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**Thesaurus Unbound**

If *Roget's* is becoming a relic, what lies ahead?

By Christine Kenneally

Monday, April 7, 2008, at 7:39 AM ET

When you are searching for a word that is more precise than another though similar in meaning, you don't browse *Piozzi's*. Yet *British Synonymy*, the first English book of synonyms, was written by Hester Lynch Piozzi. Nor do you grab your *Girard's*. Published 76 years before Piozzi, the 1718 book of French words appears to be the first collection of synonyms in any language. What you reach for is your *Roget's*. Originally published in 1852, having been compiled over the course of more than four decades by the eponymous but strangely anonymous Peter Mark Roget, the thesaurus we know and love was not the first of its kind. Roget's was the sixth or seventh in a line of, well, synonymous—but not identical—compendiums. Now, after a century-and-a-half career as a publishing juggernaut, the bound and beloved version is becoming a historical relic in the computer era.

It's at such turning points that we look back at beginnings, and now the great lexicographers themselves are emerging in the limelight. With his fresh and thoroughly researched account of Roget's life, Joshua Kendall sets out to do for his classic what Simon Winchester did for the OED's dictionarians in *The Professor and the Madman*, while Noah Webster will get some attention later this year in *Websterisms* and *Righting the Mother Tongue*. (Already, Kendall is at work on a longer look at Noah Webster.)

Kendall reports that Roget married late but happily and lived until 90, yet he was born into a family that was shockingly afflicted by mental illness. His maternal grandmother, mother, and only sister suffered from major depressive episodes. Even Roget's infancy was blighted by tragedy. His father contracted tuberculosis six months after Roget was born. The child was sent to live with his grandfather and didn't see his parents again until he was 2 years old. Roget's father died was when he was 4, and the death devastated Roget's mother, Catherine, and financially wrecked their small family.

After uprooting the household several times throughout Roget's childhood, Catherine eventually moved her family to Edinburgh, so her shy and studious teenage son could attend the university. There he was inspired by a number of marvelous scholars and teachers who challenged him to think about the imperfections of language in the pursuit of knowledge. Though he began work on his thesaurus a few years later, Roget didn't attempt to publish his collection of synonyms until he was 73. It appears that he was finally provoked to action by the popularity at the time of *Piozzi's* *British Synonymy*, which he thought greatly undeserved.

Predictably, Kendall reaches for a therapeutic analysis: In the midst of this tumult, Roget made lists as a way of exercising some control in his life. One of his first lists, at age 8, was of Latin words and their English translations. As an adult, he kept lists of important events, including “dates of deaths” of friends and relatives, and when he was working as a young doctor in Manchester, England, he began to organize a list of ideas and related synonyms that would one day become the thesaurus. There is surely something to this: No doubt Roget's manipulation of words gave him a feeling of mastery. Still, a relentless drive to itemize and taxonomize isn't always a symptom. It's also the basic character of the scientific mind, which Roget clearly had. In addition to his thesaurus, he achieved renown in his lifetime for a two-volume work classifying plants and animals and for his scientific observations about human optics.

It was precisely that scientific bent that was his book's distinction. The organization of Piozzi's and Girard's, as well the handful of others that were published before Roget's 1852 thesaurus, was scattershot by comparison. *Roget's*, which was
remarkably successful in its author's lifetime, was a comprehensive system of synonyms and antonyms. Roget built a numbered inventory of 1,000 fundamental ideas, like "existence," which appeared with a set of related words, ens, entity, being, existence. Later, he came up with a series of six nested classes, which were inspired by the Linnaean classification of animals. Thus, Kendall writes, "'Perfection' falls under Class V, 'Words relating to the Voluntary Powers,' Division I, 'Individual Volition,' and Section i, 'Volition in General.' " The higher the level, the more abstract the idea; the lower the level, the more specific. Roget considered his book the opposite of the dictionary: You started with the idea and then found the word. His project was so original and so immense in scope that it has taken not just time but the connectivity, the huge databases, and the broad online access of modern information architecture even to begin to outstrip it.

Exactly where print reference will be in 10 years time is still murky, but the writing is quite clearly on the wall or, if you prefer, the desktop. A recent survey to be published by the Dictionary Society of North America found that while students use dictionaries as much as they ever did, the online versions have overtaken paper. Many students use Thesaurus.com and Dictionary.com (also Reference.com), which in November 2007 had 15.1 million unique visitors. Conversely, the 2008 print edition of Quid, formerly one of France's most popular encyclopedias, was canceled last month for want of sales.

Happily, if the computer processing of words is killing reference books, it's also making them better. In particular, word reference is morphing faster and smarter than any other kind of compendium out there. The innovation is not just a matter of a new medium that permits us to get online what we used to turn pages for. There has been an evolutionary leap, too: The digitization of words in time allows us to see language as it really is—not so much an abstract code as a dynamic system.

One of the most important spurs to word research is the increased use of the corpus, the term used to refer to any large body of written or spoken communications, be it a collection of medieval manuscripts or a folder of sound files. Diverse scholars of language have long amassed corpora, such as books on particular topics or writings by particular people, in order to analyze the language of the whole. Before the computer era, corpus work required painstaking, slow tabulation. With a computerized corpus, you can search and count (and run any other kind of linguistic analysis) with greater ease. Corpus linguistics means that the language of thousands of people can be mined by lexicographers, reflecting the facts of English as it is spoken or written by a population, not just English as it was spoken by Peter Mark Roget. If Roget's Thesaurus, along with Webster's and Johnson's original dictionaries, is the idiosyncratic cartography of brilliant 19th-century explorers, then this stuff is GPS.

While computerized corpus research has grown since the '60s, every few years brings greater sophistication to the field. In addition to widely used corpora like WordNet and the Bank of English, which contain millions of words, lexicographers can drill further into language with specialized databases, like the Enron corpus (the company's internal e-mails) or a corpus of suicide notes. Oxford University Press relies on the Oxford English Corpus, a 2-billion-word database begun in the year 2000 to capture 21st-century English. The corpus is used to update products like the Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus. A forthcoming edition will include nuanced distinctions between words like eccentric and quirky. A traditional thesaurus would simply list these words together, but eccentric is typically used of the very rich or reclusive whereas quirky is used less about people than about their style.

One of the most staggering advances in word reference is the forthcoming Historical Thesaurus of English, which will list all the words of English—modern English words as well as long-gone versions, such as the English spoken in the year 1000. The Historical Thesaurus will be a kind of companion to the famous 20-volume etymological Oxford English Dictionary. In fact, it uses the words from the OED, but, like Roget's, it is subdivided into topics, starting with the most general and then branching into ideas of greater specificity. The very patterns of word usage will document the popularity of ideas throughout history. The Historical Thesaurus will be produced in book format as well as online. Unbelievably, the project was begun pre-computer, in 1964, by a group of brave souls at the University of Glasgow. But given the number of cross-references, the fuzziness of categories, and the massive challenges of manipulation, it's hard to imagine it being finished without computers.

As old as it is, Roget's system of classification still gets play in the research world. Some lexicographers are importing his idea structure into language databases to solve word processing problems, like disambiguating words with more than one meaning. Others are trying to reorganize language data from the ground up, ripping out the hierarchical structure of Roget-style classification and replacing it with more realistically overlapping groups of ideas.

Of course, the entire Web can be used as a corpus, and its ever-changing nature makes it a particularly valuable one. Dictionaries and thesauri, even online versions, record words that remain constant over periods of time. But language is a roiling thing, and its dynamism is sometimes of the moment, not just the year or the century. Bloggers, like Mark Peters, track "nonce" words, which, by definition, have very short life spans. Speakers drop these words almost as soon as they pick them up, so few will be recorded on paper, yet they are still real words. Indeed, endlessish and crapportunity are not just the low-hanging fruit of the new world of word reference; they represent our fundamentally changed relationship with our own language. In the spirit of Roget, if not by his book, all speakers can now
freely access information about the perfect Platonic classifications of words but also, crucially, about how they live.

**Correction, April 8, 2008:** This story mistakenly stated that Joshua Kendall is at work on a new book on Samuel Johnson. He's writing on Noah Webster. (Return to the corrected sentence.)

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**bushisms**

**Bushism of the Day**

By Jacob Weisberg

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 3:27 PM ET

"I thank the diplomatic corps, who is here as well."—Washington, D.C., March 12, 2008

Click [here](#) to see the Bush's comments. The Bushism is at 2:58.

Got a Bushism? Send it to bushisms@slate.com. For more, see "The Complete Bushisms."

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**bushisms**

**Bushism of the Day**

By Jacob Weisberg

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 6:21 PM ET

"Removing Saddam Hussein was the right decision early in my presidency, it is the right decision now, and it will be the right decision ever."—Washington, D.C., March 12, 2008

Got a Bushism? Send it to bushisms@slate.com. For more, see "The Complete Bushisms."

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**chatterbox**

**Bevel's Second Children's Crusade**

By Timothy Noah

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 7:30 PM ET

I don't know whether to attribute the lack of coverage accorded James Bevel's incest trial to historical ignorance, political correctness, or the media's inability to grasp that a man can sometimes be both hero and monster. Bevel, as Bonnie Goldstein pointed out this week in Slate's "XX Factor," is one of the undisputed giants of the civil rights movement. He was an organizer of the Freedom Rides and the 1963 March on Washington (at which Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech). Most significantly, it was Bevel who led thousands of African-American schoolchildren to march in 1963's "Children's Crusade" in Birmingham, Ala. Television images of these youthful demonstrators being knocked down by fire hoses and attacked by police dogs helped turn the tide of public opinion against Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner "Bull" Connor and Southern white segregationism generally. An intimate of King, Bevel was with him when he was killed, and just last week related his memories of that awful event as part of Time magazine's coverage of the assassination's 40th anniversary.
Even in those days, Bevel had a reputation for being a little off his nut. From Nick Kotz's book, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Made America*:

Easily distinguishable by the yarmulke he wore on his shaved head, Baptist minister James Bevel looked and acted like an eccentric, messianic preacher. He was a captivating speaker, an imaginative tactician, and, in the eyes of the other [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] staff, a "loose cannon." When reckless courage was needed, King called on Bevel, whom he called "one of my wild men."

I'm a bit hazy about the trajectory of Bevel's career after 1968, but by the 1990s, Bevel had clearly moved beyond eccentricity and fallen in with Lyndon LaRouche. In 1992, when LaRouche ran from president while serving a prison sentence for conspiring to commit mail and tax fraud, Bevel was his running mate.

Now Bevel has surfaced again in what is being treated as a local news story in the Virginia area (though it's received appropriate national attention in *Slate*'s corporate sibling *The Root*). Bevel was arrested in June for pressuring his daughter to have sex with him in Leesburg, Va., when she was 15. According to the daughter, unnamed in news accounts, the sexual abuse began when she was 6 and occurred about 10 times. She decided to bring charges sometime later, after several now-grown female siblings—Bevel has 16 children with seven different mothers—related similar experiences at a family reunion. According to prosecutors, Bevel told his daughters that it was his paternal duty to train them sexually.

The trial began Monday. I learned about it only because I happened to wander into the back pages of the *Washington Post*'s Metro section. Bevel pleaded not guilty, but the evidence against him was overwhelming. The cops had him acknowledging it on tape; other family members said he didn't deny it when they staged an intervention; and on the witness stand, Bevel himself admitted he'd "engaged in rubbing [his daughter's] chest in an educational context." By this afternoon, the jury had returned a guilty verdict. I wonder if that will provide the necessary ballast to attract national attention, or at least move it onto the *Post* Metro section's front page.

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By Timothy Noah
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 7:46 PM ET

The editors of the *New York Times* have cooked up a novel punishment for reporters who write stories that have no apparent basis in fact. They publish them on Page One of the Sunday paper, still the best-read edition of the week. On Easter Sunday, the *Times* Sanhedrin crucified Laurie Goodstein and Neela Banerjee by fronting "Obama's Talk Fuels Easter Sermons," a pious but self-evidently fraudulent feature (see "The Clairvoyant Times"). On April 6, the *Times* town elders clapped Matt Richtel into the pillory by tucking under the Page One fold his schadenfreude-tinged "In Web World of 24/7 Stress, Writers Blog Till They Drop." Bloggers for the *Columbia Journalism Review, Media Bistro*, and elsewhere instantly retitled Richtel's story "Blogging Kills."

Give Richtel credit for admitting high up in the story that what follows is purest fancy. Newspaper reporters call these caveat-rich passages "to-be-sure grafts." Richtel's put me in mind of some library steps I once purchased by catalog. They arrived with a label warning that under no circumstances should I attempt to climb them. Here's Richtel's disclaimer:

To be sure, there is no official diagnosis of death by blogging, and the premature demise of two people obviously does not qualify as an epidemic. There is also no certainty that the stress of the work contributed to their deaths. But friends and family of the deceased, and fellow information workers, say those deaths have them thinking about the dangers of their work style.

A less hearty hack would at this point conclude there is no story here and go fish for another. This one doesn't even provide the three examples traditionally deemed necessary to establish a bogus trend—unless you count a blogger named Om Malik who suffered a heart attack in December but, in an act of supreme inconsideration, survived.

The symptoms of toxic blogging, Richtel informs the concerned reader, include "sleep disorders," "exhaustion," and—heads I win, tails you lose—"weight loss or gain." The number affected is "unclear," but "surely several thousand and maybe even tens of thousands." Richtel, a salaried employee at the *Times*, is particularly flummoxed that bloggers are often paid based on how much they write and whether anyone reads them. He likens this to a "sales commission," a comparison that evokes *Alec Baldwin* chalking "ALWAYS BE CLOSING" onto a blackboard in the movie version of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. ("First prize is a Cadillac Eldorado*,. Anybody want to see second prize? Second prize is a set of steak knives. Third prize is you're fired.") A less lurid but more accurate comparison would be to freelance

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chatterbox
Death by Blogging
The *New York Times* invents another trend.
writing, an occupation I've held from time to time. It is not, I promise you, a hazardous occupation, unless you report from a war zone.

Richet strongly implies that bloggers drop dead because they work in their apartments or houses all day and never get out. Never mind that Russell Shaw, a 60-year-old tech blogger who provides 50 percent of Richet's evidence that blogging kills, died while reporting on scene at a conference 3,000 miles from his home and that "it's not clear what role stress played in his death." We never learn any circumstances surrounding the death of Marc Orchant, the 50-year-old tech blogger who provides Richet's remaining evidentiary 50 percent, and Malik, the blogger who survived, disappears entirely from the story after his cameo appearance in the above-mentioned to-be-sure graf. Yes, of course, we should all get out of our houses and exercise once in a while. This is true of virtually anyone who works all day at a computer, at home or at work, and it's bound to be even more true of people who are on call around the clock—a group that includes doctors, policemen, utility repairman, and any number of other occupations.

But let's not kid ourselves that any white-collar work ranks high among dangerous professions. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the country's most dangerous jobs are, in declining order: fisherman, pilot, logger, ironworker or steelworker, garbage collector, farmer, power lineman, roofer, driver, and agricultural worker. Construction workers drop dead at a rate of 10.8 per 100,000. People who work in the information industry (like bloggers) drop dead at a rate of 1.9 per 100,000 workers. That ought to give Richet some sense of proportion. The information-biz fatality rate is lower even than the fatality rate for people who work in "professional or business services" (3.1 per 100,000 workers), a group that probably makes up the bulk of Times readers (and Slate readers, too). The information-industry fatality rate is also lower than the fatality rate for government workers (2.3 per 100,000 workers), another significant demographic group among Times and Slate readers. So you'd be wasting your time, dear reader, to feel sorry for the humble blogger. He'll be around to blog your funeral.

correction, April 8, 2008: An earlier version of this column misspelled Eldorado. (Return to the corrected sentence.)

california

The Soiling of Old Glory
The photograph that captured Boston's busing crisis: How it was taken, and why it still matters.

By Louis P. Masur
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 7:00 AM ET

Click here to read a slide-show essay on the photograph that captured Boston's busing crisis.

dear prudence

The Wicked Stepdaughter
My new husband's grown child will not acknowledge my existence. Why's she so cruel?

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 7:00 AM ET

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

Dear Prudence,

I got married last spring to a wonderful man who loves me, my three grown children, my grandson, and the rest of my family. My children and family members all love my husband, too. My husband was previously married for more than 30 years. His ex ended the marriage 10 years ago because she was involved with and eventually married another man. The breakup was hard for my husband and his grown children to accept. When we announced our intention to marry last year, his grown daughter told him that she will never attempt to have any relationship with my children. She has also refused overtures from my youngest daughter to spend any time together, even though they have children of the same age. She told her father that she is still too upset over the breakup of her parents' marriage and is not ready to "take on another family." Recently, we went to deliver gifts to her children, along with my mentally handicapped son. When we arrived, she only spoke directly to my husband and refused to look at or acknowledge me or my son! My son recognized that he was not welcome and went to sit in the car. His feelings were hurt, and my feelings were hurt for him. Is it too much to expect that this young woman would accept my children as part of my husband's family now that we are married? I am completely stumped as to how to handle this situation.
Dear Prudence,

It's possible your stepdaughter may have an undiagnosed personality disorder. The woman's rudeness is of such a magnitude that there's got to be something wrong with her, and it's hard to believe this is the one area of her life where she acts in such an outrageous manner. If so, don't expect much to change, which doesn't mean you should put up with her behavior, no matter what the cause. No, it's not too much to ask that she accept your children as part of her father's family—they are part of her family since they are now her stepsiblings. That she explains her refusal to make eye contact with you or your son because she is still in mourning over the death a decade ago of her parents' marriage would be laughable if it weren't so infuriating. Normally, I tell second wives to back off interfering with their husbands' relationships with their children from a previous marriage, but in this case you need to ask your husband if he will have a serious talk with his daughter. Ideally, he would tell her that he has been lucky to find love again and that he expects her to behave with common decency to her new family members. If she says she can't, he has to explain he is very sad to hear it, because by necessity it is going to reduce the amount of time he will be able to spend with her.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence Video: Shut Her Up!

Dear Prudence,

I'm a new mother and thrilled about it. I adore my infant son more than anything, and life is wonderful. My question is about a grim contingency: Who should raise our son if my husband and I both die? We have avoided drawing up our wills because we can't decide what to do about it. Our parents are too old to take care of him. I have no siblings or other close relatives. My husband has one sister who is married with children, and they would be the logical choice. The problem is that neither my husband nor I is all that fond of them, and we would not be comfortable with our child (possibly children) growing up in their household. We have very close friends who also have a child and a warm, loving home. I would much prefer my child to grow up with them. I see two problems with this, however. One is that it seems an awful lot to ask of someone who is just a friend, and not family, to take on the enormous burden of raising a child. The other is that our friends live several hundred miles away from our families. Our parents dote on their grandson and would be absolutely devastated to have him grow up so far away. However unlikely this possibility is, it's keeping me up at night (sometimes literally!). What should I do?

—Life and Death

Dear Life,

Talk to your friends. They will be honored to be asked and are very likely to say yes since they know the chances of actually having to perform this duty are vanishingly small. If they decline, then think of other friends you can also imagine raising your child. Sometimes, even if loving family is available, friends are the best solution; the son of Christopher and Dana Reeve went to live with close family friends when both of his parents died less than 18 months apart. Don't be so fretful about preparing a will that you don't get around to it—in that case, if the worst happens, you will have had no say in who raises your son. You can include a letter in your will that diplomatically explains the reasons for your guardianship decision and your hope that your child will spend as much time as possible with his family. And as time goes on, you might find you have developed a close enough friendship with people who live nearer to you and your families that you want to change your son's guardian. But the sooner you take care of this, the better you will sleep during the many years to come.

—Apprehensive Stepmother

Dear Love-Struck Teen

Dear Love-Struck,

Since everyone in high school is stumbling around trying to figure out who they are and how to behave with the opposite sex, it is a time when many people act like utter jerks. Some people manage to look back and say, "I can't believe I behaved like that," while others say, "Hey, now that I've got acting like a jerk down, I'm going to use these skills for the rest of my life!" The romance between your crush and his girlfriend doesn't sound terribly enduring, but it is serious enough that you recognize they're in a relationship, so his coming on to you is both sleazy and flattering. Sure, you could do what millions of high-school girls have done and pursue this boy. But since you are, fortunately, more comfortable being the kind of person who is able to say, "I like you, too, but since you have a girlfriend, I'm not going to do anything about it," stick with that better approach. And don't forget that high school is also the time to see how much you can accomplish, both in your studies and
extracurricular activities—which will help get rid of your self-doubts about how smart and talented you are.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,
I'm associated with a group of corporate ladies, all of us in our 60s. We are giving a 65th birthday tea for one of our friends, using her guest list. It's a mixed group of women, and most people don't know one another. So the other hostesses have insisted on name tags. I hate the idea. This is not a corporate affair; it's a private party. I think it's insulting to the guests (there are only 20 of us) and indirectly a reminder of our age and our memory capacity. I'm in the minority and going along with the group (although my name tag will disappear like chewing gum under the seat sometime during the tea). But, for future reference, so I can come armed with an objective opinion the next time this occurs: What is modern etiquette on name tags? Has the corporate world so permeated our private lives that we actually think this is proper? By the way, I remember a Hillary Clinton fundraiser years ago, where a very savvy Washingtonian removed her name tag before having her picture taken with Hillary—it made her look more like a friend. Stupidly, I kept mine on.

—No Tag Lady

Dear No Tag,
Given the direction my mind is heading, I would like to require name tags at family meals. It may not be elegant to have "Hi, I'm Barbara" on your lapel, but I agree with the other hostesses that at a luncheon of mostly strangers, no one will be able to remember a dozen new people, no matter what the age of the guests. It ultimately will make the event more relaxing and sociable for everyone if they are able to connect the new names and faces. And your friend has an excellent piece of advice about ripping off the name tag just before a grip-and-grin with a celebrity.

—Prudie

Deathwatch
The Hillary Deathwatch
Clinton benefits from the soft punditry of low expectations.
By Chris Wilson
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 3:10 PM ET

There's no other way to put it: Hillary Clinton is suffering from the soft punditry of low expectations. We explained yesterday how Hillary's chances improve if she's not actively taking damage, kind of like a first-person shooter. The corollary is that Barack Obama is like Google: He has to continually outperform expectations to keep his stockholders onboard. Treading water is not an option. So when both candidates pick up a superdelegate, the tie goes to Clinton. Factor in the $2.5 million she picked up from last night's Elton John concert, and we're giving her two-tenths of a point, bringing her to a 10.2 percent chance of winning the nomination.

Today's news: Obama snagged the endorsement of Wayne Holland, the chair of the Democratic Party in Utah, while Clinton netted former Pittsburgh Mayor Sophie Masloff, for a gain of one superdelegate apiece. Elton John's benefit concert for Clinton last night raised $2.5 million for her campaign, and Clinton went on the attack in Pennsylvania, airing a 60-second radio ad calling out Obama for exaggerating his refusal to take money from oil companies. The Puerto Rico newspaper El Nuevo Dia reports Clinton up in the polls by 13 percentage points in the territory, giving her some light at the end of the tunnel if she can hang on until June 1.

Meanwhile, Colin L. Powell, the first secretary of state in the Bush administration, had kind words for Obama on Good Morning America today, praising his handling of the Jeremiah Wright situation. A new Time poll puts Clinton up by six points in Pennsylvania—the same margin as in yesterday's Quinnipiac poll. Again, a significant jump for Obama from his double-digit deficit a few weeks back.

Press coverage isn't always a factor here at the Deathwatch, but it's worth pointing out a Project for Excellence in Journalism report on last week's news: "The narrative was the debate over whether it might be time for Clinton to throw in the towel in the nomination fight. It was the single biggest campaign story line, accounting for 7% of all the campaign stories last week." That's hardly a gauge of whether Clinton will drop out. But it does suggest that the press is waking up to the bleak realities of her candidacy. Even if Clinton benefits from the soft punditry of low expectations in the short term, it's bad news in the long run.

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.

Deathwatch
The Hillary Deathwatch
Clinton turns in a solid performance at the Petraeus hearing.
By Christopher Beam
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 2:11 PM ET

In case you haven't noticed, the Hillary Deathwatch operates a lot like the health meter in Gears of War. As long as you're not
getting shot at, your health goes up. In Hillary's case, nothing too crazy happened in the past 24 hours—a solid performance at the Petraeus hearing, a slight post-Penn morale boost, and a superdelegate regained. Which, in total, bumps Clinton up 0.1 points to a flat 10 percent chance of winning the nomination.

Clinton and Obama showed off their grilling skills at yesterday's Senate hearings with Gen. David Petraeus and Ryan Crocker but didn't offer much more than their usual bleak assessments. Clinton drew contrasts with John McCain, saying she "fundamentally" disagreed with his assessment that troop withdrawals are irresponsible—but stopped short of her "willing suspension of disbelief" remarks last time. Spoken like a true future majority leader.

Obama, trying hard to look involved, gets points for pushing the two men on what sort of qualified progress they'd be satisfied with and tosses out "30,000" as a possible troop-level goal to see if they bite. They don't.

The gist of the hearing: We're going to maintain current (or near-current) troop levels through the end of Bush's administration. Neither Democratic candidate appears to benefit more than the other. Obama gets to keep playing the war authorization card, certainly. But Petraeus' testimony raises questions about whether Obama could realistically pull out all combat troops within 18 months.

It's Day Three A.P. (after Penn), and the question now is, How gone is he really? A piece in the Observer suggests he's been relegated to just-another-adviser status. As much as the shake-up stokes rumors about the campaign crumbling, Penn's demotion seems to have boosted morale, or what remains of it. Staffers argue that this will let Clinton take more-liberal stances—then again, how does she get more liberal than universal health care, restructuring NAFTA, and creating a "poverty czar"?

Meanwhile, Obama appears to be inching toward opting out of public funding for the general, despite previous statements ("promises," according to McCain) that he would accept the funds if his opponent did. At a fundraiser last night in Washington, D.C., Obama called his money machine "a parallel public financing system" that lets small donors "have as much access and influence" over the campaign as wealthy ones. McCain will cry hypocrisy, especially now that he's taking the first steps toward matching funds. Hillary might mention it, too—although that would acknowledge the possibility that Obama makes it to the general, which is still a no-no. Chances are this will hurt Obama in the short run but help him in the end.

In other news, Clinton gets a superdelegate! Or, rather, regains one she lost before. When California Rep. Tom Lantos died, it reduced Clinton's delegate count by one. His replacement, Jackie Speier, won a special election yesterday with 78 percent of the vote. More importantly, she is a Clinton supporter. That brings the number of superdelegates Clinton has netted since the week of March 4 to … five? Six? Obama has netted at least 28 in the same period, closing Clinton's superdelegate lead to 24, according to DemConWatch. If (when) that lead vanishes entirely, Clinton will have some explaining to do if she wants to sway new superdelegates.

Tonight, Elton John performs at a fundraising event at Radio City Music Hall. Here's his chance to crowd-test the inevitable Clinton version of Candle in the Wind.

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.
departure into a shot at Obama's economic adviser Austan Goolsbee, who is still with the campaign after the flap about downplaying Obama's NAFTA plan to Canadian officials. She didn't mention that Penn is, as well. But the story ain't over: The Obama campaign hosted a conference call with James Hoffa, pushing the Clintons to dismiss Penn altogether.

Clinton also led the way yesterday in calling for a boycott of the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics. Obama has said he's "hesitant to make the Olympics a site of political protest because I think it's partly about bringing the world together." This is old territory for Clinton—she was the one to tell Beijing in 1995 that "women's rights are human rights"—and she's smart to get out front, given how much political oxygen the Olympics will consume in the coming months.

Meanwhile, the polls are still conspiring against Clinton. A new Quinnipiac poll—considered to be one of the more reliable surveys—puts Clinton at 50 points in Pennsylvania, with Obama trailing at 44. That's three points narrower than the last survey, in late March, which had Clinton at 50 and Obama at 41. Meanwhile, Obama looks stronger than ever in North Carolina; a Public Policy Polling survey has him leading Clinton by 21 points. Bill must regret saying that North Carolina is a must-win for Hillary.

On the superdelegate front, Clinton picks up a newbie—a land commissioner from Arkansas. No surprise there—she now has 11 of the state's 12 supers. A Montana superdelegate endorsed Obama yesterday but then retracted, saying state party rules prevented her from endorsing in a contested race. That hasn't stopped three other Montana supers from going for him. But one of them, Jeanne Lemire Dahlman, pulled a Corzine and reserved the right to switch to Clinton if she wins the popular vote.

Tomorrow: the Petraeus aftermath!

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Deathwatch
The Hillary Deathwatch
Hillary's chances are on the rise after she finally gets rid of faulty Penn.
By Chadwick Matlin
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 11:44 AM ET

Just before Texas' and Ohio's primaries, Mark Penn told the Los Angeles Times that he wasn't actually in charge of the Clinton campaign. He was just a high-profile "outside message advisor," he said—but nobody believed him. Many within the Clinton brain trust suggested Penn was trying to save his own skin as the campaign went down in flames, since it was his strategy that torched Clinton's hopes in the first place. Now that he has left the campaign, Clinton can shake free of his failed strategy, campaign in the remaining states on a platform of experience and emotion, and convince superdelegates that she's turned the page on her past failures. As a result, we're bumping her chances of winning up by 0.5 percentage points.

Penn stepped down from his role as chief strategist yesterday, three days after it was revealed that he met with the Colombian government to help broker a Colombia-U.S. trade deal that is too free trade-y for Hillary Clinton's taste. Ostensibly, Penn met with Colombia as the president and CEO of his PR firm—but Penn's and the firm's bond with the Clinton campaign was too tight to ignore. Clinton reportedly paid Penn $13 million for his services—an amount you don't pony up if the recipient is working against your interests in his down time.

For Deathwatch purposes, Penn's dismissal is good news for Hillary. Among the high-level staffers—who often buttered heads with Penn—it will boost morale. (Even after Texas and Ohio primary wins, one anonymous senior adviser told the Washington Post, "A lot of people would still like to see him go.") Penn's speedy exit also allows Clinton to look even more resolute in her opposition to trade deals that don't primarily benefit American workers. If she spins it right, this should help in Pennsylvania and Indiana.

We should caution that Penn isn't completely exorcised. He "will continue to provide polling and advice to the campaign," according to campaign manager Maggie Williams. If Penn still has Hillary's ear, then Clinton can't completely break free from his campaign advice. And remember, as lauded a strategist as Penn was, his campaign advice led Hillary to columns like this. When you dump the dead weight overboard, you can't circle back once night falls, retrieve it from the ocean, and whisper sweet nothings to it in secret. On the whole, though, the Penn departure is a healthy one for Clinton's pursuit of the Holy Grail.

For Clinton, more good news came out of yesterday's talk-show circuit. Before the Penn story consumed the political press, Virginia Sen. (and superdelegate) Jim Webb said that he has no problem waiting to endorse a candidate until after all the states have voted. Webb is a respected, high-profile freshman senator, and other rookie congressmen may follow his lead. (Half of 2006's new congressional Democrats haven't endorsed Clinton or Barack Obama.) The longer superdelegates hold out, the more time Clinton has to wine and dine them.

Speaking of superdelegates, Clinton has once again seen an uncommitted super mosey over to Obama. A Montana state legislator, Margaret Campbell, is expected to endorse Obama on Monday—continuing his dominance among superdelegates since Feb. 5. Because of the daunting math confronting Clinton, it's
unlikely that she’ll grab a significant number of superdelegate endorsements until after Pennsylvania—and that’s the best-case scenario. That still leaves two weeks for Obama to own the endorsement headlines. Mark Penn, back in his chief strategist days, wouldn’t have been pleased about that.

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.

did you see this?
Harry Potter Is Too Cool for School
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 6:15 PM ET

dispatches
China’s Great Migration
When human smugglers were local heroes.
By Patrick Radden Keefe
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 2:36 PM ET

FUZHOU, China—Moments after boarding my flight for the short trip from Hong Kong to the southern Chinese city of Fuzhou, I get the first inkling of the extreme demographic peculiarity of the place I’m headed. A woman at the ticket counter has bumped me, with inexplicable apologies, to first class, so I get to board before everyone else and relax with a plastic flute of orange juice while the hoi polloi files on.

And this is when the weirdness starts: Half of my fellow passengers are babies.

They’re chaperoned, of course, by mothers and grandmothers and an occasional disinterested-looking uncle. But every passing adult totes a wriggling, cooing, chubby-cheeked infant. At two dozen, I stop counting.

There’s an intriguing reason for this. The overwhelming majority of Chinese who have emigrated to the United States over the past 20 years come from a handful of counties around Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian province, which lies along the banks of the Min River, just across the strait from Taiwan. Seeking better economic opportunities, the Fujianese fled their farms and fishing villages throughout the 1990s and took circuitous—and often illegal—journeys to America. In 1994, then-CIA Director James Woolsey estimated that as many as 100,000 Chinese were entering the country illegally every year. That figure was probably a little high, and the exact numbers are impossible to tabulate. But you get the idea.

The Fujianese are known for their work ethic and entrepreneurial zeal, and the new arrivals fanned across the United States and started businesses. That generic Chinese restaurant in the strip mall near your house? Almost certainly run by Fujianese. Those no-frills “Chinatown buses” that initially linked Eastern seaboard cities and now rival Greyhound, crisscrossing the continent? A Fujianese innovation.

Baggage claim looks like a Maclaren showroom. One colorful, souped-up stroller after another rolls by on the carousel. I’m waiting for something a little more prosaic. Before leaving the States, I was having a drink at the house of Sean, a Fujianese friend who works as a bartender in Philadelphia. Sean’s 9-month-old son already lives with his grandparents in a village outside Fuzhou. Sean asked, all casual, whether I would mind bringing something to the baby for him. “Of course,” I said, pleased to think that I might get to meet his son and hand over some happy, lightweight trinket from America—a stuffed toy, say, or a baby bonnet.

“Great, thanks so much,” Sean said. Then, eyeing my backpack, “It’s not gonna fit in that.”

Before this trip, I could imagine few ways to get strip-searched and interrogated faster than trying to board an airplane with a massive gym bag stuffed with 30 pounds of a powder you blithely inform security is “baby formula.” But I’ve somehow managed to make it this far without raising any alarms.

After checking into my hotel, I meet up with a friend of a friend, Dr. Tang Xiao Xiong. “There are more Fujianese overseas than there are in Fujian,” Dr. Tang tells me. He wears tinted, gold-rimmed spectacles and jeans that are pressed to a knife’s edge, and he smokes long, thin cigarettes more or less nonstop.

“The first group of Fujianese to come to America were sailors,” he explains. "New York was where they jumped ship." The
sailors who settled in New York's Chinatown in the 1960s and '70s sent word back to China that you could make more money in one year at an American restaurant or garment factory than you could in a decade back home. In the 1980s, more Fujianese started making the trip. The exodus started with a single township, Tingjiang. A young man would leave, then send for his wife, then his siblings, then her siblings, and so forth. Demographers call this "chain migration," a term that explains how a few pioneers establish roots in a new place and send for others. A Fujianese colloquialism captures the same idea: "One brings 10. Ten bring a 100."

Dr. Tang had a successful career in Fuzhou, but even he felt the lure of America. After scoring a visiting-scholar position at the University of Southern California in 1992, he overstayed his visa and moved to New York, where he lived illegally until 1997. He established a medical practice treating undocumented Fujianese, who came to him because they didn't have health insurance. These migrants lived frugally, he told me, saving money to send for family members and sending cash home for the construction of lavish mansions in their villages. These houses became status symbols, the taller and gaudier the better, and as ever-present reminders of American prosperity, they drove others to migrate.

I'm curious to see some of these houses, so Dr. Tang and I drive to Yingyu village in Tingjiang. We're joined by Jinhua, a friend of Dr. Tang's. He jokes that Tingjiang is like "a little America on the banks of the Min River."

The first thing you notice about Yingyu is the mansions: four-and five-story monstrosities of concrete and tile, floor-to-ceiling windows of mirrored blue glass. They remind me of Frank Lopez's house in Scarface—the split-level with an elevator.*

As we stroll through an ornate gate (erected with money sent from America) and wander along a stone alley that winds through the village, we notice something else: There's no one here. All the adults of working age have left, Dr. Tang explains. They call these towns "widow's villages." Half the houses are vacant and shuttered. The others are home only to grandparents—and to American-born babies.

An older couple stand with their grandson, who looks about 3. They're curious about the random white guy wandering through the village, and Jinhua tells them I'm from New York.

"Oh," they say, smiling, and gesturing at the boy. "His parents are from New York. They have a restaurant on Henry Street."

"You have a very nice house," I tell them.

"Not really," says a voice behind me. "Look at mine."

It's a skinny young woman who has been standing nearby, listening to our conversation. (At least I think she's young. More than once in Fuzhou I've met people and assumed they were in their 30s, like me, only to have them mention that they were born in 1940 and share vivid recollections of the Great Leap Forward.)

The woman points to another house, which is, if anything, only very slightly larger than the first one. (Sigmund Freud's notion of the narcissism of minor differences takes on a whole new dimension in small-town Fujian.)

A man with a crew cut and a green leather jacket approaches. "You from New York?" he asks in English. He introduces himself as Lin Song and insists that I come and look at his house, which is bigger still. We approach a salmon-colored building perched at the edge of the village, looking out over rice paddies and mountains in the distance. Inside, it's one gleaming faux-marble floor after another, flat-screen televisions in nearly every room, and stray Doric columns, serving no apparent structural function, which are painted Versace gold. The Fujianese are not shy about sharing what things cost, and as we ascend a brand-new wooden staircase, he announces, "Every step? Three thousand Chinese money."

Lin Song is a little vague about the source of his wealth, but he mentions a restaurant in Virginia and some kind of footwear concern in the Dominican Republic. I ask who lives in the house. "Me and my wife," he says. "Everyone else is in America. Four daughters. One son. All U.S. citizen!"

Undiscouraged by the apparent housing glut in Yingyu, Lin Song is actually building another, bigger mansion about 100 yards from the first. It's going slowly, he tells me, because he's having trouble finding local men to do the construction—all the potential candidates have left town.

Dr. Tang has made dinner plans, so we have to take our leave. Lin Song is genuinely disappointed. He seems to like chatting in English, and he asks when I will come back and visit him. We thank him for his hospitality, and he walks us to our car.

"See you in America," he says.

**Correction, April 10, 2008:** This entry originally misstated the name of the Scarface character with a split-level house. It was Frank Lopez, not Tony Montana. (Return to the corrected sentence.)
SHENGMEN, China—It's a dreary Wednesday morning, and I'm walking through Shengmen, a tiny village of cramped homes and concrete lanes, trying to learn about the town's most famous daughter, notorious snakehead Cheng Chui Ping, who is better known as Sister Ping. The great migration of Fujianese to the United States has largely been facilitated by human smugglers, whom the Chinese call "snakeheads." Snakeheads are basically underworld travel agents. If you're a poor Fujianese and you want to go to America, a snakehead is the person you see. No visa? No passport? No problem. Until she was arrested in Hong Kong in 2000, Sister Ping was one of the most prolific Chinese snakeheads—and certainly the most famous. (I wrote a long article about her for The New Yorker in 2006.) Authorities knew her as the "mother of all snakeheads" and estimated that she made about $40 million over two decades. When Sister Ping was a young girl, in 1964, her father left the family, joining a merchant vessel as a crewman and jumping ship in America. He stayed, illegally, for the next 13 years, sending money home to support his wife and children.

Sister Ping was nearly 30 when her father returned to Shengmen and began arranging to send other undocumented Fujianese to America. He enlisted his children to help: One daughter obtained passports and visas so that customers could travel overland to Hong Kong, then fly to Guatemala or Belize. A son oversaw the Central American leg of the trip, arranging passage across the Mexican border. Sister Ping moved to New York's Chinatown in 1982 and personally ferried passengers from Mexico to the United States.

The operation ended up being so successful that Shengmen is the most completely deserted village I have visited anywhere around Fuzhou. The houses are almost all shuttered. The liveliest spot in town is an old-folks' home, where a half-dozen residents (all with children in America) watch television.

A young woman walking a bicycle points out Sister Ping's house: a four-story structure just off the main square with a curved gate and a pagoda on the roof. No one is home. Sister Ping arranged for her extended and immediate family, and most of her neighbors, to come to America years ago.

"She made people want to go to America, because people trusted her," a retiree from a neighboring village, whose nephew now lives in Iowa and got there with the help of Sister Ping, tells me. She was very detail-oriented, the man explains, and was perceived as a professional in a field of amateurs: You had fewer reservations about putting your life in her hands. "Yes, you were paying her a lot of money," he says. (Sister Ping charged $18,000 for the trip from Fujian to New York in the 1980s. In the 1990s, it went up to $35,000.) "But she was giving you a better life."

Everyone I meet in Fujian insists that while Sister Ping may have been an outlaw, she was an outlaw in the Robin Hood tradition. She performed a vital service, lifting her fellow villagers out of poverty by enabling them to emigrate to America. Customers would make a small down payment before leaving China. Then, assuming they made it to America in one piece, they would cobble together enough cash to pay Sister Ping the balance of the fee. They did this by borrowing small amounts from friends and family—debts that then took a few years of work to repay.

For many Fujianese, the upward mobility the snakeheads facilitated could rationalize a multitude of sins. No matter that the occasional smuggling ship would capsize with the loss of all aboard or that Sister Ping and other snakeheads employed violent gangsters to hold customers until they had paid the balance of their fees. The relationship between snakehead and client is perceived as strictly contractual and not the least bit exploitative. Illegal immigration is a hazardous business, and migrants know the risks going in.

(This is the difference, in a nutshell, between human smuggling and human trafficking, two discrete criminal enterprises that journalists and human rights advocates tend to describe interchangeably. No one was telling migrants from Fuzhou that they would be working as models or waitresses upon their arrival, and incidents of snakeheads forcing migrants into sex slavery, while not unheard of, are exceedingly rare.)

Even Chinese law enforcement has tended to tolerate the snakehead trade. I meet with a Fujianese cop who works the snakehead beat, and he tells me that in recent years he and his colleagues have made some arrests, but this type of crime has never been a huge priority. The cop doesn't want me to use his name, but over one thimble-sized cup of tea after another, he talks frankly about the problem.

"The law was always the same," he explains. "It's a matter of enforcement." Throughout the 1990s, when the business was booming, Fujianese police turned a blind eye to the snakeheads. Bribery is endemic in Chinese political and law-enforcement circles, and the snakeheads were able to buy a fair amount of protection. But they enjoyed good will as well: The more Fujianese they smuggled out, the more money flowed back into the province in the form of remittances from America.

Today, the industry has changed. The snakeheads are much less active than they used to be. The economy is strong, and fewer people want to leave. And to some extent, the market is exhausted: In villages like Shengmen, everyone who might ever want to go to America is already there or has relatives with green cards who can sponsor them to make the journey legally.
The cost of the journey has also grown prohibitively high: Snakeheads now charge $70,000 for the trip from Fuzhou to New York. And the whole fee is payable upfront.

When Sister Ping was arrested by the Hong Kong police and extradited to the United States, it marked the end of an era. She was convicted in federal court in 2006 and sentenced to 35 years in prison. In New York's Chinatown, the sentence was regarded as excessive, as if U.S. authorities were trying to make an example of Sister Ping and send a message to their Chinese counterparts that the snakehead racket can't be tolerated.

She may have been paying, in part, for the impunity she had enjoyed in China. From 1994, when Sister Ping fled the United States, to her arrest in 2000, she lived in the house in Shengmei. Right under the nose of Chinese authorities, at a time when she was the FBI's most wanted Asian organized crime figure, she carried on smuggling for six profitable years.

"Everyone knew" she was there, the cop tells me. "But no one came out and pointed a finger at her." Her customers were satisfied, he explains. She was regarded as a local hero. No one came forward with any complaint about her, and the police seemed unwilling to go knocking on doors. "This is a different era from Mao Zedong's time," the cop says. "If you're going to lock someone up, you need evidence."

As he's talking about Sister Ping, there's something in his voice that sounds almost like nostalgia. Sister Ping was known for her sophisticated operation and for her great wealth, he explains. She was widely respected. "Now, if you're a snakehead, no one gives you respect anymore." In the current economy, anyone with a head for business can get rich. Today, the really smart entrepreneurs don't become snakeheads. They build factories.

It's a "lower caliber of person," in the smuggling business today, the cop concludes. "It's not people you want to be hanging out with."

dvd extras

The Mayor of Hell
James Cagney and the formative years of the American gangster movie.
By Mark Harris
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 3:13 PM ET

In 1966, Warner Bros. grudgingly green-lighted Arthur Penn's modestly budgeted crime drama Bonnie and Clyde for first-time producer Warren Beatty. A few weeks later, Jack Warner, the 73-year-old titan who had co-founded the studio back in 1918 and still ran it with a mostly iron hand, finally read the script and, in a pique of pessimistic irritation, scolded his production chief for agreeing to make the movie at all. "I can't understand where the entertainment value is in this story. Who wants to see the rise and fall of a couple of rats?" Warner wrote. "I don't understand the whole thinking of Warren Beatty and Penn ... this era went out with Cagney."

Warner's memo has since been enshrined as one of Hollywood's classic executive-suite head-slappers. Not only did Bonnie and Clyde become a game-changing hit, but its incendiary combination of comedy and bloody violence, French New Wave tropes, and American crime-spree iconography didn't remotely resemble the gangster quickies that Warner Bros. had churned out in the 1930s.

The movie holds up beautifully in its new, lushly bedecked 40th anniversary rerelease, which includes a couple of soundless deleted scenes and a making-of documentary (but no commentary track, a DVD staple that Beatty disdains). It's been thoughtfully restored, with just enough graininess left on-screen so that the frame never looks digitally Botoxed. And if after 40 years, some of those nouvelle vague flourishes are showing their age, the movie still has the power to challenge, excite, and unsettle viewers.

This was, without question, something new. But had Jack Warner, or for that matter Bonnie and Clyde's many champions, taken another look at some of the films that "went out with Cagney," they might have discovered that in its formative years, the gangster movie was funnier, weirder, more sexually charged, and less constricted by moralizing than anyone remembered—as a revelatory new box set makes clear.

The words Volume 3 on a DVD release usually suggest that a studio is beginning to reach into the dustier recesses of its library. The just-out third installment of Warner's "Gangster Collection" is no exception. If you're looking for classics—Cagney introducing Mae Clarke's face to a grapefruit in The Public Enemy or Edward G. Robinson moaning, "Mother of mercy, is this the end of Rico?" in Little Caesar—they're way back in Volume 1. Here, instead, are half a dozen relative rarities that contribute immeasurably to any understanding of how elastic, adaptable, and energetic the genre had become by 1934, when the stultifying restrictions of the Production Code began to be enforced and Hollywood movies became, for a time, duller and dumber.

These movies also showcase an actor who still has the power to astound. Between 1931 and 1934, James Cagney made 17 movies, all of them for Warner Brothers. Four—Smart Money, Picture Snatcher, Lady Killer, and the irresistibly titled The Mayor of Hell—are included here. None of them is, strictly speaking, a gangster movie. But together they make it clear that rigid genre labeling is beside the point when you're considering a
period in which genres, and talking pictures, were still inventing themselves.

Cagney became an instant star with his cocky, tensile performance in *The Public Enemy*, a moment in which, Martin Scorsese has suggested, "modern screen acting begins." Menacing, likable, funny, tough, brutal, careless, and nimble, he seemed to operate at a higher voltage than everyone around him. (It was tough to get near him on-screen without getting injured.) Over the next few years, Warner built movie after movie around him, usually throwing caution and coherence to the wind in order to create entertainment that could service the desires of pretty much anyone who walked into a movie house, whether they were looking for a shoot 'em-up, a melodrama, a romance, a comedy, a caper, or just an hour indoors.

In 1931's *Smart Money*—shot before *The Public Enemy* was released—Cagney is still a second banana, supporting Edward G. Robinson in the lighthearted story of a small-town gambler who comes to the city (that's what it's called, on-screen: "the City") in search of a bigger game. This is Robinson's show, whether he's bullying a high-rolling bettor who may be a pimp (Boris Karloff) or telling off a double-crossing dame ("Why, you hustling little bag—I'll have you on your knees begging for a cup of coffee!").

But Cagney can't be suppressed: In his brief screen time, he manages to throw some haymakers and slap around a broad. He and Robinson make a great duo, and even though one ends up dead and the other in prison, the "moral" (Gambling can make you rich! Watch out for duplicitious women! Try not to kill your best buddy by accident!) isn't delivered with the blunt-force thud that would later characterize most Code-approved crime films.

By 1933, Cagney was a much bigger star than Robinson, and hastily contrived productions were being built around his explosive physicality and motormouth momentum. *Picture Snatcher* opens with his release from prison after a three-year stretch; he heads straight for the tailor and the tub ("I'm gonna stink pretty!"), then tells his old gang he's going straight, taking his cut of their ill-gotten gains and becoming a tabloid photographer with a camera that's "just like a gun—trigger and all!" In a breakneck plot, Cagney finds time for a car chase, a sneak snapshot of a female electrocution ("I'd give my right eye and a thousand dollars for a flash of that woman in the chair!") barks his editor), a romance that begins in a ladies' bathroom, and a massive machine-gun shootout.

Just as *Picture Snatcher* combines gangster mayhem with the screwball bite of *The Front Page*, 1933's *The Mayor of Hell* merges the crime picture and the social-justice movie. "Hell" is a juvenile work camp where bad street kids go to get worse; its "mayor" is Cagney, who gets the job running the place as an act of corrupt political patronage and then discovers he's got a reformer's heart. Within a year, the substance of this picture—its cheerfully vague socialist streak (the kids are encouraged to render their guards irrelevant by turning their prison into a kind of inmate-managed co-op) and its enthusiastic brutality (including the gruesome killing of the despotlic old warden)—would be verboten.

The delirious anarchy of movies like *Lady Killer* would also be tamped down. That's a shame, since it's one of the most winningly loony movies Cagney ever made. By 1933, the peak of the public-enemy-No.-1 era, real-life gangsters were even bigger celebrities than the stars who imitated (and sometimes inspired) them; this movie allowed Cagney to be both. Briefly: Fired for running a craps game at work (he's a movie-house usher), Cagney becomes involved in a gambling racket, lams it to L.A. after a burglary/assault, gets a job as an extra in a prison movie, becomes an overnight star (with the aid of a scam fan-mail campaign that he engineers), lives the high life wooing a famous actress, attracts the attention of his old gang, is wrongly arrested, and ends up in yet another Tommy-gun free-for-all before flying off to get married. That epic plot, which unfolds over all of 75 minutes, also finds room for half a dozen movie-industry parodies and, literally, a barrel of monkeys. As in many of these films, Cagney is half-criminal, half-hero, and it's a delight watching him work every angle within that gray zone.

And then Hollywood lowered the boom. After the Code was enforced, crime movies, with few exceptions, were mired in a period of toothless earnestness from which ambiguity was banished until the first stirrings of film noir in the early 1940s. Warner was reduced to cautionary tales like 1937's *Black Legion*, a feature-length sermon in which an embittered small-town, working-class Joe (Humphrey Bogart, pre-stardom) joins a bedsheeted ultranationalist group that runs "foreigners" out of town. We learn that lynch mobs are bad, though the dogmatic screenplay manages to avoid any mention of what the Klan was really about or which minority they were actually targeting.

Speaking of which, be warned: The depiction of African-Americans in the pre-Code Cagney movies is appallingly offensive. Every shuffling "Yassuh, boss" stereotype of the age is on display. Black servants and sidekicks are given names like "Suntan" and "Snake Eyes" (a character whom Robinson treats as a lawn jockey, even rubbing his head for luck). As for women, they exist to be slapped in the face, dragged by the hair, and kicked in the ass, all for laughs. With freedom inevitably came irresponsibility and a set of stereotypes that *Bonnie and Clyde*'s creators left behind when they rediscovered what gangster films could be—as well as some things that, even in the Wild West of the pre-Code '30s, they never could have dreamed of becoming.

**Correction**, April 8, 2008: The article originally noted that in addition to being racist and sexist, pre-Code gangster movies were also homophobic, citing as evidence a line from *Lady Killer*, in which cops threaten James Cagney by saying, "We'll
run you in as a fag, and that'll mean 30 days in the tank." In fact, the line is, "We'll run you in as a vag, and that'll mean 30 days in the tank." Vag, as in vagrant. (Return to the corrected paragraph.)

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election scorecard

Clinton's Dessert
Puerto Rico's primary is one of the last of the season. Clinton is well ahead.
By Chadwick Matlin
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 12:15 PM ET

There's another new poll out of Pennsylvania today (Hillary Clinton is up by six or eight points, depending on how you look at it), but we're shifting our focus to the seas instead of the Keystone State. Puerto Rico holds its primary on June 1, the third-to-last contest in the cycle, and has a hefty 55 pledged delegates available.

The first poll we've seen come out of Puerto Rico has Clinton beating Barack Obama by 13 points (50–37). Thirteen percent of those polled say they're undecided, and 53 percent say they plan to vote. (Note: This is based on a rough translation by Slate staffers.)

The governor of Puerto Rico—who was recently indicted for corruption—has endorsed Barack Obama.

