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

art

Robert Frank's *The Americans*

How a Swiss émigré's cross-country road trip changed photography.

By Fred Kaplan

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 1:18 PM ET

Click [here](#) to read a slide-show essay about the photography of Robert Frank.

books

The Riddle of Herbert Hoover

How the hypercompetent technocrat failed.

By David Greenberg

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 6:54 AM ET

In 1932, the parents of a 4-year-old went to court to change his legal name. Christened Herbert Hoover Jones in 1928, when the commerce secretary and Republican presidential nominee was a national hero, the boy deserved relief, said his parents, from "the chagrin and mortification which he is suffering and will suffer" for sharing a moniker with the now-disgraced chief executive. His new name: Franklin D. Roosevelt Jones.

No president has ever suffered a reversal of political fortune as sudden and complete as the fall from glory to ignominy that was the sum and substance of Herbert Hoover's presidency. Elected in a landslide in 1928 to nurture the prosperity of the buoyant Coolidge era, Hoover proved unable and unwilling to lift

America out of the Great Depression. Worse, he declined to palliate the misery of the millions cast into homelessness, unemployment, and hunger. Keeping up with the Joneses, Americans felt their admiration for Hoover curdle into hatred. Cascading boos spoiled his appearance at the 1931 World Series; chants of "Hang Hoover!" resounded at a Detroit campaign stop the next summer.

Faced with writing a new biography of such a figure, the average historian might perversely attempt a rehabilitation. In fact, over the years several such efforts have come and swiftly gone. But William Leuchtenburg, author of [Herbert Hoover](#), is not your average historian. Still prolific at 86, he is one of the foremost authorities on the 1930s, the New Deal, and FDR. In this meaty little book, he brings to the life of Hoover his own lifetime of study of this watershed moment in the American past.

Leuchtenburg's book is the latest in Times Books' American Presidents series, a collection of short, readable biographies, for which, it bears mentioning, I wrote a [volume about Calvin Coolidge](#) in 2006 (the manuscript for which Leuchtenburg reviewed and improved). The series' best efforts have generally been those that tackle the middle-tier presidents. Insignificant presidents force their authors into strained claims that their present obscurity is undeserved, while giants like FDR defy encapsulation in 200 pages. So Hoover is a choice assignment. Understanding the advent of the New Deal is impossible without insight into his failures. And yet Hoover is largely forgotten: In 2004, John Kerry's presidential campaign stopped comparing Bush's dismal record on job creation to Hoover's when polling discovered that most Americans barely knew who he was.

Leuchtenburg's is a tragic Hoover. In his early career, Hoover won renown for his humanitarian commitments and his hypercompetence. Though Hoover was arrogant and prickly, his managerial skills should have served him well in tackling the financial panic and economic downturn that followed the stock-market crash seven months into his presidency—or, as Hoover chose to name it in a bit of ill-considered spin, the Depression. The tin ear for popular nomenclature turned out to be the least of his problems.

The first president born west of the Mississippi, Hoover had risen through brains, luck, and an astonishing capacity for hard work to become, by the age of 40, one of the world's leading mining engineers. A wealthy businessman as well, he performed a series of heroic tasks in World War I. He delivered food to the starving masses of Belgium when the Germans invaded in 1914. Woodrow Wilson appointed him to oversee food rationing at home after the U.S. joined the conflict. Afterward, he again fed ravaged Europe. The world marveled. Wilson called him a "great international figure," one of few men who "stir me deeply and make me in love with duty."

Hoover eyed the White House in 1920. But his Republican Party's "old guard" blocked him, scorning such heresies as his support for a minimum wage and equal pay for the sexes. Still, no president could ignore his talents, and he wound up as commerce secretary for eight years under Warren Harding and Coolidge. Here, too, Hoover was a dynamo. A consummate bureaucrat, he commandeered control of issues from conservation to aviation to the regulation of radio, and he led Coolidge's efforts to help victims of the 1927 Mississippi flood, the worst natural disaster in U.S. history until Hurricane Katrina.

What made Hoover's energy in these jobs so strange was his steadfast commitment throughout to private effort instead of public programs. His 1922 tract *American Individualism* was, despite some progressive notes, what Leuchtenburg calls a "jejune screed" offering "nothing that could not be heard at a weekly Kiwanis luncheon." Leuchtenburg explains the contradiction in Hoover by showing how in each of his previous experiences, he ascribed his feats not to the government resources at his disposal but to the charitable spirit of leading citizens—a stubborn misperception that would later cripple him.

Where a smattering of Hoover revisionists have detected in his thinking a bold progressivism, Leuchtenburg finds "mild iconoclasm." He favored cajoling private institutions into cooperating with government to reach shared goals. By stressing the limits to his activism—his belief in the primacy of private undertakings, his preference for playing "the administrator rather than the executive," in journalist Anne O'Hare McCormick's useful distinction—Leuchtenburg succeeds in explaining the seeming riddle of how the manager par excellence failed so catastrophically during the Depression.

Fail he did. Contemptuous of Congress, Hoover passed little legislation of note. Hostile to popular politics—"I'll not kiss any babies," he said as he finally agreed to stump for president in 1928—he declined to mobilize public support for his agenda. He fumbled an opportunity provided by a blue-ribbon committee to end Prohibition and passed up a chance to nationalize the water-power potential at Muscle Shoals, Ala., as FDR would later do. Presidential leadership, it turned out, required more sensitivity to public sentiment than had Hoover's prior technocratic posts.

When the crash came, Hoover offered soothing rhetoric—"The fundamental business of the country ... is on a sound and prosperous basis"—that in retrospect seems tone-deaf but at the time amounted to a reasonable attempt to rally the nation. Following his voluntarist philosophy, he got labor and business to agree to a program to prop up wages. He even promoted public works on a small scale.

Yet his obsession with restraint exposed his conservatism. "Prosperity," he intoned, "cannot be restored by raids upon the public Treasury." He spurned a huge relief effort for the growing ranks of the destitute, deeming reports of want exaggerated.

"Nobody actually starved," Hoover said. The hospitals and morgues told a sadder tale. Not until a year after the crash did he set up an employment commission, which, Leuchtenburg seethes, "churned out press releases with pap topics such as urging people to 'spruce up' their homes." A mediocre speaker who shunned the bully pulpit, Hoover did little even to "talk up" the economy or public morale.

Hoover's boldest stroke, the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corp. in 1932, was too little too late. Authorized to lend money to banks, insurance companies, and other firms, the RFC struck some observers at first as a happy volte-face for Hoover, with government now given a key role in the intended recovery. (Others wondered why bankers, but not the jobless, were now on the dole.) But Leuchtenburg maintains that Hoover enacted the RFC only when the civic-mindedness that he expected from financial and industrial leaders didn't materialize. "Only unwittingly—by revealing the inadequacy of his voluntaristic approach—was Hoover the progenitor of FDR's enlargement of federal authority."

The final straw came when the "bonus army" of impoverished veterans marched on Washington in the spring of 1932 to demand overdue benefits. Hoover deployed the Army, whose commander, Douglas MacArthur, exceeded his orders, not for the last time. The resulting mayhem, captured on newsreels, appalled the nation. Tanks decimated the squatters' encampments while bayonets and tear gas sent the ragtag protesters scurrying. "So all the misery and suffering had finally come to this," recorded one journalist, "soldiers marching with their guns against American citizens." Equally disgusted, though also selfishly pleased, was the Democratic presidential nominee. "Well," said Franklin Roosevelt, "this elects me."

In time, Roosevelt would forge a new role for government in the lives of America's citizens. In 1932, however, the "new deal" that he promised was vague even to him; the details, like the capital letters, would come later. Still, Roosevelt understood something Hoover didn't. As governor of New York, he urged the state legislature to furnish monetary relief "not as a matter of charity but as a matter of social duty" and as a means to "restore that close relationship with its people which is necessary to preserve our democratic form of government."

Hoover remained an unregenerate anti-New Dealer until his death in 1964, at age 90; he fumed in his final years that John F. Kennedy was espousing "socialism disguised as a welfare state." Yet Hoover at times showed glimmers of awareness that his failure had been a simple one—an inability to serve the people as the president should. "Democracy," he once grumbled to an aide, "is a harsh employer."

bushisms

Bushism of the Day

By Jacob Weisberg

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 10:52 AM ET

"I guess it's OK to call the secretary of education here 'buddy.' That means friend."—Philadelphia, Jan. 8, 2009

Click [here](#) to see video of Bush's comments. The Bushism is at 2:38.

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

chatterbox

Inaugorophobia, Part 3

How Ted Kennedy's illness accelerates a shakedown on his behalf.

By Timothy Noah

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 6:30 PM ET

Ted Kennedy [suffered a seizure](#) at the inauguration lunch and was taken to a nearby hospital. Apparently there is no immediate reason to think that his situation is grave (setting aside, of course, the very grave reality that Kennedy is a 76-year-old man suffering from terminal brain cancer). Nonetheless, the incident naturally cast something of a pall on the celebration, and, not for the first time, people got busy memorializing the [only son](#) of Joe and Rose Kennedy to reach his 47th birthday. President Obama said: "He was there when the Voting Rights Act passed. Along with John Lewis, was a warrior for justice. And so, I would be lying to you if I did not say that right now a part of me is with him. And I think that's true for all of us. This is a joyous time, but it's also a sobering time. And, my prayers are with him and his family and Vicki."

According to an article by Matt Viser in the Jan. 20 *Boston Globe*, it isn't only Kennedy's fellow politicians who feel impatient to celebrate Kennedy's blessedly long and productive career in public service. Drug companies, hospitals, and insurance companies do, too, [to the tune of \\$20 million](#). The money will be used to create something called the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate. "It is the single most important thing, other than family and health, that Senator Kennedy is focused on," former Kennedy aide (and former

Democratic National Committee Chairman) Paul Kirk [told the Globe](#) in August. (Kirk is now chairman of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation.) That isn't really true. Reforming America's health care system is the single most important thing, other than family and his own personal health, that Sen. Kennedy is working on. Kennedy is chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, a position that, combined with Kennedy's intense, lifelong interest in extending decent health coverage to every American, puts him [at the center](#) of any health care reform to be crafted under President Obama and [Health and Human Services Secretary-designate](#) Tom Daschle.

Which makes it more than a little troubling that Kennedy's friends and former staffers have, in four months' time, collected \$20 million from the health care industry for this memorial. [According to](#) the *Globe*, the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate will be housed in a building near the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston's Columbia Point. It will contain a replica of the Senate chamber and will be used to train incoming senators, to allow students to participate in mock Senate sessions, and to commemorate Kennedy's illustrious Senate career. "By not personally soliciting money, Kennedy appears to be avoiding pitfalls other politicians have encountered while raising money for favored nonprofits," the *Globe* reports. Indeed, vanity projects like this have become commonplace for long-serving members of the House and Senate. Most recently, Charles Rangel got himself in hot water by [raising money](#) from people and corporations who do business before the House ways and means committee, which he chairs, for a public policy institute to be created in his name at City University of New York. The [solicitation](#) that created the scandal was for \$10 million, or half of what Kennedy's friends and former staffers have raised from the health care industry. (The company in question, American International Group, never forked over the money.)

Does the distinction between raising the money yourself and having others do it for you make any difference? If I am aware that Amgen has [pledged \\$5 million](#) to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate, it's a cinch that Sen. Kennedy knows, too. "What we intend to do is be perfectly transparent in what we've received in donations," Kirk told the *Globe*. But disclosing potential conflicts of interest doesn't make them disappear. The *Globe* reported in August that Kennedy's brain tumor had [become a reason](#) to accelerate fundraising for the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate. If Kennedy has absolutely nothing to do with this fundraising effort, why should his illness affect its timing? The ethical thing, it seems to me, would be to wait until after Kennedy's death to fund this project. Sadly, that wait isn't likely to be very long. But will the health care industry be willing to kick in \$20 million after Sen. Kennedy's demise? If not, we might have to muddle along without the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United

States Senate. That will be much, much easier than living without Edward M. Kennedy.

chatterbox

Inaugorophobia, Part 2

The last shall be first.

By Timothy Noah

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 11:54 AM ET

My former neighbor Marie and her daughter Zoe, both visiting from Berkeley, Calif., got in. My rock-star nephew Adam Levine and my sister Patsy, both visiting from Los Angeles, did not.

Text message from Marie, 11:13 a.m.:

We made it onto the mall! And I can see lots of tix holders did not. Craziness with lines. Very exciting and so much good cheer, community ...

Text message from Patsy, 11:42 a.m.:

We were turned away, along with Jesse Jackson and Mariah Carey ... angry mob at our gate. Back at Adam's hotel now. Disappointed, but happy to see it up close in a ...

That's all I got. I think probably that last bit was supposed to be "warm hotel room."

[*Update, Jan. 21:* Alice reported in sometime later. Despite her late arrival, she appears to have had an even better view from the back of the Mall than Marie and Zoe had near the front, because (Alice and Marie told me) there were more [Jumbotrons](#) in the areas serving non-ticketholders than in those serving ticketholders.]

chatterbox

Inaugorophobia

Did someone drop a neutron bomb on upper northwest D.C.?

By Timothy Noah

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 11:12 AM ET

Where did everybody go?

My friend and former neighbor, Marie, is visiting from Berkeley, Calif. She brought her 16-year-old daughter, Zoe. Also visiting is my sister, Patsy. Marie, Zoe, and Patsy all have tickets to watch the inauguration. Marie got hers through a friend who works for a union. Patsy got hers through her son, Adam Levine, the lead singer for Maroon 5, who are in town to play at [various](#) inaugural parties, including Vice President Joe Biden's inaugural ball tonight for his "home states" of Delaware and Pennsylvania. (Click [here](#) to watch my nephew get harrassed by TMZ.com on his way to Al Gore's "green" inaugural ball.)

All were gone when I woke up this morning. Patsy decamped yesterday to Adam's hotel, which I'm told is crawling with celebrities. (Hollywood swarming Washington—it's like jocks storming the chess club!) Marie and Zoe got up at sparrow's fart to take the Metro to the Capitol. My son, Will, considered going even earlier with a friend, but decided against it, and is still asleep. (He's 15.) I roused my daughter, Alice (13) at 8 a.m. She's walking to the ceremony with a friend from school who lives near the National Cathedral. Listening to the radio, I heard that the easternmost part of the Mall had already reached crowd capacity. I have some anxiety about exposing my daughter to a [Haji](#)-like mob, but the kids will be accompanied by a dad who works for the government managing relief efforts for natural disasters worldwide. We left early, figuring the roads would be packed from here (Takoma D.C., at the city's northernmost tip) to the cathedral.

But they weren't. All was silent. It was as though a blizzard had blanketed Washington, but there was no snow.

Driving down through Rock Creek Park on a major north-south commuting route, I saw perhaps two or three other cars. Turning south on Connecticut Ave in the city's Cleveland Park neighborhood, I noticed that a couple of in-line skaters had taken possession of the lane to my right. We'd left half an hour to get to our destination. We arrived in about 10 minutes.

Then I drove home. I've got a cold, I don't care much for crowds, and the man-on-the-street interviews I've heard on the radio weren't stirring my competitive instincts. (Better to read Curtis Sittenfeld's enchanting *Slate* serial, [All Along, This Was What Was Supposed To Happen](#).) I've been to an inauguration (the one where George H.W. Bush pissed off Nancy Reagan by promising a kinder, gentler nation), and I don't need to shiver at another. Granted, this one is more important. But Will and I will watch it on TV.

corrections

Corrections

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 7:00 AM ET

In the Jan. 19 "[Television](#)," Troy Patterson misspelled the name of composer Aaron Copland.

In the Jan. 12 "[Life and Art](#)," Rose Dakin incorrectly described her great-grandfather Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord as being openly inclined toward communism. He supported Russia and had close ties to trade unions, but his political ideology was unknown.

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

culturebox

I Know What Happens on *Lost* This Season

Hint: Hurley's nothing but trouble.

By Chadwick Matlin

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 2:59 PM ET

I know what happens on *Lost* this Season. I haven't seen all the episodes or read any spoilers, but I don't need to. As I argued on Wednesday, [you can learn](#) everything you need to know about a given season by watching the opening sequence of the premiere. Usually this sequence is short—three, maybe four minutes. But Wednesday night's premiere treated us to nearly 10 minutes of action before the *Lost* logo crawled ominously across the screen. In a flashback to the 1970s, we saw Dharma employee [Pierre Chang](#) (whose aliases include Mark Wickmund, Marvin Candle, and Edgar Halliwax) waking up, going through his routine, and surveying the construction site for Dharma's [time-travel station](#). In a flash-forward, we saw Jack and Ben discussing their plan to lure the Oceanic Six back to the island. And in the "present" (whatever that means at this point), we saw the effects of Ben moving the island through time (and perhaps space).

In the spirit of time travel, here are my predictions for the season to come, based only on the first episode:

- That the show's writers chose to present three time periods before the commercial break suggests that

Season 5 will be the most experimental one yet—with little or no regard for the usual rules of chronological storytelling. The motto of this new season was delivered by John Locke, while Richard Alpert was taking a bullet out of his leg: "When are we?"

- In the first scene, Chang [picks up a baby](#), but it's unclear whether it's actually his. Could it be Charlotte, the British anthropologist who, it seems, has returned to the island to find her birthplace? Or is it Ben's [childhood friend Annie](#)? I venture it's Charlotte, and also that the baby holds the key to one of the show's long-standing mysteries: Why do women on the island die during childbirth?
- When Chang surveys the Orchid station, he says that there are rules to time travel. My groundbreaking guess: We'll learn the rules.
- The physical effects of time travel will be more fully explained this year. When a miner gets too close to the energy source on the island, he gets a nosebleed—surely an indication that jumping from decade to decade messes with your brain, as it did for [Minkowski](#) last year. I expect the answers will come via a reappearance of [Horace "My Nose Only Bleeds When I Wants It To" Goodspeed](#). Was he time-tripping when he saw Locke in the jungle last season? I think so. Don't know what I'm talking about? Rewatch Season 4's "[Cabin Fever](#)" episode.
- While Jack and Ben discuss how to get the Oceanic Six back to the island, they see a local news report on Hurley's alleged killing spree. This juxtaposition as well as Hurley's run-in with the law at the end of the episode suggest Hurley won't return willingly. He'll have to be forced.
- Daniel Faraday is the only character to appear in two parts of the three-part introductory segment. Expect him to be a major player this year, both as the time traveler in residence and as the guy who translates what's happening to an increasingly bewildered audience. Faraday, you could say, is our Constant—the guy who makes sure our heads don't explode while we try and make sense of all this time travel.

culturebox

No Father to His Style

The spiritual journey of Ol' Dirty Bastard.

By James Parker

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:50 AM ET

"Creation is original freshness related to God," said Ol' Dirty Bastard. No, wait—it was St. Thomas Aquinas. *Could* have been ODB, though: No one doubted his original freshness, and the

entropic rapper was quite as prone to a theological outburst as he was to one that was deranged or dirty-bastardly. Inducted as a 10-year-old into the Scholastically complex systems of the Five Percent Nation—the breakaway sect founded in 1963 by former Nation of Islam minister Clarence 13X Smith—Dirty in his short life would stray wildly from the path, but the teachings stayed with him. Always at his fingertips were the Supreme Alphabet, the 120 Degrees, the Nine Basic Tenets. "The black man is God!" he proclaimed at the end of a 1994 performance on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. And to an interviewer in 1997: "I'm God. That's my identity, one of the low gods. One of the earth gods—one with a lot of wisdom." Was he high? Almost certainly. But neither afflatus nor clinical grandiosity were at work here: For the Five Percenters, otherwise known as the Nation of Gods and Earths, these were the proverbs of a simple piety.

It's a stretch to call Jaime Lowe's new [*Digging for Dirt: The Life and Death of ODB*](#) a spiritual biography—Lowe is as concerned with Dirty's place in hip-hop as she is with the progress of his soul. But as the narrative deepens into disaster, it's hard not to see this story in the light of a doomed pilgrimage, a religious journey that went wrong.

Born Russell Jones in Brooklyn in 1968, Dirty got the Five Percent knowledge from his cousin Popa Wu—the knowledge, that is, that there is no "mystery God" or supernatural deity, that the black man is the father of civilization and his own God, and that the human race breaks down into three percentages: the ignorant herd (85 percent), the exploiters (10 percent), and the enlightened (5 percent). Ornamenting these dogmas was the homegrown freemasonry of the Supreme Mathematics—a series of mystically interrelated numbers, letters, and verbal formulae on which the initiate would be tested and retested. The young Dirty must have been a devout student: Even at his mental nadir, decades later, the lessons stuck. "He could be high as hell," ODB sidekick Buddha Monk tells Lowe, "and someone would ask him what's today's mathematics and he would know."

Dirty's home in hip-hop was the Wu-Tang Clan, where—commercially speaking—NGE doctrine was part of the package, part of the plan. His cousin and fellow Five Percenter the RZA masterminded it on brooding solo walks around Staten Island, N.Y.: In order to conquer the world, Wu-Tang would have to *be* a world. Nine killer MCs pickled in late-night kung fu flicks, chess lore, Marvel comics, street life, weed cabbalism, and NGE slang eschatology—a hip-hop Middle Earth, with its own legends and grades of being. No other crew could match the sorcerous allure, the smoky Dungeons & Dragons vibe curling off those minimal Wu-Tang beats. "I lived in at least ten different projects," wrote RZA in [*The Wu-Tang Manual*](#), "and I got to see that the projects are a science project, in the same way that a prison is a science project. ... And in comics, when a science project goes wrong, it produces monsters. Or superheroes."

Or both, he might have added, in consideration of the role he picked for his cousin. Dirty started rapping under his proud NGE name Ason Unique—a prince, an original child of the universe. But as the Wu-Tang zodiac began to constellate in the mind of the RZA, a different, lower-order persona exerted its attraction: the Ol' Dirty Bastard. The name meant that he had "no father to his style," which was true enough: The ODB rap was built around syllabic barkings and throat-clearings, curses and eruptions into wobbling song, with frequent runnings-out of breath—he had the capacity, in fact, to work *against* his own breath, with the effect of a boxer who throws his best punches when his feet are tied together. But the name also fixed him in the Clan's kung fu movie mythos: *Ol' Dirty & the Bastard* starred Yuen Siu Tien as Drunken Master, a cackling old sot of a fight tutor whose sloppy moves wrong-footed soberer opponents.

It became a lifestyle: "thirty-five years of drunken boxing," as Lowe puts it in her book. If the RZA was Wu-Tang's long-faced Prospero, holding it all together in the force field of his imagination, Dirty would be its Caliban. The charges piled up: assault, possession, shoplifting, illegal wearing of body armor, failure to pay child support. As did the aliases: Dirt Dog, Dirt McGirt, Osirus, Joe Bananas, and (the last one, the apotheosis) Big Baby Jesus.

And the raps, as he weaved between incarcerations, got nuttier. From the beginning ODB had been on the shadow side of NGE lore. "First things first, man, you're fuckin' with the worst," he warned on Wu-Tang's debut "Protect Ya Neck": "I'll be sticking pins in your head like a fuckin' nurse." An image straight out of Five Percent nightmare: Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, taught that an evil scientist called Mr. Yacub created the white race by having his nurses stick needles in the brains of black babies. Now the lyrical darkness intensified—there's a case to be made for 1999's solo outing [*Nigga Please*](#) as hip-hop's first crackup album, as splintered in its insights as Syd Barrett's [*The Madcap Laughs*](#). "I Can't Wait" is an out-of-body rant, served up by producer Irv Gotti on a bed of sizzling violins: "Nurses can't give us searches/ There won't be electric, won't be churches/ Cuz your body go against you/ Whether it's a lie or whether it's true." At times Dirty seems to be prophesying against *himself*, as if his mind has fractured according to the fateful percentages of NGE dogma. "Yo I take the 85 percent brain," he blusters in "All in Together Now," "Cuz black makes what makes rain/ Dirty brain is like payday to me/ God, unique baby!"

There were terrible times in jail—the "hellhole hotel," he called it—and after a three-month sojourn in the Manhattan Psychiatric Center in 2003, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. A year later the owner-of-the-dirty-brain was found dead, curled in the fetal position, with a swallowed bag of cocaine breaking open in his stomach. The only meaning to it, in Lowe's telling, was cessation. Release. "How was I supposed to cry," his mother,

Cherry, asks her, "when I saw him for the first time in his life at peace?" Detailed instructions for future biographers had been left in the coda to "Nowhere To Run," his 1998 collaboration with DMX and Ozzy Osbourne. A bare, snarling voice: "What, motherfucker? Don't try to psychology my shit, motherfucker. Cuz you never psychology it, motherfucker. Never. Never. Never, motherfucker. *Never.*"

culturebox

Secrets of *Lost* Revealed!

Everything you need to know happens in the first five minutes of the season premieres.

By Chadwick Matlin

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 11:13 AM ET

In advance of *Lost*'s fifth season premiere on Wednesday night, I have some advice for anyone who's fuzzy on the details of this sprawling, often confusing show. Instead of searching for recaps online or trying to pull an 82-episode marathon, just watch the first few minutes of each premiere—the introductory scene through the first commercial—and you'll learn everything you need to know. *Lost*'s producers have long said that the show is a serialized epic. As Damon Lindelof, one of *Lost*'s two executive producers, [told the *Onion's* A.V. Club](#), "The superstructure of every season is a book ... and every episode is a chapter in that book." To extend Lindelof's metaphor, the first page of every book lays the groundwork for what follows.

Take, for example, [Season 1's pilot](#), which opens on Jack Shephard lying in the middle of a jungle with cuts on his face and chest. He doesn't seem to recognize his surroundings, nor how badly he is injured. After taking a nip of alcohol, he emerges from the jungle onto the scene of a horrific plane crash. He sees people dying left and right and begins barking orders to the other survivors. Another character, Boone Carlyle, tries to perform an emergency tracheotomy with a pen—hints of the Boy Scout qualities we'll discover later. Then, right before the commercial break, the survivors hear a noise, possibly mechanic, possibly organic, coming out of the jungle. And thus, succinctly, the audience has been introduced to the first season's main characters and chief concerns.

Season 1 is principally about survival, in the most primitive sense. As Jack's injuries and the bodies scattered on the beach make clear, people will die on this show. And although Boone never again attempts emergency surgery, the season never loses the frantic and improvisational "you may just need to stab a hole in someone's neck with a pen" quality. Wild herbs must be gathered to treat asthma, makeshift amputation guillotines must be built, and babies must be delivered naturally in the middle of the jungle.

That the audience first sees Jack is no accident, since he's the one who is in charge of ensuring the survivors continue to survive. Although *Lost* notoriously has a crowded cast of characters, Jack becomes the focus of Season 1. And the first action he performs—taking a swig of alcohol—is a placeholder for [back stories to come](#). Jack, we learn, clashed with his alcoholic father and now may be turning into the man he once despised. His second action—barking orders—is a quick glimpse of the rather dictatorial leadership strategy he develops as the season unfolds. It's also telling that the first sequence closes with the mysterious moaning noise—for the next 23 episodes, the survivors will fend off danger both from the aftereffects of the crash and what turns out to be a monster in the jungle.

The fact that the series' opener contains a hint of everything to come is not, in itself, surprising. To get a show greenlighted for full production, it's best to telegraph as much of the plot as possible in the pilot. But the show's writers kept the foreshadowing technique going in subsequent seasons.

At the start of the [Season 2 premiere](#), we hear a beeping sound and watch a man with long brown hair type something into a computer prompt that looks even older than MS-DOS. The camera lingers on a close-up of [a button that says "EXECUTE"](#). Once the man presses it, the beeping stops. Then the man goes about his routine in a seemingly '70s-era apartment. He listens to a Mama Cass song, injects himself with [medicine from a vial](#) labeled "DHARMA," and rides a stationary bike. After an earthquakelike rumble, the camera winds its way up a shaft to show Jack and John Locke staring down into a hatch—the bunker discovered a few episodes earlier. The long-haired man, it turns out, isn't from the '70s—he is the answer to the cliffhanger question from Season 1: What's in the hatch?

Season 2, accordingly, is about the hatch—its contents, the survivors' interactions with it, and its history. As Desmond tells the survivors, he must press the "EXECUTE" button inside the hatch every 108 minutes to both silence that incessant beeping noise and make sure the island (and the rest of the world along with it) doesn't explode. The button will eventually exacerbate the tension between Jack, a man of science who thinks one button can't possibly control the fate of the world, and Locke, a man of faith who (mostly) believes in the button. The '70s-era furniture and music provide our first hints about the so-called Dharma Initiative—the mysterious organization that, we come to learn, built the hatch and conducted experiments on the island more than 30 years ago.

[Season 3](#), like Season 2, opens on a new character, Juliet. She's in a suburban-looking home, making muffins in advance of a book club meeting. One of the book clubbers mentions a man named Ben, which provokes a strong reaction from Juliet. Then, an earthquake-type rumble occurs (just like in Season 2), and the book clubbers rush outside to see what's going on. They're in

what looks like a Technicolor version of *Leave It to Beaver's* hometown. Ben, whom we've heretofore known as Henry Gale, comes out of a house, and we see him giving orders. Juliet and Ben have a tense conversation, and then the camera zooms out to show us [New Otherton](#) (the nickname for the village coined by the producers) in the context of the island.

In interviews, the producers have said Season 3 is about the Others, but it's also about how there's more to the island than we were led to believe. The final shot before the commercial break expands the audience's understanding of the island's geography. It's actually quite large, not just a speck on the map. Similarly, seeing the Others in their suburban setting clashes with the impression, formed in the first two seasons, that the Others are primitive—previously we saw them walk barefoot and wear shabby, shredded clothes. Ben, it quickly becomes apparent, is the leader of the group and a central character this season. Juliet's reaction to Ben's name and her tense conversation with him are the key to her behavior later on, when the audience is meant to question whether her allegiance lies with Jack or Ben (and by extension with the survivors or the Others).

[Season 4](#) is the only premiere to begin with a character we already know, although that's not initially apparent. It opens with a high-speed chase: Somebody driving a Camaro is trying to outrun the police in Los Angeles. Jack watches the chase on TV and mutters, "Damn it" as he pours himself a screwdriver. When the police eventually corner the Camaro, we discover that the driver is Hurley, looking older and more ragged than he did on the island. Before the cops arrest him, he screams, "Don't you know who I am? I'm one of the Oceanic Six!"

Hurley's grizzled appearance and run from the law, plus Jack's morning drink, clue us into the essential message of Season 4: The so-called Oceanic Six were better off on the island. The fact that Hurley drives a Camaro—a car we know has sentimental value for the character—indicates that the Oceanic Six are trying, unsuccessfully, to move on by reconnecting to the past.

Of course, upon first viewing, it's impossible to know that the introductory scenes reveal the central concerns of the season to come. In fact, it's difficult to know what's going on at all since the premieres begin *in medias res* and the camerawork almost always hides the identity of the characters in the first few minutes. The genius of *Lost* is that the first few minutes set up the rest of the season not through clearly worded hints but through a barrage of questions. How did the plane crash? How are they going to survive? What is in the hatch? What's with the button? Who is this blond woman making muffins? Who's driving that car?

I suspect that the initial three or five minutes of Season 5 will, true to form, reveal the main preoccupations of the season to come—the principal characters, themes, and mysteries. Check

Slate on Thursday morning for a follow-up post analyzing the premiere, complete with predictions for Season 5.

culturebox

Strong, Silent Types

The red-hot new stars of lesbian romance novels: Secret Service agents.

By June Thomas

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 6:16 PM ET

While the world is watching Barack Obama's inauguration, I expect I'll be distracted. Instead of listening to the speech, I'll be straining to pick out the new president's Secret Service detail. That's because, like many consumers of lesbian romance novels, I have developed a bit of a thing for the men, and especially the women, of the protective services.

The protagonists of disposable lesbian fiction—romances *and* mysteries—have had varied lines of work over the years. Back in the late 1950s and early '60s, [Beebo Brinker](#)—the butch anti-hero of the first pulps in which lesbian characters weren't all evil, sick, or suicidal—delivered pizzas and operated an elevator because those jobs allowed her to wear trousers. In the 1980s, feminist presses published lightweight lesbian novels that featured crime-solving protagonists from a broad range of professions—including a [printer](#), a [translator](#), a [restaurateur](#), and a [travel agent](#)—rather than the usual lineup of cops and PIs. (I've always suspected they avoided such characters in part because they were too stereotypically "butch"—it seemed vital in that era to break from narrow notions about lesbian gender roles—and in part because left-leaning feminists in the '80s weren't big fans of establishment figures who carry guns.) Over time, though, the market shifted, and cops and private detectives have come to dominate lesbian pulps, just as they do mainstream mass-market titles.

In the last few years, though, a new hero has emerged: Braver, fitter, and more sensitive than a cop, more honorable than a PI, the Secret Service agent is the perfect romance paragon, particularly for lesbian readers.

You'll find [several variations](#) on the shelves of your local bookstore, but the best examples of this protector-protectee romance subgenre come from a writer known as Radclyffe. In 2002, the Philadelphia surgeon published [Above All, Honor](#), a slim novel in which gorgeous, brooding Secret Service agent Cameron Roberts is assigned to protect gorgeous, troubled Blair Powell, the president's daughter. Six years and six installments later, Radclyffe brought the series to an apparent end in [Word of Honor](#), in which Cam and Blair tie the knot at a Colorado ski resort. (Radclyffe's books were so successful that she abandoned

medicine and is now a full-time writer and publisher based in upstate New York.) In the course of the series, Cam is shot, burned, blown up, hit by a car, and almost drowned, while Blair evades bullets, bombs, anthrax, and breast cancer. In between these aggravations, the two of them negotiate the boundaries of protection and freedom and enjoy a tremendous amount of mind-blowingly awesome sex.

It's easy to be snarky about the *Honor* series and about lesbian romances generally. I certainly was. I worked in feminist publishing for a decade, and although I knew that the buy-them-by-the-armful down-market dyke romances kept a lot of feminist bookstores in the black, I wasn't in the business to churn out trashy bonk-busters. I read one every few years, maintaining an expression of smug superiority throughout. Then, a couple of years ago, I picked up *Honor Bound*, the second title in the series. Within a matter of weeks, I'd inhaled more than 20 of Radclyffe's novels and reread the *Honor* series several times.

The books are quite explicit; and since Radclyffe introduces more couples as the series progresses, toward the end, there's far more sex than intrigue, which probably accounts for much of their popularity. But there's also a more high-minded appeal, something aspirational about the archetype of the honorable agent. Everyone admires a civil servant who will take a bullet in the line of duty, but one section of the population may feel the attraction more strongly than others, because the traits that make a good Secret Service agent are especially valuable in a lesbian.

It isn't just a matter of looking good in a suit and being able to handle a trigger. Although lesbians no longer hide in the shadows, everyone appreciates discretion, and Secret Service agents are the ultimate strong, silent type—they fade into the background without hiding, they keep their mouths shut, and they have your back. But the question of protection is especially complicated territory for women involved with other women. Since our relationships aren't recognized by the state, we aren't always able to shield our partners from hardship and can't offer them the social-welfare benefits that marriage confers. And just as the first daughter must sometimes take care of her protector, a good lesbian must be skilled at shifting roles.

Reading a romance novel won't give readers the coal-black hair, the chiseled profile, or the sexy gray eyes of its protagonist, but we can take a few life lessons from selfless Cam Roberts and conflicted Blair Powell: In the real world, security is a fantasy even more desirable, and more elusive, than endless love.

dear prudence

My Head Honcho Is a Hatemonger

I work with Obama-despising bigots but can't quit. How do I hold my tongue?
Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:48 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 work for a small, family-owned company in the South. The owners are white and come from a generation that did not believe in equal rights for nonwhites. I am also white but grew up during the civil rights era. Also, being a Christian, I believe that all people are my brothers and sisters. The problem is that I cannot hold my tongue much longer when these people speak in such horribly bigoted terms about nonwhites in general and the new president in particular. After being without a job for 10 months, I finally got this job last year. It is a huge step down financially, and I am currently looking at starting a second, part-time job to help make ends meet. With the economy not expected to improve anytime soon, I do not feel free to simply walk away or endanger my job by speaking my mind. We work in very close proximity to one another, so there is no way to close a door or walk out of the room to remove myself. How do I handle this? Speak up and risk my job or keep my job at the expense of denying dignity to others?

—Stressed, Angry, and Conflicted

Dear Stressed,

It's amazing any work gets done in America considering the time spent in the office on celebrations, romances, and spouting off. You are in a tough situation because you need this job, and you have no way to screen yourself from this bile. Since you actually have duties to perform besides engaging in racist chit-chat, your first line of defense is to attend to your work and tune out the commentary. But getting along in an office requires engaging in some social banter, so you need a series of seemingly anodyne responses that actually carry a pointed message. Deliver them with a calm unflappability. (For instructions on how to carry this off, watch Barack Obama's presidential debate performances.) For instance, "I can't go along with that." "That hasn't been my experience with [blacks, Hispanics, Asians]." "I heard some commentators on Fox News say they were impressed with how intelligent and thoughtful President Obama is." "This country has so many problems that it seems like even people who didn't vote for him are hoping the president succeeds." And if he does succeed, eventually the economy will emerge from the pits, you will find a better job, and you can say *adios* to this den of bigots.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence Video: What if Obama Fails?

Dear Prudence,

This year, my dad didn't get me anything for Christmas. Usually, in our family, my mom does the Christmas shopping, wrapping, decorations, and so on. My dad (who often works 60 or 70 hours

a week) has always made a Christmas Eve run to buy everyone bubble bath and trinkets. This year, my dad took the time to get five or six nice presents for my mother. I sew, and I spent hours making him a new dressing gown, which he loves. But I'm devastated that he personally did not bother to get anything for me (I'm 27) or my brother, who is 22. He took my mom out shopping to buy things for all of us, so maybe he thought that counted as his trip. But my mother has a chronic illness, which was much worse this winter, so that seems more like him taking care of my mother than him getting me a Christmas present. My parents have always been clear that their relationship with each other is more important than their relationships with the children. Should I try to have a conversation with my father and tell him that I'm hurt by his lack of thoughtfulness? Or should I just accept that he's being selfish, recognize that I can't change him, and do what I can to get over it?

—Hurting

Dear Hurting,
Here it is mid-January, here you are heading toward 30, and you're telling me you're not sure you can recover from the fact that Daddy dared get your ailing mother some lovely Christmas gifts and did not get you a bottle of cheap bubble bath (while he did pay for gifts given to you jointly by your parents)? Maybe instead of stewing over Christmas past, you should be focusing on your own New Year's resolutions. Let's enumerate some: Give up trying to displace your mother in your father's affections; realize when Christmas rolls around that you're no longer 8 years old; help your overworked father care for your ill mother. By your own account, your parents sound like loving, thoughtful, hardworking people; by your own account, you sound like an ungrateful wretch. You say your options are to confront your father or accept that he's selfish and can't be changed. I say you have a third choice: to see that you're stuck acting out some strange childhood drama but that it's way past time to pull down the curtain and get on with your own life. I'm going to guess you're single, so it's time you stopped focusing on your relationship with your father and started looking for a husband of your own. And if you're lucky, you will find one as devoted to you as your father is to your mother.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

I have recently become a recipient of commands from strangers to "smile!" The most recent occurrence was in my town's only mall, when a man in a group I was passing actually stepped out of the group, stood in front of me, and all but shouted, "Smile!" My usual response is to look through the person as though they were not there at all and continue as I was, inwardly saying something inappropriate. I come from one of the largest cities in the United States, and I moved to this town for a job. I did occasionally get accosted this way in the city, but it happened only about once a year. Now I feel as though I'm getting similar

reactions at least once a week. I don't think anyone has a right to command me to emote. Is there a better way to react? I know better than to say aloud the things I think about the person, but I wonder if there is a way to convey how little I appreciate their words.

—Not on Candid Camera

Dear Not On,

I used to frequently get the same exhortation from male strangers. Let me assure you, even if you never change your default facial expression, this problem will eventually take care of itself because men say this only to unsmiling young women. Strangers don't care enough to see happiness suffuse the face of a crabby-looking middle-aged woman. Of course you're right, your facial expression is nobody's business, and there is a large element of sexism in this—I promise you these men are not encouraging young, brooding males to lighten up. You are free to keep walking and ignore them. I, too, used to just deepen my scowl when I got similar advice. Then, in response to, "Hey, it can't be *that* bad" from a stranger, I smiled, and he smiled back—and it was nice. I realized maybe these strangers had a point. So consider that your expression, while adaptively off-putting for the big city, may be unnecessarily severe for the smaller, friendlier town where you now live.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

My husband was raised in a family of many children. All of the children are grown and either employed or married to spouses who provide financially for them. Since my in-laws chose to operate a meager, hopeless small business for a living and to have a very large family, they have never gotten ahead financially. Now, whenever they need something, a couple of siblings send all the rest of the siblings an e-mail saying: "Mom and Dad's refrigerator [or hot water heater, etc.] broke. A new one costs \$500. If you'd like to contribute \$40 to it, please send the money." The requests are always honest and legitimate. Am I wrong to feel irritated? On one hand, my in-laws raised generous, thoughtful children. On the other hand, my in-laws weren't willing to use birth control or find better jobs, so now my hard-earned money has to help pay for their new furnace. Assuming we can afford it, should we just contribute?

—Middle-Class Daughter-in-Law

Dear Middle-Class,

If only your in-laws had stopped being fruitful and multiplying, maybe your husband would never have been born, and you wouldn't now be stuck paying \$40 for their hot water heater. It used to be that one of the reasons people had lots of children was that it provided them with insurance that they would be loved and cared for in their old age. You acknowledge that this is how it's working out for these old folks, but, for some reason, this

deeply offends you. Sure, it would be great if everyone had in-laws who had done something remunerative with their lives, but it's too late for you to marry one of Warren Buffett's children. You need to face that your in-laws are going to need more help from their kids as time goes on, and you should be grateful there are so many of them able and willing to share the load. But instead of doing it in such an ad hoc way, it sounds as if the members of your generation should get together and make a more systematic financial plan for your in-laws. Perhaps all of you can talk about contributing a certain amount per year (you can think of it as the entry fee for joining this admirable family), so your in-laws are better able to meet their financial needs now, and to create a cushion to draw from later.

—Prudie

Photograph of Prudie by Teresa Castracane.

dispatches

Little Hotties at the Mall

Volunteering at the inauguration was more satisfying than I had a right to expect. Plus, I got free hand warmers.

By Nicholas Schmidle

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 1:39 PM ET

At 5 o'clock on Tuesday morning, two full hours before sunrise, I reported for duty at the base of the Washington Monument. A tangle of strobes beamed up from the center of the Mall, and more than mile away, a battery of floodlights illuminated the Capitol. Seven hours later, Barack Obama would be sworn in as president of the United States.

"Where's Team 13?!?"

"Team 6 meet here!"

"O-BA-MA! O-BA-MA! O-BA-MA!"

Semipro team leaders called out directions at the scrum of volunteers rubbing their mittens together and swapping tales about who traveled the farthest or woke up the earliest. (Others scoffed when I griped about getting up at 3 a.m.) Then I heard a lady behind me exclaim in a thick, Southern accent, "I think I gotta dud."

The woman's outburst wasn't a result of being paired off with an unpromising partner for the day, but of the fact that her hand warmers—"Little Hotties"—weren't living up to their name. This was no time for faulty advertising. Temperatures hovered in the teens, and the wind mocked each and every layer of the allegedly "extreme conditions" gear that I'd put on that morning.

Our shift lasted another 10 hours. I hoped that the "Little Hotties" just needed some time.

Weather aside, I felt more than a little uncomfortable and awkward when I showed up. The fact is, I had never volunteered a day in my life for anything. I am just not a rah-rah kind of guy. I guess I lack the civic gene. Sure, I had voted for Obama, but I never chanted "Yes, we can" or "O-BA-MA." Last week I asked myself whether I had done anything significant either to help Obama get elected or to help him succeed once in office. Having answered "no" to both questions, I raised the prospect of volunteering with my wife, a chronic do-gooder with numerous Habitat for Humanity projects under her belt.

"That's great," she replied. "I've already signed us up."

Among the various roles that any president should fill, perhaps the most crucial is the capacity to inspire the nation. Such inspiration can take numerous forms, from military service to the Peace Corps to AmeriCorps to just flying a flag in front of one's home. In Obama's inauguration speech, he called on Americans to show "a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves"; hours after being sworn in, I watched Obama on television endorsing a program called "[USA Service](#)."

Just how much will he reshape the way that Americans, especially minorities of all ages and liberal whites belonging to the generations after Vietnam, perceive national service? Based on my own impulse to volunteer, I would think a lot.

In preparatory e-mails leading up to the big day, I was told that my service would entail safety, information, surveillance, and watching for "unruly guests." Until I spotted the plethora of National Guardsmen, police, Secret Service, and Eagle Scouts, I thought this might have involved brandishing a taser. Alas, the guys in full uniform handled the more exciting jobs. My wife and I, sporting red knit caps with "volunteer" stitched across the forehead, greeted people and fielded questions. ("Sir, this is the Mall" and "Ma'am, the Porta-Potties are over there" were my two most popular replies.)

The red cap also entitled us to a secret cache of "Little Hotties." When I stripped last night, I counted 19 "Little Hotties" that, over the course of the day, I had slipped into chest, my pants and jacket pockets, and my socks and gloves. That being said, the most valuable asset of the red cap was that it threw me in the middle of Obama's new America.

Minutes before the ceremony began, my wife and I left our posts to seek out a better sightline to the nearest JumboTron. On the way, we passed blond teenage boys with Afros, men in full mink coats, and one guy holding a video camera in his right hand and a placard pasted with a collage of porn in his left. (I hummed John Cougar Mellencamp's "Ain't That America" the whole

walk—unconsciously, of course.) We settled in a grove of skeletal trees by the American History museum, some 15 blocks from the Capitol, and watched as dignitaries trotted out onto the steps.

Our fellow spectators showed little patience for the old guard. They broke into raucous boos at former President George Bush. When Dick Cheney emerged in a wheelchair, the guy next to me heckled him.

"I heard he pulled his back out yesterday moving boxes," I said.

The man, wearing a blue Santa cap, scowled at me. "Bullshit," he said. "He just don't want to stand up to Barack!" Once Cheney was out of view, Santa turned his heckles into taunts and yelled at the screen: "Show him to me! Show me the man!" As Obama's face filled the big screen, our section burst into a celebration of tears, cheers, and flag-waving.

Amid the commotion, two ladies, having spotted our red caps, approached my wife. They had a crisis: A few minutes earlier, they had found a little girl named Sydney wandering lost near the Porta-Potties. Sydney was an 11-year-old African-American from Louisiana who made the journey for a school trip. The salty residue of dried tears tracked down her cheeks. "Can you take her?" the ladies asked. Sydney shivered and convulsed, partly from crying and partly from not wearing any gloves. My wife gave her mittens and a handful of "Little Hotties."

When the inauguration speech ended and the crowd thinned out, we headed with Sydney to the first aid tent and caller her teacher. (Sydney thankfully wore a necklace with contact numbers on it.) More than an hour later, the teacher showed up. She appeared angry at Sydney, and thoroughly thankless toward us.

But I guess that's what service is supposed to be all about: never expecting anything in return. Of course, when you think about it, the reward—and the inspiration—is now sitting in the White House. So maybe that's why it was so easy to volunteer. In Obama's America, I hope to start doing it a whole lot more.

dispatches

The Partygoer

How many inaugural balls can I get to in one night?

By Seth Stevenson

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 10:16 AM ET

How many inaugural balls can one man endure? Friends, we are about to find out. I've made arrangements with several host committees. I've donned my tuxedo and a comfortable pair of shoes. It's time to hit the town and keep a running tally.

Of course, we'll need transport. These event sites are scattered all across the city. Much of downtown is closed to cars. Pedaling a bike might make me sweat through my tux. Waiting for the Metro could waste precious minutes I'll need for partying.

You know what? It's possible we've hit upon the sole practical usage for the much-maligned Segway. It's allowed anywhere a pedestrian can go. It requires no exertion. A full day's rental is a mere \$150. Let's fire it up! The quest begins.

Segwaying in formalwear is an excellent way to draw attention. A city cop directing traffic at a busy intersection breaks into a grin as I approach. "Oh, you are not going to the inaugural ball on your Segway!" she laughs.

"Oh, yes I am," I reply, rolling by.

"You handle yo' BIZ-ness!" she shouts at my back as I speed away.

My first stop: The Purple Ball at the Fairmont Hotel. I'm not totally clear on the *raison d'être* of the Purple Ball. (No doubt some worthy, noncontroversial charities will be honored.) Nor am I clear on why it's purple. What I do know is that famous people are expected to attend. Patricia Arquette. Ashley Judd. Maybe John Cusack.

