues. And later, setting his price: "Remember, we got that $350,000 book deal, so tell [Kelly and his associates] to come right." (It's unclear whether this supposed deal is for a Lisa Van Allen tell-all or a Yul Brown guide to exotic men's fashions.)

The prosecution's response: Adam Jr., Wallace, et al. were on a fishing expedition, determined to "create some sort of illusion of impropriety" as the trial began. Prosecutor Robert Heilingoetter also takes issue with Adam Sr.'s one-act play, which Wallace acknowledges is not a verbatim account of that day's events. Heilingoetter suggests that, if they had been interested in accuracy, the defense would've used technology to record the event for posterity. "Nobody on the defense team had access to a video recorder?" Heilingoetter asks. No, Wallace says, declining to acknowledge that at least one person at the defense table might have been able to loan out the requisite equipment. Perhaps even an extra duffel bag.

Adam Sr.'s performance would have stood apart on any other day, but on Wednesday he has competition from the Chicago Sun-Times' Jim DeRogatis. After failing to appear in the courtroom on Tuesday, DeRogatis arrives promptly for today's early-morning hearing, during which Judge Vincent Gaughan will decide whether the reporter has to testify. When defense attorney Marc Martin asks him a question—Did you retain exclusive possession of the tape? Did you alter the tape? Do you possess any other copies?—DeRogatis reads the following statement: "I respectfully decline to answer the question on the advice of counsel, on the grounds that to do so would contravene the reporter's privilege, the special witness doctrine, my rights under the Illinois Constitution, as well as the First and Fifth Amendments of the United States Constitution."

This happens at least a dozen times, and DeRogatis puts a different spin on each reading, like a musician riffing on a familiar tune. Sometimes he enunciates the reporter's privilege, other times Illinois. His best work, though, comes when he arrives at the word First, as in the First Amendment. Each time he gets to the final sentence, DeRogatis pauses, then half-shouts—"the FIRST … and Fifth Amendments"—like a television sportscaster making sure we all notice his trademark catch phrase.

The tightly wound Gaughan, shockingly, doesn't seem to find DeRogatis' performative style annoying. (He does, however, scold Adam Jr. for "passing out pop like you're at Wrigley Field" when the lawyer hands a drink to someone in the gallery.) The judge does think the mini-speech is getting a bit overused. When DeRogatis respectfully declines to answer Martin's query about what he does for a living, Gaughan asks, exasperated, "What are we doing here, I mean really?" (On the advice of counsel, DeRogatis does eventually admit to being the pop-music critic at the Chicago Sun-Times.) The judge ultimately rules that while the First Amendment and reporter's privilege don't apply here, DeRogatis' Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination does—he seems to buy attorney Damon Dunn's argument that a zealous prosecutor could possibly launch an investigation if the Sun-Times reporter admits to having, retaining, or destroying a copy of the tape. DeRogatis is dismissed without having to testify.

Gaughan, though, still asks for and receives the reporter's notes from his interview with Stephanie "Sparkle" Edwards, conducted within days of his receipt of the tape in February 2002. While the judge promised on Tuesday to redact portions of the notes to make sure that no source material was revealed, the Sun-Times went ahead and published the interview in full after DeRogatis' court appearance. This is a curious decision—there's information in the interview that could lead to his source, and protecting the writer's sources was seemingly the main reason why DeRogatis and the Sun-Times were fighting so vigorously to keep him from testifying.

The potentially source-revealing excerpt comes when DeRogatis tells Sparkle: "I'm sure that tape came by [B.H.]. Not directly. He's wondering about the police investigation." (The initials are in the Sun-Times' rendering of the notes.) It seems clear that the B.H. here is Kelly's former manager Barry Hankerson, who the defense has suggested might have conspired with Sparkle to create or distribute the sex tape. Hankerson's niece, Aaliyah, married Kelly when she was 15; when the manager left Kelly, he wrote a letter to his record label saying that the singer "needed psychiatric help for his compulsion to pursue underage girls."

Does it hurt the prosecution if Kelly's attorneys mention in open court that a disgruntled ex-manager might have been directly or indirectly involved in the tape's release? Perhaps, since that could further the defense theory that a shadowy band of conspirators was trying to bring down the singer. But perhaps Hankerson's involvement gives the tape some authenticity, considering that he's someone with ready access to the singer rather than a distant bystander like, say, Keith from Kansas City. Speaking of which, Keith and his associate Chuck have announced plans to alight in Chicago on Thursday. In an interview with the Sun-Times, Charles "Chuck" Freeman denied faking the tape. "There's more to this case than R. Kelly," Freeman said. "We're gonna have a press conference Thursday when we get here and everyone will see." Bring it on, Chuck, bring it on.

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**dispatches**

**China's SAT**

If the SAT lasted two days, covered everything you'd ever studied, and decided your future.

By Manuela Zoninsein

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 10:31 AM ET
BEIJING, China—For China’s 31st annual National College Entrance Exam, which takes place on the first Thursday and Friday of June, at least 10 million Chinese high-school students have registered to sit the gaokao, as it is colloquially known. They are competing for an estimated 5 million university spots.

Kao means test, and gao, which means high, indicates the test's perceived level of difficulty—and its ability to intimidate. It is China's SAT—if the SAT lasted two days, covered everything learned since kindergarten, and had the power to determine one's entire professional trajectory.

As economic development in China careens forward, interest in and the ability to pay for a college education swell. So does competition. Getting into a top-tier university such as Beijing’s Tsinghua or Peking University—the former the alma mater of four of the nine members of China’s current Politburo, the latter China’s oldest university—might lead to an interview with a major multinational or an elite political gig. At the least, a college education can circumvent a blue-collar job with a slow journey up a long, bureaucratic ladder. (Manual labor is generally reserved for poor farmers left with no recourse other than migrant work.)

Students become aware of the gaokao, the sole criterion for university admission, at an early age. Pressures and preparations begin accordingly. All schooling, especially middle- and high-school curricula, is oriented toward gaokao readiness. Students often joke that it takes 12 years to study for the test. Angel, a freshman studying at the China Foreign Affairs University, where I currently teach, remembers walking out after the first day of testing and hearing her best friend remark, "Well, there goes six years."

Essentially, Chinese universities accept those students who are good at taking tests. This makes sense for an educational system historically oriented toward rote learning, where students are tested on how well they’ve memorized their teachers’ lectures. Mary, who is about to graduate from the Beijing Foreign Languages University, admitted she had many brilliant friends who simply didn’t test well. They retook the test after another year of studying (the gaokao is offered just once a year) and enrolled wherever their scores permitted.

This style of learning might not encourage creativity or individuality, but for the world’s most populous country, the gaokao provides an objective yardstick by which to measure academic success. In theory at least, students’ social and economic statuses don’t matter: The gaokao “allows someone very poor the opportunity to rise out of poverty,” explained Mary.

Take Michael Yu, founder and CEO of New Oriental, an extremely successful provider of educational services, including gaokao prep. The son of illiterate farmers, Yu took the test three times before he got into Peking U’s English-language program. He is now a model Chinese citizen, known for heading a NYSE-listed company with $2.28 billion market capitalization.

The test is supposed to be uniform nationally, but in reality, the gaokao is modified by each province to accommodate the quality of local education. Among students, it is widely held that Tibet and Xinjiang have the easiest versions, Beijing and Shanghai the most difficult. Each university also sets provincial quotas to guarantee minimum enrollment by minorities and students from poorer provinces and to ensure a lopsided number of local entrants (this is the Chinese strategy for maintaining amicable town-gown relations).

Students are essentially competing against others in their province. Shandong, Anhui, and Sichuan provinces are known for disproportionately high averages not just because of large populations but because bad local economies dissuade young people from staying home to find work. In Shanghai, on the other hand, if a student doesn’t test well, there is no end of work opportunities available.

Scores determine one’s major as much as alma mater. Tsinghua, “the MIT of China,” has an internationally renowned engineering program, so gaokao minimums are out of this world. To enter Tsinghua’s software engineering department in 2007, students needed a score of at least 680, out of top scores in the low 700s, depending on the province. (Consider that in Shandong Province, the highest 2007 score was 675.) The software engineering program at Xibei Sciences University, in Xi’an Province, demanded just 442.

Some provinces, including Beijing, permit students to see their gaokao scores before they apply; others, like Shandong and Anhui, require them to indicate preferences before the results are released. Students are left to guess the best school and department they can get into, which often results in unhappy matches. Mike is about to complete his studies in diplomacy at CFAU. Had he seen his gaokao scores before applying, however, he would have known that he had qualified for his first choice: environmental protection at Peking U. In other cases, students overestimate their scores and are left with no option at the end of the summer but to study another year.

Later this week, China will accommodate millions of nervous gaokao-takers. Traffic cops will redirect vehicles away from test centers, and construction sites will pause their incessant drilling. Even in Sichuan, tents have been erected in case aftershocks require students to be moved from testing centers. Many Chinese citizens find the system painful, inflexible, and ineffective. But even more side with Mary, who told me, “It's not perfect, but it's the fairest system.”
Alexander Scott, *I Spy* represented pop culture's first (or, at the very least, boldest) attempt at entertaining a notion of racial equality on screen. Which is to state what should be obvious—that pioneering Sidney Poitier was hamstrung as usual in *The Defiant Ones* (1958) by the need to play the Noble Negro, and that Dean Martin's onscreen relationship with Sammy Davis Jr. was not notably different from Jack Benny's with his valet Rochester. "Cosby proffered the idea of an America that transcended race," as Ta-Nahisi Coates wrote in a recent *Atlantic* profile that traced Cosby's arc from the sly and playful hep cat of this series to the fuming black conservative of today. Without *I Spy*, there is no Will Smith and maybe no Barack Obama, and the cultural roles for fuming black conservatives would certainly be fewer.

Unless you count *Huck Finn*—and you could—*I Spy* is the ur-text of black-and-white buddy comedies. It's a mark of the show's sophistication—and also of its New Society values and of a commercial consciousness that dictated a certain reserve—that Robinson and Scott don't go in for the bristling cross-racial one-upmanship that characterizes Eddie Murphy's *Beverly Hills Cop* movies (or even, to a lesser extent, the perfectly average 2002 *I Spy* remake with Murphy and Owen Wilson). Like the Ian Fleming heroes that made their existence possible—not just Bond but also Napoleon Solo, the man from *U.N.C.L.E.*—Robinson and Scott would no sooner submit to broad comic jousting than they'd leave the hotel suite in wrinkled dinner jackets. As spies working for the Pentagon and globetrotting undercover as tennis pros, they are as slick as an ad in Harold Hayes' *Esquire*, and their laid-back world-weariness is too perfect to be disturbed by anything less than matters of national security or a pretty Russian defector in a lovely sun hat. Their racial harmony, though so perfect as to constitute a progressive fantasy itself, was depicted as a core American value, a condition of patriotism.

The brief was clear from the first episode of the first season, titled "So Long, Patrick Henry," which opens with Robinson and Scott watching a show within the show, as they often do. It's new footage of a black American Olympian who has decamped for the People's Republic of China, which is planning to launch "The Afro-Asian Games" as part of a plan to seize African resources and has paid the athlete to be its shill. The Olympian is crude, describing Africa as “a nice zoo” at a press conference and elsewhere lobbing at Robinson an epithet of the day, "ofay." Cosby, showing a hint of his mean streak, snarls at the jock, and Culp eyes him icily. They're united in being affronted, and their disgust with his self-loathing and race-baiting is indistinguishable from their revulsion at the Olympian's eagerness to sell out his country for a Dr. Evil-esque quarter-million dollars.

*I Spy* managed to get away with looking hard at politics partly by looking indelibly sharp. The series is a generous gift to fashion editors who find inspiration in its glen-plaid sangfroid,
an unwitting taunt at contemporary cinematographers who don't have the budget or leisure to emulate its patient long shots and luscious location shoots, a welcome time capsule for us new sentimentalists who think that America was as her best in the mid-'60s and that it's all been downhill since the Summer of Love and the goddamn hippies. It is detached to the point of whimsy and yet politically engaged in surprising ways—was any other show venturing to Vietnam in 1966? The Man From U.N.C.L.E. was tenser, and Mission: Impossible more tightly constructed, but I Spy has a claim to being the great American spy show, an ideal integration of cool in the Marshall McLuhan, Arthur Fonzairelli, and Miles Davis senses of the word.

**election scorecard**

**Dead Heat**

Five months before the general election, it's anyone's game.

By Chris Wilson

**Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 10:11 AM ET**

Here's a shocker: Exactly five months ahead of the general election, the Obama-McCain matchup is way too close to call.

While Obama's flood of superdelegates Tuesday appears to have finally determined which Democrat John McCain will face in November, the many polls that have hypothetically pitted him against either Obama or Hillary Clinton report little more than a statistical tie. A national USA Today/Gallup poll conducted last weekend found Obama leading McCain 49 to 44, with a four-point margin of error. Clinton led McCain in the same poll 48 to 44. A Rasmussen poll conducted over a similar time period found Obama and McCain tied at 46 percent.

Similar matchups surveyed in swing states are hardly more illuminating. A mid-May poll by Quinnipiac in Ohio and Florida, for example, found McCain leading Obama by four points in both states. A Rasmussen poll in Ohio on May 15 found McCain up by one point.

**Election Scorecard uses data supplied by Mark Blumenthal and Charles Franklin at Pollster.com.**

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<th>Total delegates: 4,049</th>
<th>Total delegates needed to win: 2,025</th>
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<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
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<td>Delegates won by each candidate:</td>
<td>Delegates won by each candidate:</td>
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<td>Obama: 1,661</td>
<td>McCain: 1,500</td>
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<td>Clinton: 1,499</td>
<td>Source: CNN</td>
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Delegates at stake:

**Want more Slate election coverage? Check out Map the Candidates, Political Futures, Trailhead, XX Factor, and our Campaign Junkie page!**

**explainer**

**Fear of Trembling**

Can an aftershock be as large as the original quake?

By Jacob Leibenluft

**Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 6:56 PM ET**

A magnitude 5.3 aftershock hit China's Sichuan Province Thursday, raising the risk of flooding in towns already devastated by last month's earthquake. Since the May 12 quake, the region has experienced hundreds of tremors as well as a major false alarm that caused thousands to flee their homes. Is it possible for an aftershock to be as large as the main event?

By definition, no. If an earthquake is followed by a more powerful seismic event, it's automatically redefined as a foreshock. The largest tremor is always classified as the earthquake; everything else is either a foreshock or an aftershock. It's also highly unlikely that a quake as massive as the one in Sichuan, which registered a magnitude of 7.9 on the Richter scale, would be followed by an event of the same intensity—especially after so much time had elapsed.

There are two principles that describe the typical behavior of aftershocks. The first, called Omori's Law, predicts that most shocks will occur immediately following the earthquake and...
become less and less frequent over time. The other, known as Båth's Law, states that the largest aftershock is, on average, about 1.2 magnitudes smaller than the main quake. (The Richter scale is logarithmic, meaning that an earthquake measuring magnitude 6.0 is 10 times larger than one measuring 5.0.) Seismologists have begun using these rules to create maps of California that forecast where an aftershock is most likely to occur. But as several news reports noted after a Sichuanese TV station issued an erroneous warning a week after the quake, there is still no reliable way to predict the exact timing or location of an aftershock.

A 2002 study (PDF) of 117 earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.0 or higher found that only 13 were followed by nearby quakes that were at least as powerful. But whether these 13 should be classified as foreshocks or as "triggering earthquakes" is a matter of some dispute among seismologists. Traditionally, foreshocks and aftershocks have been defined as events occurring one or two "fault lengths" away from the main quake, while triggering and triggered earthquakes are separate events that occur at a more remote distance. After the magnitude 9.1 quake in Sumatra that caused the 2004 tsunami, scientists debated whether a subsequent shock three months later—which the U.S. Geological Survey classified as the seventh-largest earthquake since 1900—was an aftershock or a separate quake along the same trench.

Aftershocks become less frequent over time, but they can still occur years—or perhaps even decades—after an earthquake. Some researchers even believe that seismic activity in the Midwest—including a minor earthquake this April—is the belated result of a massive 1811-12 temblor centered in New Madrid, Mo. Such late aftershocks are more likely to occur when a fault exists in the middle of a tectonic plate; the Longmen Shan fault in Sichuan, on the other hand, is located at the collision of India and Eurasia.

Got a question about today's news? Ask the Explainer.

Explainer thanks Karen Felzer and Tom Parsons of the U.S. Geological Survey, Tom Jordan of the Southern California Earthquake Center, and Seth Stein of Northwestern University.

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**explainer**

**Jumbo Jet for Sale**

What happens to a plane when an airline retires it?

By Chris Wilson

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 6:14 PM ET

United Airlines announced Wednesday that it will remove 100 jets from its fleet, including all 94 of its Boeing 737s, a popular single-aisle jet. What do airlines do with planes they don't need anymore?

They sell them or send them to the desert. An airline might be able to sell off an older model like the 737 to smaller overseas carriers who are trying to upgrade and expand their fleets. In recent years, former Soviet Bloc countries and parts of Asia have been the most avid buyers of used aircraft from the United States. While a few domestic startup airlines have also purchased aircraft from larger carriers, these sales make up a small fraction of the total.

To put a plane on the market, a carrier typically advertises in an industry newsletter like SpeedNews or Jetmark. United won't be responsible for selling all of its retired planes, though, because it may not own all of them—about a third of all commercial planes are leased by the carrier. Any loaners will be returned to their owners and then presumably sold or leased out to another company.

If a plane is sold to another carrier immediately, it's likely to go straight to a maintenance facility where it will be refurbished for its new owner. Otherwise, the airline flies it to a storage facility somewhere in the southwestern United States, where it's parked until it gets sold, cannibalized for spare parts, or converted into a cargo plane.

Unused and unsold commercial jets often end up at the Mojave Air and Space Port, a storage facility—or "boneyard"—for defunct aircraft in Southern California. The dry desert climate is ideal for preventing corrosion, and the hard soil can support heavy loads. The area does have its hazards, though: One aircraft remarketing consultant told the Explainer that, years ago, some MD-80 jets in storage in the Mojave Desert sank into the mud during a strong rainstorm and then baked in place in the next day's sun.

Got a question about today's news? Ask the Explainer.


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**explainer**

**West Virginia, Incest Virginia?**

How the Mountain State got a reputation for inbreeding.

By Juliet Lapidos

Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 6:45 PM ET

At the National Press Club on Monday, Vice President Dick Cheney noted that his maternal grandmother is descended from
Exaggeration-prone outsiders. In the 1880s and 1890s, writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox Jr. traveled across Appalachia, looking for "local color," and overstated the degree to which mountain populations lived in isolation. During the same time period, missionaries reported pervasive ignorance and poverty, with large families living together in ramshackle cabins. The notion of widespread inbreeding was at least in part the result of crude assumptions about how these isolated forest people might have been perpetuating their communities.

It's true that, through the 19th century, transportation networks developed slowly in the rugged, westernmost portion of Virginia (incorporated as West Virginia in 1863). The area was never entirely cut off, but many people lived in remote "closed communities" with little incoming or outgoing migration. Research on intransitional marriage in such enclaves is slim. In 1980, anthropologist Robert Tincher published a study titled "Night Comes to the Chromosomes: Inbreeding and Population Genetics in Southern Appalachia," based on 140 years' worth of marriage records. He concluded that "inbreeding levels in Appalachia … are neither unique nor particularly common to the region, when compared with those reported for populations elsewhere or at earlier periods in American history."

Stereotypes about West Virginian breeding practices have long been linked to the state's poverty. When Eleanor Roosevelt visited West Virginia mining towns in the 1930s, national newspapers ran pictures of rundown shacks and barefoot kids in rags, which left a lasting impression of the state as a backwater. West Virginians became the prototypical "hillbillies," and incest served as a crude "scientific" explanation for their downtrodden social condition.

In more recent memory, the 2003 film Wrong Turn helped perpetuate the inbreeding stereotype. Set in West Virginia, it features cannibalistic mountain men, horribly disfigured from generations of incest. Then, in 2004, Abercrombie & Fitch released a T-shirt emblazoned with a map of the Appalachian state and the words "It's all relative in West Virginia." In February, a casting director for the upcoming thriller Shelter put out a call for extras with "unusual body shapes, [and] even physical abnormalities" to depict West Virginia mountain people.

For the record, West Virginia has strict anti-incest laws. Only adopted cousins are allowed to marry, while in Vermont, Virginia, and a handful of other states, first cousins can tie the knot.
that eventually took him to the top of the army's psychological warfare unit. Vice-chair Maung Aye, on the other hand, was in the first class of the elite Defense Services Academy. Tensions between the two leaders reportedly came to a head last fall, when the so-called "Saffron Revolution" led by thousands of Buddhist monks called the junta's legitimacy into question. As in earlier crackdowns of Aung San Suu Kyi's pro-democracy supporters, Than Shwe is thought to have favored of a more hard-line approach than his deputy, who allegedly opposed the decision to shoot at the monks. The rift was so deep that some dispatches out of Burma suggested a coup against Than Shwe was imminent.

Part of the reason so much mystery surrounds the junta is that its members largely stay out of the public eye. Burma's interactions with the outside world—like its controversial membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—are mostly carried out by lower-ranking Cabinet ministers who serve at the pleasure of the junta. (Than Shwe's meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon a couple of weeks ago was an exception.) Even within the country, SPDC members often keep a low profile, and their isolation has been blamed for the slow response to Cyclone Nargis. In fact, among the best glimpses of the junta is a leaked YouTube video of the wedding of Than Shwe's daughter to an army major—an event at which the couple reportedly received more than $50 million in gifts.

Got a question about today's news? Ask the Explainer.

Explainer thanks Mary Callahan of the University of Washington, Josef Silverstein, and David Steinberg of Georgetown University.

family
Is This Tantrum on the Record?
The ground rules for writing about your kids.
By Emily Bazelon
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:04 AM ET

My 8-year-old son, Eli, recently tried to Google himself. We'd been looking up facts, and he liked the idea of finding himself out there in the ether. When nothing about him came up, he was disappointed. I was relieved. I don't hide the pieces I write from him, but I don't really want him to think of himself as a Google hit magnet, either. It's one thing to know your mother writes about you sometimes; it's another to revel in your own notoriety, however small.

Eli's aborted search prompted me to think about a question that has poked at me periodically since I started writing this column two years ago: What are the ground rules for writing about your kids, especially on the Internet, with its freewheeling meanness and permanent archive? Will my kids be embarrassed by these pieces at a certain point? Will a bully or (perhaps less plausibly) a college admissions office one day use the foibles I've revealed against them? Or will the kids just decide they'd have preferred to speak for themselves? Is there a point at which any good parent should stop?

When I write about my kids, I'm not only thinking as their mother. I'm also thinking as a professional writer. Those two identities don't always align—they just don't. I like to think that when there's tension, I err on the side of protecting my kids' interests, steering clear of any material that's too embarrassing or private. But I don't trust myself to be the arbiter. My husband vets my pieces when our kids appear in them, and he objects when he thinks I'm exposing one of their faults. (He hacked away at this piece about our younger son's nail-biting habit and now reminds me of this news flash: The nails are in recovery.) Ruth Marcus, who occasionally writes about her daughters in her op-ed column for the Washington Post, has the same rule. "It really matters what your husband thinks," she says. "It's much more important to your life, happiness, and marriage to make those cuts."

Some writers believe their kids are fair game only when they're small. Steve Almond blogged about his daughter Josie for Babble until she was a year and a half and then stopped. "The blog medium has a certain kind of immediacy, and a reciprocal surrendering of privacy, that we don't want in our lives forever—and that Josie may not want, either," he explained. Maybe it's better to confine yourself to events kids can't remember themselves—their "prehistory," as Michael Lewis, author of the hilarious Slate column "Dad Again," puts it. He planned from the start to write only about the first few sleepless, chaotic months after each of his kids was born. Lewis says he reserves the right to break his rule if the material is irresistible, and since his oldest daughter was 7 when his third child was born, he sort of did. But it all seemed harmless enough, and Lewis says (with comedic honesty) that writing about his kids gave him a great incentive to be a better father, because he was watching closely.

But should we all close our laptops once our kids learn to talk? As a reader, I would hate to give up the pleasures of the late Marjorie Williams' writing about her elementary-school-age children, for example, or Sandra Tsing Loh endlessly fretting over her kids' schooling in the Atlantic. But as kids grow, so does the potential for embarrassment and violations of their privacy. Heather Armstrong, creator of the powerhouse motherhood blog Dooce, lost her day job as a Web designer over her posts (which included making fun of working at a startup). She has since taken heat for the intense intimacy of her writing about her family and for posting pictures of her daughter on her site. She says that while the voice of her blog hasn't changed, her "boundaries have shifted and shifted" as her daughter moved...
from babynthood to preschool age. Her daughter's foibles are less often fodder for her writing, she says, and the real subject is now Armstrong herself. "I look at it as a universal story of coming home with a child for the first time and confronting reality," she says.

Armstrong's approach is a common one among parent-scribes: You caricature your kid a bit, picking out his funny or more outrageous habits, but your parenting struggles are the real subject, and you're the butt of all the jokes. (And your spouse is the font of all wisdom, on the theory that flattery helps.) You mine your kid for material, but you tell yourself that certain categories of behavior are off-limits. That last rule I got from Neal Pollack, the author of Alternadad. His young son Elijah's bathroom habits are fair game for Pollack's blog, but his son's discovery of his sexuality, Pollack says, is not.

Though Pollack has set certain restrictions for himself, he mostly saw my hand-wringing over the ethics of writing about my kids as the result of "the same narcissistic impulse that causes us to write about our families in the first place. Because most people don't care what we write. This isn't The Osbournes. It's not like 50 million people a week are watching." I imagine he has to see it like that to keep blogging after Gawker went after Elijah last year. Here's the spat-Pollack wrote about his son's excellent taste in fine cheese, leading Gawker to ask, "When is it okay to hate a 4-year-old?" I'm not sure I could have handled it. For me, this is the problem with the argument that our online musings about our kids don't really matter. We make them the potential victims of ruthless (if funny) harangues-harangues that, thanks to the bottomless Internet, might be around for a long, long time. Pollack says about his Gawker fight, "At the time it happened, I didn't have the financial option to stop. So instead I had to stage a self-righteous snit." Honest, and also a little heartbreaking.

In the moment, especially if they're young, kids tend to like the attention of being their parents' writing subject, according to the writers I talked to. "They, of course, love it. They love it too much," Michael Lewis says of his daughters. Eli and Simon may be heading in that direction, too. But are our kids pleased because they think we want them to feel that way? Or because they don't know how bothered they'll feel later?

I asked Rosa Brooks, who contributes to Slate's "XX Factor," to weigh in on this. Her mother, Barbara Ehrenreich, sometimes wrote about Brooks and her brother as stock "my children" characters in a column for Time magazine. When she became a teenager, Brooks remembers feeling mixed about her mother's articles. "I was proud of her and slightly tickled to be included, and also of course as an adolescent wildly irritated." She doesn't feel scarred, though, and now she sometimes writes about her own kids in her column for the Los Angeles Times. For now, her ground rules are to never mention her young kids by name or allow any pictures of them to be published. When they get older, Brooks has promised herself that she'll hand veto power over to them.

Which isn't to say that a kid's judgment should stand in for his parents. In April, my colleague Bonnie Goldstein wrote lovingly and also revealingly for Slate about her son Nate's trials trying to make it on his own after dropping out of college for a time. He's 19, so his consent means a lot more than my 8-year-old's. Nate said yes to the piece before his mother submitted it. He has no regrets. But his reasoning took me aback: He told me he couldn't really imagine a piece of writing that could violate his privacy.

Is that adolescence talking, or will he change his mind someday?

In my paranoid moments, I worry that by writing about our kids, we're encouraging them to loosen or lose their own boundaries. Then someday, they'll hurtle toward the vortex that produced the awful, self-destructive oversharing of former Gawker editor Emily Gould, as she related at such length in the New York Times Magazine recently.

I'd like to think, like many of the writers I talked to, that the small revelations I offer about my kids are harmless. But what if they're not? A few weeks ago, after writing about my 5-year-old son's frustrated search for his pre-soccer snacks, I got an e-mail from reader Marc Naimark. "I was just about to post the following to the Fray," he wrote. "Fortunately Emily uses her maiden name. Otherwise she is being cruel level 9 on a scale of 10 to her kid. Stuff on the internet lasts forever, and I'm not sure that 16-year-old Simon is going to be pleased for his friends to learn that he used to scream bloody murder about not finding his friggin' veggie sticks." This gave me pause. Maybe I need new ground rules. Or maybe at some point it will be time to stop. Except not just yet. Last night, I was talking with Eli about his misadventures at recess and thought, ah, good topic.

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**family**

**We Are (All) Family**

Growing up in an "intentional community" isn't as foreign as it sounds.

By Lee Ann Kinkade

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 11:56 AM ET

Over the next few days, the state of Texas will continue returning more than 450 children removed from a polygamous Mormon ranch to their families. According to the ruling of the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals, the state did not prove that the children were in immediate danger. "Without such proof," 38 mothers of the children argued, "the district court was required to return the children to their parents and abused its discretion by failing to do so." The Texas Supreme Court agreed.
The children who were removed and the parents to whom they are returned seem like strangers from a distant world (or time) to you. But not to me. When I listen to the media describing their lives, they feel like distant kin. As the story unfolded, I found that I had more in common with these children than with people bringing me news of them.

I grew up in an intentional community—that's commune to you. My childhood was as far from fundamentalist Mormonism as it could be without being lunar. Twin Oaks was founded in 1967 by flower children and devotees of behaviorist psychologist B.F. Skinner. The 100 people who composed my world were more likely to quote Karl Marx than Joseph Smith. The patriarchal structure of the FLDS would have made every woman I knew at Twin Oaks scream for subversion. Twin Oaks' bylaws define the community as egalitarian. Its culture is decidedly feminist.

When I was about 7, we had an all-female auto-maintenance crew. Yet like the FLDS children, I grew up in a place where my "normal" was far enough from the average American childhood to make Dick and Jane books read like cultural anthropology.

Like the FLDS children, my caregivers were nearly innumerable. Sometimes, it seemed as if nobody in particular was raising us. The most striking similarity between my life and theirs is the sense of division you feel when you grow up somewhere that defines itself as an alternative to the dominant culture. The boundaries of the property become the boundaries of ideology, dividing right from wrong, us from them. I no longer read the division as a moral issue, but I still see a divide. That's why, particularly when the news is of "outsiders," I read the newscasters as closely as the news itself and remember my own childhood.

As a child, the grown-up I was closest to cooked my homemade mac and cheese (before the hippies learned to cook tofu in any edible form) and was the only one who could get me to take a bath. She had two long-term relationships during my childhood and had them simultaneously. Biologically speaking, she wasn't my mother—but saying so is emotionally false. When I woke up from a nightmare (in the room I shared with a girl who is not my sister, but there is no better term to describe the person with whom I shared a room for 10 years and on whom I attempted to blame most of my childhood's high crimes and misdemeanors), I would walk up two flights of stairs to be comforted by the purveyor of mac and cheese, warmth, and safety. On certain days of the week, there would be a black-haired man next to her; on other days, a blond. I knew these men tangentially, knew they were her lovers, and didn't give them much thought. Whichever man it was would shove over. I would crawl under the blankets. She would put an arm around me. I don't remember waking up there. She must have carried me back to bed after I fell asleep.

The memory of moonlight is indelible.

Given the comfort of those memories, there's something in the voices of even the most tolerant newscasters covering the Texas story that bothers me. In a piece on the FLDS custody battle a couple of weeks ago, NPR's Howard Berkes reflected on the "amazing" polygamous women he has known—high-powered professionals who contrast with the image of barefoot pregnant women inside a compound. Yet unease lurks even under their assertions that many strong, capable people are involved in polygamous marriage. That unease makes Berkes' protestations ring hollow as he refers to them as articulate. When the New York Times describes the teenage and 'tween-age girls getting ready to return home, the focus is on the "identical navy blue dresses they had sewn themselves." The Times quotes the director of a children's home as saying the clothes are "their way of celebrating." As she becomes the anthropologist introducing the reader to these "strange" girls, I wonder whether they're really so different from any other young ladies getting dressed up for a big event. Is the American imagination really so attenuated that we can't see excitement in these girls if they aren't on their way to prom?

Underneath the desire to embrace cultural relativism and alternative definitions of family lurks a deep inability to reconcile the children who were taken into state custody with America's picture of itself. Americans might have an extremely generous and expansive notion of alternative lifestyle choices. But our notions of what constitutes an acceptable childhood occupy a very narrow bandwidth. Given the hairline margin for deviation, it isn't really surprising that the state of Texas' desire to protect the FLDS children resulted in chaos.

I'm often asked what it was like to grow up "that way." Whoever I am talking with wants me to build a bridge connecting the strange and the familiar. I tell them I converted to Christianity for two months when I was 6 to irritate people. Two years later, that same motivation led me to ask to join the Girl Scouts, even though I knew they were considered a quasifascistic organization. (I still haven't figured out what the problem was there.) I try to give friends from the outside a sense of the summer when the community assigned someone to sit in a hammock and teach me—a dyslexic, headstrong little girl—to read. I also tell them about the hollow feeling that came when the adults I loved would wander off to find themselves. Many people return the favor by answering my questions about custody battles, church picnics, and the social function of betting on some phenomenon I am given to understand is referred to as "March Madness."

I don't have a huge polemic ax to grind where polygamy is concerned. The idea of 13-year-old girls being married to their uncles is indefensible. I'd call social services faster than you can say "alternative lifestyle" and happily pin the men in question to the wall until the cops showed up. Any of the members of nontraditional families I know would do the same, even while a month's worth of news causes them to worry that a phone call and a state decision could break apart their own families.
The next time an intentional community stands accused of crimes, whether it's of the FLDS, New Mexico's Strong City, or another group, social services must better understand these children's lives. The tacit recognition of strangeness seems to be a key feature of this story, but the willingness to see any sameness is absent. As soon as the specter of child abuses rises in the national consciousness, we seem to need to consider communities monstrous in every particular. Children will be removed with indecent haste and returned slowly. Still, I wonder what degree of empathy is possible in a social structure that persists in defining the lives of the children it is trying to help as bizarre.

I wonder whether the newscasters and social workers have a childhood memory like mine. They woke up in a house with one family and crawled into a bed whose occupants were conventionally associated with each other. It might be that they associate that feeling of comfort with the marriage that brought about that bed. I don't know. What I do know is that despite my own distance from that Dick and Jane family you know, and like the FLDS children returning home from what must be a frightening spring, I too remember a window full of moonlight, warm blankets, and an arm around me as I fell asleep.

family

On a Short Leash
Did you hear about that Buddhist couple who're never more than 15 feet apart? Well, we tried it.
By David Plotz and Hanna Rosin
Monday, June 2, 2008, at 10:18 AM ET

Introduction

Of all the relationship experiments ever tried—polygamy, wife-swapping, no-fault divorce, open marriage—the one described in the May 15 New York Times might be the most perverse. For 10 years, Michael Roach and Christie McNally have been together—for every single minute. The two never stay more than 15 feet from each other. When they eat, they share a plate. When they read, they share the book—the faster reader waiting for the slower to finish the page. When they do yoga, they inhale and exhale together. When "he is inspired by an idea in the middle of the night, she rises from their bed and follows him to their office 100 yards down the road, so he can work." Oh, and did we mention that 1) they live in a yurt in the Arizona desert and 2) they're celibate?

Roach and McNally, who are Buddhist teachers (though he also made a fortune in the jewelry business), consider their partnership a "high form of Buddhist practice." Roach told the Times, "It forces you to deal with your own emotions so you can't say, 'I'll take a break.' "

Slate Video: Watch David and Hanna's day of closeness.

When we read about the couple—separately, because we would never read the newspaper together—it didn't remind us of a high form of Buddhist practice. It reminded us of a particularly sadistic reality TV show or the "Love Toilet." Saturday Night Live's commode built for two. ("Why not share the most intimate moment of them all? … Because when you are in love, even five minutes apart can seem like an eternity.")

But then we began to wonder if we could learn something from these Buddhist claustrophiles. We've been married (extremely happily!) for almost 11 years, with two children to show for it. But the idea of enforced physical proximity seemed terrifying—not to mention logistically impossible. How could we stay 15 feet apart if one of us had to take child A to her school while the other walked child B to his? Or when David had a meeting in his office at the same moment Hanna had a meeting in hers across town? It also seemed masochistic: Given even the briefest reprieve from work or child care, we're each of us out the door for a fortifying run, shopping expedition, or Starbucks jaunt. Which in turn led us to wonder if all the solo rushing around is its own kind of avoidance. Maybe we're crippling our marriage by neglect. Maybe we've turned it into a tag-team business partnership in which we mechanically swap off work and kid obligations, each viewing the other as a shift laborer.

Inspired by Slate's "Human Guinea Pig," we decided to subject our marriage to the Roach-McNally discipline. We would follow their rules for 24 hours and see whether it would be an exercise in mutual mindfulness or protracted torture. We cut a 15-foot length of string. Then we warned the kids that Wednesday was going to be very weird. Here's what happened:

Midnight

David: I'm flossed, brushed, reading in bed. Hanna, who's putting laundry away, decides she needs to walk down the hall to deposit some clothes in our daughter's room, which means I have to get out of bed and follow her. Two minutes later, she does this again, and again I must get up. I utter some very un-Buddhalike curses. I can see why Roach and McNally moved into a one-room yurt—no hallways to negotiate, no kid bedrooms, no kids.

Hanna: "This is annoying." "This is annoying." "This is annoying."

This is the love song that opens our 24-hour experiment in marital harmony. Right before I get into bed, random, misplaced objects will sometimes catch my eye. In this case, it was my daughter's clean underwear on the floor and a gong on David's dresser. David wants to get into bed and read his book, and I want to put things in their proper places. I win. Thus, naked,
Five minutes in, and I can already see the problem with this experiment: It's one thing to stay within 15 feet of your soul mate when you live in a yurt and do yoga all day. Not so easy when you have kids, two jobs, and a house with stairs. So far, this feels more like Lucy and Ricky or warring Siamese twins. But that's OK, right? It's like the few times I've tried (unsuccessfully) to meditate. They say it takes a while before you stop fidgeting and running through your to-do list and just settle down and empty your mind. That's why they call it a journey.

Early Morning

**David:** First thing in the morning, Hanna gets up and goes to the bathroom. As couples go, we're not big on privacy, but there are limits. You'll be relieved to hear there is no Love Toilet action at the Rosinplotzes. The rope is plenty long. I pace impatiently outside the door.

This is usually when I head downstairs to read the sports section and feed the kids breakfast, but not today. Instead I have to sit in our bedroom while Hanna gets ready. This turns out to be a revelation, but of the annoying sort. I learn that my wife has all kinds of creams and primping powders that I have never seen. She blow-dries her hair. She doesn't get dressed just once—which is all I require—she gets dressed three or four times. One shirt tried and rejected. Pair of pants scorned. Five pairs of shoes examined. And then, even though she has already blow-dried her hair once, she goes and does it again! While our kids starve downstairs!

I usually don't eat breakfast, but she does, so I glumly eat a few spoonfuls from her oatmeal. We briefly and futilely try to read the newspaper together, scanning the front page of the *New York Times*. I hate it.

**Hanna:** I never thought of myself as a "private" person or someone who keeps secrets from her husband. I do, however, want to put on makeup and fix my hair without David standing outside the bathroom tapping his foot and glaring. I have never valued my two and a half minutes of morning mirror time. Now I feel like an angry grad student, defending sacred female space from the overbearing male gaze.

Breakfast brings a bit of unexpected peaceful togetherness. David can't sneak off to read the sports section, and I can't run around hanging up raincoats and sifting through mail. Instead we operate as a tranquil machine—one cooks the oatmeal while the other pours the milk. One brushes hair while the other puts lunchboxes in backpacks. We eat from the same small bowl, which is actually pleasant, and try to read the same section of newspaper together. Which is not.

Midmorning

**David:** Upon arrival at the *Slate* office, Hanna strikes up a conversation with one of my colleagues about the school our daughter and his sons attend. Since I had precisely the same conversation with him the day before, I am bored. I interrupt to tell her so. She ignores me and keeps talking. I try to leave, but Hanna won't budge. I'm not allowed to break the 15-foot barrier. It's the first moment when I actually understand the Roach-McNally project. Because I can't leave, I have no choice but to listen to the conversation: I force myself to pay attention. I force myself to suppress my interior monologue about work I have to do and e-mails I must answer. Instead, I will myself to tune into her world. This discipline brings a reward, albeit a tiny one: a sense for those few moments that we're deeply together.

Eventually, the conversation ends, and we settle into my office. She opens a laptop on the right side of my desk; I work on my computer on the left side. It's incredibly lovely, for a while. We tip-tap away on our keyboards. She sits on my lap while we compose an Evite for a party we're hosting. I need to photocopy a form, so we convoy down the hall to the photocopier and photocopy together. She has to go to the bathroom—not to complain, but she *always* has to go to the bathroom, like 10 times a day—and I wait, red-faced, outside the ladies' room, trying not to look like a perv. As we photocopy and work, we chat about all the stuff we usually talk about only at night, the state of the children, our work anxieties, our morale.

Pretty cute, right? But am I unbothered by her invasion of my space? No! Reader: She talks to her computer. When she types e-mail addresses, she speaks them aloud: "Peter underscore Jones at gmail dot com." And her phone voice! She spends a bunch of time on her cell phone interviewing sources for a story she is writing. Here are my notes from this dark period: "Hanna talking on the phone loudly. Loud loud loud loud loud. She talks too loud on the phone. Talk talk talk. Talk all the time. Talk talk talk. Always talking."

**Hanna:** When McNally told the *Times* she followed Roach to his work yurt in the middle of the night, any modern working girl would have winced. It merely confirms our suspicions about their student/teacher, young-hot-girl/old-rich-guy relationship and makes us wonder about who is doing most of the humiliating in this saintly duo. This is what I am thinking again as I follow David into his office this morning. I am an annoying appendage, like those wives who come in to show off newborn infants while everyone's trying to work.

This karmic resentment I send out comes right back at me, leading to our first minor explosion of the day. Little did I know that the first thing my husband does upon arriving at work each
morning is open the fridge and reach for a cold Fresca. It's not even 10 a.m., and Mr. Farmers'-Market-Cruelty-Free-Meat-I'll-Have-a-Decaf-Thanks is having his first soda of the day. Tragically, there is no cold Fresca because "who the hell forgot to put the Frescas in the fridge," and "how hard is it to remember," and I can actually feel him grow hot with anger because I am standing so close. Did I really need to know that the man I love is the office kitchen diva?