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

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<td><strong>Democrats</strong></td>
<td><strong>Republicans</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total delegates: 4,049</td>
<td>Total delegates: 2,380</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total delegates needed to win: 2,025</td>
<td>Total delegates needed to win: 1,191</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delegates won by each candidate: Obama: 1,626; Clinton:</td>
<td>Delegates won by each candidate: McCain: 1,325; Huckabee:</td>
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everyday economics

The Eligible-Bachelor Paradox
How economics and game theory explain the shortage of available, appealing men.
By Mark Gimein
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 4:23 PM ET

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the available, sociable, and genuinely attractive man is a character highly in demand in social settings. Dinner hosts are always looking for the man who fits all the criteria. When they don't find him (often), they throw up their hands and settle for the sociable but unattractive, the attractive but unsociable, and, as a last resort, for the merely available.

The shortage of appealing men is a century-plus-old commonplace of the society melodrama. The shortage—or—more exactly, the perception of a shortage—becomes evident as you hit your late 20s and more acute as you wander into the 30s. Some men explain their social fortune by believing they've become more attractive with age; many women prefer the far likelier explanation that male faults have become easier to overlook.

The problem of the eligible bachelor is one of the great riddles of social life. Shouldn't there be about as many highly eligible and appealing men as there are attractive, eligible women?

Actually, no—and here's why. Consider the classic version of the marriage proposal: A woman makes it known that she is open to a proposal, the man proposes, and the woman chooses to say yes or no. The structure of the proposal is not, "I choose
you." It is, "Will you choose me?" A woman chooses to receive the question and chooses again once the question is asked.

The idea of the woman choosing expressed in the proposal is a resilient one. The woman picking among suitors is a rarely reversed archetype of romantic love that you'll find everywhere from Jane Austen to Desperate Housewives. Or take any comic wedding scene: Invariably, it'll have the man standing dazed at the altar, wondering just how it is he got there.

Obviously, this is simplified—in contemporary life, both sides get plenty of chances to be selective. But as a rough-and-ready model, it's not bad, and it contains a solution to the Eligible-Bachelor Paradox.

You can think of this traditional concept of the search for marriage partners as a kind of an auction. In this auction, some women will be more confident of their prospects, others less so. In game-theory terms, you would call the first group "strong bidders" and the second "weak bidders." Your first thought might be that the "strong bidders"—women who (whether because of looks, social ability, or any other reason) are conventionally deemed more of a catch—would consistently win this kind of auction.

But this is not true. In fact, game theory predicts, and empirical studies of auctions bear out, that auctions will often be won by "weak" bidders, who know that they can be outbid and so bid more aggressively, while the "strong" bidders will hold out for a really great deal. You can find a technical discussion of this here. (Be warned: "Bidding Behavior in Asymmetric Auctions" is not for everyone, and I certainly won't claim to have a handle on all the math.) But you can also see how this works intuitively if you just consider that with a lot at stake in getting it right in one shot, it's the women who are confident that they are holding a strong hand who are likely to hold out and wait for the perfect prospect.

This is how you come to the Eligible-Bachelor Paradox, which is no longer so paradoxical. The pool of appealing men shrinks as many are married off and taken out of the game, leaving a disproportionate number of men who are notably imperfect (perhaps they are short, socially awkward, underemployed). And at the same time, you get a pool of women weighted toward the attractive, desirable "strong bidders."

Where have all the most appealing men gone? Married young, most of them—and sometimes to women whose most salient characteristic was not their beauty, or passion, or intellect, but their decisiveness.

Evolutionary psychologists will remind us that there's a long line of writing about "female choosiness" going back to Darwin and the male peacocks competing to get noticed by "chooey" mates with their splendid plumage. But you don't have to buy that kind of reductive biological explanation (I don't) to see the force of the "women choose" model. You only have to accept that for whatever socially constructed reason, the choice of getting married is one in which the woman is usually the key player. It might be the man who's supposed to ask the official, down-on-the-knee question, but it usually comes after a woman has made the central decision. Of course, in this, as in all matters of love, your experience may vary.

There may be those who look at this and try to derive some sort of prescription, about when to "bid," when to hold out, and when (as this Atlantic story urges) to "settle." If you're inclined to do that, approach with care. Game theory deals with how best to win the prize, but it works only when you can decide what's worth winning.

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explainer

Max Mosley's Nazi S&M Orgy

It was distasteful. Was it also pathological?

By Juliet Lapidos
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 5:45 PM ET

Max Mosley is facing calls to resign as president of Formula One after News of the World published an exposé about his sex life. In a video obtained by the British tabloid, a prostitute straps the 67-year-old Mosley to a bench and beats him with a cane; then Mosley switches roles: He shouts orders in German while he lashes prostitutes dressed in imitation death camp uniforms. Mosley's bedroom habits may be distasteful, but are they pathological?

Not necessarily. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual recognizes eight major paraphilias, or aberrant sexual urges: exhibitionism, fetishism, frotteurism (the desire to rub against a person), pedophilia, transvestic fetishism (attraction to the clothing of the opposite gender), voyeurism, masochism, and sadism. But the big eight aren't considered diagnosable disorders unless the activity (or fantasy about the activity) is recurrent, causes significant emotional distress, impairs social functioning, or involves a violation of consent. So, consensual S&M that doesn't lead to, say, crippling guilt is not classified as a disease.

As for the orgy's Nazi overtones, Nazi costumes and other paraphernalia are not unheard of in the sexual role-play subculture. Like biker gear, SS outfits can heighten the sense of a "top/bottom" power differential, which, to some, is highly arousing. Mosley may have some demons to exorcise (his father,
Sadomasochism has a long literary history. The fourth-century
*Kama Sutra*, for example, recommends erotic slapping, scratching, and biting. And in the 17th century, German
physician Johann Heinrich Meibom used contemporary anatomical theory to explain why pain would cause sexual excitement (flogging warms semen). But psychiatric research on the practice began in earnest during the 19th century when Austrian psychiatrist Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing published *Psychopathia Sexualis*. According to Krafft-Ebing, sex that isn't directly related to procreation, like S&M, is a perversion. Rape, by contrast, is aberrant, but not perverse, since it can result in pregnancy. Sigmund Freud also considered the desire to inflict or receive pain during sex a perversion and noted that these opposite tendencies often occur in the same person (see Max Mosley).

Psychoanalysts today theorize that sadomasochists may be repeating an early sexual experience. (French majors may recall that, in the *Confessions*, Rousseau enjoys an early-childhood spanking and then seeks to repeat the experience later in life). But the current empirical research on what motivates sadomasochistic behavior is inconclusive. There's no established link between S&M and childhood history; practitioners are no more likely to have been spanked or sexually abused than anyone else in the population. There's also no scientific proof that consensual S&M is a gateway to nonconsensual sadomasochistic assault. Andreas Spengler, a German physician who conducted a large-scale S&M study in the 1970s, found that practitioners are generally happy with their sexual preferences, yet burdened by social stigma.

Sadomasochists who aren't happy with their preferences and seek treatment have a few options. Traditional approaches include psychoanalysis and 12-step sexual addiction/compulsion recovery programs. More recently, drugs that reduce testosterone levels and thus lower the sex drive have been used in conjunction with behavioral therapy.

Got a question about today’s news? [Ask the Explainer](http://www.washingtonpost.com).
expplaner

Do Ousted Campaign Advisers Still Advise?

Hillary Clinton can still talk to Mark Penn on the phone, can't she?
By Chris Wilson
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 6:27 PM ET

Mark Penn, the chief strategist for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, stepped down Sunday after it was revealed that one of his private business deals conflicted with Clinton's agenda. Penn and his consulting firm, which has reportedly received $10.8 million thus far from the Clinton campaign, will continue to conduct polling for the candidate. When advisers resign, do they really stop giving advice?

It depends how badly they screwed up. The No. 1 prerogative for an aide or adviser who has attracted bad publicity is to get out of the spotlight as soon as possible, even if his or her relationship with the candidate was informal to begin with. More often than not, this means cutting ties with the candidate altogether—at least for a while. If further communication does take place, it is under strict secrecy to avoid any resurrection of the scandal.

Both the Clinton and Obama campaigns have excommunicated informal advisers in the past several months in response to remarks that upset the other camp. Clinton parted ways with former vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro after Ferraro alluded to Obama's race as the reason for his popularity; Harvard professor Samantha Power resigned as a foreign-policy adviser to Obama after being quoted calling Clinton a "monster." Both women were unpaid and had less formal relationships to the campaigns than Penn, but they have nevertheless been kept away from the campaigns from that point. (Power did not respond to the Explainer's request for comment about whether she has had any further contact with Obama since resigning.)

In that light, Clinton's decision to keep Penn on as a pollster is unusual. While Penn is losing his job as the top crafter of the campaign message, his demotion is far from the usual excommunication meted out to disgraced aides. Historically, presidential candidates have erred on the side of outright firing when it comes to staffers and aides who have been caught with their hands dirty. In September 1987, Michael Dukakis let go of his campaign manager John Sasso when it came out that Sasso was behind plagiarism accusations levied against Democratic rival Joseph Biden. In the last election, the top outside counsel for the Bush-Cheney re-election campaign, Benjamin Ginsberg, resigned after it was discovered that he was also advising the independent Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

In some cases, contact does continue between advisers and their former bosses. In 1996, Bill Clinton's re-election campaign was quick to drop high-ranking aide Dick Morris after a tabloid revealed his relationship with a prostitute. But Morris continued to dole out his advice in the ensuing years, notably during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Dukakis actually rehired John Sasso in 1988, after deciding that Sasso had "paid his price"—and that he might be able to help revive a struggling campaign. Since resigning, Power has hinted that she may have some role in the future with Obama's campaign or administration, should he win the primary or the general election.

In the meantime, Penn appears to be unusually close to the Clinton campaign for an ousted adviser. Atlantic blogger Marc Ambinder reported today that Penn was on the campaign's regular daily conference call as usual.

Explainer thanks F. Christopher Arterton and Dennis W. Johnson of George Washington University, Casey Klofstad of the University of Miami, and Larry J. Sabato of the University of Virginia.

family

Tiny Tyrants

How to really change your kid's behavior.
By Alan E. Kazdin
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 2:20 PM ET

Picture an explosive parent who responds to a child's misbehavior by ranting, screaming, and perhaps hitting. Now picture a calm, patient, gentle parent who responds to the same misbehavior—no matter how provokingly awful—by reasoning and explaining. The rage-ball goes ballistic; the patient explainer works hard to see what's going on inside the child in order to get the child to understand why the behavior must change.

Obviously, the two parents have different effects on their kids. They model different responses to not getting the behavior they want, and research tells us that children tend to reproduce what happens at home when interacting with peers. The child who is yelled at and hit is more likely to yell and hit to get other children to behave a certain way; the child in a reasoning home is more likely to remain calm and persuade.

But the two parents have one important thing in common: They're likely to be ineffective in changing the unwanted behavior. Their different approaches have different side effects,
so to speak (and, of course, managing behavior isn't a parent's only responsibility), but when it comes to changing behavior, the rage-ball and the patient explainer are startlingly close neighbors on the ineffective end of the spectrum. They embody our natural tendency to fixate on unwanted behavior and unwittingly reinforce it by giving it a lot of attention—and then persist in trying either to punish or to talk it into oblivion, both of which almost never work.

More than 50 years of good science tell us that punishment doesn't do much to improve behavior, so the explosive parent's approach will almost certainly fail. All that yelling and hitting qualifies as punishment, after all, and punishment doesn't teach what to do. It rarely succeeds even in teaching what not to do.

The patient explainer will probably fail, too. Trying to change a child's behavior by helping her understand why she misbehaves and why she shouldn't derives from an old-fashioned model of human behavior inconsistent with scientific evidence.

Before going further, let me say that promoting understanding plays a crucial role in raising kids. Explanation and discussion build intelligence and language skills, develop a child's powers of rational reasoning, and teach the difference between right and wrong. Engaging your child on a range of topics has another, even broader benefit: It increases the likelihood that he will come to you in the future to discuss things, including touchy subjects. When you explain something to your child, or when he tries to explain his anger to you, his understanding may improve, and that's good.

But a large body of research tells us that greater understanding is not a strong path to changing behavior. If you are smoking while reading this, you will get the point at once. You understand that some behaviors are not good for you and may well hurt others, yet you do them anyway. Kids are no different. In both children and adults, recognition that one is doing wrong does not automatically trigger a process that will alter the improper behavior.

Parents typically grasp the weakness of the link between understanding and behavior in themselves but not in their kids. They insist on explaining and explaining why a behavior is wrong, even though verbal instructions have proven to be almost as weak as punishment in changing behavior.

It's true that feedback, which means explaining what was right or wrong about a behavior already performed, can change the behavior of unusually motivated, competent people. If you tell a professional ice skater that she's not performing a jump properly because her arms are in the wrong position, she's likely to adjust them. But she belongs to an exceptional subset of human beings. For most people, feedback does not work wonders.

Explaining in advance what's right or wrong about a behavior is no more effective than feedback. Technically speaking, that explanation in advance, when used all by itself, is an antecedent with no consequences. An antecedent is anything you do to set the stage for a behavior, to prompt it to occur; and consequences are what happens after the behavior—reward, praise, punishment—that teaches a child to do it again or not. An antecedent without consequences doesn't do much to change behavior.

Fortunately, science does tell us how to change behavior and how explanation can be used most effectively. (Those who wish to see the scholarship can find the relevant research, much of which has been published in the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, cited here, or they can read my far more accessible distillation for lay readers.)

You begin by deciding what you want the child to do, the positive opposite of whatever behavior you want to stop. The best way to get rid of unwanted behavior is to train a desirable one to replace it. So turn "I want him to stop having tantrums" into "I want him to stay calm and not to raise his voice when I say no to him."

Then you tell the child exactly what you would like him to do. Don't confuse improving his behavior with improving his moral understanding; just make clear what behavior you're looking for and when it's appropriate, and don't muddy the waters by getting into why he should do it. "When you get mad at your sister, I want you to use words or come tell me about it or just get away from her. No matter what, I want you to keep your hands to yourself."

Whenever you see the child do what you would like, or even do something that's a step in the right direction, you not only pay attention to that behavior, but you praise it in specific, effusive terms. "You were angry at me, but you just used words. You didn't hit or kick, and that's great!" Add a smile or a touch—a hug, a kiss, a pat on the shoulder. Verbal praise grows more effective when augmented via another sense.

If you don't see enough of the desirable behavior, then you can work on it using simulation play. Wait for a peaceful moment and then propose an exercise. "Let's see whether you can stay calm and just use words when I say no to you. I'm going to say no—remember, this is just pretend—and you stay calm, OK?"

You can even switch roles as part of the game. Most kids delight in playing the parent and saying no to the parent playing the child.

Your objective is to arrange for as much reinforced practice as possible, which means you want your child to have many opportunities to practice doing the right thing and then be reinforced in the habit by receiving rewards. Your praise is the most important reward, but you can also add little age-
appropriate privileges (staying up for 15 more minutes before bedtime, choosing the menu for dinner), goodies (little five-and-dime gadgets for younger children, downloads or cell-phone minutes for older ones), or treats. And, yes, you reward successful let's-pretend simulation sessions, too. This won't go on forever. A brief but intensive period featuring lots of reinforced practice, often somewhere between a couple of weeks and a month, can make long-lasting or even permanent changes in a child's behavior.

Going ballistic never helps, but explanation aimed at improving a child's understanding can actually play a useful part in this approach. When combined with reinforced practice, explanation has been proven to speed up the acquisition of behavior. So, yes, go ahead and explain why it's important to show respect to parents or to play nicely with others. The understanding your child achieves will resonate with the experience of doing the right thing and being rewarded for it. The deep, nuanced science on this topic all points to reinforced practice as the key, but the greater understanding that comes from explanation is an optional add-on that can help good behavior develop more quickly.

**fighting words**

**Obama Is No King**

Today, the national civil rights pulpit is largely occupied by second-rate shakedown artists.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, April 7, 2008, at 1:26 PM ET

When Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, I was 19 years old and fancifully considered myself to be far to the left of him. Notwithstanding that, he felt to me like one of my moral elders and tutors (as he still does). When I was first asked to sign a petition to make his birthday a national holiday, on a Manhattan side street in 1970, I was 21 and signed with pride. When, in 1983, President Ronald Reagan finally signed also, authorizing the bill for the King holiday, I was humbled to think of how far along I was in my 30s and how comparatively little I had to show for it. And last weekend, reading a beautiful reminiscence by King biographer Taylor Branch, I was arrested by the realization that King has now been dead for longer than he was alive, and that it's been 40 years.

On the very same weekend, as it happened, I was reading Nicholson Baker's much-discussed book _Human Smoke_, and I came across the following passage:

A union organizer and socialist, Philip Randolph, was in President Roosevelt's office to talk about jobs for Negroes in defense plants. It was June 18, 1941. Randolph had announced a huge march on Washington. "Our people are being turned away at factory gates because they are colored," he said to the president. "They can't live with this thing. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

FDR offered to intercede with the heads of the defense industries, but only if the march on Washington was called off: Randolph wanted an executive order prohibiting racism in hiring. In the end, the march was called off, but only in return for a strongly written executive order.

Whenever I leave my current hometown by train, I always make a little salute to the obscure and disfigured statue of Randolph that is erected in Washington's Union Station. It was 22 years before he had to try the same tactic on another vacillating Democratic incumbent. And this time, President John F. Kennedy didn't get the point until the marchers, organized by the United Automobile Workers as well as the civil rights leadership, actually flooded the city.

On the same weekend as I was reading Nicholson Baker, I also absorbed a news item about the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the recently retired pastor of Barack Obama's church in Chicago. Here is the form that the reverend's "retirement" will take: a $1.6 million home, purchased in the name of his church and consisting of more than 10,000 square feet, in a gated community in Tinley Park, a prosperous white section of the city. There used to be a secularist line about fat shepherds and thin sheep, but the joke here is not just at the expense of a man who never pretended to be much more than a hustler. The joke is on those of the "flock" who tithed themselves to achieve this level of comfort for a man who must be pinching himself when he wakes up every day.

But, then, so must the Rev. Al Sharpton, routinely described by the _New York Times_ as "the civil rights activist," be pinching himself each morning. By evening, after all, several limos will have arrived to transport him to several studios where he will be flattered and taken seriously. And this enviable existence is watched with avaricious jealousy by more junior practitioners, like the raving Rev. James Meeks of Chicago's Salem Baptist Church, who may not yet be quite ready for prime time, and by the members of Louis Farrakhan's racist and sectarian crew, who affect to think that Christianity is a slave religion and that white people are the products of a laboratory experiment gone wrong.

The thing that this gaggle of cranks and parasites has in common is the extreme deference with which it is treated by the junior senator from Illinois. In April 2004, Barack Obama told a reporter from the _Chicago Sun-Times_ that he had three spiritual mentors or counselors: Jeremiah Wright, James Meeks, and Father Michael Pfleger—for a change of pace, a white Catholic preacher who has a close personal feeling for the man he calls (as does Obama) Minister Farrakhan. This crossover stuff is not
as "inclusive" as it might be made to seem: Meeks' main political connections in the white community are with the hysterically anti-homosexual wing of the Christian right. If Obama were to be read a list of the positions that his clerical supporters take on everything from Judaism to sodomy, he would be in the smooth and silky business of "distancing" from now until November. And that is why he hopes that his Philadelphia speech, which dissociated him from everything and nothing, will be enough. He seems, indeed, to have a real gift for remaining adequately uninformed about the real beliefs of his "mentors."

This is a lot sadder, and a lot more serious, than has been admitted. Four decades after the murder in Memphis of a friend of the working man—a hero who was always being denounced by the FBI for his choice of secular and socialist friends and colleagues—the national civil rights pulpit is largely occupied by second-rate shakedown artists who hope to franchise "race talk" into a fat living for themselves. Far from preaching truth and brotherhood, they trade in cheap slander and paranoia and in venomous dislike of other minorities. Elijah Muhammad and the Black Muslims used to relish their meetings with Klansmen and Nazis to discuss the beauties of separatism. These riffraff, too, hang out with Farrakhan and make opportunist coalitions with the James Dobsons and Gary Bauers of the white right. This is the lovely clientele of the faith-based initiative. Who now cares to commemorate Philip Randolph or Bayard Rustin or the other giants of struggle and solidarity in whose debt we live? So amnesiac have we become, indeed, that we fall into paroxysms of adulation for a ward-heeling Chicago politician who does not complete, let alone "transcend," the work of Dr. King; who hasn't even caught up to where we were four decades ago; and who, by his chosen associations, negates and profanes the legacy of adulation for a ward

percent to 30 percent. In South Korea, 68 percent to 18 percent. Russia and Israel were the only countries in which a majority supported a second term for Bush.

Americans were aware of this phenomenon. "By roughly two-to-one (43%-23%), Americans say the decline in respect for the U.S. from other countries represents a major problem," reported the Pew Research Center just a couple of months before the 2004 vote. Americans recognized the problem, but they rejected the remedy—they went ahead and voted for Bush again.

Apparently, Americans care what the rest of the world thinks about them, but not as much as Kerry would have liked. Or Barack Obama for that matter.

"Many around the world have lost respect for America and the hope that America once gave them. That's a tragedy," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., when he endorsed Obama in January. In all the articles published by the top-tier presidential candidates in Foreign Affairs, one of the few areas where there was almost unanimous agreement was the need to improve America's image abroad.

"We need a president who can reintroduce America to the world and reintroduce America to ourselves," said Leahy. Samantha Power, the Obama adviser who resigned after calling Hillary Clinton a "monster," told Britain's Telegraph that "Obama can go door-to-door in Europe and say, 'Look like you I opposed the war in Iraq but what are we going to do together about Al Qaeda?'

Obama supporters can easily find anecdotal data to support their claim that he is the world's favorite. When the Democratic National Committee decided to hold its first global primary earlier this year, more than 20,000 Democrats in 164 countries cast their ballots, and 66 percent of them voted for Obama. If it's possible for Americans to be influenced by the opinions of people living in other countries, these voters would arguably be the first to fall.

Reading European newspapers and magazines only reinforces the view that Obama is the world's favorite candidate. Consider, for example, a recent issue of Germany's Der Spiegel, whose cover read, "The Messiah Factor: Barack Obama and the Longing for a New America." America, observed the magazine, "wants to be loved again." Another German magazine, the Atlantic Times, declared Obama to be "Germany's favorite politician at the moment." And a columnist in Portugal wrote that "[d]efinitively, Barack Obama is the candidate of Europe."

Such sentiments are often repeated in conversations with Arab columnists from all across the Middle East. "Obama seems to have the lead among Europeans and Africans," observed the Wall Street Journal. (It gave China and Mexico to Clinton.)

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foreigners
Disappointing the World
Does international enthusiasm for Barack Obama hurt him?
By Shmuel Rosner
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 6:47 AM ET

On the eve of the 2004 U.S. presidential election, my paper, Israel's Ha'aretz, was one of 10 foreign newspapers that participated in a survey organized by Britain's Guardian. The question: Who did the world want to be the next president of the United States?

The response, based on identical public opinion polls conducted in the 10 countries, was not very surprising. The world "back[ed] the Democratic challenger by a margin of two to one." In Canada, 60 percent favored John Kerry, 20 percent George W. Bush. In France, it was 72 percent to 16 percent. In Japan, 51
In 2008, as in 2004, Americans want a president who can heal the image wounds of the Bush era. (According to Pew, a "low regard for President Bush is more heavily correlated with an unfavorability rating for the United States than is any other attitude or opinion tested.") A poll for World Learning and the Aspen Institute found that "nearly nine in ten Americans (88 percent) believe that it is very important for other countries to have a favorable opinion of Americans."

Presumably, Obama will be able to use these sentiments both at home, for political purposes, and, if elected, abroad, to achieve his diplomatic goals.

But Americans rarely consider world opinion when choosing their presidents—Reagan was not popular abroad, and he was re-elected; Bush senior was popular in the world when he ran against Clinton in 1992 but not in America; Gore was the world's favorite in 2000, as was Kerry in 2004.

If he were elected, Obama's global popularity would be tricky to leverage. Certainly, some of the premises on which his popularity rests would prove to be valid: He might handle Guantanamo better, pay more attention to global warming, speak more softly, and hide the stick—for a while. But doing those things would eventually make it more difficult for him to operate in the world of power politics.

On Iraq, as Samantha Power publicly admitted (and this was the real reason she had to resign), his plan for a quick withdrawal is no more than a "best-case scenario." On climate change, he can talk the talk, but what exactly can be done is far from clear. And Obama, who's smart enough to ensure that people do not see him as naive now—hence the talk about bombing terrorists in Pakistan—would surely not want to be thought unsophisticated were he to become president. Tough action would be necessary to prove his seriousness. Six months ago—when I wrote about the Darfur refugee crisis—I mentioned one such incident involving newly elected President Bill Clinton:

After CIA agents visited his house in Arkansas before he was even inaugurated, Clinton had to roll back his criticism of the first Bush administration's strict policy against accepting refugees from Haiti. The agents presented him with satellite photos that showed tens of thousands of Haitians hacking down houses and trees in anticipation of the new, less restrictive administration.

Obama would face the same dilemma—and probably on more than one issue. If his diplomats or military advisers told him that the Iranians perceived his willingness to talk as a sign of weakness, he might reconsider his pledge to meet with the Iranian president as quickly as he now promises. Maybe when presented with confidential data gathered by eavesdropping on U.S. citizens, he would be less keen to drop all the measures taken by Bush and criticized by the opposition. Maybe his belief that "the United States needs to lead the world in ending this genocide" in Darfur would put him at odds with reality or with some members of the international community.

In each of these cases, Obama would suffer the consequences of high expectations. He would be trapped between the desire to preserve his high standing in the world and the need to act in ways that would erode that standing. Of course—his advisers would argue—it is better to have this political goodwill in the first place. But even if that were true, political goodwill should always be handled delicately. Starting modestly and building up is also an option, sometimes a better one if you aim to keep expectations realistic. (This, I think, is the way John McCain would play his cards internationally.)

High expectations could also hurt Obama domestically. If Americans expect world opinion to become pro-American if Obama wins, they will be disappointed. Opinion polls, especially in Europe, proved way before 9/11 that the world has a low opinion of America's culture and values and that frustration with its world domination is a cause for hostility. If, on the other hand, Americans perceive Obama as someone who will act to appease world opinion, they might become angry.

So, here is one task Obama will have to shoulder if and when he becomes the nominee (the same holds true for Clinton, albeit to a lesser degree): Prepare the world for disappointment. Yes, popularity in Germany and Egypt can be flattering. Yes, initial cooperation with U.N. Security Council members might be easier than confrontation. Yes, Obama-mania is showing signs of moving beyond America's borders and becoming a global movement.

Is this a cause for celebration? Maybe in the short term. In the long term, Obama is going to disappoint the world in one of two ways: He could go the Bill Clinton route—that is, having to choose between world popularity and tough realities. Or he could do things the Kerry way and lose to the candidate less favorable in the eyes of the world, prompting, once again, headlines like the one that appeared in Britain's Daily Mirror the day after the 2004 election: "How can 59,054,087 people be so DUMB?"

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gabfest

The Cultural Gabfest: Misplaced Outrage Edition

Listen to Slate's new show about the week in culture.

By Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 11:12 AM ET
Click here for the most recent Political Gabfest.

Listen to Cultural 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 Cultural 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
- M. Ward and Zooey Deschanel
- AC/DC
- Am I That Name? by Denise Riley
- BBC Radio 4’s Start the Week

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

April 4, 2008

Listen to the Political Gabfest for April 4 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.

John Dickerson, David Plotz, and guest Will Saletan discuss the continuing battle in the Democratic presidential campaign, the speculation over who might be selected as John McCain’s running mate, and the 40th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

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

- Mark Blumenthal on public opinion polls at the time of Ohio’s Democratic presidential primary in March.
- The latest Quinnipiac poll shows a tightening race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in Pennsylvania.
- Hillary Clinton misspeaks on Bosnia.
- A recent public opinion poll by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press asks who is more patriotic—Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama.
- Actor and former Sen. Fred Thompson once ran for president.
- John talks about the Clinton campaign continuing to use the 3 a.m. crisis television ads.
- The Root commemorates the 40th anniversary of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination.
- John comments on an article by Jack White about American views on whether the King assassination involved a conspiracy.
- Will talks about the Transportation Security Administration and nipple rings.
- David discusses the story of a 7-year-old boy who has a school record saying he sexually harassed a classmate.
- The e-mail address for the Political Gabfest is gabfest@slate.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.)

Posted by Dale Willman on April 4 at 11:30 a.m.

March 28, 2008

Listen to the Gabfest for March 28 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.

John Dickerson, Emily Bazelon, and guest Will Saletan gather in Slate’s Washington, D.C., studio to discuss whether Hillary Clinton has any chance of winning the Democratic nomination, how faulty memory hurts candidates on the campaign trail, and the 10th anniversary of Viagra.

Here are links to some of the articles and other items mentioned in the show:
John on Hillary Clinton's will to live
Jeff Greenfield on primary lessons
Mickey Kaus on the first time Obama attended the Rev. Jeremiah Wright's church
"Today's Blogs" on Hillary misspeaking about her trip to Bosnia
Emily recommends the film Fifty Nude Women
A public opinion poll finds that 22 percent of Democratic voters nationwide say Hillary Clinton should drop out of the race, but 22 percent also say Barack Obama should drop out.

Posted by Dale Willman on March 28 at 11:51 a.m.

March 26, 2008

Listen to Cultural 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 Cultural 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
- 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 14, 2008

Listen to the Gabfest for March 14 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.

Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz gather in Slate's Washington, D.C., studio to discuss the impact of New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer's resignation, how Geraldine Ferraro's comments can help or hurt each Democratic candidate's campaign, and the ongoing murmurs about a Clinton-Obama dream ticket.

Eliot Spitzer's involvement with a prostitute and subsequent resignation dominated the discussion. Of particular note, the Gabfest team explored the possibility that Spitzer did not pay enough. They discussed a post on "The XX Factor" that argues finding sex may not be easier for powerful men. They also looked at the consequences of Spitzer's resignation on his superdelegate vote.

A roundup of Slate's coverage of the Eliot Spitzer scandal can be found here.

The discussion then turned to Geraldine Ferraro's racially loaded comments and the impact they will have on each campaign. Emily conceded that Ferraro's comments held some truth, although her phrasing was deeply flawed.

Finally, the Gabfest panelists doubted the possibility of a dream ticket between the two major Democratic candidates. Emily was particularly taken with Clinton's recent ads, which, she believes, have successfully planted the seed in voters' minds that Obama is the "unready" candidate.

To include those who will not be drinking, John Dickerson introduced this week's supermarket-aisle chatter in place of the usual cocktail chatter. Emily pointed out an upcoming Second Amendment case before the Supreme Court; David marveled at Marion Barry's political resilience; and John introduced this week's best listener-submitted sports metaphors.
For most of their brief history, hybrid cars—especially the Toyota Prius, which is attaining near ubiquity in Bushenfreude territory—have been seen as luxury goods. Hybrid car buyers have generally been yuppies willing to pay more for the double satisfaction of saving a little money on gas and flaunting conspicuous, earth-saving virtue. As such, the hybrid was generally dismissed by lunch-pail American automakers as a niche product.

But the rising cost of oil and the current recession, which started among subprime consumers and is steadily eating its way up the economic ladder, may combine to change the hybrid vehicle's image from a white-collar status symbol to a blue-collar moneysaver.

Given that consumers—even well-off consumers who shop at places such as Starbucks and Nordstrom—have been pulling back in recent months, one would have thought that hybrid sales would be tanking. After all, during recessions, discretionary products suffer while discount products and companies thrive, which is why Wal-Mart has been doing well. But at Toyota, hybrids have been doing well. In March, a month in which total sales fell 3.4 percent from March 2007, Toyota sold 31,552 hybrids, up 19 percent from the year before. Sales of Lexus light trucks rose slightly, powered by rising sales of hybrid SUVs, even as sales of Lexis sedans plummeted. In this down market, sales of high-end vehicles that convey only status are slumping, while sales of slightly less high-end vehicles that convey status and promise gas savings are booming. Hybrids have become a real business for Toyota. In 2007, a year in which overall vehicle sales fell, hybrid sales rose 44 percent to constitute about 10.6 percent of sales. In March, hybrids accounted for nearly one in every six vehicles sold by Toyota.

Historically (and it's an admittedly brief history), the rap on hybrids is that the higher price one pays isn't justified by the savings in gasoline, especially since hybrids don't do much better than standard cars on the highway. (You can compare prices and mileage claims of standard and hybrid Toyota Camrys here.) But with gasoline approaching $4 per gallon, hybrids promise significant gas savings for most suburban drivers. And for power users of vehicles—those whose livelihood depends on driving, who view cars and trucks the way Prius owners might view a PC or BlackBerry, and who spend lots of time in stop-and-go traffic—hybrids present a much greater value. Take New York City's cabdrivers. Last year, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg decreed that by 2012 the city's taxi fleet would shift over to hybrids. And since the process has already started, it's increasingly common to find yourself, as I did on Monday, bumping through midtown Manhattan in the back of a yellow Ford Escape hybrid. The driver, who leased the car, rhapsodized about the hybrid, noting that it saves him between $25 and $30 a day on gasoline. What's more, taxi drivers apparently have to grease the palms of dispatchers to be assigned a hybrid for the day. (Yes, I know, talking to a cab driver is one of the laziest and lamest journalistic clichés out there. But in this case, it makes complete sense.)

The savings are even more significant for blue-collar companies and institutions with massive fleets of trucks. The most dramatic impact of hybrids is likely to be industrial. Business investment may be in danger of slumping, but companies that make hybrid-drive trains for trucks are booking new orders. Eaton Corp., which makes hybrid-power systems that can be incorporated into trucks, has made deals with Federal Express and Coca-Cola, which in February ordered 120 hybrid trucks. (Here are some other wins.) Today, Eaton announced it would build 207 diesel-electric hybrid systems for buses in China. Oshkosh Truck, which makes even bigger trucks, introduced hybrid-drive-technology vehicles in 2006. Its new ProPulse technology is being used for military vehicles.

Pretty much every blue-collar blue chip is getting into hybrid trucks. UPS is experimenting with hydraulic hybrid technology. Wal-Mart last year took delivery of its first hybrid trucking rig. Last month, Peterbilt Motors said it was starting full production of medium-duty hybrid trucks. And it makes sense. The gas savings and tax incentives rise with the size of the vehicle. With gas at $4 per gallon, a trucker who drives 30,000 miles annually at five miles per gallon could save $4,000 a year if he could increase fuel efficiency to just six miles per gallon.
The Blue Lagoon, Iceland's largest tourist destination, is a 100-degree melting pot. On a cold March day, as driving rain blows wisps of vapor from the nearby geothermal power plant, a group of Brazilian twentysomethings, a Japanese couple, and teens from St. Paul's, a New Hampshire prep school, wade through the milky water and coat themselves in silica mud.

The lagoon was created entirely by accident. In the 1970s, the Svartsengi geothermal plant began to discharge water rich in salt, algae, and silica, which turned into a kind of caulk. A pool formed in the featureless lava fields in western Iceland, and when locals jumped in, they found that it cleared up symptoms of skin ailments like psoriasis. Today, the Blue Lagoon sports a 15-room clinic and a spa that attracts 407,000 tourists annually. With revenue of $21 million and 200 workers, the Blue Lagoon is an Icelandic blue chip. "We are one of the 300 largest enterprises in Iceland," says Anna Sverrisdottir, managing director of the Blue Lagoon.

Iceland's economy, which until recently relied largely on fishing, has diversified in recent years, with rapid growth in tourism, manufacturing, and financial services. And like the Blue Lagoon, much of the growth has been a happy byproduct of Iceland's decadeslong strategy of tapping sources of renewable energy. Mindful of climate change and the need to limit emissions, many U.S. states have set goals of obtaining 10 percent or 15 percent of their energy from renewables at some point in the distant future, and the European Union has pledged to reach 20 percent by 2020. But Iceland is already at about 80 percent. All electricity on the island is generated through geothermal or hydroelectric sources—low-emissions sources that don't use fossil fuels. Most homes are heated by water pumped from geothermal hot spots. "We are blessed with a lot of clean and renewable energy," Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde told Newsweek. "The only uses of fossil fuels in Iceland are people using cars and the fishing fleet." And increasingly, Iceland, whose most prominent exports have been haddock and Björk, is devising ways to export what has been a stranded resource.

Iceland is a small island with a tiny, ethnically homogenous population: only 300,000, with more than half living in the capital, Reykjavik. It lacks coal reserves and is endowed with massive glaciers, which produce huge volumes of water that can be harnessed to generate electricity. It also happens to sit atop a rift in the Earth's crust that keeps significant reservoirs of heat bubbling near the surface. To a large degree, it is the polar opposite of the United States. Yet we—and other developed nations—can learn some valuable lessons from Iceland about what happens when a society commits to the systematic development of renewable energy.

From the cobblestone streets of downtown Reykjavik, the storybook-cute capital, to the stark fjords of the east, positive collateral benefits—many of them unintended—are evident. None looms larger than the new $1.5 billion Alcoa Fjarðaál plant, which represents the largest single private-sector investment in Iceland's epic history. East Iceland, separated from the more populous west coast by the vast Vatnajökull glacier, has been down on its luck in recent years. The fishing villages nestled against the rocky shore, separated by mountains—one of which is penetrated by a terrifying one-lane tunnel—have been losing jobs and their youth to Reykjavik. Reindeer seem to outnumber people.

But the American aluminum giant decided to build its first new smelter in 20 years near the town of Reydarfjordur, largely because of the promise of abundant clean power. Smelters require an immense amount of energy. Power-intensive companies like Alcoa are concerned both with their images and with the potential for initiatives that imposes costs on burning fossil fuels—from emission caps to carbon taxes. So when Landsvirkjun, the national utility, said it would build a 690-megawatt hydroelectric power plant 30 miles away, Alcoa took the plunge. Construction began in 2004, and today the massive plant—its 336 pots cover an expanse of nearly three-quarters of a mile, the largest such line in the world—produces massive quantities of aluminum bars, coil, and sheets. "It's almost the ideal place to invest, because of the combination of a highly skilled work force, an open and transparent democracy and the endless supplies of renewable energy," says Jake Siewert, vice president for environment, health, and safety at Alcoa.

The plant employs about 650 people directly—400 Alcoa employees and 250 contractors in areas such as maintenance, catering, and security. Alcoa's presence has also stimulated the creation of an additional 300 jobs in shipping, logistics, and engineering, says Tomas Sigurðsson, a Cornell-trained engineer who is managing director of Alcoa Fjarðaál. By creating enough jobs for 15 percent of the region's work force, the plant has lured Icelanders back to the east and stimulated the first housing construction in more than a decade. "The Alcoa project has revitalized the economy on the east coast of Iceland," says Prime Minister Haarde. The plant is also a showpiece for Alcoa's sustainability efforts. As we sit in the glass-walled cafeteria, dining on curried Icelandic lamb and looking out over crystalline water, an official explains how new technology captures emissions from the plant's smokestacks.

Icelanders regard plentiful, cheap, guilt-free energy as part of their birthright. In the 1930s, Reykjavik's municipal utilities began tapping into the Earth's crust, liberating energy bubbling under the surface to heat homes and water for domestic use. In the 1960s and 1970s, the country began to tap geothermal sources to drive turbines and create electricity. As Iceland has grown more connected with the global economy, its financial markets and institutions have been subject to volatility. But consumers have been insulated from the shocks of higher energy prices. Many things are expensive in Iceland, especially food. (A slice of surprisingly decent pizza in downtown Reykjavik will set you back $7.) But energy is cheap. Over the past 10 years,
the price of electricity, compared with a broad measure of inflation, has fallen 75 percent in Iceland.

Icelanders are energy hogs. SUVs are as common on the roads in Reykjavik as they are in Rochester, N.Y. They use electricity to power de-icing systems in driveways and city streets and to heat 130 outdoor swimming pools, which are to Iceland what Starbucks outlets are to Seattle. "If you want to hear the current gossip in England, you go to a pub; here, you go to a swimming pool at 6:30 in the morning," says Asgeir Margeirsson, CEO of Geysir Green Energy, a private-equity firm that specializes in geothermal energy. In 2004, per capita electricity use in Iceland was nearly twice the amount in the United States. But their profligacy doesn't tax the economy or the environment unduly. From the low-slung headquarters of Reykjavik Energy, the capital city's utility, puffs rise from the horizon. The water vapor is the only form of emissions produced by the Hellisheiði Geothermal Power Plant, which sits in the snow-covered hills 13 miles outside of town. Iceland is one of the world's wealthiest nations, measured by income per capita, and the U.N. Human Development Index rates it the most livable nation on the planet.

In the interconnected global economy, Iceland is discovering new ways to export renewable energy—whether it is building geothermal-powered tourist attractions or using hydroelectric power as an inducement for industrial companies like Alcoa. And today, Iceland views its expertise as a means of becoming a bigger player on the world stage. "We can contribute to the economic development of foreign countries by teaching them to use this resource," says Gunnar Orn Gunnarson, managing director of Reykjavik Energy Invest, a unit of an Icelandic utility that is currently working on a project in Djibouti—which lies astride East Africa's Rift Valley—that could provide electricity and water for drinking and irrigation.

Enex, an Icelandic firm backed by Geysir Green Energy, is in a joint venture with Chinese energy company Sinopec to build and manage a geothermal district heating system in Xianyang, China. Iceland America Energy, a subsidiary of Enex, is developing a geothermal plant in the Truckhaven area in Southern California. Glitnir Bank, one of the largest Icelandic banks, employs a staff geologist to evaluate geothermal projects and has funded geothermal companies in Nevada and California.

Icelandic New Energy, a four-person firm, is spearheading the country’s efforts to sever the nation’s remaining links to fossil fuels. In 2003, it opened the world's first commercial filling station and started running a fleet of three hydrogen-powered buses. Today, the company is overseeing the deployment of two dozen hydrogen-powered cars, including rentals available from Hertz. "If we can convert geothermal electricity into fuel, we can be a 100 percent sustainable society," says Jon Bjorn Skulason, general manager of Icelandic New Energy, as he guides his hydrogen-powered Prius through traffic on Reykjavik's Highway.

1. He pulls over to a Shell station and inserts a card reader to activate a hydrogen pump.

Even with gas at $8 a gallon in local currency, an expensive hydrogen-powered Prius isn't competitive with a gas-guzzling Jeep Cherokee. In Iceland, the public sector has funded the hydrogen experiments and continues to play a significant role in the development of alternative energy. The efforts to move beyond polluting fossil fuels carry their own environmental costs. To build the hydroelectric plant that serves Alcoa required flooding pristine areas, for example. By and large, however, there's a consensus in Iceland that having the government take such action is good economics and environmental policy. "From a global perspective, it is more responsible to produce aluminum in Iceland from clean energy sources rather than producing them elsewhere from fossil fuels,” says Prime Minister Haarde.

Companies are coming around to a similar view. Sipping a cappuccino and looking out over Reykjavik's harbor, Ossur Skarphedinsson, minister of industry, energy, and tourism, lists the blue-chip companies that have inquired about tapping into Iceland's cheap green energy. An American firm and Icelandic investors are spending $300 million to build a data center that will be rented out to foreign tenants—another new industry, and another way to export a natural resource.

At the Blue Lagoon spa, where plans have been drafted for a 150-room hotel, Anna Sverrisdottir, talks up her company's latest efforts to turn green energy into green. For about a decade, the spa has been selling pricey skin-care products at its gift shop and at the airport. This month, she says, Blue Lagoon's masks and muds will begin to appear in stores in America. "Do you know Saks Fifth Avenue?"

This piece also appears in the current issue of Newsweek.

Other Newsweek stories on the theme of environmental leadership include:

Which candidate is greenest?
Why cars don't get 50 mpg
Gallery: The century's environmental leaders
Gallery: The history of solar energy

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates Unplugged
A new book strips away the nostalgia around this classic encounter.
By David Greenberg
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 1:44 PM ET
Cynics love to groan about presidential debates. The historic 1960 encounters between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy, though now swathed in myth, gave rise to gripes that those political quiz shows weren't true debates but merely joint press conferences. And ever since general-election debates resumed in 1976, the same critique has appeared each cycle. The candidates, we're reminded, don't think spontaneously so much as regurgitate excerpts from their stump speeches or recite canned jokes. Self-important moderators degrade the discourse with gotcha questions, bullying candidates into irresponsible pledges or making them look evasive if they dare to stand their ground. Afterward, the usual cast of blowhards sets to work ignoring all but a few sound bites while dwelling on—and thus influencing—the question of who comes out ahead.

The Lincoln-Douglas senatorial debates of 1858—the seven three-hour-long contests conducted around Illinois by Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, the incumbent, and Republican Abraham Lincoln, the former congressman and challenger—stand in our collective memory as the beau ideal beside which today's events supposedly pale. In *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America*, historian Allen C. Guelzo of Gettysburg College seeks to rescue these momentous clashes from their gilded place in our lore. As an exemplar of the gauzy distortions of hindsight, Guelzo cites late media scholar Neil Postman's pronouncement that where Lincoln-Douglas embodied a literary oratory and belonged to "the Age of Exposition," Nixon-Kennedy and subsequent made-for-TV clashes were nothing but creatures of "the Age of Show Business."

Please, Mr. Postman. Scholars should know better than to traffic in such nostalgia; the Lincoln-Douglas contest, after all, provided plenty of entertainment, too. Guelzo's feat is that he does more than just resist the romanticized view of the event. He takes on with equal relish the counterclaim, widely accepted by academics, that the Lincoln-Douglas encounters were simply the trashy "political theater" of a pre-wired era. While some historians have argued that the turnout at debates like these reflected simply the robust energies of the party machines, which hustled out crowds and plied them with food and drink, Guelzo gives the debates their popular due.

He does so by locating them within the context of the 1858 senatorial campaign, enfolding them in a seamless, if sometimes heavy-going, narrative. He also grounds them in confident analyses of the period's political culture: the state of the parties, the prevalent style of campaigning and public speaking, and the issues that voters worried about—above all, the debate over slavery's expansion into the American West.

In 1858, America was approaching civil war. For more than a generation, a series of compromises between North and South—the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854—had put off without resolving the question of whether the nation could remain "half-slave and half-free," as Lincoln put it in his "House Divided" speech while accepting the Republican Party's senatorial nomination early that summer. The core question was whether to permit slavery in newly acquired Western lands. As early as 1854, Douglas had championed the principle called "popular sovereignty," which let settlers of these new territories decide for themselves whether to legalize slavery. In response, Lincoln, who would soon leave the Whig Party for the fledgling Republican Party (formed in response to the Kansas controversy), emerged as one of Douglas' most prominent critics, a "free soiler" devoted to keeping slavery from the territories, going so far as to argue against his fellow Illinoisan that slavery was ultimately incompatible with the doctrine that all men are created equal.

For the Republicans to nominate such a fierce critic of slavery's expansion in 1858 was risky. Some national party leaders, such as newspaperman Horace Greeley of New York, threw their support to Douglas. Others worried that Lincoln's stance too closely resembled abolitionism—a dirty word in some parts—which they feared would alienate the Whigs whose votes might swing the election. Douglas, for his part, also had a fine line to walk. Having fallen out with President James Buchanan, a Democrat, for helping defeat Kansas' pro-slavery "Lecompton Constitution," the veteran senator had to rally Democratic loyalists without seeming to turn a blind eye to slavery's evils.

Although Douglas at first spurned the idea of debating, he soon agreed to square off against his lesser-known rival. Such an extensive joint "canvass" was unusual, especially since they were campaigning, strictly speaking, not for their own election but on behalf of their parties, seeking to elect state legislators who would in turn choose the next U.S. senator. Each needed to sweep into Springfield enough party-mates to guarantee victory when the new legislature convened. Thus the high season of the campaign, from August through the November election, became in effect a single, rolling roadshow of a debate.

Guelzo carefully documents how each of the seven face-offs assumed a slightly different character. At each stop, Lincoln and Douglas replied to the other's charges from previous debates and tailored their remarks to local audiences, whether Republican, Democratic, or Whig. They also indulged in ad hominem attacks, slug charges of dirty dealing, and distorted the other's positions. The fierceness of these exchanges as Guelzo presents them is bracing to behold—and, for what it's worth, lends needed perspective to the dire claims we've been hearing lately that this year's presidential campaign is uncommonly divisive.

The most jarring of these appeals are the frankly racist ones. Douglas demonized Lincoln as a supporter of full equality for blacks—not just "natural" rights such as freedom from slavery—and branded his own white supremacist bona fides. Between debates, he played to the ugliest stereotypes, ranting, as one paper noted, about "the unfortunate odor of the black man [and]
Like a bad dream that keeps recurring, One Big conclusion, rooted in the ideas of Harvard political
despite the latest could be routinely deprived of." These moments
with Variety One Big to piss off Steve Martin
trumpeted that Paramount made (and that was a while ago,
it. The constant canvassing of Lincoln and Douglas
broke a few days ago. Turns out someone made one big
around Illinois in the fall of 1858, their growing irritation
because environment of raucous and sometimes ugly campaigning but
political ideas are most likely to occur not
Indeed, it's worth considering whether fruitful clashes about
political ideas are most likely to occur not despite an
environment of raucous and sometimes bullying but because of it. The constant canvassing of Lincoln and Douglas
around Illinois in the fall of 1858, their growing irritation with
each other and desire to demarcate their differences, produced
plenty of coarseness and heat. But the very intensity of their
engagement seems to have been necessary to generate a light
about slavery and its expansion that, among its other effects,
helped demonstrate the fitness of a newly prominent and battle-
tested one-time congressman for the presidency two years later.

Yet neither the demagoguery nor the grandstanding nor the
cheap shots eclipsed the debates' substance. On the contrary,
Guelzo shows how the candidates worked over the whole
complex of slavery-related issues, in all their difficulty—not
with the language and rigor of philosophers but with
sophisticated reasoning nonetheless. Indeed, the main flaw of
Guelzo's book, its eye-reflecting density, results not from any
clothing in his prose, which is supple, but simply from the highly
intricate nature of the candidates' arguments. (Guelzo includes
scorecards to help his readers keep track.)

How audiences responded to these extended presentations,
Guelzo concedes, is hard to know. But he suggests that Douglas'
slender victory in November had a Pyrrhic quality. Lincoln, after
all, went on to earn a national reputation while Douglas muddied
his own defense of popular sovereignty enough to harm him in
the South two years later—when the Lincoln-Douglas rematch
(sans debates) put the free soiler in the White House.

Guelzo's conclusion, rooted in the ideas of Harvard political
theorist Michael Sandel, interprets the debates as a triumph of
Lincoln's moral vision over Douglas' arid proceduralism. It's
presented as something of an afterthought and doesn't adequately
close his stirring tale. He might have been better off drawing out
a claim that he leaves implicit, almost untapped: that down-and-
dirty politics and serious argument about burning issues need not
exist in separate realms.

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politic ideas are most likely to occur not despite an
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engagement seems to have been necessary to generate a light
about slavery and its expansion that, among its other effects,
helped demonstrate the fitness of a newly prominent and battle-
tested one-time congressman for the presidency two years later.

The story about the two starring in a movie called One Big
Happy broke a few days ago. Turns out someone made one big
boo-boo.

Keaton was interested in doing a project with Martin, and, we're
told, he's fond of her, too. But he was not so sure about One Big
Happy, an idea for a family comedy from Chris Keyser and Amy
Lippman, who created Party of Five (and that was a while ago,
wasn't it?).

Apparently Martin remained strictly noncommittal about the
idea. But on March 30, Variety trumpeted that Paramount made
a high-six-figure deal for the pitch with Keaton and Martin
attached to star.

"He was annoyed that his name was put on as attached without
his authorization," says another source with firsthand knowledge of the situation. "He was more than annoyed. He was really
pissed off."

Who was responsible for getting ahead of the game? Our source
believes the fault lies with Endeavor, the agency that represents
Keaton. Her agent did not return our call. Another source says
the idea was to nudge Martin along with the announcement. If
so, it didn't work.

The tale of the Keaton-Martin reunion was widely disseminated,
and at first Martin's "people" were going to demand a retraction.
But after Paramount did some fast footwork, everyone
concluded that it was only an announcement, after all, and let it
go. You know how it is in Hollywood—just one big happy.
(link)

April 9, 2008

Cold sweat: Like a bad dream that keeps recurring, the latest
tape to leak to the Huffington Post in the Pellicano affair
reminds us ever so vividly of what it was like to deal with
Michael Ovitz. The recording is an April 2002 talk between
Ovitz and the now-imprisoned private detective. It was played in court today, with Ovitz on the stand.

When he placed the call, Ovitz had identified himself as "Michael" to Pellicano's assistant and said the call was about one of Pellicano's kids. The detective—obviously shaken—tries to explain his reaction to hearing that the caller is really Ovitz by saying that he actually is having a problem with one of his children. What's revealing is that Ovitz, who has complained publicly and bitterly and sometimes falsely that journalists were writing inappropriately about his kids, felt perfectly free to use one of Pellicano's kids for his own obscure purposes. "I knew you'd get on the phone," Ovitz explains. "Am I right or am I wrong?" To which Pellicano replies, "You should have just said, 'It's Michael Ovitz' and I would have gotten on the phone." (Duh.)