I leave my Segway with an amused valet, enter the hotel, and head straight for the ballroom—where I'm rudely stopped by a security guard. No press allowed inside, he says. Instead, I'm shunted into a holding pen with the other media wretches. From here, it will be possible to observe the stars arriving on the red carpet. It will also be possible to follow them mournfully with your eyes as they disappear behind closed doors to enjoy vintage Champagne and gourmet finger foods.

I spend 15 minutes amid the herd of photographers here, but no celebrities materialize. Eventually, I decide it's not worth the wait. I've got way too many places to be tonight—can't let Ashley Judd hold up my evening.

I hop back on the Segway and begin an epic, 25-minute ride to the Hawaii State Society ball on the other side of town. (Perhaps I could have planned out this itinerary better, you say. Shut up, I say.) Along the way I pass three separate motorcades, sirens a-wailing. National Guard soldiers march the streets in camouflaged packs. "We need one of those," says a Guardsman to his buddy as they wave me along. I briefly imagine the

Segway with a bulletproof fairing and .50-caliber machine gun mounted atop the handlebars.

At full speed—about 13 mph—the Segway subjects its rider to a biting wind. Couple this with the 23-degree temperature outside, and by the time I pull up to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, my cheeks and ears are raw and rosy. Once inside, there's a 20-minute delay as crowds gather in the lobby and wait for the broken escalator to be repaired.

This Hawaii ball sold out quickly on expectations of yummy luau food and a possible appearance by our new, Hawaiian-born president. It now seems unlikely that Obama will show up, as he's holding a separate, official "Home States" ball inside the convention center. As for the luau: It's nothing but a pan-Asian steam-tray buffet—with unbearably long lines.

Everybody's wearing wilted leis and wandering around in a series of contiguous, basement function rooms. They edge themselves away from the ukulele quartet. It feels like we're all onboard a discount cruise ship.

I'd love to eat some food, but I can't afford to waste another moment here. So I swoop into the buffet line, snatch a pair of greasy dumplings, and wolf them down as I make my escape. Back outside, I retrieve my Segway from the valet and scoot into the night.

I rumble across the gravel of the now-desolate National Mall, bits of trash swirling in my wake. The streets around here are still blocked off to most cars, so I'm zooming down the middle of wide, empty boulevards, my streetlight shadow stretching out before me. I've put on my black ski mask to fight the cold, and I'm fairly sure that I'm terrifying the pedestrians I pass. With the background noise of sirens, the inky night sky, and the eerily barren streets, I must look like an outtake from a Batman movie—a psychotic, Segwaying villain who zips around Gotham, emitting toxic gas from the knot of his bowtie.

It takes 10 minutes of high-speed Segwaying to reach the convention center. The security cordon around the building—which is where the president and vice president will be spending much of the evening—extends for blocks in every direction. I think I might be able to Segway straight through the checkpoint, but I'm stopped short when a Secret Service agent steps into my path and halts my forward progress, sticking his massive, barrel chest in front of my handlebars. He says nothing, appraising me with cold eyes. I suddenly realize I am dressed entirely in black, wearing a ski mask, and attempting to barge a Segway through a Secret Service blockade. It is a minor miracle I haven't been shot. I lock the Segway to a nearby light post and walk the last few blocks.

Once I'm through all the metal detectors and past the phalanx of police, I enter the main floor of the convention center. Ever gone to a bar mitzvah at a giant hotel—where there are seven other bar mitzvahs happening simultaneously? This is what the convention center feels like. At the end of every hallway is another mediocre swing band, another crowded bar, another windowless room with spilled food getting ground ever deeper into the wall-to-wall carpet.

I've got tickets to both Obama's and Biden's "Home State" balls, which honor the politicians' regional allegiances. These official balls represent my best chances to see the men of the hour. Unfortunately, as I head toward the entrance of Obama's ball, I find I'm swimming upstream. Everybody else (including D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty and comedian D.L. Hughley) is leaving the event. The woman at the door confirms the bad news: Obama just left. Though a few people inside continue to dance, the energy's gone. It's a dead ball walking.

There's still the Biden ball. Am I too late? I sprint across the endless lobby, up three escalators, and around a corner—slaloming through a blur of gowns and tuxedos. I can hear a fanfare coming from the doors at the end of the hall, and I see people rushing in. I enter just in time to see Joe and Jill Biden taking the stage. Success!

Biden takes the microphone and offers some anodyne tributes to Delaware. When he's done, he lets loose with a trademark, off-color ad-lib. "Don't get too close to these Marines, honey," he says to Jill as she walks past the Marine band. "I don't want you screwing around with any of them."

The couple takes a couple of turns on the dance floor as the band plays. Then they wave goodbye to the cheering throngs and disappear behind the velvet curtains. This was what everyone here paid the big bucks for, bought the new dress for, stood around waiting for, and the whole thing is over in about four minutes. Yet everyone seems to be thrilled. Proximity to power, however brief, is all these people wanted. They're still basking in the afterglow as I pull on my overcoat.

Exiting the convention center, I walk a block south to the ball for the Arizona State Society. It's a small event with no VIPs to speak of. But were I to spend my whole evening at a single party, this might be the one. It's got booming old-school rap, a whole lot of cowboy hats, and several visibly drunk women in cleavage-baring ball gowns. This is an extremely potent recipe for fun. But I've got to keep moving.

I unlock my Segway and head for the Mayflower Hotel in Dupont Circle. Glancing at the readout display, I notice I'm getting pretty low on power. The full charge I began the night with is dwindling fast. Which brings two undesirable outcomes into play: 1) The Segway runs out of batteries when I'm far from

home, leaving me stranded; 2) the Segway goes dead while I'm humming along at top speed, causing the balance mechanism to fail and sending me hurtling over the handlebars into a gutter.

I make it intact to the Mayflower—site of the Human Rights Campaign's "Out for Equality" ball—arriving just as Cyndi Lauper and Rufus Wainwright are launching into a ska version of "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun." The dance floor is teeming. It seems to be 85 percent men and 100 percent good-looking. Dress is more stylish than at the other balls. One fellow wears a plaid tux and totally makes it work. I feel acutely aware that my haircut could be better.

But time grows short. Must keep moving. We're on to the All-American Ball. It's nearing midnight now, and people are sprawled across the lobby furniture of the Westin Hotel. Bowties are unknotted and horseshoed around men's necks. Women are holding high heels in their hands, dangling them from the straps. I stay just long enough to see astronaut Buzz Aldrin—the ball's lone celebrity guest—take the stage and call for a new era of space exploration. What this has to do with the inauguration, I can't rightly say.

I hand my ticket to the Westin valet, and he wheels out my Segway from behind the concierge desk. There's still the Pennsylvania State Society ball to get to, and we could try to catch the celebs as they leave the Creative Coalition ball. Let's keep this thing rolling, people!

I make it 100 yards before the Segway's battery conks out. I restart it, wringing out the last drops of juice, which get me another block or two. And then it's totally dead. Game over.

Final tally: seven balls. I'm no competition for President Obama, who was scheduled to visit 10. But then, he had a motorcade to ferry him around. In the end, it was my trusty Segway that did me in.

I check my watch. Just past midnight. Which seems fitting, because my coach has turned into a pumpkin. I drag the limping machine the last few blocks to my apartment—a valet ticket still hanging from the cup holder, fluttering in the breeze.

dispatches

Two Women Named Betty

Watching the inauguration with the crowd on the Mall.

By Emily Bazelon

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 4:28 PM ET

I'm hearing tales of angry crowds from my colleagues, but we were docile and fervent on my unticketed patch of inauguration

earth and pavement just west of the Washington Monument. We stood close together and blocked the wind. No one could see the Capitol rotunda, or even really imagine where it was out there in the distance, exactly. But we were on a rise, and we had our JumboTron, and the two women in front of me who wouldn't let anyone tall block our view.

Those women were sisters, Betty and Joyce, from Raleigh, N.C. Betty had decided to make this trip the day after the November election. She was staying with her daughter Remi, who works in D.C. at a nonprofit on U Street. Remi stood next to her mother in a black wool cap. "I went to Howard, and I majored in African-American studies, and I've been saying, 'Why am I still in D.C.?' " she said. "Now today, this is why."

"I wish my daughter had come, too," said the woman Remi was talking to. Her name was also Betty, and she had traveled from Seattle with her husband, Owen, who was hiding behind an Inauguration 2009 ski mask.

Betty from Raleigh, who is black, was wearing a fake brown fur coat, track shoes, and a white wool hat. Betty from Seattle, who is white, had short red hair, a black hood, and a purple bandanna to wave. The two women figured out they had the same name before I came along and introduced each other to me. We stood for the next two hours in a small huddle of Betty fellowship. It encompassed the passing around of pieces of a granola bar (Betty from Raleigh) and Kleenex (Betty from Seattle).

Behind us, a family of four from Brooklyn sat down on the ground for a few minutes so that Ebony, the mother, could feed her 4-year-old son, Miles, and 2-year-old daughter, Savannah, small plastic pineapple cups. Miles looked behind him and pointed to the Washington Monument. "Daddy, how did Barack Obama build that?" he wanted to know. My friend Rachel, who'd come from Vermont to hang in the crowd with me, shared a laugh with Miles' father, Wes, and she and I tried not to worry that the kids would freeze. (They didn't.)

On the JumboTron, familiar faces began to appear. The first one to get a real cheer was Ted Kennedy, and then the whoop for Colin Powell rippled long and loud. There was a lull for the pageantry of Congress and the vice presidents, and the Betties and Joyce started talking. "Were you close growing up?" Betty from Seattle asked Betty and Joyce. "We shared the same bed, and I couldn't move my head because she has to feel my breath," Betty from Raleigh answered. "She would cry and my mother would say 'What's wrong?' and I'd say 'All I did was move my head!' And she'd say, 'Well then put it back the way it was for her.' " Joyce nodded. Then Betty from Raleigh told us about how she'd gone to Woodstock, and Betty from Seattle confided that she and Owen had celebrated their 29th wedding anniversary the day before.

On the JumboTron, the announcer intoned, "Please be seated," which got a big laugh from everyone around me, as we swayed and tapped our feet for relief from the cold. A man in a white hood said with authority, "There just about 2 million people here," and before anyone could point out that there was no way to know that, he added, "Here, I'll count them: 1, 2, 3 ..." That got another big laugh.

When about-to-be ex-Vice President Dick Cheney came out in his wheelchair, the crowd gave a rumble—not a sustained boo so much as a low thunder of disapproval. President Bush got a bigger rumble. No one was in the mood to thank him for the gift of his departure. And then, finally, after huge cheers for Malia and Sasha and Michelle, the crowd got who it wanted: Obama, walking forward unsmiling, lips pressed together. Betty from Seattle waved her purple bandanna and then cried into it. There was so much somber longing on the faces around me that I started to feel like I was at a wedding, waiting for the groom to say "I do." As in, I do promise to love and honor you, all of you who waiting for me out there.

But first came Rick Warren. He gave the crowd something it wanted, too: the chance to participate. When he came to the Lord's Prayer, people said the words along with him. Some bowed their heads. Some looked straight ahead. One woman behind me raised her face to the January heavens.

Then it was Barack Obama's turn to participate. And if he didn't pledge marriage, he did promise to be there, alongside us, for the next four years. It didn't matter that he and Chief Justice Roberts [stepped over each other's lines](#)—Obama's promise was all some of his thronged supporters needed to hear. Before the inaugural address began, the two Bettys hugged—a real hug—and then Betty and Joyce slipped away.

dispatches

The President's Last Goodbye

Slate crashes Bush's farewell party.

By Christopher Beam

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 1:47 PM ET

You can often tell a party by its parties. This week, Democrats are feting the incoming chief with top-shelf DJs, valet parking, and more coat checks than coats. Republicans, on the other hand, seem to be partying on a tight budget, [if at all](#).

Such was the case Sunday night at Glen Echo Park in Maryland, where outgoing administration officials gathered for a final send-off. (Well, almost final: They'll see Bush off Tuesday at Andrews Air Force Base.) Everyone from the lowliest White House aides to President Bush himself was there, many of them

bundled in coats, chomping on barbecue, knocking back Buds, and dressed in the "very casual attire" the invitation called for.

The party, dubbed "Crossing the Finish Line" and held in the park's giant Spanish Ballroom, was organized by outgoing White House Chief of Staff Josh Bolten and his predecessor, Andy Card.

The venue had been somewhat controversial, according to attendees. There was no heating, so a lot of bodies were needed. "Due to the historic nature of the venue, there are limitations on what can be done in terms of climate control," the hosts warned in an e-mail. "DO: Wear layers and coats. DON'T: Dress like you're going to Gold Cup or Smith Point."

Apparently some of the more climate-controlled venues had been taken. "There weren't a lot [of places] available," said Card. "There weren't a lot of bands available, either."

"Are these all white people—I mean White House people?" I asked someone in a genuine Freudian slip. Turned out the crowd was a mix of alumni from the White House, State Department, Treasury, and Justice and a few campaign workers. The mood felt more sweet than bitter. Many staffers had spent the weekend clearing out their offices. The question I kept hearing was "What's next?" Some were applying to grad schools, others were heading to D.C. law firms or think tanks, and others were returning to their home states or traveling. One outgoing Treasury employee had already landed a job as a manager at Abercrombie & Fitch.

As I stood in line for barbecue, Dana Perino came over to greet some friends. "I'm starting to breathe!" she said. I asked her for a comment on the party. "It's a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the outgoing administration and reminisce in casual clothes," she said.

Indeed, Bolten made the rounds in a bright-purple fleece, while Card sported a tweed blazer. Karl Rove, afloat in a gaggle of camera-toting staffers, rocked a cap from the 2004 Bush campaign.

I told Rove I was following him [on Twitter](#). (Most recent tweet: "Heading to an Alumni BBQ.") "They let you in?" he asked when I said I was a reporter. He wouldn't go on the record, but we agreed to talk when I get a job with Fox News.

Condoleezza Rice showed up briefly, and Alberto Gonzales was milling around with his wife, Rebecca. His left eye was bloodshot. He asked how I got in, but I could not recall.

"I hope you make it out of here alive," he said.

Around 8 p.m., the band stepped off, and Card took the stage. "We've been blessed to work for a phenomenal president," he said to cheers. "The president invites the best and the brightest to help, and many of us fooled someone to get there. But there's someone who really is the best and the brightest, and that's Josh Bolten."

Applause as Bolten took the mic. "We've had a lot of blessings," he said, one of which is "to have each other. ... If ever there was a group to leave government with their heads held high, this is it."

He then introduced "two special guests," Laura and George W. Bush. Huge cheers as entrance music blasted. People waved giant cutouts of the letter W.

"So we're no longer sprinting to the finish—we're dancing to the finish," Bush said once the crowd calmed down.

"This is objectively the finest group of people ever to serve our country," he said. "Not to serve me, not to serve the Republican Party, but the United States of America."

"I am glad we made this journey," he went on. Then he engaged in a little reminiscence. "Remember the time in 2003 when Bartlett came to work all hung over?" Laughs. "Nothing ever changes."

He continued: "We never shruck—"

"Shirked!" someone yelled.

"Shirked," Bush corrected, smiling. "You might have shirked; I shrucked. I mean we took the deals head on."

"It has been an awesome eight years," he went on. "The days are long, but the years are short. ... If you ever want a nice meal, come and knock on our door in Dallas, Texas." He waved goodbye over the opening chords of "Don't Stop Believin'."

On the way out, I picked up a form to join the [Bush-Cheney Alumni Association](#), which promises to "provide up-to-date news on the Bushes' and Cheney's post-White House activities." Apparently it's only for "employees, appointees, and interns of President George W. Bush ... as well as campaign donors and volunteers." Then again, so was the party.

explainer

Microsoft Oval Office

Will President Obama have a personal computer?

By Nina Shen Rastogi

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:35 PM ET

Barack Obama completed his first full day as president on Wednesday. [Pictures of the historic occasion](#) showed Obama sitting at a gleaming Oval Office desk. Will all that empty space eventually be filled by a personal computer?

Probably not, if recent history is a guide—neither Bill Clinton nor George W. Bush had a dedicated office computer. On Thursday afternoon, [the White House did confirm](#) that Obama will keep a BlackBerry to communicate with a small group of friends and senior staff. Before Obama, presidents had gone without e-mail, both to keep their messages secure from hackers as well as to sidestep the Presidential Records Act of 1978, which requires that all correspondence be archived and eventually made available to the public. (Plus, it helps keep them focused on the job at hand; all documents that arrive at the office, from bills to birthday cards, get filtered by the [staff secretary](#).) Ultimately, it's the president's decision whether he wants a computer, one he makes under advisement from the White House counsel and, most likely, the White House Communication Agency, the Department of Defense office that handles his classified correspondence.

Even if he doesn't have a desktop computer, Obama will still be able to go online now and again while he's on the job. The president has a fleet of computer-equipped staffers [sitting directly outside his office doors](#). President Bush sometimes used the computers of these personal aides to check news reports or sports scores. (He also had a personal computer at his Crawford ranch, which he used for limited personal surfing.)

Obama might bring a laptop into the Oval Office, as Bill Clinton did on occasion, and plug it into the office's Internet connection. (You can see a picture of Clinton ordering his Christmas ham online on a White House computer—complete with a big, clunky mouse—at the 1:21 mark in [this video](#).) There is no Wi-Fi in the White House, but you can get online in Air Force One, as Bush did when he hosted an "[Ask the White House](#)" Q&A while returning from a trip to the Middle East.

Clinton famously sent [only two e-mails](#) while he was president, one to test whether he could push the "send" button and one to John Glenn, sent while the former Ohio senator was aboard the space shuttle. Glenn's response—titled "Senator Glenn's message from space"—was sent to the generic [president@whitehouse.gov](#) e-mail address before getting routed through staff secretary [Phillip Caplan](#) and then, presumably, printed out and delivered to the president.

During his presidency, George W. Bush didn't have a personal log-in to the White House Internet server, nor did he have a

personal whitehouse.gov e-mail address. (He gave up his private e-mail account, G94B@aol.com, just before his first inauguration.) When he did go online, there were some things he couldn't access. During Bush's tenure, the White House's IT department blocked sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and most of MySpace. The ability to comment on blogs was blocked, as was certain content that was deemed offensive. According to David Almay, who served as Bush's director for Internet and e-communications from 2005-07, only two people had access to the iTunes store during that period: Almay, who had to upload speeches to the site, and the president's personal aide, so that he could download songs for Bush's iPod.

In 2003, the [Executive Office of the President](#) approved a policy prohibiting, among other things, the use of nonofficial e-mail programs and instant messaging systems on official White House computers. (See page 11 of this [PDF](#).) This could potentially change under the Obama administration, but as the *Washington Post* [reports today](#), it will probably be a few days before the Explainer can get someone from the administration to comment, as staffers are currently having trouble getting their phone lines and e-mail accounts properly connected.

Got a question about today's news? [Ask the Explainer](#).

Explainer thanks David Almay of Waggener Edstrom Worldwide, Ben Bain of Federal Computer Week, Meredith Fuchs of the National Security Archive, former National Economic Council staffer Jon Lieber, tech journalist Evan Ratliff, and former Bush personal aide Jared Weinstein.

explainer

One Ecstatic Inauguration Attendee, Two Ecstatic Inauguration Attendees

How do you measure a crowd?

By Juliet Lapidos

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 6:24 PM ET

Vast crowds filled the National Mall on Tuesday to watch Barack Obama take the [oath of office](#). Official figures have not yet been released, but there's [widespread speculation](#) that yesterday's event broke the attendance record set by the 1.2 million people who [supposedly](#) showed up at Lyndon B. Johnson's inauguration. The Associated Press estimated Tuesday's assembled masses at "[more than 1 million](#)," the *Washington Post* projected [1.8 million](#), and CBS reported "[between 1.8 million and 2 million](#)." How do you measure a crowd?

Basic arithmetic. Estimates depend on three variables: the area of the available space, the proportion of the space that's occupied, and the crowd's density. While the first measurement is objective, and the second fairly easily determined with aerial photography, the third is a little trickier. It's customary to assume that in a very crowded place (like a commuter train during peak hours) people occupy 2.5 square feet, whereas in a looser gathering each person takes up more like 5 square feet.

This area-based method dates back to the late 1960s. After rowdy students gathered at Berkeley's Sproul Hall Plaza in December 1966 as part of the Free Speech Movement, police estimated a crowd of 7,000 to 10,000. Newspapers repeated the range, but readers were skeptical. Then Herbert A. Jacobs, a Berkeley professor, tried to arrive at a more exact figure using an enlarged aerial photograph of the demonstration. He divided the photograph into 1-inch squares and counted heads using a magnifying glass, eventually reaching a total estimate of 2,804. So that he wouldn't need to repeat this painstaking process, he deduced the average square footage taken up by each student—about 4 square feet at a tightly packed outdoor event—and confirmed this estimate at subsequent rallies.

Thanks to advances in aerial digital photography and computer image-processing, it's now possible to get a fairly exact head count—without a magnifying glass. As Farouk El-Baz of Boston University explained in a 2003 *Wired* article, the best way to obtain an accurate image is to fly over the assembly at peak time and take a digital photograph (resolution 1 foot per pixel) from 2,000 feet or less. Using satellite images, an [Arizona State University professor calculated](#) that about 800,000 people attended the inauguration Tuesday—considerably fewer than the AP estimate (based on photographs and comparison with past events) and less than half the *Washington Post* number (based primarily on security agencies on the ground).

The National Park Service announced prior to the inauguration that they would, eventually, release official attendance figures—which is unusual. In 1995, there was a public disagreement between the Park Police and Louis Farrakhan over the [Million Man March](#). The Park Police, using pictures taken from a helicopter, gauged the crowd at 400,000, whereas Farrakhan insisted more than 1 million were in attendance, and he threatened to sue. Shortly thereafter, Congress told the Park Service to stop issuing estimates.

Got a question about today's news? [Ask the Explainer](#).

explainer

Does the Kevlar Number Come in a French Cuff?

Obama was wearing "bullet-resistant clothing." What's that?

By Juliet Lapidos

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 4:52 PM ET

Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th president on Tuesday under tight security. He rode to the Capitol in an armored Cadillac limo, spoke behind a protective glass shield, and wore "[bullet-resistant clothing](#)." Is that the same thing as a bulletproof vest?

Not quite. The vests familiar from cop shows and news footage of SWAT teams are manufactured to be maximally effective with no consideration for how they might look under a dress shirt. It's unclear what brand of body armor Obama sported at the inauguration, but several companies produce discreet, thinner vests that can be worn underneath clothing, inserted into an outer layer (like a coat) or woven into a shirt. [Miguel Caballero](#), a Colombian company, makes bullet-resistant leather jackets, polo shirts, Windbreakers, and ruffled tuxedo shirts, which range from a few hundred dollars to \$7,000 in price. There is a trade-off between efficacy and subtlety since, as a rule, it's more expensive to manufacture thin-but-reliable vests and shirts.

No soft material can provide *complete* security against all types of bullets or multiple hits in the same place (which is why the term *bulletproof* is out of vogue), but the [National Institute of Justice](#) (the Department of Justice's research agency) has developed standards for determining to what extent a product is "resistant." Type IIA armor, for example, should protect against a 9 mm-caliber, full-metal-jacketed, round-nose bullet traveling at 373 meters per second. Type IIIA (the highest standard for a flexible, as opposed to a hard, material) protects against a 357 SIG flat-nose bullet fired at a velocity of 448 meters per second.

One of the more common fabrics used in bullet-resistant vests is [Kevlar](#), a lightweight, synthetic fiber that's about five times stronger than a piece of steel of the same weight. Manufacturers use very dense strands of Kevlar—500 to 1,500 filaments per strand of yarn—and weave it into a netting. Then they cover the weave with a plastic film.

To test body armor, lab technicians coat the inside of the fabric with clay. Then they fire bullets at it. A proper bullet-resistant shirt or vest should not only stop the bullet (i.e., not tear) but also prevent a dent in the clay of more than 44 mm—a larger dent indicates a dangerously high energy transfer, which could result in fatal [blunt-force trauma](#).

Got a question about today's news? [Ask the Explainer](#).

Explainer thanks Tom Dragone of Point Blank Solutions.

explainer

Why Doesn't Every President Use the Lincoln Bible?

And other tidbits about the Inauguration Day scripture.

By Noreen Malone

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 5:26 PM ET

Barack Obama will be sworn in as president Tuesday with the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln used for his first inauguration. As his transition team noted in its press release, "[President-elect Obama will be the first President sworn in using the Lincoln Bible since its initial use in 1861](#)." Why haven't other presidents used the historic artifact?

Because the Library of Congress didn't offer it up. The Bible, which was given to Lincoln by the clerk of the Supreme Court, is part of the permanent rare-books collection of the library. Other presidents probably could have used the Lincoln Bible if they'd asked for it, but LoC staffers proposed the idea themselves shortly after Obama's election. The library already has plans to mount an exhibition of its vast cache of Lincolniana to coincide with the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, Feb. 12. The newly famous inauguration Bible will go on display directly following its use by Obama.

There are no particular rules on which Bible is used or how it's used for the ceremony. Up until Grover Cleveland, inaugurations were not BYOB—presidents arrived at the ceremony with the assumption a Bible would be provided for them. It's since become common for incoming executives to use their family Bibles, though a handful have opted for the [Masonic Bible](#) upon which George Washington swore his oath of office. That book is housed in New York City at [the lodge](#) that lent the Bible to Washington in the first place. The only other inauguration Bible held by the Library of Congress belonged to Chester A. Arthur, a gift of his descendents. Most inauguration Bibles belong either to the families of the presidents or to their presidential libraries or archives.

According to official records kept by the Architect of the Capitol, Teddy Roosevelt is the only president who wasn't sworn in using a Bible; he took a rushed oath of office in 1901 following the assassination of William McKinley. However, it's rumored that LBJ was sworn in using a [Catholic missal](#) aboard Air Force One after Kennedy's assassination. John Quincy Adams, according to his own letters, placed his hand on a constitutional law volume rather than a Bible to indicate where his fealty lay. Franklin Pierce "affirmed" rather than swore his

oath on the Bible, reportedly because of a crisis of faith following his son's death. There are no known inauguration Bibles for presidents John Adams through John Tyler; in fact, there's no concrete evidence that those early presidents used a Bible at all for the oath.

If the weather's bad enough, Obama might lose the chance to use the Lincoln Bible. George W. Bush wanted to use the Washington Bible for his first inauguration, as his father had done, but the plan was foiled by drizzly weather. The Masons are extremely careful with the Washington Bible: They refuse to let the artifact be X-rayed at airport security and demand that the president be the only one who touches it without gloves. The LoC takes [similar precautions](#) with its artifacts. Rain or snow (provided it's not bad enough to [force an indoor ceremony](#)) would probably force Obama to scramble for another Bible.

Bonus Explainer: Which members of the new Obama administration have to take an oath of office? All of them. Every federal employee, whether a vice president, Cabinet member, staff assistant, or postal worker, must take the [same oath](#) to support and defend the Constitution. That rule was established in U.S. Code in 1789 and has been slightly tweaked since then. The presidential oath of office is stipulated in the Constitution.

Got a question about today's news? [Ask the Explainer](#).

Explainer thanks Clark Evans of the Library of Congress.

explainer

How Not To Get Trampled at the Inauguration

Don't go with the flow.

By Amanda Ripley

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 4:11 PM ET

Nobody really knows how many people will throng the nation's capital for Barack Obama's inauguration, but the city's population is [expected to double or triple](#) at least. What should you do if you find yourself in a crowd crush?

Don't go with the flow. The way people die in crowd crushes is not from trampling but from asphyxiation—the force of five people moving forward is enough to collapse the lung of an adult on the receiving end. The best way to avoid that fate is to move gradually sideways or backward, out of the human flow, at the earliest sign of trouble. The trick is to know what those signs are. Once you are in obvious peril, it's usually too late.

The earliest warning of a crowd crush is the absence of organizers, police officers (especially mounted police, who have the long view), barriers, or signs and loudspeakers. If you don't see any of these, consider turning back. Crowds are rarely belligerent, but they can become deadly if, for example, there's no way to announce that someone has fallen down and everyone must take a step back.

Huge crowds can be very safe, and small crowds can be deadly. In general, four people per square meter is a safe ratio. If you see more than that—especially in a moving crowd—it's a good idea to get out of the way. Otherwise, if someone jostles you, you won't have room to stick a foot out to stabilize yourself. If you fall, other people may trip over you, creating a pileup. Meanwhile, the rest of the crowd will continue to surge forward, unaware of your situation, and the pressure will build.

Another, more overt sign of danger is the sensation of being touched on all four sides. That's the time to work your way to the margin of the crowd. After that, the last opportunity to escape may be when you feel shock waves travel through the crowd. This happens when people at the back push forward, but the people at the front have no where to go.

If you feel the crowd sway like this, you are in serious danger. Wait until the crowd stops moving and then inch your way sideways and backward, zigzagging to safety. Just as you might swim back to shore in the ocean, try to navigate during the pause between waves.

Got a question about today's news? [Ask the Explainer](#).

Explainer thanks traffic engineer John J. Fruin and G. Keith Still of Crowd Dynamics Ltd.

fiction

All Along, This Was What Was Supposed To Happen

An inauguration novella.

By Curtis Sittenfeld

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 7:23 AM ET

From: Curtis Sittenfeld

Subject: Yes, We Did

Posted Tuesday, January 13, 2009, at 7:04 PM ET

Listen to Curtis Sittenfeld read Part 1 of her novella here:

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Standing in the arrivals area of the Philadelphia airport, waiting for her 77-year-old Aunt Lettie to come into view, Patrice thinks that it's not that she wasn't thrilled about the outcome of the election—of course she was, how could she not be?—nor is it that she wasn't planning to celebrate the inauguration. It's just that she wasn't planning to *attend* it. She'd seen the news reports: up to 2 million people converging on the capital. Ten thousand charter buses and 11,000 U.S. troops and (this to Patrice was the biggest deterrent) more than 12,000 porta-potties. Both blessed and cursed with an acute sense of smell, Patrice has more than once, when alone and walking by a construction site, actually crossed a street to avoid passing within a few feet of a porta-potty's stench. And besides that, what would any normal person, without special access, be able to see at the inauguration? The question wasn't whether you'd have a view of the swearing-in but whether you'd even have a view of a Jumbotron.

No, Patrice was happy to stay in Philadelphia and toast history from the comfort of her own apartment. She was going to take the day off work, and so were Renee and Corinne, and the three of them were going to order in lunch and watch at Patrice's place—Patrice has the best television, a 40-inch flat screen—and probably they were going to cry a lot and intermittently pat or grip one another's hands and ponder the incredibility of it all and discuss Michelle Obama's outfit; that's pretty much everything they did on election night, except that then they ordered in dinner instead of lunch and drank champagne that Corinne had brought.

Watching the inauguration on TV with her two closest friends sounded to Patrice like a fine plan, a grand plan, even, but shortly after Christmas, her cousin Janet called from St. Louis. "You know I hate to lean on you," Janet said after they'd exchanged pleasantries and Patrice felt a gathering of dread below her sternum; Janet has never hated to lean on anyone, least of all Patrice. "William got his dates mixed up is what happened," Janet continued. "Here he arranged a romantic getaway for the two of us—and Patty, you *know* we haven't taken a vacation for years, just William and me—and he's so proud of himself when he tells me Christmas morning, and what do you know but the trip's the week of January 20th?"

Patrice said nothing; she still wasn't clear what exactly Janet was after.

"Well, Patty, that's Inauguration Day," Janet said. "Now, I'm sure you remember I was going to take Momma, and now I'm just in this terrible bind—"

"Have you asked Ernie or Steve?" Patrice interrupted. These were Janet's brothers.

"Oh, Ernie and his family were there in the living room on Christmas, but, Patty, he doesn't have the flexibility you do, and with Steve's kids all crazy now and you already there on the East Coast ..."

Of course: Reliably single, childless Patrice—why on earth *wouldn't* it be her pleasure to pick up the slack for her extended family or co-workers? It couldn't be that she chose her situation, could it? To live alone at the age of 48 in a high-rise in downtown Philadelphia, to work 60-hour weeks as a senior vice president of the nation's largest cable provider, to not even own a cat? It could only be that she settled on this life because of a lack of other options, right? (Or else—Patrice knew from Janet's clumsily faux-open-minded inquiries that this was an ongoing source of speculation—could it be that Patrice was a lesbian? The answer, which she denies her relatives the pleasure of learning, is that, no, she's not.)

By this point in the conversation, Patrice had mostly tuned out her cousin—she caught a reference to Cancun as the vacation destination, as well as a few more explanations and buttery, pre-emptive expressions of gratitude—and then there was a silence, and she knew the request had formally been made. "I'll look at my calendar," she said. "I'll call you back, all right?" This, Patrice had learned the hard way, was how you declined to do a favor, or at least how she did, because when she answered in the moment, she was inclined to say yes, and once she'd said yes, she felt obligated to go through with it.

"Absolutely, you pray on it." Janet lowered her voice. "It's Momma's dying wish. Not that she's dying, but, really, Patty, that's the only way to put it, and can you blame her? I'm disappointed myself not to go, but I'm between a rock and a hard place."

Oh, really? Patrice thought. *So which one is Cancun?*

She walked to her living room's sliding glass door, which opened onto a narrow balcony. Her apartment, on the 17th floor of a building on Spruce Street, was less than a block off Broad, and on election night, she and Renee and Corinne had walked outside and waved down at the revelers who'd congregated on Broad after Pennsylvania was called for Obama; the celebrating was still going strong when Patrice went to bed around midnight, and it was such a wonderful sound to hear that she purposely didn't turn on her white-noise machine.

But being overjoyed that Obama had won wasn't the same as wanting to escort Aunt Lettie to the inauguration. Apart from what was sure to be the madness of Washington, there was also the fact that Patrice and Aunt Lettie had never been each other's

favorites. Growing up in a duplex in suburban St. Louis, the other half occupied by her aunt, uncle, and cousins, Patrice had always known they considered her and her younger sister, Brenda, to be a bit prissy. Even as a very young girl, Patrice had been meticulous about keeping her clothes clean, and one of her earliest memories was of Aunt Lettie mocking her after Patrice declined baked beans at a family cookout for fear of spilling them on her pink pants; the youthful Patrice had also earned her relatives' scorn for not only memorizing the spelling of the word *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* but for frequently offering to recite it.

Patrice and her sister's separation from their cousins was exacerbated when, at a teacher's suggestion, first Patrice and then Brenda enrolled at a parochial high school instead of the public one, which led to their attending out-of-state colleges—Wellesley in Patrice's case—which in turn led to both of them going to graduate school, Patrice at Wharton. Neither of them has lived in St. Louis since high school. Brenda has been in London for more than a decade, married to a Senegalese-French man, and they're the parents of 9-year-old twins. Patrice and Brenda's father, an electrician, died of colon cancer in 1985, when Patrice was in her second year at Wharton; when her mother, a retired nurse, developed Alzheimer's in 1998, Patrice and Brenda paid for her to live in a top-of-the-line assisted care facility in the Clayton suburb of St. Louis, and until her mother's death in 2002, Patrice flew in to visit every other weekend and arranged for the delivery of fresh flowers on the weekends she wasn't there.

As Patrice held the phone to her ear and looked beyond her balcony—her view faced south, toward the stadiums and the shipyards on the Delaware River—it was hard not to imagine what her mother would want in this situation. In her quiet way, Patrice's mother had acknowledged that Aunt Lettie could be overbearing ("Lettie speaks her mind" was how Patrice's mother would put it), but still, to her, family was family—you shoveled out their car when you were shoveling out your own, you called to see whether they wanted to go along when you were getting Saturday lunch at the Chinese buffet. Patrice's mother would be shocked, Patrice thought, if she knew neither of her daughters had even gone back to St. Louis for Christmas this year. *Don't be selfish, Patty*, her mother would tell her in this moment, and her mother's voice would be not nagging but calm and generous, the voice of the person who had always believed in Patrice most. *A porta-potty never hurt anyone. Take Aunt Lettie to see Barack Obama.*

"Let's leave it like this," Janet was saying. "You call me in a day or two after you've—"

"Wait." Even as she spoke, Patrice winced, but at least Janet wouldn't be able to see. "I'll do it," she said.

Aunt Lettie, Patrice notes with alarm when at last she comes into view on the far side of the airport's security checkpoint, is not walking; rather, she's being pushed in a wheelchair, something Patrice has never witnessed of her aunt and a detail Janet neglected to mention over the phone. Patrice swallows, steeling herself, and walks forward. "Aunt Lettie," she calls as warmly as she can manage—after all, it's not *really* Aunt Lettie's fault Janet dumped her on Patrice. Aunt Lettie wears large plastic glasses and a wig Patrice hasn't seen before, a short full, model with auburn highlights, and she smiles broadly at Patrice, waves, and says something over one shoulder to the airport employee—a heavyset white woman—who's pushing her chair.

As they approach, Patrice also sees that Aunt Lettie is holding her cane so it rests diagonally across her body (which means she *can* walk, doesn't it? because otherwise why would she still need a cane?) and that it's wrapped in alternating red and blue streamers. A large Obama pin hangs on the collar of Aunt Lettie's black wool coat—Obama grinning broadly and pointing with his index finger beneath the words "I Proudly Voted for President Barack Obama 11/4/08"—and under her coat, which is open, Aunt Lettie wears a sweatshirt featuring a Barack Obama-Martin Luther King Jr. montage. Patrice herself has acquired no Obama merchandise, not during the election or since; she just isn't much of a pin-wearer, and living in the middle of the city, she doesn't own a car on which to affix a bumper sticker.

"There she is," Aunt Lettie says loudly as she's wheeled closer. "Patty Wilson, you come here and give me a hug."

Patrice leans over, inhaling the honeyed scent of shea butter. She feels for a moment as if it's her mother she's embracing, and she must blink back tears.

When Patrice has righted herself, Aunt Lettie continues to clasp both her hands, looking her up and down, and she says, "Baby, I don't know what you're doing, but keep right on doing it! You look fabulous!"

Excuse me? Patrice thinks. Has she ever, in 48 years, been greeted this enthusiastically by her aunt?

Then Aunt Lettie says, "Patty, are you ready to go to Washington, D.C., for the celebration of our lifetimes? Patty, yes, we did! Yes, we did, baby!"

In spite of herself, Patrice giggles, exchanging amused glances with the airport employee. So apparently, all these years, all it would have taken for Aunt Lettie to be transformed into a sunnily uncritical presence was the election of a black president.

"Ma'am, we need to go downstairs to baggage claim," the airport employee says, but, unexpectedly, Aunt Lettie stands. Glancing disdainfully at the wheelchair, she says, "I don't need that thing,

that's just Janet getting herself worked up. Patty, you and me, we can carry one little suitcase between us, can't we?"

Patrice nods; she is more relieved than she cares to let on that Aunt Lettie is still ambulatory. She takes her aunt's surprisingly heavy black leather pocketbook and hitches it onto one shoulder, and Aunt Lettie holds her cane in her right hand. Should Patrice tip the airport employee? She errs on the side of assuming she should, slipping the woman a \$5 bill. "What was that for?" Aunt Lettie asks before the woman has moved more than a few feet away. "That's what she's paid to do, Patty. You're just a pushover like your momma."

They collect Aunt Lettie's suitcase without incident and climb in a cab to Center City; they'll have lunch at Patrice's apartment before catching their midafternoon train to D.C. They'll be staying not in a hotel but in an apartment a few blocks off Dupont Circle that Janet's son found for them on Craigslist. Patrice is trying to remain open-minded, but she is uneasy about the fact that no matter the apartment's condition, they won't have other options.

As their cab crosses the Schuylkill River, Aunt Lettie leans forward and says to the driver, "Young man, I can tell you're as excited as my niece and I are about President Obama."

"Aunt Lettie," Patrice murmurs, before she can really stop herself. Yes, the driver is black—he looks about 30—but still.

"What? He's not hiding it." Aunt Lettie points to where an Obama-themed air freshener, a cardboard rectangle with that distinctive O, hangs from the driver's rearview mirror.

The driver looks back and grins at them. In thickly accented English, he says, "Indeed, I am as excited as you are."

Coming [tomorrow](#): Patrice and Aunt Lettie make enemies and friends on the train to D.C.

From: Curtis Sittenfeld
Subject: Got Hope?

Posted Thursday, January 15, 2009, at 6:48 AM ET

Listen to Curtis Sittenfeld read Part 2 of her novella [here](#):

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Yesterday, the Obama and Biden families departed by train from Philadelphia for Washington in an elegantly choreographed bit of political theater. Today, the Philadelphia train station is chaos. Patrice had anticipated as much and gotten them there more than an hour in advance of their departure time, but still, when their gate listing appears on the sign in the station center, they end up in the rear half of a long, snaking line that she checks three times to confirm is the correct one. Today is Sunday, almost 48 hours before the inauguration ceremony, so she suspects the crowds will only get worse between now and then, but already rumors are swirling that all of the trains en route from Boston and New York are overflowing. "Why don't you sit on that bench over there, and I'll hold our place?" Patrice says, but Aunt Lettie declines; she has struck up a conversation with a husband and wife behind them, a couple from West Philly who are telling her they have it on good authority from their minister that the Obamas will be acquiring a labradoodle because those are good dogs for someone with Malia's allergies. More people than not are wearing variations on Aunt Lettie's Obama apparel, hats and pins and shirts. Is anyone present *not* headed for the inauguration?

In one way, Patrice is reminded of the time seven or eight years ago when she agreed to join her friend Corinne in the Broad Street Run, Philadelphia's annual 10-mile road race. In the morning, as she and Corinne rode the subway to the start of the race, she kept looking around at the other passengers, all of them in shorts and spandex and race bibs, and thinking that no matter their age or appearance, they all in this moment had something in common—they had arrived in the same place, for the same reason. The difference this afternoon in the train station, though, is that unlike with the race, when she didn't care about doing anything but finishing, Patrice now feels like the people around her are her competition. They have something in common, something good, *and* she'll likely need to fight them for seats on the train. And maybe this is the reason she doesn't like crowds—that they bring out her own less-than-generous impulses. She wonders again how much of an uphill battle D.C. will be, how tricky will be the logistics of hailing a cab or finding a spot on the Metro, of obtaining food; she'd intended to buy snacks for herself and Aunt Lettie, granola bars and pretzels, as well as a nice big bottle of hand sanitizer, but she ended up having to go into work yesterday and didn't get to a store.

Riding the escalator down to the boarding platform while trying to balance both her own and Aunt Lettie's suitcases on the step, she bumps the man in front of her, who says over his shoulder in a gruff tone, "Watch it." Once they're on the train, it's moving before they can find seats, and then they're in the middle of a car, being pushed from both sides by other passengers, until there is total gridlock. *I knew it*, Patrice thinks. But a white girl, gesturing toward Aunt Lettie's streamer-bedecked cane, says to Patrice, "Does your mom want to sit down?" Patrice gratefully accepts on Aunt Lettie's behalf. When a second girl sitting next to the first one offers her own seat to Patrice, Patrice declines,

but the girl insists. She says, "We got on in Providence, so I'm ready to stretch my legs."

Of course, there's nowhere for the girls to go, so after they've stood, they just sort of park themselves in the aisle next to Patrice and Aunt Lettie, holding onto the top of the seats. "You folks from Philadelphia?" the first girl asks. She wears a navy blue bandanna that pushes back her hair and a long-sleeved T-shirt that says *Got Hope?* The other girl has on a sweatshirt that reads *O'Bama* in green letters and features a shamrock instead of an apostrophe between the letters O and B.

"I am." Patrice gestures toward Aunt Lettie. "She's from Missouri."

"Awesome," says Shamrock. "They—" she nods with her chin to the seats on the other side of the aisle—"flew in from Sweden. How cool is that? Hey, where are you guys staying?"

"Near Dupont Circle," Patrice says.

"In a hotel or with friends or what?" The girl could not possibly, Patrice thinks, be angling for a place to sleep. Could she?

"An apartment," Patrice says. "It's very small."

"Craigslist?" the girl asks, and when Patrice nods, the girl says, "That's totally what we did, too. We found a sweet place in Takoma Park—" *Thank God*, Patrice thinks, "—but the rates some people were charging, it's like, what the hell? Don't they have any sense of history?"

"I guess they'll charge whatever someone's willing to pay," Patrice says.

"Yeah, but \$15,000 a night?" This is the other girl—Bandanna—piping up. "Don't they know there aren't any Republicans coming to the inauguration?"

Patrice laughs. She knows which listings they're talking about—five-bedroom houses in Bethesda, Md., or massive Kalorama apartments that mention stainless-steel refrigerators and Jacuzzi tubs and even maid service. Which does raise the question, if you live in a place like that to begin with, do you really need the money you'd get from renting it out to strangers? Patrice personally can't imagine what amount she'd require in exchange for allowing people she's never met to sleep on her sheets and shower in her bathroom. Granting that she's uptight, it just seems overly personal and a little unsavory.

She had never ventured onto Craigslist before two weeks ago; perhaps it was a function of her age that she'd never felt the need. After Janet mentioned that Patrice and Aunt Lettie would

be staying in a place procured on the site, Patrice went online, hoping to see their actual apartment, but of course that listing had been removed. She poked around the other inaugural listings—"2065 / 3BR – STUNNING DOWNTOWN BROWNSTONE SLEEPS 6-12," or "5 SHORT BLOCKS TO THE WHITE HOUSE"—and then, with some mix of embarrassment and curiosity, she clicked over to the "casual encounters" section of the site's personals. She'd heard about this somewhere—was it from Renee or in an article?—and it wasn't as if she were going to act on any listings, but as long as she was in the area, why not learn more about the cultural phenomenon?

Which is how she found herself sitting alone in her apartment at 10:15 at night looking at penises. Actual penises! And these were under the "m4w" heading, not even the more complicated headings that she had to pause to decipher, like "t4mw." No, in the "men for women" section, you could click on a headline as innocuous-sounding as "Looking for Fun" and find yourself gazing at a disembodied, erect male member. Were there women out there who'd be tempted by this explicit greeting? Presumably so. *The world we live in*, Patrice thought wonderingly, half-appalled at the seediness and half-impressed at the gumption of the individuals who'd so brazenly go after what they wanted. Patrice's own forays into online dating, which had been of the decidedly more PG-rated variety, had mostly served to remind her of the pleasures of her own company: In the last eight years, she'd been told by three separate men—two were white, and one was black—that she reminded them of Condoleezza Rice, an observation to which she'd been tempted to respond, at least to the white men, by saying they reminded her of George W. Bush.

"Hey, did you guys hear about cell phones at the inauguration?" This is Shamrock speaking. "They think they're not going to work with so many people, so they're recommending texting instead. But honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if texting barely works, either."

Patrice turns to Aunt Lettie, who has been looking out the window at the industrial corridor on the outskirts of Philadelphia. "They're talking about cell phones," Patrice says. "I was thinking we could use mine to call the family during the inauguration, but she's saying the service won't be good."

"Oh, I've got a cell phone, too," Aunt Lettie says nonchalantly.

Patrice can't conceal her surprise. "You do? Did Janet get it for you for this trip?"

"Honey, I've had this for years." Aunt Lettie removes a silver model from her coat pocket, and when she unfolds it, the screen and number pad light up. "It's how I reach Janet to pick me up from bingo."

"Do you know how to text?" Shamrock asks. "I'll show you if you want." She is leaning over them, mostly over Patrice because she's in the aisle seat, and Shamrock says to her, "Do you know how to text?"

"I have a BlackBerry," Patrice says.

To give Aunt Lettie the lesson, Shamrock and Patrice switch places. It is as Shamrock is instructing Aunt Lettie—their heads bent together, Shamrock scrolling through Aunt Lettie's phone's options—that Patrice notices on the aisle floor a backpack, presumably Shamrock's, on which a triangular pink pin reading *Dykes for Obama* is attached to the outermost pocket. Ah, yes. Right. Not that Patrice particularly cares, but she isn't sure how Aunt Lettie would feel about the fact that the person at this very moment helping her type "DC or bust!!!" into her phone is a proud lesbian. "Then all you have to do is hit send," Shamrock says. "Voila!"

"Bless you, sweetheart." Aunt Lettie leans over and pulls a large Tupperware container from her pocketbook (no wonder it's so heavy). She peels off the lid and extends it toward Shamrock. "You want a lemon square, baby?"

Coming [tomorrow](#): A surprise awaits Patrice and Aunt Lettie in their Craigslist apartment.