The petty toxins multiply. I engage in a conversation with one of his colleagues, a fellow dad at our school, about the latest principal flap. I keep this conversation going just a little too long. I know David is eager to get to his office, which is all the way down the hallway, and turn on his computer. But, to bring him down a notch, I make him stay and listen to this conversation. I know this is wrong. Submitting ourselves to the other's will is not supposed to resemble a tug of war, but rather a soundless, tilting seesaw of recycled bamboo, slowly erasing our egos. (Him. Me. I. Her. We. Wheelie or something like that.) Nonetheless, balance is restored. For the next couple of hours, David and I work peacefully together in his office. We do not share much psychic space but we do create a collegial work environment on a cramped desk, which is not nothing. (David, by the way, will write that I make too much noise—talking loudly on my cell phone or saying e-mail addresses out loud as I type them. This first part is called "reporting," which is my job. The second part is delusional. Don't believe him. We had a lovely time, and I even sat on his lap for a bit.)

Early Afternoon

David: After lunch we walk over to Hanna's office at the Atlantic. She has to talk to her editor about the story she's writing. The editor is a good sport and allows me to come in. It's a joy to watch her at work. I see her best professional self, proposing, scheduling, clarifying, explaining—building a picture of the thrilling article to come. And my presence there contributes just what I'd hoped. I propose ideas. I bounce thoughts off her. Her editor and I agree about a major element of the story, and we change Hanna's mind. She and I are engaged, alive to the same subject. At 3:30, I have to do a conference call, and she deposits me in the cubicule next to hers. We're only 8 feet apart—way within the rules—but I can't see her. It freaks me out. I've been looking at her nonstop for nine hours: Not seeing her for five minutes makes me jittery. What's she doing over there?

Hanna: Back at my office, David gets to be the appendage. When we explain to my colleagues what we are up to, the women, especially, react with horror. "Yuck," "Creepy," "Suffocating." "I would die after two hours." One person mentions the Saturday Night Live "Love Toilet" parody commercial, which, when you watch it again, is really quite devastatingly apt, especially given how many times David has had to wait for me outside the bathroom.

Late Afternoon

Hanna: After a quick trip to the Foggy Bottom Farmers' Market, we head off to pick up the kids at ballet class. (I am intentionally skipping the half-hour I waited around for him in his office while he and a couple of Slate boys watched soccer. Because this is an outrageous thing to do in the middle of a workday, and I want to be positive.)

David: When we return to the house in the evening after picking up the kids, we have our only rule violation of the day. I stop just inside the door to check my e-mail. Hanna keeps walking through to the kitchen—25 feet away—to get food for the kids. I look up and yell at her for breaking the barrier. She barks back: "You're spaced out on your BlackBerry!" The point being, I guess, that it was my unmindfulness that caused the split. If I had been paying attention to her and to my family's needs, I would have been heading to the kitchen, too. Instead, I isolated myself in the electronic world, fleeing to my BlackBerry island. My mental separation was the real crime, not her physical one.

Evening

David: By the time we finally get the children bathed and bedded, I'm exhausted, much more than on a usual day. It is draining to be watched all the time, even by your wife. Weirdly, we have nothing to say to each other. We don't have any stories to tell each other about our day because we lived the same day. We don't have questions for each other because we know the answers. We can't lie and exaggerate and twist the day's happenings to gain sympathy—the usual evening activity for most married couples, I suspect—because the other will call foul. This is where the Buddhism may come in. We lived in the moment: Being together all the time eliminated the need for the usual daily reflection because we already spent every minute of the day reflecting.

The experiment was not nearly as disturbing as I expected it to be. I hope that's partly a tribute to the strength of our marriage—we find it easy to keep company with each other, thank God. I'm sure it's partly a tribute to the routinized banality of our lives, which ensured no melodrama. On the other hand, I don't think I could have made it another 24 hours. The next morning, as soon as I woke up, I grabbed the sports section, fled to the downstairs bathroom—one flight of stairs, 50 feet, and a psychological mile from Hanna—and locked myself in.

Hanna: At ballet, I notice that some harmony has snuck up on us. I have to admit that this day has not been creepy or yucky or suffocating. All in all, it's been quite pleasant. It's been admittedly exhausting to be watched all day, even if the witness is your beloved familiar husband. But the constant scrutiny has saved us from a layer of artifice. Many a married couple runs through the what-did-you-do-today ritual at the end of the day. This is the marriage's last vestiges of the awkward first date. It
often includes elements of theater, drama, self-consciousness, self-pity, and bragging. It's often unsatisfying because it gets interrupted by the kids. Today, we got to skip this strained ritual. I know what David did today because I was there. This feels more like the happy, silent pauses at dinner after a day spent alone, together. We leave the ballet class for the car, holding hands. The next morning, I have to admit, I feel slightly disappointed when I wake up and David has already snuck away.

*Correction, June 3, 2008: The piece originally described the Buddhist couple as claustrophobes. We meant, of course, that they were claustrophiles. (Return to the corrected sentence.*)

**fighting words**

**A Tale of Two Tell-Alls**

If you want to read a serious book about the intervention in Iraq, look to Douglas Feith.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, June 2, 2008, at 11:40 AM ET

When Bush's Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill defected from the Cabinet in 2002 and Ron Suskind told O'Neill's story of being surrounded by fools, Michael Kinsley observed that the president deserved all he got from the book. Anyone dumb enough to hire a fool like O'Neill in the first place ought to have known what to expect. So it goes with the ludicrous figure of Scott McClellan. I used to watch this mooncalf blunder his way through press conferences and think, *Exactly where do we find such men?* For the job of swabbing out the White House stables, yes. But for any task involving the weighing of words? Hah! Now it seems that he realizes, and with a shock at that, that there was a certain amount of "spin" or propaganda involved in his job description. Well, give the man a cigar. Beyond that, the book is effectively valueless to the anti-war camp since, as McClellan says of the president, "I consider him a fundamentally decent person, and I do not believe he or his White House deliberately or consciously sought to deceive the American people."

Bertrand Russell's principle of evidence against interest—if the pope has doubts about Jesus, his doubts are by definition more newsworthy than the next person's—doesn't really justify the ocean of coverage in which the talentless McClellan is currently so far out of his depth. For one thing, he doesn't supply anything that can really be called evidence. For another, having not noticed any "propaganda machine" at the time he was perspiring his way through his simple job, he has a clear mercenary interest in discovering one in retrospect.

If you want to read a serious book about the origins and consequences of the intervention in Iraq in 2003, you owe it to yourself to get hold of a copy of Douglas Feith's *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*. As undersecretary of defense for policy, Feith was one of those most intimately involved in the argument about whether to and, if so, how to put an end to the regime of Saddam Hussein. His book contains notes made in real time at the National Security Council, a trove of declassified documentation, and a thoroughly well-organized catalog of sources and papers and memos. Feith has also done us the service of establishing a [Web site](http://www.douglasfeith.com) where you can go and follow up all his sources and check them for yourself against his analysis and explanation. There is more of value in any chapter of this archive than in any of the ramblings of McClellan. As I write this on the first day of June, about a book that was published in the first week of April, the books pages of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Boston Globe* have not seen fit to give Feith a review. An article on his book, written by the excellent James Risen for the news pages of the *New York Times*, has not run. This all might seem less questionable if it were not for the still-ballooning acreage awarded to Scott McClellan.

Feith was and is very much identified with the neoconservative wing of the Republican Party, and he certainly did not believe that Saddam Hussein was ever containable in a sanctions "box." But he is capable of separating his views from his narrative, and this absorbing account of the interdepartmental and ideological quarrels within the Bush administration, on the Afghanistan and Guantanamo fronts as well as about Iraq, will make it difficult if not impossible for people to go on claiming that, for instance:

1. There was no rational reason to suspect a continuing Iraqi WMD threat. Feith's citations from the [Duelfer Report](http://www.douglasfeith.com/ch4.html) alone are stunning in their implications.
2. That alternatives to war were never discussed and that the administration was out to "get" Saddam Hussein from the start.
3. That the advocates of regime change hoped and indeed planned to anoint Ahmad Chalabi as a figurehead leader in Baghdad.
4. That there was no consideration given to postwar planning.

It's also of considerable interest to learn that the main argument for adhering to the Geneva Conventions was made *within* the Pentagon and that the man who expressed the most prewar misgivings concerning Iraq was none other than Donald Rumsfeld. Feith doesn't deny that he has biases of his own. One of these concerns the widely circulated charge that his own Office of Special Plans was engaged in cherry-picking and stoviping intelligence. Another is the criticism, made by most of the neocon faction, of Paul Bremer and the occupation regime that he ran in Baghdad. In all instances, however, Feith writes in an unapar在我国 from any sides.
Without explicitly saying so, Feith makes a huge contribution to the growing field of considering the Central Intelligence Agency to be beyond salvage. Its role as a highly politicized and bewilderingly incompetent body, disastrous enough in having left us under open skies before Sept. 11, 2001, became something more like catastrophic with the gross mishandling of Iraq. For these revelations alone, this book is well worth the acquisition. (I might add that, unlike McClellan, Feith is contributing all his earnings and royalties to charities that care for our men and women in uniform.)

I don't know Feith, but I can pay him two further compliments: When you read him on a detail with which you yourself are familiar, he is factually reliable (and it's not often that one can say that, believe me). And his prose style is easy, nonbureaucratic, dry, and sometimes amusing. If a book that was truly informative was called a "tell-all" by our media, then War and Decision would qualify. As it is, we seem to reserve that term for the work of bigmouths who have little, if anything, to impart.

Manny Howard, who chronicled his experience subsistence farming in Brooklyn for New York magazine, described his poultry harvest as "tedious and grotesque work." Afterward, he "laid down on the driveway with three bottles of beer." Even Herrick Kimball, author of the great How To Butcher a Chicken blog, admits to being "grossed out by the whole thing" at first. "That is the typical modern reaction," he writes. Many of the other Web pages devoted to urban chicken farming say nothing at all about butchering. At sites like thecitychicken.com, you can learn about coop construction, hatching eggs, feeding, protecting, and diagnosing chickens. Everything, in short, except what is for me the most satisfying part: the bloodying.

In some cities you can take classes in chicken farming—proof that these next-geners are most enthusiastic about the theoretical aspects of agriculture. Peat Willicutt teaches such a course in Minneapolis. How to lop off heads is not a part of the curriculum, per se, he told me, although students do ask. And if they ask, he tells them. In some cases, he shows them. But not in the classroom. Blood and guts are extracurricular activities. The students in Willicutt's urban chicken farming course, which fills to capacity every time it's offered, run the gamut from what he calls "pet-oriented" to what I call pot-oriented. It is in deference to the former that Willicutt doesn't draw blood in the classroom.

But I wonder whether pet farmers know that chickens get sick and hurt, and that sometimes killing can be an act of mercy. Even in cities, chickens have predators. On 29th Street in San Francisco, hungry, street-smart raccoons used to line up on my roof, staring at the hens I kept under my deck, waiting for me to slip one night and leave their door open. In the woods, where I live now, I have monkey-wrenched the dinner plans of foxes and bobcats, and I can't honestly say that my farmerly instinct for intervention was ever in the chickens' best interest. It was in my best interest, because I don't want predators thinking of my coop as a three-star restaurant. Once word gets around the animal kingdom that you're serving chicken, your life becomes a Saturday morning cartoon, and then forget about ever getting anything done.

Worst-case scenario: I talked a fox out of a hen recently, and as far as I could tell, the hen was not hurt. No blood, nothing broken, hardly even any feathers missing. She seemed as if she was in shock, so I waited for her to snap out of it. For hours she...
wouldn't eat or drink or move. She just stood there, like me. I can't say what was going through her little mind, but mine was wondering whether Jack Kevorkian ever kept chickens. Meanwhile, very, very slowly, she died. I should have helped her along, saved her some suffering. I should have Dr. Deathed her.

"It behooves everyone to once in their life take part in the killing of their meat," Willicutt told me. "I don't really have mixed feelings. I've made my peace with it. It's an essential evil of omnivores."

I can vouch for "essential." I can vouch for "omnivore." My brain and my body crave meat with my salad. In fact, I think I might die without it. For sure I'd go crazy. But, personally, I don't know about "evil." I'll own it: There's a part of me that likes to kill. When I do what I do with a hatchet and a chicken, I feel like crap, and I feel like God. I feel alive and in love and closer than ever to death. So I guess that is, for me, mixed feelings, yes. And the mix itself is welcome and intensely gratifying. In fact, it's almost too much. Too swirly, too soupy. I can tell you that the part of this swirl which seems "good," as opposed to "evil," has absolutely nothing to do with foiling the chicken industry or saving the environment or taking personal responsibility for my role in the food chain. It has to do with getting a little bit bloody and gross, like the complicated, hungry animal that I am.

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foreigners

McCain, Obama, and American Power

The next president's first foreign-policy task will be to overcome the Bush legacy.

By Stephen Sestanovich

Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 12:23 PM ET

John McCain has a big idea about how to deal with America's friends: **unite them** in a "League of Democracies." Barack Obama has a big idea about how to deal with our enemies: talk to them. These proposals—alternately praised and ridiculed by commentators across the political spectrum—have produced the first real foreign-policy debate of the long presidential campaign. Even George Bush, sounding alarms about "appeasement," has weighed in.

Yet all this controversy has missed the main point. Whether the candidates' ideas are good or bad depends, above all, on whether the United States has the power to make them work. Because the Bush administration has weakened America's global position, it will leave its successor less freedom to embrace new ideas, even some good ones.

Take McCain's plan, which should have a lot going for it. As he reminds us, democracies have always been our most reliable allies. Bringing more of them under a single tent could pay major dividends for American policy. And it would show the United States intends to listen more to other countries' views, especially those of our disgruntled European allies.

So what's the problem? It's not, as some critics claim, that democracies often disagree with one another, or that Washington has to work with autocracies, too. Had this proposal surfaced at the beginning of Bush's tenure rather than at its end, such objections would have mattered far less than they do today. In fact, other governments would probably have suppressed their reservations and joined. Grumblers and doubters alike would have expected the United States to make the new organization count—and they would not have wanted to be left out. (We've seen this happen before. Why did skeptical European governments accept Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations after World War I even though they disliked it—and him? Because American power could not be ignored.)

But that was then. If, on Jan. 20, 2009, President McCain were to ask his closest advisers how his idea was likely to play out, they'd have bad news for him. Even governments that have wanted Washington to put more stock in international institutions will resist this new forum. They will no longer automatically expect the United States to be able to make it work effectively—and it's not clear what McCain could say or do on Jan. 21 to make them think otherwise. Fearing failure, they won't tie themselves to an ambitious but amorphous American initiative.

The decline of American power means that an idea designed to unite democracies would, in fact, divide them. Seeing this, a McCain administration would have to scale back the plan, trying instead to build out slowly from our existing alliances. These relationships are themselves in need of mending, but making them work better is not beyond America's means.

The same fate would surely await McCain's sister proposal to kick Russia out of the G-8 because it's not a real democracy. It isn't, but the United States hardly has the power to kick anyone out of this group. To strengthen solidarity among democracies, a new President McCain might actually end up **expanding** the G-8—adding nondemocratic China, among others, and then forming a democratic faction within the larger group, composed of America's allies. Less drastic, much more doable.

Like Sen. McCain's proposal, Barack Obama's readiness to talk to America's enemies, especially Iran, reflects a healthy dissatisfaction with the determined passivity of current American diplomacy. The Bush administration has rejected the idea that negotiations can be a tool to stimulate division within Iran's leadership, to open independent lines of communication with Iranian society, to put the other side on the defensive—not
to mention to actually solve problems. Nobody who becomes president next year is going to accept these self-imposed rigidities, which have imprisoned Bush.

Yet, even if American diplomacy needs re-energizing, sitting down with adversaries is not by itself a strategy, much less one that can succeed without help. Negotiations produce good results only if the other side has strong reasons, positive and negative, to change course. (That, of course, is the real lesson of Munich: Neville Chamberlain’s mistake was not that he played poker with Hitler, but that he thought he could hold his own with a weak hand.)

So if, on Day 1, President Obama asked his advisers what his hand looked like, they would also have some bad news for him. They would inform him that in most respects—regional influence, nuclear options, energy wealth—Iran's position has grown stronger in this decade. Even in Iraq, where Bush's surge has narrowed some of Tehran's options, someone is bound to point out that the United States has spent a year bemoaning increased interference by Iran without doing anything about it. Before drawing new red lines that define "unacceptable" Iranian conduct, Obama ought to hear how little Washington has done to back up its previous red lines.

There would be a real irony in this briefing for President Obama. Because he was prepared to negotiate with Iran, he'd have to worry about credibility more than President Bush does. George Bush isn't actually trying to communicate with Iran, and this has left him free not to worry whether they take him seriously. His successor can't be so careless.

For the last half-century and more, one president after another has taken office thinking that his predecessor had let America's position in the world deteriorate. Today's candidates share this view. But their ambitious ideas rest on the hope that it's not true. Both McCain and Obama are describing their view. But their ambitious ideas rest on the hope that it's not true. Both McCain and Obama are describing their position in the world as stronger. It is also in Rome despite the fact that he has been formally forbidden from traveling to Europe by the European Union, which considers him persona non grata. For the last several years, his regime has beaten and murdered his political opponents in Zimbabwe so blatantly that even the Europeans noticed.

Nevertheless, it seems the Italians can't prevent him from being there this week. Since the summit is a U.N. event, U.N. rules take precedence over European or Italian border rules. This is not the first time Mugabe has taken advantage of this little loophole. He attended a previous U.N. food conference in Rome in 2002, during which he stayed at a five-star hotel on the Via Veneto, sent his wife out shopping, and bragged about how his "land reform" program—i.e., the wholesale theft of land from white Zimbabwean farmers and redistribution among political supporters—was going to enrich his nation's food supply.

It hasn't. According to Oxfam, 80 percent of Zimbabwe's population now lives on less than $1 a day, thanks to Mugabe's policies, and lacks access to basic foods and clean water. Inflation is at 100,000 percent, this year's harvest was poor, and Zimbabweans are fleeing their country in large numbers. Meanwhile, Mugabe is notorious for using food aid as a political weapon, distributing it only to those who reliably vote for him. Thus does his presence at a U.N. food summit contain many layers of troubling irony. Stephen Smith, the Australian foreign minister and one of Mugabe's more vocal critics, put it less delicately: "Robert Mugabe turning up to a conference dealing with food security or food issues is, in my view, frankly obscene."

And, as noted, the timing couldn't be worse: The United Nations is still (or should be) smarting from its recent failure to persuade Burma's generals—also notorious for using food aid as a political weapon—to accept any outside aid. As a result, a quarter of a million or so Burmese are still not receiving a steady supply of food and water a month after Cyclone Nargis hit the Burmese coast. The U.N. secretary-general did, after much wrangling, pay a visit to Burma, and the generals did, after much stalling, agree to allow a few foreign aid workers into the country. But even the United Nations' highest-ranking food-relief official recently conceded that "urgent work remains" to be done in Burma. Translation: The regime is still refusing to let

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**Food Fight**

Robert Mugabe's Roman holiday highlights the United Nations' ineffectiveness.

By Anne Applebaum

Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 7:06 AM ET

With an unerring sense of timing, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe arrived in Rome this weekend, thereby demonstrating the profound limitations of international diplomacy. Indeed, it's hard to think of any other single gesture that would so effectively reveal the ineffectiveness of international institutions in the conduct of both human rights and food-aid policy. Even someone standing atop the dome of St. Peter's, megaphone in hand, shouting, "The U.N. is useless! The EU is useless!" couldn't have clarified the matter more plainly.

For, yes, Mugabe is in Rome, at the invitation of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, which is holding a conference to discuss the very real international food crisis. He is also in Rome despite the fact that he has been formally forbidden from traveling to Europe by the European Union, which considers him persona non grata. For the last several years, his regime has beaten and murdered his political opponents in Zimbabwe so blatantly that even the Europeans noticed.

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relief workers travel to the afflicted region, still refusing to let others into the country, still refusing to let foreign ships land on the coast with aid.

In fact, the root of Burma's humanitarian crisis is a political crisis. The root of Zimbabwe's humanitarian crisis is a political crisis, too. But because the United Nations was never set up to deal with political crises, it can't really address either humanitarian crisis. Officially, the United Nations has to respect the decision of the Burmese government not to feed its people. Officially, the United Nations feels it has to invite Mugabe to Rome, despite the E.U. ban. Indeed, one U.N. official justified his presence on the grounds that the United Nations is "about inclusiveness, not exclusivity," and besides, the food issue is so serious and this week's food conference is so significant that "the rest is irrelevant."

But that, of course, is nonsense: It is "the rest," in this case—the vicious dictatorship, the manipulation of agricultural policies for political ends, the fear and violence—that matter, not the rise in international commodity prices, the mass planting of biofuels, or drought. To their credit, Europe's leaders have tried to address "the rest," to put pressure on Mugabe by restricting his movements; to shun meetings he attends; and to demonstrate, in general, that his behavior is unacceptable. Though not especially effective so far, this isn't an entirely pointless policy: Mugabe clearly cares how Europe treats him, or he wouldn't go out of his way to defy its ban.

The European boycott might work a bit better, however, if the United Nations didn't help the Zimbabwean leader to flout it. Indeed, the United Nations should join it. If this really is a serious food conference, after all, an egregious abuser of his own country's food policy has no place at the table.

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**history lesson**

**After the Assassination**

How Gene McCarthy's response to Bobby Kennedy's murder crippled the Democrats.

By David Greenberg

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 6:59 AM ET

Forty years ago, Robert F. Kennedy was murdered on the very night he defeated his fellow anti-war insurgent Eugene McCarthy in the California Democratic presidential primary. This week the news media are full of remembrances of RFK, rehearsing how his assassination, echoing his brother's five years earlier, dashed a generation's hopes for a new era of liberalism. But in a political season that resembles 1968, another aspect of the assassination is also worth considering, especially with the Democratic Party now seeking to unify its ranks. For in 1968, the persistence of intra-party divisions—which helped usher in the presidency of Richard M. Nixon—stemmed not just from the tragedy of Kennedy's murder but also from McCarthy's own subsequent failure of leadership. McCarthy's refusal to extend a hand to disoriented Kennedy supporters after June 6 left the party sundered, directionless, and ripe for defeat.

Eugene McCarthy never liked the Kennedys. At least since 1960, when he had placed Adlai Stevenson's name in nomination at the Democratic convention that chose JFK for president, the high-minded Minnesota senator had resented the hardball style and political success of the whole family. Understandably, he begrudged RFK's entry into the 1968 race. After all, back in November 1967, McCarthy had courageously challenged Lyndon B. Johnson, a sitting president, for the Democratic nomination, arguing that it was time to bring home the half-million Americans fighting in Vietnam. McCarthy's close second-place finish in the March 12 New Hampshire primary exposed Johnson's profound vulnerabilities. Only then did Kennedy—after some perfunctory soundings about a joint anti-war effort with McCarthy—throw his hat in the ring, quickly earning him treatment as a more plausible pretender to the nomination. McCarthy, who later claimed RFK had promised him he wouldn't run, was livid.

Two weeks later, LBJ forswore a second term. Anti-war Democrats rushed to align with one insurgent or the other. McCarthy won the intellectuals, the professionals, and the young, who, distancing themselves from their long-haired contemporaries, vowed to get "Clean for Gene." Kennedy attracted blue-collar, Hispanic, and black support. He complained that McCarthy got the "A" students, and he got the "B" students.

The primary battles were brutal, producing at least as much bad feeling as this year's. Against a backdrop of violent campus protests and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., McCarthy and Kennedy squared off in Indiana, Nebraska, Oregon, and California. (Not until 1972 did primaries become the dominant method of delegate selection.) Playing to his upscale base, McCarthy blasted Kennedy for having wiredapped King while attorney general. RFK, for his part, catered to the concerns of his new base—stressing, for example, his former credentials as "the chief law enforcement officer of the United States" in front of audiences worried about rising crime and urban riots. He also assailed McCarthy's previous opposition to a minimum-wage law and his allegedly weak civil rights record—enduring charges of being "ruthless" and dishonest in distorting his rival's record.

Even as McCarthy styled himself the clean politician, however, he dished it out, too. He mocked Kennedy and his supporters. A major gaffe occurred in Oregon, when McCarthy sniffed that Kennedy supporters were "less intelligent" than his own and belittled Indiana (which had by then gone for Kennedy) for...
lacking a poet of the stature of Robert Lowell—a friend of McCarthy's who often traveled with him. McCarthy also took swipes at Kennedy for chasing after black and white working-class votes.

More negativity infused a debate before the California primary. McCarthy made two ill-considered statements: that he would accept a coalition government that included Communists in Saigon and that only the relocation of inner-city blacks would solve the urban problem. Kennedy pounced, portraying the former idea as soft on communism and the latter diagnosis as a scheme to bus tens of thousands of ghetto residents into white, conservative Orange County. Angered at these characterizations, McCarthy resolved not to support Kennedy if he became the nominee.

By the time of Kennedy's murder, there was no love lost between the two men. Still, McCarthy's reaction to the assassination was singularly hardhearted. One aide recalled him sneering about his fallen rival, "Demagoguing to the last." Another heard him say that Kennedy "brought it on himself"—implying, by perverse logic, that because Kennedy had promised military support to the state of Israel, he had somehow provoked Sirhan Sirhan, the Arab-American gunman who killed him. (In fact, Sirhan had long not to support Kennedy if he became the nominee.

Kennedy's death, of course, did not leave McCarthy alone in the race. All along, many party regulars had preferred Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who announced his candidacy in April but sat out the primaries, instead building his delegate base in states without primaries—which back then constituted a majority. Indeed, with Kennedy's assassination, many observers thought that front-runner status had devolved not to McCarthy but to Humphrey. Yet while McCarthy formally suspended his campaign in recognition of Kennedy's death, and although he proceeded to engage in various acts of willful self-sabotage, he nonetheless won a big victory in the June 18 New York primary and swept around the country in search of uncommitted delegates. Yet, stubbornly, he refused to make any gestures of reconciliation toward Kennedy's inner circle or his millions of supporters.

A few key Kennedy aides soon prevailed on McGovern to join the race as a kind of placeholder at the upcoming Chicago convention—a possible nominee but also a candidate for Kennedy's delegates to rally behind until a deal could be struck. The move, of course, also made clear to McCarthy that they hadn't forgiven his various digs at RFK during the primary season. Meanwhile, others started an informal "Draft Ted" movement to get the youngest Kennedy brother, then 36, to pick up the standard. Both ploys reflected a recognition that Humphrey, for all his delegates, still wasn't the inevitable nominee and that McCarthy's cache of several hundred delegates, when coupled with Kennedy's, might still produce an anti-war nominee.

For a moment it looked possible. In Chicago, Richard Goodwin—the former JFK aide who'd gone to work for McCarthy, switched to RFK, then returned to the McCarthy camp after the assassination—sent word to friends in the Kennedy camp that McCarthy wanted to talk. Privately, the senator told Kennedy in-law Steve Smith that he would be willing to step aside in favor of Ted. But even in concession, McCarthy couldn't be gracious. He told Smith that he would take such a step for Ted, but he wouldn't have done it for Bobby. The gratuitous jab killed any prospect of a deal. In his conversations with Humphrey, meanwhile, McCarthy insisted that he not choose Ted Kennedy as his running mate.

McCarthy made almost no efforts on his own behalf at the convention. In a debate with Humphrey and McGovern before the California delegation, he refused to state his position on the war, saying, "The people know my position." He didn't even speak during the convention's debate over what the platform would say about Vietnam. But when Humphrey got the nod, McCarthy suggested that, as the winner of the most primary votes, he had been robbed of the nomination. He didn't endorse Humphrey until Oct. 29, and even then he took swipes at the vice president for his stands on the war and the draft. Humphrey lost to Nixon by 0.7 percent of the popular vote, although Nixon took 301 electoral votes to Humphrey's 191.

Whether Robert Kennedy could have beaten Humphrey for the nomination is impossible to say. Certainly, it would have been hard. But following Kennedy's death, Gene McCarthy's willful aloofness and inability to bring unity to a party cleaved during a hard-fought primary season amounted to a second tragedy for the Democrats.

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**hot document**

**Bill Murray's Pre-nup**

Want to marry Dr. Peter Venkman? Just sign here.

By Bonnie Goldstein

Monday, June 2, 2008, at 4:15 PM ET

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From: Bonnie Goldstein

Posted Monday, June 2, 2008, at 4:15 PM ET

Days before their 1997 wedding ceremony, comedian Bill Murray and his wife, Jennifer Butler Murray, entered into a (excerpted below and on the following pages). "Jennifer … is aware that Bill is a person of very substantial means and
income," the document said (Page 2). The agreement stipulated that Murray would "continue to retain all right title and interest … to all separate property he may now own or hereafter acquire" (Page 3). As a wedding present, Bill agreed to buy his bride a modest house ("not exceeding one million dollars") of her own ("title … taken in Jennifer's sole name"—Page 5). In the "event of marital discord," Jennifer would relinquish her rights to alimony (Page 4) and instead receive within 60 days of the marriage's dissolution a lump-sum "marital award" of $7 million (Page 5).

Such legal precautions, the couple believed, would "enhance and encourage a harmonious marital relationship" and avoid any "conflict or controversy in the future" (below). But the course of true love never did run smooth. Last week, Jennifer sued to dissolve the union (see excerpt on Page 6) in Charleston, S.C., family court. Jennifer cited Bill's "adultery, addiction to marijuana and alcohol, abusive behavior, physical abuse, sexual addictions and frequent abandonment." She has asked the court to determine whether the pre-nup is valid. The couple has four children.

Send Hot Document ideas to documents@slate.com. Please indicate whether you wish to remain anonymous.

human nature
Saturated Fat
The genetic limits of obesity.
By William Saletan
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:58 AM ET

Good news: Child obesity in the United States has stopped increasing. Government data analyzed in the Journal of the American Medical Association tell the story. According to a New York Times summary, "in 1980, 6.5 percent of children age 6 to 11 were obese, but by 1994 that number had climbed to 11.3 percent. By 2002, the number had jumped to 16.3 percent, but it has now appeared to stabilize around 17 percent."

Experts are jubilant. Here's the Washington Post:

"This lets us know that the epidemic is not an unstoppable epidemic and gives us hope our collective work can reverse it," said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and chief executive of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a private nonprofit group that helps fund anti-obesity programs. "It tells us that when we all work together—parents and
schools, government, voluntary organizations, industry—we can make a difference."

The Associated Press reports similar excitement:

Dr. Reginald Washington, a children's heart specialist in Denver and member of an American Academy of Pediatrics obesity committee, said "the country should be congratulated" if the rates have in fact peaked. "There are a lot of people trying to do good things to try to stem the tide," Washington said. Some schools are providing better meals and increasing physical education, and Americans in general "are more aware of the importance of fruits and vegetables," he said.

But wait: There's a problem. The stabilization may not be due to remedial interventions. According to the Times and other papers,

One concern is that the lull could represent a natural plateau that would have occurred regardless of public health efforts. "It may be that we've reached some sort of saturation in terms of the proportion of the population who are genetically susceptible to obesity in this environment," Dr. Ogden [the study's lead author] said. "A more optimistic view is that some things are working."

Bummer, huh? All that work we've been doing to teach healthy eating and exercise habits—irrelevant? Is the leveling off in child obesity just a product of genetic exhaustion?

I sure hope so.

I don't mean to dismiss the importance of changing habits. We'll need every bit of those changes to drive obesity back down to 1980 levels. But when you hear talk of making the world a better place, don't underestimate how much worse things can get. Job number one is to halt the frightening increase in fat. And the strongest ally we could ask for in holding that line isn't effort or education. It's genetics.

If, at 17 percent, we've hit the "saturation" point for child obesity, we're extremely lucky. There's no historical basis for knowing where the saturation point is, since our species has never before lived in an environment so full of ease and abundance. The far more dangerous possibility is that the saturation point is higher. In fact, given that we evolved in conditions of scarcity, it's logical to suspect that the tendency to seek and store fat is nearly universal. As the Los Angeles Times observes, "the idea that childhood weights have simply topped out doesn't quite square ... [One expert] said the fact that 60% of U.S. adults were either overweight or obese suggested that children had plenty of room to grow."

Two years ago, when I was researching the global escalation of obesity, I came across the work of Barry Popkin, an epidemiologist who studies obesity and hunger at the University of North Carolina. He's the guy who laid out the theory of how progress has changed our causes of death. In the hunter-gatherer era, if we didn't find food, we died. In the agricultural era, if our crops perished, we died. In the industrial era, famine receded, but infectious diseases killed us. Now we've achieved such control over nature that we're dying not of starvation or infection, but of abundance.

You want a really scary explanation for the plateau in child obesity? Part of it, according to Popkin, may be economic. "When economic times are difficult, we always slow things down on lots of things, like eating," he told the Post.

In other words, as the economy recovers and advances, so will obesity. And nobody knows where it'll end.

So let's stop "congratulating" ourselves for "trying to do good things" and "make a difference" in the fight against obesity. Let's pray that a force stronger than human will is behind the current stabilization. Doing good is less important than being well.

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Spoiling Sex and the City
Four women argue about the clothes, the men, and the ending.
By Erinn Bucklan, Meghan O'Rourke, Dana Stevens, and June Thomas
Saturday, May 31, 2008, at 7:46 AM ET

Readers take note: This discussion is designed to be read by people who have already seen the Sex and the City film. There are REALLY BIG SPOILERS ahead. GIGANTIC, ENORMOUS SPOILERS right in the VERY FIRST LINES. Read at your own risk.

Dana Stevens: Let's kick off with the most spoiler-y question of all. What did you all think of the ending? When Carrie finally married Big—after he'd left her at the altar (well, near it) in the movie's first act—did it make you swoon, gag, swoon while gagging, remain poker-faced, or what?
**Meghan O’Rourke:** I felt numb. The movie was heading toward *Schindler’s List* length. The whole thing felt bloated and self-important—precisely what the zippy TV show never was.

**Erinn Bucklan:** It felt like the characters hadn't changed, especially Carrie, even after all that drama. These women will continue their pattern: blow up at a man, bond with the ladies, buy a few things, and go back to a man.

**Meghan:** The show (and even more so, the original book by Candace Bushnell) was essentially episodic and nonteleological. And that was part of what was good about it: It dispensed with one-dimensional Cinderella narratives about women and talked about what dating life in NYC was really like. But the movie reneged on that essential contract with the viewers.

**June:** I agree. This movie convinced me that at least in some cases, telly is better.

**Meghan:** I never loved the show all that much, but I tuned in for the clothes and to have something keeping me company as I paid my bills. It was short, tight, and sorta charming (like S.J. Parker herself). I thought the movie was shallow and materialistic. And the materialism of the show feels very different in 2008 than in 2000. E.g., Carrie, after Big jilts her, says, "I feel like I took a bullet." Um, really? You mean, like a soldier? It totally animated the moralist in me.

**Erinn:** It's so funny that you bring up that "bullet" line. So many audience members were sobbing throughout my screening, and I was struck by hearing more crying in that movie than during any serious war movie or mourning scene I've watched in a loooong time. I left thinking, Geez, people are really hurting for love.

**Dana:** Erinn, can you describe your relationship to the show as our resident hater? Did you watch it regularly despite (or because of) the fact it got on your nerves?

**Erinn:** I actually did watch it regularly because so many people around me were obsessed, and, well, I did like to track the cartoonish fashions. It was a train-wreck of a group of women.

**June:** One thing I really missed in this movie was work. Yeah, yeah, the apartments and clothes were always beyond their pocketbooks, but they did have jobs. In the movie, Samantha was still working but hated what her job had turned into—got no pleasure from it. Miranda doesn't seem to like her work, but she's responsible and knows she has to do it. Carrie didn't do any bloody work, though she seemed to have produced some books. Charlotte's got her man. But there was no joy in work.

**Meghan:** There was no joy in anything! There was just a lot of fear. And porn, or what counts for porn in NYC: The movie opens with the money shot, as it were—a beautiful view of a stunning prewar penthouse that Carrie and Big want to buy and live in.

My big problem with the movie is that no one talked about anything. Steve fucks another woman when Miranda won't have sex with him (they've had sex once in six months). And she gets mad and won't forgive him. But there's no discussion of what role her frigidity played or whether they might be able to get past it. The film invokes all these contemporary koans about what's hard about marriage (commitment, fidelity, etc.). But it never investigates them with any pathos.

**Erinn:** It's true. These women are supposed to be so sophisticated. But they are always so emotionally crude.

**June:** And the big dilemmas the characters face are over nothing—Steve did something wrong, but thoughtlessly, unintentionally, almost accidentally; Big jilts Carrie, but only because he wanted to talk to her before the wedding and forgot that brides don't always have their cell phones handy (there were no pockets in that Vivienne Westwood, after all—maybe grooms should see the wedding dress beforehand so they realize that).

So the characters weren't asked to compromise—just to forgive transgressions that are almost random.

**Dana:** Anyone notice that Miranda never once asked Steve the most obvious thing to ask when you get cheated on: Who was she? Maybe the movie didn't want to make a big thing of the rival, but it seemed unnatural for the subject not to at least come up.

**Meghan:** OK, but here's what I liked about the movie: that little stretch of real melancholy in the middle after Big jilts Carrie and the gals go to Mexico. There's an amazing moment when Samantha feeds Carrie yogurt in bed. I confess tears welled up in my eyes. (OK, I'm a sentimental pushover.) But that scene seemed to capture something real about female friendship: It gets stronger, in my experience, as you age and become more vulnerable, as you find yourself living with less drama but, perhaps, more pain. And the way that Samantha and Charlotte in particular tend to Carrie after Big leaves her at the altar felt authentic. My favorite moment in the film—the only one I really will remember, I think—is when Big tries to talk to Carrie on the street after he jilts her and Charlotte screams: NO!

**June:** Yeah, they looked like soldiers protecting and then retrieving their fallen comrade, then nursing her back to life and eventually health and happiness. There's that war imagery again.

**Meghan:** *Ah, but love is war, my friend.* The movie did want us to think that, didn't it? But then it backs away at the last minute.
Dana: When Carrie goes back to the Fifth Avenue penthouse at the end to get her shoes, there's a voice-over line about "going back to our prewar apartment, post-war." The comparison of what happens between her and Big to armed conflict is a pretty explicit, if low-key, theme throughout. But the movie's total divorce from real political events didn't really bother me—SATC needs to be oblivious in that way. Just imagine how much worse it would have been if they'd attempted to slip in some somber hand-wringing about Iraq in between the lovelorn anguish and the Lacroix gowns.

Meghan: Actually, the moral of the story—if this were a Jane Austen novel—would have to be: Don't let the flower girl hold your cell phone. She makes a terrible go-between. Also, don't let careless friends mouth off at your rehearsal dinner about how much marriage sucks.

June: I've got to say, though, Lily's obviously got taste. I know Carrie's style is mixed-up wacky, but bejeweled phones are heinous, and Lily was right to hide it.

Erinn: I knew the minute I saw Carrie's fiendish bridal headgear that she was going to be jilted. She looked horrible. She was selfish and taking that wedding over the top. And she looked ugly to underscore that.

Meghan: Some mixed messages there, no? You should be a bride, but you shouldn't wear a Vivienne Westwood gown and invite 200 people.

June: I thought she looked awesome in the Vivienne Westwood and mousy in the vintage suit she wore in the eventual wedding. The bird was weird, but Carrie's at her best when she's looking weird.

Dana: The bodice to that Vivienne Westwood gown fit horribly! I guess that was supposed to be the look—it was repeated on a dress at the runway show—but it looked like a giant breastplate sticking out 6 inches from her torso! Part of the ongoing warrior subtext, maybe?

June: Here's my question: Do people really come to New York for love? They come for work and worry that they'll never find love because New York's so weird. (Except gay men, but gay Americans—who are surely one of SATC's core fan groups—were severely dissed in this film. There was the Chelsea "he's hot, oh, he's with a guy" moment, then the Mario Cantone character getting together with Stanford (never in a million years for so many reasons) at New Year's. And that, my friends, was it).

Meghan: June, you're totally right: That theme rang hollow for me. People come to NYC for money and for work. That's in fact how Sex and the City the book opens; with a discussion of the fact that love in NYC is impossible because it's not the point.

Dana: What did you all think of the fact that Carrie and Big do finally end up together, after all she goes through to convince herself that he will never stop doing ... that thing Big does? June, I was thinking in particular about your theory that Big should always be a MacGuffin, that when he becomes an actual character everything falls apart.

June: I do think that Big is better when he's a MacGuffin—a cipher that doesn't even have a name. When I see him reading the WSJ in bed at night (a man like him would have to read that before 8 a.m. or not at all) or cutting tomatoes (everybody did an awful lot of food preparation for New York—I have a lot less money than all the characters but I never so much as buy corn, much less shuck it myself), I have to treat him as a real person, and since he's not terriblyconvincing as a big businessman/guy-so-rich-he-has-a-driver-with-him-at-all-times, I lose interest and faith.

I did enjoy (you know what I mean) the jilting because of the way the women responded, but Big's actions made no sense. I still don't know what he wanted exactly—but I don't know that I'm supposed to.

Erinn: I think Big was frightened to commit once again to a woman who would always put her girlfriends above him. If I were the bride and my groom spent the night with his guy friends and I called him distressed about the wedding and my groom didn't come home and never picked up my phone calls (OK, for a good reason, but in a moment of panic, who thinks clearly?), and all I wanted was to "walk in" together but I couldn't because he was surrounded by his pals, if I had the guts, I might have bailed too.

Meghan: I like your sympathy for Big, Erinn, and it's clever to flip the gender like that: We'd read his ambivalence really differently if the genders were reversed. I thought he seemed within his rights. He felt that Carrie was ignoring his ambivalence about having a huge wedding, and he was right. She wasn't listening. Not that she deserved to be jilted, but I lose interest and faith. Not that she deserved to be jilted, but the issue there was more complicated than it might seem. Same with Steve. Yet the movie's writers never let the viewers really contemplate the true back and forth that needs to go into any partnership—which is what, since the movie is about these characters growing up and finally dealing with commitment, I hoped to see. But nope! Instead, it was off to the next iconic moment: A fashion show! A scene with Cosmos! Charlotte being humiliated! Carrie in fur!

Erinn: Very interesting about Big being a MacGuffin. But if that's the case, then what are they striving for? I never thought of the men as not the point. I guess because the women can be so mean to each other (laughing at Charlotte's Montezuma's
revenge; Miranda telling her bff's fiance "you're crazy to get married"; Samantha rushing off the phone when Carrie says she's engaged) that their friendship doesn't seem like the point either. If it's not about men or women, what's the point of the show then?

**June:** They were mean to one another in places. The idea that Charlotte soiling herself would be the really funny thing that finally allowed Carrie to laugh totally baffled me.

**Erinn:** Their friendship is toxic.

**Dana:** I don't have a scatological sense of humor myself. But I have at least one friend who would fall down laughing if I crapped my pants, and that wouldn't mean she loved me any the less.

**June:** OK, now I'm laughing at the thought of you crapping your pants!

**Dana:** Does that mean our friendship is toxic?

**June:** Let me just put it this way: When you notice I've put on 15 pounds, no need to be quite as direct as Mario Cantone's character was to Samantha.

**Dana:** God, we haven't even touched on that horrible fat-Samantha plot development—a moment when you realize that for all its glossy "feminism" the show really is policing women's bodies quite closely. God forbid a 50-year-old woman have the tiniest roll of belly flab, or that a working mother's pubes should go unwaxed.

