The Nation's new Digital Magazine format offers:

-The **Page-turning** experience of a print magazine
- **PLUS:**
- Live Web Links
- Multimedia Access

**CLICK HERE TO VIEW IN THE ENHANCED READER FORMAT**

[The Nation's new Digital Magazine format](#)
THE DANGEROUS US GAME IN YEMEN
JEREMY SCAHILL

BUDGET AX HITS WOMEN
KATHA POLLITT

OBAMA’S ENFORCER
ARI BERMAN

MOVIES AND MELTDOWNS
STUART KLAYANS
Letters

On Wisconsin!

Ashland, Wis.
I am resubscribing to The Nation because of your excellent coverage of the Wisconsin labor rallies. I am passionate about fighting Scott Walker’s dictatorial agenda and his desire to eliminate public unions in this state. I appreciate very much how you have supported this state that I love, and I feel it is important to support you in return. Progressives should stick together, and I will stick by you.
Tim Ziegenhagen

Gig Harbor, Wash.
I enjoyed John Nichols’s “The Spirit of Wisconsin” [March 21] as well as his appearances on Ed Schultz’s show. With all that has transpired there, I am amazed that the old custom of tarring and feathering has not been suggested for the governor and the Republican legislators. They need to be reminded of something that stuck in my mind after hearing it in the movie V: “People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people.”
Wendy Weidman

Appleton, Wis.
Walker the Stalker
Takes from the poor, gives to the rich
This lying, cheating, son-of-a-——.
Walker the Stalker
An odious man who attempts to invoke
The will of his masters, the brothers Koch.
Walker the Stalker
His abuse of power we cannot condone.
It’s time this tyrant was pulled off his throne!
The Scarlet Pimpernel

Does Abortion Make Us Brown?
Pleasantville, N.Y.
Bravo to Melissa Harris-Perry [“Sister Citizen,” March 21] for bringing up an important issue that has not been mentioned on either side of the abortion debate. Her discussion of the misogynistic and racial concern that white women are not having babies while women of color are harks back to the mid-nineteenth century, when abortion first became a contentious issue in the United States. There were a number of activists on the antiabortion side (including women’s rights activists, but that’s for another day). One group of key players were physicians, led by Dr. Horatio Storer, who wanted to outlaw abortion, except when recommended by a physician. Obviously they had a financial motive: in those days anyone could hang up a shingle and be an abortion provider.
Dr. Storer had another concern, however, which echoes Harris-Perry’s allusion to today’s antiabortionists’ fear that our country will become more brown. Dr. Storer famously asked in 1868 whether the West would “be filled by our own children or by those of aliens.” He said, “This is a question our women must answer; upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation.”
Sound familiar?
Carol Rote

Secaucus, N.J.
As an actress, I tour nationally with a 1912 script by suffragist Marie Jenney Howe, called Someone Must Wash the Dishes: An Anti-Suffrage Satire. Howe used a term now so obscure my audiences rarely even request a definition: “race suicide.” Having read Melissa Harris-Perry’s column “The War on Women’s Futures,” I plan to volunteer that definition at each future performance. I knew the early-twentieth-century white majority feared that women’s suffrage would reduce the number of “real” Americans in proportion to the more propagative immigrants. I hadn’t realized how frighteningly that fear is reflected in the rhetoric of today’s Tea Party members of the House.
Michele LaRue

People or Gadgets?
Los Angeles
The March 21 issue presented two useful visions of how Internet freedom will (continued on page 26)
Put the Banksters on Trial

Almost three years after the collapse of the housing market, the country is mired in a slump, with residential real estate prices still dropping and home foreclosures rising. Now the attorneys general of all fifty states are collectively seeking a grand bargain with the big banks—a negotiated settlement of the foreclosure crisis that would protect embattled homeowners from the bankers’ cruel, often illegal shakedown tactics. One wants to say to the AGs, Good luck. They are trying to tackle continuing injustices that Washington policy-makers and prosecutors have largely evaded. Their odds of success, however, are not promising.

The foreclosure scandal weighs heavily on the economy. Housing has traditionally been the sector that leads recovery, but in its crippled condition it can’t. This could last for many years if government does nothing to hasten a cleanup. A late 2010 analysis by CoreLogic found 11 million homeowners underwater—with mortgage debt worth more than their houses. A large portion are headed for foreclosure, but the sooner these cases are resolved, the sooner the housing market can pick up again.

That’s the context driving the AGs in their attempt at a unified challenge to the status quo. Shocking incidents keep piling up in local politics, often brushed aside by federal officials as bureaucratic sloppiness: Banks that double-cross consumers with false promises to adjust mortgage terms. Banks that have no evidence to prove they have a legal claim on a property but foreclose anyway. Foreclosures executed on the wrong homes or on homeowners not in default. It’s a reckless, abusive mess—much like the poorly regulated financial chaos that brought down the economy in 2008.

Many of these transactions were illegal on their face, so local judges began to resist by refusing to approve them. The vast number of illegalities suggested to some AGs not random errors but a general pattern of callous manipulation. The banks, it seemed, were stringing along endangered debtors, parasitically sucking more money out of them through late-payment fees or other dubious add-ons. When homeowners were finally tapped out, having exhausted savings for retirement or college, the banks finally foreclosed, collecting even more fees.

Attorneys general in Nevada and Arizona have filed new lawsuits against Bank of America that flesh out these allegations—story after story of consumers swindled by BofA’s tactics, “misrepresenting…making false promises…misleading…falsely notifying.” The two states make an additional charge: that BofA also violated the settlement terms of the lawsuit the states filed against it three years ago, when the bank promised to correct its irregular behavior. BofA made similar legal promises in settlements with dozens of state governments but continued the same ruthless tactics [see Alex Ulam, “The BofA Mortgage Settlement Fiasco,” November 1, 2010].

Now the fifty AGs, led by Tom Miller of Iowa, hope to get more secure results. Don’t count on it. As this issue went to press, their executive committee was meeting to negotiate with major banks for the first time. A lot of loose talk in the press has suggested their goal is tougher rules for the banks, which would agree to pony up a foreclosure relief fund of $20 billion or more.

That may sound like a lot, but it’s actually a drop in the bucket. Elizabeth Warren, slated to head the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, recently informed the AGs that the banks had saved more than $20 billion just
The foreclosure scandal, though complicated, is really an old-fashioned law-and-order issue. Government should start treating it like one. Send a few bankers to jail, or at least call them before a grand jury. Stage a few perp walks for TV. Then start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Back at You, Glenn Beck

As an organizer, I go to a lot of meetings, panels and discussions and often leave feeling like I’m caught in the movie Groundhog Day, where I am rehashing the same discussions and debates over and over again, and wondering if they hold any relevance for anyone else. That’s why I was so surprised when my secretly taped comments about the need to start the negotiations. Until that happens, the crooks will be calling the shots.
**Note.**

**FISA CASE BACK ON:** On March 21

*The Nation*, along with the ACLU and other organizations and individuals, won a huge legal victory when the US Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit reinstated our landmark lawsuit challenging an unconstitutional government-spying law.

One of the most egregious of the post-9/11 civil liberties abuses was the Bush administration’s secret warrantless wiretapping program. After it was exposed by the *New York Times* in 2005, the administration used fear of terrorism to browbeat Congress into granting sweeping new powers to the government through the **FISA Amendments Act of 2008** (FAA). That law allows the executive branch to conduct international surveillance without requiring it to identify targets and without meaningful judicial oversight; in particular, it grants the government nearly unlimited power to monitor the international communications of US citizens.

In 2008 *The Nation* joined **Amnesty International USA**, **Global Fund for Women**, **Human Rights Watch**, the **Service Employees International Union** and others, with the ACLU and NYCLU as counsel, in a federal lawsuit against the act. Our case, which included testimony from *Nation* writers **Chris Hedges** and **Naomi Klein**, argued that the statute was a serious impediment to our work as human rights, labor, legal and media organizations, which requires us to engage in sensitive communications with colleagues, sources and clients abroad.

The appeals court reversed a 2009 district court decision that ruled we didn’t have standing to challenge the law because we couldn’t prove that our communications had been monitored. The constitutionality of the FAA is yet to be decided by a court, but now the case can go forward; as **Jameel Jaffer**, the ACLU lawyer who argued the case in court, said, “The government’s surveillance practices should not be immune from judicial review, and this decision ensures that they won’t be.”

**ROANE CAREY**

**EXHUMING MCCARTHY:** When hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites rallied to protest Governor **Scott Walker**’s assault on public employee unions and related power grabs, Wisconsin history professor **William Cronon** developed an online study guide for people who might be interested in where the governor’s ideas were coming from. Citing conservative and progressive scholars, Cronon described the work of the corporate-funded **American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC) to influence state policies. The study guide proved to be popular, and Cronon wrote a thoughtful opinion piece for the *New York Times*.

None of this sat well with the Wisconsin Republican Party, which sent a letter (written by a former Walker aide) to the University of Wisconsin, demanding access to Cronon’s e-mails regarding the Wisconsin conflict. Cronon responded that he had nothing to hide but hoped Republicans would rethink the demand. “I find it simply outrageous that the Wisconsin Republican Party would seek to employ the state’s Open Records Law for the nakedly political purpose of trying to embarrass, harass, or silence a university professor (and a citizen) who has asked legitimate questions and identified potentially legitimate criticisms concerning the influence of a national organization on state legislative activity,” he observed.

Cronon’s observation was spot-on, and it has been reinforced by news from neighboring Michigan, where a governor has stirred legislative activity,” he observed.

Cronon’s observation was spot-on, and it has been reinforced by news from neighboring Michigan, where a governor has stirred reciprocal visit from Prime Minister Singh.

**RIDDHI SHAH**

**CONGRATS, ERIC:** We’re pleased to note that *Nation* editorial board member and Columbia University professor **Eric Foner** has been awarded the **Bancroft Prize** for his latest book, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (Norton, 2010), a political biography of the sixteenth president and his ideas about slavery. Among the most prestigious awards in academia, the Bancroft is given annually to distinguished works in American history or diplomacy. Historians **Sara Dubow** (*OurseWe Unborn: A History of the Fetus in Modern America*) and **Christopher Tomlins** (*Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America*) were this year’s other winners.
I think I may have found part of the answer in what disgraced former Wall Street stock analyst Henry Blodget admitted when he echoed Beck's wild theories on Business Insider. Describing my remarks, he wrote, “Many Americans will undoubtedly sympathize with and support them.”

So that was it: Beck, right-wingers and Wall Street sympathizers went ballistic because they knew the ideas I talked about are far from being a secret leftist conspiracy; in fact, they’re in sync with the thinking of most Americans. In my talk, I raised a very simple yet powerful idea: that homeowners, students, citizens and workers should make the same practical decisions Wall Street and corporate CEOs make every day—they should reject bad financial deals.

Beck and Wall Street are terrified that regular Americans will begin to challenge the double standard that allows one set of rules for the rich and another for the rest of us. They are petrified of the growing understanding, among people of diverse political backgrounds, that our country isn’t broke; that the tiny elite at the top has manipulated the economic crisis it created to grow even richer and more powerful while the rest of us suffer the consequences; and that Wall Street and corporations, sitting on record profits, are holding the country hostage, essentially threatening a capital strike if they don’t get further tax and regulatory breaks.

As long as Wall Street and the superrich feel secure and confident, they have no reason to negotiate a fair deal with the rest of us. Only by creating uncertainty and instability for them—by disrupting unfair business as usual—can we build the strength to challenge their stranglehold on our economy and our democracy.

But I don’t think it was just my theorizing about power relations and the economy that set off such a frenzy. It was the prospect that average Americans could take a series of concrete and practical steps, including direct action and civil disobedience, to make Wall Street pay for the trillions it stole from us. Ordinary Americans have the power and the opportunity to go on offense right now—with the immediate goals of keeping millions of people in their homes and raising revenue for cities and states to save jobs and critical services.

Here’s how we can start:

§ Homeowners and students can stop paying unfair debt. If growing numbers of them organize toward a loan strike—threatening to refuse to pay their toxic mortgages and student loans unless banks agree to negotiate lower rates—it could force banks to modify loans and provide relief to our families.

§ Citizens can demand that our governments stop doing business with bandit banks. Local governments conduct trillions of dollars in business with Wall Street banks. That leverage can be used to force the banks to pay their fair share in taxes, renegotiate high-cost deals that are bankrupting taxpayers with astronomical interest rates and stop foreclosures by reducing mortgage principals.

§ Public employees can use their collective bargaining power to protect taxpayer dollars. Teachers, nurses and other public employees can go to the bargaining table armed with solutions that would save billions, like renegotiating the toxic interest rate swaps that are costing taxpayers at least $1.8 billion a year nationally. Swaps were supposed to save taxpayers money, but they backfired when the Federal Reserve cut interest rates to help the banks after the financial crash. Now, as taxpayers deal with devastating cuts, the banks are using these swaps to suck millions out of government coffers. Imagine public employees voting to strike to pressure the city or state to use its power to protect taxpayers and critical services while also stopping foreclosures and stabilizing the housing market and tax base.

So let’s give Wall Street, Glenn Beck and the right something to be scared about. It’s time to use our collective power to challenge the economic and political stranglehold they have on our country.

Stephen Lerner

Stephen Lerner serves on the Service Employees International Union’s International Executive Board and is the architect of the Justice for Janitors campaign.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Donald Trump Demands That Obama Show His Birth Certificate

All White House hopefuls we forewarn:
You’ll have to prove that you were born.
Before Trump hits the state of granite,
He’ll have to tell us all the planet
Upon which he was born and reared—
Where loudmouths reign and hair is weird.

True Grit

Elizabeth Taylor was not a sex symbol in the usual sense: neither spawn of 1940s pinup culture, like Marilyn Monroe, nor herald of 1960s sexual revolution, like Brigitte Bardot—both of whom were her contemporaries. Taylor may not have been a sex symbol at all, if by that is meant a figure upon whom the desires of an age are projected. She seemed too frank and restless pursuing her own desires to be captured in that way.

When she died on March 23, the tabloids called her a “Hollywood goddess.” That is half right. She was Hollywood the way some people are Jersey. A luminous presence on the screen from girlhood, Taylor went on across the decades amassing a portfolio of unforgettable movie stills, a working life’s list of credits from movie classics to soap opera schlock, an archive of scandal-sheet
Are you concerned about being helpless in an emergency? Are you and your loved ones anxious about what would happen if you were unable to get to a phone? Have you considered moving out of the home you love and into some kind of assisted living because of these worries? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are not alone. Millions of seniors are concerned about their safety. There are products out there that claim to help, but they are difficult to use and even more difficult to afford. Why mess with complicated installations and long term contracts when there’s a product that’s simple, reliable and affordable? The product is the Designed For Seniors® Medical Alarm. Read on and we’ll explain why every senior in America should have one.

**First of all, it’s simple** to install and use. Unlike other products that require professional installation, this product is “plug and play.” The unit is designed for easy use in an emergency, with large, easy-to-identify buttons.

**It’s reliable.** From the waterproof pendant to the sophisticated base unit, to the state-of-the-art 24/7 call center, the entire system is designed to give you the peace of mind in knowing you are never alone in an emergency. You get two-way communication with a live person in our Emergency Response Center, and there’s a battery backup in case of a power failure.

**Simple, Reliable, and Affordable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competition</th>
<th>Designed For Seniors® Medical Alarm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Cost</td>
<td>$30-$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>$10-$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UL Approved Call Center</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Approved™</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warranty</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Shipping</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Best of all, it’s affordable.** You get the complete system for only pennies per day. No equipment charge, no activation fee, no long term contract. Call now and within a week you or someone you love will have the peace of mind and independence that comes with this remarkable system.

Be one of the first 100 to order and get FREE Shipping and a FREE Gift– valued at $35. It’s yours to keep.

**Designed For Seniors® Medical Alarm**

Please mention promotional code 42095.

1-877-421-3728

www.DFSmedicalalarm.com
April 18, 2011

headlines and triumph-to-tragedy-and-back-again stories, a few stunning roles, more than a few husbands, more hair and makeup and jewels than even that unseemly town found seemly and two Oscars, her second for a performance of such seismic force that it should have forever settled the question of whether she was an actor with a capital A. But “goddess” is too airy a term for someone who so embodied sex and enacted its complications, with all the gritty commonness that implies.

Years ago the film critic Vincent Canby wrote that “Elizabeth Taylor represents the complete movie phenomenon—what movies are as an art and an industry.” She also represented, in her work and in her life, the arts and industry of sex, the varied ways sexuality was being worked out, or not, in fantasy, commerce and ordinary life during the second half of the twentieth century.

Hollywood was part of Sex Inc.—midway on the conglomerate chart between advertising and Wall Street—long before Taylor cruised past Montgomery Clift in a 1949 Cadillac Series 62 convertible and into postwar America’s dream for more. More pleasure, more freedom, more beauty, more space, more... possibility? It was 1951 when she starred in A Place in the Sun, the story of a poor man’s careless ambitions, based on An American Tragedy. But Taylor’s style-setting society girl, Angela Vickers, is no mere update on the classic unobtainable object of desire, a goddess, like Daisy Buchanan or Sondra Finchley, on water skis. She is naive and selfish and clueless about the world beyond her privilege, but she is hungry too.