From: Curtis Sittenfeld
Subject: Stars and Stripes Forever

Posted Friday, January 16, 2009, at 6:58 AM ET

Listen to Curtis Sittenfeld read Part 3 of her novella [here](#):

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Patrice and Aunt Lettie wait in line an hour and 20 minutes for a cab from Union Station to Dupont Circle; by 30 minutes in, Patrice wishes they'd just taken the Metro, but a cab seemed better with their suitcases and Aunt Lettie's cane, plus there's a rumor that one of the up escalators at Dupont Circle isn't working, and the stranger who told her this didn't know whether the escalator was at the northern or southern exit. The apartment she and Aunt Lettie are staying in is on 17th Street where it intersects New Hampshire and S—it's technically not on Dupont Circle at all but three or four blocks north. Patrice is curious how much her cousin Janet is paying and also how exactly Janet and her son selected this apartment. Was nothing available on Capitol Hill, which would have been a much shorter walk to the

Mall, or was it just more expensive? Or did it seem less safe? Patrice has already decided that she and Aunt Lettie will rise at 5 a.m. on Tuesday with the goal of getting to the Mall by 6 or 7; they'll have to walk because the Metro entrances will be blocked for people within 2 miles of the Mall.

It is dark outside as she and Aunt Lettie enter the apartment building using keys FedEx-ed to Patrice's office earlier this week, along with directions, from one Gretchen J. Shumacher. (Patrice was relieved to learn the apartment's usual inhabitant was a woman, because she thinks, perhaps unfairly, that women tend to be cleaner.) Though the building has two elevators in the lobby, just beyond the glass doors of the entrance, Gretchen J. Shumacher's apartment is on the first floor, down the left-hand corridor. All the keys work as per Gretchen J. Shumacher's written instructions, and the apartment turns out to be tidy, if plain and not particularly well-lighted. One bedroom holds a queen-size bed—this will be Aunt Lettie's—and the other bedroom features a foldout couch, its mattress extended and made up. This room also contains a large desk and a bookshelf filled with fat novels whose covers show dragons or men on horseback wielding swords; apparently, Gretchen J. Shumacher is a fantasy buff. *We're here*, Patrice thinks with gratitude.

Aunt Lettie has been subdued since the train ride, and Patrice suspects she's weary, so she offers to pick up food for dinner. Without unpacking, Patrice lets herself out of the apartment and the building and walks south toward Dupont Circle; she has visited Washington a dozen or so times in her life, usually for work, and she's stayed in this area but she doesn't know it well. She passes a Chinese takeout place that's full but, contrasting with other nearby establishments, doesn't have a crowd out the door, and she takes note of it as a possibility. The sidewalks are thick with people and festive energy, as if the city has become one extended block party. Police officers and military personnel are visible at corners, but even they don't detract from the celebratory mood in the air, and Patrice is struck by the thought that when, as a teenager in the suburbs of St. Louis, she imagined city life, this was what she pictured—this density and merriment—when in fact city life is hardly ever like this, or only for certain stretches on certain streets: Fifth Avenue in New York or Michigan Avenue in Chicago. In Philadelphia, she often takes a cab instead of walking home from Renee's place at night, even though it's only half a mile, because entire blocks can be empty, Patrice herself the only one out. *Where is everyone?* she always thinks in those moments.

As she approaches Dupont Circle, Patrice hears music, and then she sees the band on the far side of the fountain in the circle's center. There are 30 or 40 of them—as she gets closer, she realizes they're adults, not teenagers, as she thought when she was still across the street—and they're all black, wearing maroon uniforms and helmets with white tassels and white gloves. (They must be a marching band.) They're playing a rousing, totally

unironic version of "Stars and Stripes Forever," and they're wonderful.

Previously, Patrice has pondered just what it is Aunt Lettie wants from the trip, whether being in D.C. is enough, being on the Mall during the ceremony, or whether there's some more specific moment or sight she's hoping for, and now Patrice thinks, *This*. This is what Aunt Lettie has come for. Patrice must go get her, in spite of it being several blocks for Aunt Lettie to walk. And will the band have moved on by the time they get back? But it's people and music and patriotism—Barack Obama has been elected, and now he's about to be sworn in!—and she has to try.

Aunt Lettie is initially confused by Patrice's entreaty but amenable. She has been lying in Gretchen J. Shumacher's bed, watching CNN on the television on Gretchen J. Shumacher's bureau. "Wear your scarf," Patrice says. "I think the temperature has fallen."

Outside again, retracing her steps, she tries not to hurry Aunt Lettie, though her aunt's slow pace reinforces Patrice's worry that the band won't still be there by the time they arrive. In any case, she needs to be more careful in allotting Aunt Lettie's energy.

But the band is there. Now they're playing "Living in America," and some people are dancing, people of varying ages and races (is it jaded for Patrice to think she has rarely observed a scene like this outside a soda commercial?), and the people who aren't dancing are using video cameras or regular cameras or cell phones to document the people who are. Aunt Lettie leans over and says, "That girl must weigh 400 pounds. How *does* she blow on that thing?" She means a trombonist in the second row who is indeed large, though Patrice doubts she's 400 pounds. Does this comment mean Aunt Lettie isn't enjoying the performance?

"She must have strong lungs," Patrice says.

"Janet's sure getting fat, but you've kept your figure," Aunt Lettie says. "You ought to tell her to go on a diet."

Yeah, when hell freezes over, Patrice thinks. She gestures toward the band and says, "Aren't they good?" The musicians have segued into "Yankee Doodle," which delights the crowd.

Aunt Lettie turns her head, squinting for a moment at Patrice, then says, "Your momma couldn't understand why you never found a man, but I always said to her, 'Patty is a girl that knows herself and likes her own company, and ain't nothing wrong with that.'"

For several seconds, Patrice is speechless. Her relatives flit around this topic constantly when she's in their presence—if

she's being honest with herself, she can admit that it's the reason she's not in their presence more than once or twice a year—but they never land on it this squarely. And certainly no one ever defends her singleness; even her own sister, when she visits Brenda in London, says, "But don't you want someone to grow old with?" in a way that implies Patrice has been arguing against such a scenario. At last, because she still can't think of anything better to say, Patrice murmurs, "Thank you."

After dinner at the Chinese restaurant—Patrice anticipated getting takeout, but a table opened up, and they grabbed it—they return to the apartment, and Aunt Lettie gets ready for bed while Patrice sits in the living room typing a message to Corinne and Renee on her BlackBerry. Aunt Lettie spends a long time in the bathroom—Patrice can hear her humming to herself—and when Aunt Lettie's out, Patrice knocks on the door frame of the open bedroom. Aunt Lettie is sitting on the edge of the bed; she's wearing a long-sleeved, turtlenecked, pale-pink nightgown and has removed her wig. Her real hair is thin and mostly gray, smoothed back against her scalp. "Did you take your blood-pressure medicine?" Patrice asks. This is basically all Janet gave in the way of instructions.

"I sure did, baby," Aunt Lettie says.

"Do you need anything else?" Patrice asks. "Is the heat high enough?"

"I'm just fine." With effort, Aunt Lettie swings her feet up onto the mattress. Her ankles, Patrice notes, are heartbreakingly bony. Something about the absence of her wig makes her seem extra vulnerable, and Patrice considers tucking her in and kissing her forehead, but acting on this impulse would probably make them both uncomfortable.

From the doorway, Patrice says, "OK, well, sweet dreams. If you need me, just holler."

She crosses the apartment and opens the door to her own bedroom. She's pretty sure there's an overhead light, but she can't remember whether the switch is on the right or left, and she feels along the wall with her palm. Not there, not there, not there ... she extends her left arm, finds it, and flicks. When the room is illuminated, the head that pops up from a pillow on the far end of the pull-out couch is not in and of itself terrifying—it's the head of a genial but disoriented-looking middle-aged white man, a balding fellow with a bushy sand-colored mustache, wearing a blue T-shirt—but it's the fact of anyone there at all, of a stranger in this room, that makes Patrice shriek. She is so startled, so totally unprepared in this moment to stumble upon another person, that a scream of exceptional pitch and duration escapes from her mouth.

The man holds up both hands, palms out, as if in surrender. "Lady—" he starts to say even before her scream has ended, and then again, "Lady, relax. All we're doing is trying to get some sleep."

"Patty, what is it?" Aunt Lettie calls, followed by the sounds of her scrambling out of bed and then, it seems, knocking over her cane. "Lord have mercy," Patrice hears her aunt say.

He could not be an intruder, she tells herself, grasping at logic, willing her pounding heart to slow, her entire body to quit shaking. An intruder would conceal himself, waiting to pounce, or he'd be gathering silver or electronics to steal. He would not be sleeping. This is when another head pops up from the other side of the pull-out couch, causing Patrice to gasp anew. The second person is an adolescent boy with pale skin and shaggy brown hair and—the faint glitter takes her a second to discern—a hoop earring at the corner of his lower lip. He glares at Patrice. "Who the fuck are you?" he says.

Coming [Monday](#): The White House, racial tension, and porta-potties! Oh my!

From: Curtis Sittenfeld
Subject: Obamamaniacs

Posted Monday, January 19, 2009, at 7:02 AM ET

Listen to Curtis Sittenfeld read Part 4 of her novella [here](#):

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They are father and son. The father, apparently, is named Bruce; the son is Caleb. They drove here (yes, drove) from Nebraska: They left Lincoln yesterday morning, stayed last night at what Bruce cheerfully describes as a fleabag motel outside Toledo, then rose today at the crack of dawn and put in another 10 hours—hence their "hitting the sack," as Bruce also puts it, before 9 p.m. this evening. They're Obamaniacs who started volunteering for the campaign back in February '07, Bruce explains, and wild horses couldn't have kept them from the inauguration. Caleb has never visited Washington. Bruce worked on Capitol Hill during his idealistic youth—more years ago than he cares to remember—but he hasn't returned in decades, and he's excited as hell to see the back end of George W. Bush and celebrate the advent of change that's been far too long in coming.

This information emerges while Patrice stands in the doorway with her arms folded; Aunt Lettie stands behind her wigless and

nightgowned, peering into the room; Bruce perches on the edge of the foldout couch, above the covers, in his T-shirt and a pair of boxer shorts dotted with faded red hearts (it's not as if Patrice is looking, but the boxers are on clear display, along with his scrawny and rather hairy legs); and Caleb watches the women in a surly way before lying back down and pulling a pillow over his head. Caleb does not, to say the least, seem Obamaniacal.

Oh, and, Bruce adds, they took this bedroom because it seemed like the one that wasn't occupied, but if she and her mother would rather switch—?

There then ensues the part of the conversation when Bruce reveals that he was well-aware he and Caleb would be sharing this apartment with strangers. No mix-up occurred, no error—all along, this was what was supposed to happen. He can hardly believe what they're paying, Bruce says, but, hell, compared with some of the prices people are charging in this very neighborhood, it's a steal.

Patrice turns to Aunt Lettie—did Aunt Lettie also understand that this was the arrangement?

"Janet took care of everything," Aunt Lettie says.

"Is Craigslist a miracle or what?" Bruce is saying. "I gotta tell you, I hardly remember what any of us did before it." To her distress, Patrice immediately finds herself thinking of those penis pictures, wondering whether Bruce is the kind of man who'd post a photo like that. Is he married or single? Not, based on what she gleaned during her search, that being single is a prerequisite for posting penis pictures on Craigslist. But she merely nods in a noncommittal way as Bruce adds, "When Caleb's mom and I split up, I used Craigslist to furnish my new place for under a thousand bucks, no exaggeration. Some stuff people aren't even selling. They're just so glad you'll take it off their hands they're offering it free. With my pal Davey's truck, I was golden." This answers two separate questions, or at least sort of. "Tell you what," Bruce says, "Lemme get myself decent and come out in the living room, and we'll all have a glass of wine. Nothing a bottle of vino among new friends can't set right, eh?"

"You don't need to get up," Patrice says. "Really. I'll just move my suitcase out of here."

"No offense, ma'am, but after that blood-curdling scream, I'm not sure I *could* go back to sleep," Bruce says. "You don't by any chance make your living acting in horror movies, do you?"

Patrice realizes then, based on the ma'am, that she hasn't introduced herself. She says, "I'm Patrice Wilson, and this is my aunt, Miss Lettie." She pauses, and it feels like an awkward pause. Then she says, "We'll give you some privacy." She darts

into the room, picks up her suitcase, and carries it out, closing the door behind her.

How it is that Bruce and Caleb end up accompanying Patrice and Aunt Lettie on their walk to the White House on Monday Patrice isn't sure, but Bruce seems to assume that now they're all in this together and it feels too decisively rude to inform him otherwise. It occurs to Patrice that he might be the type of white person who's extra-pleased to be spending time at the Obama inauguration with actual, authentic black people, or, even worse, that he might try to strike up some earnest conversation about race. (She discusses race with Corinne and Renee, of course—the irritation of still, after all these years, being mistaken for her own assistant or just the slight eye-widening in professional situations that means the other person didn't imagine she'd be black; the expectation from total strangers that she'll be their sassy, finger-snapping girlfriend; the implicit and explicit signs she sometimes gets from other blacks that with her education and job and lifestyle, she has sold out—but these are certainly not topics she'd want to chew on with Bruce from Nebraska. Although there was a brief period at Wellesley when consciousness-raising seemed heady and well worth the effort, that was a long, long time ago.)

Caleb, who is 14, speaks little, especially in contrast to his voluble father, and Patrice wonders whether he is annoyed to find himself in the company of an old woman and a middle-aged one. "If you two would rather keep moving, go ahead," Patrice says to Bruce while Aunt Lettie is a few feet away snapping pictures of the north lawn of the White House, but Bruce says, "Patty, we've got no particular agenda—just glad to be enjoying a moment of history on a historic day." He means Martin Luther King Day, though Patrice is more focused on the fact that not only does Bruce call her Patty, having ignored the way she introduced herself and instead picked up on what Aunt Lettie says, but he also addresses Aunt Lettie as Aunt Lettie. She keeps wavering on whether to correct him. While the habit seems disrespectful, she and Aunt Lettie will ride back to Philadelphia after the inaugural parade on Tuesday, meaning they'll know Bruce for only about 24 hours longer. Is taking a stance worth it?

Part of the reason Patrice wanted to come to the White House today is that it's a little closer to Gretchen J. Shumacher's apartment than the Mall is and therefore gives her the chance to find out roughly how long the walk will take them tomorrow morning and how Aunt Lettie will hold up. The answer to the former question is *quite a while* (an hour to go less than two miles), and the answer to the latter seems to be *OK*. They rested a few times along the way.

Outside the gates on Pennsylvania Avenue, a jolly throng of protestors, monitored by a cadre of police officers, is chanting "O-ba-ma! O-ba-ma!" and then they switch to "Bush, go home!"

Bush, go home!" Patrice wonders whether this is worth the energy, either. Bush, too, will be gone in 24 hours. Is he now packing—does a president pack any of his own possessions? His time in office has appalled but rarely surprised her; even his decisions, or lack thereof, around Katrina felt less like new information than like more evidence of what she'd already suspected.

Patrice looks at the White House's four huge Ionic columns, and above them the pediment and then the American flag; in its massive symmetry, its peculiar familiarity, the building really is a stirring sight.

"Patty, turn around and smile," Aunt Lettie says, and Patrice complies. Aunt Lettie takes no fewer than half a dozen shots of her.

"Let me take some of you," she finally says, and Bruce, who has been using his camera, says, "Why don't I take one of both of you together?"

He does, first with Aunt Lettie's camera, then with his own (perhaps to document the actual, authentic black people he has befriended?). Patrice didn't bring her camera to Washington—if they were going to meet Barack and Michelle, sure, she would have, but she guessed she'd mostly be seeing the back of a lot of people's necks.

Caleb buys a hot dog from a vendor on the corner, consumes the whole thing in about 10 seconds, then goes back to buy another. Twenty feet from them, a street performer, a magician in an Uncle Sam costume, sets up and begins his tricks, and they watch him without moving closer; the crowd that assembles in front of him soon obscures their view.

When Patrice checks around for Aunt Lettie, her aunt is facing the White House again, and Patrice is surprised to see that tears are running down her cheeks. Their eyes meet, and Aunt Lettie says, "A black family is going to live in there, Patty. Did you ever think we'd see the day? That brave man and his strong, beautiful wife and those two little girls—" Aunt Lettie shakes her head. "The world those girls will grow up in, they'll have no idea there was a time when you were told you didn't count just for the color of your skin. God bless that family, Patty."

1931—that's the year Aunt Lettie was born, and Patrice's mother was born two years later. Aunt Lettie was 23, married and pregnant with Janet when *Brown v. the Board of Education* was decided, 33 during the march on Washington. Patrice knows from having heard her mother talk about it that they all watched King's speech on the living room television in Aunt Lettie and Uncle Ernest's half of the duplex; Patrice was 3 and has no memory of it. And then Aunt Lettie was 37—still much younger than Patrice is now—when King was shot. Who could have

imagined Barack Obama then? And Patrice thinks, as she almost always does when considering Obama's election, *Let it be as good as we hope. Don't let there be some shard of horror mixed in. Let him be, at worst, unexceptional, let people criticize him in the ways and for the reasons Carter or Clinton were criticized—because they were, in the end, only men. Let Obama be an ordinary president, not a cautionary tale, not a symbol, and please, please not a tragedy.*

Aunt Lettie doesn't particularly seem to be waiting for an answer, and so Patrice doesn't give one; instead, she sets her hand on Aunt Lettie's back and leaves it there for nearly a minute.

The four of them, she and Aunt Lettie and Bruce and Caleb, are crossing H Street, heading back up 16th, when Patrice spots the porta-potties—six in a row, set at the edge of the sidewalk. Walking around yesterday and today, they've passed plenty of others, but she hasn't considered using one until now. Can she hold it until they return to the apartment? Already today, when they went by a Starbucks, she looked in the plate-glass window and saw a line 20 deep for the women's bathroom.

She gestures vaguely forward and says, "If you'll all excuse me for a minute. Aunt Lettie, maybe you also need to—" Aunt Lettie nods, and while she goes, Patrice stands outside the porta-potty holding her aunt's cane, almost glad for the delay. Aunt Lettie doesn't ask for help, but she's in there a good eight minutes, during which time Patrice attempts to breathe through her nose as minimally as possible. When Aunt Lettie finally emerges, Patrice passes back the cane, squares her shoulders—she'd rather eat glass than what she's about to do—and enters the one Aunt Lettie just exited. She tries to let none of her skin or clothing touch any surface, an unlikely goal given that she's wearing a knee-length shearling coat. She lays strips of toilet paper—of course it's a thin, cheap brand and hard to tug off the roll—onto the seat and perches there. The smell from down below—human shit inadequately concealed by an industrial-strength disinfectant—is unignorable, and she starts to gag. *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*, she thinks. Oh, how she hates porta-potties. But somehow, because all moments eventually do, this one passes. She stands. To open the porta-potty's door, she bends her index and middle fingers and turns the lock with her knuckles. And then—fresh air! Thank God! She does actually gag once as she steps back into the light, but it's practically a relief-gag now that the ordeal is finished.

When she has rejoined the others, Caleb holds something out to her and says, "You want this?" She looks from his face—that distracting pierced lip—to his hand and sees that it's a clear, travel-size container of Purell. She accepts it, and when she's squeezed out a dollop, and then a second dollop for good measure, she thinks that Caleb has just become her favorite person in the world.

Coming tomorrow: Our novella concludes with inaugural smooching and political sea change.

From: Curtis Sittenfeld
Subject: A New Nation

Posted Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 7:23 AM ET

Listen to Curtis Sittenfeld read Part 5 of her novella here:

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Late Monday afternoon, while Patrice is sitting in the living room checking her BlackBerry (the living room couch is where she slept last night—she had a feeling both she and Aunt Lettie would get more rest not in the same bed), Bruce offers to make dinner. He asks whether they eat seafood. "Some," Patrice says. He proposes clams with red sauce, which sounds fine to her—it's fish she's not crazy about—and fine to Aunt Lettie, too, when Patrice checks. Together, Patrice and Bruce walk to a grocery store on 17th and Corcoran. In addition to the clams, which he buys canned, he gets crushed tomatoes, a bulb of garlic, an onion, a bunch of parsley, a box of spaghetti, and two \$10 bottles of red wine, and in the checkout line, with little discussion, they split the total. At the apartment, she sets the table while he puts water on to boil and chops the vegetables. Aunt Lettie is in the bedroom talking on her cell phone to her son Steve, and Caleb is sequestered in the other bedroom doing Patrice has no idea what, though a good bet, based on observing him so far, would be listening to his iPod.

Bruce turns on the radio on Gretchen J. Shumacher's stereo, winding the knob until he settles on a station—jazz erupts into the kitchen, dining room, and living room, which are one open space—and Patrice is struck by Bruce's ability to make himself at home here; left to her own devices, she wouldn't even change the radio station, or at least not without taking note of where it was set to before. Bruce also helps himself to Gretchen J. Shumacher's olive oil, which he uses to sauté the garlic and onions, and to her herbs, which are lined up in a cabinet. He pours himself and Patrice each a glass of wine and, while stirring the contents of the skillet, he says, "You like to cook?"

"I don't do it that often," Patrice confesses. She is finished setting the table and has taken a seat at one of the stools pulled up to the counter dividing the kitchen and dining room. "I work long hours."

"Yeah?" Bruce says. "You a lawyer by any chance?"

She laughs. "I'm pretty sure you don't mean that as a compliment." It's strange, a reminder like this of how they hardly know each other—unconnected to whether she likes him at all, she has over the course of the day become accustomed to his presence. She says, "But no, I'm not a lawyer. I do strategic planning for Comcast."

"Ah, a corporate muckety-muck."

"Somehow I haven't convinced them to put that on my business card."

Bruce smiles. "But not for lack of trying?" Then he says, "I'm a humble middle school science teacher who can't even afford HBO. Think you could look into getting us a cut-rate? I'd be Caleb's hero."

Dryly, Patrice says, "I'll talk to my supervisor."

Bruce lifts the lid off the water, peers in, then sets the lid back in place. "Watched pots, right?" he says. "So how about the personal side of things—you married, single, attached, kids, no kids?"

Is he hitting on her? While Aunt Lettie and his teenage son are no more than a room away, while they all await tomorrow's historical milestone? And if he is, isn't that awfully tacky? "No kids," she says. "Not married."

"Divorced?"

She shakes her head.

"Lucky you," he says. "Divorce is brutal. When Deb and I split, it took me a good two, three years to get back on my feet, and it wasn't even that I thought we should stay together. But it just shakes you to the core."

"Caleb is an only child?"

"Light of my life. He's shy, obviously, but what a great kid. My proudest accomplishment."

Shy? Really? Patrice thinks. *Not surly?* But she says, "It was nice of him to share his Purell today."

"Yeah, those porta-potties kinda seemed to freak you out. You a germaphobe?"

"Not exactly."

"But maybe a little?" Bruce smiles again. She's not sure about his bushy mustache, but he has a nice smile, the smile of a man

with no mean or manipulative inclinations. He's corny, but he's not stupid and, his HBO comment notwithstanding, he really doesn't seem to want anything from her except inaugural conviviality; he'd be this friendly to anyone else he and Caleb had ended up sharing the apartment with.

Before they eat, Aunt Lettie gives a rambling grace, asking Jesus to watch over the soul and spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. as well as over the Obamas, her own family, and Bruce and Caleb, and though Patrice has an inkling their dinner companions are Jewish, they seem to accept the blessing in the spirit in which it's intended. When Aunt Lettie is finished, Bruce raises his wine and says, "To tomorrow."

They all clink glasses. Aunt Lettie is having orange juice—she isn't supposed to drink because of her blood pressure medication—but Caleb actually is having wine. Though Patrice didn't say anything when Bruce poured Caleb half a glass, her surprise must have been obvious, because Bruce said cheerfully, "Studies show that teens who have alcohol with their parents have much less chance of becoming problem drinkers."

The spaghetti and clams aren't bad. For dessert, they polish off Aunt Lettie's lemon squares, and when Patrice says she'll wash the dishes, Bruce says, "I've got a better deal for you. I'll wash 'em if you keep me company."

She agrees, and he opens the second bottle of wine. (Does Aunt Lettie raise her eyebrows at Patrice before retiring to the bedroom, or is Patrice imagining it?) After the dishes are clean and Bruce has carried the trash to the dumpster behind the building, he comes back inside rosy-cheeked and says, "I have a sneaky plan. Have you ever seen the Lincoln Memorial at night?"

She shakes her head.

"How about if we let Caleb and Aunt Lettie baby-sit each other and we go for a stroll?"

"Wouldn't Caleb like to go?"

"Nah, he was already bitching about the cold today."

Is it the wine that makes her say yes? Not that she's the only one drinking tonight. As they walk through Dupont Circle, the restaurants and bars, which are allowed to stay open late for the inauguration, are crowded and noisy.

Bruce says, "One of the reasons I wanted to get you out of the apartment is I have an idea to run by you. When I was taking the trash out, I saw a grocery cart by the dumpster. Would it sound crazy if I suggested we get Aunt Lettie down to the Mall by pushing her in it?"

"What, like she's a sack of potatoes?"

"Bear with me a second," Bruce says. "It's not ideal, but when we walked to the White House today, I noticed it really took it out of her. If we're getting to the Mall early tomorrow morning, and then standing around for five hours, I'm concerned she's going to collapse. Now, have I mentioned how cool I think it is that Aunt Lettie knocked herself out to come to the inauguration? We should all have that spunk when we're her age."

"There's no way my aunt would agree to climb in a grocery cart and be pushed along the sidewalk for two miles. Besides, don't you think the cart must be some homeless person's prized possession?"

"The back of the building is closed off. It didn't look to me like a cart that's in active use."

"But it still must belong to someone."

"Patty, for Christ's sake, it's not a family heirloom! A grocery cart is by definition stolen goods."

It is in this moment of Bruce's frustration with her that Patrice recognizes the potential wisdom of his idea. Also, the kindness of it. Why should he care if Aunt Lettie gets exhausted tomorrow?

"She might be offended," Patrice says, "but I guess we ought to try. She could use a chair to climb in, I suppose. You haven't noticed a stepladder anywhere in the apartment, have you?"

"I'll poke around when we get back."

They both are quiet, walking down New Hampshire Avenue, and Patrice says, "I should have arranged to have a wheelchair for her, or I'm sure she's eligible for special transportation even if I'm not."

"Don't be too hard on yourself," Bruce says. "None of us knew what we were getting into here, right?"

At Washington Circle, they turn onto 23rd Street, and the Lincoln Memorial first comes into view as they cross Constitution Avenue; they're approaching it from the side. People are milling around outside the monument as if it were the middle of a summer afternoon, and when she and Bruce have made their way around to the front, Bruce says, "Doesn't it give you goose bumps? What's his line from the Gettysburg Address—a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.' That's the country we're meant to be, not this bullshit of the last eight years."

Patrice hesitates, then she says, "I guess I go between feeling really hopeful and really cynical. I *want* to be hopeful."

"What's stopping you?"

She laughs. "You mean besides common sense?"

"All I know is I'd rather be optimistic and wrong than pessimistic and right."

She is on the cusp of saying, *Is that from a bumper sticker?* but something makes her pause. She glances at Bruce's profile—slightly bulbous nose, bushy mustache—and she thinks that maybe he has a point. It's less because it really is true than because she wishes it were that, very softly, she says, "Yeah, I'd rather that, too."

Bruce turns then, his gaze meeting hers. "Are you cold?" he says. "You look cold." There is in his voice something protective, something private even. There's probably a gesture or a comment she could make now—it wouldn't need to be much—and he'd kiss her.

She doesn't do whatever it is. She considers it, and she doesn't rule it out for later (she has then an abrupt vision of herself visiting Nebraska, deplaning with a wheeled suitcase, drinking wine while Bruce prepares their dinner, riding around in his car—is Lincoln where the Sand Hills are, or is that a different part of the state?), but she decides to hold this possibility at bay for at least a little longer. Her brand new optimistic outlook doesn't have to be synonymous with impulsivity; she's still, after all, herself. "I'm not cold," she says. "I'm good." She gestures toward the brightly lit monument. "Should we keep going?"

She is hung over—*hung over*—on Inauguration Day. How can this be? She hasn't been hung over since business school! Yes, it's only 5 a.m. when she rises to shower before helping Aunt Lettie dress, but Patrice has no one except herself to blame for her dry mouth and pounding head. Bruce brings the grocery cart around from the back—Aunt Lettie didn't object at all when Patrice mentioned it, which seems a sign of just what a toll all this walking around is taking—and they do use a chair for her to climb into it because they never found a stepladder. She sits with her legs tented out in front of her, and at the last minute Bruce throws in a blanket for warmth, even though that means either he or Patrice will have to carry it after they ditch the cart. "You look as regal as Cleopatra," Bruce tells Aunt Lettie, and Patrice cringes, but only a little.

Although the sun hasn't yet risen as they make their way toward the Mall, already the streets are crowded—Patrice suspects a lot of these people never went to bed last night. People appear

tickled by Aunt Lettie's mode of transportation. They hold up their hands for high fives or call, "Go, Granny, go!"

At the Mall, east of 14th Street, they can see the long security lines, and they decide to abandon the cart. Bruce, who couldn't be more than 5-foot-8, basically lifts Aunt Lettie out, and Patrice has a momentary panic that both he and Aunt Lettie will end up flat on the pavement, but it doesn't happen. Surely it's too much to hope the grocery cart will still be there after the swearing-in; surely, if it wasn't already a homeless person's prized possession, that's what it's about to become.

The sun rises during the hour and a half they're in the security line, which seems to increase the temperature slightly. Once they're past security, Patrice grips Aunt Lettie's wrist as they weave through the crowd on the Mall, and they finally find a place with a Jumbotron view where three of them could comfortably stand and the four of them must bunch together. "Lean on me if you get tired," Patrice says to Aunt Lettie.

An a capella group that Patrice can hear but not see is singing "We Shall Overcome," and she feels in her chest an expansive happiness, an anticipation, of the sort she probably hasn't experienced since college. Her feet are freezing. An hour passes, another hour, and then time slows to increasingly shorter increments—35 minutes there, 10 here. The closer they get to the swearing-in, the more impatient Patrice grows.

It is 10 minutes to 11, then 5 to 11, 10 after 11. Patrice wants to see Barack Obama standing there with his hand on the Bible, she wants it official, no going back, a new reality. Also, she wants to see what Michelle Obama's wearing. She wants discrimination to end, and she wants to find a spotlessly clean porta-potty to use after the ceremony, and she wants her mother, wherever she is, to know about today. Under the big sky, in the cold morning, everything mundane and sacred blends, the past and the future, the immediate and the intangible, the individual and the crowd. All of her regrets, all of her hopes.

"Aunt Lettie," she says, and when her aunt turns, she says, "Thank you for getting me here."

"Baby, you're welcome." Aunt Lettie's expression is mischievous; she's holding up well. "Janet doesn't know what she's missing, does she? Squeezed into a two-piece bathing suit, having herself a piña colada."

All around them, for as far as Patrice can see, people in hats and scarves and gloves are waiting for the Bushes and the Obamas to emerge from the Capitol building; on the Jumbotron, even the dignitaries in their fancy clothes, who have actual seats up there on the Capitol steps, seem restless. It's unmistakable, Patrice thinks. Something big is about to happen.

fighting words

No Regrets

Why I'm not sorry that George W. Bush beat Al Gore and John Kerry.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 12:35 PM ET

Yes, yes, I was on the downtown streets of Washington bright and early, mingling with the bright-eyed and the wide-eyed. Yes, by all means I was there on the Mall Sunday afternoon, feeling no more moist than the next person but not much less moist, either (and getting a strange lump in the throat at the rendition of—funny how these things work—"American Pie"). And yes, that was me at the ball given by [The Root](#), making a mild fool of myself as I boogied chubbily on down to the strains of Biz Markie, DJ to the capital's black elite.

I wouldn't reconsider my vote for Barack Hussein Obama, in other words, and when he takes the oath, I hope to have a ringside seat. I already know something about "the speech" and its Lincolnian tropes. (If you want your own understated preview, take a look at [what he said to the crowd in Baltimore](#) Saturday, as his whistle-stop train made its way from Philadelphia to D.C.'s Union Station.) But, on the last day of his presidency, I want to say why I still do not wish that Al Gore had beaten George W. Bush in 2000 or that John Kerry had emerged the victor in 2004.

In Oliver Stone's not very good but surprisingly well-received film [W](#), there is an unnoticed omission, or rather there is an event that does not occur on-screen. The crashing of two airliners into two large skyscrapers isn't shown (and is only once and very indirectly referred to). This cannot be because it wouldn't have been of any help in making Bush look bad; it's pretty generally agreed that he acted erratically that day and made the worst speech of his presidency in the evening, and why would Stone miss the chance of restaging *My Pet Goat*?

The answer, I am reasonably certain, is that it is the events of Sept. 11, 2001, that explain the transformation of George Bush from a rather lazy small-government conservative into an interventionist, in almost every sense, politician. The unfortunate thing about this analysis, from the liberal point of view, is that it leaves such little room for speculation about his Oedipal relationship with his father, his thwarted revenge fantasies about Saddam Hussein, his dry-drunk alcoholism, and all the rest of it. (And, since Laura Bush in the film is even more desirable than the lovely first lady in person, we are left yet again to wonder how such a dolt was able to woo and to win such a honey.)

We are never invited to ask ourselves what would have happened if the Democrats had been in power that fall. But it might be worth speculating for a second. The Effective Death Penalty and Anti-Terrorism Act, rushed through both Houses by Bill Clinton after the relative pin prick of the Oklahoma City bombing, was correctly described by the American Civil Liberties Union as the worst possible setback for the cause of citizens' rights. Given that precedent and multiplying it for the sake of proportion, I think we can be pretty sure that *wiretapping* and *water-boarding* would have become household words, perhaps even more quickly than they did, and that we might even have heard a few more liberal defenses of the practice. I don't know if Gore-Lieberman would have thought of using Guantanamo Bay, but that, of course, raises the interesting question—now to be faced by a new administration—of where exactly you *do* keep such actually or potentially dangerous customers, especially since you are not supposed to "rendition" them. There would have been a nasty prison somewhere or a lot of prisoners un-taken on the battlefield, you can depend on that.

We might have avoided the Iraq war, even though both Bill Clinton and Al Gore had repeatedly and publicly said that another and conclusive round with Saddam Hussein was, given his flagrant defiance of all the relevant U.N. resolutions, unavoidably in our future. And the inconvenient downside to avoiding the Iraq intervention is that a choke point of the world economy would still be controlled by a psychopathic crime family that kept a staff of WMD experts on hand and that paid for jihadist suicide bombers around the region. In his farewell interviews, President Bush hasn't been able to find much to say for himself on this point, but I think it's a certainty that historians will not conclude that the removal of Saddam Hussein was something that the international community ought to have postponed any further. (Indeed, if there is a disgrace, it is that previous administrations left the responsibility undischarged.)

The obvious failures—in particular the increasing arrogance and insanity of the dictatorships of Iran and North Korea—are at least failures in their own terms: failure to live up to the original rhetoric and failure to mesh human rights imperatives with geo-strategic and security ones. Again, it's not clear to me how any alternative administration would have behaved. And the collapse of our financial system has its roots in a long-ago attempt, not disgraceful in and of itself, to put home ownership within reach even of the least affluent. So the old question "compared to what?" does not allow too much glibness.

Inescapable as it is, "compared to what?" isn't much of a defense. And nor has this column been intended exactly as a defense, either. It's just that there's an element of hubris in all this current hope-mongering and that I am beginning to be a little bit afraid to think of what Wednesday morning will feel like.

food

Cooking Their Books

Trying to re-create restaurant dishes at home.

By Lauren Shockey

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 6:36 AM ET

With food prices up and discretionary spending down, dropping a paycheck on dinner at [Le Bernardin](#) seems unthinkable. Purchasing a volume of recipes by its acclaimed chef Eric Ripert, however, is a relatively inexpensive proposition. But can a restaurant cookbook measure up to the real deal? Is it possible to pull off a Le Bernardin specialty like poached [escolar](#) in your own kitchen? In the spirit of frugality, and for the sake of experimentation (not to mention my hearty appetite), I put my culinary degree to use by preparing recipes from three recently published cookbooks before sampling each dish at its respective restaurant.

For my experiment, I chose cookbooks featuring recipes from three quintessential—yet very different—New York City restaurants. [Eat Me](#) by Kenny Shopsin reflects the food and philosophy of Shopsin's, a tiny restaurant in Essex Market whose extensive menu includes hundreds of items, both standard (burgers) and eccentric (macaroni-and-cheese pancakes). Michael Ronis' [Carmines Family-Style Cookbook](#) features old-school Italian recipes from Carmines, a cavernous Italian restaurant in the heart of Times Square whose huge portions are popular with out-of-towners. [Chanterelle](#) by David Waltuck showcases recipes from the eponymous TriBeCa restaurant, known as much for its impeccable service as for its upscale, French-influenced American cuisine.

I began with *Eat Me's* "slutty cakes"—oddly named pancakes whose canned-pumpkin-and-peanut-butter filling is supposed to replicate a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. Slutty cakes are a Shopsin's specialty, and *Eat Me* even has a section titled "Pancakes and the Lost Art of Griddling." Shopsin notes, "If you buy a good griddle, you oil the griddle properly, you heat it as hot as it needs to be heated before you drop the batter, and you cook the pancakes for the correct amount of time, you could use boxed pancake mix or Aunt Jemima frozen pancake batter, and your pancakes would turn out just as good as mine."

Per Shopsin's suggestion, I used Aunt Jemima batter, which, to my surprise, yielded light and fluffy pancakes, nicely browned and dotted with a filling whose flavor was reminiscent of a Reese's cup. The recipe's headnote said the filling would be crumbly, but in reality it was rather gooey. Still, they were perfect for a winter morning. My pancakes even resembled those in the book's photograph. A rousing success, I thought.

That afternoon, my friend Cathy and I visited Shopsin's for lunch, ordering slutty cakes and chicken-avocado soup with mac and cheese. "Fuck you," cried Zack, Kenny's younger son, who works with him, in response to our orders. It would be the first of many "fucks" bellowed by Zack and Kenny throughout our meal. Kenny Shopsin is known for "speaking his mind," including yelling obscenities and expelling would-be diners who don't measure up to his standards. And it seems the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. While this verbal assault was startling, I was far more surprised to discover that Shopsin's slutty cakes only somewhat resembled my earlier effort. His were flatter with nearly perfect concentric circles of peanut butter in the middle of each pancake, topped with pistachios, and accompanied by a tiny bottle of Grade A maple syrup. On re-examining the recipe at home, I discovered pistachios adorning the slutty cakes in the cookbook's photograph, yet they were nowhere in the recipe itself, and the recipe called for Grade B syrup, not A. Was this an editorial oversight? Or does Shopsin not want people to duplicate his recipes?

Next I tried "linguine with white clam sauce," described as "one of [the] customers' first choices" in *Carmine's Family-Style Cookbook*. The recipe was simple: Steam 24 littleneck clams with garlic, basil, parsley, red-pepper flakes, wine, and clam juice and serve over pasta. I wound up with a far-too-liquid sauce, and the dish looked nothing like the clam-laden linguine in the cookbook's photograph. In taste, my pasta was vaguely similar to the one I tried later at Carmine's, although the restaurant's version used significantly more garlic, thickly sliced, not coarsely chopped as in the recipe, and featured both whole littlenecks and chopped cherrystone clams.

The following week, I tackled "cumin-crusted salmon with chive mashed potatoes" in *Chanterelle*, which required five pots, a blender, a food processor, several measuring cups, and an hour and a half to prepare. It tasted great and looked similar to the photograph, with one exception. My potatoes were pale green with dark green specks—not uniformly pea-green. I had prepared the potatoes as instructed, blanching the chives, then chopping them and pureeing them, but my blender proved useless. So I transferred them to a food processor and pureed them before returning them to the blender, still to no avail. I consoled myself by drowning them in the luscious citrus-butter sauce, which, true to restaurant form, required half a pound of butter for four servings.

At Chanterelle the following day, I knew I'd aced it as I ate the salmon, which tasted virtually identical to mine, as did the citrus-butter sauce. However, Chanterelle garnished its salmon with *haricots verts* and micro chives, and its potatoes were uniformly green. When asked how they were so perfectly hued, my waiter replied that the chives were blanched, then pureed in a blender and added to the mashed potatoes. Clearly, I either need to invest in Chanterelle's blender or hire their sous-chef.

All of the recipes I tested resembled their originals, but none perfectly recreated the restaurant version—not an entirely surprising verdict. As Kenny Shopsin writes in *Eat Me*, "My regular customers know that if they order the same thing they got last week, there is a good chance they won't even recognize it. I don't do it differently on purpose. It's just that everything I cook, every time I cook, is an event in and of itself." Variable factors like ingredient quality, temperature, and timing will ensure that a dish is different every time it's prepared, whether at a restaurant kitchen, or a home kitchen, or even from one day to another at the same restaurant.

Why, then, do we still buy restaurant cookbooks? Perhaps because we aspire to be restaurant insiders. Making a pilgrimage to Chicago to dine at [Alinea](#) was once considered impressive. These days, a true foodie won't bat an eye unless you can identify every ingredient in every dish—a party trick that requires either an excellent palate or close attention to the recipes in [Alinea](#). Besides this cheat-sheet function, restaurant cookbooks help us tap into a chef's creative genius—they help us understand how a handful of ingredients can be transformed into a restaurant-worthy meal. When we rely on regular cookbooks, we at best become good cooks; with *Eat Me* or *Carmine's Family Style-Cookbook* or *Chanterelle*, we become pseudo-restaurant chefs.

Of course, a restaurant cookbook is still, ultimately, no more than a collection of bound pages. At home, Kenny Shopsin didn't insult me (which is really an integral part of the Shopsin's experience); I missed out on people-watching at Carmine's (enthusiastic hordes devouring heaps of pasta); and while my salmon resembled Chanterelle's, I didn't get to taste the complementary deviled quail egg canapés and homemade rolls with two types of artisanal butter. At home, I had to play the part not only of chef but of waiter and dishwasher, too, with no chance of a tip.

foreigners

Slim's Pickings

Will Carlos Slim use the *New York Times* to bolster his reputation?

By Andres Martinez

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 6:30 PM ET

As a native of Mexico and a lifetime admirer of (and former editorial writer for) the *New York Times*, I confess that part of me wants to feel a measure of pride that the Sulzberger family has turned to a Mexican businessman for help. The New York Times Co. has announced that Carlos Slim Helu is essentially lending the beleaguered media company—aren't they all?—\$250 million. The Mexican tycoon will receive six-year notes with warrants that can be converted to common shares.

Slim already owns a 6.9 percent stake in the company from a previous investment and could own roughly a fifth of all common shares if he converts the warrants. Not only will he give the Times some much-needed capital, but, because he is getting common stock, he will not dilute the Sulzberger family's control over the newspaper.

But my Mexican pride doesn't survive a moment's reflection. If the Sulzbergers think they can take Slim's money without tarnishing the newspaper's brand, then America's media elite must *really* think that Mexico doesn't matter.

Let's face it. The New York Times would never strike a deal with a U.S. tycoon of a similar profile, for fear of triggering real or apparent conflicts between the newspaper's coverage and the investor's interests. Not that you could ever find such a U.S. tycoon: The conglomerate of Slim-controlled telecom, banking, tobacco, retailing, insurance, construction, and other interests has been estimated to add up to 7 percent of Mexico's GDP. Even in his heyday, John D. Rockefeller accounted for only about 2 percent of the U.S. economy. As *Forbes* put it in [its 2007 ranking of billionaires](#), Bill Gates or Warren Buffett would have to be worth \$784 billion to have a similar share of U.S. wealth as Mr. Slim has of Mexico's wealth.

I should say this is an unaccustomed position for me. As an editorial writer at the *Times* and as editorial-page editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, I often found myself defending Big Business against a roomful of reflexively anti-corporate journalists. And, further bolstering my credentials as a capitalist apologist, my father was an executive for a large Mexican bottling company. But this is a bridge too far.

First, the scale of Slim's fortune, and the extent to which it was built on a government-sanctioned monopoly, is scandalously unique. This [Wall Street Journal profile](#) provides the background on how Slim leveraged his personal ties to then-President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (and his financial backing of the ruling party) not only to prevail as a bidder in the early 1990s privatization of Mexico's telephone monopoly but to ensure that Telmex remained a poorly regulated monopoly long after its privatization. Slim's companies still control more than 90 percent of all landlines in Mexico and more than 70 percent of all wireless contracts. Mexico's respected independent central banker, Guillermo Ortiz, has pointed to the lack of meaningful competition in Mexico, especially in telecom, as one of the factors retarding the nation's economic development.

Whether a weak Mexican state can develop and implement muscular antitrust policies to rein in the likes of Slim and foster greater competition is one of the keys to our neighbor's prosperity, which shouldn't be a minor story for an American newspaper. (And it could become a national security story. Stay tuned.)

As for Slim himself, he strikes many people as genuinely well-meaning and personally modest, a man very much engaged in philanthropic activities. How much of Slim's wealth is the result of his unfairly bullying would-be competitors and would-be regulators, as opposed to his business acumen, is open to debate, and I'm not one to begrudge a tycoon for looking out for his conglomerate's interests. If I were a tycoon, I'm sure I'd do the same.

But the question is not so much whether we should resent Slim's wealth. It's whether the New York Times really wants to tie its reputation so closely to his. Was there really no one else who had a quarter of a billion dollars to spare?

After all, Slim is someone that a *Times* editorial writer, Eduardo Porter, [has called](#) a "robber baron." (His piece ran in August 2007, before Slim made his initial investment in the Times.) Will Slim now be referred to as a "robber patron"?

The beauty of this deal for the Sulzbergers is obvious: It gives the company desperately needed cash without forcing the family to relinquish any further control. That family control has been the guarantor of the newspaper's prized independence.

As for Slim, he knows exactly what he is doing. I expect him to play his self-effacing, I-won't-interfere, don't-even-give-me-cookies-if-I-drop-by role perfectly. He won't throw his weight around, as he did when he reportedly tried to prevent Mexican author Denise Dresser's popular satirical history of Mexico (with critical references of him) from being sold at his Sanborns stores. (And again, I should confess that I am a huge fan of Sanborns. Among the world's quirkiest retailers, it is a place where you can buy fresh Mexican pastries, American magazines, Japanese TVs, Cuban cigars, French ties, or merely head for the lunch counter to have some of their famous *enchiladas suizas*.)

The point is, Slim doesn't have to interfere at all. I know from experience that publishers do intervene in the editorial process, as is their prerogative. And I can assure you that Slim's investment will be a factor, even if unspoken, in editorial decision-making henceforth at the *Times*. Perhaps Mexico's crony capitalism will remain a mostly neglected topic—but now conspiracies will be read into the neglect.

Slim wins either way. When writers and editors do lob an occasional piece into the paper critical of Slim, and they will, he will then be able to brag about it back home, absolving himself of charges of being a thin-skinned bully. Indeed, the conspiracy theory will then become that he ordered the *Times*—which everyone in Latin America will assume he controls, regardless of the reality—to be critical of him.

Setting aside any specific content in the paper, the mere fact that the Times Co. has allowed itself to become so dependent on

Slim's fortune provides him with a priceless seal of approval. It becomes easier for him to write off his critics in Mexico as perennially frustrated leftist whiners. If any of what they alleged were true, after all, would the enlightened and liberal *New York Times* allow him to become one of its largest shareholders? Slim is lending money to the Sulzbergers for the same reason he has donated to Bill Clinton's foundation.

As for the *Times*, the newspaper is taking on an untenable appearance of a conflict, if not the reality of one, of the type it typically rails against in other institutions.

The prestige of the *New York Times* is such that it wields an unparalleled moral suasion. A few years ago, I wrote [a Times editorial](#) making the point that in flirting with succeeding her husband as president, Vicente Fox's wife was threatening to make a mockery of the nation's democratization. The Mexican press treated the editorial as news in itself, and Mrs. Fox backed down. (We were, to be sure, not the only ones making the point.) But from now on, any *Times* utterances on Mexico will now be interpreted, fairly or not, through the prism of Slim's stake in the company.

Such second-guessing will not be limited to news about Mexico. When the *Times* is tough on Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan leader can accuse the paper of doing its favorite investor's bidding. (Slim has businesses throughout Latin America.) And when the *Times* writes about extreme wealth concentration in other developing countries or unseemly business monopolies in Russia (or here in the United States, for that matter), second-guessers will ask why the paper of record doesn't take a closer look at what its white knight, Mr. Slim, is up to in Mexico.

The *New York Times* is facing difficult times, and it's easy to understand why it made this deal. But in the long run, in terms of the newspaper's global brand, that \$250 million may appear far costlier than the high interest payments Slim is now due.

foreigners

Piloting the Plane of State

How Barack Obama is like Capt. C.B. Sullenberger of Flight 1549.

By Anne Applebaum

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 8:26 PM ET

If one were searching for an appropriate metaphor—and, at times like this, one is always searching for a metaphor—it would be hard to do better than US Airways Flight 1549, [the plane that crash-landed safely in the Hudson River last week](#). This extraordinary event was, if you like, the anti-9/11: A plane hurtled into central Manhattan, but its pilots, instead of aiming

for a skyscraper and killing thousands, aimed at the river and thus saved the lives of all 155 people onboard.