**June:** As uncomfortable as the pubes thing made me (I wanted to plug my ears and shut my eyes), it was one of the rare moments when the women were presented as having flaws. Samantha was a bitch. (And why didn't anyone else say so?)

**Dana:** But that's the problem. The movie presented it as Miranda's flaw (having visible pubic hair) instead of Samantha's (being a bitch).

**Meghan:** To answer your question, Erinn: I think the point of the show was to try to capture something accurate about the rhythms of mating in NYC in the shadows of hedge funds. I think it wanted to show what it felt like to walk down a West Village street wearing an outfit that would make power brokers (of fashion, of film, of art) turn around. I think it wanted to portray how fleeting interactions between men and women in penthouses could leave deep scars. I think it wanted us to mourn for its characters and to envy them, and to realize how screwy that was—like wanting power more than happiness, a condition many New Yorkers find themselves in. And the show did capture a lot of this stuff (early on, at least). The movie, on the other hand, wanted merely to recapture the iconography of the show.

**Erinn:** That makes sense. Someone told me that when she left New York and moved to Hong Kong she enjoyed the show much more than when she returned here. I think that's important. I just love this city too much to think the meatppacking district's crowd embodies it. Because it doesn't.

I guess, in the end, I actually **liked** the movie as far as the SATC phenomenon goes. I didn't see it as much of a departure from the characters' essences, but this time it was like I was sitting in a really big living room with the jampacked audience hooting and sniffing away. Yes, unfortunately, the craze will go on and the movie will be a hit.

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**jurisprudence**

**Lose That Lawyer**

Do defendants in Georgia have any right at all to competent representation?

By Alan Berlow

Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 4:04 PM ET

During his five years as a justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, four of them as chief justice, Norman S. Fletcher says he voted to affirm "countless" murder convictions and a significant number of death sentences. But today Judge Fletcher is having second thoughts about one man he voted to send to the executioner in June 1993.

Curtis Osborne is scheduled to be put to death by the state of Georgia tomorrow night for a gruesome double murder he committed in 1990. There is no question that Osborne is guilty. But Fletcher says neither Osborne's jury nor the Georgia Supreme Court knew the full truth about his history at the time they made their decisions. Most importantly, he says, they didn't know that Osborne's lawyer was a racist and had never put in the time needed to present his client's mental problems and abused past, having concluded that, "The little nigger deserves the death penalty."

On Monday, despite a letter from Fletcher and other testimony, the Georgia parole board rejected without comment Osborne's appeal to have his sentence commuted to life in prison. This is a monument to the bankruptcy of the constitutional right to be represented by an attorney. The Supreme Court has never explicitly stated what level of competence is required to satisfy the Sixth Amendment's right to counsel, instead inviting state and local bar associations to come up with their own standards. But the local bars have been notoriously unwilling to challenge the performance of their bad-egg members. This case
demonstrates that it's past time for the high court to wade back in and demand rigorous standards to which lawyers are held accountable. Osborne's lawyers are filing a series of last-minute appeals in an attempt to save his life.

The lawyer that Georgia assigned to Curtis Osborne, Johnny Mostiler, barely lifted a finger to defend him. Mostiler never hired a psychiatrist to examine evidence that Osborne was a victim of childhood abuse, and was borderline retarded, despite a court-ordered sanity evaluation that had found "indications of depression, paranoia, and suicidal ideation." He never examined the history of mental illness in Osborne's family because, he said, he didn't know how to conduct that kind of investigation. Mostiler called no expert witnesses to testify for his client and didn't bother to interview the state's experts before they appeared at trial. And he rejected appointment of a second attorney to help with Osborne's defense, which the American Bar Association and all serious death penalty litigators say is essential if a capital murder defendant is to receive a fair trial.

And then there is the matter of Mostiler's alleged racism and how it might have affected his defense of Osborne. The most explosive evidence of racial bias is contained in an affidavit by one Gerald Steven Huey, a client of Mostiler's. In addition to the quote Judge Fletcher cites, Huey says Mostiler made it clear that he would not be spending much money on Osborne's defense because "that little nigger deserves the chair." Huey also charges that Mostiler was offered a plea bargain under which Osborne would have received a life sentence in exchange for a guilty plea, but that the lawyer said he "would never tell Mr. Osborne about it because he deserved to die."

Huey might not be the most credible witness on the planet. He's serving a life sentence for murdering and dismembering a drinking pal and didn't come forward with his claims until 2000, long after Osborne's trial and appeal. But then, Mostiler was dead and couldn't defend himself. But Huey isn't alone in suggesting that Mostiler's racism might have infected Osborne's defense. In March 2000, Derrick Middlebrooks, an African-American on trial for selling cocaine, asked the trial court judge to replace Mostiler, saying the lawyer told him that he wouldn't go to a particular neighborhood "because they niggers would kill him."

Asked by the trial judge about the comments, Mostiler didn't deny them. And in a new affidavit filed on Monday, Arlene Evans, who practiced law in the same county as Mostiler, says she also heard him use "racial slurs like 'nigger.' " She recounted one conversation in which, "Mr. Mostiler said he thought young black men were lazy and asked me why I thought that was so."

Perhaps most importantly, Evans says she has first-hand knowledge of Mostiler's failure to adequately defend Osborne. Evans was initially assigned to Osborne's case, after he was charged with murder in 1990. Because she had never tried a death penalty case, she asked the court to appoint co-counsel, and Mostiler was assigned to work alongside her. But over the next several months, Evans said Mostiler "was always too busy to meet with me or me and Mr. Osborne." Evans says she withdrew from the case in April 1991, eight months after Osborne's arrest, out of frustration, "Because I did not feel I was qualified to handle a death penalty case, and because I did not believe Mr. Mostiler was prepared to defend Curtis Osborne." Unfortunately for Osborne, that left him with only Mostiler. Although Evans insists she has spoken out about her former co-counsel before, it is a great pity that her detailed allegations did not surface until Monday.

In his letter to the parole board, Judge Fletcher explains why he did nothing to correct the injustice in Osborne's representation when the case came to him on appeal in 1993. His "weak response," he said, was a result of the limited review appellate judges provide: They can address only issues raised and ruled on by a lower court judge. Because of Mostiler's "grave shortcomings," the mitigating evidence about his past that might have saved Osborne's life never got a hearing. One state trial judge considered and rejected a claim that Osborne deserved a new trial because of Mostiler's ineffective lawyering, but that ruling came before the evidence of Mostiler's racial views emerged. No court has addressed the evidence that Mostiler's failure to act on his client's behalf might have resulted from his racial animosity. Now the only chance for Osborne is that the Georgia Supreme Court or the U.S. Supreme Court will order a lower court to review Mostiler's track record. It's a slim one.

map the candidates

Victory Lap
Obama visits opposite edges of Virginia, McCain is in central Florida, and Clinton is off the trail.
By E.J. Kalafarski and Chadwick Matlin
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 10:27 AM ET

medical examiner

Your Health This Week
Bed-wetting, SIDS, and emergency contraception.
By Sydney Spiesel
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:02 AM ET

This week, Dr. Sydney Spiesel discusses how to stop bed-wetting, the causes of SIDS, and the best emergency contraception.

Bed-wetting and the stages of sleep
Problem: To state the obvious, bed-wetting is no fun. When parents handle it poorly, and if it's frequent and lasts beyond age 5 or so, the condition can have a devastating effect on a child's sense of self, social relationships, and strivings for independence. Treatment is slow and frequently unsuccessful. On the upside, eventually the problem often cures itself: Only 10 percent of 7-year-old children wet the bed, and as every additional year passes, another 15 percent of the remaining sufferers stop.

Theories: A genetic component has long been suspected because there is a high likelihood that one or both parents of a bed-wetting child have a similar history. Emotional stress may also play a role. But the best-accepted theory has been that the central problem is a developmental disorder of sleep. Superdeep sleep seems a likely culprit because parents almost always say that it is virtually impossible to rouse a child who has wet the bed. In addition, parents who have outfitted their children with bed-wetting-treatment alarms (which ring as soon as they detect drops of moisture) often report that the child sleeps blissfully while the alarm wakes everyone else in the house (though, I should add, these alarms are the single most effective treatment).

New study: Recent research now casts doubt on the superdeep-sleep theory. The researchers studied 35 children between ages 6 and 14 who wet the bed almost every night, comparing them with 21 children who stayed dry. The research involved the use of the new tools in the study of sleep, including brainwave measurements, bladder measurements, and detection of bed-wetting without disturbing the child under study.

Findings: Contrary to expectations, children with severe bed-wetting problems spent more of their night hours in light sleep and fewer of them in the deep stages of sleep than children who do not have this problem. Instead, the children who habitually wet the bed all had significantly smaller bladder capacity than the children with whom they were compared. When nerve endings in their bladder walls detected a sense of fullness, a signal stimulated the bladder wall to contract and at the same time sent an activation signal to the brain, decreasing the depth of sleep. Yet the children couldn't make the final step and wake completely. The researchers speculate that perhaps this is a side effect of the bladder's long-term overstimulation of the brain's arousal center.

Implications: If that speculation is correct, perhaps we should move away from bed-wetting treatments that aim to wake the child—clearly a difficult task if the overloaded brain is blocking the final transition to wakefulness. An alternative might be treatments that minimize the signals sent from the bladder to the brain, so as to allow the bladder wall to tolerate a little more filling and to decrease the frequency of signals sent to the brain's centers that control arousal. Bladder capacity increases as children age (by about an ounce with every year of age) and, gradually, in response to stretching, but increased capacity alone doesn't reliably end bed-wetting.

SIDS and infection

Problem: Sudden infant death syndrome is one of the most terrifying possibilities new parents face. Despite a great deal of research, we still have no clear idea of the mechanism (or mechanisms) for the sudden death of a baby. Nonetheless, epidemiological research points to certain practices to avoid. For example, it is clear that an infant put to sleep on his back, without any props or supports, is much safer than a baby who is allowed to sleep face down. It is also clear that putting a sheepskin in the baby's crib or allowing a sleeping baby's face to be covered increases the risk of SIDS, as does exposure to tobacco smoke. (The use of pacifiers, on the other hand, reduces the risk.)

Question: What other risk factors are there? In England and Wales, all SIDS cases are deeply and intensively studied, and a recent report based on this research suggests that an undetected bacterial infection might sometimes play a role.

New study: The researchers examined the autopsy records of about 550 infants who died suddenly, of unexplained causes, in a recent 10-year period. The cases were divided into three piles. One group contained the babies whose death could be explained, after autopsy, as a result of a noninfectious cause. For instance, these infants may have died as a result of a congenital heart defect or the result of a physical injury. Another group consisted of infants whose death was demonstrably due to a bacterial infection—perhaps pneumonia or meningitis or a blood infection, not detected before death but showing up at autopsy. Finally, for the third and largest cohort of infants, no physical findings could clearly establish a cause of death.

Findings: The autopsy protocol included the isolation of any bacteria found in all the babies' blood, spinal fluid, or tissues. The study looked at the differences between bacteria from infants who died of physical causes (with little reason to think that the baby also had an infection) and bacteria obtained from babies with known infections. Then the researchers compared these patterns with the bacteria from infants whose cause of death was unknown. The results were striking. On average, the kind of bacteria found in infants with an unknown cause of death were much like those from children who died of bacterial infections (and the bacteria found in both of these groups were similar, and often the kinds of germs known to cause deadly infections). On the other hand, the unknown-cause bacterial cultures did not resemble those of the children whose death was caused by injury or congenital heart disease.

Implications: Needless to say, the studies don't prove that infection caused the unexplained deaths. But the suggestive associations point to a new line of research. If unrecognized
bacterial infections turn out to play a greater role in SIDS than previously thought, we might gain new ways to identify infants at risk and, perhaps, even to prevent this dreaded occurrence.

**The best emergency contraception**

**Issue:** When proper contraception isn't available or for whatever reason isn't used, there's another alternative: emergency contraception. It isn't intended to be a replacement for the real thing (for one thing, it's not quite as effective), but for many women it's a far better choice than nothing at all. An estimated 50 million pregnancies worldwide are terminated every year, a solution statistically safer than pregnancy, in terms of mortality rates, but less safe and more costly (in many ways) than preventing pregnancy in the first place.

**Question:** What is emergency contraception? What are the choices? Which method is best? How effective is it, and how safe? An extensive review of the literature, pulling together the results of 81 studies that included almost 46,000 women, compared most of the available regimens.

**Methods:** Emergency contraception usually involves the administration of one or two doses of a medication sometime in the three days following unprotected sex. (Calling it the "morning after pill" gives the wrong idea of the potential time frame.) The first available method was the Yuzpe regimen, introduced in the 1970s: two doses of a hormone combination similar to that contained in some birth control pills. It's not available in American drugstores, but some doctors keep an office supply and give the pills to patients as needed. Plan B, which is available in the United States, uses levonorgestrel, a hormone similar to one produced by the body during pregnancy. And then there's mifepristone (RU-486 or Mifeprex), a medication that blocks the activity of an important hormone needed to sustain pregnancy. Though this drug is licensed in the United States for medical abortions, it isn't licensed for emergency contraception (a before- and after-pregnancy distinction). In addition to these medications are a few other measures that are rarely used, such as a copper IUD called ParaGuard, which can be inserted in the five days following sex and offers effective emergency contraception (as well as ongoing birth control, if it's left in place).

**Findings:** The review clearly showed that the most effective medical option for emergency contraception is mifepristone, which has a failure rate between 0.5 percent and 1 percent. Mifepristone also had the lowest incidence of side effects (some nausea and vomiting and sometimes a slight delay in the resumption of menses). The hormonal methods (Yuzpe and Plan B) carried an increased risk of nausea and vomiting and sometimes caused headaches. Yuzpe and Plan B were half as effective as mifepristone. The ParaGuard was also effective, with a failure of roughly 0.1 percent, though a smaller number of women were tested with this method. Also, IUD insertion requires special skills and is much more expensive. For all the methods, no serious side effects were reported among the 46,000 women in the study. A total of eight healthy babies were born after the emergency contraception failed.

**Conclusion:** The superior safety and efficacy of mifepristone means that the FDA, which regulates the drug, is denying women in the United States the best method of emergency contraception. My speculation, of course, is that the decision not to extend the drug's license for this use was made more on political (and perhaps religious) grounds than on the basis of good science or good medicine. What's to be done? As usual, beats me, but I wish a different decision had been made.

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**sidebar**

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The risk of abortion-associated death in the United States is six per 1 million procedures. In 2004, the last year for which we have figures, the risk of maternal death was 130 per 1 million pregnancies. Thus, in terms of mortality alone, pregnancy is 20 times riskier than abortion.

**moneybox**

**People Who Buy Glass Houses**

Are architectural landmarks a good real-estate investment?

By Daniel Gross

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 3:57 PM ET

California's housing market may be in a slump. But one prominent home recently sold for an unexpectedly high price. Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House, a five-bedroom Modernist masterpiece in Palm Springs, Calif., was sold by Christie's last month for $16.8 million. Auction houses have been selling real estate to their well-heeled clients for years. But the Neutra house sale was part of Christie's effort to establish name-brand Modernist homes as a new asset class—homes that are valued as much for their architectural pedigrees as they are for their number of bathrooms and for the quantity and quality of marble therein. It's a bright idea, given a climate in which high-end art is selling briskly and high-end homes less so.

But will it work? Can historic Modernist homes be treasured, shown, and monetized like Warhols and Gauquins? A recent
visit to one of America’s best-known and most successful Modernist houses, Philip Johnson’s Glass House, and a look at its business model, suggests the answer might be no.

The Glass House, which Johnson designed and built in the late 1940s and set on 47 acres of prime turf in New Canaan, Conn., is one of Johnson’s most enduring achievements. Over the years, he and his partner, David Whitney, constructed an art-filled compound—the Glass House is one of several structures on the property—and molded the landscape to their liking. When Johnson and Whitney died in 2005, the property was left to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and was opened to the public last spring.

There are plenty of historic homes and house museums in the United States: some 15,000, or four in every county nationwide, notes Christy MacLear, executive director of Johnson’s Glass House. Very few of them are retaining their value or generating positive cash flow. Some of the most famous, such as Mark Twain’s home in Hartford, Conn., or Edith Wharton’s the Mount in the Berkshires, are struggling to keep their doors open. Too many historic-homes-turned-museums revolve around recreating the lives of the people who lived there or freezing an era in aspic, notes MacLear, who is a Wharton MBA, not a preservationist. (She worked on Disney’s Celebration project.)

MacLear and her staff have pursued a strategy of limited access and scarcity, on the one hand, and focused on making the Glass House a center for scholarship and learning about Modernism, on the other. “When we replaced the flat roof on the glass house, we documented it with the idea that every modern homeowner wants to know how we’re replacing a flat roof.”

If any historic home could break even or turn a profit, one might think it would be the Glass House. A stunning meditation on the box, nestled into New Canaan’s rolling hills, the place has been remarkably popular. Private tours (two a day) are available for $500 or $1,000 per person. (The latter includes a picnic at the Glass House.) The regular group tours, costing $25 a person, have been sold out for months for this season, which lasts from April to October. Admissions fees generate about $450,000 annually, which covers the tour operations costs and the salaries for 12 full-time and 12 part-time employees. But the total cost of running the house is about $1.7 million a year. The difference comes from fundraising efforts and from an endowment created by Johnson and by sales from Whitney’s personal art collection, which generated $13 million.

Johnson was a commercial architect. But the Glass House doesn’t easily lend itself to the sort of money-attracting branding opportunities that museums thrive on. Modernist houses, with their clean lines and lack of ornamentation, seem to defy easy commercialization. The site itself is largely unmarked. There are no plaques, plazas, or entryways where sponsors and patrons can buy placement. Nor is the Glass House available for weddings or overnights. (People who live in glass houses should not throw catered parties.) “There’s a lot of brand diligence about this site,” as MacLear put it. You won’t find Glass House snow globes in the gift shop at the visitor center. There is, however, a really cool guest book in which designers and artists have sketched designs inspired by their visits.

Successful as it is, the Glass House doesn’t come close to making a profit. And since it’s been left to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, it can’t be sold. Which highlights the challenge for buyers, owners, and traders of such properties. Acquiring a painting from the 1940s obligates the owner to a certain amount of upkeep—proper climate control, an excellent security system. Acquiring a house built in the 1940s obligates an owner to a massive amount of annual upkeep just to preserve it. If you want to live in it and update it for contemporary luxury, you’ll incur more costs—and risk altering the original in a way that harms its market value. When you want to let the public see a piece of art you’ve acquired, you can lend it to a museum for a few months. When you want to let the public see a piece of architectural art you’ve acquired, you have to let strangers into your home.

Finally, paintings have evolved into an asset class over the decades to the point at which name-brand works of fine art can easily be sold into a liquid global market. Long track records and comparable data points assist buyers and sellers in assessing value. By contrast, for Modernist homes (or historically significant homes more generally) the universe of potential buyers is small.

In the end, it’s a real-estate transaction, and, as such, it’s subject to all the whims of that market. The Kaufmann house was placed on the market, as many homes are, because the owners were getting divorced. And after all the hoopla surrounding the $16.8 million bid for it, the deal, like so many other housing deals these days, fell through.

other magazines
The Tyranny of the Toddler
Weekly Standard on the repercussions of overindulgent parenting.
By Morgan Smith
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 2:23 PM ET

New York, June 9
In the cover package on breakfast, a piece by Slate contributor Amanda Fortini investigates why “women’s magazines, and pop health magazines, and legions of mothers” (and don’t forget researchers) are so obsessed with the morning meal. Eating breakfast “tends to coincide with a healthier weight,” but it doesn’t “miraculously speed up one’s metabolism.” Breakfasting...
is "a habit that tends to occur along with a constellation of other healthy behaviors"—so it's not necessarily the only behavior that causes benefits. ... A feature profiles "YouTube divorcée" Tricia Walsh-Smith, whose "unblinking eyes seemed to mirror some madness in the soul." Walsh-Smith aired lurid details about her crumbling marriage on YouTube to leverage her 76-year-old millionaire husband when he threatened divorce. Her clips earned her 4 million hits, a Good Morning America appearance, and reportedly a reality show in the works—but no word on how they'll help her divorce settlement.

Radar, May/June 2008
The cover story on "Power Brats"—celebrity offspring who are attempting to make it on their famous last names—considers the epidemic of second- and even third-generation stars: "Forget America's long-standing image as a great meritocracy; these days, an aristocratic chill is gripping the nation as never before. Fame, the chief commodity of our era, is now being passed from generation to generation." ... A short article reveals the man behind the "hooker-stabbing, car-jacking" video game Grand Theft Auto. Dan Houser, co-founder of GTA's creator, Rockstar Games, revels in the downfall of former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer, who publicly decried the series: "Spitzer used the game for more inspiration than he's willing to let on. ... That kind of hypocrisy is beyond satire; I couldn't even write it."

Weekly Standard, June 9
The cover story argues that the "vast expense and anxiety" Americans lavish on their children has brought about a tyrannous "dreary, boring, sadly misguided Kindergarchy." During the 1960s, "culture put a new premium on youthfulness; adulthood ... was on the way out, beginning with clothes and ending with personal conduct." Parents became reluctant to be "authority figures," instead opting to be "if not exactly contemporaries," then "friends, pals, fun people" to their children. Since then, "every child suddenly became his or her own dauphin or dauphine." ... A piece explains why future presidents may follow George Bush's lead and choose not to use e-mail to avoid having correspondence subject to the Presidential Records Act: "Scrubbing just about anyone's minute-to-minute correspondence can be used to make that person look like an idiot."

Oxford American, Issue 60
The cover story in the "Home Sweet Home" issue examines Americans' lust for large homes and why "Domus has become one of the most potent gods in the pantheon of Mammon, and his temples far outstrip anything we build for church or state." Southerners have always engaged in "house worship." But the credit crisis and foreclosures have created "a new class" that is "still working and paying taxes but no longer viable players in the world of real estate, no longer eligible to dream the American dream." ... In a personal essay, a woman reflects on her New Orleans childhood, which was destroyed by Katrina: "Our house was what New Orleanians call callaloo shotgun: narrow and running horizontal with no hallway, and with a second floor of only one room added onto the back, the kind of house old folks say spirits love because they can move through easily."

The New Yorker, June 9-16
The Fiction issue contains a series of brief essays by writers on the topic of "Faith and Doubt" and a posthumous short story by Vladimir Nabokov. ... A piece uncovers the inventions of Buckminster Fuller, who imagined creations that "often had the hallucinatory quality associated with science fiction (or mental hospitals)." The turn-of-the-century New England inventor experienced an epiphany while contemplating death and believed it his mission to "[determine] what, if anything, an individual could do 'on behalf of all humanity.' " Fuller's brainchild was a series of "Dymaxion" (a word he "adopted ... as a sort of brand name") inventions. They all failed, but after his epiphany, "[h]e spent the next fifty years in a headlong, ceaseless act of self-assertion, one that took so many forms that, twenty-five years after his death, we are still trying to sort it all out," ... On the Financial Page, James Surowiecki pooh-poohs CBS's acquisition of CNET: "[D]eals like [this] are a bit like an aging outfielder taking steroids in order to stave off the boobirds. The difference is that steroids usually work."

Newsweek, June 9
The cover story explores the "politics of endangered species," focusing on environmentalists' fight to declare the polar bear endangered. Global-warming activists would like to see the animal listed as endangered (the Interior Department currently calls it "threatened"). That classification could pave the way for stricter emissions laws under the Endangered Species Act, which requires the government to "designate and preserve [listed animals'] 'critical habitat'—the area necessary for their survival—and develop a 'recovery plan' to keep them alive." ... A piece surveys a new study that indicates "teen sexual behavior in general hasn't changed much since 1991," despite "salacious stories" popping up in the media about the prevalence of oral sex. It's possible that "[t]he hysteria around oral sex, then, may be as much about attitude as behavior, suggesting that teens have become ever more exoticized in the eyes of the older generation, a seemingly strange and impenetrable tribe with bizarre rituals and alien belief systems."

philanthropy
The Best Poverty-Fighting Bet
The Google IPO event of the nonprofit world.
By Georgia Levenson Keohane
Monday, June 2, 2008, at 3:23 PM ET

If any good comes out of the misguided farm bill passed last month, it will be the recognition that Americans are hungry. Amid the egregious agricultural subsidies, the bill earmarks billions of dollars to food banks, where demand is up 20 percent from a year ago, and to food stamps, which now help feed a record 28 million Americans. (According to the latest Department of Agriculture figures, more than 40 percent of people using food stamps live in working families, up nearly one-third in 10 years.)

"Food insecurity" is part of a larger constellation of hardships, and in this uncertain economic climate, spending on new government initiatives to address all of these woes is unlikely. The nonprofit sector also typically scales back in harder times as corporate giving recedes, foundations grow cautious, and donors think twice about charitable gifts. Herein lies the recessionary rub: Just when Americans need relief most, it is hardest to come by.

This truth about nonprofit belt tightening makes the national rollout of SingleStop USA, a poverty-fighting startup, all the more extraordinary. In less than nine months, SingleStop has raised $35 million from some of the smartest philanthropic investors, including Tipping Point Community, the Robin Hood Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Blue Ridge Foundation. This is the Google IPO event of the nonprofit world. It suggests that SingleStop’s blueprint is effective and replicable—and also means that these foundations are betting on tougher times ahead.

SingleStop's operating model is simple: With a Turbo Tax-like software and legal and financial counseling, it helps people tap into public benefits (tax credits, food stamps, child care subsidies, and health insurance) that they're eligible for but aren't using. Since 2001, a New York City pilot version of the program has connected 70,000 low-income residents to hundreds of millions of government dollars. Nationally, estimates put the figure for unclaimed assistance at $65 billion. Research from the Urban Institute indicates, strikingly, that 25 percent of the working poor receive no benefits at all, despite their eligibility, and that only 7 percent of these families access all four of the major supports (tax credits, Medicaid, food stamps, and child care subsidies). So SingleStop has lots of room to run.

When the Robin Hood launched SingleStop in 2001, the foundation found that the primary reasons the working poor failed to claim public benefits were that they either didn't know about the programs or didn't know how to apply for them. Often, applying meant visiting a series of different government offices—no easy undertaking for people working multiple jobs or with limited child care and transportation. As an antidote, SingleStop developed a quick one-stop shop at 59 sites across New York. In 15 minutes, the organization's software tools calculate a family's eligibility for a host of benefits—public assistance (TANF and other welfare-to-work initiatives), food stamps, Medicaid, housing and child care subsidies, health care, school lunch programs, heating assistance, Social Security disability, and tax credits. SingleStop counselors then provide families with tailored legal and financial advice—how to stave off eviction with new rent money or vouchers, how to consolidate debt and begin to pay it off, how to open a savings or IDA account.

The concept of a benefits calculator isn't new. Nor is the one-stop-shop approach. But many existing outreach programs start people off on the benefits process without seeing them through. (Examples: the State Assistance and Referral Process in Houston, or economic development nonprofits in California that employ a "Self-Sufficiency calculator.") SingleStop goes further; after clients determine what they're eligible for, counselors walk them through the application process, help obtain the benefits, and then provide specific guidance about them.

Data consistently show that helping families keep themselves housed, fed, and healthy is a better investment than managing a crisis that's already begun. This is the case for Section 8 housing assistance over homeless shelters or health insurance over emergency-room treatment. In addition, the value of providing different supports in tandem is greater than the sum of their parts; food stamps and Medicaid promote general health, and together also help keep children in school, parents at work, and translate into more stable earnings (food on the table, money for rent). Child care subsidies help parents hold down these jobs, advance in them, and begin to save. Over the long term, savings can mean purchasing a home or a child's higher education. This is the hoped-for ladder out of poverty.

All of this helps explain SingleStop's appeal to national philanthropies that view their grants as strategic ventures and seek measurable results. They are also drawn to SingleStop's scorecard. According to a McKinsey & Co. study of the New York pilot, the average family in a SingleStop program recouped $1,800 in tax credits and $5,000 in benefits that they weren't previously receiving. For the typical SingleStop beneficiary—a single mother with two or more children, earning less than $10,000 a year and receiving no public assistance—this money can mean the difference of raising children above, rather than below, the poverty line. And for SingleStop’s underwriters, these outcomes mean substantial returns: For every $1 invested, the program gives clients $3 in benefits, $4 to $13 in legal counseling, $2 in financial counseling, and $11 in tax credits.

By helping families wring more from existing government programs, SingleStop has won the support of mayors like San Francisco's Gavin Newsom and Newark's Cory Booker. Their cities have tight budgets and a growing number of working
families filing for food stamps or in need of financial counseling about home foreclosures. In New York, Mayor Michael Bloomberg has supported the pilot, and the SingleStop staff is now racing around the country to meet with other city and state officials. Lots of places want them; they just can't roll the program out everywhere at once. Over the next two years, sites are planned for at least three new states, including California, New Jersey, and New Mexico. The five-year goal is to lift 1 million people out of poverty.

That's an ambitious aim, and SingleStop is still working out the expansion kinks. In contrast to New York, where the organization has based its sites at other nonprofit organizations, it may make more sense to work out of public agencies or even with a large corporate employer of low-wage workers (like McDonald's). SingleStop must also attract national funders for local efforts; it is unlikely that every city on its own will find a Robin Hood-esque patron. Despite the challenges of a national rollout, however, SingleStop's tested model—leveraging existing resources to help people out of poverty—is about as good a philanthropic bet as they come.

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**poem**

"The Names"

By Joe Wilkins

Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 7:00 AM ET

Listen to Joe Wilkins read.

*It is no good to grow up hating the rich.*

—B.H. Fairchild

That boy with nine fingers was beaten mean—now his wheatshock hair is always flame. The woman from Yellow Horse? Her second daughter froze to death in a ditch. And Pete, did you know that slender boy who in the fifth grade snuck a pack of his father's Camels onto the recess yard? Remember how we spat and choked and loved every red-eyed minute of it? Near ten years ago, laid off and drunk in this blasted land of Reagan bankruptcy and corporate farming, he took his little rust and yellow Chevy Luv fishtailing down a gravel road out of Ingomar and fast over Highway 12 where a trucker making time hit him broadside at eighty. But you know this. You've made your wise peace,

and though I've got no right, I somehow don't care. Why not hate the rich? It's easy, and some days easy's what I need. I lie down in the spring wet alfalfa and hear the wind like water, but then, always, the unraveling clouds shift the sky into blue highway, and the Newman boy guns his truck of dark cloud across it, and when I open my eyes everything is shattered. This country I call home is, like yours, lost, and my people too are lost, like me, so let me hate with them, let me sit up at the bar, and curse the banker, the goddamn-silly-designer chaps the new boss man from back east wears, let me speak the names of the dead and get righteous, for at least one more round.

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**politics**

*Slate's Delegate Calculator*

The popular vote proved an accurate predictor of delegate counts.

By Chris Wilson

Friday, June 6, 2008, at 7:27 AM ET

With the dust settling on the Democratic nomination, it's worth a retrospective look at how successfully our calculator was able to estimate delegate counts based on a state's popular vote. While most states allocate the majority of their pledged delegates based on district-by-district vote totals, the proportion of delegates won by each candidate has historically been very similar to the statewide popular vote. This was the fundamental assumption of our calculator.

Of the 16 contests the calculator adjudicated after launching in early March, predictions based on the popular vote were off by an average of only 1.9 percent. Six states and territories reported final delegate tallies that exactly matched the calculator's prediction: Vermont, Wyoming, Guam, Indiana, Oregon, and Montana. The calculator was least successful in predicting Texas, which might be expected due to the state's Byzantine primary system.

*Slate* would like to thank the dozens of readers who wrote in challenging our numbers and suggesting new features for the calculator over the course of this project.

**Methodology**

- The current number of pledged delegates comes from NBC News' tally. The delegate count prior to March 4
includes the 14 pledged delegates from the Democrats Abroad Global Primary and subsequent convention, who count for half as much as their domestic counterparts.

- We estimate the number of delegates based on the overall state vote, even though delegates are awarded by congressional district as well. We felt comfortable making this approximation because in the primaries through Mississippi, there was only a 2.9 percent deviation between the percentage of the overall vote and the percentage of delegates awarded in primaries. The proportion of delegates awarded by congressional district, therefore, does not differ greatly from the statewide breakdown.

- The calculator does not incorporate superdelegates into its calculations. Superdelegates are unpledged and uncommitted and therefore can change their endorsements and convention votes at any time. As a result, we’ve simply noted at the bottom of the calculator how many superdelegates the leading candidate needs to win the nomination in a given scenario.

- All of the calculator’s formulas and data come from Jason Furman, the director of the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution.

Obama spent a good deal of time on his opponent John McCain, whom the crowd first greeted with boos but switched quickly to cheers when Obama mentioned his military service. His critique, and the campaign's strategy for the campaign, came down to a single passage: "John McCain has spent a lot of time talking about trips to Iraq in the last few weeks, but maybe if he spent some time taking trips to the cities and towns that have been hardest hit by this economy—cities in Michigan, and Ohio, and right here in Minnesota—he'd understand the kind of change that people are looking for."

We're going to see that kind of flip back to the economy for the next five months.

If Clinton didn't work very hard to build unity, Obama did. He gave two paragraphs to Hillary Clinton, whom the crowd greeted with sustained applause. Obama praised the milestones in her career going back more than 20 years and promised that she would be a part of the important fights to come on health care, energy, and child poverty. It was not just praise for Clinton, but an attempt to revive the Clinton brand. All the work he'd done during the campaign running against the low motives of Clintonism were forgotten. She and her husband were selfless public servants again with an "unyielding desire to improve the lives of ordinary Americans, no matter how difficult the fight may be."

Where do negotiations stand about Clinton's campaign debt and her possible place on the ticket (which she appears to want)? On the plane flight from Chicago, top strategist David Axelrod claimed that "there had been no back-channel negotiations and no discussions." After Obama's speech, he called Clinton, left her a message congratulating her on her victory in South Dakota, and asked that she call him back.

The crowd that will gather for the Republican convention at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul certainly won't look like the multicolored one that filled the venue for Obama on Tuesday night. They came in Dashikis, tattoos, T-shirts with Time magazine covers showing a smiling Obama, and in bright-yellow rain jackets. You had to bring foul-weather gear if you were going to come as early as some did—the weather could go through a few cycles while you waited. One couple had been waiting since 3 p.m. Another group of young women had tried to camp out the night before but had been turned away. They came
back at 8 a.m., more than 12 hours before Obama was scheduled to speak.

They danced to Stevie Wonder and Aretha Franklin and chanted while they waited. They filled up on concession foods that normally feed hockey fans—chicken tenders, french fries, and nachos with dipping cheese that matched the color of their neon raincoats. An hour before Obama arrived, the Jumbotron overhead played occasional videos of Obama, one centered around his 2004 Democratic Convention speech. The crowd responded as if he were actually standing behind the podium. How young Obama looked back then, bouncing around on stage as he talked. He was more controlled tonight. Then, he was a guest at the party. Tonight, it became his party.

The "Washington game" of massaging opinion and of political navigation, as Obama puts it in putting it down, was in part, after all, a Clinton creation. "George Bush may have perfected divisive special interest politics, but he didn't invent it," Obama regularly said. "It was there before he got into office." At the heart of that game-playing was the sin of what Obama called "triangulation and poll-driven politics." Triangulation has become almost a curse word in some Democratic circles, standing for selling out on principles and using liberals as foils for deal-making with Republicans. To engage in triangulation, as Obama and his supporters defined it, was a selfish act. It built political power for Clinton but not for the party he led, as Obama explained in one debate. It is because of this worldview that Obama famously picked Reagan over Clinton when talking about leaders who had genuinely transformed the country. Maybe as a term of her surrender, Clinton will demand a paean to Clintonism.

So what will Obamism (or is it Obamology?) look like now that the Democratic Party is his to shape? There are a few specific, if not overarching, data points. As an antidote to the secrecy of Clinton's 1994 health care plan, Obama has promised his health care negotiations will be on C-SPAN for all to behold. When Hillary Clinton offered a gas-tax holiday, Obama argued against it, framing the plan as vintage Clintonism—a small meaningless sop confected only for political advantage. He said that if elected, it was just this kind of nonsense he'd avoid.

These are only hints, though. The larger promise of Obama's truth-telling has still not arrived. In Troy, Mich., yesterday the "truth" he offered about high gas prices was not that people would have to drive less, or carpool, or sell their SUVs, or maybe even accept a higher gas tax. He told the audience that energy conservation would come about through government spending, which would in turn bring Michigan new jobs. That's offering people candy, not spinach.

Obama has campaigned on the promise to pull together new coalitions, and perhaps this will be the best test of how he'll challenge Clintonism as he's defined it. The Clinton people call building a majority tailoring your convictions to appeal to particular blocs you need to win—independent voters, or the soccer moms of yore, or blue-collar white men. Obama critics decry this as a triangulation-ready watering down of principle. The alternative approach is to boldly state your convictions and convince people to move to your point of view.

In a campaign, you succeed if enough people buy enough of your message, or of you, to pull the right lever. But when Obama is president, his philosophy will have to take fuller shape. He'll actually have to win votes from members of Congress, which will test whether the inevitable trade-offs will be so great, or seem so political, that he infuriates his supporters. In figuring out how to navigate those choices, he might want to turn to the last Democratic nominee with a gift for giving fine speeches and

politics

It’s Your Party Now
Obama and the death of Clintonism.
By John Dickerson
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 4:35 PM ET

Now that Barack Obama has the nomination wrapped up, everyone will be looking for the symbolic moment when he takes Clinton's hand and they raise their arms together. This is the traditional sign of party unity. This year it may not be enough to start the bygones era, given the charges of sexism and racism that have been traded between the campaigns and the number of Clinton fans promising to nurse their embers of grievance. Maybe raised arms won't be enough, and we'll need to see a hug or a kiss on both cheeks.

In the pageant of reconciliation, Clinton, who has promised to campaign vigorously for Obama, will be repeatedly asked about her claims that he lacked the credentials to be commander in chief and would not be able to defeat John McCain. That will be hard enough for her. But it's not all. Unlike other second-place finishers who have merely had to sublimate their own ambition, Clinton will have to engage in the eclipsing of her husband's presidency and its legacy, which has largely defined the Democratic Party for the last 15 years.

Barack Obama didn't just run against Hillary Clinton. He ran against Clintonism. The assault started indirectly in his book, The Audacity of Hope, which spoke about moving past the generational fights that had consumed baby boomers in the 1990s. He was attacking both parties for their preoccupation with Vietnam and the warmed-over cultural battles of the '60s and '70s, but on the Democratic side, this was an explicit effort to push away from the biggest boomer of all, Bill Clinton, and the turmoil of his reign.
promising a third way: Bill Clinton. Maybe Clintonism can never really die after all.

politics

Clinton's Time Machine
If only she could go back a few decades.
By Jeff Greenfield
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 12:00 PM ET

On Monday, as the primary season was about to end, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, one of Hillary Clinton's most prominent supporters, offered a valedictory. Noting his candidate's success in the later primaries, and her strength against John McCain in key battleground states, Rendell said, "Most Clinton supporters are filled with bewilderment that this is happening. ... Why haven't these results caused the superdelegates to come around?"

By the standards that once governed nomination fights, Rendell's question is completely legitimate. Once upon a time, the charge Clinton staged over the primaries of the last three months would have raised serious questions among the undecided. She won most of the later primaries, including all the biggest states save North Carolina; she garnered upward of 500,000 votes more and, if the Real Clear Politics poll averages are right, she runs stronger against McCain than Obama does in the purple states of Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. (He runs stronger in Virginia, Wisconsin, and Iowa.)

So why have the superdelegates been moving to Obama, almost in lock step? The answer, I think, lies in the lesson recent political history has taught: If you fight among yourselves in the summer, you are doomed in the fall.

Once upon a time, no one would be asking a serious presidential candidate why he or she was taking the fight to the convention. Every nominating contest was settled there; that's what the convention was for. The handful of primaries that took place were essentially testing grounds, to prove to the real decision-makers, who would gather afterward, that a candidate could win votes. As late as 1968, Robert Kennedy told reporters at his announcement in mid-March that there was no way the primaries would decide the contest. A presidential candidate could hope that he might gather delegates from other candidates who were "favorable sons" of their states; they might deliver their delegations in return for a Cabinet post or federal largesse. And thus a front-runner might fade after a couple of ballots.

Even after 1968, when the primaries became the principal method of collecting delegates, convention battles remained the norm—at least for a while. Sometimes this was because of the particular battle at hand. The Democrats who opposed George McGovern in 1972 saw his nomination as a threat to their political power. They used every tool they had, including a last-minute challenge to California' winner-take-all delegation, to derail him. In 1976, passionate followers of Ronald Reagan tried to force Gerald Ford into naming his running mate before the presidential balloting at the convention, hoping whomever he picked would alienate a decisive handful of delegates. In 1980, Ted Kennedy's campaign was so determined to pull away Jimmy Carter's delegates that the convention adopted a "bind and yank" rule—forcing delegates to keep voting for their original choice. Even in 1984, Gary Hart's campaign fought all the way to the convention floor.

But sometime around the mid-1980s, the political pros began to notice something: In contrast to past decades, when parties could rally after fierce nomination battles and win in November, contested conventions seemed to have become an infallible sign of defeat. From 1964 through 1984, the party with the contentious convention went down every time. Maybe it was coincidence; maybe all these candidates would have been doomed anyway. But the political class took notice. And, coincidence or not, nomination battles began to end earlier and earlier. In large part, this was because more states began holding their primaries earlier. But the frontloading also reflected the fact that candidates rarely managed to get a second wind. Under the onslaught of intense media coverage, a candidate who suffered an early defeat began to field the same questions as the manager of a New York baseball team: "Why are you losing? How long can you hang on?" Thus, from 1988 through 2004, nomination fights in both parties were effectively taken notice of Clinton's fourth quarter charge at the convention, hoping whomever he picked would alienate a decisive handful of delegates. In 1980, Ted Kennedy's campaign was so determined to pull away Jimmy Carter's delegates that the convention adopted a "bind and yank" rule—forcing delegates to keep voting for their original choice. Even in 1984, Gary Hart's campaign fought all the way to the convention floor.

This year, much to the surprise of the political universe—and especially the Clinton campaign—the primary season, of course, did not end on Super Tuesday in February. And much to the surprise of political cliché-mongers, momentum took a leave of absence. (Mickey Kaus' theory of "mutemom," where one victory seemed to trigger a loss in the next fight, seems more apt.) In a twist of political fate, the compressed calendar resulted in the longest primary season in more than three decades.

But in our era, the political pros who once would have sat up and taken notice of Clinton's fourth-quarter charge have internalized Rule 1 of modern politics: no convention fights, especially if such a battle means a possibility, however slim, that the party would wind up reversing a majority of the pledged delegates and the popular will they reflect (more or less). The power brokers of an earlier age would have found this idea ludicrous. "Hey!" they might have yelped, "The primaries ended in a near-tie. We
superdelegates exist to pick the candidate we think is the strongest!"