Taylor once said that in acting she strove to extract maximum emotion from minimal effort; her Angela is molten in silence, breathing a mix of excitement and apprehension on the balcony outside her parents’ choked ballroom, whispering to her lover just before they kiss, “Tell Mama, tell Mama.”

She was barely 18 years old when that was filmed. Perhaps it was the hunger of youth and the time, both on the cusp of furious change. Taylor was hardly a rebel, not “ahead of it,” only with it was the hunger of youth and the time, both on the cusp of furious change. Taylor was hardly a rebel, not “ahead of it,” only with it.

Taylor had been married three times, divorced twice and widowed by then. She was 26. It’s been said that she got her ideas about love from growing up on Hollywood sets, rapt by the movies’ melodrama and improbably happy endings. If that is true, then her rough ride with romance provided a public service. Maybe people didn’t exactly know that Conrad “Nicky” Hilton beat her and left her sexually wanting, or that she traded swats and bars with the men who followed, but even the most adept publicist could not make Elizabeth Taylor’s love life a Rorschach for “storybook.”

On a TV interview with Mike Todd, whom romantics still like to think of as the good true love, she seems infantilized. After his plane crash, no sooner had she come out of sedation and the care of her hairdresser than she was cuddling with her chief consoler and Todd’s married best friend. For that she was branded a scarlet woman, but no amount of tut-tutting over the fate of the third leg in this triangle, “America’s sweetheart,” Debbie Reynolds, could conceal that it was 1959; estrangement was no longer so strange.

Taylor made it all larger, and Hollywood gave it starker lighting and better lines, but in big and little houses, within good and not-so-good families, experience was unraveling old axioms about sex, love and human nature. People were in marriages that had become killing jars. They were falling for the other man, the other woman, betting on love while knowing better. They were procuring rent boys. They were hooking or half-hooking because BUtterfield 8 beat hanging tobacco in Connecticut and usually didn’t end in a high-speed chase over a cliff. Their Mama’s boyfriend did seduce them. Their families did lock them in sanitariums because they were queer or sexed up or prone to obscene babbling. Randy young women did walk the night streets, drawn by the erotic pulse of the city, as JFK’s sister Rosemary did not long before the lobotomist scooped her brains out with a spatula. Tennessee Williams, whose sister’s lobotomy influenced Suddenly Last Summer, and Gore Vidal, who wrote the screenplay, were much later blasted for creating a monster freak show. They were not even contenders against real life: a woman of 23, saying the Lord’s Prayer, singing ditties, counting down numbers while surgeons dig in her skull until she falls mute, and this from the family that would bring us Camelot!

The country was going crazy, and Taylor was just with it. When the ‘60s exploded, old Hollywood was marooned. Joan Crawford sniffed that everything would be better if girls just grew their hair and boys cut theirs. Elizabeth Taylor’s passion with Richard Burton, the excesses of their spending and their drinking and their need, now appear rational by contrast. They got aroused playing Scrabble, she once said; “That’s love, baby.”

When they worked together, Taylor’s feel for the struggle between people bound by sex rescued something even when the lines were silly and the plot a mess. Love is a mess. When the lines were strong (or cruel, comic, feral—how many words describe Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?) no one had such strength and fragility mixed. In her solo movies, even when the lines were awful, as in the weird 1973 plastic surgery saga Ash Wednesday, she conveyed shades of pain with a look, of a body wrecked, of a woman’s fear approaching marriage’s dead end.

Taylor explored just about every trope of female heterosexuality in the movies, and once finished with them and with a brief, lonely stint as a senator’s wife, it was as if she said, “Goodbye, baby” to all that. Her hair got bigger, her eyeshadow bluer, her clothes more spangly and bright. She became a kind of drag queen earth mother just as the drag queens were dying, as hairdressers and stylists and designers and actors and friends were dying, as a great swath of Hollywood lay down in death with a great swath of humanity because AIDS didn’t fall for illusion. She got loud about condoms and clean needles and indifference because in this theater subtlety could have no impact. The old Hollywood people in the White House kept silent. Most of Hollywood, most liberals said nothing. She made noise; she was a pro at sex and survival.

JoAnn Wypiewski
Katha Pollitt

Women Under the Budget Knife

Remember “shared sacrifice”? Like the rain, the budget cuts were supposed to fall on all alike. But somehow men seem to be ending up with more than their share of umbrellas, and women are getting soaked. Attacks on reproductive healthcare are openly aimed at women and have gotten a lot of attention—like the House vote to defund Planned Parenthood and eliminate the Title X family planning program, which has fortunately been blocked in the Senate. Less visible are the ways federal, state and local government cutbacks, touted as neutral and necessary belt-tightening, will fall disproportionately on women.

The cuts will affect women in three ways. Partly as a legacy of private sector discrimination, a huge proportion of working women are employed by government or government contractors, and they tend to work in the very areas slated for the most drastic slashes—education, healthcare, social services, libraries, legal aid, secretarial and other office work. Moreover, because they are more likely to be poor, old and caring for children or relatives, women are the major recipients of social services. Thus, when a senior center is closed down, not only is the elderly person deprived of care likely to be female, the staffer who prepared her lunch or organized her group activities is probably a woman too—and so is the relative who now must take up the slack. When Head Start and childcare slots are eliminated—the Continuing Resolution for fiscal year 2011 proposed by the House axes 368,000 of them—tens of thousands of teachers and aides, almost all female, lose their jobs, and so do many mothers who rely on them. Add massive proposed cuts in the Women, Infants and Children feeding program and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, and the abolition of the Women’s Educational Equity program (which monitors schools’ compliance with Title IX), and it’s almost as if there was some kind of concerted plan to undo forty years of progress for women—and, especially, to make sure poor women stay poor.

Consider New York: newly elected Governor Andrew Cuomo plans to cut more than $300 million in human services. According to a devastating report by the Fiscal Policy Institute prepared for the New York Women’s Foundation, “A Harder Struggle, Fewer Opportunities,” the Cuomo budget will slash funding for nonresidential domestic violence programs and summer youth employment programs; defund 105 New York City senior centers; cut $7 million in childcare services for welfare recipients; eliminate transitional jobs programs and childcare for low-income college students; and reduce funding for after-school programs as well as the Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program. There will be huge cuts in housing help for homeless families, four out of five of which are headed by single mothers; in public schools; and in SUNY and CUNY, where nearly 60 percent of the students are female. In many cases, these cuts come on top of previous ones—since 2008–09, almost 13,000 teachers and support staff have been laid off. As Judith Kurens pointed out in the Gotham Gazette, homeless women, many of whom are fleeing domestic violence, will be forced to choose between their abusers and the streets.

It’s worth noting that Governor Cuomo is a Democrat, and that he is insisting on letting the so-called “millionaire’s tax” on high earners lapse. That tax would bring in around $5 billion—enough to prevent all of these cuts and alleviate much of the pain caused by the recession. Instead of making the well-off shell out a bit extra in hard times (in New York City, the top 1 percent receive 44 percent of total income), Cuomo prefers to plunge struggling mothers deeper into poverty—and their children along with them. Never mind that the state will be living with the long-term consequences—violence, sickness, educational failure, joblessness and every kind of misery—for years to come.

Consider Wisconsin: Governor Scott Walker sparked widespread outrage for limiting the bargaining rights of public sector unions to wages. Less noted was the curious fact that public safety workers—cops, firefighters and security officers—were exempted from his ire. The obvious, cynical reason is that unions representing teachers, nurses and social workers tend to support Democrats, while public safety workers are solid for Republicans. (That also explains why right-wingers like Walker feel free to bash teachers as incompetent, lazy freeloaders but never allude to the well-known romance between cops and doughnuts, let alone their generous retirement packages.) But is it entirely an accident that the workers deemed unworthy of full bargaining rights are overwhelmingly women, engaged in stereotypically female caring work, and that those whose rights are sacrosanct are men? In a statement on the budget, the University of Wisconsin System women’s studies consortium notes that union membership is crucial for a working woman’s advancement: it not only raises her wages by as much as a year of college but improves her chances of having healthcare even more than earning a college degree would have done, and gives her a measure of job security and a voice in the conditions of her work. Apparently Governor Walker thinks only men deserve those things. After all, this is a man who wants to repeal the state law requiring health insurers to cover birth control, eliminate the Title V family planning program, cut funding for sexual assault victims services and even reduce funding for a pregnant women’s smoking cessation program—oh, and eliminate Badgercare, the state healthcare plan, for 55,000 families a bit over the poverty line.

In state after state, the same gender dynamic is shaping budget cuts. In fact, this is also happening in Britain. The Fawcett Society, a women’s rights group, brought (and unfortunately lost) a gender discrimination lawsuit against the government, claiming that the cuts “risk rolling back women’s equality in the UK by a generation.” It’s not such a stretch to think that’s what may happen here.
In the months following September 11, my colleague Cornel West offered this insight: national political elites used the devastating attacks to promote the “niggerization of the American people.” West understood that long before 9/11, African-Americans were intimately familiar with terrorism. Through the Jim Crow century, they were routinely and randomly brutalized and murdered by well-organized groups of whites acting beyond the confines of the official state but with the tacit consent of their society. Under the shadow of lynching, black Americans learned what it meant to feel, as West describes, “unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hated for who they are.” After 9/11 far too many Americans, unaccustomed to this sense of collective intimidation, felt helpless to halt an unjustified war or the erosion of civil liberties. Thus, whether or not they were black, Americans were “niggerized” by the attacks.

In recent months, I have been reminded of Professor West’s analysis because one way to read our current moment is as a blackening of America. The social, economic and political conditions that have long defined African-American life have descended onto a broader population, and it has been instructive to watch how the nation has responded.

Initially, conservatives argued that Tea Party activists had every right to be disgusted with national leadership and to demand swift economic intervention to combat the near 10 percent unemployment rate. Since the mid-1970s, except for a brief dip between 1998 and 2002, unemployment among African-Americans has routinely exceeded 10 percent, yet African-Americans were rarely encouraged to blame systems or organize collectively. Instead blacks were stereotyped as lazy and undeserving. This characterization has been an effective ideological tool for politicians intent on limiting social programs, cutting welfare, ignoring cities, slashing job training and neglecting housing.

Within months, the Tea Party shifted its focus to the deficit. As it did, policy debates about the poor and unemployed came to mirror decades of discourse about black Americans. Extensions of unemployment insurance were decried as “creeping socialism.” Echoing theories of dependency leveled against African-Americans for decades, one conservative blogger suggested that extending unemployment benefits would create “a permanent entitlement and would perpetuate unemployment.” Perhaps, in this moment, Americans understood how dangerously corrosive the characterization of the poor as “idle” is for black people.

This past November the TSA introduced screening procedures that many Americans—liberals and conservatives alike—deemed intrusive, random and demeaning. But for decades urban police forces have regularly employed race-based traffic stops and pedestrian stop-and-frisks in African-American communities. These policing practices have done little to make neighborhoods safer, but they have contributed to massive incarceration rates for black men. Justifying their racially punitive behavior as a reasonable response to potential crime, police forces have acted largely with the consent of white Americans, some of whom later decried the TSA’s new procedures. Perhaps, for a moment, they felt the stinging humiliation that routinely accompanies black life.

Few events more clearly demonstrated the blackening of America than the standoff in Wisconsin. Like the nineteenth-century leaders of Southern states who stripped black citizens of voting rights, public accommodation and civic associations, Wisconsin’s Republican majority dismantled the hard-won basic rights of Wisconsin workers. Like those Confederate leaders, the Wisconsin GOP used intimidation, threats and even the police against demonstrators and rival officials. As the saga unfolded, many Wisconsin citizens felt stunned that their once-secure rights might be eliminated. For a moment, perhaps, they glimpsed the experience of black men and women who watched the shadow of Jim Crow blot out the promises of emancipation.

The 1880s were also the decade when efforts to create corporate personhood were initiated by wealthy railroad barons. In a 2010 article, James and Tomilea Allison (psych professor at Indiana University and former mayor of Bloomington, respectively) traced how these corporate interests misrepresented past cases so that the Supreme Court eventually relied on nonexistent precedent to twist Fourteenth Amendment protections intended for newly freed slaves to instead offer shelter for profiteering corporations. More than a century later, these arguments were crucial to the Citizens United decision, which putatively endowed extraordinarily wealthy corporations with an “equal” right to electoral influence but in practice gave them breathtakingly unequal representation. Perhaps, as they are reduced to a fraction of a citizen, other Americans now catch a glimpse of what it means to be codified as only three-fifths of a person.

Today corporate greed, conservative ideology, manufactured right-wing populism and progressive complicity are making more and more Americans into, as Professor West might characterize them, “niggers.” Rather than try to escape the pain of experiencing some small familiarity with blackness, Americans could choose to learn from generations of African-Americans who resisted dehumanizing processes of domination and inequality. During the 2008 election Obama’s detractors tried to smear him by suggesting that “Hussein” was a terrorist’s moniker. As a demonstration of solidarity, thousands of Americans informally declared that they too would be known by the middle name Hussein. It was purely symbolic, but it rested on a belief in the power to change meaning by embracing rather than eschewing that which is labeled subordinate, alien, dangerous and shameful. By embracing our collective blackness, perhaps we can find the fortitude and creativity necessary to face the continuing erosion of our national social safety net in the face of a persistent economic crisis.
If President Saleh falls, the US will have lost a pliant partner in its ‘global war on terror.’

The day before US missiles began raining down on Muammar el-Qaddafi’s Libya, hundreds of miles away—across the Red Sea—security forces under the control of Yemen’s US-backed president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, massacred more than fifty people who were participating in an overwhelmingly peaceful protest in the capital, Sana. Some of the victims were shot in the head by snipers. For months, thousands of Yemenis had taken to the streets demanding that Saleh step down, and the regime had responded consistently with defiance and brute force. But on March 21, a severe blow was dealt to Saleh that may prove to be the strike that ultimately brought down his regime. That day, the most powerful figure in Yemen’s military, Gen. Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, commander of the First Armored Division, threw his support behind the protests and vowed to defend Yemen’s “peaceful youth revolution.” Other senior military figures soon followed suit. Senior civilian officials, including scores of ambassadors and diplomats, announced their resignations. Important tribal leaders, long the most crucial element of Saleh’s grip on power, swung to the opposition.

Saleh, known in Yemen as The Boss, became the country’s leader in 1990 following the unification of the north, which he had ruled since the 1970s, and the south, which had been run by a Marxist government based in Aden. Saleh is a survivor who has deftly navigated his way through the cold war, deep tribal divisions and the “global war on terror.” Under the Obama administration, the United States committed increased military funding for his regime. Though he was known as a double-dealer, Saleh was tacitly viewed as Washington’s man on the Arabian Peninsula.

Throughout his reign, Saleh regarded the Houthi rebellion in the north and a secessionist movement in the south as the greatest threats. For the United States, the concern was Al Qaeda. In the end, it was an autonomous mass of largely young protesters who proved the most potent challenge to Saleh’s power.

The prospect of Saleh’s departure is a source of great anxiety for the White House, but the United States has unintentionally played a significant role in weakening his regime. For more than a decade, US policy neglected Yemen’s civil society and development, focusing instead on a military strategy aimed at hunting down terrorists. These operations not only caused the deaths of dozens of civilians, fueling popular anger against Saleh for allowing the US military to conduct them; they also fed Saleh’s corruption while doing nothing to address Yemen’s place as the poorest country in the Arab world, which proved to be major driving forces behind the rebellion.

A serious case could be made that the stakes are much higher for the United States in Yemen than in Libya, yet its response to the repression of protests in the two countries has been starkly different. While Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other US officials condemned the violence in Yemen, they stopped far short of calling for an end to the regime or for international military action. Instead, the US position was to call for a “political solution.”

A few days after the massacre in Sana, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, on a visit to Moscow, was asked if the United States still backed Saleh. “I don’t think it’s my place to talk about internal affairs in Yemen,” Gates replied. What he said next spoke volumes about US priorities: “We are obviously concerned about the instability in Yemen. We consider Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which is largely located in Yemen, to be perhaps the most dangerous of all the franchises of Al Qaeda right now. And so instability and diversion of attention from dealing with AQAP is certainly my primary concern about the situation.”

AQAP was the group that sent the “underwear bomber” to the States in December 2009. It was also behind the attempted “parcel bombings” in October 2010, and counts among its ranks radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. In February National Counterterrorism Center director Michael Leiter briefed Congress on the top threats faced by the United States worldwide.
“Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with al-Awlaki as a leader within that organization, is probably the most significant risk to the US homeland,” he declared before the House Homeland Security Committee. Attorney General Eric Holder said Awlaki “would be on the same list with bin Laden.” Other intelligence sources tell The Nation that the administration has exaggerated Awlaki’s role within AQAP, but they acknowledge that the mythology around him has developed a life of its own. Most analysts estimate that AQAP has 300–500 core members (others say the figure could be as high as several thousand).