Ovitz then claims that his real reason for lying was that he wanted to keep his identity from Pellicano's assistant. As the tape rolled. Oh, the irony.

When Pellicano mentions that one of his children has a "problem," Ovitz swings into a trademark move: "You can always call me if you need medical help." That's a classic Hollywood favor that big donors to hospitals can confer, and it can certainly create lasting gratitude. "Do you need any help at UCLA?" Ovitz continues. The previous year, Ovitz had pledged $25 million to UCLA's medical school. That offer was to be eclipsed a mere month after this conversation with Pellicano by a $200 million gift from Ovitz foe David Geffen. The announcement came just as Ovitz's management company, AMG, went kaput. When it comes to vengeance, Geffen is truly an artist.

Having called Pellicano, Ovitz—ever the agent—tries to make it sound like he's doing Pellicano a favor. He wants to meet, he says, because "I think it would be beneficial to you and probably beneficial to me." Of course, Pellicano is only too happy to help. And not that Ovitz is self-dramatizing. He simply needs to see Pellicano about "the single most complex situation imaginable."

Apparently, that is having a couple of journalists writing negative stories about his troubled business. Thank God that doesn't happen to people every day.

As for the Ovitz testimony today, he expressed gratitude to Pellicano for getting him good information. How that information benefited him, however, remains unclear. (link)

April 8, 2008

Nein: So, the release of Valkyrie, the Tom Cruise film about the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler, has been pushed back—again—from October to February 2009. The studio says that the Presidents' Day weekend represented an opportunity to cash in. But many see the move as a very bad sign, and, indeed, the buzz on the film is not good.

What's not in dispute is that filming remains unfinished, which is remarkable for a movie that started shooting in September 2007. One piece not yet shot is a battle sequence that begins the movie. An insider says director Bryan Singer will film a scaled-back version of what was originally conceived as a Saving Private Ryan-type opening. According to this source, the sequence was abandoned at one time as a cost-saving measure—and this movie is racking up the bucks—but when it became clear that the film was too talky, the battle was reinstated. The sequence explains why hero Claus von Stauffenberg wears that eye patch.

A studio source contends that the battle scene was always in. Apparently, it was going to be filmed in Dubai, which tried to lure the production with hopes of a publicity windfall derived from the presence of Tom, Katie, and Suri. Film your next movie in Dubai! That deal fell apart, and no location has been selected.

But our insider doubts that the addition of the action sequence will help. He says the problem is a script that read well on the page but played too melodramatically on the set. The studio insider responds that the script got some routine fine-tuning as it was shot but wasn't a major problem. (The production toyed early with having the actors do accents, but everyone agreed: It wouldn't do to sound like Harrison Ford in K-19: The Widowmaker. Nonetheless, some actors apparently found it hard not to slip into an accent, anyway. Something about that Nazi uniform.)

Just to be clear, our insider is not hating on Tom Cruise. He found the star to be unfailingly courteous. "Everything has to be approved by him, but he doesn't hang things up," he says. "He's a control freak, but professional." But our source hears that Cruise wants to create some space before this film is released to help himself and the studio he's supposed to be reviving, United Artists. In that space, he wants to lighten up, perhaps get another project going, possibly something with Ben Stiller. Something like Hardy Men, a project at Fox about the detective brothers all grown up.

What seems clear is that Cruise has begun to appreciate the magnitude of career damage that he has inflicted upon himself, though he may not completely grasp the cause.

Cruise has already taken a step in the lighten-up direction with that cameo so obligingly reported in the New York Times last week. In the upcoming Stiller film Tropic Thunder, Cruise does a turn as a studio mogul, supposedly based on the old man who fired him, Sumner Redstone. By all accounts, the performance, though brief, is funny. By some accounts, the Cruise camp is
claiming this will be a game changer for him. That strikes a leading agent, not associated with the film, as "the hype machine" at work. Only in Hollywood would people believe that a brief inside joke in a film (one that is supposedly funny at moments but doesn't quite gel) could wipe away all the ink that's been spilled on Cruise.

Certainly, Stiller has a hit coming next May in Night at the Museum 2. We hear there may be another Cruise cameo in that film (imagine—Cruise, part of Stiller's comic gang!), though Fox denies that. Meanwhile, our Valkyrie source tells us about a bit of humor on the set. It seems some folks displayed posters of old Cruise movies—Cocktail and so on—and decorated the star's face with eye patches. Apparently that bit of lightening up was not appreciated. (link)

April 2, 2008

Yee-haw: NBC promised year-round fun at its "in-fronts," held Wednesday afternoon. The network doesn't have many new hits to tout, so it's trying to lure advertisers with an ambitious plan: original shows 12 months a year. And instead of waiting until May to present its plans at the upfronts, NBC is tossing a lot at the wall right now.

Here's a little dish on the fates of what may be your favorite shows:

Office and America Ferrera for Ugly Betty. They chased Slater to London and Spokane! Once the network got him, it skipped the pilot and went straight to series.

Silverman cautioned that the schedule remains fluid, invoking—and mixing—sports metaphors: "We're constantly playing a three-dimensional chess game. …We obviously are going to need to be able to call audibles." (link)

March 28, 2008

Order in the court: Your Hollywoodland correspondent decided to take a firsthand look at the Pellicano trial on Thursday, arriving in the midst of seemingly endless testimony about how phone companies work.

Even Pellicano—balding, wearing unfashionable glasses and his prison-issue, olive-drab windbreaker—yawned as he watched the endless cross-examination. Seated along the defendant's row with Pellicano were accused co-conspirators from the phone company and the police department. The courtroom, with its high vaulted ceiling and rows of recessed lights, felt like a weird converted airplane hangar.

There was momentary hope that things might perk up when the phone company guy got off the stand and Freddie DeMann, former partner with Madonna in Maverick Records, stepped up. He testified about shelling out $135,000 for Pellicano to snoop on his son-in-law to establish whether he was cheating on DeMann's daughter. He admitted to listening to revealing taped phone conversations involving that son-in-law. The testimony was awkward but not devastating. One fact seemed worth noting: Others who admitted on the stand that they had listened to tapes that were allegedly made illegally have testified under a grant of immunity. But there was no mention of immunity during DeMann's testimony, and yet he hasn't been charged with anything.

Pellicano did not question him. The attorney representing ex-cop Mark Arneson tried to ask DeMann if he didn't think his daughter was better off after Dad got the dirt on her husband. The relevance of that as a legal defense was obscure; the judge sustained an objection, so DeMann didn't answer.

More pathetic was former phone company employee Teresa Wright, who wept copiously while she admitted that she conducted "hundreds" of unauthorized searches at the behest of Rayford Turner, an old friend and colleague who was sitting there in court down the row from Pellicano. She acknowledged tearfully that she, too, is awaiting sentencing.

This week's biggest drama involved an announcement in court on Tuesday that lawyer Bert Fields was planning to take the Fifth if called to testify. (Recall that Fields is the lawyer who...
hired Pellicano on behalf of many clients over many years, including Brad Grey and Michael Ovitz.)

Fields promptly denied that and said he'd testify if called. The U.S. attorney's office then issued a statement explaining the confusion this way: Fields' personal lawyer, John Keker, had advised that Fields would invoke his Fifth Amendment rights but then the counsel for Fields' law firm said it wasn't so. And Keker was, mysteriously, out as Fields' lawyer.

What does it mean? We consulted former prosecutor Laurie Levinson, who's not following the trial day-by-day but knows how these things work. She says it's possible that Keker reflexively wanted Fields to take the Fifth, as any criminal-defense attorney might, and then found out that his client disagreed with that plan. Or it's possible that Fields knew of the plan but didn't like the reaction after it was made public. Or perhaps his firm didn't like the reaction. It could be that Keker thought his client should take the Fifth and wasn't comfortable with hanging around if that didn't happen.

Keker's reputation is so good, she says, that most people would give him the benefit of any doubt in any rift with Fields. Of course, Keker can't talk about what happened because it's privileged.

As to whether the prosecutors will call Fields, she was doubtful. Fields is not the prosecution's friend in this matter, she says, and calling him would represent unknown and unnecessary risk. Just another disappointment in what was once supposed to be the trial of all Hollywood trials. (link)

March 21, 2008

Sordid details: As expected, Paramount chief Brad Grey's testimony at the Pellicano trial was not too sexy. Garry Shandling may have gotten people's hopes up with his complaints about Grey's behavior as his manager, but no one in this case has a stake in pursuing that angle. The question was whether Grey knew of Pellicano's alleged wrongdoing, and Grey, naturally, said he did not.

So it's hardly surprising that Shandling—a professional, after all—turned out to be more entertaining than Grey. For those looking for a big takedown of Hollywood power, it's long been clear that the trial seems unlikely to pay off. But the fact that Pellicano's big-name clients appear to have skated doesn't mean that the allegations in this case aren't sensational. They could hardly be more so.

If the government's got its facts right (and Pellicano, acting as his own counsel, isn't mounting a serious defense so far), then the worst is true: Justice in this country can be bought pretty easily, if not cheaply.

The case has elicited testimony that Pellicano convinced cops and phone company employees to snoop through data that should have had vigilant protection. He perverted the system, and not just to benefit rich clients who wanted to shake off unwanted spouses or thwart opponents in business deals. He is accused of having successfully intimidated a number of alleged rape victims to prevent their testifying against a client. Got that? It would mean that he helped an alleged serial rapist get off the hook.

And he got away with it all for years.

For a long time, Pellicano's tough-guy talk seemed to put him on the verge of self-parody: the hard-boiled gumshoe playing the private-dick role in the manner that people in Hollywood would expect. And in many cases, his alleged victims were hard to pity—like producer Bo Zenga, who had to take the Fifth more than 100 times when he was deposed in a lawsuit that he had initiated. (Zenga has also declared himself an award-winning screenwriter when all he had "won" was a contest that he'd made up himself.)

Then there was Lisa Bonder, who tried to shake down Kirk Kerkorian for $320,000 a month after gaming a DNA test to trick him into supporting a child who wasn't his. It was hard to feel bad when Pellicano exposed that type of behavior.

But even if all of Pellicano's victims had put themselves in harm's way, what he appears to have done goes far beyond their concerns. Every day of testimony sharpens the focus on allegations that should scare everyone—even folks who have never gotten closer to Hollywood than the multiplex. (link)

Correction, March 19, 2008: The item on the Pellicano trial originally included a photo of John Connolly, who's actually a reporter who investigated Pellicano. The image has been removed.

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hot document

Polygamy Affidavit

Four hundred children aren't feeling the Big Love in Texas.

By Bonnie Goldstein

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 3:49 PM ET

From: Bonnie Goldstein
Over the last week, the Texas Child Protective Services removed more than 400 children from a religious compound at the Yearning for Zion ranch in rural Schleicher County. The ranch is owned by the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Latter-day Saints, an unsanctioned Mormon sect that practices polygamy. After the agency "determined that an immediate danger exists to the physical health and safety of the children who are residents of the YFZ Ranch," it filed an affidavit (below and the following five pages) in state court to permit the rescue of a teenage mother from the 1,700-acre property.

The raid was conducted in response to telephone calls on March 29 and 30 by a teenager who told child-safety and shelter workers that she and her 8-month-old infant were virtual prisoners inside the sect grounds. ("She was being held against her will … and church members have told her that if she tried to leave she will be found and locked up"; see Page 3.) The girl described many beatings she had endured from the decades-older man to whom she was "spiritually married," who "was also married to several other women" (Page 2). She "also indicated she is several weeks pregnant" (Page 3). At the end of one conversation, the frightened caller "began crying and then stated that she is happy and fine and does not want to get in trouble and that everything she had previously said should be forgotten" (Page 4). Although hundreds of other young girls, many of them pregnant, have now been taken into child custody, Texas authorities have so far not located the girl who called for help.

The religious group claims the search was unconstitutional.

Send ideas for Hot Document to documents@slate.com. Please indicate whether you wish to remain anonymous.
For the year 2000, Hillary Rodham Clinton (occupation: attorney) and her husband, William Jefferson Clinton (occupation: U.S. president) paid close to $50,000 in federal income taxes on their adjusted gross income of $357,000. The 1040 tax return the couple filed for that year, his last in the White House (pages 7 and 8), was released by Hillary’s presidential campaign on Friday, along with the couple’s returns for six steadily more prosperous years (see returns for 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005). By 2006 (excerpts below and on pages 2 through 6), Hillary (occupation: U.S. senator) and Bill (occupation: speaking and writing) had upped their adjusted gross income to more than $16 million and paid $4.6 million in annual federal taxes (Page 2), after claiming $2.6 million in itemized deductions (Page 3). Although Hillary’s Senate salary was more than $150,000, the bulk of the couple’s income came from Bill’s speaking engagements, which garnered nearly $10.5 million (Page 4). The Clintons’ twin careers as book authors brought in another $500,000 from her writing (Page 5), and nearly $3 million from his (Page 6).

Send ideas for Hot Document to documents@slate.com. Please indicate whether you wish to remain anonymous.
So far, the public conversation about doping has focused almost entirely on sports: Did Roger Clemens take steroids and human growth hormone? Does Mark McGwire belong in the Hall of Fame? Nerds in academia and the media have chipped about these topics in op-eds, columns, and TV debates. It's easy to bat such questions around, figuratively, when that's as close as you'll ever get to a real bat. But what happens when the questions start hitting closer to home? What happens when the doping spotlight turns from jocks to nerds?

That's what the Nature survey and related work by Anjan Chatterjee and Martha Farah of the University of Pennsylvania are beginning to do. They're shifting the doping conversation from brawn to brains. A conversation that's been mired in laughter at Jose Canseco and buttock injections is going to get uncomfortable for many of us who have been laughing the loudest. We thought we were above scrutiny, since we sit behind desks. But it turns out that we, or at least many of our colleagues, are taking drugs for an edge, much like the athletes we scold. And if Chatterjee is right, the problem will only get worse. Off-label cognitive enhancers are easy to get, especially over the Internet, and they're gradually becoming normal in colleges and high schools.

The Nature survey suggests that some of us are suffering side effects, just like the jocks. But we do have an advantage: We're slicker at rationalizing our behavior. "As a professional, it is my duty to use my resources to the greatest benefit of humanity," a 66-year-old respondent wrote as he filled out the Nature survey. "If 'enhancers' can contribute to this humane service, it is my duty to do so."

For the most part, I'm a skeptic of anti-doping policies. I'm wary of legislating where no harm is involved, which is where I think doping is headed, as techniques improve. The lines drawn tend to be pretty arbitrary, and after we've trampled the old rules, we often wonder why we ever enforced them. But a shift in the conversation from jock doping to nerd doping might help me take the arguments for restriction more seriously.

When Nature asked whether "cognitive enhancing drugs should be restricted" in the context of "exam entry into university" or "standardized testing situations," most of its reader-respondents said yes. Maybe their experiences as test-takers and test-givers helped them appreciate the threat to equality. Nature also asked another good question: "If other children at school were taking cognitive enhancing drugs, would you feel pressure to give such drugs to your children?" Two-thirds of respondents said they wouldn't, but one-third said they would.

That's always been a problem with enhancements: The more common they become, the more they feel like necessities. When the kid in question is somebody else's high-school linebacker, it's easy to scold or look the other way. But when it's your honor-roll kid, the plight of the doper starts to feel a bit less academic.

"Look who's doping," says the headline over Nature's report on its new reader survey about brain-enhancing drugs. Some 1,400 Nature readers took the online poll. Most clearly identified themselves as scientists; others indicated they were academics or journalists. The sample isn't random, but it sure is eye-opening.

The survey focused on three drugs: beta blockers, which are often prescribed for cardiac problems; Ritalin (methylphenidate), normally prescribed for ADHD; and Provigil (modafinil), generally prescribed for sleeping disorders. Each of these drugs also has "off-label" uses—purposes for which it's unofficially used but not officially prescribed. The article notes that Ritalin is "well-known on college campuses as a 'study aid,' " Provigil is taken "to combat general fatigue or overcome jet lag," and beta blockers can control anxiety. When taken for the latter reasons, these drugs aren't exactly therapeutic. They become, as the article puts it, "neuroenhancers."

The survey asked respondents whether they'd ever taken the drugs in question. Respondents were given three options: A) "No, I have never taken any of these drugs for any reason." B) "Yes, I have taken one of these drugs for a medically diagnosed condition (e.g. narcolepsy, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or hypertension)." C) "Yes, I have taken one of these drugs or other drugs for non-medical reasons to improve my concentration, focus and memory." Thirteen percent answered B. Twenty percent answered A.

You don't have to be a scientist to do the math: The number of people who said they'd used these drugs for enhancement was 50 percent higher than the number who said they'd used them for therapy. Eighty-six percent of the admitted self-enhancers said they'd done it to improve concentration; 31 percent thought their pill of choice improved memory. Nearly two-thirds said they had colleagues who used the same drugs.

That's a lot of doping. As my colleague Daniel Engber points out, neuroactive substances—specifically, beer—are already known to affect scientific performance. But drugs that move your career in a more positive direction are a relatively new frontier.
human nature
Tuck Off
The healthy recession in cosmetic surgery.
By William Saletan
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:52 AM ET

If your local real estate agent's face is hanging low these days, it might be more than sadness. The recession's latest victim is cosmetic surgery. "Plastic surgeons from the Southland to South Florida said some colleagues are struggling to stay in business," Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar reports in the Los Angeles Times. A breast implant company disclosed a decline in surgeries late last year; a laser eye-surgery firm has lowered its forecast based on a similar trend early this year. A professional breast augmenter frets that in January and February, business for some of his colleagues was off 30 percent to 40 percent.

Excuse me while I celebrate.

It's not the suffering that gratifies me. It's the reaffirmation of the distinction between necessary and unnecessary procedures. People have always practiced medicine, albeit clumsily. And they've always adorned themselves, to the point of reshaping their heads and bodies, as the Mayans and Chinese did. (Even the Bush administration has yielded to nipple rings.) But despite the occasional overlap, medicine and body art remained two different things. One aimed at health, the other at beauty. One was necessary, the other elective. If your treatment looked really cool but all the patients died, it was a failure.

Modern cosmetic surgery has challenged that distinction. It has done so not in theory but in practice, by making aesthetic procedures so safe and lucrative that people who would otherwise have devoted their careers to medicine turned instead to cosmetic work.

Depending on how you count it, on an annual basis, the cosmetic-surgery industry—subset of the "luxury healthcare sector" and parent of the "facial aesthetics market"—is now worth $12 billion to $20 billion a year. Two weeks ago, the New York Times reported that last year, among 18 medical specialty fields, the three that attracted med-school seniors with the highest medical-board test scores were the most cosmetically oriented: plastic surgery, dermatology, and otolaryngology.

Cheerleaders hail the industry's expansion as a manifestation of upward mobility. First it was "democratized," as it became affordable to the middle class. Now it's being "globalized," with Europeans touted as the new clients whose influx will take up any slack in U.S. demand. I'm a big fan of capitalism, always glad to see it praised for the wealth it creates and spreads on the way up. But in this case, I prefer the discipline it imposes on the way down.

A month or two ago, the industry seemed invincible. "For a growing number of Americans, Botox is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity," the Associated Press declared. Despite the recession, doctors, companies, and financial analysts were projecting double-digit growth, and not just in lips and bust lines. Their confidence was based on several theories. One was that people valued bodily appearance more than jewelry, fancy handbags, and other luxuries. Another was that social pressure to look young would force us to keep shelling out. A third was that cosmetic procedures were "addictive," largely because patients feared regressing to their previous appearance. "You get used to the way you look," one analyst observed. "It's an incredibly effective dynamic."

Some people do seem addicted. "I would rather have Botox than go out to dinner," one woman tells the Los Angeles Times. But her addiction seems to have found its limits. The real-estate bust has forced her to give up her four-figure treatments. Another woman has put off a tummy tuck. A third has postponed a face lift. "I can't allow myself the luxury of thinking about something that I can't have," she explains.

More effectively than any bioethicist, the recession is reminding people that cosmetic work isn't medicine. "While healthcare spending as a whole has traditionally moved independently of the economy—a safe haven—that really isn't the case with plastic surgery," a financial analyst tells the Times. In the new, sobered economy, the paper reports, some cosmetic doctors are diversifying into "reconstructive surgery for cancer patients and others that is covered by insurance." Insurance!

Say what you will about coverage-denying bean counters, but they do enforce the essential priority of urgent procedures over elective ones. In a health-care industry controlled by tight budgets and insurers, you might even see the cream of the med-school crop shift back to the kind of work that keeps people alive. I hope they're well-paid for it, and I hope the next rising tide lifts millions more families into the ranks of the insured. But let's never forget what the bad times taught us about what matters and what doesn't.

juicy bits
Oliver Stone Takes On George W. Bush
Slate's advance look at Bush, the movie.
By Juliet Lapidos
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 5:12 PM ET
An early draft of Oliver Stone’s Bush, the life story of our 43rd president, has been leaked to ABC and is garnering attention from various news outlets. Not to be outdone, Slate has acquired a copy of the screenplay, dated October 15, 2007, and titled Bush, though IMDB now lists the working title as W. In Stone’s words, the film asks: “How did Bush go from being an alcoholic bum to the most powerful figure in the world?”

The screenplay, written by Stanley Weiser, plays up the rivalry between W. and his father, suggests at least one conspiracy theory, and dramatizes W.’s near-fatal encounter with a pretzel in 2002. But compared with Stone’s paranoid take on the JFK assassination, the script lacks imagination. For the most part, it trots out well-known Bushisms (“I’m the decider,” “shock and awe,” “is our children learning,” and “axis of evil”) and seems content to re-create equally well-known events from Bush’s presidency (pressuring George Tenet to produce actionable intelligence on Iraq, proclaiming “mission accomplished” on the USS Lincoln).

Spoiler alert: Bush gets the intelligence he needs, but the mission isn't quite accomplished. If you're not averse to a few other spoilers, follow Slate’s handy guide straight to the good parts.

Alcoholic Bum

Page 3: Stone’s W. doesn't spend any more time in the library than the real W. did. In an early scene set at Yale’s DKE frat house, the script calls for young W. to pour “cheap vodka into a large garbage can” while a fellow pledge “mixes in orange juice.” Classy. Then W. “takes a snoot-full” (presumably of cocaine, though the script doesn’t specify) and sings the chorus of the Yale Whiffenpoof song: “We’re poor little lambs who have lost our way. Baa! Baa! Baa!”

Pages 48-51: A "slightly snookered" W. nearly kills his friend Don Evans during a joy ride in a Cessna jet. Evans gets worried when the jet begins to wobble and shake; he asks W., “Tell the truth—this is the first time you’ve ever flown a Cessna, isn’t it?” W.’s response: “This is how you learn. By doing. No need to ask a million questions.” Could this scene, which ends with the plane spinning out of control and landing in a desert, be a metaphor for W.’s learn-by-doing approach to war?

Page 21-22: After being accepted to Harvard Business School, W. downs a pint of Wild Turkey, drives onto the lawn of his parents’ Washington, D.C., home, and challenges his daddy to a boxing match. George Sr. is pretty reasonable: “My advice to you—go to an AA meeting.” George W. is pretty adolescent: “Thank you, Mr. Perfect. Mr. War Hero. Mr. Fucking-God-Almighty.”

Page 60: W.’s DKE habits die hard. The morning after his 40th birthday, an extremely hung-over W. goes on an aborted jog: “Pine trees blurring past. Heart POUNDING in his chest. Woozy, he staggering over to a tree, grasping hold of it. Then leans over, retching.”

Bush in Love

Pages 14-16: Before Laura is in the picture, W. dates Judy, "a blonde, curvaceous Texas cowgirl." Judy needs a lot of reassurance: "How many times do I have to tell you, you're my gal. I'm as happy as a rabbit in a carrot patch with you," insists W. at a Texas bar.

He proposes to her: "Honey, if I had a rock big enough, I'd give it to you right now." It's romance, Texas-style: "The country classic 'White Lightning' blares from the juke box. He pulls her up to dance. [...] As Bush sings along, he gets up on a stool, climbs to the bar, pulls her up, too. People all around CHEER as they drunkenly dance across the top of the bar." Sadly for Judy, W. promises his father in the very next scene that he's just having a fling.

Page 35: When W. first meets Laura—at a Texas barbecue—he lays it on thick: "If I win [my bid for a seat in Congress], you'll be my education advisor. [...] I like the way you think. [...] And look.”

The Most Powerful Figure in the World

Page 1: Ever wonder how W. and company came up with the phrase "axis of evil"? Maybe it went something like this:

Chief Speech Writer: "Axis of hatred?" I don't know. Something about it … just misses.

Rove: Well, then what about "Axis of the unbearably odious?"

Bush: Don't get cute, Turdblossom. This is serious.

Chief Speechwriter: What about … "Axis of Evil?"

Bush: "Axis of Evil." I like the ring of that. That's it.

Page 45: W. treats his advisers like DKE pledges. He calls Wolfowitz "Wolfmeister" and at one point tells him to "think about trimmin' those ear hairs."
Page 25: When press secretary Ari Fleischer reports that Helen Thomas is asking around "about secret plans for military actions in Iraq" and wondering "what makes Saddam any different from other dictators," W. flips out: "Did you tell her I don't like motherfuckers who gas their own people?! Did you tell her I don't like assholes who try to kill my father?! [...] Did you tell her I'm going to kick his SORRY MOTHERFUCKING ASS ALL OVER THE MIDEST?!!

Page 47: Midway through the U.N. resolution process, W. is itching to invade Iraq: "I think it's time we stopped standing around with our dicks in our hands, and raised the stakes on ol' 'Hussey.' "

Pages 74-75: When British Prime Minister Tony Blair says he's concerned about "sectarian violence in the aftermath" of an Iraq invasion, W. tries to reassure him: "They'll be grateful for freedom, the last thing they'll want's 'nother war. Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, you know, in the end they'll stick together, they're all Muslims, anyway, (chuckling) and they gotta pray five times a day."

Page 3: Cheney suggests that Iraq may just be the beginning. "Anyone can go to Baghdad. Real men go to Tehran," says the VP. Pleased with this witticism, W. clinks his bottle of nonalcoholic beer against the VP's coffee mug.

Page 20: Now for that near-death experience. While watching the 2002 Miami Dolphins-Baltimore Ravens playoff game at the White House, W. gets a pretzel stuck in his throat. He "pounds his chest with his fist" then "faints, falling to the floor, hitting his head." Only then does the pretzel dislodge. W. "takes a long, deep breath, feeling lucky to have survived."

Deep Thoughts

Page 65: Stone's script perpetuates the myth that the Rev. Billy Graham converted W. at Kennebunkport in 1985. W. and Graham are walking along a "rocky shoreline" as waves crash "against a rocky promontory" when W. confides, "There's a darkness that follows me … And no matter how many times I go to church and pray; no matter how hard I try to reach out to the Lord, that darkness still has me hooked." He also complains: "People say I was born with a silver spoon, but they don't know … the burden that carries."

Page 71: W. isn't too happy when his father wins the presidency: "I'll never get out of Poppy's shadow," he tells Laura. "They'll all keep sayin' what's the boy ever done … I mean who ever remembers the son of a President?" Laura's rejoinder is heavy with dramatic irony: "You forgot John Quincy Adams."

W. Tells Daddy To Go Negative

Page 68: In the fall of 1988, the National Security Political Action Committee began running the infamous Willie Horton attack ad, which helped Bush Sr. defeat Michael Dukakis. Per the Stone script, NSPAC coordinated with the Bush campaign before airing the ad—a clear violation of campaign finance laws. The script also suggests that Karl Rove worked on the '88 race (which he didn't) and that W. convinced his father to approve negative campaign tactics.

Bush Jr.: Karl [Rove] and Lee [Atwater] predict that by the time the election is over, this guy Horton, will be a household name.

Bush Sr.: Well, uh, just remind Lee that we can't run this directly through the campaign. Find another pipeline.

Bush Jr.: Don't worry. It's being funded through an independent group—The National Security Political Action Committee. Ya know, Roger Ailes' people.

Bush Sr.: Good work, son. You're earning your spurs.

A Cameo for Slate's John Dickerson!

Page 120: Back in 2004, when Slate's John Dickerson was still with Time magazine, he asked W. to answer a simple question: "After 9/11, what would your biggest mistake be, would you say, and what lessons have you learned from it?" In the script, a Time reporter named John Dickerson asks this very question and, just as in real life, W. fumbles his response: "I wish you would have given me this written question ahead of time, so I could plan for it."

jurisprudence
Prison Trauma
The epitome of cruel and unusual punishment.
By Emily Bazelon
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 4:41 PM ET

In these Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib years, we've gotten used to worrying about how detainees and prisoners held offshore are faring in our government's hands. The incarceration of Americans and immigrants in America, on the other hand, is supposed to be on surer legal footing. Domestic prisoners have the Constitution on their side, with its protection against cruel and unusual punishment. Too often, though, those protections are not enough—as becomes instantly clear upon reading the recent opinion of Judge Dean Pregerson of federal district court
in California, concerning what he calls "one of the most, if not the most, egregious Eighth Amendment violations the Court has ever encountered."

Francisco Castaneda came to the United States from El Salvador when he was 10. His mother died of cancer when he was 17, before he could become a legal resident. He went to prison on a drug charge and in March 2006 was placed in immigration custody at a prison in San Diego, according to Henry Weinstein's article in the Los Angeles Times. (Some prisoners such as Castaneda are deported after they serve their sentences in immigration custody. Others are released, depending on the crimes they've been convicted of and other factors.) Soon after his transfer, Castaneda complained of a painful lesion on his penis. The medical staffers who saw him took down a family history of cancer and put in a request for a biopsy and circumcision. In June, Castaneda saw an oncologist outside the prison who said that Castaneda's lesion needed to be assessed and diagnosed quickly. The doctor offered to admit Castaneda but said the doctors at the prison wanted to do a less costly outpatient biopsy. "They understand the need for urgent diagnosis and treatment," the oncologist wrote, to underscore that the biopsy couldn't wait.

And yet from there, Castaneda's medical history turns gothic. His lesion got larger, odorous, and painful. "I am in desperate need of medical attention," he wrote in filing a grievance and asking again for a biopsy. The request was denied: The Department of Immigration Health Services considered a biopsy an "elective" procedure. The department's Dr. Esther Hui wrote that Castaneda does "NOT have cancer at this time." She added, "Basically, this pt needs to be patient and wait."

In July, the prison took Castaneda to the emergency room. There he saw not the oncologist nor other doctors familiar with his condition but a new physician who examined him without doing the biopsy or noting his family history of cancer. This doctor decided that Castaneda's problem was genital warts. The Immigration Health Services went with that recommendation over the previous ones. No biopsy.

In August, the prison repeated this denial and refused Castaneda a circumcision for his inflamed foreskin, reiterating that these procedures were "elective." In November, Castaneda reported bleeding and discharge. "It's getting worse, and I don't even have any meds—nothing for pain and no antibiotics," he told health services. They put in a request for seven pairs of clean boxer shorts a week.

The ACLU found out about Castaneda in December and started jumping up and down on his behalf. When he got to the doctor in December, he was diagnosed with a "fungating penile lesion that was most likely penile cancer." Still, no biopsy. By the time the procedure was finally scheduled, Castaneda had been unexpectedly discharged. He went to the ER at a Los Angeles hospital. He was diagnosed with cancer. Judge Pregerson's opinion includes this awful statement: "His penis was amputated on Valentine's Day, 2007." And this one, referring to the chemotherapy that followed: "However, the treatment was not successful, and on February 16, 2008, Mr. Castaneda died."

When the ACLU sued on behalf of Castaneda's heirs (he has a 14-year-old daughter), it did so via the Federal Torts Claim Act and the Constitution, using a path to court called a Bivens action, for a 1971 case in which the Supreme Court said that a victim of a constitutional violation by an agent of the federal government can recover damages against that official in federal court. The suit named five immigration officials, including Dr. Hui.

In federal court in California before Judge Pregerson, the defendants argued that they were immune from suit based on a law called the Public Health Service Act. In passing this law, the defense theory goes, Congress explicitly cut off recovery for constitutional violations, through Bivens, related to medical neglect. This matters because damages for a FTCA claim in California are capped at $250,000, with no possibility of punitive damages. (And if ever there were a case in which a jury might feel outraged and go for punitive against the government, you'd think this would be the one.) Damage awards for constitutional violations aren't capped, by contrast. The defense also argued that Castaneda's suit couldn't go forward under FTCA either, which would have left Castaneda's estate with no way to get into court.

Amazingly, given what Castaneda says he suffered, it looked from the decisions of many other district courts, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, like the defendants were right. Castaneda appeared to have no constitutional remedy. But Judge Pregerson ruled otherwise, based on some deft statutory detective work.

I'll spare you all the et seq. references from the federal code. The upshot is that Congress intended to make FTCA the only way to sue for some medical injuries caused by federally employed doctors. But if Judge Pregerson is right, there's an explicit exception for lawsuits brought for a violation of the Constitution. Which, if the facts Castaneda's suit alleges are true, this certainly is: Dying of untreated cancer after having your penis amputated would seem to epitomize cruel and unusual punishment.

Castaneda testified before Congress last fall about his ordeal, four months before he died. He asked lawmakers to overhaul the medical care provided by immigration services to prevent the suffering he experienced. The evidence his case brings to light of immigration-detention doctors withholding the tools of cancer diagnosis to save money speaks for itself. We can hope, at least, that the doctors of the Department of Immigration Health Services are soberly at work on the changes Castaneda called for. In the meantime, if Judge Pregerson's analysis holds up, this
If you want your doctor to send out your medical records, you have to sign a lengthy disclaimer, maybe more than once. Getting the records sent by fax or e-mail is often out of the question. Why all the rigmarole? Because federal privacy law treats medical information as both sacrosanct and, in the wrong hands, potentially explosive—and therefore does its best to ensure that other people don't get a peek at it.

Abortion opponents understand the sensitivity of medical privacy. Which is why they've repeatedly tried to subpoena the records of patients who visit abortion providers. In their hands, the power to request documents in the course of a lawsuit or a potential prosecution is a tool: It's a way of challenging doctors who perform late-term abortions and, perhaps, of scaring patients away from clinics. The courts have generally warded off these efforts to expose women's medical histories. But the abortion opponents keep trying because the legal wrangling itself serves their interests. Today, the Kansas Supreme Court heard arguments in a fight over access to medical records that's particularly unsettling—because this time the subpoena is coming from a grand jury run amok.

In the last decade, abortion provider Dr. George Tiller and Women's Health Care Services in Wichita, Kan., have been investigated half a dozen times. (In 2005, a patient died after having an abortion at the clinic. The medical board in Kansas cleared him of any wrongdoing, as did a grand jury.) Former Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline wanted to nail Tiller and the clinic for performing late-term abortions illegally. They tried to subpoena patients' medical records in the course of their investigation, and that effort came before the Kansas Supreme Court.

In 2006, the justices ruled that Kline couldn't simply go on a fishing expedition. Instead, before he could subpoena the patients' records, the attorney general had to show "reasonable suspicion" that Tiller and the clinic were breaking a law. The presiding judge also had to be satisfied that the attorney general was proceeding on "firm legal ground." If the judge went along with the subpoena, he had to make sure the records were redacted so that personally identifying information would not be disclosed. "The type of information sought by the State here could hardly be more sensitive, or the potential harm to patient privacy posed by disclosure more substantial," the court worried.

Kline was voted out of office. The next attorney general, Paul Morrison, looked at the evidence and decided not to prosecute Tiller on any of the 30 charges Kline had filed, saying they were "based on a political agenda." At the same time, Morrison filed 19 new misdemeanor charges. They didn't accuse Tiller of performing illegal abortions but of the far lesser offense of taking referrals from a doctor to whom he allegedly had financial ties.

Not satisfied with small-potato misdemeanor allegations, Kansans for Life turned to a new tactic—an 1887 state law that gives citizens the power to convene a grand jury if, in essence, 2 percent of the voters in a county sign a petition. Last September, the group delivered a petition with 7,857 signatures, asking the district court in the county of Sedgwick to crank up a grand jury to investigate Tiller. Time for a do-over. The grand jury issued a subpoena for the same medical records Kline had originally asked for, plus more over a period of five years, relating to a total of more than 2,000 women who'd come to the clinic 22 or more weeks pregnant. Kline said he needed the records to find out whether Tiller had performed a late-term abortion that wasn't necessary to preserve the mother's life or to prevent "irreversible impairment of a major bodily function," as Kansas law required. The judge appointed to oversee the grand jury ordered the clinic to produce the records, 50 at a time. Now that order, and the privacy interests it threatens, are back before the state Supreme Court.

The justices can knock back this subpoena by finding that the same standard of reasonable suspicion applies to a grand-jury investigation that applies to an investigation by the attorney general. In fact, given that citizen grand juries aren't subject to the ethical constraints that are supposed to rein in prosecutors, there's probably even more reason to make sure that a judge is looking over their shoulders before they pull the subpoena trigger. Reasonable suspicion isn't exactly a high bar. As the Kansas Supreme Court pointed out the first time around, criminal investigations before the phase of indictment are about figuring out whether there is probable cause—a higher legal standard—to think a crime has been committed. Before they even get to probable cause, grand juries and prosecutors can't be asked to show for certain that the medical records they're after contain the evidence they need to nab a bad guy. That would go too far, given the state's clear interest in investigating allegations of crime.

Once it has threaded the law enforcement needle, the Kansas Supreme Court will confront another layer of questions about privacy. If the personal information in the records of Tiller's patients is shorn of names, addresses, and the other details that
would make the women easy to find, then what's the problem? The women's lawyers answer by pointing out that there are different kinds of threats to privacy in this case. Taking out names and addresses shields women from being identified in the obvious way. But people can still burrow into the remaining details and perhaps make a match. In a 2004 opinion in a similar case—in which the court rejected a subpoena for the abortion records of 45 women—Judge Richard Posner wrote for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit about the women's legitimate fear that "persons of their acquaintance, or skillful 'Googlers,' sifting the information contained in the medical records concerning each patient's medical and sex history, will put two and two together, 'out' the 45 women, and thereby expose them to threats, humiliation, and obloquy." Redacting isn't a science.

And even if it were, Posner said next, even if the women's anonymity could be guaranteed, an invasion of privacy lingers. He drew an analogy to nude pictures of a woman on the Internet, shorn of identifying details and "downloaded in a foreign country by people who will never meet her." The woman in the pictures would probably still find the pictures disturbing, and "the revelation of the intimate details contained in the record of a late-term abortion may inflict a similar wound," Posner concluded.

That takes us to another underlying question: Why allow citizens to convene grand juries with subpoena powers in the first place? Few other states have such statutes, according to Bonnie Scott Jones, the lawyer for the Center for Reproductive Rights who represented Tiller's patients in court Tuesday. Maybe Kansas should scrap what looks like a relic of frontier justice. That's the advice of a second grand jury, convened by another petition drive, led by the LIFE Coalition, to investigate Planned Parenthood. Last month, the second grand jury not only cleared Planned Parenthood but also called for a review of the 1887 law. Instead of letting abortion opponents repurpose the old law, Kansans should throw it into the dust heap.

In a recent night-shift ad, Hillary Clinton promised that she would work hard to help workers who toil after hours. Barack Obama, for his part, has issued a call for relief for people "juggling work and parenting." The candidates' concern about the demands of employment comes at a time when businesses increasingly try to stay open for most of the hours of the day, seven days a week. While keeping our shopping malls abuzz, these frenetic routines also make it harder for workers to get the weekend off to relax or spend time with their families. The ramped-up pace is due in part to the success businesses have had in attacking laws that improve workers' lives—like mandatory-closing laws, which require many stores to close on Sundays or holidays.

Mandatory-closing laws sound, yes, like another name for "blue laws," the Colonial-era restrictions in the name of morality that also closed stores on Sunday (and even banned frivolous dress). Their original purpose was to encourage church attendance. Because of this history, these laws are often still thought of as paternalistic intrusions that impose one Christian version of morality. It doesn't help that they had a brief resurgence during the teetotaling era of Prohibition, courtesy of the temperance movement. But mandatory-closing laws have since shed their old cloak and taken on a new purpose: protecting the interests of workers who otherwise could not rely on a regular, guaranteed day off.

In 1961, 49 states had laws limiting Sunday activities, the majority of which sought to give most workers the day off. Today, most of these laws have been repealed. Fragments persist, like a Minnesota law forbidding Sunday auto sales. But only a handful of laws remain that broadly require businesses to close on certain days. One of the last such laws, in South Carolina, was saved last summer only by the governor's veto of its repeal. In New Jersey, where Sunday closing laws were once widespread, only Bergen County still has one. Maine and Massachusetts have laws that require closings, but now only on certain holidays. And even these vestiges are under attack as businesses draw attention to the laws' prudish-seeming blue history instead of to the ways they help workers.

For example, the Bergen County law has been criticized by the local business community as a denial of consumer and business freedom and as an anachronism from a Puritan past. In South Carolina, businesses seeking exemption from the state's mandatory-closing laws emphasize the infringement on consumer choice. And a Whole Foods Market executive opposed to a Massachusetts Thanksgiving closing law condemned it as "antiquated and silly."

Meanwhile, in the face of employer opposition, unions—themselves unfairly attacked by businesses as outdated institutions that hinder the free market—continue to fight for more free time for workers. For example, in its grocery contracts, the UFCW continues to press for premium pay for Sundays and holidays—a standard that discourages stores from requiring many employees to work on those day. But the decline in union membership, particularly in the retail sector, gives workers diminishing bargaining power in the fight to preserve their weekends and holidays. Today, more than 30 percent of all wage and salary employees work on an average weekend day or
holiday, and nearly 50 percent of workers in sales and related fields are at work on any given such day.

The case to be made for mandatory-closing laws is that limits on economic choice can, paradoxically, give workers more much-needed freedom to relax and spend time with family. Businesses carefully structure employees’ schedules to avoid paying overtime, doling out short shifts or days off during the week (when other family members are less likely to be at home) and asking for hours on the clock throughout the weekend. If you’re forced to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, you can easily work a 60-hour week without earning overtime. That means constantly wrangling to get time off to spend with your family.

This is a far cry from the regular, predictable schedule of office and professional workers. Vacant seats and foil-wrapped leftovers may be the sign of some loved ones at family gatherings. And it all may be getting worse. In some places, store hours have been expanded on Sundays, and custom is becoming less of a barrier to opening on holidays. Massive store sales traditionally held the Friday after Thanksgiving now begin on the holiday itself. According to the New York Times, a Manhattan CompUSA opening at 9 p.m. this last Thanksgiving served pie to customers to make up for missed desserts at home.

As to the objection that mandatory-closing laws violate the separation of church and state, the Supreme Court held, back in 1961, that Maryland’s law was constitutional, because it had taken on a secular, worker-protective purpose. It’s still true that Sunday closing laws can burden Jewish and Muslim businesses and consumers who honor Friday or Saturday religious observances. Consumer convenience is also an issue. But legislatures can address these concerns while allowing stores to stay open on the weekends—for example, by entitling workers to at least one weekend day off and giving workers and businesses the discretion to decide which day that is. Stores might have to hire more staff or reduce weekend hours, but some businesses could still stay open all weekend.

In considering the future of mandatory-closing laws, legislatures need to look beyond the libertarian outrage drummed up by business opponents. Indeed, this outrage may not amount to much in the end: As one consumer told the Boston Globe, in response to retailer-driven pressure to repeal Massachusetts’ Thanksgiving-closure law, "You can go shopping on Friday. Take a day off.”

By E.J. Kalafarski and Chadwick Matlin
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 1:26 PM ET

It's back to the trail after all three candidates were in Washington on Tuesday for the Senate hearings on Iraq featuring Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker. John McCain hits the ritzy New York suburb of Westport, Conn.; Hillary Clinton swings through Pennsylvania before a fundraiser in New York City; and Barack Obama goes to Indiana after a day in Pennsylvania.

The trip to Indiana is Obama's third in a month, the same number of days Clinton has spent in the state. But when Clinton was there, she beefed up her schedule a bit more extensively. She made nine stops over her three days in Indiana. Obama has made only three.

We've updated Map the Candidates’ look to offer you even more information than before. Click here to explore the country's political landscape, and be sure to tap into the candidates' and states’ statistics pages by clicking the popout symbols next to their names.

Map the Candidates uses the candidates' public schedules to keep track of their comings and goings. A quick primer on your new election toolbox:

- Do you want to know who spent the most time in Iowa or New Hampshire last month? Play with the timeline sliders above the map to customize the amount of time displayed.
- Care most about who visited your home state? Then zoom in on it or type a location into the "geosearch" box below the map.
- Choose which candidates you want to follow with the check boxes on to the right of the map. If you only want to see the front-runners, then uncheck all of the fringe candidates. Voilà! You're left with the cream of the crop's travels.
- Follow the campaign trail virtually with MTC's news feed. Every day YouTube video and articles from local papers will give you a glimpse of what stump speeches really look and sound like. Just click the arrow next to the headline to get started.
- Take a closer look at candidates by clicking on their names to the right of the map. You'll get the lowdown on their travels, media coverage, and policy positions.

Click here to start using Map the Candidates.
medical examiner

Your Health This Week
Is breast-feeding not all it’s cracked up to be? And more.
By Sydney Spiesel
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 11:39 AM ET

This week, Dr. Sydney Spiesel discusses a new and rigorous study on the impact of breast-feeding, physical and psychological; the effect of bad marriages on the health of the heart; and a paradoxical finding about cod-liver oil.

Breast-feeding: How good for babies is it really?

Question: How do you establish the benefits of breast-feeding in a scientific way? It would be unethical—and, of course, impossible—to assign mothers randomly to either breast-feed their infants, say exclusively for six months, or to give them formula. But the differences between mothers who breast-feed exclusively and mothers who don't include socioeconomic status, degree of education, employment, ethnicity, and a host of other factors. And so without running a randomized trial, it's extremely difficult to know what's causing any perceived difference between the two groups of babies. Is it the feeding choice or some other difference in the mothers that plays the central role?

New study: Despite the obstacles, one research team headed by Dr. Michael Kramer of McGill University in Montreal has devised a rigorous approach. Instead of randomly assigning individual women to breast-feed or formula feed, this research group promoted breast-feeding in some arbitrarily chosen geographic areas around maternity hospitals in Belarus, leading to much higher rates and duration of breast-feeding. The authors then compared the women and babies from these areas with women and babies in areas where maternity centers just continued whatever had been their customary practice, having isolated the effect of an increased breast-feeding rate.

Physical findings: Dr. Kramer's group previously found some medical benefit to breast-feeding, though less than I expected. (As I have said before, I am a proponent of breast-feeding.) Increased breast-feeding reduced the rate at which babies developed diarrhea or eczema but, contrary to expectations, had little or no effect on respiratory disease.

Psychological findings: The recently reported bigger surprise, however, was that increased breast-feeding appeared to make no difference on the psychological front for babies or mothers. About 14,000 children, from the two groups, were examined when they were 6½ years old for problems with conduct, hyperactivity, and peer relations. The researchers also looked at mothers' satisfaction with their marriages and in their relationships with their children. To my amazement, the study turned up no differences in any of these outcomes. I was sure that, on average, the tactile nature of breast-feeding would promote mother-child closeness, which would mean better adjustment for the child and greater satisfaction for the mother. I was wrong.

Conclusion: Which puts me in a very awkward position. Breast-feeding is a topic that evokes strong feelings, and merely presenting facts that might be taken as not fully supportive makes some people angry. Very angry. Breast-feeding is clearly critical—and even life-saving—in parts of the world that lack sanitation and access to fresh water and refrigeration. I continue to believe that there is a biological benefit to breast-feeding even in the developed world, where the risks of formula feeding are fewer. But I am now less sure of the psychological benefit to mother or child. Finally, I still believe that the baby will prosper most if the mother's choice of feeding method is the one that gives her the most satisfaction and pleasure. But now I want that question to be scientifically studied, also.

Marital bliss: Does it make the heart healthier?

Question: Epidemiologic research has shown that social relationships can protect adults from risk of illness and death, and that marriage is particularly beneficial. But what about bad marriages? Is it better to be single than to be in one?

New study: Recent research begins to shed light on this long-ignored question. Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad and colleagues used blood pressure as a marker for cardiovascular risk and studied about 300 adults who responded to an ad. Two-thirds of them were married and one-third were single. Blood pressure, measured frequently over a 24-hour day, was used as a rough index of cardiovascular health.

Findings: The authors found that marriage clearly promotes healthier blood-pressure levels, but only for married people who scored high for marriage quality, as reflected by their lower levels of stress, less depression, and higher satisfaction with life. Unhappy married people had poorer blood-pressure levels than the single people included in this study. Interestingly, the benefits of a supportive network didn't protect either single people or unhappily married people from blood-pressure problems, which suggests that there is something special about the marriage relationship.

Caveat: This is a preliminary study with many weaknesses. The sample is small, and the participants were not randomly selected—they chose to be studied. The participants were all white and mostly educated. The couples were all legally married and heterosexual. This self-selected group may or may not resemble the general population in ways that affect their answers to the authors' questions. Also, we don't know whether measuring blood pressure during a single day means anything about future rates of cardiovascular problems.
Conclusion: Nevertheless, the finding is worth following up. It is easy to imagine a health benefit that might be attributable to, let's say, a higher likelihood of regular meals or shared warmth at night, or less need for risky sex. But the benefit might come from somewhere else—like the diminished stress associated with a satisfying relationship. Maybe marital bliss really is good for the heart.

**The mysteries of cod-liver oil**

New study: Perhaps unjustly, I tend to think of studies with unexpected findings as the most reliable, because results contrary to a researcher's expectations would seem less likely to be the result of unconscious error. So I was immediately drawn to a recent study from Norway of 3,000 women, ages 50 to 70. It reported lower bone density for women who drank cod-liver oil in childhood than for women who escaped this treatment.

Treatment: Cod-liver oil, which I remember with a shudder from my own childhood, is a vitamin-rich liquid, indeed manufactured from fish livers. It's still widely used in Norway and Sweden to prevent vitamin-D deficiency (and build character) in children. In parts of the world with plenty of bright sunlight, our bodies naturally produce this vitamin, which we need to incorporate calcium into the bones. But in cold and dark regions, a daily teaspoonful of cod-liver oil is often downed as a substitute. The makers of modern-day versions claim they are free of the offensive taste and odor I remember.

Findings: When children don't get enough vitamin D, the result is poor incorporation of calcium into the bones, which, later in life, leads to poor bone density. This likely accounts for the great frequency of bone fractures observed in elderly Scandinavians. It seems obvious, then, that women who drank cod-liver oil in childhood would have better bones than women who didn't. And yet these authors found that the opposite—the cod-liver group actually had less calcium in their bones than the other women.

Explanation: How to make sense of this paradox? The most likely cause is an interesting one: too much of a good thing. In addition to vitamin D, a teaspoon of cod-liver oil contains too much vitamin A. (Or at least it did until a few years ago, when manufacturers reduced the vitamin-A level in cod-liver oil to a safe level.) Now, vitamin A is wonderful stuff, too: People who don't get enough of it suffer poor vision and eye damage and are at great risk for serious consequences if they develop infectious diseases like diarrhea and measles. But take in too much of this vitamin, and the effects range from liver damage to nervous system symptoms that resemble the effects of a brain tumor. And excessive vitamin A is associated with bone mineral loss, leading to osteoporosis late in life and a high risk of hip fractures in the elderly.

Conclusion: It seems most likely that the good the vitamin D in cod-liver oil did for bones was more than reversed by the bad done by too much vitamin A in the old product. We'll know soon enough if that theory is right: We just need to see if elderly Scandinavians break fewer bones now that cod-liver oil gets the vitamin-A dose right.

**moneybox**

**The Last Days of Cheap Chinese**

Why American consumers are about to start paying more for clothes, electronics, toys, and just about everything else.

By Alexandra Harney

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:33 AM ET

For years, American importers and Chinese factory managers have been having the same conversation. The importers would demand lower prices for products destined for American shelves. Factory managers would counter with a long list of reasons why they needed to charge more. Most of the time, the American importers would prevail, and Wal-Mart shoppers would rejoice.

Not anymore. The era of cheap Chinese consumer goods may finally be ending, thanks to irrepressible inflation. Now when the Chinese present their lists, some American importers are conceding higher prices, meaning that American shoppers, for the first time in years, are starting to pick up the tab for rising costs in China. Some Chinese factories are now asking their American customers for price increases of as much as 20 percent to 30 percent.

A store manager at a young women's clothing store in Boston tells me the prices of some camisoles are rising. An executive in the athletic shoe industry says that Chinese factories and buyers are now negotiating about spring 2009 shoe lines, and that is where consumers will really start to see the impact of Chinese inflation. A manager of several discount stores confides his company has started raising prices of certain goods while putting others on sale. This is only the beginning: We'll be paying higher prices for Chinese goods for years to come.

Consumers of Chinese exports (read: you and I) have for the past two decades benefited from an extraordinary confluence of factors. China's desire to attract foreign investment, rural workers' hunger for higher wages than they could earn on the farm, and excess capacity in nearly every industry helped limit price increases for Chinese exports. The renminbi was undervalued, wages were low, raw materials were cheap, and government officials turned a blind eye to factories' labor and environmental violations.