That, I suspect, is what folks like Gov. Rendell still have in mind. And they would have been right, once upon a time. It turns out that the only way Clinton could have beaten Barack Obama's fundraising and organizing machine was to find a machine of her own: a time machine. (WABAC from Rocky and Bullwinkle, anyone?) If she could move the convention back a few decades, she'd have a genuine shot.

politics
Waiting for the Flood
Barack Obama the day before the last primaries.
By John Dickerson
Monday, June 2, 2008, at 6:16 PM ET

Sitting with the crowd waiting for Barack Obama to arrive in the gymnasium at Troy High School in Troy, Mich., I listened to a parade of local officials like they were about to introduce the man everyone was waiting for. The crowd started to applaud a little louder, the kids got up on tiptoe, but then the fuss turned out to be for just another local politician. Everyone sat back down. This yo-yo act started to get tired after a little while, perhaps because it was an echo of the Democratic race: preliminaries that delayed the main event.

Finally, however, Obama's supporters don't have long to wait. By tomorrow or the next day, he will be the party's presumptive nominee. He's had to work like hell for that simple word presumptive, and, after another drubbing in Puerto Rico, he's not exactly sprinting across the finish line. Still, all the signs seem to point to an ending of this 147-day stage of the presidential race. Top Clinton supporters like Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Ed Rendell are inching away from their candidate, Clinton staffers are sending out personal contact information the way people do before they're about to be out of a job, and even Bill Clinton is getting wistful on the stump. "This may be the last day I'm ever involved in a campaign of this kind," said the former president in Milbank, S.D.

Obama advisers are showing no sign of worry that Clinton is serious about taking her fight all the way to the nomination. Tomorrow they expect a flood of superdelegates to finally put Obama over the edge.

Throughout the day, rumors spread that Obama and Clinton had cooked up a deal to choreograph her departure Tuesday night. The Obama campaign knocked down the idea that negotiations were going on but in the vague way that does little to suggest they're not. In fact, minutes after an Obama spokesman suggested he hadn't brought up the issue of how the two would come together after the nomination was finished, the candidate himself told reporters that he had told Clinton Sunday night that he looked forward to "meeting her at a time and place of her choosing" to talk about the way forward.

In anticipation of the coming end, Obama spoke warmly about his former opponent, praising Clinton's determination and promising the two of them would be united for the general election. Obama spoke for nearly an hour, and though he doesn't campaign as often without a tie as he used to—that won't do when you're trying to look presidential—he did seem loose. He offered one questioner his microphone, rather than waiting for her to receive one reserved for the audience, and did a little soft-shoe shuffle as he made his way over to her. At another moment, he offered to come kiss two audience members when he learned they were 98 and 95.

Wearing the flag pin that he once eschewed, Obama explained that what will unite all Democrats, including Hillary Clinton, will be the specter of a McCain administration. He criticized his Republican opponent on everything from the Iraq war to the gas-tax holiday. Obama immediately followed his critique with a promise not to tear down his opponents. The audience saw no contradiction, applauding this sentiment even more loudly than the McCain bashing that had preceded it.

Obama's remarks focused heavily on economic matters, an attempt to pull the conversation back to turf his aides think he's particularly strong on. "This election is not going to be like 2004," says a top adviser. "It's going to be about the economy.” Talking about the economy also helps Obama out of the national security tussle he's been in with McCain for the last two weeks.

After the local politicians got their chance at the podium, the honor of introducing Obama went to an unemployed woman, and the candidate took the chance to say that she has woes John McCain wouldn't understand. Voters, particularly those at the lower end of the income scale, have wondered if Obama understands their problems; Obama's response seems in part to be that whatever they may think about him, John McCain is even more out of touch.

The McCain campaign didn't address the criticism, exactly, but instead argued that by talking about the economy, Obama was running away from talking about Iraq. They would prefer to have every day's news cycle consumed with talk of international issues. "Every day we talk about foreign affairs is a winning day for us," said one top McCain adviser.

I first saw Barack Obama announced to a crowd as a presidential candidate in a nearly identical venue several months ago, standing at the end of another basketball court in Columbia, S.C. Then, he was a long shot. He has since lost a cigarette habit, his
Decades before Roger Ailes birthed the Fox News Channel for proud papa Rupert Murdoch, he had already played a role in creating a national conservative television news network—Television News Inc.

In Dark Genius, a new biography of Ailes, Kerwin Swint revisits the dawn—1973—and early demise—1975—of the news service funded by conservative brewer Joseph Coors to counter the "liberal" TV networks. Coors, a profligate donor to conservative candidates, causes, and institutions, thought the media needed an ameliorating conservative voice, too.

TVN was less a network than a video wire service, producing and distributing segments to network- and independent-TV stations. The Coors brain trust hoped ultimately to leverage the service into a fourth network, one based on emerging satellite technology.

Swint describes TVN's early months as fractious, in which the professional news team was pitted against Coors management. Jack Wilson, TVN's president, considered Martin Luther King Jr. "an avowed communist revolutionary" and declared King's associates unworthy of its coverage in a memo reproduced in Dark Genius. Other memos reproduced by Swint indicate management's nutty news sense. It was a mistake to call Leonid Brezhnev the "Soviet leader," Wilson wrote, because that made him the political equivalent of Richard Nixon, who had been elected. A Spiro Agnew clip depicting the vice president "in a relaxed and human fashion" won praise from Wilson as "one of the stories we could be proud to show our friends."

Ailes didn't join TVN until 1974 after a big shake-up at the news service. Ailes was experienced in entertainment and politics, having worked as a Mike Douglas Show producer, a Nixon media consultant, a Broadway producer, and a political consultant. But he had never worked in news, making him a strange choice as TVN's next news director.

Ailes has attempted to distance himself from TVN, Swint reports. In a 2004 C-SPAN interview, Ailes claimed that he had only been a TVN "consultant," even though he bragged to the Columbia Journalism Review in 1974 of his power to "hire, fire, and program" the news service.

Swint labors to establish TVN as the ideological progenitor of Fox News by comparing Wilson's comments to the famous set of news-twisting memos addressed to the Fox newsroom by Fox News Executive Vice President John Moody in 2003 and published by Media Matters for America. Moody was one of Ailes' first hires at Fox News, and the two men are simpatico in the extreme. Even though Ailes left no discernable fingerprints at TVN, Swint declares him the TVN-Fox "common denominator" who "appears to have picked up TVN's technique of managerial manipulation and filed it away for future use."

Continuing on this tack, Swint attempts to show that such Fox News slogans and buzz phrases as "Fair and Balanced," "We Report, You Decide," and "We're an alternative to the 'liberal' media" were derived from the mouths of TVN's founders. I'm not completely convinced.

At its high point, TVN employed 50 people and claimed to feed 20 news segments a day to 80 subscribing stations in North America. By October 1975, TVN's money-losing news division was dead, its bureaus in Washington, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles shuttered. (See Slate staffer James Ledbetter's book Made Possible by ...: The Death of Public Broadcasting in the United States to learn how Coors' nomination to the board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting played a role in TVN's demise. It's too weird to summarize.)

Dark Genius never really assesses TVN's quality. In the Washington Post archives, I found a May 5, 1975, feature reporting that three Washington, D.C., outlets—Channels 5, 7, and 9—found TVN's work of high-enough caliber to air. Citing the Columbia Journal Review article, the Post reported that "most of the output of TVN has been free of a noticeably conservative slant." The Post article did, however, allow that fired staffers complained that Wilson and his managers had pushed them to tilt the news to the right.

Conservative activist Paul Weyrich, who helped Joseph Coors steer his TVN venture, complains in the Post piece of a lack of influence at the service. "In fact, it's been the single most frustrating experience I've ever had," Weyrich said. "I think it comes down to the fact that if I suggested something, that was enough for it not to be covered. I think they were afraid they would get tagged." Weyrich was obviously trying to be modest: The CJR story has him giving a list of questions to a TVN reporter to ask at a Capitol Hill news conference. But there you are.

A pair of TVN obituaries pass no critical judgment on the service, noting only that its founders had sought to "balance" (Washington Post) the major networks and to provide "an alternative source of television news to what [Coors] considered
liberal-oriented news departments of the three major networks" \((\textit{New York Times})\). Ledbetter's book describes TVN's quality as "spotty" but concedes it "filled a genuine need." ABC News anchor Charles Gibson still includes TVN on his official \textit{biography}.

(Where did the TVN archives go? A Dumpster? Somebody's basement? Wouldn't it be cool to YouTube every TVN reel found?)

That nobody can point to tainted or distorted TVN coverage tells me that despite the managerial madness at the service, the guys actually in charge of producing the news feed must have done an OK job. That would have to include Roger Ailes, too, wouldn't it?

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\textit{Dark Genius} quotes from my \textit{Slate} columns twice, both favorably. If you've got the TVN archives, digitize and send them via \texttt{YouSendIt} to \texttt{slate.pressbox@gmail.com}. Or send your usual cranky e-mail. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," \textit{Slate's} readers' forum, in a future article, or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: \textit{Slate} is owned by the Washington Post Co.) Track my errors: This \texttt{hand-built RSS feed} will ring every time \textit{Slate} runs a "Press Box" correction. For e-mail notification of errors in this specific column, type the word \texttt{Ailes} in the subject head of an e-mail message and send it to \texttt{slate.pressbox@gmail.com}.

\textbf{press box}

\textbf{Hillary Didn't Lose. Barack Won.}

An idiosyncratic reading of today's presidential campaign post-mortems.

By Jack Shafer

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 5:10 PM ET

In the Hillary Clinton-for-president campaign post-mortems today, reporters can't resist explaining how Clinton lost.

The most comprehensive piece, by \textit{Wall Street Journal} political ace Jackie Calmes, finds that Clinton was "positioned to be Democrats' inevitable nominee" before she 'called the biggest plays, and … got them wrong." Unnamed sources inside the Clinton campaign ("people," "insiders," "staffers," "colleagues," "critics," "top aides," "supporters in Congress," "advisers," etc.) list the mistakes that "boil down to mismanagement, message, mobilization failures and the marital factor." Clinton neglected to "humanize" herself in time. She blew the caucuses. She didn't "acknowledge the 'Clinton fatigue' felt by many Democrats."

Calmes continues:

Sen. Clinton's management choices, it is widely agreed, gave rise to fatal strategic blunders. The main one, in the eyes of many associates, was her message: She emphasized her Washington experience when voters wanted change.

\texttt{Washingtonpost.com}'s Chris Cillizza points to \textit{New York Times} reporter Adam Nagourney's "what went wrong" piece from May 20, in which Nagourney inventories Clinton's self-inflicted wounds—not resolving the Florida and Michigan primary dispute to her advantage, booting the question about illegal immigrants' driver's licenses at the debate, not fitting Bill Clinton with a hard bit and a tight bridle (my words). To this list, Cillizza adds Clinton's decision to market herself as the experienced candidate instead of as the passionate one, her choice to run in the Iowa caucuses instead of skipping them, "creative tensions within her innermost circle of advisers," and her underestimation of Obama.

Even the \textit{Washington Post} and the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, which give primary emphasis to explaining how Obama won, not how Clinton lost, still catalog Clinton's big miscues. According to the \textit{Post}, they are failure to compete aggressively in the caucus states, investing too heavily in a Super Tuesday landslide, and overreliance on state party organizations. The \textit{Los Angeles Times} reiterates the \textit{Post}'s list and throws in pushing "experience" in a year when voters wanted change and a lack of presidential-primary experience among the Clinton brass. Clinton attempted "to run a general election campaign, aimed at the political center, in a contest dominated early on by liberal voters," the paper reports.

But evidence that Clinton ran a fairly OK campaign, while Obama ran one that simply got better and better, can be found in a chart reproduced in the \textit{Journal} story from Real Clear Politics data, which averages the national polls since October. (See this \texttt{larger version} of the chart.)

Here's my two cents, idiosyncratic as they may be: According to the chart, Clinton's national poll average was basically unchanged between the beginning of October and the middle of May, starting at about 41 percent and ending at about 42 percent. Although Clinton verged on 50 percent of the average poll and dipped to just below 40 before the New Hampshire primary, her numbers remained relatively steady. Meanwhile, Obama's numbers started at about 22 percent in October and rose faster than CO\textsubscript{2} levels in the atmosphere, breaking 50 percent at the end.

One interpretation of the average poll data—my interpretation—is that as the field of candidates thinned and undecideds got off
the pot, they migrated to Obama in huge numbers, first after the Iowa caucuses and then before Super Tuesday. Clinton, on the other hand, was a candidate whose market share was fixed. She never really expanded from her core of support, despite the many style, substance, and personnel changes she made during the campaign and no matter how much money she spent. And even then, she just barely lost the delegate count.

So the real story, which the Post and the Los Angeles Times detail nicely in their separate ways, is that Obama won by winning, not by Clinton losing.

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Look at me! I'm a pundit! I'm a pundit! Send your best examples of punditry to slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," Slate's readers' forum, in a future article, or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: Slate is owned by the Washington Post Co.) Track my errors: This hand-built RSS feed will ring every time Slate runs a "Press Box" correction. For e-mail notification of errors in this specific column, type the word pundit in the subject head of an e-mail message and send it to slate.pressbox@gmail.com.

press box
Bill Clinton, Press Critic
His critique of the Vanity Fair piece about him starts strong and then collapses.
By Jack Shafer
Monday, June 2, 2008, at 6:31 PM ET

It turns out that Bill Clinton commands talents I never knew he had. We're all familiar with his skills as diplomat, political fixer, campaigner, and foundation builder, but who had an inkling that he possessed the mental dexterity to perform the magic art of press criticism?

Yesterday, Clinton—er ... make that the "Office of President Clinton"—circulated a 2,500-word critique of "The Comeback Id," Todd S. Purdum's feature on the former president in the July Vanity Fair.

"A tawdry, anonymous quote-filled attack piece," the critique seethed, one that "repeats many past attacks on him, ignores much prior positive coverage, includes numerous errors, and ultimately breaks no new ground. It is, in short, journalism of personal destruction at its worst."

It's true that the Purdum story is tawdry, but can any profile of the man whose name will forever be linked to Gennifer Flowers, Paula Jones, Monica Lewinsky, Juanita Broaddrick, Elizabeth Ward Gracen, Sally Perdue, Dolly Kyle Browning, and Kathleen Willey* be anything but tawdry? Ripping Purdum and Vanity Fair on those grounds seems a tad unfair. If Clinton were smart, he'd not publicize Purdum's musings about the former president's gallivanting with the Steve Bing and Ron Burkle bone-daddy posse. But you know how self-righteous press critics get when they're scrutinized.

Clinton's office is right. Purdum's piece overflows with information culled from anonymous sources. Purdum describes those sources as:

- One former aide to Clinton who is still in occasional affectionate touch with him
- Another former aide, trusted by Clinton for his good judgment
- A longtime Clinton-watcher, who has had ties to the former president since his first campaign for governor of Arkansas
- Yet another long-serving Clinton aide
- Friends who worry that Clinton has never been the same since his quadruple-bypass surgery
- One senior aide, who has known and served both Clintons for years
- A participant [in a 1992 condom presentation to Clinton]
- One of [Maggie] Williams' former colleagues and friends
- A range of Clinton loyalists
- Another aide
- Fewer Clinton aides
- The aide
- Another aide
- Several Clinton aides and friends
- Aides to both Clintons
- The aide
- Aides

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*For more on Kathleen Willey, see: Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC
• this aide
• a person close to [Edward] Kennedy
• a Clinton campaign official
• aides
• Some aides
• Clinton aides
• one senior Clinton adviser
• [Clinton] associates
• friends

As a press critic who has sworn death to anonmymice, I appreciate Team Clinton’s condemnation of Purdum’s extravagant reliance on unnamed sources. I’d appreciate Clinton’s declaration more if he and his administration hadn’t relied so heavily on anonymous leaks while he was president to manage the news to his benefit.

But after this terrific start, the Clinton press critique collapses so dramatically that I’d fly to New York City tonight on my own nickel and offer its author a seminar in remedial press criticism if I thought he’d take me up on it. The critique states:

Any balanced account of President Clinton's post-presidency—which other publications have referred to as one of "a great philanthropist;" the face of "the power of philanthropy" and "a major force in fighting the pandemic [HIV/AIDS]"—would recognize that the lion's share of his work is his multi-million dollar charitable foundation, which works in almost 50 countries around the world.

President Clinton has helped save the lives of more than 1,300,000 people in his post-presidency, and Vanity Fair couldn't find time to talk to even one of them for comment.

Since when do individual stories have to be "balanced"? I blame the "fair and balanced" Fox News Channel for popularizing the idea that reporters must strive for some sort of Platonic equilibrium or they’re not producing proper journalism. Such comprehensive coverage is neither possible nor desirable (“Mr. Hitler, who was responsible for the unnecessary deaths of millions, loved children”), and the testimonies of the 1.3 million people whose lives President Clinton has "helped save" don't really have any bearing on Purdum's thesis that Clinton's post-presidential personal behavior, personal associations, and financial dealings all suggest conduct not becoming the spouse of a U.S. senator who is running for president.

The Clinton letter races to irrelevancy after that, demanding that readers know about "Vanity Fair's Troubling Ethical History." Yes, the magazine's been sued for libel, but that falls several thousand miles short of "Troubling Ethical History." Yes, Vanity Fair Editor-in-Chief Graydon Carter has capitalized "on his position at Vanity Fair to explore consulting and investment deals," but what does that have to do with the Clinton piece?

I'll leave it to Vanity Fair's fact-checking department and the Office of the President to haggle over the disputed facts that the critique lists. I haven't the patience.

What the Clinton letter fails to acknowledge is that his many questionable business dealings, all gathered here, make for an eye-opener for those who haven't followed his adventures since the final days of his administration. There's the Marc Rich pardon and Rich's ex-wife's $450,000 contribution to Clinton's library fund, not to mention all the dubious donors to the William J. Clinton Presidential Foundation. There's Clinton's private-jet travel with investor Jeffrey Epstein, who was indicted on soliciting prostitution charges in Florida. Don't forget the $3 million in consulting fees he's collected from InfoUSA, or the $15.5 million he's earned from playboy magnate Ron Burkle, or Burkle's investments in the Middle East. A whole book could be written about Clinton’s relationship with the Canadian mining financier, which the New York Times broke in January and Purdum reprises. (Addendum, June 3: See also this Newsweek story, published several days before the Times article.)

If nothing else, Purdum's piece makes a superb case for the means testing of presidential pensions. Between them, the Clintons have made $109 million in the past eight years. Why does this man deserve a government pension? (See this Washington Post piece for the run-down on the Clintons' income.)

Clinton declined to speak to Vanity Fair for the piece, and my guess is that his growing appreciation for press criticism helped him make the decision. I'll bet that he's intimate with Purdum's work, not only because Purdum married his former press secretary Dee Dee Myers, but because he's haunted by a New York Times piece by Purdum from Aug. 18, 1998, titled "Strong at Politics, Weakened by Lapses," which paints Clinton as a habitual liar. He wrote:

Time and again in the risky running melodrama of his public life, Mr. Clinton has treated the truth as an a la carte menu. … [His] sweeping elisions of reality lie far beyond the ken of conventional political analysis. … [G]ray is Mr. Clinton's favorite weapon. It has been central to his successes and to his setbacks.

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But dock Purdum a dozen points for describing Clinton as possessing "protean political talents" in both his 1998 Times
piece and his *Vanity Fair* feature! Dock Clinton, too, for not noticing! Disclosure: *Slate* co-sponsored a conference on "innovative philanthropy" with the William J. Clinton Foundation and the Clinton School of Public Service in 2006 and 2007. No money changed hands, so I don't think the Office of the President will be writing me any chiding letters about this column. Dock me at slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," *Slate's* readers' forum, in a future article, or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.) Track my errors: This hand-built RSS feed will ring every time *Slate* runs a "Press Box" correction. For e-mail notification of errors in this specific column, type the word *Purdom* in the subject head of an e-mail message and send it to slate.pressbox@gmail.com.

**Correction, June 3, 2008:** The original version of this article misspelled Kathleen Willey's last name. (Return to the corrected sentence.)

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**reading list**

**Forever Young**

Books and Web sites about how to avoid getting old, or at least looking old.

By Emily Yoffe

Saturday, May 31, 2008, at 7:44 AM ET

Recently scientists discovered that the Grand Canyon, which they had thought was 6 million years old, was actually 17 million years old. This is a heartening development for the ever-growing bulge of Americans staring into the crevasse of old age: It gives hope that it's possible to be 17 million years old but not look a day over 6 million!

Preventing, delaying, and hiding aging is an explosive growth industry. Americans over 65 make up about 12 percent of the population today. By 2030 they're expected to be 20 percent. There is a two-prong strategy for trying to stop time. The first is to find the right combination of food, exercise, supplements, and medical interventions to extend your life into triple digits. The second (and these aren't mutually exclusive) is to take advantage of various external manipulations in order to turn yourself into a permanent simulacrum of, if not quite youth, then perpetually youthful, indeterminate middle age.

For the former, check out the Methuselah Foundation, headed by Cambridge University Ph.D. Aubrey de Grey (who himself has a Methuselah-looking, though not gray, chest-long beard). De Grey believes science will soon be able to achieve his goal of a human lifespan of 1,000 years. This is not because he likes to envision the feuds that will erupt over whose house the great-great-great-great-grandchildren will spend Thanksgiving at, but because he sees aging as a form of "slaughter" of once-productive people. His Web site has lots of information about the latest thinking on the molecular processes of aging and how to stop them.

At the *New England Centenarian Study*, scientists are looking at the characteristics of what they say is the fastest-growing segment of the population: people 100 or older. Amazingly, the research, led by Dr. Thomas Perls of Boston University School of Medicine, has found that our oldest old tend to be in remarkable shape—90 percent lived independently into their 90s, and many maintain excellent brain function. While centenarians come from all educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, they are almost always lean, usually didn't smoke, and chose their families well—many have close relatives who also got to be ancient. The site also has a quiz that gives you an estimate of how long you've got left.

The National Institute on Aging has basic information on aging problems from Alzheimer's to constipation to eye floaters, but the most interactive feature is the clinical trials page, where you can see if you qualify to participate in a study. Reading through the trials gives you a peek into what interventions scientists are hoping might be the fountain of youth. (Clearly some think the fountain is bubbling with fish oil.)

If you haven't got time for science to come up with a way to actually stop aging, best-selling author Charla Krupp in her book *How Not To Look Old* has endless tips on how to appear as if you've personally decided not to get older. Krupp says her advice is not merely a tribute to vanity but a strategy for survival. To continue to thrive in their careers, boomer women must look Y&H (young and hip) because it's off on the corporate ice floe the moment you look OL (old lady). So get some bangs, wear pink lipstick, and throw away the flesh-colored pantyhose ("nude pantyhose are the devil"). She even has the solution for dreaded drooping-earlobe syndrome: a few drops of the facial filler Restylane.

For hard-core information about more invasive ways to remodel your exterior, www.cosmeticsurgery-news.com aggregates plastic surgery news from around the world, from breakthroughs ("New laser technique zaps fat without surgery") to horror stories ("I just want the mouth God gave me"). There's no quicker—or cheaper—way to make yourself feel satisfied with your own aging face than looking at the disastrous lengths celebrities go to keep themselves young. City Rag has an archive of increasingly freakish-looking celebrities (I promise even Methuselah looks better than Burt Reynolds or Faye Dunaway).

Doris Lessing, 89, was the winner of last year's Nobel Prize in literature. Lessing herself is defiantly OL, with her cranky demeanor and her bun. In 1983, under the pseudonym Jane Somers, she published the novel *The Diary of a Good Neighbor*.
the story of an unlikely friendship between a successful single
London woman and her elderly neighbor, Maudie. Maudie is the
kind of old person none of us wants to be: angry, confused,
lonely, smelly. But the book, like its author, is fierce,
unsentimental, and compelling.

They Shoot Chickens, Don't They?
How they kill birds infected with avian flu.
By Daniel Engber
Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 12:35 PM ET

Arkansas state officials announced Tuesday that Tyson Foods Inc. has begun the process of killing nearly 15,000 hens from a flock that tested positive for a strain of avian flu. In a 2005 "Explainer" column, Daniel Engber described how to dispose of birds infected with the disease. The article is reprinted below.

British government officials are planning to slaughter millions of hens, chickens, and turkeys if there's an outbreak of H5N1 bird flu on the island. In recent weeks, Romania has culled more than 50,000 domestic birds, and in 2004 the Canadian government destroyed more than 16 million chickens, turkeys, and ducks. How do these mass killings work?

In two stages: First you have to kill the birds, then you have to dispose of them. When the United Kingdom decided to kill off about 6 million cattle, sheep, and pigs to control an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001, the military officer in charge of the operation described it as being more complicated than the Gulf War.

The World Health Organization has said that mass culls might be the best option for controlling the spread of bird flu, especially where vaccines are not available. To prevent the spread of the disease, authorities might order the destruction of every bird within a few miles of an infected bird. If there are multiple infections, culls can take place over large territories and include huge numbers of animals. (Governments usually reimburse bird owners for their losses.)

The World Organization for Animal Health says that culls of any kind should be performed under the direction of a veterinarian. The "cullers" themselves should wear coveralls or surgical gowns, an apron, rubber work gloves and boots, respirator masks, and goggles. They're also supposed to wash their hands frequently with soap and water.

The killing should take place away from public view, and the birds should be handled as little as possible. In general, infected birds should be killed first, followed by those birds that were closest to the infected birds, and then finishing up with the healthy birds. Whenever possible, younger birds should be killed before older ones, to preserve them from unnecessary stress.

Any of a number of methods can be used to cull a flock. Authorities in Canada used carbon dioxide, which kills birds by increasing the acidity of their cerebrospinal fluid. (Long-necked birds, like ducks, require more gas than the relatively short-necked chickens.) Cullers sealed up poultry houses with foam and duct tape and then pumped in the gas until they thought all the birds were unconscious or dead.

Birds can be killed with other kinds of gas, such as nitrogen or hydrogen cyanide, but CO₂ tends to be the most common because it's cheap and easy to get. Another common technique hangs birds upside-down and then submerges their heads in an electrified water bath. For smaller operations, cullers might fire air guns into the skulls of the animals. Cullers can also decapitate birds with a guillotine or give them a lethal injection. Small birds can be killed by "maceration," which means they get tossed in something like a wood chipper. Newspaper reports say the culling operations in Asia (and a few other places, like Albania) have resorted to burying the birds alive after tossing them in plastic bags.

Got a question about today's news? Ask the Explainer.

Why the Mafia Loves Garbage
Hauling trash and organized crime.
By Michelle Tsai
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 1:58 PM ET

Connecticut trash executive James Galante pleaded guilty Tuesday to racketeering and conspiracy charges. Galante was indicted in 2006 as part of a federal corruption probe of organized-crime activity in the garbage industry. In an "Explainer" column this year, Michelle Tsai investigated the Mafia-garbage connection. The article is reprinted below.

The Italian government called in the army on Tuesday to clean up the mounting piles of waste in the city of Naples. Residents
blame the authorities for not doing more to stop the Camorra, the region's Mafia group, which controls garbage collection and has caused the city's constant waste problem for more than a decade. Organized crime appears to have a hand in trash collection all over the world, from Naples to Tony Soprano's northern New Jersey. Why are gangsters always hauling garbage?

It's Mob Economics 101: Find a business that's easy to enter and lucrative to control. Criminal organizations make lots of money from drugs, human trafficking, and counterfeit goods, but creating a monopoly on garbage collection is attractive because the business itself is legal, and public contracts return big profits. Compared with something like running a casino or grocery store, the logistics of taking trash from Point A to Point B are a no-brainer. Anyone with a truck and a couple of strong guys can make good money, and there's always a demand for the service.

Here's how it works: The mob organizes the trash-hauling businesses in a given city to prevent competition from driving down prices. They fix prices, rig bids, and allocate territories in such a way that customers can't choose who picks up their garbage. The Camorra, a larger and older group than the Sicilian Mafia, have controlled the industry in Naples for about 25 years. The mob harasses non-Camorra garbage collectors and extorts money from them; meanwhile, its own companies do a shoddy job. The country's Mafia groups have also illegally dumped toxic, industrial waste in Naples and other parts of the country.

Criminal organizations elsewhere in the world also find profit in trash schemes. In parts of Taiwan, gangs dig into the riverbank for gravel and sell it to construction companies. Then, they fill up the holes with waste they've collected. Georgian crime bosses swooped in when the city of Tbilisi privatized waste transport (PDF). In New York City, La Cosa Nostra more or less dominated trash collection from the 1950s until Rudy Giuliani seized control of the industry as mayor in the 1990s. It all started when members worked their way into the Teamsters union, which included garbage truck drivers; this allowed the mob to dictate which companies the drivers would work for, effectively pushing out non-Mafia operations. (The Mafia also controlled the construction sector through unions.)

For a large crime organization, the garbage racket provides relatively little in the way of revenue compared with traditional criminal enterprises like gambling, loan-sharking, and narcotics. This is especially true in Italy, where the mob operates in many industries. The Camorra is thought to make $70 billion a year, much of it from drugs, contraband cigarettes, and DVDs, as well as public sector contracts in construction and cleaning. Another Italian group, the 'Ndrangheta, traffics 80 percent of Europe's cocaine. The Mafia is so pervasive in Italy that, according to a large trade association, it controls one out of every five businesses in the country.

Got a question about today's news? Ask the Explainer.
I will continue to look over David's shoulder without, I hope, breathing down his neck.

In the past year, I've been drawn more and more into projects that expand upon what we've built at Slate. Just under a year ago, we started Slate V, a daily video site. In January, I helped launch The Root, under the editorial direction of Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Lynette Clemetson. Most recently, I've been spending time planning The Big Money, a new business site scheduled to go live in September.

My new task at the Washington Post Co. is to consolidate and expand this portfolio of Web sites under the heading of the Slate Group (press release here). Slate Publisher John Alderman and I are planning to develop an even larger family of Internet magazines. The Slate Group intends to function as an Internet start-up within the framework of an established media company. I think Slate's editorial staff understands the intersection of journalism and technology better than any other. John and I want to harness that collective intelligence to create new destinations on the Web. We also hope to test new business models to support high-quality journalism on the Web.

Being editor of Slate is the best job I've ever had, because of the freedom and support given to me by Don Graham and the Post Co., and because of the opportunity to work with colleagues I admire and adore. I'm relieved that stepping down won't mean saying goodbye to them. I fully expect that under David's direction, they will make Slate an even better magazine in the years ahead.

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**James Watson on Race**

*Cheney Disses West Virginia*

**slate v**

*Cheney Disses West Virginia*

*slate v*

Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 4:32 PM ET

A daily video from Slate V.

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**The Closest Marriage—Literally**

*Dear Prudence: Harassed at the Gym*

**slate v**

*Dear Prudence: Harassed at the Gym*

**slate v**

Monday, June 2, 2008, at 12:02 PM ET

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**Always Bet On ... White?**

**slate v**

*Always Bet On ... White?*

*Dear Prudence: Harassed at the Gym*

**slate v**

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 4:51 PM ET

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**slate v**

By Daniel Engber

Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 11:33 AM ET

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The Boston Celtics are expected to win Game 1 of the NBA Finals on Thursday night, which certainly makes sense if you look at the numbers. The Celts finished the season nine games ahead of Los Angeles. Their scoring differential was by far the best in league, a full 40 percent better than the Lakers. And the majority of the championship series are scheduled to be played in Boston, where the home team has won 10 of 11 throughout the playoffs. But Game 1 notwithstanding, the bookies in Vegas are reportedly favoring the Lakers to win it all. What are they thinking?

I hope they're not relying on the superiority of the Western Conference: This season's Celtics were even stronger against the West than they were in their own conference, at one point racking up 16 wins in a row against the Pacific Coast juggernauts. It would be just as ill-advised to play up the "playoff experience" of Lakers' coach and basketball Buddhist Phil Jackson. (As I recall, Gregg Popovich has also had some modest success in the postseason.) No, I'm guessing the oddsmakers have keyed in on something else about the 2007-08 Los Angeles Lakers … something that might give them an edge in a close series against a more skilled opponent. Maybe they've noticed that the Lakers are a very, very white team.

There's reason to believe that fair skin gives you an advantage in the NBA. Last spring, economists Joseph Price and Justin Wolfers published a careful analysis (PDF) of league statistics and found evidence of racial bias among the referees. According to their research, the numbers of fouls called against white and black players varied depending on the race of the referees for that game—when there were more white officials on the floor, fewer fouls were called against white players. And since the majority of the league's referees are white, this puts minority players at a disadvantage. (To be exact, the data showed only a
relative effect—so it's impossible to know which direction the bias went. White refs may favor white players, or they may discriminate against blacks. Or, black refs could just as well be favoring black players or discriminating against whites.)

The commissioner’s office denounced the findings, but the data it offered as a counterpoint turned out to be unconvincing. Then, last month, Price and Wolters dropped another bombshell on the league. By comparing their previous data with Vegas betting lines, the economists tried to show that a betting strategy based on referee bias would systematically beat the spread (PDF). They found that having one additional white player on the floor could make a difference of half a point in a game’s outcome, given a majority-white crew of referees. Their data also indicate that betting lines have tended to underrate teams with more white players. Have the bookmakers in Vegas finally wised up?

Take a look at the rosters for the NBA Finals. Just two players on the Celtics are white—Scot Pollard and Brian Scalabrine—and neither one has so much as set foot on the hardwood during this year’s playoffs. Meanwhile, the Lakers have two white players in their starting lineup, Pau Gasol and Vladimir Radmanovic, plus two more who get significant time in the rotation, Sasha Vujacic and Luke Walton. They've got a pair of white bench-warriors in Coby Karl and Chris Mihm and a regular player in the light-skinned, Jewish point guard Jordan Farmar. In other words, the Lakers are at least three times whiter than the Celtics.

Of course, it’s hard to figure out what effect this will have on the officiating in the finals. For one thing, we don't even know yet which referees will be calling the games. What's more, Price and Wolters teased out a tiny racial-bias effect in the NBA by sorting through a mountain of data—every single box score from 12 years of regular-season games. That needle-in-a-haystack approach has its pitfalls, since a failure to correct for a single variable can make a bit of random variation seem like something important.

Last December’s study (PDF) of racial bias among umpires in Major League Baseball may have suffered from exactly that problem. A team led by economist Daniel Hamermesh looked at ball-and-strike data from more than 2 million pitches across three seasons and evaluated whether white umpires were more likely to make judgments in favor of a white pitcher. The study found that there was indeed an "own-race" effect when it came to called strikes and that the bias disappeared when umpires knew they were being monitored by the "QuesTec" computer system for determining balls and strikes. In other words, the umpires were biased when they knew they could get away with it.

But subsequent investigations by other researchers—notably Phil Birnbaum of the blog Sabermetric Research—revealed some flaws in the analysis. The Hamermesh team didn't properly account for every variable, like the score in the game or the time of day. (Pitchers tend to throw more strikes when there’s a lopsided score, and umpires may make their calls differently in natural versus artificial light.) If there's any bias at all, Birnbaum concluded, it’s probably that minority umpires favor their own. And the effect shown in the paper might be the work of one bad apple, as opposed to rampant racism throughout the league. But even if you take the paper’s central finding at face value, the effect would be so minuscule that only one or two pitches would be affected per year for each pitcher.

Stat-heads haven’t made as much of an effort to debunk the original Price and Wolters study, but Birnbaum has cast serious doubts on the betting-line follow-up. (The results, he argues, may have more to do with the fact that white players are underrated than with racial discrimination by referees.) Still, there's some reason to believe that there's more racial bias in basketball than in baseball. Wage-discrimination studies found that salaries for white NBA players in the 1980s were 20 percent higher than they were for black counterparts with similar stats. They may have been worth the extra money: Each additional white player on a team also seemed to account for a paid-attendance boost of 13,000 fans per season.

But the financial evidence for racial discrimination in the NBA has since diminished. And there's plenty of bias in professional sports that's both more pervasive and more pronounced than racial discrimination. The home-court advantage, for example, seems to stem in part from referees who are biased toward the home team. Much of the research in this area has focused on soccer referees, who tend to assign more injury time at the end of a game when the home team is losing and less when it's ahead. They also give out fewer red and yellow cards to the home team and make fewer calls in the lab when watching video with the crowd noise turned off. As a general rule, the bigger the crowd, the bigger the bias.

There are more surprising sources of bias, too. In 1988, a pair of social psychologists from Cornell named Mark Frank and Thomas Gilovich published a study on "Black Uniforms and Aggression in Professional Sports" (PDF). They looked at data from hockey and football and found there was a connection between the color of a team jersey and the number of fouls called on the player wearing that jersey. The teams that wore black (or near-black) tallied a disproportionate total of penalty yards or penalty minutes between 1970 and 1986. (In football, these black-shirts included the Raiders, Steelers, Bengals, Saints, and Bears; in hockey, the Flyers, Penguins, Canucks, Bruins, and Blackhawks.) Meanwhile, the teams wearing the most gentle colors—like the aqua-coral-and-white Miami Dolphins—seemed to get the fewest whistles.

It's possible that the owners of black-shirted teams tend to hire more aggressive players. But Frank and Gilovich found that the pattern held even when teams switched colors midseason. The
Pittsburgh Penguins swapped their blue uniforms for black ones in the middle of the 1979-80 campaign, in solidarity with the hometown Steelers, who had just won Super Bowl XIV. The team logged 50 percent more penalty minutes after the change than they did before.

In the lab, Frank and Gilovich demonstrated that football referees were more likely to call a penalty on a player wearing black than one wearing white or grey, even on an identical play. This could be a weird offshoot of racial bias, with the uniform standing in for the color of a player's skin. Or maybe the racism uncovered by Price and Wolfers is actually an extension of this more essential bias against certain colors.

If Price and Wolfers are right, then—all other things being equal—the Lakers may have a very slight advantage over the Celtics in the NBA Finals. But all other things are rarely equal. The boisterous crowds might amplify Boston's home-court advantage. Perhaps the Celtic green will soothe the referees, in the same way that green placebos work best for treating anxiety. There will be bad calls in this championship series, and there will be biased calls. It's just hard to tell which way they'll go. Wait, did I mention that Pau Gasol has brown hair?

Can Wal-Mart Save Local Newspapers?

Wal-Mart doesn't know it yet, but it may be the savior that local newspapers have been praying for. The big-box retailer launched a new service without any fanfare last month and dubbed it Wal-Mart Classifieds. It slunk into Wal-Mart.com's left navigation bar, where it still sits inconspicuously—a dozen links from the top of the page without a hint of its brand-new status or its potential power. Its promise is well-hidden; as of now, Wal-Mart Classifieds is a clunky marketplace with spotty listings and a poorly designed interface. But its sorry debut doesn't have to remain its destiny. Wal-Mart can use the tool to liberate newspaper balance sheets from Craigslist—the misunderstood villain of the classified industry.

At this point, it's passé to say that Craigslist has demolished local newspapers nationwide. Newspapers' classified-ad revenues climbed reliably for a half-century, beginning in 1950 and ending in 2000. Once the new millennium arrived, though, expenditures crested and started to fall like a stiff log off Splash Mountain. Last year they declined by 16 percent. Craigslist, meanwhile, watched the plummet from the observation desk, soaking up business (but not necessarily profits). Stripped of their classified revenue streams—which had especially high profit margins—newspapers were forced to start stripping their payrolls.

For years, academics, journalists, and bloggers have used Craigslist as a scapegoat to hide the truth of the matter: It wasn't Craigslist's fault—newspapers simply screwed up. They failed to see the power of the publish-anything-anytime-anywhere Internet, so they fell behind. And once Craigslist found traction, it was off to the races.

These days, Craigslist is such a monolith you would think newspapers would have joined in. But Craigslist doesn't want newspapers stealing its infrastructure. Craigslist is still an island community compared with most of the Web. To use Craigslist, you need to go through its site and manually input your wares for sale. You can't graft your own database into the Craigslist architecture. (This is what's called an API in techie talk.) This forced newspapers to fend for themselves as nuclear winter approached and classified rations were running low.

Funnily enough, Wal-Mart's dominance of the retail market and its destruction of mom-and-pop stores is quite similar to the Craigslist situation. And in an ironic twist, Wal-Mart is now positioned to be newspapers' savior. Wal-Mart's classified service runs on a platform provided by Oodle—one of those Silicon Valley startups with terribly silly names. Oodle recognizes Craigslist's dominance but wants to open the architecture up to partners in order to increase the network's reach (via APIs and other methods). The company partners with 80,000 different sites, according to the CEO, and listings provided by any one of the 80,000 are visible across the entire Oodle network. That means something posted on, say, the New York Post's classified network shows up on Wal-Mart's and vice versa.

In theory, this business model means that everybody wins. Oodle gets more participants in its network, which makes its classifieds more robust and attractive. Local newspapers get to brag that they have listings not only from their own listings but from tens of thousands of other sites on the Internet. The individual sellers get a broader audience, and the individual buyers get more offerings to choose from. This is key: In the commodities market, Oodle needs to compete with eBay's vast inventory, and in the services field (real estate, job listings, etc.), it has to make an indent against Craigslist's market share.

The business model sounds great, right? Alas, there's a snag: Only about a dozen local newspapers have actually partnered with Oodle; the other 79,988 sites are mostly Web commerce and auction players looking for another outlet for their products. In other words, the local classified market is still trying to fight off Craigslist from hundreds of different directions, when what they really need is to form a unified front.
That's where Wal-Mart's deal with Oodle could be a turning point. Wal-Mart is a big-name company that can rally newspapers around one technology and one classified portal. Think about it: When a major celebrity picks one nonprofit to highlight his or her agenda, folks quickly rally around that organization to express their activism. (See: the One Campaign, Save Darfur, Barack Obama).

Wal-Mart certainly qualifies as a celebrity in the world of commerce. Last year, it had enough revenue to be one of the 25 largest countries in the world. Twenty-six million people already come to Walmart.com every month, which makes it one of the biggest players in Oodle's network. Newspapers looking to increase their sales pitch to prospective classified advertisers can say that at least 26 million Wal-Mart customers are among the paper's clientele.

Also, there's an opportunity for Wal-Mart to tap into its rural strengths. Craigslist, with its Spartan layout, city-centered mentality, and questionable personal ads comes across as a product of the urban, young techno-elite. Wal-Mart can be the people's champion, protecting small-town papers and communities from big, scary San Francisco snobs. (Already, Craigslist's current expansion centers on creating new markets beyond its typical urban focal points.) Wal-Mart can use its neighborhood roots to convince local papers to join its (and, therefore, Oodle's) classified network. This is a PR coup for Wal-Mart, which can spin the initiative as its way of investing in local communities—something it hasn't exactly been known for in the past. And that's why it's such smart business for Wal-Mart to enter into the local, online classifieds game in the first place. Protecting the First Amendment is a good way to convince Americans you aren't the devil.

But this elaborate scheme to save the local press isn't happening anytime soon—at least not while Wal-Mart continues to be a reluctant messiah. When contacted, Wal-Mart wouldn't schedule an interview for this story, issuing only a cryptic statement in response. The Classifieds page is still hidden on Walmart.com, and I couldn't find any promotions pointing users to the new feature. If Wal-Mart is planning to save the local press, they're certainly being coy about it. Maybe the Wal-Mart Classifieds logo should be a winking emoticon :-) rather than their usual smiley-face logo.