From day one of his administration, President Obama and his chief counterterrorism adviser, John Brennan, have made Yemen a top priority because of the presence of AQAP. Although Saleh has often spoken out of both sides of his mouth when dealing with the United States, it is hard to imagine a more pliant leader in that region. Saleh has given permission to the United States to wage a secret war in Yemen, including bombings of AQAP camps and unilateral, lethal operations on Yemeni soil. As a bonus, Saleh has taken public responsibility for US strikes in an attempt to mask the extent of US involvement. Meanwhile, the Obama administration has ramped up training and equipping of Yemen’s military and security forces.

Without a guarantee that a successor government will grant US forces such access, peaceful protesters being gunned down will not be the top priority. “The feckless US response is highlighting how shortsighted our policy is there,” says Joshua Foust, a fellow at the American Security Project who recently left the Defense Intelligence Agency, where he was a Yemen analyst. “We meekly consent to Saleh’s brutality out of a misguided fear that our counterterrorism programs will be cut off, apparently not realizing that, in doing so, we are practically guaranteeing the next government will threaten those very programs.”

Retired US Army Col. W. Patrick Lang, a veteran Special Forces officer, has known Saleh since 1979, having served for years as the Defense and Army attaché to Yemen. Fluent in Arabic, Lang was often brought into sensitive meetings as a translator for other US officials. He and his British MI6 counterpart would often go hunting with Saleh. “We would drive around with a bunch of vehicles and shoot gazelle, hyenas and the odd baboon,” Lang recalls, adding that Saleh was a “reasonably good shot.” Saleh, Lang says, is “a very charming devil,” describing his long rule as “quite a run in a country where it’s dog-eat-dog. It’s like being the captain on a Klingon battle cruiser, you know? They’re just waiting.” According to Lang, Saleh proved a master of playing tribes against one another. “There’s a precarious balance all the time between the authority of the government and the authority of these massive tribal groups,” he says. “The tribes will dictate the future of Yemen, not AQAP.”

During the US-backed mujahedeen war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, thousands of Yemenis joined the jihad—some of them coordinated and funded directly by Saleh’s government. When the jihadists returned to their home country, Saleh gave them safe haven. “Because we have political pluralism in Yemen, we decided not to have a confrontation with these movements,” Saleh told the New York Times in 2008. Al-Jihad, the movement of Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian physician who rose to become bin Laden’s number-two man, based one of its largest cells in Yemen in the ’90s.

Saleh saw Al Qaeda as a convenient sometime ally that could be used to protect him from the real threats to his power, including the secessionist movement in the south and Houthis rebels in the northern Saada province. The Houthis view his government as a puppet for the United States and the Saudis, and believe they are fighting to preserve their Zaidi sect of Shiite Islam. Even though Saleh is a Zaidi, the Houthis allege he has allowed Wahhabi (i.e., radical Sunni) forces to threaten their existence. Indeed, the Saudis have bombed the Houthis on numerous occasions. Between 2004 and 2010, Saleh’s forces fought consistent battles with the rebels, known in Yemen as the “six wars.”

Beginning with the 1994 civil war, Saleh deployed jihadists—who had fought in Afghanistan in his battle against the southern secessionists and the Houthis in the north. “They were the thugs that Saleh used to control any problematic elements. We have so many instances where Saleh was using these guys from Al Qaeda to eliminate opponents of the regime,” according to a former top US counterterrorism official with extensive experience in Yemen who insisted on anonymity because of the sensitivity of the operations on which he worked. Because of the jihadists’ value to Saleh, “they were able to operate freely. They were able to obtain and travel on Yemeni documents. Saleh was their safest base. He tried to make himself a player by playing this card.”

The result was that, as Al Qaeda expanded throughout the ’90s, Yemen provided fertile ground for training camps and recruitment. During the Clinton administration, this arrangement barely registered on the counterterrorism scale outside a small group of officials, mostly from the FBI and CIA, who were tracking the rise of Al Qaeda.

That would change on October 12, 2000, when a small motorboat packed with 500 pounds of explosives blasted a massive hole in the USS Cole, an American warship that had docked in the port of Aden, killing seventeen sailors and wounding more than thirty others. “In Aden, they charged and destroyed a destroyer that fearsome people fear, one that evokes horror when it docks and when it sails,” bin Laden later wrote in a poem that was used in an Al Qaeda recruitment video. The successful attack, according to Al Qaeda experts, inspired droves of recruits—particularly from Yemen—to sign up with Al Qaeda and similar groups.

After 9/11, President Bush put Yemen on a list of potential early targets in the “war on terror”; he could have swiftly dismantled Saleh’s government despite Saleh’s pre-9/11 declaration that “Yemen is a graveyard for the invaders.” But Saleh was determined not to go the way of the Taliban, and he wasted little time making moves to ensure he wouldn’t.

The first was to board a plane to the United States in November 2001. During his meetings in Washington, Saleh was presented with an aid package worth up to $400 million in addition to funding from the World Bank and International

Jeremy Scahill, a Puffin Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute, is The Nation’s national security correspondent.
Great writing begins—and ends—with the sentence. Understanding the variety of ways to construct sentences is important to enhancing your appreciation of great writing and potentially improving your own.

Get the answers to your questions about writing and style in Building Great Sentences: Exploring the Writer’s Craft, taught by Professor Brooks Landon of the University of Iowa—one of the nation's top writing schools. In this lively 24-lecture course, you explore the myriad ways we think about, talk about, and write sentences. You discover insights into what makes for pleasurable reading. You also learn how you can apply these methods to your own writing.

This course revives the sentence-oriented approach to studying writing. Unlike common nuts-and-bolts approaches that emphasize grammar, this course provides you with a larger context for what makes sentences great. The lectures stress the pleasure of language—not the avoidance of mistakes.

You investigate how to recognize the mechanics of the sentences you read and write, learn how language works on your thoughts and emotions, and discover basic strategies to make your own everyday writing more effective. Throughout the course, Professor Landon draws abundantly on examples from the work of brilliant writers who are masters of the craft to illustrate how sentences can tease, surprise, test, and satisfy you.

With its passionate approach to writing and reading, and its indulgence in the sheer joy of language, Building Great Sentences will change the way you read and write. It’s a journey that gives you unique insights into the nature of great writing. It also teaches you how you can achieve some of this greatness yourself.

About Your Professor

Dr. Brooks Landon is a Professor of English and Collegiate Fellow at The University of Iowa and Director of The University of Iowa General Education Literature Program. From 1999 to 2005, Professor Landon was chair of the Iowa English Department. He received his Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin.

Among Professor Landon's numerous awards and accolades are a University of Iowa M.L. Huit Teaching Award and an International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts Distinguished Scholarship.

About The Great Courses

We review hundreds of top-rated professors from America's best colleges and universities each year. From this extraordinary group we choose only those rated highest by panels of our customers. Fewer than 10% of these world-class scholar-teachers are selected to make The Great Courses.

We've been doing this since 1990, producing more than 3,000 hours of material in modern and ancient history, philosophy, literature, fine arts, the sciences, and mathematics for intelligent, engaged, adult lifelong learners. If a course is ever less than completely satisfying, you may exchange it for another, or we will refund your money promptly.

Lecture Titles

1. A Sequence of Words
2. Grammar and Rhetoric
3. Propositions and Meaning
4. How Sentences Grow
5. Adjectival Steps
6. The Rhythm of Cumulative Syntax
7. Direction of Modification
8. Coordinate, Subordinate, and Mixed Patterns
9. Coordinate Cumulative Sentences
10. Subordinate and Mixed Cumulatives
11. Prompts of Comparison
12. Prompts of Explanation
13. The Riddle of Prose Rhythm
14. Cumulative Syntax to Create Suspense
15. Degrees of Suspensiveness
16. The Mechanics of Delay
17. prefab Patterns for Suspense
18. Balanced Sentences and Balanced Forms
19. The Rhythm of Twos
20. The Rhythm of Threes
21. Balanced Series and Serial Balances
22. Master Sentences
23. Sentences in Sequence
24. Sentences and Prose Style

SAVE UP TO $185!
OFFER GOOD UNTIL MAY 1, 2011

1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819

Charge my credit card:

Priority Code 50919

Please send me Building Great Sentences: Exploring the Writer's Craft, which consists of 24 30-minute lectures plus Course Guidebooks.

| DVD $69.95 (std. price $254.95) SAVE $185! | Audio CD $49.95 (std. price $179.95) SAVE $130! |
| plus $10 Shipping & Handling | plus $10 Shipping & Handling |

Check or Money Order Enclosed

Non-U.S. Orders: Additional shipping charges apply. For more details, call us or visit the FAQ page on our website.

Virginia residents please add 5% sales tax.

Indiana residents please add 7% sales tax.

© moodboard/Corbis.
From the first days of his administration, Obama was hyper-focused on escalating the covert war against Al Qaeda, particularly in Yemen.

n 2002 US intelligence operatives discovered that the man they had fingered as one of the masterminds of the Cole attack, Abu Ali al-Harithi, was in the country. US officials had dubbed him “the godfather of terror in Yemen.” On November 3 the JSOC signals intelligence team in Yemen located Harithi in a compound in Marib province after he used a mobile phone number that US intelligence had traced to him months earlier. “Our special-ops had the compound under surveillance,” recalled Gen. Michael DeLong, at the time deputy commander of US Central Command (Centcom). They were “preparing to storm in when Ali exited with five of his associates. They got into SUVs and took off.”

As part of the operation, the CIA launched an MQ-1 Predator drone from its outpost in Djibouti into Yemen’s airspace. This wasn’t just a spy drone—it was armed with two anti-tank Hellfire missiles. After CIA Director George Tenet gave the green light for action, a five-foot-long Hellfire missile slammed into the SUV, blowing it up.

Among those killed in the strike was Ahmed Hijazi, aka Kamal Derwish, a US citizen born in Buffalo, New York. After the attack, US officials publicly tied Hijazi to a group in Buffalo that came to be known as the Lackawanna Six. Hijazi had been named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the alleged plot of six Yemeni-Americans to provide material support to Al Qaeda.

Unnamed US officials quoted in media reports revealed that the strike was a US operation, but they were reluctant to discuss the US role. “We didn’t want publicity,” recalled DeLong. “If questions did arise, the official Yemeni version would be that an SUV carrying civilians accidentally hit a land mine in the desert and exploded. There was to be no mention of terrorists, and no mention of missiles fired.” But then, on November 5, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz confirmed that it was a US strike. “It’s a very successful tactical operation, and one hopes each time you get a success like that, not only to have gotten rid of somebody dangerous but to have imposed changes in their tactics and operations and procedures,” he declared on CNN. Saleh was described as being “highly pissed” at the disclosure. “This is going to cause me major political problems,” he complained to Gen. Tommy Franks, the commander of Centcom.

It was the first publicly confirmed targeted killing by the United States outside a battlefield since Gerald Ford banned political assassinations in 1976. In response to criticism from human rights groups, the Bush administration pushed back hard, asserting its right under US law to kill people it designated as terrorists in any country, even if they were US citizens. “I can assure you that no constitutional questions are raised here,” National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said on Fox News a week after the attack. “The president has given broad authority to US officials in a variety of circumstances to do what they need to do to protect the country. We’re in a new kind of war, and we’ve made very clear that it is important that this new kind of war be fought on different battlefields.” She added, “It’s broad authority.”

From 2003 to 2006, Saleh’s government largely fell off the Bush administration’s counterterrorism radar, save for the occasional meeting to demand action on the Cole suspects. In 2006, while the administration was singularly focused on Iraq, a mass prison break in Sana would prove to be a seminal event in the reconstruction of Al Qaeda in Yemen. Among those who escaped were several key figures who would form the nexus of the leadership of AQAP, including Naser al-Wuhayshi, bin Laden’s former personal secretary. On February 3, 2006, Wuhayshi and twenty-two others tunneled out of their maximum-security prison cell into a nearby mosque. Wuhayshi later boasted that they performed morning prayers before walking out the front door. Wuhayshi would go on to unite the Saudi and Yemeni branches of Al Qaeda under the regional banner of AQAP. Qasim al-Rimi, another escapee, would become AQAP’s military commander. In 2007 Saleh released Fadh al-Quso, a Cole bombing suspect who...
had been jailed in 2002. In May 2010 Quso appeared in an AQAP video, threatening to attack the United States and its embassies and ships.

As Al Qaeda regrouped in Yemen, it began to carry out a series of small-scale actions, primarily in Marib province, the site of the 2002 drone strike that killed Harithi. In March 2007 Al Qaeda members assassinated the chief criminal investigator in Marib, Ali Mahmud al-Qasaylah, for his alleged role in the strike. In an audio message, Rimi announced that Wuhayshi was officially the new head of Al Qaeda in Yemen. In the message, Rimi vowed that the group would continue to take revenge on those responsible for the strike. Two weeks later, suicide bombers attacked a convoy of Spanish tourists in Marib, killing eight of them along with their two Yemeni drivers. In January 2008, they attacked a group of Belgian tourists.

In all, there were more than sixty documented Al Qaeda attacks on Yemeni soil by the end of the Bush administration. Over the years, US military aid and CIA financing has steadily increased. “When [Al Qaeda] starts creating problems in Yemen, the US money starts flowing,” asserts the former senior counterterrorism official. “For Saleh, Al Qaeda is the gift that keeps on giving. They are his number-one fundraiser.”

During the 2008 presidential campaign, John McCain and other Republicans attempted to portray Barack Obama as too caught up in the niceties of civil liberties and international law to deal with the threat of global terrorism. But in fact, from the first days of his administration, the president was hyper-focused on escalating the covert war against Al Qaeda and expanding it far beyond Bush-era levels, particularly in Yemen.

In April 2009 Gen. David Petraeus, then head of Centcom, approved a plan developed with the US Embassy in Sana, the CIA and other intelligence agencies to expand US military action in Yemen. The plan not only involved special-ops training for Yemeni forces but unilateral US strikes against AQAP. Though Petraeus paid lip service to the cooperation between the United States and Yemen, he was clear that the United States would strike whenever it pleased. In fact, he issued a seven-page secret order authorizing small teams of US special-ops forces to conduct clandestine operations off the stated battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. It was marked “LIMDIS,” short for “limited distribution.” The directive, known as a Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force (JUWTF) Execute Order, served as a permission slip of sorts for special-ops teams.

Unlike covert actions undertaken by the C.I.A., such clandestine activity does not require the president’s approval or regular reports to Congress,” reported Mark Mazzetti of the New York Times, who was allowed to read the order.

The order spoke volumes about the continuity of foreign policy from the previous administration to the Obama White House. Under the Bush administration, the Pentagon regularly justified such actions with the mantra that the forces were not at war but rather “preparing the battlefield.” What was significant about Petraeus’s 2009 order was that it extended and solidified the Bush-era justification for expand-

ing covert wars under President Obama.

During a September 6, 2009, meeting with Brennan in Sana, Saleh opened the door wide for the United States, pledgeing “unfettered access to Yemen’s national territory for U.S. counterterrorism operations,” according to a classified US diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks. “Saleh insisted that Yemen’s national territory is available for unilateral CT [counterterrorism] operations by the U.S.”

The largest US military attack on Yemen in history, part of a covert program code-named Indigo Spade, soon followed. On December 17, 2009, JSOC launched surveillance aircraft to survey the intended targets. The operation kicked off at dawn, as a Tomahawk cruise missile was fired from a submarine positioned in the waters off the coast of Yemen. Armed with cluster munitions, it slammed into a group of houses and other dwellings in Al Majalah, a village in the southern province of Abyan. Meanwhile, another strike was launched in Arhab, a suburb of Sana, followed by raids on suspected Al Qaeda houses conducted by Yemeni special-ops troops who had been trained by JSOC forces as part of a special Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU). Authorization for the strikes was rushed through Saleh’s office because of “actionable” intelligence that Al Qaeda suicide bombers were preparing for strikes in Sana. The target in Arhab, according to intel reports, was an Al Qaeda house believed to be protecting a big fish: Qasim al-Rimi.

When word of the strikes got out, the Pentagon at first refused to comment, directing all inquiries to Yemen. Saleh’s government issued a statement taking credit for carrying out “simultaneous raids killing and detaining militants.” President Obama called Saleh reportedly to “congratulate” him and to “thank him for his cooperation and pledge continuing American support.” But as images of the Abyan strike emerged, some military analysts questioned whether Yemen had the type of weapons that were used. Among those found at the scene were BLU 97 A/B cluster bomblets, which explode into some 200 sharp steel fragments that can spray more than 400 feet away. In essence, they are flying land mines capable of shredding human beings into small pieces. The bomblets were equipped with an incendiary material, burning zirconium, to set fire to flammable objects in the target area. The missile used in the attack, a BGM-109D Tomahawk, can carry more than 160 cluster bombs. None of these munitions were in Yemen’s arsenal.

As outrage spread across Yemen, fueled largely by the assumption that it was a US bombing, the Yemeni Parliament dispatched a delegation to investigate. When the delegates arrived in the village, they “found that all the homes and their contents were burnt and all that was left were traces of furniture” along with “traces of blood of the victims and a number of holes in the ground left by the bombing...as well as a number of unexploded bombs,” according to their report. The investigation determined that the strike had killed forty-one members of two families, including seventeen women and twenty-one children. Some of the dead were sleeping when the missiles hit. Rimi was not among the dead, and survivors said they had no connection to Al Qaeda. The Saleh government insisted that fourteen Al Qaeda operatives had been killed, but the Yemeni investigators said the government could
NOBODY OWNS THE NATION.