But now a perfect storm has hit China's manufacturers. So far this year, the renminbi has been appreciating at a 16 percent...
annualized rate. And prices for raw materials, which account for 60 percent to 70 percent of manufacturers' costs, are soaring. Hundred-dollar-a-barrel oil has raised transport costs and the price of oil-related materials such as plastics. Although some economists expect raw material prices to weaken in the second half of this year, in the long term, the emergence of millions of new car drivers, home buyers, and office workers in India and China will keep the price of steel, plastic, and other raw materials high.

At the same time, China is rolling out wage increases around the country and tightening its labor laws. Wages are rising at double-digit rates in coastal China. In January, Beijing introduced a new labor law that significantly strengthened the influence of the union in management decisions. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the country's state-backed labor organization, has launched an aggressive recruiting campaign. Beijing hopes that better protection for workers through the union and the new labor law will placate its increasingly restive manufacturing workforce. But a tidal shift in the country's demographics—a dwindling supply of young workers as a result of the "one child" policy in effect since 1979—will counteract Beijing's efforts.

China's Generation Y, the children born after the one-child policy came into effect, are increasingly aware of their rights to a legal wage, health insurance, and a certain number of days off every month. Their demands for better treatment will continue to drive up the cost of manufacturing in China. Already, southern China's Guangdong province, known as "the workshop of the world," is short 2 million workers, the equivalent of 14 percent of America's entire manufacturing workforce.

The problem for American retailers and consumers hooked on $3 T-shirts and $30 DVD players is that there is no other China waiting in the wings to make cheap goods reliably for American shoppers. American importers are now arriving by the plane load in Vietnam, hoping to take advantage of the country's lower wages. But Vietnam, hard as it tries, has only 85 million people—the size of one Chinese province. And only a fraction of its population is suitable for factory work. Moreover, prices are rising faster in Vietnam than anywhere else in Asia. Add in the rising incidence of strikes and labor disputes, and Vietnam looks increasingly like a short-term alternative.

India, the other country often mentioned as a China surrogate, has not yet managed to get its act together to take advantage of China's rising export prices. Importers say India is good at certain things—embroidery, for instance—but not at the volume production that the world depends on for cheap goods. India's road and port infrastructure, while improving, is nowhere near as efficient as China's.

So importers are looking back to countries they once rejected in favor of China—Indonesia, Mexico, and Malaysia. And they are looking ahead to countries not yet integrated into the global consumer-goods supply chain, such as Brazil and Kenya. Every country, however, offers its own special risks: strong labor unions in one, political instability in another. None offers the one-stop shop appeal of China, where factories make everything under the sun. For the time being, then, we will all still be buying a lot of "Made in China" products—and paying ever more for them.

moneybox
A Tax Break for Bubble Heads
Congress' latest dumb idea to fix the housing crisis.
By Daniel Gross
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 6:45 PM ET

From Wall Street to Orange County, from the exurbs of Dallas to the South Beach strip, a cry is rising from throughout the land: Something must be done about the nation's housing market!

Washington has been struggling mightily to respond. The Federal Reserve is promiscuously extending credit to banks and Wall Street; Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are boosting the size of mortgages they'll buy; and the White House has orchestrated a voluntary industry effort to stave off the rising tide of foreclosures. Concerned that these extraordinary measures still aren't sufficient, the president and Congress are now considering new moves to help the beleaguered industry, with the Senate set to vote tomorrow on a package of new tax breaks and assistance.

Even with this flurry of activity, many critics, particularly Democrats, have argued that the government isn't doing enough. But the package under consideration suggests that it may be doing too much. The bill includes several items that are likely not to do much harm—boosting deductions for property taxes, tax-exempt bonds for local housing agencies, and modest tax credits for people who buy homes out of foreclosure. But it also includes a provision, detailed in this Associated Press story, that is perverse, absurd, and unwarranted. In short, I don't think it's a good idea.

Under the proposal, the AP reports, "companies would for two years be allowed to carry back losses incurred in 2007 and 2008 against profits accrued over the previous five years, instead of the usual two year timeframe." Under current rules, companies can effectively call up the Internal Revenue Service and declare a do-over, applying losses racked up in 2008 against income reported in 2007 and 2006, and then claim a retroactive tax refund. The utility of this benefit rises as the size of the loss increases. If, for example, you're forced drastically to write down the value of land you've acquired, the loss in 2008 could
easily swamp the profits reaped in 2007, 2006, and several years before.

The technical term for this is a **tax-loss carryback**. But it should perhaps be known as a bubble-head tax break. Companies that vaulted into a hot sector and then used lots of leverage to increase their profits in said sector (the Internet, real estate) light up the charts during the boom years. But come the pop, their fortunes plummet rapidly down the same steep slope. And because accounting rules require companies to **mark assets to market**, erstwhile high-flyers frequently report massive losses.

The proposed tax break is hard to justify for several reasons. It does nothing for slow and steady companies that keep their heads and simply rack up profits year after year—and pay their taxes accordingly. Rather, it rewards the most reckless participants in the bubble. If you borrowed a ton of money to build spec houses in Miami and reported $2 billion in profits between 2002 and 2007 but gave up all those profits by notchimg a $2 billion loss this year, the extended carryback has a great deal of value. If you’ve been building affordable housing in Wichita, Kan., and booked $300 million in profits in those years, and then, through careful management of costs, managed to eke out a $5 million profit this year, it has no value. The big public homebuilders, whose shares rallied on the news of this potential tax break, didn’t pay any windfall taxes on the bubble-era earnings. Why should they get an extraordinary post-bubble windfall?

Homebuilders argue that they need relief because their sector, which provides a great deal of domestic employment, is on the ropes, and they’re finding it more difficult to raise capital. Which is as it should be. After bubbles pop, those who screwed up really badly fail and get taken over by creditors or opportunistic investors. Those who have sound underlying franchises but merely got a little carried away can survive if they take painful restructuring moves. This is what is known as market capitalism. For all the talk of a credit crunch, capital is still available—it’s just not available on the easy terms managers had come to expect during the late Greenspan years. Citigroup, Merrill Lynch, and plenty of other firms tied to the mortgage/finance complex have taken steps to shore up their balance sheets and replenish lost capital. But investors, having been burned, demand more downside protection and better guaranteed returns. Thornburg Mortgage was **forced to pay 18 percent interest** for an emergency round of capital raising that allowed it to stave off bankruptcy. This is also what is known as market capitalism.

Homebuilders should look to the capital markets first, rather than to the government, especially when their financial situation is serious but not critical. The stocks of potential beneficiaries of the expanded carrybacks—big homebuilders like Lennar, Pulte, and KB Home—have plummeted. But they’re nowhere near bankrupt. KB Home is **losing money**, but it still has a market value of more than $2 billion. And it’s still paying a decent dividend.

Finally, in many instances, the largest shareholders—and hence the biggest beneficiaries—are the managers who made the decisions that caused the losses. **Toll Brothers**, which is now **racking up losses** after years of profits, is valued at close to $4 billion. Founder Robert Toll **has** 17.5 million shares of Toll, worth about $440 million at current prices, which works out to about 11 percent of the company. At **Hovnanian (first quarter loss $131 million)**, members of the Hovnanian family own at least 15 percent of the outstanding stock, according to **Yahoo Finance**. These companies—and their extraordinarily wealthy managers—still possess the financial heft to finance the recoveries from their self-inflicted wounds.

The proposal to give new tax breaks to homebuilders and banks is yet another example of the pernicious trend of privatizing profit and socializing losses, which is gnawing away at faith in the system. Dilute the shareholders, not the taxpayers.

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**movies**

**Whoa**

Keanu Reeves as a Dirty Harry-style cop in Street Kings.

By Dana Stevens

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 12:18 PM ET

The **press** bio of David Ayer, who wrote *Training Day* and directed the new *Street Kings* (Fox Searchlight) from a story by James Ellroy, trumpets Ayer’s gritty coming-of-age experience in Los Angeles, with the director himself extolling his “organic understanding of what’s happening on the streets of L.A. on any given day.”* But however comfortable he may be chillin’ in South Central, Ayer’s scripts read like the work of a latchkey kid left home with a battered VHS tape of *To Live and Die in L.A.* In that William Friedkin classic, a pair of cops, one a moral blank slate, the other a gonzo narcissist, use their state-sanctioned power to cross far, far over the thin blue line. It’s a structure that Ayer has reproduced intact in every one of his films so far, including *Dark Blue*, which he wrote with Ellroy, and *Harsh Times*, his 2006 self-financed directorial debut. To make an Ayer film, you place a ruthless but charismatic older cop in the driver’s seat of a Crown Victoria, plonk down an Oedipally challenged rookie by his side, fill the glove box with miniature bottles of vodka, speed to the ghetto, and see what happens.

But what if the cop in that driver’s seat isn’t Denzel Washington or Kurt Russell but the **waxen, perpetually boivish Keanu Reeves**? Though he’s given a younger sidekick (Chris Evans) for a brief stretch later in the movie, Reeves’ Tom Ludlow must, in
essence, contain both sides of the Training Day dialectic within himself. He's both the macho, trigger-happy hothead and the sensitive soul sworn to root out corruption in his own unit. Early on, Tom's boss, police captain Jack Wander (Forest Whitaker), tips him off that his former partner Washington (Terry Crews) has been snitching to Internal Affairs about Tom's disregard for search warrants and Miranda rights, not to mention his penchant for smoking bad guys before bothering to discern whether they pose an imminent threat.

In a wildly improbable convenience-store holdup, Washington the whistle-blower is killed by masked thugs just as Tom is about to confront him. Tom's fellow cops, assuming that he arranged the hit, close ranks to protect him from the suspicions of Internal Affairs investigator Capt. Biggs (Hugh Laurie). But Tom's idealistic side—his inner Ethan Hawke, if you will—can't allow Washington's murder to go unsolved. His tenacity will lead him into the tangled bowels of the L.A. drug world, where he'll interrogate one suspect (played by rapper The Game) with telephone-book blows to the head, trap another in a loop of razor wire, and use an easygoing junkie named Scribble (Cedric the Entertainer) as a human shield.

By the time Ludlow uncovers the real source of the moral rot in his department (a perpetrator so obvious that Scooby and Shaggy would have nailed it by the first commercial), the audience can no longer make any meaningful distinction between this gleefully brutal enforcer and the street scum he's resolved to eliminate. "All of us are scum" would be a dishearteningly nihilistic message, but it's never clear what Ayer is trying to say.

A closing shot in which Ludlow, on a balcony high above the city, surveys the smoggy bowl of Los Angeles harks back to a line spoken by Whitaker's character earlier in the movie. Without Ludlow's brand of maverick policing, he asks, "Who'll hold back the animals?" So which is it: Has Ludlow lost our sympathy by sinking to the level of "the animals," or are we, the policed, just too craven to admit that we depend upon that brutality for our protection? There's something cynical about Ayer's attempt to preserve Ludlow as a hero after scene upon scene meant to show, with heavy irony, how lawlessly he enforced the law. You can't lionize your Dirty Harry vigilante and expose his hypocrisy, too.

**Correction, April 10, 2008:** The article originally misspelled the name of director David Ayer. (Return to the corrected sentence.)

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**music box**

**The Gnarls Barkley Problem**

They want to be Sly Stone. They're more like Beck.

By Jody Rosen

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 1:12 PM ET

The first thing you hear on Gnarls Barkley's The Odd Couple is the whirr of a movie projector, a sound effect that returns, faintly, at the beginning of each of the album's 13 tracks. It's a redundant move: Anyone who has been paying attention knows that Cee-Lo Green and Danger Mouse, the singer and producer behind Gnarls Barkley, are into cinematic sounds, and cinematic artifice. Their monster 2006 hit "Crazy" was based on a snippet from a 1968 Italian movie soundtrack. And there is no mistaking the duo's love of spaghetti-Western maestro Ennio Morricone, whose spirit lurks in their ballads' stark high-desert atmospheres and sweeping harmonic turns.

But Gnarls Barkley has included that clicking movie reel, anyway, lest anyone miss the point. It's the same impulse that compels Cee-Lo and Danger Mouse to appear onstage and in photo shoots wearing wacky costumes, done up as a 1980s hair metal dudes or 1950s greasers or the cast of Star Wars. They are anxious ironists, snickering at pop's pomp, and hell-bent on dispelling any doubt that they're in on the joke—even if it means sticking their drummer in a Chewbacca suit.

The shtick would be insufferable if the music weren't so good. The album opens with "Charity Case," a typically busy and enthralling jumble of sounds and genre gestures, which sets Cee-Lo's vocal above a brisk beat and an organ whine, with chain-gang-style grunts, chimes, and shuddering tremolo guitar chords filling the space between. As always, Cee-Lo's singing is stylistically retro, full of vintage soul and gospel flourishes. (At times, his reedy rasp eerily resembles Nina Simone.)

Yet Cee-Lo and Danger Mouse are not revivalists. Their songs mix vintage rock and soul with hip-hop production, the blend that has defined all of Danger Mouse's work. But Gnarls' attitude toward the past is more playful than reverent. The raucous lead single "Run" is a mashup of '60s go-go pop and Parliament-Funkadelic that delights in, and lightly mocks, both styles. (The "Run" video adds another layer of genre parody, spoofing '80s hip-hop, with Justin Timberlake guest starring as a goofy TV host in Cazal glasses.) Like all first-rate producers, Danger Mouse has an exacting pair of ears; his records just sound better than most. The primary pleasure of The Odd Couple is simply aural, the rub of the analog against the digital, the mix of tones and timbres: the solid slammed-car door thwack of the snare drum that powers "Going On," the round, rubbery bass that's pushed to the foreground in the album-closer, "A Little Better."

That song brings down the curtain on The Odd Couple on a cautiously hopeful note: "I can laugh at it now, I feel better/ ... And even a little is still better/ Oh, have mercy on me," Cee-Lo sings. It's the most lighthearted lyric on the record. Gnarls Barkley fans who were too distracted by the pre-p
costumes to hear the dark tidings in "Crazy" will not miss them this time around. Spiritual torment, paranoia, drugs, death, "karma"—these gentle themes that crop up in song after song, with Cee-Lo singing in the voice of the world’s loneliest man. "I don’t have any no friends at all. …/ So who’s gonna catch me if I fall?" he howls in "Whatever." In "Charity Case," his solitude is total: "Even my shadow leaves me all alone at night."

Cee-Lo is an easy musician to root for. He’s bald, short, and as stout as a Hummer H3 but nevertheless sleek, commanding the concert stage with a palpable charisma. He has a nimble falsetto voice and a knack for lyrics, peppering his songs with little insights and aphorisms. When it all comes together, as in the moltò Morricone-esque ballad "Who’s Gonna Save My Soul?"—the closest The Odd Couple comes to a song of "Crazy" caliber—Cee-Lo seems every inch the star that he obviously wants to be.

Most of the time, though, you find yourself admiring Cee-Lo but unable to feel his pain. With Gnarls Barkley, you cannot silence that movie projector’s whir in your mind’s ear. Cee-Lo and Danger Mouse want it to have both ways, flaunting their Olympian ironic distance while still delivering an emotional stomach punch. But music this stylized and knowing does not lend itself easily to pathos. When Cee-Lo bellows "Oh, I’ve been entered by evil/ So someone best love me right now," it sounds less like a cri de coeur than another impeccably wrought flourish.

I hope that Cee-Lo returns at some point to his first career, as a rapper. The emphasis in rap is on wit and flash rather than depth—it’s a job that suits him better. In the meantime, I’ll keep The Odd Couple on heavy rotation, even if I’m not quite buying what Gnarls Barkley is selling. The main fare on the new album is familiar: Cee-Lo’s is still singing a lot about insanity. "This is the start of my journey/ And my mind’s already gone," he cries in "Going On." Gnarls Barkley clearly aspire to a place in black musical’s pantheon of ingenious artsy freaks—Sun Ra, Sly Stone, George Clinton, Hendrix. But their true spiritual cousin might be Beck or, to extend the cinematic metaphor, Quentin Tarantino:

They’re postmodernists and virtuoso formalists, too meticulous and too emotionally controlled to come off as whacked-out brothers from another planet. The jesters behind Gnarls Barkley are a lot of fun. Occasionally, they’re brilliant. They’re just not crazy.

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**Death by Oboe**

How acoustic instruments torment their players.

By Jan Swafford

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 3:01 PM ET

Years ago, I heard a lovely evening of South Indian music that involved a double-headed drum called a mridangam. Afterward, somebody asked its player what the stuff he’d been smearing on one of his drum heads throughout the performance was.

"Cream of Rice," he replied.

"You mean, like in the supermarket?"

"Indeed, yes."

Turns out, breakfast cereal is just the thing to keep the head of your mridangam smooth and supple. While pop musicians and classical composers alike are always going on about computer software, acoustic instruments and the people who play them are a far more cultish affair. They’re still doing things by hand in traditional, sometimes outlandish, sometimes messy ways.

I spent some years of supposedly being a musician, but the beginning of my education in the low-tech and faintly mystical endeavor of creating acoustic instruments came when I interviewed a well-known stringed-instrument maker. When he told me his instruments were based on close study of Strads, I asked, Why not use modern technology to duplicate every millimeter of, say, a Stradivarius violin, chemically analyze the varnish and duplicate it, et voilà: great violin. He sighed, having heard that one before. "You know, every piece of wood is different," he said. Every piece of the six kinds of aged wood in a violin has to be shaped according to its particular resonance, elasticity, and function. And the varnish? "Don't get me started," he said.

Violin makers do a lot of tapping and flexing as they create an instrument. The overall shape and proportions are traditional, but to find the unique texture and resonance of a particular assembly of wood, especially for the front and back plates, you gouge it, measure it, plane it, tap it, plane it, tap it some more, flex it, plane it, scrape it, tap it, and so on for hours, if not days. An ordinary person would go insane. Many makers have a private formula for the varnish, and rumors about what goes into it have Macbethian overtones: eye of newt, toe of frog? At the end comes the mystical part. An instrument takes years of playing to break in. So when the maker first bows the strings of a new violin, what the maker is listening for is not what it sounds like now but what it’s going to sound like five years from now.

Look into the rearing and feeding of any acoustic instrument and you’ll find its own frustrations, its own weirdness, its singular history and artistry. Behold the ubiquitous cymbal: the flash of marching bands, glitter of rock acts, clanging rhythm of jazz drummers, sparkle on the climax of a thousand classical pieces. Worldwide, any number of companies make cymbals according to myriad traditions. Percussionists, who are typically fanatics,
each have their kit of favorites: This one has a set of Chinese cymbals, that one loves Javanese gongs. All of them love brake drums, which have to be secured from an auto junkyard where they are kept in rusty piles. Says a percussionist: "You go to the junkyard and hit brake drums for three or four hours till you find ones you like."

For your basic cymbal in the Western world, there has never been much doubt about who makes the most distinctive: the Zildjian family, once of Turkey; since 1928, of Quincy and Norwell, Massachusetts. Whatever it is that gives Zildjiants their unmistakable frisson is a secret alloy known only to an unbroken line of family members since being discovered, in 1623, by the Armenian alchemist Avedis Zildjian. At the time, Avedis was trying to refine base metals into gold rather than into a not particularly profitable musical instrument. His alloy is still created in deep secrecy in the Zildjian factory. Invent your own rumor here; they've all been heard, some of them including asparagus. Many Zildjians were made by traditional hand hammering until 1964, when Ringo Starr played them on The Ed Sullivan Show with the Beatles.

Next, consider pipe organs. When it comes to the metal pipes, every maker has a preferred alloy. The main ingredients are tin and lead, the latter composing up to 25 percent of the mix. All that lead can't be good for the brain cells, but it's what you do. After you've made a large organ's 4,000 or so pipes, ranging from peeping pencil stubs to apocalyptic roars up to two stories tall, every one of them sounds like crap until it has been individually voiced by hand: filed and crimped and tapped with a collection of little thingies. You blow through the pipe, fiddle with the opening, blow through it, fiddle with it, and so on roughly 10-by-4,000 times.

If you spoke with makers of any instrument from flutes to flugelhorns to didgeridoos, you'd hear a similar tale of struggle with nature, which is indifferent to perfection and loves mediocrity. When you get into the musical usages of living organisms, things get only stranger, and not just with wood-bodied instruments like guitars and cellos. Stringed-instrument bows, for example, have their own lore and history, all of them at the service of hair from a horse's ass.

Mozart once wrote his father that his favorite piano maker would leave his soundboards outside through a whole winter; the ones that didn't crack apart were the ones he used. During the Renaissance, lute players were advised to put their instruments under the covers of their beds in the morning to keep them moist and calm. Your lute was like a mistress, best residing between the sheets, adorable but fickle and hard to keep in tune.

In the modern world, nothing in music is more tragicomic than the subject of double-reed instruments like the oboe and bassoon. If you're an oboist or bassoonist in a high-school band, you buy ready-made reeds. Otherwise, you make your own from scratch, using expensive aged cane from particular terroirs, preferably in southern France. Cutting and trimming and binding and shaving reeds consumes a good deal of your days, while other musicians are practicing and regular people are having fun or making love. If you play the oboe seriously, much of your free time is spent making reeds, not love. Besides being ridiculously fragile, reeds are also sensitive to humidity, which on a soggy night can turn an orchestral woodwind section into a squawkfest.

A professional oboist will tell you more than you need to know about what constitutes a Mozart reed, a Mahler reed, a Stravinsky reed, and so on. If he plays in a pops orchestra, there's probably a Lennon/McCartney reed. If he wants to show you his reed knife, which is razor sharp, you should keep an eye on the exit. Reed making and the pressure on the brain that comes from blowing into an oboe can do unpredictable things to a person.

Actually, every instrument does you harm in one way or another, physically and mentally. Violinists and violists have a permanent bruise under their chins from the chin rest; clarinetists have receding jaws; piccolo players tend to be hard of hearing (likewise any orchestral players sitting in front of the brass or percussion sections). And whether they started that way or got that way en route, a certain percentage of drummers are simply nuts. Which is all to say that acoustic instruments are living things, as we say of wines, violas, lutes, and mridangams, and living things are always messing with you, though they can also be quite lovely some of the time.

other magazines

**The Upside of Global Warming**
The weekly standard fights the conventional wisdom on environmentalism.
By Morgan Smith
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 2:33 PM ET

**Weekly Standard, April 14**
A piece that casts aspersions on global warming "gibberish" looks on the bright side of the meteorological forecast that the Arctic will be ice-free in the summer by 2030. The piece suggests that subsistence-hunting Inuits "might find better work in the oil and gas sector, as high energy prices and melting ice make the Arctic an increasingly attractive area for exploration."

As for the outcry over decreasing polar bear populations, the piece proposes that if "the threat to the bears from climate change is real," they could be "relocated." ... An article dissects Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick's first year in office for clues as to how an Obama presidency would play out. It offers a bleak forecast: "If Deval Patrick is indeed a preview of Barack Obama,
the lesson is buyer beware. … [He is] little more than a machine politician packaged with a New Age ribbon of hope.”

**New Republic, April 23**

In a special issue on the environment, a piece by Jeffery Rosen examines conservatives' strategies against environmental regulation. They first undermined the Environmental Protection Agency in the name of states' rights, "then attacked any states that tried to pass broader environmental protections." But Rosen suggests "conservatives may have unwittingly checkmated themselves" now that Congress and state legislators are in a "pro-environmental mood." … An article probes the apparent ill will among John McCain's staffers and says McCain is "a patriarch presiding over a brood of squabbling children vying for Daddy's affection." The antagonism stems from a schism between loyalists who back longtime McCain adviser John Weaver and current campaign manager Rick Davis, who links Weaver to the February New York Times article on McCain's inappropriate connection to a lobbyist. The staffer divide has "the potential to violently erupt" because of the candidate’s reluctance to choose sides.

**Newsweek, April 14**

The cover story explores how green issues have emerged at the forefront of the 2008 election, with all three candidates holding stronger-than-average (at least, the average Republican, in McCain's case) records on the environment. According to the piece, there's been a shift in the American conscious toward "environmentalism as a broad-based political force, rather than an elite preoccupation of people concerned about the effect of rising sea levels on beachfront property." … Daily Kos publisher Markos Moulitsas argues in an op-ed that the protracted Democratic race has been good for the party. It's reawakened Democratic constituencies in states the primary season usually bypasses. It's also helped Obama prepare for the general: "After living a charmed political life, with nary a serious general-election battle against a Republican on his résumé, he needed to prove his mettle in hand-to-hand political combat."

**Good, May/June 2008**

In a cover package devoted to China, a piece profiles Orange County—the one outside of Beijing. If this gated community that promotes itself as "pure American" is "to be typical of development in the new China," it would seem that the world's most populous country is hurtling toward a dystopian future—and taking the rest of the planet with it." … In an interview, Tibet's prime-minister-in-exile, Samdhong Rinpoche, argues against boycotting the Olympic Games: "[W]e wish that a large number of free countries will participate in these games, and that that will have some kind of positive effect on the Chinese government for more transparency and more individual freedom." … A comprehensive foldout explains everything from how the Chinese name their babies to China's 10 largest companies. It also includes an amusing mock-tabloid feature—the Chinese, "They're Just Like Us!"

**New York, April 14**

A feature tells the story of "one of the untold casualties of the [AIDS] epidemic's aftershocks": Dr. Ramon Torres, once a "visionary" AIDS researcher and activist who brought treatment to New York City's homeless, now a known drug addict who "squandered his standing" among clinical circles. He currently faces felony charges of practicing medicine under the influence. As the disease "moved from a mostly deadly plague to a largely manageable condition," many "frontline veterans" like Torres have "feelings of emptiness and disillusionment." According the piece, which provides a moving history of the progression of AIDS care in the United States, a startling number of AIDS physicians have encountered drug-related criminal charges. … A piece flirts with the possibility of a gridlocked Democratic convention in a dramatization from West Wing writer Lawrence O'Donnell. Spoiler: Obama plays hardball.

**The New Yorker, April 14**

A piece recounts the thorny tenure battle of Barnard professor Nadia Abu El-Haj, who came under fire from Israel advocacy groups for her anthropological work studying how Jews have used archeology to confirm their right to the Holy Land. The campuswide debate gained global attention when a Barnard alumna circulated a petition attacking Abu El-Haj's scholarship, citing discredited facts "gleaned from militant Zionist blogs and Web sites." The piece observes that the fierce reaction from some of college's "more sheltered" Jewish student population could stem from "their first experience of a community where Israel's policies are discussed and challenged de-facto; where Muslim students share their classrooms and Muslim professors … teach them." … In a review, Joan Acocella explains the appeal of Dancing With the Stars: It offers nostalgia for the "romance [and] glamour" of the ballroom era combined with "all the sadism and sentimentality" of reality television.

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**poem**

**"Triumph"**

By Alan Shapiro

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:29 AM ET

Listen to Alan Shapiro read.

I saw him as I drove by—

I don't have to tell you what he looked like——
Spreading a plastic sheet out
As for a picnic
Except he wasn't picnicking;
He was lying down to sleep
In the middle of the sidewalk
In the middle of the day
On a busy street,
The spoils of him lying there
For everyone to gawk at
Or step around.
And when I drove by later
The same day, and then again still later
Late that night,
He was still there, sleeping,
And maybe I slowed down
To check on him or got him at least a blanket,
Or called an ambulance,
But whatever I did or didn't do
I did it to forget that
Either way
He was the one asleep on the sidewalk,
I was the one borne along in the car
That may as well have been a chariot
Of empathy, a chariot
The crowd cheers
Even as it weeps
For the captured elephant too wide
To squeeze through
The triumphal arch
And draw home
To bed my sweet
Sensitive Caesar of a soul.

Since the last time we talked in this corner of the Internet,
Mississippi and Texas have refined their delegate allocations—
and Barack Obama has widened his delegate advantage by six.
First off, Mississippi added a delegate to Obama's tally and took
one away from Hillary Clinton after party officials realized
they'd miscalculated the original delegate distribution. In Texas,
meanwhile, the caucus results were finally certified, giving
Obama a five-delegate margin overall when the caucus- and
primary-delegate allocations were combined—a gain of two
from our previous estimates.

Play with our still-new Flash version of the calculator below.

Methodology

- The current number of pledged delegates comes from
  NBC News' tally.
- 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 now includes options to enable Florida
  and Michigan. When you check the boxes next to either
  or both states, you'll notice that the overall number of
  delegates needed for the nomination changes. With
  Florida and/or Michigan involved, there are more total
  delegates to go around, so the number needed for a
  majority rises. Our calculator assumes that the DNC
  will allow both states to retain their entire pledged
  delegation, and not punish the states by halving their
  delegate totals like the RNC did.
- 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.

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How many points do you get for just showing up? John McCain will get an idea at the end of the month when he travels to venues where Republicans don't usually campaign. McCain is planning to speak in inner cities, heavily African-American sections of the South, and poor sections of Appalachia. Most of his stops will be in areas where voters have traditionally supported Democrats.

Can McCain win over many new voters in these areas? Probably not. In 2000, President Bush got just 9 percent of the total black vote. He improved slightly to 11 percent in 2004. If McCain winds up running against Barack Obama, his opportunities in the African-American community will diminish further.

That's OK, though, because the McCain tour is not aimed at winning a host of black votes. Nor is it primarily about the next obvious play: showing independents that he cares about minorities and the underprivileged, a traditional bank shot candidates take in order to make themselves appealing to moderate voters. The tour, which will include lots of freewheeling town halls, is more like performance art, an attempt to show off authenticity and the unfiltered McCain. "People can come in and do what they want," says McCain's top adviser, Mark Salter. "They can praise, chastise, and argue with him. This isn't just his style. It's a part of his message."

McCain's strategists are mapping the tour—and his campaign—on the theory that even if voters disagree with McCain, they come away with a favorable gut-level sense of his character when they get to see him up close. This is what aides think helped him win New Hampshire in 2000 and what they think sparked his comeback this election. With this tour, McCain is hoping not so much that the people in the hall fall for him as that the cameras capturing the event can convey some of his appeal to independents across the country.

McCain is doing events like this tour out of necessity, too. While the press is focused on the Democratic race, this helps bring McCain attention. The press likes Republicans doing-unorthodox-things stories, and McCain likes to see himself reflected back as a maverick in their coverage.

The tour also appeals to McCain's strong suit. He's no good in the usual campaign setting. He sounds stilted and unemotional behind a podium. In a town hall, he speaks more directly. His better qualities are more likely to come out in a high-risk setting, where he exchanges views with sometimes hostile voters, than in the deadening policy speech told before the beaming faces of GOP stalwarts.

The McCain tour also aims to draw a contrast with Barack Obama. (They already assume he's going to win the nomination.) The GOP's attack will boil down to the accusation that Obama is a big phony. The Democrat gives them an opening: Obama talks about how he goes in front of hostile audiences, but he doesn't really do it much. He heralds his bipartisan appeal and talent for bringing people together, but his track record on these fronts is thin. He talks about how his administration will put its negotiations over policy on C-SPAN, but he has run a conventionally conservative campaign, keeping press access relatively low. When his top economic aide (and former Slate contributor), Austan Goolsbee, got into trouble, the campaign hid him under a bushel rather than offering him to reporters to answer questions. "Obama talks about doing these things," says a McCain aide, "he just doesn't do them." With big acts of accessibility and reaching out beyond his party ranks, McCain hopes to show as well as tell that Obama's promises to do the same are empty.

With this tour, McCain is trying something that has never really been tried before by a Republican presidential candidate. When Jack Kemp ran with Bob Dole in 1996, I toured with him to a community center in Watts and Sylvia's in Harlem. He pitched the African-American crowds on the power of tax cuts and personal empowerment with just as much of his wacky energy as he spread over lily-white crowds. He was well-received, but his constant mantra that "green [meaning money] is the color of civil rights" never caught on. (No one was ever quite sure what he meant when he yelled it.) Plus Dole never made the same kinds of trips, which undermined the pitch. George Bush promised to run as a new kind of Republican for everyone but rarely performed outside of his comfort zone. Plus, Bush was highly nervous about unplanned questions, and his campaigns eventually screened voters to make sure he had to talk only to fawning ones.

That no Republican nominee has done a tour like this before should signal that it's high-risk. For all the energy McCain derives from town hall appearances, so far his minority crowds have been limited to Indian reservations and poor Mexican-American areas in his home state. McCain is also going to be talking about education, health care, and the economy, issues he is far less comfortable addressing than issues of defense and national security. Still, McCain and his aides are hoping that the points they win for trying will overcome the downside of possible fumbles and missteps.

Will any of this work? Only if McCain's effort is sustained. If this tour looks like a stunt, then all the grand claims the McCain team is making for it—that the tour is driven by McCain's sense of duty and openness—will boomerang. As a candidate who wants to represent all the people, his aides say, he can't keep himself from going before all different kinds of people, even if it's a risk. But all that deep-convictions talk could easily come to look like a sham. McCain doesn't want to go out to prove he's the real thing only to end up looking like another phony.
politics
The Great McCain Story You've Probably Forgotten
What an old anecdote about Mo Udall in the hospital reveals about McCain's character.
By Michael Lewis
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 6:47 AM ET

Back in 1996 and 1997, before John McCain was a presidential candidate or object of media fascination, Michael Lewis followed the Arizona senator around as he campaigned for Bob Dole and worked to reform campaign-finance laws. Lewis' pieces for the New Republic and the New York Times Magazine portrayed McCain as a passionate, cantankerous, astonishingly honest political character who frequently acted in ways that brought him no political gain. In the recent back-and-forth over whether McCain is a regular politician or a true outlier, we remembered a wonderful moment from Lewis' 1997 New York Times Magazine profile of McCain, "The Subversive." The passage below comes at the very end of Lewis' article.

By 7:30 we were on the road, and McCain was reminiscing about his early political career. When he was elected to the House in 1982, he said, he was "a freshman right-wing Nazi." But his visceral hostility toward Democrats generally was quickly tempered by his tendency to see people as individuals and judge them that way. He was taken in hand by Morris Udall, the Arizona congressman who was the liberal conscience of the Congress and a leading voice for reform. (Most famously—and disastrously for his own career—Udall took aim at the seniority system that kept young talent in its place at the end of the dais. "The longer you're here, the more you'll like it," he used to joke to incoming freshmen.)

"Mo reached out to me in 50 different ways," McCain recalled. "Right from the start, he'd say: I'm going to hold a press conference out in Phoenix. Why don't you join me?" All these journalists would show up to hear what Mo had to say. In the middle of it all, Mo would point to me and say, 'I'd like to hear John's views.' Well, hell, I didn't have any views. But I got up and learned and was introduced to the state." Four years later, when McCain ran for and won Barry Goldwater's Senate seat, he said he felt his greatest debt of gratitude not to Goldwater—who had shunned him—but to Udall. "There's no way Mo could have been more wonderful," he says, "and there was no reason for him to be that way."

For the past few years, Udall has lain ill with Parkinson's disease in a veterans hospital in Northeast Washington, which is where we were heading. Every few weeks, McCain drives over to pay his respects. These days the trip is a ceremony, like going to church, only less pleasant. Udall is seldom conscious, and even then he shows no sign of recognition. McCain brings with him a stack of newspaper clips on Udall's favorite subjects: local politics in Arizona, environmental legislation, Native American land disputes, subjects in which McCain initially had no particular interest himself. Now, when the Republican senator from Arizona takes the floor on behalf of Native Americans, or when he writes an op-ed piece arguing that the Republican Party embrace environmentalism, or when the polls show once again that he is Arizona's most popular politician, he remains aware of his debt to Arizona's most influential Democrat.

One wall of Udall's hospital room was cluttered with photos of his family back in Arizona; another bore a single photograph of Udall during his season with the Denver Nuggets, dribbling a basketball. Aside from a congressional seal glued to a door jamb, there was no indication what the man in the bed had done for his living. Beneath a torn gray blanket on a narrow hospital cot, Udall lay twisted and disfigured. No matter how many times McCain tapped him on the shoulder and called his name, his eyes remained shut.

A nurse entered and seemed surprised to find anyone there, and it wasn't long before I found out why: Almost no one visits anymore. In his time, which was not very long ago, Mo Udall was one of the most-sought-after men in the Democratic Party. Yet as he dies in a veterans hospital a few miles from the Capitol, he is visited regularly only by a single old political friend, John McCain. "He's not going to wake up this time," McCain said.

On the way out of the parking lot, McCain recalled what it was like to be a nobody called upon by a somebody. As he did, his voice acquired the same warmth that colored Russell Feingold's speech when he described the first call from John McCain. "When you called Feingold … " I started to ask him. But before I could, he interrupted. "Yeah," he says, "I thought of Mo." And then, for maybe the third time that morning, McCain spoke of how it affected him when Udall took him in hand. It was a simple act of affection and admiration, and for that reason it meant all the more to McCain. It was one man saying to another, We disagree in politics but not in life. It was one man saying to another, party political differences cut only so deep. Having made that step, they found much to agree upon and many useful ways to work together. This is the reason McCain keeps coming to see Udall even after Udall has lost his last shred of political influence. The politics were never all that important.

politics
Will Penn Stay Quiet?
Suffering in silence is his new job for Clinton.
By John Dickerson
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:51 AM ET
When I asked a Clinton ally what I would notice most now that Mark Penn has been demoted, the reply e-mail came back quickly with a quip: "No more stories about Penn."

I wonder. It's true that the press won't be able to pass along as much regular Penn griping from Clinton aides and associates. (The headline for his fall should be: Penn Downed by Sniper Fire.) But another great source for future Penn stories still walks the earth: Mark Penn.

He has good reason to speak up. He's taking a pounding. Now that Penn has been shoved to the side, he's being blamed for everything: losing the Iowa caucus, conceding other caucuses to Obama, his candidate's failure to show her more human side, cost over-runs, the campaign's pugnacious tone, and failing to see that voters wanted change this year in candidates instead of experience. Soon enough, it'll come out that he used the last of the nondairy creamer in the kitchen. A lot of this has been aired before, but many of his critics are using his plunge to take a few last whacks at the piñata.

Even Clinton supporters who don't delight in making Penn the scapegoat can find it useful to blame him. He serves as a clean

Penn is, in fact, to blame for a lot. Time's Mark Halperin has printed a helpful list for anyone plotting recriminations. Whether Penn is solely to blame for all he's being held accountable for is the topic for post-election seminars after tempers have cooled. For the moment, if he cares about Clinton's campaign, he's got to take the abuse. Any attempt to set the record straight would initiate a new flurry of press coverage that would damage Clinton. Penn was at the center of the campaign, so any soft-pedaling or denial of his failures points directly to Clinton's. Either he doomed a good candidate, or Clinton is fatally flawed.

A prolonged debate over Penn also serves up this question: Why did the Clintons hold on to him so long? Such a discussion would reinforce existing concerns about the insular Clinton family flanked by loyal guards. She's been selling her toughness, but that quality may make her impervious to criticism about those she depends on to weather the storms. This is not a good trait to get hit with if you're trying to replace George Bush. None of these conversations are helpful when they're in earshot of the voters who hold the key to Clinton's slim chances.

To stay quiet, Penn will have to show nearly inhuman self-restraint, a quality so many of his critics say he lacked. He re-energized his enemies in February when he appeared to distance himself from the campaign as it went south. In an e-mail to the Los Angeles Times, Penn described himself as "an outside message advisor with no campaign staff reporting to me. … I have had no say or involvement in four key areas—the financial budget and resource allocation, political or organizational sides. Those were the responsibility of Patti Solis Doyle, Harold Ickes and Mike Henry, and they met separately on all matters relating to those areas."

Though Penn might have been inching away, the Clintons have always shown him a lot of the loyalty so prized in Clinton land—the expectations that were the source of the harsh backlash against Bill Richardson, Bill Clinton even publicly defended Penn after Hillary's losses in Iowa. Perhaps that loyalty is part of the reason why Penn wasn't fired entirely (he continues to advise the Clintons, and his firm still does polling for the campaign). Whether Penn can stay quiet rather than defend his reputation for the next several months is a test of whether he can show that loyalty right back. He has plenty of incentive, though, to try to correct the record before it becomes rock-hard conventional wisdom. "What happened to Clinton the inevitable front-runner?" people will ask. Mark Penn does not want "Mark Penn" to be the answer.

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politics
Finding the Exit
The moment presidential candidates know it's time to go.
By John Dickerson
Saturday, April 5, 2008, at 7:11 AM ET

At some point in the next weeks or months, either Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton or Sen. Barack Obama is going to face a lonely moment. Standing at the bathroom sink with a toothbrush or huddling with aides at campaign headquarters or collapsed on a couch at home with his or her spouse, one of them will decide that it's over.

This will happen—honest. The campaign may seem interminable, but at some point, it's going to end. The voters will cast ballots, and the superdelegates will scheme, but for Clinton (or, less likely for the moment, Obama), the contest will come down to this simple, stark moment of recognition.

But how does it happen? How does a presidential candidate decide to switch off his or her frantic determination to win every news cycle, shake every hand, and rebut every charge and instead end a quest that for many candidates has been the driving force of their adult lives? "Nobody can make the decision except you," says Tony Coelho, who managed the early portion of Al Gore's race in 2000 and was a confidant to Rep. Richard Gephardt during his 1988 campaign. "And you have to make the decision in a way that you don't second-guess yourself the rest of your life."
Dawn for Clinton, "I don't think it's going to be a 3 a.m. phone call," says and says, "That's how you know." out of a candidate the veins." So it was probably inevitable that, in the race immediately because she can never overcome Obama's went further last weekend, saying that Clinton should drop before the primary voting ended. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., suggested recently of a candidate he broached the idea of throwing in the towel with the former House majority leader and got a stirring rebuke. "I'm not getting out until they cut my head off and hand it to me," Trippi remembers Gephardt roaring. "His neck was red, and you could see the veins."

Usually, candidates get ushered to the threshold of departure: The voters spurn them, the press stops covering them, and they run out of money. "It's like the seven stages of denial at hyperspeed," says Mary Matalin, a veteran GOP operative who advised former Sen. Fred Thompson (remember him?) this time around. In 1996, Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, spent record sums only to place fifth in the Iowa caucuses; he still had cash aplenty in the bank, but the voters clearly just didn't want him, so he folded up shop. In 1976, when former Sen. Fred Harris of Oklahoma ran for the Democratic nomination, his campaign plane was full of reporters—until he lost Iowa and New Hampshire. "Hell, I had 'em with me one day, and the next day I didn't," he says of the press. "That's how you know."

The biggest blow for any candidate, though, is the day the money disappears. "What gets them out is not that lightning strikes," says Bob Beckel, who managed Walter F. Mondale's 1984 campaign, "but when their treasurer arrives and says, 'We're a million bucks in debt.'" In conversations with campaign veterans and candidates, the scene they paint is always the same: stern men in shirt sleeves in a drab hotel room talking about the hard numbers and the folly of plunging into deep personal debt. Clinton won't experience that quick of a death. She has the money, votes, and media attention to continue until the convention. (So does Obama, for that matter, if he were suddenly to become the underdog.) Undecided superdelegates could rally to her, but this doesn't look likely to happen anytime soon. The voters could show an overwhelming preference in the remaining 10 contests or deliver a big upset in a single, crucial one, but they've been no help so far in bringing the race to a close. "I don't think it's going to be a 3 a.m. phone call," says Democratic stalwart Robert Shrum of the final moment that will persuade one of the candidates to get out of the race. "I think it will gradually dawn."

The Obama forces tried to bring on the early dawn for Clinton, and it backfired. Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., suggested recently that superdelegates should embrace Obama as the nominee before the primary voting ended. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., went further last weekend, saying that Clinton should drop out of the race immediately because she can never overcome Obama's lead among elected delegates.

But if Clinton had even been flirting with leaving the race, her male colleagues gave her fine reasons not to. A ruling from a few white-haired white men from the most exclusive club in America was just what Clinton needed to energize her supporters, many of whom see deep sexism in the calls for her to drop out. Supporters now show up at Clinton rallies with signs that read, "Don't Quit." Clinton sent out two different fundraising appeals prompted by the calls for her exit. "They couldn't have done anything more helpful to her," says James Carville, the Clintons' resident janissary.

All presidential candidates are ambitious, of course, but the decision to throw in the towel goes beyond one contender's personal desires. Candidates keenly feel the weight of disappointing all those people at the rope lines and in the living rooms who have told them they're pulling for them. "A lot of people invested time and money and effort into my campaign when I ran," says Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who unsuccessfully sought the GOP nomination in 1996 and 2000. "One of my feelings was that I let them down. I haven't done as well as I should have."

Candidates who think they are fighting for a cause, like Teddy Kennedy in 1980 and Ronald Reagan in 1976, won't get out of the race early because they are convinced that they are fighting for bedrock principles—the very principles that attracted them to politics!—and not their private ambitions. Clinton has been promising voters she'll fight for them; with her own struggle to survive, she has won (as it were) the chance to show people just what kind of fighter she is. So it was probably inevitable that, in Philadelphia last Tuesday, she would compare herself to the town's fictional boxing hero: "Could you imagine if Rocky Balboa had gotten halfway up those art museum steps and said, 'Well, I guess that's about far enough'? Let me tell you something, when it comes to finishing the fight, Rocky and I have a lot in common. I never quit."

So call it the Rocky syndrome—the just-before-the-end affliction that strikes losing candidates. They all go through a punchy period in which, no matter what the odds, they come to believe that they can pull out a victory with a roundhouse before the final bell. "You can convince yourself of anything," says Beckel. "I was convinced with a couple more weeks that Mondale could have beat Reagan. How nuts is that?"

To make matters harder, there are plenty of real-life political comebacks that candidates can act out in their hotel rooms at night to comfort themselves. Remember that "Dewey Defeats Truman" headline, they can tell themselves. John Kerry rescued his doomed 2004 campaign with a surprise win over Howard Dean in Iowa. Ronald Reagan looked as though he was in deep trouble when he fired his campaign manager late in his 1980 campaign. Sen. John McCain, left for dead last year, may be one of the best Lazarus stories of all. And there may yet be one
more. "If Hillary Clinton wins the nomination," says Trippi, "no candidate will ever want to get out."

Perhaps the greatest impediment to clear thinking for a doomed candidate is simply that endurance in the face of doom is a key political trait—probably one crucial to their success in life so far. Toughness and endurance were, in fact, the only ideas the McCain team had left during its bleakest period. "I have a very complicated strategy for you," adviser Charles Black says he told McCain as they tried to decide whether the senator could stay in after his staff, money, and lead in the polls had all disappeared. "Stay in the race until you're the last man standing."

For Clinton, who has endured smears, sneers, calls for her head, and a thousand editorial cartoons, this armor has sustained her throughout her career. "If you have scar tissue, then you know what it's like to be beat up, and you can go through it rather easily," says Coelho. "There's no doubt that Hillary Clinton has scar tissue, which makes her immune to many of the attacks coming her way. When people call for her to get out, they are not appealing to her intellect; they are appealing to her scar tissue, and for her that means fight on."

Candidates without a thick hide often grow one simply by going through the brutal campaign process. To have any success at all, they must become immune to the very forces that ultimately might signal that they need to drop out. Once they've bought into the process, the end-stage indignities—audiences of only a few dozen, the disappearance of your once-chummy campaign surrogates—are hard to recognize.

In the end, Clinton (or perhaps Obama) will likely call it quits when she (or he) decides, in a dark night of the soul, that continuing will permanently harm her (or his) political future. Then they will begin the long process of comforting disappointed supporters, watching the cameras disappear, and hearing the endless analyses of their political demise. They will feel, in some ways, as though they're attending their own wake. Then perhaps they'll have another solitary realization: The way they handle their exit from one presidential campaign might be the first step in building the case for the next one.

**Correction, April 7, 2008:** In the original version of this article, the Clinton quotation ended with the candidate saying, "I never give up," which was as it was reported in a number of contemporaneous accounts of the event. An audio recording suggests Clinton misspoke and said, "I never get up." The four words in question have been deleted. (Return to the corrected sentence.)

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**press box**

**What? You've Not Been Honored by the Webbys?**

If there is a less exclusive award on the planet, I've yet to hear of it.

By Jack Shafer

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 6:54 PM ET

Entering your Web site in the **Webby Awards** is a little like buying a box of Cracker Jack—everybody wins a prize.

That's only a slight exaggeration. The 2008 contest—the 12th annual—will dispense awards in **119 categories** next month, honoring Web sites, interactive advertising, film and video sites and teams, and mobile Web sites. The organization will announce winners May 6, but it has already designated "honorees" in each category, more than a dozen in some cases. The organization has also selected five different "nominees" in each category from which it will ultimately pick winners. But not just one winner—the group will bestow **two** top prizes in each category. There's the "Webby Award," selected by the group's judges, and the "People's Voice Award," chosen by online voters.

A "star-studded" ceremony is scheduled for June 9 in New York City, where Webbys, hand-cast thingamajigs that look like chromed bedsprings, will be passed out.

There's so much excellence being honored on the Webby Awards site that you need a mainframe to tote it up. I count nearly 600 nominees and upward of 1,100 honorees. The group would have you believe that it's a tough competition, boasting that of nearly 10,000 contestants this year, fewer than 15 percent were official honorees. Please. I've heard of mail-order diploma mills that are more exclusive than the Webbys.

It's with great shame that I confess that **Slate** is a nominee in both the "Best Copy/Writing" slot and the "Best Editing" video category. I'm equally dismayed by the fact that **Slate** isn't the only big-shot media entity worthy for a Webby. The **New York Times**, CondéNet, DDB Chicago, Disney Channel, MIT Media Lab, MLB, NPR, Wieden + Kennedy, MTV, Gannett, NBC, and practically every major Web presence you can think of has gathered the nominee or honoree accolade.

So, if everybody who plays is a winner, who really ends up winning?

The Webby Awards, of course. The group charges a fee of $275 for Web sites and up to $475 for each advertising-campaign entry. (If I knew **Slate** was spending money like this, I would have asked for a bigger raise in December.) Even after allowing for discounted entry fees, the back of the envelope says the Webbys could be taking in more than $2 million from its
contestants. Then there's an undetermined amount of loot collected from corporate sponsors and partners (Adobe, Nokia, Getty Images, Reuters, Variety, Wired, Pequot Ventures, Brightcove, et al.) and tickets for the awards gala. The Webbys don't mind nickel-and-diming applicants for cash, either, selling "custom framed certificates to commemorate" nominees and honorees, says its Web site.

Again, I exaggerate. The Webby Awards aren't the only winners. The winners of the prizes, the nominees, and the honorees also benefit from exercising their bragging rights to clients and competitors who aren't smart enough to know a Webby Award is worthless. Some sites are already boasting about being picked on their own pages or in e-mail to me. The winning editors, publishers, designers, and ad jockeys also gain if they can convince their bosses to throw good money after bad by sending them to attend the Webby Awards events, which last year ran for three days in New York.

Clearly, the only way for Slate to reclaim its stupid Webby investment is to send me to New York for three days in June if we're fortunate enough to win.

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Show how much you despise the Webby Awards by voting for Slate in the "People's Voice" contest. If we win, I'll denounce the rip-off from the podium provided Slate sends me. If you love the Webby Awards, send e-mail to slate.pressbox@gmail.com and show me the error of my ways. (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.)

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The 119 Webby Awards Categories

Web sites
Activism
Art

Associations
Automotive
Banking/bill paying
Beauty and cosmetics
Best copy/writing
Best home/welcome page
Best navigation/structure
Best practices
Best use of animation or motion graphics
Best use of photography
Best use of typography
Best use of video or moving image
Best visual design - aesthetic
Best visual design - function
Blog - business
Blog - culture/personal
Blog - political
Broadband
Celebrity/fan
Charitable organizations nonprofit
Community
Consumer electronics
Corporate communications
Cultural institutions
Education
Employment
Events
Family/parenting
Fashion
Financial services
Food and beverage
Games
Games-related
Government
Guides/ratings/reviews
Health
Humor
Insurance
It hardware/software
Law
Lifestyle
Magazine
Movie and film
Music
Netart
News
Newspaper
Personal Web site
Pharmaceuticals
Podcasts
Politics
Professional services
Radio
Real estate
Religion and spirituality
Restaurant

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Advertising revenue at newspapers has fallen off a cliff and may tumble all the way to the bottom of the Marianas Trench if the promised recession arrives. Average circulation is down, too, and the combined trends are prompting publications from the New York Times to Newsweek to the Washington Post to the Boston Globe to the Twin Cities' Star Tribune to Sam Zell's Tribune Co. and beyond to offer senior employees buyouts.

Some newsrooms are saying goodbye with a wad of cash to their most experienced and decorated hands. At the New York Times, Supreme Court reporter Linda Greenhouse has taken a buyout, critics David Ansen and David Gates are leaving Newsweek, and prize-winning bylines at the Washington Post are likely to depart as the paper completes its third round of buyouts in six years.

Yet, good news can be found inside the bad news. Some of the exiting veterans have held their plum positions for years, even decades, and have given no signs of leaving—this is not always a good thing. News organizations rely on turnover to keep them vital, and in many cases buyouts (hence "two cheers") may help revitalize a few franchises.