But the onus isn't squarely on Wal-Mart. Newspapers need to sign up with the Oodle network in order to build incentives for Wal-Mart to give its Classifieds site the publicity it needs to thrive. The more classifieds available, the more impressive of a product Wal-Mart has to tout.

Still, Wal-Mart would be silly to pass up the opportunity to capitalize on the online classifieds market without at least trying. The Anybody But Craigslist movement needs a leader. Who better to lead than a company that knows a thing or two about being an industry's monolithic villain?

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sidebar

Wal-Mart's only comment on Wal-Mart Classifieds is the following statement:

We recently launched Walmart.com Classifieds beta to provide additional opportunities for our customers to save money and live better. This free, community-based resource allows customers to buy and sell items locally, find local jobs and learn about events in their area. Our new Classifieds beta at Walmart.com provides an expanded offering of products and services, the majority of which are not traditionally available from Wal-Mart, such as job listings, automobiles, rentals and real estate. It also further connects our community of 130 million customers who shop the Wal-Mart brand each week.

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technology

Is Google Draining or Retaining?

Reports of an exodus of talent from the company have been greatly exaggerated.

By Chris Thompson

Monday, June 2, 2008, at 12:27 PM ET

Based on coverage in the business-and-tech press, you are forgiven for thinking that all the best talent in the industry is jumping off the Good Ship Google. For the last two months, bloggers and business reporters have breathlessly cataloged the names of Google bigwigs who've left the company. Facebook, in particular, snatched up some of the search giant's most valuable names: head of global communications Elliot Schrage, vice president of global sales Sheryl Sandberg, and director of social media Ethan Beard. Whether appearing on Wired.com or the BBC or in Fortune magazine, the story was the same: Google has lost its Valley mojo, and as the company's growing bureaucracy stifles its smartest employees' creative impulses, a "brain drain" threatens to bleed it of the very talent that made it Google.
At first glance, David Friedberg perfectly epitomizes this trend. When he joined Google in 2003, he and three other people were charged with putting together the company's corporate-development team; eventually he would become the business-product manager for Adwords, the advertising function that nets billions in revenue. But over time, he began to notice that Google's early free-wheeling culture was disappearing under layers of bean counters and bureaucrats. Eventually, he left to start the weather-risk-management firm WeatherBill.

"Anyone who joined the company in the past four years has seen a project they could work on, and in three months launch it, and have it have a major impact on the business," Friedberg says. "You could have this creative chaos, and then see millions of people use it immediately and have enormous financial implications. You had the world's largest sandbox. … Because of the maturity of the company, it became harder and harder for me to do interesting things."

But what really strikes Friedberg is how few of his contemporaries have done the same thing. Despite all the buzz about Google's talent exodus, he says, the company has managed to hold onto a remarkable number of smart, impossibly rich employees—men and women who could spend the rest of their lives sipping margaritas but choose to stay at Google because it's still so damn fun. "Any company has an attrition rate, and I think Google's is lower than almost any other company," Friedberg says. "I know people who have been there for more than six years, are fully vested, and they're staying there because they're doing interesting things."

While there's no absolute yardstick for whether a company is retaining or draining talent, evidence suggests that Google is not leaking that badly. Veteran search-engine reporter Danny Sullivan recently tallied up the number of senior executives who have left Google and found that just six had departed in the last eight years. By contrast, Yahoo lost 17 senior executives in the first six months of 2007 alone.

Salman Ullah, who recently left his gig as Google's vice president of corporate development to found Merus Capital, agrees that the firm's smartest talent is mostly staying put. "Any company that has 20,000 employees, people are going to leave. That's just normal," Ullah says. "I spent three years there, and it's just an extraordinary talent pool they have accumulated. It's going to take many, many years before they regress to the mean and become just another company."

Even some of Google's Silicon Valley rivals claim that Google has nothing to worry about. "People love to work there; it's a fun environment," says Craig Donato, who founded the rival classified ad aggregator Oodle. "I've actually been surprised and impressed by the number of people they've retained."

So where does all this hype come from? What prompted Fortune magazine to publish a 3,000-word story on the subject, with the title "Where Does Google Go Next?" According to Brett Bullington, who advises Valley startups and sits on the board of Digg.com, Google is just going through the same process of growth and maturation that Microsoft and Yahoo did a few years earlier. "The bigger issue they've got is that as they expand their employee base, so many employees, their experience with Google is really post-IPO, and the challenge is how do they keep this small, creative atmosphere alive," Bullington says. However, he adds, every company loses some of its more interesting players when it reaches a certain size, and the real story is how well Google is managing this process; "You go to a meeting at Google and ask yourself: [Can you] find a person who doesn't want to be at that meeting? They're all very active, and all very engaged. Show me another company where that's true."

That's not to say that Google doesn't face any challenges in keeping its smartest people. For one thing, the pre-IPO days when an early employee could expect massive stock windfalls are over. And for years, company managers have worried that someone has to do the dull, infrastructural coding, and hiring the best and the brightest will leave some people so bored that they'll leave to start afresh. "That was a problem in 2004," says David Friedberg. "I think the term was voyager engineers, like they would travel around and work on the things that most people didn't want to do." Google has tried to address this by offering "20 percent time," or one day a week when engineers get to work on pet projects like the social-networking site Orkut. In addition, Friedberg says, Google has begun contracting its infrastructural work to outside companies, reserving its own work force for the more intriguing projects.

Google's biggest problem may be that the company trains its employees so well that they become uniquely qualified to start businesses of their own. When asked about this supposed talent exodus, Chief Executive Officer Eric Schmidt told Fortune that the venture capital market was just too dry to lure people into the startup game right now. And in fact, venture investment dropped more than 8 percent in the first quarter. But according to Friedberg, it's one thing when any schmo with a business plan approaches a V.C. firm for seed money—it's another when you can boast Google on your résumé: "All the V.C.s are saying, 'Oh yeah, these Google companies are doing really well.' They're noticing that Google companies are better than the average company."

Nonetheless, Google seems merely to be entering the same maturing phase that its biggest rivals did before it—and managing the process better. If a true Google brain drain is going to occur, it will probably have to wait for the day that a better company emerges.
Like Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused*, Will Ferrell's *Semi-Pro*, and the first season of *That '70s Show*, *Swingtown* (Thursdays at 10 p.m. ET), the CBS drama about middle-aged men and the Tab-sipping wives they swap, is set in 1976. Judging by the pilot, the new show easily beats its forerunners in matters of time-capsulizing: The costumers unearth the hot shorts and the cool pants; the cinematographers catch that Super-8 home-movie haze with affection; the lawyers got clearances for all the most tedious disco hits squared away.

The verisimilitude is necessary—or the nostalgia-mongering is, at least—as *Swingtown* is also one of those historical fictions that's about the present. The chief swingers are Tom, a commercial airline pilot with no personal thrust reverser, and his wife, Trina, the same Quaalude-gobbling minx he met when she was a stewardess. They live in Surburbia, which here goes by the name Chicago. Tom and Trina represent the youth of today with their tight jeans, loose morals, and Charlotte Simmons debauchery. They're the kids who make you worry about their physical and emotional health and also about the fact that they go to much better parties than you ever will.

New to the couple's block are Bruce and Susan, former high-school sweethearts. The actor playing Bruce (Jack Davenport) indeed takes his face through the full range of Will Ferrell contortions, suggesting maybe that he's made a bold choice to play farce and that he furthered his research with close study of Ron Burgundy. Either way, it's Me Decade burlesque, and his Me is You: Bruce and Susan are the naifs, the wallflowers at the orgy. Their old pals Roger and Janet are the squares, and they're Us, too—surrogates for our confusion in the face of changing sexual values and for our titillation as well.

The titillation is mostly conceptual, of course. Though *Swingtown* does hustle to look racy—an early shot involves Tom's lap, his cockpit, and a faceless woman with a blond up-do—it offers nothing that you haven't seen in prime time before. *The Bachelor* delivers more skin and innuendo; *Three's Company* was more arousing. The relative tameness of *Swingtown* makes the unease it provokes more inviting: You tune in to see the bodies and stick around for the minds.

Those minds are thinking the same thing, to various degrees, with Tom all appetite, Susan half-philosophical, and Janet such a goody-two-shoes that there must be something strange going on up there—which is why I'll be back next week. They seem to be thinking—to rework Winston Churchill's line—that monogamy is the worst form of sexual relationship except all the others that have been tried. The outsized hype accorded polygamists everywhere from HBO to the Texas compound feeds not just on animal lust or emotional curiosity. The panics about apocryphal "lipstick parties" and whatever else kids these days are supposedly up to are not just about moral indignation and, its impish sibling, voyeuristic pleasure. The big lovers and the alleged blow job queens present questions about desire and how to reconcile its demands with those of stability. *Swingtown*, being as cheesy as a shag rug, does not offer any answers, but it must signify something that its original music is by Liz Phair, of Winnetka, Ill., whose 1993 masterpiece, *Exile in Guyville*, turned on a song titled "Fuck and Run."

### the audio book club
**The Audio Book Club on Anna Karenina**
Our critics discuss Leo Tolstoy's masterpiece.
By Stephen Metcalf, Troy Patterson, and Katie Roiphe
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:05 AM ET

*To listen to the Slate Audio Book Club discussion of Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, click the arrow on the player below.*

*You can also download the audio file here, or click here to subscribe to the Slate Audio Book Club feed in iTunes.*

This month, Stephen Metcalf, Troy Patterson, and Katie Roiphe take on Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, a sprawling novel about life and death, marriage and adultery, spiritual longing, and agriculture. What do the book-club participants make of the most famous study of infidelity in literature? It's Metcalf's favorite novel, Roiphe has read it four times, and although Patterson concedes that it's "perfect," he's the biggest detractor in the group. The book runs more than 850 pages, but this discussion lasts just 44 minutes.

If you'd like to get an early start on the next book-club selection, we've chosen *Netherland*, by Joseph O'Neill, which *New York Times* reviewer Dwight Garner described as "the Wittiest, angriest, most exciting and most desolate work of fiction we've yet had about life in New York and London after the World Trade Center fell." We'll post that discussion in early July.

You can also listen to any of our previous club meetings by clicking on the links below.

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the book club

**The Age of Reagan**
What Will Arise From the Wreckage?
By Tim Naftali and Sean Wilentz
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 2:47 PM ET

Dear Sean,

Congratulations on your excellent new political history of our times. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who first made his name with The Age of Jackson, would appreciate the homage implied in your title. And I suspect he might also agree—and I certainly do—that, like it or not, Reagan was the transcendent figure of fin-de-siecle politics in America.

Your first two chapters do a great job laying out the crisis of the old order. In the 1970s the entire American political establishment, which traditionally hewed to the pragmatic center, faced a series of challenges it could not handle. Establishment liberals and small "c" conservatives alike were left, as you say, "philosophically at loose ends."

While noting the lingering effects of Watergate and Vietnam, you point out that Americans had other reasons to question the basic competence of the political establishment. Stagflation confounded the conventional wisdom. Meanwhile, violent crime was on the rise. When Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter six years later, the economic situation was, if anything, worse, and the crime statistics not much better. You don't write this, but I sense you would agree that it was this striking bipartisan leadership failure that made it impossible for successful politicians to lead from the center for a generation.

And so, enter Ronald Reagan, stage right. Although he was mouthing the same nostrums that conservatives had been offering when crime, unemployment, and inflation rates were low in the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1970s, Americans were eager to give this outsider and his followers a chance. Having stressed that he successfully put a smiling, optimistic face on American conservatism, you are also careful to make clear that his election was as much the result of the collapse of liberal Democrats as because of the power of his message.

Once in office, Reagan produced Reaganism. In a departure from other analyses, you believe Reaganism is both more and less than just the catechism of the new right. "[T]he Reagan years … defy easy definition as 'conservative'; 'hawkish,' or 'pro-business,' let alone 'Republican,'" you write. "Reaganism was its own distinctive blend of dogma, pragmatism, and, above all, mythology." It follows, then, that Reagan's political children, Newt Gingrich and George W. Bush, did not quite understand the essence of their hero's governing philosophy.

I agree that the reasons for Reagan's foreign-policy successes have been distorted by his successors. Drawing upon Doug Brinkley's superbly edited Reagan Diaries and Lou Cannon's insightful work, you argue for the essential humanity of the man and his abhorrence of war. Critics on the left who labeled him heartless or a warmonger or an inflexible ideologue didn't understand Reagan. But the right didn't get him, either. Reagan's greatest achievements in foreign policy came when he rejected the approach that he had campaigned on in 1980. Much as Barry Goldwater had criticized the Kennedy-Khrushchev détente, Reagan slammed Nixon and Kissinger's policy of engaging the Kremlin. Using some of the rich materials released in Russia and here, you convincingly portray a Reagan who recognized the dangers of this confrontational approach in 1983 and shifted gears, even before Mikhail Gorbachev took the reins in Moscow. By 1986, Reagan faced opposition from erstwhile Reaganites and even some Nixonian realists for pushing for nuclear disarmament. The best presidents are often those who can think outside the consensual wisdom when it no longer works. These days we call this kind of leadership "reality-based," and you quite rightly note how little of this Reaganite foreign-policy pragmatism is in George W. Bush.

Questions? Comments? Write to us at podcasts@slate.com. (E-mailers may be quoted by name unless they request otherwise.)

* To download the MP3 file, right-click (Windows) or hold down the Control key while you click (Mac), and then use the "save" or "download" command to save the audio file to your hard drive.
But I am not convinced that Reaganism at home reflected as much pragmatism and humanity—or that George W. Bush has departed so radically from his philosophy in domestic policy as you suggest. You quote Reagan's former adviser Martin Anderson as saying, "I just can't think of any major policy issue on which Bush was different." Reagan remained committed to cutting taxes, deregulation, and privatizing welfare despite a burgeoning deficit, a crisis in the savings and loan industry, and a widening gap between rich and poor. At the end of your book, you suggest that the George W. Bush administration has been more single-minded than the Reagan administration in achieving its domestic goals. Yet had Reagan enjoyed the same control of Congress as George W. Bush, would we have seen as much compromise by him on the new right's platform in the 1980s?

It is one of the ironies of the Age of Reagan that it produced a great economy almost despite Reagan. George H.W. Bush (whom I wrote about in the American Presidents series you're now editing) and Bill Clinton deserve a lot of credit. But I wish you had included the role of another Bill—Bill Gates. You note that Reagan benefited from the crisis of liberalism. The Age of Reagan also benefited from a revolution in information technology. Computers, fiber optics, and the Web brought productivity gains that were thought impossible for a mature economy like ours. How much of this was the result of the easy money of the go-go years of the 1980s, I leave to others; but the effect of the deficits was to increase real interest rates, which came down only through Bush-Clinton. The basis for the great economy of the 1990s is another history lesson that Reagan's emulators in the current administration seem not to have learned.

You do not end the Age of Reagan with Sept. 11, which I think makes sense. Instead you include the Bush administration and argue that in his effort to emulate Reagan, George W. Bush may have hastened the end of his hero's era. As a point of departure for our discussion, does this mean that Bush's perceived failures have delegitimized Reaganism just as Johnson's, Nixon's, Ford's, and Carter's undermined what was left of New Dealism? Or is it that the American people were never as conservative as some pundits thought? Instead, they just liked and trusted Reagan.

Many thanks for your generous words about The Age of Reagan. I'll plunge right in and respond to the astute points you raise. I think that Bob Dole was only half-correct when, in eulogizing Reagan, he called all the Republicans who followed him "Reagan's children." Reagan certainly moved the political center of gravity inside the GOP, and the country at large, well to the right. But after 1988, for complicated reasons, which I try to explain in the book, much of the conservative Republican leadership lost touch with the pragmatism as well as the calming confidence that made Reagan a successful politician and, in many ways, an effective president.

I hope that no reader finishes my book with the impression that Reagan was a great humanitarian on the domestic front. Although not the moral monster that his liberal critics claimed he was, Reagan was captivated by simplistic right-wing doctrine about the evils of New Deal liberalism. He did his utmost to roll back what he considered destructive, "bleeding heart" reformism, as embodied in the progressive federal tax system.

Reagan could be callous and demagogic when it suited his political purposes, as when he mocked welfare recipients in order to attack the existing welfare system. His signal domestic success, beating back inflation, came only after he allowed the country to suffer through a severe recession. Add in the disasters of his deregulation policies, the debilitating wasteful deficits, the rampant corruption—the worst of any postwar administration other than Nixon's—and the widening economic inequality his programs produced, and Reagan's domestic record looks pretty terrible.

That said, it is important to remember that Reagan was also a pragmatist who knew when to give way as circumstances dictated. Pushed by congressional leaders from both parties as well as by elements within his administration, he actually increased taxes repeatedly (although, pointedly, not top marginal income-tax rates). He always paid lip service to the culture warriors and the right-wing evangelicals and Catholics, but he knew when to remain circumspect on issues such as abortion rights, where public opinion was generally liberal.

These are not qualities I associate with the George W. Bush administration—and I don't think the difference is chiefly because of which party controlled Congress. Remember, the Republicans controlled the Senate for the first six years of Reagan's presidency, and "boll weevil" Democrats in the House gave Reagan political leverage on key issues. It was not for nothing that Tip O'Neill openly admitted to a reporter in 1981 that "I'm getting the shit whaled out of me."

The current administration has been much more fervent and even radical. It has politicized the federal bureaucracy and turned it into a nest of incompetence and cronyism beyond anything Reagan would have countenanced, let alone encouraged. It has openly, even brazenly run roughshod over constitutional
restraints on the executive branch that Reagan generally assayed more cautiously and in private (and for which he paid a heavy price during the Iran-contra affair). It is hard to imagine Reagan—who boasted of the invasion of tiny Grenada as a major military triumph and who was content to cut and run from Lebanon—leading the country into the current Iraq disaster. Even after the Democratic resurgence in 2006, the second Bush administration has shown no sign (forced resignations aside) that it has been chastened.

But this leads me to a paradox regarding the questions you raise at the end. Polls repeatedly showed that Reagan was always more popular among the voters than his policies were. Although more conservative than in, say, 1964, the electorate never underwent a massive ideological conversion in the 1980s, as right-wing publicists claimed it did. The age of Reagan arose as much from the feebleness and divisions that afflicted the Democratic Party as it did from affection for conservative dogma.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration's failures have, I think, finally delegitimized bulwarks of right-wing Republicanism who, as recently as 2004, looked to many joyful conservatives as if they would command American politics for a least a political lifetime. What are your thoughts about this—and the fate of Reaganism?

My best,
Sean

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From: Tim Naftali
To: Sean Wilentz
Subject: Reaganism Is Dead No Matter What
Updated Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 2:47 PM ET

Dear Sean,

I think we are already in a transitional phase, whoever wins this November. It started with the Bush administration's failed crusade to restructure Social Security in early 2005, gained momentum in the wake of Katrina six months later, and is now confirmed by the mutual collapse of the "Axis of Evil" strategy and the U.S. dollar (giving us $4-a-gallon gas). In explaining the end of the age of Reagan in your book, you stress the overreaching and now the exhaustion of the conservative establishment—a parallel to the bankruptcy of the liberal establishment in 1980. I would add that our country has changed dramatically in the last quarter of a century, and so has the world around us. One of the myths of Reaganism was that there existed an idealized 1950s America to which we could somehow return. That myth is now meaningless to most Americans.

This year, voter lists include people who were born after the Cold War and whose parents were just kids at the end of the Vietnam War. This is also a far more diverse country than the one in which Reaganism took root, and it is destined to become even more so. By 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that "non-Hispanic whites" will make up barely 50 percent of the U.S. population. Cultural conservatism (which I see as a more central part of Reaganism than perhaps you do) fed off the anxieties caused by the great social changes of the 1960s. There is evidence that this reaction may be running out of steam. Last week's decision by the California courts to permit same-sex marriages was met with nowhere near the controversy that greeted the Massachusetts courts' similar conclusion in 2004. Younger Christian evangelicals, who are increasingly drawn to green and social-justice issues, may become a less dependable part of a conservative coalition.

And economically, though the United States remains an innovative powerhouse, we do not dominate international markets as we once did. Meanwhile our dollar is sinking, in part, because the world does not have the same incentives to prop up our profligacy as it did during the Cold War. (There are other investment safe havens.) These facts will force more Bush "41"-Clinton fiscal realism on future administrations. Finally, two of the greatest national security challenges facing us—terrorism, especially nuclear terrorism, and global warming—are essentially transnational. Effective counterterrorism requires multilateral police and intelligence cooperation, and, of course, no one country controls the atmosphere. These facts will demand more creative, multilateral, "reality-based" foreign policy.

My confidence in the likelihood of transformative political change, however, is not matched by any clairvoyance as to what will follow the current transition. A coherent philosophical alternative to Reaganism hasn't yet appeared in either party, as your book makes clear. The Democratic Party hasn't embraced a vision since the Great Society proved not to be great enough, fast enough, and John Maynard Keynes lost his mojo. [Bill] Clintonism, it seems to me, was less a philosophy than a strategy of governing in a conservative era. And Republicans appear to be debating first principles again.

The new era probably won't see the big-time return of income redistribution, protectionism, and trade unions (the U.S. steel industry, for example, is enjoying a resurgence, but its payroll is not), and monetarism is still holding up. Meanwhile, the Roberts Court—the most lasting legacy of Reaganism—will likely force the states and Congress to lead the way in accepting social change, but that does not mean social change can be stopped. Besides a predictable comeback for concepts like Good...
Government, multilateralism, energy conservation, and a social safety net (redefined to mean universal health care), though, we should anticipate a new take, especially from the emerging Web generation, on social justice and responsibility in a time of info-globalization. But, then again, who knows for sure when any of this might happen? After all, an Indiana Jones sequel featuring sinister Soviets and a ‘50s model community is currently dominating the box office. Thank goodness we are not social scientists!

Best,
Tim

From: Sean Wilentz
To: Tim Naftali
Subject: What Will Arise From the Wreckage?
Posted Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 2:47 PM ET

Dear Tim,

A year ago, it looked as if the Republicans were in total disarray and would fight over the nominee all the way to the convention, while the Democrats would quickly unite around a nominee, probably from the center-left, and go into the fall elections heavily favored. So much for the smart money.

We've learned instead that the Democrats still suffer from some of the same class and ideological divisions that surfaced 40 years ago and helped to usher in the Age of Reagan. Many starry-eyed Democrats either don't care about those divisions or, oddly, welcome them. The left wing of the party has been dreaming of a new winning coalition of affluent liberals, college students, and African-Americans for, it seems, forever. It's always failed. But having come close to winning the nomination yet again, the Democratic left will try once more.

Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. I've been hearing about the advent of a new "transformational" politics ever since I reached voting age (which is longer ago than I care to remember). I am aware that some experts say the demographics have shifted, that the time has finally come for a new party coalition. Yet many of these same experts have been saying for a long time that key to any new Democratic majority is the rapidly expanding Hispanic vote (which has largely abjured the Barack Obama stampede), and not a revamped version of the McGovern and Dukakis base of 1972 and 1988. I could be dead wrong—but forgive me if I remain unmoved by a media-hyped movement of self-regarding people who proclaim that they are the change the world's been waiting for.

Now, having gotten that off my chest, I agree with you that the Age of Reagan is over and will be even if John McCain wins the White House. Just because the Republicans actually had the sense to nominate their only viable aspirant for the presidency hardly means that their party is not in a state of crisis, for all the reasons we talked about in our first exchange.

Even more important, as you emphasize, there are severe structural constraints that demand a fresh departure no matter which party wins the presidency. The cumulative wreckage inside the federal bureaucracy that began under Reagan and greatly worsened under George W. Bush—a hollowing out caused by neglect, corruption, partisanship, and cronyism—badly needs repair. Our health care system is a huge drain on productivity. In foreign affairs, whatever the transnational or multilateral imperatives facing American policymakers, and whatever specific policies are adopted regarding Iraq, we need to jettison right-wing and neoconservative bellicosity and intrigue and restore the basic concepts of strong diplomacy backed by credible deterrence if we are to escape from the morass now epitomized by the Iraq debacle.

But how successfully any of this will unfold, and at what pace, is still a mystery to me, as is the shape of the coming political era. The Age of Reagan could be defined as a prolonged period beginning with Nixon and Watergate, when the center fell out of American politics. The efforts by George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to restore different versions of moderate politics failed—and, thanks partly to the tiniest of majorities on the Supreme Court, we have had to endure the most radical conservative presidency in modern times, and perhaps in all of American history. One political era has died, but the next one is struggling mightily to be born—a bafflement that might be endlessly fascinating if it were not so worrisome.

My best,
Sean

the chat room

The Feminine Mistake

XX Factor bloggers join readers in a debate about the dilemmas of Hillary's candidacy.
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 5:01 PM ET

Contributors to "XX Factor," Slate's women's blog, were online at Washingtonpost.com to chat with readers about the feminist dilemmas of Hillary Clinton's candidacy and other women's issues from the campaign. An unedited transcript of the chat follows.
Hello to everyone, and thanks for joining

My observation is that among women my age in

Clinton either

That's a really interesting observation. It

I strongly agree with Meghan's

Why would hard

The reports about race as an issue i

that all the older women who are core Hillary

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Why is this the first story that mentions revolution

I've never shown up first to anything in

After the Pa. primary (my state), I'd like to know

take to get past the bad blood occasioned by her

campaign gaffes, make peace with Obama and the party, and

most significantly recover/resuscitate her image so she can

continue a career of public service with grace and dignity?

We assess Clinton's campaign, how do

we separate what were feminist issues from what were Hillary-

specific issues?

I strongly agree with Meghan's

excellent piece about how for a lot of us, Hillary was not

feminist enough in her campaign, casting Obama as the "girl" in

the race—as if that were a bad thing! Yes, sexism is alive and

well, but there are so many good feminists who ended up turned

off by various aspects of Clinton's campaign that I couldn't buy

it as a major factor.

After the Pa. primary (my state), I'd like to know

why the media considered it to be racist when 60 percent of

white blue collar males voted for Senator Clinton, but not racist

that more than 95 percent of blacks voted for Senator Obama?

Race was a major part of this election on both sides ...

Historically feminist blacks were voting for Obama because he

was black as much as certain groups of whites who would never

vote for a woman voted for Clinton.

The reports about race as an issue in the

campaign were based on the surprisingly high percentage of

voters not only in your state but others, as well, who walked

right up to exit pollsters and told them that race had played an

important role in their decision. In West Virginia and Kentucky

in particular, an overwhelming majority of those voters who said

race was a major factor went for Senator Clinton.

While I was originally a

fan of Hillary Clinton, and believe she has been an effective and

dedicated Senator, I have been disappointed for some time by

the tone of her campaign and her various "problematic"

statements on many fronts—almost all of which have been

commented on by XX Factor contributors. What steps would

you suggest she take to get past the bad blood occasioned by her

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Montreal (relocated from New York): While I was originally a

fan of Hillary Clinton, and believe she has been an effective and
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Clinton either has some atoning to do, for the

hardball she played along the way, and also simply some work
to do to bring the party together, given how long the primaries
lasted. (How much of each depends on how you think she
handled herself.) Her big peacemaking offering is a full-throated
endorsement, of course—our colleague John Dickerson
suggested the other day that a hug or a double-cheek kiss might
be in order, as opposed to arms clasped and raised. Then she has
to make a real, genuine, and concerted effort to reassure her
supporters that they are not being screwed by the Democratic
party, and that Obama can be their candidate, too. That needs to
happen not just at this unity appearance on Saturday, or next
week, but all the way through til November.

My observation is that among women my age in

Minnesota—in their 70s or early 80s—many of those passionate
for Hillary are Republicans (often with private school, moneym
backgrounds) who were driven from the GOP over women's
issues, particularly pro-choice which they are extremely
committed to. They may say they will vote GOP, and might, but
the pro-choice issue is still there as a plus for Obama. Susan

Emily Bazelon: That's a really interesting observation. It

matches my sense that all the older women who are core Hillary

supporters aren't automatic Obama converts. I'm not sure

whether the women you know are a small or a large slice of the

pie, but they are going to need to be courted, not taken as a
given.

Emily Bazelon: While I was originally a

fan of Hillary Clinton, and believe she has been an effective and
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continue a career of public service with grace and dignity?
**Meghan O’Rourke:** I share your puzzlement. The idea that women who care about equal rights—let alone hard core feminists—would switch over to McCain seems crazy to me. I do wonder whether such a cross-over would *actually* happen. I think there’s been a lot of threatening rhetoric about changing over, sure. But when push comes to shove, and women start to look at McCain’s record on women’s rights—and if the media begins to write more assiduously about McCain and women—then they may think twice.

And you’re right: crossing over in anger at Obama is not very logical. There’ve been moments when I thought Obama could be more sensitive to gender than he has been—more sensitive to the fact that women really warm to the notion of a female president. But compared to McCain? Come on.

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**Atlanta:** I am a female in my 50s. Since you all are much younger, I don’t believe you have any idea how difficult it was to be a woman in a man’s world in the ’70s and ’80s. I worked for a Big 3 auto manufacturer—can’t get much more male dominated than that—and in order to climb the corporate ladder, I had to act more like a man than a woman.

In my opinion, Hillary never really gotten over this syndrome. Her temperament has not adjusted to the 21st century. I, too, was disappointed that she did not define herself as a woman and use it to her advantage. She campaigned like being a woman was a disadvantage! But I do understand her mindset, based on the era she is from. She is still struggling too hard to find a balance.

I believe there are 2 reasons she lost. Because of this trying to be a man thing, she lost men because she comes off as strident. Someone recently said, “When men hear Hillary speak, they hear their wives telling them to take out the trash.” And she lost women like me, because, as you said, she was not feminist enough. Just my 2 cents.

**Dahlia Lithwick:** Hey there, Atlanta, and thanks for writing. Actually we are not really all that much younger than you! We just write like teenagers. I don’t disagree that the younger generation of feminists has no idea how brutal the glass ceiling was; I don’t know about Emily but my law school class was 50% women! But while that helps illuminate the big gender rift between the generations of feminists, I almost think it’s beside the point. I think the whole “second wave versus young feminists” narrative swamped the whole campaign and ultimately obscured a lot more than it illuminated about the race.

**Washington:** When is it okay to stop talking about Hillary?

**Emily Bazelon:** Soon enough! As in next week or the week after, she won’t be front and center any more (unless this V.P. speculation goes on and on). I’m not sure, though, that we should entirely celebrate that, as feminists. I’m tired of the Clintons, yes, but I think the airing of gender issues in this campaign has been hugely useful and bracing (if often distressing, at the same time). We owe that to her candidacy, in large measure.

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**Chicago:** Meghan, I really enjoyed your piece on Hillary not being feminist enough. However, I wonder if Hillary could have run on a candidate-of-change/feminist platform when she’s so know for standing by her serial philanderer man? While I think many women might be able to accept someone who dealt with and overcame cheating in her marriage, how do they accept a Hillary as their feminist champion, when so many issues facing women are at least indirectly related the sexual habits and thinking of men like her husband?

**Meghan O’Rourke:** This is a great question, and one I thought a lot about over the past few months. If I’d had more room, I’d have addressed it in the piece. I know a lot of feminists were horrified that Clinton chose to stand by her man. That always struck me as odd. Because one of the gifts of feminism is to allow us to arrange our private lives—the matters of the heart—as we will. And while I feel I can be kind of doctrinaire about feminism, and the need for women to band together, I feel we should all be libertarians when it comes to eros. That is, who knows what keeps her in the marriage; maybe it’s ambition, but maybe it’s a complicated form of love.

That said, I think the problem of Hillary standing by Bill was that he so clearly harassed and manipulated women who had less power than he did. And you’re right that it would have been hard for Hillary to present herself as a feminist champion. Yet we don’t have a lot of great role models with as much power as she had. And I think if she had whole-heartedly embraced that role—and humbly admitted that she’s made mistakes—a lot of women would have warmed to her campaign.

At least, I would have.

_______________________

**Minneapolis:** I believe that when Hillary supporters talk about her being their “last best hope that they will ever see a woman be elected president”, they aren’t finishing their thought. The entirety of that thought is “This is our last best hope of seeing a woman OF OUR GENERATION becoming president.” There’s been an interesting divide between women of that generation and my generation (I’m in my mid-40s). Because the women of that generation did take much of the laboring oar for the advancement of the feminist cause, I wonder if they don’t feel sometimes that they are more deserving of the presidency than
the up-and-comers like Amy Klobuchar or Kathleen Sebelius. Your thoughts?

**Emily Bazelon:** I agree entirely about the generational divide. I've found it both instructive and heart rending as the campaign has progressed. Some writers have cast this as a rift between mothers and daughters; that's an oversimplification, but I do think both sides have something to gain from listening to each other. I'm not sure, though, that I think the mothers will go on to insist that one of them be the standard-bearer. Many of them saw Hillary's candidacy differently than I know I did (as a 30-something), and their disappointment now is probably different. But the next time around? I think the particular qualities of the candidate will matter more than her age.

**Edwardsville, Ill.:** I'm a big fan of Meghan O'Rourke's writing, but when she wrote that "Clinton's relationship to gender seemed at turns angry and deeply ambivalent" in contrast to Obama's relationship to race, I had to laugh. Meghan, have you read "Dreams of My Father" or "Audacity of Hope"? If so, do you really believe that Obama's relationship to race is anything but "angry and deeply ambivalent"? I think the whole controversy with Rev. Wright arose from just that anger and ambivalence, and my Senator's quest to reconcile himself with race. I also don't think his anger and ambivalence (or hers) ought to be counted as a negative. Shouldn't we all be angry about the role of race and gender in our society, still, after all this time? Aren't women all ambivalent about the impact our gender does or should have on our life choices? What do you think?

**Meghan O'Rourke:** That's a really good point, and my only excuse is that I was writing overnight on deadline! What I was trying to say, more precisely, was that in her demeanor on the campaign trail, Hillary (to my eyes) didn't manage to seem as open and humble about her situation as Obama did. Obama is deeply ambivalent in those books: you're totally right. But on the stump he seemed willing to admit how hard it was for him—and to have chosen to let people see how hard it was for him. So there's an ambivalence there, yes, but he managed to project a somewhat unified front ABOUT that ambivalence. Whereas I felt Hillary switched back and forth more.

Part of what I was getting at, or wanted to, IS that women do feel ambivalent and angry. And I understand Hillary's ambivalence and anger—I really do. And I feel I've acted the way she has, writ small, in situations where I've felt chagrined that men seem to be given more authority by default. But I do think it's the real challenge for women: how to care deeply about women's rights and equality while not becoming embittered.

And let's face the unfair, bitter truth: I, like many women, probably hold Hillary to a higher standard than I would many men. I wish that weren't the case, and I strive against it. But I'm sure I'm complicit in the double standard.

**Atlanta:** Was any editorial discussion going on behind the scenes these past few months to address the anti-Clinton bias of your blog? Henneberger in particular wrote scarcely anything that couldn't effectively—and more pithily—have been glossed as "Hillary is bad."

**Melinda Henneberger:** I'm sorry you see it as bias, but all I can say is I wish she had given me more positive material to work with. When Hillary Clinton first appeared on the national scene, I was so taken with her, and loved everything from her history to her hairband. My husband has reminded me that when we moved to Washington in the mid-'90s so that he could take an assignment covering the Clinton White House, I was constantly lecturing him, "Now you be fair to them!" Because at the time, I saw both Clintons as the victims of terrible regional and class bias and her as a target of woman-haters across the land. Her and their behavior over the years has changed my view, and no one is sorrier about that than I am.

**Emily Bazelon:** In a more general sense, we didn't carefully construct XX Factor to be balanced between Obama and Clinton supporters. (After all, we want the blog to last longer than the primary season!) But it's true that older women are under-represented, and that probably fed into the Obama tilt you're identifying. Judith Shulevitz has been a great voice on the blog for a different point of view.

**Washington:** Dahlia—I thought your piece on the next woman president was overly optimistic. When you dig deep, do you really think a woman has a chance at the presidency in the next 15-25 years? None of the women you listed in your column are even close. And pinning our hopes on an unseen phenomenon? If there were any historical examples, that might be credible, but aside from Hillary, there aren't.

The truth is that this is a major defeat for women, who are going to have to wait a long time, a half-generation or more, before the next serious run. And once again, we're about to have a presidential race with no women on either ticket (we can't even imagine a ticket with two women). Can't we have some sense of tragedy about, that even as we rejoice with and lift up Obama?

**washingtonpost.com:** One-Hit Wondering: Yes, Virginia, there will be another woman candidate in your lifetime (Slate, May 27)
Don't hillary and her millions

Thank you so much for sharing your

Slate

one way based solely on the fact

Hallo, Austin. I thought this was a wacky idea

Do any of y'all have reactions to recent

to

Washington Post

The intensity of the focus on "the women's

that

Hiya, Washington. Thanks so much for

Clinton confirmation hearing would be a living

have

Little dangerous to assume that the single-issue pitch will bring

take them for granted.

_______________________

McLean, Va.: I am a middle-aged male type-person. I just

wanted to say that I really enjoy the XX Factor. It reminds me

that although there clearly is no single female voice, there are

a lot of brilliant ones—and I thank you for sharing them.

Meghan O'Rourke: Thank you so much for sharing your

support. XXFactor exists (and will continue to) because of

readers like you!

_______________________

Boston: Do you think that, once Hilary leaves the race, the focus

will shift from how "women" as one bloc theoretically would

vote to the candidates' actual positions on issues? Especially as

we gear up for the big, national election, I'm tired of hearing

about how I'm going to vote one way based solely on the fact

that I'm a woman.

Emily Bazelon: The intensity of the focus on "the women's

vote" may diminish, but it's not going to go away, because

McCain and Obama will court women assiduously. (What if

McCain picks a woman for V.P.?) Even if it's annoying to be

treated as a bloc-member automaton, it's not a bad thing to be
courted—it should mean, anyway, that things you (we) care

about are getting attention and in theory at least that could have

a real result. Universal preschool, anyone? Social security

parity? Paid family leave?

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Coos Bay, Ore.: Don't hillary and her millions have to

wholeheartedly support Obama? The next president will make

two or three Supreme Court nominations; a McCain victory may

pack the court with Regent University grads, overturning Roe v.

Wade.

Emily Bazelon: Protecting Roe and the right to a legal abortion

is a big part of Obama's pitch to women, yes. But voters are

often more complicated in their thinking, aren't they? I think it's

a little dangerous to assume that the single-issue pitch will bring

women flocking to the Democratic ticket—in other words, to

take them for granted.

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Austin, Texas: Do any of y'all have reactions to recent

suggestions both here in the Washington Post and in Slate

that Hillary Clinton should be fast-tracked to a nomination for the

Supreme Court in an Obama administration? The fact that this

idea was floated not by bloggers but by regular contributors just

floored me. I think the appellate bench is (or should be) a highly

technical job that Clinton has not demonstrated the skills for. I'll

set aside my feelings on whether she exhibits judicial

temperament.

Dahlia Lithwick: Hallo, Austin. I thought this was a wacky idea

and I still do! A Clinton confirmation hearing would be a living

nightmare for this country in that it would smoke out all the

ugliest aspects of Clinton hatred and add no substance. My

understanding is that Clinton is an incredibly capable lawyer. I
don't doubt she is qualified. But I don't think a romp through the

Clinton's dumpster would serve the country, the Clintons or the

court well at all. Thanks.

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Oella, Md.: To Meghan O'Rourke

This is a question about the limitations of the Web for

organizing purposes. You wrote that you e-mailed a group of

young women, asking them what they thought of Clinton's

campaign and that the responses were mostly young, well-
educated, upper-middle-class, and white. Am I correct in

assuming, since you made the comment, that you sent the e-mail
to a more diverse group and only the smaller, less diverse group
responded? This is not to critique your methods, but to try to

learn about ways that movements can become more diverse.

Thanks.

Meghan O'Rourke: Great question, and I appreciate your

asking it. In this case, I was interested in the responses of

educated, upper-middle-class women, in part because early on

many had argued that these were the women Hillary wasn't

winning over. And I wanted to know what women of that milieu

felt now, six months after the debates last winter. I wasn't, in this

case, seeking out a very diverse set of answers (though I

would've been thrilled if I had gotten more diverse answers). But

it is the case that when I asked people to forward the email, they

probably forwarded it to women of the same class, educational

background, etc.
Los Angeles: Re: Insight Magazine article linked on Slate—how does O'Rourke explain her continued reliance on a notorious and famously discredited accusation against the Clinton campaign?

Meghan O'Rourke: You're right that I probably shouldn't have relied on that detail. It had seemed to me that there was enough confusion around the origins of the rumor that it was fair to link to it. But I probably should have erred on the more conservative side and not used that detail. Thanks for pointing it out.

Rochester Hills, Mich.: My mother is 93 and has, as she said, waited until women were granted the right to vote in the hopes that someday she could vote for a woman for president. I, her daughter, am 62 and feel as though I too have been waiting forever to cast my vote for a woman—Hillary! My mother feels she will vote for McCain, in the hopes that Hillary will run again in 2012 and she can vote for her then. I found that an interesting idea. While I dearly hope my mother will be alive in 2012 to vote yet again, I was wondering if you believe there are other Hillary supporters who might think this way?

Emily Bazelon: I think there are other Hillary supporters who are thinking this way now, in this initial flush of disappointment. And sure some of them will stick with that idea through November, I suppose. But if you're a Democrat, it's a pretty narrow way to view what you want from your president. Your mother cares more about his or her sex than about what he or she does in office? She disagrees with McCain on most issues, but thinks it's worth four years of him in office to give Hillary the chance to run again? With respect, that doesn't seem like feminism to me. It seems like Hillary worship.

Indianapolis: First a comment: I think the four of you represent some of the best writing online these days. Thanks. Question: If Hillary really wanted to be vice president, she had to have known that strong-arming her way onto the ticket was not the way to go. What's her angle?

Melinda Henneberger: Thank you! I don't think she wants to be vice president, for one thing because as Maureen Dowd mentioned, she's been there and done that. When Gore had the job, he used to joke about how when anyone asked him what it was like being the second-most powerful person in the world, he'd answer, "I don't know, she seems to like it." My fear—unfounded, hopefully—was that what looked like her hard-sell for the No. 2 spot was just the opposite, a tactic that would make it impossible for him to offer it to her, because to do so under pressure would make him look weak. Yet then, if it weren't offered to her, her supporters would be even more unhappy, and more likely to either vote McCain or stay home in the fall. I hope I am dead wrong, and that she is now going to do her utmost to bring her voters into Obama's tent.

Highland Park, N.J.: Hi all. How do you think Obama should move forward, in terms of courting Hillary's supporters?

Dahlia Lithwick: Hey Highland Park. That's the trillion dollar question, huh? I think Obama needs to address her supporters' doubts about him—about his experience and readiness—head on. I also think he needs to help women understand that women and African Americans are NOT in some kind of footrace. Women do not lose when African Americans win and vice versa. That has been the single most toxic element of this primary season: Our inability to accept that this race would be historic and stunning and enriching, regardless of the specific outcome.