Not GE (or Comcast). Not Disney. Not Murdoch or Time Warner. We are a wholly owned subsidiary of our own conscience.

This independence is why great writers have always used The Nation as an Early Warning System—to expose before it’s too late the frauds, felonies and follies of the all-too-private enterprise we call Our Government.

And it’s why week in, week out we’re read by an audience as illustrious as our authors.

If you believe, as our readers do, that the highest form of patriotism is demanding to know exactly what Government’s doing in your name, why not sign on today at this very low rate? You can save a lot—not least of which could be your country.

THAT’S WHY SO MANY SOME BodIES READ IT.

Walter Mosley is a longstanding Nation reader.

SUBSCRIBE NOW
WWW.THENATION.COM/TRIAL-RATE
800-333-8536

(Legally speaking, of course, everything has an owner, but as a Nation editor once wrote, “it is one of the superb facts about The Nation that you can no more ‘own’ it than you can own the spirit it represents.”)
provide them with only one name. Four days later, three more civilians were killed when they stepped on unexploded cluster bombs. After the strike, a senior Yemeni official told the New York Times, “the involvement of the United States creates sympathy for Al Qaeda. The cooperation is necessary—but there is no doubt that it has an effect for the common man. He sympathizes with Al Qaeda.”

According to documents made available by WikiLeaks, Stephen Seche, the US ambassador to Yemen, sent a cable to Washington on December 21. Referring to the strikes, it said the Yemeni government “appears not overly concerned about unauthorized leaks regarding the U.S. role and negative media attention to civilian deaths.” The cable said that Deputy Prime Minister Rashad al-Alimi told Seche that “any evidence of greater U.S. involvement such as fragments of U.S. munitions found at the sites—could be explained away as equipment purchased from the U.S.” Yemen, according to the cable, “must think seriously about its public posture and whether its strict adherence to assertions that the strikes were unilateral will undermine public support for legitimate and urgently needed CT operations, should evidence to the contrary surface.”

A week after the Abyan airstrike and the ground raids near Sana, President Obama signed off on another hit, based in part on information provided by a prisoner taken in the Arhab raid. This time the target was a US citizen: Anwar al-Awlaki. On December 24, US forces carried out an airstrike in the Rafdl mountain valley in Shabwa province, Awlaki’s ancestral homeland. US and Yemeni intelligence indicated that Awlaki was meeting with some of his cohorts there, including Wuhayshi, bin Laden’s former secretary, and AQAP leader Saeed al-Shihri. Yemeni officials charged that the men were “planning an attack on Yemeni and foreign oil targets.”

The attacks killed thirty people, and media outlets began reporting that Awlaki and the two Al Qaeda figures were among them. But CBS News interviewed a source in Yemen who said that not only was Awlaki still alive but the attacks were “far from his house and he had nothing to do with those killed.” In the coming months clear evidence that Awlaki, Wuhayshi and Shihri were not killed in the attack would emerge, as each of them appeared in video or audio messages.

The administration’s focus on AQAP grew more intense after it was revealed that the “underwear bomber,” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab—who allegedly tried to bring down Northwest Airlines Flight 253 over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009—had trained in Yemen. In early 2010, the Obama administration canceled the scheduled repatriation of more than thirty Yemenis held at Guantanamo who had been cleared for release, citing the “unsettled situation” in the country. Yemenis constituted the single largest bloc of prisoners held there.

Meanwhile, the administration continued to downplay the US role in Yemen, with officials publicly repeating a version of the same line: the United States is only providing support to Yemen’s counterterrorism operations. “People ask me—the question comes up, Are we sending troops into Yemen?” Adm. Mike Mullen, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a lecture at the Naval War College on January 8. “And the answer is, We have no plans to do that, and we shouldn’t forget this is a sovereign country.” Those comments were echoed two days later by the president himself. Obama said bluntly, “I have no intention of sending US boots on the ground” into Yemen.

Despite the official denials, a State Department Inspector General’s on-the-ground review of the US Embassy in Sana found that “steadily growing military elements based at the embassy” were part of an expanding “U.S. military footprint” in Yemen. By late January 2010, JSOC had been involved with more than two dozen ground raids in Yemen, which kicked off with the December 17 strikes. Scores of people were killed in the campaign, while others were taken prisoner. At the same time, JSOC began operating drones in the country as the covert war expanded. What started as a day of coordinated strikes was turning into a sustained targeted killing campaign coordinated by JSOC. “After the December thing with Abdulmutallab, [Saleh] had to kind of show more support for our actions,” recalls Nakhleh, the former senior CIA officer. “He would play the game—he would kind of look the other way when we would do certain kinds of military operations, kinetic operations against some radical groups there. When he was put under pressure, he would say it was his own operations. He played the game.”

While US military and intelligence agencies began plotting more strikes in Yemen, General Petraeus traveled there on January 2 for another round of meetings with Saleh and his top military and intelligence officers. He kicked off the meeting by informing Saleh that the United States would be more than doubling “security assistance” to Yemen, to more than $150 million in 2010, including a proposed $45 million to train and equip Yemen’s CTU forces for aerial warfare against AQAP. According to a classified diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks, Saleh asked Petraeus for twelve attack helicopters, saying that if the US “bureaucracy” held up the transfer of the choppers, Petraeus could strike a backdoor deal with the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates to effectively launder the transfers. Petraeus told Saleh he had already discussed such an arrangement with the Saudis.

Saleh authorized the United States to strike AQAP when “actionable intelligence” was available, but officially he did not want US forces conducting operations on the ground in Yemen. “You cannot enter the operations area and you must stay in the joint operations center,” Saleh said, according to the cable. But everyone at the meeting knew it was a collective lie they would all promote. While praising the December strikes, Saleh lamented the use of cruise missiles, according to the cable, because they are “not very accurate.” In the meeting, Petraeus claimed that “the only civilians killed were the wife and two children of an AQAP operative at the site,” which was blatantly false. Saleh told Petraeus he preferred “precision-guided bombs” fired from fixed-wing aircraft. “We’ll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours,” Saleh said. Deputy Prime Minister Alimi then joked that he had just “lied” by telling the Yemeni Parliament that the bombs in Arhab, Abyan and Shabwa were US-made but deployed by Yemen.

Shortly after that meeting, Alimi told reporters in Yemen,
The operations that have been taken are 100 percent Yemeni forces. The Yemeni security apparatus has taken support, information and technology from “the US and Saudi Arabia and other friendly countries.” But most Yemenis were not buying the story. Ahmed al-Aswadi, a leader of the opposition al-Islah Party, said “it is believed by most Yemenis” that the recent strikes were “carried out by US forces.”

While JSOC forces continued to operate in Yemen, training Yemeni forces and conducting “kinetic” actions, the airstrikes proceeded. On May 25, 2010, a US missile struck a convoy of vehicles in the Marib desert that “actionable intelligence” had concluded was heading to a meeting of Al Qaeda operatives. The intelligence was partly correct, but the men in the vehicle were not Al Qaeda members. Among those killed was Jaber al-Shabwani, the deputy governor of Marib province, who was a top mediator in the government effort to demilitarize members of AQAP. Shabwani was in a key position to negotiate, given that his brother, Ayad, was the local AQAP leader US and Yemeni forces had tried to take out in the January 15 and 20 strikes. Shabwani’s uncle and two of his escorts were also killed in the attack, which took place near an orange grove on Ayad’s farm. As with the other strikes, the Yemeni authorities took public responsibility and the Supreme Security Committee apologized for what it said was a raid gone wrong.

But this hit came with much higher stakes because the attack killed one of their own people. Within hours of the attack, Shabwani’s tribe attacked the main oil pipeline running from Marib to the Ras Isa terminal on the Red Sea coast. The tribesmen also attempted to take over the presidential palace in the province but were repelled by Yemeni army forces and tanks. Yemeni lawmakers demanded that Saleh’s government explain how the strike happened and who was really behind the widening aerial war.

What cannot be disputed is that the strikes, especially those that killed civilians and important tribal figures, were giving valuable ammunition to Al Qaeda for its recruitment campaign in Yemen and its propaganda battle to destabilize the US-Yemen counterterrorism alliance. Yemeni government officials said the series of strikes from December to May had killed more than 200 people, only forty of whom were affiliated with Al Qaeda. “It is incredibly dangerous, what the US is trying to do in Yemen at the moment, because it really fits into AQAP’s broader strategy, in which it says Yemen is not different from Iraq and Afghanistan,” asserted Princeton University’s Gregory Johnsen in June 2010, after Amnesty International released a report documenting the use of US munitions in the Yemen strikes. “They are able to make the argument that Yemen is a legitimate front for jihad,” said Johnsen, who in 2009 served as a member of USAID’s conflict assessment team for Yemen.

In the summer of 2010, after months of sustained US and Yemeni airstrikes and raids, AQAP hit back. In June a group of AQAP operatives carried out a bold raid on the Aden division of Yemen’s secret police, the Political Security Organization. During an early-morning flag ceremony at the PSO compound, the operatives opened fire with automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades as they stormed the gates. They gunned down at least ten security officers and three cleaning women. The purpose of the raid was to free suspected militants being held by the PSO, and it was successful. That raid was followed by a sustained assassination campaign aimed at bumping off high-level Yemeni military and intelligence officials. During Ramadan, which began in August, AQAP launched a dozen attacks. By September as many as sixty officials had been killed, with a substantial number shot dead by assassins on motorcycles. This method of attack became so common that the government banned motorcycles in urban areas in Abyan.

Then a plan to attack a US target unfolded that would come to be known as the “parcel bomb” plot. On October 29, Americans watched as breaking news coverage showed US warplanes escorting Emirates Flight 201 to an emergency landing at JFK Airport. Images were broadcast of other planes being swept at Philadelphia and Newark airports. That night, Obama said that explosives on the planes had posed a “credible terrorist threat.” None of the bombs detonated. But once the Yemen connection was clear—the explosive material, concealed in printer cartridges, had been shipped from Yemen—there was no debate within the administration: all eyes focused on AQAP.

Foust, the former DIA analyst, characterizes Obama’s response like this: “He immediately sent drones and special operations guys to Yemen. It was immediately, Let’s send JSOC. Send in the ninjas, is what he does.” Without providing details, which he says are classified, Foust asserts that he has seen targeted killing operations conducted that he believes were warranted, and he does not believe such strikes are “theoretically a bad thing.” He was deeply concerned, however, about the standards that were being used to determine who would be targeted. “Frankly, most of the time when I was working on Yemen was spent arguing” with Special Operations Command-Yemen and other DIA analysts “about evidentiary standards,” he recalls. “The evidentiary standard for actually killing people off, to me, is frighteningly low.”

The popular uprising against the Yemeni regime this past winter sent the US counterterrorism community scrambling to develop contingency plans. Saleh’s fall “offers an opportunity for the Yemeni people to build a more modern state,” says Nakhleh. At the same time, it “creates a challenge for the United States as Washington contin-
ues its counterterrorism policy against Al Qaeda and its franchise group in Yemen, AQAP.”

“It is something that we spend a lot of time working on. I know I lose a little sleep at night thinking about this particular problem,” Michigan Republican Mike Rogers, chair of the House Intelligence Committee, said recently. According to Foust, plans are being made to move the center of counterterrorism operations to Djibouti, the current hub of US operations against Libya, “if relations with the next [Yemeni] government don’t work out.” But, he says, of more concern is “what happens to the [US] training mission, as well as the [intelligence] collection programs in place—no one knows if or how those would be affected by a new government. We don’t have good ties with the opposition movement, which is itself chaotic and will probably begin infighting soon anyway, so it’s tough to call how they’ll react.” Saleh’s fall “could certainly have a negative impact on US CT operations in Yemen,” says Johnson, adding, “I’m particularly worried that AQAP is gaining weapons and money in some parts of the country as the military begins to break down in outlying areas.”

Yemen “has a number of more pressing problems that will, if left unchecked, all help AQAP gain strength in the coming years,” Johnson cautions. “In Yemen, there is no magic missile solution to the problem of AQAP. The US simply can’t bomb them out of existence. That has been tried before in Yemen and failed.”

There is no doubt that when President Obama took office, Al Qaeda had resurrected its shop in Yemen. But how big a threat AQAP actually posed to the United States or Saleh is the subject of much debate. What was almost entirely undisussed was whether US actions—the targeted killings, the Tomahawk and drone strikes—caused blowback and whether some of AQAP’s attacks were motivated by the undeclared war the United States was fighting in Yemen. “We are not generating good will in these operations,” says Nakhleh. “We might target radicals and potential radicals, but unfortunately in a crisis other things and other people are being destroyed or killed. So in the long run it is not necessarily going to help. To me the bigger issue is the whole issue of radicalization. How do we pull the rug from under it?”

It was the Bush administration that declared the world a battlefield where any country would be fair game for targeted killings. But it was President Obama, with Yemen as the laboratory, who put a bipartisan stamp on this paradigm—which will almost certainly endure well beyond his time in office. “The global war on terror has acquired a life of its own,” says Colonel Lang. “It’s a self-licking ice cream cone. And the fact that this counterterrorism/counterinsurgency industry evolved into this kind of thing, involving all these people—the foundations and the journalists and the book writers and the generals and the guys doing the shooting—all of that together has a great, tremendous amount of inertia that tends to keep it going in the same direction.” He adds, “It continues to roll. It will take a conscious decision on the part of civilian policymakers, somebody like the president, for example, to decide that, ‘OK, boys, the show’s over.’” But Obama, he says, is far from deciding the show’s over. “It seems that this is going to go on for a long time.”

---

**This Is What Journalism Looks Like**

On the streets of Wisconsin’s communities, the crowds chant, “This is what democracy looks like!” But democracy requires engaged, speak-truth-to-power reporting and writing. At *The Nation*, we say, “This is what journalism looks like!”

— John Nichols

April is Membership Month at *The Nation*. Help us meet our goal of 2,000 new Nation Associates by April 30

Find out why *The Nation* is reader—and writer—supported journalism.

Visit donate.thenation.com/2011 to learn more.

“For a progressive political nerd like me, being asked to write a column for *The Nation* was equivalent to being drafted by the NBA (although admittedly with a much smaller salary).”

— Melissa Harris-Perry

“There are very few media outlets that allow their writers the freedom to go beyond the headlines and take on the powers that be—to ask inconvenient questions and pursue uncomfortable truths. *The Nation* is one of them.”

— Christopher Hayes

---

*The Nation.*
Obama’s Enforcer

Re-election campaign manager Jim Messina has alienated grassroots constituencies.

by ARI BERMAN

in March 2009 the Campaign for America’s Future, a top progressive group in Washington, launched a campaign called “Dog The (Blue) Dogs” to pressure conservative Blue Dog Democrats to support President Obama’s budget. When he heard about the effort, White House deputy chief of staff Jim Messina, who was regarded as the Obama administration’s designated “fixer,” called CAF’s leaders into the White House for a dressing down, according to a CAF official. If the group wanted to join the Common Purpose Project, an exclusive weekly strategy meeting between progressive groups and administration officials, CAF had to drop the campaign. We know how to handle the Blue Dogs better than you do, Messina said. Not wanting to sour its relationship with the White House at this early date, CAF complied, and the campaign quickly disappeared from its website. Despite Messina’s assurance, however, the Blue Dogs would remain a major obstacle to the realization of the president’s legislative agenda.

The hardball tactics used by Messina against CAF exemplified how the Obama administration would operate going forward—insistent on demanding total control, hostile to any public pressure from progressives on dissident Democrats or administration allies, committed to working the system inside Washington rather than changing it. As deputy chief of staff, Messina held the same position once occupied by Karl Rove (and Josh Lyman on The West Wing). He worked as a top lieutenant for Rahm Emanuel and became the administration’s lead enforcer after Emanuel left for Chicago. White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer calls Messina “the most powerful person in Washington that you haven’t heard of.” Messina’s dream job was to become chief of staff. Instead, he recently got an arguably more important assignment—manager of Obama’s re-election campaign.

Messina, a longtime aide to Montana Senator Max Baucus, entered Obamaworld in June 2008 as the campaign’s chief of staff. He had impressed Democrats by leading the effort in the Senate to oppose the Bush administration’s push to privatize Social Security and quickly won the trust of campaign manager David Plouffe, who put Messina in charge of day-to-day operations. "I spend the money, so everything’s gotta go through me to get spent, which is the best job ever," Messina told The New Yorker. “It’s like getting the keys to a fucking Ferrari.” (Messina has been spotted driving a black Porsche convertible in Washington.)

Unlike Plouffe, who became a revered figure among Obama supporters, Messina begins the re-election campaign with a significant amount of baggage. As a former chief of staff to Baucus and deputy to Emanuel, Messina has clashed with progressive activists and grassroots Obama supporters both inside and outside Washington over political strategy and on issues like healthcare reform and gay rights, alienating parts of the very constituencies that worked so hard for Obama in 2008 and that the campaign needs to reinspire and activate in 2012. Obama’s fixer has arguably created as many problems as he’s solved. “He is not of the Obama movement,” says one top Democratic strategist in Washington. “There is not a bone in his body that speaks to or comprehends the idea of a movement and that grassroots energy. To me, that’s bothersome.”