While I hold the 61-year-old Greenhouse in great esteem and will miss her coverage, it's worth noting that she had covered the Supremes for nearly 30 years. Disco was still big when she took the assignment. Starsky and Hutch was on television. In passing the baton from Greenhouse to 47-year-old whippersnapper Adam Liptak, the Times has a chance to reconceptualize its court coverage. (Of course, you can teach somebody like Greenhouse a few new tricks, but new editor-reporter teams are usually more daring and inventive.) In the Web era, is the best use of the
Times' column inches the traditional day-after-oral-arguments story and the day-after-decisions dispatches? Is there a more creative way to report on the court? Should Liptak cover the court with more argument and greater point of view, the way he covers the law in his current Sidebar column? Whether dug-in journalists are excellent or mediocre, their departures give publications the opportunity to reinvent themselves.

The "retirement" of the buyout brigade has the added benefit of loosening the ugly stranglehold the boomers have over the press. I may be risking self-extinction by advocating wholesale boomer expulsion, but there are just too many of us—especially the older variety—in top slots for journalism's good. The sheer weight of our presence blocks the promotion of the next generation of talented journalists to the most desirable beats.

Meanwhile, over on the Web, where news staffs tend to be younger and less tradition-bound, the sort of experimentation newspapers and magazines should be engaging in is a part of the daily routine. If not for age-discrimination legislation and other statutes, our bosses would have cleared us out with sharp-bladed bulldozers long ago and replaced us with younger, more-adaptable, and less-expensive minds. Yes, you heard right. Newsrooms must cut their budgets to survive, and the high-salaried boomers (and pre-boomers) are liabilities.

Fortunately, the one thing boomers understand is money, and the offer of a couple of years' salary in the form of a buyout has been too great a temptation for many of them to resist. Whenever a journalism vet boards the SS Buyout—no matter how good he is—his departure initiates a series of reassignments that help replenish a news organization's juices by bringing down the median age of reporters and editors and making it possible for his publication to add a lower-paying entry-level slot. (Some of the bought-out have returned to their publications without leaving by signing on as contract employees. Others, like Greenhouse, have segued to gigs in academia: She's bound for a job at Yale Law School. Others have not been as fortunate.)

Lower salaries for journalists are not a good thing, but neither are the lower profits earned by their publications. It could be that the relatively high salaries journalists have earned in the last 30 years were a function of the monopoly profits their news organizations earned, and that the average salary may have peaked around 2000, about the time the number of news jobs peaked.

"There goes our institutional memory," somebody usually laments whenever a graybeard leaves a news organization. The speaker is usually another graybeard who, if pressed, couldn't tell you what is so vital about the institutional memory wheeling out the door. If institutional memory has any real value, it's been written down or passed down. It's not locked up in some geezer's head. Not all on-the-job experience brings wisdom that translates into better coverage, especially the experience that's used to protect turf as opposed to breaking news. When institutional memory impedes newsroom progress, it deserves a good erasing. At the Washington Post, the brass is currently degaussing its editing process so it can rescue the paper from the bureaucratic excesses of the industrial era and drag it into the electronic.

The stereotype driving this column—Veteran journalists! Get out of the way!—is blunted by longtime Washington Post political reporter Thomas B. Edsall. Edsall took his paper's 2006 buyout and has thrived outside its confines, with a teaching position at Columbia University's J-school and assignments from an array of top publications. In May 2007, he became political editor and writer at the Huffington Post.

Edsall doesn't want to minimize the difficulties others may have faced since taking the buyout, but he says his post-Post experience has been "a great ride" and that the Huff Post people are "excellent … with a sense of mission and a go-for-broke spirit."

I've enjoyed Edsall's Huff Post work on the campaign trail more than anything he's done in his career. He seems to feel pretty good about the work, too.

"Stories I wrote got published the way I wrote them—no editorial bureaucracy. ... After working at heavily edited publications all my life, this was like being born again," he says via e-mail.

Or maybe Edsall shows that the old horses have lots of go left in them—they just need new riders. Should the Washington Post hire him back?

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**reading list**

**The Great Uncluttering**

The best books, articles, and Web sites for helping you organize your life.

By Michael Agger

Saturday, April 5, 2008, at 7:10 AM ET

Ah, springtime: new beginnings and all that. Lately, I've been trying to streamline my life under the tutelage of Unclutterer, a blog devoted to "getting and staying organized." The site's writers have given a lot of thought to "pocket clutter," "inherited clutter," landing zones (the places where you drop your stuff when you come in the door), and more abstract notions such as uncluttering your social life. Where does all this uncluttering lead? Erin Doland, the site's editor-in-chief, wrote about the satori-like state she achieved through her efforts. So far, I've achieved a rather intense relationship with the Container Store.

Unclutterer is part of the blossoming "lifehacker" movement, which takes the ethos of computer hacking (elegant solutions to knotty problems) and applies it to life skills. What's the best way to drink coffee to maintain optimal brain performance? "Consume in small, frequent amounts." How do you stop wasting time by clicking around? Install a program that analyzes your Web use and calculates the hours you've spent watching NBA highlights on YouTube. The epicenter of the movement is Gina Trapani's Lifehacker blog, and the site's best hacks are collected in a new book, Upgrade Your Life.

One hack that I'm fond of—but have failed at—is the efficient idea that every e-mail you send should be five sentences or fewer. Outside my inbox, brief writing is thriving with the publication of Not Quite What I Was Planning, an anthology of six-word memoirs. Amusing examples abound ("Most successful accomplishments based on spite"), and more than a few have a melancholy kick ("He left me for good eventually"). Wired editor Kevin Kelly points out the boomlet in brief-review sites, such as The Four Word Film Review and Paul Ford's six-word music reviews. But none of these match the wit of their more long-winded ancestor, the Guardian's The Digested Read. When you need to skewer a pretentious book in six paragraphs, only an Englishman will do.

The appeal of brevity is that it will help us cope with the avalanche of music, movies, books, magazines, television shows, and blogs. On the site lifehack.org, writer Dustin Wax suggests that our moaning about information overload is misplaced: "What you need less of is input—all the crap that flows at you masquerading as information." He outlines a plan for a high-information diet in which you forgo the "comfort food" of reality TV and Perez Hilton for sturdier stuff that imparts useful knowledge.

Fair enough, but reading Proust can be hard work. Why not outsource it? That's the advice of the newly minted lifestyle guru, Timothy Ferriss, author of The 4-Hour Workweek. Ferriss went so far as to outsource his online dating, but in his milder moments, he makes the case that hiring a virtual assistant to summarize your e-mails and keep a schedule isn't so far-fetched. Yet if having some guy in Bangalore read your mother's e-mails doesn't jibe with your idea of economic justice, there's an easier lifehacking tenet to embrace: Do one thing at a time. Start your newly focused life by reading Walter Kirn's haunting, hilarious essay in the Atlantic "The Autumn of the Multitaskers," the story of "one man's odyssey through the nightmare of infinite connectivity."

**Correction, April 7, 2008: This article originally misspelled Gina Trapani's name. (Return to the corrected sentence.)**

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**recycled**

**To Do: Skip Newseum Opening**

Why you should boycott journalism's monument to itself.

By Jack Shafer

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 4:41 PM ET

The Newseum officially opens its doors at 9 a.m. Friday after four years and $450 million in the making. The $20 admission fee will be waived for anyone who turns out on the first day. In February, Jack Shafer blasted the bloated enterprise as self-aggrandizing and counterproductive to journalism: "The Newseum has had to invent whole categories of news artifacts to fill this Taj Mahal for journalism." The article is reprinted below.

Of all the slow-moving targets that bleed profusely when you hit them, can there be a fatter, slower, juicier bull's-eye to sight your scope on than the $450 million Newseum, the four-years-in-the-building, seven-story, steel-and-glass monument to journalistic vanity just a nine iron away from Washington, D.C.'s National Mall?

One of the most expensive museums ever built, according to the New York Times' Kit Seelye, the Newseum contains 250,000 square feet of exhibit space, including 15 theaters, 14 galleries, two broadcast studios, a 4-D time-travel experience, interactive computer stations by the score, 50 tons of Tennessee marble, a three-level Wolfgang Puck restaurant, a food court, and 6,214 journalism artifacts together weighing more than 81,000 pounds ("Wonkette's" slippers, the hotel door from the Watergate break-in, a decommissioned KXAS-TV news helicopter, Rupert Murdoch's first wife, etc.).

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Set to open April 11, the Newseum succeeds a much more modest Newseum that occupied a Rosslyn, Va., cul de sac just across the Potomac River for five years. The new cathedral was built primarily by the Freedom Forum, the outfit formerly known as the Gannett Foundation, and its donors include News Corp., the Pulliams, Disney, the Hearsts, Time Warner, NBC Universal, the Greenspun family, and the Ochs-Sulzbergers. Each donor will be represented by a gallery or venue, according to a Newseum press release.

Thanks to the Newseum’s Web site, the museum is like a play that can be reviewed before it opens. Like the similarly opulent $621 million Capitol Visitors Center, which is swelling out of its massive bunker behind and beneath the U.S. Capitol, the Newseum reduces its subject to shock-and-awe wraparound video shows, Disneyland-esque interactive programs, and tactile exhibits that virtualize that which should be—and can be—directly experienced.

Consider, for example, the fetishizing of trivial relics by the Newseum, such as the satchel, pencil, and eyeglasses belonging to reporter Mark Kellogg of the Bismarck Tribune, who was killed at Little Big Horn, that held a place of honor at Newseum 1.0. Fascinating curios, for sure, but gazing upon them tells you what about journalism? Repeat this lesson 6,214 times, and you get my drift. The story of journalism is not the story of the surviving relics.

Unlike other museums, whose curators have collected, pruned, and rarified their collections over decades or centuries, the Newseum has had to invent whole categories of news artifacts to fill this Taj Mahal for journalism. Like the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, which resides just a couple of blocks away on the Mall, the Newseum suffers from the fact that curatorial power is invested in the home team. Indian tribes—and not museum professionals—ultimately got to decide what to place in the hall designed to honor them. Independent tribes of self-glorifying journalists didn't choose what to stuff inside the Newseum, but they didn't have to, because the organization was all too ready to do their bidding. You don't think News Corp. and the Sulzbergers would lend their names and money to an enterprise that would sink a shiv into the press, do you?

That the Newseum founders, like the Indians, arranged for a stunning shrine to be erected, as opposed to a more modest structure on a less ritzy lot, also speaks reams. As Andrew Ferguson wrote of the Indian palace for Bloomberg News upon its debut in 2004, the museum’s "cavernous domed atrium … looks as if it were designed to be the sumptuous setting for candle-lit fundraisers. You can almost hear the clink of highball glasses and the jing-a-ling of jewelry." Both temples are more about money and getting more of it than they are about the press or Indians.

The Washington Post's Henry Allen identified the inherent weakness of the Newseum concept in a review of the original Rosslyn exhibit space in 1997. "You get more feeling for the newspaper business from Daily Planet panels in an old Superman comic than you get at the Newseum," he wrote. There's nothing so visually spectacular about the news business, the Allen argument continued, that it demands a vast museum space adjoining the Mall. Journalism produces no Pershing II missiles or taxidermied elephants that must be preserved and displayed to remind us of "The Press."

If you're genuinely curious about the story of the press, you can find a better representation in the works themselves, commonly available in books, on microfilm, on DVD, and on the Web, not in the simulacra. If the history of broadcast news interests you, please visit the Paley Center for Media (formerly the Museum of Television & Radio) in Manhattan. You won't regret it.

Avoid the gilded disaster that is the Newseum. Avoid paying the $20 they charge for admission. I want the Freedom Forum to sell off their monument valley installation and use the proceeds to actually support journalism. Like endowing a newspaper, for instance.

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Or how about repurposing the Newseum as a parking structure for the Lamborghini set? Send your recommendations 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.)

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**When Poetry Meets Politics**

What a new Pulitzer Prize winner tells us about age and public writing.

By Nathan Heller

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 1:30 PM ET

Robert Hass’ Time and Materials received a 2008 Pulitzer Prize for poetry on April 7, making it the first poetry book since 1983 to receive both the Pulitzer and the National Book Award. As part of Slate’s Book Blitz last fall, Nathan Heller explained how Time and Materials marked a sea change in Hass’ approach to political poetry and a turning point in his career.
Robert Hass' fifth collection of poems, *Time and Materials*, is a book about hitting the cold water of late middle age, but the story it tells is not so much of decline as of reinvention. Hass is in the front lines of a baby-boom generation coming to terms with its past. He was born in San Francisco a few months before the Pearl Harbor bombing and came of age in a cultural landscape overshadowed by Beats, hippies, and the Vietnam War. He got interested in Eastern thought, got subpoenaed as an SDS adviser in Buffalo, returned to California in time for the first tech boom, and eventually taught at Berkeley. The zeitgeist stuck with him like an Al Capp rain cloud even through his 50s: In 1995, Hass—who's poetry features proud regionalism and plainspoken eloquence, not to mention a strong tropism toward sex—became poet laureate during the Clinton administration.

Yet until this new collection, Hass the poet has shied from tackling public issues head-on. His past four volumes (the first, *Field Guide*, won the 1973 Yale Younger Poets competition; the last, *Sun Under Wood*, earned him his second National Book Critics Circle Award) focus on the natural world, his private experiences, and the people and places he knows best. His genius lies in capturing not a situation but a consciousness of the situation. That shared consciousness is Hass' bridge to his readers, creating an intimate voice that feels open and unguarded—even when it's not. (Sex aside, Hass' work has a demure, sometimes evasive strain: He'd been publishing for 30 years or so before readers learned about his mother's debilitating alcoholism.) It also imbues Hass' life with a sense of familiarity, if not an outright pang of recognition. From the early poem "Spring":

> We bought great ornamental oranges,  
> Mexican cookies, a fragrant yellow tea.  
> Browsed the bookstores. You  
> asked mildly, "Bob, who is Ugo Betti?"  
> A bearded bird-like man  
> (he looked like a Russian priest  
> with imperial bearing  
> and a black ransacked raincoat)  
> turned to us, cleared  
> his cultural throat, and  
> told us both interminably  
> who Ugo Betti was. The slow  
> filtering of sun through windows  
> glazed to gold the silky hair  
> along your arms. ...

These are not particularly fresh images: The tea is fragrant, the bookstore pedant has a beard, the afternoon light is gold. Hass, a student of the haiku masters, doesn't strain over description. His skill lies in the pacing of thought and images, which mimics the way an afternoon like this settles into memory—down to that distracted glance at the window.

His decision to write in this subjective mode wasn't purely aesthetic. Around the time "Spring" was composed, Hass said that writing "about myself and the world I knew, San Francisco and the country around it, in a fairly simple and direct way" was a response, in part, to Vietnam-era politics. "For a long time I felt a compulsion to direct myself to large issues," he explained. But then public life intensified, and he decided that writing outside the maelstrom was wiser, "a way of being human in a monstrously inhuman world, and that feeling human was a useful form of political subversion." In life, he remained an active liberal, and he mentions protest experiences in a few poems and essays. The descriptions are always uncomfortable, though. Hass in a napalm-plant picket is like a Puritan at a petting party: "The wind off the bay bullets your large cardboard sign. ... Pathetic, really, and holding it among the other signs ... you feel sheepish between gusts of affection for this ragtag army of an aroused middle class."

Why wouldn't Hass commit to political causes in his writing? The answer helps illuminate the poet's vexed, often distrustful attitude toward language—and what he's up to in the new book. Hass has described his overarching subject as the "immediate world," by which he seems to mean everything that needs no principles or justification to exist: landscape, memory, the natural order, love, physical desire. Theory and ideology, meanwhile, generally stir his impatience. Language tendentious enough to make persuasive arguments can't report human experience with precision and fidelity, as the poet must. Or, as Hass put it in a 1998 preface to *Field Guide*, "Orchestrated public violence of the kind that sends people off to war, off to die for a cause, needs to have a terrifyingly loose grip on language. The California landscape ... was a place for me where language did not belong altogether to desire, to human intention."

So it's surprising that Hass' new collection, his first since stepping down as laureate, makes poetry and politics bedfellows. *Time and Materials* has the look of a catchall, mixing occasional pieces, imitations, translations, and the long narrative poems that are Hass' tours de force. And while the book is, overall, unmistakably Hassian—aging Berkeleyites come to life in rocky West Coast landscapes and an erotic imagination of impressive stamina—its author is also readjusting his approach to language and poetic responsibility. Not only are there explicit anti-war poems of the sort he's disavowed; Hass seems to stray, at times, from his commitment to immediacy.

Apologies for verbal and moral impotence abound, as do portraits of time as a destructive force, a multiplier of errors. One poem laments the boomers' legacy as a messy disappointment. ("[T]hat small frown," the narrator worries of a passing Berkeley student, "might be her parents' lives.") Several titles—"Envy of Other People's Poems," "Terror of Beginnings," "The Problem of Describing Color," "The Problem of Describing Trees," and "Poet's Work" (which is about how hard it is)—show
a poet struggling to render something readers will find meaningful.

In one sense, this insecurity seems misplaced. Hass' best efforts in *Time and Materials* are as lithe and surprising as anything he's written. A perfectly pitched daydream of a poem called "Art and Life" explores how art can be timeless when it reifies fleeting experience. "After the Winds," a bittersweet portrait of Hass' unmoored generation, ends by brushing aside religious dogma for a grasp on the immediate: "For Magdalen, of course, the resurrection didn't mean/ She'd got him back. It meant she'd lost him in another way./ It was the voice she loved, the body, not the god ... " In another sense, though, Hass' diffidence is apt. *Time and Materials* contains explicit statements on public issues, throwing him into uncertain new territory. It also brings him face-to-face with his decisions as a younger writer. Given the disastrous new war under way, should he still keep language free from political argument?

The poet seems to think not. Four anti-war poems, in forms ranging from free verse to *haibun*, fall like bombshells near the end of the new book. Other pieces take up related political causes, like the human casualties of global finance. "Bush's War," a long meditation on innocence lost to violence, shows him learning to write in a new, polemical mode:

> I typed the brief phrase, "Bush's War,"
> At the top of a sheet of white paper,
> Having some dim intuition of a poem
> Made luminous by reason that would,
> Though I did not have them at hand,
> Set the facts out in an orderly way.

Hass still appears skeptical of poetry like this. He admits to arguing from facts he doesn't possess. And his avidity for the light of "reason" flickers with sarcasm. This is loose language, but he gives it his best shot:

> The rest of us have to act like we believe
> The dead women in the rubble of Baghdad
> Who did not cast a vote for their deaths
> Or the raw white of the exposed bones
> In the bodies of their men or their children
> Are being given the gift of freedom
> Which is the virtue of the injured us.
> It's hard to say which is worse, the moral
> Sloth of it or the intellectual disgrace.

Someone who lectures about democratic abuses, moral sloth, and "intellectual disgrace" has left the immediate world for a place where language sets rules and makes arguments. Hass may wish he'd done so sooner. Together, "Bush's War" and its peers give more attention to World War II, Vietnam, and the Korean War than to Iraq. This broad chronology matches the poems' style—fast-paced and disjointed, lurching from horrific moment to horrific moment with little pause where consciousness can set itself. As "Bush's War" reels from Nazi death camps to Sept. 11 to Iraq, Hass laments "a taste for power/ That amounts to contempt for the body." In the end, he isn't fighting hawkish politics or the immorality of violence. He's fighting a mentality that holds his project—honoring subjectivity, physicality, directness—in disdain.

Hass' poetic confidence may be tempered, and his political ire roused, but his priorities haven't actually changed. Loosening his language and jumping into the rhetorical ring is a new way of defending old territory. There's directness, after all, in acknowledging one's political stance. And a portrait of consciousness in the world can hardly be complete, or honest, if it fails to show a mind wrestling with "large issues." Hass has been negotiating a standard of public candor ever since he started writing. And while *Time and Materials* acknowledges forces stronger than poetry, forces that can be engaged only on their own terms, he hasn't stopped struggling to stay true to his audience and himself. It's an example the leaders of this country might learn from.

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**You Won a Pulitzer. Whoop De Do.**

Does anyone besides journalists care about the Pulitzers?

By Jack Shafer

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 11:24 AM ET

The *2008 Pulitzer Prizes were awarded Monday*, with a near-record six going to the *Washington Post*. In 2004, Jack Shafer had some bad news for that year's newly minted Pulitzer Prize winners: *No one cares, even if newspapers shout it from Page One. "If another trade association gave itself awards—and despite the presence of a few academics on its board, the Pulitzer Prize Committee is a glorified newspaper trade association—would its winners get Page One play?"* Shafer wrote. *The article is reprinted below.*

Outside of a couple thousand journalists working at the top-tier newspapers that stand a chance of winning one, does anybody really care about the Pulitzer Prizes for journalism? I doubt that one newspaper reader in 10,000 could tell you a day after the Pulitzers are awarded who got the prize for explanatory reporting. In a perfect world, the prizes would be treated as footnotes rather than the stuff of headlines, yet they make many a front page the day after they're announced, especially in the winning newspapers.
But news they are not. If the Pulitzers were about journalistic merit and not industry peacocksry, today's Page One hed and dek in the Washington Post, "The Post's Shadid Wins Pulitzer for Iraq Coverage; Los Angeles Times Takes Five Awards" would be reversed to read "Los Angeles Times Takes Five Pulitzers; the Post's Shadid Wins One for Iraq Coverage." As Alexander Cockburn theorized in a 1984 Wall Street Journal column, the Pulitzers are a kind of show business, a "self-validating ritual whereby journalists give each other prizes and then boast to the public about them."

The Pulitzer boasting started in a modest fashion. In 1917, the Pulitzers' first year, contained only three journalism categories—editorial writing, reporting, and public service. In 1922, editorial cartoons were added; in 1929, correspondence; and in 1942 the count swelled to eight when photography and telegraphic reporting (both national and international) joined the roster. In the late '60s, the Pulitzers expanded with the profligacy of the National Hockey League, growing to 10 by 1968, 11 by 1970, and finally settling at today's 14 categories.

As Cockburn observed, "If bankers gave themselves prizes ('the most reckless Third-World loan of the year') with the same abandon as journalists, you may be sure that the public ridicule would soon force them to conduct the proceedings in secret."

As a judge of other, lesser journalistic contests, I can tell you that it's a good thing the winners are chosen in private rather than under the scrutiny of C-SPAN's cameras. There's no real science or even fairness behind the picking of winners and losers, with the prizes handed out according to a formula composed of one part log-rolling, two parts merit, three parts "we owe him one," and four parts random distribution. That the Los Angeles Times brought home five Pulitzers to the New York Times' one this year doesn't mean it's five times the paper. It's a matter of the constellations aligning themselves perfectly in the Los Angeles Times' favor. If the paper gets shut out next year, nobody will accuse it of having lost its edge.

If journalism prizes are such a racket, why do I participate in them? To expose myself to worthy stories I might not have otherwise seen and to meet the other judges. And in those long-ago days that I edited publications, it was a good way to scout for talent. If memory isn't a liar, I believe I've entered myself in only one competition, and that was for a no-name prize that paid a nice sum (which I could have used) along with the requisite bowling trophy. (I lost.)

Whether you're for or against the Pulitzer Prizes, there is no excuse for putting the winners on Page One. For one thing, the payout is a paltry $10,000. People win $10,000 every day in the lottery, and they don't make Page One. For another, the Pulitzers for journalism aren't for the best journalism of the year, merely the best newspaper journalism of the year. Make that the best American newspaper journalism of the year. Even the Academy Awards are more ecumenical than the Pulitzers, honoring foreign films, short subjects, technical achievement, animated features, and even the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award (As long as we're cataloging the Ewwww Factor, don't forget that the Pulitzers are named after one of the inventors of yellow journalism, Joseph Pulitzer.)

Put it this way: If another trade association gave itself awards—and despite the presence of a few academics on its board, the Pulitzer Prize Committee is a glorified newspaper trade association—would its winners get Page One play? Never.

One way to make the Pulitzers Page One-worthy would be to transform them into an honest annual inventory of journalism. Cockburn suggests a "record of journalistic failure" to accompany the year's best stories. I second his idea. I'd give awards to the Worst Editorial Page, the Most Compromised Local Paper, the Most Predictable Critic, and the Most Tractable White House Reporter. Rent out Lincoln Center, trot the finalists down the red carpet, and televise the event. "Now accepting the award for Most Pliant Reporter on the Weapons of Mass Destruction Beat, Judith Miller. …"

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These days, I limit myself to frequent flyer awards. How about you? Send nominations to slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.)

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**Questions for Junot Díaz**

An interview with the Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

By Meghan O'Rourke

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 11:15 AM ET

Junot Díaz's first novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, was awarded the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction on Monday, April 7. Last November, Meghan O'Rourke interviewed Díaz about Oscar Wao, his unconventional approach to narrative.
Junot Díaz’s fiction is propelled by its attention to the energetic hybridity of American life. His debut, *Drown*, a collection of stories, dealt with questions of identity and belonging in the lives of his narrators, many of whom were young Dominicans living in New York or New Jersey. At first glance, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, his long-awaited first novel, appears to be a classic *bildungsroman*: the story of a charming Dominican-American boy who grows up to be an overweight, lonely nerd more intimate with *The Lord of the Rings* than with the social rings in his high school. But early on, the reader realizes that *The Brief Wondrous Life* is equally a story about the depredations of dictatorship and a powerful examination of the nature of authority. The novel is strangely fragmented. What initially appears to be a linear story shatters into accounts of Oscar’s family’s history, as it was shaped over time by the reign of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, a dictatorial leader of the Dominican Republic for more than three decades. We come to understand that the form of the book itself resists the singularity of perspective that is often used to establish authority. Last week, Díaz and I corresponded by e-mail about *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and about writing fiction. *Slate*: What drew you to the character of Oscar, a fat, nerdy kid from New Jersey? *Díaz*: It’s hard to remember precisely. Been 11 years since I started the book. I know I wanted to challenge the type of protagonist that many of the young male Latino writers I knew were writing. But I also wanted to screw with traditional Dominican masculinity, write about one of its weirder out-riders. And then there was just the fact of Oscar, this kid who I could not get out of my head, whom I felt strongly attached to because he was such a devoted reader and because he had this imagination that no one had any use for, but which gave him so much enjoyment and sense of purpose.

Oscar was the end point (for me) of a larger, almost invisible historical movement—he’s the child of a dictatorship and of the apocalypse that is the New World. I was also trying to show how Oscar is utterly unaware of this history and yet also dominated by it. *Slate*: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* isn’t just about Oscar Wao’s life; it spans the course of many decades and tells the stories of several people related to Oscar. The effect is of fragmentation rather than linear progression. Why did you choose to structure the story like this? *Díaz*: I’m a product of a fragmented world. Take a brief look at Dominican or Caribbean history and you’ll see that the structure of the book is more in keeping with the reality of this history than with its most popular myth: that of unity and continuity. In my mind the book was supposed to take the shape of an archipelago; it was supposed to be a textual Caribbean. Shattered and yet somehow holding together, somehow incredibly vibrant and compelling. *Slate*: You use a relatively unconventional plot device in the book. What the reader initially takes to be a standard omniscient narrator is actually a specific person, Yunior, Oscar’s college roommate—but we don’t know precisely who that person is for quite some time. How did you come upon this approach, and why? *Díaz*: This narrative approach is nothing new. Look at Rick Moody’s *The Ice Storm* and you’ll see the tactic. As we all know: All stories are told for a reason. And all narrators have a stake in the story they’re telling. In *Oscar Wao*, one of the questions that a reader has to answer for themselves is: Why is Yunior telling this particular story? One might say that for him the telling of this story is an act of contrition, but that’s too simple—it’s something else, I would argue.

One should also remember that in places like the Caribbean, which has suffered apocalypse after apocalypse, it’s rarely the people who’ve been devoured by a story that get to bear witness to its ravages. Usually the survivors, the storytellers, are other people, not even family. In the United States you only get to visit a sick person in a hospital if you’re immediate family; where I come from the idea of family is far more elastic, far more creative, far more practical, far more real. Yunior’s telling of this story and his unspoken motivations for it are at the heart of the novel and can easily be missed. *Slate*: As I mentioned above, much of *Oscar Wao* isn’t only about its protagonist, a nerdy kid from New Jersey, but about the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961. Can you tell us what drew you to Trujillo? *Díaz*: Trujillo was one of the U.S.’s favorite sons, one of its children. He was created and sustained by the U.S.’s political-military machine. I wanted to write about the demon child of the U.S., the one who was inflicted upon the Dominican Republic. It didn’t hurt that as a person Trujillo was so odd and terrifying, unlike anybody I’d ever read or heard about. He was so fundamentally Dominican, and for a Dominican writer writing about masculinity, about dictatorship, power, he’s indispensable. I’ve always been drawn to dictators. My father was a Little League dictator. That really affected me, his control-freakery, his impunity, his arbitrary unreasonable power. So there was that. Also, my book required a Dark Lord, and what better dark lord than a real life dictator? Trujillo exemplifies the negative forces that have for so long bebeaged the peoples of the New
World. Seemed the perfect foil for Oscar. This novel (I cannot say it enough) is all about the dangers of dictatorship—Trujillo is just the face I use to push these issues—but the real dictatorship is in the book itself, in its telling; and that's what I think is most disturbing: how deeply attached we all are to the institution of dictatorship.

*Slate*: What do you mean when you say the "real dictatorship is in the book itself"?

*Díaz*: We all dream dreams of unity, of purity; we all dream that there's an authoritative voice out there that will explain things, including ourselves. If it wasn't for our longing for these things, I doubt the novel or the short story would exist in its current form. I'm not going to say much more on the topic. Just remember: In dictatorships, only one person is really allowed to speak. And when I write a book or a story, I too am the only one speaking, no matter how I hide behind my characters.

*Slate*: One could, of course, have written a more straightforward "political" novel about the depredations of Trujillo's dictatorship. How—or why—in your mind do the stories of Trujillo and Oscar fit together?

*Díaz*: I guess the question for me is, how are they not related? It's like the history of the Dominican Republic. You can't tell the history of the U.S. without the history of the Dominican Republic, and yet people do so all the time. Oscar, like Lola, like Yunior, is one of Trujillo's children. His shadow, his legacy, is upon them all in ways that none of them understand. Trujillo is a local version of the legacy of the New World, which all of us who live in this hemisphere carry upon our heads. The novel's question is: How do you deal with this legacy? Do you run from it? Do you ignore it, deploy existential denial? These are strategies that add to the legacy's power, that guarantee its perpetuation. Or do you look into the silence and actually say the words that you have to say?

And as a footnote: No one can write a straightforward political novel about the Trujillato and capture its phantasmagorical power. That's another reason I had to go hard-core nerd. Because without curses and alien mongooses and Sauron and Darkseid, the Trujillato cannot be accessed, eludes our "modern" minds. We need these fictional lenses, otherwise it we cannot see.

*Slate*: The book is full of footnotes, especially at the beginning, forcing the reader to break away from the narrative to take in information that may or may not be "external" to the story. What made you decide to put footnotes in the novel? How does the presence of "factual" footnotes affect the fiction of the novel, in your mind?

*Díaz*: The footnotes are there for a number of reasons; primarily, to create a double narrative. The footnotes, which are in the lower frequencies, challenge the main text, which is the higher narrative. The footnotes are like the voice of the jester, contesting the proclamations of the king. In a book that's all about the dangers of dictatorship, the dangers of the single voice—this felt like a smart move to me.

*Slate*: You once said that "you build your entire work on a series of failures." Can you talk a little bit about what you meant?

*Díaz*: I've never had the good fortune of getting a clear idea in my head and then writing the damn thing down in one go. The only success I've had as a writer is by screwing up over and over and over. I'll write a story or a chapter 20 times before I start approaching what I think the story should be. And it is in that process of writing what I'm not supposed to be writing that I find my way to what I am supposed to be writing.

This is a tiring and demoralizing way to go about writing. But I don't know any other approach. One of the reasons I guess I take so long to write. Not only is the process hard but it takes a lot to get back to the computer, when I know that chances are good that I'm only going to screw up again.

*Slate*: Your first book, *Drown*, a collection of short stories, was published to critical acclaim. Was it very different to write a novel?

*Díaz*: I've only written one story collection (of a sort) and one novel, so my perspective is rather limited. *Drown* was nothing like *Oscar Wao*. I felt like I was in two different worlds. When you write short stories, you are a laser, cutting, cutting with precision and ruthlessness. A novel was all about the embrace. Trying to get my arms around as much material, as many characters, as possible.

*Slate*: Much of the press about your work speaks about the fact that you are a "Latino writer." Do you think of yourself as a Latino writer? If so, what might that mean? If not, why not?

*Díaz*: We're in a country where white is considered normative; it's a country where white writers are simply writers, and writers of Latino descent are Latino writers. This is an issue whose roots are deeper than just the publishing community or how an artist wants to self-designate. It's about the way the U.S. wants to view itself and how it engineers otherness in people of color and, by doing so, prop up white privilege. I try to battle the forces that seek to "other" people of color and promote white supremacy. But I also have no interest in being a "writer," either, shorn from all my connections and communities. I'm a Dominican writer, a writer of African descent, and whether or not anyone else wants to admit it, I know also that Stephen King and Jonathan Franzen are white writers. The problem isn't in labeling writers by their color or their ethnic group; the problem is that one group...
organizes things so that everyone else gets these labels but not it. No, not it.

Slate: Do you feel you have a duty to be representative?

Díaz: I've been asked to be "representative" for as long as I've been a Dominican. As a person of color living in the U.S. you're often considered an extension of your group—individualism is hard to come by. So this is nothing new. But I'm just one person, writing about one tiny set of (imagined) experiences. Sure, you can use what I write about to open a discussion about larger issues, about the communities in which my set of experiences is embedded, but that doesn't make me any expert on anything or the essence of the Dominican Republic.

Slate: Oscar Wao, like Drown before it, is characterized by a kind of hybrid dialect of English and Spanish—what critic Michiko Kakutani called "a streetwise brand of Spanglish" when she reviewed the book in the New York Times. Did you always make use of this hybrid style, or was this style a discovery along the way?

Díaz: Since I can remember, English was present in my Spanish. And clearly Spanish was always present in my English. It may have taken me a while to systemize this at the level of narrative. But the technique, the mixture, has always been within me. An accident of immigrant history, but one that I've pursued relentlessly and rigorously.

Slate: What about the fact that in certain stretches of Oscar Wao, readers who don't speak Spanish won't be able to understand? Do you expect them to pick up a dictionary? Or is the specific sense less important than the sensation of the language?

Díaz: I've almost never read an adult book where I didn't have to pick up a dictionary. I guess I participate more in my readings and expect the same out of my readership. I want people to research, to ask each other, to question. But also I want there to be an element of incomprehension. What's language without incomprehension? What's art? And at a keeping-it-real level: Isn't it about time that folks started getting used to the fact that the United States comprises large Spanish-speaking segments?

Slate: And did you get any push back from your publisher, I wonder?

Díaz: My publishers were just happy to get anything after 11 years. And my editor understood my project. Otherwise the final months would have been hell.

recycled

Hero Worship

Would Charlton Heston have made a good president?
By David Plotz
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 11:34 AM ET

Actor Charlton Heston died on Saturday at the age of 84. A lordly leading man in such epics as Ben-Hur, The Ten Commandments, and Planet of the Apes, Heston was equally well-known as a staunch supporter of Second Amendment rights. In this 1998 Assessment—written a week after Heston was named president of the National Rifle Association—David Plotz explained to conservatives why Charlton Heston was not the second coming of Ronald Reagan.

By my reckoning, Charlton Heston has played: a CIA director, two prophets (Moses, twice, and Brigham Young), two saints (Thomas More and John the Baptist), an admiral, two generals (as well as six captains and three majors), a cardinal (Richelieu), two kings (Macbeth and Henry VIII), and three presidents of the United States (Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, and Franklin Roosevelt's voice).

So the National Rifle Association, which elected Heston president this week, can be forgiven for mistaking the actor for a real commander. NRA leaders believe the patriarchal Heston will polish the gun lobby's lousy public image while galvanizing its red-meat-and-gunpowder members. "Hey, Moses is on our side," gloats NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre.

At 73, Heston does remain an awesome presence—tall, grandfatherly, astonishingly handsome, his voice as magnificent as ever. (President Heston has already employed that godly bass to great effect. His NRA speech produced a memorable sound bite that's being played and replayed on newscasts.) Heston's ascendance seems to be filling some conservatives with what-if regret. Why didn't he run for office when he was in his prime?

Heston's fans are falling victim to Celebrity Identification Disorder, the same malady that causes people to write letters to soap opera characters. Heston periodically says, "I am not Moses," but his admirers don't quite believe it. He's been associated with extraordinary men for so long that they assume he must be one.

In fact, Heston embodies a very different, more mundane, but still admirable ethos. The defining quality of his career is competence, not genius. He was never a romantic lead, but he was Hollywood's superstar during the epic's brief heyday. Since the late '50s, however, he has enjoyed the most workmanlike career of any actor in Hollywood. He has made a prosperous living by playing, with slight variation, the same role for 50 years: the hero with a stick up his rear end.
Heston is the Volvo of Hollywood actors: never brilliant, never awful, always reliable. He has appeared in more than 80 movies, countless TV films, dozens of plays. He is always first on the set. He's unfailingly polite to co-workers and respectful to directors. He never misses work because of illness. Appropriately modest, he credits his success to his "physical equipment" rather than his talent: his height and good health, as well as that voice, that jaw, and that nose. Heston researches his roles assiduously, memorizing Old Testament passages to play Moses and reading all Michelangelo's letters to play him.

Unlike many actors of his generation, Heston has cheerfully adjusted to senior citizenship. He accepts lesser parts in bad movies (Call of the Wild) and worse television (The Colbys, a short-lived, dreadful Dynasty spinoff). He has become a hired-guns narrator, the guy you buy when you need God's voice. Heston's signature characters (Moses, Ben-Hur, El Cid) always took themselves seriously, but Heston doesn't. He has played self-mocking parts in Wayne's World 2 and Bud Light ads. He is a pro, a hack, the guy whose highest value is that he gets the job done.

Off-screen, too, Heston leads an unremarkable life. He has been married for 54 years and is extremely close to his two children. He lives quietly on a (well-armed) Los Angeles estate, eschewing parties for history books and his journal (author of three memoirs, he is an excellent, funny writer).

And his activism is a steady hobby rather than an obsession. He's an enthusiast, but also a dilettante. In the early '60s, he was a staunch civil rights advocate. In the early '80s, he advised Ronald Reagan on National Endowment for the Arts funding. He has condemned the nuclear freeze movement, obscene rap music, and overpopulation. In every case Heston has been effective without being monomaniacal. (His rhetoric, admittedly, is not always restrained. He denounces political correctness with froth-at-the-mouth language that would be hilarious if it weren't so nasty. Click here for a couple of examples.)

Heston has even had moderate instincts about gun rights. Until recently, he hasn't spent much time pushing the Second Amendment. After Robert Kennedy's assassination in 1968, he endorsed strong gun control legislation, and as recently as last year he declared that AK-47s are "inappropriate for private use." (Heston's "softness" on gun rights was an issue in his NRA election, but he has quieted critics by backing off his earlier statements and hewing to the NRA's official line. He recently said that a Washington state initiative to require trigger locks was "written by Satan.")

All this is to say: Those who liken him to Reagan misunderstand Heston. It is an easy comparison. Both are Democrats who converted to conservative Republicanism. Both are actors who involved themselves in politics. Both served as president of the Screen Actors Guild. Both are marvelous speakers.

But here is the critical point about Heston: He never grabbed the ring. He declined invitations from Democrats and Republicans to run for the Senate in California and resisted efforts to draft him into the 1988 presidential race. He was an actor, is an actor, and will always be an actor. His life is comfortable, and he sees no reason to change it.

It's true that Heston the activist has accomplished more than most private citizens ever hope to. But he has never done what his characters would have. The extraordinary man, the man who believes he can change the world, who has the power to do it and pursues that power relentlessly. Reagan had that hunger and changed the world. Heston has all the "physical equipment"—brain, voice, good looks—but not the hunger.

That's why the NRA presidency is the perfect job for him. It's a ceremonial position, a grand title with few responsibilities attached. He will not actually run the NRA. His job is to give speeches, to be a symbol, to act presidential. And there's no one who acts presidential better than Charlton Heston.

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**sidebar**

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Heston said:

Mr. Clinton, sir, America didn't trust you with our health-care system. America didn't trust you with gays in the military. America doesn't trust you with our 21-year-old daughters, and we sure, Lord, don't trust you with our guns.

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**sidebar**

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In a speech to the Free Congress Foundation, he said:

Mainstream America is depending on you—counting on you—to draw your sword and fight for them. These people have precious little time or resources to battle misguided Cinderella attitudes, the fringe propaganda of the homosexual coalition, the feminists who preach that it's a divine duty for women to hate men, blacks who raise a militant fist with one hand while they seek preference with the other, and all the New Age apologists for
juvenile crime, who see roving gangs as a means of youthful expression.

In To Be a Man, he writes:

Somewhere in the busy pipeline of public funding is sure to be a demand from a disabled lesbian on welfare that the Metropolitan Opera stage her rap version of Carmen as translated into Ebonics.

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**slate fare**

**A Job for You at Slate**

If you're a great Web developer who loves Slate, we want to hear from you.

Monday, April 7, 2008, at 12:21 PM ET

If you're a great Web developer or designer who loves Slate, we want to talk to you. We're looking to hire

1. a senior-level Web engineer,
2. a Web developer, and
3. a Web designer

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Read more about the senior Web engineer position and the skills required for it.

Read more about the Web developer position and the skills required for it.

Read more about the Web designer position and the skills required for it.

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**Senior Web engineer:** This is an ideal position for someone with great ideas about and significant experience in Web-media architecture and development. It entails working closely with our editorial staff and business team to address recurring issues and build new functionality. You'll collaborate frequently with the editorial team on tech-heavy stories and features. You will be responsible for prototyping, designing, and coding major portions of Slate, and you'll function as the development group lead, performing reviews of infrastructure, code, release procedures, and other development and tech lead duties as required. You'll need the following skills:

- Ability to design and code medium- to large-sized projects
- Five years’ experience in software design and development
- Project-lead skills
- Engineering core skills (data structures and algorithms, coding, formal test techniques, etc.)
- Excellent written and verbal skills
- Knowledge of C#.NET 2.0, XML, SQL, ASP .NET caching, XPath, IIS administration, XSL transformations in .NET
- Strong experience with object-oriented design and implementation
- Ability to work in a Windows .NET environment
- Experience using a source-code control system
- Experience with Web site back-end and middle-layer design and implementation
- Conceptual knowledge of front-end development
- Experience with content-management systems
- Knowledge of network systems, Web site infrastructure, and release deployment tools and technologies
- Bachelor's in CS, CIS, math, or equivalent

The following skills are also desirable:

- Database knowledge
- Tableless CSS, Javascript, AJAX, XML, XSLT, XHTML
- Data warehouse experience

Please send your résumé to Slate technology lead Jing Gu (jing.gu@wpni.com) and Slate art director Vivian Selbo (vivian.selbo@slate.com).
Web developer: This Web developer will support and develop our Web applications, editorial features, and other technology projects. This is a great position for someone entering the work force with a computer-science degree, or for anyone with an interest in the media and with significant Web-programming experience in CSS, DHTML, XSLT, and ASP.NET applications. You will work closely with the editorial and business staffs as well as the development team, so good communication skills are a must.

Your day-to-day responsibilities will include supporting our content-management system, modifying existing XSLT templates in line with stylistic updates, and developing new Web features and applications on both short- and long-term schedules.

We're looking for the following:

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- XML/XSLT
- C#
- DHTML, CSS, JavaScript, and knowledge of the Microsoft DOM
- SQL
- Microsoft IIS
- Excellent troubleshooting and problem-solving skills
- Above-average written and verbal communication skills

Experience with Flash action scripting is also a plus.

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Responsibilities

- Work closely with the design director, Web production designer, editorial team, and business and development teams to design prototypes and mock-ups of new features and site improvements, and to develop interactive components and presentations
- Stay up-to-date on current Web design trends and technologies and share information with the team at large to prompt improvements and/or new features
- Create daily homepage covers under the direction of the design director, headlines team, and magazine editor
- Design all house-ad creative
- Be available some evening and weekend hours to execute site updates during big events
- Initiate new ideas for site improvements

Experience

- Three to five years of professional Web site design experience
- Three to five years’ experience in Web and interactive design, publishing, content management systems, and audio and video production
- B.A. or vocational degree from an accredited design program

Skills

- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- Extremely proficient with Adobe PhotoShop, Illustrator, InDesign, or Quark programs
- Advanced HTML skills
- Proficient with MS Office products
- Advanced Flash skills (preferred)
- Video and audio production skills for online presentations
- Strong IT knowledge
- Good project-management skills
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- Plentiful facilitation and negotiation skills
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- A good sense of humor and balance

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sidebar

Interactive designer: This experienced interactive designer will create a wide range of elements and new features for our online magazine. This position is in New York City. The designer will work closely with editors and writers, thrive in a fast-paced, news- and deadline-oriented environment, have ample initiative and flexibility, know how to follow directions and work in a team, speak up and ask questions, balance multiple tasks, and have the patience of a saint. Strong design and communication skills are a must. A sense of humor is highly appreciated.

Please send your résumé to Slate technology lead Jing Gu (jing.gu@wpni.com) and Slate art director Vivian Selbo (vivian.selbo@slate.com).
In the introduction to *Arnie and Jack*, Ian O'Connor's new book on the rivalry between Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus, the author asks Tiger Woods if something was missing from his career for the lack of a great rival on the course. "Tiger," O'Connor writes, "measured the thought for a moment and loosed that killer smile of his. 'No,' he said."

Woods is a huge favorite to win this weekend's Masters. A victory will give him 14 majors, just four shy of Jack Nicklaus' record. Tiger is the highest-paid athlete in the world, he's playing the best golf of his life, and he has a legitimate claim to being the greatest player who ever lived. There's not a lot missing from that package. But the point of O'Connor's question is clear, as is the point of relating this anecdote at the start of a book dedicated to two of the sport's luminaries. Throughout Tiger's career, golf pundits have opined that, great as he is, the absence of a foil like Arnie or Jack will hinder the reckoning of Tiger's legend. This is an alluring idea, but it's got Tiger and golf all wrong.

The yin-and-yang theory of greatness is a familiar argument that cuts across all sports. Borg needed McEnroe's challenge to elevate him, and vice versa. Likewise for Russell and Chamberlain, and the two names atop the Mount Olympus of sports rivalries, Ali and Frazier.

Thus far, no Frazier has emerged to counter Woods' Ali-like dominance. Phil Mickelson has been the nearest candidate, and yet, for all his talent, he has only three major titles. Since his historic collapse in the 2006 U.S. Open, Mickelson's best finish in a major is a tie for 16th—while he's a fan favorite just like Palmer was, it's looking highly unlikely that there will ever be a book titled *Tiger and Phil*.

That said, it's not Mickelson's fault that this isn't a great rivalry. Golf is an individual sport, but it isn't a head-to-head competition (or it is only rarely, and not in the major championships) and doesn't lend itself naturally to an enduring tug of war. Tennis is a head-to-head sport that's been defined historically by famous duos—Laver and Rosewall, Borg and Johnny Mac, Sampras and Agassi, and now Federer and Nadal. In golf, though, there's really been only one such defining rivalry. The idea that a titanic figure should emerge from the field, putter in hand, to engage Tiger in a series of man-to-man throwdowns is an idea rooted entirely in the mythology of Nicklaus and Palmer.

And reading Ian O'Connor's *Arnie and Jack*, one gets the sense that the circumstances that led to the pairing of Palmer and Nicklaus were unique and unlikely to be repeated. In sheer golf terms, their rivalry wasn't so much an ongoing struggle between peers as it was an overlapping of the greatest players of two different eras, one of whom proved to be unquestionably greater than the other.

Ten years younger than his rival, Nicklaus came along at a time when Palmer was an uncontested champion and icon who drew raucous hordes of fans, "Arnie's Army," behind his every stroll down the fairway. Into this scene stepped the young Jack, overweight, awkward, and cocky as all get-out, the blond, bloated Peter Lorre to Palmer's Bogart. In this drama, however, the bad guy nearly always won. Shortly after he turned pro, "Fat Jack," as he was then unfortunately known, beat Palmer in an 18-hole playoff at the 1962 U.S. Open at Oakmont Country Club, not far from Palmer's hometown of Latrobe, Pa. Beating the King in the heart of his kingdom did not go over well with Arnie's Army. That inaugural battle at Oakmont set the template for the Arnie-and-Jack rivalry: Palmer's fans, fiercely loyal, cheering for their man and mercilessly heckling his hated foe, while Jack, wounded by their scorn, exacted his revenge with victory after victory, slowly driving the aging Arnie into obsolescence.

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Palmer would win only two more majors after his showdown with Nicklaus at Oakmont. His seventh and last came at the 1964 Masters, where Nicklaus, the 1963 champion, helped him into his green jacket. Nicklaus also won his final major—his
When you consider that timeline, it seems ridiculous that the two golfers are linked together in our minds. It's a testament to the fact that their on-course battles came at the dawn of golf's popularity as a television spectacle. They were also perfect counterparts to each other, so starkly different in style and appearance, each in full possession of something the other dearly coveted. As O'Connor puts it, "Arnie had the fans and wanted the trophies. Nicklaus had the trophies and wanted the fans."

Which brings us back to Woods, today's golfer-king who has the trophies and the fans but no rival. Going by the Arnie-and-Jack index, it's hard to imagine what this absent adversary could add to Tiger's narrative, because Tiger himself is the entire equation. As the most charismatic and marketable golfer who's ever lived, he is the clear heir to Palmer, the sport's first great salesman-idol. And, of course, he is the only credible heir to Nicklaus, simply because he's so overwhelmingly and consistently dominant.

In the end, the yin-and-yang theory falls apart when it comes to golf. The best golfers play the course and not the man. This was Nicklaus' great edge over Palmer from the start. All of Arnie's Army couldn't budge Jack's intractable will, but his relentless excellence got inside Palmer's head and made him an old man before his time.

Woods has exerted a similar power over his opponents. You can make the case statistically (an economist at Berkeley has shown that other golfers play worse when Tiger is in the field), and you can see it with your own eyes in the final rounds of majors. While Tiger has had his share of career-defining duels—Sergio at Medinah, Bob May at Valhalla, Chris DiMarco at the Masters—you never got the sense that he was playing those guys exactly, although they most definitely were playing him.

Tiger's sights have always been on bigger game. In *Arnie and Jack*, O'Connor recounts a conversation that Nicklaus had after playing against the son of Bobby Jones in the 1959 U.S. Amateur. Nineteen years old at the time, Nicklaus said, "Jones is the greatest golfer who ever lived and probably ever will live. That's my goal, Bobby Jones. It's the only goal."

Tiger has a similar goal, always has. He also has one hell of a rival. Golf's marquee showdown is Tiger vs. Jack, and it's on again this weekend in Augusta.

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**sports nut**

*My Kingdom for a Free Throw*

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Kansas seizes the NCAA title thanks to a dramatic three-pointer—and Memphs' misses at the line.

By Robert Weintraub

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 8:45 AM ET

As a Syracuse alumus, I feel the pain of Chris Douglas-Roberts, the star Memphis guard who missed three crucial free throws in the final moments of last night's NCAA Championship game. In the 1987 title game, Derrick Coleman blew a freebie just before Keith Smart hit a last-second jumper to give Indiana a one-point victory over my Orange. It's probably no consolation to Douglas-Roberts, but 21 years later, everyone remembers Smart's floating base-line jumper; nobody remembers Coleman's brick from the line. This year, Mario Chalmers canned the memorable shot, a three-pointer from the top of the key to force overtime. Given five extra minutes, Kansas went on to win the championship, 75-68, denying the nation a chance to watch Buddha-like Memphis reserve Pierre Niles celebrate under the falling confetti.

It was a classic title game just two months after a Super Bowl for the ages, both welcome respites after a run of snoozers in the trophy games. Chalmers' shot wasn't quite as extraordinary as Eli-to-Tyree, but it was a shining moment in a tournament largely devoid of thrills and was the capper to an improbable KU rally from nine points down with just more than two minutes left. Chalmers took a lunging handoff from fellow guard Sherron Collins, who sprawled to the floor after barely getting the ball away. Memphis Coach John Calipari said his team had been trying to foul Collins—a mystifyingly underutilized tactic when teams lead by three with seconds to play—but there was no whistle, and Memphis guard Derrick Rose pulled his hands up in the universal signal for "Please don't call a foul on me, ref!" Had he really been trying to foul, or was Calipari making excuses after the fact?

The handoff-and-swish has become the college buzzer beater of choice in the last few years—recall the long-range basket Ty Rogers hit for Western Kentucky to beat Drake back in the first round, and the shot Ohio State's Ron Lewis made last year to send the Buckeyes to overtime against Xavier. Chalmers, who also hit four big free throws down the stretch, has now restored the luster to Alaska hoops—he's a native of Anchorage—after the horrific performance by Duke's Trajan Langdon in the 1999 final (there's a last, obligatory shot at the Devils to hold you until next season).