Turlock, Calif.: You keep framing your view of Clinton against some 35-year-old backdrop, as though it were still the 1970s and Clinton were a hormonally charged 26-year-old. When some ecstasy-promising revolution becomes near-exclusively embraced by the young, it is far more likely than not to be little more than young people following their hormones and self-centered rebellious whims, as young people always have and always will.

Maturity and experience never mollify adversity or injustice, only one's view of what constitutes adversity or injustice in the grand scheme of things that includes the world beyond their own—e.g. a college student may truly feel "oppressed" when the school clamps down on illegal file-sharing, but those views of "oppression" should be transformed sufficiently if not completely by the age of 35. If it isn't, then something went seriously wrong with that person's development or exposure to the world beyond their own nose.

Did it occur to you that Clinton's maturity and experience has mollified the vigor or weight she once threw behind some of her more youthful views? That she grew up and became a less self-centered person who isn't as prone to emotional rhetoric with little substance, and views the world as a delicate balance of often-competing interests—as opposed to the more defining youthful trait of tending to throw far too much weight behind or against this or that because it is tied on some level to their own self-interest?

Meghan O'Rourke: I don't think that young people today are self-centered and rebellious. I think they're searching for real change. It's quite frightening to be young today. It's scary, for example, to contemplate the economy, to contemplate global
warmer, to imagine bringing children into a world racked by the threat of global terrorism. So I believe that young Americans are galvanized by the idea that there's a candidate who might be able to change things. Sure, maybe Obama won't be able to; but the notion that he *might* be able to is quite powerful.

And as for maturity: You're right that people grow up and grow less self-centered sometimes—that sometimes they're quite immature as 22 year olds. But I don't think Clinton was one. I think sometimes our youthful impulses are worth preserving.

Emily Bazelon: Yes I think that was Meghan's point in her piece this week, and it's been a frustration for a lot of women. For me this is why it never made sense to view the race as the first black man v. the first white woman, ie which mattered more, race or gender. Sure, it was that. But it was also Barack Obama v. Hillary Clinton, with all their particular strengths and weaknesses. In the end, their individual characteristics amounted to more than the categories they stand for.

Ontario, Canada: Why did Hillary Clinton not just step down graciously and lady like? This only proves she is for SELF not the PEOPLE she is to represents. She likes the POWER and attention. She is not to be trusted.

Dahlia Lithwick: Hallo there fellow Ontarian! I can't agree that Clinton stayed in the race because she was selfish. She had 18 million people who believed deeply in her, and she felt that she was doing the right thing by them when she stayed in the race. That said, I do agree that we haven't yet seen the kind of gracious, supportive take-one-for-the-team behavior that she can be modeling or those supporters. I believe we are about to see it soon.

Pittsburgh: I graduated from the University of Michigan when it was still legal to look at a job applicant in the eye and say "oh, we don't hire girls for those positions," and when sexual harassment wasn't a crime, it was a perk—just like the corner office and the expense account. I managed to become the CEO of a small subsidiary of a big bank and deflect the unwanted advances that women encounter in male dominated fields.

Still, I am uncomfortable with the attitude among some of Sen. Clinton's supporters that we as women are "owed," and that we have waited long enough for a woman president. By the same token, I think that for Sen. Obama to repair his relationship with these voters, he is going to have to quit referring to us as "ladies." Call us what we are—women.

Emily Bazelon: I don't like "ladies" either. It always makes me think of the ladies' room. (Though I do think that lots of people men to be polite rather than to offend when they use it.) I agree that Clinton didn't do herself any favors when she projected being owed, because she was a woman, or married to her difficult husband, or had waited in the wings of the White House for eight years. No one is owed the presidency. It's too huge a job for that. (At the same time, to be fair, Clinton gave voters plenty of other reasons to support her.)

Somerville, Mass.: Does anyone know whether putting Hillary on the ticket really automatically would grab those 18 million-plus voters (those who wouldn't already vote Democrat automatically)? On the flip side, if her constituency was made of a lot of Republican women, Reagan Democrats and white working-class union voters, would they really prefer her on the ticket to a more experienced (i.e. white male) candidate like Edwards, Gore, Biden, etc.? Essentially I'm asking whether—if Obama is weak with white men but strong with Independents—picking Hillary over a safer Edwards/Biden type might drive away more of those voters than those gained?

Melinda Hennenger: We'll probably be arguing over this one for a while, but my own view is that he'd lose more voters than he'd gain by putting her on the ticket. For one thing because as I said, it would make him look like the sort of person who gives into blackmail, and that's not the image he's going for! Also, it would completely undercut the "I'm all about change and turning the page" narrative to choose someone who so represents the status quo as the vice-presidential nominee. (Yes, Biden and Edwards have been around the block a time or two also. But Clinton made a central selling point of her campaign that no one was as good at the old politics as she, that no one would be better at putting together a Democratic version of the Republican Attack Machine, as she always called it. To some of us, this does not seem like change. Or progress.

Chicago: Isn't Hillary Clinton just a very mediocre politician? Many women have worried that she is their last best chance, and she certainly was positioned by her marriage to make this race.
She also is tremendously intelligent and strong—but at the end of the day, this contest was a political contest, and she wasn't up to it. Her speaking style, even at its best, is artificial. She has the tin ear and poor judgment to make vulgar statements about her "hard-working white voters" and RFK's assassination. She just isn't an "in-the-moment" performer like her husband or Obama, and isn't that what it takes nowadays?

**Dahlia Lithwick:** Chicago, I couldn't agree more. Clinton is actually an exemplary politician in some senses—she is smart and well-informed and thorough and respected for her ability to broker deals across party lines, and get things done. But I think you hit the bull's-eye when you point out that she simply did not have the innate political skills that Obama had. She is not a gifted speaker, her political instincts seemed way off in many cases, and she doesn't have the ability—as Meghan wrote this week—to truly inspire and stir the public. Hopefully the history books will note that this—mores than her gender—was what decided this race.

**New York:** It wasn't just that what HRC did to inoculate herself against the sexism inherent in the system made her seem more like a man—it made her seem more like a Republican. To my eyes, while it seems like a plausible argument to say that Hillary Clinton failed to cast her campaign as a sufficiently transformative endeavor, and though it might have been harder for Clinton to seize the day than her male competitor, HRC could have avoided many of the pitfalls of identity politics if she had not spent her time in the Senate and on the campaign trail trying to split the mythical difference between core liberal Democratic positions and what she thought were the ones that made her more electable.

What do you all think?

**Meghan O'Rourke:** I agree with you—she spent a lot of time trying to split the difference on issues, and it harmed her. George Lakoff, who just wrote a book about political rhetoric, and what's behind it, was on NPR yesterday talking about the differences in how Obama, Clinton, and McCain use the word "bipartisan." And his point was that when Hillary uses it, she uses it in a way that downplays—or tries to paint over—the difference between her and those who disagree with her positions, in order to imply the disagreement isn't that profound. Obama, on the other hand (according to Lakoff) uses it to acknowledge there ARE real differences, but to stress that he'll be open to compromising when it comes to policy.

If that makes sense—Lakoff explains it much better.

**Baltimore:** While it is somewhat understandable why African-Americans might feel resentful about HRC given her husband's comments in SC, her solicitation of segments of the population that were underinformed and blatantly racist and her own racist comments about hardworking white people. However, Obama and Michelle have not said anything disparaging about women. In fact both of them exemplify a "feminist coupling" and he obviously takes pride in what his daughters will be able to accomplish in a post-racial post-gender world. Why is the older white female cohort so resentful of Obama??

**Emily Bazelon:** I don't think that resentment has much to do with Obama. He had maybe a bad moment or two along the way—that moment mid-stream in a debate about Hillary's likeability, delivered without a hint of humor, made me cringe. But aside from that, and we are talking very venal sin in the long haul, I agree that he and Michelle Obama have been respectful and gracious about gender identity. As a couple, they embody shared ambition pretty well, and yes those two adorable little girls are only an asset. But all of that, however compelling, doesn't mean that older white women (or anyone, for that matter) wouldn't have cause to prefer Hillary. She was the safer choice. Certainly we can argue that Obama is a risk worth taking, but I don't blame voters for being cautious.

**San Francisco:** Who do you think are the least and worst offenders of sexism in the coverage of this primary race?

**Dahlia Lithwick:** hey San Francisco. Interesting question. I am not certain what a "least" offender looks like but I think the media in general has been far less sexist than we keep hearing. Yes we obsessed too much about race and gender. But good grief this race was a sea-change and we were all blown away. Some pundits said some dumb things and some writers wrote some dumb things. But it looked to me that mostly we were all just striving to make sense of the gender and race factors as best as we could . . . .

**Boston:** One question for all: Many of you stated that Hillary just didn't have what it takes—negative campaigning, not feminist enough, too tough, too masculine, etc.—to be the Democratic candidate. While I, and many others, agreed with you, this was a little disheartening to read week after week! Can you provide the qualities that you think would make the perfect female candidate for president? And why would you choose those qualities? I love reading your pieces! Thanks for all your hard work!

**Meghan O'Rourke:** God, it must have been disheartening! Sometimes I felt disheartened too: I wanted to like Hillary, and I
do see that we, as women, sometimes hold Hillary to a higher standard than we would a man. On the other hand, I felt about her candidacy much the way I felt about Kerry's. Her opinions seemed so designed to pander to the public. Even the fact that she had voted for the war, and now runs on the platform of withdrawing soon. She seemed to be playing a kind of hardball politics I've never liked. Frankly, my problems with her weren't because she was a woman, to large extent. A perfect female candidate? Who knows. I just want one who could have the courage of her convictions.

Melinda Henneberger: Disheartening is right! Gosh, I'm not holding out for the perfect female candidate; no candidate is that, and no voter, either, for that matter. But I think there is a deeper bench of female talent on both sides of the aisle than we have acknowledged, because the focus has been so exclusively on Hillary Clinton. Why doesn't Nancy Pelosi get more credit, for instance?

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New York: Many of the Hillary women who are now threatening to vote for McCain also are Jewish, and I believe this is more sanguine to their choice than their being a woman—and I believe they know this and are being deceptive here.

Emily Bazelon: Obama has done a good job in the past few weeks trying to address the concerns of Jewish voters. Listening to some of the comments out of Florida, I have to say I was amazed (and because I'm Jewish, embarrassed) at the willingness to believe claims about Obama that have been debunked over and over again—that he's a Muslim, that his middle name has some dire significance, etc etc. This week, Obama addressed AIPAC, and I heard he was a hit. It will be interesting to see whether Jewish women shift toward him as the race moves to the next stage (though I don't want to overstate the significance of this, since there aren't that many of us!)

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Utek: I think the whole feminism vs. racism debate is actually a smokescreen to the biggest policy difference between Clinton and Obama—Hillary supported the war in Iraq (and even voted to give Bush the authority to continue on into Iran) while Obama opposed it from the outset. Triangulation on Iraq sunk Kerry, and it sunk Clinton. That's why Hillary was eager to play into the feminism vs. racism angle and Barack wasn't, because it let her play the victim and avoid accountability for her own lousy judgment. This is the lesson I hope Democrats will take from this race.

Melinda Henneberger: Yes, as our current president would say, that was a biggie! But another problem with arguing, as her supporters did, that no problem in our country is as pernicious or enduring as sexism is that it wildly undercut her argument that as a woman, she was more electable.

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Bloomingotn, Ind.: I love the XX Factor blog, and I would love to hear more—especially from Megan—about women of color in all this. The media has done a disservice to all of us by pitting gender vs. race and not realizing the intersection of both in women of color. "Women" in media stories generally means "white women." Making the election about identity politics instead of who's the best candidate not only rips the party apart, but makes the feminist movement suffer from division. As a young professional woman of color, Hillary's open invocations of race were extremely damaging to my views on the traditional feminist movement. You both have touched on this issue in your columns, but I'd love to hear more.

Meghan O'Rourke: Great question: I totally agree that the media has done a disservice to us all by pitting race vs. gender. It's not what the issue here really is. And it's also an unanswerable question: Which is more endemic? Well, who really knows. And it's not a zero-sum game! As you say, women of color, after all, are a large contingent of voters! And putting women of color in a position where they feel they have to choose between two "ism"s seems really short-sighted.

So in general, I try not to talk about one vs. the other. In my Hillary piece, I *did* feel I had to talk about how gender and race play into our paradigms of leadership, for obvious reasons. But it makes me uncomfortable in general.

Along the way, I've had some really interesting conversations with women of color about how they feel about this race and the media's coverage. I haven't written a lot about it, because I haven't been able to identify any singular response: Each person I've talked to has felt different from the next. So in a sense, I want to hear less from me, on this issue, and more from you, in a sense. (Feel free to email me.)

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Louisville, Ky.: Do any of you think that her relationship with Bill Clinton eventually proved to be her undoing? Considered as an individual, Hillary seems nearly a perfect candidate, as former First Lady to a philandering ex-President she seems far from ideal. Was there a way she could have addressed that—maybe by divorce or something nearly as drastic?

Emily Bazelon: You know, I've been watching Bill Clinton in this election with the sneaking suspicion that he was out to sabotage his wife. Not deliberately, exactly. I think part of him v. much wanted her to win. But I think part of him didn't, and that helps explain why he turned into such a red-faced bully. I've got no proof, but it was hugely odd to watch a man who has been
one of the most talented politicians of his generation, yadda yadda, turn into a train wreck.

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Baltimore: Can you please tell me how any Hillary supporter could vote for McCain, knowing that he laughed with a woman supporter who called Hillary the "B" word last fall? That dismissive, offensive act trumps anything that Obama might have done in the minds of these women.

Meghan O'Rourke: Amen. That and he called his wife the c-word, and he voted against the equal pay bill that recently went through the Senate.

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San Francisco: Thanks for the column about the ridiculous "not again in our lifetime/generation" claims about possible future women presidential candidates. There are quite a few very qualified women in Congress and the governors' mansions all around the country today. Consider the speaker of the House, for example, my representative, and both of my senators—not to mention national leaders not in elective office, such as Condi Rice, who certainly could run.

Dahlia Lithwick: San Fran. Yes California boasts some extremely talented female politicians and there are some seriously gifted women governors and prosecutors and state senators out there who don't get enough credit. I also attended a conference for a newish women's organization called MsJD recently. You couldn't take a step without running into some brilliant, passionate, articulate young woman. It was like visiting that island Wonder Woman hails from! I came away dead certain that the pool of female talent out there is so much deeper than we yet know. Also: willing to mention national leaders not in elective office, such as Condi Rice, who certainly could run.

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New York: The comment about pandering reminds me of what I felt was the climax, in the literary sense, of the campaign: Clinton pretending to be pro-gun and Obama shooting back "who is she now, Annie Oakley?"

Melinda Henneberger: And we needed those moments of comic relief, didn't we? For me, that moment perfectly captured how far we had come from the Million Mom March! But almost all candidates seem to feel they have to pretend to have grown up in the Old West, and it doesn't work! Voters were on to Romney's tales of how much he loved gunnin' for varmints, didn't we? For me, that moment perfectly captured how far we had come from the Million Mom March! But almost all candidates seem to feel they have to pretend to have grown up in the Old West, and it doesn't work! Voters were on to Romney's tales of how much he loved gunnin' for varmints.

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Boston: I'll tell you how Hillary lost me—listen to her speeches. "I" have a plan, "I" will fight for, "I" can fix. She has an answer for everything. No one is that smart. Had she used the work "we" more often, she would be the next president.

Dahlia Lithwick: Some pushback for you Boston? I wonder how much that "I" rhetoric was simply jarring coming from a woman. We are notoriously awful at using that pronoun. (We are good at saying "we" however!) Perhaps we all need to train our ears to hear women who say "I" as confident and assertive rather than as know-it-alls?

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Chicago: Thought you might be interested in this shirt, XX Factor Ladies! An XX shirt? When I found it online I couldn't believe it! Love your columns!
Dahlia Lithwick: Thanks Chicago. Buying some for my young sons!

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Chicago: Your article exactly captures what I feel, but also what many women I know, in their late 50's and early 60's have also expressed. How does Hillary honor feminism by attacking Obama using all the old white men tricks? And then for her to blame her problems on sexism? I'd like to know how "real" women feel. The histrionics of a small group of women who have hung on to Hillary have been portrayed as representing the sentiments of all women. Have you seen any research or polls that dig deeper into women's attitudes toward Hillary?

Meghan O'Rourke: Thanks so much. I'm glad that I did seem to capture something real women are feeling. Your point is a really important one, and what was most moving to me, writing the article, was hearing from women about what they felt. I received so many eloquent, heartfelt, confused, angry, happy, frustrated emails from women. And it made me realize that the reality of how women feel toward Hillary is so complex the media can't accurately capture it. I have seen various polls but nothing that seems to me to give a complete picture about women's feelings—or anything like it.

In fact, I've been thinking Slate ought really to publish an oral history/email history of thoughts from women like you. It would really be a service: we need more than soundbites in articles.

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New Brunswick, N.J.: The premise that Hillary wasn't feminist enough for young women is wrong—young women abandoned her, not the other way around. Perhaps she could have pushed the gender issue more, but Hillary faced the age-old quandary of how to be a strong woman in a man's world. She was damned if she did and damned if she didn't. When she teared up (didn't cry, mind you) on the campaign trail, for example, pundits sneeringly derided her for not being able to handle the presidency and all that it entails. But then to say that she was too much like a man to attract young women's support? I think the truth is closer to the fact that young women collectively don't identify with feminism the way that older women do.

Give Hillary some credit for all that she did do—she got further than any woman ever has. She is one of the thousands of women who have had to deal with outright sexism and misogynistic vitriol on a daily basis and still kept going. Stop blaming her for not fulfilling the expectations of a generation of young women who had it all handed to them and didn't quite realize the sheer enormity of what it would mean to have a woman in the White House.

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Emily Bazelon: I agree with you, wholeheartedly, about giving Hillary credit. Also about the problem of damned if you do, damned if you don't. It was very real in this campaign, though of course we'll never know what would have happened if Hillary had run differently, as Meghan suggested.

About younger women and our feminism, though, I wonder if you're being fair. I think a lot of us DO consider ourselves feminists. Maybe our definition is slightly different—certainly that's the case if you define any right-thinking feminist as a Hillary voter. But in the end, on the substance as opposed to the symbolism, I wonder how far apart we really are. And I hope we air those questions as thoroughly as we aired the ones about gender identity in this campaign.

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Beijing: Are we ever going to see Hillary in a dress again? Is there something wrong with her legs? Being tough does not equate to wearing trousers. Her cynicism aside, I just got tired of those suits. A woman aiming for the highest post in the land should have had a better dress sense. Or at list someone to help her. Who says a strong, highly intelligent woman cannot be feminine? What a missed opportunity

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Dahlia Lithwick: Beijing. Clinton needs to be credited for feeling her way along in wholly unfamiliar political and public territory. The skirts/pants thing is the tip of the iceberg in terms of the fine line she was forced to walk. She made some very hard choices about how to present herself and while some of them might strike us as cartoonish, she had very, very little room to operate, and she taught us so very much about what the next time will look like.

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Anchorage, Alaska: Good morning (local)—my question to the XXers is this; while most of the mainstream media will be devoted to the surface appearances of reconciliation, forging party unity, etc., what do you expect to be happening behind the scenes? I've seen plenty of "it's Obama's party now," but really, don't you think it would be a daunting task to either expect the old "Clinton" guard to soften and meld into the new generation, or to be rooted out? I read many of the comments from Ickes, Davis, etc., to be as much about preserving their own behind-closed-doors power as about Clinton deserving the nomination.

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Melinda Henneberger: Totally right; it's only 51 percent Obama's party now. (Or whatever; the way in which I most identified with Hillary is that I, too, am opposed to math.) But surely the biggest question still on the Democratic table is whether/to what extent she'll work for Obama. (Will she pull out the stops? Or undermine him while seeming to pull out the stops?) I think one reason you saw John Kerry so strongly in
Obama's camp is that there were also major questions about how much her heart was ever in the '04 campaign.

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**Anonymous:** Dear Emily, Melinda, Dahlia and Meghan: I've read about how Obama "gets" Gen X and Gen Y voters. Clearly, he doesn't "get" baby boomer white women in the same way. I'm a stereotypical Clinton backer ... aging baby boomer, white, female, college educated, HR Manager, 4 years to retirement, a lifetime Democrat who's never missed an election. I think Obama's campaign has been mostly flash and very little substance. The flap over his church leads me to believe that he's passive-aggressive. Bottom line, I'm really pissed that my candidate, Hillary Clinton, lost the nomination. What can/should Obama do to convince me to vote for him? Thanks. Jean

**Meghan O'Rourke:** I think you're right that Obama doesn't get baby boomer white women the same way he gets younger types. And I think Hillary really does, to give her credit. So I totally understand your frustration that your candidate didn't get the nomination. And I think Obama is no messiah: He has his flaws, his arrogance, his weaknesses. But he is a strong Democratic candidate in many ways. He seems to me—and I can only speak for myself—to be trying to put together a platform that will bring America forward. And what I like about him is that he seems to listen to voters.

Finally, though: If you care about women's issues at all, do you really want McCain to be president? He has his appealing qualities. But his support of women, frankly, is not one of them. He recently called his wife a nasty word in front of reporters; he laughed when a supporter called Hillary the "b-word," and he voted against the equal pay bill for women. As a woman interested in furthering the rights of women, I'd really not want this man in the White House.

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**Ventnor City, N.J.:** I'm a white, fiftysomething, feminist, women's studies professor who has supported Obama, not Clinton. I really agree with the recent post that she based her campaign on valuing masculine trait, and this was a disappointment. I also believe that if she was going to run on her "experience" during the 1990s, then she had to bear some responsibility for draconian welfare reform, DOMA, NAFTA and other unfeminist legacies of her husband's administration. I have been cringing at the way her campaign has driven a wedge between white women and African Americans (similar to the period after passage of the 15th amendment). I think she would be a disaster as a vice presidential candidate (and I can't wait for Bill to leave the stage).

That said, I can live with her "suspended" campaign if her point is to have the historical landmark of being one of the few women to have their names placed in nomination at the convention. I'm surprised that I haven't heard any commentators mention this as a possible goal. It's not power, but it is an important place in history. What do you think?

**Meghan O'Rourke:** Great point. I hadn't thought of that. If that were her goal, I would support it. I just worry it's not.

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**New York:** There are persistent rumors McCain is interested in a corporate Republican woman, say Carly Fiorina or Meg Whitman, as vice president. Thoughts?

**Melinda Henneberger:** Shockingly, he has not asked for MHO, but he'd sure be smart to pick someone like that; Fiorina in particular is awfully impressive, and would appeal to many a Hillary voter.

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**Essex Junction, Vt.:** There has been a view out there expressed by Clinton supporters, especially among women, that this contest was "stolen" from them—that Hilary, and they by extension, have been "victims". Out of this feeling seems to be bubbling up a desire among some for retribution or even revenge.

My question is, how much do you think these outraged feelings are justified by the way Obama and his campaign behaved during this contest, and how much are they the result of legitimate historical grievances that finally now have an outlet? Are there serious, legitimate complaints to be made about the way Obama and his campaign treated their opponent? Finally, where do you see this anger going from here? Will it have a real effect on the race for the White House?

**Meghan O'Rourke:** These are profound questions and we're running against the end of our hour here. But I just wanted to say quickly that I wish I knew the answer to the questions you raise, and that I'll think more about it and try to address them on XXFactor.

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**Park Ridge, Ill.:** I think the very last statement of this essay summed up the whole problem with Hillary's campaign: "After all, feminism need not be joyless." There was no sense of fun about Hillary, shots of Royal Crown aside, just grim determination. I consider myself a Baby Boomer feminist (I'm 49), and to me, a sense of humor is paramount to the psyche. Would any of you care to comment on Hillary's seemingly total lack of joy?
Melinda Henneberger: I dunno; maybe this WAS her joy, and may she find more of it in her next endeavor.

Hardyston Township, N.J.: In the body of your article, the word "ecstasy" or some variation of it appears at least 4 times. That is the problem I find with many educated women of your generation. They look to the "ecstasy" of a situation rather than what educated women of my generation fought for in the '70s and '80s...true equality in every facet of life. You want all of the perks without any of the struggle. I think you will find very quickly that your abandonment of Senator Clinton was ill-advised.

Meghan O'Rourke: I don't agree: women my age have struggled too. My point isn't that we want cheap joy with none of the hard work. It's that in the midst of all the hard work, we shouldn't forget that joy is possible too. Largely because of the revolutionary work of feminists the generation before us.

Emily Bazelon: Hey, everyone, thanks so much for the thoughtful and great questions and comments. It's great to hear from so many XX Factor readers! We really enjoyed the chat. On to November!

The dismal science
The $100 Distraction Device
Why giving poor kids laptops doesn't improve their scholastic performance.
By Ray Fisman
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:03 AM ET

More than three decades ago, Commodore introduced the PET, the world's first personal computer, apparently so-named to take advantage of the '70s craze for pet rocks. My ever-doting and education-obsessed parents brought home a PET for me and my siblings, hoping to put us at the vanguard of the digital revolution-to-be. The results were mixed at best. Though the machine was entirely unsuited to mindless fun—it had 4 kilobytes of memory and a tiny green display of monochrome ASCII characters—my friends and I found a way to turn this supposedly educational device into a toy. We spent endless hours watching a little green cursor race around the screen in a rudimentary, freestyle version of Pac-Man. Once an early edition of Space Invaders appeared, I think my parents came to regret their attempt to prepare us for the computer age.

A generation later, parents are more worried than ever about making sure their kids can compete in today's high-tech world, and the growing digital divide is a subject of great concern for educators and policymakers. Federal subsidies in the United States provide billions of dollars for computer access in schools and libraries, and billions more may soon be spent in the developing world through programs such as One Laptop per Child. But even OLPC's $100 laptop comes loaded with more distractions than my PET ever had. So will kids use these subsidized computing resources to prepare for the demands of the 21st-century job market? Or do computers just serve as a 21st-century substitute for that more venerable time-waster—the television?

New research by economists Ofer Malamud and Cristian Pop-Eleches provides an answer: For many kids, computers are indeed more of a distraction than a learning opportunity. The two researchers surveyed households that applied to Euro 200, a voucher distribution program in Romania designed to help poor households defray the cost of buying a computer for their children. It turns out that kids in households lucky enough to get computer vouchers spent a lot less time watching TV—but that's where the good news ends. "Voucheder" kids also spent less time doing homework, got lower grades, and reported lower educational aspirations than the "unvoucheder" kids.

This is certainly not the first attempt to measure the costs and benefits of giving computers to kids. Some earlier studies also found that computers have a negative effect on scholastic achievement. Others found the opposite. But it's hard to know what to make of these earlier studies because they compare families that have decided to buy computers with those that haven't, and compare kids who choose to spend their days parked in front of a computer versus those who spend their time doing other things (like studying, playing soccer, or getting up to no good). This makes any study of computer versus noncomputer kids an apples-to-oranges comparison: Parents who buy computers tend to place more value on education—they're also more likely to live in good school districts, pay for extra math classes, and generally provide a richer learning environment for their kids than parents who don't buy computers. (In my case, it's probably a lot more than access to a PET that accounts for my decision to spend 22 years in school.)

Malamud and Pop-Eleches chose the Euro 200 program because it solved the apples-to-oranges problem. While Euro 200 didn't exactly hand out computers at random, it came pretty close. The program provided vouchers worth 200 euros (about $240 at the time, nearly $315 today) for computer purchases by poor families with kids. (The income cutoff was $50 per month per household member.) But there weren't nearly enough vouchers to go around. In 2005, for example, nearly 52,000 qualified families applied, but the government had funding for only 27,555 of them. As a result, vouchers were given only to families with incomes below $17 per household member. This...
means that some of the families that got vouchers—those with, say, incomes between $16 and $17—were basically identical to some of those that didn't (families with $17-$18 incomes). These families all have similar computing aspirations (they all applied to the program) and differ only in which side of the $17 cutoff they happened to sit on. (Economists call this a "regression discontinuity.")

So what happens when good fortune delivers vouchers (and hence computers) into the homes of Romanian youths? Obviously a lot more time logged on to a computer—about seven hours more per week for vouched versus unvouched kids. Much of this computer time came at the expense of television-watching: Children in families that received a voucher spent 3.5 fewer hours in front of the tube per week. But computer use also crowded out homework (2.3 hours less per week), reading, and sleep. Less schoolwork translated into lower grades at school—vouched kids' GPAs were 0.36 grade points lower than their nonvouched counterparts—and also lower aspirations for higher education. Vouched kids were 13 percentage points less likely to report an intention to attend college. And, interestingly, vouched students who were college-bound were not more likely to express interest in majoring in computer science.

When my friends and I figured out how to transform my PET from a learning tool to a proto-video-game console, my parents stepped in to make sure Space Invaders didn't crowd out homework. Where were Romania's parents? The voucher program was specifically designed to help poor households, and their dire financial circumstances meant that these families were probably less able to afford after-school care or otherwise see to it that the computers were used for learning and not just recreation. Indeed, the authors found that when they looked specifically at families with stay-at-home moms who may be more present and able to police computer use, the negative effects of vouchers were greatly reduced.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the lesson from Romania's voucher experiment is not that computers aren't useful learning tools, but that their usefulness relies on parents being around to assure they don't simply become a very tempting distraction from the unpleasantness of trigonometry homework. But this is a crucial insight for those tasked with designing policies to bridge the digital divide. The express intent of Euro 200 was to give a boost to poor kids' educations. Through programs such as One Laptop per Child, governments around the world have similarly committed to purchasing millions of computers to improve computer access for children. But Malamud and Pop-Eleches' results suggest that merely providing access may be more of a curse than a blessing. If we really want to help poor kids, whether in Romania, sub-Saharan Africa, or America's housing projects, we may want to focus on approaches that provide structured, supervised access through after-school programs or subsidies that bring technology into low-income schools. But just giving kids computers? Might as well just ship them PlayStations.

**the green lantern**

**Good News From the South Pole?**

*Does growing sea ice in Antarctica bode well for the future?*

**By Brendan I. Koerner**

**Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 7:04 AM ET**

We've all heard that the Arctic ice is disappearing, surefire proof that global warming will kill us all. But isn't it also true that Antarctica's ice is growing by leaps and bounds? Doesn't that mean we're getting into a lather over nothing?

The area covered by Antarctica's sea ice has indeed expanded over the past two decades. So in the most literal sense, yes, you're right. But it's a fallacious leap of logic to argue that this trend bodes well for the planet's health. The increase in sea ice around the South Pole may actually be bad news—an indicator that steadily rising temperatures are already wreaking havoc.

It's important to keep in mind that the Arctic and Antarctic are geographically dissimilar, so it's not too surprising that their sea-ice situations would vary. The Arctic consists of a largely frozen ocean surrounded by such land masses as Canada, Alaska, and Russia. Its southern cousin, meanwhile, is almost the exact opposite—a land mass surrounded by ocean on all sides.

Because it's semi-landlocked, and thus less buffeted by ocean currents and winds, the Arctic tends to have more moderate seasonal swings in sea ice coverage. While Arctic sea ice can persist for many years, much of Antarctica's sea ice tends to form and disappear quickly—and somewhat unpredictably.

Satellite monitoring of Antarctica's sea ice began in 1972, and for the first six years there was an alarming reduction in coverage every year. But to the bemusement of scientists, the trend began to reverse itself in 1978. Since then, the surface area covered by the continent's sea ice has expanded by an average of 0.5 percent annually; however, it's a matter of debate whether sea ice covers as much territory today as it once did in the early 1970s.

No one's entirely sure what's causing the expansion of sea ice in Antarctica, but the likeliest explanation is a disturbing one. According to a 2005 NASA-funded study, warmer temperatures have caused greater snowfall around the continent's edges, where the open oceans provide plenty of raw material for precipitation. (Warmer air absorbs moisture more readily.) The weight of that
excess snow pushes sheets of sea ice down into the water, causing more water to freeze.

The incremental expansion of Antarctica's sea ice has coincided with some more troubling changes. Four of the continent's largest glaciers (whose fates are largely unrelated to that of sea ice) are retreating rapidly, and researchers blame increases in ocean temperature. The diminishment of such massive glaciers means that, despite the slow creep forward of the continent's sea ice, the total mass of all Antarctic ice—which includes inland ice—has experienced a marked decrease. And a continuation of that trend could lead to significant rises in global sea levels. Furthermore, snow is melting much farther inland than ever, as well as high up in the Transantarctic Mountains.

Some of these events might be due to causes that aren't necessarily related to human activity; it's been well-established, for example, that the Antarctic is heavily affected by naturally occurring El Niño/La Niña cycles in ways that scientists have yet to fully comprehend. But the Lantern remains convinced that our species' carbon output is changing things for the worse down in the land of penguins.

Ultimately, though, it's the Arctic that should be of greater concern at the moment. The situation on the globe's roof seems truly dire; despite the fact that last year's Arctic winter was unusually frigid, the region's sea ice continues to deteriorate. While there was a slight increase in seasonal sea ice last winter, the oldest sea ice continues to vanish at a rapid clip. This so-called perennial sea ice used to cover up to 60 percent of the Arctic; now that figure has been halved. According to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which analyzes data from the QuickSCAT satellite, the Arctic lost a Texas-size chunk of perennial sea ice between 2005 and 2007.

That might be bad news for star-crossed polar bears, but don't think they're the only ones who will suffer. Weather at the poles plays a big role in conditions here in the United States. For example, milder Arctic cold fronts can reduce snowfall in Western mountains, which in turn can affect the water supply in thirsty Western states.

Is there an environmental quandary that's been keeping you up at night? Send it to ask.the.lantern@gmail.com, and check this space every Tuesday.

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the undercover economist

A Secret Tax on Teenagers

You get your rebate check today. Your kid pays the tax bill later.

By Tim Harford

Saturday, May 31, 2008, at 7:45 AM ET

Britain's chancellor of the exchequer, Alistair Darling, did something rather strange recently to baffling applause from his own supporters and cries of "bribery" from the opposition: He announced a tax on teenagers.

Darling's plan is to cut income taxes temporarily for all but the most prosperous taxpayers. The apparent windfall is £120 each—almost $230. If that sounds familiar, it isn't surprising: A similar plan is already in motion in the United States, where a temporary "tax rebate" began to arrive in the bank accounts of a grateful nation about a month ago. The motivations are different in the British case. While the U.S. plan is billed as an economic stimulus, the British plan is marketed as compensation for those who lost out when taxes on some low earners were recently raised. No matter, because the practical impact of both plans is just the same: Teenagers are getting it in the shorts.

Here's why: Since neither the U.K. nor U.S. government intends to alter its spending plans, these tax holidays will be funded by government borrowing, borrowing that must eventually be repaid. That will require taxes to go up in the future or not to fall when they otherwise might.

Who should celebrate? Not the typical taxpayer, that is for sure. The tax cut makes no difference to her. Say her rebate check is $600; if she had wanted an extra $600 right now, she could already have it in her pocket, either by borrowing the money or by withdrawing it from savings. If she did that, of course, she would later have to pay $600 back plus interest. But that is exactly what some future administration will be demanding to repay government debt. Or, to look at it another way, the rational taxpayer should save the $600 windfall now, keeping it to pay the higher taxes that are surely on the horizon.

Whichever way you look at it, both the U.S. and U.K. governments are handing their citizens cash that was borrowed—and the citizens themselves are liable for the debt. If my bank manager arranged a surprise loan in my name and handed me the cash, I might feel pampered or put-upon, depending on whether I was planning to take out the loan myself anyway. Either way, doubt I would feel any richer.

Of course, some people should count themselves wealthier after the tax cut. Anyone expecting to die without making a bequest should be pleased: If the Grim Reaper knocks on the door before the IRS does, he can spend the tax rebate now and leave the bill for some other sucker.

Who will be the fall guy? We don't know for sure because we can't say whom a future government will tax. But an obvious candidate would be today's teenagers, very few of whom pay income tax today but most of whom will pay income tax in the next few years. Their best hope is that their grandparents add the
tax windfall to their bequests rather than blowing the money on a weekend in the sun.

The idea that a debt-funded tax cut makes little difference to anybody is called "Ricardian equivalence" after David Ricardo, one of the founders of modern economics. The equivalence is between government taxes and government borrowing. However government spending is funded, it generates a bill that will come due sooner or later. Far-sighted taxpayers will immediately take note.

Clearly, there are reasons why some taxpayers might care whether taxes arrive today, or tomorrow with interest. Even so, these tax gimmicks matter much less than we might think. It is current government spending, not current government taxation, that is the real measure of a government's size.

Empirical economists are still arguing over whether Ricardian equivalence roughly holds, but one study by Matthew Shapiro and Joel Slemrod concluded that most U.S. citizens used a the 2001 tax windfall to pay off their debts, leaving more money available to pay future taxes—Ricardian equivalence in action.

That suggests that as consumers and taxpayers, we aren't fooled by these games of three-card Monte. Are we fooled as voters? Alistair Darling obviously hopes so.

today's blogs
The Veepstakes
By Michael Weiss
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 6:20 PM ET

Bloggers assess the merits of a possible Clinton vice presidency and the Bush administration's plan for a strategic alliance with Iraq.

The veepstakes: Will Hillary Clinton run as Barack Obama's vice-presidential candidate? The Wall Street Journal thinks it's unlikely to happen, and even Clinton herself has refrained from making overtures, telling the New York Times that the decision of Obama's running mate is "Senator Obama's and his alone" to make. Still, bloggers speculate about the so-called "dream ticket," and whether it might more resemble a nightmare.

Viktor at Life's Journey writes: "I have one piece of advice for Barack Obama, keep Bill and Hillary as far away from the White House as possible. You don't need Hillary Clinton on your ticket. Take anybody else but Hillary, Bill Richardson would make a great vice president." But Jacob Freeze at liberal MyDD thinks "unity" means a joint ticket: "If Obama plans to carry over the vindictiveness of the primaries into the general election by tossing Hillary Clinton a scrap and trying to pass it off as magnanimity, he may turn what should be a Democratic landslide into a toss-up, and leave voters in the general election with a very unappealing choice between a bogey-man and a vindictive hypocrite."

Doug McCaughan at Reality Me is pretty sure what Clinton's role would be in an Obama administration: "I heard him say that she would be on his cabinet in charge of health. His words were 'And you can rest assured that when we finally win the battle for universal health care in this country, she will be central to that victory. I personally think that one sentence clearly says that she will not be the vice president." And Comedian for President says, quite seriously: "The vetting process would require that she and her husband open up the donor list of the Bill Clinton presidential library, and all of their financial arrangements - something that she is unwilling to do."

Frank James at the Swamp divines Clinton's strategy in even asking for it: "By getting her willingness to play second-fiddle to Obama out there for public consumption, she places tremendous pressure on him. Her openness to the vice presidency may not ultimately pan out but it could prove to be leverage for some other post--a Supreme Court berth, for instance." The middle-ground-seeking Globetrotter at Marin Forum offers a list of pros and cons for a Hillary veep slot. One of the cons is: "It has been an intense campaign and it is clear that neither side really likes the other. There could be too many divisions and animosity between the two for Obama to effectively govern. However, Kennedy and Johnson did not get along well but the ticket still worked." Susan Davis at the Wall Street Journal's Washington Wire notes that voters are split on the idea: "Exit polls in Montana and South Dakota showed that more than half of the voters in both states said Obama should take Clinton as his running mate. But it's a potentially divisive plan—the other half said no, he should not."

Finally, Maynard at Daily Kos has "Machiavellian" motives to support an Obama-Clinton ticket: "We'll watch her power in the senate wane as she spends her busy schedule attending such perfunctory ceremonies as funerals for foreign heads of state and other official who have passed away, or the occasional ribbon cutting ceremony instead of attending senate committee and sub-committee hearings. Thus, I argue that the Vice Presidency is the perfect place to dump Mrs Clinton where she can do President Obama and his agenda no harm."

Read more about Clinton's vice presidential hopes.

Strategic alliance or continued occupation? Patrick Cockburn of the Independent writes of a "secret deal" being hashed out between Washington and Baghdad that would allow the United States to maintain long-term use of 50 military bases in Iraq, obtain immunity from Iraqi law for American troops and private
contractors, and control the country's airspace below 29,000 feet well beyond 2008.

Martini Revolution frets: "It should be obvious that any Iraqi government which agrees to a more or less permanent occupation along with the cession of sovereignty will suffer a massive corresponding loss of legitimacy and popularcy among the Iraqi population."

Dday at liberal Hullabaloo suggests Cockburn is a bit behind the story: "There is nothing 'secret' about this 'secret deal' from the standpoint of the Iraqis. They are well aware of it and committed to stopping its progress, protesting it and demanding it be put to a popular vote. Where the Independent article is valuable is if it can bring attention to this issue in the United States." FP Passport observes: "Obviously, these terms could change in the face of Iraqi opposition, and there is already talk of political workarounds such as making the bases officially Iraqi bases with U.S. tenants. Iraqi officials have also threatened to make other arrangements if their sovereignty isn't fully respected."

Jonathan Taplin at TPM Cafe brings it back to the election: "If this one is true, it's time for the Democrats to raise a ruckus. Obama needs to ask McCain if he supports this new Bush Policy of a permanent American force in Iraq. The long term oil price and fiscal situation is bad enough. This is going to make it worse."

However, Dave Price at the classically liberal Dean's World is unimpressed with the piece, which he thinks is old and also misleading: "Cockburn then claims the plan seeks 'permanent' bases, and that Washington is denying that fact as a 'tactical subterfuge' which makes no sense as the Iraqi Parliament has to publicly vote on the terms of the pact. Even less sensibly, the article claims this will restrict Obama's ability to withdraw troops, of which course it does not as the agreement merely defines the parameters under which they would operate in Iraq."

Read more about the "secret plan" for Iraq.

Liberal Steve Benen at the Carpetbagger Report is jubilantly defiant: "Tell me that this doesn't make you feel like anything is possible in the greatest country on earth. Tell me that this ripple of hope won't capture the imagination of people who still look to the United States as a beacon. Go ahead. I dare you.' Scarecrow at Firedoglake reflects: "It was fitting that each won a primary on the final night. I wrote months ago that no matter who won, the Democrats' challenge was to conduct their campaigns in such a way as to leave no doubt that the country was prepared to have either/both break through their respective barriers. We are not there yet, but that outcome is still possible if the coming days and weeks are handled wisely.'

Conservative Ed Morrissey at Hot Air basks in the historical import of the moment—up to a point: "In watching and reading some of the reaction, many reveled in Obama's nomination for the same reason. They want to feel good about America rather than have an experienced nominee. In fact, they not only want to feel good about America, they want to feel good about themselves. They wanted to be part of that historical moment, and that was their first priority—and that's not limited to Obama supporters, either." Quoting Morrissey, Sister Toldjah says that the media's love affair with Obama clouded their vision: "[They] expected Hillary Clinton to give more than just a passing nod to the significance of Obama's win last night because, well, it makes them feel good that they helped Barack Obama become the first black person to head a major party's ticket in American history. A wall has been torn down thanks in no small part to them, and in their minds Hillary Clinton as a woman should be ecstatic as an 'inclusive Democrat; to see it happen in her lifetime."