Messina’s allies say he’s a savvy, experienced operative who played a key role in the passage of Obama’s legislative agenda, and is well prepared to lead a tough campaign for the president. “Jim was tasked with bringing together various parts of the progressive community to unite behind the president’s historic agenda—affordable, accessible healthcare for all Americans, repealing ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ and ending the war in Iraq, among other priorities,” says Hari Sevugan, a Democratic Party spokesman. “Despite their differences, he rallied that coalition behind the president’s agenda and played a critical role in making those common goals a reality. It’s exactly this ability to get things done, along with his deep relationships with grassroots leaders, activists and members of Congress, which will make Jim a strong leader for the president’s re-election effort.” But other Democrats interviewed for this article, who have dealt with Messina in the past, questioned whether he’s the right man for the job, and what his elevation says about
the kind of re-election campaign Obama plans to run. (Some declined to speak on the record for fear of retribution.)

Under Messina, Obama ’12 could more closely resemble the electoral strategy of Baucus or Bill and Hillary Clinton—cautious, controlling, top-down in structure and devoted to small-bore issues that blur differences between the parties—than Obama ’08, a grassroots effort on a scale modern politics had never seen. “It was a major harbinger to me, when Obama hired him, that we were not going to get ‘change we can believe in,’” says Ken Toole, a former Democratic state senator and public service commissioner in Montana. “Messina has a lot of talents, but he’s extremely conservative in his views on how to do politics. He’s got a tried-and-true triangulation methodology, and that’s never gonna change.” The Democratic National Committee declined to make Messina available for an interview.

At the beginning of the healthcare debate in 2009, many Democrats were justifiably concerned about the role that Baucus, chair of the powerful Finance Committee, would play in shepherding the Obama administration’s domestic policy priority through the Senate. Baucus had brokered the passage of George W. Bush’s 2001 tax cuts and 2003 Medicare prescription drug plan, and had spent the better part of the Bush presidency cutting deals with Republicans and infuriating fellow Democrats. Other transgressions included voting for the war in Iraq, the energy bill, the bankruptcy bill and to confirm Supreme Court Justice John Roberts. Among Senate Democrats, only Nebraska’s Ben Nelson had a more conservative voting record on economic issues than Baucus. Moreover, Baucus accepted the most special-interest money of any senator between 1999 and 2005, and had at least two dozen staffers working as lobbyists on K Street, including for healthcare companies adamantly opposed to reform.

Despite these obvious warning signs, Messina emerged as the leading advocate for his old boss during the healthcare debate and the top administration conduit to his office. “He is perfectly positioned to do this,” Messina told the New York Times in June 2009. Messina told the Washington Post he regarded Baucus as a father figure. “Messina will freely tell you that everything he knows, he learned from Baucus,” says Eric Feaver, president of the Montana teachers union.

The administration gave Baucus and his handpicked “gang of six” senators nearly unlimited time to secretly craft a bill, which proved to be one of its most glaring strategic missteps during the healthcare debate. “Some of the difficulty that healthcare is in today is Max’s fault,” says former Montana Democratic Congressman Pat Williams. “He took too long, he tried to satisfy too many—including people that were going to vote against it from the outset—and he gave the opposition time to regroup. That was a bad political decision on his part, and many people out here believe, rightly or wrongly, that Messina was part of that foot-dragging and vacillation.”

The administration deputized Messina as the top liaison to the Common Purpose Project. The coveted invite-only, off-the-record Tuesday meetings at the Capitol Hilton became the pre-mier forum where the administration briefed leading progressive groups, including organizations like the AFL-CIO, MoveOn, Planned Parenthood and the Center for American Progress, on its legislative and political strategy. Theoretically, the meetings were supposed to provide a candid back-and-forth between outside groups and administration officials, but Messina tightly controlled the discussions and dictated the terms of debate (Jane Hamsher of Firedoglake memorably dubbed this the “veal pen”). “Common Purpose didn’t make a move without talking to Jim,” says one progressive strategist. During the healthcare fight, Messina used his influence to try to stifle any criticism of Baucus or lobbying by progressive groups that was out of sync with the administration’s agenda, according to Common Purpose participants. “Messina wouldn’t tolerate us trying to lobby to improve the bill,” says Richard Kirsch, former national campaign manager for Health Care for America Now (HCAN), the major coalition of progressive groups backing reform. Kirsch recalled being told by a White House insider that when asked what the administration’s “inside/outside strategy” was for passing health-care reform, Messina replied, “There is no outside strategy.”

The inside strategy pursued by Messina, relying on industry lobbyists and senior legislators to advance the bill, was

“They cared more about their relationship with the healthcare industry than anyone else. It was shocking to see.” —former HCAN staffer

directly counter to the promise of the 2008 Obama campaign, which talked endlessly about mobilizing grassroots support to bring fundamental change to Washington. But that wasn’t Messina’s style—instead, he spearheaded the administration’s deals with doctors, hospitals and drug companies, particularly the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), one of the most egregious aspects of the bill. “They cared more about their relationship with the healthcare industry than anyone else,” says one former HCAN staffer. “It was shocking to see. To me, that was the scariest part of it, because this White House had ridden in on a white horse and said, ‘We’re not going to do this anymore.’” When they were negotiating special deals with industry, Messina and Baucus chief of staff Jon Selib were also pushing major healthcare companies and trade associations to pour millions of dollars into TV ads defending the bill. (Messina did have allies in the progressive community. Jon Youndahl, chief of staff at the SEIU, praised him for the “ability to pull together progressives with diverse points of view” on healthcare, while Democratic strategist Robert Creamer noted that “Messina’s mission was to get something passed.”)

Messina was adamant about shielding Baucus from any public pressure, whether it be concerns over the absence of a public option in the Finance Committee bill or his fruitless negotiations with GOP senators, Kirsch says. “The aggressive suppression of outside pressure was done by Messina,” he adds. “I can’t imagine that the president knew about it.” Messina and his allies tried to stop HCAN from sending a letter to senators
expressing displeasure with Baucus’s bill and also tried to prevent the group from running a TV ad praising the House version of the bill. HCAN’s organizer in Montana, Molly Moody, was banned from Baucus’s office and prevented from attending his public events. (Baucus’s office did not reply to a request for comment.) “This is something Messina did in Montana—any group that did any outside pressure on Baucus was iced out,” says Kirsch. “He did the same thing with HCAN in the White House.” When he worked for Baucus, Messina even kept a list of his political enemies on an Excel spreadsheet. “Ultra-paranoid behavior is very much a hallmark of Messina,” says Ken Toole.

The administration’s aversion to popular mobilization on behalf of healthcare reform, either by progressive groups or the Obama-aligned Organizing for America (OFA), backfired spectacularly when Tea Party activists organized against the bill in the summer of 2009, catching Democrats off guard. Ever since then, the White House, despite the bill’s eventual passage, has largely been playing defense on healthcare. Says one Democratic operative of Messina: “I hope he’s better at political campaigns than at managing big, important pieces of legislation.”

Gay rights was another major issue on which Messina clashed with Obama supporters. The relationship between the administration and gay rights groups was strained from the outset, when Obama chose Rick Warren to deliver his inaugural invocation. “It is difficult to comprehend how our president-elect, who has been so spot-on in nearly every political move and gesture, could fail to grasp the symbolism of inviting an anti-gay theologian to deliver his inaugural invocation,” wrote Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), in the Washington Post.

After reading the op-ed, Messina sternly rebuked Solmonese during a meeting at the White House. “I’m never going back to another meeting like that again,” Solmonese angrily told his staff afterward. From then on, HRC, to the consternation of other gay rights groups, toed the administration line.

With Messina as a top liaison to the gay rights community, the White House was reluctant to make repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT) a key legislative priority. “The White House, under Rahm and Messina, suffered from political homophobia,” says Joe Sudbay, who writes about gay rights issues for AMERICAblog. “They’re not homophobes in the traditional sense of the word, but they think it’s dangerous to do gay issues in politics.” Groups that questioned Messina’s strategy, such as the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, were frozen out of key White House meetings. “I felt like he was constantly angry with those of us who would not fall in line,” says Alex Nicholson, executive director of Servicemembers United (no relation to SLDN).

The president reiterated his commitment to repealing DADT in his second State of the Union address, in January 2010. But a few days later, in a meeting with gay rights groups, Messina spoke of the difficulty of ending DADT in the midst of two wars, a remark many of the activists in the room found offensive. The Pentagon needed time to survey the troops on the impact of repeal, Messina said, which wouldn’t be done until December. That meant there likely wouldn’t be a vote on repealing DADT until 2011, even though the Democratic Congress of 2009-10 presented the best opportunity to repeal the law. “People on the Hill kept saying, ‘The White House doesn’t have a strategy’ right up through the lame duck session,” Sudbay says.

On November 16 gay rights activists picketed the Common Purpose meeting and shouted at Messina as he entered, “What’s your plan?” It was only after the administration’s tax cut deal with Congressional Republicans enraged liberal Democrats that repealing DADT became a last-minute priority for the White House, which badly needed a legislative victory to soothe its progressive base. “It was a Hail Mary pass with ten seconds to go in the fourth quarter,” says Brad Luna, a leading gay rights activist who runs a progressive-oriented PR firm. Sudbay says the DADT repeal passed “in spite of Messina,” and Luna agrees. “At the end of the day I’d definitely label him an impediment,” Luna says. “He was not falling on a sword to get DADT passed.”

Solmonese offered a different perspective, calling Messina “unquestionably one of the great unsung heroes of DADT repeal.” The two stood side by side on the Senate floor as the bill cleared the body on December 18. When the sixtieth vote came in, Solmonese said, Messina began to cry. After it was all over, Messina touted repeal as a major victory for the administration and an example of Obama’s commitment to his base.

Messina grew up in Boise, Idaho, became active in politics at the University of Montana and cut his teeth as an organizer for Montana People’s Action, helping disenfranchised trailer park residents in Missoula. Like Obama, he refers to himself as a community organizer at heart. When Messina started working for Democrats in the Montana legislature, “he was a flaming liberal,” remembers Gene Fenderson, a veteran state labor organizer. But when he took a job with Baucus in 1995, Messina shed his liberal roots. “He changed philosophies in a nanosecond,” Fenderson says. Messina became fiercely loyal to Baucus and wasn’t shy about doing his boss’s dirty work. “Jim is one of those campaign workers who reflects his boss,” says Pat Williams. “Max does not easily suffer dissent, and Jim saw himself as Max’s enforcer.”

In 1999 Messina became chief of staff to New York Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy but returned to manage Baucus’s re-election campaign in 2002. The campaign became infamous when the Montana Democratic Party ran an ad showing his GOP opponent, Mike Taylor, a former hairdresser, fondling the hair and face of a male client while wearing a ‘70s-style leisure suit. Taylor dropped out days after the ad aired, accusing the Baucus campaign of “character assassination and personal destruction.” Gay rights groups condemned the ad as antigay, but it greatly enhanced Messina’s...
reputation as a top Democratic operative. “He touted the ad as the way to do politics in the West,” said Toole.

Baucus easily won re-election that year. Not long after, Messina visited Montana Democratic Party chair Bob Ream and demanded that he fire his executive director, Brad Martin. The Baucus camp regarded the state party as too grassroots and insufficiently loyal to Baucus. Ream resisted and his executive board unanimously recommended that Martin be retained. Then Baucus insisted that Ream resign. He refused. When Ream ran for re-election in 2004, Messina tried to find somebody to run against him, but could not.

These kinds of interventions earned Messina a mixed record back home. Baucus’s crew, colloquially known as the Montana mafia, loved him, but other Democrats did not. Those who know Messina say that, his politics aside, he can be funny, charming and generous, but also temperamental, vindictive and controlling. “People either like Jim or they don’t,” says Pat Williams. “I know a number of people who do not like him, which is unusual for political apparatchiks. The people who don’t like Jim seriously don’t like him. I have found none of those faults with Jim personally, but the truth is, they’re out there.” To this day, however, many of his critics shy away from publicly criticizing him. “If you want to have a future in Montana politics, you don’t criticize Jim Messina,” says James Anacker, a former field rep for Baucus. “That would be career suicide. People are afraid of him, to tell you the truth.”

Messina has become a controversial fixer for Obama as well. He generated bad press for the administration by offering a job to Colorado Democratic Senate primary candidate Andrew Romanoff when the administration was trying to get him not to run against incumbent Michael Bennet in 2010. Messina also reportedly praised the administration’s firing of Agriculture Department official Shirley Sherrod after a tape surfaced of her allegedly discriminating against a white farmer, even though Secretary Tom Vilsack had dismissed her before learning that right-wing blogger Andrew Breitbart had doctored the footage. “We could have waited all day—we could have had a media circus—but we took decisive action, and it’s a good example of how to respond in this atmosphere,” Politico reported, quoting a source who paraphrased Messina’s remarks. That “decisive action,” however, unfairly cost Sherrod her job. The administration later apologized and offered her the post back. It was one of a string of embarrassments for Obama’s political team.

Messina has spent his early days as campaign manager meeting with wealthy Obama megadonors on a “listening tour.” He has assiduously cultivated these relationships in his career, previously serving as Baucus’s top liaison to Wall Street and organizing lavish fundraising junkets in Montana. Baucus kicked off his 2008 re-election campaign by bluntly asking fifty lobbyists to raise $100,000 each. The Obama campaign hopes Messina’s connections will come in handy as it tries to amass a $1 billion war chest for 2012; Messina has already asked Obama’s finance committee to raise $350 million by the end of this year. But early indicators signal that Messina’s task won’t be so easy this time around. Corporate America no longer regards Obama as an ally, while many donors from 2008 are disillusioned with the administration’s legislative compromises and political timidity.

After the 2010 election, Messina spoke at the winter meeting of the Democracy Alliance, a group of wealthy progressive funders. He gave two PowerPoint presentations, including one on the administration’s accomplishments—the stimulus, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, healthcare and financial reform. The other was on what was still to come—immigration reform, the START treaty, repealing DADT. “Jim, you’re missing a word,” one donor told him during the Q&A.

“What word?” Messina responded.

“The word ‘jobs,’” the donor said.

“Messina got a lot of tough questions from people who used to love him,” says one person who was in the audience. “It was like a room of scorned lovers.”

Even as Messina jet-sets around the country, huddling with big donors, will the campaign cultivate the small donors and grassroots activists who powered and shaped the ’08 Obama campaign? On February 1 Politico’s Mike Allen reported that

‘Given how inept the White House was...why on earth would you want to move those people over to the campaign?’—former Obama official

Obamas political operation is quietly using the afterglow of his State of the Union address to begin activating grassroots supporters as the start of a continuous wave of engagement that will culminate when he stands for reelection on Nov. 6, 2012.” As part of the effort, OFA offered T-shirts to activists featuring a tag line from Obama’s speech: “We do big things.” The article provided a revealing glimpse into the campaign’s early strategy for 2012—woo wealthy donors and sell T-shirts to the masses.

The re-election campaign, at least at this stage, resembles an Obama administration reunion. Messina’s deputies will be Jennifer O’Malley Dillon, the DNC’s former executive director, and Julianna Smoot, the ex-White House social secretary. Mitch Stewart and Jeremy Bird, the heads of OFA, will oversee field operations. The new-media team, such a big part of the ’08 campaign’s success, has yet to come together. So far the campaign seems content to rely on old hands rather than bring in new blood, which some Democrats see as a mistake. “There’s been some grumbling that, frankly, given how inept the White House was politically in the first half of the Obama presidency, why on earth would you want to move those people over to the campaign?” says a former top Obama campaign official.

In certain ways, it’s easier to start a campaign as a blank slate. In 2007 Plouffe was not a particularly unconventional thinker, but because he was facing the Clintons, the Obama campaign wisely decided to experiment with innovation and cede some control to grassroots supporters, integrating bottom-up politics into the strategy of the campaign’s upper brass. Obama’s advisors knew that if they simply ran a second-rate version of the Clinton campaign, they would lose. But now that Obama is the establish-
On March 13, forty-eight hours after Japan’s Tohoku region was rocked by a catastrophic earthquake, a ferocious tsunami and partial meltdowns at several nuclear power plants in Fukushima, Prime Minister Naoto Kan asked his citizens to unite in the face of “the toughest crisis in Japan’s sixty-five years of postwar history.” Emperor Akihito underscored the gravity of the situation by announcing his “deep concern” for the nation in his first public speech since ascending the throne in 1990. His address brought back sharp memories of his father, Emperor Hirohito, who ended World War II in a famous radio address in August 1945 that asked Japan to “endure the unendurable.”

But even as Japan was reeling from the disaster’s death toll—which is expected to surpass 20,000—and growing increasingly frightened by the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Company’s nuclear reactor complex, there was growing unease at the lack of straight information from both the government and Tepco, a utility with a troubled history of lies, cover-ups and obfuscation dating back to the late 1960s.