Another questionable bit of coaching from Calipari: There were still 2.1 seconds left when Chalmers tied the game. Memphis had a timeout remaining but instead settled for a hurried heave away. Memphis Coach John Calipari said he was going from nine points down with just more than two minutes left. Chalmers took a lunging handoff from fellow guard Sherron Collins, who sprawled to the floor after barely getting the ball away. Memphis Coach John Calipari said his team had been trying to foul Collins—a mystifyingly underutilized tactic when teams lead by three with seconds to play—but there was no whistle, and Memphis guard Derrick Rose pulled his hands up in the universal signal for "Please don't call a foul on me, ref!" Had he really been trying to foul, or was Calipari making excuses after the fact?

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It's unfortunate that Douglas-Roberts will go down as the goat. He's a brilliant, unique player—the best I can do by way of comparison is to call him a whirling, slippery amalgam of Stacy Augmon, Richard Hamilton, and George Gervin (although nobody's calling Douglas-Roberts "Iceman" this morning). CDR can score with either hand, is almost impossible to keep out of the lane, and throws up shots from strange arm angles that can't be blocked. He led all scorers on Monday night with 22 points, and he was the best player on the floor until the final minute of regulation.

The Jayhawks' late-game rally required a series of improbable events (though, as Kansas fan Bill James will tell you, the lead was never safe). Just as big as the missed free throws was a botched pass on an inbounds play with two minutes left. Collins stole the ball and drained a 3-pointer, cutting the Memphis lead from a daunting seven to a manageable four. And while Chalmers will be immortalized on YouTube, it was Darrell Arthur who won it for the Jayhawks. The long-limbed sophomore hit several big shots, including a tough fallaway shot to pull Kansas within two with a minute left. With 20 points and 10 rebounds, Arthur was the best of a rotating series of big bodies that allowed KU to control the first half.

Memphis might have cruised to victory if Derrick Rose, Memphis' freshman point guard, hadn't been stymied for the game's first 30 minutes, thanks to outstanding defense by Kansas' guards and, perhaps, the deleterious effect of Rose's eating too many gummi bears. The powerful and speedy Rose came to life midway through the second half, taking over the game with a series of strong drives and pullup jumpers. (The "controversial" bank shot to beat the shot-clock buzzer was anything but, by the way: Even before replay confirmed it, it was clear that Rose's foot was inside the line when he lifted for the shot. Taking the point off the scoreboard loomed huge in a game that went into OT, but the call was correct.)

Billy Packer's analysis on CBS was strong as usual. He identified early on that setting screens for Rose was a fool's errand, serving only to bring extra defenders who could "hedge" on him, taking the Tigers out of their usually effective dribble-drive motion offense. He also made a good point about Kansas' big men being coached to keep space between themselves and the basket on passes over the top so they can have room to operate after the catch. But Packer has to stop with the historical analogies. He actually stated during the extra stanza that Kansas knows what it's like to play in overtime because the school played three overtimes in the national championship game in 1957 (and lost, by the way).

If Packer had to dip into history, he should have mentioned Darius Washington. He was a freshman for the Tigers in 2005 when, with Memphis down by one, he bricked a pair of free throws with no time remaining in the Conference USA tournament final. As a result, Memphis didn't make the Big Dance, and Washington crumpled to the court, inconsolable. Washington, who toiled in NBA D-League before landing in Greece, will forever be linked to those missed free throws. Douglas-Roberts and Rose, who both clanked shots down the stretch on Monday night, will both soon be making clutch shots in the NBA, perhaps as early as this year.

Calipari insisted all season that criticism of his squad's poor free-throw shooting was misplaced, because his guys made them when it counted. Not this time. Against most other teams, the Tigers would have won, despite the misses, but the battle-tested Jayhawks (who survived a tight game against Davidson in the regional final) squeezed through that tiny crack. In the crucible of the final game, Memphis' soft Conference USA schedule and seasonlong struggles at the stripe finally caught up to it. Despite an otherwise magnificent season, that will be this team's legacy.

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**television**

**The Satire Recession**

How political satire got so flabby.

By Troy Patterson

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:08 PM ET

Gore Vidal once said that you should never pass up an opportunity to have sex or go on television, but that was before AIDS. And cable. No one seems to have pointed this out to the people doling out stale wisecracks on *Not Just Another Cable News Show* (Saturdays at 7 p.m., ET), CNN's new misadventure in comedy. The inaugural episode constituted a half-hour of file footage annotated with cheap attitude, and I trust that coming installments will give journalists and comedians further opportunities to violate the ideals of their professions in exchange for a few snatches of airtime.

*Not Just Another Cable News Show* marks the ultimate VH1ification of American politics, with a gallery of telegenic wiseasses brought on to snark about current events. At least VH1's fluff-summarizing *Best Week Ever* had the advantage of being current; the CNN show contented itself, last weekend, with scrolling through "the most memorable political blunders" of recent decades. The episode began with a greatest-misses anthology of Bushisms. We again saw the president say, "I know how hard it is for you to put food on your family," and then waited for a pundit or stand-up (comedian Chris Regan, in this case) to match it with a one-liner. "It was part of the No Child Left Ungrayed program," quipped Regan, not badly.

Subsequent segments concerned Al and Tipper bussing lustily at the Democratic National Convention in 2000, Reagan's outlawing Sovietism on a sound check in 1984, Fidel Castro tripping and falling in 2004, and John Kerry's flubbing his line about Bush's intellectual laziness and getting stuck in Iraq during
the 2006 midterm campaign. "I think pretty much every joke John Kerry tells is a botched joke," said Ana Marie Cox, of *Time*, earning a few points for pith and none for originality, and unwittingly highlighting something horrible about the shared narrative approach of journalism and mainstream comedy.

To gauge the heft of the horror, it's helpful to turn to Russell L. Peterson, of the American Studies department at the University of Iowa, and his new book *Strange Bedfellows: How Late-Night Comedy Turns Democracy Into a Joke*, a cultural analysis so smart, supple, and frisky that it instantly stands as required reading for every aspiring critic in the country. Though his focus is on late night—the time slot to which market forces have usually relegated political jokes—Peterson would argue that *Not Just Another Cable News Show* is, in every way that matters, exactly like every other cable news show and like most other topical comedy programs, too. Its jokes "rarely transcend the level of pure ad hominem mockery." They're personality jokes and, as such, of a piece with character-based journalistic narratives that "treat newsmakers not as the subjects of newscasts but as the news' cast."

Writing about journalists' immediate response in 2006 to Kerry's botched joke, Peterson notes that "the story was a story not because it actually revealed anything about Kerry but because it seemed to confirm what the media already 'knew' about him." On NBC, Brian Williams led with the story at 6:30 p.m.—even as U.S. military commanders caved in to Iraq's demands that they abandon a search for missing soldiers. If you stayed tuned for six hours, you saw Conan O'Brien hammering out a template for Cox. "Senator John Kerry is in trouble for making a joke about soldiers being uneducated," said Conan. "As a result, Kerry promised to stop making jokes and stick to boring people."

Peterson would class that harmless jape—John Kerry? Dull? No?!—as "pseudo-satire," which is cynical and shallow and treats politics "like an infection" and stands in contrast to the real satire that, for instance, Jon Stewart offered on the subject of the botched joke and the way it was spun: "After an election in which the GOP has been beaten up by, let's say, reality, the party has rediscovered a winning issue: the has-been's faux pas."

Where O'Brien's pseudo-satirical joke trivializes the political process, Stewart's engages it by laughing at that very trivialization. The distinction isn't simply a matter of what's funny; well-constructed pseudo-satire often deserves more laughs than preachy satirical jokes. It's about the fact that comedy can perform a watchdog role and seems more ready to shirk it than Judith Miller. "By avoiding issues in favor of personalities," writes Peterson, "and by 'balancing' these shallow criticisms between conservatives and liberals, late-night comics are playing it safe but endangering democracy."

The word *endangering* might look a bit overheated there, but please consider it in the context of one of Peterson's remarks about the way that *Saturday Night Live*’s political impressions tend more toward cuddly caricature-making than worthy satire: "The show's political 'characters' are as one-dimensional and 'lovable' as any of the other catchphrase-spouting mannequins Lorne Michaels might hope to spin off onto the big screen (Jason Sudeikis as George W. Bush and Darrell Hammond as Dick Cheney in—*Night at the Roxbury II*)." Rumors of *SNL*'s rebirth have been greatly exaggerated. Since the end of writers' strike, a lot of noise has been going around that *SNL* has achieved a new political relevance, and much of that talk is nonsense on its face. The show is still leaning on material about Bill Clinton's libido and probably always will.

To review: *SNL* has twice devoted sketches to the idea that debate moderators, as members of an Obama-besotted media, have given the Illinois senator an easy go of it in his one-on-one debates with Hillary Clinton. But the only jokes were in the impersonations (*Amy Poehler's schoolmarm nodding as Hillary, Fred Armisen's catching Obama's professor-preacher cadence*) and in the hyperbole (*CNN's Soledad O'Brien so hot and bothered that she fans herself*). The joke never develops beyond its premise. We all already know that the media is in the tank for Obama because we read it in the papers. *SNL* might have tried to turn these sketches into jokes about why this is the case—Is it about race? Celebrity? The hunger for a new narrative?—or it could have wondered about the relationship between this adoration and Obama's oft-reported aloofness from reporters. It did not.

Likewise, *Tina Fey's editorial in support of Hillary as a guest on "Weekend Update"* was not a political statement. She might have cut at the press or at Obama. What she did, instead, was to identify herself and her candidates as "bitches." I can't dispute Fey's point that "bitches get stuff done," but I will argue that the entire joke falls apart without the frisson of that word connection that Sarah Silverman must have outgrown before her first period. Of course, all of this was *cozy* enough that Sen. Clinton saw fit to show up and offer an "editorial response" to Poehler, and nothing happened there, either, except for Hillary's seeming perfectly lovely and teasing the relentlessness of her ambitiousness very gently. As Peterson writes, "pseudo-satire is often embraced by its supposed victims, who are eager to get credit for their good sportsmanship and to show they are impervious to such 'criticism.'"

Obama's loops around the talk-show circuit are a bit more fraught with danger. On the glowing and gynocentric chat fests of daytime—*your Ellen*', *your Tyra*, your one and only *View*—he is catnip, but on late night he's a stranger. True, he visited Letterman's *Late Show* last year and returned to read a toothless Top 10 List. Yes, in October, he made the pilgrimage to *SNL*. That appearance, like Clinton's, was short, cute, and meaning-free, with the real Obama turning up at "Bill and Hillary's" Halloween party in an Obama mask, aggravating falsity. It seems almost intentionally unfunny. Maybe Obama, whose sense of
humor is dry and literary, was wary of being too funny, a problem that plagued Adlai Stevenson, the intellectuality of whose wit supposedly underlined his egghead quality. Obama's blackness also complicates his ventures into comedy. If, as Peterson writes, someone like Al Gore can be funny in the wrong way on late-night TV—too self-deprecating, too eager, too pathetic—it's easy to imagine the minefield of racial imagery Obama would have to tap dance through when spoofing himself. It's no coincidence that one of SNL's few genuinely satirical bits of Obama comedy is a "TV Funhouse" cartoon in which the candidate sends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton on fact-finding missions to nonexistent nations, distancing himself from old racial politics, trying not to look too black.

The impossible dream, of course, is that Barack Obama might someday appear opposite Stephen Colbert, who, via his know-it-all know-nothing character, engages in true, niche-market satire—an act so irresistible that the debut of Not Just Another Cable News Show ultimately threw its hands up and just played clips from The Colbert Report's "Better Know a District." Obama has already engaged Colbert on his own terms, publicly sending the host a letter on the eve of his delivering a commencement address at Illinois' Knox College. "Don't forget to bring the Truth," Obama wrote. "I'd recommend putting it in your carry-on bag rather than in your checked luggage. O'Hare Airport is notoriously unreliable." The letter is droll, the tone poker-faced. At one point, Obama refers to his constituents as germy ("a few words of advice ... use hand sanitizer") in a way that subtly acknowledges the disgust that all politicians must feel, at some level, for the public. It's very funny, and you can't do that on television.

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**the chat room**

**Wit's End**

Troy Patterson takes readers' questions about the unfunny state of political comedy.

**Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 3:21 PM ET**

Slate television critic Troy Patterson was online at Washingtonpost.com on March 10 to chat about the state of satire and political comedy on television. An unedited transcript of the chat follows.

**Troy Patterson:** I'm Troy Patterson, the television critic at *Slate*, and I'm pleased as punch that the *Post* has invited me to discuss "The Satire Recession," my recent piece about political comedy. The article concerns late-night TV in general and *Saturday Night Live* in particular, and it is heavily indebted to a new book titled *Strange Bedfellows: How Late-Night Comedy Turns Democracy Into a Joke*. The book, written by an American Studies professor named Russell L. Peterson and published by Rutgers University Press, is excellent—essential reading, I believe, for everyone who takes funny business seriously.

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**Chicago:** I have to agree that the state of political satire in the county is anything but strong, with, as you say, the startling exceptions of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. Listening to the Capitol Steps radio special last week, I found it mildly clever but kept thinking, why should I spend time on this when *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* and both funnier and much, much smarter on a daily basis? As you indicate, what makes those shows work is that they talk about issues and spend a lot of time talking about what political leaders say, instead of the manner in which they say it.

**Troy Patterson:** Hi, Chicago. You make an excellent point about Stewart and Colbert. I'd add that it's important to realize that those shows are able to indulge in genuine political satire—as opposed to topical jokes about political personalities—because they air on Comedy Central. Appealing to a niche market of about one million households a night, they're able to present sharp and substantive material. In contrast, Jay Leno, David Letterman, and SNL are trying to reach four or six or eight million people, and that necessitates making a lot of jokes that merely say, "John McCain is old," or "Bill Clinton likes the ladies."

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**Houghton, Mich.:** Hello Mr. Patterson. As Tommy Smothers likely would ask: Does the TV industry avoid witty, biting, satire because such content could scare advertisers desperately courting the couch-dwelling middle-class (who readily laugh at the "she's such a shrew" or "he's so dumb" jokes that are older than Bob Hope's crib)? I mean, let's face it, ultimately Lorne Michaels is just another vendor in GE's supply chain, right?

**Troy Patterson:** Hello, Houghton! The answers, as I hint at above, are yes and yes. As the great playwright George S. Kaufman once said, "Satire is what closes on Saturday night." If that's true, then it follows that SNL is, to use Peterson's term, pseudo-satire: "Satire nourishes our democracy, while the other stuff...is like fast food: popular, readily available, cheap; tasty in its way, but ultimately unhealthy."

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**Washington:** Troy. One small quibble with your article, which was fantastic overall. You draw a distinction in the response to John Kerry's botched joke, with Conan O'Brien engaged in "pseudo-satire," while Jon Stewart is engaged in "real satire," but I personally find that Stewart is among the worst practitioners of "pseudo-satire" and "personality jokes"—witness his sniveling
laughing Bush imitation, the repeated "Dick Cheney is evil" trope, the "Indecision" election coverage, etc.

I think Stewart should take a lot more blame than he does—both from you and other critics—in terms of shirking comedy's watchdog role. "The Daily Show" is at its best when it fulfills that role, such as when it finds year-old clips of politicians contradicting what they said yesterday, or points out the ridiculousness of Alberto Gonzalez's testimony with a "cannot recall" counter. All too often, though, it just devolves into Stewart pulling his shtick, and contributes little comedy of any depth. Your thoughts?

Troy Patterson: Good point. I might have taken care to mention that Stewart is less consistently satirical than Colbert. For instance, in addition to his more pointed line about Kerry's botched joke, he also did a pseudo-satirical bit imagining a Jeff Foxworthy-type CD titled The Botched Comedy Styling of John Kerry: "Under certain conditions, you might be a redneck. Unfortunately, I can't think of any at the moment." I happen to think that line is kinda funny, but I agree that it's pretty shallow.

Philadelphia: What do you think might have happened had Stephen Colbert seriously entered a presidential primary? Even if he meant it as a stunt, I remember thinking it actually could have had an impact, as any serious candidate who received fewer votes than him could have been politically hurt by his running.

Troy Patterson: Well, he was only seeking to appear on the ballot in South Carolina, so I don't think it would have had any real impact. On the other hand, it would have another dagger in the reputation of the 107th mayor of the City of New York had Colbert drawn more votes than Rudy Giuliani.

Harrisburg, Pa.: Are you familiar with Morris Udall, the joke-telling presidential candidate in 1976? If so, how do you think Udall would have been in today's environment?

Troy Patterson: I'm only slightly familiar with Rep. Udall, but I do think there's some truth to the title of his autobiography—Too Funny To be President. That said, I'm sure he could have enjoyed a wonderful Huckabee-like tour of the talk shows. Amazing how powerful humor is: I find a number of Huckabee's positions morally offensive, but, after seeing him play air hockey with Colbert, I love him dearly.

Virginia Beach, Va.: Do you have any thoughts on the possible misuse of the term "satire" in referring to modern comedic parodies? That is to say, it's my understanding that an important component of satire is that you are employing comedy to poke fun at something with the specific goal of "changing" the public's opinion, or pointing out some specific social ill, and by doing so you hope to evoke change. I guess I'm suggesting that to refer to Saturday Night Live's comedy as satire gives credit for a sophistication that does not exist.

Troy Patterson: You hit the nail on the head, Sweet Virginia, and you did so in a way that encourages me to keep shilling for Strange Bedfellows: "While he genuine satirist and the psuedo-satirist are both joking, only one of them is kidding. Real satire means it."

Anonymous: "Praise, undeserved, is satire in disguise."—Alexander Pope

Troy Patterson: What an original thought!

Phoenix: Could it be that Saturday Night Live makes flabby comedy in general? I haven't seen anything worthwhile on that show in years.

Troy Patterson: Oh, I don't know. The digital shorts—"D— in a Box" and so on—are pretty tight. I laughed at Tracy Morgan's pro-Obama response to Tina Fey's pro-Hillary editorial, especially the way Morgan inflected the phrase about preferring government cheese. It was funny; it's just not truly political.

New York: I think satire is great, and in the course of the past seven years, has been a very important release valve for all the ills that our government has hoisted upon us. I give them much credit for their biting political satire and for speaking truth to power. However, the shows I used to watch for satire aren't as funny any more. I used to love Saturday Night Live and The Daily Show, but they're just not funny any more. Not at all. And the reason is that they think they are allowed to criticize insert name of candidate here, when she/he only is trying to make this a better country. I think so-called satirical shows step over the line when they make fun of people I agree with.

Troy Patterson: And, here is an illustration of the chief commercial problem of satire. This question would seem to be a comment on the perceived audience mindset that leads to so many empty jokes. The strength is in the subtlety, and the subtlety is so subtle that it almost went over my head. Bravo!
Greencastle, Ind.: The most cringe-worthy "comedy" I've seen is Hillary Clinton with Jay Leno—between her being so unnaturally forced and Leno trying to steal every punchline possible ... a shiver just went through me while I was typing.

Troy Patterson: Yes, that was weird. Some would say there's something troubling in the way that Clinton joked about being "pinned down by sniper fire" on her way to Leno's set—an extreme version of something that most politicians do when appearing on late-night shows, attempting to defuse a volatile issue by making a ha-ha. Also, Clinton is reportedly very funny in private, but TV comedy is not her bag.

Annapolis, Md.: Your article is headlined "how satire got flabby," but it really only describes the flabbiness rather than explaining how it got flabby. There always has been a flabby side of political humor—Bob Hope is a shining example. Would you say that humor has grown more flabby? If so, why has this happened?

Troy Patterson: Fair enough. Explaining the "how," I would say that, yes, it has grown a bit more flabby, partly because there's more of it. (Carson stepped down and late-night shows began proliferating around the time that Dan Quayle arrived on the national scene.) Also, the Monica Lewinsky scandal gave comedians more license to delve into the personal side of politicians. On the other hand, the development of the cable business has enabled people like Stewart, Colbert, and Bill Maher to profitably sell satire to small audiences.

Washington: I'd agree that we're not in a golden age of political satire, but I think Letterman's "Great Moments in Presidential Speeches" has been nothing short of brilliant—and there is no joke that ever needs to be added. Maybe we're at a point where you cannot invent a joke that is as funny or absurd as the real thing.

washingtonpost.com: Great Moments in Presidential Speeches (YouTube)

Troy Patterson: I agree. Though Letterman's political jokes are largely anti-political these days, something about George W. Bush seems to incite "Dave's worn-on-his-alienation" (Peterson's words) in a way that gets him cracking.

Troy Patterson: What fun! Thanks for reading my piece, and thanks for your thoughtful responses.

Questions? Comments? Complaints? You can reach me via the bio line at the moment of my articles on Slate. Rock on....

the chat room

When To Hold 'Em, When To Fold 'Em
John Dickerson takes readers' questions on the candidate's decision to quit or fight on.
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 6:21 PM ET

Slate political writer John Dickerson was online to chat about how and why past presidential candidates have made their decisions to end their campaigns, and what this tells us about Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. An unedited transcript of the chat follows.

John Dickerson: Hello everyone. I look forward to answering your questions.

Anonymous: I support Obama but I think it's ridiculous for Clinton to bow out now. Granted, I am not a political pundit, campaigner or other, but there are many real issues to debate in this election. I think the way the Democratic Party gets the campaign back on track is to speak to issues. Shouldn't the party chair speak to that issue as well?

John Dickerson: I think that's right. The party chair should speak up and Dean eventually did, saying he hoped people would make their decision around July 1, which means not before then. Trying to get Clinton out early wasn't working as a political matter for Obama either.

Washington: John, my understanding is that Ted Kennedy was much farther behind Carter in delegates and the popular vote in 1980 than Clinton is today, but refused to pull out until the convention. Was this viewed as being the blow that helped kill Carter, or was he doomed as a candidate even without this?

John Dickerson: I think that's right. The party chair should speak up and Dean eventually did, saying he hoped people would make their decision around July 1, which means not before then. Trying to get Clinton out early wasn't working as a political matter for Obama either.

Washington: John, my understanding is that Ted Kennedy was much farther behind Carter in delegates and the popular vote in 1980 than Clinton is today, but refused to pull out until the convention. Was this viewed as being the blow that helped kill Carter, or was he doomed as a candidate even without this?

John Dickerson: Great question. Lots of people think Kennedy killed Carter. Though there were also lots of people who thought Carter was doomed from the start. In my reporting the distinction between Kennedy and Clinton made by Democrats was that Kennedy had issues he was fighting for (ERA, taxes and the draft) that made his crusade about the party and what it stood for, while Clinton's is not issue oriented in the same way.
Thanks. I wonder about the blue collar vote.

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I agree and it seems most everyone else does

John Dickerson: I think ultimately those candidates who don't

get out right away (because money problems force them to)

make their decision based on a bet that staying in any longer

hurts their long term prospects.

Washington: Why should a candidate who hasn't been

completely blown out in the primary quit? This is one of the first
times in recent memory that I've seen a Democrat with some
backbone actually fight for what they believe in. I'm an
independent, and I often have a hard time taking the Democrats
seriously.

John Dickerson: The arguments for Clinton to get out are
largely based on the idea that she's "harming the party" by
staying in and raising ugly issues in the public square that harm
the eventual nominee. One example was the recent news that she
told Bill Richardson that Obama "can't win." (i.e. that he's
fundamentally flawed). This is good ammunition for McCain,
some Democrats argue and wouldn't have gotten out there if she
wasn't fighting so hard to stay in.

St. Simons Island, Ga.: Mr. Dickerson, I am a regular reader of
Slate and of your columns in particular. You do very fine work.
About Sen. Clinton's campaign: Most of her remaining support
is from feminists and blue-collar workers. I believe the feminists
will stay with her, but the disclosure of the Clintons' tax returns
has to hurt her with the blue-collars. Indeed, I expect her polling
numbers this week in Pennsylvania will take a significant dive.
How do you see her campaign being affected by the disclosure?

John Dickerson: Thanks. I wonder about the blue collar vote.
Some polling on other issues shows that people don't really mind
if others are rich (as long as those rich folk aren't seen to prosper
unfairly). Some advocacy groups that have thought about
beating up on the wealthy owners of certain corporations have
decided not to because it doesn't really work. This, I should note,
is complicated. Plenty of polls show that disparity in CEO pay
gets people furious—but that's not exactly what would hurt the
Clintons in this case.

Fairfax, Va.: What role does concern for the good of the party
play in candidates' decisions about when to drop out? When
Obama won 12 in a row it seemed obvious that he simply was
more popular than Clinton, so Clinton chose to rip him apart
rather than acknowledge that the party had the most appealing
candidate it has had in years. Theoretically she could have quit
then and got on his bandwagon. That would have been good for
the party and probably would have preserved the excitement
surrounding Obama, which has declined.

John Dickerson: This is certainly the case the Obama forces
would make. Those in the Clinton camp would argue that he's
just not a general election candidate and that the later contests
will show that. If Clinton loses one of the big later contests
though, the argument is largely sunk.

Fairfax, Va.: If Clinton stood for something other than for
herself I could understand fighting on to the end because a noble
cause was at stake; but because she is not associated with a
cause, what is the point of her continuing on (and in the process
exposing her disdain for the larger good of ending Republican
rule and rebuilding America)?

John Dickerson: The Clinton folk would argue that her cause is
the Party cause. Since she believes that Obama is a flawed
general election candidate, she thinks all that Democrats believe
in will disappear if he wins the nomination. The stakes have to
be that high for Clinton as she makes her pitch or people will
think she's only in this for personal ambition.

Alexandria, Va.: All this "Hillary has to quit now" stuff is
driving me crazy. I know it doesn't look good for her, but that's
her call. And rules are rules—no Michigan or Florida primaries,
because that was the rule. But we can't allow superdelegates to
independently choose, and we can't allow the (agreed upon)
process to work to completion. And while there's some venom
that seems destructive, all I can say is that the Republicans have
been quite good at cooking up worse stuff for years.

John Dickerson: I agree and it seems most everyone else does
too. The point of the piece though was to look at how this
moment will come for any candidate who must, some day, face
that deciding moment.

Harrisburg, Pa.: What role does the Credentials Committee
play at the Democratic National Convention—and is this a
committee that could manipulate the outcome if it wanted to? For instance, I believe seated delegates vote on seating challenged delegates, so the manner in which challenges are accepted, heard and voted upon and then accepted or rejected could alter the final delegate count toward one candidate or another. How much leeway does the Credentials Committee have in possibly creating such a scenario?

John Dickerson: It's a great question. The rules are very complicated. The committee could vote this summer when it meets on FL and MI. Or, it could meet at the convention to make the call. The committee is made up of members selected by Howard Dean and a far larger body made up of delegates divided up roughly based on primary and caucus performance. If it gets this far it'll be a nightmare.

Montgomery Village, Md.: Thank you for your excellent and reflective article. When the time comes for Sen. Clinton to decide that her long-term career aspirations are better served by abandoning her presidential campaign this year, will she be the one who puts the question on the table, or will it be someone else? If it is not her, then will it be anyone other than her husband?

John Dickerson: This is the tension. When you get up every day to fight and are convinced it is that quality that serves you best in life, how do you possibly pull the plug on your own campaign? I think it's a dawning realization kicked off probably by a trusted source. That might be her husband or one of her close aides from over the years.

Washington: What does it mean to "quit"? Is there necessarily a bright line for quitting? If Clinton's money dried up, could she reduce campaigning to a minimum without admitting that she had lost—just her and Bill and an old RV on the road for two months—and claim "it worked for McCain"? Or does a campaign that won't cripple her gravitas as a senator require some minimum amount of cash? Could she declare a "suspension" or "temporary halt" while still trying to hold onto her pledged delegates? Can a candidate announce the formation of a "quitting exploratory committee"?

John Dickerson: She could do any of those things but she'd probably take a bigger credibility hit than she'd want to. Dragging it out too far sours people against any future run she might want to launch.

Bow, N.H.: Good piece yesterday, thank you for that. As to Clinton, didn't she really lose this race (at least as to pledged delegates) last November and December when she failed to plan (as Obama did) for a long race? Where were the people to tell her that after Iowa or after Super Tuesday? Also, where is the logic in this—she is being told to leave the race just like any other (male) candidate would be, but precisely because she is being treated like any other (male) candidate, this is somehow sexist?

John Dickerson: This is certainly a view the Obama folks would agree with. I think it's reasonable though for Clinton supporters to say that since the superdelegate rules were put in place to balance against the overheated passions of the voters it's okay for Clinton to play by those rules. She's not cheating, as some might argue, by trying to win this way. Sexism charges are a tricky thing. That it was white men with white hair telling the only woman to drop out certainly didn't add clarity to the situation.

St. Paul, Minn.: Hi John—thanks for taking my question and for your great reporting. If it were Republicans involved in the intense fight for the nomination—let's say it was McCain and Giuliani, for instance—would anything be different? In other words, is the fact that the race is still unresolved a "Democratic Party" problem?

John Dickerson: It's not a Democratic Party problem other than the fact that the Party nominating process, with its FL and MI nightmare this year, is so complicated it seems it might have been cooked up at a bar late one night. When I talked to Sen. Alexander about his run in 1996 he said that Newt Gingrich called for him to drop out for the good of the party just as Alexander thought he was getting going.

Detroit: In regard to "how does a presidential candidate decide to switch off his or her frantic determination to win," it is hard when one feels that one is preordained to be president, rather than that it is the right of voters to determine this. Here in Michigan, Hillary Clinton wants her "delegates" even though most Democratic candidates had their names removed from the ballot once the National Democratic Committee decided that such delegates would not be seated after Michigan moved up its primary. Many Obama supporters consequently never voted in Michigan. This "scorched earth" approach to politics has been around for decades. (Even with Gore having gotten the national popular vote, Bush in 2000 did not want a recount in Florida, nor did the Supreme Court.) Some candidates are not attuned to what voters are saying, and only listen to their own desires.
**John Dickerson:** That may be so, but the political instinct—fight for every vote runs pretty deep with every candidate.

**Norman, Okla.:** Why do people really seek this office/position? As I recall, the pay is rather poor considering all the responsibility. Is it the post-presidency that they really seek? Is it the position of power that's the focus?

**John Dickerson:** We've learned from the Clinton tax returns that post-presidencies can be lucrative. People want to be president for a lot of different reasons. They want to make a difference, they want the power and they want to feel productive in their chosen field.

**Scio, Ore.:** I was always taught that it was bad sportsmanship to quit in the middle of a race—even if you have to walk to the finish line, it's the sign of a winner to do so. I can't really say what that says about people who tell you to get out. Perhaps those people have set such low standards for themselves that quitting and giving up is a way of life for them, and acceptable. That's a real shame!

**John Dickerson:** It is bad sportsmanship though I suppose there's some other sports analogy here, perhaps from chess, where players concede when it's obvious they can't win. Of course, it's not as obvious that Clinton should bow out as some Obama supporters would like to argue. If it were all easy street, the Obama team wouldn't be working so hard to pound Clinton into the topsoil.

**Arlington, Va.:** What do you think of the discussion that if Clinton loses the nomination she would rather that McCain win this fall, so that she can run in 2012? Much of what she is doing now sure seems intended to either make her win or blow up the party trying. Should Harry Reid offer her the Senate Majority Leader position?

**John Dickerson:** It's certainly an argument in the case against Clinton. I think we'll really know whether there's any evidence for this (so far there isn't, I don't think) when we get to see how hard she works for Obama if he's the nominee.

**Los Angeles:** I'm an independent who usually votes Democratic, but I just haven't bought into the Obama vision. I have a problem with his lack of national and international experience and the way he casts that as a positive. If Clinton drops out, my instincts tell me to vote for McCain. Is Clinton holding onto her campaign because she knows there are millions of undecided voters like me who want to vote for her but would swing to McCain if Obama were the Democratic nominee?

**John Dickerson:** That's part of her case, yes. There have been several polls that show there are more voters like you than those who would vote for McCain if Clinton were elected.

**Fairfax, Va.:** Have you read Lawrence O'Donnell's piece about the "Movie Ending" to the Democratic nomination? Does this thing actually go to the convention? If Clinton dropped out say after the last primary and Obama went on to lose to McCain, would Clinton still be viable in 2012?

**John Dickerson:** I haven't read the piece but given the twists and turns this election has taken I should think any movie ending would involve a kung fu fight, an F-15 flyover and a championship football game.

**Baltimore:** Re: Clinton saying Obama can't win—as a lifelong Democrat I find this argument particularly galling. Clinton's unfavorable ratings have basically not moved throughout the campaign—half of the country is on record as despising her. Secondly, do we Democrats have such a short memory that we can't recall how John Kerry sold himself as more "electable"? We know how well that worked out.

**John Dickerson:** Clinton's rating have actually slipped. There are a lot of people who share your view, but given the numbers (Clinton trails in delegates, popular vote and states won) she doesn't have a lot of choices in the arguments she makes.
Washington: Why are so many of the chattering class suggesting that Hillary should quit? Didn't they learn about all of the people who failed and failed and then succeeded?

John Dickerson: Two reasons. 1: people want Obama elected. 2: those who aren't actually advocating that she drop out nevertheless are examining reasons she might be forced to before the last contest and the fact that the numbers are so against her gives ample argument for why she can't make up the deficit given the contests remaining.

Alexandria, va.: Given Obama's weakness with white, middle-class voters and Reagan Democrats (Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan), older voters (Florida) and Latinos (Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado and Florida), where does he find the votes to reach 270 electoral votes?

John Dickerson: He finds them because in a general election he'll be up against John McCain, a different candidate on a different playing field.

Rockville, Md.: Why not settle this at the convention? It might get the ratings up. I sense a lot of partisan forces at work here.

John Dickerson: Ratings might go up but a car crash gets good ratings too. If it goes to the convention, Democrats worry, there it'll be a big crack-up

Normal, Okla.: Do you see a realistic path to the nomination for Clinton? If not, why do you believe that she should stay in the race?

John Dickerson: I don't have a belief I'm expressing. It's up to her.

Is there a way she can win? Yes, the superdelegates can vote for her. Is this going to happen? It's a slim slim shot that depends on a lot of things going her way and the process by which she pulls it off could make the nomination not worth having.

Alexandria, Va.: Can you explain the media's hostility toward the superdelegates? I fail to understand this popular idea that "superdelegates should vote in accordance with the results of the popular vote." Do people fail to understand that primary politics are not (and are not supposed to be) democratic affairs, but instead are the results of a private party deciding who its leader will be?

The time for the people's opinion is November; party primaries are for party members, and the superdelegates are longtime, devoted party members who presumably have more information than the typical uneducated (about the issues/candidates) voter at large. As an aside, my opinions on this also put me in the camp that strongly opposes open primaries. I feel that if you're going to vote for someone in a primary, you at least need to be committed sufficiently to the party to properly register.

John Dickerson: You're right on the rules, but there are lots of Democrats who don't like those rules and don't think they are fair.

Raleigh, N.C.: Do you think it is possible for the Democratic Party to come up with a solution to assigning the Florida and Michigan delegates that would please both campaigns and pass the "smell test" (as in something smells fishy) with Democratic voters? If so, what are some possible solutions to assigning these delegates that would fulfill the criteria above?

John Dickerson: I'm not sure what solution would meet your criteria. Clinton wants the delegates now with no do-over. Obama doesn't want them seated under the "voting" that took place before and no do-over.

Washington: Those who call for candidates to drop out of the race so to make the nominating process easier are acting inappropriately. As long as a candidate is appealing to some portion of the population and wants to keep going, they should stay in the race to let the voters who support them have their say at the polls—and prevent the appearance of a false mandate for the eventual winner.

A president who is fooled into believing that the rank-and-file of his party support him unconditionally because he had no opposition after the early primaries probably will adopt a more unilateral style than one who knows that for a significant number of his party's supporters, he was their second or third choice.

John Dickerson: Interesting notion. This is a version of the argument that Obama is actually helped by a long primary. As a reporter, anything that tests candidates is something I like, not because it gives me stories (I'd be happy to take a little rest) but because it tests them in a way I think is useful. We learn more about them and how they act under pressure which isn't a horrible way to figure out whether they can handle the big job.
Maryland: Geez, all the talk about how there's no need for the primary to end ... how about, historically, most of us never even got to vote in a primary, as the decisions were made before it got to our states? Weren't we disenfranchised, to use Sen. Clinton's favorite word? No one cared then, they just followed the math. The Clintons will bully their way back to the White House, just watch.

John Dickerson: But in earlier primaries there wasn't a great sign that the losers in previous contests had supporters in those later states, was there?

Detroit: It is very interesting that there were very few "when should he quit" articles about Huckabee, but media types have been running "when should she quit" articles about Sen. Clinton for the better part of two months. Are reporters that excited by the prospect of Sen. Obama getting the nomination?

John Dickerson: There were a few such Huckabee stories but there was less chatter among party officials that it might do any harm to the Party which gives these stories some energy on the Democratic side.

Reston, Va.: You're the guy who asks the president all the tough questions, right? Are you going to get a chance to do that before he heads back to Crawford, or is it all presidential campaign from here on out?

John Dickerson: I'd love to talk to the president again. He has not called on me in a press conference since April 2004, so I imagine it'll have to be in person.

John Dickerson: Okay I'm off. Thanks very much for joining me and for reading the article. I'm off to make the deadline for my next one. Thanks!

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The green lantern

How To Apologize to Your Girlfriend

...Without destroying the Earth.

By Brendan I. Koerner

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:31 AM ET

My girlfriend is on the verge of kicking me to the curb, so I'd like to smooth things over with my standard apology gift: a dozen long-stemmed roses. But she's on the crunchy side, and I'm worried that cut flowers have become a major environmental no-no among such eco-minded folks. Should I find a greener way to say I'm sorry?

You needn't ditch flowers entirely—what's life without the occasional luxury?—but you ought to pay close attention to your roses' provenance. That suspiciously cheap bouquet being peddled by your local supermarket? There's a good chance its constituent flowers were raised several thousands miles away and regularly doused in toxic pesticides. If you don't want your floral mea culpa to come with a side of enviro-guilt, you're going to have to read the labels—and you may have to shell out some extra coin.

About 70 percent of America's cut flowers are imported, chiefly from Colombia and Ecuador. These two nations became flower-industry heavyweights starting in the early 1990s, thanks to the Andean Trade Preference Act; in order to encourage the development of agricultural alternatives to coca growing, the act eliminated import tariffs on numerous Latin American goods, including flowers. The region surrounding Bogotá, in particular, offers an excellent climate for mass horticulture, as well as relatively cheap labor costs. Once the American tariffs were removed, major growers swooped in to create farms or expand existing ones—among them California-based Dole, now Colombia's leading flower exporter.

Unfortunately, Latin American regulations regarding pesticides tend to be more lax than those in the United States. Numerous nongovernmental organizations, such as the Pesticide Action Network, found that Colombian and Ecuadorian flowers were heavily treated with the likes of aldicarb, which can cause dreadful health problems—especially if it seeps into the local water supply. (Pesticide residues may pose a risk to farm workers, but they are extremely unlikely to harm your girlfriend.) Flowers are also an exceedingly thirsty crop, and the rapid increase in cultivation has sorely taxed Latin American rivers and aquifers.

The flower industry's recklessness started attracting a fair bit of negative press in the late 1990s. Some growers responded by joining certification programs, for which they agree to abide by certain environmental and labor standards in exchange for a label that consumers will ostensibly associate with green cred. In Colombia, for example, more than one-quarter of flower farms are certified by Florverde, which is operated by the industry's domestic trade association; the program boasts that its participants currently use 50 percent less pesticides than a decade ago.
Yet Florverde is nowhere near as green as VeriFlora, which forbids the use of dozens of pesticides that are permissible under Florverde's regime. VeriFlora farms must also commit to moving toward organic growing—a stipulation that many Latin American growers say they can't meet, due to the fragility of their crops and the prevalence of ravenous insects.

Pesticides, of course, aren't the only environmental factor to consider the next time you need to curvy favor with your beloved. The importation of flowers from Latin America would seem to result in the emission of appreciable carbon dioxide, due to the fossil fuels that must be expended on transportation. But there's considerable debate as to whether "flower miles" really tip the environmental scales in favor of domestic products—at least those grown in energy-intensive indoor facilities.

Try as he might, the Lantern couldn't find any studies comparing the field-to-market carbon emissions of Latin American flowers with those grown in the United States. The best he could come up with was this (PDF) much-discussed report from Europe, which concluded that Kenyan roses destined for British retailers emitted 5.8 times less CO₂ than those grown in Dutch greenhouses. That's because the indoor Dutch operations require much more electricity and natural gas than Kenya's sun-kissed fields.

It's exactly the sort of contrarian conclusion that typically delights the Lantern to no end. But it's also pretty shaky: If you read the three-page report closely, you'll see that it's based on back-of-the-envelope calculations and estimations, rather than first-hand research. It also compares just a single Kenyan operation against a single Dutch one; since the report was funded by entities with a vested interest in seeing the Kenyan flowers win out, you have to wonder whether the data were cherry-picked.

In the absence of truly scientific studies regarding flower-related carbon emissions, the Lantern advises you to use common sense: Look for a VeriFlora sticker affixed to the wrapper or box, and be prepared to have your wallet lightened a bit more than you're accustomed to. A dozen guilt-free roses start at around $50, which may be double the cost of those cellophane-wrapped beauties at the corner store—particularly if the cheapies came in from China, a nascent floral powerhouse.

Ouch, huh? Well, look at it this way—if you're going to make yourself pay $50 or more every time you get in a lovers' quarrel, that's a pretty good incentive to keep things cool between you and your lady.

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.

the has-been
Coming Home
Larry Craig reveals that he'd decided to leave long before he decided not to.
By Bruce Reed
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 3:54 PM ET

Thursday, April 10, 2008

Twist and Shout: When the news broke last August that Larry Craig had been arrested in a restroom sex sting, he had a ready answer: The Idaho Statesman made him do it. He claimed that the Statesman's monthslong investigation into whether he was gay made him panic and plead guilty. Otherwise, he said, he feared that what happened in Minneapolis might not stay in Minneapolis, and the Statesman would make sure the voters of Idaho found out.

Craig's jihad against the Statesman didn't go over too well in Idaho, where people are more likely to read the newspaper in the restroom than worry about it afterward. On Monday, the Statesman was named a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Reporting for what the committee called "its tenacious coverage of the twists and turns in the scandal involving the state's senator, Larry Craig."

The story took yet another strange twist and turn this week. For the past six months, the entire political world has been wondering why Craig promised to resign when the scandal broke, then changed his mind a few days later. In a rare interview Wednesday with the congressional newspaper the Hill, Craig finally found someone to blame for staying in the Senate: The people of Idaho made him do it.

According to the Hill, Craig said "support from Idahoans convinced him to reverse his pledge to resign last year." This was news to most Idaho voters, who have viewed the whole affair with shock, outrage, embarrassment, and dismay. But Craig didn't stop there. The Hill reports that he also said his decision not to run for re-election "pre-dated the controversy."
Last fall, Craig stunned Idahoans by insisting he was not gay, not guilty, and not leaving. Now he says it’s our fault he never left, he was leaving anyway, and if he’s not running, it’s not because we don’t believe him when he says he’s not guilty and not gay.

Unfortunately, Craig’s latest explanation casts some doubt on the excuse he gave last fall. If he had already decided long ago that he wasn’t running for re-election, he had less reason to panic over his arrest, and much less to fear from voters finding out about it back home. In September, he made it sound as if he pled guilty to a crime he didn’t commit to avoid a political firestorm back home. If politics were of no concern, he had every reason to fight the charges in court. For that matter, if he was so sure he wouldn’t run again, he could have announced his decision early last year, which might have staved off the Statesman investigation before it got started.

Craig’s latest revelation undermines his defense in another way as well. If he is telling the truth that he had made up his mind not to run before his arrest, that would be the best explanation yet for why he risked putting himself in a position to get arrested. Eliot Spitzer’s re-election prospects plunged long before he got caught, too.

Nothing can fully explain why public figures like Craig and Spitzer would flagrantly risk arrest. But we can rule out political suicide if they’d already decided their political careers were over. ... 3:55 P.M. (link)

Wednesday, April 2, 2008

B.Looper: Learned reader Kyle Sammin recalls that Idaho’s Marvin "Pro-Life" Richardson has nothing on 1998 Tennessee State Senate candidate Byron "Low-Tax" Looper. Besides changing his name, Looper also murdered his opponent. Under Tennessee law, the names of dead candidates are removed from the ballot. So even though he was quickly charged with homicide, Looper nearly ran unopposed. The victim’s widow won a last-minute write-in campaign. Looper was sentenced to life in prison.

Bloopers: The Pittsburgh Pirates are now the most mediocre first-place team in baseball history. In their season opener Monday night against Atlanta, the Bucs provided plenty of evidence that this year will turn out like the last 15. They blew a five-run lead in the ninth by walking four batters and booting an easy fly ball. Pirate players said they’d never seen anything like it, not even in Little League. For an inning, it looked like the team had gone on strike to demand more money.

But to every Buc fan’s surprise, the Pirates won, anyway—12-11 in 12 innings—and with no game Tuesday, Pittsburgh has been above .500 for two glorious days. New General Manager Neal Huntington e-mailed me on Monday to promise that the team’s new regime is determined to build an organization that will make the people of Pittsburgh proud again. That might take a while. For now, we’re content to make the people of Atlanta feel really embarrassed. ... 1:35 P.M. (link)

Tuesday, April 1, 2008

Danger Is My Middle Name: Outgoing Senator Larry Craig can take consolation in one thing: out in Idaho, everyone wants his seat. Fourteen candidates have filed to run for the Senate, including eight Republicans, two Democrats, two Independents, and a Libertarian. Hal Styles Jr. of Desert Hot Springs, California, entered the Republican primary, even though he has never been to Idaho. "I know I'll love it because, clean air, clean water and many, many, many mountains," he says. "My heart, my mind, my body, my soul, my thoughts are in this to win."

The general election will likely be a rematch between former Democratic congressman Larry LaRocco and Republican Lt. Gov. (and former governor) Jim Risch. If Idahoans find those two insufficiently embarrassing, however, a number of fringe candidates have lined up to take Craig’s place. According to CQ, one Independent, Rex Rammel, is a former elk rancher who is angry that Risch ordered state wildlife officials to shoot some of his elk that got away. The Libertarian, Kent A. Marmon, is running against the ever-expanding Socialist agenda he claims is being pushed by Democratic congressmen like John Dingell.

But by far the most creative third-party candidate is Marvin Richardson, an organic strawberry farmer who went to court to change his name to "Pro-Life." Two years ago, he made that his middle name and tried to run for governor as Marvin "Pro-Life" Richardson. State election officials ruled that middle names
couldn't be used to make a political statement on the ballot. As plain old Marvin Richardson, he won just 1.6% of the vote.

Now that "Pro-Life" is his full name, the state had to let him run that way on the ballot. He told the Idaho Press-Tribune that with the name change, he should win 5%. He plans to run for office every two years for as long as he lives: "If I save one baby's life, it will be worth it."

As the Press-Tribune points out, Pro-Life is not a single-issue candidate, but has a comprehensive platform. In addition to abortion, he opposes "homosexuality, adultery, and fornication." He wants the pro-life movement to refer to abortion as "murder," although he has not yet insisted pro-choice candidates change their name to that.

Idaho Republicans and anti-abortion activists don't share Pro-Life's enthusiasm. They worry that conservative voters will check the box next to both Pro-Life and the Republican candidate, thereby spoiling their ballots. So last week, the Idaho Secretary of State persuaded both houses of the legislature to pass emergency legislation to clarify that "voters are casting a vote for a person and not a political proposition." Under the legislation, candidates who appear to have changed their names to "convey a political message" will be outruled on the ballot as "a person, formerly known as . . . ." The Prince Bill will go to the governor for signature this week.

According to the Associated Press, Pro-Life accuses legislators of "trying to legislate intelligence"—a charge not often hurled at the Idaho legislature. "The people that vote for me are more intelligent than to have something defined in legislation like this," he says.

Of course, Idahoans who really want to make a political statement will still be able to outsmart the Prince Bill. Nothing in the legislation prohibits Idaho parents who feel strongly about issues from naming their children Pro-Life or Pro-Gun at birth. For that matter, Marvin Richardson has changed his name so many times that if he changes it again, the ballot might have to describe him as "a person formerly known as 'Pro-Life.'" Or he could just change his name to Mitt Romney.

On the other hand, Republicans and Democrats alike can breathe a sign of relief over another unintended effect: the new law foils Larry Craig's best strategy for a comeback. Before the law, Craig could have changed his name to "Not Gay" and won in a landslide. "A person formerly known as Not Gay" is more like it. … 5:27 P.M. (link)

**Friday, Mar. 28, 2008**

**We Are Family:** Midway through the run-up to the next primary, the presidential campaigns are searching for fresh ways to reach the voters of Pennsylvania. My grandparents left Pittsburgh more than 80 years ago, so my Pennsylvania roots are distant. But I still think I can speak for at least half the state in suggesting one bold proposal we long for every April: a plan to rescue one of the most mediocre teams in baseball history, the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Granted, the nation faces more urgent crises. But in hard times, people often look to sports for solace. To blue-collar workers in taverns across western Pennsylvania, watching the Pirates lose night after night is as predictably grim as the Bush economy. The lowly Bucs are the reigning disappointment in the world of sport—with a batting average that seems pegged to the dollar and prospects of victory in line with the war in Iraq.

The Pittsburgh franchise hasn't finished above .500 since 1992. If, as universally predicted, the Pirates turn in their 16th consecutive losing season this year, they will tie the all-time frustration record for professional sport set by the Philadelphia Phillies in the 1930s and '40s.

Pittsburgh is still a proud, vibrant city, which has rebounded handsomely from losses far more consequential than the Pirates'. The once-proud Pirates, by contrast, show plenty of rust but no signs of recovery. In 1992, the team was an inning away from the World Series, when the Atlanta Braves scored three runs in the bottom of the ninth to steal Game 7 of the National League Championship Series. The Braves soon moved to the NL East en route to winning 14 consecutive division titles, the longest in sports history. The Pirates moved from the East to the Central and began their soon-to-be-record-setting plunge in the opposite direction.

On Monday, the Pirates return to Atlanta for Opening Day against the Braves. Baseball analysts no longer give a reason in predicting another last-place Bucco finish. This year, the *Washington Post* didn't even bother to come up with a new joke. Last season's *Post preview* said:

**Blech. This Pirates team is so mediocre, so uninteresting, so destined for last place, we don't**
know if we can squeeze another sentence out of it for this capsule we're being paid to write. But here's one. ... The Pirates haven't had a winning season since 1992, and that streak will continue this year. That's still not long enough? Well, here's another line! Hey—two sentences in one line! Make that three! And here's another! See how easy that is?

This year, the same Post analyst wrote:

Okay, folks, here's the deal: We need to fill precisely 4.22 column-inches of type with information about the faceless, tasteless Pirates, and as usual we're not sure we can do it. But guess what? We're already at .95 inches, and we're just getting started! Wait—make that 1.19 inches. ... Should they finish below .500 again (and let's be honest, how can they not?), they will tie the Phillies of 1933-48 for the most consecutive losing seasons. (By the way, that's 3.53 inches, and we haven't even had to mention new manager John Russell, Capps's promise as a closer or the vast potential of the Snell-Gorzelanny duo.) There: 4.22 inches. Piece of cake."

So now the Pirates even hold the record for consecutive seasons as victims of the same bad joke.

Pittsburgh faces all the challenges of a small-market team. Moreover, as David Maraniss pointed out in his lyrical biography, Clemente, the first love for Pittsburgh fans has long been football, not baseball. These days, no one can blame them.

Seven years ago, in a desperate bid to revive the Pirates' fortunes, the city built PNC Park, a gorgeous field with the most spectacular view in baseball. From behind home plate, you can look out on the entire expanse of American economic history—from the Allegheny River to 1920s-era steel suspension bridges to gleaming glass skyscrapers.

The result? As Pittsburgh writer Don Spagnolo noted last year in "79 Reasons Why It's Hard To Be a Pirates Fan," Pittsburgh now has "the best stadium in the country, soiled by the worst team." (The Onion once suggested, "PNC Park Threatens To Leave Pittsburgh Unless Better Team Is Built.") Spagnolo notes that the city already set some kind of record by hosting baseball's All-Star game in 1994 and 2006 without a single winning season in between.

Although the Pirates' best player, Jason Bay, is from Canada, if Pittsburgh fans have suffered because of trade, the blame belongs not to NAFTA but to an inept front office. Jason Schmidt, now one of the top 100 strikeout aces in history, was traded to the Giants. Another, Tim Wakefield, left for the Red Sox. Franchise player Aramis Ramirez was dealt to the Cubs. When owners sell off members of a winning team, it's called a fire sale. The Pirates have been more like a yard sale. In 2003, when the Cubs nearly made the Series, the Pirates supplied one-third of their starting lineup.

In the early '80s, an angry fan famously threw a battery at Pirate outfielder Dave Parker. Last June, fans registered their frustration in a more constructive way. To protest more than a decade of ownership mismanagement, they launched a Web site, IrateFans.com, and organized a "Fans for Change" walkout after the third inning of a home game. Unfortunately, only a few hundred fans who left their seats actually left the game; most just got up to get beer.

This year, fans are still for change but highly skeptical. In an online interview, the new team president admitted, "The Pirates are not in a rebuilding mode. We're in a building mode." One fan asked bitterly, "How many home runs will the 'change in atmosphere' hit this season?"