Mary* at Freedom Eden is also a little put-off by the focus on Obama's race: "The media and elected officials keep reminding us that for the first time a black man has secured the nomination of a major party. I wonder how many voters look at Obama and think 'black guy.' … Are we supposed to care about skin color? I thought we weren't supposed to concern ourselves with something as superficial as that." At the New Republic's Plank, Cinque Henderson also has mixed feelings about Obama's triumph: "I was on the phone with two black friends and I couldn't help feeling what they felt: real happiness and racial pride to see him there. Then Barack reminded me of why his change and hope speech can be quite cynical—the perfectly unnecessary description of McCain's Iraq position as staying in Iraq 'for 100 years.' Everyone knows that's not what McCain meant—and in Barack's moment of triumph, his public act of graciousness, he might have told more of the truth about his opponent, who was making a legitimate point about the use of troops abroad."

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At Commentary's Contentions, Abe Greenwald notices that Clinton wasn't around to take Obama's phone call Tuesday night. He makes the obligatory "3 a.m." joke and wonders what that will mean for a future dream-team: "What kind of plan to nab the VP spot involves blowing off the gracious nominee at the apogee of his triumph? She has a plan, all right, and the vice presidency is one branch of the decision tree she's considering." And at Comment is Free, the Guardian's Michael Tomasky is pissed at Clinton's refusal to go away: "Once again, it's all about Hillary Clinton, who delivered the most abrasive, self-absorbed, selfish, delusional, emasculating and extortionate political speech I've heard in a long time. And I've left out some adjectives, just to be polite." And Matthew Yglesias tells us how he really feels.

Clinton supporter Big Tent Democrat Talk Left responds to a Politico item that Obama will not be heavily courting offended Hillary fans with this: "Makes sense to me. Why worry about 18 million voters? So it turns out the Obama campaign has some not too smart people on his campaign too. Expect a swift rebuke from Axelrod over this."

James Joyner of Outside the Beltway lays aside Clinton's personality and weighs the merits of her advertised reasons for staying in the game this long: "It may well be that the weak points Clinton identified, which didn't quite work with a Democratic nominating electorate, will go over better in a general election campaign. ... Clinton continued to win states right up until the last night despite the media having (rightfully) declared her campaign dead weeks ago. For all his oratorical skill, he's a flawed candidate."

Read more reactions to Obama's triumph and Hillary's nondeparture. In Slate, John Dickerson covered Obama's speech declaring himself the nominee and also called the time of death on Clintonism, Meghan O'Rourke explains where Clinton went wrong, and O'Rourke and other XX Factor bloggers weigh in on Clinton's speech.

Correction, June 4: The article originally misidentified the author of the blog post from Freedom Eden. (Return to the corrected sentence.)

today's blogs
It's Obama
By Michael Weiss
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 5:04 PM ET

It's Obama: The day began with an Associated Press report that Hillary Clinton would concede that Barack Obama had enough delegates to clinch the Democratic nomination. Then the Clinton camp responded that rumors of its effective demise were greatly exaggerated. Campaign chair Terry McAuliffe rejected the AP story as "100 percent incorrect," citing Obama's failure to nab the requisite 2,118 delegates. Now comes another AP story, this one with a mathematical tally "based on public commitments from delegates as well as more than a dozen private commitments," saying Obama's got it all wrapped up. Bloggers speculated throughout the day on the hows, rather than the whens, of Clinton's bow-out.

Reliably snarky Wonkette snipes that it's all about the money: "She will make Barack Obama host some fundraisers, and maybe hold a car wash or something. At least, her chief strategist Harold Ickes said she wasn't going to pull out of the race until her debt issue was resolved, and then Barack Obama said that he would be working with her 'in November,' so obviously this means Obama is going to pay her off." But John Cole at Balloon Juice explains why Hillary still matters: "The Clintons know they will not win the nomination, so they are now not so quietly sending a clear message- we still matter. They know they do not have the nomination for now, but you need them more than they need you, and, well, things can happen. And, quite frankly, it would be stupid to push the Clintons. Although I get tired of the notion that Hillary is a bomb that needs to be defused."

Politico's Ben Smith has obtained a copy of the letter the Illinois State Financing Committee plans to send to Clinton, which seems to scuttle the abandon-ship mentality. In it, the committee calls Clinton "the best candidate of the three" and states: "The automatic delegates can change their mind up until their vote at the convention, and that is why this nominating process must be resolved in August, and no earlier."

Daily Kos' DHinMI theorizes: "It's possible that the Clinton campaign is pushing back against the AP report because they wanted tonight to be a bit of a 'surprise,' or to have her concede the race without having it seem as if it's in reaction to media announcements that she's done." New York magazine's Daily Intel argues that "if Clinton isn't dropping out tonight, she may miss her chance to really end the race on her terms" because once Obama gets all the superdelegates he needs, "Clinton's exit [will be] a foregone afterthought."

Marc Ambinder says in Clinton's speech she will "express a willingness to serve her party in any capacity deemed necessary to unite the party. The Obama world seems still very cool to this idea."

CQ Politics offers this oddly speculative what-if on Clinton's future: "She could endorse Obama — which would not foreclose the possibility of her becoming the nominee in August if he becomes politically un-viable later in the process." And Ed Morrissey at Hot Air claims if Hillary wants the VP slot, she could likely get it, Obama's antipathy toward her be damned:
"She can press him all the way to the ballot for the nomination and tie him up all summer in lobbying the superdelegates. He will be faced with the conundrum that LBJ described as between having someone outside the tent pissing in or inside the tent pissing out. At this point, he may have little choice but to accept the latter."

Liberal John Aravosis at AMERICAblog *gases*: "[O]ne thing tonight is certainly NOT about is Hillary Clinton. How in God's name does anyone pervert Obama reaching 2,118 delegates as a moment we should devote to the loser?" Aravosis isn't the only blogger focusing more on Obama than Clinton; Jonathan Stein at *Mother Jones' Mojo Blog* predicts: "When Obama gets to 2,117, every undeclared superdelegate in America is going to be calling David Axelrod hoping to be the deciding vote. I'll bet the campaign groups a whole bunch together in order to avoid a melee." Chuck Todd, Mark Murray, and Domenico Montanaro at MSNBC's *First Read* report: "We're told if the campaign has the supers we hear they have, they'll roll them out in chunks today -- possibly as many as 18 House members today, a handful of senators, and the trickling of DNC members."

Obama fan Andrew Sullivan is *upbeat*: "When Obama passes the magic number, what to post? Readers are hereby invited to submit quotes, YouTubes, poems, songs, photographs and whatever you dream up to commemorate the Clintons' departure from presidential politics for, well, at least three years. This is a celebration that can unite Democrats and Republicans."

And Dan Savage at the *Stranger's* Blog *exhales* after news of Obama's effective win: "Hey, the Democrats just nominated a black dude for president. For the first time in my adult life I'm proud to be an Ameri—oh, wait. Scratch that. It's pretty cool, though, huh? Now here's hoping we haven't screwed the pooch with this historic move."

Read more about Obama's nomination.

**today's blogs**

**Too Clever by Half?**

By Morgan Smith
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 2:07 PM ET

Bloggers react to the DNC's Florida and Michigan decision, *Vanity Fair*'s critical profile of Bill Clinton, and the fire at Universal Studios.

*Too clever by half?* The [DNC voted to seat delegates](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/morgan-smith/two-clever-by-half_b_55407.html) from Michigan and Florida at the convention, but accord them only half a vote. Bloggers debate what this means for the Clinton campaign.

At *Hot Air*, conservative Ed Morrissey *sums up*: "Democrats wound up with a compromise that solved nothing. Obama still needs more delegates to get to the nomination than he can possibly win in the few remaining primaries. The decision to halve the vote mirrors that of the Republicans, but the method … has created a second-class delegate status that guarantees bitter feelings."

**TPM ElectionCentral**'s Eric Kleefeld *deems* the decision "a huge blow to Hillary's hopes" and says it hampers her attempt to "to try to narrow Obama's unofficial popular vote lead." But Clinton supporter Jeralyn Merritt at *TalkLeft* *argues* that "[if] Hillary is ahead in the popular vote on June 3, there are a myriad of reasons for superdelegates to choose her over Barack Obama. Chief among them are her greater ability to win in November, particularly in the big swing states like Ohio and Florida; the electoral map that favors her; and the fact that she does so much better than Obama with older voters, rural voters, female voters and working class voters."

**Huffington Post** political director Hilary Rosen *advises* Clinton on how best to win over her party, claiming that in the general election, "the polls show, at least for now, that you would give us a more comfortable cushion for the inevitable ebb and flow of campaign politics." Rosen tells Clinton to "[m]ake your case based on the electability argument. It may be persuasive. ... Don't stir up our base with anger and the irrationality of the 'if onlys.' Let the Rules and Bylaws Committee decision go. Those 4 delegates don't matter at this point."

At the *New Republic's Plank*, Michael Crowley *observes* that the DNC hearings "felt more like a test of power--about how much face Hillary could save, how much respect she could earn from the party machine" and concludes "that's what her candidacy's endgame seems increasingly about: Leaving on her own terms, with the greatest possible aura of strength and potency, setting the tone for her next act."

Read more about the DNC vote on Florida and Michigan.

*Bill-lash*: Bill Clinton's post-presidential behavior comes under scrutiny in a lengthy *Vanity Fair* piece by former White House correspondent Todd Purdum. Clinton's camp has issued a lengthy retort, calling it "a tawdry, anonymous quote-filled attack piece." What's Clinton mad about? Sample sentence: "No former president of the United States has ever traveled with such a fast crowd, and most 61-year-old American men of Clinton's generation don't, either."

"It's hard for me to tell how much of the sleazy behavior that Purdum hints at here is actually true. Based on the record, it wouldn't at all be unlike Clinton for some of it to be true," reflects Matthew Yglesias. "And based on the record, it wouldn't at all be unlike the press to run with some of it even if it
isn't true. But either way, the point is that if there really is such a thing as the candidate with no new skeletons to be chewed over by the right-wing (and I'm skeptical there is) Hillary Clinton isn't it, any more than Barack Obama is."

At the Los Angeles Times' Top of the Ticket, Scott Martelle critiques the piece: "It's getting reduced to sex in some places -- friends worried that he was spending suspicion-raising time with attractive women on the road -- but there's no smoking gun.... and focusing on speculation about a return to form for the former wanderer-in-chief does the article a disservice." Though he writes that the VF piece is "a good read from a journalist who knows him well," Politico's Ben Smith agrees that "[t]he story also hints at scandal, but doesn't deliver any at all." However, Michael Scherer at Time's Swampland declares that "[f]ar more extraordinary than the piece, however, is the 2,481 word rebuttal by Clinton's office. ...It is a masterpiece of muscular misdirection."

Read more about the Vanity Fair article.

Fired up: A fire at Universal Studios on Sunday burned through several sets, including the courthouse square where 1985's Back to the Future was filmed, and a video library. Bloggers survey the destruction.

"Contrary to internet hysteria, the Back to the Future clock...was damaged but remains standing, although the courthouse facade adjacent to it was destroyed, as was all of New York Street," informs SpoutBlog's Karina Longworth. Josh Tyler at CinemaBlend chimes in with a history of damage to the clock tower: "This isn't the first time it caught fire, in fact in the 90s the original Courthouse Square set was burned down and had to be rebuilt."

Knoxville bloggers Dave and Thomas offer a tongue-in-cheek commentary: "Ironically, the fire-laden 'Backdraft' exhibit was spared. As was the 'Jaws' exhibit. 30 years and 2 huge fires later that exhibit just won't stop going." Entertainment blog BuzzSugar notes, "Many of the people quoted about the fire can't help but quip that the incident was just like what filmmakers crave when making a disaster film, except, you know, real."

Read more about the Universal Studios fire.

today's papers
Trouble in the Air
By Daniel Politi
Friday, June 6, 2008, at 6:26 AM ET

The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal's world-wide newsbox all lead with Defense Secretary Robert Gates firing the Air Force's top two officials for failing to adequately secure the nation's nuclear arsenal. It marked the first time that a defense secretary ousted both the military and civilian leaders of a service simultaneously. The stated reason for requesting the resignations of Michael Wynne, the Air Force secretary, and the service's chief of staff, Gen. T. Michael Moseley, was the recent disclosure that the Air Force mistakenly sent nuclear warhead fuses to Taiwan. An inquiry into the incident found a "pattern of poor performance" and "an overall decline in nuclear weapons stewardship."

USA Today devotes most of its front-page real estate to interviews with the presumptive Republican and Democratic nominees. In Florida, John McCain emphasized that he's not trying to distance himself from President Bush and instead just wants to "point out my own record and my own plan of action." McCain also said he'll try to win votes by contrasting his experience with Barack Obama's. The Republican described his opponent as a rookie politician who believes in "big government" and "doesn't understand." For his part, Obama was in Virginia yesterday launching a tour about economic issues that will take him to several of the states that Clinton won as part of his efforts to get white, working-class voters on his side. The Democrat also said he would launch an "Apollo-style program" to develop new energy sources and he's "almost certain" that he'll go to Iraq before the election.

Everyone agrees that the Taiwan incident was merely the last stroke. Gates has long been frustrated with the Air Force leadership because of other mishaps, including the revelation that a bomber had flown over the United States while carrying armed nuclear missiles as well as controversy over a $50 million contract that went to a company with close ties to senior Air Force officials. But it was clear that Gates also differed with the Air Force leaders on strategy, particularly their insistence on continuing to purchase expensive F-22 fighter jets even though the defense secretary has said the planes are of no use for the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "In the end, what it came down to is the feeling of the secretary of the Defense that the Air Force just wasn't on the policy page he was on," a defense analyst tells the LAT.

Gates made it clear that he sees the lack of oversight of the country's nuclear arsenal as a deep problem and appointed a former defense secretary, James Schlesinger, to head a task force to look into the issue. The firings once again emphasized the difference between Gates and his predecessor, who was often criticized for failing to hold senior officials accountable. Democratic lawmakers praised the move. "Gates' focus on accountability is essential and had been absent from the office of the secretary of Defense for too long," said Sen. Carl Levin, head of the Senate armed services committee.
While Obama was campaigning in Virginia, a move designed to show how he intends to compete in several Republican-leaning states, Hillary Clinton tried to distance herself from an effort to force Obama to pick her as his running mate. The two Democrats met late yesterday at the Washington, D.C., home of Sen. Dianne Feinstein, but no one has any information on what they talked about at the unexpected encounter. Meanwhile, Obama moved to take control over the Democratic National Committee and sent one of his top campaign operatives to oversee party operations. The presumptive nominee also said that his campaign’s ban on receiving money from political action committees or federal lobbyists would also apply to the DNC.

The NYT fronts a look at a letter written by a top adviser to McCain that says the Republican supports warrantless wiretapping to monitor Americans’ international communications. Although his campaign insists McCain’s views on the matters of surveillance and executive power haven’t changed, the NYT points out that he seemed to sing a different tune six months ago in an interview. This marks the latest example of how McCain has taken up important Republican issues now that he’s the presumptive nominee and is working to unify his party’s base.

The NYT is alone in fronting the latest from Zimbabwe, where the government ordered that all aid groups suspend their activities. Officials warned that the move could have tragic consequences in a country where more than 80 percent of the people are unemployed. Also yesterday, police detained American and British diplomats who were attacked by a group of loyalists to Zimbabwe’s president. The diplomats were investigating political violence outside of the capital and were detained after a six-mile car chase. Officials say this was all part of an effort to hide the violence that is only expected to increase before the presidential runoff this month that President Robert Mugabe is determined to win at any cost.

The WP’s Michael Gerson writes about Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army and “the most carnivorous killer since Idi Amin.” After spreading terror in northern Uganda for 10 years he was pushed into the jungles of the Democratic Republic of Congo but now appears to be staging a comeback. “If this is not a cause for horror—and a justified cause for international action—it is difficult to imagine what would be.”

Everyone reports that two men climbed the 52-story NYT building in Manhattan yesterday. In the morning, a French stuntman who has plenty of experience in the matter scaled the building and unfurled a banner that read: “Global warming kills more people than 9/11 every week.” In the afternoon, a Brooklyn man also climbed the building. The LAT hears that the second man long had plans to carry out a similar stunt and rushed to do it yesterday after growing angry that the French stuntman had beaten him to the punch. TP doesn’t know what’s more incredible, that the two separate stunts actually took place on the same day, or that the NYT needed 16 journalists to cover an event that happened right under its nose.

Just because he’s a good speaker doesn’t mean his jokes are funny. In his interview with USA, Obama said he’s looking forward to spending the weekend in Chicago with his family. But it won’t be all R&R for the presumptive nominee. On Saturday night, Obama will welcome eight 7-year-olds to his house for a sleepover to celebrate his daughter’s birthday. “These kids are planning to make pizza, so who knows what our kitchen will look like,” he said. “They shouldn’t call these sleepovers. They should call them wake-overs.”

today's papers

All About Hillary
By Daniel Politi
Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 6:21 AM ET

The Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and New York Times lead, while the Wall Street Journal tops its world-wide newsbox, with word that Hillary Clinton will end her campaign on Saturday and endorse Barack Obama. Clinton made her decision after a day of talking to supporters and Democratic leaders who urged her to back down for the sake of party unity. Even some of her strongest backers expressed frustration at Clinton's stated desire to wait before making a decision on how to proceed. "We pledged to support her to the end," Rep. Charles B. Rangel of New York, who has been a staunch supporter of Clinton, said. "Our problem is not being able to determine when the hell the end is." Meanwhile, some prominent Clinton supporters, apparently with her backing, have begun a campaign to urge Obama to pick the former first lady as his running mate.

USA Today goes high with the news out of the Clinton campaign but devotes its lead spot to lawmakers' concerns that a group of unknown foreign investors might be making a move to take control of one of the country's largest railroads. A bipartisan group of senators sent a letter to the Treasury secretary asking for an investigation of the Children's Investment Fund, a London-based group that is trying to win five seats in the 12-member board of the CSX rail line. Very little is known about the fund because it refuses to release the names of its investors, but TCI insists it's not trying to engineer a takeover of CSX and characterized the request for an investigation as a "scare-mongering tactic."

The LAT highlights that Clinton now "has several options." She could release all her delegates to Obama and drop out entirely or simply choose to suspend her candidacy and keep control of her delegates, "maintaining her political leverage until the Democratic National Convention in August." The NYT and WP
make it seem as though the decision has already been made and state that Clinton will suspend her candidacy, which, as the NYT helpfully explains, would allow her to keep on raising money to pay off the huge debt she has amassed in the past few months. Technicalities aside, everyone makes clear that Clinton was left with little choice yesterday as the few voices who urged Democrats to be patient were drowned out by party leaders who sent not-so-subtle signals that it's time to move on.

As one campaign comes to an end, another is just beginning. Robert Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television, announced yesterday that he is starting a so-called "dream ticket" campaign to urge party leaders to pressure Obama to pick Clinton as his running mate. Johnson said Clinton is "absolutely ready" to talk to Obama about it. Of course, that's being done in the name of party unity as well. But most are skeptical about the possibility. The WSJ says Obama's aides are suggesting that "an Obama-Clinton ticket is highly unlikely," while the WP says that inside the Obama campaign "there is a distinct coolness to the idea." Why? Two words: Bill Clinton. Sure, selecting Clinton as a running mate could dilute Obama's message of bringing change to Washington, but figuring out what role the former president would play seems to be the biggest obstacle.

Obama tried to move on from all this "dream ticket" talk by announcing his three-member vice-presidential search committee, which will include Caroline Kennedy. But all the pressure heaped on Clinton to drop out, plus all the vice-presidential talk, meant that "the day after Obama sealed his victory felt like many before it," with pundits wondering when Clinton would drop out, notes the LAT. The NYT reports that due to all this talk about Clinton, aides said Obama would "move slowly" in his search for a running mate. But the WP talks to supporters who say he needs to be more aggressive to take the spotlight away from Clinton by leaking the names of some prospects and perhaps even holding a meeting with a few of the people he's considering for the No. 2 spot on the ticket.

In another example of how Obama spent the day mostly reacting to news rather than making it, John McCain "put his opponent on the spot" (WP) by formally proposing that the two candidates hold a series of town-hall meetings this summer. Obama's campaign responded favorably to the idea, although it emphasized that the presumptive Democratic nominee would prefer "a less structured" format than what McCain has proposed.

Obama's big event yesterday was an appearance before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, but even there he had to share the stage with Clinton. In her remarks before members of the prominent Jewish lobby group, Clinton didn't acknowledge Obama's victory but praised the senator from Illinois and assured the audience that Obama "will be a good friend to Israel." The NYT highlights that in his speech at AIPAC, Obama moved a bit "to the right" and "described a far tougher series of sanctions he would be willing to impose on Iran than he had outlined heretofore." Obama received numerous standing ovations, but the WSJ points out that McCain enjoyed a similar response when he addressed the group.

The WP's Dana Milbank says Obama's speech showed how "a mere 12 hours" after claiming the nomination, the senator from Illinois had "changed himself into an Israel hard-liner." The change, which was "mostly in tone, but occasionally in substance," was a central part of Obama's effort to get Jewish-Americans, a key constituency, on his side. "As a pandering performance, it was the full Monty by a candidate who, during the primary, had positioned himself to Hillary Clinton's left on matters such as Iran."

In another development that might cause Obama a few headaches, all the papers go inside with news that Antoin Rezko, a longtime fundraiser of the senator from Illinois, was convicted of 16 corruption-related charges, including fraud and bribery. There's no evidence that Obama was involved in any wrongdoing, but Republican operatives made it clear yesterday they plan to bring up the conviction during the campaign in order to raise questions about his judgment.

The WP's David Broder writes that after all his early success, "Obama limped into the nomination as a vulnerable and somewhat diminished politician." Obama must now work quickly to "stop retreating and regain the initiative," and the first step in that process is to be clear that he has the duty to choose his own running mate and won't bow to pressure from Clinton supporters. "This is the big-time decision that could define a leader and lead to victory."

today's papers

The End of the Beginning

By Daniel Politi

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 6:21 AM ET

All the papers lead with Sen. Barack Obama claiming the Democratic nomination yesterday. Everyone goes high with, either in the headline or the lead sentence, the historic nature of the news as Obama has now become the first black candidate to lead a major party ticket in a presidential contest. After what the New York Times characterizes as an "epic battle" with Sen. Hillary Clinton, the Los Angeles Times says it seemed only "fitting" that the last two primaries of the five-month contest ended in a split. Obama won Montana, and Clinton came out ahead in South Dakota. But by the time the polls closed, the loss in South Dakota didn't really matter because so many superdelegates had flocked to Obama throughout the day that he easily passed the magic number of 2,118 delegates needed to
secure the nomination. "Tonight, I can stand before you and say that I will be the Democratic nominee for president of the United States of America," Obama told a boisterous crowd of 17,000 supporters at a rally in Minnesota.

Obama's victory was important, not just due to his unique background as the son of a Kenyan farmer and a white mother from Kansas but also because a "first-term Illinois senator defeated what had once been the most powerful machine in the party," notes the Wall Street Journal. The Washington Post echoes the sentiment and notes that "Clinton's defeat seemed almost inconceivable a year ago as the race was beginning to unfold." Clinton spoke at a rally in New York, where she praised her opponent but didn't drop out of the race. "This has been a long campaign, and I will be making no decisions tonight," she said. With those words, and increased speculation during the day that she might be interested in becoming Obama's running mate, Clinton put herself squarely "at the top of the list of issues Obama must handle as the presumptive Democratic nominee," says USA Today.

The LAT and NYT catch late-breaking news that Obama and Clinton had a phone conversation early today. Obama's spokesman said the presumptive Democratic nominee congratulated Clinton and once again told her he wants to "sit down when it makes sense for you." The former first lady apparently thanked him for his call, but no date has been set for the sit-down.

After such a long process, it seemed almost appropriate that the end of the primary season brought "a day of extraordinary drama, frenzied speculation and fast-changing events," notes the WP. "Obama's campaign worked furiously to pressure uncommitted superdelegates to endorse him, Clinton's campaign struggled to provide her with time to leave the race on her own terms, and the media breathlessly sought to keep pace."

In a front-page piece, the WP points out that for those who have been following Clinton, last night "hardly seemed like an end to a losing campaign" as aides excitedly shared exit poll results with the crowd of supporters in New York. Despite rumors that swirled around throughout the day, Clinton was adamant in explaining that she's not ready to drop out, though she did recognize that many are puzzled by her decision. "You know, I understand that a lot of people are asking, 'What does Hillary want?'" a question she then answered by lifting items from her stump speech about health care and Iraq. ("Since all of us want those things, too, her real desire is actually to be the person who does it," writes Slate's Dahlia Lithwick. "Why doesn't she just say that?")

Earlier in the day, Clinton assured herself a spot at the table in the veep stakes by telling New York legislators that she would be "open" to joining a ticket with Obama. "Like her husband, Mrs. Clinton has a way of becoming the center of attention even when the spotlight is supposed to be trained elsewhere," notes the NYT's Adam Nagourney in a front-page analysis. While Obama seems eager to simply move into general-election mode, the truth is that he "still has problems in his own party that may overshadow everything else until he addresses them." The LAT agrees in its own front-page analysis and points out that Obama must now work feverishly to "unify Democrats by reaching out to Clinton and her supporters."

Obama will certainly face competition for the attention of Clinton supporters, as Sen. John McCain clearly has hopes of wooing disappointed Democrats who may be willing to vote Republican. The WSJ points out in a story inside that McCain will target three groups of voters who are particularly important in key swing states: "working-class Democrats, Jews and Hispanics." Trying to claim a spot in the news cycle that otherwise belonged to Democrats, McCain gave a speech in Louisiana where he repeatedly criticized Obama's inexperience and lavished praise on Clinton. "She deserves a lot more appreciation than she sometimes received," he said. "I am proud to call her my friend."

The presumptive Democratic nominee seems to recognize the risk, and Slate's John Dickerson points out, "If Clinton didn't work very hard to build unity, Obama did." He spent a significant chunk of time talking up Clinton and her accomplishments. "It was not just praise for Clinton, but an attempt to revive the Clinton brand," writes Dickerson.

The Clinton question is hardly the only obstacle that candidate Obama will have to face. The LAT points out that in the end, the long primary battle "could prove to have been good preparation for the clashes to come." Despite the jubilant mood in Obama's campaign yesterday, the loss in South Dakota provided a poignant reminder that Obama goes into the general election as a candidate with significant weaknesses that may very well prove insurmountable. Obama certainly has the mood of the times behind his candidacy, as many expect that President Bush's low approval ratings will translate into an easy Democratic victory. But repeated attacks on his youth and inexperience, not to mention his former church, could take a toll. So expect Obama to begin talking about policy issues in much more detail. "Republican attacks on him will be largely based on experience and ideology," a Democratic strategist tells the LAT. "He needs to show that he's tough enough and strong enough to guide the country in a dangerous world."

USAT handily summarizes some of the tasks that lie ahead for Obama. He must step up efforts to reach out to key groups, particularly white voters and women without a college education, a move that will leave him with no choice but to deal with the issue of race. Obama must also consider whether he wants to plan a trip to Iraq and whether he should start releasing a new round of TV ads to counter McCain's attacks.
The papers all assure us this is a historic moment, but if you're feeling like it's all rather anticlimactic, don't worry, because you're not alone. "That's the thing about today's prediction-driven media culture," writes the Post's Howard Kurtz, "If a thousand pundits declare that Hillary is toast, then by the time she is charred around the edges it hardly seems like news."

There's been so much talk about Obama's delegate lead that when he finally claimed the nomination yesterday, the news seemed to be greeted with yawns. "We're not even limping," a media analyst said, "we're just dragging across the finish line, and everyone says, 'Oh, okay, whatever.' It feels redundant."

One group that is probably relieved the primary race is over is the superdelegates, who will finally be able to pick up their ringing cell phones without having to worry that it might be a campaign surrogate on the other end of the line. The WP fronts a look at an undecided superdelegate, who suddenly found herself in the spotlight and (wisely) kept a journal chronicling the process. Neighbors screamed at her, she received e-mails and letters, and her phone just kept ringing. She received calls from all three Clintons, Terry McAuliffe, Obama, four senators, and four governors. Even Melissa Etheridge, an Obama supporter, called and offered backstage passes. "When [the campaign] asked me to call you, I said: 'I can't call a superdelegate. What am I going to say to a superdelegate?' " Etheridge said during a call. "[A]fter I read through your biography, I said, 'Aha! They want the gay one to call the gay one.' "

Meanwhile, Obama supporters who want to celebrate would be wise to leave the champagne aside and drink a good bottle of red wine instead. The NYT reports that a new study suggests red wine "may be much more potent than was thought in extending human lifespan."

today's papers
Waiting for Tonight
By Daniel Politi
Tuesday, June 3, 2008, at 6:23 AM ET

The Washington Post leads with, and almost everyone else fronts, a look at how Sen. Barack Obama is working toward being able to claim victory after the last two primaries today, while Sen. Hillary Clinton is deciding what to do next. Obama's campaign is trying to get undecided superdelegates to his side as soon as the polls close tomorrow, but it's unclear whether he'll officially be able to claim the nomination tonight. The Wall Street Journal leads its world-wide newbox with word that Obama aides have begun the "awkward" process of wooing several of Clinton's most important donors and advisers. USA Today leads with news that Sen. Edward Kennedy is now recovering from what his surgeon called a successful operation to remove a malignant brain tumor. The 76-year-old senator now faces an even tougher challenge as he prepares to undergo follow-up radiation and chemotherapy that could prolong survival. Although Kennedy's prognosis remains grim, experts say he will likely benefit from groundbreaking research that is finding new ways to increase the survival of patients with brain cancer.

The New York Times leads with a dispatch from Venezuela that reports on President Hugo Chávez's moves to overhaul the country's intelligence agencies. Human rights groups and legal scholars say Chávez is trying to create a Cuba-style nation of informers because people, including judges and prosecutors, are now required to cooperate with Venezuela's two new intelligence agencies. The Los Angeles Times leads with the "war" that is currently being fought in Mexico between government forces and drug gangs. Since the crackdown against drug traffickers was launched a year and a half ago, approximately 4,100 people have been killed, including gang members, civilians, and members of the country's security forces. While officials insist the increased violence is a sign that the drug gangs have been hurt by the crackdown, a majority of Mexicans don't think the government is winning, and political analysts say the crackdown merely moves violence into different areas of the country while doing little to disband the gangs.

The NYT reports that the Obama campaign says it's working to get at least eight undecided lawmakers to rally around the Illinois senator tonight. Meanwhile though, Clinton backers are urging uncommitted superdelegates to wait until Wednesday before endorsing Obama. Regardless of what happens tonight after the polls close in South Dakota and Montana, Democratic leaders seem to agree Clinton will get enough superdelegates on his side to claim the nomination by the end of the week. And Obama's victory rally, which will take place at the site of the Republican convention in August, will leave no doubt that he is making the switch from being a primary candidate to his party's nominee for president.

The biggest unknown as the five-month primary season winds to a close is what Clinton will do, and the WP points out that she "sent mixed signals about her plans throughout the day." Clinton has invited top fundraisers and supporters to a rally in New York for what the NYT bills as a "farewell speech," but everyone hears from campaign aides that the move shouldn't be seen as a sign that the former first lady will withdraw from the contest immediately. Many are pointing to the possibility that Clinton will pursue what aides are calling the "middle option," which involves suspending the campaign while not withdrawing entirely. The LAT notes that it'd be unrealistic to expect Clinton to withdraw from the contest before Texas Democrats meet on Friday and Saturday to apportion the state's delegates. But even as she vowed to take her case to the party's superdelegates, former President Clinton suggested this is all but over. "This
may be the last day I'm ever involved in a campaign of this kind,” he said.

The WSJ says that the effort to get Clinton's big supporters to begin backing Obama is not an official part of his campaign strategy, "but the result of numerous informal conversations among people who have known each other for years.” Still, the Obama campaign knows it will have to approach many of these people directly and is currently working on a list of people who the senator will call personally. Of course, the process is hardly one-sided, as many Clinton aides are trying to position themselves for a spot in Obama's team. Although some moves seem almost inevitable, bringing in such a large number of people from a former opponent is likely to raise tensions. Even leaving aside the issue of lingering animosity between the two camps, Obama's advisers could feel offended if they suddenly find themselves "playing second fiddle to better-known figures," as the WSJ puts it.

Chávez has been quick to label anyone who criticizes the new intelligence law as a supporter of the "empire," meaning the United States, as well as of the Bush administration and the Patriot Act. The NYT points out that while the new intelligence law "has similar flourishes" to the Patriot Act, it also seems to have been inspired in part by Cuban policies. Most significantly, Venezuela's use of community groups to help intelligence agencies is similar to the way Cuba uses neighborhood groups to report on activities that are seen as subversive. Legal experts are exploring ways to appeal its implementation, but it's unclear whether such a challenge would even be possible for a law that was written and passed behind closed doors.

Sen. John McCain yesterday called for a worldwide divestment campaign against Iran that would be modeled on the strategy that pushed South Africa to abandon apartheid, but Obama's campaign quickly fired back by saying the presumptive Republican nominee had voted against a divestment bill that was sponsored by the senator from Illinois. Meanwhile, USA Today notes that the family investments of both senators include mutual funds that have shares in companies doing business in Iran. After the paper raised questions, Obama said he would get rid of his investment. McCain's campaign said the senator's wife once had three of these mutual funds but has sold two of them and is looking into what to do about the third.

The NYT fronts a dispatch from Moscow that takes a look at how there's a Kremlin-created "stop list" that includes the names of government critics who are not allowed to appear on television. If a critic somehow makes it into the taping of a show, as happened once last fall, he or she could be digitally erased before it airs. Government officials deny such a list exists, but it's clear that network executives know who they can and can't invite into their shows. The result is that now it's pretty much impossible to find anyone speaking critically, or even satirically, of the government on Russian television.

Just because a fire destroyed a huge chunk of Universal Studios doesn't mean the show has to stop. It is Hollywood after all, and both the LAT and NYT report that even as officials were still investigating the fire, about 130 tourists got on the 10 a.m. tram to take a tour of the studio. The guides quickly added words about the fire into their regular routines. "We're going to take you right up next to the devastated part of our lot and give you a close-up,” a guide said. Besides the effects of Sunday's fire, visitors were treated to the same old tour that, of course, included lots of controlled fires and explosions as "reality and illusion blended on the lot even more than usual," notes the LAT. "I think this is how the fire started," joked one 15-year-old.

today's papers

Staying Alive
By Justin Peters
Monday, June 2, 2008, at 3:41 AM ET

The New York Times and the Washington Post lead and the Wall Street Journal, at least online, tops its world-wide news box with Sen. Hillary Clinton's resounding victory in Puerto Rico's Democratic presidential primary. Clinton, who took 68 percent of the vote, vowed that she would not exit the race before tomorrow's final primaries in Montana and South Dakota. The Los Angeles Times off-leads Clinton and leads with a fire that damaged portions of the Universal Studios Hollywood back lot and theme park. USA Today leads with news that national public transit usage reached record numbers in the first quarter of 2008. The ridership spike is straining the capacity of many cities' underfunded transit agencies.

In all likelihood, Clinton's Puerto Rican victory will be remembered as little more than a souvenir of what was apparently a lovely vacation. Apparently disinclined to challenge the DNC's decision to award Sen. Barack Obama a portion of the vote from the disputed Michigan primary, her best shot at the nomination now seems to involve winning the popular vote and using that to lure superdelegates. Obama, approximately 47 delegates away from clinching the nomination, certainly doesn't sound concerned: He congratulated Clinton on her victory and said that she would be a "great asset" during the general election.

While some hardcore supporters appear ready to battle until the convention, many Clinton loyalists seem finally to be admitting that their days are numbered. (The key number is 2,118.) "It would be most beneficial if we resolved this nomination sooner rather than later," said one Clinton superdelegate, and the sentiment resounds throughout all of today's campaign coverage. The WSJ fronts a long story analyzing various endgame scenarios for Clinton.
The **fire** at Universal Studios Hollywood was the second there in as many decades. Attractions like the **King Kong** tour and the town square from the movie *Back to the Future* were badly damaged (**save the clock tower, anyone?**) as "the towering cloud of black smoke made it look as if Hollywood was producing a film about its own doomsday." Efforts to extinguish the unexplained blaze were hampered by low water pressure and a malfunctioning sprinkler system.

The *NYT* off-leads a **report** on Pakistan's inability or reluctance to capture Baitallah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban and the alleged brains behind the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Mehsud, who regularly appears in public, openly operates terror training camps near the Afghan border. "If the army took firm action they could crush him in two months," said one frustrated tribal leader. Pakistan seems to have thought that Mehsud's border presence could be useful in a theoretical war with India.

The *Post* goes **below the fold** with news that a record number of immigrants caught crossing the border between the United States and Mexico are being prosecuted on criminal charges. In February alone, 7,250 criminal immigration cases were brought in federal court. Officials claim that Operation Streamline has helped deter potential illegal aliens from crossing the border; critics claim that the program "makes for good election-year politics but poor policy."

The *NYT* goes up top with a **report** on how operational improvements in U.S.-operated prisons in Iraq may soon be neutralized if the U.S. agrees to remand thousands of prisoners to the custody of the Iraqi government. The extensive article, filled with praise for a remade detention system that offers prisoners fair administrative hearings and educational programs, is encouraging, but it reads something like a press release. TP wonders exactly how much supervision the reporter faced during her visits to Camps Cropper and Bucca.

**Everybody fronts the news** that Yves Saint Laurent, celebrity fashion designer and advocate for women's trousers, is dead. In a career that spanned nearly 50 years, Saint Laurent built a legacy based on a chic and daring simplicity, outfitting women in peacoats, pantsuits, and tuxedo jackets as he embraced the revolutionary spirit of his era. "My small job as a couturier is to make clothes that reflect our times. I'm convinced women want to wear pants," he once said. He was 71.

The *NYT* **reports** that the nation's credit crisis has induced many student lenders to stop loaning money to students attending some less-than-prestigious colleges and universities. The banks—including PNC, SunTrust, and Citibank—cite higher default rates as one reason why they have dropped certain schools from their loan programs. "I find it totally and completely unethical," said the financial aid director at William Jessup University.

*USAT* reffers a **feature** on Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood, an insurgent haven recently partitioned by a long wall intended to, as one merchant puts it, "separate the bad Sadr City and the good Sadr City." Although the three-week-old wall has been a security boon, the difficulties involved in passing through it have crippled many retailers stuck on the American side. "If the market is going to die, then maybe the Mahdi Army would be better," said one retailer. Everybody **notes** that the 19 American military deaths in Iraq in May were the fewest since the 2003 invasion.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates blasted the government of Burma, accusing the ruling junta of "criminal neglect" for its refusal to allow international foreign aid into its cyclone-damaged country, the *NYT* **reports**. Four American aid ships, treading water near Burma's borders for the past few days, will probably be recalled soon.

**Cash rules everything around me:** The *WSJ* fronts a **feature** examining the various extreme ways that Americans are trying to raise the cash necessary to support their debt-ridden lifestyles. Some are taking out reverse mortgages on their homes; others are selling their life-insurance policies to corporations for immediate cash payouts. "You don't want to do these things unless you absolutely have to," cautioned one financial adviser. Caution be damned, says one cash-strapped soul: "Why plan for retirement if you can't make it today?"

today’s papers
The New Math
By Jesse Stanchak
Sunday, June 1, 2008, at 7:06 AM ET

Everyone leads with the Democratic Party deciding it will seat all Florida and Michigan delegates at the party's convention this August, but it will grant those delegates only half a vote each. The decision nets Clinton 24 total votes at the convention and increases the number of votes needed to win the nomination to 2,118. To varying degrees, all the papers say the compromise is too little, too late to be of much help to the Clinton campaign.

The *Los Angeles Times* describes the deal as a compromise between Obama supporters' plan to split the two states' delegates equally and the Clinton camp's desire to see all the delegates seated with full voting rights, apportioned strictly by ballot results. While Florida was split along ballot lines, Michigan proved trickier. The *Washington Post* **reports** that the committee decided to rely on exit polling as well as ballot totals while working out the Michigan delegate allotments. In the end, they awarded all uncommitted Michigan delegates to Obama, along with four delegates that would have gone to Clinton under a
ballot-only deal. While the Obama campaign expressed satisfaction with the decision, at least one Clinton spokesman has said Clinton may appeal the decision later this summer. The New York Times says the new count leaves Obama 176 delegates ahead of Clinton.

The party's Rules and Bylaws Committee voted on the decision at a public meeting, following five hours of testimony and three hours of backroom negotiations. Votes were greeted with cheering, booing, and hisses, with Hillary supporters reacting especially strongly. The WP catalogs the displays of outrage at the meeting, while the LAT focuses on Clinton supporters' feelings of betrayal at the hands of the party and the media.

In its analysis of the decision, the NYT concludes that while the party's ruling won't force Clinton out of the race, it may help her come to terms with her increasingly long shot at the nomination. The paper cites 'associates' of Clinton's in claiming that she's slowly becoming resigned to the idea that she will not be the nominee. The paper also says the decision may help undeclared superdelegates come off the fence. The paper claims aides in both camps expect that within 48 hours of the final two primaries on Tuesday, Obama will have enough superdelegate support to clinch the nomination.

The WP runs a preview of today's Puerto Rico primary, which is expected to be Clinton's last win.

Each of the papers also includes an item regarding Obama's decision to sever ties with Trinity United Church of Christ. Obama's affiliation with the church had been a source of controversy for months, most recently because of a guest preacher's sermon that accused Clinton of weeping over "a black man stealing my show." Obama stopped short of denouncing the church, according to the NYT. The WP reports that Obama will most likely not pick a new church until January.

The NYT fronts a feature on China's quest to lead the Olympic gold medal count this summer by dominating rowing, among other events. China is focusing resources on training for the sports that offer the most chances for medals, even if Chinese athletes have historically performed poorly in those categories.

The WP reports on stabilizing conditions in Basra, saying that a military operation spearheaded by the Maliki government has scattered the city's many militias and brought at least a measure of temporary calm. In some respects the piece is quite similar to a story the LAT fronted in its Saturday edition, but where the LAT focused on the political big picture, the WP's story is about how this new political landscape is affecting everyday people. It's notable that it's the Iraqi military, not U.S. forces, bringing stability to the city, and yet there are still questions about what will happen to Basra when the current offensive is over.

Meanwhile, the NYT reports that fewer than 10 Jews are left in Baghdad, a city that was home to more than 130,000 Jews a little more than 50 years ago.

For your Sunday morning enjoyment, the WP fronts a sharply written piece on a copyright lawsuit over that "footprints in the sand" poem.