There was no panic. "Witnesses described a scene of level-headed teamwork," the *Washington Post* [reported](#). Instead of screaming, passengers scrutinized the emergency doors in the seconds before landing, the better to open them quickly. Once in the water, strangers helped one another out of the plane. Tour boats and tugboats sped to the scene to assist, even before emergency services arrived. An infant and a woman in a wheelchair were both rescued and brought safely ashore. The pilot, [Capt. C.B. "Sully" Sullenberger](#), walked up and down the aisle to make sure the seats were empty before leaving the sinking plane himself.

As you listen to President Barack Obama speak Tuesday, as you watch him parade down Pennsylvania Avenue and dance at the inaugural balls, keep this story in mind, for it describes with eerie accuracy the task ahead of him. He is, in effect, the pilot of a plane whose engine has unexpectedly exploded: Though a handful of people did predict the financial crisis of last autumn, the fact is that almost no one in mainstream politics did so, any more than anyone ever predicted that a flock of geese could bring down an Airbus. Like that pilot, Obama's task now is to prevent the unexpected financial crisis from leading to a major catastrophe. To do so, he must demonstrate competence and professionalism, qualities so rare in public life that those who possess them are—like that pilot—widely described as "heroic."

But—to extend the metaphor one step further—successful completion of this task depends not only on the pilot but also on the passengers and the bystanders who keep calm. In other words, if large numbers of people use this crisis to expand their own fortunes or push their own agendas, they might wind up sinking the whole plane.

I could illustrate this perhaps excessively poetic point in many ways, but one aspect of the new administration's various "bailout" plans worries me in particular: the assumption, which seems to lie behind them, that people make better decisions when they are handling public money than they do when they are handling their own money. Ample evidence, from many societies over many years, proves the opposite: Indeed, people entrusted with public money are overwhelmingly inclined to waste it, steal it, or simply misuse it. Following the initial failure of the federal government during Hurricane Katrina, for example, government money poured into New Orleans in the weeks and months afterward. The result: large-scale fraud, massive dissatisfaction, and mobile homes so badly built that they could not be used.

Yet many good things happened in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Volunteers of all kinds flocked to the city; local self-help organizations sprung up. This isn't to say there was no role

for government, but that government worked best by supporting citizens' initiatives, not by replacing them.

My greatest fear, on Inauguration Day, is not, therefore, that the plane's engines will fail and that the economy will tank: That has happened already. My greatest fear is that in trying to fix the economy, the new administration will waste time and money in the mistaken belief that government-funded, centrally planned infrastructure projects will somehow use money more effectively than their private or locally inspired equivalents. My second-greatest fear is that multiple company "bailouts" will ultimately produce fewer jobs and more wasted resources than the regeneration that could follow a string of intelligently managed bankruptcies.

I do realize that the "tide has turned," that the right has given way to the left, that Obama was elected in order to change the tone in Washington. But he will fail if he abandons the many lessons learned about the relationship between government and the governed over the past several decades—a relationship not unlike that between pilots, however heroic, and the passengers they are trying to save.

gabfest

The First Act Gabfest

Listen to *Slate's* review of the week in politics.

By Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz
Friday, January 23, 2009, at 11:28 AM ET

Listen to the Gabfest for Jan. 23 by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz talk politics. This week: surviving the inaugural crush, Obama's first week in office, and sacrifice begins at home.

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

The group discusses their experiences in Washington, D.C., during Tuesday's inauguration. Emily [spent time in the crowd](#) gathered near the Washington Monument. John had a better

vantage point from which to [watch the ceremony](#)—sitting on the risers along the Capitol steps.

There has still been no official estimate of the number of people gathered on the Mall. However, some people used [satellite pictures](#) in an attempt to [arrive at a number](#).

Some critics said [Obama's speech](#) didn't have enough soaring rhetoric at a time of crisis. John says [it's very difficult to say a great deal](#) in one speech.

The president quickly got down to business by issuing several presidential directives. Among them were orders to begin the process to [close the detention facility](#) at Guantanamo Bay and to restrict the methods available for [interrogation of prisoners](#). He also issued an executive order to [freeze the pay](#) of high-level government officials and [improve the ethics](#) of the White House.

A vote of the full Senate has now been scheduled for [Timothy Geithner's nomination](#) to be treasury secretary. On Wednesday, Geithner told senators that [he regretted the tax problems](#) revealed during his confirmation hearings.

David chatters about how [a former Russian KGB officer turned businessman](#) has purchased the [Evening Standard](#). The *Standard* is London's largest regional newspaper.

Emily talks about how Michelle Obama dancing with her husband made a wonderful statement for tall women around the world. The first lady [is more than 5 feet 10 inches tall](#) and [wore heels](#), not flats, to the inaugural events.

John chatters about a quick reversal by [Rep. Barney Frank](#), D-Mass. Frank had wanted a law that, among other things, [required any company](#) that receives government bailout funds to sell off its private aircraft and to remove all aircraft leases. Frank changed his mind when a fellow representative pointed out that many of those aircraft were made in America.

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 on Jan. 23 by Dale Willman at 11:30 a.m.

Listen to the Gabfest for Jan. 20 by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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To hear the question-and-answer period that followed the discussion, click the arrow on the audio player below:

Watch the [live Gabfest](#):

On Inauguration Eve, Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz talked politics before a live audience. They discussed the festivities, expectations for the first year of Barack Obama's administration, and the Obama BlackBerry.

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

The new president arrives on a wave of goodwill. John points out the latest *New York Times*/CBS News poll, in which even [58 percent of those who voted for John McCain](#) in November say they are optimistic about the country under an Obama administration.

John says Obama will focus on [a new era of responsibility](#) for the nation. He will ask people to do more for their communities and to be prepared for some level of sacrifice. Among the potential sacrifices could be cuts to some entitlement programs. Obama has announced a "[fiscal responsibility summit](#)."

Emily says Obama must balance pragmatism with principles. Many on the left worry that [Obama may be compromising too much](#) in his attempt to appeal to a broad group of people. David suggests it's possible that [Congress may push Obama](#) to the left.

Obama says he hopes to [continue to use his BlackBerry](#) to e-mail friends while in office. However, as John points out, such a move could be fraught with problems, among them [security issues](#).

The group discusses [a recent New York Times Magazine spread](#) with photos of more than 50 members of the new administration.

They also discussed Obama's audio book [Dreams From My Father](#), for which [he won a Grammy](#) award (his first of two).

David chatters about the White House organic farm project, [the Who Farm](#).

Emily talks about a Google Map that [shows the homes of people who contributed money](#) in support of California's Proposition 8 last fall. Those opposed to the map call it [a major invasion of privacy](#). Others defend it on [free-speech](#) grounds.

John chatters about the CNN interview in which Obama talked about choking up while rehearsing his acceptance speech at last summer's Democratic Convention in Denver when he spoke

about the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Obama said he would "[try to keep it together](#)" during his inaugural speech.

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Posted on Jan. 20 by Dale Willman at 11:45 a.m.

Jan. 16, 2009

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Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz talk politics. In Barack Obama's final week as president-elect, the gang discusses the Treasury nominee's problems and the last days of the Bush presidency.

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

Obama [moved his family into Blair House](#), located across from the White House, on Thursday. Obama and his family also [visited the Lincoln Memorial](#), where he paid tribute to a president he says he turns to periodically for inspiration.

The group discussed [Obama's dinner with a group of conservative columnists](#) at the home of [George Will](#). David says the meeting has [symbolic significance](#) for the president-elect, and John remembers Obama's earlier comment that although he "may not have won their [conservatives'] vote," it's important to hear their voices.

Emily wonders whether [Timothy Geithner](#) will survive confirmation hearings to become treasury secretary. [Geithner's hearing was delayed](#) after he revealed that he had failed to pay self-employment taxes for the years 2001-04.

President Bush [held his final news conference](#) this week, in which he acknowledged making some mistakes but said he was at peace with what he had done while in office. Emily said he had not owned up to the real messes he has created, while John called it the best public indication of what Bush is really like in person.

David chatters about a work of art commissioned by the European Commission. Czech artist David Cerny created [Entropa](#), which bears the outlines of each EU nation on a grid. [Germany's autobahns form the shape of a swastika](#); France is shown as being on strike; and Bulgaria is shown to be a squat toilet. The [artwork has created a major controversy](#) in Europe. [Czech officials apologized](#) for the work.

John talks about Obama and Joe Biden's [visit to the Supreme Court](#). [They met with all the justices except Samuel Alito](#). Obama will be the first incoming president to be sworn in by a justice whose confirmation he voted against.

Emily chatters about a Bush administration official's statement [that a Saudi national was tortured](#) by the U.S. military in Guantanamo. [Susan Crawford](#) is in charge of deciding whether Guantanamo Bay detainees should be brought to trial.

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Posted on Jan. 16 by Dale Willman at 12:09 p.m.

Jan. 9, 2009

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Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz talk politics. This week, the economic stimulus package, Bill Richardson's departure, and the too-long inauguration planning.

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

President-elect Barack Obama had hoped that his economic stimulus package would await his signature soon after his inauguration, but it now appears that [the package will be delayed](#) at least until February. This week, [Obama warned of the possible consequences of a delay](#), saying the economy would become ["dramatically worse"](#) if Congress did not act quickly.

Meanwhile, former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer wrote in *Slate* that [any stimulus package should include spending on more than](#)

[just basic infrastructure needs](#)—it should also include "visionary" spending for things like Internet access and robots in schools.

Another part of Obama's stimulus plan calls for a faster shift toward the use of [electronic medical records](#). Many experts feel this would improve medical treatment. It would [also be a boon](#) to a number of companies across the country.

New Mexico Gov. [Bill Richardson withdrew himself from his nomination](#) for commerce secretary. John says this is one instance in which the Obama team's [vetting process failed](#).

Observers are wondering whether the Obama administration will take an active role in investigating [possible wrongdoing by Bush-administration officials](#). Emily says one possibility could be a more passive role for criminal investigation but [a broader public release of documents surrounding possible misdeeds](#).

John says [all the discussion of the Obama inauguration](#) has been going on too long. The *Atlantic's* [Marc Ambinder](#) and *Slate's* [Mickey Kaus](#) make good points about Obama's perpetual fundraising.

A historic moment occurred this week when [all the living presidents gathered with President-elect Obama](#) at the White House.

David chatters about NBC's *Friday Night Lights*. He says the relationship between Coach Eric Taylor ([Kyle Chandler](#)) and his wife, Tami ([Connie Britton](#)), is the best cultural portrayal of a good marriage that he has ever seen

Emily talks about [Obama's choice for solicitor general](#), Elena Kagan. If confirmed, she would become the first woman to hold that post. Kagan is currently dean of Harvard Law School. Emily says it's an interesting choice, but she says that [despite her broad legal experience](#) Kagan has never argued a case before the Supreme Court—and may have never argued a case before any court.

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Posted on Jan. 9 by Dale Willman at 12:03 p.m.

Dec. 31, 2008

Listen to the Gabfest for Dec. 31 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](#).

David Plotz, Terence Samuel, and Bill Smee talk politics. This week, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich appoints a senator to replace Barack Obama, war rages in Gaza, and it's NFL playoff time.

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

On Tuesday, embattled Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich [appointed Roland Burris](#) to fill the remaining Senate term of President-elect Barack Obama. A quick reaction came from the U.S. Senate, where [some members are vowing not to let Burris take office](#). David points to a *Slate* piece that [advocated](#) a speedy appointment.

Terence points out that with Obama leaving the Senate, there are now [no blacks](#) serving in that body.

Bill says the [ongoing attacks by Israel](#) in Gaza might lead to an [outpouring of sympathy](#) for Hamas leaders, at least in some quarters. David says the attacks will [force Obama to take a stronger stand](#) on the Mideast conflict.

It's playoff time in pro football, but one team set a historic regular-season low, prompting the group to ask, "The car companies [may be in financial trouble](#), but who will bail out the [Detroit Lions](#)?"

Terence chatters about the inauguration. He says this weekend everyone in Washington will be talking about who is invited to which [inaugural balls](#) and who is leaving town because of [the expected crowds](#). He predicts the hot ticket will be the [Illinois inaugural ball](#).

Bill recommends two newspaper stories on the nation's financial mess: The *New York Times*' profile of [the rise and fall of Washington Mutual](#) and [a three-part series in the Washington Post](#) outlining how Wall Street stayed ahead of Washington regulators.

David hates [Milk](#).

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Posted on Dec. 31 by Dale Willman at 11:15 a.m.

jurisprudence

Project Open Closet

When do the legal skeletons come tumbling out of the Justice Department?

By Emily Bazelon

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 7:01 PM ET

Even without a new attorney general confirmed, the Obama Justice Department churned up the legal landscape today with its [executive orders](#) on detention, interrogation, and Guantanamo. The new administration started looking forward, to the closing of the prison on the Cuban base and other prisons abroad and to limiting interrogators to techniques for questioning suspects approved in the Army Field Manual. It also began looking backward, with a promise to review all the cases of the Guantanamo detainees and the pending Supreme Court case of Ali Saleh Kahlah al-Marri, who is being held without charges in a military brig within the United States.

Quite a day. But the new folks are just getting started. As they take over the offices and the files of people whose legal positions they criticized for years as deeply misguided, the new lawyers in town have to figure out how much of their predecessors' internal actions to expose. In some ways, setting the rules for the future is the easy part. Sorting out [which detainees should be let go](#) and which should be tried isn't easy, but it's a matter of making case-by-case determinations about what evidence to credit.

The trickiest cases for Obama's DoJ may be the ones that involve going back to the past in another way. These are the cases concerning how detainees were treated and who is responsible for that treatment, and they could force Obama's DoJ to confront directly which Bush secrets to disclose. When will we get to see the skeletons come tumbling out of the closet? And whose knock will the Obama administration respond to in opening the closet door?

Start with al-Marri. Obama ordered a review of his status as the only person being held without charges indefinitely within the United States. (Al-Marri is a Qatari citizen who was arrested while in the United States legally, then declared an enemy combatant in 2003 and sent to a military brig, where he remains.) In the case before the Supreme Court, he challenged the Bush administration's authority to hold him. The Obama review presumably will, and should, lead the administration to renounce the Bush DoJ's former position that al-Marri's capture and detention, even though they took place on U.S. soil, are perfectly permissible under Congress' [2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force](#). The new acting solicitor general has already asked for an additional month to file the government's brief in that case, which pushes argument back to late April.

Meanwhile, al-Marri has [a separate case](#), still in district court, challenging the conditions of his confinement, with a motion pending about his prolonged isolation. (At the moment he gets two phone calls with his family a year, after five years with none.)

Another case that could lead to the disclosure of documents about who ordered alleged torture and mistreatment, and who carried it out, is *Rasul v. Myers*. Four former British detainees held at Guantanamo say that while at the prison, they were tortured (beaten, shackled, threatened with dogs) and suffered religious discrimination (beards forcibly shaved, denied the Quran, a copy of the Quran thrown into the toilet). Last year, the D.C. Circuit [dismissed](#) their claims, which were based on the Geneva Conventions, the U.S. Constitution, and a federal anti-discrimination law. The court also said that even assuming the suit was valid for the purpose of argument, the officials being sued (former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and a group of military officers) had qualified immunity, meaning that the suit against them could not proceed because Rumsfeld, et al., couldn't have reasonably been expected to know that what they were doing was clearly illegal. Whether qualified immunity indeed applies is a big, looming question—and one the new Obama administration has yet to take a position on.

The Supreme Court has ordered the D.C. Circuit to go back to *Rasul* for a do-over, based on the justices' ruling last June in *Boumediene v. Bush*, which suggested more rights for the detainees than the lower court allowed for. The government's briefs in this new phase of the case were supposed to be due next week. The Obama DoJ just got an extension until March 12.

Then there are Jose Padilla's [lawsuits](#), also alleging mistreatment during his confinement and interrogation. One of these suits, brought in South Carolina, is against a group of high-ranking officials, including Rumsfeld. The other one, in California, is against John Yoo, the DoJ lawyer who helped draft the torture memos and, according to Padilla's briefs, set interrogation policy as well. The South Carolina case has a hearing set for next week. The Obama DoJ hasn't yet asked for more time.

Some of these cases were never about damages. (Padilla sued for \$1. Al-Marri didn't ask for damages.) They are about disclosure—getting to the bottom of what happened to these men in detention, asking for the documents that would lay out the underlying facts. The Bush administration stonewalled on all of this to the best of its ability. Its DoJ asserted broad privileges over the documents the detainees sought to prove their claims: attorney-client privilege, the state-secrets doctrine, another protection of government work product called the deliberative-process privilege.

Now that the Obama lawyers are in charge, does all of this change? Does the Justice Department continue to represent officials like Rumsfeld and Yoo, with whom it presumably has

little sympathy? Does the Obama DoJ settle these suits, with the disclosure of documents as part of the settlement agreement? Or does the new DoJ pre-emptively declassify and release many of the key documents on its own, or at the behest of Congress, which has been impatiently holding on to a series of related subpoenas? Does it waive the broad privileges the Bush administration asserted—in particular cases or as a general matter?

The lawyers who have just arrived at the DoJ are still unpacking their boxes, so it makes sense that they're not ready to answer all of these questions. They include former *Slate* contributors [who were some](#) of the smartest and fiercest critics of the old regime. Now they're in the position of writing the closing chapter of Bush's legal legacy, by deciding what to tell the rest of us. They're extremely well-chosen for carrying out Obama's promise of [transparency and the rule of law](#). Airing out the DoJ's closets, with or without the prod of lawsuits, is the place to start.

jurisprudence Bad Men

How many terrorists are really left at Guantanamo, anyway?

By Dahlia Lithwick

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:43 PM ET

This morning, President Barack Obama signed an [executive order](#) that will close down the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, within the year. He explained that he was "following through not just on a commitment I made during the campaign but an understanding that dates back to our Founding Fathers, that we are willing to observe core standards of conduct—not just when it's easy but also when it's hard."

Everyone agrees that the order shuttering the camp is the easy part; figuring out what to do with the 245 detainees there is far [tougher](#). Amid all the hooting and hollering you'll be hearing from around the world today, hard questions linger about how many of the detainees left at the camp are the "worst of the worst" (in the parlance of former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld) and how many simply can't be returned to sender. Are most of the detainees terrorist masterminds or just luckless wanderers? If the former is true, [Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., is right](#) to be terrified that they will all be dropped off in his back yard at Leavenworth. If the latter is true, the [Center for Constitutional Rights](#) is correct in suggesting that closing the camp isn't nearly as hard as it's been made out to be. This is not a moral or political or existential question. It's an empirical one, and presumably this matter can be resolved by the "prompt and thorough" review mandated by the president's executive order.

One thing that will not help anyone, going forward, is the kind of hyperbole we've seen from both sides, suggesting that the whole camp is teeming with assassins or choirboys. So how many truly bad guys remain at Guantanamo? Here's a start to sorting that out.

For starters, let's put to rest once and for all the cockamamie numbers about former Guantanamo detainees who have ostensibly "returned to the battlefield" after being released from the camp. This is one of those numbers that's thrown around almost drunkenly by those in favor of keeping Guantanamo Bay in operation. Justice Antonin Scalia, writing in [dissent in *Boumediene v. Bush*](#), asserted, "At least 30 of those prisoners hitherto released from Guantanamo Bay have returned to the battlefield." He cited a year-old, [widely debunked](#) report for that statistic. Last week at Eric Holder's confirmation hearings, it was Sen. John Cornyn, R.-Texas, who upped the count to 61 soldiers who had rejoined the battlefield since being let out of Gitmo.

Sixty-one is the most recent [statistic from the Bush Defense Department](#), which coughed up this hairball at a Jan. 13, 2009, press conference. While the DoD spokeswoman would not at the time clarify how that statistic had jumped from the previous number of 37, elaborate on the identities of these 61 men, explain where they had been identified as battlefield returnees, or even indicate how many were still alive, she was confident that "there clearly are people who are being held at Guantanamo who are still bent on doing harm to America, Americans, and our allies. ... So there will have to be some solution for the likes of them."

According to a [new study by Mark Denbeaux](#) and his team at Seton Hall University School of Law, this was the Bush administration's 43rd attempt to quantify the number of detainees who have rejoined the battle. The previous 42 were no more impressive. The Seton Hall study shows that the administration's prior recidivist statistics do not even trend consistently upward—a 2007 DoD report downgraded the prior estimate of recidivists from 30 to five. The Defense Department has also been known to name as recidivists several individuals who have at no time been held at Guantanamo. Moreover, the Denbeaux study shows that the Defense Department defines speaking to reporters or publishing op-eds critical of Guantanamo as "returning to the fight." The point here is not that the data kept on the Gitmo detainees are all crap. The point is that we need to get past the tendency to cite statistical "facts" about the future dangerousness of these prisoners (and to use seemingly every available digit in the history of numbers in doing so) based on highly suspect Bush administration records.

So how many truly hardened terrorists are currently cooling their heels at Guantanamo? We know for a fact that the 245 detainees at the camp include [17 Chinese Uighurs](#) who, while cleared of any "enemy combatant" charges, cannot be returned safely to China and have no place else to go. Similarly, there are, as the

Bush administration acknowledges, between 50 and 60 other men who have also been cleared for release with no place to go. (Some of these folks may now be accepted by [Portugal, Australia, and Switzerland](#).)

We also know that the single most important determinant of whether a prisoner was repatriated or kept at Guantanamo is their nationality. As the [Center for Constitutional Rights reports](#), the men from European countries were released early while almost all of the Yemenis are still there. In fact, the "luckiest" of the Yemenis remains Osama Bin Laden's driver, Salim Hamdan, who was convicted in a military commission, served out his brief sentence, and is now home with his family. Whether or not a prisoner is still at Gitmo often turns as much on international diplomacy as on future dangerousness.

We also know that among the remaining prisoners at Guantanamo there are several who clearly come under the definition of child soldiers, including [Canadian Omar Khadr](#), who allegedly threw a grenade at an American soldier and was first taken to Guantanamo when he was 15. Khadr, [we learned this week](#), allegedly identified, under abusive interrogation, another Canadian, Maher Arar, as a visitor to an al-Qaida safe house in Afghanistan. The problem here is that there is no dispute that Arar was in Canada at the time. Mohammed Jawad is another prisoner at Gitmo, and like Khadr he was also a child soldier (between 15 and 17; his birth date is unknown) when he threw a grenade and injured U.S. soldiers. As [Glenn Greenwald chronicles here](#), Jawad allegedly suffered such brutal abuse and torture, his chief prosecutor resigned and is now a witness for Jawad in his habeas corpus proceeding. As Greenwald writes, the centerpiece of the government case against Jawad is a confession he "'signed' (with his fingerprint, since he can't write his name) ... and yet, it was written in a language Jawad did not speak or read and was given to him after several days of beatings, druggings, and threats—all while he was likely 15 or 16 years old."

This brings us to the nearly unthinkable question of what happens to anyone, innocent or guilty, when they have been beaten, humiliated, and held in solitary confinement for almost seven years. One could argue that even Mother Theresa might be inclined to "rejoin the battlefield" upon release from such treatment. Somehow in the repatriation of those who arrived at Gitmo relative innocents, we must now contend with the fact that some will be dangerous as a consequence of our actions, not theirs.

But all of this is *still* the easy part. The tough part is what happens to those detainees who really do represent a threat to this country—people like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, with whom the Obama administration will now have to contend. The civil rights community [has split over this issue](#) in recent months, with proponents of terror courts and long-term preventative detention doing battle with supporters of regular criminal trials.

That is the issue we need to contend with today, and our discussions should be informed by fact, not by fiction or fabrication. One of the most thorough studies of the Guantanamo population was undertaken by my colleague Ben Wittes for his book [Law and the Long War](#). He cautions that there are some extremely dangerous men at the camp and also some unfortunate cannon fodder. Looking at all of them as a unified bloc is and has always been an error. So whether we are looking to answer questions about where to repatriate the last Guantanamo detainees, where to hold them until we try them, or how to try them, let's attempt to get past the undifferentiated orange jumpsuits, which tell us what they have always told us: virtually nothing at all.

jurisprudence

John Roberts, Fallible

The chief justice and the new president fox-trot all over the oath of office.

By Dahlia Lithwick

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 2:42 PM ET

It's not just that the unflappable chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court mangled the oath of office this morning. Even before that happened, President Barack Obama was stepping all over the chief's lines. Between both of them trying to lead, and both graciously attempting to follow, it was a performance worthy of the very first round of *Dancing With the Stars*. Let's go to the tape:

The oath is supposed to go as follows:

I (name) do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

Most presidents traditionally add the words *So help me God* at the end, as did Obama.

Here's how it went down today:

ROBERTS: (*working without a text, and also without an overcoat*): Are you prepared to take the oath, Senator?

OBAMA: I am.

ROBERTS: I Barack Hussein Obama ...

OBAMA: (*interrupting*) I Barack ...

ROBERTS: Do solemnly swear ...

OBAMA: I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear ...

ROBERTS: That I will execute the office of president to the United States faithfully...

OBAMA: That I will execute ... (*pauses, smiles, waits for Roberts to put "faithfully" in correct spot*)

ROBERTS: ... The off ... faithfully the pres ... the office of president of the United States...

OBAMA: The office of president of the United States, faithfully ... (*if you can't beat 'em, join 'em*)

ROBERTS: And will to the best of my ability ...

OBAMA: And will to [the] best of my ability ...

ROBERTS: Preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

OBAMA: Preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

ROBERTS: So help you God?

OBAMA: So help me God.

ROBERTS: Congratulations, Mr. President.

jurisprudence

All the President's Justices

Barack Obama and John Roberts make history as they repeat it.

By Dahlia Lithwick

Saturday, January 17, 2009, at 7:04 AM ET

Barack Obama will take the oath of office this week on the same Bible used to swear in Abraham Lincoln in 1861. Lincoln was sworn in by then-Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney. This means that when Chief Justice John Roberts administers the oath of office, Obama will lay his hand on the Bible once used for the same purpose by the author of the majority opinion in [Dred Scott v. Sanford](#).

It is in some ways the symbolic closing of a constitutional circle. Obama will be the first black president of the United States.

Taney, writing *Dred Scott* in 1857, concluded that blacks could never even be citizens. Taney ranted that blacks were "beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." It was one of the most shameful court decisions in history, and Lincoln made his opposition to *Dred Scott* a cornerstone of his political career.

The parallels and contrasts between Lincoln/Taney and Obama/Roberts are worth considering, particularly in light of the fact that Obama voted against Roberts' confirmation in 2005, saying: "I hope that I am wrong. I hope that this reticence on my part proves unjustified. ... I hope that he will recognize who the weak are and who the strong are in our society. I hope that his jurisprudence is one that stands up to the bullies of all ideological stripes." (Obama will be the first president sworn in by a justice he voted not to confirm.)

Is there anything to be learned from the two historic pairings? Taney's opinion in *Dred Scott* is seen by constitutional scholars as a departure from the careful, pragmatic, and scholarly approach of his early judicial career. And one of the few Roberts decisions seen as extreme and ideological also involves race. In a 2007 opinion in a case invalidating voluntary school programs in Seattle and Kentucky that sought to maintain diversity by taking account of race, the measured Roberts strayed from his reputation as a careful legal minimalist. Comparing voluntary affirmative-action programs to the kinds of Jim Crow segregation proscribed in *Brown v. Board of Education*, he wrote, "Before *Brown*, schoolchildren were told where they could and could not go to school based on the color of their skin. The school districts in these cases have not carried the heavy burden of demonstrating that we should allow this once again."

Roberts' comparison of voluntary affirmative action to forced racial segregation was so uncharacteristically broad and polemical that Justice Anthony Kennedy rebuked him for his "all-too-unyielding insistence that race cannot be a factor in instances when, in my view, it may be taken into account." Roberts' affirmative-action decision is in no way comparable to *Dred Scott* (beyond the way that it is, in places, overheated and ahistoric). More important, the tension between Taney and Lincoln on the issue of slavery has no parallel when it comes to Roberts and Obama. Indeed, Obama's own opaque pronouncements about affirmative action—including his statement that he would not want his daughters to benefit from it—suggest he and Roberts share a vision of an America in which affirmative action is unnecessary but disagree about how to get there. The Supreme Court has just agreed to hear another hotly contested case about race, which may reveal just where Roberts and Obama disagree.

There are other important parallels between Lincoln/Taney and Obama/Roberts. Taney loudly opposed Lincoln's incursions into

civil liberties in the interest of national security. In 1861, Taney pushed back against Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus with a strongly worded opinion in a case called *Ex Parte Merryman*, holding that the writ of habeas corpus could be suspended only by legislation, not by presidential order.

It gets better: Not only did Lincoln ignore Taney's *Merryman* decision, but he responded with the most famous rhetorical defense of broad executive power in wartime: "Are all the laws, but one, to go unexecuted, and the government itself go to pieces, lest that one be violated?" If George Bush owes a debt of gratitude to Lincoln for that line, the Supreme Court's liberals should thank Taney for *Merryman*, cited in a 2004 decision rebuking the Bush administration for its assertions of expansive presidential war powers.

Today, the constitutional shoe is on the other foot. Roberts is a proponent of strong executive power in wartime. Since 9/11, he has joined opinions supporting the idea that Congress authorized the president to set up whatever military tribunal he deemed appropriate. And he dissented in a decision last spring that afforded more robust rights to detainees at Guantanamo—insisting that detainees there enjoyed "the most generous set of procedural protections ever afforded aliens detained by this country as enemy combatants." Obama, for his part, lauded that 2008 Guantanamo decision as "a rejection of the Bush Administration's attempt to create a legal black hole at Guantanamo." Whether Obama's views on presidential war powers will become closer to Roberts' when Obama dons the commander-in-chief stripes remains to be seen.

Perhaps the most useful lesson to be learned when Obama is sworn in by Roberts—on the Bible last used ceremonially by two men who loathed each other—lies in the fact that Obama and Roberts actually have far more in common than their rhetoric might suggest. Both are gifted attorneys. Both are charismatic and respected by peers across the ideological spectrum. Both claim to seek unanimity and moderation. And both are devoted to putting America's racial divisions behind us—even if they disagree on the mechanism. Roberts and Obama certainly differ on presidential powers and judicial philosophy. But that will matter not at all this week when they stand side by side and swear on a Bible once held by two men who could never have imagined this day would come.

A version of this column also appears in this week's Newsweek.

medical examiner Steve Jobs and Me

A layman's guide to islet-cell tumors in the pancreas.

By Matthew Dallek
Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 3:26 PM ET

The news about Steve Jobs' decision to take a [medical leave](#) from Apple until June has been more than a bit disturbing to me—and not because I am among the legions of iPhone devotees. I, like Jobs, was diagnosed with an islet-cell tumor in my pancreas. The experience taught me a lot about this misunderstood cancer—and it has made reading media reports speculating about Jobs' mysterious medical condition, and what possible ramifications his brush with cancer have for his present health, incredibly frustrating.

The media aren't entirely to blame for the confusion. As *Slate's* Farhad Manjoo points out, Jobs hasn't made it easy to report on his medical battles. According to *Fortune*, he was [diagnosed](#) with an islet-cell tumor in 2003 but didn't publicly acknowledge it until he underwent surgery to remove it in the summer of 2004. Later, in responding to concerns about his [visibly deteriorating health](#) over the last couple of years, Jobs and Apple have been reticent, claiming at various points that he was [fine](#), simply suffering from a ["common bug,"](#) had ["digestive difficulties"](#) following his operation to remove his tumor, and had an easily treatable ["hormonal imbalance"](#) before admitting upon announcing his leave, without specifics, that the problem was more serious.

My diagnosis in 2007 was a matter of pure and simple luck. After I experienced nighttime abdominal pain, a gastroenterologist ordered up blood work and a CT scan. Over the next few days, the pain subsided, and I considered skipping the scan because I was feeling somewhat better. I was 37 years old. I ate lots of fruits and vegetables, exercised, and stayed away from trans fats. Still, I went for the scan, which revealed two things: I had appendicitis, which was responsible for my pain, and I had a tumor about the size of a "large tennis ball" in the tail of my pancreas. I had a nonfunctioning islet-cell tumor. I quickly learned that the only truly reliable way to treat islet-cell cancer is to cut the tumor out before it spreads. Fortunately, doctors at Johns Hopkins were able to do so. My surgeon, Dr. John Cameron, removed the tumor, cut out 40 percent of my pancreas (he resected the tail in a procedure called a distal pancreatectomy), removed my spleen, and took out my appendix for good measure.

While my tumor was large and had been growing inside me "for years" (my surgeon's words), it was caught before it had spread, and my prognosis is [extremely positive](#). When a friend told me shortly after my diagnosis that Jobs and I shared a disease, I soaked up as much information about Jobs' condition as I could find. More recently, I've watched with a combination of wonderment and dismay as the news media, in their rush to report on Jobs' present condition, have often engaged in a journalistic shorthand—referring to his 2004 disease as

"pancreatic cancer." While this description is technically true, it's also misleading. Islet-cell tumors can certainly kill people, but they're drastically different from adenocarcinoma, what we normally think of as pancreatic cancer, which is much more aggressive and common. Eighty percent to 90 percent of pancreatic tumors are adenocarcinomas. More than 37,000 Americans will probably be diagnosed with adenocarcinoma of the pancreas this year, while approximately 2,500 Americans annually are diagnosed with the much rarer islet-cell cancer. All of these crucial distinctions have often gotten lost amid the unseemly feeding frenzy around Steve Jobs.

Islet-cell cancer, like Jobs and I had, is usually curable when caught early; adenocarcinoma, which is usually detected only after it has spread, has a five-year survival rate of 5 percent. ([Patrick Swayze](#) has adenocarcinoma, as did Randy Pausch, whose ["Last Lecture,"](#) recorded before his death, became a viral video sensation.) Another important point to keep in mind, also overlooked by most in the media, is that islet-cell tumors (also known as "neuroendocrine" tumors) are divided into functioning and nonfunctioning categories. While we don't know what kind of a tumor Jobs had—he has never specified—I can tell you that my tumor was "nonfunctioning" because as far as my doctors could tell, it wasn't producing any hormones, and it caused no symptoms.

In contrast to my own tumor, there are five types of "functional" islet-cell tumors. They "present" in a variety of ways, depending on what kind of hormones they produce: insulinomas, which can cause low blood sugar; gastrinomas, which release large amounts of gastrin, a hormone, into the bloodstream and cause ulcers in the stomach and duodenum; VIPomas, which tend to cause severe diarrhea; glucagonomas, which cause severe skin rashes and weight loss, among other symptoms; and somatostatinomas, extremely rare (fewer than one in 40 million people get them) islet-cell tumors with "nonspecific" clinical symptoms including diabetes and stones in the gallbladder. We have no way of knowing what was causing Jobs' ["hormone imbalance,"](#) but functioning islet-cell tumors do all produce hormones, so this is one plausible explanation.

After I was diagnosed, I was told that modern medicine doesn't have chemotherapy or radiation to use against islet cells. ("We've got nothing that works" went the refrain.) Islet-cell tumors tend to be slow-growing, so chemotherapy designed to attack rapidly growing cells is ineffective. But there are some drugs, including one called streptozocin, that have "response rates as high as 70%" with islet-cells, according to Hopkins' Web page. In some cases, doctors can also use techniques such as hepatic artery embolization and chemoembolization, which essentially destroy the blood vessels that have been feeding the metastases in an attempt to choke off the tumors' blood supply.

We as a country have shortchanged medical research regarding both adenocarcinoma of the pancreas and islet-cell tumors. For

starters, the National Cancer Institute has been cutting grants for adenocarcinoma research in recent years, and the funding stream for scientists is drying up. This is happening at the very moment when doctors at the Sol Goldman Pancreatic Cancer Research Center have mapped the pancreatic cancer genetic blueprint—opening up a promising new field of research and possibly new early detection tests and treatments.

At the same time, as with many rarer diseases, pharmaceutical companies have little financial incentive to support scientific research into islet-cell tumors, while the government also shortchanges research into uncommon diseases. "The greatest emphasis is paid to funding the most common tumors, such as those of the lung, breast and colon. When you consider the pitiful federal funding for pancreatic adenocarcinoma, despite this cancer claiming over 34,000 American lives each year, you can imagine where even less common cancers like islet-cell tumors fit into the grand scheme of things," says Dr. Anirban Maitra, an associate professor of pathology and oncology at Johns Hopkins. "Unless there is a commitment to study rare diseases like islet cell tumors, there is unlikely to be significant progress in this disease."

Furthermore, "[A]dvances made in pancreatic adenocarcinoma—and there have been some significant ones, funded by nonfederal dollars—are highly unlikely to be extrapolated to islet cell tumors, simply because they are essentially completely different tumors joined only by the commonality of occurring in the pancreas. It, too, is a major medical orphan."

One professor of oncology and pathology at Hopkins, Bert Vogelstein, has said that if he can find a donor who will support the project, he and his team will do their best to sequence the islet-cell tumor genome within a year. Perhaps, if Jobs' recent medical woes turn out to be related to his islet-cell tumor, there will be greater attention paid to the disease, the way Michael J. Fox helped increase awareness of Parkinson's. If I've learned nothing else since my diagnosis, it's that medical orphans need attention, too.

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"The most important prognostic factor [for treating islet-cells] is whether or not the tumor can be removed surgically," Hopkins' recently updated Web site [says](#). "Other significant prognostic for patients with an islet cell tumor/pancreatic endocrine neoplasm include the size of the tumor, the presence or absence of blood

vessel invasion, [and] the presence or absence of metastases to lymph nodes or other organs."

moneybox

The Day Wall Street Exploded

An exclusive podcast with Beverly Gage.

By Daniel Gross

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 2:22 PM ET

The Big Money presents "Every Day I Read the Book," featuring Daniel Gross. Dan's guest today is Beverly Gage, author of the new book [*The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror*](#).

Listen using our audio player below, or [download the MP3](#).

moneybox

Liquidation Nation

Circuit City, Linens 'n Things, and Sharper Image are gone. What company is next to go under?

By Daniel Gross

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 5:09 PM ET

Earlier this month, [Circuit City](#), the 567-store electronics retailing giant that [filed](#) for bankruptcy protection in November, announced it was going to liquidate. It's closing all its stores and laying off its 34,000 workers.

Circuit City's suicide is part of an alarming trend in the retail industry. It used to be that companies came out of bankruptcy relatively easily. Chapter 11 was like rehab: a safe place, insulated from the harsh realities of the outside world—like the need to keep current on bills—that gave companies a chance to regroup and relaunch. But these days, companies are simply deciding to end it all. Liquidation is the corporate version of foreclosure. Borrowers and lenders agree that instead of undertaking the hard, time-consuming work of modifying debt and restructuring finances, they should just sell for whatever they can get, take the loss, and move on. Just as more and more homes have wound up in foreclosure, more and more companies are being liquidated.

Virtually every large company that filed for Chapter 11 in the past year intended to reorganize. But Sharper Image, which went bankrupt in February, couldn't come up with a viable plan for its gadget stores and began to [liquidate](#) them in June. (The brand still lives [on the Web](#).) [Linens 'n Things](#), which filed for bankruptcy in May, planned at first to close 100 stores. But

when it couldn't [find a buyer](#), Linens 'n Things decided in October to throw in the towel. [Whitehall Jewelers](#), which filed for Chapter 11 in June, began selling off the family jewels [in August](#). Steve & Barry's [filed for bankruptcy last summer](#) and tried to reorganize before giving up and [going for liquidation](#). [Mervyn's](#), the California department store chain, filed Chapter 11 in July and in October [said](#) it would start liquidating its 149 stores. And so on.

Retailers aren't the only ones opting for liquidation. Within a week of its Chapter 11 filing, Lehman Bros. sold off its [U.S. operations to Barclays](#) and its [European operations to Nomura](#) (the latter for the princely sum of \$2). [AIG](#), which avoided a Chapter 11 filing by virtue of a massive bailout that effectively transferred ownership to the federal government, is staging a more deliberate liquidation sale.

These liquidations are signs of significant (perhaps excessive) pessimism and the continuing hangover from the recent era of easy money. From 2001-07, cheap money allowed finance types to make huge profits by flipping assets and refinancing. Investors thrived by wading into distressed situations and doing the difficult work of cutting costs, restructuring balance sheets, and turning businesses around. In years past, companies lingered in bankruptcy for many months, even years, as creditors and borrowers hammered out agreements. Today, few people are willing to pursue this long and winding road toward profits. The preference is to write off the bad debt, take a few pennies on the dollar, shut down, and move on.

This impatience is aggravated by rampant fear on the part of both managers and lenders. Now that consumers actually have to pay cash for what they buy—rather than borrow it on credit cards or through home-equity loans—there's concern that consumer spending will settle permanently at a lower plateau. And so, the thinking goes, what's the point of keeping all those Circuit City, Whitehall Jewelers, and Steve & Barry's stores open?

The credit crisis, which helped push many companies into Chapter 11 in the first place, also explains the trend toward liquidation. The first thing a bankrupt company does is arrange what's known as debtor-in-possession financing, which enables the firm to keep stores open and pay salaries even as it starts stiffing other creditors. Because the rules (here's a [primer](#)) permit DIP lenders to jump to the head of the creditors' line, large banks viewed the DIP market as a relatively low-risk business. Now, of course, many of the firms that provided DIP financing are themselves functionally bankrupt. The surviving banks now regard all types of lending—to consumers and businesses, in bankruptcy and out of bankruptcy—as a highly hazardous activity. Meanwhile, the private equity firms and hedge funds that had been big buyers of bankrupt firms are shying away.

The trend toward liquidation may also be an unintended consequence of government policy. As Kristina Doss [reports](#) in today's *Wall Street Journal*, recent changes in the bankruptcy code have made it more difficult for companies, especially the types of companies going bankrupt now, to reorganize. For example, the deadline for companies in Chapter 11 to decide whether to assume or terminate store leases has been shortened to 210 days. That means companies that file early in the year can't wait until the vital Christmas season has passed to make a decision about which stores to keep open.

The inauguration of a new president has inspired a great deal of hope. But none of the factors that created the rush to Chapter 11 and the incentives to liquidate is likely to change much in the first 100 days. Last fall, Noreen Malone [wrote a guide](#) to buying Christmas gifts at liquidation sales. In 2009, consumers won't need to limit themselves to holiday gifts. They may be able to buy everything at going out of business sales.

moneybox

Will Anyone Give Bush a Job?

Being ex-president is usually easy and lucrative. It won't be for George W. Bush.

By Daniel Gross

Saturday, January 17, 2009, at 7:03 AM ET

For many of President Bush's critics, the fact that he is now seeking work in the worst job market in a generation is poetic justice. As Bush noted in his farewell press conference, he is too much of a Type A for "the big straw hat and Hawaiian shirt, sitting on some beach." (He might want to reconsider: Thanks to the recession, tropical resorts are running great promotions.)

Given recent history, Bush probably expects to profit from ex-presidency. Bill Clinton reported income of more than \$90 million from 2000-07. But Bush is very unlikely to earn Clintonian numbers. Ex-presidents peddle image, presence, and experience. In Bush's case, each is tarnished. To aggravate matters, many of the industries in which ex-presidents make easy money are a) doing poorly, and b) based in the Washington-Boston corridor where Bush hostility runs deep.

An ex-president's first move is usually a book deal. Clinton got an estimated \$10 million to \$12 million for his memoirs. But with sales down, and Borders and Barnes & Noble contracting, "there's likely to be a buyer's strike in the book business for up to six months," says one former head of a well-known imprint. Moreover, the industry just isn't that interested in what the Bush inner circle is peddling. Agents are dining out—mostly at Subway—on tales of turning down meetings with Condi Rice. Laura Bush is believed to have received an advance of about \$2

million for her memoirs, about one-quarter Hillary Clinton's haul.

Several publishers I spoke to believe a Bush memoir wouldn't command much in the way of foreign-rights payments. And given Bush's professed lack of interest in reflection, what could he offer to American audiences? "Right now, his presidency is seen as such a cascade of mistakes that it's hard to know what he could say that would be compelling," says Geoff Shandler, executive editor at Little, Brown. Bush's best option may be to cut a deal with a Christian publisher such as Thomas Nelson, which pays smaller advances than the New York houses. "Somebody out there will be willing to make a bet that he can reach his political constituency," says Peter Osnos, founder of the politico-friendly publisher PublicAffairs. The consensus estimate for a Bush book advance: \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million.

Bush has been mum about book plans, but he's been more forthright about his desire to join the lucrative yakkers' circuit. "I'll give some speeches, to replenish the ol' coffers," he said in September 2007. Ronald Reagan flew off to Japan to make \$2 million for a few speeches soon after leaving office. Clinton, to no one's surprise, has been a prolific speaker. But speaking agents I talked with expressed little interest in Bush—and not, they say, just for political reasons. "I'm in business to make money, and I don't think I'd make money doing it," says Bill Leigh, chairman of the Leigh Bureau speaking agency.

The biggest spenders for the high-profile speakers have traditionally been investment banks and asset-management companies, such as Merrill Lynch and Citigroup. But many firms have disappeared, and those that remain are wards of the state. Bush could, however, count on a few trade associations and friendly defense and energy companies to generate a handful of gigs at \$125,000 a pop (plus private plane travel).

While corporate boards used to be a reliable, well-paying sinecure for former politicians, "I'd be surprised to see him on one," says Wendy Pangburn, a partner in the Washington, D.C., office of executive recruiter Heidrick & Struggles. Board slots have morphed from a few meetings per year at resorts to several meetings and lots of conference calls. "You have to work at it," she says. In the age of Sarbanes-Oxley, board seats entail a heightened amount of fiduciary responsibility—which, even the dwindling core of Bush partisans will concede, hasn't been one of the president's strong suits.

That leaves the time-honored and highly lucrative field of crony capitalism, or, as it's known more genteelly today: private equity. Out of public view, magnates routinely provide nice incomes to pols who can open doors and help raise funds. Former Vice President Dan Quayle and former Bush Treasury Secretary John Snow hang their hats at Cerberus Capital Management. Bill Clinton was dealt into a fund run by ally Ron Burkle. The Carlyle Group has been a bipartisan haven for

Washington A-listers, including former President George H.W. Bush. Bush the Younger has friends in this world, including Tom Hicks, the private-equity baron who helped W. make his fortune with the Texas Rangers.

We may be too quick to write off Bush's prospects. Twenty-eight years ago, another one-time Southern governor, possessed of a deep Christian faith, left office unpopular, thanks to a shambolic economy and a foreign-policy disaster in a Muslim country. He, too, was largely written off by the Eastern establishment. It was a great embarrassment when Jimmy Carter's memoir failed to garner a seven-figure advance. But Carter has since become the Stephen King of politicians—a prolific, highly paid best-selling author of volumes on any number of topics, including fly-fishing. He probably has a lot to teach Bush about how to rebuild a reputation and build a fortune. At the recent gathering of ex-presidents in the Oval Office, Bush couldn't stand far away enough from Carter. That might have been his final strategic mistake.

A version of this article appears in the latest issue of Newsweek.

my goodness

Sister, Can You Spare a Dime?

I don't give to my neighborhood panhandlers. Should I?

By Patty Stonesifer and Sandy Stonesifer

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 7:03 AM ET

Dear Patty and Sandy,

Every day I pass at least a half-dozen homeless people on my way to work. I feel terrible for them, worse when they ask me for money, and worse still when I turn up my iPod and walk away. I struggle every day with whether to give them some coins or a buck but don't want them to get used to me giving them money, and I don't want them to spend it on drugs or alcohol. It's not that I can't afford it, but I don't want to become an enabler. Your advice?

Jo in Philadelphia

Sandy:

Being asked for money on a daily basis makes a lot of people uncomfortable—especially when they think the money might go to [buy drugs](#) or fund other unsavory activities. Homelessness is arguably the most visible manifestation of social injustice. If you're determined to do something other than use your iPod as a buffer, I suggest you start just as you have—by thinking about your different options. Do you give money just because you can, or do you worry so much about enabling that you decide not to

do anything at all? Do you hand out sandwiches or donate directly to your local shelter? Do you find a job-training center that works to help the homeless find employment, or vote for legislation that funds transitional housing?

[One out of every 200 Americans utilized an emergency residential program between Oct. 1, 2006, and Sept. 30, 2007.](#) And while it's estimated that only a small percentage of those people are panhandling, many of us (especially in urban areas) are regularly asked for money. I've decided not to give to the half-dozen people I see on my way to work each day and instead give to organizations that advocate for the homeless in my area. I also buy the occasional sandwich for the guy who sells the "[Street Sheet](#)" outside my grocery store. If you feel compelled to give to someone directly, be honest with yourself that your action isn't really about ending homelessness—but more about reinforcing shared humanity.