I've been a Pirate fan for four decades—the first glorious, the second dreary, the last two a long march from despair to downright humiliation. In more promising times, my wife proposed to me at Three Rivers Stadium, where we returned for our honeymoon. On the bright side, the 2001 implosion...
of Three Rivers enabled me to find two red plastic stadium seats as an anniversary present on eBay.

Our children live for baseball but laugh at our Pirate caps—and, at ages 12 and 14, haven't been alive to see a winning Pirate season. Yet like so many in western Pennsylvania, I've been a Pirate fan too long to be retrained to root for somebody else.

After 15 years, we Bucs fans aren't asking for miracles. We just want what came so easily to the pre-2004 Red Sox, the post-1908 Cubs, and the other great losing teams of all time: sympathy. Those other teams are no longer reliable: The Red Sox have become a dynasty; 2008 really could be the Cubs' year. If you want a lovable loser that will never let you down, the Pittsburgh Pirates could be your team, too. ... 12:06 P.M. (link)

Thursday, Mar. 13, 2008

Craigenfreude: In a new high for the partisan divide, a mini-debate has broken out in far-flung corners of the blogosphere on the urgent question: Who's the bigger hypocrite, Larry Craig or Eliot Spitzer?

Conservative blogger Michael Medved of Townhall offers a long list of reasons why Craig doesn't need to go as urgently as Spitzer did. He finds Craig less hypocritical (“trolling for sex in a men's room, doesn't logically require that you support gay marriage”), much easier to pity, and "pathetic and vulnerable" in a way Spitzer is not. Liberal blogger Anonymous Is a Woman counters that while Craig and Louisiana Sen. David Vitter remain in office, at least Spitzer resigned.

Warning, much political baggage may look alike. So, party labels aside, who's the bigger hypocrite? Certainly, a politician caught red-handed committing the very crimes he used to prosecute can make a strong case for himself. In his resignation speech, Spitzer admitted as much: "Over the course of my public life, I have insisted, I believe correctly, that people, regardless of their position or power, take responsibility for their conduct. I can and will ask no less of myself."

Moreover, for all the conservative complaints about media bias, the circumstances of Spitzer's fall from grace ensure that tales of his hypocrisy will reverberate louder and longer than Craig's. Already a media star in the media capital of the world, he managed to destroy his career with a flair even a tabloid editor couldn't have imagined. Every detail of his case is more titillating than Craig's—call girls with MySpace pages and stories to tell, not a lone cop who won't talk to the press; hotel suites instead of bathroom stalls; bank rolls instead of toilet rolls; wide angles instead of wide stances; a club for emperors, not Red Carpet.

Spitzer flew much closer to the sun than Craig, so his sudden plunge is the far greater political tragedy. No matter how far his dive, Craig couldn't make that kind of splash. You'll never see the headline "Craig Resigns" splashed across six columns of the New York Times. Of course, since he refuses to resign, you won't see it in the Idaho Statesman, either.

Yet out of stubborn home-state chauvinism, if nothing else, we Idahoans still marvel at the level of hypocrisy our boy has achieved, even without all the wealth, fame, and privilege that a rich New Yorker was handed on a silver platter. Many Easterners think it's easy for an Idahoan to be embarrassing—that just being from Boise means you're halfway there.

We disagree. Craig didn't grow up in the center of attention, surrounded by money, glamour, and all the accoutments of hypocrisy. He grew up in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by mountains. When he got arrested, he didn't have paid help to bring him down. No Mann Act for our guy: He carried his own bags and did his own travel.

Larry Craig is a self-made hypocrite. He achieved his humiliation the old-fashioned way: He earned it.

Unlike Spitzer, who folded his cards without a fight, Craig upped the ante by privately admitting guilt, then publicly denying it. His lawyers filed yet another appellate brief this week, insisting that the prosecution is wrong to accuse him of making a "prehensile stare."

While it's admittedly a low standard, Craig may have had his least-awful week since his scandal broke in August. A Minnesota jury acquitted a man
who was arrested by the same airport sting operation. Craig didn’t finish last in the Senate power rankings by Congress.org. Thanks to Spitzer, Craig can now tell folks back home that whatever they think of what he did, at least they don’t have to be embarrassed by how much he spent. In fact, he is probably feeling some Craigenfreude—taking pleasure in someone else’s troubles because those troubles leave people a little less time to take pleasure in your own.

Like misery, hypocrisy loves company—which, for both Spitzer and Craig, turned out to be the problem. But Spitzer was right to step down, and Craig should long ago have done the same. Politics is a tragic place to chase your demons. ... 5:30 P.M. (link)

Wednesday, Mar. 5, 2008

All the Way: As death-defying Clinton comebacks go, the primaries in Ohio and Texas were very nearly not heart-stopping enough. On Monday, public polls started predicting a Clinton rebound, threatening to spoil the key to any wild ride: surprise. Luckily, the early exit polls on Tuesday evening showed Obama with narrow leads in both do-or-die states, giving those of us in Clinton World who live for such moments a few more hours to stare into the abyss.

Now that the race is once again up for grabs, much of the political establishment is dreading the seven-week slog to the next big primary in Pennsylvania. Many journalists had wanted to go home and put off seeing Scranton until The Office returns on April 10. Some Democrats in Washington were in a rush to find out the winner so they could decide who they’ve been for all along.

As a Clintonite, I’m delighted that the show will go on. But even if I were on the sidelines, my reaction would have been the same. No matter which team you’re rooting for, you’ve got to admit: We will never see another contest like this one, and the political junkie in all of us hopes it will never end.

It looks like we could get our wish—so we might as well rejoice and be glad in it. A long, exciting race for the nomination will be good for the Democratic Party, good for the eventual nominee, and the ride of a lifetime for every true political fan.

For the party, the benefits are obvious: By making this contest go the distance, the voters have done what party leaders wanted to do all along. This cycle, the Democratic National Committee was desperate to avoid the front-loaded calendar that backfired last time. As David Greenberg points out, the 2004 race was over by the first week of March—and promptly handed Republicans a full eight months to destroy our nominee. This time, the DNC begged states to back-load the calendar, even offering bonus delegates for moving primaries to late spring. Two dozen states flocked to Super Tuesday anyway.

Happily, voters took matters into their own hands and gave the spring states more clout than party leaders ever could have hoped for. Last fall, NPR ran a whimsical story about the plight of South Dakota voters, whose June 3 contest is the last primary (along with Montana) on the calendar. Now restaurateurs, innkeepers, and vendors from Pierre to Rapid City look forward to that primary as Christmas in June.

But the national party, state parties, and Sioux Falls cafes aren’t the only ones who’ll benefit. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the biggest beneficiaries of a protracted battle for the nomination are the two contestants themselves. Primaries are designed to be a warm-up for the general election, and a few more months of spring training will only improve their swings for the fall.

And let’s face it: These two candidates know how to put on a show. Both are raising astonishing sums of money and attracting swarms of voters to the polls. Over the past month, their three head-to-head debates have drawn the largest audiences in cable television history. The second half of last week’s MSNBC debate was the most watched show on any channel, with nearly 8 million viewers. An astonishing 4 million people tuned in to watch MSNBC’s post-debate analysis, an experience so excruciating that it’s as if every person in the Bay Area picked the same night to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge.

The permanent campaign turns out to be the best reality show ever invented. Any contest that can
sustain that kind of excitement is like the World Series of poker: The value of the pot goes up with each hand, and whoever wins it won't be the least bit sorry that both sides went all-in.

No matter how it turns out, all of us who love politics have to pinch ourselves that we're alive to see a race that future generations will only read about. Most campaigns, even winning ones, only seem historic in retrospect. This time, we always know it's one for the ages; we just don't know how, when, or whether it's going to end.

Even journalists who dread spending the next seven weeks on the Pennsylvania Turnpike have to shake their heads in wonderment. In the lede of their lead story in Wednesday's Washington Post, Dan Balz and Jon Cohen referred to "the remarkable contest" that could stretch on till summer. They didn't sign on to spend the spring in Scranton and Sioux Falls. But, like the rest of us, they wouldn't miss this amazing stretch of history for anything. ... 11:59 P.M. (link)

Monday, Feb. 25, 2008

Hope Springs Eternal: With this weekend's victory in Puerto Rico and even more resounding triumph over the New York Times, John McCain moved within 200 delegates of mathematically clinching the Republican nomination. Mike Huckabee is having a good time playing out the string, but the rest of us have been forced to get on with our lives and accept that it's just not the same without Mitt.

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? Out in Salt Lake City, in an interview with the Deseret Morning News, Josh Romney leaves open the possibility that his father might get back in the race:

Josh Romney called speculation that his father could be back in the race as either a vice presidential candidate or even at the top of the ticket as the GOP's presidential candidate "possible. Unlikely, but possible."

That's not much of an opening and no doubt more of one than he intended. But from mountain to prairie, the groundswell is spreading. Endorsements are flooding in from conservative bloggers like this one:

Mitt Romney was not my first choice for a presidential candidate, but he came third after Duncan Hunter and Fred Thompson. ... I would love to see Mitt reenter the race.

Even if re-entry is too much to hope for, Josh hints that another Romney comeback may be in the works. He says he has been approached about running for Congress in Utah's 2nd District.

That, too, may be an unlikely trial balloon. Josh is just 32, has three young children, and would face a Democratic incumbent, Rep. Jim Matheson, who is one of the most popular politicians in the state. Matheson's father was a governor, too. But unlike Mitt Romney, Scott Matheson was governor of Utah.

If Mitt Romney has his eye on the No. 2 spot, Josh didn't do him any favors. "It's one thing to campaign for my dad, someone whose principles I line up with almost entirely," he told the Morning News. "I can't say the same thing for Sen. McCain."

Even so, Romney watchers can only take heart that after a year on the campaign trail, Josh has bounced back so quickly. "I was not that upset," he says of his father's defeat. "I didn't cry or anything."

In his year on the stump, Josh came across as the most down-to-earth of the Romney boys. He visited all 99 of Iowa's counties in the campaign Winnebago, the Mitt Mobile. He joked about his father's faults, such as "he has way too much energy." He let a Fox newswoman interview him in the master bedroom of the Mitt Mobile. (He showed her the air fresheners.) He blogged about the moose, salmon, and whale he ate while campaigning in Alaska—but when the feast was over, he delivered the Super Tuesday state for his dad.

As Jonathan Martin of Politico reported last summer, Josh was campaigning with his parents at
the Fourth of July parade in Clear Lake, Iowa, when the Romneys ran into the Clintons. After Mitt told the Clintons how many counties Josh had visited, Hillary said, "You've got this built-in campaign team with your sons." Mitt replied, to Ann's apparent dismay, "If we had known, we would've had more."

We'll never know whether that could have made the difference. For now, we'll have to settle for the unlikely but possible hope that Mitt will come back to take another bow. … 4:13 P.M. (link)

Monday, Feb. 11, 2008

**Face Time:** When Ralph Reed showed up at a Romney fundraiser last May, Mitt thought he was Gary Bauer – perpetuating the tiresome stereotype that like some Reeds, all Christian conservatives look alike. Now, in Mitt's hour of need, Ralph is returning the favor. According to the *Washington Times*, he and 50 other right-wing leaders met with Romney on Thursday "to discuss the former Massachusetts governor becoming the face of conservatism."

Nothing against Romney, who surely would have been a better president than he let on. But if he were "the face of conservatism," he'd be planning his acceptance speech, not interviewing with Ralph Reed and friends for the next time around.

Conservatives could not have imagined it would end this way: the movement that produced Ollie North, Alan Keyes, and ardent armies of true believers, now mulling over an arranged marriage of convenience with a Harvard man who converted for the occasion. George Will must be reaching for his Yeats: "Was it for this ... that all that blood was shed?"

For more than a year, Republican presidential candidates tried to win the Reagan Primary. Their final tableau came at a debate in the Gipper's library, with his airplane as a backdrop and his widow in the front row. It was bad enough to see them reach back 20 years to find a conservative president they could believe in, but this might be worse: Now Romney's competing to claim he's the biggest conservative loser since Reagan. If McCain comes up short like Gerald Ford, Mitt wants to launch a comeback like it's 1976.

Even conservative leaders can't hide their astonishment over finding themselves in this position. "If someone had suggested a year ago and a half ago that we would be welcoming Mitt Romney as a potential leader of the conservative movement, no one would have believed it," American Conservative Union chairman David Keene reportedly told the group. "But over the last year and a half, he has convinced us he is one of us and walks with us."

Conservative activist Jay Sekulow told the *Washington Times* that Romney is a "turnaround specialist" who can revive conservatism's fortunes. But presumably, Romney's number-crunching skills are the last thing the movement needs: there are no voters left to fire.

To be sure, Mitt was with conservatives when the music stopped. Right-wing activists who voted in the *CPAC straw poll* narrowly supported him over McCain, 35% to 34%. By comparison, they favored getting out of the United Nations by 57% to 42% and opposed a foreign policy based on spreading democracy by 82% to 15%. Small-government conservatism trounced social conservatism 59% to 22%, with only 16% for national-security conservatism.

As voters reminded him more Tuesdays than not, Mitt Romney is not quite Ronald Reagan. He doesn't have an issue like the Panama Canal. Far from taking the race down to the wire, he'll end up third. While he's a good communicator, many voters looking for the face of conservatism couldn't see past what one analyst in the *Deseret News* described as the "CEO robot from Jupiter."

If anything, Romney was born to be the face of the Ford wing of the Republican Party – an economic conservative with only a passing interest in the other two legs of Reagan's conservative stool. Like Ford, Mitt won the Michigan primary. He won all the places he calls home, and it's not his fault his father wasn't governor of more states.

Romney does have one advantage. With a conservative president nearing historic lows in the polls and a presumptive nominee more intent on leading the country, heading the conservative movement might be like running the 2002 Olympics – a job nobody else wants.
Paul Erickson, the Romney strategist who organized the conservative powwow, called McCain's nomination "an existential crisis for the Republican Party," and held out Mitt as a possible Messiah: "You could tell everybody at the table sitting with Romney was asking himself: 'Is he the one?'"

Romney has demonstrated many strengths over the years, but impersonating a diehard conservative and leading a confused movement out of the wilderness aren't foremost among them. It might be time for the right to take up another existential question: If conservatism needs Mitt Romney and Ralph Reed to make a comeback, is there enough face left to save? ... 3:37 P.M. (link)

Thursday, Feb. 7, 2008

Romney, We Hardly Knew Ye: When Mitt Romney launched his campaign last year, he struck many Republicans as the perfect candidate. He was a businessman with a Midas touch, an optimist with a charmed life and family, a governor who had slain the Democratic dragon in the blue state Republicans love to hate. In a race against national heroes like John McCain and Rudy Giuliani, he started out as a dark horse, but to handicappers, he was a dark horse with great teeth.

When Democrats looked at Romney, we also saw the perfect candidate—for us to run against. The best presidential candidates have the ability to change people's minds. Mitt Romney never got that far because he never failed to change his own mind first.

So when Romney gamely suspended his campaign this afternoon, there was heartfelt sadness on both sides of the aisle. Democrats are sorry to lose an adversary whose ideological marathon vividly illustrated the vast distance a man must travel to reach the right wing of the Republican Party. Romney fans lose a candidate who just three months ago led the polls in Iowa and New Hampshire and was the smart pick to win the nomination.

With a formidable nominee in John McCain, the GOP won't be sorry. But Romney's farewell at the Conservative Political Action Committee meeting shows how far the once-mighty right wing has fallen. In an introduction laced with barbs in McCain's direction, Laura Ingraham's description of Mitt as "a conservative's conservative" said all there is to say about Romney's campaign and the state of the conservative movement. If their last, best hope is a guy who only signed up two years ago and could hardly convince them he belonged, the movement is in even worse shape than it looks.

Had Romney run on his real strength—as an intelligent, pragmatic, and competent manager—his road to the nomination might have gone the way of Rudy Giuliani's. Yet ironically, his eagerness to preach the conservative gospel brought on his demise. Romney pandered with conviction. He even tried to make it a virtue, defending his conversion on abortion by telling audiences that he would never apologize for being a latecomer to the cause of standing up for human life. Conservatives thanked him for trying but preferred the genuine article. In Iowa, Romney came in second to a true believer, and New Hampshire doesn't have enough diehards to put him over the top.

Romney's best week came in Michigan, when a sinking economy gave him a chance to talk about the one subject where his party credentials were in order. In Michigan, Romney sounded like a 21st-century version of the business Republicans who dominated that state in the '50s and '60s—proud, decent, organization men like Gerald Ford and George Romney. As he sold his plan to turn the Michigan economy around, Mitt seemed as surprised as the voters by how much better he could be when he genuinely cared about the subject.

By then, however, he had been too many things to too many people for too long. McCain was authentic, Huckabee was conservative, and Romney couldn't convince enough voters he was either one.

Good sport to the end, Romney went down pandering. His swansong at CPAC touched all the right's hot buttons. He blamed out-of-wedlock births on government programs, attacks on religion, and "tolerance for pornography." He got his biggest applause for attacking the welfare state, declaring dependency a culture-killing poison that is "death to initiative."
Even in defeat, he gave glimpses of the Mitt we’ll miss—the lovably square, *Father Knows Best* figure with the impossibly wholesome family and perfect life. He talked about taking "a weed-whacker to regulations." He warned that we might soon become "the France of the 21st century." He pointed out that he had won nearly as many states as McCain, but joked awkwardly with the ultraconservative audience that he lost "because size does matter."

He didn't say whether we'll have the Romneys to kick around anymore. But with the family fortune largely intact and five sons to carry on the torch, we can keep hope alive. In the Salt Lake City paper this morning, a leading political scientist predicted that if Democrats win the White House in 2008, Romney "would automatically be a frontrunner for 2012."

It's hard to imagine a more perfect outcome. For now, sadness reigns. As the Five Brothers might say, somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout; but there is no joy in Mittville—Guy Smiley has dropped out. ... 5:42 P.M. (link)

Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008

**Mittmentum:** With John McCain on cruise control toward the Republican nomination, Mitt Romney finds himself in a desperate quest to rally true believers – a role for which his even temper and uneven record leave him spectacularly unsuited. Romney knows how to tell the party faithful everything they want to hear. But it's not easy for a man who prides himself on his optimism, polish, and good fortune to stir anger and mutiny in the conservative base. Only a pitchfork rebellion can stop McCain now, and Luddites won't man the ramparts because they like your PowerPoint.

So far, the Republican base seems neither shaken nor stirred. McCain has a commanding 2-1 margin in national polls, and leads Romney most everywhere except California, where Mitt hopes for an upset tonight. Professional troublemakers like Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh are up in arms, trying to persuade their followers that McCain is somehow Hillary by other means. On Monday, Limbaugh did his best imitation of Romney's stump speech, dubbing Mitt the only candidate who stands for all three legs of the conservative stool.

Strange bedfellows indeed: Rush-Romney is like a hot-blooded android – the first Dittohead-Conehead pairing in galactic history.

On Saturday, Mitt Romney wandered to the back of his campaign plane and told the press, "*These droids aren't the droids you're looking for.*" Oddly enough, that's exactly the reaction most Republicans have had to his campaign.

But in the home stretch, Romney has energized one key part of his base: his own family. Yesterday, the Romney boys set a campaign record by putting up six posts on the Five Brothers blog – matching their high from when they launched last April. Mitt may be down, but the Five Brothers are back.

The past month has been grim for the happy-go-lucky Romney boys. They sometimes went days between posts. When they did post, it was often *states they had just campaigned in and lost.* Bright spots were hard to come by. After South Carolina, Tagg found a "Romney girl" video, set to the tune of "1985," in which a smiling young Alabaman named Danielle sang of Mitt as the next Reagan. One commenter recommended raising $3 million to run the clip as a Super Bowl ad; another asked Danielle out on behalf of his own five sons. A few days later, Matt put up a clip of a *computerized prank call* to his dad, pretending to be Arnold Schwarzenegger – prompting a priceless exchange between robo-candidate and Terminator. Then the real Arnold spoiled the joke by endorsing the real McCain.

In the run-up to Super Tuesday, however, a spring is back in the Five Brothers' step. On Sunday, Josh wrote a post about his campaign trip to Alaska. Richard Nixon may have lost in 1960 because his pledge to campaign in all 50 states forced him to spend the last weekend in Alaska. That didn't stop Josh Romney, who posted a *gorgeous photo of Mount McKinley* and a snapshot of some Romney supporters shivering somewhere outside Fairbanks, where the high was 13 below. He wrote, "I sampled all of the Alaskan classics: moose, salmon and whale. Oh so good." Eating whale would certainly be red meat for a liberal crowd, but conservatives loved it too. "Moose is good stuff," one fan wrote. Another supporter mentioned friends who've gone on missions abroad and "talk
The rest of the family sounds like it's on the trail of big game as well. Ben Romney, the least prolific of the Five Brothers, didn't post from Thanksgiving through the South Carolina primary. Yesterday, he posted twice in one day – with a link to Limbaugh and a helpful guide to tonight's results, noting that in the past week members of the Romney family have campaigned in 17 of 21 states up for grabs on Super Tuesday. Now we can scientifically measure the Romney effect, by comparing the results in those 17 states with the four states (Idaho, Montana, Connecticut, Arizona) no Romney visited. After Huckabee's victory in West Virginia, the early score is 1-0 in favor of no Romneys.

Tagg, the team captain, also posted twice, urging the faithful to "Keep Fighting," and touting Mitt's evangelical appeal: "The Base Is Beginning to Rally." Back in June, Tagg joked with readers about who would win a family farting contest. Now he's quoting evangelical Christian ministers. The brothers are so focused on the race, they haven't even mentioned their beloved Patriots' loss, although there has been no word from young Craig, the one they tease as a Tom Brady lookalike.

Of course, if the Republican race ends tonight, the inheritance Mitt has told the boys not to count on will be safe at last. By all accounts, they couldn't care less. They seem to share Tagg's easy-go-easy-go view that no matter what happens, this will have been the best trip the family has ever taken, and this time no dogs were harmed along the way (just moose, salmon, and whale).

At the moment, the Five Brothers must feel the same nostalgia to keep going that the rest of us will feel for their antics when they're gone. Back when the campaign began, Tagg joked that they would love their father win or lose, although he might become something of a national laughingstock in the meantime. Mitt did his part, but whatever happens tonight, he can be proud the firewall he cares most about – his family – has held up its end of the bargain. ... 6:15 P.M. (link)

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**The Spectator**

**From Slo-Mo to No-Mo**

Errol Morris and the strange power of superslow motion.

By Ron Rosenbaum

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 2:22 PM ET

I've always loved slo-mo. It's one of those technological developments that we take for granted—thereby overlooking the profound pleasures, both sensual and intellectual, that slo-mo opens up for our vision of the world, of time, of being itself. What got me thinking about slo-mo again was seeing my friend Errol Morris' slo-mo-saturated new documentary about Abu Ghraib, *Standard Operating Procedure*. Slo-mo is virtually the standard operating speed of *Standard Operating Procedure*. I think there's a reason (and a revelation) inherent in its use, which I'll get to. But first let me talk about why I find slo-mo so seductive in the first place.

First, there's the sheer beauty of it! A dangerous beauty, true, since it can aestheticize indiscriminately. (Insert obligatory admonitory reference to the slo-mo machine-gun slaughter at the close of *Bonnie and Clyde* as iconic example.) But, for the most part, slo-mo can be a mesmerizing revelation of the grace inherent in the ordinary.

For better or worse, just about everything looks better in slow motion. Even awkwardness looks balletic in slow motion—or, at least, "Chaplinesque." (Do you know the Hart Crane poem by that name, by the way? Check it out here.) Gracelessness becomes graceful and gracefulness becomes transcendent.

The movement of ordinary physical objects can acquire the luminous, numinous mystery of a glowing Spielbergian UFO. I became hooked on slo-mo from watching pro football—not just the complex beauty of broken field running but the close-up of the lovely slow spiral of a long forward pass as it drifts through space to the embrace of a receiver's arms. Gravity's rainbow!

Motion itself seems more miraculous than mundane in slow motion. In slo-mo we don't take motion for granted; it becomes sensual, dreamlike art. After you've watched a lot of slo-mo, conventional life seems "jerky" in every sense of the word.

Slow motion can cause one to rethink time itself: Consider the possibility that the speed at which time seems to proceed is really arbitrary. There's no reason we couldn't live in an alternate universe in which time moves faster or slower. (Though how would we know the difference? Insert Woody Allen-type joke about how "everything would be the same except you couldn't get same-day dry cleaning".)
With slo-mo, the passage of time is suddenly something one can experience more pronouncedly, something one can observe from the outside rather than from within it. Watching slo-mo allows you to compare time as we know it with different rates of being—the way one rarely can when one is part of time, in synch with its inexorable speed, and unable to step back from it. It's the difference between floating down a river and watching it from its banks.

Did you know (I didn't until very recently) that slow motion was an invention—patented, in fact? Who knew time could be patented? Back in 1904, an Austrian priest-turned-physicist named August Musger obtained a patent for a process by which he modified film projectors to produce slo-mo on screen. The irony was that August Musger (named after the slowest month?) was slo-pay, too. He lost his patent in 1914 because he failed to pay the fees for its renewal on time.

But the corporation that snatched up the priest-physicist's patent didn't profit from slo-mo for long. Eventually, most filmmakers reproduced the effect by "overcranking" the camera (as it's called), not jiggering with the projector. They'd run the camera at a higher frame-per-second rate as they were recording, then play the film back to audiences at the usual 24-frames-per-second speed. (Although cranks are long gone, this is essentially how people do it today, although new digital methods now allow directors to achieve some slo-mo effects in postproduction.)

Still, the fact that it was an Austrian priest-physicist named August who patented slo-mo is almost too good to be true, since the technique raises the questions that priests and physicists both struggle with: the mysteries of creation and time. Did time exist before the creation of the universe (either by God or by the Big Bang)? If so, how fast was it moving, and why that speed? Will some inventive creationist defend the seven days by saying they were 7 billion years in super, super slo-mo?

Once, polymath littérateur George Steiner told me a fantasy of his: that some Austrian street photographer might have captured both Hitler and Freud together on a Viennese tram during the time they both lived in the city. My fantasy now is that Albert Einstein—working in the Swiss patent office in Bern in 1904, when Musger patented slo-mo in (relatively) nearby Austria—might have become aware of Musger's slow-motion patent (perhaps it even crossed his desk?) and that contemplation of slo-mo might have influenced Einstein's thinking about the nonabsoluteness, the relativity, of time.

But there's slo-mo and then there's super slo-mo. I'd been accustomed to Errol Morris' effective use of slo-mo in films like The Thin Blue Line and Fog of War. In a way, his use of slo-mo is akin to "close reading" in literary criticism. It expands our apprehension of the ambiguities and hidden resonances of emblematic moments.

But the super slo-mo in Standard Operating Procedure takes it to another level. I first saw it when I visited the Abu Ghraib set Morris was filming on in L.A. a year or so ago. I recall him rhapsodizing about the effects he achieved with a new camera called "the Phantom."

Most "real-time" film is shot at 24 frames per second (or close variations). Most conventional slo-mo is shot at around 130 frames per second. The Phantom shoots at the equivalent of 1,000 frames per second!

Out in L.A., Morris showed me some Phantom-created super-slo-mo footage of a snarling dog of the type used at Abu Ghraib to terrify detainees. The dog's bloodlust is bestial enough in real life. But the super slo-mo captures a more primal savagery than anything you can glimpse in real-time snarling and snapping. The footage offers some essence of viciousness that the brain must register at a subliminal level. It implicitly asks the question: Do all animals, including us, possess some variation of this rage?

Oddly enough, though, it wasn't the dog footage but a stretch of super slo-mo featuring inanimate objects—empty shotgun shell casings bouncing around after being ejected by the firing process—that somehow stayed with me. The more I thought about it, the clip seemed to encapsulate one of the key questions the film investigates most closely: How much were the perpetrators at Abu Ghraib acting with free will, making individual moral choices, and how much were they compelled by wartime "circumstances," following orders from higher-ups to act abusively?

Standard Operating Procedure focuses on the so-called "bad apples" at Abu Ghraib, the low-level military policemen and women such as Lynndie England who became scapegoats for officials further up the chain of command.

The links between the abuses at Abu Ghraib and the higher-ups writing torture-enabling memos in the White House and Justice Department (John Yoo, Timothy Flanigan) have been persuasively demonstrated by Tara McKelvey (a close friend) in her Abu Ghraib book, Monstering. (Disclosure: I actually know some people who aren't involved in investigating Abu Ghraib.)

Morris takes the notion that ultimate responsibility lies higher up the chain of command as a given. But his film seems to me to be asking whether the "bad apples," the ones following orders, following "standard operating procedure," should be let off the hook just because others higher up bear heavier responsibility. His film suggests that closely examining the bad apples' behavior and rationalizations can tell us something about ourselves.
Don’t the bad apples bear *some* responsibility? They could have said no at any point, but instead—with the exception of a couple of whistle-blowers—they played along, adding their own little twists of humiliation and viciousness to the treatment of mostly innocent detainees.

This question picks up on one recent tendency in Holocaust history, the focus on the actual hands-on perpetrators rather than on the higher-ups, the Hitlers and Himmlers, with their abstract plans for a “Final Solution.” The point is not to diminish the role of these architects but to look more closely at those who carried their plans out.

You see this tendency in Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men*, about the low-level soldiers in a German military police battalion, and in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (although they take somewhat contrary views of the nature of complicity) and, of course, in Claude Lanzmann’s famous nine-hour documentary, *Shoah*, which focuses on the Polish and Eastern European killers in the death camps.

At the heart of *Standard Operating Procedure* are long interviews with five of the seven ”bad apples,” who go to great lengths to evaluate and rationalize what they did at Abu Ghraib. The film doesn’t ignore the wider context. Rumsfeld and Gen. Sanchez are given their dues, as is the fact that, according to some accounts, before 2003 no fewer than 30,000 people were hanged to death by Saddam Hussein’s torturers there.

But Morris is fascinated by the bad apples. They open up to him, speaking not defensively but often weirdly matter-of-factly about what they did, which ranged from humiliation to outright torture and tolerating the killing of one detainee.

Listening to them talk, one thinks of Stanley Fish. Yes, I have accused the celeb professor of writing *The Worst Op-Ed Ever Published* here in Slate. But once, back when he was a more serious scholar, he posited a fascinating theory about Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in a book called *Surprised by Sin*. Fish argued that Milton’s method was to recreate in the mind of his reader the experience of the temptation and the fall that is the subject of *Paradise Lost*. He wanted his reader, too, to become entranced by the seductive rhetoric of Satan—who speaks better poetry than God—and then be brought up short by the fact that he’s fallen for Satan’s silver tongue. Just like Adam and Eve: surprised by sin.

So it is with the long and winding tales of the ”bad apples,” which are the verbal equivalent of slo-mo. They return to, circle around, a single incident (the murder of a detainee by the CIA, for instance) from a variety of angles, offering a superslow verbal accumulation of visual detail.

They offer such detailed “human” accounts that there is a temptation to ”normalize” their actions—to conclude, as they make sense of what they did, that it all makes sense. To understand all is to forgive all. They couldn’t help it. The conditions there were terrible. The place was a chaotic hell with no explicit orders except the directive to ”soften up” detainees so that shadowy ”professional” interrogators could use more formal methods of torture on them.

You almost find yourself nodding along. But, then, you recognize—surprised by sin—that you need to question this rationalizing response. You feel a need to ascertain which actions were *determined* and which were chosen, wondering all the while what you would have done in the same situation. Slow-motion storytelling becomes a kind of moral investigative tool.

Morris’ interviews tempt us to empathize. He lets the bad apples tell us their stories in what you might call slow motion, and it is in the very slowness of the way the intersecting tales are woven that one can begin to see the warp and woof of evasion and denial.

I found it a fascinating investigation of the borderline between free will and determinism. The bad apples spoke as if they had no choice, as if circumstances determined their behavior. They followed orders. And yet, as McKelvey points out in her book, Lynndie England had been a whistle-blower of sorts in her civilian life: She once chose to take a stand, pointing out workplace lapses in the chicken processing plant she worked at in her native West Virginia. Why was it different at Abu Ghraib? Weren’t the bad apples free at some level to say no?

In Browning’s book about ”ordinary men,” the story of a reserve military police battalion, we learn that the men in the unit were given the option of not participating in the mass murder of Jews. Some did opt out and were not punished, indicating that those who killed did it by choice, not compulsion. It could be done. They didn’t have to follow orders, even in Nazi Germany.

What does all this have to do with the slow-motion footage of the shotgun shells? The scene is a re-creation of a moment when one of the Americans fired a shotgun at a prisoner who had a smuggled gun. We see the midsection of the shotgun as it’s firing and ejecting brass shell casings with each blast. We follow the shells as they float in super slo-mo to the floor, bouncing off the floor and one another at crazy angles. Flying and diving.

Lingering in this way on the apparently crazy angles and bounces and ricochets highlights the fact that these trajectories are not random—that they are, in fact, an enactment of determinism. Every empty shotgun shell casing ejected from the weapon is ”following orders,” following the laws of physics. (On the macro, nonsubatomic level, of course.) Their movement,
their bounces, their ricochets are all determined to the last micron.

They have no choice. They are empty cases. The angles weren't "crazy"; they were ordained by the mathematics of force and motion. This is the way the "bad apples" portray themselves. Empty cases. Buffeted by forces beyond their control.

The image of the empty cartridge cases challenges us to question this plea of determinism, the implicit analogy. That's the way it worked for me, anyway. Were the bad apples really "empty cases" or did they have something within them that allowed deliberation, control over the trajectory of their actions?

Perhaps that challenge, that question, that investigation of moral responsibility is so deeply embedded in the documentary that my reading of the slo-mo footage is entailed by my reading of the film.

On the other hand, this contextual subtext of free will is something I might have missed if super slo-mo hadn't forced me to think about the significance of the bouncing shell casings: the question of whether the laws of psychological determinism, of emotion, are as fixed as those of motion. Is there a physics of courage and cowardice?

I tried this idea out over dinner with Morris, and later we spoke about it on the phone. He professed interest in my take, although he may have been trying to be agreeable, and I didn't press him on it, since I often feel bad about pushing him out of the more open-ended and sometimes enigmatic stances he prefers.

And so our conversation moved from the ethical dimensions of super slo-mo to the metaphysical questions it raises. From slow motion as an investigative window onto the mind to slow motion as an investigative window onto time itself. From slo-mo to the idea of no-mo.

As best as I can recall, it began with Morris discussing something he was working on for his New York Times blog, an essay that began as a defense of his use, in his documentaries, of "re-enactments," which occasionally get some critics' knickers in a twist. (The first part of the essay was published last week.) One of the things he wanted to do was to distinguish justified, versus unjustified, uses of the technique. He was planning to begin the essay (10,000 words in draft when we spoke) with a digression on "continuity problems" in films, the glitches that result when editing together two versions of a scene. (When a character wears, say, a red tie when beginning a speech but finishes it tieless, that's a minor continuity problem; major ones involve story and character inconsistencies.) Morris has a complicated theory about the relationship between re-enactments and continuity problems, which I will let you absorb directly when he publishes it in a subsequent installment.

But the discussion of continuity problems and of super slo-mo prompted me to bring up Jorge Luis Borges' persistent preoccupation, in his stories and essays, with disproving the reality of time itself as a continuum.

Borges took Zeno's paradox to its limits. You know Zeno's paradox: Achilles is racing a tortoise and the tortoise has a slight head start, but, argues Zeno, Achilles will never catch up to the tortoise. Never close the distance at all. Never move—at least in some radical interpretations—because to move forward Achilles must cross an infinite number of points between any given two points, and even if it takes an infinitesimal slice of time to cross each one, it would take him infinite time to get through the infinite points that lay between him and any point in his path. (For more, see this entertaining study by Joseph Mazur of the thousands of years of disputation over it.)

Zeno's refutation of continuous motion itself is more explicitly reflected in his "flying arrow" paradox. As Mazur puts it: "The flying arrow paradox concludes that motion is impossible. Zeno pictures an arrow in flight and considers it frozen at a single point in time … [arguing] that if it is stationary at that instant then it is stationary at any—and every—instant. Therefore it doesn't move at all."

So Borges took Zeno's paradox and ran with it, so to speak. (See, for instance, his essay "The Perpetual Race of the Tortoise and Achilles" in Selected Non-Fictions.) He claimed that if there were no such thing as continuous motion, there was also no such thing as continuous time, which is purportedly a continuous succession of moments.

What, then, was Borges' vision of time? He held that the universe was a series of discontinuous moments—almost like a series of separated frames on a strip of film. Each frame an infinitesimal moment of discontinuous time, existing entirely independent of the ones before and after it. As did the people within each frame. Not slo-mo. No-mo.

How did Borges account for memory, then? In an essay in Other Inquisitions, "The Creation and P.H. Gosse," Borges played with the notion that the universe might have been created just moments—or even a single moment—ago, and that we were created with memories of an illusory past we never lived implanted within us.

OK, it's a little tenuous, but hard to disprove.

Morris' words on this: "All of existence is a continuity problem." By this logic, you are a different person entirely from the entity who started reading this essay. You don't have to regret anything in your past. You have no real past. You are someone new. But, then, so am I.
Nice to meet us.

**Correction, April 10, 2008:** This piece originally stated that Lynndie England was fired after taking a stand against workplace lapses at a chicken processing plant where she worked. In fact, as Tara McKelvey reported, following the incident, she walked off the job. *(Return to the corrected sentence.)*

today's blogs

**Torched**
By Bidisha Banerjee
Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 6:03 PM ET

Bloggers ponder the protests accompanying the Olympic Torch relay in San Francisco on Wednesday. They also examine Yahoo's experiment in ad-sharing with Google, and Elton John's pronouncement that America is "misogynist" for not supporting Hillary Clinton.

**Torched!** San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom is drawing fire for authorizing an evasive, truncated route for the Olympic torch relay that managed to bypass most of the 10,000 viewers and protesters. Newsom cited public-safety concerns and the violent protests surrounding the relay in London and Paris.

**Daily Kos** diarist "Bagof Health and Politics" excoriates Newsom: "Have we placed the First Amendment down as collateral on the loans the Chinese government continually gives this country? Today, the Mayor of San Francisco failed to uphold his office, freedom, and the spirit of democracy." **France Insider**'s Paul Ben-Itzak, a San Franciscan living in Paris, unfavorably compares Newsom with Paris' mayor, who supported the protests in Paris: "In San Francisco, by contrast, reports today's San Francisco Chronicle, Mayor Newsom outdid the Chinese by pulling a slight of hand on the thousands of his constituents and fellow citizens all set to exercise their rights of free speech."

"Looks like total confusion in San Francisco. Excellent! I think it's wonderful that the Tibetans are getting a little air time," suggests John Derbyshire at the **National Review Online**'s **Corner**. He goes on to credit India and Switzerland for taking in Tibetan refugees, and to criticize former U.S. administrations for dropping the ball on Tibet.

But Chris, commenting on the **SF Bay Guardian's Politics** blog, reasons: "Individuals have a guaranteed right of freedom of speech; they do not have a guaranteed right to view the Olympic torch. Everyone, pro-China and anti-China had a chance to have their voices heard--the amount of global media attention has been enormous and having the torch run curtailed did not make China look good in the least in the eyes of the world; rather, it made it look like the torch got run out of town."

Although Newsom thwarted them successfully, did the protesters accomplish anything? **Shreiner's Media Landscape**, a native of Utah, celebrates the presence of Utah's Tibetan community at the rallies and writes, "[T]he demonstrations in San Francisco made me feel proud to be an American: the first time I've been able to say that since 9/11."

"For the first time, Beijing has actually admitted that the Tibetan protests are widespread and conducted on a large scale," observes Nima Taylor Binara of the Tibet Justice Center in Berkeley on **Tibet Talk**. Thanks to the recent spate of protests around the world, "Tibetans are no longer portrayed as colorful if slightly backward 'minorities.' Tibetans are now ungrateful colonial subjects in open rebellion. This is significant, because recognition of the difference between Tibetans and Chinese is the first step to recognition that Tibet is not China."

[Read more about the protests. Wired's blog links to video feeds from the streets.]

**Yahooogle**: Yahoo has announced that it will experiment with running Google ads on some search queries. The move is widely seen as a challenge to Microsoft's hostile takeover bid.

Bloggers are torn about what it will all mean. "[Yahoo's] actions, which appear to be based on destroying their market value as a counter to the Microsoft bid, benefit neither their stockholders nor their employees," notes **Tech Crunch**'s Michael Arrington. "And by setting up Google as the only real option in search marketing, they are disrupting what little market balance and competition exists in that space today. … If Yahoo 'wins' this epic battle with Microsoft, will there be anything left at the end to celebrate over?"

**Mashable.com**'s Stan Schroeder contends, "The big four are making a mess, and wasting time here, nothing more - although I'm sure it seems like a lot more to them. By the time Yahoo, AOL and Microsoft figure out who owns what, chances are that many of their online properties will be worthless."

**ZDNet**'s Larry Dignan disagrees: "This Microhoo soap opera has been a hoot, but the clock is ticking. Shockingly, Yahoo may actually get Microsoft to up its price. Stay tuned." **Silicon Alley Insider** (and **Slate** contributor) Henry Blodget gives credence to a JPMorgan analyst who believes that "[a] full search-outsourcing deal between Yahoo (YHOO) and Google (GOOG) would increase Yahoo's value by more than $5 a share."

**Gigaom**'s Om Malick concludes, "Either way, in this deal, heads or tails, Google comes away a winner. If Yahoo goes to
Microsoft, the ensuing chaos is going to benefit Google. If Yahoo gives away its search ad business, Google is a winner."

Read more about Yahoogle.

Still standing: Elton John raised $2.5 million for Hillary Clinton at a Radio City Music Hall concert Wednesday. Bloggers are abuzz about John's suggestion that misogyny is the reason behind Clinton's floundering campaign.

"Thank you, Elton John! It's almost like you have to be from outside the country to name the problem," claims Tennessee Guerilla Women's Egalia. "Sexism does NOT hurt Hillary Clinton. Being Hillary Clinton hurts her," comments Liz on the Swamp, the blog of the Tribune Co.'s D.C. bureau.

Elton's critics abound on both sides of the aisle. Ann Althouse writes: "Geezer John is a whole lot less fun than the youngish John in the 'I'm Still Standing' video, which is exactly the sort of thing feminists of the time would deplore. And now he's grown up into one of those people who deplore things." And at Stop Her Now, a blog devoted to all things anti-Hillary, Kevin points out: "I am not the first person to point out the irony involved in claiming that voting for Hillary is somehow a blow for independent women when Hillary's entire career is based on her husband's success and pity for the way he treated her. Take away her marriage to Bill - and the attendant eight years in the White House - and Hillary is just another mediocre senator."

Read more about Elton John and Hillary.

today's blogs

Jimmy Meet Hamas

By Michael Weiss
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 5:38 PM ET

Bloggers react to news that Jimmy Carter is planning to meet with a Hamas honcho, wonder about the need for "more white people" at a Michelle Obama campaign stop, and either snicker or holler upon learning that Joe Lieberman's Web site crashed right before the 2006 primary because it was overloaded, not because of sinister hacking.

Jimmy meet Hamas: Arab newspaper Al-Hayat reports that former President Jimmy Carter plans to meet next week with Khalid Meshal, the senior political leader of Hamas, who is living in exile in Syria. However, Carter's press secretary, Deanna Conglileo, said that while Carter is "planning a trip to the Mideast … we are still confirming details of the trip and will issue a press release by the end of this week." Yeah, yeah, say bloggers, who express not a whit of shock at this speculative itinerary.

Rick Moran at American Thinker calls Carter the "terrorists' best friend": "Hamas's latest peace offering was to send a gunman to a Jewish seminary and slaughter 9 innocent people. I'm sure Meshal and Carter will have a lot to talk about considering the former President's previous statements about Israel being the biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East are perfectly in line with Meshal's own fantasies." Moderate Michael van der Galien concurs. "First Carter accuses Israel of being an Apartheid state," he submits at PoliGazette, "then he goes to meet with the leader of an organization which sole purpose is to destroy Israel and to kill all Jews. As John Bolton said, '[i]t's about par for the course from President Carter, demonstrating a lack of judgment typical of what he does.'"

Righty Allahpundit at Hot Air asks, "Which prominent Democrat will be tasked tomorrow with phoning Jimbo to explain why it's not a good idea for someone who thinks Israel is an apartheid state to be huddling with terrorists in an election year? Will it be Obama himself?"

Conservative Gay Patriot fumes, "[M]aybe given that Democrat's once-professed interest in human rights, Jimmy just might press the terrorist organization on its indiscriminate firing of rockets at civilian targets in Israel? Doubt it. In the past he has shown little for Israelis, at one point suggesting Palestinian terrorist against Israeli civilians were justified. Maybe then he'll at least press Hamas to stop oppressing the Palestinians under its control in Gaza."

But Tami, the One True is more sanguine: "Why is it that I honestly feel that this guy supports peace above all else? Is it his mild demeanor? His lack of declaring wars? His work to provide housing to low-income families? His willingness to sit down with people who have their thumbs on an entire race of people and can influence their emotions at the drop of a hat to try and convince them that working with the US could help them more than working against it? Am I the only one who thinks he's trying to make things better for everyone?"

Post-racial stumping: Michelle Obama spoke at a rally at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pa., Monday, where one of her event coordinators was overheard saying to another, while looking for audience members to sit onstage behind Mrs. Obama, "Get me more white people, we need more white people." One Asian girl was told: "We're moving you, sorry. It's going to look so pretty, though."

Michael Goldfarb at the Weekly Standard's Blog says, "The Obama campaign discriminates against people of color, and their own supporters no less, in what is presumably a misguided pander to white voters. Very strange, but perhaps Obama's candidacy really has transcended race in America (surely this is
The soldier and the diplomat: Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker are spending Tuesday testifying before the Senate’s armed services and foreign-relations committees—including all three presidential candidates—and will speak before the House armed services and foreign-affairs committees. Petraeus cautioned against a precipitous withdrawal of troops and cited “significant but uneven” progress in Iraq since the surge. The influence of Iran, recent violence in Basra, and the escalating costs of the war were headlining subjects. Both men faced tough questions, particularly from Sens. Carl Levin and Jack Warner, who asked Petraeus whether the war had made America safer—a question the general parried.

Liberal Kyle E. Moore at Comments From Left Field has low expectations: "As you all know, General Petraeus is heading to the Hill today in our semiannual ritual of, 'Relax guys, it's going great,' testimony regarding Iraq. Once there he's expected to, believe it or not, say that we've made gains in our little country of occupation. Everything's going according to plan." But Mike Tippitt at conservative Wake Up America is less cynical: "These are not men who are coming to Washington jockeying for position with other lawmakers, opening themselves to the flirtations of lobbyists, or trying to determine how much pork they can bring home for their districts in the form of earmarks. Petraeus is a warrior, Crocker is a peace-broker. Despite the seeming contradictory roles they play, both men actually are working for the same goal in a country that needs their experience and expertise to begin full work in governing itself, with our help as a nation at the outset."

The New York Times’ Caucus blog sets the scene: "Most noticeable in the audience, perhaps, was a row of women wearing black headscarves. With their faces painted bone white and the palms of their hands done in blood red, they held signs reading 'surge of sorrow' and displayed a graphic photo of a bandaged Iraqi child lying in a hospital bed. … While the signs held in the committee room reflected antiwar attitudes, the line of people snaking down the hallway, awaiting a seat in the committee room, seemed to be comprised of more war supporters than opponents."

How did the presidential candidates fare? Andrew Sullivan, who is unirived in his dislike of the junior senator from New York, notes: "Just watched Clinton question Petraeus, by the way. Very low-key, to my mind. Anti-war but no fireworks and no soundbites. She behaved as if she still believes she could be president next January." Ilan Goldberg at Democracy Arsenal catches a McCain gaffe during his chance to question the duo: "McCain did genuinely mix up Sunnis and Shi’a again. Saying that Al Qaeda was a Shi’a group before quickly correcting himself. I'm speaking about past allegations of Meaks and Rev. Wright and now his own wife). … [I]f Hillary was ever caught saying such… the news would be having a field day, and probably even have tickers scrolling across our screens. Ridiculous."

Ben Smith of the Politico isn’t sure "there’s any real reason for outrage here; every campaign, at least implicitly, includes race in the staging of events like this -- even a campaign whose supporters chant ‘race doesn't matter.’ But they don't usually get caught doing it this explicitly."

Read more about the Obama camp's search for white people.

Liberal Steven Benen at the Carpe diem Report is “sure Lieberman will do the right thing, acknowledge his own mistake, express regret to the FBI for requesting an unnecessary and wasteful investigation, and apologize to Lamont supporters for the bogus accusations. We're waiting.”

Jane Hamsher at Firedoglake is furious: "I remember sitting in the blogger room and staring at the TV with Bob Geiger and Mike Stark in open-mouthed disbelief as it ran across the fucking chiron. It was the Story Of The Day, when that story should have been how anti-war candidate Ned Lamont was proving everyone wrong in their ‘shhh, don’t talk about the war’ wisdom that had dominated Democratic politics. It changed the general election. Its effects reverberated far past Connecticut and shook not only the party but the country to its very foundation."

Read more about Lieberman's Web site.

today's blogs
The Soldier and the Diplomat
By Michael Weiss
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 6:02 PM ET
But Michael Goldfarb at the Weekly Standard Blog throws up his hands: "This is getting beyond ridiculous. Sometimes people make mistakes, even liberals—like when Arianna Huffington, in the midst of attacking McCain for just such a gaffe, confused Iran with Syria. Does she really not know the difference between the two? Of course not. Or how about during today's hearings when Ted Kennedy referred to 'inter-sectarian' violence in Basra."

The recent fighting in Basra was a popular topic for senators. Who won? And did Muqtada al-Sadr Nouri al-Maliki emerge the political victor? Sadr canceled an anti-American rally scheduled for Wednesday, citing concerns for the safety of the demonstrators. He also said he'd be willing to disband the Mahdi Army if instructed by Iraq's top Shiite clerics.

Anti-war academic Juan Cole at Informed Comment laughs off the disbandment flirtation: "Folks, he always says that when there is a controversy. (He said the same thing in spring, 2004). He says it because he knows it makes him look reasonable to the Shiite public. He says it because he knows that the grand ayatollahs are not going to touch the matter with a ten foot pole."

Rick Moran at Right Wing Nuthouse writes: "Despite Maliki's recent success in pulling together society to call for Sadr's evisceration, the effect will probably be transitory. The factions and sects are not going to break out into songs of brotherhood and sit down to hammer out the details of meaningful reconciliation. They can barely stand being in the same room together. Self-interest will eventually prevail and some kind of modus vivendi will emerge."

Author and Iraq vet Austin Bay says the Sadrists didn't win the fight in Basra: "The Iraqis planned the operation and carried it out on their own, without consulting Petraeus and Crocker. Good deal. In the long run that plays well politically in Iraq and it corners Sadr—the US did not tell Maliki to go after Sadr. If the US had, Sadr could tout that 'prior approval,' maintaining that Maliki is a puppet, etc. Instead, you have an elected democratic prime minister who happens to be a Shia ordering his nation's troops to strike a Shia gangster."

Elsewhere, counterinsurgency blog Abu Muqawama has its own questions for Petraeus. Curt military blog Flopping Aces discusses the Tuesday op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, written by Sens. Joe Lieberman and Lindsey, that praises the surge and political progress in Iraq. Instapundit reprints Gen. Petraeus' opening statement and offers a roundup of links. Talking Points Memo's sister site TPM Muckracker is live-blogging the event with lots of video.

Read more about the Petraeus/Crocker testimony.

today's blogs
Out of the Penn
By Noreen Malone
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 6:11 PM ET

Bloggers weigh in on Mark Penn's departure, Condoleezza Rice's VP chances, and their own health.

Out of the Penn: Mark Penn, chief strategist for the Clinton campaign, was forced to step down Sunday after a conflict of interest was revealed. In his capacity as president of PR firm Burson-Marstellar, he met with the Colombian ambassador to discuss a free-trade agreement with the United States. An agreement that Clinton just happens to be campaigning against.

A wide swath of bloggers thought the move was overdue. Time's Mark Halperin spells out 14 reasons why, and Politico's Ben Smith sums up the general feeling by saying "[t]he knives have been out in Hillaryland for Mark Penn for years."

However, on the Atlantic's Current blog, Joshua Green offers a "semi-defense" of the unpopular pollster, though he concedes that Penn was bad news for the campaign overall: "Penn's idea of targeting women and highlighting Clinton's experience, which some (like me) found laughable, doesn't look quite so bad in hindsight. It has won her considerable support -- and as far as I know, it wasn't Penn who had her keep repeating those tall tales about the tarmac in Tuzla. His "3 a.m." ad was her biggest hit in weeks and probably allowed her to keep running." Perhaps Burson-Marstellar does some consulting for the Atlantic: Green's colleague Mark Ambinder also contends that Penn has been disproportionately blamed for Clinton's probable failure to secure the nod, and besides: "Clinton will lose this primary narrowly. About half of Democratic voters will have chosen her over Obama, a fact that will be lost in the final delegate tally. Clinton is responsible for increasing the turnout of white working class voters and women."