The information gap became an international issue on March 16, when US Nuclear Regulatory Commission chair Gregory Jaczko openly contradicted the Japanese government by declaring that water in one of Tepco’s reactors had boiled away, raising radiation in the area to “extremely high levels.” He recommended evacuation to any Americans within fifty miles of the site—nearly double the evacuation zone announced by the Japanese government (which immediately denied Jaczko’s assertions). The New York Times piled on the next day with a major article that pilloried the Kan government. “Never has postwar Japan needed strong, assertive leadership more—and never has its weak, rudderless system of governing been so clearly exposed,” the reporters declared.

To be sure, Tokyo’s response to the disaster has been erratic, and the paucity of information about Fukushima was one of the first complaints I heard about the situation from my friends in Japan. But much of the criticism poured on Japan has obscured the many ways its political system has shifted since a 2009 political earthquake, when the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was swept out of power for the first time in fifty years. The changes, particularly to people who remember the government’s pathetic response to the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, which killed nearly 6,500, have been striking.

Kan, who rose to fame as an opponent of Japan’s turgid bureaucracy, has been far more decisive. After a few days of delay and confusion—not surprising, given the magnitude 9.0 quake, the largest in Japanese history—his government moved swiftly on many fronts. Military relief helicopters and ships were dispatched to the worst-hit areas. A US Navy armada was welcomed to the coastal areas hit by the tsunami (although the ships have since moved far away to avoid fallout from the radiation). Foreign offers of resources, including medical and relief

Naoto Kan and the End of ‘Japan Inc.’

Criticism of the government’s response to the catastrophe has obscured major political changes.

by TIM SHORROCK

Japan Self-Defense Force members search for victims of the earthquake and tsunami in Miyako.

Tim Shorrock is a Washington-based journalist who grew up in Tokyo during the cold war. He has been blogging extensively about Japan and its nuclear industry at his website, timshorrock.com.
teams, were welcomed and teams dispatched within days. Kan’s spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano, has constantly been on the air, briefing reporters and the public (including on Twitter). Kan himself flew by helicopter to view the stricken reactors and took personal charge of the nuclear crisis.

As the situation at the reactors deteriorated and Tepco’s explanations became increasingly opaque, Kan quickly lost patience. “What the hell is going on?” he was overheard asking on the phone to Tepco after one frustrating briefing. On March 16 Kan shifted responsibility for the crisis from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and Tepco to Japan’s Self-Defense Forces. Tepco “has almost no sense of urgency whatsoever,” he complained. By this time, too, many Japanese had grown weary of the alarmist warnings of foreign governments and journalists. One group even posted an online “Wall of Shame” to document the “sensationalist, overly speculative, and just plain bad reporting” from foreign journalists.

That reporting, and the fact that so many media organizations had to fly journalists to Japan, underscores how much that country has disappeared from our political discourse since the early 1990s, when Japan’s economic juggernaut was halted by a financial and banking crisis that led to two decades of stagnation. At the same time, some of the US criticism of Kan seems to stem from nostalgia for the years when the LDP ruled supreme through a system in which—in the Times reporters’ words—“political leaders left much of the nation’s foreign policy to the United States and domestic affairs to powerful bureaucrats.”

That is extremely misleading. Beginning in the early 1950s, the LDP was financed heavily by the CIA as a bulwark against the once-powerful Japanese left, and successive LDP governments acted as a junior partner to the United States in the cold war. While Washington provided the weapons (and the soldiers) to fight communism, the Japanese elite provided military bases and profits by funneling economic aid and investments to US allies in South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere.

At home, the LDP and its corporate backers fought ferociously to suppress labor unions and civic groups that organized to protect workers, human rights and the environment. The end result was an LDP-created “Japan Inc.”—an undemocratic, corporatist state in which bureaucrats blessed and promoted nuclear power and other industries they were supposed to regulate, and then received lucrative jobs in those industries upon retirement—a system known as amakudari.

But during the ’90s the LDP-style of governing came crashing down. A key turning point—and the one that brought Naoto Kan to prominence—came in 1996 over a notorious scandal over tainted blood. The scandal began in the early ’80s, when the US government, warning that blood supplies were corrupted by HIV, licensed the production of heat-treated blood (which killed the virus) for use in transfusions. The Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare learned of the contamination problem as early as 1983 but publicly dismissed the threat to the public. As a result, hundreds of people, primarily hemophiliacs, received transfusions of unheated, corrupted blood; more than 500 died. The Japanese public later learned that the Health Ministry deliberately refused to license heated blood for several years, not out of health concerns but because it was available only from foreign companies (“To have licensed its use before domestic firms had set up production would have significantly affected market share,” the London Independent reported at the time). Worse, the ministry’s chief adviser on blood transfusions and HIV received large sums of money from Green Cross, one of the companies that supplied unheated blood. And, in a classic form of amakudari, Green Cross hired several former high-ranking ministry officials in senior positions while the tainted blood was still an issue.

These facts were unearthed in 1996 by Naoto Kan when he was minister of health and welfare in a brief coalition government of the LDP and several small parties. Outraged by the scandal, Kan forced ministry officials to release documents showing that they had allowed public use of HIV-tainted blood, and he publicly apologized to the victims. As a result, Kan became wildly popular and at one point was dubbed “the most honest man in Japanese politics.” I was working as a journal-

Japan’s prime minister, Naoto Kan, March 25

ist in Tokyo at the time and vividly recall how his embrace of accountability and sharp critique of the bureaucracy surprised and delighted the Japanese public.

But Kan, who became prime minister in June 2010, is also unusual because he isn’t part of a political dynasty. Unlike many Japanese politicians, he emerged from a middle-class family and (like President Obama) first made his mark as a civic activist for progressive causes. In 1997 he was elected to lead the Democratic Party, an amalgam of disillusioned LDP members, trade unionists and the remnants of the left-wing Social Democratic Party. As the party leader in 2003, he took on LDP Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for sending military forces to back up President Bush in Iraq, at one point calling Bush’s war “mass murder.”

Kan’s Democratic Party finally took control of Japan when it scored a landslide victory over the LDP in the August 2009 parliamentary elections. That contest was won by then-party leader Yukio Hatoyama, who campaigned on a plan to strike a line in foreign policy more independent of the United States. His first order of business was to scrap a 2006 agreement with the Bush administration to relocate Futenma, a US Marine Corps air base in Okinawa, to another site on the crowded island, and to send a large contingent of the Marines to Guam. By a wide majority, the people of Okinawa, home to about 75 percent of US bases in Japan, backed Hatoyama’s counterproposal to Washington, which involved
removing the Marine base from Japan altogether.

To the Pentagon, however, Hatoyama’s initiative was a non-starter. As soon as Obama took power, US officials launched a full-court press to dissuade Japan’s new ruling party from scrapping the 2006 agreement. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates argued relentlessly that the Marine presence in Okinawa (which has been continuously occupied by US forces since 1945) was critical, not only to Japan’s security but to US global strategy as well, and insisted it was particularly important in repelling threats from North Korea and China. Last May, Hatoyama gave in. He withdrew the proposal, reaffirmed the agreement with slight modifications and apologized to Okinawa for failing to remove the base. That cost him the leadership of his party and allowed Kan—who’d resigned as party leader in 2004—to take his place.

Kan has taken a softer line on the US bases, declaring that security agreements with the United States will remain a cornerstone of Japanese policy. But the difficulties of the US–Japan relationship were underscored a few days before the Tohoku earthquake when Kevin Maher, head of the State Department’s Japan desk, was quoted in a speech denouncing the people of Okinawa as “masters of manipulation and extortion”—apparently for their strong opposition to US bases. Maher was quickly removed from his post (he remains at State). But the incident is a sad illustration of America’s Big Brother approach to Japan and symbolizes a bilateral relationship that the late Chalmers Johnson once compared to the servile ties between the Soviet Union and East Germany. With the formerly compliant LDP out of power, US policy-makers are still trying to understand that they’re in a whole new ballgame.

But it’s unclear how Kan and his party will pull through. Just before the quake, Kan’s popularity had sunk to below 20 percent, largely as a result of a scandal involving illegal campaign donations from foreigners and stalled parliamentary negotiations over Japan’s budget; there had even been talk of new elections. In a poll published on March 27, however, Kan’s numbers rose to 28 percent, while a hefty 58 percent approved of his government’s handling of the disaster (but the same percentage disapproved of Kan’s handling of the nuclear crisis, and an astonishing 47 percent urged that atomic power plants be immediately abolished).

Meanwhile, the triple disaster continued to unfold as the smoldering reactors spewed high amounts of radioactivity into the environment and Japan began a rebuilding process that will continue for years. Despite the suffering, the Japanese press on, just as they did after World War II. A week after the earthquake and tsunami struck, my Japanese stepmother, Yasuko, who lived in Tokyo during the war, reminded me that her parents had met as Christian relief workers after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, which almost wiped Tokyo off the map. “If it wasn’t for that earthquake, I wouldn’t be here today,” she told me. “Out of darkness, you know, there’s always hope.”

---

**Letters**

(continued from page 2)

or will not create more openness: Micah Sifry’s “The End of Secrecy” and Chris Lehmann’s “An Accelerated Grimace.” I am closer to Lehmann’s view. The Internet, however ubiquitous and sophisticated, is a widget. It is people, not gadgets, who create a free society and the culture and institutions that go with it. Missing from the articles, as well as most discussions of the WikiLeaks disclosures, is the role of freedom of information laws. Strengthening these laws seems more likely to result in a greater level of government transparency in the long run than hacktivism.

Nick McNaughton

**Copy That**

GLEN RIDGE, N.J.  The Nation arrived and I looked, as always, to see if Stuart Klawans was in it. Yes!—reviewing Certified Copy [“A Signature Copy,” March 21]. I agreed with his analysis, especially that it’s “futile” to try to decide whether the two characters have just met or really go back. But unlike him, I didn’t like the film. I don’t think Kiarostami likes his two characters. I suspect he may not like his audience either.

I’ve seen several Kiarostami features; this is the only one that’s so cold. The others have puzzles too. But in the Koker trilogy and all the others I’ve seen, he is interested in and respectful of his characters. A partial exception is the cellphone guy in The Wind Will Carry Us—an interesting exception, because that guy is portrayed as Westernized, almost rootless, like the Western, cosmopolitan leads in Certified Copy. When I leave the theater after a Kiarostami film, even Taste of Cherry, I feel good. Not this time. It all seemed like a game, one I didn’t care about.

Steve Golin

**Klawans Replies**

NEW YORK CITY  Thanks to Steve Golin for such a thoughtful and kind dissent, and such a reassuring one. It seems he would have gone to see Certified Copy no matter what I wrote, so I won’t have to refund the price of his ticket.

He is definitely onto something when he compares William Shimell’s character here to the character of the so-called engineer in The Wind Will Carry Us. But I don’t know where in Kiarostami’s previous work we could find an analogue to Juliette Binoche in this movie. Only in Ten—and really, not even there—has Kiarostami put on film a woman who is so emphatically present. To me, his attitude to the character is not cold at all, and goes beyond mere like or dislike. He’s enthralled by this woman, with her continually shifting desires, dissatisfactions, hopes and hurts, her strangely opaque outpourings and amusingly transparent little lies.

That’s how I felt, anyway—and in saying it, I recognize that Golin and I may have an unbridgeable difference of sensibility here. So I’m grateful to him for registering another response, and also for giving me an opportunity to confess what I see as my biggest failure in writing about Certified Copy. I never mentioned that it’s often very funny.

Stuart Klawans

**Correction**

Ian Thomson’s “Scotland Yard” [March 28] made it appear that Haitian independence was declared in 1805. It was 1804.
David Bezmozgis published *Natasha* in 2004. Last year, on the strength of that book, *The New Yorker* named him one of the twenty best fiction writers under the age of 40. It’s hard to find fault with this decision. *Natasha* is brisk and lucid and poignant, a wonderful book—neither a collection of stories nor a traditionally plotted novel but a sequence of discrete episodes narrated by a Latvian-Jewish boy named Mark. It is both a coming-of-age story and an assimilation story—a story about becoming a Canadian-Jewish adult in an atmosphere of cultural and linguistic confusion—and its structure is what makes it so good. The book has a refined and essential quality, as if each episode were distilled from the material of a much longer narrative. Everything that happens in *Natasha* feels like a significant moment. To put it another way, there are no insignificant moments. There is nothing that Bezmozgis might as well have left out.

This is strange, even incomprehensible, given that the critical failure of his new novel, *The Free World*, is that it makes no distinction between significant and insignificant moments. It’s as dull as *Natasha* is sharp; baggy where its predecessor is tight as a drum; stuffed to bursting with things that he should have left out. How could this have happened, and why?

*The Free World* takes place in Rome, in 1978, where the Krasnansky family is waiting for a visa with thousands of other Soviet Jews. Samuil and Emma Krasnansky, the patriarch and matriarch, are in the care of their two sons, Karl and Alec, who are traveling with their families—Karl with his wife, Rosa, and their two sons; Alec with his wife, Polina. They have come from Latvia, and their vague hope is to emigrate to America or Canada. They aren’t sure which, and it hardly matters. Their ambition is the ambition of all emigrants: to leave a bad place in the hope that a new place, any new place, will be better.

But they aren’t going anywhere, because Samuil has failed his medical examination. This is fine with him: he wants to be an inconvenience. He is leaving the USSR because his sons’ desire to emigrate has disgraced him in the eyes of the party, but he remains true to the cause. He is an old Communist official, a Red Army veteran, and he is never going to change—in that sense, he is unfit in mind as well as body. He is what the family must leave behind.

This tension is what the book is about. The idea is a good one, even a very good one, but we can’t enjoy it. Bezmozgis is so anxious to explain who everyone is and how they’ve come to be where they are that...
the story never gets going. It’s as if he were preparing a testimonial whose authenticity he fears readers will doubt, so he must give a name and a history to characters who appear only once—who appear, in some cases, only to testify to the authenticity of another plot element. It’s all real, he seems to say, but don’t take my word for it: here’s a fellow who was really there!

Some readers may already be familiar with a few of these characters. The August 9, 2010, issue of The New Yorker featured a story by Bezmozgis called “The Train of Their Departure,” which is either a modified version of a subplot in The Free World or a short story subsequently dismembered for inclusion in the novel. We can’t know which, but it doesn’t matter. The story describes the circumstances under which Polina and Alec have come to be married, and the differences between the New Yorker version and the version that appears in the book provide an excellent lens through which to see the many things that have gone wrong in the novel.

The New Yorker version is engaging enough, even if its style can’t compare with anything in Natasha; but more important is that it’s competently paced. It starts in one place and ends in another, takes a reasonable amount of time to cover that distance and gives us some good scenes along the way. It is not complex or intricately plotted. It begins in the factory where Polina works—she is talking about Alec with a co-worker and she is already married. We expect to learn something about that marriage, and we do. The story moves back in time and describes Polina’s relationship with her first husband, Maxim. We learn how they meet, we read about their courtship and their sex life, we learn that Polina gets pregnant, and then we see her subjected to indignities in a public abortion clinic. Only after this do they decide to get married. Later Alec appears, performs his Charming Man routine and gets Polina pregnant again. The story ends after she has decided to have a second abortion, divorce Maxim, marry Alec and travel with him to the West.

The way Bezmozgis treats this story in The Free World is typical of the way he handles all of the novel’s larger plot elements. We enter the story on page nine, when Alec and Polina are on the train to Rome. The expression on Alec’s face reminds Polina of the conversation she had with her co-worker when she and Maxim were married. This is the conversation that begins the New Yorker version of the story, but here it comes as an interpolation or digression. Then we hear a little about Maxim, and we learn that he and Alec, presumably because they are different people, behave and think differently. But here the story is interrupted, and we don’t return to it for seventy-four pages—not until Polina, undergoing a medical examination in Rome, remembers that trip to the abortion clinic in Riga. Following this are several scenes in which Maxim behaves like a nice guy, and then the perplexing line: “Maxim had already talked seriously about marriage.” We haven’t been told—as we are told in the New Yorker version—that they are not already married, so we’re justified in feeling some confusion at this point. As if aware that an explanation is owed, Bezmozgis inserts the courtship sequence here, after the abortion that is its real climax. The chapter ends with the scene in which Polina gets pregnant by Alec, which is the scene that precedes the abortion in the New Yorker version. Twenty-four pages intervene before we learn that Polina and Maxim get married. Seventy-two pages after that, nearly 200 pages since the story was introduced, Alec’s role in all of this is clarified. On it goes. It takes the whole novel to tell the full story.

There are many problems here. Compare the beginning of the abortion scene in The New Yorker—“The punishment was administered by a taciturn doctor in a green-walled hospital clinic”—with the beginning of the same scene in the novel:

It was this antiseptic silence combined with the physical humiliation of being touched with such disdain that made Polina feel as if she were once again back in the green-walled hospital clinic.

The doctor there had been a woman.

There is no urgency in these lines. The scene is suggested, but not demanded, by some events in the narrative present, and then it’s crudely stapled to the end of a chapter where it doesn’t belong. Its plot elements have been incompetently rearranged with a view toward making its incorporation less jarring—the medical examination reminds Polina of the abortion ward, which inspires the recollection—but there is no reason the story must be inserted here, so there is also no reason Bezmozgis should brutalize it in an attempt to make it fit.