If you're skeptical about the ability of $600 rebate checks to stimulate the economy, you're not alone. The NYT goes under the fold with data that shows most people plan to use the money to pay bills, buy gas, or save it for future expenses. The paper does concede that paying off bills now could allow some consumers to splurge later on, since it could improve their sense of financial security. But even then, the paper's sources say, the benefit would be all but gone by the end of the year, since rebate checks don't fix the underlying problems with the economy.

The LAT fronts a feature on women in Arab media and entertainment who reflect shifting perceptions of gender and morality in the Islamic world.

Women buying individual health insurance may pay a higher premium if they've had a cesarean section, reports the NYT. Women who've had one c-section are more likely to need another.

Inside, the LAT covers the closing of one of the last FEMA trailer parks in Louisiana, with some residents still struggling to find permanent housing three years after Hurricane Katrina.

The NYT covers a continuing shift in political attitudes among younger evangelical Christians. The paper argues that some evangelical groups' growing focus on fighting poverty and injustice has diminished their ties to the GOP. The paper finds that younger fundamentalists are more interested in evangelism than political activism.

The WP reviews Scott McClellan's "somewhat limp" book recounting his years in the White House press office.

The LAT says the Supreme Court may take up a case over whether or not fantasy baseball leagues (and their use of players' names and stats) are protected as free speech.

The NYT would like you to believe that "Tiger Woods is the consolation for our mortality." Despite that horrific bit of hyperbole, the piece isn't a bad assessment of the man's gifts. If you want the skinny version of the argument, stick with the accompanying online video.
today's papers

Technical Difficulties
By Lydia DePillis
Saturday, May 31, 2008, at 5:45 AM ET

The New York Times leads local, with the collapse of a construction crane yesterday that killed two workers and has worried a city where this kind of thing has happened before. The Washington Post goes with Shiite protests over the U.S. plan to keep troops in Iraq until the end of its UN mandate on Dec. 31. The Los Angeles Times’ feature lead has to do with the death of an Italian woman who was killed while hitchhiking across the Middle East in a wedding gown, while the Wall Street Journal leads with news that Floridians may have U.S. taxpayers to thank for lower premiums if backers of an initiative that would have the federal government supplement disaster insurance get their way.

The crane incident, in which an arm snapped off and crashed into an Upper East Side building across the street, probably had more to do with a bad weld than human error. But it comes on the heels of another accident in March that killed seven people, prompting the city to tighten regulations on tower cranes, and the WSJ adds that the latest incident has led builders to call for a “comprehensive review” of construction regulations in the city.

Friday's protests in Iraq indicate rising dissatisfaction with the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, which has had to counter rumors that the Americans are pushing to establish permanent bases in the country. The NYT's bigger picture piece notes that some Maliki allies hope to put off substantive negotiations until a new U.S. president takes office. Much of the resistance has been led by supporters of Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who will be contesting October's elections and wants the plan to be put to a referendum of the people. Maliki's government is getting some credit for having stanched the violence in once-bleeding Basra, the LAT reports, although complex and overlapping political forces continue to operate under the surface.

The Democratic disaster "reinsurance" plan would cover all 50 states, but coastal states would benefit most as hurricane season gets under way—which environmentalists and some private insurers warn could prompt more building in high-risk coastal zones. The measure passed the House last year, and a Senate vote is unlikely this session, backers—including Allstate and State Farm—are trying to make it an issue in the presidential race. Also in disaster news, the NYT finds that Buddhist monks are filling in where the Burmese junta falls short in providing aid to victims of Hurricane Nargis, and the WP reports that local Chinese bureaucrats are getting a run for their money dealing with quake victims.

The NYT off-leads with news that on May 9, the Bush administration set a deadline of June 1 for all new regulations and Nov. 1 for final regulations in an effort to prevent a last-minute rush of new rules, which could be frozen by a new president if enacted less than two months before the old one leaves office (as Bush did when he came into office and Clinton did before him). The June 1 deadline is expected to impact "scores" of new pending regulations in areas including the environment and workplace health.

Today is the day that Hillary Clinton will make her last stand for Michigan and Florida, as the party's Rules and Bylaws Committee meets to determine how to deal with their delegates. Many expect a compromise in which half of the delegates from each state will be seated, but the Journal reports that some—including Michigan Sen. Carl Levin—promise to appeal any decision that doesn't result in a state's full delegation having spots in Denver.

The LAT fronts and the Post and NYT cover the bizarre tale of a polygamous Mormon sect in Texas that may now get its children back after the state supreme court ruled that child welfare officials had overstepped their bounds in seizing more than 460 kids from the 10,000-member fundamentalist group's compound in April. Talks between parents and the state broke down yesterday, and courts may have to move through each case one by one as DNA testing determines whether abuse occurred.

The WP fronts a feature on good news for Danville, Va., which landed furniture giant Ikea's first factory in the United States after almost dying when the tobacco industry moved out. The NYT says that jobs are also in the offing in Iowa, where growth in service sector and green-collar positions, baby boomer retirements, and an exodus of college graduates has created a burgeoning job surplus (if only people wanted to live there). Meanwhile, the job market for 2008 graduates is bad, but it's maybe not as bad as it possibly could be—if you graduated from Harvard with a 3.8 average, you probably still have a chance.

The NYT points out below the fold that Detroit is trying to have it both ways, putting out big-as-ever SUVs with hybrid technology that add about $4,000 to the asking price and 6 miles to the gallon (they're not having many takers). Smarter automakers are putting smaller engines in regular-sized cars, as consumers opt for pocket change over horsepower.

In the day's reassurances: Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf says that he is not leaving anytime soon, despite rumors of a rift between him and a top general; and the Vatican says that women can still not become priests, despite a spate of "so-called ordinations" by renegade dioceses in recent years.

In the day's reversals (and potential reversals): nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan claims that he never actually sold nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea, and Libya, and only admitted as much as in 2004...
under duress from the Pakistani government. And attorneys general from 10 states have asked California to stay its decision legalizing gay marriage until after a statewide referendum on the question in November, saying that it could result in legal challenges in their states that would be unnecessary if voters disagree with the court.

And in the latest sign of the apocalypse, 3,000 users of the microblogging service Twitter are receiving personal updates from a NASA Mars Lander, which sent the following missive upon touching down last Sunday:

\textit{parachute is open!!!!!!}

\textit{come on rocketssssss!!!!!}

\textit{I've landed!!!!!!!!!!!!}

\textit{Cheers! Tears!! I'm here!}

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**war stories**

**Is Barack Obama Too Naive To Be President?**

Not in the post-Cold War world.

By Fred Kaplan

Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 6:00 PM ET

The question of the moment: Is Barack Obama too naive to be commander in chief?

Now that Obama is the presumptive Democratic candidate, this is the line of attack that John McCain is aggressively pushing. In part, this is because he doesn't have much else to run on. In part, it's because there's video footage, from the Democratic primary contests, of Hillary Clinton making the same accusation.

So is there something to the charge?

The notion stems from the Democrats' CNN-YouTube Debate of July 23, 2007, when a viewer named Steve asked the candidates whether—in the spirit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's bold trip to Jerusalem—they would be willing to talk with the leaders of Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and North Korea "without preconditions" during their first year in office.

To the surprise of many, Obama answered, "I would." Clinton countered that she would not make such a "promise" (though Obama didn't either—the question was whether he would be "willing"). After the debate, she went further and called Obama's response "irresponsible and, frankly, naive." A presidential visit is special; it shouldn't be undertaken unless the outcome is all but known in advance.

Even some of Obama's own staff asked him after the debate whether he wanted to retract the remark. No, he told them, he meant what he said. He clarified later that there would have to be an agenda—he wasn't keen on talking for the sake of talking—but "preconditions," which means a great deal more, shouldn't be required.

On Tuesday, hours before Obama clinched the Democratic nomination, McCain, signaling the start of the general election, told a crowd in New Orleans, "Americans ought to be concerned about the judgment of a presidential candidate who says he's ready to talk, in person and without conditions, with tyrants from Havana to Pyongyang."

And so it's worth taking a look at what Obama actually said during that July 23 debate. Here is his full reply:

I would [be willing to meet with those leaders], and the reason is this: The notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them—which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of this administration—is ridiculous. … [Ronald Reagan and John Kennedy talked with Soviet leaders because] they understood that we may not trust them, and they may pose an extraordinary threat to us, but we have the obligation to find areas where we can potentially move forward.

Obama added, referring to the countries that the questioner listed, "It is a disgrace that we have not spoken with them." For instance, he said, we need to talk with Iran and Syria, if only about Iraq, "because if Iraq collapses, they're going to have responsibilities."

I would submit there is nothing wrong with any of this. Obama might have done well to focus more intently, at the time, on the phrase "without preconditions"—to parse its meaning and to distinguish the lack of preconditions from the lack of preparations—but, taken in full, and in the context of the question, his reply was the acme of common sense.

The remark did violate an article in the playbook of Cold War diplomacy: that a presidential visit is special, something that the recipient of the visit values above all else and therefore needs to earn; that success must be virtually guaranteed before such a high-stakes trip is taken; and that, therefore, before such a hallowed event can be scheduled, the grunts need to complete all
the "spade work," leaving little for the presidents to do beyond signing on the dotted line.

But here's a fact of our times (and Obama seems to have a grip on this, perhaps because he's not so immersed in the diplomatic subculture): A presidential visit is not the cherished commodity that it once was, because the United States is no longer the superpower that it used to be.

When the Soviet Union imploded, so did the Cold War system whose existence bolstered our power and influence. After a while, many leaders—who once turned to the United States to permit, enforce, and legitimize their dealings in the world—began to go their own way, pursue their own interests, build their own alliances, not necessarily against the United States (though sometimes it worked out that way) but, more to the point, without giving much thought to Washington's feelings about the matter.

The Bush administration's many failures have reinforced this tendency. For instance, its lack of success in Iraq and Afghanistan has made our enemies less fearful of our threats and our allies less trusting in our assurances. Its disinclination even to engage in serious Middle East diplomacy has made it politically harder for moderate Arab leaders to side openly with U.S. interests.

Look at the deals that foreign leaders are cutting on their own. Israel and Hamas are talking about a cease-fire, using Egypt as a mediator. Turkey is serving as middleman in talks between Israel and Syria. The political factions in Lebanon worked out an accord, under Qatar's supervision.

These local and regional arrangements are encouraging developments. But, as Robert Malley and Hussein Agha noted in a recent New York Times op-ed, the more these kinds of deals get struck without American involvement, the more marginalized we become. Our already-slackening influence all over the world diminishes still further.

But more than our own power is at stake. These regional peace deals often need a larger guarantor. In many parts of the world, the United States is the only country that has the potential to play that role. It is still the only country that has global reach—politically, economically, and militarily.

No matter who is elected this November, the next president will have to take extraordinary steps to translate this global reach into power and influence—to restore American leadership. One of the main challenges in this effort will be to prove to others that this leadership is desirable.

The new reality is that to a degree we haven't seen in our lifetimes, the United States is a normal country—a very powerful country, but normal nonetheless: not a superpower. A presidential visit, in this light, is not such a big deal. Or, to the extent that some countries might still regard it as a visitation from on high, it may be just the jolt to get things moving.

Either way, not only was Obama's remark not naive; it reflected a more instinctive understanding of the post-Cold War world than either of his opponents seem to possess.

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**well-traveled**

**Eco-Touring in Honduras**

What can we learn from the mysterious collapse of the Mayan civilization?

By Elisabeth Eaves

Friday, June 6, 2008, at 10:27 AM ET

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Colonia Balfate and Colonia Policarpo Galindo are not in the guidebooks, and for good reason. They are conjoined shantytowns that spill upward along two steep tropical gullies into the green jungle above. A few of the 2,300 residents have homes made of cinder block or cement, but the rest make do with scavenged wood planks, corrugated tin, or sheets of plastic. Tawny dirt roads, raw as open wounds and lined with garbage, climb sharply from the entrance to the settlement. Water delivery to the community is sporadic, residents lack a sewage system or a health clinic, and neighbors complain that the colonias are crime-ridden. In March, the owner of a nearby botanical garden called them "a haven for thieves and robbers" in the local press after two hikers were robbed on his grounds.

Balfate and Policarpo Galindo are among the faces of modern tourism. These fast-growing slums are located not on the outskirts of some Third World city but on a resort-dotted island in the Caribbean—one peddling sun, sea, and piña colada dreams to a richer, colder world. Here on Roatán, one of the Bay Islands of Honduras, direct flights from the United States are on the rise, a new ferryboat speeds crossings to the mainland, and cruise-ship traffic is ramping up. A terminal slated to open in 2009 will be able to handle 7,000 cruise-ship passengers a day. Cement trucks, feeding a construction boom in new hotels, rumble along the two-lane jungle road that serves as the island's main thoroughfare. As tourism grows, though, the island is killing off the flora and fauna that lured the foreigners in the first place while failing to enrich many Hondurans. From cruise
shipper to backpacker, every traveler who sets foot on the island, including me, is contributing to this process.

I came to Honduras hoping to unravel some of the effects of travel—because I travel and don't intend to stop and because, as a child of my time, I'm cursed with the burden of knowing I live in a planet-sized web of cause and effect. I can't abstain from this web anymore than a butterfly can refrain from moving its wings, but I feel drawn, nevertheless, to follow a few of its strands.

We hear a lot about eco-tourism these days, a term rendered nearly meaningless by travel-industry hype, but which the International Ecotourism Society defines as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local peoples." That's the kind of definition that begs more questions: Improves how much? Which local people? But it's safe to say that the businesses and well-meaning organizations promoting eco-tourism agree on one thing: If developing countries conserve their natural areas, revenue from tourism can make up for foregone income from other uses of the same land, such as logging, fishing, and farming. That income, in turn, will reinforce the will to conserve.

Often, though, this theory isn't borne out in real life. Consider Ecuador's Galápagos Islands, long the poster child for eco-travel, now turning into an eco-disaster. Between 1999 and 2005, the islands' GDP grew by a stunning 78 percent, two-thirds of which was due to tourism, according to a new study by J. Edward Taylor of the University of California, Davis. But individual welfare barely improved. GDP per head grew by a paltry 1.8 percent in the same period because the islands' population—drawn by the business engine of eco-tourism—grew by 60 percent. That ballooning population is taking an ever-higher toll on the fragile ecosystem.

In addition to being endowed with fertile jungle and turquoise sea, Honduras is a good testing ground for eco-tourism's central proposition. It's poor. It wants tourism, or indeed anything that will supplement an economy based on remittance payments, maquiladoras, and fruit. There appears to be an official will to conserve: The government has designated, at least on paper, 107 protected areas in which hunting and development are either limited or banned outright. Together, they make up an impressive 24 percent of Honduran territory and are home to endangered creatures, like the howler monkey and the manatee, and spectacular ones, like the scarlet macaw. My plan was to visit several of the national parks, meeting up with my parents along the way and ending our trip at the ancient Mayan ruins of Copán.

On a map published by the government-affiliated Honduras Institute of Tourism, nearly the entire 80-square-mile island of Roatán is part of a national marine park. But a staffer at a local conservation organization told me that while that was the plan, it wasn't actually the case. At the moment, only eight miles of shoreline, stretching little more than a mile out to sea, are officially protected.

Diving in that area earlier in the day, I had seen a hawksbill turtle, two and a half feet long, beating its flippers as it glided by like a prehistoric shadow. The hawksbill—locally called carey—is critically endangered, still hunted for its dark-and-light patterned shell. Some locals make jewelry out of it—a barefoot man had already tried to sell me a carey necklace on the beach. "One of the sad side effects of the tourism and cruise-ship industry is that it has generated a lot of illegal activity," said James Foley, director of research and development for Roatán Marine Park, which maintains a tiny beachfront office in the village of West End.

The colonias, a handful of which are scattered around the island, are another disturbing side effect.

"See those houses?" Rosa Danelia Hendrix asked me, gesturing to some 15 shacks scattered high on the hills, the latest expansions to Balfate and Policarpo Galindo. We were standing in the yard of the three-room yellow schoolhouse where she is principal.

"Three months ago, they weren't there. They don't have septic tanks. When the rains come, the waste will run down the hill and cause diseases," she said. The human waste, garbage, and sediment from the torn-up jungle also wash into the sea and onto nearby coral reefs, which are inside the supposed eight-mile protected area and which are home to hawksbills, bottlenose dolphins, and myriad fish. The sediment reduces the amount of sunlight that reaches the coral, killing it, which, in turn, slowly kills the fish that live there.

The residents of the colonias come to the island from mainland Honduras because the tourism boom shimmers with the illusion of plentiful, well-paid jobs. "The island dream," mainlanders call it. "They confront reality when they realize they don't speak English, or don't have construction skills, and they can't get good jobs," Hendrix said.

To leave the colonias, I hopped in a minibus, and in 10 minutes I was back in West End, which is far from swanky but still a world away. It was my own island dream: a single dirt road running along a palm-fringed waterfront, lined with low-key restaurants, hotels, and dive shops. I stepped into an open-air beach bar called Sundowners and ordered a piña colada, and in no time the man on the next stool was telling me he hadn't paid federal taxes since 1967. The bar filled up, and as the sun moved closer to the sea, everyone turned to watch. It slipped over the edge of the earth, streaks of orange and pink filled the sky, and the black silhouette of a cruise ship sailed across the horizon.
Not so much swimming as hovering, I slipped into the school of sharks. There were 18 of them, some as long as 8 feet. "These are big girls," the dive master had warned us; many were pregnant and thicker than usual. They swam above, below, and around me, so close I could have reached out and touched them. The dive master had advised us not to, a warning that had struck me as bizarre. I mean, really. What idiot would do such a thing?

But now I saw the problem. These Caribbean reef sharks had skin like velvet, dark and rich in the shadows, shiny and pale when it caught the light. They shimmered hypnotically as they moved. I noticed scars, dark healed gashes on their sides and around their jaws, telling stories I couldn't read—of feeding frenzies, mating rituals, and fishermen. I wanted to touch. The sharks, meanwhile, seemed to register me as an uninteresting object. They came disquietingly close but always turned away from me at the last second. As they swerved, I found myself wishing one would shimmy along my body as she did, gliding in tandem with me for a few moments.

The sharks gave me butterflies, but the truth was that I was probably more of a danger to them than they were to me. For one thing, I was with 14 other humans, some of them fatter and slower than me, giving the sharks considerable choice should they choose to nibble. For another, as sharks go, the Caribbean reef shark is not especially threatening. Just four species of the 410 or so known to science account for most shark attacks on humans, and this wasn't one of them.

The sharks, on the other hand, would have had a lot to worry about had they been half as anxiety-prone as humans. Our group was shark baiting, one of the most controversial eco-tourism practices in the Caribbean. Sharks, being wild animals, are difficult to procure on command. So many of the hundreds of shark-dive operators around the world tempt the animals with food. At Waihuka Diving, Roatán's sole shark operation, the dive master took a plastic bucket with holes punctured in the lid and filled it with a small amount of chopped-up fish. The dive master planted the bucket in the sand 20 feet from the coral wall where we kneeled, and the sweet smell of fish guts lured the sharks to school right in front of us. They kept schooling as, at the dive master's signal, we moved into the fray. My excitement was pure, more real and visceral than I had expected. And, fortunately, immune to the presence of other humans and the artificiality of the setup.

Which brings me back to the bait. In 2001, Florida banned shark feeding in its waters, a move hailed by public-safety officials but also by conservationists. Feeding sharks lowers their natural fear of humans, which makes them easier prey for fishermen. And repeatedly luring them to the same spot makes them easy for fishermen to find.

This is a problem, because more than 100 million sharks are killed by humans every year. Several species are critically endangered, and some have gone extinct within specific regions. Sharks are frequently killed as collateral damage—for instance, by tuna boats in the Pacific. (Your dolphin-safe tuna is not necessarily shark-safe.) Sharks are also a direct target of fishermen, especially for their fins, with escalating demand for shark-fin soup in China and Taiwan. The fins are so valuable that fishermen often cut them off and throw the shark back into the ocean, where it bleeds and sinks to its death.

We humans returned to our places in front of the coral wall, and the dive master, wearing a chain-mail gauntlet, ripped the lid off the bucket of chopped fish. The effect was instantaneous. These lazily graceful creatures were suddenly bullets of muscle. In a matter of seconds they became a writhing, food-focused mass. A single thrash by a single shark looked powerful enough to knock me out.

As the melee ended, the sharks dispersed, trolling the area in wider and wider curves until a few disappeared into the blue. The divers reluctantly began to swim up the anchor line. At 15 feet below the surface, I paused and hung onto the line, floating like a windsock in the current while the nitrogen left my body. For a few minutes, I was able to watch the sharks from above, now just gray silhouettes but still recognizable by the S-curve of their swim.

A fisherman on Roatán can get about $40 for one of these sharks, or $720 for 18. Waihuka gets about $80 per diver, so $960 on this 12-customer dive. They can charge $960 for those same sharks again and again, and the sharks don't have to die: The resource is renewable. Assuming similar overhead (a boat, an outboard engine, gasoline), shark-watching is more profitable for the locals than shark-fishing, and it conserves nature rather than decimating it.

Doesn't that make shark diving a good thing? The rosy view of eco-tourism would say we should exploit shark viewing to stop shark fishing. Hire the fishermen as dive masters, and you've got a win-win-win for locals, tourists, and sharks. Shark-watch businesses further argue that the more people have happy encounters with the animal, the more public support there will be for researching and protecting it. (The whale-watching industry plausibly advances a similar argument.)

Unfortunately, ecology is a little more complicated. The day before my dive, I had asked James Foley of Roatán Marine Park
what he thought about shark baiting. "If you feed sharks, you're interfering with their natural feeding cycle," he said. Since they're the top predators, that messes with the entire food chain. If they eat less of their usual prey, the prey population balloons and eats more of the creatures below it, and so on and so forth. "It sends shock waves through the whole ecosystem," Foley said. Masses of data and very sophisticated computing are required to get an idea of the ultimate impact, but the point is this: Feed wild beasts with utmost caution, not because of some selfish concern over getting your hand bitten off, but for their sake.

Even knowing what Foley had told me about the food chain, I wanted, post-dive, to side with proponents of shark diving, the ones who say that such cara-a-cara encounters will teach man to love the beast. After I surfaced, and for some time afterward, I would close my eyes and try to re-imagine myself back down to the reef, envisioning their skin and their scars and re-tasting the frisson. Not many experiences in adult life make me want to do that.

I approached the north coast of mainland Honduras by ferryboat from Roatán, thinking of two antecedents: Christopher Columbus, who was real, and Allie Fox, who was not. Columbus passed this way by ship in 1502 and claimed the shore for Spain. The existing human residents, the Tolupán, Pech, and Tawahka, lived in hidden jungle settlements, so Columbus would have seen an unbroken wall of green rising from the sandy beach up to the 8,000-foot peak of Pico Bonito. As my ferryboat approached, the peak loomed over the coast, first hazy in the bright morning sun, then greener as we got closer to the shore.

As the wilderness has become a place that humans visit by choice rather than necessity, the "leave no trace" credo has evolved into a mantra for outdoor enthusiasts. In my case, it's been ingrained since grade-school day hikes. So it's odd to think just how new this philosophy is to Western thinking. Columbus, I'm guessing, would have considered the idea of leaving no trace incomprehensible. Every Spanish name, every cathedral, every empty silver mine in Central America is testament to the belief that the bigger the trace, the better. Or consider the Babylonians, the Romans, the Mayans—the entire history of civilization is one of bending the earth to the needs and wants of humans. Today, we might worship at the altar of low-impact living, but I'll wager that our brains have not yet adapted. On a purely psychological level, impact is good. Who wants to be forgotten? We have families, make art, and build McMansions precisely so that we leave a trace.

Allie Fox and his family also approached the north coast by ship in The Mosquito Coast, a novel by Paul Theroux, who seems to have chosen the region as a metaphor for the opposite of civilization. Fox wants to escape a corrupt and materialistic modern United States, and he has notions that the Mosquito Coast savages, as he sees them, are a purer version of mankind. But once in the jungle, he is desperate to civilize it. He plants neat rows of beans and builds a giant ice machine.

My parents met me at the ferry terminal with Mark, a guide from a local company that specializes in aventuras ecológicas. The outfit is called Garífuna Tours, after an African-Indian ethnic group that lives along the north coast. This was supposed to be a group tour, but we were the only customers. We felt a bit decadent.

We drove through the modern, low-rise city of La Ceiba, which, despite its banks and restaurants and grid-patterned streets, looked bleached and weathered, as though it were still trying to assert itself against nature. The impact of humans on the north coast accelerated considerably after 1502, culminating in today's cultural peak, which comes complete with Dunkin' Donuts and KFC. Mark whisked us west of the city, turned off the paved road, and drove through a field of pineapples. A mechanical conveyor with a green-painted metal boom sat idle in the field.

The low, spiky pineapple plants grew right up to the edge of Pico Bonito National Park, 414 square miles of mountain and jungle encompassing Pico Bonito itself, the jutting peak I had seen from the sea. Entering the jungle was like stepping into a yawning palace, one made of ceiba and mahogany and rosewood trees, lit only by a few sunbeams that penetrated a latticework high above. Up there—30 or 40 yards up in the trees—existed a whole world of insects and animals that never deigned to touch the ground. The trail began to climb, and small unseen creatures rustled and were gone before I could get a look. When we came upon a termite nest, Mark urged me to eat one of the ants, and when I refused, he told me that at least I knew now that they were edible, in case I got lost in the forest. We passed a sign that banned venturing off-trail into the pointless woods beyond. Mark said a group of Spaniards had recently headed that-a-way, gotten lost for six days, and had to be rescued.
In an hour, we arrived at a waterfall. A foamy white feather spewed out of the jungle, down vine-covered rock, and eddied and churned its way to the deep, calm pool that spread out at our feet.

Outside the air-conditioned rooms, the heat had been constant since I arrived in Honduras. It was the kind that pressed on your body like a physical force, barely lessened by an evening breeze or a dip in the bath-water sea. During our short jungle climb, it seemed to have grown even thicker. Now here was a chance to be cool. I dove under the water and felt the blood rush to the surface of my skin.

As I was drying off, a troop of teenagers from the town of Tela arrived at the fall. They were on a Sunday hike with a lone American friend, a redhead Peace Corps volunteer from Texas. Honduras is host to 192 volunteers—the Peace Corps' second-largest deployment in the world (only Ukraine has more)—who are scattered around the country on their vague but benign mission to be of use. Jonathan was at the end of his two-year tour, which he had spent advising the Tela mayor's office on business development. "The Peace Corps has been in Honduras for 40 years," he told us. "So you might well ask, just how much good are we doing?"

Perhaps not much. But the urge to leave a trace is irressipressible.

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From: Elisabeth Eaves
Subject: Pineapple Fields Forever
Posted Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 10:55 AM ET

American short-story writer O. Henry, exiled to Honduras in the 1890s, coined a term to describe the country that was so perfectly evocative of colonial horrors, bad government, tropical weather, ripe fruit, and lush bougainvillea vines creeping up the patio railing that it's in wide circulation more than a century later. The term was banana republic. That piece of poetry conjures an entire period of history. For the first half of the 20th century, large swaths of Honduras were more or less run by the Standard Fruit Co. (now Dole) and the United Fruit Co. (now Chiquita). They bribed the politicians and summoned the U.S. military when things got out of hand. They built and owned the railways, which tended to run from the fields to the ports but not to anywhere useful to Hondurans, such as the capital.

Of course, the country has come a long way since then. Or has it? During my visit, Honduras This Week ran the front-page headline "President Zelaya Addresses Melon Crisis." The photographic evidence showed the mustachioed president sitting at his desk, Honduran flag visible to one side, biting into a juicy cantaloupe. The power of big fruit has diminished in recent decades, but pineapples, bananas, and melons are still export staples. A relatively minor U.S. Food and Drug Administration warning—that melons from a particular Honduran farm might contain salmonella—can become a flash point for a fragile economy.

Now a lot of people are hitching hopes for Honduras' economy to tourism. Plans for at least two new resorts are under way on the north coast, one of them adjacent to a national park. Signs in the protected areas I visited bore the logos of donor organizations—USAID, WWF, the Honduras-Canada Fund for Environmental Management. Even the Peace Corps was onboard. Since running into Jonathan at the waterfall, I had met a second Peace Corps volunteer, Nicole, who was visiting the Cuero y Salado wildlife reserve with her father. Nicole was stationed in the south, in a small town in the department of Valle. I asked her what went on there, economically speaking. She furrowed her brow and thought for a minute. Finally, she said that there were a lot of armed security guards. She was working with a women's cooperative, trying to come up with things its members could sell to foreigners. They made attractive pottery, but it didn't ship well. Nicole had hit upon the idea of making small, bright-colored purses woven from old potato-chip bags, an item she had seen for sale in other parts of Central America. There were no tourists where she lived to buy such things, but she thought that maybe the townsfolk could lure travelers from the Pan-American Highway, which passed nearby.

Tourism was clearly a popular cause, but was it smart? Does it make sense, in the long term, to sell natural charms that will be steadily worn down by the buyers? A city can renew itself with man-made attractions. I wasn't sure that jungles and coral reefs had that kind of staying power.

On our last day on the coast, I floated facedown in the Caribbean, toting up my sins. I had flown in an airplane, taken taxis instead of buses, requested air conditioning, run the air conditioning even after I realized I couldn't shut one of my windows, and bought small plastic bottles of water. That was all before sundown on my first day. Subsequently, I had participated in the feeding of wild animals, been driven around in gasoline-powered cars and boats, eaten conch (I didn't know it was threatened), and—this one hadn't even occurred to me until I read it in a guidebook—worn sunscreen and DEET-laden bug repellent while swimming above the delicate corals. But I had no idea how to weigh all that against whatever minuscule economic benefit I might have been bringing to Honduras.

We were in Cayos Cochinos Marine National Park, a collection of cays northeast of La Ceiba. That morning, snorkeling off a deserted cay, I had seen parrotfish, jacks, schools of blue tang, and one fat, lazy barracuda, motionless except for its snapping
I watched a purple fan coral sway with the movement of the tide. The sea stretched away turquoise in three directions and grew pale where it rose up to the beach. Up there, a woman in a hut was making me fried chicken for lunch. I swam in closer to shore, gliding over sea grass and rippled sand. I saw a few tiny fish and a corroded soda can. And then I saw the bearded face of José Trinidad Cabañas, a long-ago president of Honduras. He was decorating a 10-lemípa bill, which lay flat and motionless on the sand. Struck by this oddity, I dove for the bottom, but when I picked up the money, it felt so slippery and fragile that I thought it would disintegrate in my hand, so I let it flutter back down to the seabed again.

"Forget about the movie," Gustavo told Denise.

She ignored him.

"They took the heart out, and it was still beating," she said. "And they held it up like this!" She raised one pale, triumphant arm above her head.

"Let the movie go," we said in chorus, my mother and I now joining Gustavo. He was our portly, scholarly guide to the ancient Mayan city of Copán, an urban center of 24,000 people during its heyday, which was sometime between A.D. 400 and 800. He carried a stick with a bird feather attached to one end to point out archeological details, and he had the slightly aggrieved air of a man who had to be patient a lot.

Gustavo was unhappy with Mel Gibson and, in particular, with what he referred to as "that stupid movie," Apocalypto. In case you missed it, the 2006 film was a revisionist and gruesomely violent retelling of history. No surprise there, but this movie happened to be set among the ancient Maya. There were beheadings, impalings, and human sacrifices performed by drug-added priests. Not that the real Mayans didn't perform the odd human sacrifice. But Gustavo was at pains to contextualize.

At the entrance to Copán, my parents and I had teamed up with Diane and Denise, two middle-aged women from New York City, both with strong Brooklyn accents. Denise, who had short black hair and wore bright red lipstick, was a Gibson fan. To Gustavo's consternation, she kept asking where the sacrifices were performed.

And now, finally, we were in the middle of the Grand Plaza, once quite a hub, open to all members of the ancient Copán public and used for both commerce and worship. There was a small pyramid at the center of the plaza, and steles scattered around, each one intricately carved in honor of one king or another. And there, right in front of us, was a large stone object made for the express purpose of sacrificing humans.

It was dome-shaped, about 4 feet wide and 3 feet tall, with a depression hollowed out of the top just big enough to cup a human head. Two channels ran down the sides to drain the blood away. Gustavo grabbed my arm and told me to lean backward over the dome with my head in the depression—kind of comfy, if you must be sacrificed—and made as though to cut off my head with his feather-stick. That was when Denise got excited and started recounting the Apocalypto sacrifice scene, thrusting her hand into the air as though holding a beating heart. "And the people were still alive!" she said.

She reluctantly followed as the rest of us moved away across the plaza to the city's ball court. Relief-carved macaw heads decorated the walls. Mayan ball courts, it turns out, were not for playing ball in the Western sense of a game, as an earlier generation of archeologists believed. "The idea of the ball ceremony was not to please a human audience, but to please the gods," Gustavo explained. Performed correctly, the ball "game," conducted by specially trained young men, was believed to make the sun and moon come up on time.

Today, though much of ancient Copán still lies buried, you can wander among its carvings and pyramids, tombs and temples, halls of government and homes, visualizing the bright-colored stucco that once adorned them. Until the 19th century, however, they were completely invisible. Some time in the 800s, the civilization of the Classic Maya period began a collapse so complete that by the time the Spaniards began to arrive, there...
was no trace of it. Descendants of the ancient Maya scattered and survived, but the great painted cities, with their pyramids and temples, were gone, swallowed whole by the jungle. The last date found on a Mayan monument corresponds to the year 909, as though time just stopped one day.

Archeologists still debate what happened. It's clear, though, that environmental degradation played a role in the collapse. In the Copán valley in particular, studies show that as the population grew, the people stripped the hillsides of trees. Major soil erosion preceded the city's downfall. Copán also suffered droughts, which may have been partly brought on by the deforestation. The Mayans cut down the trees to plant corn, and for firewood to burn limestone, a key ingredient in their bright pigments. Why didn't they pull themselves out of this ecological tailspin? Presumably they could see the trees disappearing and the mud running down the hills. In Collapse: How Societies Choose To Fail or Succeed, Jared Diamond suggests that the elites who might have led the way out of this mess had insulated themselves from the problems of the people. So as the poor began to suffer—infant mortality was probably 50 percent toward the end—the kings kept demanding tribute.

We stood in front of the hieroglyphic stairway, an inscription covering 72 steps that make up one face of the acropolis. It's the longest hieroglyphic inscription found in the Americas, and no one has completely deciphered it. Archeologists know that it tells a history of ancient Copán and that it was created by a ruler named Smoke Shell in 753, when the city was already in decline. When the staircase is eventually decoded, maybe Smoke Shell will have something more to tell us about his doomed metropolis.

In the meantime, Honduras is still being deforested. Central America has lost more than 70 percent of its forest cover since 1960, mostly to make way for cattle ranches, sugar-cane fields, and coffee plantations. Between 1990 and 2005, Honduras lost 10,567 square miles of forest—an area about the size of Massachusetts. But that's just another scary environmental statistic. Taken together, all the bad news is enough to make you turn to irrational beliefs about planetary control. Or to mindless entertainment.

Gustavo began to tell us the story of the Mayan codices, manuscripts that could help decode the hieroglyphics. Denise cut in.

"Did they sacrifice people up there?"

Gustavo sighed. "Yes, and then they let the head roll down the steps and gave it to the victim's son," he said. "Too much Mel Gibson for you."

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Death of a Saleswoman

How Hillary Clinton lost me—and a generation of young voters.

By Meghan O'Rourke

Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 5:01 PM ET

"That bitter cynicism of yours is something you've acquired since you left Radcliffe."

"That cynicism you refer to I acquired the day I discovered little girls were different from little boys!"

—Lloyd Richards to Karen Richards, and vice versa, All About Eve.

In the coming days, as Hillary Clinton moves to the sidelines and Barack Obama takes the stage alone, many people will suggest that America just wasn't ready for a female president. This may be true. But we'll never entirely know, because Clinton did not invite us to spend much time contemplating the momentous fact that she was the first female presidential candidate with any chance of occupying that position. Her problem wasn't that she was a feminist. Her problem was that she wasn't feminist enough.

For me, at least, she wasn't—and for many young women my age. Back in the mid-1990s, as a college student, I spent an afternoon on the New Haven Green, adjacent to Yale University, waiting for Hillary Rodham Clinton to speak. There was a huge crowd of mostly young women. I found her impressive, if not entirely galvanizing. She had a girlish voice and soft, wispy bangs, as I recall, and she struck me as a real person—not merely a wife performing the role of first lady. I remember wondering if she might some day run for president. I also remember feeling that it seemed outside the realm of the imagination.

That's no longer the case. When Clinton announced her candidacy in January 2007, she raised hopes and possibilities in the minds of young women across America. But the substance of her presidential run seems far more dismal than I would ever have imagined back in 1995. You can't be a historic first unless you act like one, and Hillary Clinton has not. In the Wellesley commencement speech that made her famous before she got to Yale Law School, she spoke about "searching for more immediate, ecstatic, and penetrating modes of living." Yet Clinton ran away from the revolutionary aspects of her own candidacy. There's been nothing of the ecstatic in her presidential bid—that mode, instead, has been embodied by
Barack Obama. He appealed to voters' desire for liberation and revolution, and on the strength of that appeal won them over.

Clinton didn't trust that the message of revolution embodied in her candidacy could animate American voters, particularly male voters. And she lacked the courage of her young, ecstasy-seeking self. And so she sent the message that gender was not a factor. Presumably, she did this based on the reasonable assumption that it was politically perilous to be a woman. But the paradox is that in taking the safe tack she thought made her more electable, she actually made herself less electable. She presented herself as a hard-bitten Washington insider, running on experience when a lot of American voters, particularly young women, were looking for transformation.

Obama understood this from early on. Contrast their opening bids: Obama skillfully announced his in Springfield, Ill., with a speech that echoed Abraham Lincoln. Clinton, by contrast, announced hers in a risk-averse video recording on her Web site: "I'm in it to win," she said redundantly. As her campaign progressed, she rarely invoked the historic predecessors that made her candidacy possible—Susan B. Anthony, say, or Jeannette Rankin, a pacifist and suffragette who was the first woman to be elected to Congress (and who always had the courage of her convictions, voting against the First World War). To be sure, Clinton did praise Eleanor Roosevelt's "thick skin"—rather the way one nerd praises another's social-avoidance techniques. It was part of acting as if she were a man inoculated against the slings and arrows of sexism.

In this regard, Clinton never really was the first American matriarch. Instead, she may be best remembered as our last patriarch. The more her campaign floundered as Obama offered ecstasy and she didn't, the more masculine and hard-nosed she made herself out to be. Cannily reversing gender roles, she told Obama supporters that if he couldn't "take the heat" he should get out of the kitchen—"a subtle put-down of her own gender aimed at working-class male voters who wanted reassurance that Clinton was manlier than the girlie men the Democrats had of late been nominating. Her supporters (among them, Sen. Evan Bayh of Indiana) invoked stories of steelworkers waxing enthusiastic about her "testicular fortitude." While Obama went on rhetorical flights about hope, she compared herself to the hyper-masculine Rocky Balboa—an underdog, to be sure, but a stoic one who keeps getting up. None of this was accidental, even if the source wasn't always Hillary herself. She was "manning up." Over the years, her hair had grown shorter, and her make-up thicker, like a mask. She played the men's game so well that James Carville eventually quipped, "If she gave [Obama] one of her cojones, they'd both have two."

Unfortunately, a man's rules seemed to be politics as usual. There were the researchers who planted fears that Obama had been schooled in a madrasah, the bizarre (for a Democrat) implication that McCain would make a better president than Obama, the appeal to voters' latent racism. It was these types of calculation that lost her many young women's votes. Worse, all this hardball was occasionally interrupted by cynical, strategic cries of sexism. It's indubitable that sexism infected the campaign, and the media's coverage. Of course, there's a double standard when it comes to men and women in politics—"the tyranny of high expectations," as Elizabeth Kolbert puts it in Thirty Ways of Looking at Hillary, a recent anthology. John McCain can call his wife a "cunt" in the earshot of reporters and get little blowback, yet Clinton can't change her hair without being called untrustworthy. But even last fall Clinton's relationship to sexism seemed schizophrenic: First she did the tough, impervious act, and then she played the dame in distress when a debate didn't go her way. In contrast to Obama's matter-of-fact relationship to race—as a subject that bore serious discussion but was hardly the be-all and end-all of American politics—Clinton's relationship to gender seemed at turns angry and deeply ambivalent.

Of course, there's some logic behind Clinton's calculation that running on gender was too politically risky. Race—however profound an issue it is in America—doesn't get in the way of the paradigm that treats ambition and leadership as masculine qualities. Gender does. Obama can still draw on the classic paradigm of leadership; Clinton would have had to create something new. To judge by all kinds of studies of women in private-sector leadership positions, this would have been a fraught battle, strewn with double standards. It's only fair to point out that many of Hillary's attributes—toughness, control, emotional distance—are qualities that are sometimes admired in men but almost never in women. We'll never know whether the traits Clinton displayed in this campaign would have drawn less animus from voters had she actually been a man.

But if ever there were a moment to have ventured that battle, this was it. If she'd run against an establishment candidate like Kerry, being the experienced woman would itself have seemed radical. In the context of Obama's transformative campaign, though, she couldn't afford to become the old-style candidate. As Obama grew more potent, Clinton grew more brittle. She allowed him to set the terms of debate—optimism, church choirs, soul music. Then she responded by tearing him down instead of defining the conversation on her own terms. At the apogee of her campaign's vicious sniping this spring, Clinton seemed to embody a travesty of feminist values—to be a cautionary emblem of what can happen to a gifted young woman embittered by the challenges she's had to face. It was as if she failed entirely to see the revolutionary nature of her achievement.

Last week, I e-mailed a group of young women, asking them what they thought of Hillary Clinton's campaign as it drew to a close. The women I heard from were mostly young, well-educated, upper-middle-class, and white—one of the groups that didn't flock to Hillary in numbers her campaign (and many second-generation feminists) had expected. I got one response
over and over: frustration that Clinton hadn't done enough, as a historic "first," to differentiate herself from stodgy, old male Washington politics. But they also felt ... ambivalent about their frustration. In that sense, you might say, nothing has changed. Women have always been ambivalent about Hillary. In another sense, though, she had been a candidate of profound change—albeit not in the way that you might think. Her own risk-aversion has given us "something to chew on," as a young film producer told me. And the media's sexism forced twenty- and thirtysomethings to recognize that feminism is not just "our mother's problem," as another young professional phrased it.

As he goes forward, Obama will undoubtedly be compared to Abraham Lincoln. But I always thought Whitman was a more apt predecessor for both candidates. Whitman embodied the ecstatic to which Hillary Clinton, at one time, linked her hopes for a better America. But she didn't make it part of her campaign. Instead, she made fun of Obama's knack for lighting a fire in the hearts of a wide swath of Americans. She preached pragmatism instead of fellow-feeling. And she scolded Obama for being starry-eyed. But her decision to turn away from the ecstatic was a great mistake, as Whitman might have understood. By stripping her campaign of its native appeal, by refusing to portray herself as part of a transcendent feminist narrative, by diluting the dynamic pleasures of mass political response, she let us down. After all, feminism need not be joyless.

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