For Jo specifically, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* did a great series on [homelessness in Philadelphia](#) last February. There are a lot of effective organizations working with the homeless in Philadelphia, such as [Project H.O.M.E.](#), a nonprofit that focuses on empowering the chronically homeless through a combination of services, advocacy, and education. You can read the [National Coalition for the Homeless fact sheet on "How YOU Can Help End Homelessness"](#) for good info on volunteering your time, joining advocacy groups, and donating both money and products. Whether you decide to donate money or time, or merely let people in need know about services, my guess is that you'll feel better the next time you tell someone no.

Patty:

Sandy provides sandwiches, but I recommend not giving handouts. That may be because Sandy commutes by foot and faces her neighbors in need more personally than I do. My commute involves two different stoplights where I am sure to get asked for funds by homeless men, but I have to be honest: My car insulates me from their pain. Perhaps we would all do more about the issue if every one of us spent even a few seconds with homeless people each day. If the current economy is an indication, the numbers of people experiencing homelessness will grow in your community. I'm not prone to quoting Scripture—but I do subscribe to the belief that [whatever you do for the least among us ... that you do unto me](#). Jo, I would recommend you start by doing two things:

1. Avoid giving directly to the man or woman on the street—but do address him or her with the same human regard you give others in your path. As Sandy says, if you do decide to give them something on the spot, be sure you are realistic about why you're giving and what it will achieve.

2. Get a plan and start acting on your concern: Spend two hours—about the same amount of time your last dinner with friends lasted—and find out more about [who and how many are homeless in your community](#) and [who provides shelter in your area and who provides hot meals](#). Then turn back to your own life: Stop and calculate how much, roughly speaking, you spend each week and year on shelter and food. And then consider how much you would need to spend if things went terribly wrong in your life to ensure just your bare necessities of shelter and food.

With that information in hand—the general and the specific—you can decide what you want to do to address the needs of those in your own neighborhood who are without stable shelter and regular meals.

Whatever actions or amount you end up committing—and I realize that amount will vary depending on your own income as well as other giving and life priorities—decide how much of that (money, time, or voice) you want to spend on the immediate needs of the folks in your neighborhood, on prevention efforts, and on public and political advocacy. Then make your commitment and give those dollars and that time to the best organizations you can find.

But don't end there. Commit yourself to continuing to put in that hour every quarter or every year to learn more, as you would for other investments in your life.

A personal aside: In my hometown of Seattle, a wide range of agencies and community and government leaders are cooperating on an ambitious [10-year plan](#) to end homelessness in King County. I focus my own giving in ways that support that plan. I give regularly through the [Seattle Foundation](#) to two local organizations that focus on preventing homelessness and helping families in their transition back to having a home. The [more than 700 community foundations in this country](#) provide an important network of local knowledge and can assist individuals in finding excellent organizations in their area.

Do you have a real-life do-gooding dilemma? Please send it to ask.my.goodness@gmail.com and Patty and Sandy will try to answer it.

In our ongoing effort to do better ourselves, we're donating 25 percent of the proceeds from this column to [ONE.org](#)—an organization committed to raising public awareness about the issues of global poverty, hunger, and disease and the efforts to fight such problems in the world's poorest countries.

my goodness
The Law-School Debt Trap

Here's how to escape it and have a career in public service law.
By Patty Stonesifer and Sandy Stonesifer
Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:49 AM ET

Dear Patty and Sandy,

I'm a law student in my final year, pondering my career plans. I'll be clerking for a judge for one year following law school but am torn as to where I'll go next. Law school usually results in an enormous amount of student loan debt, and I'll be no exception: I'm looking at roughly \$100,000. I've always been driven toward public service and government work, and wanted a career in law in order to help those unable to help themselves. I'm considering a career in refugee law or perhaps as a public defender or district attorney. The trouble, of course, is that these positions pay salaries that would present a challenge even without law school loans to pay off. The conventional wisdom from a number of friends, family, and fellow students seems to be taking a high-paying job with a private law firm for a few years in order to pay off loans is the prudent course, particularly in difficult economic times. I don't want to work for a law firm: When I was a little girl, I dreamed of saving the world, not of billing hours. Still ... \$100,000 is a daunting number. Any advice?

Emily

Sandy:

While nonprofit workers have [higher ratings of job satisfaction, work-life balance, and confidence in their organizational mission, doing good](#) doesn't always correlate with *doing well* financially. Your chosen profession, law, has one of the highest differences in average salaries between for-profit and nonprofit work. A [2006 Bureau of Labor Statistics survey](#) showed the average hourly wage for lawyers was \$41.08 in nonprofit work, \$43.50 in government, and \$58.09 in for-profit. That means lawyers working for nonprofits earn approximately \$35,000 less per year.

But let's get to your particular problem. It sounds like you wouldn't be happy working in corporate law. There are several new programs that may help you to follow your dream to help people rather than bill hours, while making sure that you don't have to take on a second job to cover your debt. The first program won't be up and running until July 2009, but it could certainly benefit many underpaid and overdebted do-gooders. The Department of Education's [Income Based Repayment Plan](#) essentially caps the percentage of your discretionary income you are expected to pay toward your student loan debt. (This [calculator](#) can help you determine whether you are eligible, but only the department can give you a final verdict.) Heather Jarvis of Equal Justice Works (on their very useful [student loan podcast](#)) says that an easy calculation is that anyone who owes more than their annual salary will likely be eligible. Take extra

caution if you are married and filing jointly: Both spouses' income will be counted to determine your eligibility. Also be sure to pay attention to what type of loans you have, as not all types of federal loans are eligible.

The [Public Service Loan Forgiveness](#) program is another possibility for you. This new program requires individuals to make 120 eligible monthly payments toward their qualifying student loans while working full-time in government, at a 501(c)(3), or in another qualifying profession (including early-childhood education, social work, faculty teaching in high-need areas ...). At the end of that period, the government will forgive the remaining balance. This program is intricate: Be sure to read more about it or even use this [checklist](#) as a guide.

You should also investigate social-service fellowships (e.g., Peace Corps or Americorps) that help with loan repayment in return for a set time of public service, and loan repayment programs for special professional groups. The [FinAid Web site](#) gives a wide range of resources and programs that support these goals.

Patty:

I can't add much to Sandy's suggestions except to say that there seem to be a range of organizations and a range of partial solutions—though none is perfect. You should also go back to your college financial aid officer, your employers, and prospective employers' human resources departments and ask about loan forgiveness programs they know of. You should also ask if they, or their network of colleagues, know about other resources.

Choosing a public service career requires you to become a very good personal finance manager and a good personal networker. Even if you find a way to reduce that loan burden, you need to ensure that you are armed with some basic tools for personal budgeting. If you find yourself living beyond your means, the satisfaction of a career in public service will be offset at least in part by the pain and stress of financial worries. Personal budgeting can be a simple exercise, but, like flossing, it is one we do too seldom. Our hometown University of Washington has a [two-page personal budgeting guide](#), as do scores of other personal finance sites. Idealist has a [simple primer on "personal profit in a nonprofit world."](#) Financial health will help your mental health, and mental health means you will be far more successful in whatever public service you pursue.

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organization committed to raising public awareness about the issues of global poverty, hunger, and disease and the efforts to fight such problems in the world's poorest countries.

my goodness Blankathon

Should I give money to that bikeathon, walkathon, readathon, or danceathon?

By Patty Stonesifer and Sandy Stonesifer

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 12:07 PM ET

Dear Patty and Sandy,

I recently participated in a local five-kilometer race in which the \$25 entry fee went to the Save Darfur organization, which raises awareness about the genocide in Sudan. Would my money/time be better spent on a different organization?

Adam

Patty:

We all wonder whether or not participating in or giving to these blankathons (bike, ride, walk, knit ...) is worth our time or money. Before deciding to give to your cousin, or colleague, or neighbor's blankathon, you should use a four-part test. If you are uncomfortable at any stage of this test, say, "It's great you're involved, but, no thank you, my own giving plans point elsewhere right now." (This gentle turndown is what I affectionately call the "hug and release," and we all need to practice it in order to focus our own efforts.)

Here is my test:

1. Is the mission of this organization one I would put on my Top 20 list? If not ... just hug and release. Life is short.
2. Has this organization demonstrated progress pursuing its mission? If it's new, is it probably destined for success? To me, this second element is the most important question in all gift-giving. Don't just ask: "Is Darfur something I should be concerned about?" Ask: "Has the [Save Darfur Coalition](#) been successful in drawing attention and pushing progress on the critical issues?" (I think it has been.) If those involved can't answer this question for you, move on.
3. Is the individual asking for the pledge—or the organization arranging the fundraiser—worth supporting? Do you want to encourage their social efforts? Do you want them to represent you and your intentions? If not, bow out gracefully.

4. What do this organization's finances look like and why? Please remember that many reputable and important organizations lose money on the effort to get your first gift. They are hoping that once you've started giving, you will continue to give them support—your time, voice, or money—and that you will be a profitable partner in the future. Now, this doesn't mean that any organization should be spending 50 percent of its resources on fundraising. A rule of thumb for an established organization would be between 5 percent and 15 percent. But there are [wide variations](#), so before you give, you might want to dig a bit. Spend a few minutes and see what this organization says on its own Web site, or check out one of the top nonprofit watchdog sites ([Charity Navigator](#), [Better Business Bureau](#) or [Guidestar](#)).

Sandy:

My mom gives a pretty thorough answer to this question, but in some ways I think she is being too nice. I distrust the efficacy of these events a lot more than she seems to. If I question black-tie fundraisers that strike me as more for the see-and-be-seen than for the cause, why should I feel any better about these blankathons?

Charity Navigator produced a [report to answer just this question](#). They found that nearly half of all charities use special events as a way to raise money—and that the charities they ranked spend an average of \$1.33 to raise \$1 at special events, whereas they spend only \$0.13 to raise a \$1 in their overall funding. In other words, they actually seem to lose money on their blankathons or black-tie dinners. But before you swear never to pledge again, you should know that five of the best-known events do a lot better (and some are even more efficient in their special events than in their overall fundraising): the American Cancer Society (Relay for Life), the Muscular Dystrophy Association (Jerry Lewis Telethon), the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (Team in Training, Rock 'n' Roll Marathon), the March of Dimes (WalkAmerica), and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International (Walk/Ride To Cure Diabetes). Unfortunately, it looks as if Save Darfur isn't rated by Charity Navigator, but you could try to do your own analysis using its [publicly available 990 form](#).

Of course, as both my mom and the report say, there are other reasons organizations hold events like these: to raise awareness, to cultivate donors, to get press, etc. While there are many explanations about why big charities might do better than your local high school's race, it's important to understand that not all special events are created equal. If you decide that you can forsake efficiency for supporting a cause or an individual you care about, then go for it, just know where your dollar is going.

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other magazines

Out With the Old, in With the New

The *Weekly Standard* bids farewell to Bush, while *Newsweek* prepares the way for Obama.

By Kara Hadge

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 8:02 PM ET

Weekly Standard, Jan. 26

A [feature](#) frowns at the Bush administration's "nearly unbroken string of defeats and retreats" in its policy toward North Korea. Some of the blame falls on President Clinton, who "chose to ignore the mounting evidence that North Korea was cheating" by developing "an illicit uranium-based weapons program." But the Bush administration failed because "the president and his administration never actually developed a *policy* toward North Korea—an approach through which those attitudes toward this dangerous regime would be operationalized, and objectives coherently pursued." ... An [editorial](#) argues that some Republicans are "about to draw the wrong lessons from the Bush legacy." Bush's spendthrift ways raised the hackles of conservatives who want their party to "return to its roots" and oppose the welfare state on principle." However, Republicans wishing for smaller government should instead push for "a less intrusive government that encourages personal responsibility among its adult citizens."

Newsweek, Jan. 26

The [cover story](#) examines Obama's presidency in light of the country's changing demographics, four decades after Lyndon B. Johnson's Immigration and Nationality Act ushered in waves of new immigrants. Obama's ascension to the presidency was possible because "[a]s the electorate changes, voters themselves are more likely to come from diverse backgrounds or live in a world in which diversity is the rule, not the exception." ... As race becomes a less prominent issue in American politics, "class will likely constitute the major dividing line in our society," a [feature](#) argues. The gap between the middle and upper classes has significantly widened in the last 40 years, but "the rate of upward mobility has stagnated overall, which means it is no easier for the poor to move up today than it was in the 1970s."

New Republic, Feb. 4

The [cover story](#) argues that recessions reinforce the global economic pecking order, and the present one will do the same by assuring U.S. dominance over developing economies once the dust settles. Russia, China, and India face setbacks to their recent growth because of falling oil prices, reliance on the American economy, and political instability. Ultimately, "the financial crisis may actually resuscitate U.S. power relative to its rivals." ... A [feature](#) uses the Harvard and Yale law schools as an analogy for Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. A Yale Law graduate, President Clinton reflected the strengths of his fellow alumni, who were "creative, deep-thinking, engrossed by public policy" but perhaps more ambitious than pragmatic. Obama, on the other hand, was influenced by the emphasis on "discipline" at Harvard, which was "a three-year hazing ritual" compared with Yale's "three-year Renaissance Weekend" ethos.

The New Yorker, Jan. 26

Slate contributor Atul Gawande [mulls](#) options for health care reform under the Obama administration. The author compares the successful transitions of several European countries to government-sponsored health care during the last half-century. In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service "was a pragmatic outgrowth of circumstances peculiar to Britain immediately after the Second World War." Since "our health-care system has been a hodgepodge for so long ... we actually have experience with all kinds of systems." Regardless of the path the U.S. government pursues, it needs to focus on cutting costs for patients. ... An [article](#) chronicles the early history of the American newspaper leading up to its first death knell in the 18th century. Prior to the American Revolution, the Stamp Act ate away at publishers by requiring the purchase of a stamp for every page printed. Colonial papers alternately folded and resurfaced, but during the war, they "proved crucial to the resistance movement."

Esquire, February 2009

An [essay](#) contends that Americans were complicit in the country's failures over the last eight years. President Bush's two terms were marked by "ironies that exposed the consequences of our assent." People were horrified to learn of the National Security Agency's wiretapping yet were perfectly willing to relinquish "more of our privacy to Steve Jobs than we ever did to George Bush as soon as we bought an iPhone." What remains is a "Moral Bubble, and it will not be pricked until we take responsibility not just for the forty-third president's actions but for our *inaction*." ... A profile of Vice President Joe Biden weighs the "qualities that made some people dismiss him as a showboat and others trust him with their lives." The author went behind the scenes with Biden in the weeks after the election, a time during which, Biden says, "nobody [paid] any attention to me at all."

poem

"Inauguration Day"

By Frank Bidart

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 7:14 AM ET

Click the arrow on the audio player to hear Frank Bidart read this poem. You can also [download](#) the recording or [subscribe](#) to Slate's Poetry Podcast on iTunes.

Today, despite what is dead

staring out across America I see since
Lincoln gunmen
nursing fantasies of purity betrayed,
dreaming to restore
the glories of their blood and state

despite what is dead but lodged within us, hope

under the lustrous flooding moon
the White House is still
Whitman's White House, its
gorgeous front
full of reality, full of illusion

hope made wise by dread begins again

politics

No News Is No News

The president's new press secretary proves adept at an old game: saying nothing.

By John Dickerson

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 7:32 PM ET

Here are the headlines from the first official White House briefing by press secretary Robert Gibbs:

- President Obama will get a daily economic briefing, similar to the national security briefing he receives every morning.
- The president will be able to keep his BlackBerry to keep in touch with top staff and friends.

- At the end of his first day in office, Obama had to ask directions to get to his private quarters.

You might think it would take just a few minutes to convey this little news. But it was the product of an hourlong exchange filled with the rituals of getting-to-know-you, debates about press access, and a few tours around the mulberry bush as we tried to get Gibbs to make more news than he wanted to.

Former Clinton press secretary Mike McCurry says the White House briefing changed forever during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, when the cable networks started televising it live. Press secretaries grew cautious—a mistake could zoom around the world's televisions in minutes. Journalists became theatrical, hoping to impress bosses, girlfriends, and the members of Mom's bridge club.

At Gibbs' maiden press conference, all that was missing was a brass band. The briefing room, which is about the size of a suburban garage, was stuffed with easily more than 100 journalists and photographers. Veteran reporters surfed through puffy winter coats to get to their assigned seats. Helen Thomas had to take the arm of a colleague to run the gantlet. A cameraman for a foreign news outlet set up a step ladder in the middle of the narrow aisle, and when he swung to capture the scene his buttocks offended a series of his colleagues.

We all waited in sweaty anticipation for Gibbs to arrive. He was just a few minutes late, which was time enough to reflect on the truly awful mishmash that serves as the official White House backdrop. In the more than a dozen years I've attended these briefings, the stage on which the press secretary stands has also gone Hollywood. There's not that much room for the press secretary—Gibbs could barely complete a waltz turn—and yet in that tiny space there's a White House logo, two American flags, two fluted columns, and two electronic screens that read, "White House Daily Briefing January 22, 2009." Gibbs stands in the middle of all of this behind a lectern big enough to stop a truck. Fortunately for those of you in the viewing audience, you never see the complete picture.

When Gibbs arrived, he looked a little nervous in his baby-blue tie. "Give me one sec to get organized here," he said, shuffling his papers. The cameras clicked away. If the attention of the world weren't nerve-racking enough, the cameras should have been. Every time Gibbs gesticulated, a thousand shutter snaps exploded.

Once the exchanges began, Gibbs dished quips and performed many familiar routines that won him raves from three former White House press secretaries I surveyed afterward. He avoided specifics in favor of firmly stated generalities. He stuck to the talking points. Describing the redo of the presidential oath, he

used the term "abundance of caution" 10 times, as if he were trying to win a secret contest. The room laughed at his last use of the term. "I don't mean for you to laugh when I don't say something altogether generally funny," Gibbs said, looking a little wounded.

He moved with ease past apparent contradictions. An Obama executive order bans lobbyists from working in government jobs related to their work for their former employers. William Lynn, slated to be deputy defense secretary, was recently a lobbyist for Raytheon, a major defense contractor. Gibbs was unfazed. He said there needed to be exceptions to this new rule, and that Obama's rules amounted to the toughest ethical standards in history.

It is the kind of contradiction that candidate Obama would have rolled around in like a Labrador. "See, I was trying to explain to somebody a while back ... the okie-doke," he would have said. "You all know the okie-doke. When somebody is trying to bamboozle you, when they are trying to hoodwink you."

The briefing was dominated by questions about Obama's orders to close the Guantanamo terror detention facility and ban harsh interrogation techniques. Gibbs refused to make news, referring reporters to an earlier background briefing by senior officials. (I can't tell you their names.) After deferring a question on the president's new torture policy until he checked his facts with the National Security Council, he was asked whether it was fair to conclude the policy was up in the air. "It's fair for you to conclude that I want to make sure I don't make a mistake."

If any viewers were frustrated with Gibbs, they were no doubt far more frustrated with the journalists. Several of the questions related to access and transparency—like how President Obama could exclude TV and radio coverage of his second oath of office Wednesday. In some cases, the questions involved matters of principle that are important to the press but are of little interest to anyone else, such as whether accountability is better than anonymity. To members of the nonpress—which is to say, pretty much everyone not in that room—it must have looked small-minded. Said Jim Jordan, a veteran Democratic strategist: "It certainly worked to his advantage that the press corps—in the midst of this historic moment, in the midst of national and international crisis—descended, inevitably, into a whiny, pitiful litany of it's-all-about-me complaints about access."

Afterward, a colleague joked to me, "About midway through, I thought I was going to fall asleep." Too bad Obama has frozen the salaries of his top staffers. In earlier times, that kind of praise for a press secretary would have gotten him a raise.

politics

The Change-o-Meter

As promised, Guantanamo and CIA prisons will close.

By Chris Wilson

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:12 PM ET

For the second day in a row, President Obama is pursuing the political equivalent of the [serenity prayer](#): He's changing what he can. As expected, Obama [signed executive orders](#) Thursday shutting down the Guantanamo Bay detention facilities and the CIA's [overseas prisons](#), as well as limiting the CIA to interrogation techniques permitted in the [Army Field Manual](#), which precludes methods that have been previously used on terrorism suspects. While the interrogation edict may be fungible, the move is an early fulfillment of a major campaign promise. That and several other policy changes net a score of **60 on the Change-o-Meter**.

There's no arguing with the significance of closing Guantanamo, which for years has been the most visible reminder of the Bush administration's murky legal strategy for enemy combatants. Obama's [executive order](#) sets a limit of one year for the closure of the facility. A [separate order](#) convenes a task force, involving a good chunk of his Cabinet, to review detention options.

It's worth noting, however, that any change in the actual physical and legal conditions of enemy combatants is pending. As the *Washington Independent's* Daphne Eviatar [pointed out](#), it wouldn't be too difficult for the president to change course on the CIA call, particularly if the United States were to capture some especially dangerous or knowledgeable terrorist.

While Obama's pick for the top post at the CIA, retired Adm. Dennis Blair, [avoided](#) explicitly describing water-boarding as torture, as attorney general nominee Eric Holder did, Blair did state that "there will be no water-boarding on my watch." While that's reassuring for those suspicious of these loopholes, higher scores on our meter are reserved for policies that pack more heat and permanence than an executive order.

In other news, Obama ordered federal agencies to be [more forthcoming](#) on Freedom of Information requests and other transparency measures, a welcome move for journalists and other people who like government documents. Meanwhile, the technological wizardry of his campaign is [hitting a few snags](#) during the move to the White House, a transition one spokesman described as like "going from an Xbox to an Atari." Updates to the revamped [White House Web site](#) are still a bit sluggish as well, and aides are reportedly still getting their e-mail up and running. Nonetheless, one resident of 1600 Pennsylvania won't go without his inbox; in a major victory worthy of a nudge on the Change-o-Meter, Obama will get to [keep his BlackBerry](#).

There's a lot to cover, so we want to [hear your thoughts](#) on what the Change-o-Meter should be taking into account. No detail is too small or wonky. E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.

politics

The Change-o-Meter

A halt to military commissions in Guantanamo notches points for Obama.

By Chris Wilson

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 6:13 PM ET

After a night of inaugural-ball-hopping, President Obama showed up to work at 8:35 a.m. today to read the traditional note on the desk from his predecessor. Then he got down to business changing stuff.

At Obama's request, military judges have [granted a 120-day suspension](#) in cases involving detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, temporarily halting the trials of five men suspected of plotting the 9/11 attacks. The administration also released a [draft of an executive order](#) to shut down the naval prison altogether, directing that the camp be closed "as soon as practicable, and no later than one year from the date of this order," the Associated Press reports. The new administration quickly [put the brakes on any federal rules and regulations](#) from the Bush administration until further review.

Obama's [first official executive orders and directives](#) erected higher barriers between lobbyists and his administration—specifically, making it harder for people to move between them. Top White House aides will be barred from lobbying the government for two years. People moving in the opposite direction will not be allowed to work on issues in the White House for which they previously lobbied. Obama also issued a salary freeze for those making more than \$100,000 a year.

In addition to a busy day of consultations with a variety of different sets of advisers, Obama is also expected to ask his top military commanders for [a plan to withdraw troops from Iraq](#) in 16 months.

The Tally: Obama's move to halt the military tribunals at Guantanamo is the most immediate and substantive change of the day. While the order buys the new administration four months to figure out what to do with the detainees who are currently facing trial—including alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—many suspect it is essentially the [end of the controversial military commissions](#) established in 2006.

The Change-o-Meter is less impressed with the new in-house rules. The pay freeze is a nice symbolic gesture but functionally meaningless; just about everyone working in the top levels of government could be making a lot more elsewhere—though now they'll have to scrape by for two years before landing that seven-digit salary at a K Street firm. While it may be wise for Obama to begin his ethics reform at the White House, any meaningful revision to the convection of power in D.C. will require much more sweeping moves. One reader points out that Obama should be penalized for governing with too many executive orders, a staple of the Bush/Cheney theory of a unitary executive. While it's a good point, this is a reasonable way to set policy for one's own employees. But we'll be keeping an eye out for more egregious uses of Bush's favorite act.

We won't know the specifics on a withdrawal from Iraq for some time, but Obama gets points for convening the brass right away and setting the gears of the extraction in motion.

Bonus: It may not be the most important change in the world, but a *Slate* reader points out a telling difference in the Obama and Bush Web sites. While Bush's Whitehouse.gov [placed heavy restrictions](#) on how search engines and data miners could crawl the site, Obama's does not, making the content of the site more accessible and aggregatable. We'll toss in a point for that.

Add it all up, and we arrive at **40 percent** on the Change-o-Meter. For Day 1, it's a respectable performance.

There's a lot to cover, so we want to [hear your thoughts](#) on what the Change-o-Meter should be taking into account. No detail is too small or wonky. E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.

politics

Obama's Inaugural, Annotated

Slate writers pencil in their notes on the inaugural address.

Edited by Chris Wilson

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 12:00 PM ET

After President Barack Obama delivered his inaugural address Tuesday, *Slate* writers compiled supplementary notes on the most interesting and historically relevant phrases. Mouse over a highlighted sentence or phrase to see an explanation of its significance.

Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often

the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbears, and true to our founding documents.

So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land--a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights.

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America--they will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and

worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted--for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things--some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life.

For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth.

For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh.

Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions--that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act--not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. And all this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions--who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.

What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them--that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether

our government is too big or too small, but whether it works--whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account--to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day--because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, but this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control--and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart--not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.

As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience's sake. And so to all other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort--even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus--and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West--know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet, at this moment--a moment that will define a generation--it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would

rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends--hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism--these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility--a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

This is the source of our confidence--the knowledge that **God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.**

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed--why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a **man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant** can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires

on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people:

Let it be told to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive ... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it].

America. In the face of our common dangers, in this **winter of our hardship**, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

Have a suggestion for a new annotation? [E-mail us.](#)

Annotations by Anne Applebaum, Dana Stevens, John Swansburg, June Thomas, and Chris Wilson.

politics

Introducing the Change-o-Meter

A daily evaluation of the Obama administration's efforts to change Washington.

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 7:41 PM ET

Every new president promises to change the way Washington works, but few have made that pledge as central to their message as Barack Obama. With that in mind, **Slate** introduces the Change-o-Meter, a quasi-objective measure of the Obama administration's efforts to resculpt the federal government on any given day. Points will be awarded for substantive progress on substantive initiatives, whether they come in the form of new

legislation, federal rules, executive orders, or anything else. By the same token, the meter will punish superfluous changes, broken promises, or legislative goals that flop in Congress. The White House on the handy meter below will slide back and forth to display the scores.

For the Change-o-Meter's first installment, we're starting Obama at 25 percent. In all fairness, as of this writing he's been president for only about six hours. Still, he has not yet issued any executive orders, which would not have required any approval from Congress or anyone else. (He's expected to order the [closure of the naval prison](#) in Guantanamo Bay sometime this week.) While his inaugural address contained familiar themes of renewed leadership in America, the tone was conventional, and he did not make any major departures from tradition.

Obama still has about 35,000 hours left in his four-year term, so there's plenty of time for him to bring on some change. Each day, we'll post a rundown of what he's done (or hasn't done) and adjust the Change-o-Meter accordingly. There's a lot to cover, so we want to [hear your thoughts](#) on what the Change-o-Meter should be taking into account. No detail is too small or wonky—the only requirement is that it matter.

politics

What's New Is Old Again

Obama's speech goes for prose instead of poetry.

By John Dickerson

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 4:35 PM ET

On the west steps of the Capitol, Barack Obama turned his inaugural address into a national locker-room speech. Describing our current crisis and "a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable," he called on Americans to "pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America." He called for "a new era of responsibility" founded on America's oldest virtues. "Those values upon which our success depends—hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths."

It was a good speech but not a soaring one. This may have been because Obama has given so many strong speeches, he's graded on his own special curve—or because he wanted the speech to be thoroughly conventional. His call to responsibility and sacrifice was rooted in American history—from the first settlers through the colonists to America's soldiers. This is a familiar

theme in a political speech. In fact, Obama gave his own speech using these themes [last June](#), in which he made a similar call to a new patriotism founded on sacrifice. The use of "I say to you" and "on this day" constructions added to the feeling that this was a speech of the usual order.

Appealing to America's rich heritage makes Obama everyone's president, knitting him into the lineup of the 42 men who have come before him. (Obama is the 43rd man, not the 44th, because Grover Cleveland served as president No. 22 and president No. 24.) But it goes only so far in helping him with his speech's larger aim. His goal was to try to inspire us to give something up and reverse "our collective failure to make hard choices," which he says marked the responsibility-free era that created our current economic mess.

That kind of extraordinary call could have been helped by something more than historical analogies and drive-by references to brave firefighters. It required the kind of personal speechmaking Obama was so good at during the campaign. When he is at his most powerful, Obama makes you feel the connection with his message through either storytelling or references to his personal journey. His wife, Michelle, did the same thing during her convention speech by beautifully outlining how her father refused to give in to the pain and debilitation of multiple sclerosis. When things got hard, she said, "He just woke up a little earlier, and worked a little harder."

Instead of a personal story people could take home, Obama concluded his speech with the story of George Washington fighting for America's independence. It was a perfectly fine story, suitable for treatment in oil and fit for a gilt frame, but it's not a story that's likely to be retold tomorrow at the office.

Though the speech was familiar, there were some poetic high points. He talked about the "risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things," and as he spoke, his words echoed back to him from down the Mall, where they were being broadcast on giant televisions. He framed the new spirit of sacrifice we all must embrace by referring to the extraordinary selflessness of the military. This is a smart thing for a commander in chief to do, particularly one who was portrayed by his opponents as unpatriotic. And by putting out his familiar call for "a new era of responsibility," he has ensured that the phrase will be repeated throughout his tenure. And he hopes that the policies he will promise later, on everything from health care to entitlement reform, will become a part of the larger narrative of his presidency.

He was alternatively humble and commanding. He repudiated Bush's foreign policy. "We reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals," Obama said. "Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world,

and we will not give them up for expedience's sake." He promised humility and restraint. But then, he tempered that new approach with a clear message to America's enemies: "We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you." As he spoke, a fighter plane circled overhead, a tiny black spot against unspecific clouds.

How long Obama's words endure is a separate question from the enduring power of the inaugural moment. Though he never mentioned Martin Luther King Jr., Obama faced the Lincoln Memorial from where King articulated a dream that Obama is now helping to fulfill. That monument seemed brighter in the bitter cold, as did all the bleached white buildings that line the Mall. Between them jostled the millions of people who had come to hear and see him, their small American flags creating a blur of red, white, and blue among the museums and monuments.

Watch Obama's inaugural address:

politics

Slate's Farewell to Bush

All the valedictory articles about the 43rd president.

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 2:19 PM ET

"No Regrets: Why I'm not sorry that George W. Bush beat Al Gore and John Kerry," by Christopher Hitchens. Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

"The President's Last Goodbye: *Slate* crashes Bush's farewell party," by Christopher Beam. Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

"Mr. Ex-President: How George W. Bush can make the most of the rest of his life," by Christopher Beam. Posted Jan. 15, 2009.

"Today's Pictures: What the Bush years looked like," by Magnum Photos. Posted Jan. 15, 2009.

"Bush's Legacy: He Survived! Reagan broke Tecumseh's Curse, but Bush may have killed it altogether," by Steve Friess. Posted Jan. 14, 2009.

"Bush's Manic Press Conference: *Slate V* breaks down Bush's last press conference," by John Dickerson. Posted Jan. 13, 2009.

"Today's Cartoons: Cartoonists' take on eight years of George W. Bush." Posted Jan. 13, 2009.

"W.'s Greatest Hits: The top 25 Bushisms of all time," by Jacob Weisberg. Posted Jan. 12, 2009.

"The Enigma in Chief: We still don't know how or why Bush made the key decisions of his administration," by Jacob Weisberg. Posted Jan. 10, 2009.

politics

"This Winter of Our Hardship"

Read the full text of Obama's speech.

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 12:22 PM ET

Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbears, and true to our founding documents.

So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land—a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights.

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America—they will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted—for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things—some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

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For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act—not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids

and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. And all this we will do.

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Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, but this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control—and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart—not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.

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Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we

please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort—even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus—and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West—know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet, at this moment—a

moment that will define a generation—it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends—hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility—a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed—why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people:

Let it be told to the future world...that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive ... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it].

America. In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

politics

The Obama-Jonas Ticket

OMG! The Obama team goes after the 'tween vote.

By Josh Levin

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 11:56 AM ET

If national elections were contested via adolescent screeching, the Jonas Brothers would be America's first (and cutest!) sibling co-presidents. Without Barack Obama in attendance at Monday night's "Kids' Inaugural: We Are the Future" concert at D.C.'s Verizon Center, the Jonas boys filled the power vacuum with a disciplined campaign of eyelash fluttering and [power sliding](#). Other objects of preteen acclimation, from highest- to lowest-pitched shriek: Michelle Obama, Usher, Miley Cyrus, *High School Musical*'s [Corbin Bleu](#), "the troops," Bow Wow, a passel of cannon-propelled T-shirts of unknown design, [Demi Lovato](#), and Dr. Jill Biden, who earns last place by making the totally mortifying declaration that her four granddaughters make her "a lucky nana." Come on, Grandma!

Judging by their positions on the bill at "We Are the Future" and "We Are One," closing act the Jonas Brothers are the *High School Musical* generation's U2, while opener Miley Cyrus is Bruce Springsteen. Last night, however, Cyrus appeared to be going through her "Dylan goes pubescent" phase, exchanging a red ball gown for a "Times They Are A-Changing" T-shirt after her opening number. "Girls, I know you've got to be awfully proud of your dad, and so am I," the *Hannah Montana* star shouted, pausing her set to chat with Sasha and Malia Obama. "So I'm going to bring my dad out to join the fun." While this comparison is a bit of a stretch—Barack Obama was just elected president; Billy Ray Cyrus cut off his mullet and grew a soul patch—the older Cyrus does appear regularly on the Disney Channel. Screeching ensued.

For the Presidential Inaugural Committee, the kids' concert is the embodiment of this week's animating principle: Leave no demographic behind. Aside from newborns and emo teens, it's hard to find a group that's not being courted aggressively. Obama's train ride to Washington brought smiles to the geezers, James Taylor secured the boomers, the inauguration itself is for

earnest twentysomethings, and the balls give the idle rich a rare chance to wear their top hats.

Michelle Obama, like most every speaker on this night, knows how to butter up her audience. (The one exception: George Lopez, who delights [Speedy Gonzales](#) and nobody else with a joke about how a hypothetical Latino president will provide every American with a free *churro*.) Obama assured [the children that they are our future](#), that they will lead the way, that their laughter will remind us of how we used to be. After thanking the military for keeping the nation safe, she pointed out that "you don't need a uniform to serve this country." Kids can help out, too, Obama said, by visiting an elderly person or picking up trash. While this unfortunate parallelism might not have gone over at an AARP rally, the under-10 camp responded with a deeply felt "Wooooooooo!"

With the short speeches mostly a respite to allow Cyrus to change outfits, the evening felt like the world's schmanciest birthday party. Malia and Sasha—in the front row, flanked by Mom and Grandma—received a procession of well-wishers and dignitaries. The girls took turns snapping photos with a digital camera, getting serenaded by Corbin Bleu, and bouncing up and down un-self-consciously to the Jonas Brothers. During the finale, they even got to climb up onstage with [Kevin, Joe, and Nick](#) as confetti poured from the ceiling. For a couple of preteen girls, it's hard to imagine what could possibly top this. Watching your dad get sworn in as president can't be bad, but Inauguration Day is missing a certain something: T-shirt cannons.

politics

What a Crowd!

Great photos of Obama's inauguration.

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 10:59 AM ET

Click [here](#) for a slide show of great photos from Obama's inauguration. We'll be updating it throughout the day.

politics

Slate's Inauguration Coverage

All the articles on Obama's move to the White House.

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 7:29 AM ET

["Chris Matthews' Inaugural Jib-Jabbery"](#): The MSNBC motormouth talks a lot, says nothing," by Jack Shafer. Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009.

["One Ecstatic Inauguration Attendee, Two Ecstatic Inauguration Attendees"](#): How do you measure a crowd?" by Juliet Lapidos. Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009.

["CNN Goes to the Ball"](#): After the event, it was time for the pseudo-event," by Troy Patterson. Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009.

["Little Hotties at the Mall"](#): Volunteering at the inauguration was more satisfying than I had a right to expect. Plus, I got free hand warmers," by Nicholas Schmidle. Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009.

["Obama's Inaugural, Annotated"](#): *Slate* writers pencil in their notes on the inaugural address," edited by Chris Wilson. Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009.

["The Partygoer"](#): How many inaugural balls can I get to in one night?" by Seth Stevenson, Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009.

["Inaugorophobia, Part 3"](#): How Ted Kennedy's illness accelerates a shakedown on his behalf," by Timothy Noah. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["Does the Kevlar Number Come in a French Cuff?"](#) Obama was wearing 'bullet-resistant clothing.' What's that?" by Juliet Lapidos. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["What's New Is Old Again"](#): Obama's speech goes for prose instead of poetry," by John Dickerson. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["Two Women Named Betty"](#): Watching the inauguration with the crowd on the Mall," by Emily Bazelon. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["I Do Solemnly Swear That I Will Blog Regularly"](#): Touring the new Whitehouse.gov," by Farhad Manjoo. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["John Roberts, Fallible"](#): The chief justice and the new president fox-trot all over the oath of office," by Dahlia Lithwick. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["This Winter of Our Hardship"](#): Read the full text of Obama's speech," posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["The Obama-Jonas Ticket"](#): OMG! The Obama team goes after the 'tween vote," by Josh Levin. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["Inaugorophobia, Part 2"](#): The last shall be first," by Timothy Noah. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["The Inaugural Live Gabfest"](#): Listen to *Slate's* review of the week in politics," by Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["Inaugorophobia"](#): Did someone drop a neutron bomb on upper northwest D.C.?" by Timothy Noah. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["What a Crowd!"](#) Great photos of Obama's inauguration," posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["A New Nation"](#): Part 5 of *Slate's* inauguration novella," by Curtis Sittenfeld. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["Inauguration Day"](#): A weekly poem, read by the author," by Frank Bidart. Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009.

["Usher Quotes Aristotle"](#): On *Oprah*, the inaugural celebration gets surreal," by Troy Patterson. Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

["Why Doesn't Every President Use the Lincoln Bible?"](#) And other tidbits about the Inauguration Day scripture," by Noreen Malone. Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

["How Not To Get Trampled at the Inauguration"](#): Don't go with the flow," by Amanda Ripley. Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

["Mr. President, Give This Speech"](#): What *Slate* readers think Obama should say in his inaugural address." Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

["Obamamaniacs"](#): Part 4 of *Slate's* inauguration novella," by Curtis Sittenfeld. Posted Jan. 19, 2009.

["Enjoy the History, Ignore the Politics"](#): Why conservatives should be looking forward to the Obama inauguration," by Rachael Larimore. Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009.

["All the President's Justices"](#): Barack Obama and John Roberts make history as they repeat it," by Dahlia Lithwick. Posted Saturday, Jan. 17, 2009.

["The Storyteller"](#): Obama's best speeches have always revolved around stories. Which one will he

tell on Tuesday?" by John Dickerson. Posted Saturday, Jan. 17, 2009.

["Thongs We Can Believe In"](#): Obama's inauguration is making history and selling kitsch." A slide show by Torie Bosch. Posted Friday, Jan. 16, 2009.

["Stars and Stripes Forever"](#): Part 3 of the inauguration novella," by Curtis Sittenfeld. Posted Friday, Jan. 16, 2009.

["Got Hope?"](#): Part 2 of the inauguration novella," by Curtis Sittenfeld. Posted Jan. 15, 2009.

["All Along, This Was What Was Supposed To Happen"](#): An inauguration novella," by Curtis Sittenfeld. Posted Jan. 13, 2009.

["God Bless, and Bless, and Bless, and Bless America"](#): How many preachers does one inauguration need?" by Christopher Beam. Posted Jan. 12, 2009.

["First Movers"](#): How exactly will Obama get all his stuff into the White House?" by Christopher Beam. Posted Jan. 9, 2009.

["The Get-the-Inauguration-Over Gabfest"](#): **Slate's** review of the week in politics," by Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz. Posted Jan. 9, 2009.

politics

Mr. President, Give This Speech

What **Slate** readers think Obama should say in his inaugural address. Monday, January 19, 2009, at 1:27 PM ET

Two weeks ago, **Slate** and [MixedInk](#) asked readers to collaborate in creating Barack Obama's inaugural address: writing, editing, and rating versions of the speech they'd like to see him give on Tuesday. More than 450 people participated, creating 384 speeches—most of them original but more than 100 "remixed" with words from other contributors, including the previous 43 presidents. (For more on how the process worked, see [here](#) and [here](#).) The 1,042-word speech below, lightly edited for spelling and grammar, is the collaboration between two **Slate** readers known as Honu and Nick. It also borrows from Woodrow Wilson's and Dwight Eisenhower's inaugural

addresses, as well as a speech Obama himself gave last March. It was the contest's top-rated speech.

My fellow Americans,

Over two centuries ago, a general from Virginia was the first to take the oath I have been fortunate to repeat here today, swearing allegiance to this newborn Union.

Nearly a century later, a lawyer from Illinois swore this same oath, and then he, too, had to fight. This time, the battle was to preserve the Union, and then to perfect it by recognizing as citizens the many who had been excluded solely because of the color of their skin. A governor from New York swore this oath, and called for confidence in that Union against the perils of fear during a time of unparalleled economic crisis. A former Navy veteran from Massachusetts took this oath, and then challenged each American to ask what he or she might do for this nation.

In each generation, leaders have stepped forward and Americans have stepped up to make our union ever more perfect. Men and women have fought and worked and died to narrow the gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of our times.

The realities of today are, indeed, hard. Millions of Americans are either out of work or underemployed. Many more are uncertain whether the job they hold today will be there tomorrow. A vast number of children are still not receiving the world's best education—not because we cannot provide it, but because they cannot afford it. And Americans of all ages are afraid to go to the hospital because of rising premiums and shrinking incomes.

But American has prevailed over much worse. We have prevailed over Depression and fascism. We have prevailed over enemies abroad and bigotry at home. And as we step up today, together, united one people, indivisible, we will prevail again.

Together, we can do anything.

If we are to pursue happiness, we must also strive to protect the happiness of others. If we are to pursue learning, we must also strive to educate. If we are to love others, we must also have the courage to protect those who love us.

Future generations of Americans will look back at this moment of crisis and opportunity and they will judge us—but not by our words. They will measure us—but not by the promises we make. For language has the power to move us to action, but it is never a substitute for it.

Our children's children will ask only this: What did they do back then? Did they rise to the challenges providence had set before them? Did they unite as one people, with a common destiny?

Did they set aside the old partisan rancor in order to protect our great nation, to strengthen democracy and human rights at home and abroad and to safeguard the blessings of the natural world for all time? Did they live up to the great promise cradled in that name: America? What will these future generations say?

They will say, "Yes, they did."

Because, my fellow Americans, yes, we will. We embrace these challenges, all of them. Because that is where we find meaning in our lives.

Being American means we have the privilege, the right and the duty to strive for a more perfect society, not tomorrow, not next year not under the next leadership, but in our time.

In our time we can fix the bridges and rebuild the roads that the American economy might thrive far into the future.

In our time we can stop the oceans from rising, curb pollution, and protect our planet and the planet of our children.

In our time we can build new schools, hire new teachers, and stop just giving great teachers our praises and start giving them raises.

In our time we can make health care available to all Americans.

In our time we can end our addiction to oil.

In our time we can rebuild and restore the promise America holds to the world. The last best chance can once again be the best. We cannot just promote ideals without also living them. We can look leaders in the eye when we tell them not to torture because they know we do not. And when our nation or our values should be threatened, we will never back down, because our men and women in uniform will know that ours is not a nation that strives for domination or individual gain but for what is just, and so long as we hew to the side of justice, so long as we buttress the force of arms with the force of ideas, there is no enemy we cannot best and no challenge we cannot overcome.

Americans are not of one mind. We have spirited differences on every topic conceivable, and that makes us stronger. Our differences allow us to change and adapt our covenants and customs. But we must resist the partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that have gridlocked us in the past. We have our differences, but we also have our similarities. There are deep differences and good people on both sides of the abortion debate, but we can all agree we should try to prevent unintended pregnancies. We can all agree we should provide single mothers with help if they want to keep the baby. We all share one country, one promise. We are all Americans, and when that

promise is not a promise to us, but also a promise by us, we make our own destiny.

So let us renew this promise. This is not an oath I can fulfill by myself. In this country we elect leaders not to rule, but to serve. But we must all serve. Let us move forward together. Let us become a better nation.

Let today be not a triumph, but a dedication. A dedication that we will work harder, go further, and persist longer so that we should make this great country even greater and leave our children a finer world than the one we entered. A dedication to join the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring, and more prosperous America.

May God bless America, and may America always prove worthy of the blessings we have received.

politics

Enjoy the History, Ignore the Politics

Why conservatives should be looking forward to the Obama inauguration.

By Rachael Larimore

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 6:59 AM ET

As a conservative, I think I may actually enjoy Barack Obama's inauguration more than my many Obama-supporting friends. I'm not planning a special trip to Washington, D.C., or stocking up on commemorative coins or coffee cups. Throughout the campaign, I considered Obama to be an impressive orator, a compelling candidate, and, as we got closer to November, the likely victor. But, at the end of the day, he was still—in my eyes—just a politician, and, perhaps more distressing to his legions of fans, [a human being](#). My hopes and expectations for Obama, therefore, are much more reasonable, and I will be able to take in the history and the pomp without the accompanying anxiety that Inauguration Day will bring to my more liberal friends.

For years, conservatives liked to mock those who became unhinged in their hatred of President Bush by saying they had Bush Derangement Syndrome. I could see a similar malady developing over the next four years: Obama Disillusionment Syndrome. And I fear that many of the same folks now just recovering from BDS are most at risk for ODS. Is it possible for anyone—even the great Obama—to live up to such heightened expectations?

We've already seen hints of this anxiety. Look at the tumult that resulted from Obama announcing that Rick Warren would give

the inaugural invocation. Gays and lesbians who supported Obama [canceled their inaugural parties](#) and [debated whether Obama was reaching out](#) to those with different views or overreaching and selling out.

The conventional wisdom is that Obama has had a smooth transition, but from my perspective, I saw more than a few bumps. He upset the anti-war left by picking Hillary Clinton for secretary of state. The Bill Richardson snafu showed that maybe his vetting process wasn't perfect. And even though Obama wasn't implicated in the Rod Blagojevich mess and subsequent Roland Burris kerfuffle, the way the Democrats handled it can't put too many people at ease as to how Congress is going to perform, even with a majority in both houses.

Obama has an unenviable list of concerns waiting for him on Jan. 20: the economy, the fighting in Israel and the Gaza Strip, the decision on whether to close Guantanamo Bay. (What does it mean [if he issues an order](#) to close it within a week of taking office, but it takes a year to get it done?) The Iraq war is no longer something he can campaign against—it's now something he has to oversee. His supporters are waiting with bated breath to see how quickly and how often he can repudiate the policies of the Bush administration. But what happens the first time he has to make a hard decision about a threat to our nation? And if he errs on the side of security over liberty, who is going to be angrier—the left or the right? Ironically, I think he's more likely to get a pass from those of us who got tired of hearing how President Bush has been shredding the Constitution for the last eight years.

This doesn't mean the Republicans can kick back and put their feet up while disappointed liberals go on the attack. If and when Obama does something we disagree with, we have the right and obligation to speak out, as Bush's opponents have been doing for the last eight years. But, more important, we have our own list of unenviable tasks waiting come Jan. 20. The party is in disarray. There's no consistent message, other than the e-mails I get from various groups asking me to "help shape the new Republican Party." The contest for the RNC chairmanship [has been a comedy of errors](#), and House Republicans are [unhappy about rule changes](#) that they believe will hinder their ability to challenge legislation in Congress. And now [conservative writer Jennifer Rubin](#) points out another problem: Obama's move to the center since winning the election threatens the party's very existence.

My fellow conservatives, take a deep breath. In four years—actually, the next presidential campaign will begin in about two and a half years—the economy will either have recovered, in which case defeating Obama will be almost impossible, or we will still be floundering and we'll want to throw the bum out. That's how our democracy works. Oh, sure, I suppose Obama could be ineffective and still get re-elected. But if that's the case, I'll save my sour attitude for the 2013 inauguration.

In the meantime, I plan to watch the Inauguration Day festivities, even if for a Republican they feel a bit like hanging around for the trophy presentation after your team just blew the Super Bowl. I have no bitterness left from the election—there were no controversial vote tallies, no charges of fraud or cheating—and I think that Obama won a fair campaign against John McCain, a great American whose service to and sacrifice for his country deserve respect, regardless of whether you agree with his politics. As long as the networks don't cut away to Obama spraying a cigar-chomping Joe Biden with champagne in the Oval Office, there's no reason not to tune in.

politics

The Storyteller

Obama's best speeches have always revolved around stories. Which one will he tell on Tuesday?