Then there’s the problem of tone. The New Yorker version is written in the simple past tense, which is so conventional that we hardly notice it. In The Free World, the story is always presented as backstory, so its temporal relationship to the narrative present must be re-established every time Bezmozgis returns.
to it. That means he has to render much of it in the past-perfect tense—"I had said," rather than "I said." There is nothing wrong with the past-perfect tense, but its purpose is contextualization. It tells us when something is happening with reference to another, more important thing, and it necessarily subordinates the events it describes. Compare, again, "The punishment was administered by a taciturn doctor" with "The doctor there had been a woman." The scene has a horrifying immediacy in the magazine; in the novel it feels oblique and supplementary.

Most important, Bezmozgis has robbed the Polina/Alec story of its story-ness. It has become a sequence of recollections distributed at intervals throughout the book. Reading it this way is like listening to the first minute of a pop song and then waiting a half-hour to hear the second minute. An hour after that, when the end of the song begins to play, who's still listening?

All of the backstories and subplots in The Free World are treated the same way. The story of Kārl's mysterious rise in the criminal world, of the family's ordeal at the border in Chop, of Samuil's childhood—all of them are taken apart and handed to us piece by piece. Whatever interest they might have had has been spoiled by the sense that they are unwelcome and unnecessary digressions from a central narrative that is already maddeningly slow.

At first, it seems like the decision to defer the conclusion of the Polina/Alec story, or to withhold information about the crossing at Chop, is an attempt to give the illusion of dramatic structure to a novel that has run off the rails. This is true, but it's also true that Bezmozgis digresses from the narrative present in the middle of important scenes. At the beginning of the novel, the family expects to travel to Chicago because Emma's cousin Shura is living there and has agreed to sponsor their visa application. But when Emma tries to call her—a conversation that will determine the family's destiny—the narrative is interrupted and we're subjected to a passage of breathtaking irrelevance in which we learn some facts about Shura. The passage contains sentences like this one: "Shura, the cousin, had met her husband [in Uzbekistan] and, after the war, settled in Vilnius, his town." The casual observation that "Shura had written the war, settled in Vilnius, its town." The falling-out began on May 31, when Israeli forces intercepted a flotilla, which had been partially organized by a Turkish NGO, that was trying to run the blockade of Gaza. During the ensuing struggle, eight Turks and one Turkish-American aboard the lead ship, the Mavi Marmara, were killed, while seven Israeli commandos and dozens of other activists were wounded, prompting an international crisis and a sharp deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations. It soon came out that the NGO and Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (known by its Turkish acronym, AKP) shared many of the same supporters—wealthy religious businessmen—and that the Mavi Marmara and two other ships in the flotilla had been purchased from a company operated by the municipality of Istanbul, which is run by AKP. Then, on June 9, Turkey broke ranks with Europe and the United States to vote against sanctioning Iran. Just three weeks

of a novel about frustration that is not, itself, frustrating. Dangling Man does on every page what The Free World doesn't do at all. It gives us reasons to keep reading, even if we know that nothing is going to happen.

Bezmozgis is no Bellow, but he might have made some better choices. Dangling Man has a first-person narrator whose manipulation or concealment of information is understandable. The Free World has a third-person narrator who knows the whole story and has no reason to conceal anything. Why won't be tell the story? I'm left thinking that there is something badly wrong with him. He can hardly walk down the street. He doesn't know how to enter a room. He pretends to know everything about these people and these places, but he doesn't know what it smells like in Rome, or when the sun sets, or what the trams sound like. Most important, he doesn't know that he doesn't know.

Bezmozgis is attempting something unusual here, but The Free World isn't a risky book. The prose is wooden and the story is flat. Either he doesn't have the courage to embrace his idea or he doesn't understand what his idea is, and the finished product looks unfinished—a draft written in a state of hesitation and doubt.

Turkey’s Transformation

by MARC EDWARD HOFFMAN

Last year marked a turning point for Turkey, or at least for its reputation among political commentators in the West. For decades it had been America's darling—a secular, democratic Muslim country that was both a member of NATO and—mirabile dictu—an ally of Israel, with which it had signed a defense pact in 1996 and enjoyed close military and commercial ties. Tensions had occasionally flared up over Cyprus, Iraq and the Kurdish and Armenian issues, and Ankara's courting of Russia, Syria and other Western bugbears had been a growing source of disagreement. But never, till this past May, had Turkey's fundamental orientation come into question. Then, in the span of a few weeks, Turkey became a black sheep.

The falling-out began on May 31, when Israeli forces intercepted a flotilla, which had been partially organized by a Turkish NGO, that was trying to run the blockade

Marc Edward Hoffman is an American writer based in Istanbul.
This isn’t to say that all the charges leveled against Erdogan are false. He is an Islamist, albeit not an extreme one; his rule is heavy-handed; and his speech and behavior are often rough. As some of the wilder charges in the Ergenekon case show, the government over which he presides is growing increasingly bold, if not hubristic. (The case, which is aimed at unraveling an alleged ultranationalist conspiracy to stage a coup d’état, has at times seemed to slide into a McCarthyist witch hunt, as when police searched the home of Türkan Saylan, the terminally ill president of an NGO devoted to educating poor children, who was a defender of women’s rights and an outspoken critic of AKP but hardly a threat to public order.) Erdogan has managed to sideline, neutralize or cow secular opponents, and his party’s pursuit of EU membership is obviously, though perhaps not only, tactical. The jury’s still out on whether AKP really cares to join the union or is just using the accession process to outflank its rivals and bring the army to heel (the subordination of military to civilian rule is one of Brussels’s key conditions). But it’s undeniable that Erdogan is genuinely popular, and that his party has twice won national elections, by wide margins, whose outcomes no one seriously contests. To comprehend Turkey’s transformation, one must understand the sources and nature of that support.

who votes for AKP? Many devout Muslims, naturally: from committed but accommodating Islamists (like the party’s leaders) to the pious but passive masses. But AKP doesn’t draw much support—or inspiration—from religious extremists, who gravitate instead toward the late NecmettinErhan’sFelicityParty. Nor is its appeal limited to those who pray. The secret of AKP’s success—the reason it has been able to garner enough votes to win an unassailable majority in Parliament and govern without coalition partners, unlike its predecessors in the ’90s—is that it manages, to a degree, to transcend the secular/religious divide. It does so, above all, by appealing to the pocketbook, and to class and patriotic pride.

AKP draws its support from other types, as well: a plump, frumpy, head-scarf–wearing teyezi (literally “aunt,” but think “babushka”), still more at home in the village than the city, even after all these years. And her husband, a mustachioed doorman who’s good with tools and kids and goes to the mosque every day but doesn’t make a big deal out of it. A bearded imam, who does. A young lady who wears an ankle-length coat with long sleeves twelve months out of the year, for modesty’s sake, and, of course, a head scarf—but not one of those loosely tied rustic ones like the teyezi.

AKP transcends the secular/religious divide with appeals to the pocketbook and patriotism.

earlier, Ankara had helped broker a deal with Tehran whereby the latter would surrender some of its low-enriched uranium in return for nuclear fuel rods, and the Turkish government, loath to antagonize a neighbor, wanted to give that deal a chance.

‘Turkey’s row with Israel and perceived coddling of Iran led many pundits in the United States and Europe to wonder whether Ankara was “turning its back on the West”—as an October cover of The Economist had it—and if so, who was to blame. Washington and Brussels engaged in a round of mutual recriminations on this point. Defense Secretary Robert Gates blamed the EU for shunning Turkey, and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso retorted that, no, the United States spoiled relations—and if so, who was to blame. Washington and Brussels engaged in a round of mutual recriminations on this point. Defense Secretary Robert Gates blamed the EU for shunning Turkey, and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso retorted that, no, the United States spoiled relations and its reputation for effective governance at the municipal and local levels endear it to the average Mehmet. The latter appeal is amplified by the party’s populism and its play upon class sensitivities: Erdogan likes to remind voters that he’s a “Black Turk,” or a salt-of-the-earth type, like most of them, not a “White Turk,” or a member of the country’s urbane, Westernized, traditional elite. Wealthy industrialists, particularly the so-called Anatolian Tigers—provincial entrepreneurs who tend to be more conservative and religious than the tycoons of Istanbul—provide much of its financial support, but it’s the party’s appeal to regular people that explains its electoral success.

Among AKP’s supporters are blue-collar kids, no more than a generation removed from the village, who believe in God (who do they know who doesn’t?) but are mostly just glad to be living in the city, where they can find a bit of culture (all those bootleg DVDs!), and a bit of fun, and, if they’re lucky, a steady job, with steady if meager pay; instead of just sitting at a crummy laminated table in a dingy provincial dive, sipping strong black tea and bumping cigarettes, all through the dog days of summer and fall and winter and spring—again and again, ad nauseam. For them, politics has little to do with Islamism as a movement. They’re not itching for a confrontation with the West, or for Sharia. They’d like to get rid of the ban on headscarves and destigmatize religion. But for the most part they’re just thankful to be living a better life than their parents, to have access to the Internet—even if it’s bought by the minute rather than the month—and to have someone as their prime minister who talks and acts like them (remember when he cut him off at Davos, and instead of bearing the insult he stormed out like a real man?), rather than one of those haughty, effete “White Turks.”

AKP styles itself primarily as a party of the center—right whose main concern is efficient stewardship of the economy and encouragement of trade. It is only secondarily a party of Islam. (It is wont to compare itself to the Christian Democratic parties of Europe—which is a stretch, but not implausible.) Its support of free-market principles and export-led growth appeals to the business class, while its emphasis on bread-and-butter issues, such as improving roads, and its reputation for effective governance at the municipal and local levels endear it to the average Mehmet. The latter appeal is amplified by the party’s populism and its play upon class sensitivities: Erdogan likes to remind voters that he’s a “Black Turk,” or a salt-of-the-earth type, like most of them, not a “White Turk,” or a member of the country’s urbane, Westernized, traditional elite. Wealthy industrialists, particularly the so-called Anatolian Tigers—provincial entrepreneurs who tend to be more conservative and religious than the tycoons of Istanbul—provide much of its financial support, but it’s the party’s appeal to regular people that explains its electoral success.

Among AKP’s supporters are blue-collar kids, no more than a generation removed from the village, who believe in God (who do they know who doesn’t?) but are mostly just glad to be living in the city, where they can find a bit of culture (all those bootleg DVDs!), and a bit of fun, and, if they’re lucky, a steady job, with steady if meager pay; instead of just sitting at a crummy laminated table in a dingy provincial dive, sipping strong black tea and bumping cigarettes, all through the dog days of summer and fall and winter and spring—again and again, ad nauseam. For them, politics has little to do with Islamism as a movement. They’re not itching for a confrontation with the West, or for Sharia. They’d like to get rid of the ban on headscarves and destigmatize religion. But for the most part they’re just thankful to be living a better life than their parents, to have access to the Internet—even if it’s bought by the minute rather than the month—and to have someone as their prime minister who talks and acts like them (remember when he cut him off at Davos, and instead of bearing the insult he stormed out like a real man?), rather than one of those haughty, effete “White Turks.”

AKP draws its support from other types, as well: a plump, frumpy, head-scarf–wearing teyezi (literally “aunt,” but think “babushka”), still more at home in the village than the city, even after all these years. And her husband, a mustachioed doorman who’s good with tools and kids and goes to the mosque every day but doesn’t make a big deal out of it. A bearded imam, who does. A young lady who wears an ankle-length coat with long sleeves twelve months out of the year, for modesty’s sake, and, of course, a head scarf—but not one of those loosely tied rustic ones like the teyezi.
The Nation invites you to join us for our 14th Annual Seminar Cruise to the Caribbean with stops in Grand Turk, San Juan and St Maarten

December 11-18, 2011

For more information or to book your cruise:
www.nationcruise.com (800) 707-1634
groups@the-cruise-authority.com

Speakers:
Victor Navasky
Katrina vanden Heuvel
Julian Bond
Kai Bird
John Nichols
Christopher Hayes
Jessica Valenti
Van Jones
Dear Nation Subscribers

It has come to our attention that several of our subscribers have received renewal notifications from independent magazine clearinghouses doing business under the names Publishers Billing Exchange, Orbital Publishing Group, National Magazine Services, Magazine Billing Services, Magazine Billing Network and Magazine Distribution Services. These companies have not been authorized to sell subscriptions on behalf of The Nation magazine, and we have no guarantee that subscriptions purchased from them will be sent to The Nation.

We do use some legitimate subscription services to sell our publication. If you receive a renewal notice and are unsure of its authenticity, please call our subscriber-care department and order your renewal through them.

You may contact subscriber services by calling our toll-free number, (800) 333-8536 or via the Web at www.thenation.com/subscription-services

The Nation

SUBSCRIBER ALERT

Dear Nation Subscribers

It has come to our attention that several of our subscribers have received renewal notifications from independent magazine clearinghouses doing business under the names Publishers Billing Exchange, Orbital Publishing Group, National Magazine Services, Magazine Billing Services, Magazine Billing Network and Magazine Distribution Services. These companies have not been authorized to sell subscriptions on behalf of The Nation magazine, and we have no guarantee that subscriptions purchased from them will be sent to The Nation.

We do use some legitimate subscription services to sell our publication. If you receive a renewal notice and are unsure of its authenticity, please call our subscriber-care department and order your renewal through them.

You may contact subscriber services by calling our toll-free number, (800) 333-8536 or via the Web at www.thenation.com/subscription-services

How did AKP pull it off? Savvy strategy and marketing played a role, as did its unprecedented grassroots organization. But no amount of strategizing, marketing and legwork can conjure up this degree of consensus out of thin air. As Carter Vaughn Findley’s timely new history, Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity, makes clear, AKP is as much the beneficiary of Sufism that became popular with merchants and landowners. The currents converged at points—as in the drafting of the Gülhane
By the mid-1940s the propertied classes had grown strong enough to split off from the bureaucratic-military elite that had facilitated their rise. In 1950 they compelled the Republican People's Party (known by its Turkish acronym, CHP), which had ruled Turkey as a single-party state since the founding of the republic in 1923, to hold free and fair multi-party elections for the first time in the country's history. The result was a victory for the new Democratic Party (DP), led by Adnan Menderes, a wealthy landowner from western Turkey. The party's rise marked the first epochal shift in Turkish politics, according to Findley. Pursuing a more economically liberal and populist tack than its predecessors, the DP pushed for privatization of state industries and made some concessions to religious interests, such as allowing the call to prayer to revert to Arabic from Turkish. The latter won the DP the support of many Nur-cus (as followers of Said Nursi are known), who supported the party in the elections of 1954. The concessions also earned it the enmity of staunch Kemalists. Although the DP was re-elected, its popularity waned in the following years, as the economy languished and the party's behavior grew authoritarian. By 1960 the army had had enough: it staged a coup d'état, after which Menderes was executed and the DP disbanded. The following year, after installing a more liberal constitution, the junta stepped down.

The 1960s and '70s were tumultuous decades for Turkey. The new constitution's liberalism allowed Marxist and other leftist groups to operate freely for the first time, and their ideas and activities provoked a rightist reaction. The resultant mobilization engaged a broader spectrum of the population than ever before, but not always in constructive ways. Surging demographic growth and a massive internal migration of villagers to cities—what Findley calls the country's sudden "superurbanization"—brought more Turks than ever before in touch with modernity, but they also introduced new social stresses and made it impossible to maintain Kemalist unity. The era's short-lived coalitions governments found it difficult to cope with the growing instability; by the end of the 1960s, with the economy in recession, a series of strikes, demonstrations, bombings and kidnappings wracked the country. In 1971 the army once again intervened in an attempt to restore order. Alas, the same problems re-emerged later in the decade—albeit this time with the rightists rather than the leftists holding the upper hand—prompting the army to stage another coup in 1980.

When the army stepped down in 1983, after installing a more restrictive constitution, Turgut Özal's Motherland Party won the election. Özal, an electrical engineer by training, had been a longtime civil servant and onetime employee of the World Bank, and he had been tapped by the generals to serve as deputy prime minister for economic...
Each successive single-party government in Turkey has been more openly religious.

Only granted concessions to religious interests—for example, by allowing the number of religious imam-batîp schools to grow—but publicly admitted to being a Naksibendi, and completed the hajj.