Liberal Steve Benen at the Carpetbagger Report ticks off a list of burning questions, including "Will any major presidential campaign ever again make the mistake of putting one person in charge of strategy and polling? (The conflict is absurd — Penn crafted a plan, and then provided his own data to show how right he was)," and "How soon will Penn actually collect the $2.5 million the campaign still owes him?"

Wonkette perhaps reveals the collective id of the blogosphere, snarking, "Now he's just another fat bum spewing fireballs out of his mouth."

Read more about the aftermath of the Mark Penn era.
Vice President Rice? Is Condoleezza Rice angling to be John McCain's VP candidate? On This Week With George Stephanopoulos, GOP strategist Dan Senor declared that the secretary of state has been "actively" chasing the nod. McCain says that's news to him.

At The Nation's Campaign Matters blog, John Nichols seems happy to see someone with a similar stance on Iraq floated as a possible running mate for McCain, remarking sarcastically that it "[s]ounds like a match made in neo-con heaven... or in that corner of hell where a hundred-year war, er, occupation, seems like an attractive prospect." That's why some conservatives think Condi won't cut it.

The National Review's Jim Geraghty doubts the veracity of the rumor, pointing out on the Campaign Spot that "when the President's approval rating is about 30 percent, and the incessant mantra of the election is 'change', McCain probably won't want someone who's been associated with the foreign policy decisions in Washington for most of a decade." Self-identified "capitalist" Jason Pye agrees, saying, "It could potentially be a drag to the ticket in an already Democratic year." Meanwhile, libertarian Doug Mataconis at Below the Beltway sees her as a giant political question mark, asking, "Why do some conservatives back her even though, like Colin Powell back in 1990s, nobody has the slightest idea what her position on social issues or fiscal policy might actually be?"

Not everyone thinks Rice is dangerously unproven. Black conservative James T. Harris at the National Conversation offering up a prayer instead: "Dear Lord, Precious Lord... Let this rumor be true. Then allow Hillary to steal the nomination from Obama to ensure a McCain/Rice presidency. Then Lord, in your time, grant Condoleezza Rice the privilege of answering the phone that's ringing in the White House at 3:00 a.m." Fellow black conservative Bob Parks links to various caricatures he's seen of Rice on liberal Web sites and writes: "Condoleezza Rice on the presidential ticket would show America, if not the world, just who the Republican Party was and is. We would also get a good look into the dark, racist world of the Democrats."

Read more on Rice's chances.

Killer keyboards: The New York Times' posited Sunday that blogging can be harmful to one's health, citing a recent spate of heart attacks (three, two fatal) by middle-aged bloggers. Bloggers are having a coronary over the trend piece.

Michelle Malkin explains that blogging is an outlet for her, since "[s]ome people do yoga; I pound the keyboard. The blood pressure goes down either way." Dr. Helen (also known as the InstaWife), agrees that the Times drew its conclusions too swiftly: "Funny, I had a heart attack before I started blogging. Now I am fine. Coincidence? I think not," but also conceded, "I think many people who blog don't feel well to begin with." (Her famously opinionated husband, meanwhile, mocks the Times for its sketchily drawn conclusions.)

Ann Althouse says the key distinction the Times missed is that money is the root of all evil: "I think the mindset that makes blogging oppressive is doing it for money. I don't think Dr. Helen is blogging for a living, and I'm not blogging for a living. I get money from ads, but blogging wouldn't be so fun and fulfilling if I was depending on it for my livelihood." (Matt Yglesias disagrees.)

Gawker's Ian Spiegelman concludes "Oh snap... I'd better post this shit before everyone beats me to it! But... getting... diz"

Read more on more on death by blogging.

today's papers
You Say Tomato
By Daniel Politi
Friday, April 11, 2008, at 6:15 AM ET

The Wall Street Journal leads its world-wide newbox, and the Los Angeles Times fronts, Defense Secretary Robert Gates telling a Senate panel that he wants to resume troop withdrawals quickly. The statement came hours after President Bush officially backed Gen. David Petraeus' plan to indefinitely halt any further troop withdrawals after this summer, a story that leads the New York Times and Washington Post. "I've told him he'll have all the time he needs," Bush said while also emphasizing that the war "is not endless."

USA Today leads with an analysis that shows "independent political groups" have spent $17.3 million in the first three months of the year, which is more than double what was spent during the same period in the 2004 presidential contest. The vast majority of that money has helped Democrats (around 80 percent), although, of course, that's seen as a result of the drawn out battle between Sens. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. "We can expect to see much more money," a campaign finance expert said. The LAT leads locally with news of a deal between Plains Exploration & Production Co. and environmental activists that would discontinue oil production off Santa Barbara County in exchange for permission to tap into underwater reserves. The oil company said it would also donate thousands of acres of land for public use.

Gates made sure to note that although he no longer thinks the number of U.S. troops in Iraq will fall to 100,000 by the end of the year, "the hope, depending on conditions on the ground, is to reduce our presence further this fall." A similar sentiment was expressed by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Although
these divisions within the Pentagon are well-known, "rarely have they been aired publicly," says the LAT.

Democrats, including the party's presidential contenders, immediately criticized Bush's statements yesterday as an endorsement of a war with no end and made it clear that they expect to soon start clashing with the White House over the war-funding bill. Members of both parties also said that Bush is trying to direct war policy after he leaves the White House by signing a long-term agreement with Iraq relating to the status of U.S. forces there. Although the administration insists the agreement won't tie the hands of the next president, the WP points out that the White House "has only vaguely outlined what the commitment would be."

The NYT fronts a vivid account of the fighting currently going on in Sadr City and describes how the U.S. military is using this latest outbreak in violence to shift responsibility to the Iraqi military and test how the local troops perform under pressure. To be sure, American troops are still very much involved in the fighting and provide lots of air support. But U.S. service members on the ground are often providing strategic advice and then pulling back to allow Iraqis to take the lead. The NYT goes inside with another dispatch from "deep in Sadr City" and describes how Mahdi Army fighters move around with impunity in the area. The NYT's Stephen Farrell describes how unmasked men set up grenade launchers and roadside bombs in the middle of the day and "nobody blinked."

The top beneficiary of the spending by independent groups has been Obama. Between Jan. 1 and March 31, $7.4 million was used to help the Illinois senator, most of which came from a labor union. Comparatively, independent groups have spent $5.4 million to aid Clinton's candidacy.

In related news, the WP off-leads a look at how, despite Obama's claim that he has created a "parallel public financing system," he still relies on rich bundlers for much of his money. The paper doesn't deny that Obama has raised lots of money from small-time, individual donors and points out that about half of his money has come from donations of $200 or less. But for the other half of the whopping $240 million he has raised, Obama has, just like the other contenders, relied on rich, well-connected people. Seventy-nine bundlers have helped raise at least $200,000 each, and much of it came from members of the typical Democratic donors, such as Hollywood stars and trial lawyers. But Obama has also managed to get newcomers into the bundling game, including many who had never made a contribution to a presidential campaign.

In other news from the campaign trail, everyone points out that Sen. John McCain switched his position on how much the government should help homeowners who are having trouble keeping up with mortgage payments. He had been criticized for taking a largely hands-off approach and saying the government

shouldn't "reward those who act irresponsibly." But yesterday he put forward a plan that included a heavy dose of policy more typically associated with Democrats, says the WSJ. The plan would aid homeowners who are having trouble making their payments, but McCain insisted that it won't help speculators and investors.

The LAT notes inside that "a long-standing Philadelphia ritual" involves political candidates handing out "street money" to Democratic operatives in the city who then mostly give it out as a sort of payment to the "foot soldiers" working to get out the vote. It's perfectly legal, but it seems Obama's campaign is telling local leaders that it won't pay up. Neither Clinton nor Obama is publicly talking about whether they'll hand out the money. But some ward leaders say that Obama's campaign has made it clear it won't give up and are warning that this could hurt the Obama's chances in the April 22 primary. "It's our tradition," a ward leader said. "You don't come to someone's house and change the rules of someone's house. That's just respect."

The LAT goes inside with a look at how a Navy officer who testified yesterday that she worked as an escort for the so-called D.C. Madam could face punishment and might even be discharged. The Post's Dana Milbank points out that while the powerful men who allegedly used the D.C. Madam's services "appear likely to get a pass," the 15 women who were forced to recount in graphic detail their past work as prostitutes, including a 63-year-old, are seeing their lives turned upside-down. The prosecution wants to make public the names of other former prostitutes, but Milbank deftly wonders why all the fuss. "Prosecutors act as if they've caught a major organized crime figure," but the prostitution ring brought in "$2 million over 13 years—small potatoes for a federal racketeering and money laundering case that could ruin the lives of 132 women."

And while on the subject of sex scandals, Laura Frost writes in the LAT's op-ed page about Max Mosley, the president of Formula One who was filmed participating in an orgy that involved S&M and, apparently, Nazi choreography (for more details see Slate's "Explainer"). Frost focuses on how, after it was all done, Mosley had a cup of tea "in the nude with his former tormentors." That cup of tea shows how people can keep their sexual fantasies separate from their normal lives. Whatever one might think of Mosley's acts, "we should be mindful that erotic enactments do not necessarily reproduce the power relationships they portray, and we should beware of putting fantasy on trial."

today's papers

Grounded for Days
The **Washington Post** leads with news that President Bush will announce today that Army combat tours in Iraq will be cut from 15 months to 12 months. Bush will make the announcement during a national speech in which he will also endorse Gen. David Petraeus’ plan to indefinitely halt any further troop withdrawals after this summer. The move would return the length of combat tours to what they were before last year’s ”surge” and is seen as an acknowledgement by Bush that the longer deployments have been straining service members. The move is hardly controversial as even Gen. David Petraeus has expressed support for it, and the shorter deployments would apply only to service members sent to Iraq on Aug. 1 or later.

The **New York Times** and **Los Angeles Times** lead with the continuing headaches for air travelers, which are not expected to end soon as airlines continue to face more intense scrutiny from Federal Aviation Administration inspectors. American Airlines canceled almost 1,100 flights yesterday and stranded tens of thousands of passengers. The airline continues to try to deal with wiring problems on some of its planes, which had already resulted in more than 400 cancellations Tuesday. The airline said it expects to cancel 900 flights today. **USA Today** leads with a new Transportation Security Administration program that will screen the cargo that goes inside passenger planes. The new program will get started this summer in major cities and could cause delays in shipments. The **Wall Street Journal** leads its world-wide newsbox with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi rebuffing Bush’s attempts to get quick passage of the Colombia free-trade agreement. Pelosi said she will try to “freeze the clock” so lawmakers aren’t constrained by the time limits to approve the agreement. Democrats insist the deal can only be considered after more expansive action is taken to deal with the downturn in the domestic economy.

After two days of congressional hearings about the Iraq war, the **Post** points out that a bipartisan group of lawmakers will push to get Iraq to pick up a larger share of the tab for the war and reconstruction efforts. As they prepare a new war spending bill, it seems Democrats are preparing for another fight with the White House. Democratic lawmakers want the bill to include a ban on torture, a mandate that would give service members as much time at home as in combat, and a timetable for withdrawal that would leave military commanders in charge of key details. Bush has said he’s opposed to all three ideas, not to mention that he’s also spoken up against including domestic spending in the war bill, a request that Democrats will almost certainly ignore.

Petraeus told lawmakers yesterday that he’s not planning on asking for another buildup of troops, even if the security situation gets significantly worse. But the **NYT** points out that it seems likely there will be an increase in the number of U.S. troops in Iraq for the elections, which are now scheduled to take place in October, even if there’s no official ”surge.” It’s a strategy the military has carried out several times since the invasion by bringing in new troops while holding brigades scheduled for departure from Iraq a few weeks longer. Interestingly enough, the **NYT** talks to an administration official who says benchmarks are no longer really being used as the standard to measure progress because there are other important factors to consider.

In a Page One analysis, the **LAT** takes a look at the intense focus that Petraeus put on Iran during the hearings and notes that officials and experts don’t all agree about the role that Tehran plays in controlling the Shiite militias and what kind of influence it has over Iran policy. Some contend Iran’s role is being exaggerated and while it’s certainly a player, it’s a stretch to say that Tehran is in full control of the militias.

The **WP** goes inside with a look at Bush’s claim that by keeping troop levels stable in Iraq until he leaves office, he’s doing the next president a favor because it increases the likelihood that security won’t deteriorate. There are those who agree with him, but others, particularly some Democrats, see a more nefarious motive to the move and contend that it’s merely Bush’s way to shift blame to the next administration. “He is going to do what Lyndon Johnson did: make sure the war was not lost on his watch,” a former president of the Council on Foreign Relations said. Meanwhile, in Iraq, fighting continued to rage in Sadr City, and three U.S. soldiers were killed in bomb attacks. Also yesterday, an Iraqi judicial committee ordered an Associated Press photographer who was detained nearly two years ago to be released.

The **NYT** fronts a look at how most believe that there’s little chance more than a few cases against prisoners in Guantanamo will actually go to trial before Bush leaves the White House. Why is it taking so long? Mainly because the cases are extremely complicated and involve sensitive material. But also, those advocating for the detainees are trying to make sure it goes slowly, ”partly to keep the system from gaining legitimacy,” says the **NYT**. The Pentagon wants to show that military tribunals can operate, but defense teams are trying to make sure they do not turn into "a quick show trial," as the ACLU’s executive director said.

The **LAT** and WSJ front word that Yahoo and AOL are close to reaching a deal that would combine their operations into an online advertising giant, as the **LAT** puts it. The move would help Yahoo avoid being acquired by Microsoft. But Microsoft didn’t take the news lying down and is apparently in talks with Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. about mounting a joint bid for Yahoo. And if this new twist didn’t include enough Internet heavyweights, Yahoo is also in talks to outsource some of its advertising to Google.

The **NYT** goes inside with word that many Afghan prisoners who were once held by U.S. forces in Guantanamo and Bagram Air
Base are now being sentenced to as many as 20 years in prison by secretive trials in Afghanistan. The trials mainly use the claims put forward by the American military as evidence, and the whole process usually doesn't last more than an hour. A human rights group that examined the trials said most of those who go through the secretive system are convicted.

The NYT notes inside that Sen. Barack Obama has added another detail about his life that he says gives him better foreign policy credentials than his rivals. On Sunday, Obama revealed that he took a trip to Pakistan when he was in college, which he didn't mention in either of his books. It was because of this trip that "I knew what Sunni and Shia was before I joined the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," he said. Obama said he's confident of his foreign policy experience because his rivals have traveled the world as Washington officials, which gives them a narrow view of the countries they visit. A senior adviser to Sen. John McCain responds by saying McCain always strives to meet a variety of people when he goes abroad to get the big picture. "Oh, and as Senator Obama may know, he has actually spent some time living abroad as well."

The LAT and USAT front the Olympic torch relay in San Francisco, where officials were so fearful of the potential chaos that they decided to change the flame's route. "You want to protest the torch, officials seemed to challenge, see if you can find it first," quips the LAT.

Gen. David who? The WP points out that while Washington was focused on the testimonies of Petraeus and Crocker, most Iraqis couldn't care less. "The Americans have hundreds of meetings and testimonies like this, and what has it done for the Iraqi people? Nothing," said one 49-year-old carpenter. "I don't even know who Petraeus and Crocker are," said a 31-year-old shop owner. "I think these sorts of things are more important for Americans than they are for Iraqis."

today's papers
The End Isn't Near
By Daniel Politi
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, at 6:17 AM ET

The Los Angeles Times, New York lawmakers that troop withdrawals from Iraq should stop indefinitely this summer. Testifying before two Senate committees alongside Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Petraeus insisted the security situation in Iraq has improved since last year's buildup of troops but emphasized the gains are "fragile and reversible." To no one's surprise, Petraeus advocated for a 45-day pause in troop reductions after the already-planned withdrawal in July as a time for "consolidation and evaluation" and said that only then would commanders begin considering bringing more troops home. Despite repeated questioning from Democrats, Petraeus refused to say what kind of conditions would tip the scales toward further withdrawals and adamantly declined to offer a timetable.

The Wall Street Journal leads its world-wide newsbox with word that the Bush administration is planning to expand a government program to help those who are having trouble keeping up with mortgage payments to stay in their homes. This expansion, which is designed to help about 100,000 homeowners, will be announced today. The Washington Post gives big play to the hearings but devotes its lead spot to a new study by the Government Accountability Office that reveals federal employees regularly misuse government credit cards. The audit found that over a 15-month period, almost half of the purchases didn't follow proper procedure. There were also several instances where employees used the card in questionable and even "fraudulent" ways to pay for such things as personal expenses, iPods, laptops, expensive meals, and even Internet dating services. "Too many government employees have viewed purchase cards as their personal line of credit," Sen. Norm Coleman said. "It's time to cut up their cards and start over."

USAT reminds its readers up high that the plan Petraeus put forward yesterday would leave more American troops in Iraq than before the "surge." After July, there would be approximately 140,000 service members in Iraq, and everyone notes there's little chance that number will change much before the presidential election. "Withdrawing too many forces too quickly could jeopardize the progress of the past year," Petraeus said.

Petaeus blamed Iran for much of the continuing unrest due to Tehran's support of "special groups" (i.e., Shiite militias), which he said now "pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a democratic Iraq." The LAT notes Crocker "gave some of the most detailed analysis of Iranian goals in Iraq delivered by a senior U.S. official," as he pointed out that almost all Shiite factions have some sort of link to Tehran. Crocker characterized it as a "Lebanization' strategy" because it looks similar to the way Iran has backed Hezbollah.

The LAT says that despite all the back-and-forth, Petraeus didn't really have as much on the line yesterday as he did seven months ago. Back then, it looked like, even if just for a second, impatience with the lack of progress could have pushed lawmakers to support a withdrawal from Iraq. There was no such risk yesterday, which was more of a "confrontation between two immovable forces," and there's little mystery as to the outcome since President Bush has made it clear he will support Petraeus' plan.

Another factor that made yesterday's hearings different was that much of the focus was not on Petraeus and Crocker but rather on
the three presidential contenders who took a break from campaigning to attend the hearings. The NYT notes there were times when the Democratic contenders and the Republican candidate "seemed to be talking about two different wars," although they all followed a general strategy of trying not to seem "too easy or tough on General Petraeus." Sen. John McCain was the first to speak and said that calls for a rapid withdrawal are "reckless and irresponsible." Clinton got a chance to respond a few hours later when she said that it would be "irresponsible to continue the policy that has not produced the results that have been promised time and time again." Clinton emphasized that "it's time to begin an orderly process of withdrawing our troops" so the military can focus on other conflicts. For his part, Obama said the reduction in violence hasn't led to much political reconciliation and argued against setting the bar so high that the appropriate conditions for withdrawal could never be met.

This point made by Obama echoed the frustration of several lawmakers who, as the WP points out in a Page One analysis, expressed exasperation over their inability to get a straight answer to one question: What would constitute the right "conditions" for withdrawal? "The bottom line was that there was no bottom line," says the Post.

Under the new plan that the White House will announce today to help struggling homeowners, lenders would be encouraged to decrease the value of the mortgages and "the risk of default would be shifted to the government," notes the WSJ. This new expansion could specifically benefit many who owe more on their home than it's worth. Democrats are likely to resist the move because it would help only a small fraction of the homeowners who are currently in trouble. But the move could help Republican lawmakers who don't want to appear as though they're not doing anything about the housing crisis but aren't comfortable with the broader Democratic plans.

The NYT fronts a look at how the Justice Department no longer seems to be that interested in prosecuting companies that are accused of wrongdoing. Over the last three years, the department has chosen not to prosecute "more than 50 companies" that agreed to enter into an agreement that allows the government to levy fines and appoint an outside monitor to mandate internal changes in a corporation. These deferred prosecution agreements have been used extensively by the Bush administration, and some worry that companies might be taking on extra risks because they're confident they won't have to face trial if detected. The NYT says this might well be the way Justice will deal with companies involved in its subprime mortgage investigations.

The NYT's David Leonhardt points out that an interesting fact about the current economic downturn is that "the now-finished boom was, for most Americans, nothing of the sort." For the first time since World War II, the economic expansion of the last few years didn't benefit the median American family who actually made a bit less in 2007 than in 2000. "We have had expansions before where the bottom end didn't do well," an economist said. "But we've never had an expansion in which the middle of income distribution had no wage growth."

The Post fronts a piece on a Chinese human rights activist who is "treated like a threat to national security" when most countries would consider him "a gadfly." It's a pertinent reminder that even as the protesters surrounding the Olympic torch relay focus on Tibet and Sudan, there are plenty of other things to complain about regarding the daily activities of the Chinese government toward its own citizens who have the audacity to challenge authority. As officials get ready for what are expected to be large protests in San Francisco today, the NYT's editorial board offers some "free advice" to China, which is said to be looking for a public relations firm to boost its image before the Olympics. "Here's what you do: Stop arresting dissidents. Stop spreading lies about the Dalai Lama. … Stop being an enabler to Sudan in its genocide in Darfur."

today's papers
Flame Out
By Daniel Politi
Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 6:18 AM ET

The Washington Post leads with a preview of what we can expect to hear when Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker testify before Congress today and tomorrow. It's hardly a surprise to reveal they'll both talk up recent security gains in Iraq, but the paper highlights how even Republicans who have been largely supportive of the war effort are likely to express more impatience with the pace of progress than when Petraeus and Crocker testified in September. USA Today leads with, and the Los Angeles Times fronts, a look at how San Francisco police are preparing for big protests Wednesday when the Olympic torch will make its only public appearance on North American soil. In Paris yesterday, the torch relay turned into a chaotic scene as demonstrators forced officials to snuff out the flame five times and cancel the last leg of the relay.

The Wall Street Journal leads its world-wide newsbox with President Bush's announcement that he's sending a Colombia free-trade agreement to Congress, which gives lawmakers 90 legislative days to approve or reject the deal. The New York Times leads with a look at how rising inflation in Asia is threatening to bring to an end the era of cheap imports to which Americans have become accustomed. Inflation in developing countries is nothing new, but some are warning it will be felt more deeply in the United States this time around, particularly because prices are rising at a time when the value of the dollar is
continually decreasing. The LAT leads locally with a grand jury transcript that reveals a guard at an Orange County jail was watching *Cops* and writing text messages while a prisoner was beaten to death by other inmates. Overall, the grand jury found that prisoners were allowed to use violence and pretty much run the jail while deputies took naps, watched television, and played video games.

The *Post* highlights, and *USAT* also mentions inside, that money is likely to be a central point of discussion at the Petraeus and Crocker hearings. Several lawmakers have recently said that they don't understand why the United States continues to pay for many of Iraq's bills when the country has $30 billion in reserves and an economic growth rate of 7 percent. *USAT* notes that some lawmakers are pushing for future money commitments to be made in the form of loans. "It doesn't make any sense when they're making surpluses that we would continue to invest our money in Iraq for their infrastructure," Democratic Sen. Ben Nelson said. The recent offensive in Basra is also likely to figure prominently at the hearings as lawmakers have said they want to ask Petraeus to assess how the Iraqi security forces performed in the fight. As a general rule, lawmakers seem ready to focus on the bigger picture for Iraq that goes beyond the gains in security. "The debate over how much progress we have made in the last year may be less illuminating than determining whether the administration is finally defining a clear political-military strategy," said Republican Sen. Richard Lugar.

Iran is also likely to figure prominently at the hearings, and the *WSJ* says it "might end up sharing center stage." Beyond the fact that Petraeus will bring up how Tehran is helping the Mahdi Army, the hearings will also give the three presidential candidates an opportunity to talk about their different views on how to approach Iran, which "is emerging as a hot-button campaign issue," says the *WSJ*. The paper warns that the issue could be a difficult one for Sen. John McCain. While talking about Tehran's influence could help him make the point that U.S. troops shouldn't be withdrawn quickly, it could also convince voters that he's eager to take military action against Iran.

The LAT off-leads the latest from Iraq, where three U.S. soldiers were killed yesterday as the fighting between Shiite militias and Iraqi and American soldiers continued to intensify. The paper points out that "at least 18 U.S. service members have been killed in and around Baghdad since March 25" and characterizes the fighting as "some of the most intense since January 2007." Thousands of Sadr City residents continued to flee the area in an attempt to escape the fighting. The *NYT* fronts a look at the increasing divisions in Iraq as a result of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's offensive against the militias. Yesterday, Maliki said Muqtada Sadr's party would be banned from the upcoming elections unless the Mahdi Army is disbanded. In some ways the offensive has been good for Maliki's political power because he's gained new allies, not only from Sunni and Kurdish lawmakers but also from rival Shiites who "resent" Sadr. These alliances could help Maliki pass new laws, but the crackdown has also given rise to a new bloody chapter in the Iraq war. New figures show that the number of attacks in Baghdad more than doubled in March.

In case there was any doubt that the Olympic torch will be met by protesters Wednesday, activists made it abundantly clear yesterday when three people climbed the Golden Gate Bridge and unfurled pro-Tibet banners (both the LAT and *NYT* front large pictures of the banners). The LAT says San Francisco police are increasingly concerned they won't be able to control the demonstrators, who are not exactly being discouraged by politicians. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said people "should show how displeased they are" and even Sen. Hillary Clinton got into the mix by calling on President Bush to boycott the opening ceremony in Beijing. Meanwhile, the Chinese media have censored most images of the demonstrations while trumpeting the success of the relay. When the protests are mentioned, officials are quick to blame a few Tibetan separatists.

Democratic leaders are against the Colombia free-trade deal, so most think it has very little chance of passing, particularly in an election year. So, why present it now and risk defeat? The LAT says the administration is taking a gamble, knowing that "waiting would accomplish nothing, and the clock is running out on his opportunities." But the WSJ suggests there could be another motive and points out that the effort could help Bush portray Democrats as mere puppets of their union supporters. This could help Republicans in the upcoming elections, particularly among business groups that have increasingly been turning to the Democratic Party. The WSJ also notes that the possibility that the legislation will fail is raising fears in several countries that have pending trade deals.

The *Post* fronts a little self-promotion by noting that the paper won six Pulitzer Prizes. The *NYT* reffers the news and points out that it's the second-highest number of Pulitzers that a newspaper has won in a single year (the *NYT* won seven in 2002). The WP won the public service medal for its stories on the poor treatment that veterans received at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the national reporting award for the four-part series on Vice President Cheney. The *Post* also won the breaking news award for its coverage of the Virginia Tech killings. The *NYT* shared the investigative reporting prize with the *Chicago Tribune* and also won an award for explanatory journalism. The fiction Pulitzer went to Junot Diaz for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and Bob Dylan was awarded a special citation for his "profound impact on popular music and American culture." Charlton Heston was apparently an "avid newspaper reader," who would have his assistant spread out the paper around the pool. Heston not only wrote dozens of letters to the LAT but also frequently called up editors to share his opinions. Today, the LAT publishes excerpts from some of his letters and TP's favorite is one from 1999, where Heston writes about how he
was having a conversation "with a stunningly beautiful, famous star" at "one of those silly 'A-list' parties" about the divisions inside the United States. The actress was surprised when Heston told her she had her "Latin backward" and he proceeded to explain that \textit{e pluribus unum} means "from many one" and not the reverse. "'No kidding?' she said, amazed. 'Well … whatever.' And there you have it. We live, increasingly, in a 'well, whatever' nation. God help us all."

\begin{center}
\textbf{today's papers} \vspace{0.05in}
\textbf{Almost Fired} \vspace{0.05in}
By Daniel Politi \vspace{0.05in}
Monday, April 7, 2008, at 6:15 AM ET
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The \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{Wall Street Journal}'s world-wide newsbox lead, and most of the other papers front, news that Hillary Clinton replaced her campaign's chief strategist, Mark Penn, after the WSJ disclosed late last week that he was actively working to win approval of a trade deal that the senator opposes. Word that Penn had met with Colombian officials in his role as president of a public relations firm apparently infuriated Clinton, particularly since trade is set to play a big role in this month's crucial Pennsylvania primary. Although the official line is that Penn resigned, everyone makes clear that word from the campaign is that he was pretty much forced out. \textit{USA Today} leads with a look at how there's been a huge increase in voter registration in six of the eight states with upcoming Democratic primaries. Not only are new voters coming in, but many who were already registered are changing their party affiliation so they can participate in the Democratic primaries.

The \textit{Los Angeles Times} and \textit{Washington Post} both lead locally. The \textit{LAT} gets word that a UCLA Medical Center employee improperly looked at the electronic records of more than 30 "celebrities, politicians, and high-profile patients." UCLA knew of the problem last May but didn't notify any of the patients involved. The WP takes a look at how the economic downturn means Washington suburbs are suddenly no longer concerned about what was the No. 1 issue in regional politics for more than a decade: growth. Just as in other fast-growing areas across the country, local politicians now have to worry about dealing with budget shortfalls instead of debating whether to approve a new residential development.

Rather than a direct firing or ouster, Penn's move can be more accurately described as a "demotion" since, in the words of Clinton's campaign manager, he will "continue to provide polling and advice." It was the second big staff shake-up in the campaign this year, and this one is particularly significant because Penn has been the subject of much controversy. Many Clinton insiders have blamed Penn for carrying out a flawed strategy that failed to quickly adapt when the former first lady's numbers began to drop. But despite repeated calls for his ouster from several of her campaign's staff members, Clinton stuck by her longtime adviser. "There won't be a tear shed here, I can assure you," a Clinton adviser tells the \textit{WSJ}.

The \textit{WP} points out that Penn's decision to stay on at the public relations firm while working for Clinton always puzzled \textit{insiders}, who saw it as a recipe for disaster since it could raise exactly this type of conflict-of-interest scenario that could put Clinton's credibility on the line. The \textit{LAT} notes that since Penn will still be part of the campaign, the demotion might not be enough to "mollify influential labor groups" who have been complaining for months about Penn's extracurricular work.

The \textit{NYT} fronts the latest from Iraq, where there was heavy fighting yesterday in Baghdad's Sadr City as American and Iraqi troops tried to overpower militias who have been firing rockets and mortars into the Green Zone. The attacks continued and killed at least two U.S. soldiers and wounded 17 in the Green Zone. A rocket attack also killed another American soldier in a military base in eastern Baghdad, and a fourth U.S. service member was killed by a roadside bomb in Diyala. The \textit{NYT} notes that U.S. troops have moved into Sadr City and are "living in primitive conditions" to battle the militias "who appeared to have a well-organized system of command and control."

Although violence in southern Iraq largely died down after cleric Muqtada Sadr called on his followers to drop their weapons, the \textit{LAT} and \textit{WP} both front looks at how the attack on Basra revealed deep divisions that could quickly explode into intra-Shiite warfare. "We are now locked in a battle," an Iraqi government official tells the \textit{LAT}. The WP says that members of the Mahdi Army are quick to say that the Basra offensive has changed everything and many are eager to continue fighting in order to take revenge on the government. One militia commander tells the paper that he now considers other Shiites to be "bigger enemies" than Sunnis. The \textit{LAT} also points out that intra-Shiite warfare is hardly the only concern of U.S. officials, as there are also signs that al-Qaida in Iraq appears to be coming back.

The \textit{LAT} points out the recent increase in violence will make it difficult for Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker to "depict Iraq as moving toward stability" when they testify \textit{before Congress this week}. Regardless, the \textit{WP} notes the hearings are "eliciting no more than shrugs" because, unlike the last time they testified, no one expects any surprises. And besides, most probably won't even be paying that much attention to what they say since all eyes will be set on the three \textit{presidential candidates} who are taking time off from campaigning to be at the hearing. "Although the committee chairmen are loath to admit it, two relatively junior Democratic senators and one ranking Republican are likely to steal the show," says the \textit{Post}. Sen. Lindsey Graham characterizes it as
"sort of a dress rehearsal for who is best prepared to be commander in chief."

The NYT takes an interesting look at how all the hoopla surrounding the recently imposed restrictions and disclosure requirements for earmarks ignores the fact that members of Congress can still get money for their pet projects without specifically asking for it. Welcome to the world of "soft earmarks." The difference is that instead of asking for a specific amount of money outright, lawmakers use words such as urges or recommends to point agencies toward their pet projects. Although the language may seem courteous, government officials often feel obligated to comply with the requests. "Soft earmarks, while not legally binding, frequently come with an implicit threat: If you don't take our suggestions, we will give you a hard earmark next," said Andrew Natsios, a former administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The LAT announces today that it is officially retracting its March 17 story about rap star Tupac Shakur. The paper has removed the story "and related materials" from its Web site because the piece "relied heavily on information that the Times no longer believes to be credible."

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**today's papers**

**World Historical Man**

By Lydia DePillis

Sunday, April 6, 2008, at 6:35 AM ET

The *Washington Post* leads with a look at the Bush-Petraeus relationship, positing that the president communicates more directly with his field commander in Iraq than has been the practice of leaders past. The *New York Times* reports new worries about mental health problems afflicting soldiers returning from multiple tours in Iraq: According to a survey conducted in October and November of last year, more than one in four combat troops returning from their second or third stint reports depression, anxiety, and stress, which could pose a particular problem if—as Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday—deployments in Afghanistan are to increase significantly by the end of 2009. The *Los Angeles Times* leads local with L.A. Police Department Chief William Bratton's struggle to acknowledge the realities of racial tension in the city while persuading the black community especially that Hispanic gang murders are mostly not race-based.

The LAT also off-leads with the Petraeus effect, forecasting "high political drama" when the general returns to Washington on Tuesday to present Congress with his recommendations for the next few months in Iraq: draw down the troop buildup through July and then wait to see how things go. All three presidential candidates sit on committees Petraeus will face, and only one of them—you have one guess—has staunchly supported the general's strategy thus far. The *NYT*'s Week in Review story on the subject says he should be fine, drawing the man as an astute politician who's attracting his own buzz around the prospect of an Eisenhower-style run in 2012. But any optimistic picture will be tempered by a dire new assessment from the U.S. Institutes of Peace, which says that continuing a troop presence in Iraq may not even be worth the United States' "massive" human and financial investment, the WP reports.

In its feature lead, the *NYT* prods the combat experience of Lance Cpl. Jimmy McCain—which sounds a lot like any young soldier's service, except his dad's name happens to be John. As the paper has noted before, the senator remains largely quiet about his son's service, and the young McCain himself insists on getting no special treatment. Meanwhile, McCain the elder has been harkening back to younger days himself, recounting tales of insubordination and indiscretion for personal effect on the campaign trail.

On the Democratic side, the *WP* offers a rundown of the uncommitted superdelegates, asking why they're still playing hard to get. Holdouts like Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown are infuriating people like Maryland Rep. Chris van Hollen, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, who wants to see the race locked up so congressional candidates don't get lost in the muck. (The current AP count has Hillary leading Obama, 221 to 251). Farther back in the paper, a familiar face to *Slate* readers psychologizes how a candidate decides to call it quits.

Meanwhile, the Zimbabwe election saga continues, as the opposition party claims victory and says a runoff election—which might be easier for incumbent president Robert Mugabe to influence through a renewed campaign of intimidation—shouldn't be necessary. The international community is ratcheting up pressure on the country's electoral commission to release the vote tally, but the organ continued to drag its feet on Saturday, with South African President Thabo Mbeki contending that Zimbabwe should be able to take its time. Meanwhile, the NYT's correspondent has been jailed in Harare, while his wife (!) continues to report from Johannesburg.

The housing puzzle gets front page play with the *NYT*, which takes a look at the difficulty of crafting a plan to bail out homeowners: House Democrats are pushing a plan to make $300 billion in federally insured loans available in what the paper calls "the most sweeping government intervention on behalf of homeowners since the New Deal." The mess has even reached Switzerland, drawing in the conservative investment banking powerhouse UBS, whose shareholders are railing against management for losing tens of billions on a very un-Swiss mortgage gamble. Closer to home, the WP finds an ironic edge to the crisis: The Mortgage Bankers Association is having...
trouble paying off its own mortgage on its fancy new L Street digs. On a related note, the paper fronts a street-by-street chronology of how D.C. progressed from gritty urban battlefield to a shiny modern metropolis where few can actually afford to live anymore.

For those who've been following the climate chatter, the sense of dread is getting stronger as leading experts warn the world is behind schedule on finding and implementing alternative energies. Via the NYT, economists—namely Jeffrey Sachs—say we can't deal with global warming without hurting economic growth unless we pour large amounts of cash into radically new low-carbon technology, stat. The WP takes the case study of coal, highlighting a leading climate scientist's dialogue with one of the country's biggest coal producers, who isn't decarbonizing his plants' operations fast enough for many environmentalists.

The NYT covers two sides of the modern blogging condition. In the states, techheads and political junkies—often paid by the post—are driving themselves into the ground to keep up with the media circus. In Iran, online scribes are still being arrested—but not very consistently, and a lively chatter on a variety of subjects has flourished in the country's blogosphere.

Worth mentioning: Fareed Zakaria says that slain Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto's new memoir, published posthumously, has the "best-written and most persuasive modern interpretation of Islam I have read," even if the book contains some of the weaknesses inherent to political expositions.

The LAT and NYT catch late-breaking news of the passing of Charlton Heston, player of epic heroes and crusader for American values. The shorter LAT obit largely glosses over the actor's offscreen role as president of the National Rifle Association, as well as his last film appearance in wide release, a cameo in Michael Moore's Bowling for Columbine. It does, however, recall one of the man's more pertinent one-liners: "The world is a tough place," he said with a chuckle. "You're never going to get out of it alive."

Yesterday the Clinton campaign released tax return documents showing that the Clintons earned $109 million over the last eight years, mostly from their best-selling books and Bill's speaking engagements. The Wall Street Journal tops its world-wide newsbox with word that the Iraqi prime minister ordered a freeze on raids against Shiite militants.

The papers report that the huge job loss is the result of the problems in the housing and credit markets spreading throughout the economy. The NYT focuses on Democrats' calls for new measures to save the workers, like economic stimulus packages and tax rebates. The WP gives top billing to an expert who declares that recession is upon us. The WSJ quotes experts who say otherwise but notes high up in its story that the unemployment rate jumped from 4.8 percent to 5.1 percent, and that according to an expert, such a large increase has never happened in the postwar period without the economy being in recession. The papers note "bright spots" in wages and in the health, education, and leisure industries.

Of course, numbers don't tell the whole story. The WP uses an out-of-work software engineer to illustrate its piece. The NYT has a former roofing company manager and a laid-off researcher. The WSJ finds a long-unemployed woman in danger of losing her home and a man who's decided to go for unemployment benefits instead of flipping burgers. LAT's muse is an administrative assistant who's done from an insurance brokerage. TP wants to know—where is the out-of-work economist?

The WP says the Clintons' tax returns for the last several years illustrate a "rags-to-riches" story, since the Clintons weren't rich when they arrived in the White House and had massive debt when they left. The papers agree that Barack Obama's earlier tax disclosure put pressure on candidate Clinton to reveal her returns, but the WSI and the LAT are the most aggressive in explaining the significance of it all, saying the disclosure makes clear the big income disparity between the candidates and could make Clinton vulnerable to political attacks over her extreme wealth. The LAT reports that in Pennsylvania, where Clinton faces a must-win primary in coming weeks, the median income is about $44,000—less than what the Clintons claimed in expenses for "cleaning and maintenance" of their homes. The WSJ and the NYT differ on whether the couple has been charitable enough; the Journal says the Clintons' charitable giving increased with their income, while the Times says the Clintons' charity "has not always kept up with their income."

Forty years after the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights era is on the wane, according to a front-page WP story. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference can barely pay its utility bills, the Congress of Racial Equality is down to 10 percent of the membership it had in the 1960s, and the NAACP is shedding staff due to budget shortfalls. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is gone altogether.

today's papers

Labor Pains
By Arthur Delaney
Saturday, April 5, 2008, at 5:52 AM ET

The New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times lead today with bad news: The Labor Department announced yesterday that the U.S. economy lost 80,000 jobs in March, the largest loss in five years. It remains uncertain whether we're supposed to call this a recession. The other big news today is that Bill and Hillary Clinton are really, really rich.
The story suggests that the organizations are victims of their own success.

Above the fold, the LAT reports that hostilities between Kurds and Sunni Arabs are devastating the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. The Kurds are pushing for a referendum to annex disputed areas to Kurdistan, arguing that a vote would settle hostilities. The U.S. and Iraqi governments blame the violence on al-Qaida in Iraq, but the Times reports that problems predate the group’s involvement in the area.

The NYT fronts word that universal health care coverage in Massachusetts is compromising the quality of care available. The law adopted last year that requires residents to obtain health insurance has caused doctors’ caseloads to swell considerably.

Robert Mugabe won’t go away, says the NYT. Party officials in Zimbabwe say that if it turns out Mugabe didn’t win last week’s election, he will participate in a runoff. The slowness in announcing the victor of the election has led the opposition to suspect vote-tampering.

The WSJ reports from the front lines in the battle against the nation’s "crassness crisis." A Johns Hopkins University professor is leading a campaign for civility in Howard County, Md. The campaign’s chief opponent is, of all people, a pastor.

In what is perhaps the saddest sign of a suffering economy, the LAT reports that the cosmetic surgery industry in Los Angeles is sagging. A group of girlfriends has had to forgo its almost-monthly trips to a plastic surgeon for touchups. A disconsolate out-of-work mortgage broker tells the Times, "I would rather have Botox than go out to dinner."

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**video**

**Wars: Lebanon**

A Magnum photo essay.

By Paolo Pellegrin

Monday, April 7, 2008, at 6:54 PM ET

"While covering the war in Lebanon, bombs and missiles were exploding around us, but you never saw who was launching them. It was different from all the wars I had covered before. This might be the way future wars look."

—Paolo Pellegrin

Photographs by Paolo Pellegrin
Produced by Adrian Kelterborn

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**war stories**

**Bush's Double Talk on Iraq**

A close reading of the president’s latest speech.

By Fred Kaplan

Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 3:58 PM ET

President George W. Bush delivered his latest statement on Iraq today, and the main question at this point is whether he instructed the speechwriters to be mendacious or merely shallow.

It was a short speech, so let’s take it from the top.

As a result of the surge, Bush said, "a major strategic shift has occurred. Fifteen months ago, America and the Iraqi government were on the defensive; today we have the initiative."

This isn’t really true. Yes, "progress"—tactical progress—has been made. But U.S. and especially Iraqi forces are still, by and large, responding to crises when and where they occur. The recent (and unusual) attempt at taking the initiative—the offensive in Basra, which Bush last week called "a defining moment"—played out badly, as Gen. David Petraeus admitted at his Senate hearing on Tuesday. The operation revealed that the Iraqi army is nowhere close to being capable of leading a major fight, and it confirmed that the Iraqi police are nearly hopeless.

"Fifteen months ago," Bush said today, "extremists were sowing sectarian violence; today, many mainstream Sunni and Shia are actively confronting the extremists."

Here's where the mendacity comes in. Take a close look at those two sentences. They are not necessarily contrasts. Last year, extremists "were sowing violence." That doesn't mean they're not sowing violence now. Today, mainstream Muslims are "actively confronting the extremists." That doesn't mean they're defeating them. Nor does Bush define mainstream or extremist. Militias of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq fought alongside Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s army against the rival Shiite militia of Muqtada Sadr. ISCI and Sadr both have close ties to Iran. ISCI is allied with Maliki; Sadr is much more popular among the Shiite population, especially in southern Iraq. In this context, mainstream and extremist are loaded, if meaningless, terms. And how about our new friends in the Sunni Awakening? A year ago, they were "extremists" (because they were shooting at Americans). Now are they "mainstream" (because they're not)? Maybe they're mainstream to us, but not to many Shiites.

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"Gen. Petraeus has reported," Bush said today, "that security conditions have improved enough to withdraw all five surge brigades by the end of July."

I hope a few people on the speechwriting team blushed when they penned this passage. Those five surge brigades were going to pull out this July no matter what the situation in Iraq happened to be. Their 15-month tours of deployment will be up by then; they will go home; the Army has no combat brigades ready to replace them. This was always the calculation. It's the product of arithmetic, not policy.

Accepting Petraeus' recommendation to assess conditions before making any further withdrawals, Bush said, "Some have suggested that this period of evaluation will be a 'pause.' That's misleading, because none of our operations in Iraq will be on hold."

No, that's misleading because nobody has suggested that this will be a "pause" in operations—only in further withdrawals. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who was in the audience today (and who I hope blushed when he heard this line), has himself used the word pause.

"Prime Minister Maliki's government," Bush said today, "has launched operations in Basra that make clear a free Iraq will no longer tolerate the lawlessness by Iranian-backed militias."

That's one interpretation—though if that's his story, it's too bad, because under those terms, the Basra militias have won. Maliki went into the offensive, demanding that militias surrender their arms. A few days later, he agreed to a cease-fire (negotiated with the assistance of the Iranians) that let the militias keep their weapons. Another interpretation is that Maliki and ISCI went into Basra to destroy Sadr's base of support before the upcoming provincial elections. He failed on that score as well. And, as noted earlier, both ISCI and Sadr's Mahdi Army are "Iranian-backed."

"As Iraqis assume the primary role in providing security," Bush assured us, "American forces will increasingly focus on targeted raids against the terrorists and extremists."

The key word here is the first word in the sentence: as. As the Iraqis take on "the primary role," we'll reduce our role. The Iraqis are not close to doing this now. So we won't be shifting down for the foreseeable future, either.

On their way back to Iraq, Bush announced, Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker will visit Saudi Arabia, while senior U.S. diplomats will brief "the leaders in Jordan, the UAE, and Qatar, and Kuwait and Egypt."

That's good, but the elephants in the room are Iran and Syria—the border states whose involvement will be key to any settlement in Iraq. No Bush official is visiting those countries. (It might be a good idea to stop by in Turkey as well.) This means the consultations with the others will come to naught.

"Our work in Iraq," Bush said, "will still demand sacrifices from our whole nation, especially our military, for some time to come."

Clearly, the military is sacrificing, but someone tell me what sacrifices the rest of us are making. We're not assuming even a financial burden. The costs of the war are merely stoking the deficit. Our growing national debt is being carried by China's central bank. Granted, our children and, possibly, grandchildren will be hit with the interest payments.

"To ease the burden on our troops and their families," Bush said, "I've directed the Secretary of Defense to reduce deployment lengths from 15 months to 12 months for all active Army soldiers deploying" to Iraq or Afghanistan.

This is a welcome and much-anticipated move. But note the next sentence: "These changes will be effective for those deploying after August 1st. According to an Army spokesman, one brigade, from the First Armored Division, will be deployed to Iraq in May. Those soldiers—and all the others who are there now—will be there for 15 months.

"Recruiting and retention have remained strong during the surge," Bush said.

That depends on how you define strong. Senior Army officers are in a panic over the effect that this war is having on precisely this issue. Recruitment targets are being met—but only by drastically reducing standards. Retention statistics look fine—but only because of extravagant bonuses, and, even then, the Army is hemorrhaging talented captains and majors.

The president then disputed the idea that the war is costing too much. He noted that during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, the "defense budget rose as high as 13 percent of our total economy." During the Reagan years, it accounted for "about 6 percent of GDP." Now, it's down to "just over 4 percent … a modest fraction of our nation's wealth."

He has a point, but a fairly flimsy one. Defense used to account for a larger share of the economy, but so did taxes. The people were actually putting up the money for the defense budget. Now we're not. Social programs, especially during the 1940s and '50s, were puny compared with those of today. Which ones is the president suggesting we cut back to the levels of yesteryear? Finally, GDP itself is much, much larger, even measured in real terms. Whether the budget is too small, too large, or just right
has nothing to do with what share of the GDP it consumes. Bush put his finger on the right issue when he added, "We should be able to agree that this is a burden worth bearing." In fact, this is exactly what we are not able to agree.

Also, he said, the cost of the war "pales when compared to the cost of another terrorist attack on our people."

But what does the war in Iraq have to do with a terrorist attack on the United States? Where is the link?

If we pull out of Iraq, the president warned, as he has many times before, al-Qaida "would claim a propaganda victory of colossal proportions, and they could gain safe havens in Iraq from which to attack the United States, our friends and our allies." At the same time, he said, "Iran would work to fill the vacuum in Iraq." All this "would diminish our nation's standing in the world, and lead to massive humanitarian casualties, and increase the threat of another terrorist attack on our homeland."

Let's parse these three claims.

First, it's true that al-Qaida could claim victory if we withdraw totally—but no major American politician is advocating that course. Even those Democrats who call for substantial troop reductions say enough should remain to go after al-Qaida in Iraq.

Second, if the Iranians do "fill the vacuum," wouldn't they start going after al-Qaida? (Iran is Shiite, al-Qaida Sunni.) And would they fill the vacuum? What would the other Sunnis do about that? What would Iraqi Shiites who bitterly fought Iran for eight years do? A more likely scenario is that Iraq might descend into anarchy if we pulled out totally and right away. But a) that's something else, and b) nobody is calling for a total, instant withdrawal.

Third, if Bush is worried about our standing in the world, humanitarian casualties, and the threat of a terrorist attack, he should realize that all those things are also damaged by our continued presence in Iraq and his adamant refusal to consider even a moderate change of course.

The "pause" in troop withdrawals, after the surge brigades go home this July, will not be "brief"—as some officials have hoped—but indefinite.

The way that Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker formulated the problem, cutting troops below the current level of 140,000 is not even a conceivable option. They laid out a Catch-22: If things in Iraq get worse, we can't cut back, lest things get worse still; if things get better, we can't cut back, lest we risk reversing all our gains.

In hearings before two Senate committees today—armed services in the morning, foreign relations this afternoon—Petraeus sought to convey a sense of control, complexity, and precision, displaying detailed charts and uttering seemingly scientific jargon ("conditions-based analysis … battlefield geometry … the politico-military calculus").

Yet, at a telling moment this morning, Sen. Hillary Clinton asked him under what conditions he would recommend reducing troop levels. Petraeus couldn't, or wouldn't, answer the question, noting, "It's not a mathematical exercise."

That's true, but, for the Bush administration, it doesn't seem to be an exercise at all. Sen. Joseph Biden, chairman of the foreign relations committee, later tried to squeeze an answer to the same question from Crocker—what are the conditions that might permit a phased withdrawal—again to no avail.

Their unwavering stance amounted to this: Further pullouts might trigger defeat; the costs of defeat are too horrible to ponder; therefore, we shouldn't ponder further pullouts.

Specifically, Petraeus called for a 45-day pause after the five surge brigades go home this July. After the pause will come an "evaluation" of the security situation. Then there will be an "assessment" of that evaluation. And on that basis, there will be a "determination" whether further reductions can be made, "as conditions permit."

As Sen. Carl Levin, chairman of the armed services committee, noted, this sounds an awful lot like an "open-ended pause" that could "take pressure off Iraq's leaders to take responsibility for their own country."

This is the dilemma that was raised by a few senators, but it was never really engaged. True, if we withdraw more troops, Iraq might fall apart. But if we make it clear that we will not withdraw more troops, no matter what, Iraq's political leaders will simply bask in America's security blanket and take no steps toward reaching some accord with their sectarian foes or forming a unified government.

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**war stories**

**Stonewall Petraeus**

Testifying before the Senate, the general sticks to the script.

By Fred Kaplan

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at 7:50 PM ET

Judging from Gen. David Petraeus' Senate testimony today, our military commitment to Iraq is open-ended and unconditional.
Both sides in this debate have a point. But the Bush-Petraeus-Crocker position—refusing even to threaten or contemplate withdrawals—amounts to a hope and crossed fingers, not a strategy. It lays out no clear course for how to translate tactical progress into strategic success.

As Petraeus himself has said many times, and as many senators repeated over eight hours of hearings today, the surge—along with the shift to a counterinsurgency strategy—is a means, not an end. Its point is not to win a military victory (there is no such thing here, Petraeus has emphasized) but rather to create enough security in Baghdad—a "breathing space"—to let the political factions reconcile their disputes.

In those terms, the surge—along with several other factors—has helped reduce violence in Iraq. That is tactical progress. But the Iraqis have not taken advantage of the breathing space to get their act together. There has not been strategic success; nor is there any sign of it on the horizon.

Near the end of the afternoon, Sen. Barack Obama, the Democrats' likely presidential nominee but a junior member of the foreign relations committee, finally got his turn to ask questions—and he homed in on one of the administration's key conceptual failures.

Obama built up to his point with a series of questions. Our goal, he asked, isn't to wipe out every member of al-Qaida in Iraq (an impossible feat), but rather to reduce AQI's threat to manageable proportions, right? Petraeus agreed. And we're not going to erase Iran's influence in Iraq—they're neighbors, after all. The goal is to make this relationship somewhat stable.

That being the case, Obama continued, what is the standard of success? What level of stability in Iraq would let us reduce our presence there to, say, 30,000 troops? What does a stable-enough Iraq look like? "If the definition of success is so high—no al-Qaida in Iraq, a highly effective Iraqi government … democracy, no Iranian influence—that portends … staying 30 to 70 years," Obama said. What's a more achievable definition?

What's a realistic goal, and what are we doing to get there? "I'm trying to get to an end point," he said. "That's what all of us are trying to do."

This is what many critics and thoughtful supporters of the war have been trying to do for five years now. The Bush administration hasn't addressed the issue. And, ultimately, neither did Petraeus or Crocker today.

There was much anticipation over the presence of Sens. Clinton and Obama, hot and weary off the campaign trail. Some saw their performances at the hearings—the quality and tenor of their questions—as a "test" of their presidential mettle, and both showed their stripes.