By John Dickerson

Saturday, January 17, 2009, at 4:40 PM ET

Barack Obama has a lot of ground to cover in his inaugural address. He has to create optimism, kick off a new era, give the country a vision of happier days, act humbly, thank God, thank his family, live up to his own sky-high rhetorical expectations, and not get frostbite.

He will undoubtedly hit these marks. What I'm wondering is whether he's found a story for the moment. Some of Obama's most memorable campaign speeches were powerful because of the news—after his Iowa victory and after his defeat in New Hampshire—but the ones that were most successful on their own always ended with a story.

Obama didn't just tell inspirational anecdotes. He told stories about a transaction—the moment inspiration jumps from one person to another. It was this transaction, repeated thousands of times, that turned the Obama candidacy into a movement. That it also happened to be an effective way to ask for people's votes was surely part of the plan. But Obama was also selling an idea that could sound corny or quaint: the notion that many small actions could make a large difference.

The sense of unity and collective action is the spirit he will try to rekindle Tuesday on the Mall. His inauguration speech will be framed with the idea of a "new era of responsibility," a theme he touched on at the end of the campaign and again in his recent speech about his economic recovery package. The idea is that everyone, from politicians to CEOs to those of us trying to get a bank loan, has to take greater responsibility to get us out of the fix we're in.

Sounds good. But how do you build this kind of thing, particularly in an age where trust in government is low and people are cynical and distrustful of their fellow humans for all the reasons Obama himself has outlined? To get us all on board with this idea, Obama has to wire us together. To build collective responsibility, there has to be social cohesion. If we're not all in this together, if my neighbor or editor isn't going to do his part, why will I bother to fulfill my responsibilities? I might also be doubtful about whether simply acting responsibly can change anything. And I might also reject the premise: Those Wall Street bankers did more than I did to get us into this mess. So why shouldn't they have to do more to get us out?

Obama undoubtedly knows this, which is why the entire inaugural cavalcade has been designed to help create unity. As Obama says in his message about the inauguration: "It's not about me. It's about us." His office has created [Organizing for America](#) to help people organize in their communities, and encouraged people to host inaugural celebrations in their hometowns and join together in a [national day of service](#).

Some of that might actually work. But none of it will be able to match the power of a well-delivered speech, which much of America (and the world) will stop to watch. In his address, Obama could simply describe the dilemma and call for a collective effort to solve it. "The change we've worked so hard for will not happen unless ordinary Americans get involved," he said in his message announcing Organizing for America. Or he could return to familiar phrases about our ability to "recognize ourselves in each other." But he has the skills to be more rhetorically powerful. This is where the stories come in.

During his campaign, Obama also had to convince people that individual action and connection could make a difference in a community (and, not incidentally, a campaign). Two examples from last year stand out. (If you want to experience them instead of having them synopsized—and you should—the first can be [watched](#) or [read](#) and the second can be [watched](#) here.)

The first is the [story of Ashley Baia](#), a young white woman volunteering in his South Carolina office. Baia's personal story so affected a black man nearly three times her age that he became a volunteer in the Obama campaign. The story was so effective that Obama reprised the tale at the end of his speech on race in America. The second story is the one Obama told regularly throughout his campaign about being rallied by the spirit of an elderly woman on the city council in Greenwood, S.C.—the "fired up and ready to go" story he told perhaps never so well as on the [last night of his campaign](#).

The goal of these stories was not just to make people feel good, though they did. It was to make the case for engagement. At the end of each campaign story of inspiration, he made the same claim—that a voice could change a room and a room could

change a city and a city could change a state and a state could change a nation.

To convince Americans to make a collective sacrifice, Obama first has to convince them that they face a collective danger. It's clear from Obama's recent statements that he believes the economy can be improved for the long term only if people genuinely embrace a new feeling of shared responsibility. "There are going to be very difficult choices," he told the *Washington Post*, choices requiring "sacrifice and responsibility and duty."

Will Obama find his story? One might have landed in his lap in the heroic actions of Capt. [Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger III](#), the pilot who safely landed that US Airways jet in New York's Hudson River on Thursday. There are rumors he might make an inauguration appearance. What better tale for the times than one of calm, collective action at a moment of crisis?

Then again, storytelling can feel forced, and it's certainly not crucial for an inaugural address, which is a clear departure from the campaign rhetoric. Kennedy's famous address did not include any anecdotes, yet for inspirational punch, it ranks alongside the one Martin Luther King Jr. gave at the other end of the Mall two and a half years later.

Of course, there is another approach available to Obama. Maybe he doesn't need a new story because just by standing there, he will be the story. In many ways, despite what he's said about Tuesday, the story will not be about us—it will be about him.

press box

Chris Matthews' Inaugural Jib-Jabbery

The MSNBC motormouth talks a lot, says nothing.

By Jack Shafer

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 7:19 PM ET

Nobody in TV news stir-fries his ideas and serves them to the audience faster than MSNBC's Chris Matthews. Drawing from a larder filled with old anecdotes, unreliable metaphors, wacky intuition, and superficial observations, the always-animated Matthews steers whatever's handy into the hot wok that is his brain. The sizzling free-associations skitter through his limbic system, leap out his mouth, and look for a resting spot in the national conversation, where they steam like fresh lava in untouchable heaps.

Anything can set Matthews to cooking, but nothing summons his inner chef like a National Event of Great Importance such as yesterday's inauguration. If you watched MSNBC's coverage, you understand why Keith Olbermann wears a body apron and

totes a fire extinguisher whenever they co-host: to keep the flying grease from setting his suits aflame.

A couple of hours before the oaths were given, Matthews and the MSNBC team of Olbermann, Eugene Robinson, and Rachel Maddow were chatting, and they spotted Muhammad Ali in the gallery. After Olbermann had his say, Matthews butted in.

"Well, and can I point out something else about him? He beat Sonny Liston," he said.

Both Olbermann and Robinson agree, but that doesn't deter Matthews, who is looking for a TV argument.

"Nobody can beat Sonny Liston, and he beat him. And he couldn't fight again after that," Matthews ejaculated.

If Matthews meant to say that Liston "couldn't fight again after that," he's wrong, because Liston entered the ring at least another [16 times](#).

If Matthews meant that Ali "couldn't fight again after that," he's also wrong, as Ali fought Liston a second time and defended his heavyweight title [eight more times](#) before the sport temporarily banished him after he refused induction into the armed services.

Olbermann retook the conversation and attempted to sketch Ali's place in the pantheon of American heroes. But Matthews snatched it back with a pointless bit of personal recollection about a ride on a Senate elevator when he was a congressional staffer.

"I was much younger, and [Ali] was much younger, and he was still in great shape," Matthews said. "And it's one of those magic moments where the elevator door opens and he just happens to be there. And opens the door, and there I am. I'm a kid, practically. I go, 'Wow!' And there's Muhammad Ali in the doorway."

Matthews' colleagues laughed at his story, and taking that as encouragement, he continued: "And he gives me one of those things that only a great jock hero can do, those great winks. Great jocks can do, because they know you're a fan."

Olbermann did the only thing a sane man can do in a case like this. He said, "Right," which Matthews took as an invitation to repeat the "kicker" to his inconsequential brush with Ali.

"And he gave me one of those great Muhammad Ali winks. I'll never forget that," Matthews said.

Later, Matthews ejected a more recent memory when the topic turned to Chief Justice John Roberts. Matthews, from the transcript:

You know, Keith, this country is not as monarchical as it sometimes seems to the outsiders. I was at the shoe store the other day to get my shoes fixed, and sitting next to me—standing next to me at the cobbler was Jane Roberts, the wife of the Supreme Court justice. I was at a Georgetown game the other day, watching them beat Providence, and sitting next to me is the chief justice. I keep saying to myself, That's the chief justice of the United States sitting there next to me. He's a sports fan. There is some measure of democracy that comes to mind here.

Imagine that—the chief justice of the United States has a wife who ferries worn shoes to the cobbler for repair, just like you and me, and the chief justice enjoys college basketball like a normal person. Take that, you hoops-hating monarchists!

After noting the many smiling faces in the assembled inauguration crowd, Matthews took a shot at explaining the happiness. Sure, it's the festivities, but it's also the proximity of the crowd to the MSNBC booth, he insisted.

"This is the network that has opened its heart to change, to change and its possibilities. Let's be honest about it. These—these people watch this network out here," Matthews said.

MSNBC is the "it" network for the Obama masses? That's news to me. Olbermann approached his colleague like a teetotaler trying to talk down a drunk, offering the opinion that people might be smiling about the shared experience of the Obama inauguration. But Matthews wasn't having it.

Matthews: No, this is the network of the 21st century, MSNBC. And I think we're open to it. And that's why this crowd knows us. And I think—

Olbermann: He's Chris Matthews, and he approved that message.

Matthews: We're not crotchety about change, stuffy.

Matthews' galvanic mind twitched again as President George W. Bush became visible and the crowd booed.

"Don't do this," Matthews said to nobody and everybody at the same time.

"Surprised we are hearing ... booing," said Maddow, attempting to put the noise in context. "And that is a surprise."

"Don't boo. Bad form. Bad form here," Matthews repeated, as if he's the political sphere's Miss Manners.

Matthews finally packed himself up for delivery to his own show, *Hardball*, where there's nobody with Olbermannian authority to block—or explain—his fast-food observations. It's not easy filling TV's dead air, as Matthews proves every time he sits down with a microphone. From last night's *Hardball* [transcript](#):

The scene we're watching today would have been very different had McCain won, had Hillary Clinton won. ...

You know, every president that gets elected is a solution to the mistakes of the guy he succeeds. ...

I gave Val Kilmer a ride home last night. I met—let's go through the names of who I met, John Cusack. I love—I always wanted to meet him. He said he always wanted to meet me. That's kind of cool. And Ed Harris. And Robert De Niro, I met him last night. ...

[Sen. Edward Kennedy] didn't get that hat from Ireland, I'll tell you that. That is one hell of a hat he had on today. He reminds me of Don Corleone going around with the bug spray in the vines of the movie. He looks—I say that with the greatest adoration. ...

Who's running the country? Barack Obama. Who ain't running the country? George W. Bush. Something of a change in one day, wouldn't you say? ...

And so the hot-buttered Matthews nuggets continued to ricochet through the evening, denting television ether with their inanity and slopping a trough for the consumption of the nation's undiscerning viewers.

Am I the only one happy that he's not running for Senate in Pennsylvania? Share your favorite Matthews nugget via e-mail at slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," *Slate*'s readers' forum; in a future article; or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

Track my errors: This [hand-built RSS feed](#) will ring every time *Slate* runs a "Press Box" correction. For e-mail notification of errors in this specific column, type the word *Matthews* in the subject head of an e-mail message, and send it to slate.pressbox@gmail.com.

recycled

Why Is Philip Seymour Hoffman a "Supporting Actor"?

Your Oscar questions, answered.

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 1:42 PM ET

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [released the nominee list](#) for the 81st annual Oscars on Thursday morning. Although the criteria for some categories, like best picture, are obvious enough, others are a bit harder to parse. Below are answers to your most pressing Oscar-related questions from the Explainer archive.

The Academy nominated Philip Seymour Hoffman for best supporting actor, even though he gets a whole lot of screen time in *Doubt*. How does the Academy decide who's in a "leading role" and who's in a "supporting" one?

It's up to the voting members of the Academy. No rule determines the category for which an actor can be nominated. Every actor in every role in every movie that was released in 2008 was eligible for a nomination for either the leading or supporting award.

How does the voting work? The Academy uses a preferential voting system—members rank up to five preferred nominees in descending order. Click [here](#) for a detailed explanation of the system used by the Academy, and click [here](#) for a "Chatterbox" that discusses the system.

The voters who select the nominees can be influenced by the publicity campaigns orchestrated by movie studios to promote their pictures and stars. Back in 2001, *A Beautiful Mind*'s ads in *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* promoted Jennifer Connelly for best-supporting actress, not best actress. That may be because Connelly believed she had a better shot at winning a supporting-actress nomination than a best actress nod.

My favorite French film of the year, *A Christmas Tale*, isn't up for a foreign-language Oscar. Why not?

Each country can enter only one film into the best-foreign-language-film competition, and this year the French nominating committee gave the nod to [The Class](#), a drama about a high

school in a tough neighborhood. Academy rules also state that nominated movies "must be predominantly in a language of the country of origin."

What's the difference between all the cinematic groups that dole out end-of-year awards?

The National Board of Review is perhaps the most curious of the lot, since it comprises "film professionals, educators, students, and historians" rather than working critics. The organization was founded in 1908, in response to a New York City mayor's efforts to shutter movie theaters on moral grounds. The board's solution was to create a seal-of-approval system, a forerunner to the ratings system now employed by the Motion Picture Association of America. Movies deemed morally upstanding were tagged with the on-screen graphic "Passed by the National Board of Review." But when the MPAA launched its own self-censorship in the 1920s, the board began to morph into a film appreciation society, publishing *cinéaste* journals and hosting panel discussions.

The board is often confused with the National Society of Film Critics, which consists of 52 of the nation's most prestigious reviewers. The society is known for its intellectual tastes and often opts for art-house and foreign fare in lieu of Hollywood epics. In 2000, for example, the group gave its best-picture nod to the Taiwanese film *Yi Yi (A One and a Two)* while the Oscars chose the decidedly more mainstream *Gladiator*. The society's members include newspaper, magazine, and online journalists.

The society was actually founded in 1966 as an offshoot of the New York Film Critics Circle, which, at the time, didn't accept magazine writers in its ranks. The Circle has been handing out hardware since 1935, when John Ford's *The Informer* earned best-picture honors.

The most well-known Johnny-come-lately is the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, founded in 1975 and known for its populist bent. In 1977, for example, the association feted the box-office sensation *Star Wars* as its best picture while virtually everyone else (including Oscar voters) went for *Annie Hall*. Every other big North American city worth its salt also seems to boast a critic's group—Toronto, San Francisco, and Chicago all have them. There's also the increasingly influential [Broadcast Film Critics Association](#), which consists of 182 film critics who appear on local newscasts, cable, and in syndication.

recycled Torture Logic

Obama legal appointee Marty Lederman's writing for *Slate*.
Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 10:48 AM ET

Georgetown law professor Marty Lederman has [joined](#) the Obama administration's Justice Department as deputy assistant attorney general in the Office of Legal Counsel, which basically makes him the president's lawyer (or one of them, at least). Lederman will be leaving his teaching post at Georgetown and, for now, his position as a prized *Slate* contributor. Lederman has blasted the Bush administration's position on torture and surveillance—as well as its general tone of secrecy—in *Slate* discussions and on our "[Convictions](#)" blog. Here's a selection of his work:

June 17, 2008: "[How Did Jim Haynes and Donald Rumsfeld Come To Authorize Torture, Cruel Treatment, and Systematic Violations of the UCMJ?](#)"

June 10, 2008: "[Justice O'Connor's Fragile Legacies](#)."

May 5, 2008: "[Does Anyone Care Whether the Bombing in Somalia Was Legal?](#)"

April 28, 2008: "[Voter ID Laws: A 'Solution' in Search of a Problem](#)."

April 2, 2008: "[The Yoo/Chertoff/Ashcroft Memo?](#)"

March 31, 2008: "[No Way To Run a Government](#)."

Aug. 30, 2007: "[Are We Heading Back to the Bad Old Days?](#)"

Aug. 28, 2007: "[Eureka—the Government Admits It's Been Breaking the Law!](#)"

Read all of Lederman's "Convictions" posts [here](#).

recycled FISA and Gitmo and Cheney, Oh My!

Obama appointee David Barron's writing for *Slate*.
Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 10:47 AM ET

Barack Obama has [tapped](#) Harvard law professor David Barron as principal deputy assistant attorney general in the Office of Legal Counsel, an obscure office sometimes called "the president's law firm." Barron has been a longtime critic of the Bush administration's policies on domestic wiretapping and presidential powers—views he has shared in the *Harvard Law Review* and on *Slate*'s "[Convictions](#)" blog. Below is a selection of Barron's writing for *Slate*, including pieces on FISA, Guantanamo, and the vice president's bizarre "dual role."

June 20, 2008: "[Super-Duper Exclusive!](#)"

June 12, 2008" "[The President Reacts.](#)"

June 12, 2008: "[First Thoughts on Boumediene.](#)"

June 2, 2008: "[The Guantanamo Cases—Suppose the Court Gives Congress Advice ...](#)"

May 23, 2008: "[Beating a Dead Horse With a New Stick—Once More on Wiretapping](#)"

April 15, 2008: "[World Warms, EPA Chills](#)"

March 20, 2008: "[Binary Executive—Take II](#)"

March 17, 2008: "[The Binary Executive?](#)"

Read all of Barron's "Convictions" posts [here](#).

recycled Ten To Toss

The top Bush executive orders that Obama should scrap immediately.

By Emily Bazelon and Chris Wilson

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 1:03 PM ET

Newly minted presidents have often used executive orders to set the tone for their administration right out of the gate, as Barack Obama is [expected to do this week](#). But while these orders can be issued unilaterally, they can just as easily be overturned by the next guy. Last fall, [Slate](#) compiled a list of the top 10 executive orders signed by George W. Bush that the next president should roll back right away. The list is reprinted below.

The presidency comes with a superpowered pen for signing executive orders. Without negotiating with Congress to pass a law, or even going through the notice-and-comment period that precedes a new federal rule, the president can change the music that federal agencies dance to. He's the executive, and it's his executive branch.

What, then, is the worst of the damage President Bush has caused all on his own? In putting together a top (or bottom) 10 list from the Bush administration's [262 EOs](#), we sifted through some familiar targets, such as his faith-based initiative and diversion of funds from stem-cell research. We also realize that some of the Bush moments we rue didn't come in the form of an executive order. The [recent bid](#) to force family-planning clinics to certify that their employees won't have to assist with any procedure they find objectionable, for example, took the form of

a federal rule. So did the administration's decisions to open up new swaths of public land to [logging and mining](#) and to [raise the allowable level of mercury emissions](#).

We'd like to see those rules repealed, too, but we decided to stick with EOs for this list because of their consoling simplicity. If they can be conjured by a stroke of the pen, they can also quickly be made to vanish—presidents show little reluctance to excise their predecessors' dictums. Here are our picks for the nine orders most deserving of the presidential eraser come January, plus a tenth suggested by readers.

No. 1: Gutting the Presidential Records Act [Executive Order 13233 \(PDF\)](#) Nov. 1, 2001

What the order says: With Executive Order 13233, the Bush administration tried to gut the Presidential Records Act, passed in 1978 to make sure that the internal documents of the executive branch are public and generally will become part of the historical record. The 1978 law itself was a compromise in favor of privacy in some respects: Presidential records aren't disclosed for up to 12 years after an administration leaves office, and requests for them are subject to the limits imposed by the Freedom of Information Act, which means that classified documents stay secret. But the Bush order essentially threw out the law's bid for transparency [altogether](#). After stonewalling for months over access to documents from the Reagan era, former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales drafted an order that gives a sitting president, or the president whose records are being requested, the power to review a documents request, with no time limit. If either president says no, you have to sue to get the records.

Why it should go: The American Historical Association [hates](#) this order for good reason: It puts a president's interest in secrecy—to prevent embarrassment, inconvenient revelations, whatever—over the public's interest in understanding past events of national import. In 2007, a federal judge [struck down](#) part of EO 13233 for conflicting with the Presidential Records Act—which trumps a presidential order, since it's a law enacted by Congress. But parts of the order remain in effect, and a bill in Congress to scrap the whole thing has stalled. The next president shouldn't wait for the judiciary or the legislature: He should throw out this order on his own, as proof that a dozen years after he leaves office, he won't be afraid of an inside view of his White House.

No. 2: Blocking Stem-Cell Research [Executive Order 13435 \(PDF\)](#) June 20, 2007

What the order says: In August 2001, Bush [issued a rule](#) limiting federal funding for embryonic-stem-cell research to existing colonies of such cells. Five years later, he expended the

[first veto of his presidency](#) to reject legislation served up by a Republican Congress to ease those restrictions. This subsequent executive order a year later, issued the same day he [vetoed the legislation a second time](#), encourages research into alternative measures of creating pluripotent stem cells. The order directs the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health to prioritize research consistent with Bush's previous directives and devote resources to finding other means of creating human stem cells.

Why it should go: Supporting alternative means of creating stem cells is a fine idea—just not at the expense of supporting the more immediately available source of stem cells, which are among the most promising lines of medical research today. There is certainly hope that the debate over whether to destroy human embryos to collect these valuable one-size-fits-all cells will eventually be moot. Researchers have found ways to [turn back the clock on adult skin cells](#), reprogramming them as embryonic cells. But this is a [tricky process](#) that involves inserting new genes, and it's not yet a sufficient alternative to embryonic stem cells. In the meantime, Bush's order is diverting funds even from research that could eventually sidestep his ethical concerns; scientists have successfully harvested bone fide stem cells [without harming](#) the nascent embryo. Both McCain and Obama supported the legislation that would have loosened Bush's research restrictions when it came before the Senate in [2006](#) and [2007](#). While some supporters of embryonic-stem-cell research have [questioned McCain's resolve](#), his campaign says his position is unchanged. This order should go no matter who is elected.

No. 3: Finessing the Geneva Conventions

[Executive Order 13440 \(PDF\)](#)

July 20, 2007

What the order says: After the Supreme Court pushed back against the Bush administration's efforts to hold the Guantanamo detainees indefinitely and without charges, doubts arose about the legality of the CIA's use of coercive interrogation techniques (or torture, if you think water-boarding amounts to that). For a time, the CIA's interrogation squeeze was on hold. Then Bush issued Executive Order 13440, and the interrogators started rolling again. The order isn't explicit about which practices it allows—that remains classified—but it may still sidestep the protections in the Geneva Convention against humiliating and degrading treatment. [According to the New York Times](#), water-boarding is off-limits, but sleep deprivation may not be, and exposure to extreme heat and cold is allowed.

Why it should go: EO 13440 looks like an improvement on previous directives to the CIA, like the memos from the Justice Department written by John Yoo, which narrowly defined torture and Geneva's protections. ([According](#) to Barton Gellman's new book about Cheney, the only technique Yoo rejected on legal grounds was burying a detainee alive.) Still, the

executive order leaves the door open to techniques that the United States would not want used against its own soldiers and so is part of the Bush administration detritus that has damaged the United States' moral authority abroad. The administration's record is so tarnished on this score that the next president should declare that he is scrapping this order, so he can start over and come up with his own policy on interrogation and the CIA.

No. 4: Handing the Keys to the Vice President

[Executive Order 13292 \(PDF\)](#)

March 25, 2003

What the order says: In 1995, then-President Bill Clinton issued an executive order that made it easier to declassify documents, and hundreds of millions of pages of information about the White House tumbled forth. In 2003, the Bush administration took another tack, amending Clinton's order to get the vice president into the business of classifying whatever he wants. Executive Order 13292 gives the vice president the same power to classify documents that the president has.

Why it should go: EO 13292 is a twofer: It both expands the scope of secrecy and the powers of the vice presidency. As Byron York [argues](#) in the *National Review*, "Since the beginning of the administration, Dick Cheney has favored measures allowing the executive branch to keep more things secret. And in March 2003, the president gave him the authority to do it." This is reminiscent of Cheney's [efforts to prevent](#) the National Archives and Records Administration from enforcing the rules that govern classified information as they pertain to the vice president. Cheney is famous for wanting his office to be a closed box. Executive Order 13292 looks like it was written expressly for him. We hope that the next vice president won't also want to keep secrets to this extent. But the boss should eliminate this worry by revoking this order.

No. 5: Free Rein in Iraq

[Executive Order 13303 \(PDF\)](#)

May 28, 2003

What the order says: Issued two months after the invasion of Iraq, this order offers broad legal protection for U.S. corporations dealing in Iraqi oil. Bush's directive, justified as a means of protecting Iraqi oil profits, nullifies any sort of judicial proceedings relating to either Iraqi petroleum or the newly created [Development Fund for Iraq](#). The executive order also declares a national emergency to deal with the threat to a peaceful reconstruction of Iraq, which Bush has renewed every year since, [most recently in May 2008](#).

Why it should go: This directive is the foundation for all of Bush's subsequent executive orders on Iraq (see No. 6, below), so it's the logical place to begin rolling back abuses of authority relating to the war. Given the many concerns over [cronyism](#) and waste by U.S. contractors in Iraq, revoking their blanket legal

protection when oil is on the table is justified. Watchdog groups originally feared that the order could be used to prevent people with tort claims from suing corporations working in Iraq. That hasn't come to pass so far—Tom Devine, the legal director at the Government Accountability Project, says he has not seen the order applied in any legal case. Still, given that the United States will probably be in Iraq for [at least 16 months](#) after the next president takes office, it's not too late to inject a little accountability into the contracting. As the Government Accountability Project wrote at the time, "The scope of the EO's mandate for lawlessness is limited only by the imagination." The order is also overkill; the [U.N. resolution](#) that passed concurrently with it, which was [hailed as a major diplomatic victory](#) for the United States and Britain at the time, contains more limited legal immunity for oil-related commerce in Iraq.

No. 6: Going After Troublemakers in Iraq

[Executive Order 13438 \(PDF\)](#)

July 17, 2007

What the order says: This order grants the administration the power to freeze the assets of an abstract but broadly defined group of people who threaten the stability of Iraq. The list of targeted people includes anyone who has propagated (or helped to propagate) violence in Iraq in an effort to destabilize the reconstruction. Most ominously, it also applies to anyone who poses a "significant risk of committing" a future act of violence to that end. The order, which applies to anyone in the United States or in U.S. control abroad, also declares, "Any conspiracy formed to violate any of the prohibitions set forth in this order is prohibited." The order appears to acknowledge that it could conflict with constitutional protections but then states that targets of its provisions do not need to be notified ahead of time that their assets will be frozen.

Why it should go: The [Fifth Amendment](#) has a few interesting things to say about the seizure of property without due process—namely, you can't do it. While this is far from the first time the Bush administration has trampled constitutional rights in the name of national security, this order, if broadly interpreted, could target war protesters in the United States. Then-White House spokesman Tony Snow [said at the time](#) that it was intended to target terrorists and insurgents, but the language of the order is vaguer. This EO drew condemnation from all ideological directions, from Swift-boater [Jerome Corsi](#) to the [ACLU](#). One needn't be a civil libertarian to see the danger of the order's loose definitions or wonder why we needed the order in the first place. **Bonus:** The next month, Bush issued a [similar order](#) targeting mischief-makers in Lebanon and their supporters. That one can go, too.

No. 7: Eyes and Ears in the Agencies

[Executive Order 13422 \(PDF\)](#)

Jan. 18, 2007

What the order says: Recent presidents have gone back and forth over how much control the White House should exert over writing federal regulations, particularly in contested areas like environmental policy. Unsurprisingly, Bush came down on the side of strong White House influence. This order mandates the designation of a presidential appointee in each federal agency as "regulatory policy officer," with authority to oversee the rule-making process. This largely revises Bill Clinton's 1993 [executive order](#) granting agencies [more regulatory independence](#) from the White House (which nullified two of Reagan's executive orders). Defenders contend that it is important for the administration to be able to balance regulatory policy with business and economic concerns.

Why it should go: The Bush administration has shown no qualms about interfering with federal regulations normally left to civil servants, particularly on environmental fronts like [ozone limits](#), as Democrats like Rep. Henry Waxman, the chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, [have pointed out](#). Repealing the order would be a step toward scrubbing the agencies of the stench of political tampering. The next president shouldn't mix political appointees with civil servants from the inception of the regulatory process by requiring a company man in each agency to supervise.

No. 8: Letting Religious Groups Call the Hiring Shots

[Executive Order 13279 \(PDF\)](#)

Dec. 12, 2002

What the order says: Adding to the pair of 2001 executive orders that encouraged religious groups to apply for federal money for social services, Bush's December 2002 order made it easier for churches and synagogues to take the money by letting them skirt certain anti-discrimination laws. Because of this order, the faith-based groups can take federal funds while refusing to hire people who aren't of the faith the groups espouse.

Why it should go: As Timothy Noah [pointed out](#) in *Slate* at the time, this seems sensible enough at first: "Why shouldn't government-funded religious charities be allowed to favor members of their own religion when hiring, firing, and promoting?" But there are a couple of problems here. The first is that the groups get to define for themselves who counts as a good Baptist or a good Jew—and what if they decide someone is out because he or she is gay, for example? The second problem is that it's not really clear why Catholic charities should be able to hire only Catholics to serve meals to the homeless, if that work is being funded by the government. In a [debate](#) on *The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer*, Christopher Anders of the ACLU framed the order this way: "What this is about is creating a special right for some organizations that don't want to comply with the civil rights protections." James Towey, then director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, said, "The question is, 'Do they lose right to hire

according to religious beliefs when they take federal money?" " Either way you frame it, the order is a bad idea. Both John McCain and Barack Obama have [pledged](#) to continue federal funding of faith-based programs, but Obama has promised that groups taking the money won't be able to make social-services hires on the basis of religion.

No. 9: The Alternative-Fuel Fix-All **[Executive Order 13423 \(PDF\)](#)** **Jan. 26, 2007**

What the order says: Shortly after his [2007 State of the Union address](#), in which he devoted significant time to environmental proposals, Bush signed Executive Order 13423. Among other things, the order requires federal agencies to cut petroleum-based-fuel usage by 2 percent annually through 2015 while increasing alternative-fuel use by 10 percent each year. The order also requires agencies to reduce overall energy consumption and purchase more hybrid vehicles.

Why it should go: On the face of it, Bush's directive seems like a step in the right direction. Officials in California, however, were quick to [question the policy's ecological bottom line](#). Producing alternative fuels, they argued, can result in a large spike in greenhouse-gas emissions, particularly when harvesting resources like oil shale and coal. There's also doubt that the alternative-fuel industry simply has the capacity to meet the order's requirements. As the *Washington Post* [editorialized](#), "Where might 20 billion alternative-fuel gallons come from?" To complicate matters, the Supreme Court [ruled two months](#) later that the Environmental Protection Agency does have the authority to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, prompting Bush to [issue another executive order](#) directing several agencies to draft guidelines for reducing emissions from cars and trucks. The sound, responsible energy policy that should be at the top of the list for the next president—and Congress—will need realistic goals and a big-picture understanding of costs and benefits of alternative fuels.

Update, Oct. 3, 2008

Last week, *Slate* compiled the nine most odious executive orders issued by George W. Bush that the next administration should overturn and asked readers to supply the 10th. Of the submissions, the most popular by far was [National Security Presidential Directive 51](#), the Bush administration's plan for keeping the government functional in the case of a catastrophic crisis. The policy is not technically an executive order, but we'll allow it. The national-security presidential directive is a close-enough cousin and highly worthy of revocation.

What the order says: The public part of NSPD-51 grants broad authority to the president in a time of emergency, explicitly stating, "The President shall lead the activities of the Federal Government for ensuring constitutional government." The rest of

the order is fairly bureaucratic, appointing a national continuity coordinator and directing agency heads to develop their own plans.

But that's not all. Not only has the White House classified most of the annexes to the directive, it has refused to show them to the members of Congress on relevant committees. As the *Oregonian* [reported](#), the White House stonewalled efforts by Rep. Peter DeFazio, an Oregon Democrat and member of the homeland-security committee, to gain access to the classified parts of the directive.

Why it should go: A partly classified plan for national emergencies only fuels the sense of foreboding that the White House has staked out wider and wider powers under the guise of national security. As Ron Rosenbaum [wrote](#) in *Slate* when the directive was released, the secrecy gives rise to all sorts of fears about plans for succession that set aside those provided for in the Constitution, of the sort that [Ronald Reagan supposedly put in place](#). To be sure, cataclysmic emergencies may call for strong, centralized leadership in their immediate aftermath. But any responsible policy for such a scenario should be both transparent and short-lived, focused on the speedy restoration of checks and balances on executive power.

slate fare **Slate's Inaugural Address Contest Ends Sunday**

There's still time to write and collaborate on your own version of Barack Obama's big speech.

By Chris Wilson

Sunday, January 18, 2009, at 7:18 AM ET

About two weeks ago, *Slate* [invited its readers](#) to help write an inaugural address for President-elect Barack Obama using software from [MixedInk](#), which allows authors to collaborate by borrowing lines from one another's drafts. To get things started, we loaded previous presidential inaugural addresses into the software, allowing would-be speechwriters to borrow words from the ex-presidents at will.

Thus far, there are 329 submissions, 88 of which invoke lines from two or more authors or presidents. The third submission, for example, which came from user ElainNJ, borrowed the last line of the previous submission, from SHorany: "As we face these and many other challenges, remember that we must never succumb to greed and to selfishness. For when we think of none but ourselves, we are truly alone." (The software can tell which lines were originally written by which users, so this sort of remixing is encouraged.)

That same day, user Torybeth drew on the crack team of Calvin Coolidge and George W. Bush, including a line about spreading freedom from the current president's [second inaugural](#). While many contributors have drawn on the usual suspects—Lincoln, Kennedy, Jefferson, etc.—we're seeing a few unusual suspects. James Garfield makes several appearances, such as user Sdc5124's use of the line: "If this generation comes to its inheritance blinded by ignorance and corrupted by vice, the fall of the Republic will be certain and remediless."

This feature is open for submissions and remixes through noon ET on Sunday, Jan. 18. After that, readers will still be able to vote on their favorite submissions for another 24 hours, at which point we'll publish the favorite draft on *Slate*.

In the truest of American traditions, the current leading contender comes from one individual who chafed at the words of former presidents and fellow contributors alike. User Surferdad begins his inaugural: "On this day, together we embark on a journey whose path has been forged, and availed to us from the earliest days and decades of this country's existence to this very Moment." (At least he capitalizes like a Founding Father.) The 1,174-word draft recounts the country's history of adversity and, in a State of the Union-style nod to current events, gives a shout-out to the US Airways pilot who landed a passenger jet safely on the Hudson River on Thursday.

Think you have something to add? It's not too late to continue contributing drafts. If you like anything you see from anyone else's attempt, feel free to steal it, at which point their name will be listed alongside yours as an author. Give it a shot—your lines could end up in the final version.

slate v

Science News: Wall Street's Big Swinging Digits

A daily video from *Slate V*.

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 11:40 AM ET

slate v

Dear Prudence: What Happens If Obama Fails?

A daily video from *Slate V*.

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 1:50 PM ET

sports nut

Fictional Moldovan Soccer Phenom

Tells All

Inside the ingenious hoax that fooled the British sports press.

By Brian Phillips

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 12:18 PM ET

On a typical weekday, the English soccer press devotes itself to unsubstantiated rumors, manufactured scandals, and bikini pictures of players' girlfriends (who seem to roam the earth together in a giant conjugal yacht, like the Beatles in *Yellow Submarine*). This week, however, thanks to an ingenious hoax that took in the *Times* of London, the soccer press has been engrossed by Moldova. Specifically by one Moldovan teenager, who is not, as it happens, a real person.

Earlier this month, the *Times* ran a feature called "[Football's Top 50 Rising Stars](#)," which featured at No. 30 a 16-year-old attacker named Masal Bugdov whom the paper, never one to fear irony, described as "Moldova's finest." A bright future seemed to fill Bugdov's windscreen. The young player has been "strongly linked," the *Times* said, with a transfer to the London club Arsenal, had already earned a mention on the popular soccer news site [Goal.com](#), spawned excitement in online forums, and been portrayed as a something of a savior by the magazine *When Saturday Comes*, which introduced him as "one bright spot" amid Moldova's nationalist strife.

But as the old scout's adage says, even the most talented young striker will struggle if he has no corporeal being. Blogger Neil McDonnell, who [writes about sports](#) under the name Fredorraci, suspected something might be amiss after picking up a hint from a Russian blog commenter about a "fanny missteak" in the *Times* feature—the spelling presumably the result of complex transliteration from the Cyrillic for "dude, what." After a bit of rifling through Wikipedia history pages and an exchange of e-mails with the editor of *Soviet Sport* magazine, McDonnell discovered that not only was there no such player as Masal Bugdov, *Masal Bugdov* wasn't even a Moldovan name.

McDonnell kept poking around. He found that the player had originated in a series of [fake AP stories posted to forums](#) and [blog comment sections](#), as if they'd been copied and pasted there. Taken together, these formed the droll chronicle of a temperamental young talent, already a regular for the Moldovan national team as a teen, who was convinced of his own greatness—"I Will Destroy Luxembourg and Join Arsenal Says Bugdov" raged one headline—and frustrated by the unending delays, attributed to unspecified "diplomatic issues," that kept him from completing a move to his favorite club. The stories were just excessive enough to carry a faint Wodehousian aroma if read in sequence, but not quite excessive enough to arouse suspicion in a newspaper writer on a jag of pre-deadline speed-Googling.

The hoaxer, it seemed, had exploited the trickle-up nature of online information flow. The blog comments fooled the blogs,

the blogs fooled the news sites, and the news sites fooled the magazines. When the *Times* came to Bugdub, his story was resting on a pedestal of widespread acceptance. In the end, the hoax laid bare what we had all dimly suspected: Sometimes, sportswriters do not know what they are talking about.

After McDonnell published [the account of his investigation](#) on the blog SoccerLens, Masal Bugdub speedily attained, in the soccer-y parts of world, the kind of Internet cult-king status normally reserved for the likes of Chuck Norris. Blogs bloomed, comments quivered. The media outlets that had fallen for the hoax apologized, Goal.com and *When Saturday Comes* relatively quickly, the *Times* only after attempting [a cover-up](#)—slotting in a new, nonfictional player in Bugdub's 30th-place position—that might have worked in 1785, the year the paper was founded. Other media outlets—the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*' Goal blog, radio shows, even ESPN—leapt in to cover the story, some to comfort their old-media brethren, some to taunt them, some to explicate the [Sidd Finch parallels](#).

What no one seemed to remark on, however, was exactly what made the hoax so clever, which was the way it managed to beat the media at its own game. Unlike the major American sports leagues, the world's top soccer leagues have little in the way of salary caps or transfer restrictions. If Manchester City wants to acquire Brazilian superstar Kaká from AC Milan, as they tried to do last week, they don't concoct an ornate trade scenario involving expiring contracts and draft picks, they just offer Milan a cash payment—[in this case, more than \\$130 million](#)—during one of the designated transfer windows. And unlike the American sports media, most of the world's soccer press is delightfully unburdened by retrograde ethical standards regarding "the need to attribute quotations to a person" and "the need to report information that has features in common with the truth."

As a result, the sports pages in English newspapers—not just the gaudy tabloids but mutton-chopped old hussars like the *Times*—tend to be marbled, a little grotesquely, with fantasies about which star player is bound for which famous club for the GDP of which landlocked principality. They're full of hoaxes already, in other words, tales planted by manipulative club representatives, prehensile agents, and the nannies of David Beckham. The only difference with Masal Bugdub was that it was the papers that fell for the hoax and the readers, vengeful victims, who saw through it.

So, who was this clever hoaxer? Whoever engineered the prank left behind a calling card in the form of the fictional Moldovan newspaper *Diario Mo Thon*, described in one of the concocted AP stories as "the top sports daily in Balti." *Diario* means *diary* in several Romance languages, and *mo thón* is Irish for *my ass*—just the kind of nested, polyglot ass pun that every good imaginary-Moldovans prank requires.

It got better. After SoccerLens blogger McDonnell broke the story, Bugdub fans in Ireland noticed that the player's name was a phonetic twin for *m'asal beag dubh*, which is Irish for "my little black donkey." A second Irish ass pun, sure. But "My Little Black Donkey" [is also the name of an Irish-language short story](#) by early 20th-century writer Pádraic Ó Conaire. And the story, about a man tricked into overpaying for a lazy donkey based on some vivid village gossip, can be read anachronistically as a parody of the culture of soccer transfers, in which the flaming rings of hype around a player—about how good he is, where he might go, how much a club might pay for him—often seem to overwhelm the minor matter of what he does on the pitch.

Our hoaxer, then, was likely an allegorically inclined Irishman. This theory gained steam when, not long after the hoax was revealed, I got an e-mail via [my Bugdub-obsessed blog](#) from someone claiming to be the instigator of Bugdub mania. He said he was a newspaperman in Galway. Some of the fake AP stories had, indeed, been posted under the pseudonym "GalwayGooner," and the e-mailer's IP address did, indeed, match Galway. Now writing under a different pseudonym, he confirmed the prank's "Little Black Donkey" origin and passed along some entertaining anecdotes, including one about hearing Bugdub's name in a pub conversation before the *Times* piece went to press. He said he dreamed up Bugdub as a "social experiment."

What was strange, though, was that while I worked to confirm his identity—the more brilliant the hoax, the less you trust the person who takes credit for it—my quarry kept sidestepping every request for evidence. He knew the details of the hoax inside out and even sent me a rollicking narrative account of the work he'd done to create it. (You can read the alleged hoaxer's lengthy explanation of the Bugdub-creation process—and whether the fictional footballer is more like Borat or Forrest Gump—in [this sidebar](#).) But whenever I pressed him for more definitive proof, he'd get skittish and threaten to cut off contact. Either this was another hoax—a counterfeit hoaxer trying to become the real thing—or else the actual hoaxer, like all good magicians, preferred to maintain an element of doubt.

What he sent me, instead of proof, was more about our imaginary player. I learned his nickname ("Massi") and the personality of his agent ("like the fat bloke who accompanied Borat around America"). I even got a new fake AP story, in which Bugdub claimed that he was real and the exposure of the hoax *was a hoax*. It became clear that while I was worrying over the unreality of my pseudonymous correspondent, he, whoever he was, was delighting in the reality of Masal Bugdub. The Moldovan phantom had taken on a life of his own.

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The whole thing was part of a social experiment to see just how far it could go. Whether or not I could go as far as having him mentioned in any reputable outlet. I suppose getting your fake player into the world's top 30 can be deemed success. My only regret is that I didn't sell him to [the club Cork] City on that fateful last night of the transfer window.

I came up with the thought during the summer transfer window. Each window is filled with endless rubbish to the point that your granny could be linked with Barcelona if only she could get a work permit. So that got me thinking. What if I created a virtual player who was full of promise. I would drop him into the feeding frenzy that is summer transfer window time and see if he would be noticed on the radar.

Without getting into the exact details of how I did it, we had to create a history for the player, a sort of background. The name Masal Bugdiv as you have suggested came from the short story M'Asal Beag Dubh (My Little Black Ass) written by Pádraic Ó Conaire, whose statue used to sit here in Galway. The story as you have rightly explained the folly of buying someone unsuitable in an illogical market and can be applied to the window—all our clubs have bought useless donkeys. We all have had a Veron, a Jeffers, a Cygan.

The speculation linking him to top clubs was easy given the feeding frenzy was made up of the same auld clichéd bullshit you hear from all transfers. "It has always been my dream to play for ... (fill the gap)." Having created a life story for Bugdiv and placed him in games that would be uncontradictable by fans outside Moldova, I knew that Masal had a window in which to live. And within days of being dangled in supporter blogs and having had his name lashed across the bottom of the Setanta TV Sports news screen, he became a real person. Soon he was being mentioned on football radio programmes, his Google mentions went from 20 to 30 to 100 to 500 to 2,000. I heard him mentioned in the pubs. The fact that I described him as being "built like Rooney and Mikel" meant that he was not considered a skinny Moldovan hopeful, but a player of real promise.

The dynamic of being an attractive target soon set in and many fans wished they had him. For Arsenal fans, he was just another promising teenager. With his agent Sergei Yelikov at his side and his "long-time Arsenal fan father" behind him, Masal became a sort of footballing Borat, with the agent reminiscent of Borat's fat sidekick.

However, Masal Bugdiv was more Forrest Gump in that he was a fictitious character reacting to real events and in the process becoming a personality of his own. Through the placing of just

seven stories, he became a superstar without a club. As the end of August approached, it seemed inconceivable that he would be clubless, but obviously, as he didn't exist, that was the case.

I knew then that Masal's news value was limited out of transfer window time, so his only activity at that time would be the use of the World Cup qualifiers to put himself back in the shop window. Hence his "I will destroy Luxembourg" remarks and his relative silence after the historic 0-0 draw.

A stroke of good fortune ensued in the November games when a Bugaev scored for Moldova. Enough of a coincidence to ensure that his legend lived on.

I never set out to directly fool any news outlet into believing that Masal existed. It was put across as "Did you hear what I heard" and then quote an obscure Moldovan newspaper. It was the equivalent of pub-talk, and placed in blogs that would make sure that he lived a sub-news existence. It was then interesting to see how this talk became part of football news.

At Christmas, he was quiet until Harry Redknapp made some remark about the folly of buying "someone from Moldova or wherever," sparking Masal into life, lashing Harry for dissing Moldovan footballers.

In Irish despatches, I always referred to him as Massi (short for Masal) in order to prolong the joke, as all Paddies would quickly guess what was going on, as happened when I tried to flog him to Reading who were then to loan him on to Cork City in order to get a work permit. At the time, Reading were negotiating with Cork over top striker Dave Mooney. Cork fans were less than impressed that they were losing a top striker for an untried 16-year-old.

So what now for the boy wonder? Being deemed nonexistent has devastated his football career. He has been dropped by Moldova and even Sergei Yelikov has probably moved on to his next protégé.

There is nought left for him but a career in sheep-herding. "I'd even play for City," he said, before penning another letter of application to the local sheep-farmer. "It has always been my dream to mind sheep ..."

Will I do it again? Maybe, just maybe, out there under the radar lie my sleepers. Just waiting for something to bring them back into life and into the news. Sleep, my little beauties.

technology

I Do Solemnly Swear That I Will Blog Regularly

Touring the new Whitehouse.gov.

By Farhad Manjoo

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 3:54 PM ET

When I logged on to the White House Web site about an hour before the inauguration, George W. Bush was already gone. He'd been replaced by an error message that popped up while, I imagine, the Young Turks on Obama's Web team flipped over the site. I kept hitting refresh, and just after noon, before the new president even took the oath, Barack Obama popped up online. The [new White House Web site](#) leads with a smiling photo and the headline, "Change Has Come to America." Click the photo and you're taken to the site's leading element—the [White House Blog](#).

I suppose it shouldn't come as a surprise that Obama, who gained so much from online social networks during the campaign, is greeting the Internet with a blog post. Still, it's a dramatic transition from the last White House site—indeed, from every White House site ever, not to mention most government sites—which took a formal, we'll-tell-you-what's-going-on tone on its front page. At its close, the Bush site was mainly a mess of links to press releases, speeches, and propaganda documents. (One of its leading sections was titled "Setting the Record Straight.")

The Obama site is leaner—understandably, the administration being just a few hours old—but also promises more interactivity. In the [first blog post](#), Macon Phillips, Obama's White House director of new media, reaffirms a campaign promise—that the White House will post all nonemergency legislation to the site for five days and review all the comments that come in before the president signs or vetoes the bill. Wisely, the first blog post allows no comments—if it had, we'd have seen a mob of wiseasses posting "First!!!!" At the moment, the only way to send a note to the White House is to use [this contact form](#).

After the election, [many wondered](#) how Obama would transform his campaign's online network into a force for pushing his policy goals. As far as I can tell, the White House Web site is not—or not yet—a social network. You can't build a profile, connect with friends, and start groups to advocate for certain positions—the functions that allowed millions of supporters to take part in his campaign. What you can do is give the site your e-mail address and ZIP code. When I did so, I got a pop-up message thanking me for my submission, and that was that. I hope they don't spam me.

The site is not without its bugs, either: A [flashy slide show](#) of past presidents fails to include anyone past Gerald Ford. In

addition, the Web masters were so thorough in their attempts to erase the old site that they broke many legitimate pages. For instance, when you Google [George Washington](#), [Abraham Lincoln](#), [FDR](#), or any other past president, you get now-broken links to their bios on the White House site.

On television this morning, many of the anchors were reveling in the majesty of America's "peaceful handover of power." The handover online, though, is far less civil and carries no pomp. It's violently abrupt: All of a sudden, there's a new president—and the old one vanishes.

To test out the new site's search engine, I typed in "Bush." I got back just four pages dedicated to the clan—one bio each for [Barbara Bush](#), [George H.W. Bush](#), [Laura Bush](#), and [George W. Bush](#). That last page recounts the 43rd president's achievements in just a few short paragraphs—it says nothing about Iraq, Katrina, Gitmo, Scooter Libby, Alberto Gonzales, or anything else you might've lost sleep over these past eight years. It's almost like none of it ever happened.

technology

Forget Yahoo—Buy Palm

Why Microsoft would be foolish to get into the Web ad business.