Curiously, Findley fails to draw a connection between Özal and Menderes. “With Özal,” he writes, “the religiously committed, business-oriented, Anatolian-rooted but now increasingly urbanized sector of society finally came to power. After decades as targets of state policy, they became policy makers.” All that is true—but much the same could be said of Menderes, who rose with the support of provincial agricultural and commercial interests. Yet when assessing Özal’s importance, Findley reaches for another comparison: “Embodying the combination of economic liberalism and Islamic values that bested overtly Islamist parties in gaining voter support, [Özal] reoriented Turkish politics more openly religious than the last because he briefly served in a coalition with CHP, Erbakan had founded two Islamist parties, both of which had been banned for violating the constitution’s strict laicism, before he founded the Prosperity Party in 1983. Effectively sidelined by Motherland’s dominance during the next decade, Prosperity did not enjoy notable success until 1994, when several of its candidates became mayors of major municipalities—including Erdoğan in Istanbul. Building on those victories, Prosperity outperformed all the other parties in national elections the following year. Though the party didn’t receive enough votes to form a government on its own, Erbakan was able to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement whereby he would rotate as the prime minister with Tansu Çiller of the True Path Party. But as Findley writes, “His inflammatory rhetoric and idiosyncratic, Islamic-themed policy ventures alienated interests as far apart as the military high command and the leader of the branch of the Naksibendiye with which he had once been affiliated.” Thus, in 1997, after Erbakan had been in office just over a year, the army intervened once again and compelled him to resign. The following year, Prosperity was banned, as its two predecessors had been.

Erbakan re-emerged with the Virtue Party, which was banned in 2001, and again with the Felicity Party, which is still in operation. But he was never able to reclaim a central position in Turkish politics. His former lieutenants, on the other hand, are now running the country. After Prosperity was banned, and after Erdoğan served a ten-month jail sentence for reading an incendiary poem at a rally, he and other ex-Prosperity “innovators” broke with Erbakan and formed AKP.

Many Turkish secularists (and many in the West) refuse to believe that AKP is at heart any different from Prosperity. They insist that its moderation is a sham, designed to keep the prosecutors and the army at bay, and that in secret it pursues a radical Islamist agenda. But as Findley notes, there is no reason to think so. If anything, AKP seems to be responding to the Turkish electorate, which in recent years has been concerned primarily with “employment, the economy, and inflation, not religion. Almost all of those surveyed [in 2002] believed in God, but the proportion who went to mosque once a week (23 percent) was lower than that of those who never or rarely went (30 percent). Equally high proportions believed that women university students should be free to cover their heads (78 percent) but opposed a sharia-based state in Turkey (75 percent). It is no wonder,” he concludes, “that the political scientists who study the AK Party seldom share the fear, voiced by some...that it will turn Turkey into an ‘Islamic republic.”

“Organizationally,” Findley concedes, AKP may be “a descendant of Erbakan’s Islamist parties.” But “in vision, quality of leadership, and breadth of support,” it “more nearly recalls Özal’s Motherland Party of the 1980s.” This is a profound observation, to which I would add: it also recalls Menderes and the Democrats of the 1950s. All three parties have demonstrated that (as Findley says of the more recent two) “religious conservatives’ greatest political successes have come, not with narrowly religious movements, but with center-rightist parties able to appeal to business interests as well as ‘values voters.’” This has been by far the most successful political strategy in Turkey for the past sixty years. None but these three parties have appealed to a broad enough demographic to construct a strong and long-lasting single-party government. In the periods between their rules—the 1960s, the ’70s and the late ’90s and early 2000s—Turkey was governed predominantly by unstable and ineffective coalitions, and each period ended in economic crisis and military intervention. The fact that AKP’s government is the most religious of the three recent single-party governments is neither coincidental nor revolutionary. Each successive single-party government has been more openly religious than the last because at each stage the religious current has figured out how better to “mainstream” itself, while the secular current has grown more accepting. But at no point has religion been the key factor. It is only when religious parties have embraced more-or-less liberal economic principles—which stand in stark contrast to Kemalism’s rigid (and elitist) statism—that they have enjoyed notable success.

The brilliance of Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity lies in its conception and thesis, which are novel and incisive. It is hampered by Findley’s tendency to abstraction and the cant of academic theory, as well as a somewhat shambolic structure, which at times makes his argument hard to track. His discussion of the secularizing current is clear enough, as one would expect: this ground is well trod. But his discussion of the religious current is episodic and unconnected. He provides an adequate précis of several Islamist thinkers and the movements to which they gave birth, but he does not demonstrate how their ideologies influenced political actors or society. This is not necessarily Findley’s
I fear that because of his overreaching, Findley’s book will fail to find a large audience. That would be a shame, because his argument is a necessary and timely corrective to the prevailing wisdom. Against the secularist narrative—in which a Kemalist elite forged the remnants of the Ottoman Empire into a modern nation-state, and then led it willy-nilly out of Islamic obscurantism into the light of Western civilization—Turkey’s recent developments seem aberrant and atavistic. But they are neither. Rather, as Findley has shown, they are merely the latest stage in a long-running evolution, the newest steps of a proud but factious people making its way in the world.

Readjustments

by STUART KLAYANS

I am taking a break from the movies—just for a paragraph or two. It seems the thing to do, given that the images now on screen are so inadequate to what I’ve been seeing in the news. If I am to write about a show-business product that even halfway evokes the globe’s current meltdowns, then the only real choice lies outside the movies, in Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark.

From this entertainment, I learn that we are stuck, all of us, inside an injurious debacle that no one will shut down; a debacle that has gained in awful fascination, and assumed power to drag on indefinitely, precisely because of being injurious. We see in Spider-Man the blind overreliance of the world’s elites on dubious technologies; the determination of the investing class to press on, no matter how many people get hurt; the profound complicity in the disaster of the Commentariat (always so censorious, yet always quick to remind us that profit justifies all); and from the suckers in the seats, a self-confounding horror over the destruction they’re buying, combined with a readiness to pay for more. We even see the psychological dodge, standard in politics and entertainment alike, that permits us to endure, and endure, and endure. Consensus settles on Julie Taymor as the bearer of the evil, Taymor as the figure who must be sent to Azazel. A supposed genius-leader who previously was heroized out of all proportion, she is now made an object of derision by people who (for all her shortcomings) can’t claim a tenth of her achievements.

“Oh!” as Elizabeth Bennet cried, sick unto death. “I am excessively diverted.”

So excessively, in fact, that I feel the need to think again—to consider whether it might be a good thing that film has stopped being central to American life.
By film, of course, I mean movies, projected in public spaces large enough to accommodate a crowd. Audiovisual materials exist everywhere at once today—they’re as common as air, and are consumed about as thoughtfully—but movies have lapsed into a semi-historical, niche-market status, like Broadway musicals, easel paintings and the books peddled under the dismal name “literary fiction.” When a production in one of these categories rises to true significance nowadays, it’s almost always by accident (as is literally the case with Spider-Man, the Fukushima Daiichi of Broadway shows). But habits of thought die hard. Those of us who maintain a loyalty to fuzzy-duddy art forms go on hoping that they will make an occa-
sional demonstration of serious intent—not necessarily a big statement (that would really be old-fashioned) but a gesture of engagement with the larger world, as if they could still make a difference.

The title of a new book by Dave Kehr, at present the film historian for the New York Times (under the guise of being its DVD reviewer), would be enough to prompt these reflections: When Movies Mattered: Reviews from a Transformative Decade (Chicago; $22.50). In his aesthetics, Kehr is far from being a big-statement guy, as the items in this collection show. (They’re a selection of the long-form reviews he wrote for the Chicago Reader some thirty years ago.) But as a thinker with a retrospective turn of mind, Kehr is keenly aware that the business of making and exhibiting movies was changing radically during his first years at the Reader, in the mid-1970s, and that the business of publishing ideas about movies (and so encouraging conversation among a general audience) began to undergo its own drastic change within a few years of his leaving that paper a decade later. He accordingly introduces When Movies Mattered as though it were a chronicle left by a vanished civilization—which may only slightly exaggerate the situation. Running through these remarkable critical essays, in murmurs and asides that went half-noticed at the time, are uneasy observations about the course movie culture was then taking. It was a period, Kehr writes, “of tumult and possibility.” A gentlemanly phrase, it casts a discreet silence over his opinion of how those possibilities turned out.

A sfor my own opinion of that outcome, and of how much or little American movies might matter today, I look for fresh evidence and find it (as well as anywhere) in two recent releases: The Adjustment Bureau, written and directed by George Nolfi (based on a Philip K. Dick story), and Win Win, written and directed by Tom McCarthy.

The more unassuming of the two, and the more widely admired, is Win Win, which had its premiere at this year’s Sundance Festival and boasts Paul Giamatti in the lead. Giamatti, though, is not necessarily the big draw. Topping the newspaper ads is the line “from the [unspecified] director of The Station Agent and The Visitor,” as if to promise ticket buyers a reasonably substantial yet relatively undemanding experience—an auteurist film for people who needn’t be bothered to remember the auteur’s name. The marketers have done their product justice in this case: as Win Win plays out, it indeed makes a virtue of being quiet, a little down at the heel and just slightly unpredictable.

Set in small-town, white-ethnic New Jersey, Win Win is the story of Mike (Giamatti), a cash-strapped family man who by day provides legal counsel to the elderly and after work coaches the high school wrestling team. The team is hopeless; the law office is falling apart (starting with the toilet and boiler). But Mike is a decent guy who nevertheless, under pressure, commits a plot-determining indecision. While you wait for his wrongdoing to be exposed, most likely in the sixth or seventh reel, a homeless out-of-state teenager appears on the doorstep (played by the stringently handsome, towering facade built on a foundation of utter improbability. You can’t take 70 percent of it seriously, and you suspect that Nolfi doesn’t want you to. The other 30 percent is as real as any American film I’ve recently seen.

Imagine a wildly popular young office-seeker campaigning as a progressive. (His party affiliation, though unstated in the film, is obvious; the character is running for the Senate as a favorite son of Brooklyn, and the actor playing him is Matt Damon.) Imagine as well that this David Norris, though ostensibly a straight talker, is not his own master; while chafing at the control exerted by his best friend and campaign manager—a big man in the private equity business—he accepts such oversight as necessary. Now suppose that David turns out to be more of a “tool” (as the dialogue puts it) than the usual faux populist in Wall Street’s pay. The Adjustment Bureau is the story of how David learns that his career is controlled by someone even more powerful than the campaign manager—a nameless boss who exacts obedience through a network of grim-faced undercover agents, all of them dressed chillingly in old-time FBI garb.

Who is this all-seeing Dr. Mabuse of grim-faced undercover agents, all of them dressed chillingly in old-time FBI garb? Nolfi is too clever to come right out with the identity; so I shouldn’t presume to do it, either. What I can say is that the wish fulfillment played out in the shadow of this figure is fascinatingly double: first the desire for the sinister force somehow to prove benevolent, and then the desire for David to succeed in making his escape when escape is clearly impossible. Groveling and
resistance in a single gesture, despair and defiance combined. Look beyond Nolfi’s playfully deployed tropes of menace (so overcharged with associations that some reviewers have misidentified *The Adjustment Bureau* as a science fiction film or an imitation *Matrix*), and you’ll see a whiz-bang enactment of the tension between ordinary citizens and the semi-invisible power structures that entangle them.

I call this an engagement with the real world, but I also note that it takes romance to give the political allegory its zing. David needs to resist for the sake of someone other than himself, and we’re lucky enough that she’s Elise (Emily Blunt), a lithe knockout who also happens to be strong-featured, sharp-tongued, slyly amused and credibly employed in a serious artistic pursuit. She speaks in complete sentences, puts up with no pretense and in a serious artistic pursuit. She speaks in complete sentences, puts up with no pretense and in a serious artistic pursuit. She speaks in complete sentences, puts up with no pretense and in a serious artistic pursuit. She speaks in complete sentences, puts up with no pretense and in a serious artistic pursuit. She speaks in complete sentences, puts up with no pretense and in a serious artistic pursuit.

Everything that is solid melts into air: who has learned that lesson of communism better than the former Soviet communists of *My Perestroika*, Robin Hessman’s tender, engrossing and utterly brilliant new documentary? Its five subjects—Muscovites from a thoroughly ordinary background—are members of the last generation to have worn the red kerchief of the Pioneers, the generation that later, in college, dared to drop out of the Komsomol and was just getting married and taking jobs when the Berlin Wall came down. “I was completely satisfied by my beautiful Soviet reality,” recalls Lyuba, laughing wryly at the memory of her patriotic childhood. Then the world that had formed her disappeared.

Lyuba and her husband, Borya, both hard-working teachers at School No. 57, serve as the central witnesses of *My Perestroika*, and the most warmly engaging. They are joined by three of Borya’s childhood friends: Ruslan (once a punk rock star, now a busker), Olga (a glamour girl who was going to marry rich and now services coin-operated pool tables) and Andrei (an entrepreneur who owns seventeen luxury men’s wear shops). In tones that vary from Olga’s bafflement to Borya’s darkly humorous acuity (he is a history teacher by profession and apparently by birth as well), these people narrate a period of unimaginable change; and thanks to Hessman’s archival research, you see the change in astonishing period images, including a lifetime of Borya’s home movies. The experience of change makes *My Perestroika* a film that shouldn’t be missed. The lifetime part makes it indispensable.
Puzzle No. 1626

FRANK W. LEWIS

ACROSS
1 A place in Illinois—not much fun to sail poorly fitted out, but spectacular. (6,8)
8 Hardy girl, and one associated with the fireplace turning into what should be checkering. (12)
10 Put too much weight on one end, with the coat unable to be tailored. (10)
11 It might be a map of Lapland, but not a little one. (4)
13 A Carib language form? (6)
14 In the main, everything confused. (3,2,3)
16 Ate there daily, tied inside. (8)
17 The man of 16 at last passed on and did what smoke or water does in turn. (6)
19 Possibly confessed to having French blood. (4)
20 A word of warning before a unique move on board the ship, in part. (10)
22 No surprise concerning the success of the child prodigy? (6,6)
23 It doesn’t imply one in charge of defense is necessarily bad. (8,6)

DOWN
1 What the screen lion evidently believed in might imply a selfish corner in Camelot. (3,3,4,4)
2 It had three tongues. (7,5)
3 Some who fail might hope to be. (10)
4 Poster for dance and song, perhaps. (6)
5 With the tire burst, a difficult clue is made into a bag. (8)
6 The famous river of the rising star. (4)
7 Common carrier? Not exactly, though a leader in the field, with color. (8,6)
9 A peculiarly tall daisy’s an early November occurrence. (3,6,3)
12 Male in female dress, otherwise a form of narcotic. (10)
15 Ask to get up to a number procreated in the old-fashioned way. (8)
18 Want to do away with the law? Ring again! (6)
21 Coat that certainly isn’t heavy, but might be a little dirty. (They’ve made a movie out of it.) (4)

From the April 3, 1976, issue. Be sure to vote in our contest to pick the new Nation puzzlemeister! (thenation.com/article/159126/five-vie-puzzlers-mantle)

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, the first week in March, and biweekly the first week of July through the second week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2011 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 37853, Boone, IA 50037-0853, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 40041477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement No.: 40612608. When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions. Basic annual subscription price: $79 for 47 issues. Back issues $6 prepaid ($8 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 37853, Boone, IA 50037-0853. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.
When they’re as low as $54.95, expect a little pillaging

The first-ever 2011 Viking Silver Noble celebrates the fierce thousand-year-old Viking heritage of the Isle of Man, situated off the coast of England in the Irish Sea.

The government of the Isle of Man gave GovMint the exclusive right to sell this legal-tender Viking Silver Noble. It’s one Troy ounce of 99.9% silver and it’s bigger than a U.S. Silver Dollar!

Hurry! Only 1,500 Nobles are available in this release and you can’t get them anywhere else! The mintage for this release of the 2011 Silver Noble is shockingly small: Only 1,500 of these large silver pieces!

Don’t delay, and don’t be disappointed!

Order Right Now Risk Free!
Call right now to get this historic first-of-a-kind 2011 Viking Silver Noble. Each comes with a 30-day return privilege. If you are not satisfied, return your coins within 30 days for a full refund (less s & h).

Buy more and save more!
1 Viking Silver Noble for only $64.95 + s/h
5 for only $61.95 each + s/h SAVE $15
10 for only $59.95 each + s/h SAVE $50
20 for only $54.95 each + s/h SAVE $200

Toll-Free 24 hours a day
1-800-859-1629

Offer Code SVN124-02
Please mention this code when you call.

GovMint.com
14101 Southcross Drive W., Dept. SVN124-02
Burnsville, Minnesota 55337
www.GovMint.com/noble2

Prices and availability subject to change without notice. Note: GovMint.com is a private distributor of worldwide government coin issues and is not affiliated with the United States government. Facts and figures were deemed accurate as of February 2011. ©GovMint.com, 2011
Carbonite automatically backs up your computer files for less than $5 a month.

A hard drive crash, virus or even a simple accident can wipe out your computer files in seconds. Protect your photos, music, email and other irreplaceable files with Carbonite – the online backup service trusted by more than one million people.

Carbonite automatically backs up your files whenever you’re connected to the Internet. Backup space is unlimited, and everything is encrypted so your data remains secure and private. When you need to recover files, getting them back is easy – you can even access your files remotely from any computer or on your smartphone.

Start your free trial today at Carbonite.com or call 1-800-340-5686 to learn more.

But we can make sure your files are spill proof.

- Unlimited online backup
- Automatic & continuous
- Encrypts files for privacy
- Installs in minutes – PC or Mac
- Trusted by more than 1 million customers
- Access files from any computer or smartphone

TRY IT FREE!
Visit carbonite.com
* Use Code CB337 and get 2 FREE months upon purchase.