By Farhad Manjoo

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 7:33 AM ET

Nearly a year ago, Microsoft made an unsolicited \$44 billion bid to buy Yahoo. No good came of it: Yahoo's executives, who appeared chronically allergic to any move that might reward shareholders, [wasted a precious year](#) fending off Microsoft rather than finding a way to beat their chief corporate rival, Google. Microsoft emerged looking no better; as it puzzled for months over whether to go all out for Yahoo or leave it alone, the company seemed to fall ever further short of developing a business strategy to compete with its main rival—yes, Google again. Do you see a pattern here? The only beneficiary of all of these chaotic merger talks has been the company that Microsoft and Yahoo are most desperate to beat.

Happily for Google, Microsoft and Yahoo may be ready to dance once more. Last week, Yahoo named Carol Bartz its new CEO. Many expect the appointment to spark a new round of talks with Microsoft; gossips were recently rewarded with the sight of Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer and Roy Bostock, Yahoo's chairman, [meeting for lunch](#). This can't end well. The past year has eroded the already tenuous rationale supporting any partnership between these two also-ran Web companies. Not only would regulatory hurdles and a clash of cultures doom

Microhoo—the new company would now be forming during a [declining Internet ad market](#).

What's most puzzling about the possibility of renewed merger talks is that in betting on Yahoo, Microsoft would be jumping deeper into a volatile business that is outside its area of expertise. Microsoft really has no business being in the business of advertising. It is a software company, and software remains an astonishingly lucrative market. So why does it want to sell ads?

For Ballmer, beating Google in the ad game might offer a kind of redemption. The *Wall Street Journal's* Robert Guth [reported](#) last week that over the past decade, Ballmer and Bill Gates missed several chances to build a Google of their own. Yet Microsoft's early blindness to the ad business was understandable—Ballmer and Gates were more focused on the bigger riches to be had from selling operating systems, office applications, and Web servers. Does Microsoft need to be in the ad business now? Only if you believe that advertising is somehow a threat to revenue from software—in other words, that the economic future of software depends on advertising rather than paying customers. But that's a foolish bet—and buying Yahoo will only magnify the foolishness. Instead, I've got a better idea for Ballmer: Abandon the Internet ad business and focus on your main market, developing and selling software. I've even got a great way to jump-start that strategy: Buy Palm!

As computers burrow ever more deeply into our lives, the market for good software only grows. Ten years ago, the PC was the only device that ran a recognizable operating system. Today, your cell phone, your music player, your TV's set-top box, your camera, your GPS navigator, your video game console, and dozens of other devices require code to keep them humming—and to keep them working together. Not only that, but people are willing to pay for software that makes these devices easy to use. Look at the iPhone. Sure, it's pretty on the outside, but its main innovations are inside: its user interface, Web browser, App Store, and seamless connection to your PC and the Internet cloud. The iPhone carries no ads; it is supported entirely by customers' monthly contributions to Apple and AT&T—to the tune of around \$2,000 over the life of a two-year contract.

The success of the iPhone and other smartphones demonstrates how the market for software is changing. Applications are no longer bound to a single device—your programs come in different flavors on different gadgets and share data across the Internet. The model by which we pay for software is also shifting. Once, we bought applications in boxed units; now, depending on your need, you may buy a subscription to an online service (see what [37 Signals](#) does with its Web collaboration software), you may download software for free in conjunction with a gadget (sales of iPods and Macs subsidize Apple's development of iTunes), or you might get an app in

return for viewing ads (that's how Google supports most of its Web apps for consumers).

As Henry Blodget [has pointed out](#), free, ad-supported Web applications pose little threat to Microsoft's most profitable business—selling software to corporations. It's true that companies are increasingly replacing their desktop software with Internet apps—but many still want to pay for the stuff they're using. Google charges firms \$50 per employee for a suite of its online programs; in return, employees see no ads, and companies get technical support from Google. Salesforce.com, one of the most successful online software companies, also shuns the ad-supported model—and last quarter, its revenues [jumped 43 percent](#).

You could forgive Microsoft for being slow to develop its own Google-like search advertising business—search engines weren't its main focus. What's less forgivable is that over the last few years, the world's biggest software company has failed to adapt to the changing software market. Microsoft's apps integrate poorly with the Internet—how did you share your Word documents with co-workers before you had Google Docs? Microsoft's portable software also isn't very good. Apple, Google, Research in Motion (Blackberry's manufacturer), and Palm now all make stylish, easy-to-use mobile operating systems. Microsoft's mobile OS, Windows Mobile, looks ancient in comparison and carries none of the sex appeal that's proven so important in the sales of mobile phones.

Microsoft even failed to anticipate the next wave in PCs—its main business. Windows Vista, its current OS, doesn't work well on [netbooks, the tiny, ultraportable, cheap laptops](#) that are becoming a big part of the notebook market. Last month, I [praised Windows 7](#), Microsoft's excellent successor to Windows Vista, which the company says will run well on netbooks. But many people who load up Windows 7 will still go elsewhere for most of the software they run on it—they'll download iTunes to manage their music, Google's Picasa to manage their pictures, and Firefox or Chrome to get online. When we think of the software that powers our most personal apps, we rarely think of Microsoft.

Buying Yahoo would solve none of Microsoft's software woes—and could likely make them worse if Ballmer spends resources fixing what's wrong with Yahoo rather than fixing what's wrong with Windows Mobile. So here's another plan: Earlier this month, Palm unveiled its fantastic new phone, the Pre. The device looks to be the most advanced competitor to the iPhone yet—in many ways, its user interface, which is [much more responsive](#) than Apple's and features the ability to run multiple apps side by side, [bests the iPhone](#). What it lacks, though, is distribution. The Pre will be locked to Sprint's network, and Palm has only a fraction of the marketing muscle of Apple, RIM, and Google.

Microsoft might pay tens of billions of dollars for Yahoo; it could pick up Palm instead for just \$1 billion or \$2 billion and then spend several hundred million more on transforming the Pre's user interface into a mobile OS that can run on phones made by multiple vendors. Microsoft would also gain a loyal Palm audience—and a base of developers looking to create apps for the device. And then Microsoft would have money left over to buy other software companies—startups and established firms that power the next generation of devices, or that are pioneers in the selling online software to companies. In other words, it could buy lots of companies that share its core mission—building apps—instead of one that makes its money in a completely alien business.

Over the past few months, Google, the company that Ballmer considers his main rival, has made a series of moves to cut costs and ditch parts of its business that aren't performing. It announced plans to close down the virtual world [Lively](#), its [video search engine](#), the Twitter-like service [Jaiku](#), and the scrapbook app [Google Notebook](#), among others. Many of these projects seemed like boom-era extravagances—things that might have seemed smart when Google's stock price was \$700 but now look like deviations from the company's main business.

Microsoft's own boom-era delusion was that by buying Yahoo, it could succeed in both the Internet ad business and the software business. Now that the boom is over, Microsoft ought to take a page from its rival and pick a single business. In 2009, companies are expected to spend about [\\$45 billion on Internet ads](#). The market for software is nearly 10 times that size—around [\\$388 billion](#) this year. If you were Microsoft, which would you choose?

television

CNN Goes to the Ball

After the event, it was time for the pseudo-event.

By Troy Patterson

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 1:59 PM ET

The [little hitch](#) in the oath of office looked something like a beauty mark on the news shows' recaps and wrap-ups. This was the one element of the whole pageant that wasn't strictly symbolic, and with the chief justice and the president gently bungling it, there was a welcome speck of imperfect humanity at the core of highlight reels that might have otherwise felt unreal or pompous or postcard-perfect. Didn't one of the meanings of Obama's inauguration have to do with facing America's flaws?

There of course had been a great televised quest for meaning. Standouts among the talking-head historians included righteous Douglas Brinkley, measured Michael Beschloss, punky Doris

Kearns Goodwin, and Michael Eric Dyson, who's positioning himself as TV's go-to black intellectual for the Obama era, a Cornel West with better flow and fewer flights of fancy. BBC World News dispatched a journalist to capture the tearful joy of a black community in Alabama, and he reported back with that faint tone of condescension that can overcome Brits talking about American race relations. CNN, as ever, toys with its electronic playthings with a Christmas-morning fervor; Tom Foreman caressed the "Magic Wall" more pointlessly than ever, first sliding the logo of the National Park Service across a map of the Mall, later tracing the parade route in minute detail. And then after four days of giving us indelible images and useful historical insights—along with the usual trivia, clichés, and platitudes—the news networks were running on empty. Perhaps the turning point came while they were waiting for the Obamas to enter the reviewing stand: On Fox News, analyst Larry Sabato declined an invitation to discuss who might escort the first daughters when they needed to go tinkle.

Thus, having wrung all the meaning out of the event, TV was left with a kind of rubbery pseudo-event to bat around for another six or eight hours. CNN, committed to the big picture, tracked the locations of the inaugural balls in a 3-D rendering. On ABC's anticlimactic presentation of the Neighborhood Ball, the Obamas first danced to Beyoncé's rendition of "At Last" and then to "Signed, Sealed, Delivered" as mangled by an all-star supergroup. MTV had the Youth Inaugural Ball, where, in the most arresting shot of the night, every attendee lifted a camera to snap the new president, and, annoyingly, the crowd chanted his name at length, a bit of idolatry best put in storage until the 2012 campaign. On CBS, Katie Couric brought us the political choreography of the Commander in Chief Ball from somewhere behind her eyeliner. While debriefing *Washington Post* fashion critic Robin Givhan, NBC's Brian Williams confessed to being disturbed at the keenness of his interest in the rag trade. He was alone in voicing such compunctions.

Pitiably star-struck, the Washington press corps had spent half a week chattering about the pleasures of rubbing shoulders with Bruce Springsteen and Ben Affleck out on the town. By 11 p.m. Tuesday, they were so strung out on celebrity that it was a coup to snag screen time with a third-tier Baldwin brother outside the Creative Coalition Ball. Soon, NBC was reporting from the BET party, and Fox News reporters were interviewing MTV News reporters, and Larry King was threatening to allow that tuneless hustler Will.i.am back on air, at which point it was time to go to bed in hopes of a brighter tomorrow.

—Posted Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009, at 2:01 PM ET

ESPN ran ABC's feed of the inaugural ceremony, following it with a memorable live report from its own Jeremy Schaap. It is possible that Schaap understood the mood on the Mall better than every other journalist on the scene. It is also possible that he either had been carried into madness by the rigors of the moment

or was engaged in a subtle self-parody. "At the end of the day," Schaap said (with that cliché lending credence to the prank theory), "I think a lot of people here, as excited as they were to see him inaugurated and take the oath of office, were so cold that they just wanted the inaugural address to end." He said it was unclear how many athletes were on the scene ("There are a few million people out here. It's hard to spot everyone"), and this also seemed conceivable as a dry joke. But how to read Schaap's flight to the comfort of statistics? "He didn't challenge William Henry Harrison's record in 1841. *That* was an inaugural address of over 8,000 words."

The home-shopping network QVC didn't cover the inauguration itself, but one of its personalities was stationed around the corner from the parade route, where he chatted with a smooth-jazz maestro and tried to move some units of *Yes We Can: Voices of a Grassroots Movement*, a two-CD set that can be yours for \$18.57 plus shipping and handling. Then, at the 4 o'clock hour, QVC aired ***The First Lady's Jewelry Collection***, the lowlights of which included a "brand-new multi-cross charm bracelet inspired by Abigail Adams" and a "gorgeous simulated emerald ring inspired by Dolly Madison." Confronting the horrors of "The Mary Todd Lincoln Collection" inspired a longing for "The Betty Ford Liquor Cabinet."

—Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009, at 7:33 PM ET

When MSNBC announced that it would beam its inauguration coverage into Starbucks outlets in New York, San Francisco, and Seattle, my counterpart at *Time* [gaped in wonder](#). "Seriously: Did David Brooks think up that promotion?" At the outlet closest to my TV set, that seemed to be a possibility. Brooklyn Bobos did their [Bobo thing](#)—graphic-design work, drinking chai tea after yoga class, blocking the aisles with their infernal double-wide baby-strollers. The audio flooded the store, but the screen was mounted so that the guys behind the counter had the best view. "Ooh, there's Hillary and Bill," one said around 10:30 a.m., wiping down a cup-sleeve stand as various dignitaries entered the Capitol. "My homeboy, Bill."

Throughout the morning and early afternoon, Chris Matthews toiled steadily to provide MSNBC's critics with sufficient ammunition for the new administration's first 100 days. Before Matthews had seen Obama's speech, he'd already ranked it with the inaugural orations of JFK and FDR. The *Los Angeles Times* [caught him explaining](#) why he was receiving so many smiles from the crowd on the Mall: "Let's talk straight here: This is the network that has opened its heart to change. ... These people watch this network." His excitement did not go unnoticed by his colleagues, with Keith Olbermann stiff-arming that statement: "He's Chris Matthews, and he approved this message." Later, Al Roker implied that Matthews sensed [the infamous thrill up his leg](#) because the new president looks good without his shirt on. His pride seemingly wounded by a weatherman, Matthews sat there trying not to look like he was stewing.

TV One—which generally plays second fiddle to BET as a black-focused cable network but is easily outdoing it today—has no pretenses to journalistic objectivity, so there is no point in chiding Joe Madison for wearing an Obama knit cap while anchoring its enthusiastic coverage. But let the record reflect that panelist Al Sharpton lost significant street cred, in the moments before the ceremony, in mistaking Aretha Franklin for Barack Obama's mother-in-law. Dude was James Brown's tour manager and he can't identify the Queen of Soul?

—Posted Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009, at 3:30 PM ET

It fell to the Disney Channel to start the serious milking of the inaugural festivities for every Nielsen family they're worth. Disney, which [paid handsomely](#) for the exclusive rights to air a children's concert, saluted military families, promoted volunteering, remembered Martin Luther King, and facilitated a William Howard Taft fat joke on Monday night's ***Kids' Inaugural: We Are the Future***. But mostly it branded its own carefully cultivated pop acts as Obamariffic agents of change. The Obama daughters and Biden grandkids teenybopped heartily to the Jonas Brothers. The musical highlight was Miley Cyrus' ["Fly On the Wall,"](#) which seems to quote a riff from Blur's ["Song 2."](#) (Read [Josh Levin's account](#) of the concert.)

Elsewhere in the entertainment world, the showbiz-news programs foamed with anticipation. ***Entertainment Tonight's*** Mary Hart served up Beyoncé sound bites and Ben Affleck sightings from the White House lawn. ***Access Hollywood*** marked its territory as a keen observer of first lady fashion ("Today it was a more casual Michelle in a belted cardigan as she did volunteer work. ..."). ***The Insider*** reported that Neiman Marcus had set up a boutique in the lobby of the St. Regis Hotel on K Street. Its pampering station apparently features a Manolo Blahnik shoeshine stand and a "drive-by bow-tie service." Every viewer will get worked up about the circus around this ceremony at his own pace, and this is where I draw the line: If you can't tie your own bow tie, then go get your mommy to help you.

—Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009, at 9:50 PM ET

Monday's ***Oprah Winfrey Show*** was a commemorative plate of a special episode taped at the Kennedy Center. Oprah was sharing her pre-inaugural excitement in a soft-focus way, stressing self-improvement and allowing star power do its thing. "There are a lot of people who feel like I do," Oprah said. "So let's get started and welcome Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher!" You can't fault Demi for getting choked up while talking about her hopes and dreams, or Ashton for not choosing this as the day to start combing his hair.

On tape and by satellite, other celebrities helped Oprah celebrate. The singer Usher, urging public service, quoted Aristotle ("We are what we repeatedly do"), which somewhat outclassed the wisdom offered by Justin Timberlake ("We all of

the sudden have swagger, America"). Tonight's cocktail chatter about the appearance of Joe and Jill Biden will concern her candor about his career choices, but for Oprah's purposes, the best part of it was Joe—can I call you Joe?—getting touchy-feely when talking about his mom.

The capper was the world premiere of "America's Song," an original composition by David Foster and the disturbingly omnipresent Will.i.am. "America's Song" is most notable for featuring lyrics more bland than its title. Will.i.am joined Faith Hill, Seal, Mary J. Blige, and the inevitable Bono in raising his voice at the chorus: "America / America / America is beautiful / (Yes it is) / My America / Your America / Our America / Is beautiful." "This came together in a week," Oprah enthused. That long, huh?

Oprah will again broadcast from D.C. on Wednesday. The promo promises a guest line-up unprecedented in the annals of broadcasting: "Forest Whitaker, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Jon Bon Jovi."

—Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009, at 6:42 PM ET

HBO variously invested ***We Are One: The Obama Inaugural Celebration***—the Sunday-afternoon concert it produced at Lincoln Memorial—with solemn ceremony, buoyant pluralism, handsome edutainment, and just enough embarrassing moments to remind us that the marriage of politics and showbiz will always have its difficulties. Was George Lopez really the biggest Hispanic male star available? Would it be possible to take Jack Black seriously in this context? Did Shakira vamp around a bit much while singing "Higher Ground" with Stevie Wonder? Yes, and no, and what of it?

During readings, Hollywood A-listers (with a few politically minded celebrities of a lesser wattage) spoke of past American leaders and of core democratic principles that honored "the ongoing journey of America to be America," as Queen Latifah said therein. The musical numbers ranged in tone from heavy pomp—Tom Hanks intoned his reading over the booms and tinkles of Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait"—to incongruous revelry.* During a performance of Bob Marley's "One Love" by Herbie Hancock, Sheryl Crow, and the well-meaning, ever-jabbering Will.i.am, the camera caught Sasha Obama regarding the show with bald skepticism. The group might have convinced the assembled throng of adults that this was the right place for something like a Rasta jam, but 7-year-olds are much tougher to deceive.

But some performers were born to transcend the awkwardness of moments like this and make the heart soar. John Mellencamp jangled out "Pink Houses" with a choir behind him as some effective heartland propaganda—radiant photo portraits of schoolteachers and firefighters—slid across the screen. During

U2's two numbers, Bono—immutable Bono, with his wraparound shades and a messiah complex that is by now as endearing as Joe Biden's hamminess—played to the camera rather than the crowd. And there is something wrong with you if you were not moved by the sight of the formerly [blacklisted](#) Pete Seeger, heroically spry at age 89, standing next to Bruce Springsteen and leading a singalong of Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land." Banjo in hand, Seeger sparkled like the sands of America's diamond deserts. Nothing twinkled more brightly than he that day, except maybe Shakira's tights.

—Posted Monday, Jan. 19, 2009, at 12:01 PM ET

The cable-news networks launched inauguration coverage at 10 a.m. on Saturday, setting the table for half a week of theater and ceremony and hoping to set the tone for half a year of programming. "This event helps build the next six months," MSNBC exec Phil Griffin [told *Variety*](#) last week.

In which case, we should expect MSNBC's ***Hardball*** to evolve into a cineaste's salon where host Chris Matthews riffs, freestyle, about Hollywood classics. As the president-elect's train pulled into Union Station on Saturday evening, that glamour junkie ceaselessly invoked *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Something sweet gleamed in Matthews' starry eyes as he compared Obama's cool to [Ray Milland's](#). But if Matthews was going to go all TCM, then he should have mentioned [The Tall Target](#), Anthony Mann's 1951 noir about a detective guarding Lincoln on his pre-inaugural train ride to Washington. Given the networks' frequent chatter about Obama's allusions to Abe—and their slightly paranoid reports on security—the omission glared like a Fox News anchor's highlights.

What was the Fox News team thinking beneath their dye jobs? The network was figuring out how to celebrate the inauguration while still feeding meat to its red-state base. When CNN and MSNBC broke from covering the train ride, those networks often featured analysts and historians talking about coming power plays and policy challenges and puppy acquisitions. When Fox broke away, it almost always inveighed against government spending. At one point, anchor Neil Cavuto did a virtuoso job of filling time with bad locomotive-related puns, recognizing that his audience wanted to "rail and rail" against the bailout bill. Fox joined the other two networks in placing cameras on Obama's train, pointing them out the windows and, via unreliable broadband, airing choppy, smeary footage of what was happening outside. This was, of course, ridiculous, though it did have the advantage of making Delaware look fractionally less dull than usual.

—Posted Sunday, Jan. 18, 2009, at 6:55 PM ET

Correction, Jan. 19, 2009: This article originally misspelled the name of Aaron Copland. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)

the best policy

America's Fear of Competition

How cronyism and rent-seeking replaced "creative destruction."

By Eliot Spitzer

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 6:51 AM ET

Although everybody claims to love the market, nobody *really* likes the rough-and-tumble of competition that produces the essential "creative destruction" of capitalism. At bottom, this abhorrence of competition and change are the common theme that binds together the near death of the American car industry, the collapse of the credit market, the implosion of the housing market, the SEC's disastrous negligence, the Madoff Ponzi scheme, and the other economic catastrophes of recent months.

Consider the examples of the SEC and GM, which would appear to have nothing to do with each other. The traditional critiques of the SEC have been that it was underfunded and didn't have up-to-date laws needed to regulate sophisticated financial transactions in evolving markets. That's not accurate. The SEC is a gargantuan bureaucracy of 3,500 employees and a budget of \$900 million—vast compared with the offices that actually did ferret out fraud in the marketplace. And the general investigative powers of the SEC are so broad that it needs no additional statutory power to delve into virtually any market activity that it suspects is improper, fraudulent, or deceptive. After each business scandal (Enron, Wall Street analysts, Madoff ...), the SEC claims a need for more money and statutory power, yet those don't help. The SEC has all the money and people and laws it needs. For ideological reasons, it just didn't want to do its job, and on the rare occasions when it did, it didn't know how.

GM's excuses—that its UAW contract and health care costs make it too top heavy to compete—are partially true but ignore a simple reality: These are the self-inflicted wounds of a company that chose a path of least resistance rather than confront the need for dynamism and innovation. GM and its brethren forged a partnership with the UAW that avoided difficult choices on legacy costs, because the world seemed to permit it. Similarly, they opposed meaningful reform in health care. While this approach may have been tolerable in the '50s and '60s, it made no sense over the past 30 years. The auto industry preferred protection to competition. And when it had to compete, it wasn't up to the task.

Both the SEC and GM refused to adapt from the world of the last century to the more dynamic new millennium. Each reacted the same way to competition: Instead of improving its product, it played defense. Instead of genuinely asking how it had missed structural flaws in the marketplace that cried out for investigation, the SEC repeatedly joined forces with major Wall Street banks to handcuff those who had discovered the market

failures. No one at the SEC seemed to ask the most important question: Given how the market is changing, what *should* we change to insure the integrity of the capital markets?

Instead, the SEC spent its energy preventing others from doing the work it should have done. Using the rather arcane doctrine of pre-emption, the SEC fought in the courts and on Capitol Hill to keep other enforcers at bay: Apparently, worse than having fraud in the marketplace was the possibility that an entity other than the SEC would appear to be more effective than the SEC at finding it.

The auto sector was similar, avoiding or opposing the innovations that would generate consumer excitement. For both the SEC and the auto industry, Congress was a place to find protection from meaningful competition. Each used its bureaucratic clout to insulate itself from the pressures of capitalism. Both the SEC and GM have lacked the nimbleness to realize that the market was changing beneath their feet. Each found it easier to continue doing the same thing over and over and to reward those who made the same product, or kept the competition from marketing a better product, rather than themselves creating a better product.

The result has been unfortunate: Over and over, we supplied the protection from needed change that these entities desired. Then, when the going got tough, neither the SEC nor GM was up to the task. By preventing the stern taskmaster of competition from forcing adaptation, we became complicit in their becoming dinosaurs.

The contrast to the real marketplace, where a company like Apple has to reinvent itself every product cycle, is remarkable. GM and the SEC need the Steve Jobs mentality. It doesn't matter that the SEC is a government agency. Instead of focusing on cookie-cutter processing of minor claims, it needs to value creativity. It needs to move fast so that tipsters will feel that their information will be acted upon, not shuffled up in triplicate to a committee that eons later may read and discard it. Both GM and the SEC need to see a change in market conditions as an opportunity—not a challenge to market share.

We must rebuild these two institutions. If we don't infuse them with a culture of change and love of competition, they will fail once again. The SEC should go out and hire some of the young, recently laid-off traders from hedge funds and investment banks. They need work, and better than any group of lawyers or agent-investigators, they know what trading patterns and practices to examine and where to drop subpoenas to find the skeletons. The SEC should welcome the creative tension that results from having state regulators or other federal agencies such as the CFTC on the beat. And GM should use government funding for green technology to truly transform itself: It should build the infrastructure for plug-in technology that will be the next iteration of "gas stations."

This is a unique opportunity for President Obama and the Congress to take two seemingly different entities and force them to play by the real rules of capitalism: compete and transform to produce better products.

the dismal science

You Can't Put a Price on Friendship

Or can you?

By Ray Fisman

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 7:03 AM ET

Blanche Dubois may have famously depended on the kindness of strangers in the closing scene of Tennessee Williams' [A Streetcar Named Desire](#), but in a world fraught with treachery and deception, most of us prefer to depend instead on the kindness of friends and family to help us through hard times, and reciprocate when called upon to return the favor. But are there limits to what we'll do to sustain the bonds of friendship?

In their new book [Heroes and Cowards](#), economists [Dora Costa](#) and [Matthew Kahn](#) use the Civil War as their laboratory to study what men will do in the name of friendship. They find that men serving in companies with tight social connections—like shared birthplace and occupation—were more likely to stand and fight than those in less tight-knit companies, where desertion rates were up to four times higher. The bonds of friendship also mattered for Union soldiers who ended up in Confederate POW camps: Soldiers imprisoned with others of similar backgrounds were much more likely to survive to see the war's end.

When economists look at friendship and social networks, what they see is people trading favors—you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. A friendship's value is determined by the benefits of favors you receive weighed against the cost of the favors you'll need to do in return. A friendship built on cold economic foundations can be sustained only as long as the gains of the long-term trading of favors exceed the benefit of taking one last back scratch before putting an end to the relationship (though news travels fast, so retaliation from others in your social circle may help to keep you from taking advantage of others).

Of course, for all but the most calculating of individuals, there's more than naked expediency to friendship—we help others because we care about their well-being rather than what it gets us in return. At an extreme, this concern for others can lead us to do things like [giving up kidneys](#) or falling on hand grenades to save our friends—acts that can't be good for our long-term health. So friendship can help us in our daily lives but can also prove very costly because of the extreme sacrifices that emotional bonds may inspire.

Much of the evidence on the nature of favor-giving among friends examines situations that [aren't exactly life-or-death](#). Costa and Kahn look at the larger stakes decision of whether Union soldiers chose to risk death by remaining to fight or desert and save their own skins. The authors reason that social bonds are stronger among soldiers from similar backgrounds. New England-born soldiers, for example, will feel greater kinship with other New Englanders, the Irish with other Irish, blacksmiths with other blacksmiths. In companies where men had shared backgrounds, fewer soldiers would be expected to abandon their comrades, both because of the greater kinship among men with a sense of social connection and because their shared network would make it easier to punish and censure cheaters back home.

The military service records of every Union soldier—including birthplace, occupation, age; whether he deserted, got captured, won a Medal of Honor—were sent to the National Archives after the war. To test their theory, Costa and Kahn analyzed the records of soldiers in 354 Union companies, a total of 41,000 men. They found that on average, nine out of 100 men deserted. However, in companies populated by a relatively homogeneous group of men—of similar ages, born in the same place, who worked similar jobs before the war—the desertion rate was closer to two in 100. Belief in the cause mattered—enlistees from pro-Lincoln counties were less likely to desert. And the likelihood of catching a bullet by staying and fighting naturally figured into soldiers' decisions to go AWOL as well—desertion rates went down when the war tilted in the Union's favor. But neither belief in the war nor hopes for survival mattered nearly as much as the strength of social bonds in predicting who would stay and fight.

This wasn't because soldiers felt safer surrounded by friends whom they could count on for life-saving favors—a soldier's best chance at survival was to desert, regardless of the strength of his fighting unit. Rather, it was the shame and embarrassment of abandoning one's comrades. A community quickly got word of cowardice as well as heroics through soldiers' letters home, and deserters were nearly 50 percent more likely to pick up and move to a different state after the fighting ended.

If your goal was to survive the war, the bonds of friendship, then, actually worked against your interests—your best shot at staying alive was to run for the hills. But for the unfortunate thousands who were captured, herded onto cattle cars, and shipped to Confederate POW camps, easy escape was no longer an option. Circumstances in many of the camps were more perilous than the war's front lines. More than 40 percent of inmates at the infamous Andersonville Camp in southwest Georgia perished, mostly from scurvy, diarrhea, dysentery, and other diseases of malnutrition and overcrowding. Yet for men who were lucky enough to get captured with a ready-made social network, chances of survival were far greater. An Irishman who was captured with enough other Irish company-mates, for

example, had a better than 90 percent chance of making it to the war's end. Why was friendship such a crucial resource in surviving as a prisoner of war? The camps were overcrowded, rations in short supply, sanitary facilities nonexistent. Survival required the care of friends if one fell sick, the sharing of food, shelter, other resources, and protection from looting by other prisoners.

For Civil War soldiers, friendship was thus a double-edged sword—on the front lines, the obligations of friendship cost more than the benefits; in the camps, the situation was reversed. In these difficult economic times, many Americans are finding themselves in need of [friends to lean on for financial and emotional support](#). But friendship is once again proving to have its costs and benefits. Trust among friends is a source of vulnerability well-recognized by hustlers and conmen. It proved to be the undoing of the Jewish and Palm Beach communities that were victimized in the \$50 billion pyramid scheme concocted by Bernie Madoff, one of their own. With friends like these, maybe Blanche was onto something after all.

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In one [recent experiment](#), college undergrads were asked to split a \$10 pot between themselves and a partner. A purely selfish subject would keep the entire amount for himself. Most subjects gave at least something to their partners but were much more generous when paired with friends than when matched with anonymous partners. But the potential benefits from selfishness in this case are small. Who wants to lose a friendship—or risk becoming the dorm pariah—over pocket change?

the oscars

Let's Talk Oscars

Please, *Slumdog Millionaire* is not the little indie that could.

By Troy Patterson and Dana Stevens

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 10:44 AM ET

From: Dana Stevens

To: Troy Patterson

Subject: *Revolutionary Road* Got Shafted. *The Reader* Is Still Ridiculous. Ledger Will Win.

Posted Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 12:26 PM ET

Hi, Troy,

Gossiping about Oscar nominations during this historic inauguration week feels sort of like being one of the skanks passing notes in the back of the junior-high classroom while the star civics student gives a prizewinning oration. But you know what? He's going to be up there talking for four years, and Oscar season only lasts for one brief, sparkling, tawdry moment. So let's hide a movie magazine in our civics textbooks and skank out.

Scanning the [list of nominees](#), I find myself in the odd position of feeling indignant on behalf of a movie I didn't like much, *Revolutionary Road*. I don't think I would mind this handsomely mounted yawner getting what amounts to a jumbo-sized dis—Leo not up for best actor, Mendes not up for best director, Justin Haythe not up for best adapted screenplay, the movie itself ignored for best picture—if it weren't for the alarming number of accolades beings heaped on *Revolutionary Road*'s evil twin, *The Reader*. Everyone knew Kate would get a best-actress nod, and as a five-time loser, she still seems likely to win the category. But it somehow besmirches her honor to be recognized for the execrable *Reader* (aka *Boohoo*, *I Bonked an Illiterate Nazi*). And the fact that *BIBAIN* also snapped up noms for best adapted screenplay, best director, and best picture (it made a lot of critics' lists for *worst* movie of the year, and with good reason) only rubs salt into the wound. I guess Ricky Gervais, whose presentation at the Globes last week was the ceremony's high point, was right: Do a Holocaust film, and the awards will come.

What else? Masked fanboys everywhere must be blogging portentously in Gothic font about the lack of recognition for *The Dark Knight*. No best-picture nomination (gotta make room for those illiterate Nazis!), no best-director nod for Christopher Nolan or original screenplay for his brother, Jonathan. Indeed, the only nontechnical award the Caped Crusader is up for is best supporting actor for Heath Ledger. Which may be the ceremony's only real lock: The only surer route to Oscar credibility than making a Holocaust movie is being dead. In all due respect, Ledger's performance reigned—but so did Robert Downey Jr.'s in *Tropic Thunder*, which earned him that movie's only nomination. (What, no best makeup?) The total *Gran Torino* shutout seems to indicate some degree of Clint backlash, though Eastwood's *The Changeling* did wedge its way into the best-actress category (Angelina: "I want my son! Where is my son? This is not my son. Find my son.") as well as best cinematography and art direction.

Slumdog Millionaire, with 10 nominations (second only to *Benjamin Button*'s 13), seems positioned to Hoover up every award in sight by virtue of being the cute, inoffensive crowd pleaser that no one hates (me included—I walked out with a warm glow that only gradually congealed into faint annoyance). *Slumdog*, and I mean this kindly, is the grandma movie in the

lineup, and a lot of academy members vote the grandma ticket. Among only three nominees for best song, two are from *Slumdog*, which guarantees a couple of rollicking Bollywood-style production numbers at the ceremony. (But also seems likely to split the best-song vote, making Peter Gabriel's *Wall-E* ballad the default winner.) Would it have killed them to recognize Springsteen's lovely, spare [theme](#) for *The Wrestler*? Troy, do you have any three-legged dogs in this fight?

Dana

From: Troy Patterson

To: Dana Stevens

Subject: Hear, Hear for *Milk*, Penelope Cruz, and Melissa Leo

Posted Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 4:22 PM ET

Hey, Dana—

Yes, we're skanks, agreed—yet I sense a symmetry between this morning's glossy announcements and Tuesday night's Obamathon. If you take away the Obamas' wedding-reception dancing, the made-for-TV balls played, in all, like a long and grinding awards show, complete with emotional reaction shots, self-laudatory mood, and Kanye West in an overly dandyish tuxedo.

I cannot shed a tear over the omission of *Revolutionary Road*; I have avoided seeing the film and am eager to take its snubbing as a sign that it's safe to continue avoiding such a patent sack of pretty, petty maundering. However, I shed several tears laughing at your alternate title for Stephen Daldry's *The Reader*—with *The Hours*, that director took an almost decent novel inspired by a modern classic and turned it into *A Special Womanly Sadness*. Daldry has something more valuable to the Academy than artistic vision: a knack for *The Prestige*. His three films have earned a total 17 Oscar nominations. Next on Daldry's plate is an adaptation of [The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay](#), a novel partly about escaping the Holocaust using magic tricks, so Michael Chabon's friends can go ahead now and send him a note of congratulations. Or condolences.

Yes, agreed, *Slumdog Millionaire* seems to have the momentum. The movie itself is all momentum, giddily and sometimes wonderfully—but how do you suppose its controlled rush will sit with the grandma set? And how many voters will join reasonable people in finding its hybrid of Dickensian melodrama and Bollywood melodrama a little too melodramatic? If I had a best-picture vote, I'd cast it for *Milk*. It's the squarest movie Gus Van Sant has ever made and not even his best of the year—that'd be *Paranoid Park*, about manslaughter and sinking dread and skate

punks more graceful than gliding fish—but you take what you can get.

Besides, the morning offered a few glimmers of justice. With Melissa Leo's visibility raised by her best-actress nod for *Frozen River*, one excellent performer won't need to clock in so often on run-of-the-mill police procedurals. From my perspective, the best news of the morning was Penelope Cruz's nomination for her Frida-Kahlo-as-Sophia-Loren squalling in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, as I'd vowed to quit watching movies if that perfect turn went neglected. It was nice for Richard Jenkins to get a nomination for *The Visitor* and even nicer that the movie was otherwise ignored, it being a middling entertainment about a white guy who has his soul restored by some brown people—less coherent than [Henderson the Rain King](#), though notably less creepy than Baz Luhrmann's [current ad for Australian tourism](#).

I notice that you didn't say anything about *Frost/Nixon*. Is that because *no one* is saying anything about *Frost/Nixon* outside of the immediate hearing of Grazer/Howard?

Hold that thought for a month.

Yours,
Troy

From: Dana Stevens

To: Troy Patterson

Subject: Please, *Slumdog Millionaire* Is Not the Little Indie That Could

Posted Friday, January 23, 2009, at 10:43 AM ET

Dear Troy,

Don't misunderstand me on [Revolutionary Road](#)—I'm neither defending its artistic merit nor lamenting its under-recognition, and if it had earned a bunch of nods, I wouldn't be hollering "Whoo-hoo!" but mumbling "That figures." I guess I'm just puzzled at [The Reader](#) having barged its unsubtle way into so many big categories. If academy voters want to reward Kate Winslet for her entire body of work (and why shouldn't they, even if 33 is a bit young to start bemoaning your long-overdue Oscar), why overlook her obvious blue-chip project of the year, a beautifully crafted if somewhat lifeless movie, in favor of the morbid pandering of *The* (even more lifeless) *Reader*? The most likely answer—that a majority of academy voters simply enjoy morbid pandering for its own sake—is so dispiriting that I'd prefer to leave this an open question.

So, you're one of those people who thinks *Paranoid Park* is the great Gus Van Sant movie of 2008. There were a few of them at

every year-end critics' meeting I attended, and I confess that I half-suspected they were just being deliberately contrarian. Not that *Paranoid Park*, a grim little young-adult morality tale set in the skate-rat culture of the Pacific Northwest, was a bad movie—just so slight that it disappeared from my memory within weeks of seeing it. The ambitious, sprawling, large-spirited [Milk](#), on the other hand, is unforgettable. (And though it is a conventional biopic in some respects, can you really call it Van Sant's "squarest movie"? Wouldn't that award have to go to *Good Will Hunting*?) I'm with you: If I had a vote to cast for best picture out of these nominees, it would go to *Milk*. (But for best director, I might choose [The Wrestler](#)'s Darren Aronofsky, who wasn't even nominated.)

As for [Frost/Nixon](#): Like [Doubt](#), it was a filmed play that didn't try to be more than that. (Well, in *Doubt*'s case, director/playwright John Patrick Shanley tried a bit too hard but remained stage-bound.) Still, I enjoyed every dishy, talky, stagy moment of both *Frost/Nixon* and *Doubt*—and, as a theater-buff friend of mine likes to rant, what's so wrong with filming a play? Can't one of cinema's many tasks be to record theatrical performances that are worth preserving? Ron Howard is never going to give Renoir or Ozu a run for their money, but *Frost/Nixon* makes perfectly respectable filler for the best picture category (though it won't win), and Frank Langella's magisterial turn as Nixon certainly seems at home in the best actor category (though I'm pulling for Mickey Rourke or Sean Penn—Penn's performance is my favorite of the year, and wouldn't you like to see Rourke's acceptance speech?).

What gets on my nerves about the marketing of [Slumdog Millionaire](#) is the whole "little indie that could" rhetoric. That's annoying enough when applied to movies that are legitimate sleepers; still, at least *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Juno* were films by first-time directors that attracted larger and more loyal followings than anyone expected. But Danny Boyle is a long-established and popular British filmmaker who's had many hits in the United States (*Trainspotting*, *28 Days Later*, *A Life Less Ordinary*), and he's working with a cast of actors that includes Indian superstars Irrfan Khan and Anil Kapoor. If people want to laud the movie, fine, but let's not pretend it was constructed from duct tape and spit by the Little Match Girl.

Now, *Frozen River*—there's a movie that just about was constructed from duct tape and spit, shot on digital camera in rural New York State by first-time writer/director Courtney Hunt. I was very happy to see Melissa Leo get a nod for her fine performance as an impoverished single mother who starts smuggling immigrants across the U.S.-Canadian border to support her family. But I was thrilled, and surprised, to see Hunt's name appear in the best original screenplay lineup. Truth be told, I seldom think about the Oscars in terms of who "deserves" what—as Hamlet said, "Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?" (That line has always struck me as the setup for a Mae West-style riposte along the

lines of "Hon, you can use me after dessert anytime.") The formula for winning an Academy Award is such a mysterious algorithm, some unquantifiable mix of strategy, luck, and the prevailing taste of the moment, that usually, to paraphrase the real Mae West, goodness has nothing to do with it. But when the name of an unknown talent like Hunt pops up on these nomination lists, you remember that even the academy, every once in a while, is capable of making the right call.

Go ahead, burst my bubble,
Dana

today's business press

Thain's Pain

By Matthew Yeomans

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 6:00 AM ET

today's papers

Fighting Terrorism, Obama Style

By Daniel Politi

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 6:33 AM ET

The [Washington Post](#) leads with a look at how congressional Republicans are increasingly raising grievances about the economic-stimulus plan that President Obama wants to pass with [broad bipartisan support](#). Republicans say Democratic lawmakers are high on power and have written the \$850 billion legislation largely by themselves while ignoring their concerns that many items included in the draft bill wouldn't do much to stimulate the economy. The [New York Times](#) leads with Obama's nominee for treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, accusing the Chinese government of "manipulating" its currency, suggesting the new administration will be more confrontational in dealing with [Beijing's controversial exchange-rate policies](#).

The [Los Angeles Times](#) and [USA Today](#) lead with Obama issuing a series of executive orders to reverse some of the most controversial [counterterrorism policies of the Bush administration](#). Claiming the "moral high ground" in the fight against al-Qaida, Obama ordered Guantanamo closed within a year, the CIA prisons overseas shut down, and the use of harsh [interrogation techniques](#) prohibited. While the move sent a strong signal that the United States will change the way it fights terrorism, "Obama put off many of the most difficult decisions," notes the *LAT*. The *Wall Street Journal* banners news that former Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain was [forced to resign](#) from a top job at Bank of America. The bank's chief executive was angry that Thain rushed out bonuses for Merrill executives and spent lavishly before the company's sale to Bank of America closed,

despite the brokerage's \$15.3 billion in losses during the fourth quarter.

The Democratic majority in Congress makes it unlikely that Republicans could actually stop the stimulus bill, no matter how much they complain. But the rising Republican doubts mean that Obama's first major piece of legislation could pass on a party-line vote, "little different from the past 16 years of partisan sniping in the Clinton and Bush eras," [notes the WP](#). Democratic congressional leaders are basically saying, tough luck, that's what happens when you lose elections. But Obama seems determined to prove that he was serious about all that bipartisan talk and will host a meeting with congressional leaders at the White House and is apparently even willing to discuss the prospect of including more tax cuts into the stimulus package. Some Democrats are hinting that Obama's priorities are all wrong, and the focus should be on passing legislation, not on getting a few more Republican senators on his side.

Geithner made the comments about China's currency in writing to the Senate finance committee, which later in the day recommended that the full Senate confirm him as treasury secretary. White House officials insist Geithner didn't do anything except repeat something that Obama said [during the campaign](#), but the statement will undoubtedly anger China at a time of economic uncertainty. Geithner's words raise the possibility that the administration will explicitly label China a "currency manipulator," which would require negotiations to take place with Beijing over its currency policy. Labor unions and manufacturers that have long cried foul at China's exchange-rate policies are likely to be pleased if the administration takes a harder line on the issue. But China might decide it's suddenly not so interested in buying U.S. debt if the White House begins a serious push to get Beijing to revalue its currency.

In signing the orders that signaled a shift from the previous administration's methods of fighting against terrorism, Obama said he wanted to [send a message](#) that "we are willing to observe core standards of conduct not just when it's easy, but also when it's hard." But most of the orders will take time to implement and left many [unanswered questions](#), such as what will happen with the Guantanamo detainees who are identified as dangerous but can't be tried in American courts. And while Obama declared that CIA interrogators must abide by the methods outlined in the Army Field Manual, he suggested these techniques could be expanded and appointed a special task force to look into the issue. The CIA secret prisons haven't been used much since 2006, but their closing has raised doubts about what the agency would do with terrorist suspects captured overseas. The *LAT* also specifies that the CIA practice of "extraordinary rendition," in which agents transfer suspects to other countries, will remain intact as long as detainees aren't sent to countries that [engage in torture](#).

Some Republicans criticized Obama's moves, saying that the new administration is acting quickly without thinking through the potential consequences. Highlighting the difficult path that lies ahead to close Guantanamo, the *NYT* fronts word that Ali al-Shihri, a former detainee who was released to Saudi Arabia in 2007, is now the [deputy leader](#) of al-Qaida's Yemeni branch. While the *LAT* points out that the Pentagon has said that [61 former Guantanamo detainees](#) have taken up arms against the United States since their release, the *NYT* specifies that the "claim is difficult to document." Still, "few of the former detainees, if any," are thought to have become leaders of a terrorist organization like Shihri.

In a front-page analysis piece, the *WP*'s [Dana Priest](#), who won a Pulitzer Prize for her reporting on the CIA's secret prisons, declares that Obama "effectively declared an end to the 'war on terror,' as President George W. Bush had defined it." And while the administration insists it will continue to pursue terrorists, the idea that a president can ignore the law "simply by declaring war was halted by executive order." The executive orders marked a quick close to an era that was already ending, as the public had been growing wary of tactics that came to be seen as abuses of government power.

The *LAT* fronts, and everyone covers, news that Obama will get to [keep his BlackBerry](#). Ever since winning the election, Obama has waged a very public battle to hold on to his beloved device and will now become "the nation's first e-mailing president," [as the NYT puts it](#). But he had to accept certain restrictions. Only a small group of people will be allowed to send e-mail directly to the president—"one of the most exclusive lists ever created," [declares the Post](#). The *LAT* says that although the White House specifically mentioned the BlackBerry, some experts think Obama would adopt another kind of smartphone that has a higher level of security.

The drama surrounding the New York Senate seat left vacant by Hillary Clinton continued yesterday. But after what the *NYT* calls "a confusing and even embarrassing two-month ordeal," it seems Gov. David Paterson will finally announce his choice today. Early this morning, the *NYT* [confirmed speculation](#) that Paterson has picked Rep. Kristen Gillibrand, a largely unknown lawmaker from upstate New York. But it's still unclear exactly why Caroline Kennedy took herself out of the running, and there was some back-and-forth yesterday, with people close to Paterson saying that Kennedy gave up because of problems involving taxes and a household employee, but there was little evidence of the claim. They also took other shots at Kennedy, saying that she was never Paterson's choice, but other people close to the governor say that's not true. It seems clear that even if Paterson makes his announcement today, he may have permanently hurt his reputation, as many thought he was plagued by indecisiveness and appeared to enjoy being at the center of attention [a little too much](#).

While the exact reason for Kennedy's withdrawal remains a mystery, what is clear is that she has now become the latest in a growing number of women who have sought a prominent political office "only to face insurmountable hurdles," [notes the WP](#). In the past year, women seeking high-profile political jobs faced what many see as a double standard because of their sex. Some think it's ridiculous to think that Kennedy's woes were due to her sex, but others insist that she was treated differently than other politicians, primarily because much of the criticism centered on demeanor and style rather than substance.

USAT fronts a new study that says [more trees are dying](#) across Western states because of global warming. Over the last few decades, tree deaths have more than doubled in older forests in the West, and scientists expect the trend to continue.

The NYT reveals that the classical music played by Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, and two other musicians before Obama's oath of office was [previously recorded](#). The players and organizers said they had no other choice because of the weather. "No one's trying to fool anybody," a spokeswoman said. "This isn't a matter of Milli Vanilli."

While most of the media is deep in the Obama honeymoon phase, the NYT's [Paul Krugman](#) says he became less confident about the country's economic future after Obama's inaugural address. Krugman was troubled by the "conventionality" of Obama's speech, which followed typical Washington themes and could suggest that the new president will "wait for the conventional wisdom to catch up with events." Of course, the speech might not mean much in the long run, but if "the platitudes" he expressed are a sign of what is to come, the country is in trouble. "If we don't get drastic action soon," writes Krugman, "we may find ourselves stuck in the muddle for a very long time."

today's papers

Obama Makes Changes on Day One

By Arthur Delaney

Thursday, January 22, 2009, at 5:33 AM ET

All the papers give top billing today to stories on President Barack Obama's busy first full day in office. The *New York Times* [leads](#) with Obama's plans to sign an order today calling for the shutdown of the CIA's network of secret prisons abroad and the closing of the detention camp in Guantanamo Bay within one year. The *Washington Post* [leads](#) with the expected order and tough new ethics rules on lobbying and document disclosure ordered by Obama yesterday. The *Los Angeles Times* [focuses](#) on Obama pushing military leaders for a plan to withdraw from Iraq. The *Wall Street Journal* [highlights](#) a pay freeze for top

staffers. In its rundown of yesterday's presidential doings, *USA Today* [declares](#) that "the change began" shortly after Obama entered the Oval Office.

Looking to solidify the current Mideast cease-fire, Obama placed calls to the leaders of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. The president also met with military and national security advisers to discuss the situation in Iraq and plans for troop withdrawal in 16 months, [according to](#) the WP. On the home front, the *Post* [reports](#) that yesterday's ethics order will prohibit former appointees of this administration from lobbying the federal government while Obama is still in office. The *LAT* [provides](#) a nice summary of three executive orders signed by Obama yesterday to increase the transparency of the executive branch.

The NYT [says](#) today's expected orders will be the first steps in "undoing" the detention policies of the previous administration. The order to close Guantanamo will call for an immediate case-by-case review of each of the 245 detainees there. Obama will also order the shutdown of the CIA's network of secret detention facilities abroad and new prisoner-treatment rules to comply with international treaties.

The NYT [devotes](#) a full Page One story to Obama's retaking the oath of office yesterday after he and Chief Justice John Roberts flubbed it on Inauguration Day. Roberts brought his robe over to the White House for a mid-evening redo in the presence of four aides, four reporters, and one photographer. A White House lawyer said they thought the do-over unnecessary but went through with it anyway out of "an abundance of caution."

All the papers front or tease stories on Caroline Kennedy's abrupt withdrawal last night from consideration for Hillary Clinton's vacant Senate seat. Kennedy cited "personal reasons" for the withdrawal in a statement, which an NYT source [says](#) must mean she dropped out over uncle Ted Kennedy's flagging health. A WP source [casts doubt](#) on the ill-uncle explanation. The *LAT* [says](#) Gov. David Paterson may have been irked by Kennedy's aggressive pursuit of the job.

The tech-savvy Obama team confronted a series of technological obstacles after arriving in the White House yesterday, according to a Page One WP [story](#), which says that if Team Obama represents an "iPhone kind of future," the first day of the new administration was downright "rotary-dial." Phone lines were disconnected, e-mail accounts inaccessible, and the White House Web site went un-updated throughout the day. Worst of all, Mac-accustomed Obama staffers were apparently chagrined to discover that they would be forced to use Windows XP: They "found computers outfitted with six-year-old versions of Microsoft software."

Speaking of Macs, the *WSJ* [reports](#) that Apple Inc. bucked the recession and posted strong sales and profit for the holiday

quarter, thanks to those fab computers and that nifty phone. The bad news for Apple is that the Securities and Exchange Commission has opened an inquiry into the accuracy of previous statements on CEO Steve Jobs' health.

Cleaner air causes longer lives, [according](#) to a front-page *USAT* story on a new medical survey. Life expectancy in the United States increased by nearly three years from just two decades ago, and a portion of that increase may be due to improved air quality in urban areas.

Bad news from Afghanistan: The *NYT* [reports](#) a Taliban presence in every area short on NATO forces. But American commanders have been told to make plans for 20,000 to 30,000 additional troops that the Obama administration plans to deploy there.

The *WP* has a nice front-page [follow-up](#) on some of the troubles faced by folks who traveled to Washington for the inauguration. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chairwoman of the Congressional Inaugural Committee, has demanded an investigation after hearing stories of ticket-holders who did everything right, and even showed up early, and then found themselves stuck in unmoving lines for hours, only to be told they could not get in. Lots of people wasted their morning inside the Third Street tunnel, now known as the "Purple Tunnel of Doom." It seemed police wanted to stuff people in the tunnel just to have someplace to stuff them. TP can attest: When he arrived near the Third Street checkpoint, an officer told him he couldn't get in; TP would have to enter the tunnel and try from the other side. When TP asked if he would be able to access the Mall after walking through the tunnel, the officer said no, definitely not. TP went home.

today's papers

Obama: Let's Remake America

By Daniel Politi

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, at 6:35 AM ET

Barack Hussein Obama took office as the 44th president of the United States yesterday and immediately vowed to "begin again the work of remaking America." It was a day of celebration in Washington and across the country as the son of a black immigrant and a white woman from Kansas moved into a White House that was partly built by slaves. *USA Today* says that around 1.8 million people packed Washington's National Mall to witness the nation's first nonwhite president take the oath of office. While everyone around him seemingly couldn't stop talking about the historical nature of the day, the *New York Times* points out that [Obama made](#) "only passing reference to his own barrier-breaking role in his 18-minute Inaugural Address,"

by pointing out that "a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath."

For a man who catapulted into political royalty in large part thanks to his powerful speeches, Obama's inaugural address was "notable for its sober tone as much as its soaring rhetoric," [observes](#) the *Washington Post*. Indeed, throughout the address, Obama "leavened idealism with realism," as the *Wall Street Journal* [puts it](#), and outlined the challenges that the country faces in what he called "this winter of our hardship." The *Los Angeles Times* notes that while there was [lots of talk of the troubles ahead](#), "the heart of Obama's first address to the nation as its president was a rejection of the policies and values of his immediate predecessors."

Obama made clear that "his aspirations are among the largest of any president since Lyndon B. Johnson," [notes the WP](#) in an analysis piece inside. But he was very short on specifics beyond saying that the road ahead won't be easy and that Americans must pull together. Instead, as the *LAT* [points out](#) in a Page One analysis, he "spent a surprising amount of time drawing connections" between the problems that the country is now facing and politicians who were focused on what he described as "protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions."

When soon-to-be-former President Bush came out of the Capitol to take part in the inauguration ceremony, many spectators booed and at one point [even sang](#), "Nah, nah, nah, nah, hey, hey, hey, goodbye." For his part, Obama made sure to thank Bush for his service but then quickly "delivered what amounted to a searing indictment of the Bush presidency," says *USAT* in its analysis piece, which points out that the last time a new president "offered such a stinging critique" of his predecessor at an inauguration [was in 1933](#), when Franklin Roosevelt told Americans that "the money-changers have fled." Most of the other papers pick up on this theme in their own analyses, and the *NYT* says that Obama's words "must have come as a bit of a shock" to Bush. He may not be a [stranger to criticism](#), but "he had rarely been forced to sit in silence listening to a speech about how America had gone off the rails on his watch."

And at some points, he sounded like a father who wanted his children to stop being so immature: "In the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things," Obama said in words that made it seem as though he were belittling "what had come before him as frivolous," [as the LAT puts it](#). The *NYT* [points out](#) that throughout his address, Obama signaled that he's ready "to embrace pragmatism, not just as a governing strategy but also as a basic value."

In a line that *USAT* says "brought a gasp and applause" [from the audience](#), Obama declared, "We reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." But he was also forceful in

his message on terrorism, vowing to defeat "those who seek to advance their aims by ... slaughtering innocents." At the same time, [he pledged](#) to "seek a new way forward" with Muslims "based on mutual interest and mutual respect."

The *WSJ* notes that some Republicans [weren't happy](#) with Obama's criticisms of the Bush administration in his address. Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona said the comments "detracted from the overall high tone of the speech."

The *NYT* points out that there were times when Obama seemed "to be having a virtual dialogue with his predecessors." When Obama said that "what is required of us now is a new era of responsibility," he was picking up on a theme that both George Bush and Bill Clinton talked about at their inaugurations. In 1981 Ronald Regan declared that "government is the problem," while in 1997 Bill Clinton retorted by saying that "government is not the problem and government is not the solution." Yesterday, Obama seemed ready to throw out that old formula, saying that the important question isn't "whether our government is too big or too small but whether it works."

Everyone notes that Obama didn't actually recite the oath of office correctly. Obama and Chief Justice John Roberts may be constitutional experts, but they had problems getting in sync. First, Obama started to recite the words before Chief Justice John Roberts had finished [saying the first phrase](#). But the real problem occurred when Roberts, who was administering the oath for the first time, clearly made a mistake that caused Obama to say he will "execute the Office of President of the United States faithfully" instead of "faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States." Coincidentally (?) it was the [first time](#) any chief justice had sworn in a president who had voted against his confirmation. While constitutional experts agree the mistake was insignificant, they say [a do-over wouldn't hurt](#) and could help avoid some legal headaches in the future.

After the inaugural ceremony ended, President George Bush and First Lady Laura Bush left via helicopter to Texas, and the Obama administration got to work. The new president appointed his Cabinet as his first official act, and the Senate quickly approved seven of the nominees but delayed the confirmation of Hillary Clinton as secretary of state. As expected, Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel ordered federal agencies to stop all work on [pending regulations](#) until the new administration can review them. The *WP* also reports that Obama ordered military prosecutors to ask for a 120-day pause in all pending cases at [Guantanamo](#). Military judges don't have to automatically grant the requests, but the move is seen as the first step toward closing the facility that came to define much of Bush's presidency.

Almost as if to underscore the troubles that Obama referred to in his address, the financial crisis reared its ugly head once more and sent stocks plunging as much of Washington was celebrating. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 4 percent of

its value in what was the index's worst Inauguration Day performance in its 124-year history. Banking stocks were the big losers as some of the biggest names in the industry plummeted. Overall, shares of U.S. banks decreased about 20 percent "to their lowest level in more than a decade," [notes the *WSJ*](#).

The *WP* explains that investors were quick to press the sell button as "fresh evidence mounted that the industry's problems are larger than previously understood," and current government efforts may not be enough to [make things better](#). Investors fear that Obama will choose to nationalize some banks and wipe out stockholders in the process. Although it is widely seen as a last resort, the fact that nationalization is viewed as a distinct possibility "reflects the failures of repeated government interventions to stem a widening crisis of confidence in the banking system," reports the *WSJ*. The Obama administration insists it won't be rushed into detailing a plan, but officials know that they have to deal with these huge bank losses if they hope to thaw the [frozen credit markets](#).

The *NYT*'s [Thomas Friedman](#) writes that he hopes "Obama really is a closet radical," because it's "a moment for radical departures from business as usual in so many areas." It's rare that a politician really has a chance to change the system, but now it's "impossible to exaggerate how much our future depends on a radical departure from our present." Obama needs to take risks and be willing to consider new ways to make the country, and the world, a better place. "The hour is late, the project couldn't be harder, the stakes couldn't be higher, the payoff couldn't be greater."

today's papers

The Better Angels of our Nature

By Lydia DePillis

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 3:56 AM ET

In a morning rife with sentiment and speculation, the [New York Times](#) leads with a long [rumination](#) on President-elect Barack Obama's leadership style as understood through his transition, casting him as a cool cucumber not afraid to get others hot under the collar. Michelle gets the [same treatment](#), although focusing on how she might run the administration's domestic side. (Hint: She's delegated choosing the china.) The [Washington Post](#) devotes its entire front page to the city's party of the century, leading with a more academic [preface](#) to Obama's tenure: The inauguree will enjoy perhaps the most power in presidential history, both by virtue of his personal characteristics and President Bush's legacy of a stronger executive.

[USA Today](#) and the [Los Angeles Times](#) lead with more [straightforward rundowns](#) of questions that Obama will have to

consider in his first weeks in office, focusing on security and foreign policy—[more details](#) inside the *Post*—but also including deficit management and the auto deal.

The *Wall Street Journal*, mercifully, largely confines its inauguration coverage to [one lead article](#), with a peek at what Obama will address in his address (pssst: responsibility!) and a preview of what's on deck for the first day (closing Guantanamo and rescinding bans on federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research and funding for abortion programs abroad).

The papers today suggest that this inauguration has been covered from more angles than any other in history, among them the reaction in places outside the political mainstream. The *NYT* fronts a [snapshot](#) of an unemployment center in Columbia, S.C., which illustrates that while the out-of-work may be jazzed about change in Washington, you can't eat hope. The paper also reports that Obama has [made some headway](#) in places where he didn't start out popular, namely Oklahoma. The *WSJ* takes another [look](#) at life not changing with new leadership, albeit much closer in: the poor neighborhood of Anacostia, just south of the Capitol in Washington D.C.

Beyond reports of [long journeys](#) and [massive crowds](#), the inauguration's procedural aspect has an element of fun. The *WSJ* has an awesome [profile](#) of Emmett Beliveau, the walkie-talkie-toting man in charge of making sure the event—and, as the newly named director of advance, all of Obama's future appearances—goes perfectly. The *Post*'s portrayal of [D.C. hotel acrobatics](#) is nearly as entertaining, and the *LAT* fronts a poignant [illumination](#) of the history behind the inaugural route: From the steps of the Capitol built by slaves, past the National Council of Negro Women headquarters, toward D.C.'s first integrated hotel one block from the White House.

There's still some old business to take care of, though. At the end of George W. Bush's pardoning power, he [commuted the sentences](#) of two border guards who shot an unarmed smuggler in the back. In all, Bush racked up 189 pardons and 11 commutations, in contrast to Bill Clinton's 396 and 61 respectively. The Patriot Act is still kicking, the *LAT* [uncovers](#), having been used to prosecute 200 passengers for disorderly—but hardly terroristic—behavior on airplanes. Read carefully the *Post*'s article about the conclusion to a fight over Vice President Dick [Dick Cheney's records](#), because it's confusing: A federal judge ruled that there was no proof that he had been planning to destroy documents, as transparency advocates had alleged, so they will enter the National Archives unchecked. However, on other arguments of principle—such as whether the court even had jurisdiction in the matter—Cheney's office lost. Which, for the vice president yesterday, was just [adding insult to injury](#).

Meanwhile, it seems like nothing has changed in Iraq, where tribes still [vie for representation](#) in ostensibly democratic provincial elections at the end of the month. Grand Ayatollah Ali

Sistani is [telling everyone to participate](#), the *Post* reports, counteracting a sense of disillusionment with the result of the last elections in 2005.

Postmortems continue in the wake of Sunday's cease-fire in Gaza, as Israel [pledged to accelerate](#) its withdrawal enough to get all troops out by the time of Obama's inauguration. The official Palestinian death toll has passed 1,300—the Israeli body count stopped at 13—and Hamas said 5,000 homes had been destroyed. The *Post* and *NYT* [both chronicle](#) the human cost of that destruction, while the *WSJ* argues that Hamas has [more support than ever](#).

After many false starts, the leaders of Russia and Ukraine finally [put pen to paper](#) on a 10-year agreement that will get gas flowing again to Ukraine and beyond. Russian oil monopoly Gazprom lost \$1.5 billion on the two-week shutdown, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin [promised](#) negotiations would be "absolutely transparent" from here on out.

Fiat of Italy is nearing a deal to [buy a large chunk of Chrysler](#), the *Journal* reports, in a move that could save both struggling automakers. Rather than paying in cash, Fiat is expected to take a 35 percent stake in the American company through retooling one of Chrysler's plants to produce Fiat models for sale in the States, as well as more efficient auto technology. In [another survival move](#), the New York Times Co. sold about 18 percent of itself to Mexican telecom mogul Carlos Slim, raising \$250 million in the short term—at 14 percent interest. London announced its own [bank bailout boost](#), pumping billions more into the Royal Bank of Scotland as it became clear its first cash infusion hadn't stopped the bleeding. The latest move brings the British government's stake in RBS from 58 percent to 70 percent.

The *WSJ* also has [one last inauguration gem](#), from one pair of sisters to another—an op-ed only two people in the world will ever need.

today's papers

Gazans Count the Dead

By Daniel Politi

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 6:42 AM ET

The *Los Angeles Times* leads with a dispatch from the Gaza Strip, where Palestinians slowly emerged from hiding yesterday and were shocked at the devastation around them after a [22-day Israeli offensive](#). Following Israel's unilateral declaration of a cease-fire on Saturday, Hamas declared a seven-day truce yesterday but vowed to resume fighting if Israeli forces don't leave Gaza within seven days. Early morning wire stories report

that Israeli officials say they intend to have all of their troops out of Gaza before President-elect Barack Obama is inaugurated tomorrow. The [New York Times](#) leads with a look at how the Great Recession has been good for the military: More Americans are choosing to sign up at a time when unemployment [continues to increase](#). In the last fiscal year, all active-duty and reserve forces met or exceeded their recruitment goals for the first time since 2004.

The [Washington Post](#) and [USA Today](#) lead with the official start of the three days of ceremonies and parties to celebrate the inauguration of the country's first black president. Around [400,000 people](#) gathered in the frigid Washington, D.C., weather to attend a concert at the Lincoln Memorial that included some of the most recognizable names in the entertainment industry. "There is no doubt that our road will be long, that our climb will be steep," [Obama told the crowd](#). The *WP* slathers on the groan-inducing imagery in its Page One story: "At times, the multitudes seemed to dance as one, Americans from every corner of the country, of every generation."

Some areas of Gaza returned to a tenuous state of normalness yesterday as a few shops reopened and maintenance crews repaired power lines and water pipes. But the devastation was hard to miss. The Israeli incursion completely destroyed hundreds of homes as well as government offices, schools, and roads. Palestinian rescue crews were finally able to reach some areas that had been inaccessible during the offensive and came across more than 100 bodies, many of them badly decomposed. "The smell of rotting flesh was suffocating," [the NYT declares](#). The Palestinian death toll rose to at least 1,300. The *LAT* cites Gaza Health Ministry figures that claim that [at least a third](#) of those killed were children, while the *WP* says that [more than half](#) were civilians.

The *WP* makes the obvious but necessary point that no one expects the current cease-fire to end the violence. Ultimately, the offensive "ended without surrender" as neither Israel nor Hamas "made any concessions, except to stop fighting temporarily," [notes the WP](#).

In a front-page analysis piece, the *NYT* says that [after 22 days of fighting](#), "what has been accomplished is unclear." Israeli officials said they expect Hamas to keep firing rockets into Israel, if for no other reason than to prove that it has not been decimated. Indeed, 15 rockets were fired into southern Israel after the cease-fire took effect. Hundreds of Hamas militants may have been killed, but that only amounts to a fraction of its thousands of fighters, and the group's leadership structure remains pretty much intact. How was Hamas able to avoid a higher death toll? Quite simply, by staying away. In what appears to have been a carefully calculated move, Hamas fighters didn't directly confront Israeli soldiers in large numbers. One source "close to Hamas" tells the paper that while Hamas fighters once had a "love of martyrdom," they've been receiving

training from Syria and Iran that "helped them rethink their strategy."

The fact that more Americans choose to sign up for military service when unemployment increases is hardly a new trend, but officials insist it's not the only reason for the recent [spike in recruitment](#). Many high-school graduates are also particularly tempted by the new G.I. bill, which will expand education benefits. And, of course, the decline of violence in Iraq has also helped some decide to take the plunge and move into a military career.

Assuming the general rule that a weak economy is good for recruitment continues to hold, the military won't have much trouble meeting its recruiting goals for a while. In a front-page analysis, the *LAT* notes that an increasing number of economists think the American economy won't be returning to its former glory anytime [in the near future](#). "Instead, it probably will continue to sputter and threaten to stall for years to come," says the *LAT*. Some think that unemployment may actually be a bit higher by the time Obama's first term ends and that there's unlikely to be anything but modest growth throughout the next four years. "We're in a post-bubble global recession, and post-bubble recessions are lethal for growth," one expert said. "It will be a long time before the world experiences anything more than anemic recovery."

Obama and his team are well aware of these projections and often remind Americans that they shouldn't expect a quick recovery. The incoming White House press secretary, Robert Gibbs, said that the economy "is likely to get worse before it gets better." Obama is expected to continue with this theme in his inaugural address that is expected to focus on "responsibility and restoring public confidence," [notes the Post](#).

The *NYT*'s [Michiko Kakutani](#) writes about the important role that books have played in Obama's life and how "his ardent love of reading" is behind his ability to communicate and explain important topics in simple terms. And, perhaps more importantly, books helped Obama develop his vision of the world as well as of himself. President Bush quickly read books as part of competitions and often embraced "an author's thesis as an *idée fixe*," which is why members of his administration seemed to prefer books that advocate a certain path. Obama, on the other hand, often picks nonideological books that present complex issues for which there are no easy solutions.

In the *NYT*'s op-ed page, [Paul Krugman](#) writes that many influential people appear ready to embrace a new kind of voodoo economics: "the belief that by performing elaborate financial rituals we can keep dead banks walking." Washington is still "deathly afraid" of the word *nationalization*, which is why nobody wants to "implement the obvious solution: an explicit, though temporary, government takeover" of troubled banks. Instead, the government might soon hand out "huge gifts to bank

shareholders at taxpayer expense" by purchasing toxic assets. "I hope I'm wrong, but I suspect that taxpayers are about to get another raw deal," writes Krugman, "and that we're about to get another financial rescue plan that fails to do the job."

In an op-ed piece in the *WP*, Martin Luther King Jr.'s son writes that his father would be "proud of the America that elected" Obama and made him the country's first black president. At the same time, "it is important to remember that Barack Obama's election is not a panacea for race relations in this country," [Martin Luther King III writes](#). "Though it carries us further down the path toward equality, Barack Obama's election does not render my father's dream realized."

today's papers

All Eyes on Washington

By Kara Hodge

Sunday, January 18, 2009, at 6:24 AM ET

The [Washington Post](#) and the [Los Angeles Times](#) lead, and the [New York Times](#) [off-leads](#), with word of Israel's unilateral [cease-fire](#), declared late Saturday. Israeli soldiers [remain in Gaza](#) nonetheless, and Hamas has asserted that it will keep fighting until the troops leave. More than 1,200 people have died during 22 days of airstrikes and ground assaults, and much of the Gaza Strip has been obliterated in the process. The *NYT* leads with figures from [a NYT/CBS News poll](#) reporting that 79 percent of Americans are optimistic about Obama's presidency—a sharp contrast to the record-low 22 percent approval rating with which President Bush leaves office. The other papers off-lead with inauguration-related stories and photos of the Obamas' and Bidens' symbolic train ride from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., yesterday.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced that "Hamas was hit hard" during more than three weeks of fighting, but he also said that Israeli troops would continue fighting if Hamas failed to put down its weapons. The [tenuous cease-fire](#) followed a day of heavy Israeli bombardment and criticism from the United Nations after an Israeli attack killed two young brothers (ages 5 and 7) in a U.N. school. The *LAT* frames the cease-fire as an Israeli decision to start out on good footing with Barack Obama when he takes office on Tuesday, but Israeli citizens and military experts alike express skepticism that it will hold. At a summit in Egypt today, hosted by the presidents of Egypt and France, representatives from the U.S., the U.N., and other nations will discuss reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip and endeavor to prevent weapons smuggling into that region.

On a more celebratory note, the papers look ahead to Tuesday and glance back into history with stories on the Obamas' and

Bidens' train ride to Washington yesterday. The [inaugural tradition](#), begun by Abraham Lincoln in 1861, continued this year with an abbreviated version of Lincoln's journey, punctuated by speeches in Philadelphia, Wilmington, Del., and Baltimore. Invoking a serious tone throughout the seven-hour trip, Obama called for "a new declaration of independence ... from ideology and small thinking, prejudice and bigotry—an appeal not to our easy instincts but to our better angels." The *WP* [frames](#) the ride as Obama's "history lesson" tying together subtle references to Lincoln throughout his campaign, including the announcement of his candidacy in Springfield, Ill., in 2007. An adjacent front-page piece suggests how times have changed, arguing that blacks and whites are finally [mingling socially](#) among Washington's elite.

The *NYT* stuffs its train story inside the A section but fronts an [analysis](#) of how the world—and Obama's views of it—has changed in the nearly two years since he began his campaign for the presidency. The *LAT* [off-leads](#) its own symbolic journey, as a reporter and a photographer wrap up the six-week cross-country road trip to D.C., during which they surveyed the opinions of resilient and hopeful Americans from state to state. One 22-year-old they met on a bicycle in New Mexico in December was bound for the inauguration, and "he will pedal into Washington today"—albeit in much colder temperatures than those where he began.

After an interesting *NYT* piece [last weekend](#) on Minnesota charter schools geared toward immigrants, the *LAT* [fronts](#) a different perspective on the experience of certain immigrant youths in that state. It turns out a number of young Somali-Americans have returned to Africa to join the Islamic militia in their native country. The FBI estimates that between 12 and 20 youths from Minnesota have left the U.S. to join a Taliban-like group that American authorities view as a terrorist organization. One 27-year-old man is thought to be the first American-citizen suicide bomber, following rumors that he was responsible for a bombing that killed 30 people in Somalia last fall. Minneapolis is home to the largest Somali immigrant community in the U.S., but the FBI is also keeping an eye on other cities, including Boston, San Diego, and Seattle, as it investigates the possibility of terrorist recruitment.

Meanwhile, tensions are also flaring in North Korea, where the military [proclaimed](#) an "all-out confrontational posture" against South Korea yesterday. In a remark to an American scholar, North Korean officials suggested they had enough plutonium to make six or more nuclear bombs.

A [profile](#) in the *LAT* looks farther north to Siberia and an ecologist who is trying to save Lake Baikal from the environmentally apathetic Russian government. Despite harassment, Marina Rikhvanova is trying to protect the world's largest, 25-million-year-old freshwater lake from Vladimir

Putin's plans in recent years to run a gas pipeline near the lake and open a uranium-enrichment plant nearby.

In the "Week in Review," the *NYT* draws attention to all that has changed in American society and government since [Kennedy's New Frontier](#), one of the more plausible analogues to the nascent Obama administration. In doing so, it hearkens back to an era in which women and African-Americans were second-class citizens, national security did not include pre-flight screening, people consumed their news in 15-minute evening TV broadcasts, and the U.S. was in high standing with the rest of the world. Also inside "Week in Review" is a comprehensive guide to Inauguration Day [speeches](#), [crowds](#), [parties](#), and [more](#). But it's the *WP* that really gets the goods with one piece in the Style section on the [\\$4.96 inaugural ball-gown](#) that has one woman giddy with the satisfaction of spending a total of \$70 on her entire ensemble, and another on baffled first-time [tuxedo-wearers](#) trying to outfit themselves for the big night. There's hope yet, though: The *LAT* [concedes](#) that the Obamas might—gasp!—bring fashion to Washington.

The *Washington Post* "Book World" reviews Gwen Ifill's new book, [The Breakthrough](#), about the coming generation of black politicians. The book views Obama "as one, fairly typical member of a breakthrough generation of African American politicians," who grew up during and after the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King Jr. as a role model and widened access to education.

In the *NYT*, Maureen Dowd has some [parting words](#) for George W. Bush, as she compares the 43rd president to the incoming one. In considering the upcoming transition of power, Dowd says of the two men, "One seems small and inconsequential, even though he keeps insisting he's not; the other grows large and impressive." Don't let the door hit you on the way out, W.

today's papers

Gaza on the Brink of Peace

By Jesse Stanchak

Saturday, January 17, 2009, at 6:37 AM ET

The *New York Times* [leads](#) with reports that Israel will convene its security cabinet on Saturday to declare a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, though Israeli troops are expected to stay put in Gaza during the next phase of negotiations. The *Wall Street Journal* leads with the federal government preparing to take a second run at [bailing out the banking industry](#), this time focusing on getting bad assets off bank balance sheets. The *Los Angeles Times* leads with a local law-enforcement story, while its top national news piece is Circuit City announcing it will [close](#) all 567 of its U.S. stores, leaving 34,000 employees out of work. The *Washington*

Post leads with [ongoing preparations](#) for Tuesday's inaugural events, focusing on organizers worrying about striking the proper tone.

Fighting in Gaza continued early Saturday morning: Israeli tank fire killed two boys and injured 14 others in Beit Lahiya. Israeli officials say, however, that the current offensive has met its objectives and that they're prepared to put an end to the campaign. While Israel isn't negotiating directly with Hamas, the two sides are holding parallel talks with Egypt to come up with a formal cease-fire. As part of an effort to end the violence, the U.S. has agreed to take certain steps to help the Egyptian government end the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. The agreement does not cover sending in U.S. troops. The paper says Hamas' leadership is officially defiant, but Hamas' Gaza branch is seen as likely to comply with the proposal.

In an accompanying story, the *NYT* looks at [accusations](#) that Israeli forces have acted improperly during the campaign in Gaza. Have Israeli soldiers committed war crimes? The paper doesn't pretend to know the answer. Instead, it focuses on the dilemmas that war presents—and how difficult it is to establish when ethical guidelines have been breached on the battlefield.

The incoming Barack Obama administration is preparing to unveil a second component of its financial bailout program, this time focusing on buying toxic assets from financial institutions. The proposal is gaining momentum on the heels of Friday's announcement of huge losses at Citigroup Inc. and Bank of America Corp. FDIC Chairman Sheila Bair said that any proposal must be aimed at getting private capital back into the banking system. It is unclear whether the White House's plan will require Congress to authorize funding beyond the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program. TP thinks this sounds suspiciously like what the TARP program was supposed to do in the first place.

The *WP* off-leads with a look at how the foreclosure crisis is [spreading](#). The problem is no longer confined to people with subprime mortgages or people who bought homes they knew they couldn't afford. Most shockingly, the paper reports that some homeowners are intentionally missing payments in order to refinance their mortgages.

The *NYT* [fronts](#) a piece on a 1992 securities scandal that could have tipped regulators off to Bernie Madoff's scheme—if inspectors had just been looking a little closer.

The *LAT* [off-leads](#) with a feature on Nick Scandone, a competitive sailor with Lou Gehrig's disease who died earlier this year. Scandone won a gold medal at the Beijing Paralympics last year.

Will California's Sen. Dianne Feinstein give up her clout as head of the Senate Intelligence panel to run for governor in 2010? The *LAT* [says](#) Feinstein has been butting heads with her fellow Democrats lately, but Feinstein swears she isn't going to let internal party politics influence her decision.

In what has got to be the most lighthearted plane-crash story ever written, the *NYT* gets [anecdotes galore](#) from the survivors of US Airways Flight 1549, which crashed into the Hudson River on Thursday. The story picks up just after the plane hit the water, recounting the experiences of several passengers as they scrambled out of the plane and waited on the wings to be rescued. While some of the anecdotes are amusing, the piece doesn't do such a great job of creating a narrative or painting a picture of the scene. The story freely jumps from one passenger to another, creating a pastiche of the event instead of a reconstruction.

The *WP* also [fronts](#) the crash but chooses to look at it in the context of airline safety. The paper notes that no one has died in a U.S. commercial airline accident in more than two years. Crashes still happen, but, increasingly, all the passengers are able to escape unharmed. The paper credits the decline in fatalities to better training and better plane designs.

The *WSJ* [writes](#) that a growing number of companies are cutting their workers' pay to shore up the bottom line.

Both the *WP* and the *NYT* front and the *LAT* teases an obituary for painter Andrew Wyeth. Wyteth was best known for painting stark [rural landscapes](#).

The *WP* argues that Iraqi Prime Minister [Nouri al-Maliki](#) isn't just a leader anymore; he's a symbol of a political slate and the embodiment of new "Iraqist" political agenda.

Would you get a clothesline just because the Obamas have one? At least one advocacy group is hoping some people will go back to drying their clothes outside if the White House gets onboard. Other interest groups have similar plans, [writes](#) the *WSJ*. Interest groups are pushing the Obamas to do everything from installing an organic vegetable garden to adopting a stray dog.

The *NYT* takes a break from reporting on the U.S. economic meltdown to talk about the collapse of the [Chinese tea bubble](#).

The *WSJ* [reports](#) that the Australian government's controversial aborigine welfare policies are paying unexpected dividends, particularly for aboriginal women.

tv club

Friday Night Lights, Season 3

Week 1: The perfect chaos of Tim Riggins' living room.

By Emily Bazelon, Meghan O'Rourke, and Hanna Rosin

Monday, January 19, 2009, at 3:59 PM ET

From: Hanna Rosin

To: Emily Bazelon and Meghan O'Rourke

Subject: Week 1: Mass Amnesia Strikes Dillon, Texas

Posted Saturday, January 17, 2009, at 7:01 AM ET

As anyone who has talked or e-mailed with me in the last couple of months knows, my obsession with *Friday Night Lights* has become sort of embarrassing. My husband, David, and I came to the show late, by way of Netflix, but were hooked after Episode 1. We started watching two, three, four in one sitting. It began to seem to me as if these characters were alive and moving around in my world.

David was happy with the football. I was into the drama. I worried about Smash, the sometimes-unstable star running back. I dreamed about Tyra, who was being stalked. When I talked to my own daughter, I flipped my hair back, just as Coach's wife, Tami Taylor, does and paused before delivering nuggets of wisdom. Once or twice, I even called David "Coach."

I was all set to watch Season 3 in real time when I heard, to my horror, that it might not get made. But then NBC cut a [weird cost-sharing kind of deal](#) with DirecTV, and the Dillon Panthers are back in business. The episodes have already aired on satellite, but I don't have a dish. So I'm just now settling in for the new season.

But did I miss something? The field lights are on again in Dillon, Texas, but the whole town seems to be suffering from a massive bout of ... amnesia. The previous season ended abruptly, after seven episodes got swallowed by the writer's strike. For Season 3, the writers just wipe the slate clean and start again. Murder? What murder? Landry is back to being the high-school sidekick, and we can just forget that whole unfortunate body-dragged-out-of-the-river detour. Tyra got a perm and is running for school president. Lyla Garrity's preacher boyfriend, rival to Tim Riggins, has disappeared.

Over the last season, the show was struggling for an identity. It veered from *The ABC Afterschool Special* to *CSI* and then finally found its footing in the last couple of episodes, especially the one where Peter Berg—who directed the movie adaptation of Buzz Bissinger's book *Friday Night Lights* and adapted it for TV—walked on as Tami Taylor's hyper ex-boyfriend. In Season 3, the show is trying on yet another identity. Mrs. Taylor has

suddenly turned into Principal Taylor. With her tight suits and her fabulous hair, she is Dillon's own [Michelle Rhee](#), holding meetings, discussing education policy, and generally working too hard. Meanwhile, Coach keeps up the domestic front, making breakfast for Julie with one hand while feeding baby Grace with the other.

This strikes me as a little too close to home, and not in a way I appreciate. The beauty of *Friday Night Lights* is that it managed to make us care about the tiny town of Dillon. It drew us in with football but then sunk us into town life. The show took lots of stock types not usually made for prime time—a car dealer, an arrogant black kid, an ex-star in a wheelchair, a grandma with dementia, a soldier, lots of evangelical Christians—and brought them to life. It was neither sentimental nor mocking, which is a hard thing to pull off.

Now I feel as if I'm looking in a mirror. Tami is a mom juggling work and kids and not doing such a good job. Coach is trying his best at home but screwing up. The only town folk we see in the first episode are Tim's brother and Tyra's sister, drunkenly falling all over each other in a bar—the sorriest, white-trashiest bar you can imagine. Our heart is with Tyra, who, just like the children of the show's upscale fans, is trying to go to college. The final, inspirational scene of the episode takes place in a racquetball court. At least Smash has the good sense to note that it's the whitest sport in America.

That said, *Friday Night Lights* would have to do a lot to lose my loyalty. Just the fact that there was a high-drama plotline centered on the Jumbotron is enough to keep me happy. It's one of the show's great gifts, humor in unexpected places. Like when Tim's brother, looking half drunk as always, tells him Lyla will never respect him because he's a "rebound from Jesus." I'll give this season a chance.

Click [here](#) to read the next entry.

From: Emily Bazelon
To: Hanna Rosin and Meghan O'Rourke
Subject: Week 1: Why Doesn't Tami Taylor Have Any Girlfriends?
Posted Monday, January 19, 2009, at 6:58 AM ET

Hey there, Hanna and Meghan,

While we're complaining, isn't this the third year that some of these characters—Tim, Lyla, Tyra—have been seniors? The producers seemed to be dealing with this small lapse in planning by bringing on the soft lighting and lipstick. Tim looks ever

more like Matt Dillon in *The Outsiders* (not to sound like that thirtysomething mom who was shagging him in the first season).

But I'm letting these objections go. I fell for this opener once Coach and Mrs. Coach had one of those moments that make their marriage a flawed gem.

You're right, Hanna, that the Taylors seem more like a typical two-career family as we watch Eric tending the baby while Tami comes home at 9:45 at night, tired from her new job as principal. Also, her sermon about how broke the school is descended into liberal pablum (real though it surely could be). But it's all a setup for a sequence that makes this show a not-idealized, and thus actually useful, marriage primer. He tries to sweet-talk her. She says, with tired affection, "Honey, you're just trying to get laid." Then she realizes that he's signed off on a bad English teacher for their daughter Julie and starts hollering at both of them. Oh, how I do love Tami for losing her temper, snapping at her teenager, and yelling loudly enough to wake her baby. And I love the writers for bringing it back around with a follow-up scene in which Mrs. Coach tells her husband she's sorry, and he says, "I could never be mad at my wife. It's that damn principal." Way to compartmentalize.

Much as I appreciate Tami, I'm puzzled by a weird gap in her life: She doesn't have girlfriends. I know that her sister showed up last season, but that doesn't really explain the absence of female friends. In fact, it's a pattern on the show: Julie's friend Lois is more a prop than a character, Lyla never hangs out with other girls, and although Tyra occasionally acts like a big sister to Julie, she doesn't seem to have a close girlfriend, either. Does this seem as strange to you as it does to me? In Lyla's case, I can see it—she often acts like the kind of girl other girls love to hate (and I look forward to dissecting why that's so). But Tami is the kind of largehearted person whom other women would want to befriend. The lack of female friendships on the show has become like a missing tooth for me, especially when you consider the vivid and interesting male friendships (Matt and Landry, Tim and Jason, even Coach and Buddy Garrity). It's revealing in its absence: No matter how good the show's writers are at portraying women—and they are—they're leaving out a key part of our lives.

A question for both of you: What do you think of the surly version of Matt Saracen? I'm starting to feel about him as I felt at the end of the fifth Harry Potter book: past ready for the nice boy I thought I knew to come back.

Emily

Click [here](#) to read the next entry.

From: Meghan O'Rourke
To: Emily Bazelon and Hanna Rosin
Subject: Week 1: Why Matt Saracen Got Surly
Posted Monday, January 19, 2009, at 12:33 PM ET

Hanna, Emily,

For me, the genius of *Friday Night Lights* is the way it captures the texture of everyday life by completely aestheticizing it. The handheld camera, the quick jump-cuts, the moody [Explosions in the Sky](#) soundtrack laid over tracking shots of the flat, arid West Texas landscape all add up to a feeling no other TV show gives me. And very few movies, for that matter. Then there's the fact that *FNL*, more than any other show on network TV, tries hard to be about a real place and real people in America. This is no Hollywood stage set; it's not a generic American city or suburb; the characters aren't dealing with their problems against a backdrop of wealth, security, and Marc Jacobs ads. Most are struggling to get by, and at any moment the floor might drop out from under them. In this sense, the show is about a community, not about individuals. Football is an expression of that community.

That's why, Emily, I don't find surly Matt Saracen annoying; I find him heartbreaking. After all, his surliness stems from predicaments that he has no control over: a father in Iraq (how many TV shows bring that up?) and an ailing grandmother he doesn't want to relegate to a nursing home. Like many Americans, he finds himself acting as a caretaker way too young. And because he's not wealthy, when his personal life gets complicated—like when his romance with his grandmother's sexy at-home nurse, Carlotta, goes belly up—he loses it. (OK, I thought that story line was kinda lame; but I was moved by the anger that followed.) But your point about the lack of female friendships on the show is a great one. It's particularly true of Tami. (We do get to see a reasonable amount of Julie and Tyra together, I feel.) Like Julie, I had a principal for a mother, and one thing I always liked was watching all her friendships at the school develop and evolve.

It's also true, Hanna, that the first episode of this season hammers home its themes—Tami's an overworked principal with a funding problem; Lyla and Riggins are gonna have trouble taking their romance public; and star freshman quarterback J.D. is a threat to good old Matt Saracen. But for now I didn't mind, because there were plenty of moments of fine dialogue, which keep the show feeling alive. Like the scene in which the amiable, manipulative Buddy hands Tami a check and says in his twangy drawl, "Ah've got two words for you: Jumbo ... Tron!" (Tami, of course, has just been trying to meet a budget so tight that even chalk is at issue.) Later, at a party, Buddy greets Tami in front of some of the Dillon Panther boosters—who are oohing and aahing over an architectural rendering of the

JumboTron—by exclaiming, "Tami Taylor is the brain child behind all this!" Ah, Buddy. You gotta love him. He's almost a caricature—but not.

What keeps a lot of these characters from being caricatures, despite plenty of conventional TV plot points, is that ultimately the show portrays them in the round. Coach Taylor, who has a way with young men that can seem too good to be true, is also often angry and frustrated; caring and sensitive, Lyla is also sometimes an entitled priss; Tim is a fuckup with a heart of gold (at least, at times); and the raw and exposed Julie can be a whiny brat. In this sense, ultimately, I think the story *FNL* is trying to tell is fundamentally responsible, unlike so many stories on TV. When the characters make mistakes, they suffer real consequences. Think of Smash losing his football scholarship. I sometimes think the weakest feature of our entertainment culture is a kind of sentimentality about pain, if that makes sense—an avoidance of the messiness of life that manifests itself in tidy morals and overdramatized melodramas.

But what could make *FNL* better? I'm hoping for more football and atmosphere and fewer overwrought plotlines. Will the J.D./Matt Saracen face-off help this story, do you think? And, finally: Can the writers of the show figure out how to dramatize games without making them seem totally fake? It feels like so often in the last five minutes of an episode we cut to a game—that's-in-its-final-minutes-and-oh-my-God-everyone-is-biting-their-nails ...

Meghan

Click [here](#) for the next entry.

From: Hanna Rosin
To: Emily Bazelon and Meghan O'Rourke
Subject: Week 1: The Perfect Chaos of Tim Riggins' Living Room
Posted Monday, January 19, 2009, at 3:59 PM ET

That's it, Meghan. What the *Sopranos* accomplished with tight thematic scripts and the *Wire* accomplished with a Shakespearean plot, *FNL* pulls off with moody music and some interesting camera work. It's not that these shows transform brutal realities into beauty. They just make them bearable by packaging them in some coherent aesthetic way that calls attention to itself. And the result is very moving.

The inside of Tim Riggins' house, for example, is a place that should never be shown on television. It's a total mess, and not in an artsy Urban Outfitter's catalogue kind of way. There's that bent-up picture of a bikini beer girl by the television and

yesterday's dishes and napkins on every surface and nothing in the refrigerator except beer. This is a very depressing state of affairs for a high school kid if you stop to think about it. But whenever we're in there, the camera jerks around from couch to stool to kitchen, in perfect harmony with the chaos around it. So it all feels comfortable and we experience it just the way Riggins would—another day in a moody life.

I think part of the reason Peter Berg doesn't see these characters from such a distance is that he seems deeply sympathetic to their outlook on life, particularly their ideas about the traditional roles of men and women. The men are always being put through tests of their own manhood and decency. The boys have Coach, but hardly any of them has an actual father, so they are pushed into manhood on their own. Almost all of them have to be head of a household before their time, with interesting results. Matt is decent but can't fill the shoes. Riggins is noble but erratic. Smash is dutiful but explosive.

Emily, that insight you had about Tami is so interesting, and it made me see the whole show differently. At first I thought Peter Berg must love women, because they drive all the action and make all the good decisions. Then, after what you said, I realized that for the most part, the women exist only to support the men. They are wives or girlfriends or mothers but don't have many independent relationships outside their own families. Judd Apatow's women are a little like this, too. It's a male-centric view, and helps explain why a Hollywood director would be so in tune with the mores of a small conservative town.

It's also why this season could get interesting. As the principal, Tami is stretching the show in all kinds of ways. Buddy has shed his vulnerability and is back to being the town bully. Coach is stuck in the middle. All kinds of potential for drama.

twitterbox

Spotted on Mall: Obama-Themed Hat, Shirt, Scarf, Baby

The latest from *Slate*'s inauguration Twitter feed.

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 11:47 AM ET

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war stories

A Presumption of Disclosure

Obama revives the Freedom of Information Act.

By Fred Kaplan

Friday, January 23, 2009, at 12:06 PM ET

It has received the least attention of his first-day decisions, but President Barack Obama's [memorandum](#) on reviving the Freedom of Information Act stands as the clearest signal yet that his campaign talk about "a new era of open government" wasn't just rhetoric; it's for real.

The key phrase comes right at the top: "The Freedom of Information Act should be administered with a clear presumption: In the face of doubt, openness prevails."

Later in the memo: "All agencies should adopt a presumption of disclosure. ... The presumption of disclosure should be applied to all decisions involving FOIA."

Furthermore, "In responding to requests under the FOIA, executive branch agencies should act properly and in a spirit of cooperation, recognizing that such agencies are servants of the public." In fact, "All agencies should take affirmative steps to make information public. They should not wait for specific requests from the public."

This could not be clearer. The new president was calling for a complete reversal of the Bush administration's directives on this matter—and a restoration of the Freedom of Information Act's original purpose.

The Bush era's tone was set in October 2001, when [then-Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a memo](#) to all federal agencies, assuring them that if they were sued for refusing to release documents under the FOIA, the Justice Department would defend them in court as long as their decision had a "sound legal basis." This reversed a guideline, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1993, noting that the Justice

Department would defend agencies' refusals only if releasing the documents would cause "foreseeable harm."

Ashcroft's guidance was reinforced in March 2002, when Bush's chief of staff, Andrew Card, issued a memo urging agencies to protect information that was "sensitive," even if it was unclassified.

Both memos were written in the aftermath of Sept. 11; the impulse behind them was, up to a point, understandable. However, the bureaucrats who control the documents—cautious by nature and sensitive to signals from on high—took the memos as cues to tighten the lid not just on legitimate national-security secrets (which the FOIA had always exempted from routine disclosure) but on *everything*.

The consequences were dramatic. From 1995 to 2001, federal agencies declassified 1.15 billion pages of documents under the Freedom of Information Act—an average of 190 million per year. From 2002 to 2006, after Ashcroft issued his memo, agencies declassified 182 million pages *in total*—an average of just 36 million per year, less than one-fifth the volume.

Even these statistics understate the stranglehold because, in many cases, even after the documents were declassified, the relevant agencies—the Pentagon, the CIA, the SEC, or whatever—refused to release them.

Part of the problem was, and still is, sheer overload. Hundreds of millions of classified documents, many dating back a quarter-century or more, are stacked up in the archives, awaiting review. Countless FOIA requests submitted by individuals or public-interest groups have gone unanswered for years—in some cases for more than a decade. The original law, passed in 1967 and strengthened in 1974 and again in 2002, required at least an acknowledgment of the request within 10 days. (It is worth noting that President Gerald Ford vetoed the '74 expansion, on the advice of Donald Rumsfeld, his chief of staff; Rumsfeld's assistant, Richard Cheney; and the Justice Department's chief counsel, Antonin Scalia. Congress overrode the veto.)

But much of this delay is by design. Some agencies have been conscientious in filling their statutory duties, but, especially since the Ashcroft memo, many others have simply ignored the law, leaving their FOIA offices vacant and no longer training officials in how to review FOIA requests.

In 2006, the National Security Archive, a private research organization headquartered at George Washington University, sued the U.S. Air Force for failing to respond to several FOIA requests. A federal judge ruled that the Air Force had engaged in a "pattern and practice" of neglect on the issue. Since then, the Air Force has cleaned up its act, retrained personnel, and resumed serious reviewing. Other agencies have stepped up their

training, too—but in the opposite direction, ordering their FOIA officers to find legal rationales for withholding everything (the natural bureaucratic tendency), knowing that the Ashcroft memo assures them of executive-branch backing at the highest level.

But that was before President Obama's memorandum.

The Obama memo doesn't lay down new law. But it does order his attorney general and his budget director to devise new guidelines and regulations, which will have the force of new law—guidelines based on a *presumption* of disclosure, the exact opposite of the Bush-Ashcroft guidance.

Again, a presumption is not a requirement; the statute's exemptions covering genuine national-security secrets will no doubt remain in place. But presumptions matter to bureaucrats; they lay down what is expected; they set the boundaries of safe behavior. Under Bush-Ashcroft, the presumption was: When in doubt, classify and lock the archives down. Bureaucrats are always in some doubt, so they slammed the vaults and hid the keys. Obama is saying: When in doubt, if there's no demonstrable harm, open the gates. (One line of his memo stresses that government should not keep information secret merely because of "*speculative or abstract* fears." [Italics added.])

In January 2008, an obscure federal entity called the Public Interest Declassification Board—a group of nine specialists, mainly academics and former officials, five appointed by the president, four by Congress—submitted a report to President George W. Bush, proposing more than a dozen ways to make the process more sensible: consolidating authority in the National Archives, creating centralized data banks, automatically declassifying almost everything that's more than 25 years old, and so forth.

Bush ignored it. Obama shouldn't. It spells out how to translate his principles into policies.

In the early 1980s, while researching a book about the history of American nuclear strategy, I filed a lot of FOIA requests with the Department of Defense. One day, I received a call from a major, saying he was my FOIA contact officer. He was phoning just to introduce himself and to assure me that he'd argue vigorously on my behalf, not only to declassify the documents I requested but also to waive the search fees on the grounds that release of the material was in the public interest. (Fee waivers were once common for journalists and authors. Now fees are charged to everyone, and up front, not so much to reimburse for searches as to set up a toll booth to dissuade most citizens from even trying to get information.)

I didn't get all the documents I'd requested, but I got most of them. The secrets they spilled were about weapons, war plans,

and bureaucratic battles 20 to 30 years earlier, in the 1950s and '60s. Their declassification filled a lot of gaps in our knowledge of history, which arguably helped readers understand certain aspects of the present. But they revealed nothing that would have remotely assisted our enemies, then or now.

sidebar

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These figures come from a bar graph on Page 7 of "Improving Declassification," a January 2008 [report](#) to President Bush by the Public Interest Declassification Board. Data before 1995 are not cited by individual years.

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